

***Media Imaging Literary Canada:  
Migrancy as a Visible Sign of Globality<sup>1</sup>***

**1. MEDIA IMAGING MIGRANCY**

Mass media and mass migration routinely provide a doxic form of global discourse with recognizable *topoi* of verisimilitude. Digital signs on the move and transnational patterns of human motion fit a necessarily figurative whole to perceivable patterns of accessibility, interconnectedness, and often-traveled space. A certain cross-over effect may be witnessed in the field of global studies, where epistemic tropes of “flows” and “flux” are rather common. Yet, learned discourse taking aim at the entangled complexity of global phenomena do, for the most part, account for somewhat more embanked fluidities. Without a doubt, media practices and migratory displacements are theorized as defining traits lending synchronic legitimacy to the global moment. They are nevertheless described as often resisting, and at times contradicting, the hyperbolic figure of a global interconnectivity sustained by mobility. The “ideology of home”<sup>2</sup>, notably in the form of invented homelands, or again very localized televisual experience of “world image”<sup>3</sup> can be given as instances of mediatic and migratory counterflows in the shifting currents of various global tides. Mike Featherstone’s “field of tensions” synoptic definition captures rather tellingly such paradoxical inadequacies pertaining to a globalized condition<sup>4</sup>. A perceived – and as such phenomenologically relevant – world of global belonging is non-reciprocally matched by limited and at times non-existent set practices of global engagement.

One cultural issue of global relevance revolves then around the potential for self-reflexivity in contemporary media productions. Beyond the obvious world effects of seemingly removable distances, can mediated places, people and events be shown and heard in critical awareness of a persisting distancing effect inherent to any media production, but also of an all too easy rhetoric of proximity specific to the media context of globalization? This has become a migration-focused issue for cultural expression in recent cinematographic production. Movies such as Mohsen Makhmalbaf’s *Safer e Ghandehar* (Kandahar, 2001), Gianni Amelio’s *Lamerica*

---

<sup>1</sup> I wish to acknowledge the financial and academic support of the Canada Research Chair in Literary and Cultural Transfers held by Professor Walter Moser at the University of Ottawa. I am also thankful for Dr. Kathryn Radford’s careful stylistic comments.

<sup>2</sup> Robertson, Roland (1992), *Globalization. Social Theory and Global Culture*, London, Sage Publications.

<sup>3</sup> Pieterse, Jan Nederveen (2004), *Globalization and Culture: Global Mélange*, Lanham, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.

<sup>4</sup> Featherstone, Mike (1995), *Undoing Culture. Globalization, Postmodernism and Identity*, London, Sage.

(1994) or Theo Angelopoulos' *To vlemma tou odyssea (Ulysses's Gaze, 1995)*, to name but a few, all mediate audiovisually various contemporary experiences of mass exodus while narratively emplotting the mediating agency of cinema, television or mass media reporting. A similar connection between media imaging and the expression of mass exile will be explored in the following analysis of *Les Belles Etrangères*, a 1996 documentary directed by the French film-maker Bruno Moynié.

A few years back, the French Ministère de la culture introduced Canadian literature in English to the French reader in a sustained yearlong campaign of cultural activities. Described as a *pays* but also a *littérature* "d'immigration", Canada as a cultural referent took shape in the form of bookfairs, public readings and audiovisual productions. As with previous editions, *Les Belles Etrangères*, a nationwide cultural program showcasing each year a given foreign literature, included a made-for-television documentary. *Les Belles Etrangères – Canada* portrayed in a series of mediatically complex interviews a poet, seven novelists and two critical thinkers. By the very fact of their being co-opted as contributing speakers in the made-for-television communicative event, the ten interviewed writers were confronted, as self-commentators, with issues of mediation writ large. Indeed, how does one bridge the distance between personal situatedness and the national space under televisual investigation? How does individual authorship interconnect with the solicited idea of a collective literature? Attempts at self-mediation address these very issues in a number of ways. "Insiding" literary Canada, that is, media-imaging Canada from a Canadian standpoint, takes essentially three forms in the documentary.

## 2. MEDIA IMAGING AS SELF-MEDIATION

### 2.1 Canada Signs

First can be considered a mediation best described as semiotic. One at a time, each writer proposes as a favoured *locus* of personal Canadian situatedness, a visual sign on which and from which he or she further elaborates: a tree stump in the West, blocks of stones in central Canada, a pulp and paper mill in New-Brunswick, immigrants on a Montréal street, etc. The most basic of Peircean trichotomies – icons, symbols and indexes – proves useful in getting to the particularity of such a sign-mediated author-to-Canada relationship. Plainly a few of these signs acting as self-locating devices do conform to the indexical logic of sign-to-reference co-substantiality: stones and tree stumps ground Canada in a self-referential natural (or commodity) materiality. Yet, by and large, the self-location of authors is predominantly symbolic. It does not fit the empirical evidence of landscape and evades a natural sourcing of the self in the geo-biological environment inhabited. Rather, it draws on distant signs that only make sense of a Canadian locality through the secondary mediation of a personal or group narrative: Shyam Selvadurai's Indian sari on a Toronto Street, Neil Bissondath's migrant faces on the move in the urbanity of Montréal, for Jane Urquhart an Ontario small town lapsing into the memory of an Irish past through the anachronism of a passing Mennonite buggy, or in the case of Lorna Crozier a

Chevrolet *El Camino* traveling across Canadian space but also family timelines. On the whole, the Canadian insider's semiotic response to the locating injunction does not pick out a sign of shared national territoriality. Rather, the overall effect is one of a diffracting opening-up of an imagined common space to distant or mobile cultural localities. Temporally, geographically displaced signs are cited as meaningful sites of Canadianess such that the *insiding* mediation operates from the outside in, following a migratory pattern of localization.

## 2.2 *Canada Tales*

Besides the location of choice being presented as a sign of Canadian situatedness, what the Canadian writer actually says about his or her practice of writing in Canada ought to be looked at as another attempt, narrative in this particular case, at a locally produced mediation, one that takes as its object the self-expressed author-to-writing relationship. Indeed very few writers do base, in their own words, the legitimacy or worth of their writing on a normative cultural canon to be nationally or aesthetically emulated, opposed, or transformed. Intertextual references to "CanLit" authors are scarce, and the few arguments of authority favour as a rule "WorldLit" figures: Camus, Dostoyesky, Austen. For the most part, authors tend to convey the specificity attached to their writing by expanding into a personal narrative the very site which semiotically engages their sense of Canadian location. It is, for instance, by means of literature that Neil Bissoondath connects passing migrant figures he witnesses on Montréal's Saint-Laurent Boulevard with a personal experience and family inheritance of migratory life patterns. The unequal possibilities of drift – a key term which he queries imaginatively in his fiction – are autobiographically ordered within a Canadian narrative. In turn, Jane Urquhart singles out as a Canadian site an Ontario family home where dwells the lapsing memory of a collective Irish exile she takes up fictionally in her 1993 novel *Away*. Lorna Crozier, for her part, evokes the looming intensity of the Canadian landscape framed by her car windows in terms similar to the untold poignancy of lives lived ordinarily, such as her father's, which defines a prime poetic concern of hers. As a rule then, the relation of Canadian presence to Canadian writing is such that the latter is routinely quoted as a mere expression of the former: a sense of localized situatedness scripts the printed sentence.

Both semiotic and narrative mediations of English writing and writers in Canada frame a very localized and biographically indexed Canadian perspective. Be that as it may, it is not necessarily obvious that they both contribute a dislocated migratory effect. Community as an implied collective reader and regionalism as a laudable practice of cultural recognition do in fact punctuate periodically the authors' narratives. As such, they could be said to advance the cause of localism, which remains an infranational form of territorializing legitimate units of social and cultural space. David Adams Richards' mill-working Maritimers, Lorna Crozier's unsung working man, Jack Hodgins' microcosmos of the "general store" are recurring figures in a social discourse asserting the norm of a community-centered literature. In Hodgins' narrative, in particular, Canadian writing is quite explicitly advocated in terms of storytelling performance, that is as the traditional

media of territorially tight oral cultures. Yet, the conclusion that would equate a self-mediated English Canadian Literature with a loose aggregate of autonomous regionalisms or narrated communities would lack interpretative validity. What would need to be omitted from such an account is the basic fact that most communities with which the writers concern themselves are far more imagined than real. Overall, they do not amount to tangible social entities to which a literature of mimetic representation can be said to refer. Rather, they are literary configurations, fictional experimentations by means of which possibilities of belonging across set time-space coordinates are explored. From his own account, Neil Bissoondath speculates from glimpsed faces on the move to imagined life trajectories of dislocation setting in motion a complex interplay of motives, fate, elation, and risk. Shyam Selvadurai's sari-ed women do not populate his fiction as taxonomic literary figures of visible ethnic groupings but rather contribute to a clearly worded theme, that of playing out and playing with the layered otherness of complex identities. If Irishness is taken up for a day on the streets of Montréal, to paraphrase Charles Taylor, it is equally subject to an imaginary take-up in Jane Urquhart's work, in her fictional supplement to a gaping Irish memory which lacks the very possibility of *anamnesis*. Set within such imaginatively patterned narrative identities, the regionalism explicitly advocated by both Hodgins and Adams Richards tends to impress itself on the viewer as yet another means of imagining communities, of entertaining in this particular case the possibility of the strictly local in a literary landscape criss-crossed by translocal imaginaries.

### ***2.3 Performing Canada***

However, to both the semiotic and narrative mediations previously detailed must be added, for a few of the interviewed writers, a performing act, a staging of their personal account which points, for some, to a less cohesively deterritorialized or to a more nation-oriented perception of writing in Canada. Perched on the side of an elevated billboard advertising a symbol of American mass-consumption, John Ralston Saul makes the case for Canada as a strategically peripheral location, a place "without a center", from which to assess critically the discourses and practices of Empire. Blending in and out of a street parade, Charles Taylor speaks at some length of a Canadian multiculturalism in action. Finally, Timothy Findley, by far the most accomplished actor of the three, chooses a dance studio, complete with wall-length mirrors and rehearsing figure, as a setting for staging a well-established discourse of the literary as aesthetic perfection. What is striking is that this added-on mediation, fully embodied in the staged presence of the performing writer, goes hand in hand with a semiotic mediation elevating Canada to the abstraction of the conceptual sign: Taylor's Canadian sign is none other than the collective political subject of multiculturalism, Saul's Canada is a site of critical discourse. As for Findley, his Canada is essentially a nurturing environment within the ecological order of art's evolutionary ascent to perfection. The physical performance seems as such to sustain a rhetorical effort aiming for a grand representation of Canada, a Canada bound within the allegorical geography of an ideal. Incidentally, it is precisely in this minority version of a self-mediated Canada that a grand narrative of

national legitimacy comes into play, sequencing in its Canadian form episodes of militant non-Americanism, cultural distinctiveness and lethal separatism.

Far from providing an immediate take on English Canadian literariness, the documentary's *insiding* approach thus relies on a number of self-mediations which tend to work in syncretism, yet can combine at times to produce diverging perceptions of writing in Canada. Semiotic and narrative mediations quite certainly frame an internal perspective of Canada which brings to mind some of Arjun Appadurai's conceptual constructs and theoretical analysis of cultural globalization.<sup>5</sup> First, his concept of global group identity or *ethnoscape*, understood both in its acutely perspectivist sense and as a commonly deterritorialized sense of spatial identity finds a clear application in the migrant gaze that comes to dominate signs and narratives of literary Canadianess. Moreover, the dynamics of "flows and disjunctures" he associates with the stop-and-go mobility of global phenomena can be made to account, as a theoretical model, for a performing mediation reasserting the Nation. Although *modernity at large* refers to cultural and social practices routinely unmoored from the guided efforts of the Nation-State, the territorialized and bureaucratized national collective model does not necessarily remain adrift. It can oppose the eroding effect of "diasporic public spheres" or other such deterritorialized groupings by interfering in the media flows and networks, that is in the "mediascapes" providing such grouping with a sense of belonging from a distance. Finally, just as Appadurai remarks that such persisting stabilities remain nevertheless "shot through with the woof of human motion", it must be conceded that the staged nation-form of a literary Canada partakes in some ways of a loosened modernity: even the odd sign-location indexing Canada on an absent because abstract We-figure – *i.e.* Charles Taylor's *mouvement de foule* as a Canadian collective subject –, mediates Canada through the symbolic relation of "Irishness-for-a-day".

### 3. PROMPTED MEDIATIONS

It is appropriate to raise at this stage an issue that connects the Canadian perspective seemingly *insiding* the documentary with anthropological issues of fieldwork. For, indeed, Canadian self-mediation is a prompted mediation, answering to modes of questioning and semantic closures native to the participant-observer. Considered from this angle, the pragmatics of media documenting undergo a reversal of some sort. Mediating agency becomes the prerogative of the outsider looking in and visualization, or the production of television images, defines the primary means of mediating or remediating a certain perception of Canada.

#### 3.1 Prompting Canada Signs: Mediascapes the Ethnoscape?

This compounded shift is most visibly at work in the documentary's refocused semiotic mediation. Quite obviously, the documentary interconnects each individual Canada sign with the metasign of national space, visualized in a documentary-long East-West motion sweeping across regions and provinces. Yet, the feature that best

---

<sup>5</sup> Appadurai, Arjun (1996), *Modernity at large. Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Minnesota, University of Minnesota Press.

defines *Les Belles Etrangères*' visual treatment of the chosen signs surely is the iterative quality of the semiotic remediation. Through a variety of interspaced scenes, stones or migrant faces acquire a visual density in numbers. The lengthy detailed shot of an uprooted tree provides Hodgins' stump with a time sustained on the screen presence. In television news fashion, Selvadurai's Indian sari brushing against a Toronto Street shifts from the semiotic mediation of orality to a fictional reenactment doubling up, in the immediacy of a visual effect, the running commentary of the interviewed author. The documentary can thus be said to practice an ontology of showing, by visually enhancing an otherwise strictly figurative, strictly audible chosen sign of Canadianess. What becomes quite possibly remediated in the shift from an insider's to an outsider's gaze, is the rhetorical function of the sign as it is selected from within: an essentially symbolic sign mediation, Canada as a biographically determined cultural location (a sari, a car, a Mennonite buggy) is turned into a visually obvious, televisually repeated iconic relation. Such a change must be considered in conjunction with another remediating effect, which although falling outside visualization proper, nevertheless impacts the prompted mediation by means of reiteration. The semiosis of the translated word, another means of sign production for the documentary, does in fact point to a sustained substitution of semantic fields clearly visible in the subtitles' white lettering. The uncapped geographies of "new land", "settlers", "regional writers" and "communities" are routinely landscaped to the shape of a known civic space : *nouveau pays, quartier, villages et villageois*.

It would appear then that the documentary strengthens a cohesion-lacking media image of Canada. However, broadly assessing territoriality as a *modus operandi* of cultural location implicitly woven in the visual production of televisual images lacks theoretical breadth. A more fully contextualized analysis of the documentary would indeed need to consider the connection between the cultural media and book industry as it relates locally in France to the mass production and mediatic designing of foreign literatures. Reality effects in a (tele)visual culture cannot be totally removed from the mediatic production of signs with built-in commodity equity. In addition, the expression of a potentially nation-bound visual discourse of otherness must be probed as a globally motivated phenomenon, rather than a marginal attempt at cultural reterritorialization. Certainly, one may point once more to a situation of "disjuncture" whereby the documentary disconnects itself from an ethnoscaping self-mediation proposed by some of the Canadian writers. Yet, national or international mediascaping as a means to generate a managed visibility of difference is theoretically developed by Appadurai to account for a collectively driven push for minority recognition seeking a status of legitimacy from the Nation-State. Even in symbolic terms, the rather loose self-mediated image of Canada can hardly be said to present the French documentary with such a threat. However, this might prove an issue to be revisited if the focus were to be shifted from the collective domain to the subjective dimension of identity-formation. In this respect, Anthony Giddens' conception of modern/global self-identity might provide the analysis with a more relevant theoretical outlook. "The avoidance of cognitive dissonance" when faced with "mediated information" contradicting a given life narrative could certainly be considered as a hypothetical

self-preserving move on the part of a subject reasserting the visibility of nation signs, yet within the high-risk environment of multiple, imaginary and conflictual life narratives – some of which, as in the case at hand, are no longer place-bound but deterritorialized.<sup>6</sup> As such, the semiotic remediation, however locality-focused it may be with respect to visible signs of cultural identity, could be said to point to conditions of instability and displacement that extend from global transformations at large to the highly reflexive intimacy of identity-formation.

### 3.2 Narrative Uptake and the Discourse of Tourism

Yet, such an intermediate conclusion must be left in the form of a hypothetical statement: the overall theoretical relevance of the analysis clearly lies elsewhere. Interestingly, if the documentary iconically engages the semiotic mediation by possibly territorializing and quite certainly overvisualizing selected Canadian locations, the documentary's narrative uptake marks a clear shift in the remediation process. The pictured story put together in *Les Belles Étrangères* shows neither a resemblance to a Nation-State imaginary nor, for that matter, a strong affinity with a visual narrative of individual life stories. Rather, the documentary seems to exercise a third narrative option, neither *insiding* nor *outsiding* a literary Canada but passing through it and taking the highway of the road movie genre. What connects each sequence is both an introductory and closing scene involving a train, car, motorbike or city bus that assist transcanadian mobility. The documentary thus proceeds from writer to writer as though completing, through the mediation of the narrative effect, a stage-by-stage Canadian itinerary. The opening and closing shots frame within the boundaries of open waters the road project or adventure which provides a state of being on the road with narrative dynamics and orientations. The road movie pattern is further discernable in the documentary's iconography and phenomenography of movement. Blown-up road signs, a diner, the ambulatory movement of curbed pedestrians, oncoming traffic, a 1960's car and road-framed vistas link the hour-long documentary using the visual theme of the road narrative. Moreover, the constantly shifting depiction of movement belongs clearly to the cinematographic tradition of mobility experienced on the road: shots are taken both inside and outside moving vehicles, landscapes flow in the lateral view of a passenger window, side mirrors act as reflecting prosthetic extensions of the camera lens. One defining aspect of the road movie as a visual narrative form is certainly lacking from the documentary. As a rule, the road movie situates within a key infrastructure of modernity an attempt to dodge, escape, slow the social *habitus* of modernization: the inability to sustain a lifestyle of various mobilities routinely seals such motion narrative as a diegetic failure. Yet, the documenting voice and gaze on the move through a literarily landscaped Canada do not have to face up to the daunting prospect of slowing and settling down. The sense of an ending is rather upbeat, musically speaking, as the other distant shore is reached. When the traveling runs out of space, the documenting trip reaches an end. The shift to a more narrative mode of representation appears then to disengage the

---

<sup>6</sup> Giddens, Anthony (1991), *Modernity and Self-Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 1991, p. 188.

documentary from a mediating process of semiotic appropriation. The documentary seems here to approximate Caren Kaplan's discourse of postmodern tourism, understood as a home-bound practice of non-involvement with the space traveled.<sup>7</sup>

The liberties taken with the visual storyline do not amount to a mere documenting act of playful distanciation. As a matter of fact, the body in movement traveling through a literary Canada set in mediatic motion can be debated as a means to engage imaginatively the foreign cultural site. Such a process of participative or productive imagination comes to the fore when the analysis focuses on *Les Belles Etrangères*' media performance.

### 3.3 Reperforming Canada: Imagined Participation

First, the documentary takes aim at its own prompting performance by deliberately showing a silent interviewer, whose presence seems at times odd and almost staged. Not a word is exchanged with Charles Taylor, although the famed philosopher's long monologue is clearly addressed to the foreign confident figure walking with him the Montréal streets. Curiously, John Saul's barricade-like act of American mass-culture iconoclasm is witnessed by the same interviewer, who remains, however, at a significant distance from the militant thinker, becomes visible only as the camera moves out, and was always quite certainly out of earshot. The effect of showing on screen what in this case amounts almost to a mock mediating presence is dual. First, the documentary appears to express candidly a situation of non-immediacy where questions are framed and uttered if not audible. Second, such a prompted mediation is shown at times as almost irrelevant, not quite in control or not quite a full participant in the communicative event it initiated.

The mediating performance thus opens up a reflexive distance within the act of mediating Canada such that the mediating agent becomes disengaged within this critical space from the self-evident, objective, truth-binding quality entertained by media representation. Interestingly, the documentary exercises at times a critical disconnect *vis-a-vis* the self-mediated performance of the interviewed Canadian writer: lengthy inquisitive shots make him or her lose composure or the camera suddenly seems to lose interest with the carefully worded speech of the portrayed sitting figure and undertakes to detail body parts, the sudden flick of a wrist, a detail in the landscape, as though relevant signs of a literary Canada were to be found elsewhere...

Acts of mediatic self-representation relax the grip of situational constraints, defined either as the necessary self-effacement of media presence, or the full attention given to the immediacy effect of direct speech. They make possible, or a least comprehensible, another range of media performance. I am referring here to what John Tomlinson analyzes as a form of "mediated proximity".<sup>8</sup> The progressive, partial, or punctual disengagement from set patterns of mediating otherness or

---

<sup>7</sup> Kaplan, Caren (1996), *Questions of Travel: Postmodern Discourses of Displacement*, Durham, Duke University Press.

<sup>8</sup> Tomlinson, John (1999), *Globalization and Culture*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, p. 150-180.

scripted self-mediations makes the mediating agent available to other modes of media engagement such that the media is no longer a distance, visual or otherwise, to be overcome. It becomes rather the means, the choice medium, to experience and approximate a perceived state of being Other.

By a sort of reverse prompting, the documentary interlays modes and moods of unsettlement which refer to reported experiences of Canadian migrations and mobilities. First, the clashing disorientation but also the empowering possibilities of *drift* singled out as an acute affect of migration translates mediatically into a televisual picture at times blurry and unfocused, often poorly framed, shaky even. Such a dissipative sense of migration stands of course in stark contrast with the semiotic closure of univocal visual signs, as though the documentary were dramatically sequencing the anticipated image safely projected onto the distant literary place and the subsequent visual shockwave of initial cultural encounters.

As another contrasted means to achieve a mediatic imagination of literary Canada, a different process approximates a migrant strategy of mimetic acceptance or tentative integration. Each writer (but for one) is introduced in his or her own literary (or academic) words voiced, however, by a collective Canadian readership seemingly selected at random, yet highly representative of the racial and cultural mix detailed in some of the authors' self-mediated account of Canada: an anglophone stumbles on the syllabic composition of a foreign place name, a reader we may assume to be a recent immigrant laboriously but convincingly reads through the selected passage. By staging such public street readings, the documentary secures a somewhat refocused image of Canada. The alienation bred by a sense of otherness as foreignness is socially shaped into a common voice. A heavily accentuated diversity shares in a literary orality.

The dominant visual effect produced and sustained by the documentary remains nevertheless an aesthetic of movement. Beyond a visual sense of drift and the ordered polyphony of readers, the routinization of mobility is mediatically expressed in the documentary as a regulating principle impacting the least likely of shots and angles: fields are animated by the liquid motion of drifting snow, wind swept clothelines batter the stillness of a rural landscape, a clump of trees is caught in the circular motion of a rotating *contre-plongée* shot, etc. Set in the context of such a motion-prone, motion-prompted televisual account of Canadian English literature, the *road movie* genre registers less as a highly creative add-on to the documentary and begins to strike the viewer as a likely mediatic involvement with the subject at hand. Whether expressed in a visually narrated travel fiction or captured in a single-shot motion, the concern with shifted focal points attains in *Les Belles Étrangères* a measure of normalcy reminiscent of Alain Touraine's self-reflexive migrant figure for a mature modernity.<sup>9</sup> In the end, the documentary

---

<sup>9</sup> Touraine, Alain (1992), *Critique de la modernité*, Paris, Fayard, p. 260: "Simmel a fait de l'étranger la figure emblématique de la modernité; c'est celle de l'émigré qu'il faudrait choisir aujourd'hui, voyageur rempli de mémoire autant que de projets et qui se découvre et se construit lui-même dans cet effort de chaque jour pour nouer le passé à l'avenir, l'héritage culturel à l'insertion professionnelle et sociale."

achieves imagined participation in the global topic at hand through the media's performing multiple modalities of what might be termed migrancy, rather than merely reproducing a single-framed conception of migration.

#### 4. ON THE GLOBAL APPEAL OF GLOBAL BELONGING

Showcasing Canada as a visible sign of migrant globality was quite certainly not the mandate of an internationally focused program such as *Les Belles Étrangères*. To assign cultural content to the category of the foreign is to reassert in more ways than one the territorial limits of sovereignty. Moreover, a television documentary which explicitly engages the distancing effect of media production can hardly be said to perpetuate an all too common iconography of the global. Yet, by imaginatively engaging a media image of literary migrancy, the documentary points to a marked concern with achieving global proximity. This theme, well developed by John Tomlinson in terms of media reception, still lacks comprehensive treatment as far as media production is concerned. Quite certainly, in *Les Belles Étrangères*, a globally inspired desire to “inhabit another person's lifeworld” (Tomlinson, 1999) translates into a mediatic relation of intimacy that shows cultural partiality. Obvious signs of ethnicity and hybrid cultural traits enjoy their due share of cinematographic attention. Moreover, the road movie genre, perceived and valued as an epitomized North American cultural import to the Old World, appeals to a European imaginary as a seemingly fitting way to visualize a North American cultural space. It remains, nevertheless, a personally meaningful way of media experiencing a Canadian literariness which happens to be routinely self-portrayed from the outside in.<sup>10</sup> Set within a wider comparative context, the practice of media imaging migrancy actually connects with a highly relevant mode of questioning cultural globalizations, one that explores how a speculative imagination at work in cultural production locally engages a disjunctive affinity with the global appeal of global belonging.

#### *Abstract*

In the late Nineteen-Nineties, the French Ministry of Culture commissioned a made-for-television documentary (*Les Belles Étrangères : 10 écrivains canadiens*), which showcased the exilic literary personae as a dominant feature of contemporary English writing in Canada. Undeniably, the foreign culture image promoted abroad relied on geographical visualization to outline a territorialized literary landscape. Yet, the mobility of migration did pattern in some significant ways the documentary's visual mediation. How both processes shape the production of Canadian migratory imagery will be the focus of this paper.

---

<sup>10</sup> It is along very similar lines that John Tomlinson's degree of “personalization” argument spells out a necessary condition for the relevance of mediatic engagement (Tomlinson, 1999: p. 180).