

Catching the Public Eye: The Body, Space, and Social Order in 1920s
Canadian Visual Culture

by

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A thesis
presented to the University of Waterloo
in fulfillment of the
thesis requirement for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in
History

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada, 2006

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Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.
I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

ABSTRACT

In the cultural upheaval of the 1920s, Canadians become particularly invested in looking at and debating women's images in public. This dissertation looks at how English-Canadians debated, accepted, and challenged modernity through public images of women. In analysing the debates over cultural rituals of looking it seeks to show how the discussions about images reveal the power of vision in ordering and understanding modernity as well as social and cultural changes. Through five case studies on the flapper, the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, two beauty contests, an art exhibition including nudes, and the relationship between film and automobiles this study reveals how important images of the body were to the cultural developments and debates on the post-World War One modern world.

By the 1920s urban visual culture was dominated by various images of women and an analysis of those images and the debates around them reveal underlying tensions related to gender, class, age, social order, and race. Anxieties over changes in these areas were absorbed into the broader concerns over the pleasures and perils associated with being modern. This dissertation looks at Canadian visual culture in terms of what it can reveal about modernity and the problems, perils, and pleasures associated with it.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have helped with this dissertation. My advisor, Dr. Wendy Mitchinson, believed in this project when at times I doubted that it was possible to complete. Her support, understanding, good humour, and determination are big part of why this dissertation is finished. My committee were exceptionally helpful. Thank you to Dr. Keith Walden, Dr. Sandra Burt, Dr. Cynthia Comacchio, and Dr. Jamie Snell for the careful reading of and insightful feedback on my work. Dr. Comacchio provided support for this project in all of its stages.

The Tri-University Programme provided a friendly and inspiring intellectual community from which I benefited greatly. Many thanks to professors in the department who took an interest in the project and provided kind words in moments of self-doubt, hints for the best way to tackle writing, and suggestions for reading. In particular, I have been extremely fortunate to work with James W. St. J. Walker. His passion for history and teaching are nothing short of inspiring.

I want to thank the directors of the Tri-University program during my time in the program. Dr. Kenneth McLaughlin and Dr. Richard Reid invested much time and energy to ensure the program focused on the success of the students. For most of my time at the University of Waterloo Dr. Patrick Harrigan was Chair of the History Department. I want to thank him for his continual support. The administrative staff in the Department of History are exceptional. Thank you to Irene Majer and Nancy Birss.

I have been very lucky to have other people take an interest in my project and provide help at various stages. My thanks to Dr. Daniel E. Bender who provided sources,

support, and ideas for this project. Thank you to Dr. Elwood Watson for sharing his research and ideas on the history of beauty contests with me.

My fellow graduate students in the Tri-University program have provided much needed support and friendship over the years. A special thank you to Kirrily Freeman who helped with ideas, interpretations, and celebrations. Her continuing enthusiasm and generosity are appreciated. Jason Churchill read and provided much needed feedback on the dissertation at critical times. I want to thank him for his unwavering support of this project. Renée Bondy provided many references, suggestions, and kind words. Thanks also to the members of the Gender History Reading Group.

Archivists and librarians at a variety of depositories provided help with the research for this project. Thank you to the archivists and librarians at the National Archives of Canada, the Archives of Ontario, the University of Toronto, the City of Toronto Archives, the City of Vancouver, the University of Waterloo Library and Archives, the Lakehead University Library and Archives, Thunder Bay Museum, Dance Collection Danse, and the Canadian National Exhibition Archives. Linda Cobon at the C.N.E. Archives was exceptionally helpful. My thanks must also go to Dr. John Thurston for sharing the Conklin records with me. A number of individuals helped in trying to locate paintings for me. Thank you to Charles Hill, Dr. Brian Foss, David and Laura Kilgour, and Glenn Allison.

My friends and family were supportive throughout this process. Thank you to Tina and Craig Vieira, David Paddington, Peter and Barbara Nicholas, and Brenda and Oliver Reimer. Oliver provided much needed technological assistance in the last stages of writing that was greatly appreciated! I would also like to thank Brenden Hughes and

his grandmother Agnes Kelly. Mrs. Kelley was kind enough to share her memories of growing up in Canada during the first half of the twentieth century over tea and lunch. She is an exceptional woman and I greatly enjoyed my discussions with her.

Nazzy, a very attractive Malamute/Collie cross, listened to every word of this dissertation. I am happy that he never chewed anything related to my dissertation. I consider all the chewed shoes a good compromise...

Lastly, I want and need to thank Karl Reimer. Thank you for every distraction, for every talk, for every moment...I could not have done this without you. Thank you for sharing in and supporting me through this experience.

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INTRODUCTION

“THE AGE OF UNINNOCENCE”

In 1919, Beatrice M. Shaw, writing for *Saturday Night*, welcomed readers to the “the age of uninnocence.”¹ In her article, Shaw drew evidence to her claim of lost innocence by calling into question the appearance of young women, and touched upon a number of concerns that penetrated the cultural consciousness of the 1920s: the threat of the ‘modern’ woman, the crisis in masculinity, the concern over the physical and moral health of the nation, mass consumption, and the never-ending stream of American magazines, literature, and films pouring into Canada, which added to, if not caused, the other problems.² Shaw pointed to some of the problems of modernity, embodied in young women and set the tone for debates in the following decade. By 1926, an anonymous writer for the *Catholic Register* regarded the appearance and behaviour of young women as a symptom of greater social disorder. No longer was it simply a matter of lost innocence, the cultural conditions represented by young women’s bodies was threatening. The writer observed,

The knee-skirt – and the women are not quite satisfied to let it hang to the knee – must be considered together with other fashions: the sensual hugging dance in which a woman hardly half-clad is held as no man dare hold a woman in a decent house a few years ago; the paint and the smoking; the drinking and the toleration of the off-color (sic) joke or story; the petting party in the dark corner; the flask, too, all of these things must be considered together with the excessive exposure of woman’s form to man’s eyes, if we want to accurately judge social conditions

¹ Beatrice M. Shaw, “The Age of Uninnocence,” *Saturday Night*, May 24, 1919, 31.

² Of course, whether one saw the issue as a pleasure or a problem was largely dependent on social position. Shaw echoed the older generation’s sense of impending disaster and showed how easily these symptoms of potential problems could be measured simply by looking around. Implicit in her article was the idea that these young women were everywhere and could be easily identified and recognized. This sentiment was articulated throughout the decade by a mature generation who was concerned with these and other changes.

which are becoming quite widespread. Social disorders must be judged by their symptoms.³

More than simply social conservatives grating against the new forms of popular culture and fashion, these critics represent an important part of the debate over Canadian culture in the 1920s that centred on the body and appearance of young women. By the 1920s, Canadian culture was caught up in this image and it provided the starting point for numerous other important social and cultural concerns and discussions. It is important that they receive our attention as they reveal much about how Canadians made sense of modernity, thought of change, reacted to differences, and experienced the ephemeral. To understand them, this dissertation discusses some of the visual ‘symptoms’ of the social disorder that Shaw and others identified.

The experience of modernity, the massive change brought about by the First World War, the social anxieties and concerns about social disorder were all brought down to the level of individual understanding through visual culture. As a whole, the dissertation seeks to read across visual culture for what it reveals about the concerns over gender, class, space, disorder, age, and race. Each of the following chapters studies different, but complementary, aspects of the various concerns reflected in visual culture. In particular (although not exclusively), female bodies played a significant role in attracting the eye and in public discussion of cultural changes.⁴ As Martha Banta argues in *Imaging Women*, by the end of the nineteenth century, “the American girl was singled

³ “Has the Sense of Decency and Delicacy Been Lost?” *Catholic Register*, April 22, 1926, 5.

⁴ Physical culture shows at the turn of the century were a popular venue for the display of male bodies. See Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995) and John, Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2001). In Canada in the 1920s, athletics for boys and men became a place where they could showcase their bodies and manliness. See Cynthia Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920 to 1950* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 117-18.

out as the visual and literary form to represent the values of the nation and codify the fears and desires of its citizens.”⁵ In the cultural upheaval of the 1920s, Canadians, too, became particularly invested in looking at and debating women’s images in public. The dissertation is about the debates over cultural rituals of looking at women’s bodies. The discussions about women’s bodies reveal the power of vision in ordering and understanding modernity as well as social and cultural changes.

Historian Keith Walden writes, “Modern urban culture was, and is, a culture of the eye.”⁶ Walden explains that during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, understanding became rooted in seeing, to the exclusion of other senses. As time progressed the desire and need to see became more acute.⁷ By the 1920s, technological developments and economic changes made the proliferation of visual images easier, and allowed for better reproduction of images. With movies and magazines people became well-cultured in reading images, and, if only unconsciously, reading their particular visual codes and symbols. These codes and symbols, however, were not confined to pages or film reels, but existed in the public domain in art shows, national celebrations, and beauty contests. The sites of culture were not new; however, they had all undergone significant and important transformations by the 1920s that opened them to a wider audience and shifted their focus and display. More importantly, they all incorporated certain bodily tropes that constructed woman as spectacle.⁸ In short, to modify Walden’s

⁵ Martha Banta, *Imaging American Women: Idea and Ideals in Cultural History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 2.

⁶ Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 119.

⁷ Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto*, 119.

⁸ On woman as spectacle in narrative film see Laura Mulvey, *Visual and Other Pleasures* (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1989), 14-26 and Jackie Stacey, “Desperately Seeking Difference,” in *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture*, ed. Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marchment (London: The Women’s Press, 1988), 116-120.

statement, modern urban culture in the 1920s was a culture where the eye was frequently brought to rest on women's bodies. This dissertation studies the moments when and spaces where Canadians' eyes were attuned and attracted to women's bodies and how these occasions allowed people to discuss and debate widespread cultural and social anxieties related to modernity and change. In broad terms, the dissertation is about how people thought of and attempted to make sense of change through discussions of women's bodies in English-Canada. As Walden's statement reveals, the focus will be primarily on the urban but this is not to suggest that rural Canada was immune to modernity and its symptoms. "Farm flappers" and young women from rural communities who lived a flapper lifestyle caused a stir inside and outside of the city.⁹ It seemed that with the proliferation of technology and mass culture it was harder and harder to find places where the impact was not acutely felt.

In the aftermath of the First World War, Canadians were frequently told that the world had permanently changed. Cracks in Victorian morality, which had appeared before World War One, had fallen open by the end of it. For youth who came of age in the wake of it, a revolution in morals was at the core of the post-war generation. The challenge of the 'new' morality was not simply looser attitudes to sexual experimentation, but also its implication for the nation. One article – "A Plea for the Younger Generation" – described Canadian youth in the 1920s as "opening its first socially conscious eyes on a world recently emerged from the greatest physical and spiritual upheaval of the ages. The war did something to convention which was worse

⁹ Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 39, 64.

than annihilation; it made it ridiculous.”¹⁰ This was the generation that would come of age – through adolescence – together with the nation.¹¹ It was the future of the adult nation. To think of change and the future on such a massive scale proved to be difficult. In order to make sense of and attempt to challenge it, people turned their attention to a tangible symbol of change, and in Canadian culture during the 1920s, that symbol was a young woman.

Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue that cultures ‘think themselves’ through four hierarchies: psychic forms, the human body, geographical space, and the social order.¹² In this thesis, I study body, space and social order, in order to understand how people attempted to make sense of social and cultural changes (psychic forms) – or how people ‘thought themselves’ through a period of change. The sites and content of popular visual culture in Canada in the 1920s, including art, movies, and beauty contests, reveal how representations of women were used to understand and contest the meaning and constructions of modernity, sexuality, gender, class, and race. People used, discussed, and constructed visual images and metaphors of vision to patch together an ideal understanding about what it meant to be modern and the desires and anxieties held therein. Not simply banal representations, visual messages in different media both arranged and affirmed some constructions of how the body was to be ordered and undermined others. In the hands of cultural organizers, magazine editors, copywriters, and the like, the particular blend of image, space, and sight was an attempt to educate eyes in the proper mode of looking, to create consent, and to legitimate cultural and social

¹⁰ An In-Between [pseudo.], “Ready-Made Youngsters: A Plea for the Younger Generation,” *Chatelaine*, April 1928, 1.

¹¹ Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 69, 84, 97.

¹² Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 2-3.

hierarchies. However, the audiences' values were sometimes at odds with those of the creators. Apparent transgression was met with discussion that revealed the underlying tension people felt, if not the resistance to the promotion of a particular ideal. As much as advertisers, promoters, businessmen, and government officials all wanted to represent a specific type of understanding, these often outwardly conflicted with others or contained internal contradictions, and people were sensitive to these in trying to fit traditional thought with qualities of modernity.

In Marshall Berman's classic work *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air*, he describes being modern as "to find ourselves in an environment that promises us adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world – and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are."¹³ The experience of modernity in the shadow of the Great War was to live with this foreboding tension of power and pleasure, destruction and ruin. The circumstances selected here for study look at the two sides of modernity – at the concurrent celebration of being modern and the shoring up of defences against its potential gloomy disorder. As the copy for one advertisement for the British American Oil Co. Limited in the *Globe* stated, "Life seems to be a perpetual race between education and disaster."¹⁴

With the rise of modernity vision was singled out and placed at the top of the hierarchy of the senses. As modernity developed, essential technological and consumer enterprises worked to establish and maintain vision's supremacy as they made recording, transmitting, disseminating, and accessing images a reality. The rise of a print culture (with widely available newspapers, magazines, and periodicals), the development of the

¹³ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983), 15.

¹⁴ *Globe*, August 22, 1927, 5.

camera, the opening of public art exhibits, and the invention of moving pictures were all nineteenth-century ‘discoveries’ that gave way to a modern urban visual culture. At the most basic level, entry into the realm of many popular entertainments was often premised on the ability to see. Along with the rise of popular culture came the rise of a culture increasingly based on vision. Radio, a substantial and important means of entertainment, of course, was the major exception to the culture of visibility, but even radio in the 1920s made attempts to turn an aural culture into a visual one. For example, the radio waves carried the sounds of dancing when Regina dancer Edith Grant was asked by radio producers to ballet dance on air.¹⁵

The twentieth century witnessed the popularization of these technologies both in terms of their cultural entrenchment and their accessibility to the public. While this occurs unevenly in cases of the populations affected and how they become culturally established, by the 1920s there is a clear sense that images and visual practices needed more public attention in terms of their power, accessibility, and regulation. Censorship of salacious literature, pornographic periodicals, vulgar art displays, and immoral films was demanded by the public throughout the decade in order to protect the masses from their detrimental impact.¹⁶ Public, visual culture was such a concern because movies, art, and magazines were not simply vehicles for entertainment but also places for the education of the public. Theatres, galleries, public streets, for example, were only a few of the popular places of visual entertainment that not only provided fun, but also trained eyes to certain scopical regimes and imbued bodies and objects with meaning. The very power of the visual was its educational value – even if it occurred unconsciously. Images suggested

¹⁵ Karen Rennie, “Gail Grant: A Life in Ballet” (master’s thesis, York University, 1992), 17.

¹⁶ See for example *Saturday Night*, August 26, 1922, 1 and *Globe*, September 14, 1927, 4.

the way things were supposed to be, helped to establish and maintain social norms, and reinforced cultural values in a way that was easily accessible. For many people who entered into the public discussions, it was the very accessibility of images that made them troublesome. They required no English language skills, could be found or purchased easily, and were difficult to control once in the public realm. Images could be sites of contestation where social and cultural values and norms could be challenged or sabotaged.

One of the challenges to making sense of being modern, urban, and industrial was that modernity was double edged and always enmeshed with the past. To think of modernity required thought about tradition. The historiography on the 1920s in Canada has been defined by a number of historians as mediation between tradition and modernity.¹⁷ As theorist Walter Benjamin's work showed, the past was a very real part of modernity as the two were frequently intertwined in areas like architecture, film, advertising, and fashion.¹⁸ As much as modern life was meant to be defined by progress, advancement, and innovation, tradition (or the memory of it) remained. Michel de Certeau argues that modernity is always engaged with the past. Although the discourses of modernity may attempt to cover or repress the past through a language of progress, it continually bears its mark in unsettling ways. In this sense the modern exists with a ghost of the past and one with which it is permanently engaged in discussion.¹⁹

¹⁷ Mary Jean Vipond, "National Consciousness in English-Speaking Canada in the 1920s: Seven Studies" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1974) and W.L. Morton, "The 1920s," in *The Canadians, 1867-1967*, ed. J.M.S Careless and R. Craig Brown (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), 205-235.

¹⁸ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA.: MIT Press, 1991), 253-260.

¹⁹ Michel de Certeau, *Heterologies: Discourse on the Other* trans. Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986), 4.

To “look again at looking and allow the artwork to educate the eye once more,” as Peter de Bolla suggested in *The Education of the Eye*, is a central axis of investigation and interpretation in the following chapters.²⁰ Broadly defined, artwork in the 1920s was changed due to the proliferation of periodical literature and the use of art and photography in print culture. Benjamin’s work also informs us that essential parts of the project of modernity were mechanical reproduction and ephemerality. For historians, the latter of these two factors is most challenging to study. Like Benjamin’s interest in a wax figure of a woman adjusting her garter, historians of modernity can only study ephemeral moments that have been recorded, or as Susan Buck-Morss describes “frozen in time.”²¹ What follows in this dissertation are those types of ephemeral performances or moments that have been recorded. As with all histories, but particularly with the ephemeral, the histories of the events remain, at best, partialities. My reliance on newspaper and other written sources can never reveal fully the sensuousness of an event or moment witnessed or participated in. Nonetheless, given the fleeting and ever-changing nature of capitalist modernity, it is important that even with these limitations we make the effort to understand this incarnation of lived experience. The experience of ephemerality is what marks most lives and it exists between and unites the punctuated, documented moments that become the fabric of recorded history. As de Bolla suggested I will “look again at looking” but it must be kept in mind that is a partial and obscured view.

In each of the chapters that follow, the focus is on different aspects of the culture of visibility. The chapters seek to explain how particular elements or moments can be used to understand the complicated cultural environment of the 1920s. Benjamin in *The*

²⁰ Peter de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 13.

²¹ Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 369.

Arcades Project argued that images were the tangible “small, particular moments” in which the “total historical event” was to be discovered. Further, he argued that the visual opened the door “to discover the crystal of the total event in the analysis of the small, particular moments.”²² The three middle chapters on the Diamond Jubilee, the 1922 Miss Canada and 1926 Miss Toronto beauty contests, and the 1927 Canadian National Exhibition are explorations of “particular moments” that reveal their wider associations and repercussions for Canadians during the decade. These chapters are bounded by an initial chapter on the flapper and a fifth chapter on film, automobiles, and speed. The middle chapters follow a basic pattern that begins with a broad scope in the first, becomes narrow with the middle three, and broadens again in the last one. The first and last chapters look at broader ideas and concepts that permeate the more directed case studies that make up the bulk of the dissertation.

The first chapter begins by discussing the significance of vision and visual culture to modernity and then analyses the significance of the flapper to visual culture in the 1920s. Although historians have correctly argued that most young women did not lead the flapper-like lives made famous by authors like F. Scott Fitzgerald, she remains an important symbolic and literal figure for the time period. Although few young Canadian women would have had the resources and permission to lead a life of gin and jazz, women did copy her ‘look’ and some of the behaviours that were associated with her. People believed that she existed as the quote that began the introduction demonstrated. Second, the flapper is an important figure of the cultural landscape and her existence, if only as it existed in symbols, marked many of the other debates on national celebration, beauty contests, nude art, and film.

²² Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing*, 74.

The three case studies that constitute chapters two, three, and four are on the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, beauty contests, and the display of three nude paintings at the 1927 Canadian National Exhibition. The second chapter looks at the celebrations of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation for the way organizers recognized, harnessed, and implemented visual culture in order to promote Canadian culture and history. As with the other case studies, organizers of the celebration used the body of a young, White woman to represent their ideals and those of the country. The subsequent chapter discusses early Canadian beauty contests that sought to use the same image for remarkably different purposes. The main focus of the chapter juxtaposes two different styles of beauty pageants to reveal how popular and malleable the image of the beauty contestant was and how controversial this type of selection could be. The very tension that marked the decade, that between the traditional and modern, is a theme carried throughout the dissertation, but one that is brought to the foreground in the debates over beauty contests. The fourth chapter allows us to look in greater depth at the debates over the culture of visibility. The chapter explores the controversy over the hanging of three nude paintings in the Art Gallery at the 1927 Canadian National Exhibition. The three nudes, which were not the only nudes to be hung in the Gallery in the 1920s, garnered hundreds of letters to the newspaper editors, which form the bulk of the evidence for the chapter.

The fifth and last chapter on film and automobiles is deliberately broader. Movies and automobiles brought another disconcerting problem: speed. Many Canadians agreed that the First World War played an integral role in triggering many of the troublesome changes of the 1920s. One editorial suggested, “the world was visibly slipping in 1914

and the years preceding, but with the Great War a general madness seized it and broke it loose from its moral mooring.”²³ World War One offered the decisive and dramatic push into a full-fledged modernity. It seemed that despite anyone’s best efforts it could not be slowed. In many of the debates and discussions in the other chapters, a significant part of the concern was due to the seemingly rapid speed at which change was now occurring. There was a distinct concern over technology and two technological innovations in particular came to represent the disturbing cultural shifts. Movies, in particular, became an important way for studying how the concerns, debates, and particular moments fit together with the other themes of the dissertation including visual culture, space, modernity, tradition, change, and bodies. Cars – a technology culturally related to film – became a marker of modern life and frequently, in this regard, appreciation and criticism were levelled at both of them. Although the focus of the chapter strays slightly from the otherwise close focus on women’s bodies, it brings to the dissertation an important discussion of the power of the visual and its relationship to speed and technology. Bodies, however, do play a critical role in the discussions of movies and cars, both of which were seen as having positive and negative implications for the body and physical experience. Modernity was made that much more troubling because of the speed at which it seemed to change things.

Taken as a whole, the dissertation builds upon and adds to the historical studies on visual culture in Canada. As a field of study, visual culture is relatively new, and as a result, the field is still experiencing problems in definition. George Roeder has described

²³ Editorial, *Catholic Register*, September 1, 1927, 4.

visual culture in the broadest of terms as “what is seen.”²⁴ The genealogy of visual culture perhaps provides more clues as to its scope and limits. James Elkins describes visual culture as “less Marxist, further from the kind of analysis that might be aimed at social action, more haunted by art history, and more in debt to Roland Barthes and Walter Benjamin than the original cultural studies.”²⁵ The origins of visual culture, therefore, suggest an ingrained interdisciplinarity. Nonetheless, such borrowing from other older disciplines has created tension within and outside of the field.²⁶ As the linguistic turn did, the new emphasis on the visual has created intense debate. Literary critic W.J.T. Mitchell has identified this shift or ‘turn’ toward the visual in the human sciences and, more broadly, in culture as “the pictorial turn.” Mitchell defines the turn as

a postlinguistic, postsemiotic rediscovery of the picture as a complex interplay between visibility, apparatus, institutions, discourse, bodies, and figurality. It is the realization that *spectatorship* (the look, the gaze, the glance, the practices of observation, surveillance, and visual pleasure) may be as deep a problem as various forms of *reading* (decipherment, decoding, interpretation, etc.) and that visual experience or ‘visual literacy’ might not be fully explicable on the model of textuality.²⁷

The argument presented in this dissertation acknowledges the complex interplay of the picture and other images and seeks to understand their reading (spectatorship) within their historical context.

In a very real way, historians have always engaged with the visual. Historians have used photographs, films, and other visual sources as evidence for many years. For much of their use, however, visual sources were an addition to text-based ones and were

²⁴ George Roeder, “Filling in the Picture: Visual Culture,” *Reviews in American History* 26, no. 1 (1998): 275.

²⁵ James Elkins, *Visual Culture: A Skeptical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 3-4.

²⁶ Some of these tensions arise from visual culture’s rise to status as a discipline in the United States. See for example the debates in ed. Rosalind Krauss and Hal Foster, special issue, *October* 77, (Summer 1996).

²⁷ W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 17.

relegated to a secondary position. The emphasis on visual reminds us that visual sources can tell their own unique stories about the past. It also sheds light on the fact that the visual can no longer be unproblematic glimpses into another time and that, as with written sources, they carry their own potential multiplicity of readings and troubled relationship to such things as 'truth' and the 'actual past'.

Despite the 'newness' of the proclaimed field of visual culture, there exists a related body of literature in Canadian history that deals with aspects of visual history. As with the linguistic turn, Canadian historians interested in the pictorial turn have begun to produce a rich and varied historiography. The lack of definition and borders in the field of visual culture, along with its interdisciplinary nature, have created an eclectic body of literature. Historians whose work has been used in this dissertation may not have readily engaged with the pictorial turn, but have, by virtue of the nature of their study, produced work of importance to the historiography on Canadian visual culture. Whether explicit or not, historians engaged in work on public memorials, cultural performances, and advertising have all in some way implicated visual culture.²⁸ One of the strongest emerging bodies of work exists around the history of photography with particular

²⁸ See for example, Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto*, Chapter 3; Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, "Smoke and Mirrors: Gender Representations in North American Tobacco and Alcohol Advertisements Before 1950," *Histoire sociale/ Social History* 31 no. 62 (1999): 183-222; Keith Regular, "On Public Display," *Alberta History* 34 no. 1 (Winter 1986): 1-10; Wade A. Henry, "Imagining the Great White Mother and the Great King: Aboriginal Tradition and Royal Representation at the 'Great Pow-wow' of 1901," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, n.s., 11 (2000): 87-108; H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec's Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); Alan Gordon, *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montreal's Public Memories, 1891-1930* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001); Valerie J. Korinek, *Roughing It in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000); Jonathan F. Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997); Colin M. Coates and Cecilia Morgan, *Heroines and History: Representations of Madeleine de Vercheres and Laura Secord* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); and Paul Rutherford, *The New Icons? The Art of Television Advertising* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994).

attention paid to how it influenced the imagination of the nation.²⁹ This dissertation seeks to build upon the existing Canadian historiography on visual culture, but in a much more self-conscious way. It takes as its starting point particular aspects of visual culture that intersects with issues of the body, gender, and social order. In this respect, its historiographical debt is much deeper than visual culture alone.

Readers will notice that the dissertation is not in chronological order. While the first and last chapters look at the decade as a whole, the three middle chapters take as their starting points different events that occurred at various times during the 1920s – the Jubilee in 1927, beauty contests in 1922 and 1926, and a nude art display in 1927. While I have chosen certain events that punctuate the decade, these events do not only belong to the moment at which they occur. In all the cases, the actual event is a product and a producer from which we can study the issues that lead up to and follow it.

In addition, each of the case studies allows an insight into the larger context of the decade. Since the flapper remains the best-known cultural symbol of the decade, a discussion of her meaning allows us to explore the surface of the cultural terrain of the 1920s. Many of the themes introduced in this chapter are returned to and developed in later ones. The Diamond Jubilee of Confederation allows us glimpses at the larger

²⁹ See for example Melissa Rombout, "Imaginary Canada: Photography and the Construction of National Identity," *Views: the Journal of Photography in New England* 12, no. 2 (1991): 4-9; Colleen Skidmore, "Photography in the Convent: Grey Nuns, Québec, 1861," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 35, no. 70 (November 2002): 279-310; James Opp, "Re-imaging the Moral Order of Urban Space: Religion and Photography in Winnipeg, 1900-1914," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, n.s., 13 (2003): 73-93; Peter Geller, *Northern Exposures: Photographing and Filming the Canadian North, 1920-45* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004); Brian S. Osborne, "Constructing the State, Managing the Corporation, Transforming the Individual: Photography, Immigration and the Canadian National Railway, 1925-30," in *Picturing Place: Photography and the Geographical Imagination*, ed. Joan M. Schwartz and James R. Ryan (London: I.B. Tauris, 2000), 162-192; J.C.H. King and Henrietta Lidchi, ed., *Imaging the Arctic* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1998); Lyle Dick, "Nationalism and Visual Media in Canada: The Case of Thomas Scott's Execution," *Manitoba History* 48 (2004): 2-18; and A.J.B. Johnston, "Imagining Paradise: The Visual Depiction of Pre-Deportation Acadia, 1850-2000," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 38, no. 2 (2004): 105-128.

national political, social, and cultural issues that the nation was facing throughout the 1920s and provides a wider context for the dissertation. In this sense, it offers another perspective on the time. The Jubilee was a culmination of the years preceding it, and as we shall see, was very much influenced by the First World War and the events that occurred in the first years of the 1920s. The Jubilee is very much a negotiation between the concurrent aspects of modernity (pleasure/doom) and that theme carries into the following chapter on beauty contests. With the beauty contests I explore how Canadians debated and showed acceptance of modernity by examining the discussions over nude art. As was clear during the Jubilee celebrations, Canadians longed for an idealized past and expressed concern about the future. With the nude art display, this pull between past, present, and future reveals how thoroughly modern Canadians were as they accepted – although they may not have liked – the symbols of modernity that appeared before them. The tension between a past and present, tradition and modernity was part of the very thing that made them modern. In sum, the dissertation is organized thematically and although the case studies provide the road into the cultural landscape, readers will find that the chapters look more broadly at the decade than the dates of the particular events may suggest.

This dissertation can be thought of as a discursive kaleidoscope. The lenses of study that I discuss in the project focus in different ways in each chapter and take on different priorities. Each case study reveals a different way of organizing the lenses, of having the pieces fall into a pattern of light and shadow. Modern urban Canadian culture was predominately visual and the culture of visibility absorbed the underpinning social constructions, where they coalesced and refracted into new directions. The ability to

look, absorb, and emit a powerful look depended on the positioning of person in space and in relation to the object or subject in the line of sight. In short, the sight, site, and situation interacted in a complex, and sometimes unpredictable manner, to shape visual discourse. The idea of the kaleidoscope allows us to remember how complicated modernity was and how quickly things seemed to change and that when we look through the lenses we see the thoughts and ideas of Canadians who have come through a watershed moment into a barely recognizable world.

CHAPTER ONE

'I ENJOYED LOOKING AT HER': VISION AND THE FLAPPER

In 1921 a leading journal of Western medicine, *The Lancet*, published an article on the possibility that radiation was emitted from human eyes. The author, Dr. Charles Russ, started from the following premise:

The fact that the direct gaze or vision of one person soon becomes intolerable to another person suggested to me that there might be a ray or radiation issuing from the human eye. If there is such a ray it may produce an uncomfortable effect on the other person's retina or by collision with the other person's ray; it is a fact that after a few seconds the vision of one or the other will have to be turned away at least for a short time. Numerous everyday observations and experiences seem to support the possibility of the existence of a ray or force emitted by the human eye, and in order to give my theory the support of some experimental evidence I decided to try and find or create some instrument which should be set in motion by nothing more than the impact of human vision.

To prove his theory, Russ built a solenoid (a wire wrapped around a metallic core) held steady with a magnet and suspended by silk and placed it within a metal box. One end of the box had a glass pane that allowed for observation. He found that

If the human eye looks through the slot in the observing window and maintains a steady gaze at one end of the solenoid the latter will be seen to start into motion, which is usually away from the observing eye. If the gaze be now transferred to the true centre of the solenoid the latter stops, and if the vision is now applied to the opposite end of the solenoid the latter moves in a reverse direction to the motion first induced.

In order to have better controls for the experiment, Russ eventually constructed more sophisticated and complex boxes for the solenoid to protect against the influence of heat, motion, light, electrostatic, and electromagnetic forces. In the end, he concluded that the

human eye emitted physiological rays that could induce motion.¹ Vision, he contended, was powerful enough to change the electromagnetic force around an object and control it with precision.²

Another physician, Dr. Ian Suttie, who was critical of Russ's jump from people to objects, pointed out that in regards to people, psychological relations might be the cause of the need to look away, and challenged the premise of Russ's experiment. Although he did not completely dismiss Russ's findings, in a letter to the editor of *The Lancet* he wrote,

The discomfort is not sensory but arises in the sphere of ideas and sentiments, and is manifestly dependent upon the past history of the patient and his psychic relations with the gazer. Thus a woman may feel acute discomfort in the knowledge that someone is gazing at a hole in her stocking, a discomfort strictly analogous to that experienced by a person with something to conceal while another stares through 'the windows of his soul.'³

¹ Charles Russ, "An Instrument Which Is Set in Motion by Vision or by the Proximity of the Human Body," *The Lancet* 198, no. 5109 (July 30, 1921): 222-4.

² With the experiment, Russ did not introduce an entirely new theory of ocular functioning, but rather (briefly) attempted to resuscitate the ancient notion of the active eye. From the ancient Greeks to eighteenth century philosophers, people believed that light rays emanated from the eyes. Historian Martin Jay argues that the theory of extramission "has long been discredited," and ends his discussion of the theory with Descartes who held to the belief that animals such as cats were endowed with extramission. Even Descartes might have been exceptional in his acceptance of the theory, which by the eighteenth century, after almost two thousand years, was largely opposed. The eyes became only receivers as opposed to receivers and transmitters. Some scholars have challenged Jay's interpretation and argued that the idea of the active eye was re-positioned and not completely discarded. Historian Teresa Brennan demonstrated that the notion that the eyes join and shape the view of reality has remained salient to various degrees. She points to the examples of Mesmer's rays from the eyes and anthropologists studies of the evil eye. Freud, whose writings had become popular among the masses in North America in the 1920s, also offered the possibility of invisible energetic forces emanating from the eyes. The difference from the ancient conception was that extramission was no longer thought of in "active physical terms." See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 9-10, 30-1, 74; and Teresa Brennan, "The Contests of Vision," in *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight*, ed. Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (New York: Routledge, 1996), 221. On Freud's impact on American culture see Gilman M. Ostrander, "The Revolution in Morals," in *Change and Continuity in Twentieth Century America: The 1920s*, ed. John Braeman, Robert H. Bremner, and David Brody (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1968), 323-350; and Robert Allen Goldberg, *America in the Twenties* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2003), 95.

³ Ian Suttie, "The Supposed External Effects of Human Vision," *The Lancet* 198, no. 5110 (September 3, 1921), 533.

As Suttie's example of a woman's discomfort with being looked at reveals, a certain set of visual practices and norms exist around looking. The fictional woman in his example seeks to conceal part of her body from the line of sight extending from another person. Gazing or being the recipient of the gaze is always embedded within a social and cultural network of relations. Suttie's only paragraph on the psychological origins of visual relations unintentionally discloses a whole other set of cultural problems. In cultural terms, vision was a potent force that encompassed social constructions of gender, class, race, and age. Suttie's example brings the body into the culture and discourse of visibility and aptly demonstrates how fundamental social relations were to the visual. The discomfort the woman feels in Suttie's example was the result of her social transgression that was potentially mixed with fear or embarrassment. It was not simply, as Russ's experiment might lead us to believe, because the man's eyes emitted rays that caused sensation in the exposed part of her leg that was the object of his gaze.

Russ's experiment and Suttie's response can be understood as an example of the attention given to the visual in the 1920s. Like Russ's experiment attempted to prove, eyes did have power in the 1920s – power to consume, absorb, communicate, and express. As his main critic contended, however, ideas and psychic relations played a significant role in determining the visual discourse. During the decade, one particular figure - the flapper - became the focal point for the cultural debates that revealed the cultural relations embedded in looking.

This chapter discusses the ideas of both Russ and Suttie that circulated in modified forms in the cultural terrain of the 1920s by focussing on the flapper. Although many historians have correctly shown that she was, for the most part, a fictitious

representation of womanhood and that her lifestyle could not be emulated by many women of the period, she remains an important cultural figure.⁴ As other historians have argued, perception, regardless of its relationship to actual ‘fact’, matters because of its intellectual and cultural weight.⁵ Her presence in print and emulation of her look on the street meant that she was the focus of broad discussions on cultural change. The most ubiquitous of images from the 1920s, she not only stood for wider social and cultural changes but also has come to represent the decade itself. This chapter looks at the meanings associated with the image of the flapper as she appeared in print and on the street. The first section of the chapter discusses the flapper as a popular Folk Devil in order to explore the broader implications of social and cultural change she embodied. The second section looks at the flapper – an American creation – in the context of Canadian culture in the 1920s. The third section discusses the cultural associations with the flapper’s look, while the last section discusses how advertisers used her image to promote a different way of looking at the body. In the last section, I argue that the flapper was situated as someone *to be looked at* in the culture of visibility and thus introduced the ideas that the body was to be under constant surveillance as it would be seen by others. In addition to the discussion on the flapper in this chapter, frequent references to the flapper occur in the chapters that follow. Thus, this chapter serves as an introduction to her cultural meaning that will be explored in a variety of contexts in other

⁴ Mary Vipond, “The Image of Women in Mass Circulation Magazines in the 1920s,” in *The Neglected Majority: Essays In Canadian Women’s History*, Vol. 2, ed. Susan Mann Trofimenkoff and Alison Prentice (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1977), 116-124; and Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp Clark Pitman, 1988), 7.

⁵ See for example Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization Without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917-1927* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), 5-6; Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 4; and Cynthia Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of a Modern Canada, 1920 to 1950* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press), 28.

chapters. In order to understand the potency of her relationship to other events and trends, we need to establish what she represented.

THE FOLK DEVIL AND THE FLAPPER

In his work on the history of sexuality, Jeffrey Weeks argues that people often need to make widespread social, economic, cultural and/or political crises more understandable by bringing them down to the level of the local and particular. Weeks discusses how crises are turned into moral panics where discursively constructed groups are singled out as “Folk Devils.” Often these moral panics became focused on sexuality as an area that could be controlled and morally and legally regulated. Historically, the insane, homosexuals, and prostitutes have all been the focus of such panics.⁶ I would like to suggest that in the 1920s the flapper was a desirable Folk Devil – devilish because of her representations and desirable for those who wished to copy, discuss, and even vilify her. Unlike other Folk Devils, part of her perceived danger was the fact that she ‘spoke’ so clearly and in such attractive ways to people. She was a Folk Devil who attracted and repelled. Both men and women found her alluring – and for women this meant mimicking all or part of her ‘look’ (see fig. 1.1 and 1.2).



⁶ Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics, and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality Since 1800* (London: Longman, 1989).

Fig. 1.1 Young women mimicking the flapper look at the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation Celebrations. (Library and Archives of Canada/ C18078)



Fig. 1.2 Two young flappers, Toronto, 1926 (Private collection)

Her existence – in print and in modified forms on the street – caused fear among Canadians for she was a potent symbol of modernity and change in gender relations, the co-mingling of classes and races, leisure and amusement, courting and consumption, and the disjuncture between past and present. In her classic work on American youth in the 1920s, historian Paula Fass argues

The image that teases the historical imagination is of a rebellious youth, iconoclastic, irreverent, frivolous, lost to social responsibility, and even more lost to traditional values and beliefs. While no longer tied to the past, they also rejected the present.... Contemporaries caricatured youth in order to understand and finally come to terms with the many changes which youth represented and which suddenly overwhelmed an older order.⁷

While many of these changes existed to a greater degree in the imagination of the press than in reality, they nonetheless caused a significant amount of discussion. The image of

⁷ Paula Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 6-7.

the flapper represented more than a change in fashions, she represented a change in the social order. In a country turning to its history and imagining its future to find a way to make sense of itself, she represented a disconcerting rejection of the traditional Canadian order. Urban, reckless, fully steeped in the machine-aged habits, the related challenges to age, class, and gender were significant to both individual families and the country.

The flapper appeared across the cultural landscape, and was employed in a variety of spaces, including all of those studied here (the art gallery, bathing beaches, theatres, and streets). The alleged existence of the young, irreverent, and free woman gripped the cultural imagination in the 1920s. She was mythic and real for she existed in literary and visual culture as the embodiment of postwar society and had women mimicking her in public. She was an embodiment of Walter Benjamin's postulate that the urban, industrial, modern world was reenchanting with myth and, in the case of the flapper, this mythic reenchantment occurred through advertising.⁸ In popular culture, the flapper appeared in advertisements, paintings, fictional stories, celebratory and cautionary articles, letters to the editor, commercial art, movies, and on magazine covers. She was a literary and visual force that did and has continued to define the decade between the First World War and the Great Depression.

The flapper was such a potent image because she was more than a simple visual rendering. Her look was infused with cultural meaning and symbols through a cultural process of imaging. Jon Stratton describes the fetishization of the female body for visual consumption associated with projects of modernity, including consumption and mass marketing that began in the mid-nineteenth century. He argues that these intertwining

⁸ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 253-4.

developments led to a “spectacularization of the female body” where the sexualized female body became a desirable spectacle in a way that it had not been before.⁹ The flapper continued the trend of symbolizing the desires and fears of the nation in a young woman’s body, but in the context of a consumer culture that increasingly sexualized the female body for the pleasure of visual consumption.

The 1920s was an era of change, although in many cases the process had been underway for decades. The devastation and bloodshed of the First World War served to heighten the problems. By 1921, for the first time, just over half of all Canadians were living in urban areas. This caused tension in a society that placed symbolic emphasis on farming, rural life, and the land as sources of the country’s tradition, history, and stability.¹⁰ Urbanization brought into sharp relief some of the other ‘problems’ people associated with modern life, including industrialization, immigration, and secularization. In Canadian cities, one could witness the industrial by-products of poverty, illness, dirt, and decay. Cities also contained an increasingly diverse cross-section of Canadian society. The composition of Canadian immigrant populations shifted and the originating countries of new Canadians changed from the British Isles to Central and Eastern Europe and Asia.¹¹ Stories appeared in major Canadian periodicals that warned that young, single women entering the cities looking for work were being seduced and degraded by a

⁹ Jon Stratton, *The Desirable Body: Cultural Fetishism and the Erotics of Consumption* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 25-58.

¹⁰ John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 3-4.

¹¹ Thompson with Seager, *Canada 1922-1939*, 7; Peter Ward, *White Canada Forever: Popular Attitudes and Public Policy Towards Orientals in British Columbia*, 3rd ed. (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, [1978], 2002); and Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991).

“foreign element.”¹² The secular pleasures of the city were thought to provide too many dangerous distractions to Canadian youth, leading them away from their traditional roles associated with work and family. Anglo-Celtic Canadians, already fearful of French Canadians’ propensity for natural increase, worried that White, middle-class, English-Canadians were limiting family size to the peril of the nation. The apparent embrace of secular culture associated with consumerism and new leisure pastimes took young Canadians further away from the reach of traditional centres of control such as the family and the church.¹³ Although throughout the 1920s Christian values were promoted in high schools, and associations like the YMCA and YWCA attempted to attract young people to Christian leisure pursuits, reformers continually expressed concern over popular modern pleasures like dancing, drinking, and motoring.¹⁴ Cities were the literal and symbolic sources of these problems.

¹² Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, 111-112; and Carolyn Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1880-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 152-7. Emily Murphy’s book *The Black Candle*, which was a collection of *Maclean’s* magazine articles, warned about the potential dangers of miscegenation and the potential threats young women faced as a result of men of colour’s influence. See Emily Murphy, *The Black Candle* (Toronto: Thomas Allen, 1922; Coles Canadiana Collection, 1973). Citations are to the Coles Canadiana Collection edition.

¹³ Richard Allen, *The Social Passion: Religion and Social Reform in Canada, 1914-1928* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971); Ramsey Cook, *The Regenerators: Social Criticism in Late Victorian English Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985); and D. Marshall, *Secularizing the Faith: Canadian Protestant Clergymen and the Crisis of Belief, 1850-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992). Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau have argued that the secularization thesis has been overstated and that religion continued to play a significant role in Canadian society. See Nancy Christie and Michael Gauvreau, *A Full-Orbed Christianity: The Protestant Churches and Social Welfare in Canada, 1900-1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1996). While religion continued to play a significant role in the lives of Canadians and in defining their social values, religious leaders expressed concern that secular activities were eroding Christian values and gaining importance in shifting the moral direction of society.

¹⁴ Cynthia Comacchio, “Dancing to Perdition: Adolescence and Leisure in Interwar English Canada,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 32, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 20. See also Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem*, chapter 6; Robert A. Campbell, *Sit Down and Drink Your Beer: Regulating Vancouver’s Beer Parlours, 1925-1954* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001); Craig Heron, *Booze: A Distilled History* (Toronto: Between the Lines Press, 2003); and Craig Heron, “The Boys and Their Booze: Masculinities and Public Drinking in Working-Class Hamilton, 1890-1946,” *Canadian Historical Review*, 86, no. 3 (September 2005): 446-452.

The new consumer culture, intimately connected to the modern city, advertised a sexual freedom, a lifestyle, and an image (particularly the flapper) that were beyond the reach of many people, and ignored some of the continuing problems they faced in the labour force and in their personal lives. By 1929 the average annual wage was \$1200, while the Department of Labour estimated that the average Canadian family needed \$1430 to maintain a “minimum standard of health and decency.”¹⁵ In the decades prior to the 1920s, the rapid changes in industrialization pitted workers against the evolving face of corporate capitalism in bitter, and sometimes bloody, labour disputes. Many middle-class Canadians remained concerned over labour’s socialism and radicalism.¹⁶ While they disagreed on the origins of the problems for Canadian families, labour and middle-class reformers did work to alleviate what they saw as the greatest threats to the Canadian working family. For unions, the answer was job protection, the maintenance of skilled labour, and the introduction of a family wage. For social reformers, concern over work, family, class, and the future of the country were tied together with issues such as alcohol consumption, the enfranchisement of women, incorrect parenting (especially by mothers), and improper, unclean, work environments.¹⁷ The social and moral reform movements did achieve success in the 1910s and 1920s with the passing of temperance legislation, the granting of the vote for women, and other social welfare campaigns.¹⁸ Although

¹⁵ Quoted in Thompson with Seager, *Canada 1922-1939*, 138.

¹⁶ A. Ross McCormack, *Reformers, Rebels, and Revolutionaries: The Western Canadian Radical Movement 1899-1919* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977); James Naylor, *The New Democracy: Challenging the Social Order in Industrial Ontario, 1914-1925* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); and Harry Gutkin and Mildred Gutkin, *Profiles in Dissent: The Shaping of Radical Thought in the Canadian West* (Edmonton: NeWest, 1997).

¹⁷ On the efforts of reformers see Katherine McCuaig, “From Social Reform to Social Service.’ The Changing Role of Volunteers: the Anti-tuberculosis Campaign, 1900-30,” *Canadian Historical Review* 61 no. 4 (December 1980): 480-501.

¹⁸ On temperance see Wendy Mitchinson, “The WCTU: ‘For God, Home and Native Land’: A Study in Nineteenth-Century Feminism,” in *A Not Unreasonable Claim: Women and Reform in Canada, 1880s-*

these were incredible successes, the changes did not always garner the expected results. With the slow defeat of temperance throughout the 1920s, the women's movement saw some of its power slip away. In regards to other aspects of the social campaigns, a number of recent studies have shown the achievements of welfare and clean milk came at a price of increased moral regulation, especially for the working-classes and women.¹⁹ Furthermore, the patchwork solutions could not change, or did not address the underlying problems of a hierarchical class system based on inequality and compounded by ethnic, age, and gender discrimination.²⁰

In terms of gender, the ideal for White women, in particular, did not include a long-term stay in the workforce; work was expected to be a temporary stage before women took on the permanent role of wife and mother.²¹ Most women's lives followed

1920s, ed. Linda Kealey (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1979); Jan Noel, *Canada Dry: Temperance Crusades before Confederation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Heron, *Booze*; and Sharon Anne Cook, *'Through Sunshine and Shadow': The Woman's Christian Temperance Union, Evangelicism, and Reform in Ontario, 1874-1930* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1995). On the suffrage movement in Canada see Catherine Cleverdon, *The Woman Suffrage Movement in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970); Veronica Strong-Boag, *The Parliament of Women: The National Council of Women of Canada, 1893-1929* (Ottawa: National Museum, 1976); and Carol Lee Bacchi, *Liberation Deferred? The Ideas of the English Canadian Suffragists, 1877-1918* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982).

¹⁹ See Valverde, *The Age of Soap, Light, and Water*; James Struthers, *The Limits of Affluence: Welfare in Ontario, 1920-1970* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994), chapter 1; Cynthia Comacchio, *Nations Are Built of Babies: Saving Ontario's Mothers and Children, 1900-1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993), chapters 6 and 8; and Margaret Little, *No Car, No Radio, No Liquor Permit: The Moral Regulation of Single Mothers in Ontario, 1920-1997* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1998) chapter 3. Nancy Christie argues that the moral regulation thesis has been overstated. Looking at Mothers' Allowance in Ontario, Christie argues, "the system of state welfare that mothers' allowances established was based not so much on moral regulation (of sexual behaviour, character, and homemaking skills), as on the reinforcement of family economic interdependence." See Nancy Christie, *Engendering the State: Family, Work and Welfare in Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000), chapter 4, especially 140-8. Moral regulation was also part of the reforms that target leisure and amusement. See Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, chapter 6.

²⁰ See for example Ruth Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the Jewish Labour Movement of Toronto, 1900-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992).

²¹ Bryan Palmer, *Working Class Experience: Rethinking the History of Canadian Labour, 1800-1991*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1992), 192-6; Linda Kealey, *Enlisting Women for the Cause: Women, Labour, and the Left in Canada, 1890-1920* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1998), chapter 4; Joan Sangster, *Dreams of Equality: Women on the Canadian Left, 1920-1950* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1989), chapter 2; and Ruth Frager, *Sweatshop Strife: Class, Ethnicity, and Gender in the*

this pattern, which emphasized continuity from the past as the youth of the 1920s found the overall pattern of their lives similar to their mothers.²² In short, the 1920s were a time of perceived and real upheaval, and citizens attempted to make sense of modern Canada. The concerns did more than provide the context for the reception of the flapper's symbols; they shaped and focused people's vision and their reaction to her.

SEEING THE FLAPPER IN CANADIAN CULTURE

In F. Scott Fitzgerald's classic novel, *The Great Gatsby*, protagonist Nick Caraway meets a flapper and makes the following observation:

I enjoyed looking at her. She was a slender, small-breasted girl, with an erect carriage, which she accentuated by throwing her body backward at the shoulders like a young cadet. Her grey sun-strained eyes looked back at me with polite reciprocal curiosity out of a wan, charming, discontented face. It occurred to me now that I had seen her before, or a picture of her, somewhere before.²³

Given the popularity of the flapper, Nick Caraway would have certainly "seen her before, or a picture of her, somewhere before." The passage above speaks to the pleasure ingrained in looking at her body, the omnipresence of her image, and to part of her expected role as a figure *to be seen*. The male narrator's voice combined with the silent look of the unnamed woman infuses the quote with the expected gender relations surrounding the flapper. For all her visual impertinence, the flapper was typically depicted as silent and there to be looked at. This is indicative of the cultural meaning of the flapper as a whole. As we shall see, for as much as she challenged traditional conceptions of womanhood, she upheld many.

Jewish Labour Movement in Toronto, 1900-1939 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), chapters 5 and 6.

²² Alison Prentice *et al*, *Canadian Women: A History*, 2nd ed., (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 278.

²³ F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (New York: Scribner, 1925, reprinted with preface and notes by Matthew J. Bruccoli, New York: Collier Books, 1992), 15. Citations are to the Collier edition.

Credit for the flapper is usually given to American illustrator John Held Jr. who first drew the flapper for *Life* magazine.²⁴ The flapper was not the first fictional representation of womanhood to define a generation. She was preceded by and sometimes overlapped with Charles Dana Gibson's creation of the quintessential 'American Girl' with the Gibson Girl, and other fictional female icons, in particular the New Woman, the sexually charged 'It Girl,' and the vamp. Like these other representations, the flapper was caught up in a complex web of meaning that was easily understood in popular culture and whose image was employed to represent a specific set of cultural constructions. Importantly, the flapper's appearance was different than her predecessors. She was defined by her angular, almost geometric shape, which emphasized long vertical lines and obliterated the curves of breasts and hips. At times, the flapper was drawn in a way that integrated her body into a modern abstract piece of art. Roland Marchand has argued that the flapper's shape was associated with another symbol of modernity – the skyscraper.²⁵ Drawn unrealistically thin, in an almost rectangular shape, her short skirts showed off long, thin legs and hands and feet that ended in points.²⁶

Despite her very particular look and the origins of her existence, the image of the flapper was not restricted to American audiences. The flapper was a ubiquitous image both in Canada and internationally.²⁷ Part of the flapper's wide appeal can be attributed

²⁴ Carolyn Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover: The Origins of Visual Stereotypes in American Mass Media* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 121. Interestingly, Gibson Girl creator, Charles Dana Gibson, owned *Life Magazine*.

²⁵ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 181-184.

²⁶ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 155.

²⁷ On Canada see Allen Levine, *The Devil in Babylon: Fear of Progress and the Birth of Modern Life* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2005), chapter 7; and Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, especially 64-5 and chapter 6. For the international historiography see, for example, Ann Heilman and Margaret Beetham, Eds., *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism, and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930* (New York: Routledge, 2004); Laura Davidow Hirschbein, "The Flapper and the Fogey: Representations of Gender and Age in the 1920s," *Journal of Family History* 26, no. 1 (January 2001): 112-137; Maria Makela, "The Rise and Fall of the Flapper Dress: Nationalism and Anti-Semitism in Early-

to the flexibility of meanings that surrounded her. Louise Ryan argues, “The flapper, a symbol of modernism, embodied not only those different national characteristics, but also helped to frame the specific debates and concerns of particular national contexts.”²⁸ In short, the flapper became a hybrid that could be moulded to suit different needs as the complex project of modernity unfolded at different speeds in different places. For Canadians, who were experiencing a national ‘coming of age’ in the wake of the Great War, youth in general – and the flapper in particular – represented more than simply a generational conflict. As Cynthia Comacchio argues “young Canadians [were] ‘in process’ within the context of a young nation caught up in its own self-formation and transformation.” Youth represented Canada’s promise as a young country with its own potential.²⁹ As future leaders and citizens youth held an important place in a country coming of age. In contrast, the flapper presented the potential peril in which the new generation may have placed the country by engaging in disconcerting behaviour and challenging traditional values.

The flapper’s behaviour epitomized the urban, industrial, machine-age modernity where technology transformed space and public and private relations. To Canadians in the 1920s who valued rural, agricultural society, her appearance marked the dangerous import of American culture and some of the more distasteful compromises of modern life. She was often portrayed as the epitome of the iconoclasm of modern life. One cover of *Maclean’s* magazine depicted a young flapper in church. Sitting in a pew she had her bible held up in front of her face as though she were diligently reading it. However, her make-up compact is held inside the bible and she is touching up her make-up (see fig. 1.3).³⁰

Twentieth-Century Discourses on German Fashion,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 34, no. 3 (Winter 2000): 183-208; and Miriam Silverberg, “Advertising Every Body: Images from the Japanese Modern Years,” in *Choreographing History: Unnatural Acts: Theorizing the Performative*, ed. Susan Leigh Foster (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), 129-148.

²⁸ Louise Ryan, “Locating the Flapper in Rural Irish Society: The Irish Provincial Press and the Modern Woman in the 1920s,” in *New Women Hybridities*, 91.

²⁹ Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 2, 13.

³⁰ *Maclean’s*, February 15, 1927, front cover.



Fig. 1.3 A flapper secretly touches up her make-up in church. (*Maclean's*, February 15, 1927)

In a Canadian society that was searching for a national culture of its own, flappers held an awkward place. For Canadians, World War One held a promise of maturity as a nation and the post-war period was a time when Canadian intellectuals and the cultural elite consciously sought to cultivate a distinctly Canadian culture. Of course, what English-Canadian elites considered culture was rather narrowly defined, and typically excluded popular forms of amusement. Art, literature, music, poetry, and perhaps even good quality, moral (Canadian-made) films counted. At the heart of the desire for a completely Canadian culture was cultural nationalism that mythologized as much as it endorsed. Canadian culture was promoted as one born in a rugged Northland, true to a higher national spirit, and free from the obscenity and cynicism that seemed to mar American culture.³¹ Although voluntary groups, newspapers, magazines, and individual

³¹ The mythology around the Group of Seven and their work illustrates this point. See Peter Mellen, *The Group of Seven*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), 6-22; and Thompson with Seager, *Canada 1922-1939*, 163-165. See also Carl Berger, "The True North Strong and Free" in *Nationalism in Canada*, ed. Peter Russell (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson Ltd., 1966), 3-26. See also Brian Osborne, "The Iconography of Nationhood in Canadian Art," in *The Iconography of Landscape: Essays on the Symbolic*

Canadians supported this idea, it remained an ideal. In truth, Canadians, like their American counterparts, were enmeshed in a North American culture that can be exemplified by the border trade of films, magazines, and literature that crossed into the country to the concern and delight of Canadians.³² In these realms, the image of the flapper was propagated.

Given that the flapper's image was born in a magazine, it is not surprising that she appeared most prominently in them. Periodical literature played an important role in 1920s Canada. It was a forum for the exchange and promotion of ideas and images, a vehicle for fantasy and escape, and a forum for the private and personal study of the body. Canadians purchased both Canadian and American periodicals, but regardless of their national origins, the advertisements they carried were either the same or very similar. Both *Maclean's* and *Saturday Night* carried advertisements that appeared in American magazines like *Vogue* and *Ladies Home Journal*. What is striking about magazines in this period, especially top selling Canadian magazines, is the heterogeneity of content. Each issue had to appeal to a broad range of interests and so included news stories, fiction, sports, investments, pieces on beauty and fashion, and a wide range of advertisements that spanned from home cleaning products to cosmetics to foodstuffs to national resources. Advertising played a prominent and important role making up a substantial portion of each issue.

Representation, Design and Use of Past Environments, ed. David Cosgrove and Stephen Daniels (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 162-178.

³² On the influence of American culture see Mary Jean Vipond, "National Conscious in English-Speaking Canada in the 1920s: Seven Studies" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1974); and Mary Vipond, "Canadian Nationalism and the Plight of Canadian Magazines in the 1920s," *Canadian Historical Review* 58, no. 1 (March 1977): 43-63.

The use of the image of the flapper in magazines and newspapers was uneven and contradictory. Magazines that decried her existence, real or imagined, used that very representation in advertisements and on covers. Fictional stories that presented her positively ran next to social commentaries about the dangers her body foretold. *Hush*, a tabloid which often ran disparaging articles about flapper-like young women, ran a regular column in 1929 entitled “Confessions of A Flapper” in which all the provocative details about one flapper’s life were revealed on a regular basis.³³ It seems that magazine publishers could not escape the contradiction inevitable in the flapper’s existence: her image caused fear among some, but sold magazines to others who found her alluring. Even *Maclean’s* magazine asked, “Is the Flapper a Menace?” while it continued to run her picture. The bottom line was that, like Nick Caraway’s character, people enjoyed looking at her, and this enjoyment caused anxiety in others. These were important tensions in the debates over the politics of looking at the body in the 1920s.

THE CULTURAL ASSOCIATIONS OF THE FLAPPER LOOK

In her study of “brazen performers,” Angela J. Latham argues that the fashions that defined the flapper were a “visual synopsis of all that was morally wrong with American womanhood.”³⁴ For Canadians she revealed equally disturbing problems. The flapper was frequently portrayed in motion. Her hair was bobbed, she wore new, fashionable, mass-produced, and store bought clothes. Perhaps more disturbing were the questionable activities the flapper engaged in: dancing the Charleston, listening to jazz,

³³ For example see *Hush* August 16, 1928, 8; January 31, 1929, 5, 9; February 7, 1929, 2; February 14, 1929, 8, 12.

³⁴ Angela J. Latham, *Posing a Threat: Flappers, Chorus Girls, and Other Brazen Performers of the 1920s* (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 2000), 69. See also Angela J. Latham, “Packaging Women: The Concurrent Rise of Beauty Pageants, Public Bathing, and Other Performances of ‘Nudity’,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 29, no. 3 (1995): 149-167.

driving, dating, petting, drinking, and smoking. To show her alleged freedom and domestic emancipation, advertisers and illustrators highlighted some of the flapper's more disconcerting visual characteristics and behaviours (see fig. 1.4).

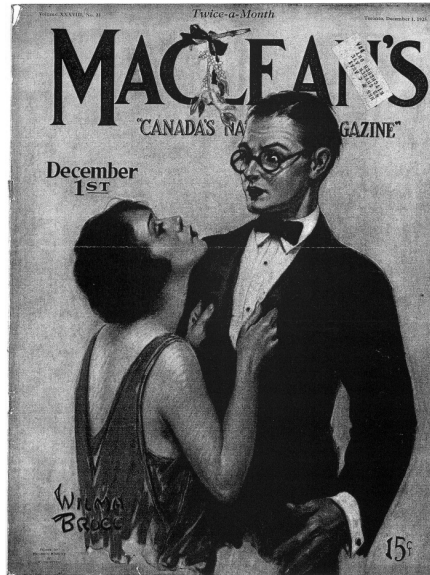


Fig. 1.4 An illustration of the “brazen” behaviour associated with flappers. The young man (and object of her affection) looks shocked by her assertiveness. (*Maclean's* December 1, 1925)

Her clothing received a great deal of attention. Women's fashions of the 1920s were cause for consternation for some Canadians who found the flesh-revealing garments to be shocking or even dangerous.³⁵ In response to the new revealing modes of dress, *The Catholic Register* praised a group of Catholic girls in Chicago for their statement on modest dress. They reprinted the credo of the Chicago Catholic Student Conference, which included a resolution that stated: “We depreciate the thoughtlessness of girls and women who become a source of temptation to man forcing too much of their physical form upon his gaze.”³⁶ While changes in fashion beginning in the late nineteenth century, and continuing into the twentieth century, helped to lessen the restrictions on women's

³⁵ Helen Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport and Sexuality* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1986), 68.

³⁶ *The Catholic Register*, May 23, 1929, 4.

movement and reflected their new presence in the public world, by the 1920s many believed that the trends in fashion had swung too far in favour of exposure and mobility. Significantly, women's fashions in the 1920s were also related to nudity. Critics chastised fashion houses and advertisers who seemed to be promoting vice, immodesty, and criminal activity. *The Catholic Register* in separate and related articles to those on beauty contests quoted physicians, criminologists and sociologists who argued that there was a direct link between the revelation of women's bodies and crime. Rolled stockings in particular were problematic, and whether or not women who wore them were 'innocent,' they caused crimes of passion.³⁷ One young man who grew up in the 1920s recalled that the "impractically" dressed young women in short skirts meant that young men like him often found themselves in a state of sexual arousal.³⁸

Despite the criticisms of the new style of clothing, there were positive and practical sides to the changes in women's fashion. Women's clothing in the nineteenth century epitomized the conceptions of Victorian womanhood as fragile, feminine, and delicate. Fashionable clothing restricted women's movement, was painful, and at times, dangerous. In the 1860s and 1870s Canadian physicians expressed concern over the popular styles of women's dress. Doctors warned that tight lacing and corseting could cause a long list of medical problems from miscarriages to curvatures of the spine to weak lungs.³⁹ In comparison, fashions of the 1920s were lauded for their more "natural"

³⁷ *The Catholic Register*, March 11, 1926, 4.

³⁸ Rebecca Coulter, "Teen-Ages in Edmonton, 1921-1931: Experiences of Gender and Class" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 1987), 128.

³⁹ On dress reform in Canada in the nineteenth century see Barbara E. Kelcey, "Dress Reform in Nineteenth-Century Canada," in *Fashion: A Canadian Perspective*, ed. Alexandra Palmer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004), 229-248. On physicians' push for dress reform see Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 66-71. As Mitchinson notes, the medical profession was not a monolith and not all physicians shared this concern or placed equal emphasis on the corset in particular. Further she argues that

shape and hygienic qualities. An article by an anonymous author in a 1925 issue of *Saturday Night* described the modern woman's silhouette stating, "There is no unhygienic compression in one place to produce an exaggeration of outline in another. The woman in these athletic days keeps herself thin – and some would say flat – but she is free and at ease in her robes. From the point of view of aesthetics the fashion, if not pushed to extremes, is undoubtedly to be approved. At any rate, it appears so to our modern eyes."⁴⁰ The very clothes worn by flappers were interpreted as physical liberation. In a comment to mothers, *Chatelaine* described "your flapper daughter" as having a "free unhampered body."⁴¹ The *Victoria Times* reported that "To-day, skirts reach little below the knees, waists are cut low and sleeves, if any, are usually very short. The reason for this of course is explained by the fact that we are now enjoying a period of freedom."⁴² In an article on Turkish women, an anonymous *Victoria Times* author measured "feminine freedom" in terms of dancing the Charleston, bobbing her hair, and wearing lipstick.⁴³

The focus on ideas of freedom and emancipation in terms of clothing and appearance was a double-edged sword. First, few women could meet the rigorous bodily standards the flapper projected as ideal. As Roland Marchand has pointed out in regard to images of women in advertisements in the 1920s, the proportions as they were drawn indicated a woman of over nine feet.⁴⁴ Flappers were drawn in geometric style that obliterated the curves of breasts and hips. For many women, to achieve this look required

while style of dress did lead to medical problems, doctors' focus on it often obscured other issues like malnutrition.

⁴⁰ *Saturday Night*, December 12, 1925, 19.

⁴¹ An In-Between [pseud.], "Ready-Made Youngsters: A Plea for the Younger Generation," *Chatelaine*, April 1928, 1.

⁴² *Victoria Times*, April 25, 1927, 10.

⁴³ *Victoria Times*, May 14, 1927, 6.

⁴⁴ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 182.

uncomfortable physical restrictions. The dominance of the flapper look made it difficult to find clothing for women who did not or could not form their bodies to her image. Jane Walters recalled

And the clothes! They were hard to take. Do you know, there was a time at that stage when they wore dresses absolutely straight and flat across here, and some of them used to bind their bosoms to get into these dresses! I had a singer's body and believe me, I had a big bosom, and I had the most awful time getting dresses – all the girls did. We just went through that stage of flat bosoms. It was a bad time. You can't buck nature and not get some bad results from it.⁴⁵

Advertisements employed the flapper image and sold products that allegedly allowed women to copy her shape. Dresses, coats, and even corsets promised to give buyers the slim, straight lines of the flapper's geometric body. Corset advertisements assured women that they could achieve the straight lines demanded by the flapper's body. Ironically, while people declared the body freed by the flapper's dresses, many women had to literally restrict their bodies to meet the demands of her long, thin body. While the shape given by the corset changed, wearing corsets did not disappear. Indeed, there were numerous advertisements for corsets in popular magazines. Advertisers promised that modern corsets would "re-mould" the figure and give "attractiveness."⁴⁶ One advertisement was titled "For the woman who would be slender," and promised that the body-shaper's results could be instantly seen. In drawing attention to the model who posed in a corset, the advertisement drew attention to the way that the device re-shaped the flesh into long lines. It demanded, "See how the line of beauty flows over the curve of the bust into the waistline, indicating but not emphasizing it, how it continues down

⁴⁵ Jane Walters, interview in *The Great War and Canadian Society: An Oral History*, ed. D Read and R. Hann (Toronto: Hogtown Press, 1978), 214.

⁴⁶ *Saturday Night*, April 24, 1920, 35 and *Chatelaine*, September 1928, 2.

over the hips, and the thigh line, in perfect, unbroken symmetry. Note the supported, youthful lines, the smoothed, curved contours of the entire figure.”⁴⁷ In another corset advertisement, the product was presented as being able to give “average or stout figures...a perfect straight front and a small hip effect.”⁴⁸ Other items promised that they were built on “slim, straight lines.” Certainly slenderness was an attribute that was promoted by a wide range of companies from clothing retailers to food. Advertisements boldly declared that “Fat Is Not In Fashion.”⁴⁹ Girls and women appear to have received the message. Joan Jacobs Brumberg noted that in the 1920s young American women increased the amount of time they devoted to body image and weight loss.⁵⁰ In *Chatelaine*, women were warned to watch what they ate, especially after the age of 29, and given dieting advice such as “abstain from food entirely for one day a week.” Such dieting techniques had an added incentive of improving “the moral fibre as well as the figure.”⁵¹ Yet, while the flapper’s image bordered on an unrealistically slim figure, women were warned that one could be too thin. Advertisements for yeast and cod liver oil declared, “Nobody Loves a Skinny Woman,” “No Woman is Beautiful Who is ‘Skinny’” while another stated “You Can’t Be Good Looking If Skinny.”⁵² In the advertisement thin women were shown to emphasize the difference between the desirable thin and the undesirable skinny.⁵³

⁴⁷ *Chatelaine*, March 1928, 33.

⁴⁸ *Canadian Magazine Advertiser*, 58 (November, 1921), 20.

⁴⁹ *Manitoba Free Press*, April 28, 1927, 3.

⁵⁰ Joan Jacobs Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History* (New York: Random House, 1997), 97-107. In the American context see also Margaret Lowe, *Looking Good: College Women and Body Image, 1875-1930* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), chapters five and six.

⁵¹ *Chatelaine*, November 1928, 52.

⁵² *Victoria Times*, May 12, 1927, 6.

⁵³ See for example the advertisements in *Globe* September 2, 1927, 6, and 20.

Physical bodily restrictions aside, few women would have had the free time necessary to perform the upkeep required by the flapper's demanding look, not to mention the available time to have anything close to resembling her social schedule. Despite the flapper's visual promise of freedom from traditional constraints, the home, family, church, and community remained important influences and "checks" on adolescent behaviour.⁵⁴ Yet, countless women from all classes imitated her appearance, by bobbing their hair and shortening their skirts.⁵⁵ Some might have even adopted aspects of her lifestyle such as dancing and listening to jazz or even experimenting with some of the more worrisome aspects such as drinking, smoking, and sex.

Second, while changes in women's fashion meant greater opportunities to participate in sports and areas of public life, the discourse on fashion, freedom, and emancipation took on a more subtly insidious tone. As the women's movement began to falter in the 1920s after achieving many significant goals, the idea of female emancipation was reduced to conspicuous consumption. As Cheryl Krasnick Warsh argues, "The fragile figure of the flapper, the emphasis on short-term gratification, and the espousal of the value of fashion – ephemeral and unproductive – dissipated some of the anxieties caused by increasing public roles for women. Power was not defined as purchasing power, the goal of which was the traditional one of pleasing a man."⁵⁶ Bobbed hair, lipstick, a complicated skin care regime, and all of the other body projects promoted in advertisements and articles encouraged women to spend their available time engaged in improving their appearance and associated physical improvement with power.

⁵⁴ Comacchio, "Dancing to Perdition," 5-35.

⁵⁵ Rebecca Coulter, "Teen-Agers in Edmonton, 1921-1931" (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 1987), 128.

⁵⁶ Cheryl Krasnick Warsh, "Smoke and Mirrors: Gender Representations in North American Tobacco and Alcohol Advertisements Before 1950," *Histoire sociale/Social History* 31, no. 62 (1999): 200.

Freedom was sold, for example, in advertisements for cars, which depicted four happy flappers fleeing the city for adventure. One cartoon under the title of “Then and Now” called “Speaking of Spinning” allegedly demonstrated the difference between women in the past and modern women. One woman is depicted in a long corseted dress sitting, looking bored at a spinning wheel. The modern woman below her (identified by her bobbed hair, cloche, and bare arms) was sitting at the wheel of a car smiling (see fig. 1.5).⁵⁷

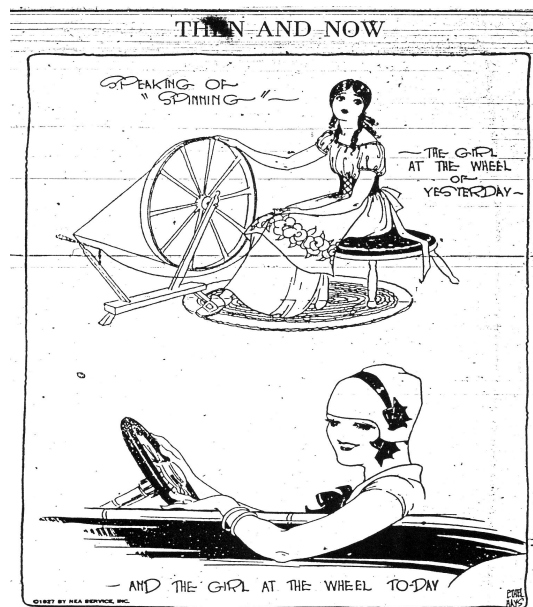


Fig. 1.5 A cartoon that juxtaposed traditional and modern womanhood. (*Victoria Times* April 23, 1927)

The use of the flapper image to promote unrealistic standards for young women did not escape criticism from within the magazine that used her image. A *Chatelaine* article described the impact of advertisements and the pressure on young women to conform to particular standards. The anonymous author wrote,

Whatever she does, wherever she goes, she will have the enthusiastic aid of the advertising artist...the advertising artist is

⁵⁷ *Victoria Times*, April 23, 1927, 12.

faithful to his trust. He will tell the girls from Castine, Me. to San Luis Obispo how they should dress, how to eat oysters, how to speak to the waiter, how to attract masculine attention, how to clean their faces, or bid their 'boy friends' good-night. The proper behaviour in bathtubs and drawing rooms, in kicking babyhood and placid old age, is spread abroad by way of his influence.

Writing of the “tremendous outside pressure” on young women and girls, the author pointed out that “the youngsters of to-day are fortified with nothing but a tyrannical code picked up from each other and crammed down their throats by every type of modern publicity.”⁵⁸

Equally distressing, the flapper’s look, driven prominently by what modernity was supposed to look like, obscured other bodily visual clues related to class and ethnicity. The inability to ‘read’ class and ethnicity had the potential to disturb. Mass produced clothing and accessories available at relatively cheap prices meant that the flapper look was accessible to a wide range of girls and women and thus blurred the distinctions between classes and ethnicities. As Suzanne Morton suggests, the flapper look “eclipsed class and focused upon gender and age.”⁵⁹ Ready-to-wear clothing made from cheap synthetic fabrics and produced in a range of prices led to the democratization of fashion that mimicked larger cultural concerns about the co-mingling of classes.⁶⁰ American historian Nan Enstad has argued that fashion and consumer culture was important to working-class women who used it to create their own gender, class, and ethnic identities.⁶¹ In rural Saskatchewan McGill sociologist Charles Young observed that “on

⁵⁸ An In-Between [pseud.], “Ready-Made Youngsters: A Plea for the Younger Generation,” 4.

⁵⁹ Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working-Class Suburb in the 1920s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 131. See also Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 64.

⁶⁰ Joshua Zeitz, *Flapper: A Madcap Story of Sex, Style, Celebrity, and the Women Who Made America Modern* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2006), 161. On the flapper’s ability to obscure visual clues on class see Morton, *Ideal Surroundings*, 131.

⁶¹ Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Twentieth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 2-3.

summer Saturday nights ‘the streets thronged with the beautiful bright-eyed Ukrainian girls who, in dress and deportment, could not be distinguished from our most typical Anglo-Saxon.’⁶² Furthermore, for the middle classes, the image of the flapper “was a reverse of the ‘aesthetic of imitation’ a sort of class fluidity that created the illusion of *downward* social mobility.”⁶³

While visually obscuring class and ethnic boundaries, it was more frequently argued that flappers dangerously toyed with gender boundaries. Modern women were defined by clothing that fell in long straight lines and de-emphasized the breast and the hips, a trend that many described as ‘boyish’. Contemporaries and historians frequently describe her in terms of ‘boyishness’. The *Toronto Daily Star*, for example, ran a photograph of new spring flapper styles and described them as having “a boyish effect for the flapper.”⁶⁴ *Maclean’s* included a joke on the subject in its 1925 and 1926 issues.

Under the title “Sounds Reasonable” it went

Affable Old Lady: It’s a fine day, Miss.
Youth: It’s a fine day, but I’m not a “Miss;” I’m a “Mister.”
Old Lady: Oh, I beg your pardon. You looked so much like a boy
that I took you for a girl.”⁶⁵

Activities associated with the flapper added to her ability to cross gender lines and to the confusion over gender to which the joke refers. Morton points out that “For many people, men and women were becoming more alike. The flapper was one example of this conjunction, as her mannish bob, boyish figure, and personal habits of swearing,

⁶² C.H. Young, *The Ukrainian Canadians: A Study in Assimilation* (Toronto: Nelson, 1931), 71 quoted in Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth* 163.

⁶³ Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover*, 58.

⁶⁴ *Toronto Daily Star*, December 29, 1927, 22

⁶⁵ *Maclean’s*, November 15, 1925, 76; and April 15, 1926, 76.

drinking, and smoking encompassed what had been exclusively male characteristics.”⁶⁶ Things such as these were previously thought to be firmly in the domain of masculinity. The flapper, in appropriating these habits, moved in on this territory and blurred distinctions between male and female activities. As Canadian historians have demonstrated, the 1920s was the first time that smoking was advertised as acceptable for women. An advertisement for cigarettes depicted a young woman enjoying a cigarette and advised, “Men may come and men may go but Player’s Navy Cut are constant ever” (see fig. 1.6).⁶⁷ The advertisement linked the flapper, smoking, and sexual experimentation. The concerns over women’s look of masculinity, her taking over of masculine habits, and her entry into public space were all related. Male smoking was often restricted to places associated with male bonding and fraternization like bars, clubs, and dining rooms. When women smoked in public, however, they did so in much different spaces like retail stores and art galleries and “rendered effeminate a male ritual.”⁶⁸ Despite the images that were presented, both Strong-Boag and Warsh demonstrated that with smoking many women remained reluctant to pick up the habit.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Morton, *Ideal Surroundings*, 153.

⁶⁷ *Saturday Night*, June 25, 1927, 32.

⁶⁸ Warsh, “Smoke and Mirrors,” 199-200.

⁶⁹ Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, 85; and Warsh “Smoke and Mirrors,” 191.



Fig. 1.6 The “masculinization” of women was tied to the appropriation of traditionally male habits like smoking. This advertisement for Players cigarettes also suggests sexual activity. (*Saturday Night* June 26, 1927)

The flapper certainly represented shifts in gender, but despite her alleged boyishness she still held firmly onto the trappings of femininity, albeit in disturbingly modern forms. By attempting to obliterate the traditional look of femininity, by reducing the body itself to an almost two dimensional flatness, and by appropriating what were once seen as male habits, the flapper certainly indicated change. In regard to change, however, the flapper created or promoted new ways of identifying femininity. The use of make-up became a key indicator of femininity. Sylvia Fraser argues that “When a woman wanted to look like a woman, she added long strings of beads, dabs of rouge, smouldering eyeshadow, beestung Clara Bow lips, and perhaps a touch of the just-introduced Chanel No. 5.”⁷⁰ The look of womanhood in this case was firmly tied to consumption, not only of an image but also of the products that would allow one to copy

⁷⁰ Sylvia Fraser, *A Woman's Place: Seventy Years in the Lives of Canadian Women From the Pages of Chatelaine Magazine* (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 1997), 15.

such an ideal. As will be discussed in the next section, the promotion of this way of identifying gender encouraged a different way to see and experience the body.

FROM THE OUTSIDE IN

The flapper was to be looked at; from her artistic representations to her imitators on the street she was meant to attract the male gaze. Advertisers built upon an already established idea that women's bodies were meant to be improved upon and to be pleasing to look at in public. Advertisers, however, in promoting the flapper look, also encouraged a different way of understanding the body. The images and text in advertisements revealed that it was no longer enough to experience one's body and respond in terms of physical sensations or be judged by one's character.⁷¹ Modernity with its focus on vision meant that one had to examine one's body from the outside in – as a stranger – in order to respond to its needs. Surveillance was of the utmost importance and women were encouraged by advertisers to look at their bodies as other people would, not as they felt or experienced them. “Scare copy” persuaded potential consumers that they needed the product in order to avoid negative judgements, which frequently were described as a disapproving look or the inability to get noticed in social situations.⁷² In the 1920s, modern advertising exploited this idea and translated it so that every part of the body was in need of improvement and could be improved. As Kathy Peiss's work on cosmetics reveals, the beauty and advertising industries after World War One promoted the “democratic and anxiety-inducing idea that beauty could be achieved

⁷¹ Brumberg, *The Body Project*, 101.

⁷² On ‘scare copy’ see Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*, 14. On the development of modern advertising from 1914 through the 1920s see Raymond Williams, *Culture and Materialism* (London: Verso, 1980), 179-181.

by all women – if only they used the correct products.”⁷³ Further, Brumberg argues that movies and magazines among other venues that promoted the image of the flapper “gave primacy to a woman’s visual image.” The idea of the body as visual image, in need of constant attention and improvement, “made the body into a project.”⁷⁴

Advertising sold a tiny piece of the fantasy of an ideal body, which could be purchased with a cream, a cleanser, a car, or a manicure kit. The flapper’s image was carved up into tiny pieces that could be individually purchased by consumers. Women were targeted as consumers by the 1920s and their bodies were seen as being in need of constant maintenance during the entire life cycle.⁷⁵ Mothers were warned to train their daughters in the proper regimens of bodily care and women right through to their senior years were told to be diligent in saving a youthful appearance. One advertisement for Palmolive soap stated, “When she grows up...She will be beautiful, of course, in the rosy future pictured by a mother’s dreams. But – this future beauty will not be left to chance, for modern mothers know how to make their dreams come true.”⁷⁶ Advertisers quickly absorbed the flapper’s youthful appearance, and the idea of the cult of youth, into their

⁷³ Kathy Peiss, “Making Up, Making Over: Cosmetics, Consumer Culture, and Women’s Identity,” in *The Sex of Things: Consumption in Historical Perspective*, ed. Victoria de Grazia with Ellen Furlough (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996), 311.

⁷⁴ Brumberg, *The Body Project*, 101. On the cultural push towards body projects in magazines in Canada in the 1920s see Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, 85-86.

⁷⁵ While women were the primary targets of beauty advertisements, men’s bodies came under scrutiny as well. In one advertisement by Pompeian for Massage Cream, men were asked to consider whether or not their face would stand a ‘close up.’ Using the language of popular film culture, the advertisement showed how men’s bodies, to a lesser extent, were now being judged on the basis of their looks. The difference was that women were seen in the culture of magazines to be only judged by their looks. An advertisement for men’s clothes made this distinction clear when it stated “No man has ever won success from good appearance alone – but many a man has lost success through poor appearance.” Yet, these advertisements were rare when compared to the numbers that ran in magazines each month that told women to scrutinize themselves before someone else did. Further, many advertisements that had products intended for men’s use still advertised for women who were expected to purchase them and persuade men to use them. One advertisement for toothpaste stated “Show Men the way to whiter teeth.” For examples see *Saturday Night*, February 21, 1920, 5; June 19, 1920, 32; February 17, 1923, 8; June 19, 1927, 26; October 22, 1927, 13; and March, 10, 1928, 5.

⁷⁶ *Saturday Night*, February 3, 1923, 27. See also *Saturday Night*, June 4, 1927, 28.

marketing strategies.⁷⁷ In a different advertisement by the same company, women were warned to “Keep that Schoolgirl Complexion.”⁷⁸ Although women might have natural beauty or charm, these could be spoiled and neglected. An advertisement warned that one should be “A Vision of Loveliness” and the need to perfect the body was premised on the careful surveillance of one’s own body and of others.⁷⁹ Overall looking from the outside made the body seem as naturally imperfect and in need of monitoring so that it could stay in order.

The revealing fashions of the 1920s meant that more of the body had to be monitored and perfected. *Chatelaine*’s beauty columnist MAB summarized the work required when she wrote, “To- day, beauty demands that a woman be slender, graceful, and exceedingly well groomed. This is the age of revelation. We have no billowy skirts, false hair or veils to hide our defects, and eternal youth is the cry of the hour. For the most part beauty is not obtained or retained without a good deal of personal effort.”⁸⁰

Popular advertisements encouraged women to carefully study their bodies by including large photographs depicting women looking into mirrors and seemingly naturalized such scrutiny. In a full-page advertisement for Pompeian Night Cream, a large photograph depicts a woman seated, holding a hand mirror and studying her reflection. The caption read: “Miss Van Q. regards *with critical eye* the exquisite beauty of her skin, which she

⁷⁷ Howard P. Chudacoff, *How Old Are You? Age Consciousness in American Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 123-24.

⁷⁸ *Saturday Night*, February 4, 1928, 28. The advertisement went on to warn readers that the time to preserve youth’s appearance was in youth. It stated “It’s not only in the thirties and forties that Youth Preservation presents itself as a problem. It starts in the late ‘teens and the early twenties, with the admonition of experts that the time to safeguard youth is *in* youth.” See also the advertisement for Woodbury skin preparations that asked, “After Thirty – can a woman still gain the charm of ‘A Skin you Love to Touch?’ *Maclean’s*, February 1, 1925, 32.

⁷⁹ See the advertisement for Luvisca lingerie in *Saturday Night*, February 25, 1928, 36.

⁸⁰ *Chatelaine*, October 1928, 30.

keeps properly cleansed and cared for with Pompeian Night Cream.”⁸¹ An advertisement for the Cutex manicure kit asked “Do you realize how often eyes are fastened on your nails?”⁸² The eyes of others were clearly of concern, and advertisements established a world of panoptical vision where the body was the focus. That type of visual regime demanded a particularly careful eye towards the body before the body entered into the public culture of visibility. Take, for example, the advertisement that depicts a woman sitting forward looking intently into a mirror while the caption commands, “Look at Yourself! Are you satisfied?”⁸³ Scrutiny of one’s own and other’s bodies allowed one to have the ‘critical eye’ necessary to make the changes that would turn into social success or failure. Deviation could mean social mortification for it was clear that the body was constantly being watched. One’s ‘look’ rather than other elements, such as personality or intelligence, were presented as the measure of social success for women, and sometimes men. To this end, the cosmetic industry provided female consumers with the option of purchasing a small, handheld mirror. As Brumberg argues, these mirrors were significant “because they allowed women to scrutinize and ‘reconstruct’ the face almost anywhere, at a moment’s notice.”⁸⁴

In another advertisement an anonymous housewife recounts the story of having a dinner party for her husband’s boss. The evening becomes a “failure” when she was “pouring coffee, and for the fraction of a second his [the husband’s boss’s] glance rested on my hands.” Her “red and rough” hands were an embarrassment. After the dinner she

⁸¹ *Maclean’s* February 15, 1926, 33 (my emphasis). The advertisement ran in numerous Canadian and American magazines and newspapers.

⁸² *Saturday Night*, March 20, 1920.

⁸³ *Saturday Night*, September 24, 1927, 30.

⁸⁴ Brumberg, *The Body Project*, 70.

began to use Lux soap that left them “soft, smooth and white.”⁸⁵ In another advertisement, this time for a hair removal cream, a young woman sits reclining in her slip with one arm above her head, exposing her underarm. The underarm is marked with an ‘x’ and the caption reads “From the man’s viewpoint.” The text warns that “should he glimpse the slightest trace of unsightly hair – the whole impression is spoiled; he classifies you from then on as a woman lacking in fastidiousness” (see fig. 1.7).⁸⁶ Advertisements promoted the importance of attracting the male gaze. A different advertisement for Pompeian Day Cream showed two women and a man walking together. The man’s eyes were focused on one woman while the other looked over at her as well. It read: “Both were young and one was beautiful. His eyes followed on, lingering on the smooth velvet of her cheek, her warm color, his senses delighting in the elusive fragrance that floated near. The other was forgotten – yet she, too, was young.” Attracting the gaze of others was promoted as a powerful idea that translated into many different areas of life including finding a mate and impressing the boss, as well as developing an overall sense of satisfaction.

Becoming a vision of beauty also implied that one entered into the culture of visibility under regimes of surveillance and pleasure. In an advertisement for Gaytees shoes, the copy stated “You know those evenings – that leisurely feeling – the pleasure of seeing and being seen...”⁸⁷ Harvey Hosiery and Lingerie’s advertisement played upon the double meaning of seeing and being seen. In their advertisement a woman is posing in

⁸⁵ *Saturday Night*, September 29, 1928, 16. On whiteness, soap, and racial association see Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, chapter 2.

⁸⁶ *Maclean’s*, February 1, 1926, 54.

⁸⁷ *Saturday Night*, November 12, 1927, 35.

her underwear, behind her is a large oval. In the picture it is unclear whether we are seeing the woman or seeing her through



Fig. 1.7 This advertisement was one of many that encouraged women to imagine and see their bodies as others – specifically men – would. (*Maclean's* February 1, 1926)

the other side of her mirror as she stares into her own reflection. The caption reads: “To the eye enchantment! To the wearer, contentment because of her knowledge that the finest materials, perfect fit and beautiful lasting shades are what she buys when she insists upon Harvey Hosiery.”⁸⁸ While there could be pleasure in knowing one was being watched, there was also inherent danger, and pleasure was cast onto the onlooker as opposed to the one being watched. Indeed despite the effort women were supposed to make, there was a definite emphasis on it seeming natural as opposed to contrived. Attracting attention in obvious ways (as beauty contestants did) was thought to be distasteful at best and dangerous at worst. Magazines warned that women who deliberately sought attention in obvious or dramatic ways were socially offensive and perhaps even placed themselves in danger.

⁸⁸ *Chatelaine*, May, 1928.

Although the flapper may not have existed in the exact form she was best known for, at the very least, parts of her look were copied, and this was not insignificant. For a culture increasingly defined in the visual, even the look of the flapper on the street carried a certain set of meanings and it was sometimes difficult to distinguish between the look being copied and the copying of the private behaviour. When stenographer Vivian Maw bobbed her hair in December 1922, other employees at the Winnipeg Grain Exchange discussed it for days.⁸⁹ In Calgary in 1927, four nurses in training were dismissed for bobbing their hair. Newspapers reported that this was the second time nurses had been fired for donning the popular hairstyle.⁹⁰ Decades later, Jake Foran recalled that bobbed hair was so significant and surprising that he took pictures of it. He recalled, “But I have pictures of the first girls I ever saw with bobbed hair. That was considered wicked almost, bobbing one’s hair. The older people thought the world was going straight to hell because they bobbed their hair and shortened their skirts.”⁹¹ The flapper was the very embodiment of the pleasure and fear of modernity. She represented fun and freedom to some, while for others she pointed the way to the destruction of Canadian society and its ideals.

Bobbed hair was one of the more dramatic and obvious symbols of the flapper and one that was comparatively easy to copy. Bobbed hair, however, symbolized a potential embrace of other ‘trends’ of the era. One of the more concerning in relation to young, single women was sexual activity. In 1923, *Saturday Night* printed an article on the report of the Bureau of Social Hygiene of New York. The Bureau researched the “indiscreet conduct of the flappers.” The report asserted that 375 women admitted to

⁸⁹ Levine, *The Devil in Babylon*, 298-9.

⁹⁰ *Manitoba Free Press*, May, 1927, 1; and *Vancouver Sun*, May 4, 1927, 2.

⁹¹ Jake Foran interview in *The Great War and Canadian Society*, 213.

having spooned with men other than their fiancés and that nearly fifteen percent of respondents admitted that spooning was part of “‘go as far as you like,’ if he was a really attractive male.”⁹² So closely tied together were the flapper’s unique image and her alleged activities that mimicking her fashions, from clothing to hairstyle, or copying her appearance were signs enough to raise concern about other areas of her life. The body became a public indicator of private behaviour.

Flappers also reveal the increasing preoccupation with youth and age. Beginning in the early twentieth century, age consciousness in terms of youth became increasingly important and by the 1920s, the “cult of youth” had “spread widely across society.”⁹³ Although there were occasional references to women between the ages of 30 and 50 mimicking flappers, for the most part she was the symbol of youth. The 1920s was “the age of youth” and the flapper defined what that was supposed to look like.⁹⁴ Almost every month, the beauty column in *Chatelaine* magazine lauded youth as the main characteristic of beauty and provided tips for women to hold on to it. For example, women were told that “a tiny fund of youth....can be tapped by right thinking and right exercise and lotions and by keeping strict account of calories.”⁹⁵ Women were also told that old age had become optional and told that “intelligent care of their bodies every day will postpone old age, indefinitely.”⁹⁶ The appearance of youth required constant care in

⁹² *Saturday Night*, August 4, 1923, 1. This was one of many articles expressing concern over modern sexual practices. See also, “Is Youth Forgetting How to Love?” *Saturday Night*, December 24, 1927, 21; and “Feminine Clamor For ‘Free Love,’” *Saturday Night*, November 26, 1927, 1.

⁹³ Chudacoff, *How Old Are You?*, 112-3 and 150-52.

⁹⁴ *Chatelaine*, February 1929, 30.

⁹⁵ *Chatelaine*, September 1929, 38.

⁹⁶ *Chatelaine*, February 1929, 30.

order to stave off old age that was seen as a disadvantage. Women over the age of forty were warned that their bodies did not “show up well in a room full of flappers.”⁹⁷

As American historian Laura Davidow Hirschbein shows, the image of the flapper was often juxtaposed with images of older women. Expressing the alleged clash between the generations allowed critics “to explore the implications of new and old in American society and to organize rapidly shifting social, cultural, political, and economic worlds.”⁹⁸ A similar claim can be made in the Canadian context.⁹⁹ Youth came to stand for both the progressive and destructive tendencies of modernity and older men and women were relegated to either a critic or defender role. Youth was described as having alertness, elasticity, vitality, energy, enthusiasm, while old age was described using words and phrases like “fatty degenerations,” misshapen, conceited, lazy, flabby, and having “lost the magic of youth.”¹⁰⁰ Beyond being simple physical descriptions, such words translated into social, political, and cultural areas.

By the end of the 1920s, although the anxiety regarding women, work, and leisure had somewhat subsided, strains of the anxiety that had marked the previous three decades continued.¹⁰¹ The working girl was seen as a valuable national resource: the future mother of the next generation of Canadians and thus demanded attention. The incredible loss of life as a result of the First World War combined with the high rates of venereal disease among servicemen and the fear of the ‘secret plague’ in the general population contributed to concerns over race suicide. Situated within these social fears young

⁹⁷ Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, 85.

⁹⁸ Hirschbein, “The Flapper and the Fogey,” 113-4. See also Levine, *The Devil in Babylon*, 299.

⁹⁹ For an exploration on the generation clash in Canada see Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, chapter 2.

¹⁰⁰ *Chatelaine*, July 1928, 32, January 1929, 28; and February 1929, 30.

¹⁰¹ See Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*; Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem*; and Morton, *Ideal Surroundings*, especially Chapter 7.

women took on increasing importance as mothers of the race.¹⁰² Social and moral hygiene and sex education sought to counter the threat of degeneration through venereal disease.¹⁰³ Birth control, illegal although not unavailable, was part of the problem as it was assumed that White, middle-class women, the ones that held the key to the future of Canada in their wombs, were the ones using prophylactics. As evidence, social and moral reformers pointed to the differences in birth rates among different ethnicities and classes in Canada.¹⁰⁴ Debate over young women as flappers was integrated into these broader social issues. As far as dress went, people argued that the flapper's shorter and looser dresses were healthier than corseting and left them in a better state of health for motherhood.¹⁰⁵ The level of thinness desired to wear flapper styles was often considered much too thin. A physician in the *Victoria Times* complained, "The modern girl is starving herself to death...The 'flapper figure' is absurd...I laugh every time I see one. The average flapper is from ten to twenty pounds under weight and looks more like a string bean than a girl." The title of the article was "EAT! – For Your Country's Sake – EAT!"¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, 204-5 and Chapter 7.

¹⁰³ On sex education see Christabelle Laura Sethna, "The Facts of Life: The Sex Instruction of Ontario Public School Children, 1900-1950" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1995), esp. chapter 4. See also, Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap, and Water*, 75-6.

¹⁰⁴ Angus McLaren and Arlene Tigar McLaren, *The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada, 1880-1980*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), chapter 1; Marianna Valverde, "When the Mother of the Race is Free: Race, Reproduction, and Sexuality in First-Wave Feminism," in *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*, ed. France Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992), 3-26 ; and Cynthia Comacchio, "Mechanomorphy: Science, Management, and 'Human Machinery' in Industrial Canada, 1900-1945," *Labour/Le travail* 41 (1998): 49-53.

¹⁰⁵ An In-Between [pseud], "Ready-Made Youngsters," 1 and Dr. Frank Crane, "Why Flappers Flap," *Vancouver Sun*, May 28, 1927, 6.

¹⁰⁶ Roy J. Gibbons, "Eat! – For Your Country's Sake – EAT!" *Victoria Times*, April 16, 1927, 6.

The image of the flapper was bound up with the changing morality and leisure opportunities available to youths in the 1920s.¹⁰⁷ She clearly represented the in-between stage of adolescence when young women were at the crossroads between childhood and an adulthood defined by marriage and motherhood. While girls and young women who grew up in the 1920s would almost certainly enter the workforce, for most, this period was meant to be a transitory one that would end upon marriage. Although the prospects of marriage were made more difficult due to the number of men who were killed on European battlefields, it remained the desired goal for women. In a 1922 article in *Maclean's*, Gertrude E.S. Pringle interviewed a number of young Canadian women asking what they were going to do with their Bachelor degrees. After discussing job opportunities as teachers, doctors, lawyers, researchers, and journalists, Pringle concludes her piece with 'Annette' who has decided that her B.A. will help her run a household as wife and mother. The final paragraph summarizes the temporary nature of the other careers. As Pringle concluded, "Decidedly Annette feels satisfied with her choice of a vocation, and doubtless in time the rest of them will be converted to that kind of a career also."¹⁰⁸

For married women, particularly young married women, copying the flapper look with its association to youth and freedom added an additional complexity. The associations of flappers with sexual promiscuity, youth, and rebellion are illustrated in a fictional story printed in *Maclean's* magazine titled "Pokey and Her Flapper-Masher Bob."¹⁰⁹ This story epitomizes many of the desires and problems associated with the flapper. In the story Ruth, a married woman with a child, tells her husband that she wants

¹⁰⁷ Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover*, 121.

¹⁰⁸ Gertrude E.S. Pringle, "What Shall I Do with my B.A.?" *Maclean's*, June 15, 1922.

¹⁰⁹ *Maclean's*, February 1, 1925, 14-4, 47, 49-50.

to bob her hair because her friend Betty did and “she looks sixteen.” In response her husband, Peter, states, “I do not approve of bobbed hair for married women; especially for the mothers of children.” Peter continues to argue that he does not believe in “maturity aping youth.” Despite their spat, Ruth bobs her hair and instantly regrets it as she realizes it does not suit her face or her hair type. When she arrives home Peter is entertaining his boss and, in his embarrassment over her appearance, introduces Ruth as his sister and not his wife. After the guest has left, Peter explains that the boss “had just told me that he was unalterably opposed to this present craze for bobbed hair which made married women look and act like flappers, and cause them to attract attention from young lads who, if the women dressed and acted properly, would not be thinking of anything but pig-tailed school girls.” The next day Ruth decides to buy a hat to cover her hair and on her way home from the store young men – mashers – accost her. They follow her down the street, grab on to her and threaten, “We’ll run you home in no time.” After Ruth punches one of them, a police officer comes over to the group. The young men accuse Ruth of asking “for some dope.” In reply, Ruth asks the officer if she looks like the type of woman who would do such a thing. The officer responds by bringing the young men and Ruth to the police station. At the station, Ruth’s story is believed until her husband and his boss happen to show up. Ruth hides her face from them. They defend the mashers and unknowingly call Ruth a “hussy.” When Ruth reveals herself and the sergeant tells Peter’s boss that Ruth is his wife, Peter is upset. Back at home Ruth explains to Peter and his boss that she bobbed her hair “for the protection of my weaker sisters.” She continues, “Even Peter didn’t know. I am president of an association for the apprehension of mashers, and in order to help round them up and so protect the

thoughtless girls who might be victimized I sacrificed my hair – my beautiful hair -...that I might look flapperish [sic] and so attract the species of human insect known as the flapper-masher.” As a result of Ruth’s false confession both her husband and his boss express their support for her efforts. Later that night Peter apologizes to Ruth and admits that he likes her bobbed hair. Ruth requests twenty dollars for her permanent wave since her story of the association managed to salvage Peter’s relationship with his boss. The last line of the story has Peter “meekly” obeying Ruth’s demand.

The fictional piece deals with a number of topics related to the flapper in contradictory ways. Ruth desires the flapper look because of its associations with youth, but quickly regrets her decision when she realizes that the look does not flatter her face. More importantly, the story highlights the potential dangers flappers faced. For the readers of the magazine, mothers and daughters, this was a warning. Along with dangers such as loss of reputation, mashers allegedly targeted flappers in public. Worse still, articles like “The Problem of the Missing Girl” revealed that men in the “immoral traffic” preyed upon girls and young women who looked and acted like flappers.¹¹⁰ Despite the physical threat and the fear of a tarnished reputation, the end of the story vindicates Ruth’s decision and leads to a power shift in her relationship with her husband. But Ruth’s entire ‘victory’ was based on lies. Deception was rewarded. Ruth’s defence of herself and her haircut as being part of a movement to “defend her weaker sisters” draws on women’s associations with social movements.

CONCLUSION

Despite Ruth’s personal victory in defending the flapper look, flappers were not so easily accepted into 1920s Canadian culture. As symbols of modernity, the new

¹¹⁰ “The Problem of the Missing Girl,” *Chatelaine*, March 1929, 9.

morality and changing gender roles, the flappers represented cultural change. The mimicking of the flapper look by Canadian youth represented another disturbing trend: the ease with which young modern women fit with the new order.¹¹¹ The problem was that the new order did not fit quite so neatly with the other generations or with the vision of the country and its youth held by the dominant class. The flapper held a straightforward place in the nation-building project in the post-war intellectual landscape. She did not belong and where she existed she caused concern. In the 'official' 'national' representation of Canadian womanhood that was projected for the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, a more traditional view of womanhood was preferred. In reflecting back on Canadian history and thinking forward to the ideal Canadian future, organizers of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation needed to come up with an image of Canada that would represent the ideal formulation that would be celebrated across the country. Since youth, women, and the nation were inextricably bound in conceptions of the 'future,' finding and projecting an image to counter the flapper was of national importance.

In this context, the anxiety over the image of the flapper is easily understood. Yet, she had some saving graces. The flapper was not intended to subvert what was seen as the natural and inevitable roles for women (wife and mother), but to highlight the possibilities for a fun and free period before she took the steps to settle down. As Carolyn Kitch argues "The flapper was an ordinary woman having an extraordinary moment, one that was made possible by the new morality of a postwar youth culture and by leisure products."¹¹² However, few women would have had the luxury to live the carefree lifestyle of the flapper who was all play and no work, and who seemed to have

¹¹¹ Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 84.

¹¹² Kitch, *The Girl on the Magazine Cover*, 121 -23.

limitless resources at her disposal. Further, few young women (or men) would have been able to escape the familial relations that attempted to guide their behaviour, and the almost certain entry into the workforce. Nonetheless the anxiety over what she represented remained. The shift in the social order was perceptible and how Canadians – particularly Canadian elites – were going to respond to the challenge was partially revealed in the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation celebrations.

CHAPTER TWO

“WHERE THERE IS NO VISION THE PEOPLE PERISH”: CULTURAL NATIONALISM, THE FEMALE BODY, AND THE VISION OF THE NATION IN THE DIAMOND JUBILEE OF CONFEDERATION CELEBRATIONS

On the morning of August 27, 1927, seven-year-old Barbara Hudson, dressed as Miss Canada, purchased the first ticket to the Canadian National Exhibition and set the tone for the days to follow in the year of Canada's Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. To celebrate the Jubilee, C.N.E. organizers planned a number of special features including a fifteen hundred person historical pageant on a thousand foot stage and the dedication of the new eastern gate, a permanent monument, to be officially opened by the Prince of Wales. The C.N.E.'s Diamond Jubilee celebrations, with well-orchestrated spectacles, were in a very small part foiled by a vehicle driven by an unknown driver who crashed through the temporary wooden gates at the eastern entrance and became the first visitor to the Fair that year, preceding the young Miss Canada by just a few hours. Further, Toronto police officers had to remove "ambitious youngsters" who wanted to sleep outside the gates so they could be the first to enter.¹ This story carries strains of the ideals and problems that defined the Jubilee celebrations and also the decade. As much as people desired to find and propagate a new idealism, modernity shattered many attempts as it dismantled the old order and left the public searching for a new one. Technology left a bittersweet taste as it promised progress while it added a whole new series of problems that sometimes, like the car that crashed through the gates of the C.N.E., arrived unceremoniously. Everything from the urban landscape to women's fashions seemed to reveal the onslaught of a new social order that had undermined social and economic classifications that structured society. The old class, gender, age, and

¹ *Evening Telegram*, August 27, 1927, 19.

racial divisions were shifting and some feared that their social and cultural power was being eroded. Yet, despite the tumultuous changes, the late nineteenth century practice of imaging the female body continued and became more pronounced. Miss Canada, as she appeared on the first day of the 1927 C.N.E., was more than a simple performative element; she was the embodiment of social and cultural ideas and anxieties, hopes and, sometimes, disillusionments.

Prior to the C.N.E.'s Jubilee events, the official three-day nation-wide celebrations began on Dominion Day. The symbols and tensions that surrounded the Exhibition's activities were a continuation of those developed by the National Committee for official festivities. At the conclusion of his speech on Parliament Hill on July 1, 1927, Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King, quoting the Bible, asked Canadians to remember, "Where there is no vision the people perish."² King's 'vision' of the nation combined history with the promise of a prominent future. Speeches, artistic renderings, books, pageants, and floats all attempted to portray this idea to Canadians across the country. Although recent work on public commemorations in Canada at the turn of the twentieth century have suggested that using commemorative practices (including historical pageants) to link the past, present, and future declined by the 1920s, the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation celebrations show that this practice persisted. King, the national and local Jubilee organizing committees, artists, and advertisers firmly believed that history could be used to link the past to the future. The "divorce of the past from the present" that became prominent in late nineteenth century celebrations was a

²*Evening Telegram*, August 27, 1927, 8.

point of concern that organizers wanted to address and not accept or uphold.³ The idea that Canadians had one eye to the past and one to the future fit with the general sense of the decade when people attempted to cobble together a present from a traditional past and a modern future.

In *Remaking America*, John Bodnar argues that commemorative events “almost always stress the desirability of maintaining the social order and existing institutions, the need to avoid disorder or dramatic changes, and the dominance of citizens’ duties over citizen rights.”⁴ With the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, the presentation of one long progressive narrative was to end with the ultimate success of Canada as a productive nation with an important role in the Empire, something in which each Canadian could take pride at a local and national level. Using imagery of the female body was one way that vision was evoked to promote nationalism. The notion of a unifying vision for the country was combined with the use of images of women to depict the proper interpretation of Canada’s past, present, and future.

Miss Canada would embody the ideals of the nation and represent the nation itself. Her body was more than inscribed with nationalist discourses, it became one. In the celebrations of the Diamond Jubilee, artwork, floats, and pageants used depictions of women to convey the sentiments of what it meant to be Canadian. Unlike in nude art, beauty contests, and moving pictures, the symbolic, performative use of the female body for the Jubilee was not considered to be an exploited representation for a cheap thrill, but rather a glorified example of embodied nationhood. With the Jubilee, women’s bodies

³ Ronald Rudin, *Founding Fathers: The Celebration of Champlain and Laval in the Streets of Quebec, 1878-1908* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003), 234.

⁴ John Bodnar, *Remaking America: Public Memory, Commemoration, and Patriotism in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 19.

were neatly packaged, contained, unified, controlled, celebrated, and exalted like the country was itself. Therefore, Miss Canada was part of the process of expressing and trying to override concerns about the strength of the nation and social order. The images constructed for the commemoration played an important role in proving the Canadian success story and downplaying the challenges Canadians (and Confederation) were facing in the 1920s.

This chapter reveals that the vision of the country was tied to and relied on images of women's bodies to further develop an "imagined community" of Canadians. The two-fold use of vision, as a metaphor and its literal use, was part of an effort to provide a unifying focal point for citizens. The symbolic use of women's bodies was, therefore, central to the attempts at developing a sense of Canadian nationalism. In order to understand how this worked it is necessary to discuss other aspects of the Jubilee and present the Jubilee within the wider context of Canadian history in the 1920s. This chapter discusses the planning, implementation of, and advertising of the Jubilee in order to frame how important and prolific the images of women were to the development of a national sentiment in 1927.

In order to situate the analysis of the images within the broader context of the Diamond Jubilee and Canadian culture, the four parts of the chapter deal with the three themes of the development of the celebrations, the actual events that were carried out, and the relationship between commemoration and consumption. The first section discusses the development and planning of the celebrations. The second part closely looks at the celebrations in Ottawa in order to gain a sense of the magnitude of the event, the technological and cultural efforts to bring the country together, and as an example of

how the various events were carried out in public. The third part discusses the relationship between the spectacle of the Jubilee and the rising culture of consumption. It looks at how the event was publicized and made significant, and also how it became a popular, marketable product for Canadian consumption. The fourth and last section on pageants and parades discusses how the body and vision were employed at the nexus of politics, Canadian culture, and consumption in a decade of transition. It seeks to explain how images of Canada as a young woman came to embody ideas of modernity and symbolized an attempt at the cultural retrenchment of the concepts of tradition, empire, gender, race, and space after the disruption of the First World War and the longer trajectory of change caused by industrialization.

This chapter relies on the images that were widely available to Canadians through print culture. When it was time to celebrate the anniversary of Confederation, organizers used periodicals, newspapers, pamphlets, and books to get their message and vision of Canada to the audience. Benedict Anderson argues that with the rise of modernity, print culture, what he calls print capitalism, displaced religion to create an “imagined community” from a group of people who could never meet each other. An “imagined community” brings together a heterogeneous group of people to a homogeneous imaginary space where they form a sense of commonality.⁵ Anderson has argued that “print-language” plays a significant role in engendering national sentiment. As art historians have argued, visual images, reproduced and circulated through print media

⁵ Benedict Anderson, *Imagine Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 5-7.

were pivotal to the development of “imagined communities.”⁶ In the 1920s, technological and economic changes produced an impressively prolific print culture.

In recent years, the historiography on commemoration has developed significantly and this study builds on our current understanding of the power of commemorative events. Studies on commemoration are marked by a broad focus on subject area, time period, and geographical boundary.⁷ The historiography on commemoration in Canada can be divided into three groups: events, people, and places.⁸ This study adds to the first category- events. Like all of the studies in these three categories, the study of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation necessarily overlaps with other related areas including the history of spectacles, pageantry, and parading.⁹ It is not the first to study the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. In a series of articles, Canadian historian Robert Cupido has studied the Jubilee in terms of Canadian nationalism.¹⁰ Cupido’s focus has

⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, chapter 3; and Angela Miller, *The Empire of the Eye: Landscape Representation and American Cultural Politics, 1825-1875* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), 7-8.

⁷ For example, Barbara Wisch and Susan Scott Munshower, eds., *All the World’s a Stage: Art and Pageantry in the Renaissance and Baroque* (University Park: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990); Bodner, *Remaking America*; and Simon Peter Newman, *Parades and Politics of the Street: Festive Culture in the Early American Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997).

⁸ On events see, for example, H.V. Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building: Pageantry and Spectacle at Quebec’s Tercentenary* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999); and Ian Radforth, *Royal Spectacle: The 1860 Visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada and the United States* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004). On people see, for example, Ronald Rudin, *Founding Fathers: The Celebration of Champlain and Laval in the Streets of Quebec, 1878-1908* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2003); Colin M. Coates and Cecilia Morgan, *Heroines and History: Representations of Madeleine de Verchères and Laura Secord* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002); Peter E. Pope, *The Many Landfalls of John Cabot* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997); and Norman Knowles, *Inventing the Loyalists: The Ontario Loyalist Tradition and the Creation of Usable Pasts* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). On places see, for example, Alan Gordon, *Making Public Pasts: The Contested Terrain of Montreal’s Public Memories, 1891-1930* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001); and C.J. Taylor, *Negotiating the Past: The Making of Canada’s National Historic Parks and Sites* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1990).

⁹ On Canada see, for example, Bonnie Huskins, “The Ceremonial Space of Women: Public Processions in Victorian Saint John and Halifax,” in *Separate Spheres: Women’s Worlds in the Nineteenth-Century Maritimes*, ed. Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1994), 145-59; and Craig Heron and Steve Penfold, “The Craftsmen’s Spectacle: Labour Day Parades in Canada, the Early Years,” *Histoire sociale/ Social History* 29 (1996): 357-89.

¹⁰ Robert Cupido, “‘Sixty Years of Canadian Progress’: The Diamond Jubilee and the Politics of Commemoration,” *Canadian Issues* 20 (1998): 19-33; Robert Cupido, “Appropriating the Past: Pageants,

been on the attempts of organizers to develop a pan-Canadian nationalism and the resistance they faced to the particular type of nationalism they presented in various areas of the country, particularly Quebec. Cupido's work has been important to this study, but the chapter here takes a more direct look at the images produced for the Jubilee in terms of gender. In this regard it builds upon a limited body of work on the visual aspects of the Jubilee.¹¹ My focus diverges from Cupido's in its more narrow scope on the visual and the reading of images. Because the historiography on commemoration grew out of social and cultural history, the histories of celebrations usually include an analytical focus on one or more of the following: gender, class, race, and ethnicity. The Jubilee chapter borrows from many of the works that cover different events, places, and periods as a result. Overall the historiography of commemoration teaches us about how people wanted to see themselves ideally. In this sense the Diamond Jubilee fits in well since it was very much about searching for, defining, and imaging Canadian ideals.

Imaging Canadian ideas on a national level in the 1920s was increasingly important. The bicentenary had been largely forgotten and, by 1927, the project of building the nation seemed to be showing some significant fractures. On July 1, 1917, the fiftieth anniversary of Confederation passed without much fanfare. The war in Europe, with its devastating impact at home and abroad, overshadowed the Golden anniversary. When the war broke out in 1914 Canadians could not have predicted the

Politics, and the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation," *Journal of the Canadian Historical Association*, n.s., 9 (1998): 155-86; Robert Cupido, "The Medium, the Message and the Modern: The Jubilee Broadcast of 1927," *International Journal of Canadian Studies* 26 (Fall 2002): 101-123; and Robert Cupido, "Solidarity Without Consensus: Montreal Celebrates the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Canadian Historical Association, Halifax, Nova Scotia, 29-31 May 2003). On the Jubilee and nationalism see also Geoffrey Kelly, "Developing a Canadian National Feeling: The Diamond Jubilee Celebrations of 1927" (master's thesis, McGill University, 1984).

¹¹ Cupido touches upon the visual aspects as does Linda Helen Sawchyn. See Cupido, "Appropriating the Past;" and Linda Helen Sawchyn, "The 'New Canadian' and Canada's 1927 Diamond Jubilee: Representation of National Unity and Identity" (master's thesis: University of Alberta 1997).

slaughter that would mark the next four years. Six thousand casualties at Ypres, some the result of the new style of chemical warfare, drove home the fact that this was a modern war with technological innovations that resulted in mass casualties on the battlefield and beyond.¹² Ypres would not be the last devastating battle. In April of 1917, only two months before the anniversary, Canadian casualties numbered over ten thousand at Vimy Ridge. Although Canadian soldiers played a significant role in what would become the turning point of the First World War, the cost was brutal.¹³ One month after Vimy Ridge, Canadian Prime Minister Robert Borden announced plans to implement conscription. Opposition to the Military Service Act, passed later that same year, tore at the fabric of the country accentuating French-English divisions and caused discontent among farmers and labour.¹⁴ When the war was over in 1918, sixty thousand of the six hundred thousand Canadian soldiers were casualties of the war, and at least that many again were severely injured either mentally or physically. The incredible cost of war caused Canadians to search for answers to the inexplicable and to make sense of the sacrifice of the sons and daughters of the nation through acts of mythmaking.¹⁵

¹² On the homefront reaction to human costs of modern warfare see Ian Hugh Maclean Miller, *Our Glory and Our Grief: Torontonians and the Great War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 38-49.

¹³ On the Canadian military experience during World War One see Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook, *Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1974); Desmond Morton and J.L. Granatstein, *Marching to Armageddon: Canadians and the Great War, 1914-1918* (Toronto: Lester and Orpen Dennys, 1989); and Desmond Morton, *When Your Number's Up: The Canadian Soldier in the First World War* (Toronto: Random House, 1993).

¹⁴ On the conscription crisis see J.L. Granatstein and J.M. Hitsman, *Broken Promises: A History of Conscription in Canada* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1977); and Ramsey Cook, Craig Brown, and Carl Berger, eds., *Conscription 1917* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1969).

¹⁵ In his seminal work on the Great War, myth and modernity, Paul Fussell points out that "the dynamics and iconography of the Great War have provide cultural political, rhetorical, and artistic determinants on subsequent life. At the same time the war was relying on inherited myth, it was generating new myth, and that myth is part of the fibre of our own lives." Paul Fussell, *The Great War and Modern Memory* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975), ix. Canadian intellectuals such as Frank Underhill participated in the mythmaking, but Vance argues that in the end it was ordinary Canadians who were responsible for the myth. Jonathan Vance, *Death So Noble: Memory, Meaning, and the First World War* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1997), 7, 228-9. On Underhill see Carl Berger, *The Writing of*

On the home front it seemed that the war had brought about many disconcerting social and cultural changes. Youth seemed more reckless, the number of killed and injured men caused concern about the stability of future families and the existence of single women, and women's wartime efforts in politics and at work seemed to undermine traditional ideas about gender. The war had helped to yield results for long-time social reformers fighting for women's right to vote and prohibition.¹⁶ Yet, during the following decade it seemed that these successes and changes were tempered by a return to traditional values and cultural, political, and economic shifts that undermined the achievements. When it came time to celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of Confederation, Canadian elites felt that they needed more than a celebration, they needed to develop a pan-Canadian national sentiment that would transcend differences and unite Canadians.¹⁷ To draw together the country, organizers looked to the past and promoted a history and imagery that was meant to induce feelings of nationalism that would unify its citizens.

With the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, Canadian cultural and political elites planned elaborate national celebrations that drew heavily on the notion of tradition. The 'imagined community' of Canadians was based on what Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King summarized as "settlement and government."¹⁸ Drawing upon the recent sacrifices of Canadian soldiers as well as the history of the development of the country, organizers promoted a national identity firmly rooted in the country's past. Not surprisingly, the history presented in pamphlets, poems, books, and parades made subtle

Canadian History: Aspects of English-Canadian Historical Writing since 1900, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1986), chapter 3 especially 58-9.

¹⁶ Alison Prentice *et al*, *Canadian Women: A History* 2nd ed. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 230-7.

¹⁷ Cupido, "Appropriating the Past," 156-7.

¹⁸ W.L. Mackenzie King, *Confederation Address, Parliament Hill, July 1, 1927* (Ottawa: s.n., 1927).

comments about contemporary Canada and the need to remember tradition in order to gain success in the future.

‘A CLEARER VISION OF OUR ASPIRATIONS AND IDEALS’

On April 14, 1927, the House of Commons and the Senate unanimously passed a resolution that stated,

It is the earnest wish of Parliament that the Diamond Jubilee Celebration for which plans are now being rapidly matured, shall commemorate appropriately and enthusiastically the accomplishment of Confederation and the subsequent progress of the Dominion. We trust that this commemoration will lend added inspiration to the patriotic fervour of our people, and afford a clearer vision of our aspirations and ideals, to the end that from sea to sea there may be developed a robust Canadian spirit, and in all things Canadian a profounder national unity.¹⁹

Officially, the explicit goals for the Diamond Jubilee were progress and national unity.

Looking back to Confederation, the compromises and challenges that brought the colonies together would provide the backbone for a united citizenry. In part, it was meant to inspire a national spirit and to give Canadians an ideal “vision” of the country that they could work towards. Although rarely explicitly addressed, the commemoration of Confederation was intended to knit together the political, economic, and social tears that had beleaguered the nation for decades and which had come to a head again during and immediately after the First World War. In addition to tensions between French and English, labour and capital, city and countryside, the concern over American influence was particularly acute, especially in terms of culture. An American guest speaker Melville E. Stone, at the Canadian Club of Ottawa, succinctly stated the problem in 1922.

He stated:

When speaking to Canadians, I am never quite certain as to who you are. I never see a Canadian that I do not wonder if he does not

¹⁹ This was later read to the audience on Parliament Hill on July 1, 1927

really belong to us: if he was not deprived of his citizenship in the United States by one of those numerous ruthless and maurading (sic) commissions which have dealt with our useless boundary questions in the years gone by. You all look like Yankees. I am not sure that that would be flattering.²⁰

Stone's statement that this characterization would not have been flattering (especially to members of the Canadian Club) was an understatement for Canadian nationalists.

Culturally, one of the major anxieties that marked the 1920s was the concern over the flood of American literature, radio, movies, and periodicals coming into the country.²¹ In a speech given during a debate on protective tariffs for Canadian magazines in the House of Commons on April 7, 1927, MP Marcil complained of the popular American influence, especially in terms of periodicals and advertising. He stated "We should be on guard lest they contaminate the morals of our boys and girls, the future citizens of our country."²² However, such cultural products produced in the U.S. were so popular in Canada that, despite government and industry's best efforts, defining, creating, and selling Canadian cultural products proved to be difficult.²³ One of the goals of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations was to begin to rectify this situation. After July 1, 1927,

²⁰ Melville E. Stone, "The Crisis," in *The Canadian Club Year Book, 1922-23*, ed. Arthur S. Bourinot, W.J. Sykes, C.G. Cowan, and Major J.J. Bell (Ottawa: Davidson-Merrill Press), 79.

²¹ In the 1920s, almost all movies on Canadian screens were American, eighty percent of radio programming listened to by Canadians was American and the circulation for American periodicals reached fifty million. See John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada, 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 176, 182; and Mary Vipond, "Canadian Nationalism and the Plight of Canadian Magazines in the 1920s," *Canadian Historical Review* 58, no. 1 (March 1977): 43.

²² Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, (7 April 1927), p. 2037 (Mr. Charles Marcil, MP).

²³ Maria Tippet, *Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts Before the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 7-8; Vipond, "Canadian Nationalism and the Plight of Canadian Magazines in the 1920s," 43-63; Mary Vipond, "National Consciousness in English-Speaking Canada in the 1920s: Seven Studies" (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1974); Mary Vipond, *Listening In: The First Decade of Canadian Broadcasting, 1922-1932* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1992); and Peter Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978).

organizers hoped that Canadians would know exactly who they were, where they came from, and how bright the future was for them.

A nation-wide celebration was no mean undertaking and before it could occur the commemorations needed to be carefully planned. Yet, while the government's ideas were significant and certainly well intended, they were not the original force behind the celebration of Confederation. The government's resolution quoted at the beginning of the section obscures the fact that the government had to be petitioned to organize the celebrations and that it was divided as to whether or not Confederation was even a success that should be celebrated.

The impetus for the grand plans to commemorate the anniversary came from the Canadian Club. *Saturday Night* reported that in 1926 the Orillia branch of the Canadian Club "agitated for a properly organized celebration."²⁴ In fact, the agitation for a nation-wide celebration of Confederation was first raised in 1923 at the annual Canadian Club conference. That year, members of the voluntary association passed a resolution to recommend such celebrations to the federal government.²⁵ Along with the resolution for the Jubilee were others that were intended to foster pan-Canadian nationalism. The Canadian Club believed that support of Canadian literature, researchers and graduate students of Canadian history, and the standardization of the lyrics of "O Canada" would provide Canadians with a deeper sense of national unity. Although the Canadian Club

²⁴ *Saturday Night* June 25, 1927, 1.

²⁵ "Resolutions of Conference," *Maple Leaf* 2, no. 1 (November 1923): 53; and Russell R. Merifield, *Speaking of Canada: The Centennial History of the Canadian Clubs* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1993), 34-5.

promoted a strong national sentiment among Canadian citizens, they did so conscious of the desire to maintain strong ties to Britain.²⁶

To members of the Canadian Club, the problems of club and country were inseparable. The sense that the country was in need of saving from the grips of sectionalism and disunity coincided with concerns over the crisis in the Canadian Club movement. By 1923, it was clear that there were problems within the clubs, substantiated by declining membership and “loss of purpose.”²⁷ These issues were made more alarming to people from outside the association, including top-ranking government officials, who promoted the idea that the Canadian Clubs played an integral role in maintaining national unity. From 1923 to 1925 guest speakers, including Prime Minister King and Governor General Lord Byng, told members “the duty and responsibility to save the nation rested in their hands.”²⁸

The Canadian Clubs played a large role in shaping the overall direction of the commemoration. From 1925 to 1926, in an effort to salvage the organization, the Association of Canadian Clubs reorganized and drafted a new constitution.²⁹ The objectives of the Club as defined in the constitution reappeared in the Jubilee celebrations. In particular, five of the eight sections matched some of the most publicized desires for the commemorations. These were

To foster and encourage a national public opinion and spirit, to stimulate intelligent citizenship, to awaken an interest in public affairs, and to cultivate an attachment to the institutions and soil of Canada;

²⁶ “Resolutions of Conference,” 53 and Vipond, “National Consciousness in English-Speaking Canada in the 1920s,” 229.

²⁷ Vipond, “National Consciousness in English-Speaking Canada in the 1920s,” 223-24.

²⁸ Vipond, “National Consciousness in English-Speaking Canada in the 1920s,” 231.

²⁹ Merifield, *Speaking of Canada*, 35.

To foster friendly and equitable relationships between the two great races of the Dominion in the full recognition that each race is equally entitled to express and preserve its own identity and culture....

To assist new Canadians in becoming part of the life of the Dominion, and to encourage them to become acquainted with Canadian institutions and to contribute to the Commonwealth their particular racial culture;

To encourage the study of arts; literature and history of Canada; its economic organization and its problems generally, and its tradition of British justice and liberty;

And otherwise to assist in making Canada a strong nation united from sea to sea.³⁰

The goals of the Canadian Club after its reorganization and those of the Diamond Jubilee were wed. The constitution came to serve as a map for the national celebrations.

In 1926, shortly after the reorganization of the Canadian Club, its first full-time secretary, Brigadier-General D.W.B. Spry, outlined a number of suggestions for the celebration of the sixtieth anniversary of Confederation. His ideas included “a three-day celebration, a national organizing committee, bilingual programs, the encouragement of participation by new Canadians, and a nation-wide radio broadcast.”³¹ Each of these ideas were promoted by the National Committee and integrated into the celebrations.

On February 17, 1927, the House of Commons debated a bill to incorporate a National Committee for the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation – less than six months before the anniversary. This late date reflects the fact that, despite the effort put forth by the Canadian Club, the federal government showed reluctance in planning the celebration. Historian Mary Vipond states that “this long-delayed action

³⁰ *Canadian Nation*, 1 (April, 1928), 31, quoted in Vipond, “National Consciousness in English-Speaking Canada in the 1920s,” 236-7.

³¹ Vipond, “National Consciousness in English-Speaking Canada in the 1920s,” 248.

occurred only after C.G. Cowan and Jean Désy of the Canadian Clubs went from cabinet minister to cabinet minister with Spry's memorandum in their hands."³² Although passed the same day, the bill was contentious. The idea of the commemoration raised exactly the type of issues that the promotion of a pan-Canadian nationalism was seeking to erase. In the debates in the House of Commons the tensions between labour and capital, fear of Americanization, and the fact that, despite the declaration of equality in the empire at the Imperial Conference of 1926, Canada had not completely shaken its colonial status put the official start of the plans for celebrations on shaky ground. The proposed federal sponsorship of \$250,000 also caused debate.

The idea that the Canadian Clubs lobbied for the celebrations but the government was to pay for them caused consternation among some members of Parliament and their criticism of the proposal extended into criticism of the clubs. One Member of Parliament stated "If the Canadian clubs and the Empire clubs want to have such a celebration let them pay for it...The Canadian clubs which are behind this movement are no more Canadian than the imperial clubs are imperial."³³ This was not the only difficulty. Perhaps the most pressing issue was the lack of confidence expressed by some MPs that Confederation should be celebrated. Canada's colonial status had been lessened with the country's participation in the First World War and at the Imperial Conference in 1926, but nonetheless it remained. Winnipeg MP J.M.S. Woodsworth pointed out that, "It seems to me in the first place that this is an excessively large amount for a celebration which, as far as we can determine, will consist very largely of flag-waving, especially

³² Vipond, "National Consciousness in English-Speaking Canada in the 1920s," 249.

³³ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, (17 February 1927), p. 415 (Mr. Thomas L. Church, MP).

when we do not have, as at the present moment, a distinctly Canadian flag to wave.”³⁴ Further, some Canadians took pride in the country’s intimate relationship with Britain and wanted to foster it rather than change it. By 1927, it seemed that the previous sixty years had revealed more about the shortcomings of Confederation than its achievements. During a lengthy statement, Toronto Conservative MP Thomas L. Church outlined a number of the problems facing the Dominion that reflected the fact that Canadians had more pressing issues at hand that deserved attention and monetary help. Lack of adequate jobs for returned soldiers, the numbers of people who had to leave for the United States to work, and the American millionaires purchasing Canadian land and businesses all took precedent over “such extravagance by the government.”³⁵ He stated

But why celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of confederation? Confederation has not been a shining success that we should desire to spend \$250,000 on its celebration. With the economic problems now confronting this country I see no occasion to shout from the housetops about our status and our diamond jubilee.³⁶

In a similar vein, Woodsworth put forth that the very people who were paying for the celebrations would be unable to participate. Woodsworth stated,

I submit that the great majority of the people of Canada will have very small opportunity to participate in these festivities. We are inviting outside visitors, accustomed to very frequent celebrations, and will provide very elaborate entertainment for them, but what about the mass of people across the country who will pay the bills?³⁷

³⁴ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, (17 February 1927), p. 410 (Mr. J.M.S. Woodsworth, MP).

³⁵ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, (17 February 1927), p. 413-416 (Mr. Thomas L. Church, MP).

³⁶ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, (17 February 1927), p. 413 (Mr. Thomas L. Church, MP).

³⁷ Hansard, 410. Woodsworth’s position and concerns over the Jubilee celebrations were reflective of his views about Canadian society. One historian described Woodsworth’s personal philosophy as “a mixture of nineteenth-century English liberalism, Anglo-Canadian nativism, Methodism, and the pioneer assumptions of a new agricultural frontier.” See Allen Mills, “Cooperation and Community in the Thought of J.S. Woodsworth,” *Labour/ Le Travail* 14, (Fall 1984): 104.

Woodsworth's concerns over the government's financial support of the celebrations, along with the exclusion of working people from gaining access to them, was followed by a discussion of who should actually make up the National Committee. The proposed committee included the presidents of the Canadian National Railway and the Canadian Pacific Railway in addition to members of the Imperial Order of Daughters of the Empire. To Woodsworth, the National Committee should reflect some of the diversity of the nation, including labour and recent immigrants from Eastern Europe who played an integral role in opening, settling, and developing the Western agricultural frontier. In supporting a "distinctly educational" celebration, he also suggested that teachers be included as part of the Committee.³⁸

In response to Woodsworth's suggestions, Agnes Macphail, an original member of the proposed committee, offered to withdraw and argued that if labour had no place in the organization then neither did agriculture. King was quick to respond to Macphail that she was chosen as a representative because of her "distinguished and historic place in this country as the first woman to be a member of the parliament of Canada."³⁹ Macphail insisted that she represented agricultural labour and that if industrial labour was not included as part of the National Committee she would withdraw her name. She argued,

I represent agriculture. I understood the Prime Minister to say that it was not because of that I was on the committee but because I was the first woman member in the House of Commons. While parliament does represent all classes of the people, I am here as a result of organized agriculture and I must represent them on the committee or not represent anything. If it is true that the ranks of industrial labour, indeed all classes of labour, are not represented on the committee in any official capacity, I do not feel that I can allow my name to remain.⁴⁰

³⁸Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, (17 February 1927), p. 410-411 (Mr. J.M.S. Woodsworth, MP).

³⁹Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, (17 February 1927), p. 411 (Ms. Agnes Macphail, MP).

⁴⁰Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, (17 February 1927), p. 413 (Ms. Agnes Macphail, MP).

Macphail's challenges to the composition of the National Committee were resolved after King called a recess to work out the details. He met with Macphail and returned to Parliament with additional names to be added to the National Committee, including Tom Moore, President of the Trades and Labour Congress of Canada, M.J. Coldwell, President of the Canadian Teachers' Association, Henry Wise Wood, President of the United Farmers of Alberta, and Michael Luchkovich, Member of Parliament, (included because of his Ukrainian background). As a result, Macphail allowed her name to remain.⁴¹

Quite clearly, the commemoration was off to a rather shaky start. National unity was going to be a problem if the representatives on the Committee were any indicator. The debates on the passing of the bill to incorporate the National Committee for the Diamond Jubilee made it clear that the problems of the near past were not going to be so easily quelled by these celebrations. The proposal of a Diamond Jubilee once again brought to the surface the tensions of the previous three decades.

In the end, the early ideas presented in the memorandum by Spry did indeed shape the plans for the Jubilee celebrations. In Ottawa, from July 1-3, 1927, grand celebrations were carried out that included bilingual programs and a nation-wide radio broadcast. Incorporated into pamphlets and other published material put out by the national organizing committee was the suggestion that in local venues new Canadians be included

⁴¹ The final National Committee consisted of the following: Governor General and Viscountess Willingdon, W.L. Mackenzie King, Ernest Lapointe, E.M. Macdonald, O.D. Skelton, E.J. Lemaire, T. Ahearn, Chas. Marcil, Hewitt Bostock, Sir George E. Foster, Thomas Mulvey, William F. Todd, E.M. Marlor, Chas. Stewart, Robert Forke, Michael Luchkovich, E.W. Beatty, R. Dandurand, J. LeRoy Holman (representing the Premier of P.E.I.), J.E. Sinclair, James A. Robb, Tom Moore, J.H. King, A.C. Hardy, J.A. Wilson, Miss R.M. Church, Agnes Macphail, A.G. Doughty, Rodolphe Lemieux, Jas. G. Gardiner, T.A. Burrows, M.J. Coldwell, George F. Edwards, R.B. Bennett, R.K. Smith, Hugh Guthrie, Henry Thorton, Mrs. Wesley Barker, George H. Perley, John Lewis, R. Willis O'Connor, and C.J. Cowan. See Archives of Ontario, Minutes of the meeting of the National Committee, March 17, 1927.

in the celebrations whenever possible.⁴² Publications and the national program were bilingual and the Executive Committee defined its primary function as promoting “a spirit of unity in Canada.”⁴³ When the Executive Committee issued its Report after the celebrations they noted that the “comprehensive memorandum” of the Canadian Clubs “proved to be of great value.”⁴⁴ For their efforts C.G. Cowan and Jean Désy were named Honorary Secretaries of the National Committee for the Celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation and were also part of the Medals Committee.⁴⁵

On Wednesday March 17, 1927, the National Committee for the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation held its first meeting in the Railway Committee Room of the House of Commons. After the debates in the House regarding the composition of a representative committee, the Executive consisted of an eclectic assembly of people including Tom Moore, Agnes Macphail, Queen’s University professor O.D. Skelton, and future Prime Minister R.B. Bennett.⁴⁶ A little over one month later, King complained in his diary that the “Committee appointed seems to have done little or nothing....It is lamentable how the Committee in charge have fallen down. Nothing of a celebration only a commemoration.”⁴⁷ When the bill to incorporate the National Committee for the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation was debated in the House, King made a point to ensure that the word “celebrated” be used instead of “commemorated.”

⁴² On the inclusion of “newcomers” see *Diamond Jubilee of Confederation: General Suggestions for the guidance of committees in charge of local celebrations*, (Ottawa: Published by the Executive Committee of the National Committee for the Celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, 1927), 6.

⁴³ Canada. Executive Committee of the National Committee for the Celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, *Report of the Executive Committee National Diamond Jubilee of Confederation* (Ottawa, 1928), 5.

⁴⁴ *Report of the Executive Committee*, 4.

⁴⁵ *Report of the Executive Committee*, 60-1. Désy was the Chairman of the Medals Committee.

⁴⁶ AO, Minutes of Committees, Minutes of a meeting of the National Committee for the celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, March 17, 1927.

⁴⁷ William Lyon Mackenzie King, *The Mackenzie King Diaries, 1893-1931*. Transcript (Toronto, 1973), 26 April, 1927.

According to King, the word “celebrate” would “explain away the idea of a mere spectacle.”⁴⁸ To King’s disappointment, the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation was being planned as a spectacle - a passive display - rather than a participatory event. Nonetheless, the qualities of education and national spirit that he desired had the potential to be part of the spectacle. By the time the anniversary arrived, plenty of events that were predicated on public involvement had been organized. On July 1, 1927 the nation-wide celebrations began with towns and cities participating in events to mark the day, but whether or not the Jubilee would be a success in fostering a unifying national spirit was not yet apparent.

THE OFFICIAL NATIONAL CELEBRATIONS IN OTTAWA

By far the most prominent program was held in the nation’s capital where the ceremonies were considered to have “special significance” due to the fact that it was “the seat of Government of the Dominion.”⁴⁹ The Ottawa celebrations incorporated events that were meant to symbolically link Canadians to each other through the designation of new buildings and through a national radio broadcast heard across the country – a technological first. Thus, organizers planned the official celebration to include an audience beyond participants who could attend in person. Nonetheless, many of the defining features of the first two days of the event were based on visual participation: the laying of the cornerstone for the new Confederation Block, the planting of a “Confederation tree” by Lady Willingdon, a parade, and watching sports games and other competitive activities. The National celebrations were a visual spectacle that consisted of three days of public events, which attracted tens of thousands of spectators. The spectacle

⁴⁸ Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, (17 February 1927), p. 421 (Mr. William Lyon Mackenzie King, Prime Minister).

⁴⁹ *Report of the Executive Committee*, 10.

continued as newspapers across the country focused their coverage on the events in Ottawa, reported on them in detail and included photographs. The celebrations were based on having an audience watch them and internalize their meanings. Out of the eye of the public the performances of public figures and other citizens lost their cultural power.

The first day of celebration on July 1 was the largest and most formal, with speeches from dignitaries and prominent politicians. The second day was reserved for sports and leisure activities and a National Thanksgiving Service highlighted the third day.⁵⁰ Despite the attempts to provide a feeling of solidarity among Canadian citizenry, the celebrations revealed the fractures in official interpretations of Canadian nationhood and the competing nationalisms already entrenched within Canadian political culture. As the Prime Minister recorded in his diary, the celebrations were interlaced with “a thread of disorder and confusion.”⁵¹

On the morning of July 1, the permanent markers of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation were dedicated. The morning began with the laying of the cornerstone of the new departmental building by Governor General and Lady Willingdon. The Confederation Block, as it was to be known, was meant to replace the old Parliament Buildings destroyed by fire in 1916. Due to the cost of the First World War, the building of the new block was delayed and the reconstruction of it tied into the Jubilee events. In keeping with the overall theme of tying the past to the present and future, King explained to the crowd that the receptacle beneath the cornerstone that would hold coins, stamps, and “papers of record” was from the original building. King stated, “there is a very

⁵⁰ *Report of the Executive Committee*, 9.

⁵¹ King, *The Mackenzie King Diaries*, Friday, July 1, 1927.

intimate link between the original buildings as laid by the founders of Confederation and this building.”⁵² After the laying of the cornerstone came the inauguration of the Carillon (also known as the Peace Tower). As with the new Confederation Block, the Carillon was a project that had begun a decade earlier and had simply been tied into the Jubilee celebrations.

After the ringing of the Carillon, the Boy Scouts laid wreaths at the graves of two of the fathers of Confederation (as was being done around the country) and decorated Laurier’s grave. Just after noon, the wife of the Governor General, the Viscountess Willingdon, planted a “Confederation tree” on behalf of all women in Canada. Physically and psychically separated from the other official celebrations, Lady Willingdon’s involvement in the celebrations emphasized the expected ornamental status of women. In the *Globe*’s coverage of the episode her clothing garnered as much press attention as her actions. The paper reported that “Her Excellency, attired in a flowered crepe gown with white hat, parasol and accessories, was the essence of simplicity and coolness.” To turn the soil, Lady Willingdon used a “diminutive” silver spade, and although she filled in the hole “energetically,” it was her husband, using a “larger implement” who showed his “skill.” Similarly, the Prime Minister, in performing the same task, showed “real pioneer style.”⁵³

The afternoon and evening program attracted sixty thousand spectators who listened to speeches, the one thousand person Centenary Choir, the Governor’s Generals Foot Guards’ band, and watched “a great moving pageant depicting the history of

⁵² *Report of the Executive Committee*, 76-7.

⁵³ *Globe*, July 2, 1927, 1.

Canada” as it proceeded through the city’s streets.⁵⁴ The programs were bilingual and included French and English patriotic songs, like *Canada My Home*, and folk songs, like *Vive la canadienne*, speeches by French and English dignitaries, recitations of some of the speeches from Confederation, and a reading by the daughter of a former Speaker of the House, Margaret Anglin, of Bliss Carmen’s commissioned poem, *Dominion Day 1927*. As Robert Cupido has argued in connection with the events, “the cultural and linguistic balance of the entire program was finely calibrated.”⁵⁵ French-Canadian folk songs were followed by traditional British ones and speeches by French-Canadian politicians were nestled between national and imperialist speeches by English-Canadian politicians.

The second day of the celebrations was reserved for sporting events “as distinctly Canadian as possible in character,” including lacrosse and canoeing.⁵⁶ As Canadian historian Gillian Poulter has demonstrated, participating in public sporting events was a way for partakers and observers to make a claim to national identity.⁵⁷ According to the Executive Committee, the sporting events held in Ottawa and around the country were “old Canadian sports.”⁵⁸ In other locations, additional “Canadian” games were included

⁵⁴ *Report of the Executive Committee*, 10 and Cupido, “The Medium, the Message and the Modern,” 107.

⁵⁵ Cupido, “The Medium, the Message and the Modern,” 111.

⁵⁶ *Report of the Executive Committee*, 11, 100.

⁵⁷ Gillian Poulter, “Montreal and its Environs: Imagining a National Landscape, c. 1867-1885,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 38, no. 3 (Fall 2004): 72.

⁵⁸ *Report of the Executive Committee*, 11. By appropriating the “indigenous and indigenizing” sports and games of Native peoples, White Canadians “felt they had a legitimate claim to call themselves native Canadians.” Poulter argues, that sports such as snowshoeing and tobogganing “were indigenous in that they were activities appropriated from the original indigenous peoples, the Native peoples, rather than being imported from Europe. They were indigenizing in that participating in the sport involved repeated and stylized interaction with the natural environment. In effect, performing as a Native made you native. Becoming conversant with and comfortable in the colonial landscape was one way colonists could feel themselves to be indigenous and claim a new national identity ...” By the time of the Jubilee, the process of indigenizing these Native sports was almost entirely complete. See Poulter, “Montreal and its Environs,” 72.

in the festivities such as logrolling that showed ties to local industry and workers' skills.⁵⁹ Sporting events were not simply diversions or playful events to offset the more solemn or sanctified celebrations. Sports and games held wider appeal and events were often organized to match what were seen as age and gender limitations. These events included a wider section of the population as children, women, and workers could actively participate. Even those people who preferred to be bystanders could take part in the events. As with other aspects of the Jubilee celebrations, audiences played an integral role and watching events was a means of participation.

On the second day of celebrations famous American pilot Colonel Charles Lindbergh appeared as part of the day's programme. His impressive transatlantic flight made him a modern hero who had conquered time and space with a machine. However, his visit posed some problems for the celebration, which was after all supposed to focus on Canadian achievements and history. The Publicity Committee, a sub-committee of the National Executive, reported that "they felt to unduly advertise the coming of Colonel Lindbergh on July 2 might divert the interest of the public from the real object of the celebration, namely, the commemoration of Canada's Jubilee."⁶⁰ It is unsurprising then, that Lindbergh's visit was formally understood as "an official recognition by the United States Government of the Diamond Jubilee."⁶¹

⁵⁹ Lakehead University Archives, "From 'The Landing' to Modern Port Arthur: Offering of the City Council to the Diamond Jubilee of Canadian Confederation and Official Program." As with other cities and towns in Canada, Port Arthur chose to formulate its own Jubilee celebrations that deviated from the official recommendations. In Port Arthur, sporting events took place on the afternoon of July 1st and all day on July 2nd. On other local variations see Cupido, "Appropriating the Past," 155-186.

⁶⁰ *Report of the Executive Committee*, 72.

⁶¹ *Report of the Executive Committee*, 100. For the actual celebrations, Lindbergh and his flying partners arrived and circled the Parliament buildings. Afterward during his speech, Lindbergh emphasized Canada's relationship to the United States and accentuated the importance of transportation in the future.

Even though the Ottawa celebrations were held far from the homes of most Canadians, many had a chance to listen to the events over the radio. Canadians tuning in across the nation heard the speeches, the ringing of the Carillon bells, the poetry recitation and the folk songs. The national broadcast was a technological feat and the first time the entire country was symbolically brought together through transportation and communication systems. The telegraph and telephone lines of twenty-six companies were linked, special devices were created to overcome the incompatibility of some pieces, and 23,000 miles of telephone circuits and telegraph wire was supplied by the U.S in order to overcome the lack of it in Northern Ontario.⁶² Simply conquering the technological problems in cobbling together a national network in less than three months was an impressive achievement and one that “helped Canadians to internalize the idea of the nation, and inaugurated a new, more intimate relationship between the political centre and the periphery.”⁶³

The success of Lindbergh’s visit and the Jubilee celebrations were tragically marred as one of his flying partners crashed. The pilot, J. Thaddeus Johnson, attempted to parachute from the plummeting machine, but it failed to open completely and he was killed as the crowd gathered below watched. As one newspaper reported, “from national thanksgiving the nation’s Capital turned to national mourning for a young United States officer.” Although officials in charge of the Jubilee initially considered cancelling the remainder of the afternoon program, they decided against it since thousands of people had come to celebrate Confederation and to see Lindbergh. Unfortunately, Johnson’s plane crash was not the only one related to the Jubilee. Captain Roy Maxwell, the Ontario Government’s air chief, who was flying from Toronto to Moose Factory dropping Confederation messages from Premier Ferguson, crashed close to Sudbury, Ontario. The lengthy message stated: “On this day when all Canadians are being brought closer together by the commemoration of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, it is a special satisfaction to the people of Ontario to realize that the outlying portions of the province are being brought into close touch with the older-settled parts of Ontario...This event marks an important advance in our history and at the same time demonstrates to the world the stages by which we are entering the actual working possession of our great northern domain...Destiny point to northern Ontario as the field for our expansion and development in the future.” Maxwell was not seriously injured in the accident, the plane was severely damaged and the flight could not be continued. As with the fatal crash in Ottawa, this accident was unrecorded in the official report of the Executive Committee. See *Report of the Executive Committee*, 44-5, 101; and *Globe*, July 4, 1927, 1.

⁶² Cupido, “The Medium, the Message and the Modern,” 106.

⁶³ Cupido, “The Medium, the Message and the Modern,” 119.

After the conclusion of the Jubilee celebrations, the Executive Committee reported that

The results exceeded all expectations. From the inauguration of the carillon in the tower of the Parliament Buildings in Ottawa at noon on July 1 to the conclusion of the national program in the early morning of July 2, striking features of the national celebration were carried over the radio to the most distant parts of Canada and, in addition, to widely scattered points in the United States, Great Britain and other parts of the world. Musical and dramatic numbers by Canadian artists, addresses by public men and the music of the National Carillon were heard everywhere. This feature of the Jubilee celebration evoked tremendous enthusiasm. People in remote hamlets and in the very extremities of the country heard the national program as distinctly as if they had been present on Parliament Hill in Ottawa. Within a few days after the celebration, thousands of letters were received by the committee from all parts of Canada and from many different countries throughout the world, commending this great radio achievement.⁶⁴

In addition to the Executive Committee's report of the broadcast's success, King recorded in his diary that the Jubilee's radio coverage marked the beginning of Canada's new place "as a world power."⁶⁵ Cupido, borrowing from Maurice Charland's work, has argued that the Jubilee broadcast can be seen as a landmark in the development of "technological nationalism."⁶⁶ Cupido argues that the broadcast helped to serve to legitimize the nation-state as it symbolically lessened the space between the political heart of the country and its extremities, and helped to promote a specific idea of nation. The problems of difference in language, religion, regionalism and sectionalism were presented as problems in the past that were due to "distance and natural obstacles."⁶⁷ In a book produced by the National Committee, technological developments in travel and

⁶⁴ *Report of the Executive Committee*, 9.

⁶⁵ King, *The Mackenzie King Diaries*, 1 July 1927.

⁶⁶ Cupido, "The Medium, the Message, and the Modern," 104

⁶⁷ M.O. Hammond, *Simpson's Confederation Jubilee Series, 1867-1927* (Toronto: The Robert Simpson Company Limited, 1927), 5.

communications were touted as having the power to break down “all that remains of ancient misunderstandings between different parts of the country.”⁶⁸ Nonetheless, as Cupido’s work aptly demonstrates, “in 1927 the reach of the National Broadcasting Committee exceeded its grasp.”⁶⁹

On the front page of *The Globe*, the headline stated “Canada’s Story of Achievement Circles the World.” The article emphasized the significance of the event beyond Canadian borders with the opening sentence: “The world paused today while Canada celebrated the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation.” Further, the paper made it clear that the Jubilee was not an unimportant event for the future of Canada. “It was a historic day, a day of good-will to all peoples, a day of pageantry and picturesque events whose memories shall never fade.”⁷⁰ After the three-day celebration in Ottawa which included speeches from dignitaries, folk songs sung in both official languages, poetry readings, a nation-wide radio broadcast, the designation of new buildings and the ringing of the Carillon, a full day of sports, and a religious ceremony entitled the National Thanksgiving Service, King had no doubts about the Jubilee’s achievements.⁷¹ On July 3, in his diary he recorded his happiness. “It was like the triumph of nationhood, this sixtieth anniversary of Confederation, the beginning of a new epoch in our history....We have at last a country of our own which is a nation.”⁷²

⁶⁸ Canada. Executive Committee of the National Committee for the Celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation, *Suggestions for Historical Pageants, Floats and Tableaux (with illustrations in colour) for the Guidance of Local Committees in Charge of Diamond Jubilee Celebrations*, (Ottawa, 1927), 38.

⁶⁹ Cupido, “The Medium, the Message and the Modern,” 118.

⁷⁰ *Globe*, July 2, 1927, 1.

⁷¹ On the actual content of the celebrations in Ottawa and in various cities and towns across the country see Cupido, “Appropriating the Past,” 155-186; and Cupido, “Solidarity Without Consensus”; Cupido, “The Medium, the Message, and the Modern,” 101-123.

⁷² King, *The Mackenzie King Diaries*, 3 July 1927.

Despite the ringing success of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations and King's own enthusiastic expressions of delight, the very reliance on visual performances assured that the 'vision' of Confederation and Canada that King longed to promote would be experienced on the actual days, but then stored permanently as a memory. The fleeting moments were produced as a potentially persistent memory through tangible consumer goods. The images of men and women promoted during the celebrations integrated the history of the country with modern concerns and made powerful statements on the meaning of Canadian in terms of gender, race, and class. In a time when the world seemed to be recovering from the massive disruption of the First World War, defining access to citizenship and the proper roles for citizens within the nation produced an idyllic 'mist' of nationalism. Both nationhood and nationalism were re-embodied in representations of ancient images as a new mythology in a dreamlike state cleansed of the destruction, blood, and dirt of modernity. The memories of the First World War persisted, but the moment that marked Canada's step into a maturing nationhood was remembered in different – often less graphic – forms.⁷³ Nationalism, in this moment of production, was, as Canadian historian W.L. Morton described, “a mist that hung over the vortex of Canadian life; it was, in its drift and changes, lit by sunlight, eye-catching and seemingly solid, but it was in large part mist.”⁷⁴ The mist, however, was significant for it reflected the desires and wants of national elites and highlighted the new visual interpretation of Canada meant for popular consumption. In the next two sections of the chapter we will see how the Jubilee was produced and consumed as a popular good and

⁷³ As Vance points out, Canadians grew weary of remembering the war in terms of “its hideousness and miseries.” Vance, *Death So Noble*, 74.

⁷⁴ W.L. Morton, “The 1920s,” in *The Canadians, 1867-1967*, ed. J.M.S. Careless and R. Craig Brown (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1967), 232.

how the imagery of the Jubilee reflected the new embodiment of nationalism and nationhood.

SELLING THE JUBILEE: CONSUMERISM AND THE SPECTACLE

In looking to history to propel Canadian spirit and development into the future, organizers of the Diamond Jubilee were negotiating between “the opposing drives of what may be termed nostalgic and the propulsive elements in Canadian society. Canadians, looking backward with sentiment, were being driven forward by desire.”⁷⁵ In a similar vein, Mary Vipond argued that the 1920s in Canada can be defined as a decade of transition, defined by great hopes for the future and a nostalgia for an idealized past.⁷⁶ This tricky negotiation and process of cultural selection is evident in the images of the Diamond Jubilee.

The development of ‘national’ images in the 1920s was important not only because it reflects what national elites wanted Canadian identity to be, but also because visual culture was a place for its development. In a recent edition of *Invisible Culture*, Lucy Corzon explains that, “Visual culture, in this context, is understood not as a mirror that reflects national identity, but rather a complex venue for its interpretation – a site through which populations come into consciousness as members of a particular community.”⁷⁷ Canadian elites unconsciously and consciously undertook a process of cultural selection and produced a narrative of Canadian history that was intended to provide a unifying sense of patriotism among Canadians during the Jubilee. Imagery was an important venue for the promotion of what it meant to be Canadian, especially in

⁷⁵ Morton, “The 1920s,” 229.

⁷⁶ Vipond, “National Consciousness in English-Speaking Canada,” 3-4.

⁷⁷ Lucy Curzon, “Introduction: Visual Culture and National Identity,” *Invisible Culture*, 5 (2003): 1, http://www.rochester.edu/in_visible_culture/Issue_5/introduction.html.

seeking out what defined Canadians after the massive change brought by the First World War.

The idea that Canadians had passed through an important stage and were entering into a new maturity was a sentiment that marked the decade.⁷⁸ For the most part, this new self-confidence can be attributed to the sacrifices and gains made as a result of the First World War and the Imperial Conference in 1926. The blood that had been shed during World War One marked Canada's entry into the world scene as a quasi-independent nation-state. The Balfour Declaration confirmed it when it declared that Britain and the countries of its empire were "equal in status, in no way subordinate to one another in any aspect of their domestic or external affairs, though united by a common allegiance to the Crown, and freely associated as members of the British Commonwealth of Nations."⁷⁹ Although external and foreign affairs for Canadians were still attached to the British government, there was a new sense of an independent Canadian nationhood. This sentiment was expressed in Jubilee publications such as *Simpson's Confederation Jubilee Series*, which announced that the questions over a lack of unity and common purpose due to political differences, distance, and "natural obstacles" had been quieted. In the introduction to it, author M.O. Hammond declared "The answer is seen in the unity revealed in the Great War emergency, in the steady expansion of industry and trade, the ambition for greater triumphs, and the progress of creative arts such as literature,

⁷⁸ Part of Canada's new maturity was marked by Canada's participation at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1919. See Margaret MacMillan, *Paris 1919: Six Months that Changed the World* (Toronto: Random House: 2001), 44-48.

⁷⁹ Ramsey Cook, "A Canadian Account of the 1926 Imperial Conference," *Journal of Commonwealth Political Studies*, 3 no. 1-2 (1965): 51. See also Thompson with Seager, *Canada 1922-1939*, 49.

painting, and architecture.”⁸⁰ Now it seemed that all the country needed was a cultural maturity to match its new status. Canadian historian John Herd Thompson explains,

To members of English Canada’s intellectual community, the end of the Great War symbolized their country’s coming of age. The only attribute of full-grown nationhood that post-war Canada appeared to them to lack was a culture that could reflect this new national status and demonstrate, to Canadians and the world, that Canada had left behind her unlettered adolescence and entered a more refined adulthood.⁸¹

In the 1920s, Canadian intellectuals and elites wanted to develop a national culture. The Confederation celebrations were simply a neatly encapsulated portion of a broader enterprise. Jubilee organizers produced a film, material for newspapers, magazines, and radio. The material produced for these media was meant to be part of a cultural development and a way to encourage Canadians to take an active interest in the history of Canada.⁸² It was hoped that a historically minded nationalism circulated through some of the venues of popular culture would slow the consumption of American produced cultural products. Organizers argued that Canadians knew “less about the splendour of their own story than any other people of a similar culture.” They argued that through historically-based activities and productions, Canadians, particularly Canadian youth, would develop a historically based national identity as a counterpart to a “jazz-mad age.”⁸³

A week after the July 1 celebrations, a columnist in *Saturday Night* argued that the “festival of praise and thanksgiving” served the important purposes of shoring up

⁸⁰ Hammond’s statement could be read as a proclamation as opposed to a reflection of fact. Hammond, *Simpson’s Confederation Jubilee Series*, 5.

⁸¹ Thompson with Seager, *Canada 1922-1939*, 158.

⁸² Cupido, “Appropriating the Past,” 161.

⁸³ *The First Canadian Historical Congress and the Willingdon Foundation: A Short Discussion About the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation and Certain Commemorative Proposals Arising Therefrom* (Oshawa, [1927]), 2, 14.

national, cultural defences and increasing Canadian “self-respect.” The magazine reported,

More than any other factor it should serve to combat the outside influences of which some of us are so apprehensive – foreign literature, advertisements, and moving pictures. Living so close to a people so prone as our neighbors to extol the greatness of their country and their achievements, we in Canada almost require the armor (sic) of a constant awareness of the happiness of our own lot in being citizens of a blessed land richer in many respects than any other on the face of the earth!⁸⁴

As the quote from *Saturday Night* suggested, the promotion of Canada’s greatness was thought to provide a measure of defence against the onslaught of cultural products produced south of the border. In an advertisement by book publishers J.M. Dent & Sons, Ltd., the copy encouraged Canadians to read only Canadian authors “as much as possible...Not the trash – one finds that in every country’s literature – but such books as are really worthwhile, for there are plenty of them, from the pens of fellow-countrymen.”⁸⁵ The material produced to counteract the flood implicitly turned against the content of the popular cultural products. Jazz, flappers, and gin simply did not fit with the ideal conception of Canada, past, present, or future.

The popular documents of the Jubilee were produced with the goal of developing a national, historical consciousness that celebrated “the progress of creative arts such as literature, painting and architecture.”⁸⁶ In reality, few gestures were made to include literature, painting, and architecture into the celebrations. One of the only Canadian paintings reproduced for the occasion was *The Fathers of Confederation*. At the national

⁸⁴ *Saturday Night*, July 9, 1927, 4.

⁸⁵ *Saturday Night*, May 7, 1927, 8. This was part of a promotion of Canadian literature and authors that was prevalent throughout the 1920s. See Vipond, “National Consciousness in English-Speaking Canada,” chapter 6 and Clarence Karr, *Authors and Audiences: Popular Canadian Fiction in the Early Twentieth Century* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2001).

⁸⁶ Hammond, *Simpson’s Confederation Jubilee Series*, 5.

celebrations in Ottawa a poem by Bliss Carmen was read and folk songs were performed. Beyond that, the conscious cultivation of Canadian culture that existed throughout the 1920s in terms of literature and especially art were relegated to be a means of educating Canadians during the Diamond Jubilee festivities. When elites looked back into the past they chose to emphasize political events, politicians, and symbols of material progress, rather than Canadian cultural producers. When they reached for the land, they did not reach towards the canvases of the Group of Seven, but rather images of the land under production and settlement even as the North was exalted as part of the Jubilee celebrations.

What is striking about the various Diamond Jubilee celebrations is the absence of permanent, commemorative public artwork (statuary, etcetera) to mark the occasion. On Parliament Hill, the only nods to a permanent, public commemorative piece were the laying of the corner stone for a new departmental building and the inauguration of the Carillon – projects that had been conceived years earlier. The Jubilee festivities were indeed marked by ephemerality as most celebrations that took place across the country were observed with parades and pageants.⁸⁷ The expense of permanent pieces along with the hasty assemblage of the celebrations can explain the lack of enduring cultural structures, but another factor needs to be taken into consideration. As discussed in the Introduction and Chapter One, ephemeral performances were an important part of modernity, and the Diamond Jubilee celebrations were essentially about modernity. The link between past, present, and future, the interplay between modernity and tradition, and the reliance on ephemerality all mark the celebrations as thoroughly modern. Therefore, the focus on ephemeral performances should not simply be seen as a negative factor or

⁸⁷ *Report of the Executive Committee*, passim.

simply the result of a lack of long-term planning. Preparation was necessary for these events, and part of the groundwork involved the grooming of potential audiences.

To prepare the broader public for these public performances newspaper advertisements and other coverage would circulate throughout the country. For organizers this meant increased investment in visual images provided through various popular media (newspapers, magazines, moving pictures, and radio) to promote and celebrate the Jubilee. The lasting impact would be its educational qualities promoted in pageants and parades and not in stone or metal artwork. Organizers implicitly relied on the fostering of a lasting national spirit through memories of the event as opposed to permanent markers that would perpetually serve as reminders.

For the interested public, there were a number of ways to participate in the events beyond direct involvement in official celebrations. Many of these included elements from the growing consumer culture. Watching shows (including historical pageants and parades), reading newspapers, seeing advertisements, watching the jubilee film, and taking pictures were but a few ways that consumption and celebration were tied together.⁸⁸ The very event was premised on the assumption that there would be an audience to receive the Jubilee message. In order to ensure that the Jubilee would be successful in attracting potential audiences and that audiences would receive the cheerful message, it was necessary to groom or prepare potential spectators. The Publicity Committee of the Diamond Jubilee was well aware of the significant connection between the public event and newspapers and magazines and they worked hard to ensure that Canadians at home and abroad knew about the Diamond Jubilee celebrations. Other sub-

⁸⁸ The Jubilee film was a ten minute silent film that showed pictures of Parliament, drawings of maps that showed the geographical expansion of the country, drawings of early rural communities, and images of cities.

committees helped to disseminate information. The Historical sub-committee distributed 180,000 copies of the book *Sixty Years of Canadian Progress* to newspapers, churches, schools, and individuals throughout Canada.⁸⁹ The advertising of the Diamond Jubilee did more than publicize the event, it legitimated it and helped to make the Jubilee a commercialized spectacle. As with other public events in the wake of mass consumerism, public participation in the Jubilee included a commercial aspect. Once it became clear that the Jubilee was to be a national event, advertisers, editors, and writers appropriated it for their own purposes. For example, one coffee advertisement suggested that the “blending together the best coffees” was similar to the “blending together of different provinces. Each contributed of their best *only*.”⁹⁰

The link between Jubilee celebrations and commercial culture was strong enough to make the latter an important part in the production and promotion of the occasion. In regards to Queen Victoria’s Diamond Jubilee celebration in 1897, historian Tori Smith argues that

souvenirs, press coverage, advertisements, and theatrical presentations were as much a part of the spectacle as was the official procession, and the significance attached to the jubilee derived from the interaction of all these media, commodities, and events. Likewise, manufacturers, the press, theatrical impresarios, and advertisers were as much authors of the spectacle as were civil servants and politicians.⁹¹

Newspapers and popular periodicals such as *Maclean’s* and *Saturday Night* produced special issues to commemorate the Jubilee. In total there were 123 special editions of daily and weekly newspapers and sixty magazines issued across Canada. Even American

⁸⁹ *Report of the Executive*, 8.

⁹⁰ *Maclean’s*, July 1, 1927, 58.

⁹¹ Tori Smith, “‘Almost Pathetic...But Also Very Glorious’: The Consumer Spectacle of the Diamond Jubilee,” *Histoire sociale/ Social History* 29, no. 58 (November 1996): 336.

and British newspapers carried Diamond Jubilee content (mostly sent to them by the Publicity Committee) and the *London Times*, the *New York Times*, and other American papers published special Canadian issues.⁹²

More importantly, prior to the official celebrations on July 1, media coverage made the event an *event*. Columns, stories, and advertisements appearing in the months preceding the actual anniversary raised public awareness, encouraged participation, made the event newsworthy, and implied that it was significant.⁹³ In May, a column heading in *Saturday Night* announced, “CANADA IS A NATION.” The unidentified author wrote,

Canada is a nation, some day in the near future she will be a great nation, and it is within the range of possibilities that she will be the greatest unit of the British Empire. It is a wonderful country, a country of unlimited resources and magnificent possibilities. As a nation she celebrates her sixtieth anniversary this year.⁹⁴

Prior to this in 1926, *Maclean's* readied Canadians for the Jubilee in an article entitled “Fifty-nine Years of Nation Building.” The article told readers that the country had entered “her diamond jubilee year.”⁹⁵

The Publicity Committee deliberately courted editorial and consumer attention by running editorial contests for daily and weekly newspapers as well as a competition for the public in which readers would determine the three best slogans advertisers might want to incorporate. The slogans were to be “typical of Canada and its progress in the Jubilee year.”⁹⁶ Editors followed the suggestions and periodicals were filled with various Jubilee materials that helped to send the message that this was a special occasion. Prior to the

⁹² The Publicity Committee of the Executive Committee supplied most of the material that appeared in these issues. *Report of the Executive Committee*, 74-5.

⁹³ Smith, “‘Almost Pathetic...But Also Very Glorious’,” 345.

⁹⁴ *Saturday Night*, May 28, 1927, 19.

⁹⁵ *Maclean's*, July 1, 1926, 3.

⁹⁶ *Report of the Executive Committee*, 73.

publication of their special issue, *Saturday Night* reported that “while it is not the policy of SATURDAY NIGHT to publish ornate special editions, its Confederation issue will constitute a valuable souvenir of a great occasion.”⁹⁷ In the Women’s Section, a British-based correspondent reported “Canadians on this side, and many of those who are lovers of Canada without belonging to the country, are much interested in the celebration for the Diamond Jubilee of the Dominion.”⁹⁸ This statement not only raised awareness of the upcoming commemoration, but also made it seem like it was an important event for the Empire. It was not the only piece that aggrandized the Jubilee. Advertisers suggested that the Jubilee had “taken on world-wide significance.”⁹⁹ Indeed, newspaper coverage and the advertisements that accompanied it were part of a reciprocal relationship with the promotion of the celebrations. Ordinary Canadians, reading their favourite magazine or newspaper, were drawn into the celebratory spirit of the event in the weeks and months prior to the anniversary. When companies and editors tied their products to the Jubilee in the hopes of promoting sales, they advertised the event to the extent that they became, in a way, producers of it.¹⁰⁰ Beyond becoming producers, the presentation of the Jubilee in popular media for mass consumption turned history into a commodity for public consumption. Purchasing a special edition of a magazine or paper, or purchasing a particular product because of its (sometimes tenuous) associations with the Jubilee and Confederation linked history with consumer culture.¹⁰¹ The connection between consumer culture and the Jubilee were thus two-fold: consumer culture became a site for

⁹⁷ *Saturday Night*, June 25, 1927, 2.

⁹⁸ *Saturday Night*, June 25, 1927, 26.

⁹⁹ *Saturday Night*, June 25, 1927, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Smith, ““Almost Pathetic...But Also Very Glorious,”” 344, 346.

¹⁰¹ Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Contest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), 56-61.

the popular promotion of the Jubilee and for the consumption of history as a commodity. Simply by reading advertisements and newspaper stories or buying a product because of its relationship to the Jubilee, consumers quietly and privately took part in it.

Even products that did not seem to have a direct relationship to the development of the country or its history included narratives of the Jubilee. Soap company Fels-Naptha linked the union of Canada with the union of soap and naptha in their product.

The advertisement stated

Fels & Co. congratulate a people united so long for mutual help. May Canada continue to enjoy prosperity, and her people live in happiness. For more than 30 years Fels-Naptha has been giving *extra* help to the housewives of Canada as the result of union, too – the union of good soap and plenty of dirt-loosening naptha in one Golden Bar.¹⁰²

The Dominion bank emphasized its historic ties with the country by emphasizing that it had been established almost as long as the country. The advertisement read “It was from the Dominion we took our name, in the year 1871. At that time our first Banking Office was opened. We have shared in the Nation’s growth and prosperity.”¹⁰³ For many companies Confederation became the benchmark by which to measure their own success and longevity. The Aetna Insurance Company boasted that it was in business forty-six years before Confederation. Picking up on the official theme of linking the past and the present, the advertisement nostalgically stressed continuity and progress. The company was “proud indeed to have shared the early struggles of Canadian pioneers in making hard-won property secure against material misfortune....and it is doubly proud to stand

¹⁰² *Maclean's*, July 1, 1927, 29. On soap, gender, race, class, and empire see McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, chapter 5.

¹⁰³ *Saturday Night*, June 25, 1927, 19.

to-day beside other pioneers, looking backward over the rugged road.”¹⁰⁴ Picking up on the popularity of the widely distributed government pamphlet entitled *Sixty Years of Progress*, Canadian National Railway cleverly entitled their advertisement “Sixty Years of Canadian National Progress.” The advertisement copy (not incorrectly) stated, “The development of Canada and the Canadian National Railways is interwoven closely. As one grew, so did the other, mutually dependent....Canada, being a land of vast distances, the railway was seen to be the key to her future expansion and prosperity.” The advertisement encouraged Canadians to take a trip on one of Canadian National’s trains and “see Canada in Canada’s Diamond Jubilee Year.”¹⁰⁵

Other companies directly linked their product with the success of the nation. Crane Plumbing and Heating said that they were celebrating the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation because as a company they were “Conscious that we have been privileged to contribute to an important part of the Dominion’s progress and growth.” The celebratory tone of the advertisement continued to include Canadians’ spiritual and moral progress, and drew important links to popular issues like hygiene. The advertisement linked the company’s history with the hopeful Canadian ideals of creating a “land of happy homes and efficient industries.” Crane’s advertising copy boasted, “So rapidly have we as Canadians assimilated the spiritual and moral significance of hygiene in the art of living....What cannot be predicted of a nation with such ideals?”¹⁰⁶ Of course, the advertisements that drew upon the political commemoration could not avoid the contemporary social constructions of gender and class in their statements. For example, Fels-Naptha aided middle-class housewives in doing their daily cleaning duties and Crane

¹⁰⁴ *Maclean’s* July 1, 1927, 42.

¹⁰⁵ *Maclean’s*, July 1, 1927, 47.

¹⁰⁶ *Saturday Night*, June 25, 1927, 4.

linked spirituality, morality, and hygiene in selling expensive indoor plumbing and heating systems when they were an out-of-reach luxury for many working Canadian families and farmers. Just as they were part of the Jubilee, advertisements were embedded in the social and cultural issues of the 1920s, such as hygiene, class, and women's role in the home.

Visually, a common theme ran through the product advertisements – the juxtaposition of the past and the present to highlight material progress. The Aetna Insurance Company's advertisement had a ghost-like *coureurs de bois* representing the country's past looming over the new Parliament buildings. Canadian National Railway's layouts contained opposing pictures: a pastoral field on top of which a bubble was placed representing the past. Inside the bubble was a coal-fired locomotive with people dressed in mid-nineteenth-century clothing. On the other side was a modern train, drawn speeding into the centre of the picture. The pastoral landscape was replaced by an inset of a sketch of the inside of the train where modern-outfitted men and women sat and a telegraph operator worked. The coffee company Chase and Sanborn made stark use of oppositional pictures and commented on modern gender roles as well. In the depiction of 1867, a man and a woman sit to have a cup of coffee. The man is leaning forward towards the woman who looks like she is offering him a cup of coffee. In the picture from 1927 the man is leaning backwards and positioned in the background of the drawing, while the woman is leaning forward towards him. This time she is clearly consuming the coffee and enjoying it (see fig. 2.1).¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁷ *Saturday Night*, July 9, 1927, 29.

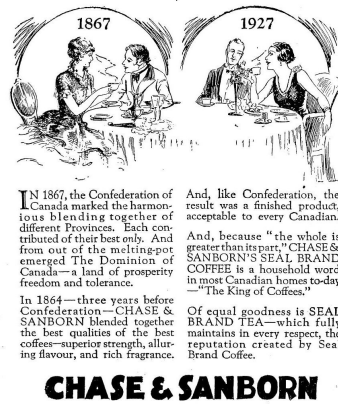


Fig. 2.1 This coffee advertisement is one of the few times the flapper appears in connection with the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. Her depiction reveals what many saw as the changing nature of gender relations. (*Maclean's* July 1, 1927)

The advertisement picked up on popular themes of women's increasing public role, the alleged existence of the flapper and her bold behaviour, and women's new roles in the economy as consumers. In the advertisement the young woman is leaning forward symbolically claiming space and also indicating assertiveness. The very fact that she was dressed in flapper's clothing highlighted the changes associated with modern womanhood. Finally, in perhaps her boldest move, the woman consumes the coffee as opposed to offering it to her male companion.

Advertising campaigns, especially those for companies whose executives were part of the national organizing committees such as General Electric and the CPR, more explicitly drew upon central themes of a vision for the country and tied them to men's right to political power. Like King's statement that without vision people perish, advertisement copy drew a continuous line from the vision of the Fathers of Confederation to the need for a clear, central vision in 1927. Literally, many

advertisements, like official material produced for the Jubilee, praised the vision of Confederation-era politicians. One advertisement for Canadian Pacific Railway read

Vision and Action – these are the qualities to which Canadians of today pay tribute in their grateful recognition of the work of the Fathers of Confederation sixty years ago....We, their successors, have likewise our problems to solve. We have to provide this half-continent with a population sufficient in numbers to ensure its proper development; educated up to the best Canadian standards; trained in the ideals of good Canadian citizenship; accustomed to respect for law and order; and conscious of the noble tradition which is our national heritage....The Canadians of today likewise have their vision and their opportunity for action. They have the example of the Fathers to teach and to hearten them. The vision which our Fathers saw must never fail. Their noble deeds must still live in the minds of generations to come.¹⁰⁸

Foregrounding the success of Confederation in the face of crisis, the copy stressed vision and action as the legacies of the Fathers of Confederation. It implied that the challenges that Canadians were up against in the 1920s could be overcome with development, education, citizenship, law and order, and tradition. The political leaders of the mid-nineteenth century bestowed an ideal and it was the duty of contemporary Canadian *men* to ensure that this vision survived and flourished.

Canadian General Electric's advertisements were bolder. One declared

Vision - To the men of vision all the world is indebted. To the race of pioneers in every age, in every nation and in every line of human endeavour, both honour and respect are due.

Particularly, at this sixtieth anniversary of Canada's nationhood, should we remember, with pride and gratitude, the men whose foresight and unflinching courage made our Dominion a reality...

And there are still men to answer the call – to catch the vision – to accept the challenge. For Canada's life is but beginning; illimitable possibilities stretch out before us; a noble past points to a yet more glorious future, the most alluring future any nation has ever known – and Canada's sons of widest vision

¹⁰⁸ *Maclean's*, July 1, 1927, 39.

are they whose eyes are open to the golden opportunities of their homeland.¹⁰⁹

In the charcoal sketch that accompanied the advertisement a young, modern looking man and an older man dressed in nineteenth-century clothing look out over a valley of industry. The older man points to the valley showing the young man his vision of progress and prosperity (see fig. 2.2).



Fig. 2.2 This advertisement for Canadian General Electric connected vision to political power. It made it clear that the maintenance of the ideals of Confederation fell to an exclusive group of men. (*Maclean's* July 1, 1927)

The association between the political unity of the past and the successful industrial and business opportunities of the present made vision the essential quality the country and its men needed to succeed. Vision was central to achievement and men who saw possibility inevitably accomplished goals that were good for the country. These two advertisements also made it perfectly clear that the maintenance of the ideals of Confederation, citizenship, tradition, and heritage were men's duties. It was men who

¹⁰⁹ *Maclean's*, July 1, 1927, 35.

made Confederation a reality, and modern men who shared a similar vision would meet the current challenges and build a better nation. But vision was more than a sense, more than an act of looking. In this usage, vision was intimately connected to power. Vision was presented as an innate gift of wise men whose destiny it was to build the nation. It was a gift closely associated with imperial tendencies and histories. Exploration and discovery were premised on an act of imagination – a “way of seeing”.¹¹⁰ Seeing new territories and spaces as empty and waiting for development was intimately linked to ideas of power, entitlement, and supremacy. It was not a democratic construction of vision that suggested that Canadians had equal access to it and the power it held. The undercurrents implicitly worked to reaffirm the right of White men of the dominant classes to political power, making it seem natural that they had the right to develop the country along the lines they saw as being most fit. It naturalized their ideas and made Confederation an innate objective that just required the right person to realize it. During a time when men’s traditional venues of power – politics, education, and the home – were being eroded, reinforcing an intrinsic quality that made them better fit to claim power was significant.¹¹¹ The appeal to Parliament by the Canadian Clubs to organize a celebration of the anniversary reinforces the idea of modern male political responsibility. Confederation and the Jubilee were the responsibility of men in the 1920s who were meant to ensure that this vision of a unified country was maintained.

By sheer volume it would seem that the publicity of the event through advertisements, articles, and editorials was successful in terms of attracting attention to the Jubilee. By the end of the anniversary, the Publicity Committee had collected 13,647

¹¹⁰ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing: Based on the BBC Television Series* (London: Penguin [1972] 1990).

¹¹¹ Cynthia Comacchio, “‘A Postscript for Father’: Defining a New Fatherhood in Interwar Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 78, no. 3 (September 1997): 385-408

clippings. An editorial in the *Manitoba Free Press* subtly promoted the power of the press in disseminating the story of Canada:

A majority of Canadians have learned more Canadian history in the present year than they had learned in all their life. This has not been the result of anything done in an official way, but is due to the information given to the public in connection with the Jubilee celebrations. The story of Canada unfolded last June and July proved as fascinating as a novel to large sections of the public, warmed as it was with romance, colour, heroism and dauntless enterprise.¹¹²

The preparation of the audience and the reception of the ideas through the media and other events were heralded as a success by newspapers as the quote above illustrates. Popular print culture played an integral role in linking the national celebrations with local ones and in making the Jubilee a significant event for the public and made an attempt to shore up White middle- and upper-class men's political power. In nationally produced material on how to visually represent and celebrate the Diamond Jubilee, gender would play a significant role in how the country was portrayed historically and in the present.

IN PAGEANTS AND ON PARADE

Closely connected with consumerism, visual culture and metaphors of vision played a central role in delineating what the past meant to the present. These ideas were carried out beyond the pages of periodicals and newspapers, however, to live performances on the streets of towns and cities. Carefully crafted suggestions for historical pageants and parades embodied the most fundamental ideas of nation, empire, and gender. It is significant that nowhere in the official Diamond Jubilee celebrations does the flapper make an appearance. Although the organizers relied heavily on media in which she was prolific to deliver their message of celebration, the Jubilee almost wholly

¹¹² *Manitoba Free Press*, September 21, 1927, 4.

excluded images of young, modern women.¹¹³ In Victoria, for example, a modern-looking beauty contest winner was barred by the local organizing committee from participating in the ceremonies as Miss Canada or at all.¹¹⁴ Being modern meant that she could not fit within the theme of history and she was excluded from being part of the theme of progress since her ‘progressiveness’ was a source of concern. Further the flapper represented the type of gender relations that organizers were attempting to curb through the promotion of domesticity. Flappers – whose origins were American – also highlighted North American connections, which would have been problematic for organizers who thought of the Jubilee in terms of Empire and imperial projects. This section notes the conspicuous absence of the flapper and argues that this was not simply an oversight but an attempt to confront modern gender relations in an effort to promote a more traditional image of womanhood as Canadian. Her absence from materials produced by the various Jubilee Committees, read in conjunction with other images, reveals the efforts to shore up traditional qualities of masculinity that the flapper was said to have appropriated and turned into threats to modern men. One of the few times she did appear was in the advertisement of Chase and Sanborn coffee and then she did embody the changing dynamic between genders – a theme noticeably absent from nationally produced materials.

The twin narratives of progress and history were interwoven into all of the suggested floats for the celebrations. The Executive Committee of the National Committee for the Celebration of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation published a book that included colour illustrations of suggested arrangements for historical pageants, floats,

¹¹³ As we shall see, images of young, modern men were eschewed in favour of presenting men in their historic roles as literal and symbolic builders of the nation.

¹¹⁴ *Victoria Times*, May 5, 1927, 4 ; and May 10, 1927, 8.

and tableaux. The publication of the book did more than provide suggestions, it established an official visual narrative of the country's history and a normative standard for parades and pageants. Communities that added their own variations or selectively used the national suggestions varied the national story, but elements of it remained consistent. The book also made an important statement about the visual. The use of imagery as a means of educating and as an important aspect to local celebrations was heartily encouraged by national organizers. By the 1920s North Americans were well attuned to the fact that if the eye could be attracted and harnessed educational possibilities abounded. Historical pageants and parades were popular means of getting the public's attention, but by the end of World War One the popularity of pageants was beginning to wane as a result of the loss of social idealism and the competition from moving pictures.¹¹⁵ In August of 1927, a commentator in *Saturday Night* argued that "the possibilities of being bored to death in Canada have been greatly increased in recent years for Pageants on every subject and no subject have been seen on all sides."¹¹⁶ The *Vancouver Sun* reported that pageants do not "generally give much thrill to citizens."¹¹⁷ Despite their increasing unpopularity, both pageants and parades were used to transmit the message of the Jubilee and for most communities were a central aspect of the celebrations.¹¹⁸ At the C.N.E., for example, Kate Aitken and the Women's Institute produced pageants called "Canada's Mixing Bowl" and "New Canadians."¹¹⁹ And even after the *Sun* reported that pageants do not "give much thrill," the piece continued, "That is why the Vancouver Exhibition association invites attention to the details of the greatest

¹¹⁵ Nelles, *The Art of Nation-Building*, 143.

¹¹⁶ *Saturday Night*, August 20, 1927, 2.

¹¹⁷ *Vancouver Sun*, May 10, 1927, 9.

¹¹⁸ *Report of the Executive Committee*, 13-62.

¹¹⁹ *Globe*, August 29, 1927, 13, 16; September 7, 1927, 16; and *Toronto Daily Star*, September 7, 1927, 5.

pageant ever attempted in the city... ‘Confederation’.”¹²⁰ Although they were on the wane in terms of popularity, pageants still drew crowds and were an effective means of producing a visual narrative for diverse audiences across the country. Diamond Jubilee organizers relied heavily on this type of production. From the first meeting of the Executive Committee, members urged that the proposed celebration should emphasize peace and pioneer life, be educational, and emphasize historical pageants. One member of the Executive Committee also encouraged the use of historical pageants because they could “especially portray the life of pioneer women.”¹²¹ By the end of the nation-wide celebrations it seemed that the plans had come to fruition. The Executive reported that “In all the large cities, moving pageants were carried out.”¹²² In reports sent to the National Executive, provincial organizers emphasized how important and numerous pageants were in smaller centres as well. From Alice Arm, British Columbia, to Sydney Mines, Nova Scotia, parades and pageants played integral roles in the Jubilee celebrations.

As Canadian historian Alan Gordon argues, parades are an important ritual of public memory because, unlike monuments and plaques, they can be participatory. Further, Gordon argues parades can be a better representation of popular representations of the past than statues.¹²³ As with sport, people who become performers in the parades and pageants literally embody the ideas presented and the physical performance becomes part of the “mnemonics of the body” where physical acts construct cognitive knowledge

¹²⁰ *Vancouver Sun*, May 10, 1927, 9.

¹²¹ AO, Minutes of Committees, Minutes of a meeting of the National.

¹²² *Report of the Executive Committee*, 10.

¹²³ Gordon, *Making Public Pasts*, 145.

and develop into part of the social memory.¹²⁴ Yet the parades to celebrate the Diamond Jubilee were less spontaneous public spectacles of the masses and more carefully crafted displays by the National Executive in charge of planning. Although as Cupido's work has demonstrated, local pageants often strayed from the ideals promoted by the National Committee and incorporated local values and history, the national suggestions deserve further inquiry as they became the blueprint for other places and were copied.¹²⁵

A suggested programme for the celebrations began simply by recommending that processions be organized. It continued stating, "historical pageantry and floats should be included wherever possible."¹²⁶ To this end, the Executive Committee went to the extent of publishing a lengthy document with colour reproductions of suggested floats and tableaux drawn for the event by Canadian artist J.B. Legace.¹²⁷ In the brief period of ten days, Legace was asked to produce fifteen sketches. These sketches, it was hoped, would serve as "a guide for local celebrations of Confederation."¹²⁸ The sketches were produced as a book and were distributed to communities across the country to serve as a guide for their own celebrations. The sub-committee of the Medals Committee made recommendations for fifteen subjects: Jacques Cartier, Samuel de Champlain, Pierre Gauthier de Varennes et de La Verendrye, Alexander MacKenzie at the Pacific, Hudson Bay Fort, Pierre Du Gua De Monts, Loyalists at St. John, Confederation, Immigration, Strathcona, First Canadian Railroad, Canada's prosperity of today and three floats to represent industry, commerce, and agriculture (such as pulp and paper, fisheries, farming,

¹²⁴ Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (New York: Cambridge University Press), 84-8.

¹²⁵ Cupido, "Appropriating the Past," 167.

¹²⁶ AO, Minutes of Committees, Suggested Programme for Diamond Jubilee Celebrations.

¹²⁷ *Suggestions for Historical Pageants, Floats and Tableaux*.

¹²⁸ AO, Minutes of Committees, Minutes of the Seventh Executive Meeting.

mining, electricity, manufacturing, lumbering, and cattle).¹²⁹ When the Executive Committee met again on April 21, the Medals Committee reported that Legace's designs had been approved. The final product reveals that Legace followed many of the Committee's suggestions regarding the most appropriate subjects for the floats.¹³⁰

As many of the suggestions for floats reveal, the symbols of national progress were rooted in the Canadian landscape and nowhere was this message clearer than in the images produced. The Canadian national spirit was intimately related to the soil and rock that the country was built on. In the opening article of the July 1 issue of *Maclean's* the relationship between spirit and land was linked. Author John Nelson wrote, "Even after several centuries physical Canada is not yet fully discovered. That process is now going on. It may take another century. And the soul, the spirit, of Canada is just beginning to emerge." The sign of maturity and self-discovery was the recognition that Canada was more than a pastoral landscape, but was a place of manufacturing, natural resources, and had the ability to finance these developments from within its own borders. The physical 're-discovery' of the land meant national unity and "the beginning of national wisdom."¹³¹ This sentiment was apparent in officially produced material. The fact-packed booklet *Sixty Years of Canadian Progress* focused almost entirely on the physical development of the land and related industries such as hydroelectric power, fisheries,

¹²⁹ AO, Minutes of Committees, Minutes of the Seventh Executive Meeting.

¹³⁰ Interestingly, Legace's sketches are placed out of chronological order. They accompany a sketch of Canadian history, but there is a noticeable disjuncture between the printed word and the visual images. For example, the illustrations begin with "Progress" and end with "The Discovery of Canada." In placing the sketches in the text this way, the entire text works to tie even the distant past to the present. Further, it meant that it could be "read" in two different ways – visually with a reverse chronology beginning in the present and working backwards to its origins and through the text that started in New France and ended with a description of modern Canada. Significantly, only the visual text discussed the early contact period. See *Suggestions for Historical Pageants, Floats and Tableaux*.

¹³¹ John Nelson, "Canada Re-Discovered," *Maclean's* July 1, 1927: 3-4, 55, 58.

agriculture, and manufacturing.¹³² The strong sense that unity could be developed through images of the land was apparent in both literary and visual representations. In addition to selecting the land and national spirit, women's bodies were included. A popular cultural trope, the association between women, land, and national spirit would be heavily relied upon in pageants and in parades during the Jubilee celebrations.

Both parades and pageants produced a particular type of dramatic visual narrative that the National Committee encouraged. Certainly part of the reliance on these types of performances was the result of the limited time communities had to plan Jubilee events, a fact that the National Executive Committee recognized.¹³³ In addition, the fact that pageants and parades were a tried and true method of presenting material that fit with the national mandate that the celebrations be educational in character would have helped to make them a popular choice. In the final Report of the Executive Committee, the Chairman of the Executive, George Graham, concluded that in regards to the moving pageants held across the country "the celebration revealed a growth of initiative as well as an artistic development which is most gratifying to Canadians everywhere. Many of the historical floats were striking in design and beautifully executed. *They were not simply meaningless decoration*, which could be used for any kind of celebration, but vividly represented distinctly Canadian achievements and events."¹³⁴ In short, pageants and parades were an effective means of achieving the educational goals of the Jubilee.

The material produced on a national level can be viewed as part of a wider ideological project that attempted to bring together contradictory fragments of the past and the present into a whole and accessible image for mass consumption. One of the

¹³² Canada. Dominion Bureau of Statistics, *Sixty Years of Canadian Progress, 1867-1927* (Ottawa, 1927).

¹³³ AO, Minutes of Committees, Suggested Programme for Diamond Jubilee Celebrations.

¹³⁴ *Report of the Executive Committee*, 10 (my emphasis).

functions of ideology is to make representations seem natural, apolitical, and innocent, and the images from the Diamond Jubilee re-worked and developed an ideology of nationhood and citizenship using the body. These impressive acts of cultural selection were successful in binding together the arcane and the contemporary, and blending away deep-seated divisive issues in creating a readily available, understandable, and consumable body (or representation thereof) tied with a vision of gender, consumption, and the North that emphasized tradition, nostalgia, memory, continuity, progress, and success.¹³⁵ The material produced by the National Committee worked to promote and re-entrench traditional ideas of progress and gender that had been challenged in the preceding decades. It was this, the ideological use of the image of the female body so widely used in the Diamond Jubilee celebrations that requires extended comment.

Legace's sketches relied on bodies to create meaning. There were a series of over-arching themes in his designs. Men are represented as active historical makers in discovering, cultivating the land, lumbering, building the railroad, policing, and trading. Women are most frequently depicted as witnesses to men's efforts and less frequently as helpmates to them. In representations of discovery or the opening of new territory in the West or in industry such as lumbering women are entirely absent. Where women play their most significant and visible role is as symbols of country, empire, or domesticity. Historical tableaux and floats served to uphold gender and racial hierarchies that continued to marginalize women and peoples of colour while privileging Anglo-Celtic men and naturalizing their claim to history and active citizenship. Anglo-Celtic men were depicted as the ones who discovered, worked, and built the country and, therefore,

¹³⁵ As we shall see even the representations of tradition, nostalgia, memory, continuity, progress, and success were understood and represented in gendered ways.

had a more privileged status within it. In this sense there was a divide between competing gendered representations of the land. While women's bodies figuratively represented the concept of an imagined nation-state and that conceptualization was tied to Canada as a northern nation and dominating the land, the land itself, when discussed for its potential and as the North, was male territory. In part this relates to the conception of the North as the last conquerable territory, which harkened back to a spirit of discovery and physical labour associated with masculinity.

The North represented in the Jubilee celebrations, however, was not the far North or Arctic. It was the more northerly parts of the provinces. The Arctic, in the 1920s, was undergoing a transition from an unknowable space with unknowable people – the Inuit – to a part of the Canadian landscape and peoples. In separate works, both Janice Cavell and Peter Geller have argued that Canadians and the government had a difficult time integrating the Arctic into the existing paradigm of nationhood. According to Cavell, “Canadians in the nineteenth century did not see the Arctic as part of the nation at all, and even in the twentieth century they found it difficult to integrate the cold, remote ‘second frontier’ into their paradigm of national development.”¹³⁶ In this regard, Peter Geller's work reveals how significant visual records taken in the 1920s of the Inuit and the Arctic were to integrating them into the national paradigm. Geller argues “The creating of this visual record of northern administration, then, was part of the production and circulation of knowledge about the entity called the North.”¹³⁷ In this regard, despite the work being done in the 1920s in the Arctic, it remained separate from Jubilee celebrations where the

¹³⁶ Janice Cavell, “The Second Frontier: The North in English-Canadian Historical Writing,” *Canadian Historical Review* 83, no. 3 (September 2002): 364-65.

¹³⁷ Peter Geller, *Northern Exposures: Photographing and Filming the Canadian North, 1920-1945* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), 50.

“North” referred to a land coming under development and cultivation and viewed as having a significant White population.

The North played a not insignificant cultural role in the events commemorating Confederation and it was fused with gender relations. Material produced for the occasion celebrated “the subjugation of the wilderness” and described the “primitive years of struggle” for early pioneers who energetically toiled on the unforgiving land and “set up a society based upon work and abounding in enterprise.”¹³⁸ In Legace’s drawing of such events men are portrayed on the land with symbols of European “civilization” built on the right hand side of the float, such as symbols of heraldry. In “The Founding of Acadia,” “The Fur Trader,” and “The Discovery of Canada,” European explorers and workers are depicted (often with Aboriginal men) beginning the process of settling the country. Given the recent discoveries of profitable metals and minerals in the Northern regions of the country, the 1920s witnessed a shift in attitude from seeing the North as an empty wasteland to an area of potential. This made the narratives and images of discovery and masculine efforts to tame the wilderness increasingly popular. The North was painted as an area of untapped, and only recently discovered, natural riches that through time and effort could be expanded, exploited and settled to enrich the entire country.¹³⁹ In a *Maclean’s* article, writer John Nelson, described the discovery and enterprise of the North in terms of a conquest of impossible wilderness that could lead to national unity. Nelson proposed that:

¹³⁸ *Suggestions for Historical Pageants, Floats and Tableaux*, 10, 11.

¹³⁹ In mining and forestry there were ebbs and flows in production across the country over the entire decade. Further cities and towns built around resource extraction had existed for decades. As with other material produced for the Jubilee this idealization of the North and primary industries has a particular bent. See H.V. Nelles, *The Politics of Development: Forests, Mines and Hydro-Electric Power in Ontario, 1849-1941* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1974), chapter 11.

What might be regarded as a secondary result of this new phase of Canadian development is political in character, and more beneficial to Canada than all the gold of Ophir. The great Laurentian range that Jacques Cartier first saw from the St. Lawrence remained up to the end of the nineteenth century, not only a locked treasure house, but a grim barrier to Canadian national life...Geologically known as the Pre-Cambrian shield, it became in our National Life the Pre-Cambrian spear, for it pierced the body of Canada just where its waist contracted to a space of three hundred miles or so between the head of Lake Superior and Hudson's Bay. In every sense indeed it was a 'waste.'...A great political problem in Canada has been solved by the development now taking place along the Cambrian highlands. It is ceasing to be a land of desolation. It is becoming the home of active, prosperous and cultured people. Enterprise has been justified of her children. Again, in further discovering Canada, Canadians have possibly solved the greatest obstacle to their national unity. A solution has been found for a problem for which even the prescience of the fathers of Confederation could not provide.¹⁴⁰

The North was a new hinterland that only needed production and settlement to reach its full potential. It was simply another step in conquering the country's landscape and linked with that was the success of the nation and its citizens. As H.V. Nelles describes, "It was in this double sense that the north was new: it furnished new ground for the extension of familiar activity, and raw materials for the growth of a whole new generation of modern industries."¹⁴¹ What was termed the "New North" provided a focal point for Canadians and a direct link to the past. Canadians were told to remember that the North was simply following in the footsteps of other more developed parts of the nation; it was just entering into its pioneering stage. Thus, the New North was symbolically associated with the entire country as a Northern Country. One Jubilee book reminded readers that "in coming decades progress will go on, confidence increase, and a hardy Northern people will be proud of their heritage from the pioneers who broke the soil, and from the

¹⁴⁰ Nelson, "Canada Re-Discovered," 4.

¹⁴¹ Nelles, *The Politics of Development*, 52.

founders who created the Dominion out of unrelated Provinces floundering in political chaos and economic uncertainty.”¹⁴² To a country that seemed to be still “floundering,” the idea of new pioneers, the defeat of the last of the natural barriers, the progressive continuation of settling the land, and the prospect of shared economic growth came just at the right time. In the present as in the past progress was possible.

The promise of the power and potential of the North was a popular theme in the 1920s. Harold Innis espoused his northern vision in public lectures that made the North the land of progress and economic nationalism.¹⁴³ In the popular media, authors described “Its Wonders, Its People and Its Meaning to Canada.” *Saturday Night* contributor, art critic, and adversary of the Group of Seven, Hector Charlesworth described the New North as an economic and social bridge that would literally and figuratively bring the country together.¹⁴⁴ In early 1928, Charlesworth regretted the fact that so few “public men” had embraced the new conception of the North. He wrote,

It is not so many years since many Canadians feared that Canada was hopelessly divided geographically by the great northern wilderness, which by its lack of productive communities would create an ever-growing cleavage of interest between East and West. But the unforeseen development of the Northland will solve this problem and banish fears. With new communities ever arising north of the height of land a continuous link of human ties is being yearly extended. That is what Northern development signifies to Canada, and surprisingly few public men East and West have yet grasped that fact.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴² Hammond, *Simpson's Confederation Jubilee Series*, 5.

¹⁴³ On Innis see Matthew Evenden, “The Northern Vision of Harold Innis,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 34, no. 3 (Fall 1999): 162-184.

¹⁴⁴ In 1916, Charlesworth, working as an art critic for the *Toronto Star*, suggested the J.E.H. Macdonald's paintings *The Elements* and *Rock and Maple*, would be more aptly named Hungarian *Goulash* and *Drunkard's Stomach*. See J. Russell Harper, *Painting in Canada: A History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 263-4, 279.

¹⁴⁵ Hector Charlesworth, “The Northland: Its Wonders, Its People and Its Meaning to Canada,” *Saturday Night*, January 28, 1928, 2.

Despite his reservations about businessmen and politicians, Charlesworth acknowledged that the reading public was well aware of the development and potential in the New North. He observed that “If you glance over an average group of persons reading daily newspapers in a public place you will find most of them turning to the columns which deal with latest quotations and events in connection with the great mining and industrial corporations of Northern Ontario. The place names and corporate titles of the northland are known to hundreds of thousands of people...most of them have very dim ideas of what it is like.”¹⁴⁶

In turn, other authors along with advertisers promoted the North as a sportsman’s paradise, a primeval paradise, conquerable virgin country, and a place of health or rejuvenation. The myth of virgin territory or empty land was important to the continued project of settlement and natural resource extraction. The idea that the land was virginal and empty marked it as a void awaiting male “history, language, and reason” and attempted to psychically terminate aboriginal territorial rights.¹⁴⁷ In the 1920s, the North was viewed as empty land for settlement, commerce, and leisure. In terms of popular conceptions and access, travel to more remote parts of the country was especially important. As historian Tina Loo points out, “Part of the impetus to make a modern wilderness was rooted in a bourgeois dissatisfaction with modern life.”¹⁴⁸ The growing leisure and tourist industry, spearheaded in particular by the major Canadian railway companies, asked Canadians to “Choose A Canadian National Vacation This Year” and enticed (an assumed male audience of) readers with phrases like “Virgin Forests Call You

¹⁴⁶ Charlesworth, “The Northland,” 2.

¹⁴⁷ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 30.

¹⁴⁸ Tina Loo, “Making a Modern Wilderness: Conserving Wildlife in Twentieth-Century Canada” *Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 1 (March 2001): 93.

To Hunt” (see fig. 2.3).¹⁴⁹ For middle-class Canadians, technology had opened up the opportunity to travel and other leisure pursuits. New railway lines, built through a Northland that was previously thought to be impenetrable, and the car proved to be mediators that allowed people to escape the confines of the city.¹⁵⁰ For middle- and upper-class men and women, escaping to the outdoors was seen as a cure for the ills of modern life. However, women’s and men’s cures were different. For Canadian men, the need to escape urbanization was seen as more important because “modernity had taken a greater toll on middle-class men, rendering them overly rational, soft, a breed prone to nervous exhaustion and incapable of being men – that is, incapable of acting decisively and aggressively.”¹⁵¹ During the interwar period a perceived “crisis in masculinity” required men to take an active role in developing and maintaining it.¹⁵²

¹⁴⁹ *Maclean’s*, September 1, 1927, 86. On tourism, especially outdoor tourism associated with the ailments of modern life see Patricia Jasen, *Wild Things: Nature, Culture, and Tourism in Ontario, 1790-1914* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

¹⁵⁰ Tina Loo, “Of Moose and Men,” *Western Historical Quarterly* 32, no. 3 (Autumn 2001): 269-319.

¹⁵¹ Loo, “Making a Modern Wilderness,” 100.

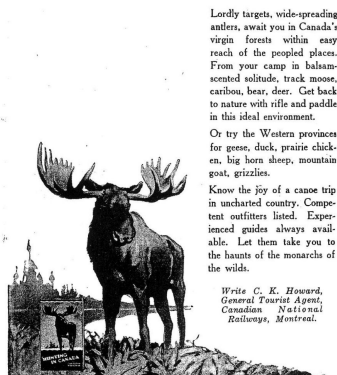
¹⁵² Craig Heron argues that “there has been great instability and disruption in the structures of gender relations for large numbers of working men.” He disagrees with the prevalent description of these disruptions as a crisis in masculinity since “the term assumes a pre-existing period of fixed stability, rather than one of regular challenges.” I agree with Heron’s criticism, but I think that the idea of a popularly accepted crisis is still relevant for the 1920s given the repercussions of the Great War and the intensified concerns around health and degeneration. Literary critic Christopher Breu has recently argued that hard-boiled masculinities represented by a tough, prophylactic exterior and detached, amoral actions was one of the dominant ways masculinity was fantasized during the interwar years. Emerging from pulp magazines and spreading to “high-cultural writings of American modernists” and eventually film, hard-boiled masculinities were a defensive reaction to corporate capitalism. Hard-boiled masculinities were an adaptation of older conceptions of masculinity related to individualism and autonomy. Breu argues that “the emergence of hard-boiled masculinity thus needs to be understood as a retrenchment of cultural conceptions of masculinity as well as a reconfiguration of the meaning of male identity in the face of new socio-economic circumstances.” See Craig Heron, “The Boys and Their Booze: Masculinities and Public Drinking in Working-Class Hamilton, 1890-1946,” *Canadian Historical Review* 86, no. 3 (September 2005): 414. Christopher Breu, *Hard-Boiled Masculinities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 4-6.

On this perceived crisis and responses to it see Comacchio, ““A Postscript for Father,”” 385-408. For more on the critics of the “masculinity crisis” see Bryce Traister, “Academic Viagra: The Rise of American Masculinity Studies,” *American Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2000): 274-304; and Breu, *Hard-Boiled Masculinities*, 1-22.

CHOOSE A CANADIAN NATIONAL VACATION THIS YEAR

VIRGIN FORESTS

Call you to hunt



CANADIAN NATIONAL
The Largest Railway System in America

Fig. 2.3 A sexually-charged depiction of the North and West presented the forests as empty territory ready to be conquered by modern sportsmen. The advertisement encourages men to “get back to nature.” (*Maclean's* September 1, 1927)

Bourgeois men were distanced from physical labour. Too many long days at a desk, away from the labour of their fathers and grandfathers, took a negative toll.¹⁵³ Therefore while camping or canoeing in the outdoors was good for women, men “required a much closer and more intense engagement with the *wild*.”¹⁵⁴ Hunting, particularly big-game hunting, was a tonic for modern life and was often linked to a virile sexuality in advertisements.¹⁵⁵ One advertisement appealed to this sense, saying,

¹⁵³ Heron, *Booze*, 203. See also John Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America* (New York: Hill & Wang, 2001), 10-19; and Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

¹⁵⁴ Loo, “Making a Modern Wilderness,” 100.

¹⁵⁵ Cynthia Comacchio notes that “eugenic theory intensified anxieties about declining manhood...sensationalist tales of immigrant sexual depravity fuelled anxieties that were ostensibly about social purity, but also belied worries about the virility of Canadian men.” See Comacchio, “‘A Postscript for Father’: 390. On the connection between travel, big-game hunting, and imperialism in the late nineteenth century see Greg Gillespie, “‘I Was Well Pleased with Our Sport among the Buffalo’: Big-Game Hunters, Travel Writing, and Cultural Imperialism in the British North American West, 1847-72,” *Canadian Historical Review* 83, no. 4 (December 2002): 555-584.

When the days begin to have that unmistakable fall ‘tang’ – when you shiver more than a trifle if you leave your coat home nights – when the leaves are turning brown quicker than you can watch them – right then you feel that impulse to climb into that old khaki suit, to pull on those old knee boots, and to fondle that fine little old rifle – ...The backwoods of Ontario are calling you to a real fall hunter’s holiday.¹⁵⁶

Along with alcohol and sporting events, the North, already constructed (and sometimes existing), as a space for men was further marketed to men as a way get in touch with a rougher, more “natural” masculinity (see fig. 2.4).¹⁵⁷ The concerns over a ‘soft’ modern masculinity and the links to ‘virgin territory’ and conquering the North were decisively linked in the Diamond Jubilee floats.

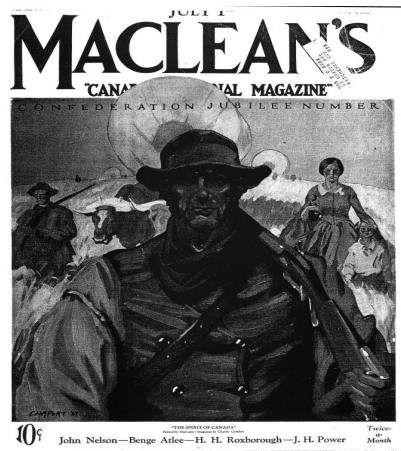


Fig. 2.4 This *Maclean's* cover showed a traditional image of masculinity that was rooted in the land and labour. (*Maclean's* July 1, 1927)

White men were represented as national and imperial actors whose actions and labours bettered the country and empire. In the sketches for the floats “Champlain the Discoverer,” “The Discovery of Canada,” and “Discovery of the Canadian West,” White men are presented as confidently laying claim to the territory and being welcomed, even

¹⁵⁶ See for example, *Canadian Magazine Advertiser*, November 1921, 45.

¹⁵⁷ Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), chapter 6; Heron, *Booze*; Heron, “The Boys and Their Booze,” 435; Colin Howell, “A Manly Sport: Baseball and the Social Construction of Masculinity,” in *Gender and History in Canada*, ed. Joy Parr and Mark Rosenfeld (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1996), 187-210.

assisted, by Aboriginal people depicted as helpmates. White men are portrayed as acting decisively and assertively, qualities that modern urban men were thought to be in danger of losing.

Men's bodies were defined and used in a much different way than women's in the celebrations. No less constructed than women's, White men's bodies were used to represent action, power, and success in an effort to promote a spirit of powerful masculinity that dominated the land. In an allegorical representation in the *Simpson's Confederation Jubilee Series* entitled "Nine Provinces United in Progress and Prosperity" six women and three men represent Canada's nine provinces and one woman represents Canada (see fig. 2.5). While the women are dressed in classical Greco-Roman robes, the men are shirtless and wearing work pants. The women in the picture are standing or seated and two of them are holding baskets of fruit. The three men are depicted carrying heavy loads of produce or fish and the third is wielding a sledgehammer at the feet of Miss Canada. This construction and link between the past and the present delicately addressed contemporary concerns about gender roles – about the physical toll of modernity, political and cultural changes in women's roles, and issues of power.

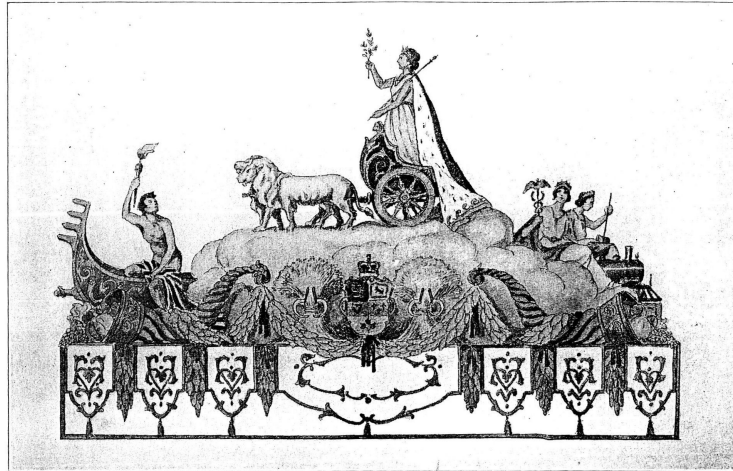


Fig. 2.5 An allegorical representation entitled "Nine Provinces United in Peace and Prosperity. The illustration drew links among gender, work, and power. (M.O. Hammond, *Simpson's Confederation Jubilee Series, 1867-1927*, Toronto, 1927, 58)

Legace and the organizers of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation did not invent the symbolic usage of a young woman's body to represent the nation. Miss Canada had appeared in Canadian advertisements, political cartoons, and other literary venues for decades. As historian Christina Burr demonstrated in her analysis of J.W. Bengough's caricatures and editorials in *Grip* at the end of the nineteenth century, Miss Canada was a popular trope used to propagate his idea of national identity.¹⁵⁸ Throughout the 1920s her body was evoked to visually establish nationhood and advertisers used Miss Canada to embody various ideas of nationhood from spirituality to pride in electrical power.¹⁵⁹ The female embodiment of nation was rarely represented as a powerful figure, but when she was, it was made clear that she was the representation of power and not the bearer of it. This type of symbolism of women and power was used for the Jubilee. For, example, Legace's sketch entitled "Progress" has a woman standing confidently in a chariot, holding an olive branch in one hand and a staff in another (see fig. 2.6). Yet, in that powerful pose, "Canada" is remarkably static. Portrayed standing still, she remains a passive watcher as opposed to active participant. Her feet are not even on the ground and her movement is the result of someone else's effort. This theme is more heavily accentuated than many of the images where Miss Canada is depicted seated. Her importance comes not through activity but through the embodiment of ideals.

¹⁵⁸ Christina Burr, "Gender, Sexuality, and Nationalism in J.W. Bengough's Verses and Political Cartoons," *Canadian Historical Review* 83, no. 4 (December 2002): 505-554.

¹⁵⁹ See for example the advertisement for the Canadian National Exhibition that appeared in the *Globe*, September 6, 1924, 7.



PROGRESS
Canada looks forward to an Era of Peace and Prosperity.

Fig. 2.6 “Progress” depicts a symbolic and powerful Miss Canada. Her power is circumscribed, however, by her physical inaction and position as a bearer and not maker of meaning. (*Suggestions for Historical Pageants, Floats, and Tableaux*)

Women remained allegorical symbols of progress and may have participated in traditional ways as helpmates and companions of men, but the representations did not reflect many of women’s roles or the recent the changes in status.¹⁶⁰ As Cupido has argued,

there were no images of women as pioneers, suffrage campaigners, temperance leaders, teachers, nurses, or social workers, assuming an independent role outside the home. The idea of progress extolled by official nationalism, conceived mainly in terms of economic, technological, and constitutional development, did not encompass the social and political emancipation of women.¹⁶¹

The representation of women’s traditional roles helped to provide a measure of continuity in stressing the connection between the past, the present, and the future. Industrial and commercial progress changed the face of Canada in a relatively short period of time,

¹⁶⁰ The inclusion of women in public performances (including parades) from the late nineteenth century onwards would have reflected women’s greater presence in the public sphere, but the most recent gains for women in terms of legal rights were not represented in Jubilee floats. This inclusion of female performers would not have been the case in the earlier half of the nineteenth century when the visible and respectable roles for women would have been few. In the early to mid-nineteenth century, public performances were dominated by male players (men and boys) who played the female parts themselves. Female images were used similarly to the later period for their symbolic statements on purity and patriotism. See Huskins, “The Ceremonial Space of Women,” 146-48.

¹⁶¹ Cupido, “Appropriating the Past,” 176.

disrupting the public and the private sphere as well as the relationship between the two. In maintaining a traditional view of womanhood and anchoring that representation in the past or as an allegory, it attempted to provide the appearance of cultural and social stability and reassurance that only positive changes were occurring. Presenting women without acknowledging their recent political gains stood out as a symbol of an ideal society where women were depicted as domestic and maternal, free from the strife of the problems of the nation.¹⁶²

Burr has argued that the image of the nation as a woman in the nineteenth century was based on “the image of woman as chaste, dutiful, and daughterly or maternal.”¹⁶³ While most of these elements exist in modified forms in the Jubilee images, there are a few differences that need to be noted. In the images of the Diamond Jubilee women did not actually labour in terms of production or reproduction but were symbols of both. There was, however, an important distinction between the two – while women’s actual labour was excluded from representations of nationhood, notions of women’s reproduction were only alluded to in visual form. Importantly, representations of reproduction were separated from representations of childcare and even children. In terms of the Jubilee, we do not see representations of women as mothers, which is interesting given the concerns over the declining birth rate, infant mortality, and the pro-natalism and child-saving efforts of the period.¹⁶⁴ The symbols of fertility and reproduction are much more oblique. In this way, woman’s role in the nation was reduced to her potential symbolic functions.

¹⁶² Bonnie Huskins makes this argument in terms of women’s participation in parades in the late nineteenth century, prior to women achieving suffrage. See Huskins, “The Ceremonial Space of Women,” 153.

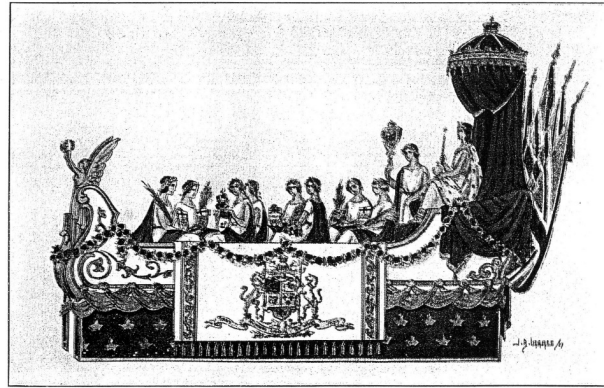
¹⁶³ Burr, “Gender, Sexuality, and Nationalism in J.W. Bengough’s Verses and Political Cartoons,” 549.

¹⁶⁴ Cynthia Comacchio, *Nations Are Built of Babies: Saving Ontario’s Mothers and Children, 1900-1940* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1993), 53-59

Wheat was a popular trope used to represent both men's production and women's reproduction. In three floats "Progress," "Confederation," and "The Story of Wheat," wheat appears as a symbol of fertility and agricultural success (see fig. 2.7 and 2.8). The symbolic referents to farming and rural life figured as antidotes to the moral panics over the cultural and social urbanism that was pervasive. Rural life was the backbone of Canadian society and this construction refracted through the female body connected women's bodies, the soil, and nature's power of regeneration. In the depiction of the float "The Story of Wheat," ten young women in nineteenth-century style of dress are sitting or standing on a wooden wagon surrounding a large, decorated bushel of wheat. Around the wagon men are depicted walking with pitchforks and hoes raised to rest against their shoulders. The farm implements represent men's active role in harvest and the positioning of them (and that of the men) suggests a defence of both the women and the crop. In regards to the float, the caption that accompanies it describes the "barren plains of sixty years ago" and the image and text suggest the transformation of unfruitful land into fertile fields through men's labour.¹⁶⁵ The physical closeness and the sharing of space between women and wheat conjure up the long-standing connection between wheat, women, and fertility. Men transform the barren plains through productive farming efforts, while women transform the "barren plains" through reproduction. The direct link between White women of an agricultural tradition and fertility also can be read as an attempt to soothe the nativist fears of declining birth rates among White, middle-class women. When represented as actual historical characters, as the women in "The Story of Wheat" drawing were, women's roles were presented as passive and inactive. Despite the fact that this did not accurately reflect rural women's integral labour performed on

¹⁶⁵ Suggestions for Historical Pageants, Floats and Tableaux, 33.

farms and in markets, it suggested a safe, traditional, and stable society where women were returned to their “proper” roles as wife, mother, and helpmate, although the work involved in these actual roles was not shown.¹⁶⁶



CONFEDERATION
The birth of this nation of the North. In 1867 a group of weak, scattered and more or less unsympathetic colonies were linked together in a union that a few years later spread from sea to sea. Confederation has brought with it strength, cohesion, growth, ambition, national consciousness. We look backward to sixty years of foundation-building, and forward to the super-structure of worth and beauty that shall rise therefrom.

Fig. 2.7 As with other images produced for the Jubilee, this one entitled “Confederation” included complex messages about gender. (*Suggestions for Historical Pageants, Floats, and Tableaux*)

In all the floats where women are represented as historical - as opposed to symbolic – beings, they are presented with signs that celebrate the nineteenth-century cult of domesticity. As Anne McClintock reminds us, “Domesticity denotes both a *space* (a geographic and architectural alignment) and a *social relation to power*.”¹⁶⁷ The celebration of domesticity in Legace’s sketches sought to reaffirm what were seen as traditional and “natural” gender roles and promote a particular understanding of proper female roles that predominantly revolved around the home. The attempt to celebrate, naturalize, and promote women’s roles in the home worked as an attempt to soothe modern fears embodied by the flapper about women’s new roles in public –either in education, as consumers, on the street, or in politics. The connection between White

¹⁶⁶ Romy Golan, *Modernity and Nostalgia: Art and Politics in France Between the Wars* (Yale University Press, 1995), 20-1. See also Huskins, “The Ceremonial Space of Women,” 153.

¹⁶⁷ McClintock, *Imperial Leather*, 34.

women and domesticity also relates back to the imperial project. As Canadian historian Sarah Carter points out in *Capturing Women*, White women were symbols of settlement

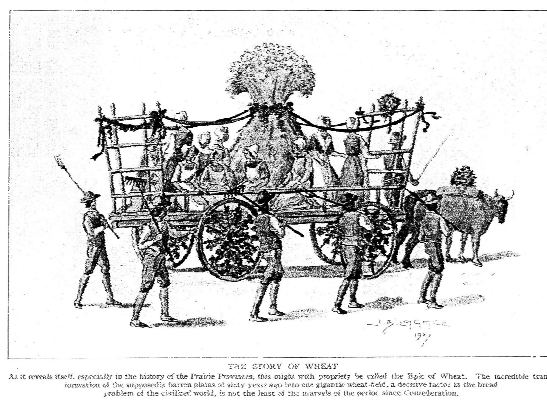


Fig. 2.8 The sketch for “The Story of Wheat” was imbued with symbolism related to gender, imperialism, and domesticity. (*Suggestions for Historical Pageants, Floats, and Tableaux*)

and frequently the arrival of the first White woman in a specific area is commemorated.¹⁶⁸ White women’s role was to bring the markers of civilization through domesticity (the idea of home, the separation of public and private spheres, and children of good imperial ‘stock’) to areas under colonial rule.

The allegorical representations of women as Canada speak to the expected continued ornamental status of women. When Canada was represented as a young woman she was not an intellectual, a worker, an active participant, and certainly not a flapper. She was the embodiment of ideas on empire, race, class, and gender. Yet, in her representation of women’s ornamental status, she appeals to the sentiment that there is a muted power in being the embodiment of ideals. Some women’s groups in the country found the use of women’s bodies as allegories of nation and traditional values appealing. The Women’s Canadian Club of Fort William, Ontario, mimicked one of Legace’s designs and portrayed “Confederation” (see fig. 2.9).

¹⁶⁸ Sarah Carter, *Capturing Women: The Manipulation of Cultural Imagery in Canada’s Prairie West* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1997), Introduction.

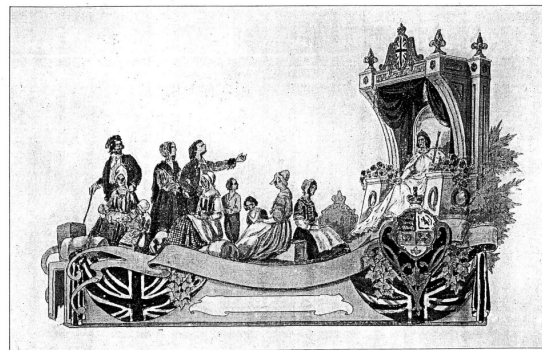


Fig. 2.9 The Women's Canadian Club of Fort William, Ontario acted out one of Legace's suggestions for their local parade. (Thunder Bay Museum, A48/9/6, Women's Canadian Club Fort William, Diamond Jubilee Year Activities, 1927-1928)

Ten local women dressed in Grecian-inspired white gowns with nine of them meant to each represent one of the provinces and one to represent Canada as a whole. In their annual report of 1927-28, they reprinted two pictures of the float and expressed pride in their participation in the local celebration and their "very beautiful float."¹⁶⁹ The appeal of this type of representation went past simply exalting a traditional ideal of womanhood and extended into its affirmation of links to Empire and racial superiority. Women who were meant to represent the nation were depicted in classical Grecian clothing and draped in symbols of empire – crown, staff, cape, the Union Jack, and lions. Beyond the imperial connection, however, the ties between woman as empire and the actual roles of women being visually confined to the domestic realm can be read as part of the continued imperial project in Canada. If Canada was entering into a period of increased independence, she did so maintaining strong links to the Empire.

¹⁶⁹ Thunder Bay Museum, A48/9/6, Women's Canadian Club Fort William, Diamond Jubilee Year Activities, 1927-1928.

An important part of Miss Canada’s formulation was her Whiteness. Miss Canada was always White. When included, women of colour were visually excluded from active, participatory representations of the nation and its past. Aboriginal men were depicted in limited circumstances portraying various instances of ‘discovery’, with the Mounted Police, and in images of the Fur Trade.¹⁷⁰ In all these areas, First Nations men are portrayed as passive onlookers, a possible threat, or assistants to European men. As with sporting events that appropriated traditional Aboriginal games and turned them into Canadian sports, Native participation in visual depictions of the country’s past, present, and future were solidly rooted in the past. In depictions that include White women, men of colour are excluded, even in the Jubilee float allegedly embracing Canadian tolerance of diversity entitled “The Melting Pot” (see fig. 2.10).



THE MELTING POT
Canada holds out her hand in welcome to the Foreign Born. She offers them Honors, and demands in return that they become Good Citizens.

Fig. 2.10 The float, “The Melting Pot,” made it clear who was included and excluded from the assimilationist goals of the Canadian government. (*Suggestions for Historical Pageants, Floats, and Tableaux*)

More often Native peoples were used to symbolize the antithesis of modern, industrial society. On the afternoon of July 1 King sent such a message clear across the country when he stated,

Even to-day we have not lost traces of the earliest Canada. In the background of the present, there remains the Indian habitations –

¹⁷⁰ *Suggestions for Historical Pageants, Floats and Tableaux*, 21, 24, 29, 41, 43, and 45.

the little groups of huts, silhouetted against the forest depths, content to remain within its shadows that the larger Canada, emerging from obscurity and shade, may take her place in the sun among the powers of the world.¹⁷¹

The Jubilee organizers were not alone in this interpretation and use of Native imagery. In other national celebrations and more localized events like fairs and exhibitions, First Nations people in exoticized performances were often used as a spectacle to attract audiences and the performances were frequently juxtaposed with ideas of modernity and progress.¹⁷² As Ian Radforth argues, “However much the Canadian state has robbed, suppressed, patronized, and denigrated First Nations peoples, governments have nevertheless found it advantageous to include Aboriginal people in celebrations that define and affirm an imagined national community.”¹⁷³ Radforth and others have successfully demonstrated that Native people were not simply the passive victims of such cultural appropriation and misinterpretation. These public events were often times when First Nations people could claim public space, the attention of a wider audience, demand political consideration, and challenge the hegemonic order.¹⁷⁴

Along with the popular images of the North, the suggested tableaux drew upon ideas of antimodernism and many of the images were directly linked to land. It was a traditional pastoral landscape that continued the tradition of placing women’s bodies in and as part of the land in Canadian painting.¹⁷⁵ Yet the association with antimodernism

¹⁷¹ *Report of the Executive Committee*, 89.

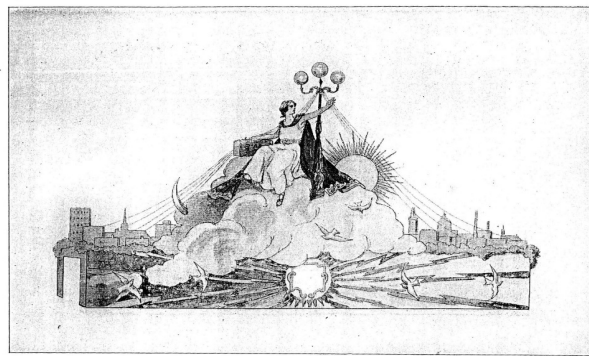
¹⁷² Keith Regular, “On Public Display,” *Alberta History* 34, no. 1 (Winter, 1986): 1-10.

¹⁷³ Radforth, *Royal Spectacle*, 206. See also Ian Radforth, “Performance, Politics, and Representation: Aboriginal People and the 1860 Royal Tour of Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 84 no. 1 (March 2003): 1-32.

¹⁷⁴ Radforth, *Royal Spectacle*, chapter 6; and Wade A. Henry, “Imagining the Great White Mother and the Great King: Aboriginal Tradition and Royal Representation at the ‘Great Pow-wow’ of 1901,” *Journal of the Canadian Historical Review* n.s. 11, 2000: 87-108. See also Regular, “On Public Display:” 1-10.

¹⁷⁵ See W.H. New, *Land Sliding: Imagining Space, Presence, and Power in Canadian Writing* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997). Two contemporary examples were Edwin Holgate and Kathleen

was not necessarily a critique of modernity. In choosing to promote an image of women's bodies rooted not in the country's own history but in ancient European history, the National Committee was not seeking to erase the contemporary with the ancient. Instead they participated in what theorist Walter Benjamin described as the culture of modernity. Benjamin argued that modernity was marked by a juxtaposition of the very old and the very new.¹⁷⁶ For example, this can be seen in Legace's sketch of a float that celebrated Canada's capacity to produce hydroelectric power (see fig. 2.11). In it Canada was depicted in ancient Greco-Roman draped clothing and carefully balanced, seated on a cloud, holding in her hand a lit street lamp. The very combination of ancient symbols, the embodied ideals of nation in a woman, and the idea of technological progress were part of the visual affirmation of modernity. To a Canadian public who were frequently critical of modernity for its destructive tendencies, such images sought to provide a different sense of safety and familiarity.



ELECTRICITY
Canada finds in the Harnessing of her Streams an unlimited source of Power to drive her Factories and Light her Homes.

Fig. 2.11 This representation of “Electricity” combined tradition and modernity in symbolizing the positive elements of technological progress. (*Suggestions for Historical Pageants, Floats, and Tableaux*)

Munn. On Holgate see Brian Foss, “Living Landscape,” in *Edwin Holgate*, ed. Rosalind Pepall and Brian Foss (Montreal: Montreal Museum of Fine Arts, 2005), 38-54.

¹⁷⁶ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1989), 254-256.

The connection between women and the nation was not unique to the Diamond Jubilee. The depiction of a Canada being represented by young women with wheat was one repeated throughout the decade. Women embodying Canada dressed in Grecian robes, supported by men's labour, combined with various symbols of material progress, and holding or surrounded by wheat appeared as symbols for a variety of national events.¹⁷⁷ There are many similarities between the Jubilee images and those produced for different reasons. In this way, the Jubilee was not unique in representing Canada and gender in these ways, but the level and scope of the production and circulation of them speaks to at least one strain of tradition intertwined with modernity at a national and official level.

CONCLUSION: 'A DEEPER DEVOTION'

The Report of the Executive Committee concluded that the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation had been a success. They argued that it strengthened national unity and stimulated a "deeper devotion to Canada...in the minds and hearts of Canadians everywhere." In addition, the Jubilee healed long-standing differences, helped to foster "a widely diffused public spirit" and secured a place in the Canadian consciousness for "the idea of national unity."¹⁷⁸ Certainly, the Jubilee did not erase cultural differences and succeed in the way that the Executive Committee decided it had. Nonetheless the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation is significant for what it reveals about the harnessing of the eye and the need for 'vision.' Visual culture was an important way to disseminate information across the country and having a vision was a strength on which the country could develop and progress. The Jubilee is also important for what it tells us about the

¹⁷⁷ See for example, *Globe*, September 6, 1924, 4 and *Chatelaine* July 1928, inside cover.

¹⁷⁸ Report of the Executive Committee, 11-12.

connections between bodies, gender, nation, region, and development. How Canadians idealized the nation and how they saw the nation (literally) were intimately connected. As an educational tool both the idea of vision and the actual thing were important and organizers relied heavily on them to portray what they saw as the proper interpretation of Canada – past, present and future. Organizers courted and appreciated the publicity given to the event by newspapers, periodicals and advertisers. In carrying the message of the Jubilee across the country, in helping to establish it as an important event, they became co-producers of it. Advertisements and magazines not only helped to promote the event as important, but also expanded the realm of who could participate. Pageants and parades were integral to the dissemination of the message of the Jubilee and to an attempt to re-configure modern gender relations, but the complexities of gender in modern Canada necessarily meant that other seemingly natural categories were understood in gendered terms as well.

CHAPTER THREE

'THE IDEAL TYPE OF WOMANHOOD': NEGOTIATING TRADITION AND MODERNITY WITH MISS CANADA, 1923 AND MISS TORONTO, 1926

In August 1928, a strongly worded anonymous editorial appeared in the *Catholic Register* that called for the end of marathon dancing;

The so-called 'marathon dance' is a brutal exploitation, for sordid gain, of our well-known human weakness for notoriety and our pitiable susceptibility to a little passing applause. It brings neither fame nor fortune to the participants, but it cheapens and degrades by vulgar public display the divine womanhood of the poor girls who may be the foolish dupes of its mercenary promoters.

The editorial continued, quoting Mrs. J.P. Hynes, vice-president of the Toronto Local Council of Women, who expressed surprise that "this new evil should so soon take the place of recently banned beauty contests."¹ It seemed as though the underlying troubles associated with beauty contests had simply transformed themselves into another form. The 'evils' of beauty pageants - exploitation for the promise of fame and fortune, the involvement of professional entertainment businessmen, and public performances that potentially required a revealing costume - had evolved into a new style of display, but the fundamental problems remained. Beauty contests were simply one incarnation of the troubled display of women's bodies in questionable performances during the 1920s and a symbol of a new, modern generation with a different sense of morality and acceptability of the public exposure of the body. The strong response to marathon dancing was an extension of the popularity of and controversy over beauty pageants, and pageants themselves were a product of cultural changes (both real and imagined) that occurred during the decade.

¹ *The Catholic Register*, August 9, 1928, 4.

Modern beauty pageants, a creation of the early 1920s, became a focal point for discussion because they contained micro versions of many widespread elements of cultural change. They drew together issues of the new morality, American-Canadian cultural relations, the influence of working-class amusement and leisure pursuits in popular culture, the rise of the advertising and movie industries, the prominence of the flapper image (and her related body projects), and the concerns over youth culture and the future of the nation. Pageants became an ideal place for the discussion of these large issues on a smaller scale because of their success, the links to other dubious commercial amusements, and their own troubling history. The popularity of and controversy over beauty contests in the 1920s existed because the contestants became symbols of disturbing social and cultural changes. They embodied the cultural tension between tradition and modernity that Canadians – particularly youth – were attempting to negotiate. The women who competed in the pageants represented the enmeshing of youth and modernity in the post-World War One period. These young women, like the depictions of young women in the Jubilee pageants, came to symbolically represent the nation. As historian Cynthia Comacchio notes, “adolescents embodied the young Dominion’s prospects.”² With beauty contests this was clearly the case as ‘good’ or ‘bad’ pageants represented the potential benefits and pitfalls of modern life.

The negotiation between tradition and modernity that Canadians were engaged in had two related dimensions.³ The first was a nostalgic reaction to the problems brought by industrial capitalism and the First World War and was related to the promotion of the

² Cynthia Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of Modern Canada, 1920-1950* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2006), 13.

³ W.L. Morton, “The 1920s,” in *The Canadians, 1867-1967*, ed. J.M.S. Careless and R. Craig Brown (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1967); and Mary Vipond, “National Consciousness in English-Speaking Canada in the 1920s: Seven Studies” (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1974).

idea that things were simpler in the past.⁴ The second was a synthesis and propagation of the links between the simplified past and the modern present. The latter was a subtle appropriation of images or ‘looks’ of the past that were integrated into modern images. Beauty contests came to embody these mediations in visual culture – a social tension and a cultural synthesis.

The very nature of beauty contests, however, marked a level of acceptance of modernity with its consumer culture, new feminine icon, and performance opportunities for women in public. In the nineteenth century, such public exposure of women wearing make-up, in bathing suits, or sports costumes for the purposes of competition would be at the very least considered vulgar. Yet, in the 1920s, while some people found beauty contests offensive – sometimes for reasons related to public performance, costuming, and competition – their widespread appeal to potential competitors and audience members revealed an acceptance of the modern, female body and thus, the aspects of modernity it represented. With all cultural change, however, the acceptance was uneven.

This chapter discusses how the cultural concerns over modernity were related to the bodies of beauty pageant contestants and how their image circulated to convey meaning about the desire for modern life, the need to maintain tradition, and the blending of the two. There was never a single meaning or image projected by the contests, and in this respect, they become excellent cases for studying the multiple voices and groups invested in women’s bodies and visual culture. Beauty contests were marred by contradictions, perhaps to the point that contradiction becomes a pre-eminent feature. As

⁴ On nostalgia see T.J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and Ian McKay, *The Quest of the Folk: Antimodernism and Cultural Selection in Twentieth-Century Nova Scotia* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1994).

organizers tried to cobble together a living hybrid image of modernity that represented its positive sides and downplayed the negatives, they inevitably met both with successes and dramatic failures. The middle ground they sometimes sought could never appease the many sides invested in the image. This chapter studies how and why the contests became a salient symbol for the cultural tension and accord between the old and the new by discussing the history of the beauty contest, the modern formulation of the contestant, and the use of her image to find a potential ideal representation of modern Canadian womanhood. It also seeks to highlight the contradictions inherent in these fragile cultural performances. Like modernity itself, beauty pageants tied together the ancient and the modern, and the possibilities of pleasure and destruction.

Throughout the 1920s there were hundreds of beauty contests organized across the country that were held for a variety of reasons. What follows is not a comprehensive overview of every pageant, but a look at how the different types of contests functioned and the reaction to them. The early beauty contests have proven to be difficult to study. As ephemeral performances, beauty contests have evaded permanent record collections. Most of what historians have been able to access has come from visual and newspaper sources. This chapter relies on these types of sources to piece together a broad look at the early history of beauty contests. Certainly what follows here is a selective look at different contests and a preliminary look at a largely unstudied group of women in Canadian popular culture.

Recently, beauty contests have become more popular in academic studies because of the legitimization of areas of study ranging from consumerism to beauty. Most of the historiography on pageants focuses on the United States, in particular the Miss America

contest, and much of the early literature is largely celebratory in nature.⁵ Recent critical inquiries on early incarnations of pageants have discussed them as ‘brazen’ though troubled performances of femininity, as backlashes against first-wave feminists, as continuations of older celebrations, and as sacrificial rituals.⁶ There are a few studies on how pageants in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s have functioned to embody national and cultural ideas of ‘race’ in countries outside of the U.S.⁷ Work on Canadian contests or Canadian participation in other contests is limited. Some of the American studies mention Canadians competing in early Miss America contests but, with the exception of a few works, the history of Canadian beauty contests remains to be written.⁸ Taken together the body of work on beauty contests and its absences reveal how multi-faceted

⁵ See Henry Pang, “Miss America: An American Ideal, 1921-1969,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 2, no. 4 (1969): 687-696; Frank Deford, *There She Is: The Life and Times of Miss America* (New York: Viking Press, 1971), chapter 7; and A.R. Riverol, *Live From Atlantic City: The History of the Miss America Pageant Before, After and in Spite of Television* (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green University Popular Press, 1992), chapter 2.

⁶ See Lois Banner, *American Beauty* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1983), chapter 12; Sarah Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World: Beauty Pageants and National Identity*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999) chapter 1; Deborah Sue Wolfe, “Beauty as Vocation: Women and Beauty Contests in America” (PhD diss., Columbia University, 1994), chapter 2; Kimberly A. Hamlin, “Bathing Suits and Backlash: The First Miss American Pageants, 1921-1927,” in *There She Is, Miss America: The Politics of Sex, Beauty, and Race in America’s Most Famous Pageant*, ed. Elwood Watson and Darcy Martin (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 27-51; Jennifer Jones, “The Beauty Queen As Sacrificial Victim” *Theatre History Studies* 18 (June 1998): 99-106; Elwood Watson and Darcy Martin, “The Miss America Pageant,” Watson and Martin, “Introduction,” *There She Is, Miss America*, 1-23; and Angela J. Latham, *Posing a Threat: Flappers, Chorus Girls, and Other Brazen Performers of the American 1920s* (Hanover, NH: University of New England Press, 2000). On second wave feminists protests over beauty contests see Marlene LeGates, *Making Waves: A History of Feminism in Western Society* (Toronto: Copp Clark, 1996), 311; Margarita Jimenez and Laura Mulvey, “The Spectacle is Vulnerable: Miss World, 1970,” in *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Laura Mulvey (London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1989), 3-5; and Naomi Wolf, *The Beauty Myth*, (Toronto: Vintage Books, 1990), 288.

⁷ See Colleen Ballerino Cohen, Richard Wilk, and Beverly Stoeltje, *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage: Gender, Contests, and Power* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995); Rick A. López, “The India Bonita Contest of 1921 and the Ethnicization of Mexican National Culture,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82, no. 2 (2002): 291-328; and Jennifer Robertson, “Japan’s First Cyborg: Miss Nippon, Eugenics and Wartime Technologies of Beauty, Body and Blood,” *Body and Society* 7, no. 1 (2001): 1-34.

⁸ On Canadian contests see David Goss, “The Fairest Girl,” *The Beaver* 83, no. 1 (February/March 2003): 29-32; Karen Rennie, *Moon Magic: Gail Grant and the 1920s Dance in Regina* (Toronto: Dance Collection Danse, 1992), 18; and Patrizia Gentile, “Searching for ‘Miss Civil Service’ and ‘Mr. Civil Service’: Gender Anxiety, Beauty Contests and Fruit Machines in the Canadian Civil Service, 1950-1973” (master’s thesis, Carleton University, 1996). For American studies that include discussions on Canadian participation in Miss America see Deford, *There She Is*, passim; Watson and Martin, “The Miss America Pageant” and Wolfe, “Beauty As Vocation,” chapter 2.

they were, how diverse their purpose was, and how challenging they have been to interpret. Images of beauty contestants, like images of the flapper, were remarkably flexible and could be tailored to meet local and national ideals.⁹

THE HISTORY OF THE BEAUTY CONTEST

The ritual process of selecting a young woman as a representative of an event dates back to the Middle Ages. American historian Lois Banner argues that the origins of beauty contests can be traced back to May Day celebrations and nineteenth century reproductions of medieval tournaments. These events became part of fairs that continued the tradition of selecting queens, although physical beauty was not always the most important criteria.¹⁰ The first known beauty contest where women were chosen only on their attractiveness was held in the same venue as the display of freaks, wonders, and curiosities.¹¹ American entrepreneur *par excellence*, P.T. Barnum, realizing the powerful

⁹ On the diverse use of the image of the flapper and New Woman see Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham, "Introduction," *New Woman Hybridities: Femininity, Feminism, and International Consumer Culture, 1880-1930* ed. Ann Heilmann and Margaret Beetham (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 3.

¹⁰ Banner, *American Beauty*, 250-4.

¹¹ Freak shows were very popular and profitable in nineteenth century North America and Europe. When amateur scientists started some early dime museums in the early nineteenth century, they attempted to provide "rational amusement." Rational amusement was important since Victorians were concerned about the nature and purpose of leisure activities. In the early nineteenth century even art galleries and regular museums in the United States sometimes included freak performances alongside the display of fine art. By 1848, the public was so fascinated with freaks that the British newspaper *Punch* called the trend "deformitomania." In 1840, P.T. Barnum made this type of display infamous when he opened the American Museum in New York City. The American Museum was a central part of what would become popular amusements and gave the display of freakery increased cultural importance. It was also an affordable but respectable place for middle-class Americans to spend their leisure time. The locations for the display of freaks varied widely, but as historian Andrea Stulman Dennett argues, Barnum's American museum appealed to both middle-class men and women who thought of these displays as moral and educational amusement. Yet, by the end of the nineteenth century, freak shows and dime museums had lost much of their popular appeal. In part, they entered into a period of decline because of competition from newer forms of amusement, and because of the rising interest in the eugenics movement. Rather than entertainers, freaks became visual evidence in the problems and perils of reproduction. By the 1920s, the display of freaks was entrenched as part of a lower form of amusement that many people found increasingly distasteful. *Punch* is quoted in Erin O'Connor, *Raw Material: Producing Pathology in Victorian Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), 148. On the history of the freak show and dime museums see Leslie Fiedler, *Freaks: Myths and Images of the Secret Self* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978); Robert Bogdan, *Freak Show: Presenting Human Oddities for Amusement and*

draw of women's bodies attempted to hold a beauty contest in 1854, following his successful bird, dog, flower, and baby contests at the New York City American Museum.¹² After the initial call for contestants was met with only a few entries from women of questionable character, Barnum decided not to have the women compete live but through daguerreotypes. The contest was a success. The appeal of a photographic contest that avoided the public display of women's bodies spread to major American newspapers, which copied the idea.¹³ These types of contests still did not meet the demands of middle-class respectability since many of them ran in newspapers that used sex and violence to attract readers. Others were closely linked to world's fairs and carnivals.¹⁴ Nonetheless, photographic beauty contests conducted for profit in the late nineteenth century became very popular among working-class men and women, and were aligned with other questionable amusements such as dime museums, carnivals, and fairs.¹⁵ As early as the 1880s, the cultural terrain was tested for a beauty contest removed from carnival culture and more in line with the older tradition of choosing a young woman as a representative of a specific event. One of the first attempts was the Miss

Profit (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988); David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (New York: Basic Books, 1993); Rosemarie Garland Thomson, ed., *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Rachel Adams, *Sideshow U.S.A* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), chapter 2; Andrea Stulman Dennett, *Weird and Wonderful* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), chapter 2; John Sturm, "Detroit's Wonderland Dime Musee," *Chronicle: the Quarterly Magazine of the Historical Society of Michigan* 24, no. 3 (1988): 4-6, 14; Walker Rumble, "A Showdown of 'Swifts': Women Compositors, Dime Museums, and the Boston Typesetting Races of 1886," *New England Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (1988): 615-628; and Larry Widen, "Milwaukee's Dime Museum," *Milwaukee History* 8, no. 1 (1985): 24-34.

¹² Banner, *American Beauty*, 255.

¹³ Banner, *American Beauty*, 255-7; Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*, 34; and Ballerino, Cohen, Wilk, and Stoeltje, *Beauty Queens on the Global Stage*, 4-5. The use of beauty contests to promote newspapers happened in Mexico as well. See Rick A. López, "The India Bonita Contest of 1921 and the Ethnicization of Mexican National Culture," 297. On the more recent use of beauty pageants in ethnic communities as a response to the exclusionary practices of mainstream pageants see Nhi T. Lieu, "Remembering 'the Nation' Through Pageantry: Femininity and the Politics of Vietnamese Womanhood in the *Hoa Hau Ao Dai* Contest," *Frontiers* 21, no. 1-2 (2000): 127-151.

¹⁴ Banner, *American Beauty*, 257.

¹⁵ Banet-Weiser, *The Most Beautiful Girl in the World*, 34.

United States contest at Rehoboth Beach, a family resort in Delaware that catered to working-class families. Miss United States, 1880, was designed as part of a publicity campaign to attract tourists to the summer resort. By the turn of the twentieth century, beach beauty contests were popular at some American bathing beaches, but they were not yet the popular, cultural phenomena that they would become in the 1920s.¹⁶

Until the second decade of the twentieth century, beauty contests were firmly entrenched as part of working-class amusements. Dime museums, especially those in New York's Bowery district, offered beauty contests as part of their displays. Primarily visual, they overcame language barriers by providing new immigrants with dominant messages about American standards of beauty.¹⁷ By the 1890s, beauty contests were part of travelling sideshows, circuses, and fairs that included Hoochie Coochie dances and girl shows where women were displayed for money and often appeared in bathing suits or revealing costumes.¹⁸ While the mainstay of these types of entertainments remained freaks, women's sexually charged performances added another element that appealed to their audiences. Many of these beauty contests and related female performances were more explicit about capitalizing on female sexuality than later beauty contests or mainstream middle-class amusements. Not all of the shows were restricted to working-class amusements, however, as world fairs, which attracted a range of clientele and were supported by all levels of government and respectable voluntary associations, included carnival style entertainment. Midways that were part of major American expositions like the Chicago Columbian Centennial of 1893, for example, used women's beauty to draw patrons to the grounds. At the Centennial, visitors could walk through the building

¹⁶ Banner, *American Beauty*, 266.

¹⁷ Banner, *American Beauty*, 258.

¹⁸ A.W. Stencell, *Girl Show: Into the Canvas World of Bump and Grind* (Toronto: ECW Press, 1999).

looking at the Congress of Beauty, which amounted to women dressed in national costumes sitting on stage.¹⁹

Although Canadians visited and performed in carnival and freak performances, the public tolerance of such displays was waning. By the second decade of the twentieth century, moral reformers, government officials, and the police had targeted a gamut of female performances, including Hoochie Coochie dancers and girl shows, as part of the “carnival menace.”²⁰ In 1910, an undercover inspector for the Ontario Provincial Police, William H. Mains, investigated a complaint about Hoochie Coochie dancers in the Mighty Haag Railroad Shows in Niagara Falls. Mains reported that

on the side show I found that after each performance the men were invited to pay 10 cents and go behind a curtain where they would see some performance that would be interesting to look at – a number of men present as well as myself were admitted to the apartment where we found a person dressed in female attire on a platform who went through what is known as the hoochie koochie (sic) performance.²¹

In 1917, the Attorney General of Ontario received a complaint regarding a sideshow performance “in a number of Ontario towns” that included “three voluptuous rather scantily dressed females, posing and dancing. Two of the dances were crude, vulgar and quite suggestive.”²² By the 1920s, a full attack had been launched against travelling sideshows and circuses that were deemed offensive. Voluntary associations, boards of trade, and municipal councils adopted resolutions to abolish these types of amusements.

¹⁹ For a full account of the Chicago’s World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893 see Robert Rydell, *All the World’s a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), chapter 2.

²⁰ On the carnival menace see Tina Loo and Carolyn Strange, “The Travelling Show Menace: Contested Regulation in Turn-of-the-Century Ontario,” *Law and Society Review* 29, no. 4 (1995): 639-667.

²¹ Archives of Ontario, Attorney General’s Files, Circuses and Travelling Shows, 1910-1914, RG 23-26-20 File # 1.2.

²² AO, Attorney General’s Files, Office of the Attorney General, RG 4-32, File 1636.

The Sault Ste. Marie Board of Trade passed a resolution similar to other groups that called for the Premier, the Attorney General, and the Ontario Provincial Police to

take the necessary action to forbid the showing in Ontario of questionable amusement orgies and carnivals of inanity and vice, of which Ontario had a surfeit during the Summer of 1920 and which made for weeks of immense pollutive influence from the United States being focussed upon and intensified in Canadian communities.²³

In addition, many citizens signed petitions against sideshows and circuses. In 1921, members of the Brantford, Ontario, Chamber of Commerce responded to a referendum on carnivals and included their own comments on them. Respondents wrote that carnivals “are degrading and a worn out class of entertainment,” and “a positive danger to our young people.”²⁴ Part of the danger was that sideshows and carnivals were seen as the lowest form of ‘American’ entertainment. In the 1920s there was a great deal of concern over Canadian youth’s preoccupation with American-style commercialized amusements. In general, the Canadian impression of American culture was that it was “immoral, violent, and materialistic.”²⁵ Movies, jazz, amusement parks, dance halls, and dime novels were seen as causing social breakdowns with problems such as criminal activity, sexual activity, and uncontrolled consumption. Closely associated with the new and looser morality that seemed to spring from the devastation of the Great War, sideshows in particular represented a troubling slide towards American debauchery.

Early beauty contests did not hold much appeal north of the border in part because of the failure of such working-class amusements like dime museums but even attempts at

²³ AO, Attorney General’s Files, Circuses and Travelling Shows, 1919-1921, RG 23-26-20, File # 1.57.

²⁴ AO, Attorney General’s Files, Circuses and Travelling Shows, 1919-1921, RG 23-26-20, File # 1.57.

²⁵ John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 191.

more respectable contests garnered disappointing results.²⁶ At the 1884 Toronto Industrial Exhibition (later the Canadian National Exhibition), the Ladies Department attempted to run a beauty contest where entrants would be ranked based on portrait photographs. The list of available prizes was impressive and included a fifty-dollar gold watch and twenty-five dollars worth of jewellery. There were no interested contestants. As Keith Walden argues, “the idea of the beauty contest ran counter to the conventions of modesty, but its complete failure suggests that people, especially women, were reluctant to court public view deliberately, even at a remove.”²⁷ A beauty contest on the fairgrounds was not attempted again until the late 1930s.²⁸ Despite the hesitancy to engage in beauty contests north of the border at the C.N.E., they had taken root in American working-class culture and would be imported to Canadian culture through the powerfully engaging amusement park and movie culture. By the 1920s, as American cultural products swept into Canada, beauty contests became part of the cultural landscape. While the C.N.E. did not hold them, amusement parks and movie theatres did and these contests attracted a diverse audience. Although they existed in new and different ways, the modern contests of the 1920s never entirely shook their past connection with amusements like the carnival, the freak show, and the dime museum. Beauty contests continued to use similar methods of display. For example, women who competed in the 1927 Miss Canada contest, sponsored by Famous Players Lasky and held in theatres across Western Canada, found themselves exhibited in the same manner as

²⁶ On early working-class amusements see Gerald Lenton-Young, “Variety Theatre,” in *Early Stages: Theatre in Ontario, 1800-1914*, ed. Ann Saddlemyer (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 166-213.

²⁷ Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 155.

²⁸ Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English-Canada, 1919-1939* (Toronto: Copp, Clark, Pitman, 1988), 85.

women in girl shows.²⁹ In the preliminary rounds for the Miss Victoria contest, for example, each contestant was positioned under a spotlight on a revolving pedestal. After her time was up, the curtains closed and another contestant was positioned for her time. After each one had had her turn individually, the contestants came out in a group.³⁰ In displaying contestants to the audiences in this fashion, beauty contests imitated carnival girl shows. Yet, the historical association with fairs and carnivals can only partially explain the controversy since, from the late nineteenth century, there existed beauty contests that attempted to make a claim to respectability and remove themselves from any direct association with the carnival.

The modern beauty contest was born in 1921 at Atlantic City with the first ever Miss America competition. While some critics opposed the contest, the hoteliers of Atlantic City who were in charge of the pageant were successful in attracting contestants, audiences, sponsors, and advertisers.³¹ The appeal of the pageant changed in the 1920s because of wider cultural shifts that took place in the preceding decades. The 1884 contest at the Toronto Industrial Exhibition proved to be unpopular because the idea of a female public, competitive performance was at odds with the ideas of modesty and respectability for women. In the nineteenth century the ‘public woman’ was associated with prostitution and vice, but by the 1920s the idea of women in public had begun to change.³² From the late nineteenth century, middle-class White women made new claims

²⁹ Stencell, *Girl Show*, 86.

³⁰ “Four More Join in Contest for “Miss Victoria,” *Victoria Times*, April 16, 1927, 7.

³¹ Deford, *There She Is*, 77 and Watson and Martin, *There She Is, Miss America*, 3.

³² The idea of the ‘public woman’ as prostitute did not mean that women were excluded from participating in public life during the nineteenth century. Women participated in reform efforts and in public celebrations like parades, bazaars, and fairs as both contributors and spectators. However, respectable women’s participation in public was carefully controlled and regulated in order to maintain their claim to being a ‘Lady.’ On women’s participation in the public sphere in the nineteenth century see Ian Radforth, *Royal Spectacle: The 1860 Visit of the Prince of Wales to Canada and the United States* (Toronto:

to the public, while the images of women were increasingly deployed as a symbolic bearer of information. Additionally, economic, social, and cultural shifts in work, amusement, and leisure pursuits gave women in entertainment increased respectability. Taken together, these changes gave rise to new ideas about women in public; however, the older concerns about the 'public woman' were never completely lost.

The reorientation of the cultural hierarchy at the end of the nineteenth century played a significant role in allowing beauty pageants to at least make a claim to respectable entertainment.³³ The transformation of beauty and entertainment related industries led to the increased acceptance of the image of women's bodies in public. In particular, the increasing respectability of models, chorus girls, and actresses helped to change the acceptability of displaying women's bodies in limited areas. The rising commercial culture came to intersect in important ways with the legitimization of women in public. Prior to the late nineteenth century, public performance by women like modelling and acting were associated with prostitution, venereal disease, and social disorder. While the associations with vice were not completely shaken, the forms of female display did begin to improve their public image. For models, the popularity of George Du Maurier's heroine Trilby, who romanticized the artist's model, as well as the elite women who posed for Charles Dana Gibson, helped to begin the process of bringing

University of Toronto Press, 2004), 116-120, 150-163; E.A. Heamann, *The Inglorious Arts of Peace: Exhibitions in Canadian Society During the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 268-269; Cecilia Morgan, *Public Men and Virtuous Women: The Gendered Languages of Religion and Politics in Upper Canada, 1791-1850* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 196, 202-215; Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto*, passim; Alison Prentice et al., *Canadian Women: A History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Harcourt Brace & Company Canada, 1996), chapter 7; and Bonnie Huskins, "The Ceremonial Space of Women: Public Processions in Victorian Saint John and Halifax," in *Separate Spheres: Women's Worlds in the 19th-Century Maritimes*, ed. Janet Guildford and Suzanne Morton (Fredericton: Acadiensis Press, 1994), 145-159.

³³ Lawrence Levine, *High Brow/Low Brow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

the model into respectable culture. Modelling for advertisers and clothing designers became more acceptable as consumer culture developed and women looked to these places for advice on how to look and what to wear. Further, as modelling developed in the 1920s, women from well-known families became attracted to it, which added a new level of glamour and respectability.³⁴

Newspapers played an essential role in publishing articles about models, as well as actresses and chorus girls.³⁵ Canadian starlets like Mary Pickford, nicknamed “America’s Sweetheart,” became a commercial success, making more reputable films that did not rely on sex or violence as their key attractions.³⁶ From the 1880s, famous actresses were recruited to appear in advertisements for cosmetics and beauty aids. Although before World War One women who painted their faces were associated with prostitutes and working-class women and were a source of concern for middle-class reformers, extensive marketing campaigns and a proliferation of goods, as well as increased regulation helped to make the use of cosmetics more popular.³⁷ Actresses were part of the most popular commercial amusement of the age – movies – and drew crowds. Advertisers were ready and willing to tap into their commercial power and by the 1920s major advertising companies were pandering toward the female matinee crowd who sought to emulate the looks of famous actresses.³⁸

Despite these changes, the beauty contest existed on shaky cultural ground. The 1920s was a decade marked by a society being pulled in two different directions. One

³⁴ Banner, *American Beauty*, 170.

³⁵ Banner, *American Beauty*, 261-3.

³⁶ In 1920 Pickford earned more than a million dollars. On Pickford’s commercial success see Merna Forster, *100 Canadian Heroines: Famous and Forgotten Faces*, (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2004), 205-6.

³⁷ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 54-5, 104-5.

³⁸ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 61-2.

way pointed to a popular culture and entertainment that had increasingly accepted working-class amusements and had transformed itself through commercialism and consumption to promote desire and pleasure. The other was highly critical of such developments. Correspondingly, to many Canadians commercial culture and the new popular amusements were associated with the United States and Americanization. The trend toward the Americanization of popular culture started in the decades before the 1920s, but with the end of the First World War and the social and cultural changes it ushered in, the problem garnered more attention. In 1913 Bernard K. Sandwell described English-Canadians as “absolutely dependent” on American popular culture.³⁹ In the 1920s, the concern over American culture received frequent attention in newspaper and magazines and prompted politicians and national elites to discuss and implement solutions.⁴⁰ Nonetheless, the trend continued. While Canadians consumed American commercial culture, they were concerned about its glorification of violence and promiscuity. Thus, American culture was understood in two sometimes contradictory ways: as a well-liked means of entertainment and as a sign of the cultural depravity of the neighbours to the south.⁴¹ Modern beauty contests were an American invention and were seen as part of the influx of American consumer culture. While they attracted a number of interested competitors and audience members, for critics, they represented the dangerous potential of cultural invasion.⁴²

³⁹ Maria Tippet, *Making Culture: English-Canadian Institutions and the Arts before the Massey Commission* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 7.

⁴⁰ Mary Vipond, “Canadian Nationalism and the Plight of Canadian Magazines in the 1920s,” *Canadian Historical Review* 58, no. 1 (March 1977): 43-63.

⁴¹ Thomson with Seager, *Decades of Discord*, 190-2.

⁴² There was criticism of beauty contests in the United States. In regards to Rudolph Valentino’s beauty contest held at Madison Square Garden in 1923, a *New York Times* editorial declared that “This, too, was once ‘Un-American.’” See *New York Times*, November 30, 1923, 14. On the controversy over the Miss America pageants in the 1920s see Hamlin, “Bathing Suits and Backlash,” 27-51.

Tied into this concern was the moral panic about gender and sexuality that had been building from the 1880s and continued throughout the 1920s. Particularly for women, respectability was important to embody and maintain in everything from daily tasks to sexual behaviour.⁴³ The opposite of being a respectable woman meant being rough and quite possibly sexually available. A key part of respectability was control over sexuality, which was why a youth culture that seemed to revel in sexual freedom was such a concern. During the 1920s there was considerable anxiety over what young Canadians were doing in their leisure time and how it could imperil the future of the nation. Going to movies that showcased sex and violence, doing sexually provocative dances like the Charleston, riding around in cars (an opportunity for sexual experimentation), drinking, smoking, gambling, and having sex were some of the top ranked concerns. This was especially worrisome for middle-class families who saw many of these modern leisure activities seeping into their homes from working-class, immigrant, uncultured, disrespectful adolescents.⁴⁴ However, this is not to suggest that working-class or immigrant families embraced the new commercial leisure pursuits for their families or adolescents. Children in immigrant families who mixed with Canadian born youth at school, work, and play often found themselves in a difficult situation where modern amusements conflicted with religious values and expectations of filial obedience. For daughters the situation was particularly acute in families where “the demeanour and behaviour of daughters, whose personal morality represented family honour and

⁴³ See Karen Dubinsky, *Improper Advances: Rape and Heterosexual Conflict in Ontario, 1880-1929* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 24-7, Lynne Marks, *Revivals and Roller Rinks: Religion, Leisure, and Identity in Late-Nineteenth-Century Small-Town Ontario* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996); and Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1800-1930*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995).

⁴⁴ Comacchio, “Dancing to Perdition: Adolescence and Leisure in Interwar English-Canada,” *Journal of Canadian Studies* 32, no 3 (Fall 1997), 7.

reputation, were a special concern.”⁴⁵ Nonetheless popular culture attracted a wide range of youths who were spending greater amounts of time and money in the pursuit of fun.

Film, photography, commercial art in advertising, and live performances were a few popular types of visual entertainment that not only provided fun, but also became key places for the imaging of the body. These areas were integral to the popularity of beauty contests since their images were frequently used in advertising and newspapers published photographs of contestants to attract readers. Movie houses sponsored pageants, had contestants compete in between film screenings, and made documentary-style films about pageants and contestants. Famous Players sponsored the 1927 Miss Canada competition that was held in movie theatres across Western Canada. All of the competitions took place in movie houses and the winner, Madeline Woodman, received a screen test as one of her prizes and a film was made of her journey to Hollywood where she met and lunched with notorious film star Clara Bow. Woodman also got to participate in the global pageant held in Galveston, Texas, which was also run by Famous Players.⁴⁶ As a performance, beauty contests like Miss Canada, 1927 and Miss Toronto, 1926 were held over a number of days in order to draw audiences to places of leisure, either a movie house or an amusement park.

As a result of changes in leisure activities, amusements, and the beauty industry, the idea of popular beauty pageants became a possibility. Much older traditions of selecting a queen of the fair or other such female community representative reinforced the idea of appropriately imaging women’s bodies. In the case of the 1920s, however, the

⁴⁵ Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 56.

⁴⁶ For example see the advertisements in *Manitoba Free Press*, May 3, 1927, 21; *Regina Leader*, April 25, 1927, 10 and *Victoria Times*, May 14, 1927, 12. On the screen test see *Victoria Times*, April 18, 1927, 9; May 11, 1927, 11; May 18, 1927, 1; May 21, 1927, 3 and June 11, 1927, 1; *Vancouver Sun*, May 14, 1927, 1 and June 13, 1927, 5.

selection was tied to modern trends. In beauty contests, the strands of an ancient idea combined with recent changes in the leisure and beauty industries made contestants powerful visual symbols as the embodiment of tradition and modernity.

EMBODYING TRADITION AND MODERNITY: MISS CANADA and MISS TORONTO

In 1923 *The Maple Leaf*, the magazine of the Canadian Club, reported that instead of Johnny Canuck, Canada might be represented “as a comely maiden of graceful deportment, high home ideals, exemplary religious and social living, and withal a pleasing, friendly personality, a good fellow with all classes, colors, and creeds.”⁴⁷ The *Maple Leaf* was celebrating Miss Canada, 1923, Winnifred Blair, who was crowned at the Montreal Winter Carnival. In 1926, however, the *Globe* condemned the Miss Toronto pageant. An editorial stated

There is something repugnant to most people’s sense of decency in such parades as these. For a woman to ‘parade’ her beauty is about as sensible as a Negro taking pride in his blackness. Neither did one thing to create that upon which they set such store. If the only charm that the entrants in the present contest at Sunnyside can boast of is that of face and figure, they had much better for their own future happiness and peace of mind stay at home and pray the prayer of the old pagan philosopher, ‘Teach me to grow beautiful within.’⁴⁸

The different reactions to the idea of beauty contests represented by the *Maple Leaf* and the *Globe* were not merely differences of opinions. The two sources reflect the different types of pageants that took place in the 1920s. With beauty contests being a relatively new phenomenon, there was no one formula for them, so they often varied in style and type.⁴⁹ The 1923 Miss Canada contest and the 1926 Miss Toronto contest were starkly

⁴⁷ “Miss Canada Honored,” *The Maple Leaf*, 2 no. 1 (March 1923), 13.

⁴⁸ *Globe*, August 10, 1926, 4.

⁴⁹ The contemporary formula would be developed from some of the early contests.

different in the type of image of young women they promoted. Each contest attempted to represent one side of the tradition/modernity dichotomy. However, what represented each side of the dichotomy was less than clear-cut and in each contest the complexities of negotiating between tradition and modernity were subtly revealed.

As with the Miss America contest, Canadian beauty contests served to both utilize and imbue women's bodies with meaning and many organizers negotiated the careful line between the popular images of modern youth and traditional womanhood. Organizers who wished to promote a more traditional idea of modest Canadian womanhood separate from the image of the flapper worked to ensure that their contestants and winners met middle-class ideas of respectability. The Miss Canada competition held in Montreal in 1923 was this type of competition and sought to use its representative in ways more closely aligned with the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation celebrations. Other contests, however, pandered to more modern ideas of beauty and the exposure of the body in order to meet their needs. These competitions were participated in by young women who emulated the look of the flapper, and most often were run as a means to attract paying audiences to other attractions. In both cases, the contests linked women's revealing fashions, commercial amusements, and advertising. As a result, pageants proved to be successful and controversial.

One year after Margaret Gorman was crowned as the first Miss America in Atlantic City, New Jersey, in 1921, organizers for the Montreal Winter Carnival decided to hold their own Miss Canada contest. In February 1923, nine young women representing the cities of Winnipeg, Quebec, Regina, Halifax, Sherbrooke, Edmonton, Ste. Anne de Bellevue, Montreal, and Saint John, competed for the title of Miss Canada.

The organizers were intent on judging the women on appearance, personality, deportment, and athleticism. In one day, five judges at the Montreal Athletic Association judged the contestants as they appeared under a spotlight in the Venetian Gardens, watched them dance at the grand ball at the Windsor Hotel, and watched the contestants “fancy skate.”⁵⁰ On February 10, 1923, nineteen-year-old Winifred Blair, a stenographer from Saint John, New Brunswick, became Miss Canada (see fig. 3.1).



Fig. 3.1 Miss Canada (right) and Miss Moncton in Saint John, NB. (“Miss Canada Honored,” *The Maple Leaf*, 2 no. 1 (March 1923))

When Blair returned to Saint John as Miss Canada she received a warm welcome. The Women’s Canadian Club of Saint John had a luncheon in her honour and presented her with a gold bracelet and a lifetime membership. Blair was not only celebrated for her athletic ability, but also her intelligence and moral character. One judge praised her knowledge of Canadian history.⁵¹ Her pastor, Rev. Neil MacLaughlin, paid tribute to her during a Sunday sermon and praised her “modest and faultless demeanor.” Further, MacLaughlin expressed desire that the pageant become “a permanent thing. As the queen selected from year to year moves from province to province attending and patronizing social functions, the various parts of our country will be drawn together in a

⁵⁰ Goss, “The Fairest Girl,” 29-30.

⁵¹ “Miss Canada Honored,” 48.

friendlier spirit...”⁵² In representing the country at public events, Miss Canada and her successors would symbolically knit the nation together.

Despite the well publicized success of beauty contests in the United States, the winter carnival organizers in Montreal wanted to separate their contest from those others that had fallen into controversy. Almost immediately, the Miss America pageant faced opposition from religious and women’s groups.⁵³ Focusing on the athletic capacities of the contestants, organizers of the Miss Canada pageant hoped to make their contest more than a simple personality or beauty contest. George Driscoll, manager of Trans-Canada Theatres Ltd. and a judge for the competition, stated that the pageant was neither a beauty contest nor an athletic contest. However, he did not define exactly what type of contest it was and simply stated that Miss Saint John represented “ideal Canadian beauty.” Of Miss Saint John’s win, however, Driscoll commented primarily on Blair’s athleticism maintaining that “She is wonderfully athletic, vivacious, modest, and a real outdoor girl...” As well, Blair’s athletic abilities were singled out in photographs. Miss Canada was almost always pictured in her skates. According to historian David Goss, this emphasis on athletics symbolizes the break between the Victorian conception of women as frail and delicate, and the modern ideal of women as healthy and vigorous. Certainly, in other pageants contestants were promoted for their athleticism, but contestants were only judged on their physical attractiveness.⁵⁴

⁵² “Miss Canada Honored,” 48.

⁵³ On the controversy over the Miss America pageant in the 1920s see Deford, *There She Is*, 129-30; Watson and Martin, “The Miss America Pageant,” 107-8; Hamlin, “Bathing Suits and Backlash,” 27-51; Riverol, *Live From Atlantic City*, 23-4; Banner, *American Beauty*, 265-70; and Latham, *Posing a Threat*, chapter 3.

⁵⁴ Goss, “The Fairest Girl,” 29. In particular this occurred in newspaper reports of the 1927 Miss Victoria competition. For example see the *Victoria Times*, April 23, 1927, 12 and April 30, 1927, 9.

Like beauty pageants, the acceptance of women's involvement in sports depended upon a number of factors. These included the type of sport, the level of competition, and the amount of physical exertion required to participate. The promotion of sport among women (and men) was a reaction to concern over the other temptations in popular culture and a way to support healthy lifestyles. Social reformers suggested that supervised, organized sports would solve the problem of too much idle time and too many easily accessible but questionable amusements. However, concerns remained over the impact of physical activity on women's bodies, especially during puberty and menstruation.⁵⁵ Carefully controlled involvement in sport was encouraged as a way to keep young people out of trouble. Yet, for young women there remained the risk that their physical health would be compromised by too much exertion and competition would imperil their femininity. Competition by way of physical activity had been used since the late nineteenth century as a way of building masculinity in the wake of the softening features of modernity. Although by the 1920s it had shifted away from its association with moral integrity, competitive athletics became key features in measuring physical achievement and manliness.⁵⁶ Concerns that sporting would cause women to lose their femininity or become 'mannish' were tempered, in part, because of the new feminine style that was associated with women's physical activities.⁵⁷ While participation in sports by the 1920s was promoted as being good for both men and women, aggressive competition was still a masculine trait.

⁵⁵ Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 63-5; and Prentice *et al*, *Canadian Women*, 287-8 and 313-4.

⁵⁶ Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 117.

⁵⁷ Helen Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport and Sexuality* (Toronto: Women's Press, 1986), 67.

Organizers for the Miss Canada competition were wise to choose skating since it had been an acceptable form of physical activity for women since at least the nineteenth century as physicians included it as a sport suitable for girls.⁵⁸ Fancy skating meant that grace and aesthetics remained an important part of the athletic competition. Organizers also carefully tempered the athletic section with the beauty contest ensuring that neither became the focus. The ideal young woman was to be athletic but still meet the standards of feminine beauty and personal modesty. In this way Driscoll's description of Blair cited earlier is particularly telling. She was attractive enough to win the contest yet still "wonderfully athletic, vivacious, *modest*." Skating as a winter sport also fit in nicely with the Northern image of Canada.

Miss Canada was meant to be the embodiment of traditional feminine and Canadian values. In this way, organizers sought to define and reaffirm an ideal form of Canadian womanhood. Indeed, Blair was described as "an ideal wholesome type of Canadian womanhood" and the "ideal Canadian beauty."⁵⁹ Evidently her combination of traditional beauty (not skinny like the flapper, "not too stout"), her modesty, and her deportment made her the perfect choice.⁶⁰ The distinction of being 'ideal' made Blair into a role model for young women and others searching to find a more traditional role model for young women to emulate. Driscoll took this idea even further and suggested that the type of beauty and womanhood embodied by Miss Canada should be taken as an example for other countries, whose beauty contests favoured flapper types. He noted, "The same qualities should be looked for from the ideal American or British girl. I was struck by the complete absence of 'flapperism' in Miss Blair. She is certainly no flapper, but a

⁵⁸ Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies*, 62, 64.

⁵⁹ "Miss Canada Honored," 47-8.

⁶⁰ "Miss Canada Honored," 48.

nineteen year old young woman who would make a favourable impression in any society and would hold her own in fashionable circles while quite as easily she would make friends among the masses.”⁶¹ Blair was cast as the universal ideal for womanhood and one that would appeal to a broad range of people. Despite her differences from the iconic image of the flapper, proponents of Blair suggested that she would be popular.

Evidently organizers achieved success in having Blair transformed into and recognized as a national figure. Blair was the first woman to be allowed in the coalmines as a guest and was invited onto the floor of the New Brunswick Parliament. A reporter noted that her appearance in the House of Commons marked “the first distinctive recognition by any legislature of Canadian womanhood.” The report is curious since it neglects the fact that women had demanded and achieved recognition as voters, which was a legal recognition of Canadian women and that Agnes Macphail, Canada’s first woman Member of Parliament, was elected on December 6, 1921.⁶² In praising Miss Canada and her appearance in Parliament, however, the *Globe*’s report made it clear what the preferred style of Canadian womanhood was passive, silent, and decorative. The type Miss Canada represented was a spectator and not a participant in the political system. She embodied Canadian ideals yet was not a part of the running of the country. Where Miss Canada was praised as an ideal of representation of womanhood, Macphail was attacked and denigrated for her “mannish” behaviour and her “plain” style of dress.⁶³

⁶¹ “Miss Canada Honored,” 48.

⁶² Goss, “The Fairest Girl,” 31. On Macphail’s life and political career see Margaret Steward and Doris French, *Ask No Quarter: A Biography of Agnes Macphail* (Toronto: Longmans, Green, 1959); Doris Pennington, *Agnes Macphail: Reformer: Canada’s First Female MP* (Toronto: Simon and Pierre, 1989); and Terry Crowley, *Agnes Macphail and the Politics of Equality* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1990). On masculinity in the coal mines see Steven Penfold, “‘Have You No Manhood in You?’ Gender and Class in the Cape Breton Coal Towns, 1920-1926,” *Acadiensis* 23, no. 2 (Spring 1994): 21-44. Crowley, *Agnes Macphail and the Politics of Equality*, chapter 3.

⁶³ Crowley, *Agnes Macphail and the Politics of Equality*, 57-60; and Pennington, *Agnes Macphail*, 41-43.

For beauty contest organizers, there was far more support of winners and contests themselves when the embodied ideal reflected more traditional roles and, as the *Globe's* reporting indicates, Macphail was exceptional as opposed to typical. Blair was the symbolic promise of a more traditional life and a possible indication of the potential and acceptable modernization of the traditional type of womanhood.

As other comments made clear, Miss Canada's existence had a dual purpose – to represent the nation and to stand as a role model for Canadian women. Intimately related, Miss Canada stood as a protected reflection of political power, as an ornament of the country, and an embodiment of traditional ideals. Despite breaking the gender barrier in coalmines, Blair did this as a representative spectator and not as a worker, and this distinction was significant. She posed no threat to male workers and her intrusion into their workplace, like places of political power, was temporary.

Blair's symbolic qualities as Miss Canada earned her a special accolade by George R. Ewing who added another verse to 'O Canada' in order to honour her. It went

Miss Canada, our Queen, whose gentle sway
Holds all in love and loyalty today –
Ideal type of womanhood,
Stout-hearted, winsome, true,
Upholder of what's fair and good,
Canadian through and through.
Miss Canada, Miss Canada,
Whose wide Dominion spread from sea to sea,
We pledge to thee our love and fealty!⁶⁴

The additional verse of 'O Canada' would not be sung to other winners for Blair was the only Miss Canada to be crowned at the Montreal Winter Carnival. By the end of her reign, beauty contests had become too controversial for even those who wished to run one

⁶⁴ Quoted in "Miss Canada Honored," 47.

that ran counter to the distasteful aspects of swimming suits, moving pictures, and the lure of fame.

By 1923, a number of widely reported controversies had publicly marred the Miss America contest, and it and other pageants were receiving negative publicity from major American and Canadian newspapers. The *Globe* reported that the contests “place an undue emphasis upon mere physical attributes and, as conducted in the United States, involve wearing costumes and a display of person subversive to modesty.”⁶⁵ For those who wished to represent “ideal type of womanhood” in a more traditional sense, beauty contests had garnered a bad reputation. It would seem that the tide had turned against beauty contests in Canada. Despite the negative attention, beauty contests persisted throughout the decade, but many of the ones that did were much different from the contest Blair won. These other pageants deliberately sought to align themselves with modern commercial amusements and advertising. In doing so, they attracted modern looking contestants and at times chose modern winners as their ideal. Yet, given the context of controversy surrounding them, the pageants picked up on traditional symbols to mediate their appeal to modernity.

One of the most noticeable differences between the 1923 Miss Canada and the 1926 Miss Toronto contest was that contestants in the latter wore the new style of bathing suits to compete in (see fig. 3.2). Swimming attire had changed significantly in the preceding decades. As with other areas of fashion and dress, bathing suits were much more revealing than the bulky dress-like attire worn at the turn-of-the-century. New and tightly fitting swimsuits hugged the body and revealed shoulders, arms, the back, and portions of the chest. The suits were frequently worn with stockings that wearers rolled

⁶⁵ Quoted in Goss, “The Fairest Girl,” 31.

down to expose their knees and thighs. By the end of the 1920s, swimsuit attire had received much negative attention for the style and the behaviour that allegedly went with the revealing fashion. For instance, in 1928 the Canadian tabloid *Hush* reported, “certain of the smart set are getting too fresh in these days of excessive heat.” The report continued

Their recent swimming parties...have almost degenerated into orgies. Many of the guests drove up in motor-cars, wearing bathing dresses of the slightest description. Some of them never troubled to go into the water at all, but drank champagne and skylarked round the bath. We wonder what would be said if ordinary people behaved like this around the pool at Sunnyside.⁶⁶

The concerns expressed in *Hush*'s report on the wearing of skimpy bathing attire without swimming and the spaces of heterosociability were exactly the type of issue that caused a public outcry against the Miss Toronto beauty contest held at Sunnyside in 1926, which was won by Jean Ford Tolmie.



Fig. 3.2 Miss Toronto, 1926, Jean Ford Tolmie is second from the left. (City of Toronto Archives/1028J)

One significant factor in defining the modern beauty contest was the fact that women competed in bathing suits as opposed to dresses or with their skills. Unlike the Miss Canada competition held in Montreal, contestants did not compete using their

⁶⁶ “Bathing de Luxe,” *Hush*, August 16, 1928, 5. In general, *Hush* had a penchant towards sensational reporting and framing cultural conflicts as class conflicts. On early Canadian tabloids see Susan E. Houston, “‘A little steam, a little sizzle and a little sleaze’: English-Language Tabloids in the Interwar Period,” *Papers of the Bibliographic Society of Canada* 40, no. 1 (Spring 2002): 37-59.

sporting skills, but competed through performance of their bodies. This performance was based on parading along the beach in their bathing suits. The one-piece swimsuit was a key difference between modern beauty contests of the 1920s and their earlier counterparts. The new and more revealing bathing costumes were so central to the modern pageants that they were often referred to as bathing beauty contests. More often than not, the pictures of contestants were taken in their bathing attire. If they competed in anything else – formal dress, for example - bathing suits were the choice outfit for photographers and publishers of the pictures.⁶⁷

Shortened skirts and armless tops of the new dress paled in comparison to the new style of swimsuits that seemed to dominate the public beaches. When American swim champion, and future film star, Annette Kellerman appeared on a Boston beach in 1908 wearing a revealing one piece bathing suit, she was arrested for indecent exposure and started a trend.⁶⁸ By the 1920s this was the type of bathing suit that contestants competed in. The decorative element was important and swimwear manufacturers produced suits that were attractive outside of the pool and not merely functional.

Like other fashion trends of the 1920s the new style of swimwear was popular and contentious. Part of the popularity of the new suits stemmed from the fact that they

⁶⁷ Most of the beauty contestants in Canada appeared in their bathing suits for press releases. Further, newspapers covered beauty contests from across North America, but most frequently the coverage consisted of reprinting the picture of the winner in her swimsuit with a small caption explaining which contest she had won. See for example *The Hamilton Spectator*, May 23, 1927, 16, August, 23, 1927, 8, August 26, 1927, 19, August, 29, 1927, 8, September 10, 1927, 23.

⁶⁸ Kathleen Morgan Drowne and Patrick Huber *The 1920s* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004), 103 and Latham, *Posing a Threat*, 69-70. Part of the concern over the Kellerman suit by the 1920s was related to Kellerman's status as a vaudeville and film star and the content of some of her movies. In 1917, for example, in the very successful *Neptune's Daughter*, Kellerman appeared to be skinny-dipping and appeared almost nude as a mermaid with only her hair as a cover. Most of Kellerman's films required her to appear in few clothes and revealing swim attire. Erdman argues "perhaps more than with any other single female performer, the imperatives of consumer capitalism and the fetishizing gaze of the heterosexual theatre patron found their surest inscription on the body of Annette Kellerman." On Kellerman's theatrical career see, Andrew L. Erdman, *Blue Vaudeville: Sex, Morals, and the Mass Marketing of Amusement, 1895-1915* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2004), 93-99.

allowed women to engage in swimming as an athletic endeavour. Yet, the utilitarian side of the new bathing suits could not completely overcome the shock people experienced when women wore them. Exposure on bathing beaches was a point of concern as people argued that women's beach styles bordered on the nude.⁶⁹ The concern was magnified over the fact that the new styles were paraded as a means to gain attention. As Angela J. Latham points out, donning a bathing suit for the purpose of public bathing was a performative event in that it was "an experience largely associated with looking at others and being looked at by them."⁷⁰ Even for legitimate competitors in sporting events there was concern over the impropriety of their outfits, but for beauty contestants there was an additional challenge.⁷¹ In part, the controversy stemmed from the fact that the women participated while wearing the bathing suit for a competition that had little or nothing to do with water or swimming. In the 1926 Sunnyside competition, the performative aspect took precedence since swimming skills were not part of the decision-making and women paraded in their suits and high heels.⁷² Although the contest took place at the bathing pavilion, potential candidates for Miss Toronto did not swim. One year after the Miss Toronto competition, the President of the C.N.E, J.J. Dixon responded to a complaint about women in bathing suits demonstrating how a certain brand of shower operated. As part of an exhibit for the shower, the women, dressed in "ordinary woollen bathing suits," would shower to show how the technology functioned. Dixon responded to the complaint and stated "I do not object to bathing costumes if they are going under the water. But I do not think it is a proper use of them to parade girls in beauty shows, clad in

⁶⁹ *The Globe*, September 22, 1927, 4 and *Toronto Daily Star*, September 13, 1927, 6.

⁷⁰ Latham, *Posing a Threat*, 65.

⁷¹ Lenskyj, *Out of Bounds*, 68.

⁷² Photograph of five finalists of the 1926 Sunnyside Miss Toronto contest. City of Toronto Archives (CTA), *Globe and Mail Photographic Files*, Fonds 1244, Item 1028J.

little or nothing, and merely showing their bodies.”⁷³ Drawing upon older traditions of choosing beach beauties, contests held at bathing beaches like the Miss America pageants from 1921 to 1927 and the Miss Toronto contest held at Sunnyside Amusement Park in 1926 attempted to naturalize the fact that women competed in bathing suits. There was an obvious association between patronizing a beach and wearing a swimsuit.⁷⁴ Yet, as Dixon’s comments reveal, the fact that swimming was never a part of the contests remained a problem.

Advertisements for swimwear that appeared in Canadian magazines in the 1920s were well aware that it could be both functional and visually appealing. In a 1927 advertisement for Aberley swimsuits, the copy suggested that when Canadian swimmers chose their company’s suits “they double the thrill of water sports.” The advertisement stated that not only were Aberley’s great to swim in since “an Aberley fits like your own skin,” but also that the suits had “smart, graceful styles with a dash and snap to their design.” The copy promised, “You’ll never know how well you’ll look in a swimming suit until you get into an Aberley.”⁷⁵ The company also included a photograph of Miss Toronto, 1926. The photograph’s caption identified Tolmie as “Miss Toronto” and boasted that she wore the “stylish Aberley” suit at the competition. In an advertisement for Monarch Bathing Suits, the caption stated, “Whether you choose a bathing suit for beach wear or for swimming – Monarch gives you the best choice.” The picture that accompanied the advertisement showed a young woman walking along a beach in a swimsuit with two men and one woman in the background watching her. Like the Aberley company, Monarch also made it clear that their suits were functional and

⁷³ *Toronto Daily Star*, September 10, 1927, 4.

⁷⁴ Kasson, *Amusing the Millions*, 43-44.

⁷⁵ *Maclean’s Magazine*, July 1, 1927, 77.

attractive. The Monarch company promised that their suit “enhances the charm of the figure, while real utility is retained for the swimmer.”⁷⁶ Advertisements for Eaton’s focused directly on marketing their product to beauty contestants. A “smart new” bathing suit from Eaton’s offered potential candidates “carefully designed simplicity and a perfection of form that would mould to the supple, graceful lines of your figure, leaving no superfluous folds.”⁷⁷ The functional aspect of swimwear was not as important as the aesthetic of the body it helped to shape.

The controversy over the 1926 contest did not occur because it was the first to introduce pageantry of this sort to the city. The Miss Toronto contest held at Sunnyside was one of many beauty pageants Torontonians experienced in the first half of the decade. The contests held in Toronto received mixed receptions by the public, but either negative or positive, contestants caught the public’s attention. Beginning in 1922, Miss Toronto, along with other women from Canadian cities, competed in the Miss America contest after local preliminary rounds.⁷⁸ That first year Miss Toronto made headlines in the *New York Times* for spurning a millionaire suitor to marry her mechanic boyfriend. The *Times* lauded her decision as proof that young women could compete and remain unaffected by the attention. The article stated,

Behind this [wedding] announcement is a story of a pretty girl who refused to let her head be turned by admiration and attention at Atlantic City. Her friends say her most persistent suitor was a young millionaire of ‘the States.’ She did not forget her Canadian sweetheart, however, nor did she wish to desert her Canadian home

⁷⁶ See for example the advertisement in *Saturday Night*, June 8, 1926, 3.

⁷⁷ See for example the advertisement in see *Manitoba Free Press*, April 19, 1927, 8.

⁷⁸ From 1922 until the pageant was discontinued in 1927 Canadian women were allowed to compete for the title of Miss America. After a brief hiatus, when the pageant returned in 1933 and then permanently in 1935 the rules were changed so that only women from the United States could vie for Miss America. See Watson and Martin, “The Miss America Pageant,” 107.

for New York or Hollywood, and today's simple wedding is the result.⁷⁹

That kind of positive publicity celebrated the fact that despite young women's entry into a commercial, public, and competitive sphere (as represented by the beauty contest), participants would return to their 'natural' roles as wives and mothers. Like the flapper, beauty contestants merely had a brief foray into the world of commercial amusements before settling into their expected role. For many contests, the fact that the winners could exist in the modern world without spurning their future traditional roles was important to emphasize.

In 1923, for example, at a different contest, a young woman from Toronto also made headlines in the *New York Times* and at home. In November, the famous film star Rudolph Valentino held his own beauty contest in Toronto as part of a North American tour sponsored by Mineralava beauty clay to find the "Most Beautiful Girl in America."⁸⁰ Canadian winner Miss Norma Niblock of Toronto won the contest in front of a sold-out crowd at Madison Square Garden in New York City.⁸¹ Although a *Times* editorial chastised participants saying that "no decent girl would exhibit herself this way," they happily reported that the winner did not use cosmetics. The editorial, entitled "This, Too, Was Once 'Un-American,'" suggested that "even for the old-fashioned person of mossy and archaic notions there is one source of satisfaction to be derived from this episode.

The winner of the first prize was a girl who confronted her judges with charms unassisted

⁷⁹ *New York Times*, October 15, 1922, 30.

⁸⁰ The quote is from an advertisement for the final round. See *New York Times*, November 28, 1928, 14. For an example of the advertisements that appeared in Toronto see *Globe*, April 16, 1923. On Valentino's participation see Irving Shulman, *Valentino*, (London: Leslie Frewin, 1967 and 1968), 223- 6 and 228-30; and Norman A. Mackenzie, *The Magic of Rudolph Valentino*, (London: The Research Publishing Co., 1974), chapter 6.

⁸¹ Joseph M. Mauro, *Thunder Bay: A History* (Thunder Bay: Lehto Printers Ltd., 1981), 299. Niblock's parents were once residents of Port Arthur.

by any touch of paint or powder!”⁸² Only one month after Valentino’s contest held in Toronto, hundreds of women competed for prizes but no title at Massey Hall.⁸³ Neither competition caused a major outcry in Toronto. Significantly, neither Valentino’s competition nor the one at Massey Hall involved swimsuits.⁸⁴ The mixed results in terms of popular reception would be much more apparent by 1926. The shifting context of North American pageants and changes in the type of contest that used modern symbols made the Miss Toronto contest of 1926 strikingly different from both others held in the city and the Miss Canada competition held at the Montreal Winter Carnival.

Like the Miss America contest, Miss Toronto 1926 was held at an amusement resort. More than a backdrop for the contest, the amusement park set the stage for the type of pageant the organizers could produce. Imbued with its own cultural norms and practices of viewing, the contest was fitted into Sunnyside’s own cultural and visual landscape. Sunnyside was completed in 1919, after having its construction delayed by the First World War, and officially opened on June 28, 1922.⁸⁵ Located on the waterfront, Sunnyside was an accessible place for visitors to enjoy Midway-like rides and games, dancing, swimming, and general leisure activities.⁸⁶ Sunnyside reflected the new culture of heterosociability in that it provided a space for men and women to enjoy activities together. In the early twentieth century, many of Toronto’s beaches were reserved for men and boys. By the 1920s, the beaches had become places both genders could enjoy. Bathing beaches in the 1920s were part of a wide range of commercial

⁸² *New York Times*, November 30, 1923, 14. See also the article entitled “Paintless Girl Wins,” *New York Times*, November 29, 1923, 30; “Toronto’s Beauty Best in America,” *Globe*, November 29, 1923, 1; and the column “A Bystander at the Office Window,” *Globe*, December 4, 1923, 4.

⁸³ *Toronto Star*, December 22, 1923, 17.

⁸⁴ CTA, Globe Picture Files, 1775, 1777, 1779, 1783, and 8495.

⁸⁵ Mike Filey, *I Remember Sunnyside: The Rise and Fall of a Magical Era* (Toronto: Brownstone Press, 1981), 96.

⁸⁶ Randall White, *Too Good To Be True: Toronto in the 1920s* (Toronto: Dundurn, 1993), 52.

amusements that many people thought led to the exploitation of unwitting young women or filled their heads with false hopes and sensual images. In particular, beaches were places that moral reformers identified as areas where young women, especially young working-class women, would engage in inappropriate behaviour. As part of a host of cheap amusements, the beach park was an area saturated with the possibilities of sexual encounters. Moral reformers and concerned citizens expressed apprehension that these places threw young women and men together, inflamed passions, and might lead to prostitution.⁸⁷ Certainly, the beach was a space where young men and women could meet and court. Sam Sniderman recalled that Sunnyside “was the focal point, from April to September, for our courting and social activities...As we waited in line with sweaty dimes clutched in our hands for admittance to the always crowded tank area, we welcomed the chance to parade like peacocks our suntanned muscles.”⁸⁸ As Sniderman’s recollection makes clear, courtship had changed by the 1920s. It had moved from under the watchful eyes of family to a system of dating that occurred in public at arm’s length from home and family. This shift in courtship practices has been linked to the development of youth culture, new public amusement opportunities, and the invention of the automobile.⁸⁹

To complicate matters further, Sunnyside’s Midway style attractions also marked the space as one of potential transgression. Midways were identified with some of the most vulgar human displays. Performances that ranged from girl shows (early versions of the striptease) to diving beauties (women performing dives in bathing suits) exposed

⁸⁷ Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem*, 120-4.

⁸⁸ Quoted in Filey, *I Remember Sunnyside*, 80.

⁸⁹ On courtship see, Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*; Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, chapter 3; and Beth L. Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America*, (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988), 10-11.

the female body in a way that continued to run counter to accepted norms of decency. Sunnyside was a place for pleasure seekers and unlike the C.N.E., which considered its primary purpose as education, the amusement park had no such cover. As such, it was placed alongside other questionable amusements like dance halls and movies. The management's decision to run a beauty contest as a publicity stunt at a beach alongside a Midway tested the boundaries of acceptability. Although the contest was extremely successful in attracting contestants, it also gained the attention of people and groups who found it to be thoroughly modern and absolutely offensive.

By the mid 1920s operators of Sunnyside were looking for a means to attract more tourists to the facility. The Attractions Manager, having visited Atlantic City and being familiar with the Miss America pageant, suggested a Miss Toronto pageant to be held at the bathing pavilion. Although there was some opposition to the idea, in early 1926 Toronto newspapers began to carry advertisements to recruit contestants.⁹⁰ From this perspective, the Miss Toronto contest held at Sunnyside was little more than a promotional event. Officials at Sunnyside explicitly drew upon the success of the Miss America pageant in order to attract more people to the park. Organizers understood how powerful the female body was in attracting people's attention and decided to capitalize on it. Organizers advertised that the Miss Toronto contest was "authorized by the Atlantic City Pageant Committee" and that the winner of the Miss Toronto pageant would get to compete at the Miss America pageant. The advertisement lured that "Fay Lanphier, 'Miss Los Angeles,' made \$50,000 as the result of being chosen by her city."⁹¹ Associating the Miss Toronto contest with the Miss America pageant served to add a gloss of importance

⁹⁰ Filey, *I Remember Sunnyside*, 96.

⁹¹ *Globe*, July 31, 1926, 2. This statement obscured the fact that Lanphier's success came not from being Miss Los Angeles but from being Miss America.

to the inaugural event and meant that the winner would have the chance to compete in a larger pageant.

The American contest, however, had come under scrutiny and had garnered much negative publicity. An editorial in *The Catholic Register* highlighted the downside to promoting Miss Toronto as part of the Miss America family.

The annual parade of female flesh, the annual blot on American civilization, the annual insult to woman's honour and dignity, the annual exploitation of woman's undraped charms before the gaze of salacious vulgarities gathered from the clubs and dens of the continent, has been proclaimed as about to take place. Our Toronto papers carry advertisements announcing this outrage to American womanhood and asking for girls to present themselves for the dishonor of being 'Miss Toronto' at the Atlantic City's carnival of shamelessness.⁹²

In addition to other outspoken critics, the Young Women's Christian Association (Y.W.C.A.) warned that beauty contests fundamentally changed contestants. They argued that "competent observers" noticed that "the outlook in life of the girls who participated was completely changed. Before the competition they were splendid examples of innocence and pure womanhood. Afterwards their heads were filled with vicious ideas."⁹³ This type of belief explains why Miss Toronto, 1922 spurning a millionaire American suitor gained the attention of the press. The tie between Miss America and Miss Toronto meant that the city's pageant was also associated with the less desirable aspects of the Atlantic City competition.

Part of the problem was that Sunnyside used a beauty contest in order to increase revenues and this fact caused opponents to complain that the amusement park was exploiting women for financial gain. The *Catholic Register* stated that the young women

⁹² *The Catholic Register*, August 5, 1926, 4.

⁹³ Quoted in *Atlantic City: 125 Years of Ocean Madness*, Produced and compiled by Vicki Gold Levi, Text by Lee Eisenberg, (New York: Clarkson N. Potter, Inc. Publishers, 1979), 163.

were subjecting themselves to be “scrutinized and examined, pawed and handled, measured and weighed” just so that they could claim the “dishonour” of being Miss Toronto and then paraded before “the vulgar and impure.”⁹⁴ Like the moving pictures, beauty contests promised false fortunes to women who were willing to unnecessarily expose themselves. The youth culture that the contestants were part of seemed to show an increased comfort with sexuality, commercialism, and adventure. In her history of adolescence in Canada, Comacchio argues that youth culture – a culture that increasingly defined mass culture – worried critics who felt that “young Canadians were being sucked into the intensely materialistic, commercialized, immoral/amoral vortex of modernity. The youthful ‘thirst for pleasure and luxury and money’ was undermining ‘the qualities of mind and character that must form the foundation for a race.’”⁹⁵ Beauty contests were simply part of this new youth-defined mass culture, but they were a more public expression of it. The young women who participated in front of an audience and sought to attract attention to themselves, through the display of their bodies, also attracted attention to the problems of the “vortex of modernity.”

Amidst the warnings of insult, exploitation, and dishonour, the pageant attracted competitors who met the minimum qualifications for entering the contest. During the week of August 9, 1926, Sunnyside held its first Miss Toronto pageant with over four hundred contestants.⁹⁶ The explicit rules were that interested contestants had to be female, between the ages of 16 and 25, single, and a “bona fide resident” of Toronto as of

⁹⁴ *The Catholic Register*, August 5, 1926, 4. The concern over judges touching and measuring the contestants stems from the Miss America pageant where in different years judges measured the contestants. See Wolfe, “Beauty As Vocation,” 85-6 and Norman Rockwell, *My Adventures as an Illustrator* (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc, 1960), 204. Rockwell was a judge for the Miss America pageant in the 1920s. In his memoirs he recalls that “The judge who thought it up had a wonderful time measuring all the girls – bust, waist, hips, etc.”

⁹⁵ Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 167.

⁹⁶ File, *I Remember Sunnyside*, 96.

December 31, 1925.⁹⁷ The fact that contestants had to be single meant that there was a check on culturally sanctioned sexual activity and a protection against direct attacks that contestants were being lured away from their ‘proper’ roles as wives and mothers. Being young was vital to being beautiful and the Miss Toronto contest, like others, emphasized this point. Beauty culture in the 1920s emphasized remaining young as a solution to everything from being unable to attract a boyfriend to being passed over for a promotion at work and told women to hold on to their youthful beauty at any cost.⁹⁸ Ignoring the inevitable process of aging and the stresses of work, childbearing, childrearing, and illness, beauty contests worked to set the standard of beauty firmly in the realm of youth and neglected the realities of women’s lives.⁹⁹ In turn, advertisers used beauty contests to warn readers that the judging of female beauty was not an irregular occurrence that happened only at formal competitions. Women, as advertisers reminded their readers, were judged as if they were in a beauty contest everyday.¹⁰⁰

After at least two rounds of eliminations, Tolmie won the title of Miss Toronto. In the few weeks before the Miss America pageant, Tolmie made public appearances at Sunnyside modelling her new wardrobe for the Miss America contest. After meeting with Miss Niagara Peach, Tolmie went to the Miss America pageant and won “the cup for beauty of face and grace of carriage.”¹⁰¹ Tolmie’s public appearances continued after her return from Atlantic City. She appeared in public modelling clothes and opening recreation clubs, in moving picture theatres, and in advertisements and articles in Toronto

⁹⁷ *Globe*, July 31, 1926, 2.

⁹⁸ Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream*; Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, Banner, *American Beauty*,

⁹⁹ Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, 85-6; and Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 184-5.

¹⁰⁰ Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled*, 86.

¹⁰¹ *Globe*, August 19, 1926, 2; *Globe*, August 27, 1926, 10; *Globe*, September 2, 1926, 13; and *Toronto Daily Star* September 19, 1927, 22.

newspapers and other Canadian publications such as the *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada*.¹⁰² Miss Toronto's picture in the *Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* was part of an advertisement for the opening of a new recreation club in Runnymede. Tolmie was photographed learning how to play billiards from a man, while men, women, and young boys watched. This type of activity made the concern over what happened to beauty contest winners all the more disconcerting. Playing billiards was so distressing as a seductive pastime for youth that in 1927 Ontario legally banned persons under the age of 18 from entering billiard halls.¹⁰³ In the fall of 1926, Tolmie left Toronto to tour with Captain Plunkett's 1926 Revue. On September 18, 1927 Tolmie married H. Leslie Appleby, the business manager of the Revue in Fort William, Ontario.¹⁰⁴

Despite the fact that almost everything about the Miss Toronto contest in 1926 pointed towards an embrace of modernity with its direct links to popular commercial culture, when Tolmie was chosen as Miss Toronto, surprisingly, the judges picked a winner who did not embody the image of a flapper. She had dark, long hair, wore stockings that covered her entire legs, and was dressed all in white. She was chosen over the other finalists who looked much more like flappers with bobbed hair and rolled stockings. Of the final five women in the running for Miss Toronto, only one had her stockings rolled down to expose her knees and one other had bobbed hair. Photographic evidence reveals that bobbed hair was very popular as were abbreviated stockings among

¹⁰² See for example, *Globe*, August 16, 1926, 10, August 27, 1926, 10, September 17, 1926, 3, September 28, 1926, 2, October 8, 1926, 2, *The Journal of the Royal Architectural Institute of Canada* 4, no. 1 (January 1927), xxviii, and *Maclean's Magazine*, July 1, 1927, 77. The runner up in the contest, Florence Garbe, also made public appearances as the "understudy to 'Miss Toronto'." See *Globe*, September 6, 1926, 16.

¹⁰³ Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 167.

¹⁰⁴ *Toronto Daily Star*, September 19, 1927, 22 and September 20, 1927, 3.

contestants who did not make it to the final selection.¹⁰⁵ Clearly despite the prevalence of the ‘flapper look’ judges preferred a winner who had a more traditional look. Since American judges seemed to favour the look of traditional beauty, and because Tolmie would go on to compete for the title of Miss America, this was significant. Kimberly Hamlin argues that Miss Americas in the 1920s were selected because they did not have the look of flaming youth and represented a more conservative femininity.¹⁰⁶ A more traditional look was defined as long hair and less bodily exposure. Even the Miss America pageant was not entirely modern and experienced the same sort of negotiation between modernity and tradition as the Canadian contests did. However, there was an inherent contradiction in using modern beauty pageants to promote a more traditional style of womanhood when women had to compete in bathing suits. It did not go unnoticed.

Overall, opponents saw the pageant as the pinnacle of a popular culture that seemed to be increasingly sacrificing womanhood for material gain and for the pleasure of the public gaze. By early 1927 a number of groups in Toronto had protested the contest. The Woman’s National Council of Toronto, the Council for Social Service of the Church of England of the Diocese of Toronto, and the Toronto Social Hygiene Council all passed resolutions denouncing the pageant. Agnes Smythe, President of the Woman’s National Council of Toronto, went so far as to seek out legal council from the Attorney General of Ontario. On February 26, 1927 Smythe sent a letter to the Attorney

¹⁰⁵ CTA, Globe Picture Files, Sunnyside Beauty Contest, 1926, files 8496-8 and 8501-8503. Some of the pictures are reprinted as a four-page centrefold in Filey, *I Remember Sunnyside*.

¹⁰⁶ Watson and Martin, “Introduction,” *There She Is, Miss America*, 2-4; Henry Pang, “Miss America: An American Ideal, 1921-1969,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 2, no. 4 (1969): 687-696.

General requesting advice on whether beauty contests could be legally banned. In her letter Smythe stated that

A great deal of discussion is going on among the women regarding Beauty Contests. The consensus of opinion seems to be entirely against these contests. I have been asked to write you regarding this matter and to find out if anything can be done to ban these from Ontario?...The women, I feel sure, are anxious to attack this problem in the proper way and will be glad of your advice.¹⁰⁷

In response Smythe received a letter that drew attention to the fact that a law banning contests would mean that participants might be charged and prosecuted. The letter stated that the remedy might “bring out greater evil than the Act might be designed to prevent.” Indeed, as women’s historians have demonstrated, court appearances for women in the 1920s could have negative consequences for the women ranging from public scrutiny to incarceration.¹⁰⁸ The Attorney General encouraged Smythe to take other routes to end beauty contests. He wrote, “I think on consideration you will appreciate that in so far as beauty shows are objectionable from a Social or individual standpoint, they can be prevented more effectively by that social pressure which women when they are in earnest, know so well how to exercise.”¹⁰⁹ The combined social pressure and widespread negative publicity that other pageants received in the Canadian press were successful in halting future Miss Toronto contests held at Sunnyside. On March 9, 1927, the *Toronto Daily Star* announced that Sunnyside was “making no plans for beauty contests.”¹¹⁰

While beauty pageants represented a link with the traditional view of women’s ornamental role in that they were judged entirely on appearance, beauty contests exploited people’s desire to see women’s bodies. This was their most troubling

¹⁰⁷ AO, Attorney General Files, RG 4-32 File 538 [1927].

¹⁰⁸ See Dubinsky, *Improper Advances*, 3, 163; and Prentice *et al*, *Canadian Women*, 160-2,

¹⁰⁹ Letter dated March 9, 1927, AO, Attorney General Files, RG 4-32 File 538 [1927].

¹¹⁰ *Toronto Daily Star*, March 9, 1927, 1.

characteristic. Women from local communities, the future wives and mothers of the next generation, performed publicly for judges in questionable attire for material gain. It was the ultimate fear that consumerism and consumer fantasy would distract respectable young women away from their proper roles and to the false and debauched world of professional entertainment.¹¹¹ In addition, the revelation of women's bodies in public could cause other problems since both men and women in the audience could garner pleasure from watching the display.

Beauty contest winners and competitors were held up as examples of physical perfection and became (sometimes controversial) role models for Canadian women. Beauty contests of all kinds focused on the outside physical appearance of women rather than their spiritual development or character (although these played a role in the public's acceptance of pageants).¹¹² Organizers drew upon established cultural practices of looking to attempt to gain a female audience and to project standards of beauty and sometimes behaviour. Beauty contests' strong associations with advertising, film, and other venues of visual culture meant that the practices of looking and cultural norms of attractiveness were interwoven into the competitions. Like women's magazines and film, for example, beauty contests encouraged women to study and emulate other women's bodies (or images of them) in order to fit dominant modes of dress and physicality or to emulate a specific 'look'. Photographs of winners were widely published in local papers and even beauty contestants from the United States and Europe had their pictures published in Canadian newspapers as well. Advertisements included pictures of beauty

¹¹¹ On the debauched American world of entertainment see Ann Douglas, *Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 1995).

¹¹² Joan Jacob Brumberg, *The Body Project: An Intimate History of American Girls* (New York: Random House, 1997), see inset photograph 32.

contest winners and film stars and provided hints at how women could copy the look. One advertisement for Maybelline mascara informed readers that film star “Irene Rich uses Maybelline” and promised that with the product “eyes will become expressive deep shadowy pools of enchanting loveliness.”¹¹³ Further, advertising copy persuaded women to become surveyors of their bodies and other women’s bodies. Boncilla Beautifier promised that for women who used the creams and powders “the most critical eye can find no flaw.”¹¹⁴ Another advertisement depicted a woman adjusting her hat and another woman looking horrified at her hands. The copy stated in bold and large print: “every day people judge you by your nails.” As with the Boncilla Beautifier advertisement, this one for Cutex nail products promised women that with the regular use of their product their bodies would stand up to “the most critical eye.”¹¹⁵ In encouraging women to look critically at themselves and others, they demanded a type of surveillance that meant the newspaper, the street, the home, and places of amusement all became ground for study. Beauty contests were another means to display the modern body projects required of women to meet new standards of beauty and project an appropriate visual image of beauty.¹¹⁶

Despite recent public and social gains, women who deliberately courted the gaze were still viewed as potential threats to themselves or others. New styles of dress were seen as having the potential to make a woman “seductive” and appearing “to exploit her charms and more and more to reveal her primitive nudity to masculine gaze.” This war on immodesty was part of a “denunciation” of beauty contests. The fact that large

¹¹³ *Saturday Night*, May 7, 1927, 32.

¹¹⁴ *Saturday Night*, February 17, 1923, 29.

¹¹⁵ *Saturday Night*, March 27, 1920.

¹¹⁶ Brumberg, *The Body Project*, 101.

numbers of women paraded in revealing bathing costumes, deliberately courted the view of the public and the male judges, competed for the promised prizes of cash, movie contracts, or cars, exposed the more nefarious side of popular culture and might suggest prostitution.¹¹⁷ In the post World War One struggle to prevent venereal disease among the Canadian population, prostitution and sexual activity increasingly weighed on the public conscience. Young men were encouraged to control sexual impulses and young women were warned not to attract sexual attention through action or dress. In the pamphlets produced by the Canadian National Council for Combating Venereal Disease, for example, young women were warned that they needed to maintain self-control “in order to avoid arousing the sexual desire of men by words or acts or suggestive clothing.”¹¹⁸ Contests like the Miss Toronto pageant in 1926 that included contestants in bathing suits, rolled stockings and high heels – all of the new fashions that were public visual clues of immodesty – contradicted such messages of conservative dress and behaviour. Like advertising and film, pageants placed emphasis on the ultimate power of women’s visual image.¹¹⁹ Beauty contests existed in a cultural realm that required visual readings of bodies and they were ultimately premised on publicity and attracting audiences. Organizers frequently exploited this primacy of the visual in maintaining contact with newspapers, which published pictures of contestants in bathing suits as part of advertisements or features that were intended to bring patrons to the event. In this sense, the image of beauty contests went much farther than the beaches, theatres, and other places of competition. The image was pervasive. Contests were an additional sign

¹¹⁷ At many events the prizes were promised but not delivered. See Goss, “The Fairest Girl,” 32.

¹¹⁸ Suzann Buckley and Janice Dickin McGinnis, “Venereal Disease and Public Health Reform in Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 63, no. 3 (1982): 348.

¹¹⁹ Brumberg, *The Body Project*, 101.

of the worrisome disconnection between youth, their families, and communities, and the simultaneous the lure of popular culture and new entertainment opportunities. For groups, like the Canadian National Council for Combating Venereal Disease, these issues of public appearance had the potential for serious, negative and far-reaching consequences.

MODERNITY, SEXUALITY, AND BEAUTY CONTESTS

The Miss Canada and the Miss Toronto pageants reveal specific ideas about modernity and sexuality. Beauty contests had a difficult time treading the boundaries between the popular culture of flaming youth and the demands of the dominant class's notion of respectability. This was especially true in light of the ongoing generational tensions that coalesced around concerns over youth, leisure, and the future of Canada.¹²⁰ Early beauty pageants revelled in using *an image of female sexuality* for their success. Feminist theorist Teresa de Lauretis describes the pervasive cultural role of woman as image, as “spectacle, object to be looked at, vision of beauty – and the concurrent representation of the female body as the *locus* of sexuality, site of visual pleasure, or lure of the gaze...”¹²¹ It mattered how contestants looked – whether it was their bodies in bathing suits, how they carried themselves (deportment) or how they performed dancing or figure skating. Contests played up the spectacle of women and objectified them as a source of visual pleasure, but tempered this with traditional elements of beauty in order to escape the overtly modern ‘jazz baby’ image. The contests hinted at suggestiveness but combined it with the trappings of tradition in order to try to make them publicly acceptable. Most contests picked winners who had shunned the flapper’s trendy bob and

¹²⁰ Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 12.

¹²¹ Teresa de Lauretis, *Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1984.

the publicity stressed contestants' wholesomeness. For example, the rules of the Miss Victoria contest held in 1927 stated, "The contestants must be of good character."¹²² In short, beauty pageants attempted to make a compromise between respectability and modern sexuality. It was a compromise, however, that seemed to be in continual flux as the image proved to be tricky to maintain in a static form once unleashed into the public realm. The tenuous balance between sexuality and respectability marked a negotiation that was prevalent across Canadian culture. With both types of beauty contests, however, we see how even the understanding of tradition in the 1920s has been changed by modernity. In the context of postwar society, too much had changed for tradition to be left unscathed and what was left was memory. Both contests required public display of women's bodies and opened them to judging – an idea that would have been disgraceful in the nineteenth century. This change adds credence to Joan Jacob Brumberg's conclusion that "modern femininity required some degree of exhibitionism or, at least, a willingness to display oneself as a decorative object." While beauty contestants had a much more "public [body] project" their experience was not entirely unusual as consumer society, projected most powerfully through film and advertising, made acceptable "public projects" for even "nice middle-class girls."¹²³ Despite the uproar over beauty contests that took place on beaches with contestants in swimsuits, contests attracted participants and audience members. This occurred in spite of social warnings about the potential danger to women.

¹²² The rules for Miss Victoria are reprinted in the *Victoria Times*, April 19, 1927, 7. For example, when Miss Canada, Madeleine Woodman, made an appearance at the luncheon of the Gyro Club at the Chamber of Commerce, the *Victoria Times* made a point of stating that her mother was with her. For other examples see *Toronto Star*, December 22, 1923, 17; *Victoria Times*, April 14, 1927, 8; *Victoria Times*, April 16, 1927; *Victoria Times*, April 22, 1927, 2; *Winnipeg Free Press*, April 16, 1927, 3; and *Vancouver Sun*, May 7, 1927, 1.

¹²³ Brumberg, *The Body Project*, 107.

As a society, Canadians were deeply invested in young women's bodies in the 1920s. As daughters of the nation, young women represented the future as citizens, mothers and moral guardians. State and medical intervention in addition to advice books and the input by various social and moral reform groups made it clear that these were important roles.¹²⁴ As such, concern over sexuality became important especially in the context of fears about venereal disease and eugenic concerns about the proclivity of the less 'desirable' to reproduce at greater rates than middle-class, White women.¹²⁵ The parading of sexuality that went along with some beauty contests drove home the fear that young women were being lured by the popular entertainment industries, especially the movies, into unwholesome and immoral lifestyles.

Since female sexuality was a popular trope used by advertisers to attract patrons, people were also concerned about the impact of viewing too much of the female body. Young women exposing themselves on the street could have a dangerous impact on viewers. Women in suggestive clothing, critics claimed, at best distracted men and boys and at worst tempted them "forcing too much of their physical form upon his gaze."¹²⁶ The ramifications went beyond the initial impact. These were not simply beauty contestants making an error in personal judgement and tempting men and boys, they were future mothers and as such a vital part of the fabric of the nation. Detractors warned that an experience in one of these contests could make young women sophisticated, sexualized or competitive.

¹²⁴ Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*. See also Valverde, *The Age of Light, Soap and Water*,

¹²⁵ Valverde, "'When the Mother of the Race Is Free,'" McLaren on eugenics in Canada, McLaren and McLaren, *The Bedroom and the State*, Jay Cassell, *The Secret Plague*; and Suzann Buckley and Janice Dickin McGinnis, "Venereal Disease and Public Health Reform in Canada," *Canadian Historical Review*, 63, no. 3 (1982):

¹²⁶ *Catholic Register*, May 23, 1929: 4.

Beauty contestants quickly became popular personalities in the communities they represented and beyond. Newspapers reported that thousands of people showed up for public appearances by beauty contestants, even when they appeared in the middle of the night.¹²⁷ Edith Grant, Miss Regina 1927, recalls that when she departed from Regina on the Miss Canada Special on May 4, 1927 over two thousand people came to see her off. According to Grant, the popularity of the contest in Regina was matched in other cities. She stated, “and every city was the same. There was just a mob to meet us and they had to fight to get us you know through the crowd, you know, to the hotel.” Even at one-thirty in the morning, over one thousand citizens of Moose Jaw showed up to see the Miss Canada contestants.¹²⁸ The concern was that women who got used to this type of public attention and adulation would go to further and further lengths to attract it. “One of the greatest nuisances in a community,” the *Catholic Register* noted “is childless women of leisure who have an itching for publicity. They are always starting something either for the purpose of intruding themselves into the limelight or merely perhaps of palliating dullness and giving time a shove.”¹²⁹

CONCLUSION

By the end of the 1920s, beauty contests were trendy and contentious. The hybrid image of the beauty contestant, who was associated with other hybrid-gendered identities of the New Woman and the flapper, was a contradictory, fragile, and controversial symbol deeply embedded in the cultural debates of the decade. The negotiation between

¹²⁷ *Victoria Times*, April 26, 1927, 9.

¹²⁸ Dance Collection Danse, (DCD) Karen Rennie’s interview with Gail Grant July 16, 1991. In the early 1930s, while dancing at Radio City Music Hall in New York City, Edith Grant had her name changed to Gail Grant by her fellow dancers who thought that Edith did not sound theatrical enough. Later when she married, she used the name Gail Grant Ryan, although Gail Grant remained her stage name. DCD, Karen Rennie’s interview with Gail Grant February 8, 1992 and Lawrence Adams’s interview with Nancy Caldwell August 16, 1989.

¹²⁹ *Catholic Register*, August 18, 1921, 4.

modernity and tradition that took place within the symbol and the ritualized selection of the embodied image corresponded to the general attempts to come to terms with social and cultural changes particularly in terms of youth culture and changes to morality. Problems arose because of the wide differences in opinion as to what was the ideal and proper relationship between popular culture, womanhood, youth and the body. Yet, the very acceptance by contestants and audience members of all types of contestants reveals at least a tenuous embrace of modernity.

The spectacles of the modern beauty pageant both embraced and challenged accepted notions about vision and the body. From at least the nineteenth century, the revelation of the body in public was most frequently associated with social problems like uncontrolled sexuality, venereal disease or prostitution. Beauty contests attempted to negotiate a revelation that used sexuality away from these more dangerous aspects and also tap into ideas that women's bodies could represent communities or the nation.

Nonetheless, beauty contests, as they were run in the 1920s, ensured that women remained the bearers of symbolic meaning as opposed to the producers of it.¹³⁰ Whether they followed more traditional ideals or were firmly embedded in modern popular culture, the very nature of beauty contest participation meant that young women strived to meet cultural ideals as interpreted by a few judges. They worked in unconventional and conventional ways to promote particular understandings of what it meant to be young and female – and more importantly, what that was supposed to look like.

¹³⁰ Pierre Bourdieu, *Masculine Domination*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 29.

CHAPTER FOUR

'THE SEXHIBITION': SEXUALITY, SPACE, AND THE POLITICS OF LOOKING IN THE ART GALLERY AT THE 1927 CANADIAN NATIONAL EXHIBITION

The 1927 Canadian National Exhibition was part of the nation-wide celebrations of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. The Jubilee extravaganza was to continue throughout the duration of the Fair with the opening of the new eastern entrance of the grounds by the Prince of Wales, and a number of other celebratory events, including the “inspiring” Grand Spectacle “Canada” where 1500 actors depicted the country’s history.¹ After invitations to open the Fair were declined by the Prince of Wales and the Governor General, the executive of the C.N.E. secured Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King to officiate the opening ceremonies on Saturday August 27, 1927.² The day before the official opening, King toured the C.N.E. grounds and recorded the following observation in his diary:

I was immensely interested in the other buildings as well, went thro’ the Art Exhibit. While I liked some of the paintings I have a positive dislike for the work of the New School which is seeking to call itself ‘Canadian.’ Russell had a figure of a nude woman which may be good painting but seemed to me an immoral exhibit & not the kind of thing we should seek to accustom our people to, there was an even worse allegorical painting of two figures which I think should be burned instead of exhibited.³

The Prime Minister’s reaction to the nude paintings in the Art Gallery was a precursor to a much more public discussion about them. Despite careful planning by the C.N.E.’s officials and volunteers, other aspects of the Exhibition were overshadowed by the

¹ *Toronto Daily Star*, August 25, 1927, 5 and see, for example, the advertisement in *The Globe*, September 4, 1927, 2.

² Canadian National Exhibition Archives (CNEA), Minutes of the meeting of the Executive Committee August 2, 1927.

³ William Lyon Mackenzie King, *The Mackenzie King Diaries, 1893-1931*. Transcript (Toronto, 1973), 26 August 1927.

eruption of a controversy over the hanging of three nude paintings in the C.N.E.'s Fine Art Gallery. Indeed, the paintings - John Wentworth Russell's *A Modern Fantasy*, George C. Drinkwater's *Paolo and Francesca*, and Rosalie Emslie's *Comfort* - sparked a controversy that lasted from the opening day to weeks and months after the closing of the gates (see fig 4.1 and 4.2). These were not the only three nudes hanging on the walls of the Fine Art Gallery at the C.N.E. or in other galleries across the country, but they were the only ones that sparked a long and contentious debate that caused a public outcry, impressive newspaper coverage, and hundreds of letters to the editor. As Brian Foss has demonstrated in terms of Edwin Holgate's nudes, the presence of nudes in Canadian galleries increased during the 1920s, although "squeamishness" remained. However, as Foss points out, the reaction to the nudes, particularly Russell's, was "extreme."⁴

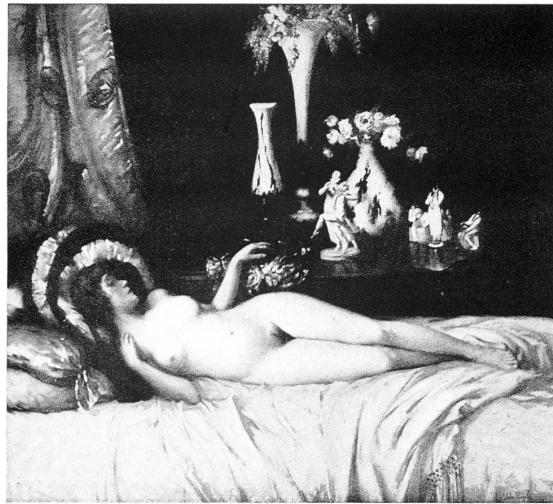


Fig. 4.1 John Wentworth Russell's *A Modern Fantasy*. Oil on canvas (Reproduced from the 1932 *Catalogue of the Exhibition of John Wentworth Russell at the Canadian National Exhibition*) Location of painting unknown

The three nudes provide the starting point for a discussion about the appropriateness of certain people looking at the body, more specifically, the body of a

⁴ Brian Foss, "Living Landscape," in *Edwin Holgate*, ed. Rosalind Pepall and Brian Foss (Montreal: Museum of Fine Arts, 2005), 46-47.

White, young, nude woman. The discussions in the print media tell us about the politics of looking in the 1920s and how people's reactions to looking embodied cultural anxieties. It reveals their sense of themselves and the challenges they perceived to those ideas, and whom they saw as a threat to the ideal conception of Canada and Canadians. In this context, it was not unrelated to the C.N.E.'s involvement as part of the Diamond Jubilee celebrations. The fact that public discussions of the paintings at the C.N.E. moved beyond the Art Gallery emphasized a number of important social and cultural changes that marked the 1920s. People discussed changes in gender, class, race, and space that were related to wider social and cultural shifts.



Fig. 4.2 Rosalie Emslie's *Comfort*. Oil on canvas (Reproduced from the 1927 *Catalogue of Fine, Graphic and Allied Arts and Salon of Photography*) Location of painting unknown

Social and cultural changes, while taking place in a public realm, are often part of what anthropologist Michael Taussig terms “the public secret.” Like Foucault’s postulation that sex is the secret we are destined to speak about forever, Taussig defines the public secret as the reorganization of the social knowledge of *knowing what not to*

know.⁵ The public secret includes well-known cultural rules about knowledge that are implied as opposed to explicit. Taussig's work demonstrates how the activity of looking in the context of a controversy can reveal public secrets. The three nudes at the 1927 C.N.E. that were stared at, looked at, glanced at, and gazed at and then spoken and written about leave an opening to explore the public secret. The concept of the public secret also helps to answer the question: why were these three paintings so controversial? Much of the debate focused around who was allowed to look in terms of class and age, and more specifically, who was allowed to look at the nude body and the difference between nudity and nakedness. In the space of the exhibition, people debated the wider ramifications of the class and gender of the gaze. Who was watching and absorbing information that they were not supposed to know was an important factor in the discussion. But the gaze did not exist separately from the other larger changes that were affecting Canadians; indeed, the gaze encompassed these important shifts, and when people debated aspects of looking at the paintings they also discussed deeply imbedded anxieties about the modernization of the country. The public secret existed at the nexus and, in this case, was tied to the practices of looking at the body.

This chapter studies the complex convergence of culture, subjectivity, identity, and looking using the case study of three controversial paintings exhibited at the C.N.E. in 1927. It seeks to understand the cultural dynamic of the embodiment of looking, and the social and cultural formation and reformation of subjectivity as a result, as well as the politics of the content of the paintings. Art historian Lynda Nead in *The Female Nude* has argued that cultural distinctions are "a matter of defining and controlling the effect of

⁵ Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labor of the Negative* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1999), 2,5.

the image or object on the viewer, of drawing the line between the pure gaze of the connoisseur and the motivated gaze of the cultural vandal.”⁶ The study of the art exhibition at the C.N.E. is significant as it shows how powerful people saw the image of a nude woman in affecting thoughts and behaviour as well as art, and how cultural distinctions in visual practices that separated the high from the low were often transgressed despite the attempts to mediate the impact on viewers by the exclusion of certain people from having the ability and opportunity to look.

The first part of this chapter describes the paintings and discusses how they were different from other nudes hung at the C.N.E. during the decade. The second part discusses how the paintings became controversial because of their revelation of the female body in a space where established practices of looking were frequently transgressed. As it became known that there were nude paintings on display people crowded into the Art Gallery. People who saw themselves as defenders and critics of art were concerned that the dynamic of the Gallery was shifting as the patrons in it changed. In short, the paintings became objects of concern as the dynamic of the Art Gallery changed from a place of moral and social reform to a space more aligned with the transgressive, and often uncontrollable, Midway.

The final section of the chapter discusses the actual politics of looking and how social constructions of ‘race,’ gender, class, and age circulated through discussions of looking at the body. It is here that the concern of who is looking and the outcome of that look were debated in a public forum. The debate reveals the difference between high and low cultural forms in terms of space and content, but also how ways of looking at an image were expected to change in different arenas. This cultural and political division in

⁶ Lynda Nead, *The Female Nude: Art, Obscenity and Sexuality* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 12-16.

the act of looking is what Martin Jay has termed scopic regimes.⁷ Art historian Peter de Bolla has argued that scopic regimes can be divided into two categories: the regime of the eye and the regime of the painting. The regime of the eye refers to the fact that the eye must be educated in order to appreciate the art. It is the opposite of the more democratic regime of the painting, which refers to the fact that the art itself can educate the eye. In the latter, the possession of vision is the only prerequisite to appreciating painting.⁸ Conversely, under the regime of the eye, social identity determined who could see. Thus, space and image required censorship to limit certain art exhibits from those viewers who were incapable of appreciating the formal qualities of art rather than enjoying the sensual pleasure they might provoke.

The chapter also discusses how the body represented on the canvases came to have cultural currency. As Griselda Pollock writes, “in order for [a] drawing to have currency, it had to make someone want to look at it. There must therefore be some convergence between the idiosyncratic – that is, an individual artist’s work – and the common structures of subjectivity within a culture forming its classed and culturally specific genders and sexualities.”⁹ What made the paintings so scandalous at that particular time was the convergence of the artists’ representations of bodies that simultaneously matched and challenged current structures of class, gender, and sexuality. The bodies in the paintings reflected the tension over the changes in modern womanhood. As Peter Stallybrass and Allon White have argued, the body cannot be thought of

⁷ Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

⁸ Peter de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape, and Architecture in Eighteenth Century Britain* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press), 15-18.

⁹ Griselda Pollock, “Beholding Art History: Vision, Place, and Power” in *Vision and Textuality*, ed. Stephen Melville, and Bill Readings (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1995), 50.

separately from the social formation, symbolic topography, and the constitution of the subject.¹⁰ By examining the culture of visibility we can see how multi-faceted the activity of seeing actually was and how it, as an embodied process, challenged, reaffirmed, and created room to debate social and cultural formation as well as the body's place, both literally and symbolically, on the cultural field. On another level, the content of the paintings certainly was a central factor in the controversy as people (and which people was important) had unfettered visual access to a body that was normally off limits even at the Fair. In this sense, the interpretation of the art matched concerns about the general exhibition of bodies in popular culture and the infiltration of low culture from the American working classes to the Canadian middle classes.

It was not, of course, the simple display of bodies that caused the controversy. Bodies had always been on display at the C.N.E. and certainly part of the culture of the carnival was the acceptability of staring at bodies. Freak shows, commercial displays, and public performances, for example, were areas where bodies were deliberately used for entertainment or advertising purposes. On the Midway, disabled or different bodies or the bodies of racial 'Others' were the most frequently acceptable to look at.¹¹ In particular, women existed as part of the spectacle associated with freak shows, amusements, or commercial exhibitions. Of the nineteenth century fairs, E.A. Heamann argues, "If exhibitions encouraged 'degraded' showgirls to display their bodies, they also permitted respectable women, who ordinarily shunned public display, to achieve a greater

¹⁰ Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 192.

¹¹ Benjamin Reiss, *The Showman and the Slave: Race, Death and Memory in Barnum's America* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001); and Thomas Fahy, "Disabling Visions: Freak Shows in Modern American Literature and Visual Culture" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, 2001).

public presence.”¹² Certainly, nudity was not new to the Fair. In 1892, one visitor to the Toronto Industrial Exhibition (the precursor to the C.N.E.) commented that women “were out of their sphere, and worse still, they were out of their clothes.”¹³ Although exposure was part of the carnivalesque atmosphere of the fairgrounds, the displays reflected a softening of socio-cultural rules rather than a complete abandonment of them. As the quote above demonstrates, other fair-goers were willing to act as spontaneous regulators by speaking out when boundaries were crossed.

The controversy arose out of the collision of concerns that centred on the revelation of a body normally off limits, in a space that demanded particular ways of viewing, and the transgression of the scopic regimes that, it was feared, would cause harm to not only people’s minds, but also perhaps their bodies. Taken together, then, this chapter is about the politics of viewing nude bodies in a public space where the private and forbidden was revealed. The C.N.E., as a microcosm of society, allowed people to literally see and discuss cultural changes, and the three nudes in 1927 allowed some Canadians to express deep-seated concerns about modernity, sexuality, and desire in looking at the body.

THE PAINTINGS

The three nude paintings themselves were central to the debate. Although, in part, the appeal of nude paintings was the erotic, the controversy over the content of the

¹² E.A. Heamann, *The Inglorious Arts of Peace: Exhibitions in Canadian Society During the Nineteenth Century* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1999), 269.

¹³ Quoted in Heamann, *The Inglorious Arts of Peace*, 269.

paintings was not simply a prudish reaction by a Canadian public unable to appreciate the artistic qualities of such an art form.¹⁴ One woman was quoted in a newspaper saying,

It isn't that we object to nude pictures. There are very beautiful nude pictures which anyone should admire. 'Eve Triumphant' at the Exhibition last year was a beautiful picture. It was a nude, yet no one could object to it. It is the sensuous nature of the pictures shown this year that makes us want to rule them out.¹⁵

During the 1920s other nude paintings were shown that received little attention from the press or the public. Even in the C.N.E.'s 1927 *Catalogue of Fine, Graphic and Applied Arts and Salon of Photography* (or in any of the Catalogues from the 1920s) a number of nude and semi-nude paintings of women were included. An important difference between previous nudes and the three that appeared in 1927 marked the difference between acceptance and indignation. The most noticeable difference between these paintings and the other nudes was the lack of the traditional elements of the nude: a male gaze to hold the focus on the painting, religious elements, allegorical representations, (allegedly) asexual bodies (of childlike angels, for instance), partial covering, and soft, circular lines. In many of the other nudes displayed during the 1920s there existed an element of metaphysical, Christian symbolism. The paintings were of angels or sacrifice or depicted a fantastical element that removed the body from a sexual context. In other nudes, the paintings had the more traditional element of male voyeurism and resembled classical formulations of nude paintings. In one, titled *Self-portrait* exhibited in 1925, there was a nude woman staring into a mirror and a man, seated to her right, staring at

¹⁴ On the erotic nature of nudes see Richard Leppert, *Art and The Committed Eye: The Cultural Functions of Imagery* (Oxford: Westview Press, 1996). J. Russell Harper argues that "puritanical Toronto shuddered" in reaction to the paintings. See J. Russell Harper, *Painting in Canada: A History*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1977), 232.

¹⁵ "Women State Protest Over 'Nudes' at Fair," *Toronto Daily Star*, September 9, 1927, 22.

her.¹⁶ What helped to make the nudes in the three paintings of 1927 so controversial was their invocation of modernity through form and technique. *Comfort* and *A Modern Fantasy* deliberately provoked viewers by casting off the traditional trappings, while keeping them in the painting; coverings were close at hand but discarded, soft, circular lines were mixed with harsh, jagged brushstrokes, and the women themselves were modern. In *Paolo and Francesca*, *Comfort*, and *A Modern Fantasy*, the focus of the viewer's eyes were drawn to a representation of a powerful female sexuality; one which, without the traditional elements of nude paintings, made modern women's bodies sensuous.

It was the very invocation of a potent, female sexuality, combined with a touch of iconoclasm on the part of the artists that made these particular paintings controversial. The outcry of the public in response to the three paintings was reminiscent of the way Manet's *Olympia*, when first exhibited in Paris in the 1860s, tapped into cultural fears of nakedness, feminine sexuality, the (mostly symbolic) cultural collapse of class differences, as well as more concrete bodily concerns related to prostitution, pornography, and the spread of venereal disease.¹⁷ Art historians have argued that *Olympia* was so controversial when it was exhibited because she was naked, sexually assertive with an outward gaze, and represented the embodiment of contemporary political and social concerns. For example, T.J. Clark argues that with *Olympia*, Manet referred to modernity in a most familiar incarnation: the prostitute. Manet highlighted

¹⁶ CNEA, *Canadian National Exhibition Catalogue of Paintings, Graphic Art and Photography*, August 29- September 12, 1925, 13.

¹⁷ See Gerald Needham, "Manet, 'Olympia' and Pornographic Photography," in *Woman as Sex Object: Studies in Erotic Art, 1730-1970*, ed. Thomas B. Hess and Linda Nochlin (London: Allen Lane, 1972), 80-89; and T.J. Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life: Paris in the Art of Manet and His Followers* (New York: Knopf, 1985).

cultural concerns of how the centre and periphery of social order were becoming increasingly hard to define.¹⁸ Although references to prostitution cannot be blithely dismissed in regards to the three paintings in the 1927 C.N.E. Art Gallery, more poignantly, the paintings pointed to a popular cultural reference that held within it deep anxieties about feminine sexuality and modernity: the flapper. The scandal that ensued reflected not only the content of the paintings, but also the cultural referents embodied within them. Reaction to the paintings, which varied considerably, spun out from the canvases to other incarnations of cultural change. Nonetheless the canvases were important and deliberate in their iconoclastic representation of the nude. Even to ‘ordinary’ people in the gallery, the suggestions of deliberate cultural vandalism were not lost.

In *Paolo and Francesca*, English painter George Drinkwater portrayed Dante’s dark tale with a modern twist. The painting depicted the moment after Francesca’s husband caught her and his brother in a moment of passion, and stabbed them, pinning them together. With the sword sticking out between her shoulder blades, Francesca caressed her lover’s face and kissed him as they died together. The elements of modernity were represented by Francesca who, according to one viewer, was “a flapper, bobbed-hair and blonde of ‘the complexion that gentlemen prefer’” and seemed “entirely undisturbed by the assassin’s dagger.”¹⁹

From the reaction to the painting, people were quite clearly aware of the tale of Paolo and Francesca, but even if they had not been, the *Toronto Daily Star* summarized it

¹⁸ Clark, *The Painting of Modern Life*, 79.

¹⁹ The phrasing was originally from an article in the *Evening Telegram* but was repeated in a letter in the *Globe*. See “Letter Presents Artist’s Reply to Toronto’s ‘Viragoes of Virtue,’” *Evening Telegram*, September 17, 1927, 18, and Alice Humler, letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 22, 1927, 4.

for readers on the opening day of the C.N.E.²⁰ In the original story, Paolo and Francesca were brother and sister-in-law as Francesca had married Paolo's older brother. On the fateful day, Paolo and Francesca were sitting together reading aloud the story of Lancelot and Guinevere. In particular, they were reading the section when Lancelot kisses the queen. The story overwhelmed Paolo and Francesca who were seduced by the book and began their own affair. The kiss shared by Paolo and Francesca followed the imaginary kiss of Lancelot and Guinevere. Francesca describes how, "Several times our reading caused our eyes to meet and our faces to pale; but it was one point alone that overcame us."²¹ The lovers were caught; they were shot by her husband, and ushered into hell.

Drinkwater takes some liberties with the story. The two are nude and are pierced together by the sword Francesca's husband used to stab her, and although the story originally took place in the late Middle Ages or early Renaissance period, Drinkwater made Francesca into a modern woman who was associated with disturbing cultural trends like the conspicuous consumption of cheap fiction, theatre, and films.²² In short, the painting *Paolo and Francesca*, like the original story, illustrated the fear of seductive texts.

English painter Rosalie Emslie's *Comfort* depicts a young woman with short, dark hair, sitting naked in a club chair with a piece of crumpled fabric underneath her. The disarranged fabric was an affront to the traditional nude. The material is present, the woman could be covered, but instead, she is deliberately exposed. In other ways Emslie's painting transgressed the classical visual tropes of nudes by exposing the entire

²⁰ "Nudes' Hung at Exhibition Likely Cause Controversy," *Toronto Daily Star*, August 27, 1927, 22.

²¹ Quoted in Renato Poggioli, "Paolo and Francesca," in *Dante: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. John Freccero (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1965), 62.

²² See Cynthia Comacchio, "Dancing to Perdition Adolescence and Leisure in Interwar English-Canada," *Journal of Canadian Studies* 32, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 11-17; and Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem*, 122-7.

body, tempering references to a soft and subtle femininity, and situating the woman in a realm of sexuality. The woman's body in *Comfort* is not an idealized body of a classical nude. The angular lines around her head and shoulders imply a hardness or roughness to her, as does the technique used by Emslie. Her head is down and her arms and head form a circle that encompasses most of her body and she is staring down at her vagina, almost to the point of straining to look. Whether the viewer follows the circle her body creates or the woman's gaze in the picture, the focal point is her vagina. The contemplation of her sexuality would have been worrisome to a public anxious about sexual activity from masturbation to sexual emancipation to venereal disease.²³ In addition, she is draped over a leather club chair, symbolically, if only temporarily, taking over a piece of masculine territory. Concern over the increasing social and political power of White, middle-class, Canadian women who had just made significant gains, especially in terms of the vote, was frequently expressed in terms of women becoming men or gender roles being blurred and ill-defined.²⁴ The woman in the painting is contemporary as opposed to classical and thus tapped into the fear that nakedness was associated with prostitution, crime, and venereal disease. In addition, the image of the flapper invoked in Emslie's painting, combined with her nakedness, represented sexual assertiveness and availability.

²³ Birth control was a contentious issue in the 1920s and along with it came the concern that White, middle-class women were limiting the sizes of the families for selfish reasons and to the detriment of the nation. As a result of the First World War, Canadians had become increasingly concerned about the spread of venereal disease. Canadian soldiers returned from Europe with the highest rate of venereal disease among Allied forces. The issue was brought to the public's attention through newspaper articles and the government's public knowledge campaign that sought to halt the spread of the diseases. See Jay Cassel, *The Secret Plague: Venereal Disease in Canada, 1838-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1987), chapters 6 & 7; Angus McLaren and Arlene McLaren, *The Bedroom and the State: The Changing Practices and Politics of Contraception and Abortion in Canada, 1880-1980* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), chapter 3; and Linda Gordon, *Woman's Body, Woman's Right: A Social History of Birth Control in America* (New York: Grossman Publishers, 1976), 204-8.

²⁴ Easy examples of this type of understanding in visual culture are the political cartoons of the decade, which depicted women dressed as men or acting with what was defined as masculine characteristics. For a selection of contemporary cartoons that illustrate this point see Charles Hou and Cynthia Hou, *Great Canadian Political Cartoons 1915 to 1945* (Vancouver: Moody's Lookout Press, 2002).

Emslie's position as a female artist also suggested an act of transgression. Women artists faced formidable challenges in being accepted as legitimate, and were more readily recognized if they painted as a hobby, or painted subjects considered appropriate for women. The proper subjects for them included still lifes, landscapes, and paintings for children's books. Nudes of women were beyond the limit of acceptability, in part, because they implied familiarity with anatomy, a relationship to a studio model (women who often existed on the margins of society) or the possibility of a self-portrait. The fact that a female artist would paint a nude possibly carried undertones of lesbian sexuality.

By far, the most controversial painting was John Wentworth Russell's *A Modern Fantasy* (what some people mistakenly, although not inappropriately, titled, *A Phantasy in Jazz*). Painted between 1917 and 1920, the large piece in black and pink depicted a semi-conscious woman reclining naked on a couch gazing at (and fantasizing about) china miniatures of a jazz band and dancers. *A Modern Fantasy* had already been exhibited in Paris and was accorded the highest honour at the Spring Salon de Société des Artistes earlier in 1927.²⁵ Russell's tenuous association with the Canadian art world certainly played a role in his painting's reception, not necessarily by the public, but certainly by some of the other artists and the art committee of the C.N.E. Russell, a Canadian who left in 1905 to live and study in Paris, was by most accounts, a maverick on the Canadian art scene known for his "naturally artistic temperament" and his refusal to join Canadian art societies.²⁶ In 1932, the *Evening Telegram* described him as "John Russell, a member of nothing, honoured (by request) by nobody."²⁷ Russell was also decidedly outspoken. (He once insulted the Group of Seven, of whom several members

²⁵ Muriel Miller, *Famous Canadian Artists* (Peterborough, Woodland Publishing, 1983), 73.

²⁶ Newton MacTavish, *The Fine Arts in Canada* (Toronto: Macmillan Co., 1925), 118.

²⁷ Quoted in Paul Duval, *Canadian Impressionism* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1990), 70.

sat on the C.N.E. art committee, calling them “the jazz band of art.”)²⁸ The exhibition of his work at the C.N.E. marked his homecoming.

As with Emslie’s *Comfort*, there are similarities between *Olympia* and *A Modern Fantasy*. With Russell’s painting, however, the similarities are not merely suggested: Russell emulated Manet’s styling of the painting. Manet painted *Olympia* between 1832 and 1833 and his painting is considered to be a turning point in the development of modern art. With *Olympia* Manet recast Titian’s *The Venus of Urbino* with a young woman beginning to defiantly question the feminine role (see fig. 4.3 and 4.4).²⁹



Fig. 4.3 Titian’s *The Venus of Urbino*. 46 7/8 x 68 7/8 Oil on canvas, Uffizi Gallery, Florence

As had Manet, Russell painted a female nude in a traditional position (reclining on her side), but who, like *Olympia*, revealed a shift in the construction of femininity. Instead of gazing outwards, Russell’s model was gazing at miniatures of a Black jazz band and dancers, replacing the Black woman and cat that were in the background of Manet’s painting. Manet’s prostitute became the popular trope of the flapper infatuated with jazz, dancing, and popular culture.

²⁸ Harper, *Painting in Canada*, 232 and Duval, *Canadian Impressionism*, 70.

²⁹ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1972), 63.

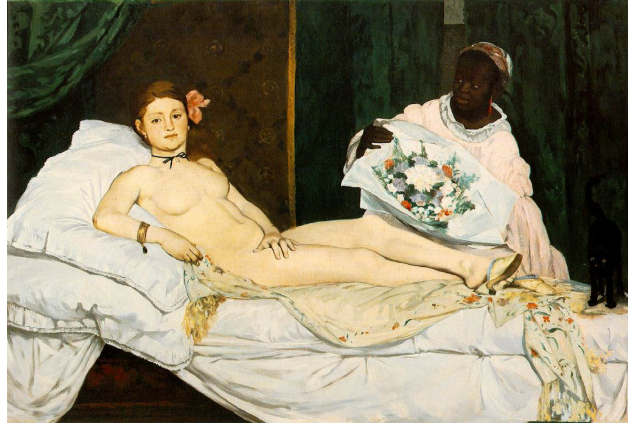


Fig. 4.4 Manet's *Olympia*. Oil on canvas, 51 3/8 x 74 3/4 in. Louvre, Paris

In *Fantasy and Comfort*, the woman's gaze was central to the image-making qualities of the painting. In *Fantasy* it was the woman's desire that was the central point of the picture. It was her power that captivated viewers. She was not passive, there to only be looked at, but she did the looking. The sexuality of the nude woman in the painting had no male chaperone, no male viewer. She was solitary, looking into herself, down on herself, and in the case of *A Modern Fantasy*, clearing fantasizing. Female sexuality was the powerful force drawing the viewer into her fantasy. This type of woman was not supposed to lounge naked, semi-conscious, and fantasizing. Certainly, this was not the image of womanhood that some Canadians wanted to project. To them, the "menace of the flapper," as one *Maclean's* article described her, was already an affront to Canadian womanhood through her sexual escapades.³⁰ These paintings used symbols of the Jazz Age and tapped into current anxieties about female sexuality. As a number of historians have demonstrated White, middle-class women's bodies were to represent much more than just themselves, but also the essential qualities of nation,

³⁰ Gertrude E.S. Pringle, "Is the Flapper a Menace?" *Maclean's*, June 15, 1922.

motherhood, and the future.³¹ A powerful and pleasurable female sexuality was hazardous not only to the individual and her family, but also to the entire nation.

The idea of the nation was a powerful one at the 1927 C.N.E. since it was the year of the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation. The 'Ex,' which was promoted as a national event, self-consciously made an effort to improve the nation and its people. As we shall see, on the grounds of the C.N.E. education and entertainment were key qualities that organizers espoused. The spaces and sights of the C.N.E. were meant to uplift, inspire, and educate, and part of the controversy over the painting stems from their supposed contradiction of these values.

THE SITES AND SIGHTS OF THE CANADIAN NATIONAL EXHIBITION

American historian Robert Rydell asserted that fairs performed a hegemonic function because they replicated the ideals and values of the country's leaders and offered their ideas as "the proper interpretation of social and political reality."³² The social and political reality that was being publicly promoted at the Canadian National Exhibition

³¹ There is a rich body of literature on the symbolic qualities of women's bodies as well as their roles as mothers of the nations. See for example, Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Mariana Valverde, *The Age of Soap, Light, and Water: Moral Reform in English Canada, 1885-1925*, (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1991); Mariana Valverde, "When the Mother of the Race Is Free," in *Gender Conflicts: New Essays in Women's History*, ed. France Iacovetta and Mariana Valverde (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1992); Cynthia Comacchio, *Nations Are Built of Babies: Saving Ontario's Mothers and Children, 1900-1940* (Kingston and Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Katherine Arnup, *Education for Motherhood: Advice for Mothers in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); Carolyn Strange, *Toronto's Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1800-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995); Hega Geyer-Ryan, "Imaginary Identity: Space, Gender, Nation," in *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight*, ed. Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (New York: Routledge, 1996), 117-125; Nira Yuval-Davis, *Gender and Nation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997); and Ida Bloom, Karen Hagemann, and Catherine Hall, ed., *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century* (Oxford and New York: Berg Publications, 2000).

³² Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 2.

was that of moral reform, education, and progress. Organizers of the 'Ex' billed the 1927 C.N.E. as

a panorama of Canadian progress since the early days. It affords opportunity for gathering the latest information regarding progress in all fields of Canadian endeavour and it is the assembling place for the latest achievements in Science, Art, Industry and hosts of other activities that stamp themselves upon the face of Canadian history, a tremendous effort to place before the Canadian people the last and best word in the realm of progress in all that is of interest and concern to every citizen.³³

This was only part of their goal. The C.N.E. was also meant to inspire confidence in material progress, social and political institutions, and manufactured goods.³⁴ Organizers of the Exhibition saw their purpose extend beyond highlighting progress and achievement to education and the encouragement of moral standards. Fairgoers heard that the point of the 'Ex' was education, not profit, and the C.N.E. was likened to an "industrial university."³⁵ For women especially, the exhibition was billed as not just a holiday but also "an institution of enormous practical and educational value."³⁶

In their publicity, the organizers even distanced themselves from other fairs by singling themselves out as one of the finest. Ontario Premier G. Howard Ferguson described the C.N.E. as a Canadian institution that was rapidly becoming an institution of the empire and in newspaper advertisements the 'Ex' was called "the World's Greatest Annual Spectacle."³⁷ Even exhibitors from other countries played into the propaganda. B.M. Bellasis, Exhibition Manager of the Federation of British Industries, went on record

³³ CNEA, *The Official Catalogue of the Canadian National Exhibition*, 1927, 21.

³⁴ Keith Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto: The Industrial Exhibition and the Shaping of a Late Victorian Culture* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), chapter 2.

³⁵ CNEA, The Annual Meeting of the Canadian National Exhibition held in No.1 Committee Room, City Hall, Toronto, February 22, 1928, 8

³⁶ "Mother and Daughter Specially Attracted," *The Globe*, August 27, 1927, 3.

³⁷ CNEA, Minutes of the Annual Meeting of the Canadian National Exhibition, City Hall, Toronto, February 22, 1928, 5 and see, for example, the advertisement in the *Toronto Daily Star*, August 26, 1927, 4.

saying, “I am always being asked to make comparisons between the Canadian National Exhibition and other shows. It is impossible really to compare the Canadian National Exhibition with any other show, because it is unique.”³⁸ This uniqueness, however, did not foreclose on the fact that the Fair was technically open to everyone who had the inclination and the funds to attend. The organizers of the C.N.E. certainly did not want to create the Fair as an exclusive space, but they wanted to ensure that those who came for fun and leisure also incorporated the educational aspects into their experience. The *Toronto Daily Star* described the C.N.E.’s appeal “to all classes and creeds and colors of people...[who] within its gates all find something to wonder at, to admire, to appreciate, to enjoy.”³⁹ The *Star*’s description is telling. Not only was the fair meant to attract a diverse audience, but also its space and attractions were meant to match these differences. While the social hierarchies did not collapse when people passed through the gates, the very nature of the carnival and its wide attraction ensured transgression. The fabric of the fair meant that a simultaneous contest between reaffirmation and subversion, order and disorder was ongoing.

The Art Committee of the C.N.E. played an important part in the application of the ideas on moral reform and education, in shoring up and transgressing cultural hierarchies, and in the performance of identity at the Fair. Part of the changes to the carnival that occurred in the decades before the controversy was the separation of Art from the rest of the Fair. At the turn of the twentieth century, the creation of an art gallery was part of the middle-class effort to create a space that would provide inspiration for morality, decency, idealism, and beauty. In 1902 the Art Gallery was separated from

³⁸ “Pins for Boyish Bobs and Stump Pullers are British Exhibits,” *The Globe*, August 22, 1927, 11.

³⁹ “New Novel Features to Help 49th C.N.E. Surpass All Records,” *Toronto Daily Star*, August 27, 1927, 1.

commercial exhibitions and was established in its own building. One of the central thrusts in the move to separate the art from practical, material goods was the increasingly popular idea that art served a social role as a civilizing force that underscored elite leadership and taste. Further, art served as a moral force lifting the viewers from their preoccupation with their appetites and focusing instead on developing their spiritual character.⁴⁰ The removal of the high art from the low, commercial objects associated with everyday life was part of the process whereby the symbolic hierarchies between classes were established.⁴¹ It is not a coincidence then that as the Gallery was being constructed the Midway was being moved from a central location to the periphery of the fair grounds with its own separate entrance.⁴²

While Robert Bogdan argues that nineteenth and early twentieth century freak shows were “heralded as morally uplifting and educational, not merely frivolous amusement,” at the 1927 C.N.E. this assertion requires gentle qualification.⁴³ Appetites of all kinds were encouraged and satiated at the Midway. Despite the efforts to clean up the Midway, it remained a space where social and cultural norms were tested. The Midway with its low forms of entertainment like the “two-headed cow positively alive” and the semi-nude, grossly obese woman was the place where people went to gawk at freakish

⁴⁰ Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto*, 239.

⁴¹ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 5.

⁴² Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto*, 287-8.

⁴³ Robert Bogdan, “The Social Construction of Freaks,” in *Freakery: Cultural Spectacles of the Extraordinary Body*, ed. Rosemarie Garland Thomson (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 27. Rosemarie Garland Thomson argues that by the early twentieth century freak shows had lost some of their legitimate educational veneer and had settled at the bottom of the cultural hierarchy. This caused, for example, Barnum and Bailey to rename their freak show “human curiosities” because of the stigma attached to the freak shows. See Rosemarie Garland Thomson, “Introduction: From Wonder to Error – A Genealogy of Freak Discourse in Modernity,” in *Freakery*, 13.

bodies on display, to look at the exotic, and to experience the carnival.⁴⁴ They also went to gaze at the bodies of scantily clad women in girl shows or the diving beauties who performed acrobatic tricks in bathing suits for money. The Midway was a place where the body was used in exotic and erotic spectacles that signified racial order and gender divisions among other things. As a low form of entertainment that was physically and psychically separated from the middle-class attractions and ideals of material and moral progress, it stood in stark contrast to the well ordered exhibitions of farm machinery, new and useful household products, or the history of Canada spectacle in the grandstand. If it was an educational space, it employed starkly different methods and had marked differences from other areas. Despite the challenges of the Midway, it remained a necessity as people expected its entertainment and it often provided substantial amounts of money for the Fair.⁴⁵

The separation of Art from the Midway served a greater goal of showcasing differences between diversissements and the products of and for material progress. More importantly, however, it marked the difference between high and low cultural forms, and one's attendance at certain exhibits helped to signify and reaffirm one's identity. If the Art Gallery was a step above the lauded material exhibitions that showcased Canada's progress, it was on the other end of the spectrum from the Midway, which was solely there for amusement. If the Fair was meant to educate as well as entertain, and if even the

⁴⁴ The Two Headed Calf was part of the "Freak Animal Show." See the advertisement in the *Globe*, September 2, 1927, 2.

⁴⁵ Auditor's Reports show the receipts from the Midway to be worth between \$69,000 to \$81,000 for the C.N.E. This would not include what the contracted shows themselves would make. Johnny J. Jones stated that the C.N.E. receipts for the company were expected to be worth over \$100,000. CNEA, Auditor's Report, Midway File; and *Billboard* January 25, 1919 and September 6, 1919, 58.

Midway should have nothing to offend on it, then the three nude paintings were certainly out of place in the Art Gallery.⁴⁶

While rigorous definitions of class and space were crossed by people who ventured into all corners of the Fair, there were specific definitions and accompanying codes of decorum in different areas. As Stallybrass and White argued, “each ‘site of assembly’ constitutes a nucleus of material and cultural conditions which regulate what may and may not be said, who may speak, how people may communicate and what importance must be given to what is said.”⁴⁷ The 1927 Exhibition allowed for an informal public discussion about appropriate regulations, conduct, and viewing practices. This was most clearly emphasized in the comparisons between the Midway and the Art Gallery. While many people questioned whether the two had been transposed with the hanging of the three paintings, others pointed out the apparent shifts in space on the fairgrounds. One person questioned if, given the lack of censorship in the Art Gallery, there was a different artistic law for the rich and for the poor.⁴⁸ The contention that art represented the dominant class’s leadership and taste, clearly separated from the low entertainment of the Midway or commercial amusements, was contested with the display of the three nudes. Although nudity was not new to the Art Gallery, something in the three paintings provided the fodder for comparisons between the expectations of the Gallery and the Midway, between the high and low forms of entertainment, and between beauty and freakish wonder.

⁴⁶ In advertisements for the Midway throughout the 1920s, the C.N.E. made it clear that the Midway had been cleaned up by using the line “nothing to offend.” See, for example, the advertisement from the *Evening Telegram*, August 31, 1920, 17.

⁴⁷ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 80.

⁴⁸ A Father [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Evening Telegram*, August 27, 1927, 21.

Of major concern was the fact that women's bodies were being revealed in a space where it was acceptable, if not desirable, to stare at them. The Midway was the place where the body was most frequently revealed, but the space of the Midway was differentiated from other areas, even at the Exhibition, especially the Fine Art Gallery. The Midway deliberately toyed with the threshold of acceptability in eliciting the sensuous gaze, but the Art Gallery was supposed to be removed from these types of scopopic regimes. The paintings reversed the acceptable practices of looking at the Fair by inverting the continuum between the Art Gallery and the Midway. Art historian Sir Kenneth Clark suggests that the difference between nudity and nakedness is the embarrassment and uncomfortable overtone suggested with the latter with a nude having an entirely different suggestion that is neither embarrassed nor uncomfortable. The nude is a "balanced, prosperous, and confident body: the body reformed."⁴⁹ This distinction was blurred as people attacked the nudes that debased the art and the gallery, so that they seemed to belong in the realm of the carnival. The bodies transformed from nudes to being naked under the gaze of the viewers. C.N.E. President J.J. Dixon made the distinction as he said that one of the paintings was "not of a nude but of a naked woman."⁵⁰ Many people clearly saw the nude paintings as sensuous or even suggestive, and differentiated between other nudes and the three causing the controversy. One person renamed the C.N.E. the "Sexhibition."⁵¹ The low culture of the Midway showed up in the middle-class realm of the Gallery.

⁴⁹ Kenneth Clark, *The Nude: A Study in Ideal Form* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1956), 3. Art historians have challenged this dichotomy. See Leppert, *Art and the Committed Eye*, chapter 5.

⁵⁰ "Women State Protest Over 'Nudes' at Fair," *Toronto Daily Star*, September 9, 1927, 22.

⁵¹ "Women State Protest Over 'Nudes' at Fair," 22, "Exhibition to be Wary of Nudes Hereafter," *Toronto Daily Star*, September 10, 1927, 4, "To Censor Strictly But Not Ban Nudes," *Toronto Daily Star*, September 12, 1927, 3; and What Father Started, [pseud.], letter to the editor, "What Father Started," *Evening Telegram*, September 17, 1927, 24.

From the early twentieth century, Canadian police departments were involved in attempting to regulate circuses and carnivals, and often responded to public complaints about the ‘carnival menace.’⁵² Not surprisingly then, the Morality Department of the Police became involved, but quickly quashed the rumour that they had asked the C.N.E. directors to remove the paintings using section 207 of the criminal code, which referred to obscene pictures tending to corrupt morals. Inspector McKinney argued that there was nothing objectionable about the pictures, although “it would be different if the pictures were shown elsewhere than in an art gallery.”⁵³ Clearly the space of the Art Gallery provided a modicum of protection for the paintings. Perhaps the Inspector’s statement related to the expectation of the type of visitors who visited the Art Gallery and how they would see the paintings. These were factors that a number of people raised in discussing the relation of the Gallery and the Midway, and the complex nature of the Gallery.

Whether people liked or disliked the paintings, many of the writers used the dichotomy of Midway/Art Gallery to discuss them. D. McTavish, one of the first to write on the paintings *A Modern Fantasy* and *Paolo and Francesca* in a letter which was dated August 27, 1927, the opening day of the C.N.E., expressed shock that the “blot on the C.N.E.” was to be found in the Art Gallery and not on the Midway.⁵⁴ Under the headline of “An Exhibition Mistake,” the editor of the *Globe* commented, “If these works of art had been exhibited in a Midway booth at ten cents a view, as they were in the Art Gallery under the auspices of the Exhibition management, the place would have been closed

⁵² Tina Loo and Carolyn Strange, “The Traveling Show Menace: Contested Regulation in Turn-of-the-Century Ontario,” *Law and Society Review* 29, no. 4 (1995): 639-667.

⁵³ “Art’s Art in Gallery, Nudes are Fine Art,” *Toronto Daily Star*, September 14, 1927, 2, “Paintings to Remain in ‘Ex’ Art Gallery,” *Evening Telegram*, August 30, 1927, 21 and “‘Nudes’ Not Banned,” *Evening Telegram*, September 14, 1927, 23.

⁵⁴ D. McTavish, letter to the editor, *Globe*, August 30, 1927, 4.

within five minutes.”⁵⁵ In defence of the pictures a writer chastised the *Globe* and argued that they had conflated the Gallery and the Midway, which, quite clearly to the writer, were two different spaces.⁵⁶ One man argued that people should turn their attention away from the Art Gallery and focus it on the Midway, which in his opinion had none of the redeeming qualities of education, artistic merit, or social value. To him, the Midway was a place where “the hideous deformities of both man and beast are open for public inspection; half nude dancing girls, without art as an alibi, performing at the bidding of the public, and so on.”⁵⁷ Even with the current art on display, the Art Gallery was still a higher form of entertainment that served a social and moral purpose, unlike the Midway. Although the Midway remained the point of popular comparison, people disagreed on the art’s relationship to it. One writer sardonically suggested that the livestock officials or the Midway men be in charge of choosing next year’s selection of art since the Hanging Committee had selected “circus pictures”.⁵⁸ Another letter to the editor juxtaposed the beauty of women’s bodies in *A Modern Fantasy*, to the ‘disgusting’ freak show bodies. To the “Artist’s Daughter” the paintings belonged in the gallery because they displayed beauty unlike the 400 lb. Chrissie who had “masses of superfluous flesh.”⁵⁹

Fully nude pictures of women were hung at the C.N.E. on the Midway in the early 1920s. A “Stenographer” wrote to the *Globe* on September 13 to add her voice to the common displeasure expressed at the pictures. “Stenographer’s” entire letter revolved around comparing *A Modern Fantasy* to the painting named *Stella*, which was a part of

⁵⁵ Editorial, *Globe*, September 10, 1927, 14.

⁵⁶ Jns. W. Hird, letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 16, 1927, 4.

⁵⁷ Rentoul Castell, letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 22, 1927, 4.

⁵⁸ Norman Harris, “‘Circus’ Pictures At Exhibition People Say Nudes Poor Taste,” *Evening Telegram*, September 3, 1927, 8.

⁵⁹ An Artist’s Daughter [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 15, 1927, 14.

the Johnny J. Jones sideshow in 1919 and 1920.⁶⁰ *Stella* was one of the paintings that the *Globe* and other newspapers were referring to in their editorials regarding the pay-per-view paintings exhibited on the Midway. To view the painting, which was advertised in the *Globe*, one paid the fee and entered a darkened tent where the painting was hung at the far end. *Stella* was a painting of a life sized nude blonde-haired, blue-eyed woman reclining on her right side.

The writer, by the use of the pseudonym ‘Stenographer,’ identified herself as a young, educated, working woman, and made a conscious effort in her letter to subtly define herself as one with good moral standing and the ability to recognize and distinguish between Fine Art and degrading carnivalesque images. She and her friend who attended the C.N.E. were “pure-minded” and not typically the type of working girl to visit questionable areas of the Midway. It was only with hesitation that they went into the tent on the Midway to see the painting. Upon gazing at *Stella* she was

spellbound...The golden ringlets, the dancing life in the blue eyes, the dimples, the lips that looked as though they were just about to speak to us, the pretty, pretty hands and shapely feet – and the absolute innocence and naturalness of her, just held us breathless – never had I looked upon such loveliness, such beauty of body, but even far more striking, the beauty of the young girl’s soul and spirit that shone at us. A lump in my throat and my thoughts were something like this: “Oh, what glorious beauty! Could any woman be so altogether lovely? Surely only God could make such beauty, and if God made her then He is indeed to be worshipped, humbly and adoringly.” I was filled with delight and reverence and cried out: “That – that – is art!”

⁶⁰ The Johnny J. Jones Exposition had most of the contracts for the C.N.E. Midway throughout the 1920s as they were contracted from 1919 and 1920 and from 1923 to 1927. On which company was awarded the Midway contract during the 1920s see CNEA, Midway File. The Jones Exposition described *Stella* as “the world’s most perfectly formed woman.” *Stella* is mentioned in advertisements and reports on Johnny J. Jones in *Billboard Magazine*. See, for example, *Billboard*, January 25, 1919, 75 and July 5, 1919, 67.

According to the letter, the two young women had an almost religious experience being “spellbound” by *Stella*’s beauty. The nudity allowed her soul and spirit to shine through making the Stenographer realize the splendour of God’s creation. *Stella* was inspiring, and moreover, she was inspiring moral and religious thoughts. The writer makes it quite clear that *Stella*’s nudity, or even her body, were important to her experience. She emphasized the portrayal of innocence, the naturalness, the spiritual undertones, and all the qualities that the executives of the C.N.E. desired to have associated with the Fair. Upon hearing about the pictures being hung in the Gallery the Stenographer decided again to visit hoping to have the same experience that she had had with *Stella*. She was completely disappointed. *A Modern Fantasy* was

simply the naked body of a young woman, shapely and most beautifully tinted and shaded, it is true but where was the soul and the inspiration? Utterly lacking – in fact, the first sight of that picture sent such a bolt of horror through my being that my heart actually tightened, and I just longed to rush forward with a knife and rip it to shreds – I even wondered if the nail-file in my purse would do the job – but, like the others, I merely turned quietly away, for was I not, after all, in the Art Gallery?⁶¹

‘Stenographer’ made a subtle but important reference to the fact that Russell’s painting was ‘naked.’ Beyond being embarrassed or uncomfortable as Clark suggested, *Fantasy* inspired horror. In fact, she was so horrified at the lack of inspiration that she longed to destroy the canvas. But outcry and destruction were inappropriate in the Gallery so she simply diverted her eyes. Where she had cried out before, she kept silent, and just stopped looking. Whereas *Stella* was ennobling and uplifting and gave “grace to live better and purer lives,” *A Modern Fantasy* was base, low, and dirty, lacking soul and inspiration. Others pointed out this association as well, describing the art as muck,

⁶¹ Stenographer [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 17, 1927, 4.

unclean, low, or “art in a mud hole.”⁶² One article described the woman in the painting as “indolent, luxurious, naked and unashamed...lounging, lolling, frenzied, dead, freak postured.”⁶³ The Stenographer was one of many who saw the Midway as having transposed itself onto the Art Gallery with the display of the nudes. It was the sensuousness of the image that triggered the difference.

The Stenographer, in her shaping of her own identity by carefully outlining her moral position, proved herself to be a young woman capable of negotiating between the highs and lows of exhibition culture.⁶⁴ Incorporating the rhetoric of moral reformers she defines herself as having the ability to discern between acceptable and unacceptable cultural artefacts. Art was meant to uplift and be a moralizing factor, and yet when *A Modern Fantasy* failed to meet this test, the young woman had enough “purity to resent such a painting, and especially for the sake of the young boys and girls.”⁶⁵ More poignantly, however, she alluded to an inversion of the reigning moral discourse. Her letter was an interesting foil to the majority of the letter writers’ fear that the bodies of young women in sensuous situations should not be on public display for anyone to see. For the Stenographer, this was not the issue, as she clearly felt no objection to the display of *Stella* since that painting on the Midway was capable of evoking a spiritual reaction. Purity and grace were on the Midway and the dirt was in the Art Gallery.

The Fine Art Gallery and the Midway at the C.N.E. shared some common elements. In both, consumers of the Fair experienced crowds. With the exception of one

⁶² D. McTavish, letter to the editor, *Globe*, August 30, 1927, 4; and A Mother [pseud.], letter to the editor, September 8, 1927, 4.

⁶³ Father [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Evening Telegram*, August 27, 1927, 21.

⁶⁴ Nan Enstad makes this argument in terms of young working-class women in New York. See Nan Enstad, *Ladies of Labor, Girls of Adventure: Working Women, Popular Culture, and Labor Politics at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

⁶⁵ Steonographer [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 17, 1927, 4.

day, attendance at the C.N.E. topped 100,000 and sometimes 200,000 daily. By the time the gates had closed on the 1927 'Ex' 1,870,000 men, women and children had attended.⁶⁶ The attendance, the composition of the crowd, and the cultural anxieties experienced in and by the crowds helped shape a visit to the Exhibition regardless of the sites and sights one took in. In 1927, many people decided to enter the Art Gallery in order to see the paintings. Although the 1927 Fair was special in terms of its celebration of the Diamond Jubilee, and because of that it was heavily advertised across North America, the paintings certainly played a role in deciding where people were going to spend their time and money.⁶⁷ The 1927 Exhibition more than tripled the expected attendance of 50,000 in the Art Gallery with approximately 158,000 people passing through its doors.⁶⁸

The newspaper coverage of the paintings began immediately and worked to report the controversy, provide a forum for discussion, and either purposefully or not, attracted people to the Art Gallery. The Ontario Society of Artists described the attendance as “phenomenal partly owing to the newspaper publicity gives to paintings to which exception was taken by some of our citizens.”⁶⁹ On the opening day the *Globe* printed an article by M.O. Hammond that described Russell’s work as a “striking picture, a figure

⁶⁶ “All Records Smashed,” *Globe* September 12, 1927, 1.

⁶⁷ It would have been hard not to know that the nudes were on exhibition as almost every Toronto newspaper, and some tabloids and magazines, covered the controversy. The *Evening Telegram* even printed a photograph taken of *A Modern Fantasy* hanging in the Gallery.

⁶⁸ M.O. Hammond, “Strong Encouragement is Given by Exhibition to All Creative Arts,” *Globe*, August 27, 1927, 16. The revenues of the Art Gallery illustrate this point as well. In 1927, the revenues from admission to the Art Gallery were \$6134.50 and jumped to \$15,840.20 in 1927. In 1928, revenues fell to \$10,866.90. CNEA, The Annual Meeting of the Canadian National Exhibition, City Hall, Toronto, February 22, 1928.

⁶⁹ Ontario Society of Artists, President’s Annual Report, 1927-28, Archives of Ontario, Ontario Society of Artists fonds, www.ontariosocietyofartists.org/archives/arcframe.html, accessed June 24, 2004.

study.”⁷⁰ That same day the *Evening Telegram* printed a lengthy letter by a Father who was outraged at the Exhibition. Curiously, however, this letter was not included in the regular section of letters to the editor and was instead placed as a column in the first pages of the newspaper. The *Toronto Daily Star* was more explicit in the description of the three nudes, describing, for example, G. Drinkwater’s painting as one that “ensorious people will ask to have turned to the wall.”⁷¹ In the late edition of the *Star*, the editors ran a lengthy article with the headline “‘Nudes’ Hung at Exhibition Likely Cause Controversy: but Art Gallery Committee is standing pat on what it has shown – John Russell’s ‘Modern Fantasy’ Excites Comment.” In the article, each of the nudes was described in detail.

In turn, newspapers charged that the long line-ups at the Gallery were only the result of the controversy, and sceptical readers often accused them of stirring up cheap publicity so that more Fair-goers would go to see the paintings.⁷² *The Globe* went so far as to suggest that cigarette-smoking youths and giggling girls, only interested in the cheap thrill of seeing a nude picture in the Art Gallery, made up the long lines in front of the exhibition and, therefore, were the cause of the record-breaking attendance. Certainly some people were attracted to the Gallery because of the controversy. A number of people admitted in their letters to the editors that they were stirred to see the paintings for themselves after hearing or reading about the controversy. For instance, after hearing

⁷⁰ Hammond, “Strong Encouragement is Given by Exhibition to All Creative Arts,” 16.

⁷¹ “C.N.E. Pictures This Year Galaxy of High Average,” *Toronto Daily Star*, August 27, 1927, 3.

⁷² *Saturday Night*, September 24, 1927, 1-2; Gene LaVerne Devore, letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 14, 1927, 4; and W. Stewart Thomson, letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 16, 1927, 4. M.O. Hammond, “Strong Encouragement is Given by Exhibition to All Creative Arts,” *Globe*, August 27, 1927, 16. Interestingly, no one directly blamed the operators of the Gallery or the Exhibition itself.

about their existence one woman admitted that she marched down to the C.N.E. to see them herself, and then would not let her children go.⁷³

On September 3, C.N.E. officials responded to the accusation that the box office rush was only due to the nudes. One official was quoted as saying, “We are getting a good class of people in the gallery, not just the seekers after a cheap sensation of a thrill. Our sales of the art catalogue are much greater than ever before. Casual callers who are looking for nudes do not as a rule buy catalogues. The art lovers do.”⁷⁴ Within three days of the denial, a conflicting report appeared in a different Toronto newspaper wherein the Art Commissioner of the C.N.E. allegedly thanked the paper for printing a reproduction of one of the nude paintings that increased attendance in the gallery. He was quoted as saying; “I figure that the publicity given the picture by *The Telegram* was worth at least 30,000 admissions.”⁷⁵

There were important reasons to get people into the Fine Art Gallery. In 1926, the committee involved in art selection made a conscious effort to improve the quality of both the foreign and the domestic art shown in their gallery, and to make the art show of interest to the public generally.⁷⁶ This decision, made by the Fine Art Committee, came a month after the closing of the 1926 C.N.E. The Committee also wished to increase sales of art and expressed concern that they would not be able to attract artists in the future given the slim chance of the artist selling the work at the C.N.E. In particular, this was

⁷³ Thomas C. Rumney, letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 15, 1927, 14.

⁷⁴ “Box Office Rush at “Ex” Art Gallery Not Due to Nude Art, Says Official,” *Toronto Daily Star*, September 3, 1927, 19.

⁷⁵ “Line up Crowds Art Gallery Many Pictures Are Sold,” *Evening Telegram*, September 6, 1927, 21. The Art Commissioner was also interested in building a new and better facility for the Gallery, and the 1927 display of art was integral in pushing for a bigger building.

⁷⁶ CNEA, Minutes of the Canadian National Exhibition Graphic and Applied Arts Committee Minutes, October 28, 1926.

true for Canadian artists.⁷⁷ Fred S. Haines, the Art Director of the Gallery, made the link between the increased attendance and the increased sales of paintings as signs of the outstanding success of the 1927 display. He was quoted as saying, “Many artists have been loath to leave their pictures tied up in an exhibition for a few months but they will have no hesitation in sending in their best work when they know that there is a chance of a sale.”⁷⁸ Haines was also interested in building a new Art Gallery.⁷⁹ In the Annual Report for 1927, the attendance at the C.N.E. was heralded as proof of “the ever increasing appreciation that Art is receiving at the Canadian National Exhibition, and stresses the need for a new gallery.”⁸⁰ However, when newspapers reported the large attendance as part of the justification for the proposed new space, there was some scepticism. The *Toronto Daily Star* reported that many thought the “notable nudes” were solely responsible for the boost in attendance and that this would not be maintained in later years.⁸¹

There is little evidence that the officials involved in selecting the paintings deliberately attempted to create the controversy.⁸² However, neither the executive of the

⁷⁷ CNEA Minutes of the Meeting of the Fine Arts Committee, October 28, 1926. The motion to attempt to sell more Canadian art was originally passed in 1919. CNEA, Minutes of the Meeting of the Fine Arts Committee, May 30, 1919.

⁷⁸ “Line-up Crowds Art Gallery Many Pictures Are Sold,” *Evening Telegram*, September 6, 1927, 21. By September 10, ninety-three paintings had been purchased from the Fine Art Gallery. The *Toronto Daily Star* ran an article listing all of the paintings that had been purchased. None of the three in question were listed as sold. See “Pictures on Exhibit Are Being Purchased,” *Toronto Daily Star*, September 10, 1927, 9.

⁷⁹ The Ontario Society of Artists described the need for a new Gallery as “most urgent.” The plans to build a highway through the C.N.E. grounds, right through where the Art Gallery stood also added pressure for a new gallery. See AO, Ontario Society of Artists, President’s Annual Report, 1927-28, Ontario Society of Artists fonds, and *Toronto Daily Star*, September 7, 1927, 1.

⁸⁰ CNEA, Annual Report for 1927, 39.

⁸¹ “New Highway Through Exhibition Means Wrecking of Art Gallery,” *Toronto Daily Star*, September 7, 1927, 1.

⁸² Some newspaper articles did make the suggestion, however. A staff writer for the *Toronto Daily Star*, making another reference to the collision of the Art Gallery and the Midway, stated that the art officials did more in increasing the attendance at the Gallery by hanging the nudes than they ever could have if they employed Midway techniques. See “Dementia Praecox Curious About Nude in Modern Art,” *Toronto Daily Star*, September 17, 1927, 7.

Exhibition nor the art committee undertook measures to remove the pictures or limit admittance even under pressure from citizens to do so. Even one year later the controversy hung over the C.N.E. The 1928 Annual Report of the C.N.E. stated, “Any suspicion that a crowded Art Gallery can only be the result of sensationalism, either in publicity or in exhibition, was dispelled in the 1928 Exhibition. The Galleries were crowded with interested, beauty-loving people, despite the fact that no pictures which could by any means be described as sensational were displayed....”⁸³ But in 1928 the gallery was significantly less crowded than the year before as revenue fell by almost five thousand dollars.⁸⁴

The above quote from the 1928 Annual Report indicated that the Gallery had returned to a space where the composition of the crowd was restored to only “beauty-loving people.” From this statement and from the volumes of letters written to the editors of papers on the subject, it seems that the restrictions on the space of the gallery failed to do their regulatory jobs in 1927. Nonetheless, the admission charge marked an important line for the spatial organization of looking; that is, it indicated an expected change in the practice of looking that was decided by social and economic status. It certainly marked a change in territory from other exhibits and thus a change in how one was to visually consume. Yet, as the composition of the crowd changed so did the dynamics and politics of looking.

⁸³ CNEA, Annual Report of the Canadian National Exhibition, 1928, 34.

⁸⁴ In 1926, the revenues from admission to the Art Gallery were \$6134.50 and they jumped to \$15,840.20 in 1927. In 1928, revenues fell to \$10,866.90. CNEA, The Annual Meeting of the Canadian National Exhibition, February 22, 1928.

THE POLITICS OF LOOKING: INSIDE THE GALLERY

Given the particularities of the construction of the Art Gallery's space, the tensions and fears of the politics of looking were funnelled into the discussion of the nudes. One letter to the editor was particularly revealing. The author wrote,

Sir: Having seen in the press news about there being in the art gallery at the Exhibition certain pictures of the nude that ought not to be there, I decided to go and see those pictures so that I could decide for myself about them. But imagine my disgust when, on reaching the place I could not get in owing to the long line of people ahead of me. Those people were going to see those pictures drawn by vulgar curiosity. I went out again the next night about dark but again found the same disgraceful crowding and was unable to get in. If these pictures are to be shown anywhere else before leaving the city kindly let me know at the address enclosed. It is evident from the way the crowd acted that we have a large element in the city that is attracted by the coarse and prurient so that a clean-minded man can't get near the place.⁸⁵

The letter, signed "Artistic," points to a number of visual clues as evidence of modern cultural changes and anxiety: the desire to see, the frustrating existence of the crowd, concerns over a vulgar gaze, and the difference in gazing based on social position and the education of the eye. The interwoven themes were reiterated by a number of people who ventured to the C.N.E. and entered the Gallery.

Deciding to enter the Gallery was a conscious decision and one with repercussions. Being in the Art Gallery itself was an important part of establishing a public persona in an environment where social identities were thrown into flux and often grated against each other in the close proximity of the grounds. More than the art was on display at the C.N.E.'s Art Gallery. People entered the Gallery in order to see the display of art, but also to be seen. Art historian Peter de Bolla argues,

⁸⁵ Artistic [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Toronto Daily Star*, September 10, 1927, 6.

Not only are the walls full of images for display, but the room is also crammed with people looking at and listening to other people: here in all its chaotic jostling and posturing, is the society of visibilityIn this sense the viewers compete not only with the images displayed but with one another. Consequently, then, as now, the viewer becomes a kind of exhibitionist as he or she enters into the spacings of the visibility of visibility.⁸⁶

The ability to look at art and to appreciate it for what it was meant to be was an important aspect of one's social standing. Although this desire to see and be seen may have been compromised slightly on the Fair grounds given the space's accessibility, there remained an important distinction for exactly that reason. On the grounds where anyone could be, the defence of one's social status was important and people's social and moral positions were on display in the Gallery. Although perhaps not consciously articulated, the construction of space indicated appropriate activity. Yet, like the transgression in space, the paintings caused transgressions in the accepted practices of looking.

When people passed through the gates of the fairground and, by means of whatever tricky route, made their way to the Fine Art Gallery, they entered into a culture of visibility where they became part of the landscape. Although most fair-goers would have been used to the feel of a crowd as part of urban life or an urban experience,⁸⁷ it would certainly contain unpleasant, if accidental, aspects, including an obscured view, noise, bumping, different smells, and unsolicited touching. People paid as much attention to the crowd as they did the art on the walls in part because the mass of people could draw the eye to it as easily as the paintings. Pronouncements of disgust or acceptance could be heard. Standing outside the Gallery one evening someone overheard a young man passing and saying "Gee, look at the line-up of people waiting to get in and see those

⁸⁶ de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye*, 42.

⁸⁷ Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto*, 94.

dirty pictures.”⁸⁸ Visitors to the Gallery experienced not only the sight of the art but also the sight, sound, and sometimes touch of the people around them. These sensory perceptions helped to influence their experiences within the Exhibition at large and in the Gallery in particular. People reacted as much to the paintings as they did to the people around them, and as much as people were concerned about the actual content of the paintings, they were also concerned about who was being admitted into the Art Gallery and changing the internal dynamic of it. One man, for example, who appointed himself “a committee of one to investigate,” was dismayed at the ‘uncultured crowd’ waiting to enter the building and the ‘rabble’ that made it difficult to purchase a catalogue.⁸⁹

The fact that the viewer was as much on display as the painting hung on the wall was implicitly understood. Some people deliberately went to the Fine Art Gallery in order to watch the crowds for their composition and reactions to the three particular paintings in order to gather evidence that they were having a negative impact. Mrs. J. Patrick MacGregor, President of the Local Council of Women, spent two hours one day in the Gallery watching people and listening to their remarks in order to prove that the paintings were having an adverse effect on the public.⁹⁰ The *Toronto Star* sent a reporter to sit in the Gallery and record the visitors’ reactions to *A Modern Fantasy* and *Paolo and Francesca*.⁹¹ The reporter described the following situation. One middle aged woman said to another, “‘Well he must have nasty mind – for I think it is just beautiful,’ raising her voice in defense of some slur cast by a third person upon the revelation before them.” Another member of the crowd, described by the *Star* reporter as “riff-raff,” proudly

⁸⁸ Subscriber [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 12, 1927, 4.

⁸⁹ The Rambler [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 16, 1927, 4.

⁹⁰ “Women State Protest Over ‘Nudes’ at Fair,” *Toronto Daily Star*, September 9, 1927, 22.

⁹¹ These two paintings were the most controversial. Emslie’s painting received a lot of attention, but *A Modern Fantasy* and *Paolo and Francesca* were considered to be particularly offensive.

declared “‘Well that’s art, all right,’” as he “forced himself in to the forefront of the spectators.”⁹² In an anonymous letter to the editor, a writer told *Toronto Star* readers that if they wanted to really understand the reactions of the public that they should sit in the Gallery and watch the behaviour of the crowd. By the author’s own analysis he found that “Nine out of every ten women and eight out of every ten men, having had one hasty glance, carefully moved away. Most of those that do wish for a second look take it furtively from a distance.”⁹³ Certainly the numbers are questionable as are the verbatim quotations taken from a reporter in a noisy gallery, but they show that the composition of the crowd was of interest to visitors who paid admission to watch the gallery-goers exhibit themselves and establish public identities.

On the fairground, identities were not only reflected, but also shaped in relation to all the other classes, races, spaces, and genders present.⁹⁴ When a woman, who described herself as a mother, walked away from the paintings she made a statement to those around her that intentionally differentiated her from those who stood, stared, joked, pointed, and enjoyed. ‘Indignant Mother’ wrote, “One glance at those pictures was sufficient. I hung my head in shame and made a hasty retreat. There were young boys there about sixteen, and scores of men, jeering and laughing and making rude remarks. Were they lovers of art, think you?”⁹⁵ Her shame and quick exit reaffirmed her place as a mother and respectable woman by walking away from the boys and men who saw the pictures as pornographic objects. Another woman decided to make a hasty retreat from

⁹² “Human Form Divine Shocks Visitors to Art Exhibit,” *Toronto Daily Star*, September 6, 1927, 6.

⁹³ One of Them [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Toronto Daily Star*, September 8, 1927, 6.

⁹⁴ Walden *Becoming Modern in Toronto*, chapter 4.

⁹⁵ Indignant Mother [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 12, 1927, 4.

the Gallery when she realized that there were few if any women there.⁹⁶ Their testimonies reveal the problems with the composition of crowds and who got access to the paintings, as well as how the spatial politics helped to shape their subjectivities on the fair grounds. As Stallybrass and White argue, looking at the body of a low Other helped to shape disciplined, disembodied middle-class subjectivity, connecting the critical, observant eye and the body.⁹⁷ Many visitors to the Gallery made it clear that there was a stark difference between those who viewed the works as art and those who were there for their own sensuous amusement and this was closely attached to the subjectivity embedded in the look of the observer. The look, even at the Fair when it was deliberately encouraged, could be provoking and dangerous; for women it could mean a loss of respectability and for men the prospect of violence was present.⁹⁸ The women's experiences described above reveal what feminist theorists describe as the objectifying male gaze that helps to maintain the structures of patriarchy and the relations mediated by it.⁹⁹ Women expressed fear at potential actions that gazing at the paintings could provoke. "A Daughter" wrote to the *Evening Telegram* objecting to the paintings on the grounds that, "As a woman, I do not approve of certain pictures of my sex being hung in art galleries, especially where every Tom, Dick, and Harry can gaze on them out of plain curiosity."¹⁰⁰ Women, unable to return the critical and aggressive gaze (and possibly

⁹⁶ Harper, *Painting in Canada*, 232.

⁹⁷ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 119-20.

⁹⁸ Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto*, chapter 3.

⁹⁹ See for example, Laura Mulvey "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* 16 no. 3 (1975): 6-18; Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman*, trans. Gillian Gill (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1985); Lorraine Gamman and Margaret Marshment, *The Female Gaze: Women as Viewers of Popular Culture* (The Women's Press, 1988); Griselda Pollock, *Vision and Difference: Feminism, Femininity and Histories of Art* (New York: Methuen, 1988); Griselda Pollock, *Sexuality and Surveillance: Bourgeois Men and Working Women* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994); and Rosalind Coward, "The Look," in *Reading Images*, ed. Julia Thomas (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 33-34.

¹⁰⁰ A Daughter [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Evening Telegram*, September 2, 1927, 24.

fearful of aggression itself), avoided the situation, averted their eyes from looking back into the male gaze, and removed themselves from the situation. According to women's groups, the danger of looking was real as it could and did lead to aggression against women. In an appeal to the President of the C.N.E., one woman argued that when similar pictures were shown a few years ago in Toronto there had been a number of offences against women.¹⁰¹

One of the main points of concern was with certain *others* viewing the bodies. Many fair-goers argued that some patrons were not lining up to appreciate the art. Instead of viewing the works as fine and beautiful representations of femininity, observers noted that some people in the Fine Art Gallery were only there to catch a glimpse at a body that was usually off limits, even at the Fair. People commented that the gallery was filled with coarse people who only wanted to gaze at the "dirty pictures."¹⁰² Writers to the *Globe* emphasized that the Art Gallery was now filled with people who were there to fill their heads with sensuous images. When this happened a number of writers asked what was wrong with the Art Committee? Were they simply following the rotten path of vaudeville, advertisers, and moving pictures? Had they fallen into flaunting false ideals, which did not intend for the elevation and uplifting of the human race? Certainly, some Canadians usually attracted to the Art Gallery were used to avoiding tabloids, vaudeville, and objectionable moving pictures. But here they found a more disturbing image right in the middle of a realm they considered their own. Others, however, found that the pictures were less offensive than what was on stage in some of the Toronto theatres and pointed to the inconsistency that these pieces were causing a stir

¹⁰¹ "Women State Protest Over 'Nudes' At Fair," *Toronto Daily Star*, September 9, 1927, 22.

¹⁰² Subscriber [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 12, 1927, 4.

when any night on stage one could see something far worse and few complaints could be heard. One writer who defended the pictures was one of the ‘art lovers’ that mothers and women complained vehemently about as he admitted to visiting the Gallery three times and once brought a young lady on a date to see the paintings in question. He stated that he felt more comfortable looking at the paintings than he did watching some of the objectionable displays on Toronto’s vaudeville stages.¹⁰³ What divided the amateur art critics were the scopic regimes. Many thought that the art could have an educational value if, in the minds of the viewers, it could be removed from the sensuous gloss of popular culture. Others argued that the educational exhibit could not be appreciated or even understood by the uninitiated.¹⁰⁴

One clear indication of the differences in opinion on whether the public could appreciate nudes was the social identity people arrived with at the Fair, most importantly of class, gender, age, and race. These nuances were embedded in a deeper discussion about vision and the conflicting nature of scopic regimes: the education of the eye and the education of the painting. What divided the many commentators on the painting was the idea of the education of the eye. Could art be universally democratic under the gaze and provide an education for the viewer? If not, then does art need to be censored in terms of who can see the paintings? These were points of discussion that fuelled the debate and linked the discussion about vision to wider cultural hierarchies and their apparent transgressions. In both cases, the cultural politics embedded in the practices of looking revealed deeper tensions in relation to class, race, gender, and age. The discussions over the impact of the paintings on the viewer and who had access to them

¹⁰³Gene LaVerne Devore, letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 14, 1927, 4.

¹⁰⁴Another Art Lover [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Toronto Daily Star*, September 1, 1927, 6.

(either literally, as in access to the Art Gallery as discussed earlier, or figuratively, in terms of whether or not they could look at and appreciate or understand the paintings) revealed how looking related to cultural anxieties. In the Art Gallery the important questions of access and censorship, and the impact of images on the eye were debated, but the discussion was not limited to the paintings themselves. It extended from the Art Gallery to the streets, films, performances, and fashion, and revealed how permeable a space the Gallery was for it absorbed and reflected social issues.

Kenneth Clark argues that while people supposed that the undressed body was “an object on which the eye dwells and which we are glad to see depicted,” it was an illusion.¹⁰⁵ If it was an illusion, it was a powerful one and one that people continually thought that unlearned or young and impressionable people would not be able to appreciate. Part of the controversy surrounding the paintings was who was looking at them and the space in which people could look. These paintings had dangerous potential if your eyes were uneducated. The Art Gallery was constructed as an entirely different space than the Midway or the industrial exhibits that were meant to entice desire, whether for bodies or commercial products. The Gallery was meant to be a place where the gaze was to be driven by beauty, as opposed to formulations of desire, disgust, or consumption. The gallery at the C.N.E. had a long tradition of displaying art for C.N.E. goers, but, as we have seen, as its location on the fair grounds shifted so too did its purpose. These changes were important in the formulation of a specific image of the Art Gallery, an image that would frame some of the debates over the presentation of nudes.

Many of the commentators expressed concern that these paintings were an affront to decent individuals and risked the reputation of Canadians, and more specifically

¹⁰⁵ Clark, *The Nude*, 5-6.

Torontonians, as a “Christian race of people, chaste and clean.”¹⁰⁶ The discourse of moral reform was not just simple rhetoric, it shaped the visual landscape and made people acutely aware of the potential danger that an image held, even in places that were likely to be immune from negative forces, such as the Art Gallery. Writing on September 9, one woman identified the problem stating that the “picture and in such an environment [was a] mockery ... of morality, or even decency.”¹⁰⁷ All the public discussion about the Art Gallery that year and the disgust levelled at the paintings also provoked a desire to see them. Generally vilified by newspapers and their readers, the paintings were symbolically pushed to the margins of the Fair. Yet, their construction as filth, disgusting, dirty, and low inspired a desire to see them.¹⁰⁸ One *Globe* reader put the viewers into three general categories: people kept away because of the pictures, people who saw them and honestly criticized, and a third who went out of “morbid curiosity.”¹⁰⁹

The C.N.E. was space defined by racial hierarchies and the controversy around the paintings echoed these divisions.¹¹⁰ The grounds were technically open to anyone who could pay the admission charge, but the grounds were a place of uneven power relations that sometimes transgressed and other times reinforced boundaries that existed outside of the gates. The author of one letter to the editor couched the argument in terms of racial hierarchy saying that “reasonable covering is a sign of civilization; only uncivilized races and demoralized people go naked.”¹¹¹ Race was clearly a problem for some viewers of the paintings, perhaps not surprisingly, because as readers were debating

¹⁰⁶ Me too [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Globe* Wednesday, September 14, 1927, 4.

¹⁰⁷ A Woman [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 9, 1927, 4.

¹⁰⁸ Stallybrass and White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, 191.

¹⁰⁹ Subscriber [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 12, 1927, 4.

¹¹⁰ On racial divisions at the C.N.E. see Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto*, 167-71.

¹¹¹ Decency [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 17, 1927, 4.

the topic the *Globe* ran an article wherein an author declared jazz music a danger to modern civilization and the White race.¹¹² In terms of the fairgrounds, people of colour were marginalized and often found that their greatest area of prominence was in entertainment, and their expected role was to confirm racial hierarchies and alleviate fears that White superiority was being challenged.¹¹³ In this regard, *Fantasy*, was particularly disturbing for it tapped into the debates about jazz, miscegenation, and the influence of Black culture on White, middle-class youth.

Class divisions were important to uphold at the C.N.E. The maintenance of the Art Gallery as a middle-class space was invoked both by people who appreciated and people who strongly disliked the pieces. One anonymous writer to the editor of the *Globe* who appreciated the art still did not want any more nudes to be hung in order to protect the art from the “sacrilege” of the “vulgar gaze of people who do not understand even the rudiments of art.”¹¹⁴ This reader’s concern was that the “vulgar gaze” of certain people would lead them to view these works in a sensual way, rather than appreciating the art and the artist’s techniques. The reader wanted to protect the art from the denigrating vision of the uneducated eye. The Toronto Local Council of Women protested against the hanging of two of the nude pieces in the Art Gallery – Russell’s and Drinkwater’s. The Council did not wish to debate the artistic merits of the paintings, but objected on the grounds that they were hung in a public place where “mixed classes” could view them.¹¹⁵ John C. Reade writing to defend the exhibition of the paintings, made it quite clear that the problem was not the art but those who looked at it. He

¹¹² “Jazz to Be Banned, Advocates Musician,” *Globe*, September 20, 1927, 3.

¹¹³ Walden, *Becoming Modern in Toronto*, 169-70.

¹¹⁴ Characterologist [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 22, 1927, 4.

¹¹⁵ *Globe*, September 15, 1927, 14.

pointed out that to “the vast army of tolerant and serenely minded people, the paintings were gazed upon as a natural subject produced with skill and honesty.”¹¹⁶ It was in the distorted minds and “erotic and sensuous imaginations of callow youths” that these pictures became an affront to womanhood. Both the Toronto Local Council of Women and Reade saw a problem with those who were entering the gallery, particularly the working class. The scopoc regime of the painting was too dangerous in this case to allow an untutored eye. Having the ability to see was an incomplete qualification of entry into the space. The fear, reiterated by a number of citizens, was that the nudes at the Art Gallery were doing a disservice to the space and the art by attracting not beauty-loving people, but people simply wanting a cheap thrill. Further, the admission price was not keeping them out. The Gallery was crowded, difficult to get into, noisy, and few people were there to see the moral or spiritual art works and instead were rushing to find the nudes. It now had the feeling of the Midway.

Concerns over youth in particular seeing the contested works were raised by a number of writers. Even the people who supported the Art Committee’s selection expressed concern. One father protested that the paintings’ effect “on the mind of a boy or girl a year or two past puberty cannot be good and might be hurtful beyond measure.”¹¹⁷ Clearly people were anxious about the art’s effect on the eye and subsequently on the body. One person described Russell’s painting, as “of such a subtle, daring, grossly indelicate and sensual character, that it cannot fail to do incalculable harm. What a picture for our young people from all parts of Canada to visualize and carry

¹¹⁶ John C. Reade, letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 15, 1927, 14.

¹¹⁷ A Father [pseud.] letter to the editor, *Evening Telegram*, August 27, 1927, 21.

home with them!”¹¹⁸ The danger was in the eye and the power of it to invoke pleasure. The unstated assumption was that some people could control or remove themselves from the lower and sensuous effect, but others, especially youths, could not be in command of their reactions. The eye would provoke a dangerous reaction and release sensuous thoughts and actions. In this way, the paintings became a larger part of the concern over the types of popular images Canadian youths were seeing in theatres, at movies, and in other popular venues. Many people quite obviously believed that the power of female sexuality could overwhelm certain people, most notably youths and the working classes, with desire. The representation of woman as image combined with the imaging of the female body as the locus of sexuality meant that representations of the body were imbued with significant cultural power.

The suggested solution to the problem was to look at the schools and homes that produced such troubled youth. Writers defending the art indicated the eyes of youth were being inadequately cultured in the homes and schools of the nation and were instead being developed in the dangerous territory of popular culture. Some argued that with the proper tutoring these paintings could actually help to tame the imaginations of the youth by confronting them with biological reality. One person wrote,

If nudity were more frequently seen in our daily lives it would lose whatever it may now have of suggestiveness; nudity to the extent that it suggests erotic thoughts does so in consequence of perverted teachings that have been transmitted through many generations.¹¹⁹

The question was not really a matter of the body being hidden as on the Midway and, as other writers demonstrated, on the bathing beaches and in fashion magazines, over-exposure was the trouble. Yet that was a different type of exposure, in a different space,

¹¹⁸ A Woman [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 9, 1927, 4.

¹¹⁹ Hugh McKanday, letter to the editor, *Toronto Daily Star*, September 2, 1927, 6.

and a different body. If the youths could have their eyes properly trained to appreciate biology, removed from the more sensuous gloss added by popular culture, then the Art Gallery could live up to its ideal of moral and social education, and the art inside the Gallery could educate youths in how to appreciate anatomy. The eye, not the art, was at fault.

There were also concerns that the popular culture and fiction from Europe, and particularly from the United States was distorting the minds of Canadians, and making them unable to appreciate fine art. According to some writers, American fiction emphasized animalistic love and European theatre had become coarse. *Main Street* had come to Canadian culture in terms of dime novels, jazz, movies, and beauty contests, and certainly youths could not be blamed for falling into the trap of a debauched popular culture.¹²⁰ A columnist for the *Toronto Daily Star* questioned whether “a generation accustomed to the modern dance, public or private, to beauty contests or even the accepted bathing attire, finds much in any genuinely artistic picture to shock or even startle it.”¹²¹ The very fact that a generation of Canadians might be used to this type of display and not be shocked by it was in itself a problem. Popular culture had invaded the art gallery and changed ways of looking at nudes. This was a problem that was noticed by Canadians and others. By the turn of the twentieth century, as Lynda Nead has shown, “high art could not and did not remain immune from the changes which were taking place elsewhere in late Victorian culture. By the last years of the century, the Kantian-derived principle of contemplative viewing of the beautiful was fatally compromised.” As Nead explains, movies in particular introduced a new way of viewing that was embodied –

¹²⁰ On concerns over youth culture in the interwar period see Comacchio, “Dancing to Perdition,” 5-35.

¹²¹ H. Paulin, letter to the editor, *Toronto Daily Star*, September 17, 1927, 6; and The Observer [pseud.], “Modern Art and the Old Puritanism,” *Toronto Daily Star*, September 22, 1927, 6.

haptic viewing. The spaces of visual culture overlapped in the training of scopic regimes. Film and photography “had begun their fatal assault on painting. Perception, in the age of film, had become temporal and kinetic, and had destroyed the possibility of a unified, contemplative beholder.”¹²² The very problem with the art shown in the Gallery in 1927 was that it highlighted the insecurity over traditions in viewing. In a rather short period of time, modern optical machines had trained young, modern viewers in ways of seeing that challenged and mocked traditional ways of viewing and showed their insecurity and instability. Through the divisions of age and class, the changes in visual culture percolated to the surface.

In part, what the display of nudes in the Art Gallery did was provide a space for the discussion about the more general revelation of the body in the 1920s, especially young women’s bodies. As hemlines were raised and new bathing costumes came into vogue, concerns about the direction of youth and women were expressed. In American and Canadian magazines a debate raged on women’s dress, morality, leisure, and health.¹²³ In letters to the editor, writers incorporated the debates about women’s dress and morality that were often directed towards adolescents. J.W. Jones writing a letter to the editor of the *Globe* clearly made the connection.

It seems to me rather funny that people can get shocked over this when the general decree of fashion these days is to border as close to the nude as possible. Can any one avoid seeing the extraordinary display of silk stockings and short skirts every day in evidence, not in art galleries but on our public streets? After all to exhibit the nude is not half as sinful as to exhibit that which creates an evil suggestiveness in the mind...If they think these things should be censored, then let short skirts, lipsticks, petting parties,

¹²² Lynda Nead, “Strip: Moving Bodies in the 1890s,” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 3, no.2 (September 2005): 147.

¹²³ On the American debates see Angela J. Latham, *Posing a Threat: Flappers, Chorus Girls, and Other Brazen Performers of the American 1920s* (Hanover, NE: Wesleyan University Press, 2000), 48-62.

and cigaret [sic] parties and open spooning come in also for a little of their attention. When these beams are taken out of their holy eyes they will see more clearly to cast the mote out of the eye of the C.N.E. whose sin, if any, is modesty itself compared with the immodesty which one is almost forced to encounter daily.¹²⁴

For most who linked the nudes and popular culture, the more fearful of the two was what they saw on the streets, in theatres, and on local beaches. If one wanted to see morality challenged, all one had to do was look at the lawns of neighbours or the steps of buildings where women sat around exposing their knees.¹²⁵ Nudity in art was the least of their concern in an age when ‘flaming youth’ seemed to be running wild and engaging in behaviour and dress that were offensive at best and imperilled the future of the nation at worst.

In displaying the paintings at the time that they did, the Art Committee tapped into the public fear echoed in newspapers and magazines that young women were unnecessarily exposing themselves and this was closely tied to concerns over the available leisure activities that youth, especially young women, were engaging in that took them farther away from the traditional areas of family, church, school, and community groups.¹²⁶ If *Fantasy* was deemed offensive, it was partly because women’s bodies were revealed and partly because of the types of disconcerting behaviour the woman represented might engage in.¹²⁷ Some of the behaviour that people expressed concern about was premised on the revelation of the body at beaches or beauty contests where one piece, tightly-fitting bathing suits were the norm. One letter pointed out that,

¹²⁴ J.W. Jones, letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 22, 1927, 4. The point that people should be less concerned about the art and more concerned about their daughters was brought up by a number of citizens. See also A Lover of Real Art [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Toronto Daily Star*, September 13, 1927, 6.

¹²⁵ One Who Risked an Eye and Not Ashamed [pseud.], 6.

¹²⁶ Comacchio, “Dancing to Perdition,” 13-15.

¹²⁷ Another Woman [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 13, 1927, 6.

Many women are indignant because they consider themselves exposed. Have women not been unnecessarily exposing themselves for some years now? What do we see in our offices, on our street cars, on our streets, at bathing beaches and summer resorts, to say nothing of fashion parades and beauty shows – mothers and daughters alike flapping their sex before the eyes of man and flaming youth.¹²⁸

Another letter suggested that looking at the paintings was less offensive than “the Charleston dancing, suggestively short-skirted, cigaret-smoking, petting, rouged, modern young woman.”¹²⁹ As mentioned in the chapter on beauty contests, even C.N.E.

President J.J. Dixon spoke out saying that the beauty contests where women competed in their bathing suits in front of crowds of men and women were much more distasteful than the paintings.¹³⁰ In a statement defending the nudes, Dixon noted that they were ““not as

bad as the beauty show that was conducted in this city a year ago.”” The article continued stating that “He [Dixon] regarded the parading of so many Toronto girls in scanty bathing suits before a huge crowd of men and women as much worse than the Art Gallery pictures. ‘It would be all right if the girls were going in swimming, he said, ‘but they were not wearing those costumes for that.’”¹³¹ One reader pointed out what she saw

as hypocrisy among women complaining about the nudity in the paintings, especially *Paolo and Francesca*, but then allowing themselves or their daughters to be exposed on

public beaches. She wrote that the scene portrayed by Drinkwater was repeated

daily on any popular bathing beach, and sad to say, such is the inconsistency of humanity that many of the same maters and paterfamilias who are loudest in denunciation of such a portrayal in art may be seen there attired in the same revealing garments which chiefly serve to accentuate the human form, without any audible clamor at such scenes; rather, indeed, it has been observed that

¹²⁸ R.H. McD [pseud.], letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 16, 1927, 4.

¹²⁹ Burgess Robertson, letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 15, 1927, 14.

¹³⁰ “Women State Protest Over ‘Nudes’ At Fair,” 22.

¹³¹ “Women State Protest Over ‘Nudes’ At Fair,” 22.

some of these ‘viragoes’ of virtue, so far as art is concerned, maintain a discreetly oblivious state of mind when a marriageable daughter is similarly engaged.¹³²

Literally, of course, bathing beaches were not filled with people acting out Dante’s story, but people were concerned with a youth culture that seemed far too permissive. As Cynthia Comacchio argues, modern leisure activities, combined with a youth culture “with its blatantly sexual overtones and its associations with working-class, immigrant, uncultured and possibly ‘unrespectable’ adolescents,” were cause for concern during the interwar period.¹³³ For many people, the nude paintings could not be removed from the context of what they saw around them. Looking on the streets they found all the evidence they needed that over-exposure of women’s bodies was happening at a remarkable rate. Of course, not all people were equally concerned with the effect on young minds. John Russell responded to a reporter who asked him about the worrying effects his painting might have on the morality of youths by asking, “Did you ever see anything more sophisticated than the young people of to-day?”¹³⁴ Russell’s statement was provocative and would have been disconcerting to many people who were concerned about the sophistication of Canadian youth that included knowledge of sex, drinking, smoking, and jazz. For people concerned about ‘marriageable daughters’ and their dress and decorum, sophistication was in itself enough to cause worry.

¹³² This letter was also sent to John Wentworth Russell who attached it to his letter to the *Evening Telegram*. The *Telegram* printed it in its entirety. John Wentworth Russell, “Letter Presents Artist’s Reply to Toronto’s ‘Viragoes of Virtue,’” *Evening Telegram*, September 17, 1927, 18, and Alice Hulmer, letter to the editor, *Globe*, September 22, 1927, 4.

¹³³ Comacchio, “Dancing to Perdition,” 15.

¹³⁴ “Why Make Vulgarity of a Divine Thing?” *Toronto Daily Star*, September 8, 1927, 16.

CONCLUSION: “I SAW THE PAINTING”

On the last day of 1927 the scandalous paintings were back in the press. The *Toronto Star* asked Prime Minister King to comment on the rumour that the National Gallery was considering purchasing Russell’s painting. In response to the query, King responded, “I have not heard anything about buying Russell’s painting for the National Gallery. It may be so, however An Art Committee deals with these matters. I saw the painting at the Exhibition and thought it was a marvellous work.”¹³⁵ King who earlier (and privately) commented that *A Modern Fantasy* was immoral, publicly avoided the controversy. Yet months after the closing of the gates of the 1927 Canadian National Exhibition, the fate of Russell’s painting was still considered newsworthy. As late as 1932 a display of a nude at the C.N.E. recalled the 1927 exhibit.¹³⁶ The memory of the controversy was persistent.

The controversy that grew out of the display of the three nudes was in stark contrast to the Confederation celebrations, yet they had ingrained in them the concerns over modernity that many Canadians had. For as much as the various committees had a vision for the events of the C.N.E., they could not control the public’s actions and reactions that tapped into deeper cultural anxieties about sexuality, space, and the politics of looking. The unpredictability came in part from the intermingling of and conflicts with identity at the Fair. How people dealt with this, and how they made sense of the world around them was through the process of looking in all of its contexts. The culture

¹³⁵ *Toronto Telegram*, December 31, 1927, 17. The National Gallery of Canada did not purchase Russell’s painting.

¹³⁶ *Toronto Daily Star*, August 18, 1932, 1,3. The nude that was to be displayed in 1932 was one of John Wentworth Russell’s paintings.

of visibility opened a space for the literal and metaphorical discussion of power and politics of looking.

The construction of the spaces of the C.N.E. played an important role in defining the behaviour that was expected to go on inside. The Art Gallery was supposed to be a different space than the Midway, although in 1927 these differences seemed to have been transgressed with the hanging of the three nudes. Space was an important element in defining the scopic regime and in trying to regulate who had access to the paintings. Certainly, class played an influential role in deciding who had the ability to look, and moreover appreciate. Class and gender intersected in important ways in regards to the three nudes. Women expressed concern at being in the gallery with the likes of vulgar, male, youths who, influenced by the image, might act out the sexual impulses the paintings were said to provoke. In some ways, it was conceded by a number of letter writers that the transposition of high and low culture was really at fault.

A year later it would seem that all had changed, or at least it had in newspaper and magazine copy. In 1928, *Saturday Night* reported that quite possibly the most shocking aspect of this collection, now at the Art Gallery of Toronto, was that it no longer shocked the Canadian public.¹³⁷ But as discussed in the first half of this chapter, the space in which the paintings were presented was integral to the controversy. The Canadian National Exhibition was a space where anyone could and did attend. This was most clearly emphasized in the comparisons between the Midway and the Art Gallery. The debates on the transposition of Midway and Art Gallery were a central point in the discussion about appropriate regulations, conduct, and viewing practices. The

¹³⁷ Author unknown, "The Nude in Art and Life," *Saturday Night*, September 24, 1928, 1-2.

construction of the space was essential in trying to predict and limit visual practices and control the impact of the image.

In 1927 the Director of the Art Gallery of the C.N.E. promised *Globe* readers that there would be no more nudes hung at the Gallery. Within a week, however, this statement was tempered and in the 1928 show there were nudes displayed (including one by Rosalie Emslie). This time there were no letters to the editor, no coverage in the tabloids, and scarcely a mention in Canadian magazines. This does not mean that the deeper meaning tied to the visual anxieties about the paintings was solved. The controversy at the C.N.E. in 1927 was the result of the convergence of a number of factors including the content of the paintings. The three nudes hung in 1927 were references to and commentaries on modernity and as a result they tapped into the contemporary fears using the popular and prolific symbol of women's bodies. The three works of art opened up space for the larger discussions that were underlying other debates about the revelation of the body. Women's bodies carried symbolic meaning that related to many different aspects of society and thus some people felt invested in ensuring the symbol met their proper interpretation of social and cultural values. Looking at the body was a political act that required a specific subjectivity in relation to the visual subject. Inversion of this reflected more disturbing cultural trends of class conflict, perceived changes in gender roles, and concerns over the maintenance of White superiority. It would seem then, that the spontaneous eruption of controversy at the C.N.E. did not create the problem, but simply opened up a legitimate area for discussion for Canadian anxieties and desires over a new modern world.

CHAPTER FIVE

IN A WORLD OF MADNESS: MOVIES AND THE SPEED OF MODERNITY

In the 1920s, magazines and newspapers were inundated with advertisements for automobiles. For those who could afford them, cars freed people from spatial limits and provided the potential for new and exciting experiences. Road trips to more remote locales became a possibility, motoring became a high-speed pastime, and cars became a private space for sexual experimentation among youth. Cars represented freedom, desire, and escape in advertisements and for those who purchased them.¹ What cars provided for those who had access to them, movies gave to a much wider audience. Moving picture shows provided a literal and imaginative escape from home, work, school, and the street for a small charge. They gave ticket-holders the possibility to see foreign places, travel back or ahead in time, and imagine themselves in a variety of exciting dramatic or comedic situations.² Like cars, theatres provided a dark, quasi-private space for dating rituals. Nonetheless, both cars and movies caused unease and had people crying out for regulation. Newspapers were filled with stories of automobile crashes that killed people and destroyed property.³ In response, the government installed traffic signals, regulated parking, altered street patterns, had police apprehend speeders, and called for the “re-

¹ See, for example, *Saturday Night*, April 24, 1920, 21; June 4, 1927, 22; *Maclean's*, March 15, 1924, 60; November 15, 1925, 57; *Chatelaine*, January 1929

² Nathan Miller, *New World Coming: the 1920s and the Making of Modern America* (New York: Scribner, 2003), 192.

³ See, for example, *Globe*, May 28, 1927, 5; *Saturday Night* October 8, 1927, 1; October 15, 1927, 20. The Ontario Department of Highways advertised the possibilities for tourism and recreation that cars provided in addition to giving warnings about the necessity of good driving. One advertisement stated “But when you go out into the country to refresh body and mind by feasting your eyes on autumn tints, remember you owe it to yourself and to others on the road to show common sense and courtesy in driving.” The advertisement then highlighted four important points for motorists to remember. They were: do not speed, watch your headlights, be sure of your brakes, and be courteous. See *Saturday Night*, October 15, 1927, 12.

education” of pedestrians in order to stop “reckless walking.”⁴ In a similar manner, individuals and groups decried the popularity of moving pictures. However, the link between cars and film goes beyond similarities in the use of space, entertainment, and the calls for regulation. Both technologies appeared in the mid 1890s, became markers of modern life, and changed how people perceived social and cultural landscapes. Time, technology, and the bodily experience of speed and pleasure, connect cars, moving pictures, and visual culture.

A few scholars have discussed the connection between cars, film, bodies, and visual culture. Historian Kristin Ross writing on post-World War II France argues that

the two technologies reinforced each other. Their shared qualities – movement, image, mechanization and standardization – made movies and cars key commodity-vehicles of a complete transformation in European consumption patterns and cultural habits. Much of that transformation involved a change in perception, a change in the way things were *seen*.⁵

In addition art historian Lynda Nead, exploring the connection between painting, films, cars, and the female body in Britain at the turn of the twentieth century, argues that these new technologies did not “emerge fully formed, prepared to take their place in, and perhaps forever to transform the social scene.” Rather, she explains that the idea of standardization used by Ross was not “a consistent or absolute phenomenon” in the late nineteenth or early twentieth centuries. The experience of continuous speed with either movies or cars can be more accurately described as a “coming into movement” in the

⁴ Stephen Davies, “‘Reckless Walking Must Be Discouraged’: The Automobile Revolution and the Shaping of Modern Urban Canada to 1930,” *Urban History Review* 18, no. 2 (October 1989): 123-38.

⁵ Kristin Ross, *Fast Cars, Clean Bodies: Decolonization and the Reordering of French Culture* (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1995), 38.

earlier period.⁶ My interest is similar to Ross's and Nead's in that this chapter explores the relationship between cars, film, visual culture, and women's bodies to explain some of the more controversial and captivating aspects of moving pictures – fantasy, desire, escape, sexual experimentation, and modern life. In addition, since it is situated temporally between Ross's and Nead's work, this chapter demonstrates that by the 1920s, Canadians were 'coming into continuous speed' as technology changed visual culture and its perception but remained invested in representations of women's bodies and increasingly in the embodied reactions of their viewers. Movies, as discussed in chapter four, had a permanent impact on visual culture. Detached viewing was replaced with physical and emotional arousal and excitement. It was literally a change in the way things were seen and the result was an effort to control images since an actual attack on visual practice was impossible. The speed at which movies came to reign over popular culture meant that returning to traditional viewing practices would be difficult.

Even though it seemed that visual practices were compromised, it did not mean that concerned groups simply stood by and watched the change occur. The regulation and censorship of moving pictures was a key concern in the 1920s. Movies, like cars, were difficult to control because the solutions for regulating them extended beyond such tangible measures as traffic signals or seating patterns. It was not simply a matter of increasing safety measures in movie houses, although this was a particularly important issue in the 1920s; to regulate movies meant censoring images that were potentially

⁶ Lynda Nead, "Paintings, Films and Fast Cars: A Case Study of Hubert von Herkomer," *Art History*, 25 no. 2 (April 2002): 240, 249.

dangerous.⁷ To confront this problem, however, the public needed to decide what the limits of visual respectability were especially as movies were thought to impact the body and behaviour. Moreover, despite concerns about the content of films, audiences and the potential for mimicry proved to be some of the more contentious issues surrounding movie houses.

As we have seen in the first four chapters of the dissertation, there existed a heightened awareness over the perils and pleasures of looking at women's bodies. In a culture that had become increasingly visual, modern urban society had come to literally and symbolically focus on particular images of young women. Moving picture shows were integral to all aspects of this focus as movies were a culturally important part of modern life.⁸ They provided unfettered access to looking at women's bodies in public, they created women as spectacle, and helped to solidify the directed relationship among desire, pleasure, the gaze, and women. While movies were not a product of the 1920s, it was during the decade that they became understood as a permanent cultural fixture open to a varied audience. Movies, therefore, can be seen as the nexus of a discussion on the power of the visual in popular, urban culture for they bring together many of the themes brought to light in other areas as well as being discursively or spatially linked. Cinema

⁷ Movie house regulations became increasingly important in the 1920s. Celluloid was highly flammable and many fires started in theatres, which increased public regulation of theatres. In January of 1927, a fire in a theatre in Montreal killed 78 children and directed national attention to the problem.

⁸ In North American the history of film is a well-studied sub-field. In Canada the focus on the early period for film has been studied most rewardingly in terms of the Canadian film industry and American-Canadian cultural/political relations. See Peter Morris, *Embattled Shadows: A History of Canadian Cinema, 1895-1939* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1978); Gerald Mast, *A Short History of the Movies* (Toronto: MacMillan, 1992); George Melnyk, *One Hundred Years of Canadian Cinema* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2004); Ted Magder, *Canada's Hollywood: The Canadian State and Feature Films* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1993); and David Clandfield, *Canadian Film* (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987).

was a shaping influence in visual culture. The eyes of the masses were trained in movie houses.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section looks at the cinema as an area of popular visual culture and entertainment. It discusses how patrons were attracted to its qualities of freedom, desire, and escape. The second section briefly discusses the concerns over one of the key factors of the cinema's qualities of desire: sexual activity. The third section looks at responses to the attraction of film by the government, social groups, and others who were concerned about the power of moving images and the subsequent behaviour they were said to inspire. It looks at calls for, and attempts at, censorship and other forms of regulation. At the heart of the discussion were women's bodies both on the screen and in the seats of the theatre. The last section forays into some of the broader questions about the nature of film, technology, and bodies as a marker of modern life. The discussion brings us back to one of the earliest discussions in the dissertation on how women's bodies become the territory for the discussion about shifting social and cultural landscapes. This last section can be seen as a microcosmic study of Marshall Berman's description of modernity. It is the promise of joy, transformation, and pleasure tinged with the fear of the destruction of everything known. The popularity and pleasure caused many people to fear it as the downfall of the moral and social order. This chapter focuses in particular on Ontario in terms of government control over images. While by the 1920s all provinces except one had their own provincial board of censors, Ontario took the lead in terms of setting standards and other boards frequently followed Ontario's decisions.

FREEDOM, DESIRE, ESCAPE

In the first decade of moving picture exhibits in Canada, travelling shows made films accessible to audiences. Since films were expensive to purchase and were offered cheaply, usually for a dime, the travelling shows would repeatedly show the same film across the country. Urban areas, small towns, rural villages, and northern pioneer communities would have the same film shown in improvised theatres. Early movies in urbanizing centres like Toronto were shown in dime museums alongside other attractions like freaks and vaudeville performances. Vaudeville houses offered films in addition to live performances.⁹ Throughout the 1920s, as films increasingly became a draw of their own, the incorporation of bathing beauties, freak show acts, and other displays remained popular. For example, conjoined twins Daisy and Violet Hilton sang, danced, and played musical instruments at the Pantages Theatre in Vancouver. In a single show audiences watched the conjoined twins, performances by a local dance troupe, and two movies.¹⁰ Beauty contests were used to attract theatre patrons and shown in addition to films on fashion sometimes starring previous beauty contest winners. As a result, film had a somewhat troubled early existence. While it attracted audiences in large numbers simply out of curiosity rather than content, its association with sideshow amusements and vaudeville in their declining days served to establish movies as ‘low brow’ entertainment.¹¹

In Canada, before 1906 films were shown in theatres that were makeshift at best. In the first few years of the twentieth century more permanent theatres were being constructed, but these were usually only partially renovated businesses that rarely hid

⁹ Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 10-14.

¹⁰ *Vancouver Sun*, May 23 1927, 12; May 25, 1927, 18; May 28, 1927, 1, 3; May 31, 1927, 3, 16.

¹¹ Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 11-17.

their origins. Seats were uncomfortable and typically consisted of borrowed chairs from other businesses. In 1905, with the Nickelodeon's opening in Pittsburgh, a new standard was set for the theatre experience. The original Nickelodeon had permanent and comfortable seating, nice furnishings, and cheap admission prices. One year later, this new style of theatre began to appear in Canadian cities. With permanent buildings separated from sideshows and theatres that were pleasant to attend, the movie pictures gained a more structured and stylish existence.¹² New spaces alone, however, did not give them a claim to middle-class respectability and movies remained an amusement of questionable moral value.

Along with a number of other cheap amusements such as amusement parks, dance halls, dime novels, and penny arcades, the popularity of movies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, represented a shift in urban, working-class leisure. With increased leisure time and more opportunities for affordable entertainment, came middle-class concerns about how that time and money were being spent. In this sense, cheap amusements reflected both meanings of the word 'cheap.' For workers they were financially accessible and for reformers they represented the "poor quality and dubious moral value" of the inexpensive amusements.¹³

The inexpensive admissions to movies combined with the perceived relative safety of the movie theatre - when compared with the saloon - meant that the audience was composed of men and women. For a variety of reasons film going was attractive to

¹² Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 21-23.

¹³ Reformers initially thought that movies were an appropriate form of amusement for the whole family and a substitute for the saloon. The potential for movies to be positive depended on a host of factors including theatre supervision, type of film shown, and parenting practices. Constance Balides, "Cinema under the Sign of Money: Commercialized Leisure, Economies of Abundance, and Pecuniary Madness, 1905-1915," in *American Cinema's Transitional Era: Audiences, Institutions, Practices*, ed., Charlie Keil and Shelley Stamp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 285.

men and particularly to women who worked. However, cinemas quickly became a space for women's amusement. Movies were cheap, separate from masculine saloon culture, a safer place of amusement, and short in duration. American historian Kathy Peiss argued that early theatres "played to a restricted female audience" who as patrons did not need to depend on men treating them to cover the price of admission or require as much of a rebellious spirit against parents as going to a dance hall or an amusement park did. Women who had little disposable income could find the ten to twenty-five cents in the family budget to go to the movies.¹⁴

After the First World War, films had become a form of amusement that people from all classes could enjoy. In part, the increased popularity and acceptability of film going came as a result of the First World War and people's desire to see images from the conflict in Europe. Audiences filled the theatres to watch movies and newsreels produced by the Imperial War Office Committee and Commercial Films of Montreal among others.¹⁵ Despite early concerns that war pictures would hamper recruitment efforts, the Canadian government recognized the power of film in disseminating propaganda. News reels, movies extolling the importance of war bonds, and films highlighting the government's work caring for wounded soldiers were given for free to theatres and shown across the country.¹⁶ To some extent, the war was brought home on celluloid. The combination of the recognition of the propaganda power of film and the increasing respectability of theatres changed movie-going. Writers who declared that movies were an enduring cultural fixture overtook critics who had predicted that they

¹⁴ Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the-Century New York* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 140-146.

¹⁵ Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 58-61.

¹⁶ Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 60.

would disappear in the decades earlier. As a quote from the British newspaper the *Manchester Guardian*, reprinted in the Canadian periodical *Queen's Quarterly*, stated, "The movies are no longer a peepshow entertainment that wise men can afford to ignore."¹⁷

By the early 1920s it had become clear that moving pictures were a permanent part of the entertainment landscape and an amusement that attracted more than the working classes and reckless youth – although these groups continued to receive a greater amount of the public's attention. In 1921, Censor Boards across the country agreed that movies

are the means of the entertainment of the masses – and particularly of the family. The children enjoy and understand the same motion picture their parents see because the story is told or the entertainment is given by means of pictures. If the same story was told in a book or a play only a comparatively limited number of people would read it or see it. But where the subject is presented by a motion picture with all its wealth of detailed illustration it is within the reach of all classes and can be comprehended by both old and young.¹⁸

Such recognition meant that film now demanded attention as one of the main influences on an ever-increasing number of pleasure seekers. A report on using film in education by the chief censor of Alberta, Howard Douglas, pointedly reported, "The moving picture has invaded and taken possession of the whole country."¹⁹ While not everyone agreed on their place in Canadian culture, people understood their popularity, if not their appeal.

Movie houses were readily available and well patronized in the 1920s, especially in urban areas, but also in smaller communities. By 1928, there were approximately one

¹⁷ Quoted in Dorothy Stacey Brown, "The Unknown Movies," *Queen's Quarterly* 36 (Summer 1929): 504.

¹⁸ Archives of Ontario, RG 56-1-1-4, Censorship Files, 1911-1921, Minutes of the Meeting of the Provincial Censor Boards of Canada, Toronto, November 9, 1921.

¹⁹ AO, RG 56-1-1-4, Censorship File, 1911-1921, *Report on The Motion Picture in Education*, 2.

thousand theatres in the country. In addition to urban movie houses, other spaces transformed themselves into theatres on Saturday nights as halls, churches, rural schools, and colleges included moving picture shows.²⁰ In 1928, Valance Patriarche, a member of the Manitoba Censor Board, told readers in the *Dalhousie Review* that despite a scattered population and many rural communities, three million Canadians attended the movies each week.²¹ In fact, by 1929 weekly ticket sales for Canadian theatres reached two million a week.²² Four years later, in the heart of the Depression, as one study in Edmonton and Calgary showed, it was estimated that urban youth attended at least one movie per week.²³

Films were significant in exposing a wide audience to popular fads and fashions. Moving pictures were powerful enough to affect behaviour and dress. The 1928 Annual Report of the Ontario Board of Censors declared that film “was the greatest advertising power in the world.” In addition the Report stated, “American films played a large part in moulding public taste.”²⁴ Popular critics of films used their observations of women on the street and participating in beauty contests as evidence of the power of films. Young women, they repeatedly complained, sought to dress themselves as ‘disrespectable’

²⁰ AO, RG 56-1-1-1, British Films, 1926-1932, Memo to Hon. J.D. Monteith, Provincial Secretary from J.C. Boylen, Acting Chairman; RG 56-1-2-121, *Annual Report, 1922-23*; and John Herd Thompson with Allen Seager, *Canada: 1922-1939: Decades of Discord* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1985), 176. Even watching movies at home was a possibility for Canadians in the 1920s. For families of more substantial means, the Eastman Kodak Company sold home movie equipment and, along with other companies, rented movies to individuals for consumption at home. In the 1920s middle- and upper-class families who purchased the technology could view the same films that were in theatres in the privacy of their own home. Film libraries and distributors like Eastman Kodak, Bell & Howell, Empire Films, Home Film Libraries, and Neighbourhood Motion Picture Service offered a home movie business in the United States and Canada. Stacey Johnson, “Taking Pictures, Making Movies and Telling Time: Charting the Domestication of a Producing and Consuming Visual Culture in North America” (PhD diss., McGill University, 1998), 251-2.

²¹ Valance S.J. Patriarche, “The Cinema of To-Day,” *Dalhousie Review* 7, no. 4 (January 1928): 419.

²² Thompson with Seager, *Canada: 1922-1939*, 176.

²³ Rebecca Coulter, “Teen-Agers in Edmonton, 1921-1931” (PhD diss., University of Alberta, 1987), 125.

²⁴ AO, RG 56-1-2-124, *Annual Report 1928*.

screen stars and attempted to shape their behaviour to match what they witnessed on the screen as it broadcast new trends in style and behaviour.²⁵ Of particular concern was the fact that the borders between fiction and reality seemed to be repeatedly crossed with the encouragement of fantasy and desire. *Hush* made the effort to dispel Hollywood love scenes. They reported on how actors made scenes so real when in fact “film love is just cold-blooded acting.”²⁶ Such relaxed, dispassionate views on promiscuity certainly would have been a double-edged sword taking the passion out of filmmaking and turning it simply into spectacle.

Canadians, especially youth, critics alleged, were trying to reproduce the magic of the screen in their lives. This sympathetic magic took many forms from mimicking a starlet’s particular look or behaviour to desiring her entire life.²⁷ Newspapers reported on girls running away from home in search of the love, adventure and lifestyle revealed on the silver screen. In 1920, two Chatham, Ontario girls fled their homes and crossed into the United States allegedly following one girl’s actress sister. Their ultimate goal was to appear in movies.²⁸ These two girls were not an anomaly. Beginning as early as 1914, and becoming an extensive ‘problem’ in the 1920s, was the number of “movie struck girls” who had left their homes for Hollywood studios.²⁹

Female movie-goers were of particular concern and garnered special attention from the public, censors, and voluntary organizations. Lynda Nead recently argued that

²⁵ Lewis Jacobs, *The Rise of the American Film: A Critical History, 1921-1947* (New York: Teachers College Press of Columbia University, 1967), 405.

²⁶ *Hush*, September 27, 1928, 8, 12.

²⁷ On sympathetic magic and mimesis see Michael Taussig, *Mimesis and Alterity: A Particular History of the Senses* (New York: Routledge, 1993), 36. Sympathetic magic is the ‘older language’ for mimicry. Taussig describes mimesis as “an art of becoming something else of becoming other.”

²⁸ Cynthia Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth: Adolescence and the Making of a Modern Canada, 1920 to 1950* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier Press, 2006), 31.

²⁹ Heidi Kenaga, “Making the ‘Studio Girl’: The Hollywood Studio Club and Industry Regulation of Female Labour,” *Film History* 18, no. 2 (2006): 130.

women of all classes by the twentieth century were seen as “particularly susceptible to the appeals of the *visual* image.” In her study of images on the street in mid to late nineteenth century London, England, Nead showed how women were thought of being easily pulled into states of unregulated and potentially sexualized daydream and fantasy.³⁰ Popular film genres appealed to women’s fantasies and in the moral panics of the 1920s this allure had dangerous associations. Motion pictures in the 1920s tended to glorify heterosexual relationships, romance, leisure, and conspicuous consumption. Critics were concerned that for the most susceptible, young, working-class women, this might lead to a flawed character and higher expectations.³¹ An article in *Chatelaine* magazine warned that lonely working girls in the city that attended movies and walked to and from the theatres were at the prey of men watching them and hoping to lead them into an immoral life. The author also warned that movie tickets were used to lure young women into prostitution.³² Movies had not only become popular among women, but Hollywood pandered to young women. Particularly for working-class women, many films encouraged fantasy that broke away from traditional models of home, work, and family. The burgeoning star system of the 1920s created myths of actresses’ lives that mimicked screen roles adding to the believability of the fantasy. Further, advertising and cosmetic companies sold “star secrets” in products that promised to provide consumers with a little bit of that star’s glamour.³³ Movies provided an escape both literally and

³⁰ Lynda Nead, *Victorian Babylon: People, Streets, and Images in Nineteenth Century London* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 149.

³¹ Carolyn Strange, *Toronto’s Girl Problem: The Perils and Pleasures of the City, 1800-1930* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 59; Peiss, *Cheap Amusements*, 180; and Cathy L. James, “‘Not Merely for the Sake of an Evening’s Entertainment’: The Educational Uses of Theatre in Toronto’s Settlement Houses, 1910-1930,” *History of Education Quarterly* 38, no. 3 (Autumn, 1998): 295.

³² “The Problem of the Missing Girl,” *Chatelaine*, March 1929.

³³ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture*, (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 129, 141.

imaginatively from everyday existence and they created a fantasy that had the potential to lure people into dressing, acting, and consuming differently.

In 1928 Ontario Provincial Treasurer J.D. Monteith received a letter that connected the art controversy at the 1927 Canadian National Exhibition and the Canadian film industry. It stated,

In the first place if the Government is going in for moving pictures they must be of a distinctly Canadian atmosphere – this alone will not make a picture a success, you must give the people what they want.

Last year at the Toronto Exhibition [Canadian National Exhibition] the Art Gallery had a couple of paintings of nude women on view. Now there was nothing vulgar, or immoral, or unhealthy, or indecent about this, it was art, and as I understand it the hall in which these pictures was [sic] exhibited was thronged with people eager to see them. Of course we had some kill-joys, blasphemous hypocritical sanctimonious psalm singers, and religious hocuspocus [sic] artists, shouting their lungs out against these pictures being shown, but the holipolli flocked to see them, they were what they wanted so they went.

Now what I want to bring out is this: if you are going to make pictures that are going to be [a] success you must have a ‘kick’ in them, along with the ‘kick’ you can get in a lot of educational work, but there is no use producing pictures that the people are not going to pay their money to go and see, and talk about them after they have seen them; get this into that part of their anatomy, of your censors, where most people originate their ideas. Give the people what they want, then you can successfully compete with American, European, or any other film producers.”³⁴

As chapter four discussed, film had changed the viewing of art in the Gallery and many people expressed concerned over film’s influence on young minds. Film was a culture for the masses that had no claim to art as a cover – its use of sex, violence, and nudity were not allegorical but literal. They were not employed as social or political

³⁴ AO, File RG 56-1-1-1, British Films, 1926-1932, Letter From L.C. Serrios to J.D. Monteith, February 2, 1928.

commentary but simply for pleasure. Yet the connection between art and film by the 1920s was a very real one.

What people feared in art was obviously exploited by film – fantasy, pleasure, and desire – an intensely embodied way of looking. Art historian Lynda Nead explains this new form of looking as “a particularly intense form of embodied, haptic spectatorship.”

With mechanical technology came a

new perception of viewing that was in direct opposition to the traditional ideal of the detached contemplation of beauty. If art promoted the intellectual and contemplative consumption of the image in which the body had been trained not to look, then film and the optical machines of the mid- and late nineteenth century reintroduced the viewer’s body as an integral part of its attraction.³⁵

When moving pictures were introduced to Canadians in 1896 the new embodied perception startled viewers. As Canadian film historian Peter Morris stated, “The illusion of realistic movement itself created an extraordinary sense of audience participation, of actually *experiencing* the events on the screen.”³⁶ It was reported that film-goers often had dramatic physical reactions to the visual. One newspaper informed readers that “On one occasion, an old lady in the audience, quite unable to suppress a scream, started up in her seat and tried to scramble out, and in doing so knocked over the person behind her in her endeavour to get away from the horses; many more cases of the same sort have been known.”³⁷ This was haptic viewing; a way of perceiving and reacting with the body and

³⁵ Lynda Nead, “Strip: Moving Bodies in the 1890s,” *Early Popular Visual Culture* 3 no. 2 (September 2005): 136.

³⁶ Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 3.

³⁷ Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 3.

a type of sensuous history that places the body within a nexus of touch, motion and seeing.³⁸

With the popularity of nudity in both art and film, haptic viewing was a troubling phenomenon. Artists, like John Wentworth Russell, Rosalie Emslie, and George Drinkwater, used the female nude to test the boundaries of morality, convention, sensation, and artistic practice at once. As the chapter on the controversy at the Canadian National Exhibition describes, the nudes were ‘read’ within the context of a particularly disturbing youth popular culture that revealed – and revelled in – the female body. Movie houses were implicated as spaces where viewers were incorrectly educated in the ways of looking. In terms of film and its predecessor photography, Nead argues, “here was a medium which had introduced a new way of showing and looking at the female body.”³⁹ As the controversy over nude art raged in newspapers, many commentators compared the offensive paintings in the C.N.E.’s Art Gallery to what they saw as the lowest form of modern entertainment – the movie. One person wrote a letter to the editor questioning whether given youth’s propensity for the vileness of movies, which lacked beauty and idealism, could nude paintings be worse? They inquired “Can a few weeks at the Exhibition make much difference to children trained so early in crass vulgarity?”⁴⁰

The cinema was not the place for disembodied viewing and this was perhaps the most disturbing of all of the problems. Moving pictures did not separate the act of seeing from the body. They did not expect an intellectualized disassociation from the body that was expected in art galleries and art education. Movies required that viewers embodied

³⁸ Joy Parr, “Notes for a More Sensuous History of Twentieth-Century Canada: The Timely, the Tacit, and the Material Body,” *Canadian Historical Review* 82, no. 4 (December 2001): 742.

³⁹ Nead, “Strip,” 144-5.

⁴⁰ *Globe*, September 10, 1927, 14.

and understood physical suggestions on the screen. Film theorists have reminded us that cinematic vision requires that we know “what it is to touch things in the world.”⁴¹ This was key to both the trouble with the movies and their power outside of the theatre for they spread not only in terms of the fads they offered but also their cultivation of this new perception. The ‘kick’ described in the letter above, as chapter four discusses, was not necessarily the art itself, but how it was perceived and absorbed, particularly by a generation raised in the movie houses. Film and its introduction of new ways of seeing had dangerous implications on sexual experimentation.

SEXUAL EXPERIMENTATION: ON SCREEN, IN THE THEATRE AND BEYOND

As discussed in other chapters there was a sense of tension over new fads and fashions in dress and behaviour that Canadians, especially youth, were following. Critics decried new fashions, dating rituals, sexual experimentation, and the convergence of high and low culture, but it seemed that little could be done to alter the new immoral direction. Movies were powerful for disseminating fads and “stood unchallenged as the most potent of the new cultural forces affecting youth. American films were deemed ‘constantly and seriously demoralizing.’”⁴² The invasion of motion pictures was more than a revolution in leisure pursuits – it had a profound effect on the understanding of the body, visual culture, and its symbolic power (see fig. 5.1).

⁴¹ Nead, “Strip,” 139.

⁴² Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 467.



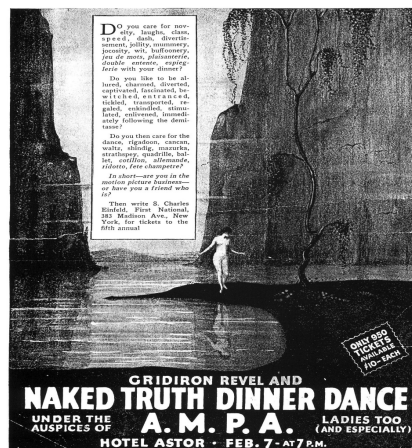
Fig. 5.1 Film – in moving pictures and advertisements – represented the most dramatic of challenges to tradition and its images and, at times, used some of the most obviously sexual imagery. (*Kinematographer Weekly*, September 25, 1924)

In declaring war on immodesty, the *Catholic Register* defined the various incarnations of “the plague of impurity” as manifesting “itself in lewd manners, loose conduct, questionable amusements, animalistic dancers, immodest dress, obscenity of conversation, a suggestive literature, a vile drama, filthy moving pictures, a general disregard for marriage, a cynical mockery of conjugal love, and an appalling increase in divorce.”⁴³ Movies, especially, became a symbol of negative social change during the decade since they were frequently associated as one of the sources of the social plague. Although youth were singled out specifically, movies also remained troublesome as entertainment for the masses.

One of the most prominent concerns was over the sexual content of films and its potential to encourage sexual immorality among movie patrons. Movies were presented in darkened theatres with crowds of people who, when the lights went out, entered into a

⁴³ *Catholic Register*, July 31, 1924, 4. On the impact of divorce in Canadian society see Jamie Snell, *In the Shadow of the Law: Divorce in Canada 1900-1939* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 42. Snell argues that World War One “revealed rather than caused marital problems.”

visual relationship with the screen during which time they were especially susceptible to the images. Critic Clinton R. Woodruff writing in the *Dalhousie Review* warned readers that “Pictorial representation, because of its direct appeal to our most sensitive and most accurate of senses, produces an impression more striking than that effected by the printed or spoken word....Furnish the eye with harmful or suggestive scenes, and the imagination can stimulate the emotions to evil desire. Vivid impressions arouse curiosity.” Films’ “suggestive impulses” were of particular concern because of “the intensity with which the photo-play takes hold of its audience.”⁴⁴ An advertisement that appeared in the trade magazine *Moving Picture World* summed up the suggestive powers of movies with an image and words. In their advertisement a nude woman appears. The advertisement asked, “Do you like to be allured, charmed, diverted, captivated, fascinated, bewitched, entranced, tickled, transported, regaled, enkindled, stimulated, enlivened, immediately flowing the demitasse?”⁴⁵ Such an advertisement hinted at the potential sexual impulses that films aroused as well as their ability to move (transport) people away from the comparative dullness of everyday life (see fig. 5.2).



⁴⁴ Clinton R. Woodruff, “An American View of Motion Pictures,” *The Dalhousie Review* 2, no. 1 (April 1922): 34.

⁴⁵ *Moving Picture World*, January 31, 1925, 418.

Fig. 5.2 This advertisement from *Moving Picture World* used the seductive imagery of a female nude and suggestive words to present the allure of moving pictures. (*Moving Picture World*, January 31 1925)

While the image and content of the movies were problems, there were further concerns about what actually took place in the audience that may have been inspired by the screen. The space of moving picture houses could be used for other purposes beyond film watching. Theatres were dark and provided a semi-private space for fantasy and activity. Despite the attraction of the screen and the darkness, like the Art Gallery, the movie house was a space to observe and regulate the behaviour of patrons. Often in the 1920s what people witnessed in theatres added to already high levels of anxiety. One observer noted,

In discussing the Cinema one need not confine one's self to the films; and there are other things at fault besides those pictures which are banal, vulgar or objectionable. There are the patrons, the theatres, and the reviewers. The embracing lovers, the morons unable to appreciate anything but the crudest thrills, hypocritical older men and – more often – women who patronize pornography and profess not to have understood the meaning of it, and parents who see a sex play on Friday and imagine some divine dispensation makes it suitable for their children on Saturday because they can get in for a dime!⁴⁶

In the post-war period when parenting practices became an increasingly popular public concern that involved a variety of experts from social workers to physicians, the appropriate care of children, including control over their leisure time, was frequently cited as an important factor in safeguarding the future of the nation.⁴⁷ What people,

⁴⁶ Patriarche, "The Cinema of To-Day," 30.

⁴⁷ See for example the article "The Problem of the Missing Girl," *Chatelaine*, March 1929, 9. The attention given to parenting was much more focused on mothering. See Veronica Strong-Boag, *The New Day Recalled: Lives of Girls and Women in English Canada, 1919-1939* (Markham: Penguin, 1988), chapter 5; Cynthia Comacchio, *Nations Are Built of Babies: Saving Ontario's Mothers and Children* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1993); Katherine Arnup, *Education for Motherhood: Advice for Mothers in Twentieth-Century Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1994); and Cynthia

especially youth, were doing in the darkness of movie houses under the influence of sexually suggestive films raised levels of alarm. Physical contact like “knee flirtation” caused anxieties over sexual experimentation among youth. Newspapers and magazines reported the shocking sexual liaisons said to have occurred in the public spaces of moving picture houses.

In a regular column in *Hush* entitled “Petting Among the Highbrows” a young man of humble means who worked hard to gain entrance to university told readers about the inner world of young, upper-class women in higher education. Week after week, “Junior” reported about the escapades that young women took him on. It was reported that on one occasion a young woman named Ellen took him to a movie theatre and told him “You’ve got to learn about making love in the movie-houses if you are ever going to get anywhere...” Of the experience, he reported to readers that “It was a surprise to me to find out how much petting you could do in a couple of theatre seats and how much was always going on. Ellen pointed out a few couples to me. Some of it was raw enough to make me blush but it didn’t seem to bother her.”⁴⁸ While “Junior’s” report would not necessarily have represented the actual lives of university students, it tapped into the concern over the influence of movies, the space of the theatre, and modern sexual practices.

As early as the 1910s, social surveys across Canada identified movie theatres, along with dance halls and skating rinks, as places where unsupervised and unregulated

Comacchio, “A Postscript for Father’: Defining a New Fatherhood in Interwar Canada,” *Canadian Historical Review* 78, no. 3 (September 1997): 385-408.

⁴⁸ *Hush*, December 22, 1927, 9.

immoral socializing between the sexes could occur.⁴⁹ Bodies in close contact, in the dark, combined with scenes of sexual impropriety had an obvious impact. The *Catholic Register* warned of movie-struck girls who were becoming “insufferable prigs” because of the lustful visions they watched on screen. The paper warned that these girls could be seen on the street and that “every casual glance a stranger gives them they interpret as expressing adoration, or the animal passion so crudely portrayed in their favourite movie-drama!”⁵⁰ If movies lured young men and boys to violent action, people worried that for young women and girls, the moral cost of films was sexual activity and potentially the spread of venereal disease.

Venereal disease was an important concern for Canadians in the 1920s. Although concern over the sexual health of the nation originated in the nineteenth century, the occurrence of World War One brought the issue to the forefront.⁵¹ By 1917, the National Council of Women pressed the federal government for a nation-wide campaign to study and control sexually transmitted diseases.⁵² By the end of the war, the social hygiene movement was emerging with force and began to encourage education as a means to combat the spread of venereal disease. On April 11, 1919 the federal government established the Department of Health with one of its ten divisions focused on venereal disease. Beginning in the 1920s, sex education was introduced in schools and government-produced pamphlets were printed and distributed to the public.⁵³

⁴⁹ Alan Hunt, “Measuring Morals: The Beginnings of the Social Survey Movement in Canada, 1913-1917,” *Histoire sociale/ Social History* 35, no. 69 (May 2002): 190.

⁵⁰ *Catholic Register*, February 6, 1922, 4.

⁵¹ On nineteenth century concerns in Canada see Wendy Mitchinson, *The Nature of Their Bodies: Women and Their Doctors in Victorian Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), 60-1.

⁵² Alison Prentice, *et al*, *Canadian Women: A History*, 2nd Ed., (Toronto: Harcourt Brace, 1996), 167.

⁵³ On sex education in schools see Christabelle Laura Sethna, “The Facts of Life: The Sex Instruction of Ontario Public School Children, 1900-1950” (Ph.D. diss., University of Toronto, 1995), 124-5.

A lengthy pamphlet published in Canada by the Canadian Social Hygiene Council warned young women to avoid accepting dates from “chance acquaintances,” to ride in cars or go to movies. These types of dates were offered with “the intention of leading them [young women] into sex relations.”⁵⁴ According to prominent social hygiene lecturer Arthur Beall, part of what made the environment so conducive to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases was the morally impairing influence of suggestive movies.⁵⁵ In addition to the cry to clean up the movies and regulate the images that were available to youth, the government screened educational movies about venereal disease. In the 1910s, the Ontario Board of Censors rejected movies about venereal diseases like the unsubtly titled *Damaged Goods*.⁵⁶ But by the 1920s, such movies were being exhibited as long as they met certain restrictions. Venereal disease movies like *Damaged Goods*, *End of the Road*, and *Open Your Eyes* were shown under the supervision of the Canadian National Council for Combating Venereal Diseases, restricted to audiences 16 years and up, and with separate screenings for men and women.⁵⁷

Beyond the specific concern over movies, sexual suggestiveness on the screen, and venereal disease, people’s concern spread to the more general area of sexual experimentation. As a significant part of the anxiety around modern urban commercial entertainments, concerns regarding movie-going were interwoven into the moral panic about youth. Reformers warned that movies and movie houses were breeding grounds

⁵⁴ Doris Lewis Rare Book Room, University of Waterloo Archives, E1339, *Healthy, Happy Womanhood*, (Toronto: Canada Social Hygiene Council), Reprinted by permission of the American Social Hygiene Association, No date, 1920s.

⁵⁵ Sethna, “The Facts of Life,” 124. The Ontario Women’s Christian Temperance Movement employed Beall until 1912 when he joined the Ontario Board of Education and lectured with them until the early 1930s. Sethna, “The Facts of Life,” 71-2.

⁵⁶ AO, RG 56-3 File 2.69 Restricted Feature Files, 1918-1971.

⁵⁷ AO, File RG 56-1-1-4, Censorship File, 1911-1921, Letter from Samuel M. Meher to Peter Smith, Provincial Treasurer, January 16, 1920; and AO, RG 56-3, Censorship File, Letter for Chief Censor, Ontario Motion Picture Bureau from Gordon Bates, Canadian Social Hygiene Council, December 23, 1921.

for sexual activity and overall moral and physical degradation.⁵⁸ The Canadian tabloid *Hush* reported the “Menace of Arabian Sheik Love.” The story warned that there was an epidemic of “neurotic screen-struck women” who “had their heads turned by the sentimental rubbish that is released in certain types of films” and were throwing themselves at “Arabian Sheiks.” The most disquieting aspect of this story was summarized by the subtitle that declared “New Mania for Colored Men.”⁵⁹ Tapping into the contemporary fear of racial miscegenation and the eugenics movement, this “mania” was part of a larger fear that was thought to lead to social dislocation and the failure of the Anglo Saxon race.⁶⁰ Rudolph Valentino was a cultural icon as the Sheik – a racialized and sexualized character that turned Valentino into the heartthrob of the 1920s.⁶¹

CENSORSHIP AND REGULATION

As a result of the diversity of the theatre patrons in conjunction with the content of the films, there were concerns that movies’ power extended too far. Movies made by the wrong sort of people (who in the 1920s seemed to be most of the American filmmakers) had the potential to cause serious disruptions in the social order. Member of Parliament P.F. Casgrain noted the potential for disruption in 1920. Addressing the House of Commons he stated,

Another point I want to make against these moving picture institutions is that they are responsible, in Montreal, Quebec and

⁵⁸ Lee Grieveson, *Policing Cinema: Movies and Censorship in Early-Twentieth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), 14-15; and Comacchio, “Dancing to Perdition,” 12-3.

⁵⁹ *Hush*, October 18, 1928, 9.

⁶⁰ This issue extended beyond North America. Rosaleen Smyth argues that beginning in the 1920s in the East and Central African colonies under British control Hollywood films were seen “as a threat to the British *imperium* because of the unsavoury image of the white race that was being projected.” Rosaleen Smyth, “The Development of British Colonial Film Policy, 1927-1939, With Special Reference to East and Central Africa,” *Journal of African History* 20, no. 3 (1979): 437-38.

⁶¹ Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth* 70.

other large cities for a great deal of evil that is being committed. In many cases a moving picture show is a common rendezvous for a certain class of people who want to hide themselves...The pictures that are exhibited are suggestive, and in some cases they lead to very bad results. They are an invitation to the people of the poorer classes to revolt, and they bring disorder into the country.⁶²

While the spectatorship of films had shifted in the preceding decades, in the 1920s fear about the movies remained and critics, like Casgrain, made it clear that certain spectators were more susceptible to the screen, in particular the working class and youth. In what was perceived as an overall loosening of morals and a shift in family values, movies were seen to cause rips in the social fabric of the nation that slowly weakened it. Due to the “suggestive” nature of many of the films shown in Canadian movie houses, federal and provincial governments took steps to ensure a higher quality of picture was available to the viewing public. An article on film censorship in Canada that appeared in *Maclean's* magazine reported that the censors “saved” Canadians from a host of dangerous images because of their potentially dangerous “effect upon weak and degenerate minds.”⁶³

Because movies appealed to all classes, ages, and both genders, the content of films increasingly drew attention. Although as early as 1911 the Ontario government passed legislation that required that an adult accompany children under the age of 16, this was not always enforced. It was not until 1928 that a movie classification system was developed that divided movies into two categories: ‘Universal’ and ‘Adults Only’. As with the earlier rules, the classification system was difficult to enforce and unevenly and infrequently employed. As a result, youth often had ample opportunity to attend

⁶² Canada, *House of Commons Debates*, (27 May 1920), p. 2811 (Mr. P.F. Casgrain, MP).

⁶³ R. Laird Briscoe, “What the Censor Saves Us From,” *Maclean's* November 1, 1925, 28-9, 40. See also “Taking the ‘Pep’ Out of the Movies,” *Saturday Night*, March 5, 1921, 1.

movies.⁶⁴ Despite the proscription on children and youth attending the movies, social commentators and censors continued to point out the potentially damaging impact they had.

Moving pictures had gripped the imagination of the nation. An advertisement for the Royal Securities Corporation of Montreal read “The Appeal of the ‘Movies’ Motion Pictures satisfy a universal demand for entertainment at reasonable prices. Motion picture theatres are consistently patronized by all classes of the community.”⁶⁵ The appeal of movies to all classes of Canadians represented a disturbing cultural trend in the commingling of classes. As the flapper’s fashions represented on the street, in advertisements, and in art, movies symbolized a blending of the classes and the increasing difficulty in visually deciphering someone’s class.⁶⁶ Being seen patronizing a movie house did not necessarily preclude or ensure middle-class respectability. Nonetheless, a paradox of class remained. Movies had lost much of their stigma as a working-class entertainment and had come to be patronized by a wider audience, yet they had not garnered the patina of high culture.⁶⁷ The rather dubious category of ‘taste’ remained a problem in terms of the content of movies shown in Canadian cinemas. Since moviemakers could not be trusted to produce appropriate films for Canadian audiences, censors were required to screen and suggest cuts to films in order to make them suitable. They protected audiences – and increasingly diverse audiences – from the lewd,

⁶⁴ AO, RG 56, Records of Film Review and Theatre Inspection of the Government of Ontario; Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 168.

⁶⁵ *Saturday Night*, November 19, 1927, 18.

⁶⁶ On the flapper and class see Suzanne Morton, *Ideal Surroundings: Domestic Life in a Working Class Suburb in the 1920s* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 131.

⁶⁷ Thompson with Seager, *Canada: 1922-1939*, 175.

suggestive and immoral lest they be tainted by American, working-class, 'immigrant' ideals.

In reaction to the negative consequences of film culture came the need to regulate and censor that to which people had access. Moving pictures brought into sharp relief the fact that visual images held immense power that needed to be controlled and, at times, censored. All across North American local, state, and provincial boards of censors decided what was morally fit for their communities. By 1914, almost all Canadian provinces had established boards of censors. Initially, the Canadian provincial boards of censors were concerned with what they saw as unnecessary patriotism in American films, in particular gratuitous flag waving and prize fights.⁶⁸ During the First World War, there was also a concern that gruesome newsreels from the front lines would deter recruitment, which after the first year of the war was already a problem.⁶⁹ In 1915 the United States Supreme Court ruled that movies were not entitled to protection under the first amendment, which protected free speech. The *Mutual* case gave legal protection for the censoring of films and invested parties (inside and outside of Hollywood) reacted by imposing restraints on the movies. The *Mutual* decision betrayed the origins of movies and maintained their status as a low cultural amusement arguing that they were little more than a carnival sideshow and a "spectacle" that was "capable of evil." The predominantly American motion picture companies were willing to work with provincial censor boards because the censoring of films had been legally entrenched in the U.S.⁷⁰

By the 1920s American film producers were responding to public criticism of their work and had implemented their own self-regulatory standards under the Motion

⁶⁸ Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 53-5

⁶⁹ Dean, *Censored!*, 22.

⁷⁰ Magder, *Canada's Hollywood*, 19.

Picture Producers and Distributors of America, Inc. (MPPDA). As a means to stem the flow of public outcry, these rules set the standards for representing sex, violence, crime, and morality in Hollywood produced films. Self-regulation attempted to ensure that the status quo of cultural acceptability was maintained, as were box office receipts. While a controversial film could initially attract an audience, in the long-term Hollywood producers needed to maintain their cultural power and the public's approval.⁷¹ The MPPDA was meant to be a pre-emptive strike used to ensure that local censors would pass films.⁷² Hollywood moguls introduced self-regulatory practices in an effort to respond to public criticism and frequently edited their films to meet community censors' demands and created an extremely powerful publicity campaign that sought to win the public's favour.⁷³ In this sense, censorship of films in the 1920s was a process of cultural negotiation. Nonetheless movie producers were not going to produce films solely for the censor at risk of losing an audience. The general trend remained that Hollywood produced films that audiences wanted to watch. The various aspects of self-regulation and censorship could tame some of the more offensive scenes and movies but they could not change public preference.

With the increasing demands of censors to have scenes cut from movies, most of the troublesome behaviour was implied or off screen. Yet, implication and subsequently relying on the imaginations of the audience could be more troubling than the actual content. Movie-going audiences were aware of the visual changes that indicated a cut

⁷¹ Bernstein, "Introduction," in *Controlling Hollywood: Censorship and Regulation in the Studio Era*, Matthew Bernstein, ed., (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 2.

⁷² For American movie producers the public negotiation over film content coalesced in 1930 when Catholic organizations drafted the Production Code. Although revised by Hollywood's movie elites and frequently modified in practice, the notorious Code gave its administrators the right to oversee and intervene into script writing, filming, and editing movies. Bernstein, "Introduction," 2.

⁷³ Stephen Vaughn, "The Devil's Advocate: Will H. Hays and the Campaign to Make Movies Respectable," *Indiana Magazine of History* 101, no. 2 (June 2005): 1-22.

and also that only certain types of scenes were subject to elimination. They were left to ‘fill in the blanks’ for themselves. Such censorship, critics argued, did little to stop the suggestiveness in films. To make the point clear, one *Saturday Night* writer argued it was the same as a newspaper editor deciding to eliminate the letter ‘e’. Even with ‘e’ gone a reader could still understand what was being said. B.K. Sandwell wrote, “The- int-llig-nt r-ad-r would –xp-ri-nc- v-ry littl- difficulty in filling in th- blanks.”⁷⁴ On screen notorious ‘It Girl’ Clara Bow was not shown participating in anything more than a quick kiss, yet the ‘it’ she came to represent was sex appeal.⁷⁵

Movies clarified for Canadian elites the power of the image not only in affecting the mind but also the body. The viewing body of the movie-goers was tied through film content to the social body. Part of the public, cultural investment in debate and various attempts to regulate films stemmed from this connection. When the government, social agencies, reform efforts, and the voices of ‘ordinary’ citizens meshed national identity, concerns over sexuality and vision, they tied together the bodies of individuals with the body and the moral and social health of the nation.⁷⁶ Ironically, the link was clearly articulated in a column in a Canadian newspaper that defended American movies. Under the title “Moral Movies,” columnist Dr. Frank Crane wrote

My own observation leads me to believe that Americans are more particular about the moral quality of their entertainment than any other people. In any country in Europe on the stage and screen that people in America would not stand for....North Americans are characterized by the fact that they have more bath tubs per capita than any other nation. They are also morally cleaner. They don’t care for dirt in whatever form it comes. And while there is a

⁷⁴ *Saturday Night*, August 20, 1932, 1.

⁷⁵ Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, 170.

⁷⁶ Grieveson, *Policing Cinema*, 19-20.

certain element that is always attracted by suggestive things the great body of the people does not like them.⁷⁷

Crane's column was unique in the position it used to make the connection, but the connection between the moral purity and physical cleanliness was not. A more common position was expressed in a letter to the editor of the *Toronto Daily Star*. The writer was concerned that in the absence of "vigorous censorship" the minds of youth, especially boys, were being spoiled with the glorification of crime and lewdness. At the conclusion of the letter the writer asked, "Is it not time we roused to the importance of careful and vigorous censorship of all these 'shows' that our young people are so eager to see and which are shaping their futures – the future of our nation – to a great extent?"⁷⁸ The "necessary evil" of censorship was the response.⁷⁹ At a conference of provincial boards of censors, the President of the Canadian Motion Picture Distributors Association stated that although he was theoretically opposed to censorship, he agreed that it was necessary in Canada.⁸⁰

In the public investigations into movies in the aftermath of a fire in a Montreal movie house in January 1927 where seventy-eight children died, the concern extended beyond the physical and structural problems with theatres.⁸¹ Although provincial regulations changed licensing and inspection practices as well as minimum ages and hours of admission, concern spread to moral and social concerns. When various social organizations met to discuss the problems they argued that movies were "injurious to young children. They affected their eyes, made them excited, destroyed traditions and

⁷⁷ *Vancouver Sun*, June 7, 1927, 9.

⁷⁸ *Toronto Daily Star*, March 4, 1927, 6.

⁷⁹ *Manitoba Free Press*, April 25, 1927, 13.

⁸⁰ AO, RG 56-1-1-4, Censorship File, 1911-1921, Minutes of the Meeting of the Provincial Censor Boards of Canada, November 9, 1921,.

⁸¹ For a contemporary example see *Victoria Times*, May 5, 1927, 8.

customs of the race, and were contrary to the spirit of family life, affecting children in their formative years.”⁸² Like alcohol, movies could be a poison for the mind. The *Catholic Register* stated “Temperance Leaguers and Prohibitionists have been busy keeping physical poison away from their children, while the latter were imbibing moral poison and the degradation from the yellow dramas of the movies.”⁸³ The influential medical journal *The Lancet* carried articles on the physical and moral impact of movies.⁸⁴ An article in the *Canadian Medical Association Journal* warned that the “gripping” effect of films caused fatigue in boys and a “20 per cent reduction of his physical capacity.” The article went on to state that for “physically and mentally subnormal children” the repercussions could be more serious. In times of crisis, the author warned, these children would automatically reproduce the “stereotyped gestures of actors” that they had subconsciously stored.⁸⁵ Newspapers also reported about the possible health repercussions of the visual. All movie-goers, but especially children, risked eye strain, nervousness, anxiety, and mental disability.⁸⁶ Commercial enterprises picked up on the concerns. The cosmetic industry drew upon these fears to market products like eye drops to potential customers. For example, *Murine*’s advertisement declared “Movies frequently strain Eyes.” The advertisement continued, “When you return from a picture show with strained, tired eyes, apply a few drops of soothing *Murine*.”⁸⁷ While it

⁸² *Manitoba Free Press*, May 5, 1927, 3.

⁸³ The *Catholic Register*, March 31, 1921, 4. On the relationship between the temperance movement and the push to reform the film industry in the United States see Kathleen D. McCarthy, “Nickel Vice and Virtue: Movie Censorship in Chicago, 1907-1915,” *Journal of Popular Film* 5, no. 1 (1976): 37-55.

⁸⁴ See for example Herbert Carson, “Amusements and Their Effects,” *The Lancet* 195, no. 5030 (January 31, 1920): 294-5; “Notes, Short Comments, and Answers to Correspondents,” 195, no. 5033 (February 14, 1920): 410; and “Notes, Short Comments, and Answers to Correspondents,” 196, no. 5076 (December 11, 1920): 1236.

⁸⁵ “The Movies and Childhood,” *Canadian Medical Association Journal* 20, no. 1 (January 1929): 84.

⁸⁶ For examples see *Saturday Night*, May 12, 1923, 11, 6; and *Manitoba Free Press*, May 5, 1927, 3.

⁸⁷ See, for example, the advertisement that appeared in *Saturday Night*, August 20, 1927, 24.

suggested the physical ailments could be rapidly cured, the physical, moral, and social impact of films required a more difficult solution. Reformers and educators complained that juvenile delinquency and anti-social behaviour were sometimes the result of watching movies and youth's tendency to mimic some characters' behaviour.⁸⁸

The situation was complicated. The very problem with the moving pictures was that you did not need to "be someone in order to see."⁸⁹ Unlike the theatre, with its social stratification in admission prices and the hierarchy of seats, the social environment of the movie theatre was far more democratic. The wide attraction of the movies meant that classes, ages, and genders were thrown together into the same, relatively small, space. Silent films did not require that patrons understand English or possess a certain level of literacy. Further, the content of movies did not require an education in appreciation in order to understand them as was thought to be necessary with high art. Already under strain from the movies, art education, particularly art appreciation, was seen as a necessity for schoolchildren in order to ensure common values in 'taste'. Beginning in the early twentieth century art education in Ontario schools focused on promoting aesthetic appreciation to "improve the higher standards of public taste." By the late 1910s and 1920s, it emphasized the importance of people being able to discern good pictures from bad. In a letter from Chief Inspector John Waugh to provincial Superintendent John Seath, Waugh emphasized that the first purpose of art education for every Ontario schoolchild was "The ability to appreciate good pictures independently and unaffectedly,

⁸⁸ James, 'Not Merely for the Sake of an Evening's Entertainment,' 297-8.

⁸⁹ Peter de Bolla, *The Education of the Eye: Painting, Landscape and Architecture Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford: Stanford California Press, 2003), 15.

a power which...is rarely found in persons without at least an elementary knowledge of the use of the ordinary Art mediums.”⁹⁰

The composition of the space meant that members of the audience were particularly vulnerable to the visual message on the screen. In a 1922 article, the author stated

An audience in a darkened picture-house, its attention fixed upon the screen, is in a state of high susceptibility to receive suggestive impulses from the film. The intensity with which the photo-play takes hold of its audience demands that special care be taken in the selection of the subjects which are to be so effectively presented, and necessitates supervision of the manner of that presentation.⁹¹

The absolute focus on the image combined with what many saw as the suggestiveness of movie content were thought to cause undesirable effects.

Newspapers, religious organizations, voluntary associations, and government officials all warned that the power of movies extended beyond simple amusement and reported that they could be a vehicle for instruction and the shaping of public morality.⁹² As a result, the content of films was important since they were not simply divertissements, but a powerful tool in shaping ideals, morals, and actions. In 1927 the Ontario censors quoted a newspaper editorial that stated, “The motion picture assuredly is the greatest engine of all times for the creation of mass opinion, and the most subtle and effective agent in the world for the dissemination of propaganda...”⁹³ Even the most outspoken critics and concerned citizens recognized the power in using images, attracting

⁹⁰ In Ontario, for example, art replaced drawing in the school curriculum in 1904. This shift represented a concern for ensuring the promotion of aesthetics appreciation and “higher standards of public taste.” See B. Anne Wood, “The Hidden Curriculum of Ontario School Art, 1904-1940,” *Ontario History* 78, no. 4 (December 1986): 351, 356.

⁹¹ Clinton R. Woodruff, “An American View of Motion Pictures,” *The Dalhousie Review* 2, no. 1 (April 1922): 34.

⁹² *Catholic Register*, November 29, 1923, 4

⁹³ AO, RG 56-1-2-123, *Annual Report 1927*.

audiences, shaping public opinion, and educating citizens. The *Catholic Register* succinctly stated that “With its direct dramatic appeal the moving picture is a great power for good and evil.”⁹⁴ A government report confirmed that film’s influence extended well beyond the movie house. It stated

It is admitted that the moving picture has come to abide with us, to take an important part in moulding the attitude of the minds of our future citizens towards the most vital issues of national well-being. Nor is this all, for the state of mind, the view point, the outlook, developed by this influence of the moving picture is bound to affect the individual in his relations to and conception of life itself and to re-act on his conduct and character...if appropriated and developed by the proper agencies in the right way, the moving picture can be made into a most effective educational aid. Few realize that is [sic] is possible to harness the moving picture to many interests, and that it is folly to ignore its power, because it may be used in an evil way.⁹⁵

Film, therefore, was an issue of importance in that it had become a major factor in influencing the minds of the substantial number of movie-goers. The problem with film was that nefarious businessmen were using it in an “evil way,” which usually meant that they made films depicting divorce, improper sexual relations, nudity, and violence, controlled it. At a meeting of provincial censors in 1921, representatives from six provinces declared that these types of themes did not conform to Canadian standards of family life.⁹⁶

The fact that film was an American industry made the effort to control it even more pressing in a decade when other American cultural products were a concern. Movies displayed many of the most negative aspects of American culture and their popularity among Canadian consumers highlighted cultural dependence and attempts at

⁹⁴ *Catholic Register*, September 17, 1926, 4.

⁹⁵ AO, RG 56-1-1-4, Censorship File, 1911-1921, *Report on The Motion Picture in Education*, 6-7.

⁹⁶ AO, RG 56-1-1-4, Censorship File, 1911-1921, Report on the Conference of the Censor Boards of Canada, November 4, 1921 (Conference was from November 1-3, 1921), 3.

Americanization of Canadians. Despite efforts to confront the power of the American movie, the problem of film content remained. In 1928 the Federated Women's Institutes of Ontario wrote a letter to Provincial Treasurer J.D. Monteith that informed him of a recent resolution that they had passed. It stated,

That, recognizing the great influence of the films, we the Women's Institutes in convention assembled, humbly beg to request that every effort be made to furnish educative, wholesome films, and to eliminate anything of a degrading and useless character, and we beg further to request that a more strict censorship be introduced, so that gradually our people will be led to call for nothing but the best, and that the use of British films be encouraged.⁹⁷

For many critics, British films were seen as an antidote to the menace of Hollywood films.⁹⁸ At the Imperial Conference in London in 1926 a resolution was passed that expressed the need for more films made within the Empire being shown in the Empire. Although Britain introduced their quota system in 1928 and Australia worked to protect its film industry, the federal government did nothing. Canadian film historian Peter Morris writes, "What is most puzzling about the official inaction is that it took place in an atmosphere conducive to action. Many were disturbed, as they had been nearly a decade earlier, over the predominant influence of Hollywood movies in Canada."⁹⁹

In the end, the attempts at the standardization and regulation of movies remained piecemeal and largely ineffective. Although censors could demand the elimination of particular scenes and stop certain movies from being shown, Hollywood continued to control the movie industry and could thus set the standards.¹⁰⁰ Despite the fact that movies were frequently blamed for contributing to such worrisome trends as delinquency,

⁹⁷ AO, File RG 56-1-1-1, British Films, 1926-1932, Letter from A.F. Stone and M. Macoun to J.D. Monteith, February 3, 1928.

⁹⁸ See, for example, "Encouraging British Films" *Manitoba Free Press*, April 20, 1927, 15

⁹⁹ Morris, *Embattled Shadows*, 179.

¹⁰⁰ Magder, *Canada's Hollywood*, 19.

sexual experimentation, rebellion, defiance, idleness, violence, and revealing fashions, films often simply reflected pre-existing concerns and simply broadcast them to much larger audiences. Movies that were a concern to censors often appealed to audiences and, in the end, the films that people wanted to watch were the ones made and shown. Like automobiles, films and film culture travelled at an increasingly quick pace. Change was rapid and attempts at control were reactive.

MARKERS OF MODERN LIFE

Clearly, images – and who produced, controlled, and consumed them – mattered. In the cultural terrain of the 1920s, however, movies not only projected images, but also had their own image. This image was intimately related to that of automobiles as symbols of modernity. Returning to the initial proposition of the chapter, movies and automobiles shared many common elements. As two of the most potent symbols of modernity, cars and movies met around issues of women’s bodies, visual culture, speed, and technology (see fig. 5.3).



Fig. 5.3 In this advertisement the “Body by Fisher” suggests both the car’s body and that of the woman’s. Note how the shape of the car in their logo is suggested in the back of her dress. (*Maclean’s* November 1, 1928)

For example, a joke printed in *Maclean's* revealed the connection between flappers and cars. The joke went

Mary: "Why do you call your car 'Flapper'?"
Elmer: "Streamline body, swell paint job, quick pick-up, all kinds of speed, keeps me broke, warms up quick, and is always ready to go."¹⁰¹

The association between flappers and cars, the shape of their body, paint (as make-up was frequently referred to in the 1920s), and speed were linked in visual representations as well. An advertisement for the De Soto Six made parallel suggestions (see fig. 5.4).¹⁰²



Fig. 5.4 A representation of the culture of cars, flappers, youth and speed. (*Maclean's* April 15, 1926)

In a similar fashion, modern movie patrons demanded “gloss and finish” but also “swift-moving drama, mechanical perfection, youth and beauty.”¹⁰³ Through a variety of popular cultural media, bodies, machines, and vision were linked with each other and modernity.

¹⁰¹ *Maclean's* April 15, 1926, 30.

¹⁰² See, for example, the advertisement that appeared in *Maclean's* July 15, 1929, 27.

¹⁰³ Patriarche, “The Cinema of To-Day,” 419.

As discussed in the other chapters, women's bodies became symbols of modernity. Moreover, the debate over women's bodies represented much wider social and cultural concerns over the pleasures and problems of modern life. With movies and cars, the relationship between women's bodies, the visual, and modernity articulated a concern over the increasing speed of life and change associated with the modern. As one car advertisement told readers, "The busy world of today pays homage to the motor car."¹⁰⁴ When commenting on the impact of the Great War, writers made it clear that life had changed permanently. The old order had collapsed and the new generation was born in the wake of blood and pain.

Movies and automobiles were singled out as symbols of modern life – particularly the negative aspects - with its quick pace, thrill-seeking, and recklessness. Moving pictures represented "life as a wild succession of hair-breadth escapes, thrilling feats, erratic adventures, and give the youth of the present day a weariness and distaste for the monotonous routine of well-ordered existence." In regards to cars, the *Catholic Register* warned that "the craze for speed, which has its vent in the driving of high-powered motor-cars at a reckless pace" symbolized youth's "unhealthy" and "abnormal" preoccupation with perpetual fun.¹⁰⁵ Coming into a continual stream of new movies and objects for consumption and youth were singled out as the modern generation, as consumers, and as leaders of mass cultural movements. Movies were directed towards an increasingly culturally powerful generation of youth; cars tapped into the widespread discourse on the desire to be young. One advertisement described their product as "a

¹⁰⁴ *Saturday Night*, July 17, 1920, 3.

¹⁰⁵ *Catholic Register*, August 18, 1921, 4.

creation that embodies the vibrant spirit of youth, a car that fairly breathes life and vigor and confident class.”¹⁰⁶ The car being advertised was the Hynes Special Speedster.

Cars and movies themselves had drastically changed in a few decades. One contemporary noted, “Films, once crude, halting, episodic, have become finished, smooth-flowing and closely knit. The camera now performs wonders as an aide to mood and atmosphere.”¹⁰⁷ Both moving pictures and automobiles, like other newer technologies, required that consumers be comfortable with technology and the increasingly rapid changes to it. For both, consumers had to be able to think of the changes as progressive, fascinating, and non-threatening.¹⁰⁸ Reflecting back on the war years and the first few years after, V.S. Patriarche pointed out that the ease of technology provided respite. “Sick men, broken men, weary and reckless men on furlough, called for entertainment; anxious watchers at home longed for respite and relaxation. The new, smart, smooth-running screen stories made in the new finely-equipped American studios brought pleasure and forgetfulness to millions of jaded souls.”¹⁰⁹

In regards to cars and movies, women were singled out as primary consumers and also as targets for making the technology seem safe and exciting. In film serials directed towards women, the stories helped to prepare women for changes and suggested that modern women “should be prepared to accept and learn about technological change.”¹¹⁰ In a similar way cars promised women ease and safety accentuating features like “smooth

¹⁰⁶ *Saturday Night*, July 31, 1920.

¹⁰⁷ Patriarche, “The Cinema of To-Day,” 420.

¹⁰⁸ Sherrie Innes, “The Feminine En-Gendering of Film Consumption and Film Technology in Popular Girls’ Serial Novels, 1914-1931,” *Journal of Popular Culture* 29, no. 3 (Winter 1995): 173.

¹⁰⁹ Patriarche, “The Cinema of To-Day,” 424.

¹¹⁰ Innes, “The Feminine En-Gendering of Film Consumption and Film Technology in Popular Girls’ Serial Novels, 1914-1931,” 173. On the technological developments see Gerald Graham, *Canadian Film Technology, 1896-1986* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1989).

as velvet” brakes, a “big and powerful engine,” and easy steering.¹¹¹ Advertisements sometimes featured pictures of dashboards with descriptions of how the different instruments worked along with detailed explanations. For example, “You easily depress the small lever (A) at the left – and the velvety-powered Haynes engine with its dependable force and strength in reserve is in motion softly humming in readiness to propel your new series Haynes.”¹¹² The description emphasizes what the driver will see, hear, and feel as a way to ready them for the physical and sensory experience of driving.

Although efforts were made to ‘sell’ the technology, problems remained. As discussed earlier in this chapter, film technology was thought to have a potentially damaging impact on the physical and psychological health of movie-goers. Automobiles had clear dangers associated with them. Technological change was never fluid and, although it seemed to arrive quickly, it also came haltingly with crashes, breakdowns, and accidents. For example, in Toronto in 1914 eighteen people died in car accidents while in 1928 over two hundred people perished as a result of crashes.¹¹³ Movies had a similar relationship to speed in that they could be experienced at different paces from a complete stop to rapid movement. Film, like cars, had the ability to slow down. Walter Benjamin argues that film offered a potential antidote to the sped up modern world through the slowing down of time.¹¹⁴ As cars provided potential healing escape when they were driven into ‘natural’ areas, movies provided filmgoers with the potential to heal modern ills by bringing together disconnected images. The audience thus experiences the images

¹¹¹ *Chatelaine*, June 1929.

¹¹² *Saturday Night*, July 17, 1920, 7.

¹¹³ Allan Levine, *The Devil in Babylon: Fear of Progress and the Birth of Modern Life* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 2005), 236.

¹¹⁴ Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: the MIT Press, 1991), 268.

of modern life as a distanced expert rather than an active participant. As the experience of the speed of cars redefined urban and rural landscapes as two-dimensional images and thus allowed drivers to become spectators in their own setting, film technology buffered modern realities.

Movies and cars broadcast styles of bodies and fashion to be emulated, showed changes in behaviour, and attempted to trap youth into cycles of change and consumption. In both, bodies were integral to understanding speed. In Canada in the 1920s, continuous motion was very much a part of the problem with movies and film culture and efforts were made to slow the speed of change. It is of little wonder then that the flapper – herself an embodiment of perpetual motion – came to be a central figure in and of early cinema. She appeared frequently in car advertisements along with friends who were motoring for fun and adventure. Cars were frequently described in similar terms to flappers and their apparel. Appealing to women’s new power as consumers, advertisers promised cars that had “the streamline effect of the body,” “conspicuous good looks,” “long, graceful lines,” and “slender profile.”¹¹⁵

Like movies, driving cars promised excitement and adventure and these possibilities were directed towards women, especially young, middle-class women. Despite the decreasing prices for automobiles and the increasingly numbers of them – by the end of the 1920s there were over one million automobiles registered in Canada – they remained beyond the means of many Canadian families.¹¹⁶ However, copywriters often

¹¹⁵ *Maclean's* January 1, 1926, 35; June 1, 1926, 33; and May 1, 1929, 39.

¹¹⁶ On car ownership see James Dykes, *Canada's Automotive Industry* (Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 31; John de Bondt, *Canada On Wheels: A Portfolio of Early Canadian Cars* (Toronto: Oberon Press, 1970), 7-8; and Levine, *The Devil in Babylon*, 233-34. Levine argues that by the late 1920s cars were a necessity. He cites the famous American *Middletown* study by Robert and Helen Lynd. The Lynds performed research on cultural and social trends in Muncie, Indiana between 1924-25. They found that people were

made the experience of being in – rather than owning – a car paramount. In marketing automobiles to women, advertisers quoted other female drivers who stated “The joy I get out of motoring is in having a peppy, responsive engine” “Long, low, racy...just the kind of car I was sure would do the most thrilling things, quite easily.”¹¹⁷ The car described in the last quote also came equipped with “Lovejoy Shock Absorbers.” Cars, like their theatrical counterpart, became a space for adventure, excitement, and quite possibly a private space for sex. As one young man in the 1920s recalled, young men “needed a car to make it with girls.”¹¹⁸ One of the more troubling aspects of the modern age was the change in courting practices that moved away from adult chaperoned ones to automobiles, movies and other commercial recreations. Youth embraced the mass culture that promoted a new morality but could not entirely break away from deep rooted traditions around home, work, and marriage. Like movies much of what cars and their advertisements sold was fantasy. While traditions were changing, familial and community control, the expectation of marriage and strictures against teen pregnancy worked to ensure that the new morality was tempered with traditional values.¹¹⁹ Modernity it seemed could be slowed at times, but not permanently stopped.

CONCLUSION: “LEAPS TO THE IMAGINATION”

A letter from R.S. Peck, the Director of the Canadian Government Motion Picture Bureau, argued that motion pictures were more powerful than the press in delivering messages and moulding public tastes and opinions. Peck quoted a writer in

willing to forgo food in order to save for a car and that among working-class families more had cars than bathtubs.

¹¹⁷ See, for example, the advertisements that appeared in *Maclean's* June 1, 1926, 33; and *Saturday Night*, August 27, 1927, 28.

¹¹⁸ Interview with Jean C., November 1981 quoted in Coulter, “Teen-Agers in Edmonton,” 128.

¹¹⁹ Comacchio, *The Dominion of Youth*, chapter 3. See also Beth Bailey, *From Front Porch to Back Seat: Courtship in Twentieth-Century America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988).

Kinematograph Weekly who wrote, “It (the movie) leaps to the imagination instantly.”¹²⁰ Moving pictures – and their own technological mirror image the car - did represent an important change in the modern world: the speed of modernity. Visually and metaphorically, moving pictures and cars symbolized the potential of the rapid succession of change not only technologically but also culturally and socially. Movies had a profound impact on Canadian culture, particularly Canadian visual culture in the 1920s. They helped to re-shape morality through providing spaces for fantasy, desire, and escape. The cinema was blamed for encouraging and providing the space for sexual experimentation among youth. A result of the influential nature of movies, control over the image and its cultural repercussions was sought through censorship and regulation. Despite having the ability to eliminate scenes and stop screenings of particularly offensive movies, censors had difficulty competing with the public’s demands for certain types of shows and Hollywood’s power in producing them. What movies and their cultural counterpart the automobile really represented was the speed of change associated with women’s bodies and visual culture that symbolized the continuous motion associated with modern life. It could be momentarily halted – technology failed, the censors had some successes – but overall modernity had arrived and continued to quicken the pace. It was enmeshed in visual culture and caught up in the representations of women’s bodies. Automobiles and movies promised a new way to experience the body – at top speed – and not about to slow down.

¹²⁰ AO, RG 56-1-1-1, British Films, 1926-1932.

CONCLUSION: “A RIOT OF FLECKS OF COLOUR”

A recent edition of *Scientific American* noted “one of the prime discoveries in recent neuroscience: mirror neurons.” Found in the premotor cortex and the parts of our brains responsible for language, empathy, and pain, mirror neurons are responsible for a major biological component of human learning. New research suggests, “we mentally rehearse or imitate every action we witness, whether it is a somersault or a subtle smile. It explains much about how we learn to smile, talk, walk, dance, or play tennis. At a deeper level, it suggests a biological dynamic for our understanding of others, the complex exchange of ideas we call culture...”¹ Researchers believe that mirror neurons hold keys to understanding how we learn culture and how culture is transferred from one generation to the next through mimicry. The discovery of mirror neurons also adds a scientific component to long-standing concerns over the impact of visual culture. Of course, Canadians in the 1920s could not have known any of the biological foundations of visual culture, but they did express concern about and over what people were watching and how it was affecting their actions and behaviour. For many, the links between watching, knowing, learning, and doing were very real.

Walter Benjamin made the connection between visual learning and understanding in a slightly different form. He postulated that

Perhaps the daily sight of a moving crowd once presented the eye with a spectacle to which it first had to adapt [...T]hen the assumption is not impossible that, having mastered this task, the eye welcomed opportunities to confirm its possession of its new ability. The method of impressionist painting, whereby the picture is assembled through a riot of flecks of color, would then be a

¹David Dobbs, “A Revealing Reflection,” *Scientific American* 17 no. 2 (April/May 2006): 22-27.

reflection of experience with which the eye of a big-city dweller has become familiar.²

For Benjamin the link between the perception of the crowd and impressionist paintings was based in popular culture's mimetic restructuring in response to the trauma of modernity. Mimicry –in the visual realm – mediated through technology (i.e. film, photography, advertising, etc.) connected modernity, visual culture, and the body. Being modern was perhaps associated with a new way of seeing. John Berger reminds us that “the way we see things is affected by what we know or what we believe.” As the case studies presented here revealed, being modern in Canada produced *ways* of seeing in relation to things and people.³

For Canadians in the 1920s visual culture reflected and refracted important social and cultural concerns related to modernity and opened up opportunities for public discussions on these larger issues. It was not simply antimodern tendencies that erupted around visual symbols, but a far more complex consideration of the acceptance of aspects of modernity and the anxiety over others. Canadians in the 1920s had accepted modernity. As Marshall Berman describes, however, being modern was the appreciation of the pleasure of modernity and the concomitant fear of destruction.⁴ Being modern meant balancing between those poles and, in the 1920s, Canadians sought balance in being modern. During the Jubilee national elites tried to restore the balance between tradition and modernity and promoted the idea of continuity between the past, the present, and the future to ease the disruptive forces that threatened Canadian culture. In the public

² Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 269.

³ John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1972), 8-9.

⁴ Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (London: Verso, 1983), 15.

debates and discussions that took place around beauty contests and nude art, people were questioning whether or not the balance had been upset. Films, cars, and the images of the modern female body revealed the continuing tension around avenues for modern pleasure. They also indicated the speed of modernity, which was a disconcerting fact that repeatedly threatened the stability of social order that Canadians sought.

Through case studies this dissertation has explored the variety of ways primarily urban, English-Canadians dealt with, debated, and sought to remedy some of the problems they saw with modernity. While the issues seemed to spread across a diverse section of Canadian society and culture, ways of understanding the concerns and the fractures in social and cultural order were brought down the level of understanding through the images of women's bodies. In a prolific and powerful visual culture, women's bodies stood out as symbols of tradition, modernity, power, pleasure, and change.

Of these complex images, perhaps the most recognized was (and is) the flapper. The flapper's image hosted a number of complex meanings about modernity and the body. Her complex relationship to a Canadian society and culture coming into its own did not lessen her potency. She was a modern Folk Devil – desired and feared. As a hybrid image that could be suited to national purposes, hers reflected the ongoing cultural tensions and negotiations in Canada. The flapper also revealed different ways of thinking and experiencing the body that were tied to the project of modernity – through her appearances in and erasure from various events and spaces in the Canadian cultural landscape she revealed ideas about gender, class, age, race, and social order.

Without a doubt the flapper remained an elusive icon for women to copy. Mimicking the flapper look suggested continuous work. No longer was the body simply a venue through which one could experience the world, it had to be carefully monitored. In a culture based on the visual, what the body looked like to others became a key point promoted and stressed through advertisements. The body became a project and one that relied on modern practices of consumption for improvement. If the body was to be improved it was done so through purchasing any number of products. Thus the flapper embodied contradiction: she claimed freedom but this came at the price of increased personal surveillance and continued bodily work. The flapper, despite her often confusing and contradictory meanings associated with freedom, remained a salient image of modernity in Canada.

Despite the flapper's popular appeal, she was largely ignored in the creation of a visual culture for the Diamond Jubilee of Confederation celebrations. Once the planning of the Jubilee celebrations was set into motion the concerns and anxieties over a broad range of issues were absorbed into the artistic renderings for the Jubilee. Anxieties over the changing nature of femininity, masculinity, regional spaces (particularly the North), and Whiteness among others were expressed through official materials. The Jubilee revealed the ongoing cultural struggle that national elites faced in attempting to bring a nation together. The modern future held promise, but only if it was carefully tempered by a conscious consideration of the past.

The flapper, as a symbol of modernity, was more obviously negotiated in beauty contests held during the decade. While contests varied considerably, as a whole they became a focal point for discussion on modern life and the balance between

tradition/modernity, pleasure/destruction. The imaging of female sexuality was important to many of the debates, and sexuality was not only a personal expression but also a source of public concern. The revelation of the female body – an aspect of modern femininity that seemed was apparent in a variety of venues – represented potentially dangerous cultural shifts.

While many people discussed the body in terms of beauty contests, it was the full revelation of depictions of bodies at the 1927 Canadian National Exhibition that garnered a serious public debate. Anxieties over visual culture and its potential impact on viewers were at the heart of the concern. These debates also revealed the uneasiness with which some Canadians viewed the connections between bodies, popular culture, and class dynamics. Perhaps one of modernity's most disconcerting elements was the speed at which it seemed to demand of those who lived under it. The connection between films, cars, and bodies highlight the concern over speed and the cultural conditions reflected in and revealed through images of women's bodies.

Reading the visual culture of the 1920s reveals Canadians' acceptance of modernity. Understandably they embraced it as they continued to be cautious of it. As a whole, Canadians made their own modernity, cobbled together by their acceptance and rejection of ideas and ideals presented by female bodies. Given Marshall Berman's argument on modernity, this made Canadians and their understanding of culture in the 1920s thoroughly modern. As the kaleidoscope of culture shifted patterns before their eyes, they attempted to make sense of what it meant to be modern, and of that, what they could accept. Living in the post-World War One world meant living with change that

seemed to come at a rapid pace. Despite concerns and anxieties over new cultural directions, Canadians in the 1920s were modern and they could see it.

APPENDIX
A NOTE ON METHODOLOGY

Doing the history of visual culture is challenging. Like all types of histories it presents a certain set of theoretical and methodological issues. The relative newness of the field provides an additional challenge in that the boundaries of it have yet to take a distinct shape. Recent and continuing debates on what actually constitutes the field of visual culture reflect some of the more basic problems of definition and practice.¹ While I do not engage with these debates in my study, I do acknowledge that it remains difficult to provide a fixed definition of what the term visual culture encompasses. By way of a definition, however, here visual culture indicates a broader view of art and performance that is based in popular culture and reveals underlying social and political projects. Irit Rogoff argues that visual culture is more than an expanded domain of art objects. She writes that the new visual field includes “the information, desires and encoded values that circulate throughout every level of culture in the form of visual representations.”² In this study I have focused on aspects of visual culture through which social and political issues can be observed. James Elkins warns that certain subjects on visibility can lead to having to “give up the entire project of social and political analysis.”³ Nevertheless as a cultural historian with a debt to social history, my work is based on a politically-informed analysis, particularly feminism.⁴ My study is shaped by gender history and by a feminist

¹ Some of the origins of the debates can be found in “Visual Culture Questionnaire” *October* 77 (Summer 1996): 25-70.

² Irit Rogoff, “‘Other’s others’: Spectatorship and Difference” in *Vision in Context: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives on Sight* eds., Teresa Brennan and Martin Jay (New York: Routledge, 1996), 189-190.

³ James Elkins, *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 84.

⁴ Elkins’ interpretation of politics is largely undefined. In his discussion on the possibility of politically-informed analysis he refers to identity theory, the politics of nationhood, and art. His notion of politics in terms of contemporary works on visual culture seems to be tied to art history and gender analysis. For the full discussion see Elkins, *Visual Studies*, 83-86.

interpretation. Part of the process in my selection of case studies was that such cases revealed the politics of the body, gender, class, age, and ‘race’. For this reason, my work is more closely aligned with the definition of visual culture provided by Nicholas Mirzoeff than its other usage related directly to what might be otherwise called the new art history. Mirzoeff argues that the study of visual culture should “highlight those moments where the visual is contested, debated and transformed as a constantly challenging place of social interaction and definition in terms of class, gender, sexual and racialized identities.”⁵ This definition is the starting point for the feminist-based analysis that forms the crux of my dissertation.

In order to explore the history of visual culture I have relied on the methodology of discourse analysis with its focus on the relationship between discourse (both text and image) and the production of meaning. Discourse and discourse analysis were central to French philosopher and historian of ideas Michel Foucault, whose work has informed my own ideas on history and methodology but are not explicitly evident in the main body of my dissertation.⁶ As with many works that use discourse analysis, my work has traced a theme – the female body – through a variety of sources to reveal both commonalities and absences. As illustrated in the chapter on the Diamond Jubilee, absences and invisibility – in this case particularly in terms of the flapper – can be just as revealing as the knowledge intended for dissemination. As Gillian Rose points out, discourse analysis relies on interpreting sources for what a particular discourse says about truth, reality,

⁵ Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 4.

⁶ The work by and on Foucault is prolific. Interviews done with him before his death continue to be published and work interpreting his ideas or using them is almost unlimited. The clearest introduction to discourse analysis and Foucault’s methodology can be found in Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Publications, 1972). On Foucault’s methodology see Michèle Barrett, *The Politics of Truth: From Marx to Foucault* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1991), chapter 6; and Gillian Rose, *Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), chapters 6 and 7.

and/or nature and about what is left invisible.⁷ Making connections between images and other forms of discourse (what is known in theoretical terms as intertextuality) reveals the production and maintenance of social and cultural differences. Using a Foucauldian based methodology of discourse analysis allows visual culture to be ‘read’ and connected to wider webs of meaning in relations to gender, class, age, and ‘race’. In this way the theoretical and methodological basis of the dissertation meet in terms of identifying and understanding the meaning of the female body among wider cultural networks and constructions.

Because of the theoretical nature of most work on visual culture – particularly its emphasis of the condition of postmodernity – at times theorizing visual culture and writing the history of it have seemed at odds. Images are prolific; archival sources are less accessible. In our postmodern world we are surrounded by images; finding historical images in archives depends on the sometimes haphazard way such history gets saved. More importantly, the everyday reactions to images rarely made their way into the written records of ‘official’ history. At one level then, there is a variety images readily available to historians, but at another level, there is little evidence about the production of the image, who was represented in it, or how it was seen and received by the public. Thus, some of the key questions contemporary theorists ask about visual culture are difficult to empirically prove for the historian. Situating images within historical context and reading them alongside other sources remains one of the challenges of this type of history. For my dissertation this issue necessarily limited the case studies to those moments where enough evidence existed for the interpretation of the images. In this

⁷ Rose, *Visual Methodologies*, 151.

study images provided the springboard for discussion and were read within their wider historical context.

The bulk of my sources are newspapers, periodicals, and magazines, which were prolific and accessible both in the past and today. In focusing on popular culture, I needed to rely on sources that allowed insight into that area of Canadian culture. By the 1920s these sources contained both printed material as well as photographs, drawings, and other visual renderings. These sources allowed me to ‘read’ the images alongside of sources that contained commentary on them specifically or on the culture more generally. Archival records, when they could be found, were used. Printed material – both newspapers and archival sources – provided insight into the larger social and cultural context. The main focus on a national history and a wider look at ‘Canadianness’ has meant that sources with a national character and distribution were most often selected. In particular, this has meant relying on newspapers like the *Globe* and magazines like *Maclean’s* and *Saturday Night*. Where necessary, however, regional or local sources that dealt with or commented on the particular case studies were incorporated. The result, however, meant that my study focused on gender, class, age, and ‘race’ within a national framework.

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Other Depositories
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Dance Collection Danse Archives
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