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Fragments of Memory: Mainstream Representation and Italian Canadian Film and Video

"The limits of one's language signify the limits of one's world"
(Boelhower 1984, 26)

Abstract

While the mass media continues to disseminate one-dimensional stereotypical renditions of Italian culture, the actual "work of the imagination" (Appadurai 4) is taking place in the margins of these sites. Here action and agency, framed against the mass media, develops ethnic minority representation as a rich complexity of images and stories. Because Canadian film and video makers who use their immigrant and "ethnic" experience in their work, will often find it being judged as culturally "poor" and of "no value", it is important that the label of "ethnic" be deconstructed. Meanings are never fixed or immutable (Tator 8). William Boelhower's investigation of ethnic semiosis that he applied to American ethnic literature and Italian Canadian poetry can therefore also be applied to the works of some Italian Canadian filmmakers. For this paper I transpose Boelhower's theories on the Italian Canadian poetry in Pier Giorgio Di Cicco's Roman Candles (Di Cicco 1978; Boelhower 1992: 229-244) to the two Italian Canadian films being discussed here: Sara Angelucci's video America il Paradiso (1997) and Patricia Fogliato and David Mortin's film The Good Life (1991).

Résumé

Pendant que les médias continuent à disséminer des interprétations stéréotypées un-à dimensions de culture Italienne, le véritable "le travail de l'imagination" (Appadurai 4) a lieu dans les marges de ces sites. Ici l'action et l'agence, encadrées contre les médias, développent la représentation de minorité ethnique comme une complexité riche d'images et d'histoires. Parce que le film Canadien et fabricants vidéo qui utilisent leur immigrant et leur expérience "ethnique" dans leur travail, souvent trouvera il étant jugé comme culturellement "pauvre" et de "aucune valeur," c'est important que l'étiquette de "ethnique" ait détruit. Les moyens ne sont jamais réparés ou immuable. (Tator 8). L'investigation de William Boelhower de semiosis ethnique qu'il est appliqué à la littérature ethnique Américaine et la poésie Canadienne Italienne et, aussi peut être appliquée par conséquent aux travaux de quelques cinéastes Canadiens Italiens. Pour ce papier que je transpose les théories de Boelhower sur la poésie Canadienne Italienne dans les Bougies Romaines de Pier Giorgio Di Cicco (Di Cicco 1978; Boelhower 1992: 229-244), aux deux films Canadiens Italiens étant ici discuté: le vidéo

de Sara Angelucci *Amérique il Paradiso (1997)* et le film de Patricia Fogliato et David Mortin *La Bonne Vie (1991)*.

My MA thesis, *Challenging Exclusion: Film, Video, Identity, Memory and the Italian Canadian Immigrant Experience*, brought together and documented, for the first time ever, a body of film and video created over the past fifty postwar years. It then probed what it means for Italian diasporic artists to be, act and construct "Canadian." Instead of offering a chronicle of historical developments or a thematic link for what has been produced, an interdisciplinary methodology within cultural studies was used. This choice was made in order to critically analyse ethnic-minority representation, action and agency, that is framed against the background of a mainstream media dominated by the overwhelming albatross of negative Italian stereotypes created by Hollywood. A recent study completed by the Italic Institute of New York, titled "Image Research Project: Italian Culture on Film during the Period of 1928-2001"¹ found that of the 1220 Italian-related films produced during this period only 374, that is 31%, portray Italians in a positive light or in a relatively complex way. The other 846, that is 69% of the total, portray Italians in a negative light. These 846 films that portray Italians in a negative light were broken down even further into two individual categories: Mob characters and boors, buffoons, bigots or bimbos. In the mob characters category we have 487 films, 40% of the negative category. In the boors, buffoons, bigots or bimbos category we have 359, 29% of the negative. The Institute then broke this mob category down even further: Real mob characters and Fake mob characters. In the films that supposedly represent real mob characters we find 58 films, 12% of the mob category. For the films that represent fake mob characters we have 429, 88% of the category. The criteria for selecting films are based on image, not aesthetics.

The absence of intricate and contradictory identity constructions in the mainstream media therefore resounds loudly. In the world of mainstream Canadian film and video production, Italian characters and stories that feature chaotic and complex pictures of identity, the pull and push of being Italian in Canada, are rarely seen. While the mass media, in both Canada and the United States, continue to disseminate one-dimensional renditions of Italian culture, a recent example being the very aggressively marketed and stereotypically vulgar, violent and sexist HBO programme *The Sopranos*, which was also shown on BCE-CTV, a Canadian Public Television Network, the actual "work of the imagination" (Appadurai 4) is taking place in the margins of these sites. It is in the Canadian margins that a rich complexity of images and stories is created from diverse and multiple perspectives. It has been the goal of *Challenging Exclusion* to create a discourse that will break the silence and absence of Italian Canadian national cinema. In turn it is hoped that this discourse will bring meaning and value to this heterogeneous Italian Canadian cinema space and allow it to take its rightful place as part of Canadian national cinema where it continues its silence (Gittings 2002). More importantly, however, it is especially hoped that this continuing "act[...]

of concrete reclamation” (hooks iv) by its Italian diaspora will challenge, broaden and transform what we mean by “Canada.”

For the purpose of this paper I will discuss two particular Canadian works: Hamilton artist Sara Angelucci’s eleven-minute video *America il Paradiso* (1997) and Toronto filmmakers Patricia Fogliato and David Mortin’s 23-minute film *The Good Life* (1991). One of the important theorists whose work contributes to the discourse created in *Challenging Exclusion* is William Boelhower and his investigation of ethnic semiosis or ethnic poetics. When Boelhower first taught a course on ethnic literature in the United States, he and his students continued to find themselves confronted with methodological problems that connected to broader cultural concerns that went beyond the literary level alone. One of their first presuppositions was that ethnic American literature and American literature were created out of the same structuring context, both political and cultural, in which they were born. Therefore “being American and being ethnic American are part of a single cultural framework” (Boelhower 1984:10).

The course then explored some preliminary cultural contexts within which ethnic literature could be identified as such. Indeed, the subject inevitably became ethnic discourse and ethnic semiotics, since the *verbum* proved to be too diffuse and scattered to be limited to this or that novel or to a clearly defined literary canon. We were also more interested in enlarging the corpus of ethnic texts than in reducing it. Ultimately, it was necessary to construct an approach that cut across several disciplines, such as cultural geography, anthropology, semiotics, cartography and cultural history. (Boelhower 1984:9)

It was in the spirit of “enlarging the corpus of ethnic texts” that Boelhower then used the micro-strategies of ethnic sign production that he and his students applied to American ethnic literature, and applied them to the Italian Canadian poetry in Pier Giorgio Di Cicco’s anthology *Roman Candles* (Di Cicco 1978; Boelhower 1992: 229-244). In turn Boelhower’s semiotic investigations can also be applied to the visually rich works of some Italian Canadian filmmakers. Both Italian Canadian literature and Italian Canadian film and video are part of the same Canadian cultural and political framework. However as Italian Canadian literature is “still fighting for cultural status” (Boelhower 1992: 230), so too is Italian Canadian film and video. Like the poets, because Canadian film and video makers of Italian heritage who use their immigrant and “ethnic” experience in their work will often find it being judged as culturally “poor” and of “no value”, it is important and necessary that the label of “ethnic” be deconstructed. As Boelhower suggests,

ethnic poetry is often considered culturally poor because of the poverty of its interpreter or his lack of fluency in the type of local semiosis that accounts for the ethnic subject and ethnic poetics. Far from being trapped in a pathetic anthropology that can best promote a nostalgic quest for lost roots and existential

wholeness, Italo-Canadian poets have provided a radical critique of the postmodern condition in Canada by relying on what can be called the micro-strategies of ethnic sign production. (Boelhower 1992:230)

The “ethnic” label therefore still poses particular challenges in the sphere of giving meaning and value. “But the meanings of any one cultural form, artifact, or event are neither fixed, nor true, nor immutable. Postmodern thinking affirms the validity and value of the struggle over meanings” (Tator 8). Hence Boelhower’s system offers a distinct and complex framework that helps to explore the possibilities for dialoguing, criticizing, writing and valuing this body of work that is oftentimes dismissed with the label of “ethnic”. For my purpose I accept and transpose Boelhower’s theories on the Italian Canadian poetry in *Roman Candles* (Boelhower 1992: 229-244) to the two Italian Canadian films being discussed here. As he states for poetry, “if one pushes each poem in this collection to its limits, one is inevitably faced with the larger and shared issue of ethnic semiosis, at the centre of which lies the very act of producing the ethnic sign and of constructing the ethnic subject as author and cultural protagonist” (ibid 1992:230). These signs found in Italian Canadian poetry are similar to those found in the film and video. These common signs can, for the most part, be explored within three contexts: geography, “whereby the ethnic subject proceeds in creating [symbolic / real] ethnic space within Canadian culture” (ibid 1992:231); genealogy / history, “recalling and interpreting old photographs, funerals and wakes, the calm gaze of grandparents, the defeat of immigrant fathers, and old-world place as an *umbilicus mundi*” (ibid 1992; 235); and finally cultural memory, through which “the ethnic subject goes forward by going backwards” (ibid 1992; 236).

As well, ethnic semiosis is organized on the basis of a topological system that generates an open series of such binary isotopes as old world / new world, emigrant / immigrant, ethnic / non-ethnic, presence / absence, origins / traces, dwelling / nomadism, house / road, orientation / disorientation. This provides not only a way or seeing but of thinking that has its own type of ethnic *savoir-faire*. (Boelhower 1984: 13)

“The limits of one’s language signify the limits of one’s world” (ibid 1984:26) and for Boelhower the label of “ethnic” is but a beginning and not an end.

Fragments of memory

The two works, Angelucci’s *America il Paradiso* and Fogliato and Mortin’s *The Good Life*, can be discussed together. The two titles themselves suggest an absence, and though the titles may be interpreted as ironic (Hutcheon 1994), it is perhaps only Angelucci who has made use of this device intentionally in naming her video *America il Paradiso*. The naming of *The Good Life*, on the other hand, does not intend to be ironic, even though it too, once the film is viewed, does contain allusions to irony. However, with the

strategy of Boelhower's ethnic semiosis and the shifting and polar paradigms of absence and presence, the emphasis here on "Paradiso" and "Good" therefore do also acknowledge that there exists an opposite "Paradise / Inferno (Hell)" and "Good / Bad".

In *America il Paradiso* Angelucci uses old home movie footage, juxtaposed with audio text from Italian immigrant letters. There is an attempt at a narrative but it does not take a traditional or linear format. The story is told in a fragmentary way, both with images and with audio text. Sometimes the image moves forward as if to develop a story and then it shifts into rewind and we see people repeating their movements backwards. Much slow motion is used as if to try to slow down time, a lost time that cannot be captured. The video was produced as part of Angelucci's thesis work for her Master's degree at the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design in Halifax. Angelucci writes

I wanted this place and the experience of being here to be a fresh start. I would make myself a *tabula rasa*. This, I would later find, was an impossible task. Instead, I was to be flooded by memories.

Although my intention was to have the present set my new course, what I didn't expect was that the present would draw me closer to the past. The distance from home and the strangeness of a new landscape, dominated by the sea's presence, seemed only to encourage the memory process. It was early in the fall that I recognized a simple, but profound equation. I had arrived in Halifax, and my parents, in immigrating to Canada, had landed in Halifax. Our sense of dislocation met and mingled here. (Angelucci 1)

This text demonstrates how the past lives in Angelucci and how she discovered this without a specific intent. From this experience she started to explore her relationship with her ancestors through her memories, but as well explored other people's memories too. Angelucci's parents had both passed away and the artist faced the fact that there were many questions she had not asked them while they were living. To deal with this she placed an ad in *Corriere Canadese*, an Italian Canadian daily newspaper published in Toronto, and asked the Italian public to write to tell her their stories of immigration and their life in Canada. Angelucci received five letters in all.

The first letter I received was from Romolo Paiano. His letter was eight hand-written pages. In it he said "I hope you will be able to understand what I have written. I only went to the fifth grade...I wrote as well as I could remember in my mind." Lucia Montoni, who also responded to the ad, said "My words are poor, when you are poorly educated how can you express yourself more than this, but these few words are sincere." ... Each of the five immigrants who wrote apologized for how poorly educated they were, and for how poorly written and grammatically incorrect their letters might be. Why did they

feel they had to apologize to me? What is it about our culture which makes people feel that they cannot speak if their words aren't "correct"? I wonder how many people couldn't bring themselves to write at all because they were afraid their words were too "poor." (Angelucci 6)

Using the text written in these letters about the memories within these stories, Angelucci then juxtaposed them with her own memories, specifically of her grandmother. As the video opens, the image seen, in slow motion, is of her grandmother's hand moving behind the bushes in the Italian Canadian garden, as a popular folk song, "*La casetta piccolina in Canada*" ("The little house in Canada") plays in the background. The song resonates with the longing, the dream of many Italians to come to Canada in the hopes that they would have a small space, place, home, to call their own. The lyrics of the song suggest an absence of this type of home in Italy and bring to the forefront the isotopies of emigrant / immigrant. This is where the topological system that Boelhower elaborates is denoted. The desire created by the song, usually listened to in Italy, is juxtaposed with the reality of the space in Canada, the "little house". There are smiling faces, a family comes out of the "Canadian" house and walks around through the garden, smiling at the camera, waving, and then ultimately getting into the brand new car. These slow motion, silent images are then replaced with an image of the sea with the text of the letters overtop. The opening images and song for the audience resonates with happy feelings. However, as these images are followed by the texts from the letters, spoken in voice over, first in Italian then English, we hear of labour exploitation; "The very day I arrived, I started to work on a farm for \$2 a day. The other workers were paid seven dollars, and for a good eleven months I was obliged to work there by order of law" (Angelucci 11). A number of references are made to the cold and bitter climate. They do not depict the happy words and lyrics of "*La casetta piccolina in Canada*", nor do they resonate with the smiles that we see from the faces of the family shown. The contradiction between the two scenes brings to light in a more direct way the ambiguity between the reality of life and the myth of America as paradise as polar opposites, as contradictions. As one of the first letters Angelucci received recalls, "We thought coming to America would solve all our problems" (11). The last scene in the video explores the one memory of her own that Angelucci recalls and recounts, that of her grandmother and the role she played in Angelucci's life. As a four-year-old child Angelucci spent much of her time translating her grandmother's Italian into English for a neighbour, yet there is no specific recollection of what was translated. Angelucci's grandmother never learned to speak English. These are the words we hear with Angelucci using her own voice to tell her story.

When I was nine, my grandmother had a stroke which affected her speech. I remember spending hours with her trying to understand her new ways of talking. I would point to various things in the room, naming them, and slowly I was able to make a connection between a word and her sound.

My grandmother died when I was eleven, and in all those years of translating for her, and in learning her new way of talking, I

can't remember anything I ever translated....except my name. After the stroke I remember she would call me from across the house to come and translate for her....my name Sara became Aaarra. (Angelucci 8-9)

These memories accentuate a sense of loss on multiple levels and it is this loss that prevails throughout the video. The American dream of paradise that encompasses the ownership of a house and car (material gain) is juxtaposed with the other stories contained in the letters. These stories talk about cultural displacement, financial abuse of immigrants at the hands of the host country as well as the simple reality of a different landscape as one Italian woman recounts how during the winter one year, she went to mail a letter, and it was so cold that her hands stuck to the mailbox. Angelucci's own journey to her past in order to find her present is demonstrated clearly as a natural process in memory and how it works. This was not her intent when she arrived in Halifax for her MFA, yet Halifax the point of geographical entry for her parents (as well as for many other Italians) juxtaposed itself within her ancestral memory. Her resultant project began with this topology / geography of Halifax as the first space where her parents connected with Canada in order to begin their new life, as well as their own displacement from Italy. Subsequently with Angelucci's own arrival in Halifax, where she too saw her Master's work as a new beginning, a new life, with her own displacement from the life she had led up to that point. Angelucci recognized that the *tabula rasa* she had hoped for was an impossible reality, as her flood of memories attested. Her own displacement from her parents' lives was also apparent and the video with its fragmented form emphasizes this fact. Because her parents were no longer living she looked back to her grandmother and her very specific memory of her grandmother. As she was working on the video, she had the Super 8 images as records of a past life; however, it was not until the memory of her grandmother returned to her so vividly one day that certain realities became clear. With this memory Angelucci recalled the disappearance of her grandmother.

In remembering my grandmother, my mind went to this tiny segment of Super 8 film footage of her walking through this little plot of backyard garden. Every square inch is cultivated with vegetables and flowers. At one point as she walks, she seems to disappear among the roses. She disappears. This phrase resounded in my mind, the film footage is ... evidence of her disappearance. (Angelucci 9)

Hence her project, her video, developed through memory, her own as well as the memories of other strangers, and it resulted in this attempt at a dialogue with her ancestors, her grandmother, that, far from simply being a nostalgic quest for her own lost roots, was a complex quest for guidance, direction, understanding and home in Angelucci's present. "Layering materials and histories has been a way of drawing the past into the present" (Angelucci 14).

Like Angelucci, Fogliato and Mortin's *The Good Life* began with what was supposed to be a dialogue with Fogliato's grandmother. Most of *The Good*

Life was filmed in Italy and Fogliato states that when they got there her grandmother, without explanation, refused to have anything to do with the film, hence in a sense it can be said that she too “disappeared” like Angelucci’s grandmother among the roses. Instead, in *The Good Life* there is a dialogue with Fogliato’s parents, demonstrating Patricia Fogliato’s own need to go back to her parents’ lives and memories in order to better understand their reasons and motives for emigrating. *The Good Life* is a story that makes use of a documentary narrative in a more linear space.

In the early 1950s, Arrigo and Gabriella Fogliato each left their home in Italy and came to Canada in search of a better life. Arrigo’s sister, Maris, decided to stay in Italy and continue a traditional rural lifestyle with her husband, Beppe. Now for the first time in nearly forty years, the Fogliato family has gathered on Maris and Beppe’s farm in Piemonte, Northern Italy. (Fogliato & Mortin, *The Good Life*)

Here too, as Boelhower’s semiotic program suggests, there is a recognition of the role geography plays in the development of the ethnic sign. There is much footage of the landscape of the farm in Piemonte. Many of the interviews that take place are set in the out-of-doors / the landscape. The rich, fertile soil of the grape vineyard is used as a backdrop for camaraderie and social space. All of the dialogue / voices in the Italian spaces are in Italian with the translations documented via subtitles. Maris and Beppe are heard stating that they have never wanted to leave Italy. That theirs is the “good life” in Italy. The owning of a house and land is all that they need and have ever wanted and this they have, so there was no need to emigrate. These sentiments are juxtaposed with those of Arrigo and Gabriella Fogliato, who are interviewed in their dining room back in Canada, as well as in an outdoor café in Italy. All of the scenes in Canada are filmed in or around the family home. Arrigo and Gabriella speak of their choices to emigrate. They speak in English and though they are answering their daughter’s questions they also seem to be speaking to an audience beyond their daughter. Arrigo states that he did not want to be a farmer in his life in Italy, and Canada for him offered him a different sort of life and more options. Gabriella states that the pull of the “American dream” was quite strong, so they took a chance, and thought that maybe they had as much of a chance as anyone to make their dreams into a reality in Canada. However, Gabriella recounts the tears and pain of the first years. The hard work and the never-ending struggle with the harsh reality of life and immigration. Of being new in a land that was not always welcoming, and the realization that the American dream was indeed a myth. They both stated that they no longer felt that they belonged in Italy, though they will always be Italian. They also stated that they also felt that they do not really belong in Canada either, that they are not “real” Canadians, yet they also accept that their life is now in Canada. After years of struggle and pain, they too are living “the good life” in Canada, but this came at a price, unlike Maris, Arrigo’s sister, back in Italy. There is no centre or stability, as their paradigm has shifted and is caught in between. It is here that the ethnic sign resides. The sense of place and geography and belonging that is apparent in the vast shots of the landscape in Italy, disappear in the lack of

shots of a landscape in Canada, the problem of origins, as Boelhower elaborates. Instead, the new Canadians have built their homes and it is *in* their homes that they have created new lives and where they feel most at “home.” It is here where the Fogliatos are seen playing with grandchildren and belonging. There is a sense from this short and beautiful film that though both Gabriella and Arrigo realize that their lives are in Canada, there is a sense of loss and displacement that is still felt. Other than in their own home, it seems that they have not really created a space for themselves outside, in the wider landscape of Canada. There is no joy when they acknowledge the reality of belonging more in Canada, even though it is articulated strongly. However, the viewer also acknowledges what is left unsaid and what can never be totally resolved: old world / new world.

In another interview in Italy, a cousin of the filmmaker is asked whether she feels that the children of the Fogliatos are Italian or Canadian. For this cousin, the answer is quite simple. For her, the difference she sees in her cousins is the difference of an unrecognizable Canada, hence her cousins must be Canadians. This simple answer fails to acknowledge the complexity that her aunt and uncle feel with their sense of place and home, and the need for their children to ask this question. The very fact that the filmmaker felt it was important to ask this question in regards to her own identity shows that there is a desire to dialogue with the ancestors in order to understand her own place. A simple shedding of the Italian cultural heritage is not that easy, even though the children were born in Canada. An attempt to reinterpret the past by dialoguing with the past, in this case with the senior Fogliatos. Through their memories, which are passed on to the children, there results a reinterpretation of the present: the reality that their children have assimilated more completely and are more Canadian than the parents is not an easy fact to digest or to establish. After all, it was the filmmakers who first expressed the desire to have the grandmother tell her story, which would have dealt with the breakup of her family: emigration / immigration.

Like Angelucci’s *America il Paradiso*, *The Good Life* explores two worlds, an ethnic semiosis that denotes the old world and the new world. Angelucci does it through some of her own memories as well as through the stories of other people of her parents’ generation, while Fogliato and Mortin actually go back to Italy in order to dialogue with Fogliato ancestors. Both juxtapose emigration / immigration, house / road, orientation and disorientation and the shift goes back and forth in order to try to go forward with a more solid foundation. In Angelucci’s case, fragmented memory played its own role in allowing her to recognize that the past lived within her and could not be escaped, but could be re-interpreted and re-embraced. In the case of Fogliato and Mortin, there was an active decision to go back to Italy in order to explore what should have been the grandmother’s memories and her views on the breakup and re-unification of the family. Instead it became an exploration of the memories of Fogliato’s parents in order for them as well as their children to try to understand and accept past decisions to emigrate. Through the exploration of Fogliato’s parents there is also a glimpse of the questions that the filmmakers are asking in their own lives. The conclusion of the film suggests that “the good life” is indeed the one in Canada, that this

was the better choice. Yet the very fact that these same words are used by Maris in Italy also denotes the sense of loss and confusion. The complexity and contradiction as well as absence of what is not said in both of these works brings us back to their titles. *America il Paradiso* was not a paradise, but a world of discrimination, hard work, difference and sacrifice, as well as the material gain of the sought after house and car. For *The Good Life*, the new “good” life in Canada was gained at a price: the lack of a sense of belonging and the assimilation of one’s children into the more dominant Eurocentric Canadian culture. Both works use Boelhower’s semiotic strategies of geography / memory / and genealogy in order to create works that elaborate a fragmented reality whose meaning is at one level very specific and at another level very enigmatic.

In conclusion, these Canadian artists of Italian heritage are trying to redefine the place of ethnicity in Canadian culture, as they are fighting for cultural status. Though there are similarities and differences here, the works of Angelucci, and Fogliato and Mortin demonstrate the desire on the part of these artists to tell stories that reach into their pasts, which live inside of them and bring them into their present, the film and video texts they create. They interrogate their grandmothers / grandfathers, mothers / fathers in order to know what part of themselves connects with this past. Memory is used as a way to re-interpret the past in the present and to tell stories that show how they are “holding [their] ground” (Boelhower 1984:243). These film and videomakers use similar strategies of memory, genealogy and topology/geography as a way of entering their own personal and public spaces, but spaces that are very different from each other. The projects of the Canadian film and videomakers discussed here richly exhibit an ethnic semiosis that explores Boelhower’s theoretical concepts/context of Geography/Topology, Genealogy and Memory. They live in complex worlds in between. This duality, in betweenness and difference brings us back to Boelhower and the frame and space of ethnic semiosis, “which offers a double perspective of postmodern identity” (Boelhower 1992:239). It also brings us back to Homi Bhabha (1990) and Benedict Anderson (1998). “From that place of the ‘meanwhile’, where cultural homogeneity and democratic anonymity make their claims on the national community, there emerges a more instantaneous and subaltern voice of the people, a minority discourse that speaks betwixt and between times and places” (Bhabha 309).

As Canadians born inside Italians, their eyes see with the eyes of difference. They are full of creative ideas and a deep hunger for “story and culture”. Though the overwhelming albatross of the financially rewarding negative Italian stereotype (Bagnell, 1989; Baldassarre 1994; Bonanno 2001; Elliot 1999; Harney 1993; L’Orfano 2002; LaGumina 1999; Lawton, 2002; Montesano 1997, 1999; Pivato 2001; Sturino 1999) sold by Hollywood conglomerates and their Canadian affiliates continues to be a formidable opponent, the films and videos from the margins have begun to successfully challenge the symbolic space of the “imagined community” (Anderson 1998) of Canada. This bodes extremely well for the national cinemas in both Canada and the United States, which are being challenged to make room for

Italian Canadian and Italian American representations that go beyond the one-dimensional negative paradigm.

Using Boelhower's theories of ethnic sign production to explore some Canadian video and film, I have begun to establish that the possible meanings and messages communicated through these works are far more valuable and dynamic than the limitations and silences imposed by the dismissive label of "ethnic." For these Canadians of Italian heritage the shifting and complex space of Italy in Canada is far more than simply a place they need to escape. Instead it is a desirable and meaningful space for creation, re-creation and invention. These stories resonate with many people. This difference, this displaced sensibility, is experienced and lived by many Canadians from different places and heritages. At the beginning of a new century, as Antonino Mazza's poem "Echos in the Garden" suggests, we continue to be emigrants / immigrants, refugees / foreigners: all exiles, living in diasporic worlds, searching for home.

How natural it is in the metropolis this October 28,
to awake in the future....

A homeless genealogy aching in wants--

And memory reassures. And the soul is pure
fiction. (Quoted in Pivato 1998:114)

Endnote

1. The Image Research Project was initiated in 1995 by Bill Dal Cerro, an Italic Institute Media Director and film critic for *Fra Noi*, an Italian American newspaper in Chicago. In addition to Dal Cerro's encyclopaedic knowledge of film, four of the Institute's top researchers contributed film titles and input on a continuous basis. Another 100 titles remain to be added to the project pending personal verification by the researchers. The project is updated annually in March. For details see <http://www.italic.org>.

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