

— Ottawa with Quebecois senior civil servants, and with bilingual young English Canadians. It has given the language a respect and prestige it never had in Ottawa, and Ottawa has been largely French-speaking since the beginning of its existence. This is my native city I am talking about; I know whereof I speak.

These facts also make the French aces in the schools of the West Island of Montreal, yes, even there, the "future" group. The well-adapted, the going-somewhere. And steadily, too, they deprive Alliance Quebec of something it needs if it is to reassemble the old Anglo-Quebec worldview: a mass of people who are thrown into distress when they hear a French sentence spoken to them, and who would be lost and vulnerable if the face of their city became French.

When Bill 101 was being conceived, what was really being conceived was a French Quebec of many ethnic groups. Few partisans of independence and unilingualism really saw this. Few really understood this implication of their own action. The old folk-unity of Quebec is going, a new diverse francophone society is coming.

I know it's hard to face an unexpected shift, an emergence that one hasn't yearned for. What a bizarre injustice that I, as an English-Canadian in my origins, one taught to sympathize with immigrants that should be prepared for something that takes by surprise the prophetic, the Vallières, the Vigneaults.

Toronto, Ottawa, Saskatoon, with their rapid diversification, their thousands of Canadianized faces of brown and yellow, their brake on racism, their stretch of integration (the exception: Saskatchewan racism against the Indians)... I know it's strange that these cities should suddenly be examples for Quebec to study. But the important thing is that Quebec is also performing well in this area; its traditions seem spontaneously to know how to adapt to this new challenge.

One thing has surprised me in this evolution. Here I have a point to concede. An unease within me.

It is that English has remained strong in Quebec, despite the rise of French. I now see that, even were Quebec independent, English would be much spoken in Montreal.

So let us accept that, I say. This is a language with a lot of attraction for all of us that we're talking about. It's the Latin of the century. Well, there will be other centuries. It is still doable; to give priority to French, and broad and deep acceptance. But let's look at some difficulties.

I live in Quebec City, where the new Quebec is clearly visible in the downtown streets. Berber restaurants, South American intellectuals... A trip to Montreal sobers one up, however. Is it the Latin of the century I'm hearing... or the old English arrogance? In every subway train, in every restaurant, the question is with me.

I believe that French resolution and French pedagogy will eliminate this ambiguity with time. For French too has a big

share of the prestige of the century. The International Jack Kerouac Gathering proved this for me, the Quebec Summer Festival goes on proving it. Blais proves it, Sartre proves it, Senghor proves it. I think, for example, about the Portuguese of Montreal, I'm curious about them. What have they lived these ten years? French must have had its impact, and the *criancas* must be different from the old folks. (Allow this one Lusophile interjection: in Portuguese they call a child "a creation.") I know they have a huge immigrant base in France, I know Lisbon is full of rich people and poor who speak pretty fair French.

But they're the quietest ethnic group in America! How are they getting along?

Dear Quebecois friends, let's find out. Our networks are more in place than we think, perhaps. Our tools, our arms, are better now. And have to get better still; staff to be trained, funds to be allotted...

For yes: we do yield very often, in our daily lives, to things English. I myself sometimes use anglicisms for effect; I never did that before. But now that French friends do it...

The defeat of sovereignty-association in 1980 has caused more disorientation than I'd have thought. Me, in Rene Levesque's shoes, I'd have said on Referendum Night: "Here is my resignation. I've decided to go back to the grassroots to implant this fine and workable idea more firmly." But that wasn't the path taken, and now an Quebec might be *why bother?* Pop music, for example, is a sort of Battle of Batoche of culture, and pop means a lot to young people. The Metis need some help against the redcoats, kids.

There are hopeful signs, too. There is a north-south alliance operating in Chilean and Nicaraguan Spanish and Quebecois French, very lively. There is an Italo-Quebecois literary milieu, *Vice Versa* its magazine, *Guernica* its publishing house, very lively also. These things surround me with comforting presences; others have accents too. And so: I owe something to the Charter of the French Language.

My intuition whispers to me that it is the rebuilding of the Quebec left, of the communal feelings we had in 1970, that will rebuild the muscle-tone of French. By giving the language *new things to say*. This left won't be like Vallières' left, I think, it will be strangely punk, very Third World, deeply ecological.

Quebec is part of the First World, that's now clear, and it's questioned by the Third. Problems that are discussed in my city when developers propose demolishing the Cote d'Abraham and citizens propose a "popular" development of the same hill, are the same problems that Amsterdam debates, the same ones Tokyo ponders.

Vocabulary, dear friends! We need new vocabulary. The word *chaussure* no longer frightens, no longer thrills. We need 21 new worlds for 21 new concepts before the 21st century. At least.

You want my opinion? *Tout à changé.*

Malcolm Reid's column is a regular feature in *Border/Lines*.

## Still Dreaming of a Multicultural Canada

Chris Creighton-Kelly

As the spectre of our virulent (maybe soon violent?) racism looms over Vancouver, this "Asian" metropolis sitting, as it were, on the coast of the Pacific Rim, it might be prudent to poke about in the Liberal closets and dust off the skeleton marked "Multiculturalism." Are there any vital signs of life here? Is this a body politic worth exhuming? The skeleton replies, "I am alive and well and Canada has a new Multiculturalism Act as of July 1988... C'est quoi le probleme?"

It's a kinda' I-like-the-way-you-move spring day on Commercial Drive. Two women walk arm in arm, a bounce underfoot. They are laughing intimately. It seems to have something to do with desire. Two youngish Vietnamese guys in an old rusty green Datsun honk and smile at this open display of pleasure. The driver turns up the radio, the other yells. The car slows to a crawl, the yell approaches a conversational feel. The shorter woman banters back while her partner silently gives them the finger. Fear and power seem minimal here; but then, it's 2:30 in the afternoon. More laughter all around... and who is joking whom? The car screeches away. The women turn into a cappuccino bar. Seven blocks up the Drive a huge 18-storey commercial development looms, its long shadow casting doubt on the future of this multicultural neighbourhood. There is no laughter; this is not a joke.

So what is multiculturalism? The Act itself states that it reflects the cultural and Canadian society and freedom of all members of the Society to preserve, enrich their cultural heritage and to promote inter-ment homilies about ring hollow against the cutbacks to English-as-a-second-language courses, more restriction and elimination of multiculturalism to fight racism.

We as citizens need to imagine a Canada (not a genuine "mosaic"... which is greater than "ethnic" (ethnic in reality). Such a dream calls for a reality, however, with the power relations and cultural minorities and collective relation to the state like the Canada Communications Commission.



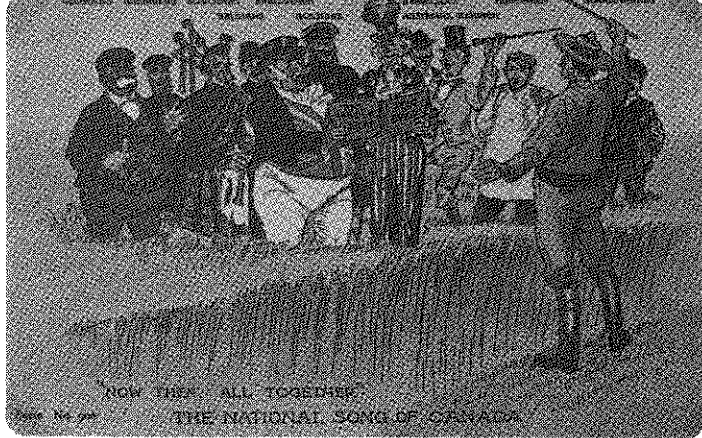
But this understanding is only the beginning. We know, as all humans have throughout history, that tradition is significant. But we also know that the weight of certain traditions (e.g. patriarchy) can be oppressive. Such is the real dilemma for people with roots in other places or, in the case of native people, in other times. How much to keep? What to discard? So much of our postmodern lives have been spent breaking with the past. As a result, we live in a society where images are deculturized and dehistoricized. White pop musicians use third world markets as exotic backdrops for their rock videos, Thai food is in vogue for grazing yuppies, reggae music sells shampoo. In a world where any image can mean anything, most images are used to make money. In our desire to discard the yoke of tradition and roots culture, in our attempts to forge a mostly emperor's-new-clothes, "progressive" postmodernism, we have thrown the multicultural baby out with the bath water.

The Italian delis and coffee bars have been here the longest. Lately a few of the owners have been rearranging the security mirrors and cash registers. They complain about the Chinese and Punjabi kids ripping off their goods after school. All kinds of children have always stolen from these stores but now it seems only Asian kids do. It dovetails nicely with the "Van Kong" graffiti springing up in other, whiter areas of the city. But on the Drive, an earnest community activist is buying some hot smoked capicollo and a few olives. He goes on about losing the neighbourhood to gentrification. The Italian owner doesn't bat a lash, pontificating about all the people who have come and gone, and anyway new people mean new business. His wife slices the meat, silently. He says he makes a lot of money from the Lotto machine now and nobody can steal that from him. The community activist asks him about buying the building and he laughs... why would he want this beat up old place? He's got first option on a new deli location opening up in the Fraser Valley; B.C. is a big place, he says, no need to worry, lots of room. The capicollo is neatly wrapped, loon coins are exchanged, the activist hurries out. The street teems: where is there lots of room in this neighbourhood anymore?

Even for those of us who want to "do" multiculturalism, there remains a host of unanswered questions. The "fine art" tradition of the college-educated elite sets arbitrary standards not only for dominant culture, but by inference, for all cultural expression regardless of origin. Sometimes ethnic or regional cultures seem amateurish by these standards. They lack the urbane slickness, the glib sophistication, the arrogance of the metropolis. The cultural bureaucracy must clean up its own act if it is serious about a real multicultural society. People from visible minorities must be on the stage, in books, arts administration, on juries and other consultative bodies, making programming decisions.

And do we want arts policy that hives off special ghetto funding programmes for minorities or do we want integrated juries? Or both? Or neither? And do we want to insist that young people "celebrate" their roots when they want to be integrated or at least hybrid? Perhaps they would not feel the need to assimilate so quickly if they could live their ethnicity without harassment and prejudice.

And who "owns" minority images and history anyway? Can sympathetic white persons make or use aboriginal images in



"Now Then, All Together"  
The National Song of Canada  
a turn-of-the-century  
postcard

their work in an effort to express their "nativeness?" Do they need permission? From whom? And what happens to work staged out of its cultural context? An Indo-Canadian play on farm workers and pesticides reads differently at a Punjabi community centre, at a folk festival and at a mainstream professional theatre. How do we present it totally out of context onstage or in a gallery and do it "in context?"

You used to find Howie in the park selling salmon out of the trunk of his car. Howie is always in trouble with the law and tells great stories about how to evade cops, even one where he just bolted out of a courtroom and ran hard and they didn't catch him. But these days he can't even sell his fish, which he claims have no poison in them because they come from streams where white people don't go. The cops will only let Howie give them away. So he "gives them away" for other food and the odd beer, cursing the situation, defying the law but not breaking it, re-inventing an old/new way of bartering. Up the Drive, the new money is coming. It knows no barter.

Finally, how multicultural can one person really be? Can we truly experience all cultures? Canada's peoples are not simply a smorgasbord of cuisines, "costumes" and dialects. For many of us it takes a lifetime just figuring out our own roots and what they mean. To eliminate racism we need understanding rather than tolerance. We also need defiance and imagination.

Chris Creighton-Kelly is a Canadian artist and writer who lives in the East End of Vancouver. He tries to "do" multiculturalism, and will be writing "From Out Here," a regular column in *Border/Lines*.

So what is multiculturalism, anyway? The Act itself states that "multiculturalism reflects the cultural and racial diversity of Canadian society and acknowledges the freedom of all members of Canadian Society to preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage." Fine, but government homilies about celebrating diversity ring hollow against the backdrop of more cutbacks to English-as-a-second-language courses, more restrictive immigration laws and elimination of curricula designed to fight racism.

We as citizens need to continue to imagine a Canada (many Canadas) that is a genuine "mosaic"... a whole society which is greater than the sum of its "ethnic" (ethnic in relation to what?) parts. Such a dream cannot be made a reality, however, without understanding the power relations among various racial and cultural minorities, and in turn their collective relation to cultural institutions like the Canada Council, the CBC, Communications Canada, etc.

