

# 04

GEORGE A. REID AWARD 2006/07  
(300/400 LEVEL)

## CARRIE CUTFORTH-YOUNG

<sup>1</sup> Elaine Gold, "Canadian Eh?: A Survey of Contemporary Use," *Proceedings of the 2004 Canadian Linguistics Association Annual Conference*, 2004, University of Manitoba, 27 Nov. 2006  
<<http://http-server.carleton.ca/~mojunker/ACL-CLA/pdf/Gold-CLA-2004.pdf>>

<sup>2</sup> Elaine Gold cites at least 10 varying usages of "eh?"—statements of opinion, statements of fact, commands, exclamations, questions, to mean 'pardon', in fixed expressions, insults, accusations, and narrative — and proposes the French words "hein" or "eh" as in "hey" and "eh bien" as in "good" as possible etymological source of "eh." Elaine Gold, "Canadian Eh?" 2, 11.

<sup>3</sup> I elevate my mother's explanation above all academic ones as it comes from a collected and constructed imagining of the Canadian term, an example of the very nature of the nationalistic word "eh?"

TO SUPPOSE AN  
**AGREEMENT IS TO SUPPOSE A CAMARADERIE;  
IT IS TO SUPPOSE A SHARED NATIONALITY.**

Someone had just asked me, "If you could solve one problem in the world what would it be and how?" My mind went cross-eyed as it saw Canada's two official languages at once. "I would like to see more 'frontières' without borders," I blurted. I had meant to say, "We need more organizations in the vein of *Doctors without Borders* (*Médecins Sans Frontières*)," to follow up with, "and teachers without borders, librarians without borders, politicians without borders, people without borders. . ." Recovering from my chain of thought, I continued, "Yes, but that is exactly what I meant to say: we need more 'frontières' without borders and more borders 'sans frontières'."

SINCE 1972, THE CANADIAN-NESS of the idiom "eh?" has been hotly contested, with the triumph of its nationality only recently being declared as distinctly Canadian.<sup>1</sup> While there are a variety of explanations as to its etymology and usages,<sup>2</sup> I will concentrate on the version explained to me by my mother who once said:

'Eh?' is a transcription of the deviated French expression, 'et toi?', which translates 'and you?', as in, 'and what are your thoughts on the matter?'. The French Canadian voyageurs dropped the 'toi', leaving only the 'et' as in 'and. . .' not as in 'and you?' when speaking with the Anglos.<sup>3</sup>

No longer interrogative, this "eh?," as the conjunction "and," stands as an adjacent hinge between the initiator's statement and the respondent's reply. "Eh?" brackets the two statements together: initiator's statement with the Canadian tag "eh?" + interlocutor's parallel state-

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SUBVERTING THE CANADIAN NATIONAL  
ARTEFACTS: FROM "EH?" TO ZEE

# SUBVERTING THE CANADIAN NATIONAL ARTEFACTS:

ment = a unit of agreement. To suppose an agreement is to suppose a camaraderie; it is to suppose a shared nationality. Furthermore, it supposes a "belief that there is such a thing as a common heritage that will have meaning across boundaries of race, class, sexuality, and generation."<sup>4</sup> This "eh?," as the national unifier, connects the two official languages and identities, suturing the French with the English in an "A eh? B = 1 nation" equation. No longer an idiom, the distinctly Canadian "eh?" is now a national artefact, a bilingual bridge between the two official cultures of Canada—the French and the English.<sup>5</sup>

But what about Canadians who inhabit the places in-between the official cultures or those who reside outside of them? In this essay, I will look at works by artists who subvert the notion of an official Canadian identity. Robert Morin, a Quebec filmmaker, engages in the slippage between his two cultures while con-

versing between his dual selves, his French persona and his English one, in the film, *Yes Sir! Madame*.<sup>6</sup> Jin-me Yoon, a Korean-Canadian artist, explores the periphery of the acknowledged Canadian identity through asserting her figure onto the romantic Canadian landscape throughout her postcard project, *Souvenirs of the Self*.<sup>7</sup> And Kent Monkman, a Canadian artist of Cree descent, reverses the post-colonial gaze in his installation, *Salon Indien*.<sup>8</sup>

In between two intense and landmark national unity debates in Canada—the failed Meech Lake Accord of 1994 and the

<sup>8</sup> Kent Monkman, *Salon Indien*, Co-presented by the Museum of Contemporary Canadian Art with the Art Gallery of Hamilton at the Toronto International Art Fair, Toronto 9–13 Nov. 2006.

# FROM "EH?" TO ZEE

<sup>4</sup> Anne Whitelaw, "Whiffs of Balsam, Pine, and Spruce," *Capital Culture: A Reader on Modernist Legacies, State Institutions, and the Values of Art*. Eds. Beland and Hornstein, (Montréal & Kingston: McGill-Queen's Press, 2000) 133.

<sup>5</sup> Sandra Schecter, "Eh? Revisited: Is It or Is It Not Canadian," *The English Quarterly*, 12.4 (1979) 37–45.

<sup>6</sup> *Yes Sir! Madame*, dir. Robert Morin, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Jin-me Yoon, *Souvenirs of the Self*, 1991–2000, Transmounted c-print, Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver.

last Quebec Separatist referendum of 1995—Robert Morin released the film, *Yes Sir! Madame*.<sup>9</sup> Throughout the film, Morin narrates in both French and English as the character Earl Tremblay, a son of mixed Francophone and Anglophone parentage. In parody of Canada’s policy on official bilingualism intermittently performed for the Olympics and unendurable bureaucratic speeches, Morin/Tremblay speaks in both of his mother tongues. Fluent in both languages, Morin/Tremblay occupies a minority position, one that vacillates between the two cultures. Not quite French and not quite English, the character Tremblay is constantly being reminded of his difference by those that identify themselves as one or the other. Christine Ross points out, “As the identity quest progresses, the translation from one language to the other starts to operate a split, creating a progressive gap between the Francophone and Anglophone Tremblay. Slippage starts to occur.”<sup>10</sup> What Morin/Tremblay demonstrates “within the social linguistic space of a nation” is a Canada that has been “re-imagined into existence” by the politics of an official bilingualism operating “as

a unity to be achieved by indirectly reinforcing two different visions of Canada.”<sup>11</sup> Occupying the centre position between two mirrors in what Homi Bhabha has termed a “third space, [which] displaces the histories that constitute it,”<sup>12</sup> Morin/Tremblay films his reflections as they multiply to confront one another.

Morin/Tremblay narrates:

I faced us, and there was a lot of them. On s’est fait peur pour vrai. We were all there. On était tous là. All the peasoups on the one side. Toutes les têtes carrées de l’autre bord. The fight would have been a massacre. La bataille aurait pu être mortelle pour tout le monde. The only reasonable solution was to split. Fait qu’on a décidé de se séparer. For good. Pour de Bon. Yes Sir! Oui Madame! Bonne chance. Good Luck.<sup>13</sup>

No longer able to sustain this split personality, Morin/Tremblay’s Francophone and Anglophone personalities take turns in dominating one another until the only option in the end is for Tremblay to disappear entirely.

Whereas Québécois Separatists and Sovereignists have long wanted to separate themselves from Canada to varying degrees, Québécois Federalist Nationalists have sought recognition of their distinct

## AS THE IDENTITY QUEST PROGRESSES, THE TRANSLATION FROM ONE LANGUAGE TO THE OTHER STARTS TO OPERATE A SPLIT.

<sup>13</sup> Jolene Pozniak, “Beneath the Mosaic: Representing Canada’s Multicultural Policy in Contemporary Canadian Art,” *Journal for the Arts, Sciences and Technology*, 03-01 (Kingston: McGill University, 2005) 44. [Emphasis added.]

## CURNOE’S ACT OF CONNECTING THE CANADIAN NATION TO ITS LAND REINFORCED CANADA AS A HOMOGENOUS AND UNIFIED BLOCK.

society. This is important for understanding the debate around Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s former declaration proclaiming that the Québécois form “a nation within a united Canada.”<sup>14</sup> By allowing for distinction, Harper’s statement rearticulates the “A eh? B = 1 nation” equation as a foil to the motion set out by Bloc Québécois Leader Gilles Duceppe in the fall of 2006. C.E.S. Frank, a political studies professor, explains:

[Duceppe’s] motion makes it clear that the Québécois do not form this sort of independent nation-state. Nor does the motion define Quebec as a nation-state. It states that the Québécois form a nation within a united Canada. This greater unit, the united Canada, must then be an autonomous and independent sovereign power, or nation-state, which acts on behalf of its citizens, including the Québécois, both domestically and on the world stage.<sup>15</sup>

Quebec’s drive for distinction from the national Canadian identity is quite similar to Canada’s own drive to distinguish itself from its Southern neighbour. It is noteworthy that much of the heated debate centering on the national identity of “eh” took place in the 1970’s when a series of identity crisis took hold of the nation, both politically and culturally. Like the assertion of distinction by the Québécois to the dominant Canada, artists of this period, such

as Greg Curnoe, asserted their Canadianhood to distinguish Canada from the dominant United States at a time when cultural production was charged with nationalistic fervour. Curnoe’s imaginative rendering of the continent redrawn in his *Map of North America*<sup>17</sup> effectively removed the United States in order to hem Canada closer to other dwarfed nations “through a simple realignment of the 49th parallel with the border of Mexico.”<sup>18</sup> For Jamelie Hassan, a life-long friend of Curnoe, this act diminished “our problematic geographical relationship to the United States by declaring our closer affinity to those nations south of the U.S./Mexican border.”<sup>19</sup> However, Curnoe’s nationalistic gesture is not unlike previous modernist mappings that identified “the boundaries and terrain of the land” and “contributed to the linkage forged between geography and the ‘character’ of the nation, as imagined within the national mythology.”<sup>20</sup> Akin to the colonialist motivations of earlier gen-

<sup>14</sup> C. E. S. Franks, “If Quebec is a Nation, What is Canada?” *The Toronto Star*, Nov. 24 2006, The Toronto Star. 26 Nov 2006 <[http://www.thestar.com/NA-SApp/cs/ContentServer?pagename=thestar/Layout/Article\\_Type1&c=Article&cid=1164456970860&call\\_pageid=968256290204&col=968350116795](http://www.thestar.com/NA-SApp/cs/ContentServer?pagename=thestar/Layout/Article_Type1&c=Article&cid=1164456970860&call_pageid=968256290204&col=968350116795)>.

<sup>15</sup> C. E. S. Franks, “What is Canada?”

<sup>16</sup> Lianne McTavish “Body Narratives in Canada: 1968-99, Sarah Milroy, Catherine Heard, and Kathleen Sellars,” *Women’s Art Journal*, 21.2 (Woman’s Art Inc. August 2000–Winter 2001) 5.

<sup>17</sup> Greg Curnoe, *Map of Canada*, 1972. Ink on Paper. Dalhousie Art Gallery.

<sup>18</sup> Jamelie Hassan, “What Counts as Culture,” *Theory Rules: Art as Theory, Theory and Art*, Eds. Berland, Straw and Tomas, (Toronto: U of T Press and YYZ Books, 1996) 103.

<sup>19</sup> Jamelie Hassan, “What Counts as Culture,” 103.

<sup>20</sup> Jolene Pozniak, “Beneath the Mosaic,” 50.

<sup>21</sup> Jolene Pozniak, "Beneath the Mosaic," 54.

<sup>22</sup> "Québécois" is a politically loaded term making the distinction between "Québécois de souche" or the "Québécois pure laine" French and the marginalized French speakers living in the province of Quebec: Acadians, Haitians, Chiac, etc., who have, according to Neo-Québécois, no claim on the nationhood of Quebec. See André Libech, "Canadian, Eh?," *Journal on Ethno politics of Minority Issues in Europe* (Geneva: Institut Universitaire de Hautes Etudes Internationales, Issue 4/2002). Nov 27, 2006 <[http://www.ecmi.de/jemie/download/Focus4-2002\\_Liebich.pdf](http://www.ecmi.de/jemie/download/Focus4-2002_Liebich.pdf)>

<sup>23</sup> Elaine Gold, "Canadian Eh?" 11.

<sup>24</sup> Anderson, B. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, (London: Verso, 1983) 6.

erations of modern artists such as Paul Kane and the Group of Seven who served to romanticize the Canadian landscape, Curnoe's act of connecting the Canadian nation to its land reinforced Canada as a homogeneous and unified block.

Governmental policies and cultural products that reassert the notion of a homogeneous national identity have "resulted in the proliferation of hyphenated identities which set apart 'Canadian-Canadians' from a vast continuum of 'other-Canadians' on the basis of facial and cultural difference."<sup>21</sup> The Canadian national identity is now not only composed of Francophones and Anglophones, but also of allophones—other peoples whose native languages are not Québécois French or English<sup>22</sup>—all of whom identify themselves as Canadian by using the nationalistic "eh?". The linguist Elaine Gold notes: "New immigrants... associate the use of *eh* with their developing Canadian identity: one speaker, who had been in Canada for less than two years, said, 'I was kind of proud when it slipped out of my mouth the first time'."<sup>23</sup> If, according to

Benedict Anderson, "communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined,"<sup>24</sup> it is this imaginary nationhood sutured by the symbolic "eh?" that bridges the gaps between peoples in an agreed expression of constructed nationhood founded on the imagined nation equation: "A *eh?* B *eh?* c *eh?* d *eh?*... z = Canada."<sup>25</sup>

In Jin-me Yoon's work, *Souvenirs of the Self*, the artist positions herself in front of the backdrop of quintessential Canadian tourist destinations in images accompanied with the descriptive textual passages written "in the third person singular with translations in English, French, Japanese, Chinese, and Korean."<sup>26</sup> These backdrops are reminiscent of the sublime landscapes, such as Lawren Harris's *Maligne Lake*,<sup>27</sup> used to promote a mythic, empty, and pristine Canada only fit for the "true, north strong and free"—white, male Canadians.<sup>28</sup> Jin-me Yoon's self-assertion as a visibly female and Asian-Canadian minority attempts "to revise Canada's past and present, which relies on a narrative that conveniently omits the 'other' cultures, races and histories that disrupt the coherence of the 'imagined commu-

## YOON STANDS RIGIDLY FIXED PRESENTING THE VIEWER WITH AN **IRRECONCILABLE DICHOTOMY BETWEEN WHAT HAS BEEN NARRATED AND WHAT HAS OCCURRED.**

<sup>25</sup> This nation equation also has the effect of what Anne Whitelaw terms "acculturating" immigrant cultures and assigning them a place within the Canadian mosaic," (Anne Whitelaw, "Whiffs of Balsam": 122). Referring to the Canadian use of the "mosaic" which differ from the American melting pot, Jolene Pozniak explains that this "cultural mosaic carried to its extreme... society is seen as a panorama of culturally different tiles locked into place by a mainstream grout." Jolene Pozniak, "Beneath the Mosaic," 51

<sup>26</sup> Jolene Pozniak, "Beneath the Mosaic," 53

<sup>27</sup> Lawren Harris, *Maligne Lake*, Jasper Park, 1924, oil on canvas, National Gallery of Canada (no. 3541).

<sup>28</sup> Dennis Reid, "Tom Thomson and the Group of Seven," *A Concise History of Canadian Painting*, (Toronto: Oxford UP, 1973) 146–148.

nity'."<sup>29</sup> One postcard's caption says: "Marvel over the impressive collection of Western Canada's natural history museum. Yoon looks with curiosity and imagines life beyond the rigid casings."<sup>30</sup> Rather than looking with curiosity, however, Yoon stands rigidly fixed presenting the viewer with an irreconcilable dichotomy between what has been narrated and what has occurred.<sup>31</sup> As Jolene Pozniak comments:

Jin-me Yoon's hybrid position as a Canadian citizen of Korean origin is reflective of the paradox that transpires with naming and nationalism... The ambiguous situation Yoon creates in this staging underscores the conundrum of identity; that is, the perceived need to identify Yoon (and 'others') in a singular, coherent manner.<sup>32</sup>

It is ironic and disheartening to note the biographical entry for Jin-Me Yoon on the Canadian website *Cybermuseum*, the National Gallery of Canada's online web-portal, contains the single line: "Born in Seoul Korea, 1960."<sup>33</sup>

In *Imagining Communities (bojagi)*<sup>34</sup>, Yoon created a third space for diasporic Korean females by using an installation and internet project. For Lynne Bell, Yoon's project "creates a poetic and demanding text that speaks of living the in-between of the Korean diaspora—between here and there, between

<sup>33</sup> "Jin-me Yoon," *Cybermuseum*, 5 Nov. 2006 <[http://cybermuseum.gallery.ca/cybermuseum/search/artist\\_e.jsp?iartistid=14522](http://cybermuseum.gallery.ca/cybermuseum/search/artist_e.jsp?iartistid=14522)> e.jsp?iartistid=14522>

<sup>34</sup> Jin-me Yoon, *Imagining Communities (bojagi)*, 1996, Artspeak Gallery, Vancouver, BC.

<sup>35</sup> Lynne Bell, "Decolonizing Cyberspace: Notes on Art an Virtual Communities," *MAWA: Culture of Community*, Ed., Vera Lemecha, (Winnipeg: MAWA 2004) 54, 55.

## THIS COMMUNITY **SUBVERTS** THE NOTION OF A HOMOGENEOUS CANADA **BY MAKING THE INVISIBLE VISIBLE.**

Korean and Canadian culture, between mother-tongue and adopted-tongue."<sup>35</sup> Rather than parlay a national artifact such as the "eh?" or further promote an essentialistic vision of Canada, Jin-me Yoon actualized an online community for Korean-Canadians to communicate in and about the very nature of their hybridity.<sup>36</sup> This community subverts the notion of a homogenous Canada by making the invisible visible.

Visibility has long been an issue for First Nations (aboriginal peoples) of Canada. As Pozniak noted, "The construction of Canada as a racially homogenous nation comprised of the French and the English effaced the Aboriginal presence in the imagining of the nation."<sup>37</sup> This colonial sentiment was reinforced when both Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Bloc Québécois Leader Gilles Duceppe neglected to include First Nations people in the national unity debate. Many reporters and editorial writers were quick to associate Canada's acknowledgement of the Québécois forming "a nation within a united Canada" with the politically correct term "First Nations" associated with Canadian aboriginals. Native Leaders responded by clarifying that this is not how the government of Canada has perceived or

<sup>29</sup> Jin-me Yoon, *Souvenirs of the Self* (Banff Park Museum), 1991, Catriona Jeffries Gallery, Vancouver. Text qtd. by Jolene Pozniak in "Beneath the Mosaic," 53.

<sup>30</sup> Jolene Pozniak, "Beneath the Mosaic," 53.

<sup>31</sup> Jolene Pozniak, "Beneath the Mosaic," 54.

<sup>32</sup> Jolene Pozniak, "Beneath the Mosaic," 54.

<sup>36</sup> Lynne Bell, "Decolonizing Cyberspace," 55.

<sup>37</sup> Jolene Pozniak, "Benath the Mosaic," 52

## WITH BITING SATIRE, MONKMAN CONTINUES TO EXPOSE THE EXPLOITS OF CURRENT POST-COLONIAL INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICES.

defined aboriginals, but that this terminology is what people of First Nations have used to define *themselves*. As British Columbia Premier Gordon Campbell commented in an article written by Mark Hume: “It is high time we formally acknowledged Canada’s ‘third solitude’—the aboriginal peoples of Canada. We should do that formally, proudly and emphatically in a similar resolution that embraces our heritage as a nation of many nations.”<sup>38</sup>

When Marcia Crosby spoke of the “recent phenomenon in the arts and social sciences—the embracing of difference” as “a component of postmodernism,” she remained justifiably cynical, describing the trend as “just another form of the West’s curious interest in its other; or more specifically, the ultimate colonization of ‘the Indian’ into the spaces of the West’s post-modern centre/margin cartography.”<sup>39</sup> For Crosby, one strategy of resistance to the construction of the “Imaginary Indian” is to expose “the self serving purposes, and the limitations that such cultural maps impose on all First Nations people.”<sup>40</sup> One artist to accomplish this task with aplomb is Kent Monkman, who, as Miss Chief

Eagle Testickle constructs his own imaginary colonist in the subversive and homoerotic *Group of Seven Inches* film as a part of his *Salon Indien* installation. In Miss Testickle’s statement, Monkman writes: “I was shocked to see that the European males in North America were looking less and less like the authentic European male specimens that I had become so fond of ‘encountering’ during my travels abroad.”<sup>41</sup> With biting satire, Monkman continues to expose the exploits of current post-colonial institutional practices—the continued screening and attached “ethnological import” attributed to Edward Curtis’s films of “North American First People” at the McMichael Canadian Art Collection and the current installation of Paul Kane’s paintings at the Royal Ontario Museum—noting that Monkman’s *Group of Seven Inches* and *Gallery of the European Male* are both playful responses to “a misdirected enterprise.”<sup>42</sup>

Another Canadian artist, Loretta Todd, a Métis writer and filmmaker, sought to explore the to and fro movement between the Fourth and First Worlds in expression of self and culture. It was Todd’s hope “that in encounters between the First and Fourth

Worlds there can be not just conflict, but understanding that will result in a new creation.”<sup>43</sup> If “the social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective,” according to Homi Bhabha, “is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation,”<sup>44</sup> Todd’s new creation can also be seen in terms of the cultural hybridity and/or hybrid. According to Christine Ross:

Hybrids are quasi-objects or quasi-subjects who do not completely comply with the ‘measured’ abstraction of the national and who bring into play complex networks of negotiations, mediations, and intermediate organizations between the particular and the universal, between nature and culture.<sup>45</sup>

By being resistant to acculturation, artists such as Robin Morin, Jin-Me Yoon, and Kent Monkman use strategies of hybridity in their cultural production to create and explore the in-between spaces. Rather than allowing themselves to be defined by their relation to the nationalistic “*eh?*” in the nation equation, they question artefacts, boundaries, languages, translations, and symbols in conflict with the very notion of Canadian-ness as set out by official policies, cartographies, and cultural institutions. ♦

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<sup>43</sup> Loretta Todd, “What More do They Want?” *Indigena: Contemporary Native Perspectives in Canadian Art*, Eds. McMaster, Martin, (Vancouver: Douglas & McIntyre 1992) 101.

<sup>44</sup> Homi Bhabha, “The Location of Culture,” (London: Routledge 1994) 2.

<sup>45</sup> Christine Ross, 43.

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