

“We’ll Be Right Back After These...”: History, Narrative, and the  
(Re-)Constitution of Canadian Identity in Television Commercials

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**ABSTRACT**

“We’ll Be Right Back After These...”: History, Narrative, and the (Re-)Constitution of Canadian Identity in Television Commercials

Riccardo Mauricio-Cardilli

Canadian history and identity are bounded by an ongoing discussion of the civic difficulties that arise as a consequence of being made to represent a pluralist society. Establishing more widely accepted interpretations of memory and nation-building can positively influence this country’s sense of national character and collective identity. This study is a rhetorical examination of the cultural articulations in three commercial advertisements on television: Tim Horton’s *Proud Fathers*, Canadian Tire’s *A Bike Story* and Bell Canada’s *Dieppe*. Aside from the products and brand names these ads are designed to promote, their images of everyday vernacular experiences of Canadian families coupled with ethical tropes (pleasant surprises, thoughtful gestures, kind words) are reminders of the moral values characteristic of Canada’s past, present and, hopefully, its future. While each ad involves different representations of memory and Canada’s socio-political development, they all seek to constitute and isolate the proper ethical practices of Canadians that transcend all schismatic social categories.

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To Mom and Dad,  
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## Introduction

To carry messages meant for dissemination across a wide range of demographics, television commercials are an effective medium. They are brief enough to retain our attention throughout their entirety yet long enough to fit in as much sequential imagery as satisfies their communicative purpose. The following few pages are devoted to the introduction of three advertisements broadcast in recent years by Canadian television networks.

*Proud Fathers*<sup>1</sup> is a commercial for the Tim Horton's coffee brand. The narrative toggles between present day and flashbacks of the past generation. The scene opens on an elderly man of Chinese origin, Lou as he enters a municipal hockey arena carrying three Tim Horton's coffees secured by a cardboard take-out tray. Lou offers a cup to Charlie (the arena caretaker), standing in the corner who, surprised at the gift, thanks Lou. Lou joins his son Jimmy in the stands and gives him the last coffee. Jimmy is also surprised to see his father, and puzzled as to why Lou would want to come watch his grandson Tommy play hockey. All the while, we are shown brief glimpses of the past where a younger Lou is disappointed by ten-year-old Jimmy's love of hockey as he emphasizes the importance of diligence about his son's studies. A conversation then ensues at the present day arena between father and son:

Jimmy: (*referring to Tommy*) He's good.

Lou: Better than you.

Jim: How would you know?

Lou: I come watch.

*Flashback of younger Lou secretly peeking into the arena at his son playing hockey from behind the door as a younger Charlie offers him a Tim Horton's coffee.*

Jim: Okay. (*Testing Lou*) What team did I play for?

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<sup>1</sup> When aired on television, this title does not appear. It is indicated on the Tim Horton's webpage as the official title of the ad. The same applies for the other ads.

*Lou pulls out a wallet-sized picture of Tommy clad in his yellow team uniform.*

Lou: You, right wing.

*Jim is speechless as Lou cheers for Tommy (as it is implied that Tommy has scored), turning around to address other spectators.*

Lou: My grandson! That's my grandson!

Jim: Thanks for coming, Dad.

Lou: Give me my picture back.

*On-screen text: Every cup tells a story. (Tim Hortons)*

Canadian Tire's commercial entitled *A Bike Story* is set in the 1930s/40s in rural Canada. An automobile crawls along a dirt road, approaching a field of long grass, and its driver delivers a Canadian Tire catalogue to a young boy approximately ten years of age. The boy flips through the catalogue as his character, represented by the voice of an elderly man, begins to narrate. What follows is a montage of the boy's silence, for what looks like days and weeks, within which his obsession with a bicycle he has seen in the catalogue is enacted. His daydreams, a cut-out picture of the bike as visual accompaniment, follow him to his bedroom, the schoolhouse, the field, and the barn:

Narrator: I'm sure a lot of folks can tell you the same story. You just don't forget a thing like that. I can still tell you the page number in that Canadian Tire catalogue. That bike went everywhere with me [*referring to the cut out image*], but I knew Dad had more important things to think about. I slept, ate, lived and breathed that bike, but I just couldn't ask him for it.

Dad: Hey boy. I got a couple new tires you can help me unload.

*Dad reaches into the back of the pickup truck and pulls out a shiny red bicycle, identical to the one from the catalogue, as the boy looks on in astonishment.*

Narrator: Boy what I'd give to have seen my face that day.

*On-screen text: Some things from Canadian Tire are priceless. (Canadian Tire)*

Remembrance Day is the dominant theme of *Dieppe*, the Bell Canada ad. The curtain rises on a young man, Mark, a red maple leaf stitched to his backpack, wandering pensively along a beach overshadowed by tall, jagged cliffs. The young man keys a



number into his cellular phone. An elderly man, soon revealed as Mark's grandfather, answers his ringing telephone in the entrance hallway of an old townhouse. Their conversation is complimented by a montage of Mark strolling through various sceneries within a historic battleground and an old town.

Grandpa: Hello?

Mark: Hi Grandpa!

Grandpa: Mark! What a nice surprise. How's your trip?

Mark: Oh it's great. I'm in France.

Grandpa: Ah, Paris...the girls still as lovely as I remember them?

Mark: Grandpa, actually I'm not in Paris.

Grandpa: Where are you then?

Mark: I'm in Dieppe.

*Grandpa looks at his framed wartime photographs of himself and his comrades.*

Grandpa: [*almost speechless*] Wow...well...

Mark: Grandpa?

Grandpa: I'm glad you're there.

Mark: I guess...I guess I'm calling to say thanks, Grandpa.

Grandpa: [*pausing, holding back tears*] It's great of you to call. Thank you.

*Concluding text: To learn more about Remembrance Day, visit [www.sympatico.ca](http://www.sympatico.ca) (Bell Canada)*

The ads presented here are of a particular quality and style. They tell stories that include, sometimes inactively, the products they promote. These stories are carefully constructed and convincingly told. They revolve around family relations and generally illustrate sentimental, memorable or nostalgic moments based on sequences of events. These three are only a sample of this form. There are many more commercials of a similar style circulating on Canadian cable. For instance, another Tim Hortons ad features a younger brother who fills in as goalkeeper for his older brother's hockey team, plays a great game, and is congratulated and taken to the doughnut shop for a moment of fraternal appreciation. In a Ford commercial, Wayne Gretzky practices alone in a hockey rink to be pleasantly surprised by his father, his "inspiration," who appears at the zamboni door. An RBC ad about "outstanding hockey volunteers" shows an elderly man

at the hockey rink who builds a bench and prepares a separate dressing room for a girl on a youth recreational team comprised mainly of boys. Boston Pizza runs a clip about an Ontario town that “puts the cottage into summer,” but when all the seasonal tourists are gone, the regulars stay and wait, watching from inside the pizza place while “Joe” is outside measuring the ice thickness. When he gives the signal, the group proceeds outdoors to relish in an afternoon of shinny hockey. Home Depot’s offering is the story of a father and son who design, shop for, and build a tree house together. The ad invokes nostalgia by constantly cutting to an imitation of Super 8 film footage of the two working together after buying their supplies at the Home Depot. The Canadian flag even makes a few brief appearances in this one.<sup>2</sup>

Although I have included only a small sample, a pattern can be easily discerned. Apart from the emphasis on Canada’s favourite sporting activities, and the predominance of paternal relationships and, for that matter, men and boys in general, a recurring theme is the juxtaposition of healthy, respectful and good-natured relationships within family and community. People are shown getting along, taking part in constructive activities, and honouring one another with unpredicted, sudden good deeds, some of which have a lifetime of significance attached to them. The ads display life as a simple journey. Times are usually happy. When things go wrong, we admit to our mistakes and do what it takes to make them right. When all is well, we continue to live our lives as small components of a much larger entity, as cogs in a wheel dependent on each person’s connection to a common source of enjoyment.

It is no secret that advertising messages and imagery appropriate and redistribute cultural conventions and lifestyles, a way for companies and organizations to say “We

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<sup>2</sup> These commercials are summarized briefly here from memory and notes.

understand you; this is who you are, or would like to be, and our product can help you keep or attain that identity.” But, speaking from personal experience, apart from knowing that these companies exist and are engaged in the business of associating their names with Canadian culture, continuously etching them into the national psyche, most of these commercials leave a lasting positive impression on me. Sometimes, as was the case with *Proud Fathers*, I wanted to watch it repeatedly, specifically the extended version of one minute and 30 seconds (a rare treat), and would quiet everybody in the room when it finally came on. Irrespective of what they sell, these ads present images I love to see. Perhaps this is because I somehow identify with them, although none of their characters speak to or for me personally. Perhaps also because they reflect a world or experience that is not necessarily a current universal reality, but an ideal, hopeful version of it.

Telling this type of story, about simple people and their very human actions, seems to be a highly effective marketing strategy. But beyond selling products and corporate logos to the public, there exists, without a doubt, a second side to these messages. If we were to think of the ads as short films, independent of any commercial roles, what could be said about their reflection of everyday practices? What could be understood of the social commitments they make as a combined stylistic category? Furthermore, what kind of methodology or angle is best suited to the task of examining their discursive constructions? Most importantly perhaps, are the social effects of this type of advertising useful? Is this use acceptable?

The point of this study is as much a search for a workable methodology as it is a textual analysis of the three ads described above – *Proud Fathers*, *A Bike Story*, and *Dieppe*. A sample of three media texts, appropriate in their thematic variance, should

suffice to represent the larger body of comparable ads. Their examination will be a rhetorical project of which the theoretical framework comes from an aesthetic-constitutive model within the study of rhetoric. As explained in the following chapter, this model assesses communication for its identificatory qualities, its ability to influence people through their emotions, and its narrative construction of social categories and identities (Burke 1969; Charland 1987; Hauser 2002). By unpacking the cultural articulations within the ads, I will attempt to demonstrate the existence of a particular discourse surrounding the creation of an ethical bridge toward the consolidation of a more stable and coherent Canadian identity. Moreover, I hope to strengthen the theoretical foundations upon which it is possible to accept constitutive rhetoric, particularly in the form of television commercials, as a viable and indeed necessary tool to create a more united and centralized interpretation of Canada as a nation.

The first chapter comprises a review of salient literature following which I situate my own argument in relation to the positions taken by cultural commentators as well as rhetorical and historical theorists on the topic. In this chapter, I present and answer all necessary preliminary inquiries by facilitating dialogue between foundational works of reference.

Chapter Two contains the analytical thrust of this study. In it, I perform a comparative reading of each of the three ads with respect to their communicative style, their manifestation of national character and the social political implications of the media devices featured in the narratives. It is in this chapter that I make a preliminary judgment concerning the ethical value of their representations of Canadian family life.

Chapter Three opens up a discussion on the broader implications of the nationally-oriented narrative advertising style. The three ads are viewed in light of the *Heritage Minutes*, similar minute-long productions that narrate select diverse moments of Canadian history, to reveal a discursive gap dividing the distinct ways in which each of the two forms speaks for the nation. Following this I highlight a recent resurgence of conservative-minded efforts to establish an official national history, and by association a common sense of social normalcy, while attempting to place the discourse of the ads within this civic republican turn. The final stop, before arriving at my conclusion, briefly explores the constitution of “Canadian civil culture” (Dorland & Charland 2002) and its dependence on a “discursive economy” (Dorland 1991; 1996) of “social knowledge” (Farrell 1976). In this way, I plan on making sense of the ads as they pertain to a greater struggle to fuse Canadian identity-citizenship with a generally defined code of ethics or proper social conduct in both the public and private realms.

## Chapter 1

### A Review of Salient Literature

To begin addressing how best to conduct the study of three television commercials and their rhetorical effectivity, it is essential to set forth a plan that situates the topic within an existing range of theoretical works. Following the brief introductory chapter that exposes the topic in its most basic dimensions, a number of questions arise. What kind of rhetoric is in operation in the ads? What is the nature of the nationalism being invoked? Which aspects of Canadian society are referred to and with what claim? How is history appropriated and put to work within the imagery? How are we meant to identify with the ads? What purpose do these representations serve? Each of these questions search for their respective answers, but in order to establish the necessary groundwork for response, a number of voices must first be consulted. Only through a comparative analysis of selected texts can I provide enough conceptual clarity to effectively state my own claim regarding the discourse created by the ads. Primarily in summarizing the main assertions of interested theorists will I be able to answer this most important question: Is the goal of the discourse rationally acceptable? In other words, what are we to make of the way in which we are identified, and is it ultimately good for us?

This first chapter is a review of literature organized into three general clusters. These clusters are not absolute assignments of category and a particular text may belong to more than one cluster while some texts are more relevantly rooted in a specific cluster than other texts. The first cluster is rhetorical theory. It includes approaches to problems of methodology as well as critical readings concerned with various types of rhetoric and

how they contribute to structuring the subject of this study, especially in regards to conceptualizing community and social cohesion. The second cluster deals with competing historical perspectives and the politics of memory, specifically how memory is appropriated and put to work on transforming public cultural attitudes. The third cluster consists of general political and cultural commentary on Canadian people, attitudes and self-identification. All three rubrics are solidly interrelated and open up a forum that facilitates inter-categorical dialogue. Throughout the literature review, I will offer a brief introduction to my position and where it stands among those summarized in this chapter.

### **Rhetorical Theory and Criticism**

Rhetoric is an expansive art accounting for the majority of the speech and symbolic representation that takes place between people. In other words, it is the art of effective use of language and symbols. Rhetorical theory is the field of communication that organizes, categorizes and attempts to make sense of the many forms and tropes of communication that function in a multitude of ways to influence opinions of individuals, groups or communities, to create and shape consciousness or new knowledge. Aristotle identified epideictic rhetoric as the kind of speech that approves of actions the speaker sees as acceptable and good while indicating which actions are unacceptable within a given social context. These distinctions are usually made by a figure of authority within a community or household (Hauser 2002, 113). Gerard Hauser agrees that epideictic rhetoric plays an important role in building and maintaining communities by making value judgments and establishing sets of morals and norms (114). These judgments may establish moderate guidelines or definite rules as to what constitutes acceptable conduct in a community and what is cast as marginal, unorthodox, disruptive or evil. In short,

epideictic appeals set precedents that lead to the consolidation of community through shared beliefs and codes of conduct.

This rhetorical task is perhaps more easily performed on relatively homogeneous groups of people than it is on culturally, ethnically or religiously pluralist societies. This begs one of the central questions of this thesis: How can one effectively communicate to a pluralist society? More specifically, how does one construct a common identity within a multicultural state?

In *Pragmatism, Democracy, and the Necessity of Rhetoric* (2007), Robert Danisch examines the practice-oriented philosophy of pragmatism through the lens of classical rhetoric while attempting to locate the appropriate rhetorical form that best fosters democratic decision making in a culturally diverse America. Danisch explains that “when one sees the world as uncertain, plural, ambiguous, and subject to human intervention, one creates the conditions of possibility for seeing rhetoric as a necessary art” (2007, 14). Of particular interest here is the fifth chapter in which Danisch studies Alain Locke’s philosophy and his use of epideictic rhetoric. Locke understood that a culturally pluralistic nation is possible, but only under the circumstances in which a typically clashing gamut of value systems could exist in harmonious concert and tolerant dialogue. His pragmatism asked that people “hold their values less dogmatically” (115) and his epideictic rhetoric focused on classifying values as personal, imperative “action-choices” rather than “products of universal reason or judgment” (125). One of the goals of epideictic rhetoric is to evaluate and reassess value systems to be able to more effectively and reasonably serve a larger community. Later on, I will make a claim similar to Locke’s theory of values, as laid out by Danisch, with respect to the way in which the



three commercials operate to persuade Canadians to restructure our multiple identities according to their importance within the larger community. The first of Locke's "three working principles' that underscore the flexible norms of tolerance and reciprocity" is important in that it "demands that we search for 'functional similarities in our analysis and comparisons of human cultures' and not differences" (Danisch quoting Locke, 127).

From Danisch's positioning of rhetoric – demonstrated in his examination of American pragmatism – as indispensable to the organization of human progress through public affairs, it follows logically that I narrow my scope to look at the type of epideictic rhetoric the three ads employ. Two of the three commercials, *Dieppe* and *Proud Fathers*, contain no direct audience address while in *A Bike Story* the main character narrates his personal experience. Thus, the appeal of the commercials barely relies on audience address or any kind of direct public oratory. Rather, this appeal comes from the fictional scenario constructed through imagery and script and enacted for cameras, then edited and transmitted through the medium of television. In other words, the commercials collectively make their argument in the form of artful representation. Technically speaking, to properly analyze the ads for their discursive effectivity would require a survey of works dealing with the aesthetic-constitutive turn in methodologies for rhetorical analysis.

The aesthetic-constitutive turn is when theorists began to see rhetoric as not simply persuading its audience, but identifying its audience (Burke, Charland, Whitson & Poulakos, Biesecker, Greene, Black). In other words, an audience becomes the subject of the discourse that identifies it. Furthermore, social formations and identities are in fact created, defined and maintained by talk that is socially transformative. Constitutive

rhetoric functions primarily through appeals to people's emotions and aesthetic sensibilities rather than people's ability to reason, and it is through the constitutive model that we are able to examine the way in which "subjects, personas, situations, and problems emerge as the effects of rhetorical practices" (Greene 1998, 19).

In *A Rhetoric of Motives*, Kenneth Burke (1969) adds to the conception of rhetoric as persuasive speech by introducing the rhetoric of "identification". Burke points to Aristotle's proposed strategy of audience flattery and takes it further, using it as a conceptual stepping stone to bring into view "the conditions of identification or consubstantiality in general" (1969, 55). As a basic rule, if the orator would like to change the opinion of his audience, he must openly identify with its other existing and commonly held opinions so as to gain its trust. Therefore, norms, attitudes and values are understood as having persuasive powers if used in a particular, calculated way (56). Form, for Burke, is of central importance. The way in which an idea is proposed, its structure, trends, development all invite the audience to participate in spite of what the content may signify. "Thus you are drawn to the form, not in your capacity as a partisan, but because of some 'universal' appeal in it. And this attitude of assent may then be transferred to the matter which happens to be associated with the form" (58). It is precisely this discussion of form, the artful manner – whether by language or imagery or a combination of the two – in which ideas are proposed, that allows us to logically turn to an aesthetically minded way of thinking about and theorizing rhetoric.

The constitutive model is positioned against the tradition of viewing rhetoric as an epistemic practice in which persuasion is the desired outcome of the discourse. As Maurice Charland (1987) explains, some things logically do not apply to the ethical

model of effectivity because good reasons imply decisions far too self-conscious to allow for such grand categories to be effectively negotiated: “[M]uch of what we as rhetorical critics consider to be a product or consequence of discourse, including social identity, religious faith, sexuality, and ideology is beyond the realm of rational or even free choice, beyond the realm of persuasion” (133). In a paper entitled *Constitutive Rhetoric: The Case of the People Québécois*, Charland builds on Burke’s theory of “identification” by demonstrating that much of the communication that identifies does so by constructing the subject, defining its boundaries, and titling the collectivity. The notion of the constituted *subject* in Charland’s essay evolved from Louis Althusser’s description of how subjects come to be established within social consciousness as the transformative process of “interpellation” or “hailing” (138). Interpellation can be described as a type of willed imposition of collective identity in which a group is named into existence as such and subsequently responds to that name. “Interpellation occurs at the very moment one enters into a rhetorical situation, that is, as soon as an individual recognizes and acknowledges being addressed” (Charland 1987, 138). In this way, the subjects of identification are the ideological effects of narrative. Michael McGee (1975) explains, drawing from past arguments, “that such concepts as ‘The People’ may be strictly *linguistic* phenomena introduced into public argument as a means of ‘legitimizing’ a collective fantasy” (239). Constituted identity is thus the result of advocating fictitious constructions animated by aesthetic rhetoric and the open involvement of an audience whose participation makes such a myth possible.

Charland (1987) uses the example of the constitution of the Québécois people to articulate the constitutive power of narrative. A particularly important institutional

mention of the Québécois appeared in a White Paper tabled by the Québec government recounting the history of Québec in a manner that positions the province's desire for sovereignty as a sensible, rational outcome (138). By suggesting that the *peuple québécois* existed as a social entity throughout history, the White Paper's authors have created a "transhistorical subject" that "transcends the limitations of individuality at any historical moment and transcends the death of individuals across history" (140).

However, because the narrative form implies a linear trajectory with a set of expectations imposed on those represented to properly conclude their own story, "subjects within narratives are not free, they are *positioned* and so constrained. The freedom of the character in a narrative is an illusion, for narratives move inexorably toward their *telos*" (140). In the example given, the Québécois are destined to remain consistent with their story by continuing to build the independence movement in the hope of finally separating the province from the rest of Canada. As Charland expresses, paraphrasing Burke, "the White Paper effects an identification of the temporal sequence of its plot with the logical development of an ultimate principle" (141) enabling for the Québécois the narrowest selection of possible endeavours. "Alienated subjects" are then not seen to be persuaded to establish themselves within new positions but rather it is the discourse that shifts the boundaries of positions which results in the subjects "recognizing" the "'rightness' of [the] discourse" and thus identifying with it (142).

Since the theory of constitutive rhetoric owes the bulk of its strength to the ubiquity of the narrative form within ideological discourse, this is an appropriate time to turn to discussions of *narratio* within contemporary rhetorical theory. Michael McGee and John S. Nelson (1985) argue that there exists a strong relationship between moral

storytelling and cultural practices. For McGee and Nelson, who bring Quintilian into conversation with contemporary culture, the narrative operates as a rhetorical form in the realm of “mythic epistemology” in that the knowledge active within myths illuminates “the moral, narrational, poetical, and political presentation of reality and possibility” (152-3). Stories make “cultural commitments” and are the sole discursive form able to convey “the ritual regularity of human moral habits” (1985, 150). For the most part, people learn the proper social customs within their respective milieu or culture through the necessarily epideictic demonstrations of stories. Every story has a moral, whether clearly stated following its conclusion (traditional in many children’s stories or folk tales) or implied; no story communicated by language is fully objective in its moral claims. At a young age we are taught to understand the essential components and structures of stories so that the form becomes a natural reflex. We are all fluent storytellers and we share an intimate trust in the ability of stories to directly or indirectly offer us cultural capital and practical wisdom. For this reason, public discussion depends on arguments constructed as narratives. By rearranging the formal elements of the story, such as plot, characters and setting, narratives have the ability to reflect the world in which we live and suggest/reinforce shared sets of values. Arguments familiarized by the narrative form are more easily related to by their audience. McGee and Nelson’s refutation of Walter Fisher’s dichotomous separation of reason and narrative in political debate follows logically as they favour “a functional view of narrative conceived as a moment of argument intrinsic to reason and practiced especially, but not exclusively, in politics” (140). Narration, they add, is the vehicle of popular public affairs because it supplants “authoritative declaration” with “friendly persuasion” (153).

John L. Lucaites and Celeste Condit warn against categorizing narrative as a simple form. This is due to the existence of different kinds or functions of narratives: poetic, dialectical, rhetorical (1985). The poetic function serves purely artistic ends and deals exclusively with the fictional depiction of beauty for pleasure and entertainment purposes while dialectical discourse distances itself from fiction altogether, insisting that fact is the unique passage to truth as it contains “empirically ‘verifiable’ phenomena” (93). A rhetorical narrative, however, “exists for a purpose beyond its own textuality” (94), for employment in circumstances requiring the interpretive action of an audience based on its comprehension of the relationship between the narrative, the given context, and what is at stake. Rhetorical narratives in this view are “formally and functionally incomplete” due to their dependence on context and claim (Lucaites and Condit 1985, 101). This suggests, as does McGee (1990), that discourse is fragmented and the rhetorical narrative is only one element of the discourse it may support.<sup>3</sup> However, Lucaites and Condit would most likely see our three commercials as rhetorical narratives that “seek to imitate poetic narratives as much as possible,” best understood as “hybrids” (101). The fictive quality and semi-detachment<sup>4</sup> of the commercials is therefore given more credibility than, say, speeches or narratives that reflect real events, toward which people are more likely to disclaim as mere “rhetoric” (in the vulgarized sense of the word).

In an essay entitled *Communities, Identities, and Politics* outlining the conceptual changes facing rhetoric in the twenty-first century, Barry Brummet (2004) comments on

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<sup>3</sup> I will further explain in Chapter 2 the subject and methodological implications of discursive fragments as introduced by McGee.

<sup>4</sup> I say “semi-detachment” because the ads only represent real issues and events by implication, and through their aesthetic loyalty to real life.

political discursive forms, specifically the image of the public figure as increasingly articulated through aesthetic appeals. Image, explains Brummet, is not dependent on the public's ability to reason and analyze; rather, it hinges on human desires for "pleasure and entertainment" and operates to either attract or repel its audience through a "sense of bonding or disgust" (295). Thus, image is conducted by "aesthetic material of narrative and pictures" (296). Brummet observes, most interestingly, that appearance in politics and other forms of discourse gained vital importance with the development of film and later of television. Nowadays, with the proliferation of visually based communication technologies and the speed at which texts can be disseminated and shared, the power of the image is such that "Political rhetoric no longer uses the image; instead, the image is the site on which much political rhetoric is played out" (296). In other words, Brummet suggests that the objective has shifted away from using image construction as merely a political implement, onto viewing the image as a definitive end. The image is now the centrepiece of political discourse.

Another interesting point – but one that I will not treat in detail in this project – is the commodification of the imaginary in politics. Brummet hypothesizes the existence of a trend in the communication of ideas that resists any discourse that could potentially fly in the face of the supremacy of the capitalist system, by using the discourse to its own advantage through the process of commodification. "[O]ne prime way to make sure that political struggle does not extend to the board room is to move it to the plane of signs and images, television and movies, and popular culture" (2004, 297). To be sure, the movement suggested by the discourse of the three commercials I introduced earlier is in no way anti-capitalistic. While it holds true, I would like to move beyond the idea that the

market appropriates the nation-building message solely for economic benefit, instead calling attention to the imagery itself and its symbolic content. If we shift our attention away from the way media might support capitalist economic structures or the “system,” we will have the opportunity to see how the media texts under study might serve to unite, to bridge cleavages and to create a fluid, harmonious community out of discordant societal fragments.

Arguably, the most logical category is that which places emphasis on localizing traditionally national and international issues or concerns. Brummet understands the weakening material subject in the national, making it a core motivation for public communicators to increasingly concentrate their messages locally, constructing “the personal and domestic” as a more relevant, proximate front to support symbolic exchange (298). “As people become increasingly attuned to the national and international levels of political rhetoric as played out through image...the lack of material involvement and real personal engagement in the imaginary demands a corrective” (298). Perhaps the ordinarily complex task of building Canadian national unity can be guided by amplifying the “local” as “a form of *metonymy*, the trope of reduction, in which political problems too vast or distant to comprehend meaningfully are reduced to a more psychologically manageable set of signs” (299, emphasis mine). To localize is thus to stage the desire for consubstantiality as simultaneously a site of national/public and regional/community concern.

### **Historical Perspectives and Memory Politics**

In 1998, J. L. Granatstein, a well-known Canadian historian, first published *Who Killed Canadian History?* The book is a scathing indictment of the people and



institutions responsible for dismantling historical consciousness in Canada, and its author suggests that they are stalling the country's bid for national unity. Throughout its pages, Granatstein enumerates the causes for such public amnesia, elaborates on the conditions under which this problem arose, and pines for a Canadian society that celebrates, teaches and knows its national history

History is barely taught in high schools, writes Granatstein, because teaching methods today tend to favour "child-centred" learning over content-intensive course loads (1999, 25) and also because provincial departments in charge of school curricula now focus on "progressive education, on remedying societal ills such as sexism and racism, and on making students feel good about themselves" (33). Given these stated objectives, Canada's allegedly racist, sexist and intolerant past may offend or exclude too many students. Thus, history has somehow become outdated in the school system. After proposing the necessary adjustments, Granatstein points the finger at academic historians for compartmentalizing their discipline into special topics, for no longer looking at the nation as an analytical object, and for muzzling the now daring practitioners of Canada's true political history. A "new history" has arrived to replace traditional historical accounts, indicted for having marginalized the usual groups that claim marginal status. In response to a 1987 report by women historians who concluded sex equity law violations in all sixty-six books examined, Granatstein comments: "No one seemed to care that most of Canada's history had been made by men, however unfair that might have been, and that any overt attempt to write more women into history might distort the past" (62).

It is fair to say that Granatstein is a purist of historical interpretation, data collecting and methodology and a strong dissenter to both contemporary educational tactics and what he observes as the surrendering of academic practices to political correctness. The book in its entirety contains a convincing argument that both the study and general public awareness of Canadian history are indelibly connected to a healthy national identity. Those systematically prying the historical domain apart are not only attacking the country's political solidity but equally see no ontological or communitarian value in the concept of nation.

Desmond Morton, in a short essay-lecture, attempts to debunk Granatstein's portrayal of a grim time for historical consciousness in Canada by labelling the view as conservative and demonstrating that low public consciousness of history was a problem in other developed states as well (Morton 2006). History education, though in better health now than in the past, could still potentially benefit from the creation of a national association of history teachers to counter the disconnectedness resulting from separate provincial curricula. Much of the problem with today's high school history textbooks comes from provincial agendas in the telling of Canadian history, the banality associated with "heritage making," and the postmodern tendency to expose the inaccuracy of various perspectives (26-29). Ultimately needed is a plan to develop students' critical skills and analytical precision when studying historical texts. "Through the study of history, students could learn 'historical understanding': the fundamentals of causation, sequence, and relationships that distinguish 'history' in its full intellectual rigor from that magpie's nest of diamonds and baubles called 'heritage'" (2006, 27). Thus, while downplaying the alarm sounded over history's apparent "death," proposed by

Granatstein, Morton nonetheless advocates for the reunification of practices and practitioners over the question of education.

A major component of historical thought and organization is its narration. How does narrative affect what we know and how we understand it? How do we narrate stories of the past, especially in broad terms? A form that popularized the study and consumption of history in the early to mid 20<sup>th</sup> century, in the writings of some of the most famous historians of modern times, is the “master narrative.”

A master narrative that we find convincing and persuasive differs from other stories in an important way: it swallows us. It is not a play we can see performed, or a painting we can view, or a city we can visit. A master narrative is a dwelling place. We are intended to live in it. (Fulford 1999, 32)

Robert Fulford, in his Massey Lectures published as *The Triumph of Narrative*, recounts the ascension and gradual obsolescence of all-encompassing histories, observing that despite the diminished value of the master narrative, our predisposition to package vast amounts of historical fact into “coherent narrative[s]” will never wane, for this method of organization is still the most attractive to popular audiences and is recognized as a natural human habit (1999, 60-1). Currently viewed as a largely exclusionary and elitist form of historical record, the master narrative finds its operational supplement in the micro-narrative, stories at the personal level that, through metonymy, serve to illustrate, hence render more relatable, minor instances of the larger story. Thus, for the purposes of supporting the argumentative development of this paper, the micro-narrative, existing as but a textual fragment, supplements the master narrative with discursive imagery while the latter contextualizes and anchors the former.

Fuelled by the epideictic rhetoric embedded into their imagery, master narratives have the diegetic power to be adopted as official myths of state, society or class, operate

to inform our young of their identities, and inspire all to live virtuously. Fulford invokes Alasdair MacIntyre's argument that "humans create their sense of what matters, and how they should act, by referring consciously or unconsciously to the stories they have learned" (1999, 33). Then, by inference, societies expectedly tend to exemplify and celebrate only those moments of the past that serve as lessons, positive or negative, and ideal collective self-representations. In other words, "societies learn how to play out their life stories by absorbing the history that seems relevant to them" (34).

For a country like Canada, preoccupied by simultaneous and sometimes mutually antagonistic discourses of diversity and unity in the constitution of its collective identity, "the emotional immediacy of dramatic storytelling" may work to consolidate belief in the nation (West 2002, 214). In an essay discussing two projects designed to promote Canada's multifaceted heritage, the *Heritage Minutes* and *Canada: A People's History*, Emily West proposes that there are two interrelated goals. Present national exigencies benefit from ideally romanticized depictions of history while vernacular cultural memory is appropriated with the aim of legitimizing official collective memory (227). West's work will be vital to a comparison between the genre of commercial advertising under the microscope in this paper and the *Heritage Minutes* as a similar form of media product in structure and composition yet dissimilar in primary communicative motivation.

What renders problematic the field of public memory is the existence of ongoing struggles surrounding the diversification of historical perspectives and the proliferation of socio-cultural histories. West explains that "the tension between the particular and the universal is a challenge that collective memory must always deal with because the notion of a 'collective' is always to some extent more idealized than realized" (222). Because

the ads feature private Canadians as the animators of quintessentially Canadian moments, a connection is established between their individual lives and our national history, either tacitly observed by the audience or conspicuously indicated by an act of remembrance, as in Bell Canada's *Dieppe*. Not only is this a contact point between the two levels of representation but it could also demonstrate an effort to reverse the notion that the person is part of the nation, inclusively making it possible for the nation to incarnate and be enacted within the person. Through thought and action, society and citizen are mutually bound concepts.

As what is officially referred to as multicultural, Canada's demographic composition indicates that the state encapsulates a civic nation, albeit one that is unstable. M. Lane Bruner (2002) states that "Civic nations are based on narratives that justify the construction of a political community with common institutions, rule of law, a bounded territory, and a sense of legal solidarity" (6). The stories told by the ads, however, seem to treat such constructions as pre-given, and they seek to articulate collectivity on a less material, finite level, moving closer to a realm where national character is overlapped and apprehended by a general cultural citizenship. The cultural nation "usually requires that subjects speak the nation's language, obey the nation's laws, honor [*sic*] the nation's traditions, 'believe in' the nation, and be willing to make personal sacrifices..." (Bruner 2002, 5). To be sure, cultural nationalism is socially constructed and relies on public belief and trust. It is an object of value for conservative politicians, social scientists and historians, with whose efforts the cultural-civic nation has remained an attainable goal. However, Bruner is weary of the illusory nature of the national, particularly in Quebec, one of the case studies in his book *Strategies of Remembrance* (2002). "Public

discourse,” he explains, “can be both truthful and transgressive and...discourse related to the public articulation of imagined community is distorted by the politics of memory” (88). This poses a danger to “healthy” national identity because, as Bruner quotes Burke’s “The Rhetoric of Hitler’s Battle”, “unity, if attained on a deceptive basis, by emotional trickeries that shift our criticism from the accurate locus of our trouble, is no unity at all” (2002, 100). It is important to note that the ads I examine in this paper should not be interpreted as propagandistic or in any way deceptive. Though I do not deny that they are politically motivated, there is a significant difference between specious representation and a polite reminder of the potential for a negotiated version of cultural unity based on certain criteria, which I will discuss in Chapter 2.

### **Canadian Politics and Culture(s)**

Granatstein (1999) quotes Gad Horowitz: “Multiculturalism is the masochistic celebration of Canadian nothingness” (108). These words aptly summarize Granatstein’s view that Canada officially over-accommodates its immigrants and their cultural habits. Telling newcomers to hold onto their traditions and languages and that their foreign cultures are celebrated and even subsidized in this country, in Granatstein’s view, is a mistake because it undermines the creation of a coherent, fluent society that is able to act and think Canadian, first and foremost, before recognizing what should ideally be known as auxiliary identities. Multiculturalists are “‘unpatriotic’ because they repudiated the idea of national identity and the emotion of national pride” (1999, 91).<sup>5</sup> He blames the Canadian government for downplaying our collective identity and giving too much credence to a set of values that renders the promotion of history and heritage virtually impossible.

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<sup>5</sup> Granatstein draws from and agrees with comments in a 1994 *New York Times* article by Richard Rorty.

Granatstein finds his adversary in historian and Liberal politician Michael Ignatieff who, beyond retorting that “Historical knowledge...is not a precondition for civic virtue or civic sacrifice” (2007, 37), recognizes a form of solidarity within “common cultural capital,” which he defines as the set of mundane social practices Canadians would know as our way of life. For instance,

being honest, being on time, doing the best we can in the circumstances...has nothing to do with politics and national unity. Yet without this boring, low-level reproduction of daily life, we wouldn't have a country. And this division of labour cuts right across the political divisions we do have. Indeed, it is why so many of our political arguments seem so irrelevant to most people. (Ignatieff 2007, 38).

The idea of “low-level reproduction” possessing extra-political unifying power is central to the argument I will unveil and expand in the next chapter. The reality, however, is that the “common cultural capital” we share is, apart from a distinctly Canadian obsession with minor differences, indistinguishable from that of a number of other developed post-industrial states (39). Even so, it points to a progressing universality among the global elite that Canada has kept pace with and is leading in many aspects – our politeness, our level of democratic thinking, our relatively accessible education and universal healthcare system, our preference with taking the middle ground rather than choosing sides. Much of our disposition has been dismissed as a narcissistic myth of moral superiority; however, this habitual mythmaking, I believe, is socially justified by its function as an exercise of patriotism and nation building.

Neil Bissoondath emphasizes the importance of the imaginary by considering Canadian identity as manifest within two separate spheres – private identity and public identity. Private identity, he explains, is driven by self-reflexive, relative negotiation, “the essential, living identity, shaped by tales of the family odyssey that help individuals

locate themselves in time and place, the personal mythology that tells you who you are” (Bissoondath 2007, 46). Public identity, on the other hand, is an expression of “collective social attitudes and structures” that serve as points of “shared reference” (46-7), the ontological space in which the Canadian flag and other national symbols create a field of meaning. The problem, however, is that in Canada, private identities are performed, hence recognized, as public, exposed by the politics that seek to cultivate the spectacular notion of the Canadian “mosaic.” Deploying ethnic difference as the “theatrical display” of Canada’s cultural *richesse* counteracts all efforts to strengthen our national community.

Flower arrangements in the living room may be appealing, but they have nothing to do with the solidity of the foundations below...the costumes, dancing and singing have no meaning beyond entertainment and folklore. This is fragile ground on which to build a cohesive country. (Bissoondath 2007, 47)

Thus, public and private identities should remain apart and in order for a true public domain to coalesce, “We have to learn to see beyond our comfortable limits, be they religious, racial, ethnic or linguistic” (48). There is no place in the universality of Ignatieff’s quotidian routine or Bissoondath’s public sphere for accommodation to personal preferences, especially when imposing, inconvenient or incompatible in nature; our social and economic interdependence requires a culturally cooperative nationality. My argument relates to this idea of consubstantiality as communication sympathetic to that goal exists in the form of the three ads and others like them.

How does the above argument intersect with historical representation? One result of the postmodern compartmentalization of the field of historical study, as Granatstein remarked, is that the public has become alienated from Canada’s true history, providing an intriguing rhetorical opportunity. When a thirty-two hour television series *Canada: A*



*People's History*, the first ever on Canadian history, flew in the face of conventional belief during the 2000-2001 season as its ratings remained on par with those of the Olympic games and the Stanley Cup playoffs (Cohen 2007, 92), Canadians demonstrated, week after week, that their history mattered to them if told in a coherent, chronological and grand manner. As Andrew Cohen points out, in a chapter entitled "The Unconscious Canadian" from his book *The Unfinished Canadian* (2007), the story of Canada is indeed fascinating, but first it must be told.

[If] the country were to teach its history, preserve its historic places, mark its anniversaries, remember its leaders, and create museums and memorials, it would find a public. The challenge isn't demand, it is supply. This isn't simply nostalgia or sentimentality; it is a deep desire...to understand some of the fundamentals about ourselves...we continue to write our biography every day. The alternative is a book of blank pages. (Cohen 2007, 92)

I will add that if narrated with a measure of romanticism and power, any country's history bears the rhetorical potential to elicit a sense of pride and belonging in all citizens. The insertion of Canadian historical or cultural content, even subtly, into a public outlet like commercial advertising perpetuates the influence of an entire field of signification operating to *constitute* us exclusively as individuals of Canada. This is accomplished through various representations of laypeople and the local setting fused with narratives that serve as unique supplementary episodes of the national story.

## Chapter 2

### The Ads that Define Us: Commercials, Culture, and Nation

Understood aesthetically, constitutive discourse is culturally motivated and seeks not only to maintain a relationship with its subjects by representing them artfully, but also to ensure in its subjects a taken-for-granted willingness to continuously enact (or redefine) a collective sense of identity: through historical and cultural education, political speeches and texts, stories, artworks, films, television shows, books, and so on. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that commercial advertising on television can be viewed as an aesthetic rhetorical form that lends itself to examination through a constitutive model. It is important, before I begin, to distinguish, and perhaps distance, the known and extensively studied theories of advertising from what I plan to discuss. This study pays little attention to the commercial goal of persuading audiences to consume products or to be loyal to particular brand names. Rather, it focuses on the imagery in ads that seeks to reinforce cultural and ideological norms.

Of course, I cannot perform a complete separation of these two communicative levels since the aim of the latter is to support and satisfy the former in what Ira Wagman (2002) describes as “a mode of information used to animate certain objects in such a way as to align them alongside previously existing components of ‘way of life’:...the transposition of product into moment...” (80). Wagman (2009) makes a number of interesting claims regarding public memory in advertising. He indicates, for instance, that advertisers tend to reuse the same historical moments and themes to make their corporate associations, hence drawing from a limited bank of images (2009, 4, 28). Wagman stresses the importance of studying “advertising *rationale*...why historical references

perform an idiomatic function in the language of advertising,” emphasizing corporate motivation inherent in nationalism as marketing strategy (4). In the end, the on-screen “partnership motifs” construct a larger “message of economic nationalism,” thereby supporting the retention of brand names and products that are domestically and nationally inclined (30). However, my approach will not centre on the primary motivation of advertising. Instead, I will focus on how these ads, individually and collectively, articulate a productive version of *the people*. Interestingly, West explains, on the topic of the *Heritage Minutes* and *Canada: A People’s History*, that

the makers of these programs...must negotiate their representations of the past so as not to alienate viewers with what might be perceived as a federalist agenda, while still providing a narrative that demonstrates that diversity can exist and flourish within a unified conception of Canada. (2002, 217)

In a parallel thought, what softens the obviousness of the purpose of the ads in this study, to the public audience, is that I am dealing in the first place with their penultimate function. Where it is expected that people think Canadian cultural history is being evoked in order to sell products, it may be easily forgotten that the imagery they are seeing still produces affect with or without the brand’s inclusion.

In this chapter, I will perform an analysis of the three commercials introduced earlier in the paper that have been broadcast in recent years on Canadian channels: Tim Horton’s *Proud Fathers*, Canadian Tire’s *A Bike Story* and Bell Canada’s *Dieppe*. All three commercials use the narrative form of representation, are based on themes of history fused with interpersonal familial dynamics, and all invoke the ethical trope of the thoughtful gesture. Foreshadowing a formal hypothesis, it is safe to state that, despite their inherent thematic differences, the social constructions implicit in all three advertisements are indeed similar. The rhetoric of the ads seeks to motivate audience

identification within a collective sense of cultural practice. Does this message speak to all Canadians? Does an idyllic official concept of Canadian exist within the imagery? Do the characters in the commercials reflect a preferred vision of Canadian social interaction? I ask these questions because the nature of an official Canadian identity (if such a thing actually exists) is disputed and problematic. This apparent crisis is caused by a number of factors, such as a decrease in general public consciousness of Canadian history – causing a heritage drought – blamed on disjuncture between historians, teachers and lawmakers (Granatstein 1999, Sandwell 2006); or the active, four-decade-old separatist movement in Quebec; or First Nations peoples who have been made to live at the margins of Canadian society throughout their colonial existence; or the sheer geographical size of this country, its divisive natural barriers and its amalgam of pre-national identities and cultures (religious, ethnic, racial, etc). The sum of these causes – of which those listed are only the most prominent – is compounded by the theoretical and practical difficulty of striking a balance between an institutionalized multicultural policy and the idea of civic nation.

If invoking politically charged rhetoric will simply succeed at rehashing the same timeworn debate surrounding the paradoxical impasse pluralism brings to a normative understanding of nationality, then an alternate, more realistic, route must be taken. Andrew Cohen (2007) appropriately reflects this polemic by unpacking the complexity of Canada's "national character." As an expression of personality, national character is attributed to the people living within a country but is strongly representative of the population's morals and ideals, and may be influenced by – but not necessarily a reflection of – its history, foreign policy, political, social, economic and cultural institutions. Cohen explains that "Some of our characteristics as a people are clear. Some

are contradictory” (2007, 5), a statement that seems to say: “we cannot successfully generalize about the national character of Canadians (especially in oversimplified representations); for as we may have a good sense of its complexion, our character remains ambiguous and out of reach.” I suggest that the ads studied here attempt to mould Canadian personality into a normative concept while at the same time disqualifying as many particularities as possible, zooming in on the one element of life that ties us all together, establishing that element as an anchor to which other elements may be attached and through which they may be understood. While all three ads still represent elements of particularity, the common thrust of their narratives proclaims: “beyond all this ambiguity, we have family.” My argument in this chapter is as follows: stories about simple people, artful narratives that bring images of vernacular culture to the forefront, function as effective constitutive texts to unify Canada as an ethical nation. Only then can I contend – as is partially the framework for Chapter Three – that the commercial ad on television is an effective rhetorical form with which to establish and strengthen this common ground.

Treating the three commercials as discursive “fragments” of texts (McGee 1990), I will attempt to unveil the essence of the discourse engrained in cultural presuppositions found in each ad. The “apparently finished discourse” (McGee 1990) in this case may reveal a preferred construction of (imaginary) Canadian culture through images and scenarios immediately recognizable and acceptable as socially normative. This sort of representation readjusts the boundaries of a collectivity, and “interpellates” us, calls us into ideology by constituting us, in this specific case as ethical subjects rather than political subjects (Charland 1987, 136-8). As Steve Whitson and John Poulakos contend,

rhetoric viewed through the aesthetic lens consists of “linguistic images that satisfy the perceptual appetites or aesthetic cravings of audiences. These appetites can only be satisfied temporarily through artistic creations. But once the appetites are satisfied, the creations remain, and over time become petrified” (1993, 138). To recapitulate, the rhetoric of the commercials identifies in the form of small parts of textual imagery operating collaboratively in the gradual process of engraving messages (attitudes, modes of understanding, perceiving) and identities into their audience’s consciousness.

The complexity of “postmodern arguments” requires us to rearrange our conception of Stephen Toulmin’s model of “singular components of claim, data and warrant” (Delicath & DeLuca 2003, 323). Although John Delicath and Kevin M. DeLuca discuss “image events” as radical journalistic tactics of resistance and public protest, their ideas concerning the absence of communicative structure in the postmodern era echo those of McGee. The onus is on the growing predominance of images as public arguments and the notion of the Habermasian “public sphere” evolving into the more contemporary idea of the “public screen” (Delicath & DeLuca 2003, 329). Here I recognize that the constitutive function of television commercials contributes to the notion of the television screen as a significant mediator of public deliberation, and is therefore a space in which the negotiation and construction of collective identity occurs. My argument in this essay acknowledges this notion and takes it one degree further: The particular selection of ads examined here operates in precisely this manner while providing a *non-political* representation of Canadian identity.

I will situate my line of inquiry within a reading strategy developed by McGee, which takes into account that textual fragments cannot be separated from context because they risk losing meaning.

Make it clear that [each ad] is a *fragment*;  
 Look for particular locutions that implicate its sources;  
 Show where cultural conventions are presupposed;  
 Locate the places where [the ads are] trying to create, [or seek, an] audience;  
 Show where and how the [ads] anticipate their own “everyday” critique. (1990, 283-4 formatting mine)

McGee’s model is concerned primarily with identifying how these fragments (ads) carve out and call forth (interpellate) their implied audience, and how they can be rearranged and positioned to represent, facilitate and reveal a larger, more visible discourse. This model can be seen as a map at the interpreter’s disposal to help her select decontextualized fragments and juxtapose them in such a way as to construct, by revealing the ways in which the clips articulate each other, what would appear to be a finished discourse. A wider perspective would perceive the object of study examined in this essay as contributing to the understanding of the discursive effects of media and popular culture on collective identity and related socio-political phenomena.

### **Style and Presence**

To reiterate my claim, the three commercial television ads described here are examples of a discourse that frames the boundaries of Canadian identity with ethical parameters at the expense of the political. That is not to say that these texts transcend politics altogether – for very few texts can actually escape possible political interpretation – but I argue that such is their purpose in order to underline an alternate source of collective meaning as opposed to invoking the problematic traditional indicators of statehood. Canada is by no means a nation-state, nor is it a country that encapsulates a

common religion or cultural practice within its borders and shores. Canadian nationalist rhetoric, to this end, attempts to include as many categories of people living amongst each other, but it is nonetheless always exclusionary to some degree. Benedict Anderson (2006) sees the nation as an imaginary construction because what brings unity to people who, for the most part, will never meet or know of each other as individuals is each person's ability to visualize this mutual connection. But how does a sense of unity, if not true nationhood, become consolidated in a state comprising peaceful yet politically and culturally bifurcated solitudes? Anderson states that "Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the *style* in which they are imagined" (2006, 6, emphasis mine). On that account, the ads can be viewed as textual fragments that when juxtaposed with one another reveal a larger (but never quite finished) discursive intervention to remedy a confusing and disjointed identity, symbolic action to inspire a clearer collective self-image in the narrative form. In other words, breaking from the usual nationalist rhetoric, the discourse of the ads is the introduction of a particular *style* of imagining our community that may solidify its common acceptance.

Firstly, the characters in the ads have been ascribed particular moral and ethical virtues that function to both implicate and subdue the civic virtues omnipresent in the texts. Although the notion of "Canadianness" is not at the forefront, it is measurably painted into the imagery. At different intensities, the three commercials offer honouring one's family priority over being a good national citizen and, in the same stroke, tie the two virtues together suggesting softly that in Canada developing a strong familial relationship is part and parcel to the values required for ideal citizenship. Simply the title *Proud Fathers* is indicative of this notion; for it invokes the unconditional pride fathers



have of their children (regardless of whether or not it is revealed or translated into moral support). Within the ad itself, the most prominent ethical trope at play is that of forgiveness. Jimmy forgives his father by thanking him for coming to watch Tommy and accepting the gift of a cup of coffee. There is an inherent politeness (mostly visible in his ironic, deferring, Mona Lisa-esque smile and the playful self-mocking nature of the questions he poses) that seems to engulf Jimmy's reaction to Lou's arrival. This, and their subsequent conversation, suggest that Lou was always already forgiven by his son for having neglected and discouraged Jimmy's childhood passion for hockey. Lou reveals that his past rigidity was merely performed for the good of Jimmy's upbringing. Lou had been curious about his son's athletic ability all along, enough so to secretly attend his hockey games. At play here is the idea of *presence*. Presence is an overarching theme of the three ads, and is manifested differently in each one. Presence emphasizes the choice to make positive and lasting investments of time in the lives of one's family members. In *Proud Fathers*, Lou's stern, affirmative presence in Jimmy's formative years, as well as his covert presence at the rink, is worth noting.

In *A Bike Story*, presence is demonstrated through silence. The narrator's modesty illustrated by his reluctance to ask his father for a bike is in turn rewarded by his father's decision to buy it for him. Silent presence appears in the attitudes of both the boy and his father: the boy's quiet humility, patience and devotion to his father and the man's silent yet reflexive awareness of his son's thoughts, wishes and credibility. Embedded in the dialogue and scenario in *Dieppe*, presence can once more be found. Mark's conversation with his grandfather is mediated by the distance between them. On a personal level, Mark communicates with his grandfather to include a veteran first-hand voice from his own

family into an experience he has created in the spirit of past events. Dieppe is an important place for Mark's grandfather. It resides in his memory and in the memories of others who lived through its history. Part of his life remains there despite that many of his compatriots lost their lives. Mark travels to be close to that memory. Steps are retraced, the town is explored, and sand and stones on the beach are physically touched, picked up. They are the sediment of the foundation upon which this memory was created, long before Mark's birth. This memory was then supplanted into his mind through stories narrated by his grandfather. Hence, by placing a long distance phone call, Mark is able to be remotely present for his grandfather, and reciprocally and involuntarily, his grandfather is spiritually present in Dieppe for Mark.

Thus through the notion of presence and the different ways of being present (for one another), the characters' personal ethics within the narratives can be illustrated and typified. Furthermore, these depictions of ideal forms of presence are the first step in the process of collective identification. By representing an ideal image of the ethical person, the ads identify "first by inducing the auditor to participate in the form, as a 'universal' locus of appeal, and next by trying to include a partisan statement within this same pale of assent" (Burke 1969, 59). The "partisan statement" Kenneth Burke speaks of is equivalent to the fulfillment piece of the discourse implied by these fragments. First, the commercials tell us something about ourselves that we want to hear; then, once they have our attention, they connect us to one another, as McGee suggests, by reinforcing presupposed cultural conventions (1990, 283).

The tasks of pinpointing "locutions" that reveal the "sources" of the rhetoric and "locating" where the ads "create" their audience (McGee 1990) are closely related as

both are occupied with indicating stylistic instances that enable critics to make moral judgments. Edwin Black puts forth that these moral judgments are directed at identifying (or “extracting”) both the moral character of the speaker – the “source” of the text – and that of the “second persona” – the audience “implied” by the text (1970, 112). In other words, the “second persona” of the rhetoric is the image or embodiment of an ideal auditor the rhetor wishes of his actual audience, an audience that is “projected by the discourse” but does not necessarily exist (Black 1970, 113). Furthermore, Black states that

...the association between an idiom and an ideology is much more than a matter of arbitrary convention or inexplicable accident. It suggests that there are strong and multifarious links between a style and an outlook, and that the critic may, with legitimate confidence, move from the manifest evidence of style to the human personality that this evidence projects as a beckoning archetype. (1970, 119)

Perhaps the argument being made in this essay is less centred on ideological orientation<sup>6</sup> than on the articulation of national character, but it is important to take into account how the style of the textual form constructs an image of “human personality” and uses this image to identify and expand the scope of a community. In light of this, I will now discuss how each of the three ads makes the “cultural presuppositions” McGee requires for contemporary discourse analysis and how human personality – the ethical image painted by different forms of familial presence – gets inserted into the spectrum of national character.

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<sup>6</sup> I refer here to the attempt by the ads and the discourse they write to avoid letting political implications overtly shine through their messages.

### **“Cultural Presuppositions” and National Character**

The narrative theme of each commercial takes root in the past and thus offers an historical perspective on national character. *Dieppe* strongly implies and depends upon knowledge of Canada's past; *A Bike Story* is set in the past; *Proud Fathers* simultaneously makes reference to and depicts the past. To begin, *Proud Fathers* deals with two cornerstones of nation-building in Canada: immigration and hockey. The act of reconciliation dramatized in the ad serves to recreate the dilemma of the immigrant by asking “How fervently will I resist participating in Canadian culture in order to retain my own values and traditions?” and by answering that the ideal situation is one in which Canadian national culture and past-times exist for all to enjoy. Lou embodies this resistance as hockey is iconic of national culture, owned and operated by Charlie, the white Anglo-Saxon arena caretaker, the gatekeeper of this territory who does not discriminate. The gatekeeper allows everyone in and shows no opposition to those, like Lou, who are content to remain on the outside peering in. However, the *outside* can be a troublesome location and even hostile toward pragmatic efforts. One of the reasons many in Canada remain psychologically stuck on the outside is because they do not see themselves as having been in any way part of this country's history. Granatstein attests that “there is much to disunify Canadians and, all too often, very little to join them together. History is one such unifying factor: the way of life and the traditions that men and women created in this nation” (1999, 5). Many so-called Canadians use their citizenship and all the privileges it entails to temporarily seek refuge or economic opportunity, contributing far less to our system and our dwindling sense of community than they benefit before departing. These “Canadians” could not be bothered with our

daily cultural practices, the minimum of functional social knowledge required to integrate harmoniously within these borders, and are constantly thinking of elsewhere.

Many immigrants do not [understand the meaning of citizenship]. Theirs is a vague view of a country that is cold, safe, rich, dull and nice. Canada is *terra incognita* to them. It is an empty vessel. And that is what makes it so attractive. Being Canadian doesn't demand much. (Cohen 2007, 157)

The purpose of the flashbacks within the ad is to contrast the Lou of the past – the protective, stubborn immigrant, who hopes that his son achieves more than those kids playing street hockey – with the image of the ideal immigrant and naturalized citizen Lou projects in the present day. In this case, the reconciliation between Lou and Jimmy represents the evolved and ideal attachment between Lou-as-immigrant and the national community.<sup>7</sup>

The iconography of national character is presented more discretely in *A Bike Story*. In this ad, the historical cornerstone of nation-building is agriculture, and the ethic of agriculture is embodied by the hard-work-no-play personality of the protagonist's father. The red on the bicycle is probably the most striking colour we can see in the entire gold-washed short film and represents not only the gesture of gift-giving but also the idea of hard work rewarded by time left over for leisure and play. The message of this commercial is most poignantly driven home by the relationship described earlier between the father and his son as their ethical characteristics are deeply embedded in the simplistic aesthetic of the time-period depicted. Interestingly, the "Our Story" page on the Canadian Tire website describes this advertising campaign as "captur[ing] the attention and emotion of Canadian families as a cultural slice of life...sending a timeless message of

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<sup>7</sup> The cup of coffee and the text "Every cup tells a story" are to be taken as mere surface-level commercial rhetoric and do not figure into the discussion except as a reconciliatory token gift. Recall Wagman's "transposition of product into moment."

family, hard work, dreams and rewards” (Canadian Tire Corp.). It is no secret then that the notion of “attention,” or *presence*, in each of the ads may be understood as a discursive articulation of cultural life in Canada.

*Dieppe*'s historical significance lies in Canada's involvement in the Second World War, specifically in the D-Day raid on Normandy. To say that the commercial requires its audience to have prior knowledge of the war would be an understatement, for the institution of Remembrance Day would fall to pieces if Canadians were not conscious of their country's participation in the great wars of the past century. However, the theme of remembrance looms over the entire length of the sequence, tying the present day to this other event that took place long ago by using certain iconic indicators: the town of Dieppe, the generations between Mark and his grandfather, the framed wartime photographs of Mark's grandfather as a young man surrounded by his comrades in uniform. The main focus here is on Mark's character. Mark was born decades after the war ended and we infer that his character would have to be taught about the war and Canada's role in it. The narrative of the ad thus presents Mark performing a ritual of remembrance for something of which he has no actual memory. Perhaps this segment is only one small stop within a much longer voyage. However one looks at it, this particular stop constitutes a pilgrimage; Mark has gone out of his way to visit the actual site of the historic battle and reflect upon the consequences the war has had on his own life and present circumstances.

The Canadian virtue this screenplay presents belongs to a past reality Cohen would like to see restored when he laments that “Canadians do not recall Dieppe when thinking of their citizenship. Dieppe is about duty, honour, and sacrifice. It is doubtful

that they imagine bearing arms or performing national service...though as citizens, they may well be expected to [do so]" (2007, 149). Over and above his good natured willingness to call his grandfather to thank him, Mark embodies the idealized persona implied by the ad through the tribute he pays not only to his grandfather, but to all other soldiers who served in his country in the war. Because "few of us are born to grow into an identity that was incipiently structured before our births...[t]he quest for identity is the modern pilgrimage" (Black 1970, 113). The image of this young man's confidence in his own identity as a Canadian is presented as a model for emulation. By presenting this simple yet solemn gesture of gratitude, similar to so many performed daily across the country for myriad reasons, as one of national importance, this ad has plugged our shared *ethos* into an imagined national community. As a textual fragment, this ad speaks to each of its audience members at different points in their quest for identity. The epideictic rhetoric of the ad attempts to call a common culture into existence: the ethical nation.

### **The Role of Communication(s)**

The unifying discourse of the three ads is supported by the on-screen use of various media technologies in distinct context-driven ways. Gerald Friesen (2000) introduces four eras of the history and colonization of northern North America organized in light of their leading modes of communication: oral-traditional; textual-settler; print-capitalist; and screen-capitalist. Studying how these devices were (and are) socially appropriated can better inform us about periodic conceptions of time and space as well as how the layperson can be seen to write history through her reaction to social, political and economic change rather than from the perspective of those effecting change (Friesen 2000, 7). Canada's enormous territory was a significant problem for the nation-builders

of the past; hence, conventional wisdom would recognize the need for a constantly developing communication system so that the country could be run adequately. For this reason, the history of Canada is inexorably told in part as the history of media (in the Canadian context).

*A Bike Story* is set close to the end of what Friesen designates the “print-capitalist national society,” a period governed by a rapid explosion of technological innovation and the emergence of waged labour. “All of a sudden, the message could travel faster than the messenger, as Marshall McLuhan put it. Such an unprecedented combination of changes in work and breakthroughs in communication imposed great strains upon every society, not least on common people” (Friesen 2000, 107). This story could not have been possible if not for the participation of the reigning communication paradigm. The plot revolves around the catalogue, relaying representations of consumer goods available for acquisition. The medium of print is supplemented by technologies of mobility and travel, which can also be seen as media for their involvement in transporting messages and messengers. The boy cuts out the picture of the bike and keeps it. The hole left behind is an absence, an empty space, a metaphor indicating the lack of leisure and play in his and his father’s banal daily routine. At the moment of acknowledgement, the catalogue is no longer simply a tool of capital accumulation, but a method of interpersonal communication in a setting and a context in which there is otherwise silence. Instead of historicizing the nation at that particular time in classic terms of the struggle between capital and labour, the communication process presented by the commercial helps it to go beyond this struggle, which is no longer relevant to today’s audiences. The ad is therefore an illustration of one of Friesen’s main assertions: In print-capitalist Canada, “The



cauldron that was capitalism has melted everyone into a new and, from the perspective of a nineteenth-century settler household, relatively uniform society” (2000, 135).

This is similar to Ignatieff’s argument, summarized in Chapter One, for finding community embedded within ordinary habitual practices; what made us Canadian, and continues to do so, is our simultaneous and shared participation in the daily grind, normalized by the emergence of a uniform ideology to govern our national way of life.

As a construction of time and space

The economic forces of print-capitalism increasingly drew ordinary Canadians...into a *single* community...Rather than region or religion or ethnicity, wages, property values, and prices increasingly measured common people’s daily existence. Citizens passed their time increasingly within the common units of monetized minutes and work weeks and productive careers. Within a century, the space in which they lived...had become a transcontinental nation...Common people’s cultural responses...rebuilt Canada. (Friesen 2000, 162-3)

The ad goes further than this. Its screenplay demonstrates that what governs the family milieu in general is a degree of gracious interaction and sympathetic consideration, a tendency to “do the right thing.” Suddenly, the democratic, gentle-handed, middle-ground attitude characteristic of Canadians loses much of its mythical status and comes to be recognized as a legitimate *modus operandi* in the private sphere like it is at the public and international levels.

Still reading from Friesen’s communication theory of the history of Canadian society, I observe that *Proud Fathers* is set within the current dominant paradigm of “screen-capitalism,” a period of technological innovation marked by an unprecedented blurring of public and private spheres as well as the paradoxical overlap of abundance and insecurity. The cultural economic phenomenon of particular importance to this discussion is the latter. As opposed to living off the riches of the land in textual-settler

societies and being assured basic human necessities through the consistency of waged work in the print-capitalist era, screen-capitalism saw the expansion of the middle-class, the institutionalization and subsequent deregulation of many social programs, increased workplace conditions, the affordability of luxuries, personal space, and personal time, but also, in later years, increased precariousness of full-time positions and the creation of more peripheral, part-time jobs (Friesen 2000, 182-5). Although one no longer had to rely on good fortune for basic needs and acceptable living quarters, there was a recurring sentiment of instability among those that had come from poverty and had carefully saved their way into reasonable comfort.

This inherent frugality is still prevalent among immigrants that came to Canada from more precarious situations. To a certain degree, that ongoing sense of insecurity can lead people to disconnect themselves from society, become more competitive, and disavow time normally reserved for leisure and cultural activity, in order to concentrate more on building security and getting ahead of their peers. Lou's actions in the flashback moments of the ad reflect this sense of insecurity. He recognizes his family's minority status in a white anglophone-francophone country, and thus acts to protect his son and enable him to succeed at school, to outperform those who spend their time playing hockey on the street, at the rink, or who watch it on television. Lou's cultural attitude toward Jimmy's upbringing involves discouraging unproductive activities that do not usually lead to a respectable career, financial gain, economic stability and social prosperity.

In the ad, the television set serves either as an obstruction from Lou's perspective and a diversion from Jimmy's perspective. Their reconciliation, years later, however, is

based upon the absence of mediation: the two men sort out their differences through face-to-face dialogue while watching Tommy play hockey live. The immediacy of the moment is in itself a claim about the state of communication and how cultural understanding is best maintained. In a world where conceptions of time and space have been reconstituted and the speed and bandwidth of information transfer has increased dramatically due to technological innovation, clarity finds its purest form in interpersonal communication. The ad does not point the finger of blame at media for distorting dialogue; It simply states that in situations requiring delicate rectification, an unmediated conversation is one in which the clearest signals of sympathetic appeal are able to operate at their full potential.

Before moving on to *Dieppe*, it is important to note the role of the advertised products as themselves communication devices. From the vantage of advertising theory, the red bicycle and the cup of coffee have both operated as silence breakers and relationship enhancers. The ads have inserted an artificial, provisional step in the procedure to attain harmonious family ties by constructing a situation that elicits a desirable emotion and positioning the product as complicit in its creation. As Judith Williamson (1978) explains, “[The product] represents *access* to happiness; it is therefore a sort of money that will buy happiness. It provides an intermediary currency between real money and an emotion” (38). Despite this being in part the strategy used by the advertiser, my contention is that the narratives created connect to their audience in such a way as to render the employment of the particular product almost impotent alongside the stories told. For example, Lou could have approached Jimmy with a different offering or none at all – or Jimmy could have refused the coffee because he had just had one – and the same charming moment most likely would have followed. Tim Horton’s coffee does

not mediate their pivotal conversation. The product thus disappears, upstaged by the seemingly real relations of real people.

In *A Bike Story* and *Proud Fathers*, the gesture is what counts. In *Dieppe*, the plot depicted is not possible without implicating the product, which, in turn, is the mode of communication featured in the commercial. The cellular phone and the wireless long distance telecommunications network it uses not only mediate an unexpected action of gratitude and honour, but they also eliminate the distance between a boy and his grandfather, connect incoming and outgoing generations of people and bridge two time periods by juxtaposing new media technologies and history. This is one of the diverse ways in which history and its nationalist orientation are being integrated into popular public culture. The image of a trendy, adventurous, confident, yet very ordinary, young man using a new communication medium to reflect upon his nation's history negotiates the modernization of the aesthetic appeal of collective memory, especially to the disengaged youth for many of whom history holds little to no palpable value. In other words, much like the film *National Treasure* (Disney 2004) works to make American national history "cool" by telling it partially through a modern day narrative that involves new technologies, *Dieppe's* scenario works to restore an emotional sense of propriety towards national memory by updating and repackaging its on-screen treatment to be more attractive, exciting and nostalgic to popular audiences.

### **Refrain**

Where Canada's web of complex and overlapping identities and cultures converges is in the space in which the various incarnations of *presence* coexist. Canada's past may have been inscribed by prominent historical figures, national heroes, great

leaders and their bold exploratory, political, economic and cultural unprecedented acts, but the definition of national community remains embedded in everyday cultural practice. This focus on the vernacular, directing our attention towards extracting meaningful narratives from the daily lives of average people, demonstrates the significance of the everyman and his connection to collective memory and nation-building. As noted by Stephen Leacock, “The history of Canada is the sum total of the biographies of all its citizens...In its unfolding, all have a share; from its narrative, all derive that pride that comes of participation...[I]t is yet...a deeply personal record...history belongs to us all” (quoted in Cohen 2007, 54). The rhetoric of the ads is very much in tune with Leacock’s statement. The identities of all the characters are on display as they interact with one another in pious observation of conventional and graceful (in this case, scripted) conduct. They go about living their daily lives, and at the same time they are emblematic of what we all have in common. The characters exist to show us that being good people is equal to being Canadian.

The “incomplete” discourse to which the ads belong does not exist to persuade its readers and interpreters to any form of decisive action. Rather, these fragments seek to address their own “everyday critique” by inviting all audience members to act as critics to amplify “communal [snap] judgments of salience, attitude, belief, and action” and to respond to the commercials by “providing in a formal way the missing fragments of the object of criticism, its influence” (McGee 1990, 282). This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that the three commercials studied in this project – *Dieppe*, *A Bike Story*, and *Proud Fathers* – should be understood as examples of constitutive rhetoric that promote consubstantiality. In this case, a consubstantial society does not bear a negative

connotation, for it functions to restore some order to the complexities and confusion that are part of being Canadian. In being constituted, Canadians are able to see themselves as participants within the narratives presented here and are thus compelled to meet the requirements for a renewed conservatism and a more collectively dutiful model of living. The notion of presence is illuminated by symbolic behaviour that consolidates the ethical fortress of the Canadian identity. The discourse of the ads supports the idea that presence, family, and a connection to the past, define the moral culture of Canadians, a category that should transcend all schismatic categories of identification.

## Chapter 3

### Discursive Formations and the Construction of Collective Clarity

The previous chapter looked inward at content and form. This chapter will attempt to focus outward at social ramifications. It will moreover feature a comparative examination of parallel textual forms. The advertisements have been analysed for their rhetorical style, cultural articulations, and the way in which the communication media featured inside the ads bind time across generations and bind space through their symbolism of a national culture. The theme I refer to is that of the ordinary person and her connection to a collective conscience by way of acknowledging, ritualizing and memorializing our national history. In the first segment, I will bring the ads into discussion with the popular *Heritage Minutes* in order to draw some conclusions concerning the discursive and extra-commercial nature of the featured ads. Following this will be a discussion on Canada's historiographical situation and how the ads may appropriately include themselves in a recent trend to reconsolidate a centralized version of Canadian history, hence citizenship. Furthermore, I seek to expand my argument regarding the discursive construction of a Canadian brand of proper public *ethos* or, as Michael Dorland and Maurice Charland (2002) term it, "civil culture."

### The Rhetoric of One Minute

The *Heritage Minutes*, popular sixty-second short films originally commissioned by the CRB Foundation and aired throughout the nineties during commercial breaks on television and in theatres across the country, were created to publicly promote Canada's history (Historica). "Many of our country's defining moments and personalities are captured in these miniature dramas," explains the Historica Foundation website, where all

seventy-four minutes are currently hosted, along with radio minutes and “footprints,” one-minute documentaries exclusively featuring Canada’s “athletes and sporting traditions” (Histori.ca). The *Heritage Minutes* are similar to the ads I deal with in this study because of their filmic, high budget quality and their sentimental narrative form. Beyond this however, they are quite different. *Heritage Minutes* offer first-hand dramatic representations of pivotal events extracted from Canadian history books. The only deviation from this formal arrangement is the *Minute* that tells the story of Emily Murphy and her role in the famous Person’s Case of 1929. The event itself is not dramatized outright but is described in a single-take, subjective monologue by an actress playing Murphy (Watson 2004, 525, 582).

A number of writers, researchers, and journalists of Canadian cultural, political and historical study have commented on the *Minutes*. Granatstein (1999) applauds the CRB’s efforts to popularize history for the masses by adapting it for the most current media and entertainment forms, and thus reaching a target audience that spends a much smaller portion of their day reading books than they spend in front of the television. “By turning history into melodrama, the CRB Foundation’s teleplays have unquestionably helped to popularize history with young people” (1999, 12-13). History is often dismissed as being among the most boring subjects taught at the high school level; and for this, in addition to uninspiring teachers and the field’s turn to research-based compartments rather than beginner-friendly pedagogical units, it can partially blame the explosion of entertainment technologies aimed at capturing and diverting the minds of the nation’s young. Attention spans have undergone steady dramatic shortening, synonymous with the onset of the pace, brevity and arbitrary overlapping of allegorical images characteristic of



music video and video game culture. Reformed educational methods have focused on the entertainment quality of the lesson, opting as a last resort to integrate contemporary media forms and popular discourses into course content in order to spark an increase of interest and interaction among generally disengaged students. The Minutes have been successful learning tools as the “subjects covered” have “become magnets drawing student essay writers” (Granatstein 1999, 13) and teenage producers of imitation Minutes valorizing their own selection of history’s many important moments (MacMillan 2008, 4). They have the potential, writes Granatstein, to “create a demand for a more systematic study of the past” (13).

Cohen (2007) cites the *Heritage Minutes* as a “superb” method in an insufficient broader campaign to restore public consciousness of Canadian history. Television could be used more rigorously to combat widespread amnesia, but its scope barely extends beyond employing the help of commercial breaks and the History Channel, which, despite airing “imported dramas like *JAG* and *Over There*,” has occasional “good days” as well (Cohen 2007, 91).

Throughout her synthesis of the *Heritage Minutes* and *Canada: A People’s History*, West (2002) makes a number of key observations. Firstly, West acknowledges, without saying it, that the film clips are brimming with a sort of epideictic rhetoric, that they communicate in a suggestive, demonstrative tone she calls “subjunctive appeal” (222). “By taking Canada as their unit of representation, these media initiatives are engaged in a *subjunctive endeavour*, where the fellow feeling and shared understanding of ‘our’ past must be understood more in terms of ‘ought’ than ‘is’” (222, emphasis mine). The example of the strategic unveiling of thirteen new *Minutes* months prior to the

1995 referendum on Quebec sovereignty, on a CBC Television special presentation entitled *Proud and Free*, hosted by Rex Murphy (222), illustrates the *ad hoc* motivation behind the existence of these shorts to attend to the contemporary political climate. Like Alain Locke's pragmatic decorum, as expanded upon by Danisch (2007), which dealt with "issues of group identity, race, cultural pluralism, value relativism, and aesthetics," the social exigency of Quebec separation begged for schemes of mass persuasion of an epideictic nature (2007, 115). Therefore, aside from the *Minutes* being a rhetorical tool to promote history to a population that largely does not know its national history, it is also a rhetorical tool to promote national unity at a time in the nation's history when unity is in considerable question and in dire need of a more pragmatic redefinition.

Secondly, West's analysis visits heroism and the creation of national heroes. Charlotte Gray (2007) asks: "Why don't we [Canadians] spawn a few larger-than-life characters who bend the rules to fit them rather than shaping their own behaviour to the norm" (109)? The reality here is that Canadians thrive on normalcy, adherence to rules, and modesty, and have therefore settled into a tendency not to elevate the likes of the talented, the unique, the glamorous and the brave. Those we celebrate are more often than not famous for their role in the country's political development, guidance and leadership.

Gray continues:

On my return home to Canadian soil, I am overwhelmed by TGIH. Thank God I'm Home, in a country where bully-boy tactics are not celebrated and civility is the norm. A country where we put dead and forgotten prime ministers, such as Robert Borden, on our banknotes, rather than kings and conquerors. The political and military heroes of other countries are celebrated for their fierce individualism, insensitivity to other points of view, and driving determination. But these are not Canadian qualities. (2007, 109)

The Canadian brand of heroism can be designated by those people who, through their actions and attitude, have succeeded at fusing individual with collective history (Gray 2007, 111; citing Peter C. Newman). West indicates that specific *Minutes* like *Midwife*, depicting an unnamed midwife assisting an arbitrary birth, and *Soddie*, about an 1890s immigrant couple from Europe building their first home – a “soddie” – in the prairies, were products of the CRB philosophy that the stories of those nameless people not recognized as heroes by classical historiography should be represented, acknowledged and celebrated as segments of the country’s construction and broad heritage (2002, 223).

The *Heritage Minutes* present these acts of everyday heroism as equally deserving of their own *Minutes*, and therefore present a model of heroism, and of what we ought to remember, that is more inclusive than more narrow definitions of heroism that might only recognize the kind that leads to medals of valour, and the like. (West 2002, 223)

As simulated portrayals of tasks no longer (normally) carried out, either at all or in the same context, in Canadian quotidian culture, which were necessary and required great sacrifice, hard labour and physical strain, these particular *Minutes* seek to account for the people providing the extra-political mechanics of progress. Their fabricated scenarios are based on the knowledge historians have conveyed about lifestyles and demands of the period, drawing attention to rituals perhaps lost on most people today; many young Canadians have but a glossy idea of the hardships and sacrifices their forebears faced.

The final perspective on the *Heritage Minutes*, which I will present briefly, I consider problematic, for it assumes in a critical tone that contemporary mediations of history for one reason or another are elite materials for the abuse of power. Peter Hodgins (2002; 2004) associates the *Minutes* with what he terms the “heritage industry,” the continuous representation to the public of historical fact for reasons other than merely

educating about history. This definition includes the “spectacularization of memory” through ““authentic re-enactments””<sup>8</sup> that capitalize on our easily elicited “nostalgia” and ““where all pasts exist to be stripped and exploited purely for their surfaces””<sup>9</sup> (Hodgins 2004, 105). Cultural memory has become a highly fragmented location, having taken on the character of Jean-François Lyotard’s notion of “le petit récit,”<sup>10</sup> the short length and narrow scope of which conveniently misplace reminders of past racial and cultural prejudices and conflicts usually found in complete and accurate accounts. The telling of history in short clips, explains Hodgins, comes from a recent “tendency to fracture the past into depoliticized and easily digestible morsels that lend support to a benign and therapeutic version of multiculturalism” (2004, 105). In other words, Hodgins warily treats most mass mediated reflections of public memory as problematic, but offers an interesting crossroad. One can either see the recent revival of memory projects as a means toward “hegemonic ends” or embrace it as a nobler “resuscitation of more authentic practices of remembrance,” which would depend upon our willingness to disregard our postmodern aptitudes and intuitions towards what constitutes truth in the realm of historical representation (2004, 106).

One can always challenge any media text over the authenticity of its content and the style in which that content is delivered. To do so is a requirement for the defence and maintenance of deliberative democracy in this age of textual uncertainty, fragmentation, and incomplete, continuously reconstituted discourses. A distinction must therefore be made that sets the need for impartial historical representation apart from the need to

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<sup>8</sup> Hodgins cites Lowenthal, D. 1996. *Possessed by the Past: The Heritage Crusade and the Spoils of History*. New York: The Free Press.

<sup>9</sup> Hodgins cites Walsh, K. 1992. *The Representation of the Past*. London: Routledge.

<sup>10</sup> Hodgins cites Lyotard, J-F. 1984. *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

develop solutions to the problems associated with identitarian politics. It is here that this project and Hodgins's conclusions clash. Whereas it is understood by Hodgins that cultural memory is being usurped by the power elite to create a superficial public nostalgia for "hegemonic" gain, this is beside the point. His preference for unbiased representation of the ugly "truth" of national history is altogether a different project because it does not provide a response to the rhetorical situation dealt with by the ads. The telling of history, in the end, is about positioning actors as protagonists or antagonists within the narrative, and depends on the efficacy of a rhetoric of victim and victimizer. While exposing a rightfully known darker side of the past, or simply even "telling it like it is", might be just as rhetorical as the ads, it does not provide the means for the development of a common cause, does little to offer public virtues, and does not promote an improved national life. Regardless of whether the *Heritage Minutes* seek to promote Canada by theatrically painting a brighter picture of its oftentimes rocky past, or whether the commercial ads conspicuously make use of Canadian historical themes to sell products and brand names, these aesthetic representations are good for both national unity and the health of public culture.

Although the Cold War has long been over, the ideas of Jacques Ellul (1973) on democracy's dependence on propaganda for public support are relevant to the twenty-first century's concept of the modern civic nation. Despite the fact that the term "propaganda" has become pejorative when discussing spheres of ideological influence, now, more than ever, multiculturalism demands the consolidation of public consciousness and attitude toward the polity. "The notion of rational man...seems opposed to the secret influences, the mobilizations of myths, the swift appeals to the irrational, so characteristic

of propaganda” (Ellul 1973, 233). Thus democracy (or in this case, the civic nation) needs to extend its appeal by promulgating myth-based rhetorics. Furthermore, Ellul identifies a strategic split between domestic and international communication.

Interestingly, he notes that in external relations, “the democratic State will want to present itself as the carrier of its entire public opinion, and the democratic nation will want to present itself as a coherent whole” (233), displaying the image of a strong, undivided people rallying behind and willing to defend its country’s foreign affairs policies. In the Canadian case, foreign politics is a fragile matter with various international communities at odds with the government’s positions on issues relating to their native countries. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the narrative themes of both the *Heritage Minutes* and the commercial ads examined in this study are less devoted to Canada’s current and recent face in global politics than they are to the domestic developments that have positively marked the nation.

To be sure, some of the *Minutes* do, in fact, depart from the usual depictions of triumphs, heroes and progress. However, those about the struggles of various groups against the body politic use particular narrative conventions to show that these events have contributed to Canada’s success in the present. One *Minute* entitled *Nitro* clearly illustrates the racism surrounding the building of the Canadian Pacific Railroad, how Chinese immigrant workers were offered “boat fare to Canada for their wives if they dare place a bottle of nitro-glycerine in a tunnel that is being excavated” (Hodgins 2002, 258), and how many Chinese Canadians died performing this task. The survivor featured in the *Minute*, at the end an old man, explains to his grandchildren the popular belief that “there is one dead Chinese man for every mile of the track” (Historica). The *Minute* entitled

*Louis Riel* features a soundtrack that superimposes Riel's monologue, his sentencing by a trial judge, the brief intermission of a priest reciting Riel's last rites in Latin, a woman narrator, and an Anglophone priest reciting the Our Father, accompanied by soft Gregorian chant of a choir. The clip ends with Riel's death by hanging, and sympathizes with the plight of the Metis as well as all First Nations Peoples. It also insinuates that the situation in Canada has since improved for the Metis Nation by treating Riel as a symbol of "hope and strength and pride" (Historica). Despite that these and other *Minutes* like *Sitting Bull* and *Imukshuk* hint at the mistreatment and misunderstanding of aboriginal peoples as well as racial and ethnic groups, the narratives nonetheless position the events as examples of lessons the nation has learned which have enriched it and endowed it with the resulting heritage.

The similarities between the two types of texts, *Heritage Minutes* and the commercial ads, remain bifurcated over character selection and the angle of public life they simulate. However wide and inclusive the range of historical subjects of the *Minutes* may be, from the amazing feats of sports heroes and great inventors to the innovative policies of politicians and triumphs of women's suffrage movements, they do not transcend the mere presentation of historical fact.<sup>11</sup> Charles Bronfman, who suggested "that the education system has failed Canadians in teaching history properly" (West 2002, 214), used the explanation that "If we can use sixty seconds of television to persuade Canadians that cornflakes are interesting – or Cadillacs or tampons – couldn't we use the same amount of time to persuade our fellow citizens that this country is interesting?" (Watson 2004, 520). This statement clarifies that the approach taken by the

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<sup>11</sup> Surpassing the promotion of history was never actually the stated mandate of the *Heritage Minutes*, but this observation is part of the exercise of juxtaposing the *Minutes* with commercial ads under examination.

producers of the *Heritage Minutes* to popularize history is one that gives their “fellow citizens” an introduction and a glimpse into the actions of those noteworthy people instrumental in building this country and our collective livelihood; but because the vast majority of the *Minutes* feature prominent national figures as their main characters, they do not necessarily begin narratives that members of the general public will take upon themselves to conclude. While the *Minutes* educate and excite, the three ads and others like them inspire us, by placing ordinary people into heart-warming stories of good will, to fulfill the narratives and to honour history’s heroes by living well. They do not seek to glorify people’s contributions to history; by using the television screen as a model for emulation, they simply represent what civility in the Canadian sense means, showing how desirable it is to *be* Canadian before being anything else.

*Dieppe*, *A Bike Story*, and *Proud Fathers*, in other words, position Canadian historical (and political) themes as secondary to and merely implied by the discourse of civility. These everyday narratives of the family establish spaces that foster reflection on how political and social issues of the past resonate with the construction of a national ethical character. These issues are but echoes, never mentioned or shown but referred to in *Dieppe*, and symptomatically present in the contexts and sceneries of *Proud Fathers* and *A Bike Story*.

### **Riding the Resurgence Wave**

Many commercials on television use the “nostalgia for memory” trope discussed by Hodgins to place their product or trademark at the root of timelessness. This is accomplished by presenting the company as a source or anchor of national or familial traditions that date back to previous generations. A fine example of this is an ad for



Werther's Original caramel candy. An elderly man narrates how, when he was a little boy, his grandfather gave him Werther's original, his first taste of candy. It made him feel like "someone very special" and from then on became a tradition that symbolically mediated the strong relationship they had. After a two-generation ellipsis, the narrator reveals that he is now the grandfather and has since continued the Werther's tradition with his own grandson (Werther's Original). A classic tale, the ad positions the company as deeply rooted in cultural practice, and the product as a communication medium enabling positive personal interaction, the centre piece around which relations revolve. One difference between the Werther's commercial and, say, *A Bike Story*, likewise a first-hand account of early youth by a senior male voice, is the absence, in the Canadian Tire ad, as well as the other two ads, of the company name from the narration. This strategic subtlety on the advertising front works indirectly to emphasize the storyline and render it more credible, less like a commercial and more like a short film. The pitch is less blatant and seems to stylistically give priority to storytelling and the social transactions it projects.

Due to easily distinguishable cinematic qualities, it is possible to conceptually locate the ads within and contributing to the recent trend to restore public historical consciousness in Canada. Ruth W. Sandwell (2006) situates Granatstein's *Who Killed Canadian History*, discussed in chapter one, at the apex of a counter-critical movement to develop solutions for this national social deficiency. As a result of this mobilization "In recent years, it is almost as if history...has been opening up a contemplative space where Canadians can reflect on who 'we' really are and start discussing who we really want to be" (Sandwell 2006, 3). Sandwell briefly summarizes the crisis as having occurred just as

the lines of communication were shutting down between historians, history educators and bureaucrats, throwing the entire educational discipline into disarray and thus causing the disintegration of public interest towards initiatives of historical learning or teaching (3). Dorland and Charland (2002) also chronicle the “fragmentation, over-specialization, and lack of synthesis between” professional historians, adding that the public has instead filled the literature gap with amateurs and popular journalists (47). Also, historians have been increasingly losing what was once almost monopolistic control over the area of knowledge they claim to govern, as well as “the capacity [of ‘intellectuals’] to table general topics of broad public discussion, a capacity by and large now widely assumed to have been taken over by the mass media” (69). The latest “interpretive” approach to the study of Canadian history is attempting to reinstate national coherence to the domain, yet it remains unsure, given the delicacy of the situation, how this reform will be brought about (47).

The ambivalence of memory politics, and therefore identity politics, in Canada has triggered this highly problematic environment of cultural delicacy. Dorland and Charland suggest a possible remedy in “communicative commonality,” which may prove difficult to establish by returning to a coherent version of national history but which, through the language of “law,” has considerable potential. Interestingly, they explain...

...that ‘law’ is surely one of the great commonalities of social organization: in Habermas’s view, it is the central, remaining site of interface between the lifeworld in which we dwell existentially and the highly technical ‘steering systems’ that regulate lifeworlds in complex societies. Law is, in other words, one of the principal communicative channels by which societies organize the continuing contact between ordinary lives and systems of regulation... (D & C 2002, 70)

Therefore, on the one hand, we have the simultaneous loss of influence among intellectuals, and their replacement by the media, over who has the power to generate public debate; and on the other hand, as a nation, we lack a common cultural language with which to facilitate this kind of debate, the kind that can, in turn, lead to building a unified nation at the level of socio-cultural experience. Law, as an organizational tool that marries language to power, is useful toward achieving the latter, so claim Dorland and Charland; however, this predicament also calls for the use of creative, persuasive forms of representation, since the mass media are where the powers of deliberation and democracy currently lie.

Enter: the three narrative television commercials. These ads shape the debate from a unique angle. Their screenplays each imply that history matters to our collective sense of identity, but what is more important is how we allow it to factor into ongoing negotiations of personal identity. Over and above the importance of history as scholastic subject or field of knowledge is the conception of “history as a kind of intellectual space, a platform upon which to observe and discuss a deeply personalized, collective, and meaningful understanding of human social relations through time” (Sandwell 2006, 4). It is precisely the consolidation of social relations that the narratives of the ads seek to address, through scenarios demonstrating a preferred model for Canadian civility.

### **The “Discursive Economy” of “Civil Culture”**

The notion of civility popularly brings to mind such public human behaviours as the use of good manners, politeness, respect, self-discipline, and keen interpersonal sensitivity. In social practice from the viewpoint of rhetoric, “civil behaviour” can be defined “as acts of ‘persuading, soliciting, consulting, advising, bargaining,

compromising, coalition-building,' as opposed to coercing, deceiving, manipulating etc. Civility is a social good, effected rhetorically" (D & C 2002, 270). What does it signify, then, that civility is rhetorically based and so conducted? Dorland and Charland argue, in part, that Canadian civil culture is a product of a long history of laws and constitutions that have contributed to the evolution of a general Canadian social attitude and public disposition. This is evidence that the word of law is instrumental in having deeply influenced the nature of public symbolic action in Canada, and this set of socio-political values is perpetuated largely by percolating down from official doctrine through political discourse through media channels, arriving at its adoption by the citizenry. In other words, we can thank the rhetoric of law for having offered us a national order and way of life.

So to answer the question posed above, the notion of civility should be understood as an aesthetic phenomenon, as "the performance of social appearance" (D & C, 288). To be sure, the constraints of piety in other societies do not necessarily involve civility, but in Canada, the practice of piety includes and revolves around being civil. As discussed earlier, mass media exercise considerable influence over society and are therefore responsible not only for the ongoing circulation of norms and values but also as a global pane through which our civil culture gets juxtaposed with foreign cultures to either reaffirm or renegotiate what we as a nation hold to be true. For what is politics, if not the creation of the best possible society through the continuous inscription into official legislation the opinions of an ever-changing and evolving public? Furthermore, what is rhetoric, if not the attempt to effectively influence opinion for social or political purposes?

The ads come into conversation with the notion of Canadian civil culture at two distinct points. The first point is the base level of narrative, the aesthetic recreation or simulation of human interaction. The characters are sincere, regardless of whether they have been charged of past misconduct, and there are no antagonists, only forgiveness, as in *Proud Fathers*, or acts of kindness, as in *A Bike Story* and *Dieppe*. Sincerity is only a small fragment of a civil national character, but it is nonetheless a crucial basic component of public and personal exchange, a modern day code of chivalry that guides individuals to improve their public image or build and retain meaningful, symbolic relationships with others. Sincerity is, then, an aesthetic endeavour. The ads I have chosen to study do not extend in scope beyond the inner circle of the family, the private realm. On the women's rights movement, Dorland and Charland write:

In offering a 'domestic' understanding of the nation, [female political subjects] 'democratized' and domesticated what had previously been the monarch's 'parental' duties. As such, they broadened the notion of civil culture by introducing into it the principle of caring for others, even as they politicized the role of motherhood. Public and private spheres came to interpenetrate, as Canada was figured as a project directed toward the constitution of an ethical nation, where personal virtue became political. (D & C, 259)

While sharing much in common with the observed social transformation of the struggle for women's rights, the ads, in their own mode, work to deliver the same blend of public ideal and "personal virtue."

The second point is the position of the ads as public messages. They are part of a broader discourse of a civil national environment that suggests pragmatic solutions to the friction and disunity caused by cultural, ethnic, racial and religious pluralism and the institutional celebration of difference. In this role, the commercials can be seen as

fragments of a complex, multi-faceted discursive formation whose self-given mandate is to promote cultural identification with the national before the pre-national.

A central question of rhetoric is the status of truth. Because the art of rhetoric can conceivably affect all phenomena that may fall subject to debate and cannot be proven true by scientific methods of experimentation, it deals with what is called “social knowledge,” defined by Thomas Farrell as composed of “conceptions of symbolic relationships among problems, persons, interests, and actions, which imply (when accepted) certain notions of preferable public behaviour” (Farrell 1976, 4). Farrell elaborates that social knowledge assumes that individuals of a society will react in similar fashion through their interests, and that social knowledge is a requirement for the success of symbolic action and building consensus (5-7). Therefore, truth can be a principle agreed upon by a large number of people with respect to their beliefs and value system.

McGee (1980) understands that

‘truth’ in politics, no matter how firmly we believe, is always an illusion. The falsity of an ideology is specifically rhetorical, for the illusion of truth and falsity with regard to normative commitments is the product of persuasion. Since the clearest access to persuasion (and hence to ideology) is through the discourse used to produce it...ideology in practice is a political language, preserved in rhetorical documents, with the capacity to dictate decision and control public belief and behaviour. (4-5)

“Public” and “behaviour” are valuable words alike in both Farrell’s and McGee’s explanations of the association between rhetoric and politically constituted community.

For Farrell, the rhetor must be well endowed with the “social knowledge” of his audience, in order to effectively invoke that which will make his auditors react with positive emotion and, furthermore, so that their reaction can clear space for the occurrence of persuasion or some form of mobilization. For McGee, ideology, a system

of shared political beliefs, is formed rhetorically and constructed so that those in power can continue to access its key terms with predictable, controllable results. Both analogies are consistent with one another and can exist in conceptual cooperation. Before I tie them back to our subject, I visit a third and final idea concerning the social construction of consensus and civil culture.

Michael Dorland, in his doctoral dissertation entitled *The Discursive Economy of the Emergence of the Canadian Feature Film: Discourses of Dependency and the Governmentalization of A Displaced National Cinema, 1957-1968* (1991), comments on the shared and collectively willed belief of the existence of something that, in practice and function, does not exist. Dorland's views on the feature film industry in Canada are informed by his perception of the industry as a largely immaterial phenomenon. Specifically during the course of its emergence, development and economic transformations, the Canadian feature has been the subject of an entire field of cultural and symbolic exchange that constructs what is appropriately termed a "discursive economy" (Dorland 1991, 1996), the specialized talk surrounding the Canadian cinema which gives the subject a kind of simulated palpability.

Starting on the premise that the Canadian feature film industry is, in many respects, an imaginary construction outlined by discourse, much like Anderson's notion that nations are but *imagined communities* and national identity is fabricated artifice (Anderson 2006), Dorland clarifies that

to employ such terms as 'illusionary' or 'imaginary' serves not to minimize the reality of the phenomenon: on the contrary, it is to emphasize that one is dealing here with a complex form of language-game whose discursive contours it behoves, as analysts of film policies, to better understand (Dorland 1996, 116).

The imaginary quality of the feature film industry is a direct corollary of the will to survive, after the “originary ‘film industry’ in the 1920s” collapsed; however, what has survived is something quite distinguishable from “*a film industry per se*”; rather, it consists of “elements of a film production infrastructure sufficiently established to support the periodic emergence of discursive formations that produce ‘talk’ about an imaginary or potential industry” (Dorland 1991, 10). In other words, these discursive formations tend to position as reality either what, in fact, does not exist or what has but the inanimate mechanism in place and the potential to become reality. Feature film policy in the early 1960s was established on the grounds that the emergence of a Canadian feature film industry prior to the 1920s had considerable economic potential, and can be seen as an attempt, by creating the institution of a film industry as a discursive object, to resurrect a common belief in that potential. Therefore, the emergence of the Canadian feature film industry is “not...an economic object, but...the discursive articulation of a public idea, an imaginary construct upon which another imaginary construct, national identity, is seen substantially to rest and become manifest” (Dorland 1996, 119).

On the level of ordinary social practice, the personal interactions of Canadians do not differ entirely from those of ordinary people living in other developed post-industrial countries. This opens up both the desire and the need to distinguish and differentiate public culture through the discursive articulation of a distinctly Canadian brand of relations of civility. It draws from our laws and constitution, political institutions, popular idioms and widely known cultural and historical facts and artefacts to construct the characteristically recognizable Canadian. In short, the protectionist disposition and tactics of cultural nationalism has spearheaded and sustained a socially constructed field of



knowledge, the prime function of which is to defer the creeping reality that Canadian and American people, to foreign eyes, are indistinguishably North American, or worse yet, just American.

The three ads operate with aesthetic appeal, using Canadian “social knowledge” so that, subconsciously, we acknowledge the proximity of their narratives to our home (and our hearts) thus always already implicating ourselves within the imaginary location of the national experience; they properly appropriate, perpetuate and reaffirm the “discursive economy,” a space within which we appreciate, sympathise and identify with the detailed content, having been exposed and grown accustomed to allegories of national symbols, icons, emblems and rituals of daily practice during time spent living inside these borders, geographically as well as socio-psychologically. The commercials do not openly lecture us on ethical right and wrong, nor do they use their plotlines to preach epideictic. Their collective message is embedded in the attractive style of its artful delivery.

*“[Ernest] Gellner suggested that nations and the national culture spawned within them represented ‘a response to the mobility and anonymity of modern societies. Far from being a movement of retreat from the modern world, nationalism is a solution to some of its most distinctive problems.’ In a world where labour is so mobile, where continuous innovation is the rule, and where local economies have been subsumed within larger production systems, citizens require a means of establishing a shared vocabulary: ‘Communication among people who do not know each other...is a functional necessity.’”*  
*(Friesen 2000, 212)*

## Conclusion

Identity, writes Natan Sharansky (2008), occupies a precarious position in intellectual circles devoted to postmodern, democratic and post-national thought. It is widely understood as the cause of both civic and global conflict and we must relegate it to posterity if we are to transcend its divisiveness and progress as a global community. Sharansky's message: This point of view is dangerous and destructive. Our lack of identity in the West is why few Western citizens would stand up and fight (and die) to defend our freedom and our democratic virtues against much more deeply entrenched identities held in other parts of the world. Our democratic nothingness is the source of our weakness. He asserts that "strong identities are as valuable to a well-functioning society as they are to secure and committed well-functioning individuals" (Sharansky 2008).

Along a similar vein, albeit less self-evident, Rudyard Griffiths (2008) notes, upon his resignation as director of the Dominion Institute, that Canada is at its worst point in the last fifty years in terms of the effort to strengthen a united Canadian identity. He distinguishes Quebec from the rest of Canada as the province where history is more or less widely known and ritualized, where culture is celebrated and defended, and where many victories over time, resulting in a high level of political autonomy, have helped it to ensure the survival of its nation. Griffiths scolds the rest of Canada for failing to demonstrate the same fervour in the interest of its own identity, for allowing both a slow but gradual Americanization of our political and cultural institutions, and the distinctiveness of a single province mostly responsible for Canada's sustained internal fracture. Quebec's inner solidarity has thus not only been an impediment to a united Canada but also, quite paradoxically, a blessing, as its Quiet Revolution and constant

“provocations” have incited Canada to “overhaul its political institutions, including the Constitution, in ways that give expression to the legal, cultural and historical duality of the country”, preserving Canada’s continental political sovereignty (Griffiths 2008).

Sharansky and Griffiths both value national identity as indispensable to the success of human social organization, one for its important contribution to freedom and democracy, the other for the same reason with the addition of the cultural and civic sovereignty guaranteed by a united national identity, respectively. The major setback to building national identity, hinted at by both writers, is the continuous, compounding practice in Western civic democracies to accommodate and encourage identification along pre-national cultural, ethnic, religious and racial lines, a practice that displaces a more coherent vision of the larger country while allowing minority voices to speak louder than the body politic. This lack of coherence and resolve within the nation is why, in Sharansky’s view, the West is weak in comparison with the duty and sacrifice of radical Islamic fundamentalists. That is not to say the fundamentalist community does not have its own internal quarrels and sub-divisions; but on the whole, it is considerably more communal.

To the fundamentalists, the West seems shorn of any clear identity, atomized, with each individual living for the day, in pursuit of purely egoistic, materialistic goals...a society unwilling to make sacrifices for a cause bigger than the self and view this as a glaring weakness that can be exploited.  
(Sharansky 2008)

Likewise in Griffiths understanding, Canada has committed two errors: granting an overdose of authority and self-governing powers to Quebec so it can express and cultivate its own separate collective identity; and allowing the rest of Canada to slip ever

closer into continental cultural indistinguishability with our much more populated southern neighbour.

The question remains: How can these processes of “atomization” be reversed? How can dislocated individuals and groups be assembled to form a union that spans the breadth of what should rightfully be, socially and geographically, recognized as the nation? One of the institutions that is more constructive than not is our system of party politics. Voting Liberal or Conservative may create active and deeply seeded factions within many Western societies, but it creates bonds between many groups endorsing the same party. This allows groups to amalgamate temporarily through external political identifiers during election campaigns.

A more hopeful solution resides in personal, individual investment in the idea of being Canadian. This calls for an adjustment of the boundaries and parameters of what each person accepts as common ground for (not merely tolerance but) seamless and fluid socio-cultural cooperation and its level of pertinence to both persons and groups. The question, then, is How does the nation convince itself that it exists and is worth living for, defending, and if need be, dying for? One must establish a unified set of virtues, a pan-Canadian *ethos*, a commonly acceptable social piety, discursively tightening what falls inside and outside of the moral code. In essence, we must repeatedly affirm and reaffirm what is Canadian and un-Canadian not only in the public sphere, but perhaps more importantly in the private realm of the family as well.

Strategically speaking, what can bring about a reversal of the contemporary record of special interest and the encouragement of pre-national association is the use of constitutive rhetoric. However, this type of speech should not occur in predictable,

conspicuous venues such as public service announcements or political speeches. This message should hide behind other rhetorics, more ubiquitous and credible, seemingly reflecting real life in Canada, while at the same time setting standards and winning approval through its aesthetic form and appeal. One such form is the televised commercial advertisement. Both television and advertising permeate our culture, and from them springs the possibility of building an entire sphere of influence. If the medium and its persuasive content have the power to entrench entire systems of meaning, like that which governs the self-perpetuation of commercialism, into collective consciousness, then its power can equally be made to construct the location where individuals and groups seek to associate over common ground.

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Throughout this study, I have been concerned with how discursive constructions of national character are vital to the survival of the nation as a united community. The discourse supported by the type of ads explored here has stylistically joined two representational factors. The first is based largely on Ignatieff's "low-level reproduction of daily life," mentioned earlier (2007, 38). The second displays people effecting extraordinary change, within this daily setting, by performing simple selfless actions like gift-giving without occasion, personal apologies and phone calls to express gratitude. People, beyond their own personal prioritizations of multiple identities, are likely to be drawn to these narratives, stories that remind us of our real cultural and ethical identity, that which is lived at the human level from when we wake up to when we fall asleep (inclusively presiding over even the times at which scheduled sleep occurs). Some of the ads are sometimes broadcast far too frequently, and there is no conclusive evidence that

there is a widespread embrace of the heartfelt stories they tell. However, in a CTV news story about the oft repeated Olympic ads, one interviewee comments on *Proud Fathers* that “I enjoyed the relationship of the grandfather sneaking in and the son not realizing his dad had actually paid attention all those years. I kind of like that symbolism”

(Canadian Press 2006). Cynics and their numbers aside, the ads’ influence can easily lend itself to both qualitative and quantitative empirical response analyses, a viable trajectory of further research following this study, which has served as an initial examination of form and content.

The ads are crafted to evoke emotional responses from ordinary citizens of all ethnic, religious, racial and cultural backgrounds. The purpose of the discourse does not require that we get up and begin chanting the national anthem; what it does promote, however, is public agreement about a couple of things: firstly, that there exists an ideal conduct between family members; and secondly, that this conduct falls within, and helps to shape and strengthen, what could be a Canadian code of ethics, a kind of cultural, moral passport. This sense of propriety did not materialize out of thin air, for it already enjoys a strong foundation in the form of Canadian civil culture, explored in Chapter 3 through the work of Dorland and Charland (2002), which has been built upon a history of constitutional law and its version of civility translated into shared cultural habits and practices.

As this study draws to a close, how can I accurately go about defining my position? I have assembled some influential ideas on rhetoric and the aesthetic turn that can perhaps help to appropriately encapsulate my broader argument. To begin, the need for common political virtues and a more universal idea of commitment to the polis are

civic republican values. Publicly speaking, the pillar of civic republicanism is the concept of self-government, moral virtue of the citizenry, and a high level of public participation in political matters. With the common good of the people in mind, private interests are discouraged to allow for proper forms of persuasion to fuel the deliberative democratic process (Hariman 1995, 96). Aesthetic articulation, such as eloquent delivery of speeches, is a significant factor in what Robert Hariman (1995) calls the “republican style” of politics.

The aesthetic dimension of persuasion exists, explains Hariman (1998), in the interplay between the “sublime and the mundane”, the “dialectical interactions” of the practice of the everyday routine and instances of spectacular beauty and power that have transformative effects on people’s emotions (3). To experience the sublime is to break from daily constraints to witness a moment of which an emotional, sensory equivalent would be to “come over the hill and [see] a great cityscape...spread out before you, ablaze with electric light” (3). In Hariman’s understanding, rhetoric as a way of knowing must take into account the elements of rhetorical style, hence “social performance, discursive artistry, textual design, individual eloquence” (2). But ethical aptitude as informed by epistemology is now seen to be the partial product of aesthetic delivery, as “the model character arises not just from good choices but also from the ability to rise above the mundane without repudiating that world, which is essential to the continuity of whatever good might be realized at the moment of transformation” (3). Thus Hariman has discovered a relevant philosophical paradox. Whereas aesthetics is seen to limit or deceive one’s ethical judgment, it has likewise the capacity to produce “good”, by using its power to adjust people’s rationality, causing them to, for instance, let down their



guard, partially abandoning their strongly held assumptions or beliefs for the benefit of the greater community. Hariman uses the Odyssey as his object of analogy:

In the patriarchal equations of the Odyssey, for example, aesthetics is a snare of the ethical just as beautiful women are a snare for men of action, and the greater the degree of heteroerotic pleasure the worse it is for one's sense of purpose. But it also is true that the beauty of Circe's palace restored the spirits of the wanderers. Magic turned the men into pigs, but only by enjoying such pleasures as soft clothing and good food could they become fully human. *Beauty can trap, but it also heals*, and every structure is destabilized as it becomes subject to continuing oscillation between sublime and mundane embodiments. (1998, 8, emphasis mine)

The ads examined in this study attempt to create the sublime through images and interactions within the mundane. Each reaches a climactic instance of profound emotion: Jimmy realizing that Lou *had* taken an interest in his hockey games; a young boy looks on in awe as his father unloads a shiny red bike from his truck; an elderly man is speechless to hear of his grandson's whereabouts. How do these situations, which explicitly feature familial relations, connect to or speak for a civic republican *ethos*? In contemporary Western societies, the family unit or the individual are the subjects of central importance. In other words, it is their own private life that people spend the majority of their time and energy developing. In our liberal privatized era, civic republican virtues require a privatized counterpart, values that govern and account for duty, and responsibility and grace in the home. Individually, each ad mounts a solid credible defence of the family; together, the ads project the existence of a community constructed upon shared priorities and values.

Reflecting now on methodology, this study has approached its subject from the angle of rhetorical theory, specifically theory pertaining to aesthetic-constitutive representation, to examine in a unique manner the content of televised commercial

messages. Relative to the field of rhetorical studies, and dominant anti-capitalist, neo-Marxist trends in the field communication studies, I am less inclined to see rhetoric as a critical tool for the deconstructive exposure of discourses of power and hegemony than as the most appropriate mode of interpreting texts, identifying the strategies and classifying the tropes they employ, and using these cases to develop discursive remedies for social problems. In other words, I recognize rhetoric's role in *phronesis*, arguments for the communal good, particularly within the ethical boundaries of a platonic humanism.

Raymie E. McKerrow (1989) contends that rhetorical criticism would be better conceived of as a "critique of domination" and a "critique of freedom", practices of an "emancipatory" nature he terms "critical rhetoric." While my model of rhetorical criticism conforms to some of McKerrow's "eight principles", namely the characterization of "rhetoric as 'influential' as contrasted to 'causal'" (91), more "doxastic" than "epistemic" (103), and as subject to "polysemic rather than monosemic interpretation" (107), I see considerable potential in institutional and commercial public discourse (when interested) to continue to solidify an ethical model of social piety. Rather than suspiciously uncovering its political motives or revealing its propagandistic attempts by some establishment to conserve hegemonic social control, I opt to see it as a necessary means to the end of encouraging the further development of guidelines for democratic life while working to counter competing law systems and "moral neutrality, a refusal to make judgments about what is good and bad behaviour, right and wrong behaviour" (Offman 2008)<sup>12</sup>. Without judging what is right and wrong and unequivocally committing to follow through, we risk the danger of being a valueless society, of losing sight of our

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<sup>12</sup> Offman quotes a speech delivered by British Tory leader David Cameron during a byelection campaign in July, 2008.

ethical substance, and thus losing our ability to properly define who we are and what we stand for as a nation. This kind of discourse allows us to recognize the social peril, the empty relativism, and the cultural nothingness inherent in the belief that in Canada you can be whatever and whoever you want to be. This line of thought positions the nation and its laws and shared customs as equal or inferior to certain religious and cultural associations that are at once offered the chance to assume that their claims, beliefs, rituals and lifestyles must be accommodated, when in conflict with those of the greater secular civic society, and that their demands should be met. To clarify, I do not envision the untenable, deplorable idea of a civic body of a common faith and ethnicity, nor am I suggesting that people give up their respective ethno-cultural heritages in order to become Canadian citizens. I have attempted to demonstrate that the traces of pragmatic nationalist discourse within the ads are offering us a clear image of a pan-Canadian culture at a common, practical, functional level.

Interestingly, Charland (1991) points out that McKerrow's proposition "disembodies" the critic, strips him of his home, offering no place from which to observe and critique (71). Nobody can claim to be positionless or outside politics. One's *doxa* should not decrease the credibility of their interpretations of rhetorical texts to appreciate the *phronetic* strength and content of their arguments.

The interpretive component of *phronesis* seeks to locate the contingent good for a particular community at a particular time and place. Rhetoric and *phronesis* are inherently tied to the local and this forms the basis for a crossing of postmodern and hermeneutic trajectories...rhetoric suggests that discourses that address publics remain dependent on them; that even while traversed by discourses and constituted in relations of power, publics make sense of them in ethical terms. (Charland 1991, 73)

This “dependence” of discourse on the publics to which they are addressed refers to the conception of public moral arguments as capable of producing identification pending audience approval and affirmative collective will. In Burke’s tradition, “the participatory dynamics of rhetorical acts lead to symbolically induced relations; rhetorically constituted meanings significantly shape social will” (Hauser 2002, 229).

The analytical content contained in the previous chapters amounts to barely a fraction of what can be accomplished by reading advertising texts in the following way. The method used involves a conceptual priority reversal of the initial motivation behind the production of the ads. It takes seriously the parts of the message that normally perform the secondary, supportive role, and lifts them into a position in which their prior function as well as the products and company names advertised are rendered virtually insignificant or mute.

Simply stated, this study illustrates how commercials promote more than they normally seem. Once we move beyond the obvious fact that advertisements are designed to sell products or create corporate brand credibility, we can see that they rely upon, reproduce, and rearticulate social knowledge. They are authored and produced by people who grew up seeing, knowing, doing and wanting the same things as all of us. Furthermore, we must expand our critical focus by taking as given, and pushing aside, the fact that ads are commercial and exist to commodify. Only then might we be able to recognize the nature of their secondary operations, the content which displays for us a certain reflection of ourselves, our daily activities, our attitudes towards one another, and our position(s), collective *and* individual, in the broader context of the social space we occupy. Their messages trigger our feelings and motivations, and are thus able to move

us in a certain direction. This content, narrative in form, offers us a way to shape our existence, through virtues, identities, and cultures that enable a life in common. The storyline is the star of the show, and it provides no other service than simply speaking for itself as a media clip, a minute-long audio-visual text, a discursive fragment, a stylistic expression of good character, and in this case an aesthetic appeal to ease the complexity of a nation and its people.

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