

Selling Patriotism / Selling Beer: The Case of the "I AM CANADIAN!" Commercial

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In the spring of 1999, Molson Brewery fired its advertising agency and ended a forty-year relationship. That fall, they then hired the multinational agency Bensimon Byrne and D'Arcy with a view to improving Molson's market position. This agency produced the I AM CANADIAN! beer commercial, the first of a new series of ads promoting Molson's top-selling brand.¹ Molson aired the ad during the NHL playoffs of 2000 and the response was overwhelming: within months, Molson moved up more than a full point in the stock market.

In this paper, I offer a social semiotics analysis of this popular commercial, which was almost immediately dubbed "The Rant," using the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1959), Roman Jakobson (1959), and Roland Barthes (1967, 1973, 1977) as my theoretical framework. The project I report on here grows out of an ongoing study of popular Canadian cultural artifacts and practices.² In the first section, I offer an account of the discourses by which the meanings under consideration are constructed; in the last section, I offer a "spectral" analysis of the message itself, as Barthes (1977) puts it, with a view to explaining the artful organization of the words and images and sounds. My objective is to identify the rhetoric according to which all the signifying systems have been combined to produce the effect many viewers find so striking.

The Beer Industry

Commentators have argued that, since the 1980s, the beer industry across North America has been going through a major sea change (see Sellers 1994). They claim that the consumption of domestic beer has been going down, whereas the consumption of imported and microbrewed beer has been going up. The market has fragmented considerably. These days, consumers can find many more brands in the store than they found ten years ago. Young men—so the argument goes—no longer follow traditional beer drinking patterns. As well, women drink more beer than they did in the past, but their tastes differ from men's tastes. Thus, the major breweries have had to create products that compete with those produced by the little companies and introduce high-priced products that protect their established brands.

Here, I offer an overview of the beer industry, as it operates in the United States and in Canada, with a view to establishing a context for appreciating the task of designing an advertisement like the one under consideration. I take my statistics from two web sites, *Beer Expedition* and *The American Brewing Industry*. In addition, I use three terms in comparing these situations: "major brewery," which means a brewery that produces more than two million barrels annually; "microbrewery," which means a brewery that produces less than fifteen thousand barrels annually; and "brewpub," which means a restaurant-brewery that sells most of its beer on site.

The American Context

Commercial beer making in the United States dates from the late 1600s. The industry keeps expanding, depending upon market needs and social attitudes. Currently, the U.S. beer market ranks eleventh in the world. The per capita beer consumption in the United States has doubled since 1935. A state-by-state tally shows that New Hampshire ranks first; that Nevada, Wisconsin, and Texas rank second, third, and fourth; and that Utah ranks last. Per capita consumption went from 22.1 gallons in 1998 to 22.3 gallons in 1999. In addition to drinking a little more, consumers are also paying a higher price, as breweries have been raising prices or offering fewer rebates than they did in the past.

Understandably, competition is fierce. No less than forty-three major breweries operated during the year 1999, including Anheuser-Busch (the maker of Budweiser), which commanded 49.9 percent of the market; Miller (the maker of Miller Lite), which commanded 21.3 percent of the market; Coors (the maker of Coors Light), which commanded 11.0 percent of the market; and Pabst (the maker of Schlitz), which commanded 7.1 percent of the market. In addition, 535 microbreweries and 1303 brewpubs operated during this period. While many segments of the industry reported disappointing results for 1999, the craft brew segment recorded a 7-percent increase in the number of barrels shipped.

The major breweries employ several strategies to maintain their market share. One of these is to vary the styles of beer they produce, such as light and "ice" beers, in response to shifting trends. Drinkers in the 21-27 age group, together with drinkers in the health-conscious group, command the light-beer market. During the early 1970s, breweries developed "light" and non-alcoholic beer in response to the increasing concern about alcohol and calories—they tried to address consumers who had

health problems or moral objections (Berger 1988). Premium light beers now make up about 29.9 percent of the market. Budweiser, Bud Light, Miller Lite, and Coors Light make up the top four best-selling brands. Latterly, the major beer producers have concentrated on marketing "ice" beers, which capture almost 6 percent of industry sales, more than all the imports combined. Two years ago Anheuser-Busch introduced Catalina Blonde, a low-calorie, low-alcohol beer, hoping to attract women drinkers. Just recently, Anheuser-Busch introduced Tequila, a beer with lime and tequila flavors, and Coors has been promoting its Zima brand to some effect.

The evidence suggests that, for a variety of reasons, young, affluent drinkers in the 25-34 age group are turning to the designer-brew brands that microbreweries and brewpubs now offer. These college-educated drinkers consume more than the average drinker; they enjoy the likes of Laughing Skull, Flat Tire, Wild Goose, and Honkers Ale, as well as numerous other imaginatively named beers, with a meal.

Another strategy of the major breweries is to modify their marketing strategies—for example, discounting famous-name beers on an ongoing basis, as well as launching contests and packaging prizes with their products and jockeying for advantageous product placement in shops. In addition, some employ momentum marketing; that is, instead of mounting one or two full-scale campaigns each year, which requires costly TV commercials and retail displays, a brewery will conduct half a dozen simple tests.

According to reports, the major breweries spent (in 1997) about US \$700 million in an effort to maintain their share of a market worth about US \$60 billion. American beers tend to be pale and watery compared to European beers (research shows that American customers prefer pale lager) (see Rangel 2000; Goldammer 2001). However, the more watery the beer the more difficult it is to maintain a unique, identifiable flavor. American beers tend to taste the same. Consequently, marketing strategies typically involve image marketing; that is, selling beers in terms of brand name has become more important than promoting the distinctive qualities of the beers per se. Major breweries try to appeal to young consumers with "offbeat" ad campaigns. To their credit, the ad companies have produced many creative and entertaining campaigns (Knepper 2001).

The Canadian Context

The beer industry in Canada has also fragmented. Altogether, ten major breweries, 113 microbreweries, and 90 brewpubs operated in Canada

during 1999. Since the 1980s, the industry has included many small breweries (microbreweries and brewpubs) that serve local or regional markets. For the sake of this discussion, I focus on two major companies (see below), which have dominated the market: Labatt Breweries (which operates eight plants) and Molson Breweries (which operates seven plants).

Reports suggest that per capita consumption of domestic beer in Canada has fallen 15 percent over the past ten years (see Theobald 1999; Wilson-Smith 1999). During the early 1990s, Canadians on average drank 95 litres (20.9 gallons) of beer annually. By 1998, this rate of consumption had dropped to 83 litres (18.3 gallons) annually. Brewery executives have been concerned, considering that this rate of consumption compared unfavorably with that of the Americans or that of the Czechs, the heaviest beer drinkers, who on average consume 160 litres (35.2 gallons) annually (Theobald 1999).

As well, the popularity of wine, imported beer, and microbrewed beer has increased during this period. Statistics Canada reports that, during the year 1998-99, the sale of imported beer went up 9.7 percent and the sale of wine went up 4.9 percent (Elliott 2000). Experts like John Sleeman, founder of Sleeman Breweries Ltd. in Guelph, Ontario, describe the matter in these terms: big breweries sell image—small breweries sell taste (quoted in Wilson-Smith 1999).

Today, Labatt and Molson each controls 45 percent of the market, and each spends more than CDN \$200 million a year to maintain its share of the market, which during the period 1998-99 was worth about CDN \$12.4 billion (Wilson-Smith 1999; Elliott 2000). They too face the challenge of producing products that appeal to the younger drinker, not to mention protecting their big-name brands. Understandably, beer marketers look for some kind of edge, "given that one beer tastes pretty much like another beer" (industry analyst Michael Palmer, quoted in Gudoni 1998). Traditionally, these breweries (like breweries around the world) have based their advertising campaigns on the beer-sports connection, in this case trying to make people believe that hockey and beer are two defining elements of the Canadian identity (see Dryden and MacGregor 1989; Wilson-Smith 1999). Many Canadians regard the start of the NHL playoffs as the start of the beer-drinking season.

Labatt Breweries

Labatt was established in London, Ontario, in 1847, and since 1995 it has been part of Interbrew SA (Belgium), which markets itself as the

world's local brewer. Interbrew has become one of the largest groups in the world, marketing more than 120 products in more than eighty countries. Labatt markets a wide variety of domestic brands, including John Labatt Classic, Labatt Blue, Labatt Extra Dry, Labatt 50, Labatt Genuine Draft, Labatt Ice, Labatt Lite, Labatt Select, Labatt Wildcat, not to mention Boomerang, Kokanee Gold, Kokanee Light, and Kokanee Mountain Lager, and a variety of import brands, such as Budweiser, Bud Light, Carlsberg, Carlsberg Light, and Carlsberg Red. Labatt markets Stella Artois (brewed in Belgium) and Sol (brewed in Mexico) with the hope that they will improve its share of the import market.

Thanks to able management and clever marketing, Labatt Blue moved ahead of Molson Canadian during the 1990s. In the United States, Labatt Blue has overtaken Molson Ice as the top selling Canadian Beer (Brent 2000). Labatt's "Out of the Blue" radio and television campaign generated rave reviews (Wilson-Smith 1999). Moreover, in 1999, Labatt secured—for the first time in forty years—the exclusive rights to sponsor the Hockey Night in Canada playoff telecasts, thereby gaining an edge on its rival Molson (Wilson-Smith 1999).

Molson Breweries

Molson was founded in Montreal in 1786; a diversified Canadian public business with interests around the world, Molson dominated the market until the early 1980s, when its top-seller Molson Export started losing ground (Heinzl 2000f). Molson markets a wide variety of domestic brands, including Molson Canadian, Molson Dry, Molson Export, Molson Golden, and Molson Ice, not to mention Black Label, Black Ice, Black Horse, Carling, Lethbridge Pilsner, Rickard's Red, and Tornado, and a variety of import brands, such as Coors Dry and Coors Light, Foster's, Iron Horse, Spring Bock, Miller, and Milwaukee's Best. Interestingly, Molson markets the best-selling imported beers: Heineken (brewed in Holland) and Corona (brewed in Mexico).

For three decades—until the late 1990s—Molson focused on a number of non-brewing projects, hoping to become a diversified holding company (Wilson-Smith 1999). In an effort to finance its expansion into such ventures as Beaver Lumber Co., Ltd., a home-building supply firm, Molson sold off shares in its core brewing company. Latterly, however, the firm has reorganized itself, so that it could concentrate on producing beer—and regain its market shares (Wilson-Smith 1999):

- In 1998, Molson engineered the buy-back of the shares it had sold, and since that time has prided itself on being wholly Canadian-owned (Gudoni 1998).
- As indicated here at the outset, in May 1999, Molson fired its ad agency, MacLaren McCann Canada Inc., ending a relationship that went back forty years (Livingston 2000). In September 1999, Molson hired Bensimon Byrne and D'Arcy, the multinational agency (Toronto and St. Louis) that looks after the advertising for such organizations as Proctor and Gamble and Rogers Communications, to turn its fortunes around (according to reports, the account was worth CDN \$10-12 million annually). This firm became the lead agency for all Molson electronic and print advertising. Dan O'Neill, President, told reporters (in September) that Molson's profits were as much as CDN \$100 million below Labatt's on the same sales. (Brent 1999)
- That fall, Molson closed its Barrie, Ontario, brewery, laying off 18 percent of its salaried work force, about two hundred white-collar employees, a response to a nine-year slide in their share of the market. (Brent 2000)
- In the United States, Molson has been negotiating with its American distributor, Coors, with a view to improving its sales there. Molson sends about 20 percent of its production to the U.S.
- On 1 February 2001, Molson sold 80.1 percent of the Montreal Canadiens and 100 percent of Molson Centre, so that it could concentrate on its core brewing business, thereby ending a relationship dating from 1964.

On this last point, it should be noted that the Montreal Canadiens are an important Canadian institution. The most famous hockey franchise in the world, the Canadiens joined the National Hockey League (NHL) in 1917 and won five Stanley Cups (in a row) during the period 1955-60 and four more during the period 1975-79. The Canadiens last won a Stanley Cup during the 1992-93 season. The team sank to last place in their division during the 1997-98 season and have missed the playoffs for three straight seasons. Reports suggest that the team has been losing CDN \$10-12 million annually (Naylor and Peritz 2001; Strachan 2001).

Labatt and Molson have traded on the hockey-beer connection for decades. Labatt shifted the emphasis from professional hockey to recreational (or street) hockey in 1998, when it launched its popular "Out of the Blue" campaign at the Winter Olympics in Nagano, Japan. Shocked by Canada's poor showing at the competition—Team Canada ranked fourth—sports

pundits predicted that Canada would never again dominate the game. Labatt executives felt that young people across Canada would nevertheless retain their enthusiasm for road hockey. In 1994, Molson launched the first I AM CANADIAN! campaign, which featured the phrase (as its tag-line): "Here's where we get Canadian" (Bryant 2000; Derdeyn 2000). In 1999, when it became a truly Canadian-owned brewery, Molson commissioned the ad under consideration, with a view to raising its profile.

The New I AM CANADIAN! Commercial

Beer marketers always look for an edge, and Bensimon Byrne and D'Arcy found their edge in adding the maple leaf to the beer-hockey connection. Flag waving in Canada has been regarded as the edge of last resort (Gudoni 1998). However, Molson pushed ahead with the I AM CANADIAN! project, which trades on the firm's status as the largest Canadian-owned brewery. Glen Hunt (creative director for the agency) wrote the spot, targeting young men 18-24 years of age, and Kevin Donovan, an American, directed the production (Gillespie 2000).

During the period 1997-2000, Hunt had worked for the Ammirati Puris Lintas agency in New York, which produced the popular Labatt Blue road-hockey ads (Gillespie 2000). The story goes that the ad grew out of his experiences in New York, where he had encountered every stereotype of Canadians possible. The advertisement also drew on a series of interviews with beer drinkers. For six months the agency fine-tuned the lines and the images, testing the sixty-second ad with focus groups—that is, electronically monitoring individual responses (Derdeyn 2000).

Molson aired the sixty-second version of the ad for the first time on 17 March 2000, during the Oscar celebrations, just after the dance routine for "Blame Canada" from the *South Park* (2000) movie. At a press conference, Jack Bensimon, president of the agency, told reporters: "We understand how you feel as a Canadian right now and we know that you want to tell the world about it" (quoted in Livingston 2000). Molson aired the fifteen-second version ten days later during commercial breaks at selected Cineplex Odeon cinemas and during prime-time television broadcasting, especially during televised NHL playoff games. In addition, Molson sponsored live performances in Toronto and Ottawa during the NHL playoff games, provoking standing ovations (Livingston 2000): one should remember that Molson's rival, Labatt, now has exclusive sponsorship of the Hockey Night in Canada telecasts. Molson also sponsored live

performances of the ad in Vancouver and in Ottawa on Canada Day, 1 July 2000. Adam Bryant (2000), writing for *Newsweek*, declared that "The Rant" had become "the unofficial anthem north of the border."

As already mentioned, the ad was a great success, enabling Molson to move up 1.6 points in the stock market in a period of six weeks (see Heinzl 2000b). Brett Marchand, Vice-President of Marketing for Molson Canadian, told reporters that the brand Molson Canadian gained almost two points in market share—climbing to about 14 percent, each point being worth CDN \$15-20 million in annual profit (quoted in Bryant 2000). Bryant reported that, as another measure of the ad's success, for ten days it ranked second overall on the top-ten popular spots at AdCritic.com, the site where people could view "The Rant" and other ads (he observed that in May 2000 the site got up to six hundred thousand hits per day). Altogether, the spot generated a remarkable response among young Canadians, who for example put on "ritualized performances" of the ad in a variety of public venues.

Findings

In analyzing the ad, I start with the publicity message itself, observing that the signification is intentional. The signs are frank and emphatic, "full of meaning" in Barthes's (1977) terms, formed with the view to providing the viewer with optimum reading. The I AM CANADIAN! advertisement can be described as follows: An unassuming young man in his twenties, wearing a plaid flannel shirt and jeans, walks onto a stage and speaks into a microphone; at first, this Everyman addresses the audience in a conversational voice, explaining away the misconceptions Americans have about Canadians; a slide show (behind him) illustrates his talk; gradually, his voice increases in volume and his gestures become more emphatic and he concludes this highly-charged address—with arms raised in triumph—shouting: CANADA IS THE SECOND LARGEST LANDMASS, THE FIRST NATION OF HOCKEY, AND THE BEST PART OF NORTH AMERICA! MY NAME IS JOE, AND I AM CANADIAN! The Molson tag-line, featuring the last words, together with an image of beer (we notice bubbles climbing to the top of a glass), concludes the message.

This commercial yields three separate messages: first, a linguistic message; second, a denoted or non-coded iconic message; and, third, a connoted or coded iconic message. I begin with the oppositions that struc-

ture the message. Nothing means anything in and of itself; everything in fact gains meaning in terms of some kind of relationship (obvious or implied) it is embedded in. For example, "work" gains meaning only in terms of "play," and "love" gains meaning only in terms of "hate." Saussure wrote (1959) that "concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but by their relations with the other terms in the system." He added that "in language there are only differences." In the same vein, Jakobson (1956) observed that the binary opposition is fundamental to the operations of the human mind and therefore basic to the production of meaning. Thus, meaning arises from relationships, and from a semiological perspective the most important kind of relationship is that of opposition. As interpreters of signs, we employ the principle of binary oppositions, identifying the paradigmatic structure or the latent meaning of the text. A number of important oppositions (or discourses) of the Canadian/American variety structure the I AM CANADIAN! commercial, including: Prime Minister/President; peacekeeping/policing; and diversity/assimilation.

Before analyzing this publicity message in more detail, I will discuss these dichotomies briefly, taking my cue from Jakobson (1977), who wrote that, in language, we have differences only. I will then discuss the music in the ad, which helps viewers process the words and the images. In the analysis that follows, I will show that the tone of the message renders the meanings ambiguous, at once pro-Canadian and anti-American.

To begin with, one of the organizing principles of English Canadian nationalism has always been anti-Americanism. As analysts (for example, Lipset 1965) point out, the United States is the result of successful revolution and a prolonged war of independence organized around the ideology embodied in the Declaration of Independence, which proclaimed the principles of egalitarian and universalistic social relations. By contrast, Canada is the result of an ongoing counterrevolution and what some historians have called an evolution from colony to nation (Lower 1961). Whereas Americans have developed a highly charged and openly expressed nationalism, often called the American civic religion, Canadians have a more complicated, less easily expressed sense of nation (Lipset 1965). Canada is a product of a counterrevolution, whereas the United States is the product of a successful revolution; these events in fact structured the two New World nations, thereby setting the character of their institutions. Thus, the term "Prime Minister," which signifies the chief executive officer of a parliamentary style of government, and the term

"President," which signifies the chief executive officer of a republican style of government, constitute condensed references to this fundamental difference and persistent source of mistrust.

Arguably, English-speaking Canada and the United States share the same liberal values, but in Canada they are held much more tentatively. For example, S.M. Lipset (1965) points out that there is less emphasis in Canada on equality than there is in the United States and that there is a greater acceptance of hierarchical, paternalistic patterns in Canada than there is in the United States, thanks in part to Canada's ties to the United Kingdom. As well, Lipset argues, there is a greater emphasis on achievement and self-orientation in the United States, while in Canada there is a reluctance to be overoptimistic, assertive, or experimentally inclined in economic affairs. Early efforts (in the 1930s) to determine Canadian self-perceptions indicated that Canadians of that period regarded themselves as "quieter, slower in tempo, and saner in quality" than Americans, while seeing Americans as loud, shrewd, less honest, and more anxious to get rich quickly.³

During the late 1950s and the early 1960s, to cite J.L. Granatstein, Canadians looked to peacekeeping as the perfect middle-sized role for a middle-sized nation. During this period, Canadian foreign policy was tied to American foreign policy by virtue of the fact that Canada was a member of the North American Air Defence Command (NORAD) and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), but increasingly peacekeeping fostered a sense of self-importance, served as a way to assert independence from the United States—to promote a more Canadian foreign policy. The image of the peacekeeper dates from 1956, when Lester B. Pearson, one of Canada's most respected international statesmen, established the United Nations Emergency Task Force (UNEF) to maintain peace in the Middle East. For this achievement, Pearson was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1957. He became leader of the Liberal party in 1958 and Prime Minister in 1963. Gradually, peacekeeping became an important part of Canada's world image. The Americans had a very different world image, thanks to their huge military might and their worldwide network of military bases. Canadians were glad to be seen as middlemen, honest brokers, helpful fixers in a world where these qualities were hard to come by. In this way, peacekeeping seemed to make Canadians different—and somehow better. Over the years, however, this image has faded.

In the diversity/assimilation opposition, we see another feature that supposedly distinguishes American society from Canadian society—at the

level of social psychology and social structure. Lipset (1965) explains the matter in these terms: the emphasis on achievement and self-orientation in the United States is strongly linked to universalism—that is, the proclaimed need to treat everyone according to the same standard. This universal objective underlies the concept of the “melting pot,” which holds that no one should be disqualified from full participation in social and cultural life on the grounds of ethnic or social origin. By contrast, Canadians tend (since World War Two and particularly since the institution of multiculturalism in 1971) to think of their society as a “mosaic,” a concept that enunciates in theory the “right to sustained collective individuality.” Canadians (at least in theory) emphasize the contributions that diverse ethnic and linguistic groups bring to Canadian life in the form of cultural heritage.⁴

Tradition has it that hockey (Canada’s unofficial national game) likewise distinguishes American culture from Canadian culture. Long ago, people in northern England played stick and ball games on ice; cultural historians tell us that British soldiers brought these games to Canada early in the nineteenth century. Apparently, British troops garrisoned at Halifax and Kingston played variations of these games (Dryden and MacGregor 1989). Ice hockey as we know it today was first played indoors in Montreal in 1875. Hockey changed radically over the years, thanks in large part to the professionalization of the game. The first overtly professional league was formed in 1903, with teams from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania; Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario; and Houghton, Calumet, and Sault Ste. Marie, Michigan. Most of the players on these teams were Canadian. The National Hockey Association (NHA) was formed in 1909 and reorganized as the National Hockey League (NHL) in 1917 (Gruneau and Whitson 1993). The Canadian media constructed the NHL as a uniquely Canadian institution (reporters championed the Montreal Canadiens and the Toronto Maple Leafs), even though by the 1920s the league was based in many American cities (Whitson 1997). Still, most of the players were Canadian. In 1934, the CBC started broadcasting “Hockey Night in Canada” on the radio, reaching its first national audience, and in 1952 the CBC started broadcasting “Hockey Night in Canada” on television, thereby reinforcing the belief that hockey is a central part of the country’s identity.⁵ Ironically, this belief has persisted, despite the commercialization—what many have seen as Americanization—of the NHL and despite the fact that gradually Soviet Russia, Sweden, Finland, and Czechoslovakia iced teams that have dominated international championships. Still a major preoc-

cupation of a great many young men across the country, hockey continues to be intimately woven into Canadians' self-image and mythology.

To return to the ad itself: What drives the message home as it were is the music, and I end this preamble about the discourses that shape the I AM CANADIAN! commercial with a few words about Edward Elgar's military march called "The Land of Hope and Glory," which tells viewers how to process the words and the images. During the years 1900-30, Elgar composed five military marches, which he called "Pomp and Circumstance Marches," Nos. 1-5 (op. 39). Actually, he composed this rousing, "patriotic" melody (No. 1) in 1901 to celebrate the coronation of Edward VII. The mood of this piece—note the confidence and the swagger—matched the occasion perfectly (Brown 2000). Appropriately, Elgar's music, and "The Land of Hope and Glory" in particular, has come to epitomize the Edwardian period, an era of great prosperity and much glitter, of social stability and spacious ease, the halcyon days before the storm as it were. The melody evokes an emotional, patriotic response.

Here, then, in a step-by-step analysis, I try to show how a number of signifying systems—based on the dichotomies discussed above—come together and intersect:

The Linguistic Message

The first message is made up of all the words uttered and displayed in the commercial (the label and the caption), denotations and connotations, which are inserted into this message. The code from which the denoted message has been taken is that of (English) Canadian lore, in terms of culture, geography, politics, and sports. This code includes such statements as "I have a Prime Minister," "I believe in peacekeeping, not policing, diversity not assimilation," "a beaver is a noble animal," "a chesterfield is a couch," "a toque is a hat," and "Canada is the second largest landmass, the first nation of hockey."

The code from which the connoted message is taken is that of a distinctly English-Canadian nationalism; that is, Canadians have a long-standing tendency to define themselves as non-Americans and a long-standing sense of grievance vis-à-vis Americans due to the tendency of the latter to ignore them.

The music, "The Land of Hope and Glory," underscores this meaning. The sign (the label) I AM CANADIAN! yields by its assonance another signified—that is, "Canadianicity." The connotation here is that Canadians subscribe to the propositions uttered by the speaker, an ordi-

nary Canadian. This idea is reinforced by the red and white colors that dominate the Molson tag-line, the colors of the Canadian flag.

The Denoted Message

The literal message is the first (the un-coded) iconographic message. The signifiers are constituted by the real objects in the scene (they have been filmed), including the speaker, the setting (a conventional stage), the slides featuring images of things "Canadian," the music, and the image of the beer in question. This message yields a series of discontinuous signs. The order of these signs (outlined below) is not important (they are not linear).

The signifiers of the first sign (the speaker, the slides, and the setting) suggest the idea of a public address: a handsome young man talks to an (unseen) audience about such matters as culture, geography, politics, and sports.

The signifiers of the second sign (the speaker, the slides, the setting, the music, and the flag) suggest the idea of a lecture on Canadian identity or Canadian nationalism. Viewers notice that the speaker shows slides to illustrate his discussion. They notice images of the Canadian Houses of Parliament, the beaver, and Paul Henderson, in the end-zone of the Luzhniki arena, Moscow, scoring the goal that ultimately gave Team Canada the victory in the 1972 Canada vs. USSR international hockey series.

The signifiers of the third sign (the speaker, the images, the setting, the music, and the tag-line at the end) suggest the idea of a beer commercial; that is, the speaker endorses a particular brand of beer—Molson Canadian.

The Connoted Message

This symbolic message is the second (the coded) iconographic message: The signifiers are constituted by the real objects in the scene, and the linguistic message serves as the code by which we are supposed to read the text.

In an orchestrated way, then, the sender (Molson) conveys rather assertively a message about nationalism, one that is not usually attributed to Canadians. This speaker (he represents a new generation of Canadians) is prepared to tell the world about his country. At once, he challenges American hegemony and subverts the traditional image of the polite, deferential Canadian. Arguably, the connotative message works at a number of levels:

The first message suggests that watching hockey and drinking beer is as Canadian as the maple leaf. One is invited to think of that very old tradition of men (young and old) listening to and watching Hockey Night in Canada on CBC and sharing a case of beer. Moreover, one is invited to remember that, during the period 1964-2001, Molson Breweries sponsored Canada's most celebrated hockey franchise, the Montreal Canadiens.

The second message suggests that young Canadians—young men especially—drink Molson Canadian.

The third message suggests that drinking Molson Canadian is a patriotic act, one that draws on and reinforces Canadians' resistance to being consumed—eaten and drunk up—by the American colossus and offers a vehicle for “drinking in” Canadian identity.

The Rhetoric of the Message

The objective of my analysis is to understand the overall structure of the commercial, the interrelationship of the three messages. As Barthes (1967, 1977) puts it, one must produce not a naive analysis but a structural description of the messages, one which grasps the principle tying all the elements together.

Again, the signs of the third message—the symbolic (cultural or connoted) message—are discontinuous. Even when signifiers seem to extend over the whole message—for example, the enormous flag—they nonetheless function as signs—one separated from the other. One deals with a normal everyday system the signs of which are drawn from a cultural code, even if they seem to be linked analogically. The system is “original” to the extent that different individuals read the same lexical unit (word or image or sound) differently. Here, I summarize my analysis, again following the model Barthes (1977) developed:

- Three connotative signs make up the I AM CANADIAN! commercial. One can identify others, such as the stage and the audience, which can signify Americans (at the outset) and Canadians (at the end). The variations in reading depend upon different kinds of knowledge—national, cultural, aesthetic, and so on—and this knowledge can be classified. A portion of the symbolic plane (of language) corresponds to a body of practices and techniques. The message (in its connotation) is thus constituted by an architecture of signs drawn from a variety of lexicons (of idiolects), including theatre (drama) and sports (competition), together with the need for refreshments (beer) at those venues.

- The language (or the rhetoric) of the image here is not merely the totality of the utterances emitted, but is also the totality of the utterances received. It can be argued that, from Saussure's (1959) perspective, speech (a series of utterances) is what is emitted, drawn from the language system—and in turn what constitutes it. Viewers may or may not bring an anti-American feeling to the message.
- Analyzing the connotation can be difficult: no particular analytical language corresponds to the particularity of its signifieds—how are the signifieds of connotation to be named? Some can be defined by the term “Canadianicity.” Others can be designated by words taken from ordinary language, such as patriotism. The metalanguage, which has to take charge of them at the moment of analysis, is not specialized. This is problematic, because (for example) denoted “patriotism” never expresses the essence of connoted “patriotism.”
- The signifiers of connotation (the beaver, hockey, i.e., Team Canada, and the flag especially) correspond to the general ideology. The denoted word never refers to an essence because it is always caught up in a continuous syntagm or series of verbal utterances, which provides a context for interpreting the discourse. The signifiers mentioned above can thus be called connotators, and the set of connotators a rhetoric, a rhetoric thus appearing as the signifying aspect of the ideology: It's cool to be patriotic. The viewer will recognize a second ideology (embedded in the first): Everything is for sale, even patriotism.
- The principle by which the system of connotators is organized can be described as a “rhetoric,” rhetoric thus appearing as the signifying aspect of ideology. Rhetorics vary in terms of their substance: here an articulated sound and there a vivid image. The rhetoric of the message—that is, the classification of its connotators—can only be established on the basis of a considerable inventory. Here, the beaver, hockey, and the flag signify “Canadianicity” by metonymy. It could be argued that, among the paradigmatic elements, metonymy furnishes the message with the greatest number of its connotators and that, among the syntagmatic elements, asyndeton (a kind of ellipsis) furnishes the message with the greatest number of its connotators.
- The denoted message or syntagm reads: I AM CANADIAN!—as a statement of nationalism.

- The connoted message or syntagm reads: I AM [A] CANADIAN [AND I DRINK BEER] or by extension CANADIANS DRINK MOLSON CANADIAN.
- Finally, one can say that, in terms of the total system of the message, the structural functions are polarized: on the one hand, there is a kind of paradigmatic condensation at the level of connotators, which are strong signs, "reified" as it were; on the other, there is a syntagmatic "flow" at the level of the denotation (the "iconic" discourse naturalizes the signs). The message here is at once PRO-CANADIAN and ANTI-AMERICAN. The music driving the message, "The Land of Hope and Glory," reinforces this irony. The rousing (patriotic) melody celebrates the United Kingdom at the height of its imperial power (a time when Canada was virtually a colony in that empire); it also celebrates the Molson Canadian advertisement as a vehicle for conveying a pent-up patriotism.

Conclusion

One can decode the I AM CANADIAN! commercial—it has been described (Derdeyn 2000) as a Heritage Moment for the younger generation—in a number of ways. One can read the text as a significant artistic achievement, the winner of two major awards. First, it was voted the number two commercial on the U.S. AdCritic Website—www.adcritic.com. Second, the Molson ad won (June 2000) the bronze lion for the best TV ad in the alcoholic beverage category at the Cannes International Advertising Festival, regarded by some as the Olympics of advertising. This award represents a great triumph, considering that a total of thirty-three TV ads in this category (from 247 countries) were selected. The top award (the Gold Lion) went to Anheuser-Busch's "Whassup" campaign for Budweiser. This campaign consists of a series of male-bonding ads, featuring friends voicing the guttural greeting—Whassup—now a cultural phrase, particularly among the targeted audience (Brent 2000; Heinzl 2000d).

As well, we can read the text as a patriotic statement, one that touches a nerve of anti-American feeling many Canadians generally keep in check. Judging by the music, patriotism need not be a solemn affair. As analysts point out, for at least two centuries Canadians have defined themselves and their country in terms of this anti-American feeling.

Canadians who feel frustrated by living in the shadow of the United States and angered by the general misconceptions Americans have about their country have found in this ad a vehicle for expressing their injured nationalism (Heinzl 2000b; 2000g).

Ironically, in January of 2001, Jeff Douglas, the Nova Scotia native who played Joe in the I AM CANADIAN! commercial, moved to Los Angeles in order to find work in Hollywood, thereby raising—at least for some—profound questions about Canadian national identity. Many commentators pointed out that this turn of events proves once again that the brain drain is robbing the country of its most talented people. Typically, we let the young man star in a much-admired beer commercial with patriotic implications—and we still can't keep him in Canada. As a result, Jeff has joined the ranks of such celebrated Canadians as William Shatner, Dan Akroyd, Peter Jennings, Michael J. Fox, and Jim Carey. Heather Sokoloff (2001) expressed the views of many when she wrote: "Joe" really became a Canadian when he moved to the United States.

Epilogue

The latest phase of the I AM CANADIAN! campaign (launched in June 2001) draws on the symbolic resources of history and music to exploit the I-am-proud-to-be-Canadian theme, with the hope that viewers will hum the catchy tune. The ad, dubbed "Anthem," features (at the start) an image of Donald Smith, the nineteenth-century financier, hammering home the last spike on the Canadian Pacific Railway. The clang of sledgehammers evokes a musical beat, and soon the laborers and the businessman sing: "I know this place is where I am / No other place is better than / No matter where I go I am / Proud to be CA-NA-DA-DI-AN." Then, it features images of soldiers returning home, loggers rolling logs, sports heroes, and ordinary Canadians. Shooting extended over seven days and involved eleven locations and 255 actors: William Shatner and Jeff Douglas play cameo roles. Viewers may or may not agree with industry analysts (see Heinzl 2001) who suggest that Molson is making a mistake by continually playing the patriotic card.

NOTES

I presented a version of this paper at the Southwest/Texas Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association (PCA/ACA) annual conference, which was held

at the Sheraton Hotel, Albuquerque, NM, 7-10 March 2001. Many friends and colleagues, including reviewers for this journal, have helped me enormously by commenting on drafts. It would be impractical to name all of these people, and some may prefer to remain anonymous, but I am especially grateful to John Heinzl, Todd M. Kuipers, and Tamara P. Seiler. Of course, I assume full responsibility for not accepting all of the good advice I have received.

1. Advertising is the most visible, but by no means the largest, part of a firm's marketing efforts. An ad can be regarded as a kind of informational or persuasive message about a product or a service. Schudson (1986) has argued that television advertisements may be powerful precisely because people pay them so little heed; that is, they dismiss ads as just so much propaganda. Thus, the term "advertising" can be used in three ways: first, as an institution that plays a key role in the marketing of consumer goods; second, as an industry that manufactures cultural products called advertisements or commercials, informing people about new goods and services; and, third, as an omnipresent system of symbols. However, the popularity of AdCritic.com, operated by Peter Beckman (Heinzl 2000a; 2000g), suggests that a great many people take ads seriously—as art or entertainment.

2. Over the past few years, my wife/colleague and I have examined a variety of popular Canadian cultural artifacts and practices—such as representations of the cowboy—trying to discover, for example, how some readings of these artifacts support the dominant ideology, whereas others oppose it. See Seiler and Seiler (1998; 2001).

3. A number of analysts have developed similar arguments about Canada and the United States, albeit from different perspectives, including Frye (1971), Kilbourn (1988), Smith (1994), and Taras (2000). Some have challenged Lipset's generalizations, most notably Nevitte (1996).

4. Tamara P. Seiler (2000) has argued that this distinction is far more complex than is popularly assumed. See also Reitz and Breton (1994), whose empirical studies show that Americans are in many ways more accepting of diversity than Canadians.

5. Millions of people across Canada play hockey in one form or another, millions more follow the game passionately, and millions try to ignore the game. Part sport, part recreation, part entertainment, part social event, part business, and part folklore, hockey suffuses everyday life in Canada. Hockey season defines the rhythm of life for a great many Canadians, not only in terms of NHL games and the Stanley Cup playoffs, but also in terms of the practices and the contests between community teams. One event has made time stand still for Canadians: the last game in the Canada-USSR international hockey series, which was held in Moscow on 28 September 1972—that is, the moment when with thirty-four seconds left to play Paul Henderson scored the goal giving Canada the victory (Ludwig 1972; Dryden and MacGregor 1989; Morrison 1989). In hockey one sees a key element in the construction of Canadian masculinity (Gruneau and Whitson 1993; Whitson 1993; Earle 1995). It seems clear (if difficult to prove) that the privileged place of hockey in Canadian life vis-à-vis that of other sports such as baseball or football—which are also popular, but are not regarded as the national game—is based on some deep affinity. Ken Dryden and Roy MacGregor (1989) suggest that hockey is at the spiritual heart of the

country: "Somewhere in our souls is a spiritual Canada. Most probably, its bedrock is snow and ice, winter and the land. And if we were to penetrate it a little deeper, chances are we would find a game" (13). Like many other analysts before them—historian W.L. Morton (1972) and writer and critic Margaret Atwood (1972), for example—Dryden and MacGregor suggest that Canada's northern character is definitive of its national identity; however, they go even further in claiming that hockey—which demands skill, effort, endurance, and commitment—is the activity that symbolizes the essence of Canadian experience. If this is so, perhaps what the game captures is the way in Canada geography, economics, and political history combined to produce a way of life (both real and imagined) defined by a fragile, staple-based economy dominated from afar. One thinks of the picture Anthony Rasporich (1997) paints of northern Ontario, with its frontier, working-class culture, defined by lives of physical risk and masculine bravado (398); one thinks too of Rasporich's assertion that, from the early 1900s, for "generations of Ontarians," this northland "was the seasonal wellspring of their Canadian identity, the inspiration of the Group of Seven, one of masculine self-affirmation, and the natural, frontier source of (an emerging) Canadian self-awareness and cultural identity" (395-96). When they reflect on the matter, Canadians are likely to speak of hockey as a celebration of speed, skill, and toughness in a bleak and often inhospitable environment (Dryden and MacGregor 1989; Earle 1995; Whitson 1997).

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