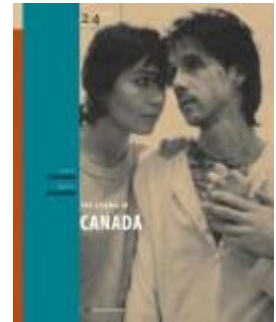


Jerry White, ed.. *The Cinema of Canada*. London: Wallflower Press, 2006. v + 268 pp. \$80.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-904764-61-8.



Reviewed by Dominique Brégent-Heald

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Over the past decade, there has been a noticeable surge in scholarly works dedicated to Canadian cinema, in step with mounting international recognition and accolades for Canadian filmmakers. Although a steady domestic audience for Canadian films remains elusive, the quality of Canadian feature-length productions in recent years is promising. However, does this mean that there is a Canadian national cinema? National cinema, as a category of analysis, covers more than the domestic film industry. Rather, as Andrew Higson has argued, a national cinema seeks "to proclaim a unique identity and a stable set of meanings," and has "invariably been mobilised as a strategy of cultural [and economic] resistance" against the U.S. mainstream film industry.[1] Yet, as Higson notes elsewhere, defining cinema according to the geographic or imagined contours of the nation-state ignores the existence of transnational, regional, hybrid, and diasporic filmmaking.[2] Just as there can be no coherent and unified nation, there can be no coherent and unified national cinema. *The Cinema of Canada*, edited by Jim White, assistant professor of film studies at the University of Alberta, is a collection of twenty-

four short and diverse essays, which are cinematic expressions of Canadian identity in all its heterogeneous and fragmented glory. The anthology does not seek to clarify the relationship between cinema and national culture, but rather problematizes that relationship. This text is another addition to the ambitious 24 Frames series published by London-based Wallflower Press. Rather than attempt to define a "national cinema," each volume seeks "to highlight the specific elements of that territory's cinema, elucidating the historical and industrial context of production, the key genres and modes of representation, and foregrounding the work of the most important directors and their exemplary films" (p. iv). In keeping with the goal of the series, the purpose of *The Cinema of Canada* is not to present readers with a canon of Canadian-made films. Instead, White's admittedly eccentric and incomplete film choices are intended to inspire interest in Canada's place in world cinema (p. 10). (Readers may be surprised, as I was, to find that David Cronenberg, Guy Maddin, and Claude Jutra are absent while Jim Jarmusch's *Dead Man* [1995] is included.)

There is, however, a logic driving this collection. Influenced by John Ralston Saul's notion of Canadian identity as a "triangular reality," White organizes the anthology according to Canada's three distinct cinematic traditions--anglophone, francophone, and aboriginal, with eight essays apiece. As are other volumes appearing in the series, the chapters are arranged sequentially by production date, from 1937 through 2002. A thematic presentation, however, would have made the triangular metaphor more resonant. Nevertheless, the chronological order does give the reader a sense of change over time by touching on National Film Board documentaries, the direct cinema movement, the impact of Quebec's Quiet Revolution, experimental and avant-garde filmmaking, the emergence of First Nation's Cinema, and finally postmodern cinema. The contributors to the volume, which include established film scholars, graduate students, cineastes, and critics, are as diverse as the film selections. This also accounts for a multiplicity of methodological approaches. Although the anthology is text centered, in keeping with the mandate of the 24 Frames series, some of the essays are theoretical (e.g. chapters 3 and 6), others are more descriptive (e.g. chapter 15), and others focus on historical context or issues of spectatorship or reception (e.g. chapters 1, 2, and 5). As a result, there is a lack of coherence between the chapters. This is not meant to be a criticism of the editor, who is constrained by the format of the 24 Frames series. Still, those who have little knowledge of oppositional Canadian cinema will find the anthology enjoyable as an introduction to the eclectic nature of domestic film production in Canada. There is also adequate discussion of lesser-known films that should appeal to those schooled in Canadian film studies. However, readers seeking a comprehensive examination of filmmaking in Canada or a history of the Canadian film industry and film policy will need to look elsewhere. Notes

[1]. Andrew Higson, "The Concept of National Cinema," *Screen* 30, no. 4 (1989): 36-46 in *Film and*

Nationalism, ed. Alan Williams (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 53-54.

[2]. Andrew Higson, "The Instability of the National," in *British Cinema Past and Present*, ed. Justine Asby and Andrew Higson (London: Routledge, 2000), 35-48.

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