

International Cultural Relations as a Factor in Postwar Canadian Cultural Policy: The Relevance of UNESCO for the Massey Commission

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Abstract: The Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (The Massey Commission, 1949-1951) is widely seen to be Canada's most important position paper on national cultural policy. This article explores the relation of this significant document to UNESCO and its characteristic discourse of "cultural relations." Not only did UNESCO appear in the terms of reference for the Massey Commission Report, but it also was a repeated touchstone for submissions to the Commission. This overlooked international aspect of the Massey Commission underscores the connection between politics and culture in Cold War Canada providing a clear case of how international political language becomes entangled with—and helps to legitimize—artistic and cultural endeavours. The combination of the discussion of education and culture with that of development and trade allowed Canada to reconsider its position on public funding for the arts.

Résumé: La commission royale sur le développement national des arts, des lettres et des sciences (la Commission Massey, 1949-1951) est vue par de nombreuses personnes comme étant la plus importante en ce qui a trait à la politique culturelle nationale. Cet article explore les rapports entre ce document présenté à l'UNESCO et son discours caractéristique de "relations culturelles". Non seulement l'UNESCO sert-elle comme point de référence dans ce rapport, mais il fut aussi un repère constant dans les soumissions à la commission. Cet aspect international négligé de la commission Massey souligne le lien entre la politique et la culture au Canada pendant la guerre froide. Ceci démontre de façon évidente de quelle façon le langage politique international devient entremêlé avec et prête une certaine légitimité aux activités culturelles et artistiques. Le rapprochement de la discussion sur l'éducation et la culture avec celle du développement et du commerce permet au Canada de reconsidérer sa situation vis-à-vis le financement public des arts.

Keywords: Communication history; Cultural policy; Massey Commission; UNESCO

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As our task reaches its conclusion and our Report goes to press, we find ourselves working against a darkening horizon in the international world. This may suggest to the citizen that the objects of our recommendations are at the moment irrelevant. Are not tanks more needed than Titian, bombs more important than Bach? It has been said more than once that however important our suggestions may be, their acceptance might well be delayed until the sky is clearer. To answer this, we must ask another question. If we as a nation are concerned with the problem of defence, what, we may ask ourselves, are we defending? We are defending civilization, our share of it, our contributions to it. The things with which our inquiry deals are the elements which give civilization its character and meaning. It would be paradoxical to defend something which we are unwilling to strengthen and enrich, and which we even allow to decline. (Massey Commission Report, 1951, p. 274)

As the Cold War period (1946-1989) recedes, the example it provides of the emphatic interconnection between culture and politics has taken on a new importance. From our vantage point, it is instructive to see how the ideological polarity of the immediate postwar period—when freedom versus totalitarianism and capitalism versus communism were pitched as a battle for civilization—manifested itself in cultural objectives and policies, many of which helped to shape the cultural landscape for decades to come. In Western states, art, education, psychology, and culture became the new testing grounds for a war of ideas and values. In Canada, the early Cold War period was dominated by the spectre of the two-year study and final report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (The Massey Commission, 1949-51),¹ which established the rationale for many of the national cultural institutions that would play key roles in the subsequent half century: the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), the National Film Board (NFB), the Canada Council, the National Gallery, the National Archives, the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, and the National Library. By contrast, since the late 1970s, the economic discourse of industry, rather than the establishment of national culture, has dominated cultural-policy discussions in Canada (Dowler, 1996). The dominance of commodification as a discourse of culture in recent years, not to mention the liberalization of global trade, has often led to a nostalgic reading of postwar cultural nationalism in Canada.

In my work on the National Film Board (Druick, in press[a]), I have been compelled to reconsider the narrative of benevolent cultural nationalism that surrounds Canada's now-beleaguered cultural institutions. Nationalism has indeed been a significant rationale for cultural funding since the 1920s, but postwar nationalism is indebted to a logic of internationalism, and it inherited many of its contradictions and tensions. As the world was divided along the ideological lines of the Cold War, internationalism worked to bolster the centralizing tendencies of nationalism and gave an advantage to the federal government over the provincial governments on the international scene—a development of no small significance in a country where arts and education policy are controlled by the provinces (Tippet, 1990). In hindsight, culture played a key role in relation to the new economic

and political configuration of the postwar period, both intra- and internationally, for “the ability to shape public opinion beyond one’s borders was a *sine qua non* of the cold war” (Robinson, 1997, p. 158).

The postwar period was characterized by the crises surrounding recovery and reconstruction following a devastating war; anxieties about the return of economic depression; and a re-configured world order. These critical areas were emblemized in the formation of the United Nations (UN) in 1945, whose mandate was to provide an international site for diplomacy and dialogue in a polarized world and, ultimately, to prevent global annihilation in a nuclear conflict. However, the creation in the next few years of both the Cominform (1947) and NATO (1948) seemed to render the UN’s emphasis on discourse rather than conflict naïve (UNESCO, 1972; Wells, 1987). Nevertheless, from the outset, the UN’s emphasis on cultural exchange, diplomacy, and peace provided a symbol, if not a mechanism, for liberal internationalism—a pacifist philosophy of tolerance and dialogue that had held sway as an alternative to both fascism and communism in many influential quarters during the 1930s (Smith, 1999). This ideological battle was brought home clearly in a parody of Marx’s Communist Manifesto by Sir John Maud, Britain’s Secretary of Education, at a UNESCO meeting in 1946: “Educators of the World, UNESC [sic], you have nothing to use but your brains” (quoted in Kidd, 1956, p. 248). This would prove to be the moment when liberal educational ideals about culture were crystallized into intergovernmental, and later governmental, organizations.

In what follows, I re-examine the history of cultural policy in postwar Canada, exploring the connection between nationalism and internationalism in policy concerning media and the arts during this period and re-evaluating the influence of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) at the national level. I also consider a range of 1950s cultural examples in both the United States and Canada in which politics played an important role. It is my hope that this re-contextualization of the Massey moment will problematize any simple distinction between the clear-sighted nationalism of the past and a crisis of the nation-state today. Rather, each period is characterized by its own crises and discourses, each of which merits specific attention.

The tempo of change in our generation has become so swift that clear thinking on most subjects was never more difficult to achieve. Most of the changes which have transformed our daily lives, our standards in matters of government and education, our hopes for the future of man, and indeed those general ideals which serve as lanterns to mark our path—all these changes have originated in the dominating role which science has come to play in our lives. No such fundamental change has ever before been recorded in so brief a period of human history. Science has taught us to increase human productivity of goods to an incredible extent; we not only enjoy comforts and conveniences hitherto undreamed of, but power to create a new Eden on earth. As a matter of fact we have chosen to indulge in the most expensive of all luxuries—recurring world wars. Our discovery of the atomic bomb would seem to guarantee bigger and better wars in the future. In perplexing contradiction to these facts we have

tried to establish a United Nations Organization and to achieve something like universal education. It is all very confusing. (Wallace, 1951, p. 99)

So begins Malcolm W. Wallace, Principal and Professor Emeritus of University College, in his study on the place of the humanities in the modern world submitted to the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences (Royal Commission Studies, 1951). In his statement of the problem and his rhetorical admission of confusion is encapsulated the quandary of the postwar moment for Canadians of his class and generation: how to situate a newfound commitment to national culture in the face of both the wonders of modern life and the anxieties of modern warfare. A good portion of the Massey Commission's published studies and recommendations is consumed with similar considerations of the sea-change that had occurred in Canadian life in the previous 30 years, from reliance on the church and the school for both culture and education to the influx of a new technologized world, in which foreign mass media and extreme ideological polarization had driven Canada to consider its national culture and its role in world culture in new and potentially disorienting ways.

As B. K. Sandwell, then editor of *Saturday Night* magazine, noted in his study of "Present Day Influences on Canadian Society" in the volume of studies written for the Massey Commission, "Culture . . . is no longer mainly transmitted in youth by the little red schoolhouse; it is transmitted by Hollywood and Radio City, and by books and magazines which are more and more becoming accessories of those institutions" (Sandwell, 1951, p. 4). And George Grant, in his companion study on the plight of philosophy in the modern world, puts it even more bleakly:

The tragedy must be admitted that, just as the controlling forces in our western world are beginning to understand how deeply our spiritual traditions need guarding, and that some of our energy must be diverted from technology towards that purpose, our society is being challenged to defend itself against a barbaric Empire that puts its faith in salvation by the machine. This must inevitably mean that a large percentage of western wealth be spent on the mechanism of defence. (Grant, 1951, p. 132)

The commissioners echo these sentiments in their assessment of the situation:

The radio, the film, the weekly periodical have brought pleasure and instruction to remote and lonely places in this country, and undoubtedly have added greatly to the variety of our enjoyment. In the great plenty that now is ours, there is some danger that we may forget that music and drama and letters call for more than passive pleasure on our part; in this new world of television, of radio and of documentary films, it will be unfortunate if we hear no more our choir and our organist in valiant and diligent practice of the Messiah, making together a gracious music that reaches us faintly but with great sweetness across the quiet of an early winter night. (Massey Commission Report, 1951, p. 20)

The Massey Commission continues to be a compelling document precisely because it negotiates an array of conflicting sentiments. Its overarching melancholy about the losses precipitated by modern technologies and modern media—loss of community, of pervasive amateur culture, of clear-cut values and traditions

tied to European culture and religion—is met with a kind of resolve about how to mitigate these losses with bold decisions about national funding for culture. The report negotiates the shift in the concept of culture from Arnoldian—the best of what had been thought and written—to anthropological; from prescriptive to descriptive; from the elite to the everyday. As the quotations above demonstrate, the report is also dealing with two international foes simultaneously, both of which may manifest within Canadian borders: American mass culture and the pernicious ideologies of the Soviet Union.

As the most elaborated statement about Canadian culture ever produced, the report of the Massey Commission has been the subject of much analysis. Many studies on the report have been published in the past 20 years, and they look back to the Massey Commission from a current climate of cultural privatization with a kind of nostalgia of their own, if not for organic Canadian culture, then for such clear-sighted thinking about cultural funding and the public good. The prevailing view is that the Commission provided a positive resolve to fund Canadian culture, despite various compromises, and that, on balance, it improved the quality of Canadian life (Bissell, 1986; Evans, 1991; Finlay, 2004; Litt, 1992; Massolin, 2001; Robinson, 1997; Thompson & Randall, 2002; Tippett, 1990; Whitaker & Marcuse, 1994). George Woodcock's comments are typical in this regard: “[The Massey Commission and its effects] revealed for the first time a widespread recognition among Canadians of the truth . . . that in its arts a community finds the most profound and faithful expression of its true nature, and that for this reason . . . the community is under an obligation to see that the arts do not die, but flourish” (Woodcock, 1985, p. 12). In his article “The Cultural Industries Policy Apparatus,” which presents something of a departure from most histories of the Massey Commission, communications theorist Kevin Dowler focuses on the relationship of culture to security during the 1950s, reflecting a sentiment clearly expressed in the excerpt from the Massey Commission included at the head of this paper and echoed by Grant: “Culture,” he writes, “constituted a form of defence against both internal and external threats” (Dowler, 1996, p. 338). Yet Dowler too presents the Commission's emphasis on culture “free from the pressures of the marketplace” as admirable.

As is readily apparent from the above quotations taken from the Massey studies and report, the dominant interpretations about the Commission's impact on cultural funding and production in Canada are consistent with the commission's intentions. However, in the emphasis on nation building—a theme whose anachronism in an age of globalization often appeals to contemporary cultural observers—the role of internationalism in general and the United Nations (UN) in particular on the Massey Commission has been left largely neglected. In what follows, I highlight the importance of internationalism for postwar Canada, in order to situate national cultural initiatives associated with the Massey Commission within a larger frame. For example, although the Massey commissioners were largely ambivalent about the mass media, as is apparent in the quotation taken from their report above (p. 20), they were subject, I argue, to a Cold War pressure

to align Canadian arts with the objectives of the UN's cultural wing, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The UN's organ for encouraging peace through proactive means of education and cultural exchanges of all sorts, UNESCO was for pragmatic reasons strongly in favour of the role the mass media could play in the modern world. Behind these initiatives lay the threat of war. The preamble to the UNESCO convention describes the modern mind as a battlefield: "Since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed" (UNESCO, n.d., p. 5).²

UNESCO ideals of cultural relations and cultural exchange required participation at the national level from member states. Canada was, as Philip Massolin (2001), Maria Tippett (1990), and others have documented, sorely lacking in national culture by the end of the war.

[C]ultural accoutrements in Canada compared poorly with those of the United States and countries in Europe. Canadian governments also had little to boast of in terms of promoting culture. In spite of aiding the development of the National Gallery, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), and the National Film Board (NFB), they had largely stayed out of the field of culture. Unlike their counterparts elsewhere in the western world, they were niggardly about funding cultural organizations and focused instead on more concrete initiatives such as immigration policy and maintaining full employment. Indeed, cultural policy not only belied Canada's origins as a pioneer colony but also reflected Canadians' pragmatism and penchant for material success. (Massolin, 2001, p. 164)

Given Canada's increasing profile at an international level, the underdevelopment of her national culture was beginning to become an embarrassment (Litt, 1992).

The Canadian government avidly turned to its leading advocates of culture and education, many of whom had been members of liberal internationalist organizations during the interwar period, to find representatives for UNESCO meetings. For instance, the Canadian delegation to the meeting to draw up a constitution for UNESCO, which took place in London, November 1, 1945, was composed of adult educator and National Film Society stalwart Robert Wallace; Edmond Turcotte, editor of *Le Canada*, a former member of the National Film Board, and later a member of the Fowler Commission; and Vincent Massey, who was finishing up his term as high commissioner for Canada in London (Kidd, 1956). The connection between national cultural development and international relations was becoming clear.

When Prime Minister Louis St. Laurent proposed the idea of a royal commission to study arts and culture in Canada in the late 1940s, he, and later Massey, always referred to UNESCO as part of the rationale (Litt, 1992). This framework turned up in the terms of reference for the commission itself and informed much of the language of the submissions, many of which were given by volunteer organizations dedicated to arts and education. Of the four issues stipulated in the Order-in-Council that created the Massey Commission, the third, following the pressing issues of broadcasting policy and the "operation and future develop-

ment” of federal arts agencies, and preceding the relations of the government with voluntary bodies and the preservation of historical monuments, was explicitly concerned with UNESCO and “similar international bodies” (Massey Commission Report, 1951, p. xii).

As the Massey Commission Report documents, 70 briefs from voluntary organizations expressed some concern about Canada’s relations to UNESCO (Massey Commission Report, 1951, p. 246), and many of the submissions urged the formation of a national commission dedicated to matters of international culture, as had been established by this time in 30 other countries (p. 246). During hearings, commissioner Hilda Neatby reportedly derided the overvaluation of the work that UNESCO could do to bring about world peace (Litt, 1992). These views are encapsulated in the section concerning UNESCO in the report, in which it is stated that although the aims of UNESCO are commendable, its “catholicity of enterprise has led to high administrative costs, and the consequent curtailments of the budget have tended to narrow the orbit of operations rather than curtail their central administration. UNESCO is therefore accused of doing much talking, or organizing too many meetings, of making too many plans and of producing too few results” (p. 247). Nevertheless, the report backs away from harsh criticism by saying, “In repeating the criticisms we have no thought of ranging ourselves with the cynical and the lethargic. On the contrary we believe with the authority whom we have quoted that an honest recognition of the causes of weakness in this important organization must bring home to every thoughtful person his obligation to give the greatest possible support to this cause” (p. 248). Many of the final recommendations of the Commission, including the emphasis on the need for Canadian participation in all forms of intellectual and artistic cultural exchange, are completely in line with UNESCO. The Commission plainly states:

For good or ill, information and cultural matters are now becoming more and more an essential part of foreign policy. The pace in this matter has in recent years been set by the dictatorships; democratic countries are following their example partly in recognition of changing circumstances which make this activity necessary and desirable in itself, partly because false propaganda can be countered only by the truth effectively and generously disseminated by every practicable means. (Massey Commission Report, 1951, p. 263)

Despite this discourse in the report, the international aspect of the Massey Commission has been sidelined in the histories, a fact that allows us to lose sight of the significance of UNESCO as a legitimizing discourse for national cultural funding in the postwar world.

Rarely noted, for example, is that the recommendation for the establishment of the Canada Council, in many ways the culmination of the report and widely considered the Commission’s only substantive recommendation, was originally a call for a Council for Arts, Letters, Humanities and Social Sciences, which might serve as a catch-all for the problems set out for the Commission to solve, including relations to UNESCO. “We . . . recommend,” states the report, “that a body be created . . . to stimulate and help voluntary organizations within these

fields, to foster Canada's cultural relations abroad, to perform the functions of a national commission for UNESCO, and to devise and administer a system of scholarships" (Massey Commission Report, 1951, p. 377). The Canada Council was also mandated to call an annual national UNESCO affairs conference and to "take appropriate measures to extend the knowledge in Canada of UNESCO's purposes and programmes," as well as bringing Canadian needs to the attention of UNESCO by way of External Affairs (p. 379). In Paul Litt's words, "the UNESCO issue pulled the government one step closer to assuming responsibility for sponsoring the arts" (Litt, 1992, p. 175).

Although they were Canadian nation-builders to a person, everyone involved with the Massey Commission was also actively engaged with international affairs, most of them also directly or indirectly involved with UNESCO. Aside from Vincent Massey, the members of the Massey Commission were Georges-Henri Lévesque, Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Laval University; Norman A. M. MacKenzie, president of the University of British Columbia and member of the Wartime Information Board; Hilda Neatby, a professor of history from the University of Saskatchewan; and Arthur Surveyer, a civil engineer from Montréal. All five commissioners had been active in groups such as the Canadian Association for Adult Education (CAAE) and the Canadian Institute of International Affairs (CIIA) before the war (Faris, 1975; Litt, 1992). The CIIA was closely aligned to the ideals of the League of Nations and was founded in 1928 "to promote and encourage in Canada research and discussion in international affairs and to give attention to Canada's position both as a member of the international community of nations and as a member of the British Commonwealth of Nations" it was a gathering place for Canada's elite.³ It was at a meeting of the CIIA in 1934 that Brooke Claxton, the politician who initiated the inquiry that ultimately became the Massey Commission, first met Massey.⁴ Like Massey and Alan Plaunt (co-founder of the Radio League), Claxton had developed a commitment to the philosophy of internationalism while attending Oxford (Litt, 1992), and as with them, Claxton's involvement with Liberal politics went beyond the backrooms. In 1936 he published a position paper on the need for internationalism despite the failings of the League of Nations (Claxton, 1936). Claxton would go on to be the first chairman of the Canada Council (Woodcock, 1985). Many of the commonwealth and liberal internationalist ideals favoured by Canada's "Ottawa men" were embodied in the conception of UNESCO (Granatstein, 1982).

Vincent Massey, heir to a farm-equipment manufacturing fortune, was raised according to prevailing custom in the upper echelons of early twentieth-century Canadian life, which included being sent abroad for university. Massey was a supporter of international and imperial connections from his days at Oxford, where he established a "round table" chapter, an empire-wide association based on the imperialist notions of Cecil Rhodes (Faris, 1975; Massey, 1963). He was also committed to both culture and education. Upon his return from university, Massey became president of the National Council of Education, where "it was hoped that it could create a bureau of education on a national basis, non-governmental and

unofficial, which could be a clearing house of ideas in this field” (Massey, 1963, p. 85). Massey vigorously pursued his own brand of commonwealth nationalism from his position as high commissioner in London during the war, and Massey’s internationalism—his support of both the United Nations and the British Commonwealth—is apparent in his book, *On Being Canadian*, in which both entities are compatible with his brand of nationalism (Massey, 1948).⁵

UNESCO’s insistence on cultural exchange fit well with an emphasis on free trade, decoupling state sponsorship of the arts from the spectre of totalitarianism. A discourse of “cultural relations” pervaded postwar internationalism, combining humanist progressivism with a notion of multiply reinforcing levels of international relations (McMurry & Lee, 1947). Historian Frank Ninkovich notes that in the United States, the “analogy [of culture] with commerce was typical of a liberal mentality that looked at politics, culture, and trade as a seamless web of mutually reinforcing filaments” meant to bring about a “liberal ecumene” (Ninkovich, 1981, p. 15; p. 61). UNESCO officials Walter Laves & Charles Thomson summarize the convergence of education, culture, and commerce concisely: “Through UNESCO the governments of member states have been able to give new emphasis to their belief that education is indispensable to a country’s development; that it is vital for political democracy, for raising living standards, for adequate understanding of the discoveries of modern science, and for cultural as well as for economic growth” (Laves & Thomson, 1957, p. 191). The Massey Commission Report follows directly on this kind of discourse, asserting that “the exchange of information and cultural goods with other countries has become an essential activity of the modern state. In the case of Canada it is important for trade reasons, but there are also less tangible results in terms of improved understanding which must also be earnestly sought” (Shea, 1952, p. 56).⁶ UNESCO’s combination of education and culture with development and trade allowed states such as Canada, which had been resistant to the notion of public funding for the arts, to reconsider their position in ways that did not challenge their political or moral ideologies.

The Massey Commission Report is peppered with carefully worded advisories about overreliance not only on American popular culture, but also on American philanthropic largesse. “We benefit,” state the commissioners, “from vast importations of what might be familiarly called the American cultural output . . . We are . . . deeply indebted to American generosity . . . Of American institutions we make the freest use” (Massey Commission Report, 1951, p. 13-14). America was not only the source of the majority of Canada’s commercial culture, but of much of her high culture as well. The commissioners expressed concern about Canada’s overreliance on philanthropic organizations such as the Carnegie Corporation and the Rockefeller Foundation. Indeed Appendix Five of the report details the millions of dollars of aid received by Canadian groups and institutions from these organizations between 1911 and 1949. The report puts the problem succinctly: “the cinema at present is not only the most potent but also the most alien of the influences shaping our Canadian life. Nearly all Canadians go to the movies; and most movies are from Hollywood. The urbane influences of Carnegie

and Rockefeller have helped us to be ourselves; Hollywood refashions us in its own image" (Massey Commission Report, 1951, p. 50).

The support received for worthy cultural projects from American organizations was significant. The United States was not simply the source of "vulgarity and debilitation" (Wallace, 1951, p. 100); it was also the site of well-organized commitments to enlightenment. There was, for example, a strong contingent of American internationalists, many of whom acted as enthusiastic participants in the formative years of UNESCO. Ninkovich notes that "the concept of popular participation in UNESCO had a natural appeal to most Americans" (1981, p. 94). Indeed the UNESCO preamble was written by Archibald MacLeish, Librarian of Congress and UNESCO's first American representative (Donaldson, 1992; Ninkovitch, 1981).⁷ MacLeish was a "liberal's liberal, a loyal New Dealer, and fervent internationalist . . . He was also a believer in the potency of cultural relations" (Ninkovitch, 1981, p. 116). In MacLeish's words, "Cultural Relations . . . is more important to the people of the world, and the people of the United States in particular, than almost anything else they can read about or think about at this moment in their history" (MacLeish, 1947, p. v).

The discourse of "cultural relations" pervaded American internationalist circles. There were many American educators intent on creating widespread support for UNESCO and its utopian promise of peoples communicating to peoples without state intermediaries (Ninkovitch, 1981). Ninkovich could almost be discussing Canadian submissions to the Massey Commission when he writes about American voluntary organizations that: "These groups considered [UNESCO's] call for national commissions to be an extension of the principle of voluntary association to the multilateral sphere under governmental auspices"; many made submissions to that effect to the State Department in 1946 (1981, p. 95). The American contingent is most famous for arguing unrelentingly for absolute free flow of information, a self-promoting position that, when it was not widely accepted, eventually led to American withdrawal from the organization in 1984. But this point of conflict also demonstrates just how seriously Americans took their participation in UNESCO (Ninkovitch, 1981).

In the struggle against barbarism, the enemy for many, Canadian and American alike, was dual: both American mass culture and totalitarian communism. This complex of political, economic, educational, and cultural objectives led the Massey commissioners to blend contradictory aspects of elite and mass culture. In the report, one finds discussion of the objectives of art as ennobling and identity-promoting thrown together with the promotion of national mass media, a tangle of problems embodied in UNESCO's mandate as well. As with UNESCO, the Massey Commission bore the contradictory impulses of creativity and institution, art and technology, culture and commerce. These conflicts and contradictions reveal themselves in the relation between the Massey Commission and the Canadian state, as well as between UNESCO and the UN and various factions of culture and politics in the United States.

Myriad examples of the complex relationship of art and politics in the postwar period can be observed in the use of culture for international relations in the United States. Positive sentiment for UNESCO's messages of Cold War humanism are well illustrated by one of America's "most significant cultural productions" of the 1950s, the Museum of Modern Art's international touring exhibit, *The Family of Man* (Sandeen, 1995). Composed of black and white documentary photographs by dozens of photographers from around the globe, this exhibit had as its spirit the seemingly apolitical message, "Mankind is one" (Sandeen, 1995, p. 40). The photographs depicted people in diverse cultural settings carrying out similar everyday activities, from eating and sleeping to dancing and making love. In the wake of World War II, Cold War America wished to emphasize universal humanist messages, while still promoting support for the American way over Soviet communism.

One of the ways this message about a unified humanity—a new one, according to a UNESCO study by Claude Lévi-Strauss (1956)—was expressed through the emphasis on the celebration of "diversity" found in democratic America, compared with the enforced homogeneity and repression of the Soviet Union. This was a tactic of American foreign policy as well: "maintaining and even encouraging cultural differences . . . would create an enduring barrier to Soviet expansion" (Sandeen, 1995, p. 27). Thus although the exhibit emphasized the anthropological diversity of peoples, the dominant metaphor was of the containment of difference in a UN model of a universal community (Sandeen, 1995). As Eric Sandeen puts it, "a satisfying consensus was multivocal but, like a good chorus, well-orchestrated" (Sandeen, 1995, p. 32). The final image in the exhibit, intended to restore hope after the iconic mushroom cloud of an exploding nuclear bomb, was a picture of the UN headquarters in session.

Sandeen's study connects with work by Serge Guilbaut (1983), Frances Saunders (2000), and Naima Prevots (1998) on the role of culture in international ideological struggle. Visual art, writing, music, and dance were all exported by the United States as forms of cultural relations in the 1940s and 1950s. The Americans reached out in particular to Europeans who had felt the brunt of the war and were sympathetic to a variety of forms of socialism and communism. The Americans' message was most often about the diversity, creativity, and tolerance that were said to characterize American society, a position often deemed incredible to a politicized international community of artists and intellectuals. This use of the arts for political purposes was often funded by the CIA and was legitimized as an expense because of its supposed power as a form of psychological warfare (Saunders, 2000). As Guilbaut puts it in his study of the dominance of abstract expressionism in the postwar art world, "culture had become politicized and important in a world sharply divided between the forces of good and the forces of evil . . ." (1983, p. 4). Guilbaut notes that abstract expressionism, art that seemed to fly in the face of both popular and elite ideas of aesthetics, expressed a kind of "political apoliticism" that seemed custom-made for the American philosophy of the "vital

centre,” supporting freedom of expression without actually expressing any clear politics.

If high art was seen to be an appropriate medium for psychological warfare and cultural relations, what was the role assigned to mass media? Film was by far the most important medium in UNESCO discussions of the late 1940s. Broadcast television was yet but a promise and visual media were thought to be more significant for the masses of the world’s illiterate than print. The United States insisted that the free flow of ideas distinguished the West from the repressions of Soviet communism and attempted to extend this rationale to trade as well. Through GATT (1947), the United States insisted that Hollywood films be accepted internationally on a free trade basis, an argument resisted most adamantly by France (Jarvie, 1998; Jeancolas, 1998; Schiller, 1979).

Film was given exemplary status in UNESCO discussions as it promised to function in many desirable ways (Druick, in press[b]). It had educational applications that extended from demonstrations of practical skills and the circulation of information about national ways of life to the documentation of national cultural production and the creation of high art. Film was also the leading form of amusement and entertainment, a situation that continued in the Third World long after television had displaced film in the domestic American market. As one UNESCO publication put it, “the commercial cinema remains of sufficient interest to any student of education and culture, as the only mass communications medium which effectively crosses frontiers and perhaps the most potent force by which one modern culture influences another” (UNESCO, 1955, p. 3).

There was overwhelming support for film as both a method of transmitting “fundamental education” and as a cultural missionary (UNESCO, 1947). In Canada, the National Film Board had been operating along these lines of film and education, making government documentary films since 1939 (Evans, 1984). Despite the Massey commissioners’ preference for high culture, they were already well aware of the uses of new media such as film and radio for adult education and could not object to the UNESCO principles of advancing “mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples, through all means of mass communication . . . to give fresh impulse to popular education and to the spread of culture, [and to] maintain, increase and diffuse knowledge” (Ellis, 2000, p. 230). Massey had this to say about the UNESCO prospect:

UNESCO, we learn from its constitution, is concerned with the advancement of ‘the mutual knowledge and understanding of peoples, through all means of mass communication,’ and the promotion of ‘the free flow of ideas by word and image.’ That is a tremendous proposition. It means the enlistment of the mighty forces of the radio and the film and the press as well as everything in the field of culture, for the purpose of enabling peoples to talk to peoples. Nothing could be finer than the ideals which have inspired such a programme. (Massey, 1948, p. 162-163).

Perhaps unsurprisingly, then, the report of the Commission included the following endorsement of educational documentary film:

In a democratic state, national effort in war and national unity in peace are maintained only by the informed conviction of its citizens. No democratic government can afford to neglect at any time a means of public information so far-reaching and so persuasive as film. The provision and distribution of films by the national government is as little open to question as the issue of the white paper or the blue book. (Massey Commission Report, 1951, p. 310)

I have elsewhere traced the relationship of the NFB to British colonial film theory (Druick, in press[a]). And, indeed, UNESCO film education has been seen as a form of neocolonialism, often tracing the same paths through former colonies as the colonial administrators had (Hungwe, 1991). With regard to educational film, the NFB was already in place to help link Canadian cultural production to UNESCO's objectives. The close connection between the NFB and UNESCO is made even more apparent by the fact that after leaving the NFB under a Cold War cloud in 1945, government Film Commissioner John Grierson went to UNESCO to direct its media division (Druick, 2003; Ellis, 2000; Evans, 1984; Knight, 2005; Kristmanson, 2003; Robinson, 1997; Whitaker & Marcuse, 1994).⁸ His successor at the NFB, Ross McLean, would follow him to UNESCO in 1950 after being similarly ousted from the Film Board (Evans, 1991).

Although Grierson is often presented as an internationalist, his internationalism was based on a dialogue between strong nations. In January of 1948, Grierson, in his UNESCO capacity, appeared at a conference of the British Film Institute whose topic was "Film and Colonial Development." In his talk, entitled "The Film and Primitive Peoples," Grierson iterates the UNESCO position that the success of "fundamental" education on a global scale is reliant upon national effort. "So we arrive," he said, "at the paradox which some of us have known all our lives, that internationalism begins in the nations, and for many of our immediate tasks, it begins at home" (Grierson, 1948, p. 11).

At the first UNESCO meeting on mass media and international culture, Grierson linked strong mass media infrastructure to national reconstruction and development (Ellis, 2000). The film subcommittee recommended that UNESCO act as an international clearing house of information, once again warning that its success depended entirely on individual national efforts: "UNESCO could only act efficiently as an International Clearing House if each country has a national film information center or national film committee" (UNESCO, 1947, p. 38). Along with filmmaker Basil Wright, Grierson drafted a plan for the production of a series of films on UNESCO subjects by "national film-producing groups" for international distribution (Ellis, 2000, p. 232). True to the ideas about representative typicality that dominated Grierson's view of documentary (Druick, 2000, in press[a]), the proposal included a list of films to be "produced by member countries about their own 'specialities'; e.g. French cooking, English landscape painting" (Ellis, 2000, p. 232). This led to a somewhat paradoxical situation in which UNESCO was on the one hand promoting the complete arbitrariness of cultural difference as a way to diffuse racism, but reifying differing cultural temperaments and aptitudes on the other.⁹

In order to fulfill this international communications objective, a series of films was produced over the next few years, including French and English versions of *Introducing Canada* (1956).¹⁰ In 1950 Stanley Jackson directed a film called *Our Town is the World*, which used the allegory of children fighting to make broader conclusions about the tolerance for difference and the need to respect the Universal Declaration of Human Rights as laid down by the UN. The film originally used boys of French and English descent and portrayed the conflict as linguistic and cultural. This script was quashed by the Department of External Affairs for fear that it portrayed Canada to an international community as unable to reconcile its ethnic groups (Robinson 1997). The story was duly changed to a conflict between children from two sides of a river. "Our town is the world now," concludes the narrator, "and if we are to live, we must live in peace."

So what are the conclusions to be drawn from these examples? In the 1940s and 1950s, the language of UNESCO was ubiquitous in the government and the culture lobby in Canada, and it informed cultural production and circulation in the United States as well. This not only helps to explain why UNESCO appears in the terms of reference for the royal commission on culture, but also gives clearer reasons than some of the current histories for the choice of the commissioners and the participation of networks of educators and arts groups in the hearings process. Importantly, the emphasis on culture by UNESCO and the Cold War pressure to be aligned with the United Nations helped to give the government the rationale it required to direct funding to the arts. Finally, the UNESCO problematic of education, art, and media helps to explain the somewhat bifurcated structure of the royal commission's report, in which although culture is the subject, the media are often the messengers.

As I have tried to show, the UNESCO discourse emphasized national participation in an international dialogue and highlighted the role of culture and education in this process. This conception of national culture in an international framework helped to mould policy that in turn shaped Canadian cultural institutions such as the Canada Council and the National Film Board. These institutions have gone on to have a profound effect on the direction of domestic art production. The activities and writings of those involved in the Royal Commission and the adult educators and other internationally minded groups of the day demonstrate the degree to which a narrowly nationalist vision was certainly not the Commission's goal; nor were their sentiments limited to the Canadian scene. The Massey commissioners, the interested voluntary bodies, and the report itself are all steeped in an international Cold War ideology of cultural relations. To this end, the production of Canadian culture was not only a nation-building project, but was also seen to be the basis of membership in an international cultural community. In sum, well before cultural-policy discourse in Canada came to be dominated by the notion of trade and cultural industries, it was nonetheless clearly imbricated with international politics. Negotiating with many contradictory forces, the Massey Commission was able to adapt the civilization and enlightenment tradition to terms suitable for institutionalization and instrumental application. In so doing,

the Commission set the benchmark, not only for being “the single most important document in the history of Canadian cultural policy” (Finlay, 2004, 211), but also for becoming an example of how cultural policy can and does embody dialogic tensions between economics, politics, culture, and government. For these reasons, the Massey Commission’s establishment and its report offer a telling example of how intellectuals and artists—not to mention cultural-policy writers—can find themselves negotiating with a governmental, ideological (or, in our own time, economic) language for the arts, because these vocabularies are presented as compelling crystallizations of social or political aims.

Notes

1. Although convention in recent years has been to refer to the commission as the Massey-Lévesque Commission, drawing upon the names of both its chair, Vincent Massey, and its high-profile French-Canadian member, Georges-Henri Lévesque, this is a revisionist manoeuvre, not reflected in discussion about the Commission in its own period, when it was uniformly called either the Massey Commission or the Culture Commission. If anyone else’s name should be added to the title, it should most likely be Hilda Neatby, who apparently was responsible for much of the written report.
2. Derived from the use of the phrase by Clement Attlee at an international education conference in 1942, the phrase also clearly recalls the title of one of the NFB’s most famous wartime films, *The War for Men’s Minds* (1943).
3. Description taken from the preface to Gwendolen Carter’s Canadian Institute of International Affairs-issued book, *The British Commonwealth and International Security: The Role of the Dominions, 1919-39* (Carter, 1947, n.p.). Through the Massey Foundation, which Vincent ran after his father’s death, Massey granted money to the Canadian Institute of International Affairs in 1932 (Massey, 1963).
4. Claxton was also an active member of the Association of Canadian Clubs, the Canadian League, and the League of Nations Society.
5. The book was originally called *Canada and the World*.
6. Albert Shea, a political scientist who worked for the War Information Board during the war and wrote a synopsis of the Massey Commission findings called *Culture in Canada* in 1952, went on to conduct a world survey of mass communications for UNESCO in the early 1950s (Shea, 1952, p. 6).
7. At an address to the Canadian Club in Ottawa, February 12, 1941, MacLeish gave a version of his continental manifest destiny: “We who are Americans—Canadians and citizens of the United States alike—will nobly save or meanly lose the last, best hope of earth. And the fiery trial through which we pass will light us down—us also—in honor or dishonor. Our freedom is to choose” (MacLeish, 1943, p. 42).
8. There were six departments at UNESCO: education, natural sciences, social sciences, cultural activities, mass communication, and technical assistance (Laves & Thomson, 1957).
9. The foreword to *The Race Question in Modern Science* situates UNESCO’s mandate—comprised of culture, science, and education—as central to the problem of race: “Because of its structure and the tasks assigned to it, UNESCO is the international institution best equipped to lead the campaign against race prejudice and to extirpate this most dangerous of doctrines. Race hatred and conflict thrive on scientifically false ideas and are nourished by ignorance. In order to show up these errors of fact and reasoning, to make widely known the conclusions reached in various branches of science, to combat racial propaganda, we must turn to the means and methods of education, science and culture, which are precisely the three domains in which UNESCO’s activities are exerted; it is on this threefold front that the battle against all forms of racism must be engaged”

(UNESCO, 1956, n.p.). Another notable UNESCO-related anthropological text is *The Study of Culture at a Distance* (1953), edited by Margaret Mead & Rhoda Métraux.

10. Other Canadian-made films associated with the UN and the British Commonwealth during this period include: *UNRRA—In the Wake of Armies* (1944); *Now—the Peace* (about the UN) (1945); *Guilty Men* (International Courts of Justice) (1945); *Suffer Little Children* (1945); *The Peace Builders* (1945); *Canada, World Trader* (1946); *Out of the Ruins* (UNRRA) (1946); *Everyman's World* (1946); *The People Between* (1947); *Common Concern* (Food and Agriculture Organization of the UN) (1947); *I.L.O.* (International Labour Organization) (1947); *Stuff for Stuff* (multilateral trade) (1948); *Maps We Live By* (1948); *The Road to World Peace* (1950); *Thunder in the East* (1950); *The New South Asia* (1953); *Sight and Sound* (1954); *The Commonwealth of Nations—A Study in 13 Parts* (1957); *Overture* (1958); *On Guard with UNEF* (1959); *U.N. in the Classroom* (1959); *New Voices* (1961); *Tomorrow Begins Today* (1962); *You Are Welcome Sirs, to Cyprus* (1964); and *Postmark UNEF* (1965). Films made by the UN film service itself, such as *The General Assembly* (about the United Nations) (1962); *The Trusteeship Council and System* (1962); *The Security Council* (about the United Nations) (1963); and *International Court of Justice* (1964) remain in the NFB catalogue to this day.

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