

MA MAJOR RESEARCH PAPER

Rooting For the Home Team:

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation and Canada's National Sports Culture

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Abstract

As a cultural institution, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) is meant to connect Canadian citizens from coast-to-coast in ways that would otherwise be impossible. With regards to the collective memory of Canadians, it is thus imperative to address the media narrative that has undoubtedly assisted in the construction of a 'national psyche' in Canada. Following interpretive logics of inquiry, this intrinsic case study will explore the creation of a national sports culture in Canada, and how it has manifested through the CBC's broadcast television operation. In particular, the primary objective is to analyze the position of the CBC in the cultural production of hockey in Canada. By exploring the CBC's television program *Hockey Night in Canada* this paper strives to better understand how hockey has emerged as a social phenomenon, and how identity-building organizations such as the national broadcaster have institutionalized hockey lore and tradition in Canadian culture. Through Canada's obsession with the sport of hockey it may be possible to better understand the dynamics at play in the nation's cultural, socio-political and economic realms.

Keywords

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC), Hockey, Identity Politics, Broadcast Television, Media Spectacle

Introduction

“In a land so inescapably and inhospitably cold, hockey is the chance of life, and an affirmation that despite the deathly chill of winter, we are alive.” - Stephen Leacock

In April of 2004, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) aired a new television series entitled *The Greatest Canadian*. The television program encouraged Canadian viewers to vote online, by mail, or by phone, to determine the greatest Canadians of all time. While not a scientific poll by any means, the census among those who watched and participated in the program presented a catalogue of Canada's most cherished values at the start of the twenty-first century. To no surprise, the proverbial Canadian icons of health-care, anti-Americanism, peacekeeping, communications, and hockey were reflected in those who were voted onto the program's top ten list. Perhaps most surprising, was the top ten ranking of Don Cherry among Canadian pioneers such as Tommy Douglas, Pierre Trudeau, Lester B. Pearson, and Sir John A. MacDonald. A former hockey coach and long time commentator on the CBC's *Hockey Night in Canada*, Don Cherry's rank on this list is interesting in several ways. For instance, not only did Don Cherry manage to secure a spot in the top ten, he also ranked ahead of Wayne Gretzky in voter polling across Canada. While Wayne Gretzky is arguably the greatest hockey player of all-time, Don Cherry is well known only for his controversial segment *Coach's Corner* on *Hockey Night in Canada*. Does this mean that the television program *Hockey Night in Canada* is more important to Canadians than the sport of hockey in general? Undoubtedly, Don Cherry's place in the top ten signifies the role of the CBC's *Hockey Night in Canada* as an identity building tradition. What makes this even more fascinating is the fact that no one else primarily associated with the national broadcaster was included on the list, illustrating the deep connection between

Canadian experience and *Hockey Night in Canada*. From this standpoint, I will examine how this single television program has bridged a national sports culture with the CBC's mandate to contribute to the development of national unity, and thus provide for the continuing expression of Canadian identity.

Methodology & Theoretical Framework

Following interpretive logics of inquiry, this investigation speaks to the notion of hockey as a myth or allegory for Canadian culture. By questioning the stories Canadians tell themselves about what it means to be Canadian and how hockey ties into the national psyche, this research project presupposes that cultures can be understood by studying what people think about, and the ideas that are important to them. Using an intrinsic case study, I explore the creation of a national sports culture in Canada, and how it has manifested through the CBC's broadcast television operation. By exploring different segments and phases of the CBC's *Hockey Night in Canada* empirically, this paper strives to better understand how hockey has emerged as a social phenomenon, and how identity building organizations such as the national broadcaster have institutionalized hockey lore and tradition in Canadian culture.

In order to contextualize the ways in which hockey has emerged as a social phenomenon, made into tradition, and institutionalized in Canada, it is necessary to emphasize the key theoretical frameworks that I will draw upon. Presenting the sport of hockey as culture, this paper provides a lens to study expressions of Canada's national ethos. Given its popularity and pervasiveness, hockey offers a comparable window into Canadian society and culture.¹ We construct who we are in the process of identifying with the images and cultural narratives that

¹ Robert H. Dennis, "Forever Proud?", in *Canada's Game: Hockey and Identity*, ed. Andrew C. Holman, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2009), 161.

dominate our ways of seeing and representing the world.² As such, cherished images and stories of *Hockey Night in Canada* on the national broadcaster are assumed to belong to the entire Canadian public. Benedict Anderson's concept of the imagined community accentuates this type of nationhood, which is to say imagined by the public who identify themselves as part of that group.³ Of significance, the development of the CBC and broadcast television were essential in socially constructing this kind of national consciousness. Anderson argues that nations are imagined communities, "because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion."⁴ When considering hockey's ability to be a unifier in the Canadian mosaic, Benedict Anderson's concept of nationhood is employed to analyze *Hockey Night in Canada* as a nationalizing text. In a modern nation of actual strangers, the common language of hockey and viewing *Hockey Night in Canada* is something experienced together.

Similarly, Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz's theoretical approach defines televised "media events," along notions of folklore, collective experience, and ritual participation. With regards to *Hockey Night in Canada*, Dayan and Katz's work on the festive viewing of television will be used to interpret several historic occasions that were televised on the CBC as they took place, and transfixed a nation. In connection to Anderson's notion of the imagined community, Dayan and Katz suggest that "the media have the power not only to insert messages into social networks

² Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, "Telling Our Own Stories: The Role, Development and Future of Aboriginal Communications," in *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise*, ed. Marlene Brant Castellano, Lynne Davis, Louise Lahache, (UBC Press, 2001), 76.

³ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 5-7.

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983), 5-7.

but to create the networks themselves.”⁵ Evidently, the sense of place that *Hockey Night in Canada* has created for Canadians provides meaningful insight into the ways in which media events construct forms of nationhood, community, and essentially their own constituencies. Beyond routine television, the special character of *Hockey Night in Canada* has the propensity to transform its Canadian viewers into expectant witnesses of historic moments. Dayan and Katz theoretical framework will be used in conjunction with Anderson’s notion of the imagined community to better understand the CBC’s formula to tell stories.

It is also important to be mindful of *Hockey Night in Canada*’s potential for multiple meanings. In this sense, hockey’s deeply iconic place in Canadian society must be seen as a complexity of stories from a variety of perspectives. By studying hockey as culture, the sport reveals to Canadians, stories about the ways in which they define and perform their multiple identities. In an attempt to illustrate Canadian identity as problematic, this paper challenges the notion of hockey as an all-encompassing form of national identity. From this point, several senses of the word ‘public’ tend to get intermixed, as a sense of totality is brought out in speaking of hockey as being quintessentially Canadian. Michael Warner points to the realization that whenever one is addressed as ‘the public,’ there are others assumed not to matter in the process of imagining Canada as a national community.⁶ In terms of *Hockey Night in Canada*, and nation building, this essay will address the stories that are often left untold. By investigating how identity building organizations such as the CBC have institutionalized hockey as a Canadian tradition, this paper speaks to various implications that analytical categories such as social class, gender, and ethnicity raise for the study of sport and identity politics.

⁵ Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 15.

⁶ Michael Warner, "Publics and Counter Publics," *Public Culture* 1st ser., 14 (2002), 49.

Framing the Discussion

Beginning with a historical analysis of the CBC and its founding principles, this project explores several nationalizing exercises of the broadcaster that were instrumental in creating a national sports culture in Canada. The link between Canada's national network and hockey's deeply iconic root in Canadian culture will provide a basis to interpret the notion of hockey as a unifier in the Canadian mosaic. Canada's love affair with hockey must then be explored from a critical perspective, in light of socio-political implications of the sport's identification in Canadian culture. At this juncture, conclusions will emphasize disconnects between the national broadcaster and the Canadian public it is mandated to represent. Each dimension will be discussed in turn.

The Best on the Box: The CBC and Broadcast Television

"In a country that spans a quarter of the world's time zones and has a population thinly spread across the waistband of a continent, broadcasting is nothing less than the central public place, a village square of Canadian life." - David Taras

Public broadcast television provides a locale in which nationhood is enacted via institutional dispositions and their accompanying discourses. In this sense, the relationship between television (its representations, and its institutions), and the nation which it serves, shapes, and strengthens, has undoubtedly assisted in the construction of collective memory in Canada. With reference to the *1991 Canadian Broadcasting Act*, this section will draw attention to the continued importance of social structures to which broadcasting as a social and cultural form has been tied. Importantly, I do not ask whether Canadian audiences enjoy CBC television, but instead whether CBC television shapes audiences. The discussion is framed as an assessment of the accomplishment of public broadcasting's goals outlined in the *Broadcasting Act*. The Act mandates the CBC to adequately safeguard and enrich the cultural, socio-political,

and economic fabric of Canada, but under which conditions has the broadcasting model endured? The CBC's role as a cultural institution in Canada will also be examined in order to emphasize several causes for concern moving forward. In order to add context to this historical analysis, I will reflect on the CBC's *Hockey Night in Canada*, when appropriate.

The Broadcasting Model

"Bringing Canadians Together" – CBC Slogan (1977)

Television is a cultural form of broadcasting, constructed as a social institution on the model of broadcast radio. Unlike all previous communication technologies, radio and television were broadcasting systems primarily devised for transmission and reception as abstract processes.⁷ The word 'broadcasting' is an agricultural metaphor, originally referred to as sowing of seeds by hand, in as wide circles as possible.⁸ As outlined by Jostien Gripsrud, the metaphor relies on the "existence of a bucket of seeds –that is, centralized resources of information, knowledge, creative and technical competence, and the like –that is to be distributed as widely as possible in a certain field or territory."⁹ The broadcasting model as it developed in radio with central transmitters and domestic receivers seemed to be the inevitable protocol for the succeeding television medium.¹⁰ According to Raymond Williams, broadcasting as a cultural form reflected a pronounced centralization of resources and what he termed the "mobile privatization" of people's lives.¹¹ William's notion of mobile privatization reflected the modern

⁷ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, (London: Routledge, 1990), 1-23.

⁸ Jostien Gripsrud, "Broadcast Television: The Chances of its Survival in a Digital Age," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, (Durham: Duke University, 2004), 210-23.

⁹ Jostien Gripsrud, "Broadcast Television: The Chances of its Survival in a Digital Age," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, (Durham: Duke University, 2004), 210-23.

¹⁰ Wade Rowland, "Television," *Spirit of the Web: The Age of Information from the Telegraph to Internet*, (Toronto: Key Porter, 1999), 175.

¹¹ Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, (London: Routledge, 1990), 1-23.

transformation in domestic relations and social configuration.¹² Modernization brought with it urbanization and industrialization which created new living conditions, requiring new forms of communication. Gripsrud's analysis of mobile privatization illustrates the increased social and geographical mobility of individuals and nuclear families at the expense of the stability of older, traditional social communities.¹³ While traditional communications systems relied on schools, churches, and town hall meetings as the predominant social organizers, broadcasting offered in contrast, a whole social intake of information within the home. In terms of the needs and rights of citizens in a functioning modern democracy, broadcasting became a central institution within the public sphere, making essential information, knowledge, and cultural experiences available simultaneously to all members of a particular society.¹⁴ More often than not, broadcast television happens in a national context. As cornerstone institutions in the majority of developed nations and political democracies throughout the twentieth century, broadcast systems remain national properties and are therefore owned by the public, and administered by the state on their behalf. For instance, with regards to broadcasting policy in Canada, the *1991 Broadcasting Act* articulates that "the Canadian broadcasting system shall be effectively owned and controlled by Canadians."¹⁵ Accordingly, there is no universal form of television, as the social process of media differs from place to place.

The struggle for public service broadcasting produced different outcomes in every nation as well. Of significance, Britain and the United States (US) who had very much in common both politically and culturally, developed systems of broadcasting that were in theory completely

¹² Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, (London: Routledge, 1990), 1-23.

¹³ Jostien Gripsrud, "Broadcast Television: The Chances of its Survival in a Digital Age," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, (Durham: Duke University, 2004), 210-23.

¹⁴ Jostien Gripsrud, "Broadcast Television: The Chances of its Survival in a Digital Age," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, (Durham: Duke University, 2004), 210-23.

¹⁵ Canada. *Canadian Broadcasting Act*. 1991.

opposite to one another. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) established the principles of what would become the shining example of public service broadcasting.¹⁶ Conversely, the United States adopted a system dominated by two networks, NBC & CBS which were supported exclusively by commercial advertising.¹⁷ From the Canadian perspective, nowhere was the international dimension of broadcast policy-making more apparent than in Canada. On one hand, Canada had close political and cultural ties with Britain. On the other, many Canadians could pick up US Broadcasting stations on their radio receivers.¹⁸ Alongside differences in terms of content and regulation due to national contexts, television broadcast systems had distinguishing features related to social purpose. The structural disparity between public and private systems spoke to the different purposes, experiences, and stories that were contingent on any given system. In other words, each broadcasting system is distinct in the target of each story it attempts to tell.

From a historical viewpoint, it was in this context that the *Canadian Radio League* was founded in 1930 by Graham Spry and Alan Plaunt. The purpose of the Radio League was to mobilize support for public service broadcasting and to counter the campaign to bring commercial broadcasting to Canada.¹⁹ They emphasized how a private commercial system would undermine the democratic potential of broadcasting. For co-founder Graham Spry, "Canadians faced a brutal choice of either 'the state' or the 'United States.' Either the government intervened to establish a publically financed broadcasting system, as a 'single glowing spirit of

¹⁶ Robert McChesney, "Public Broadcasting: Past, Present, Future," *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 229.

¹⁷ Robert McChesney, "Public Broadcasting: Past, Present, Future," *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 231.

¹⁸ Robert McChesney, "Public Broadcasting: Past, Present, Future," *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 230.

¹⁹ Robert McChesney, "Public Broadcasting: Past, Present, Future," *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 237.

nationality,' or Canadian broadcasting would become part of the American commercial system."²⁰ Spry argued that broadcasting as one of the most potent and significant agents for the formation of public opinion, it should be considered no more a business than the public school system.²¹

Founding Principles of the CBC

"Broadcasting added muscle to the sinews of national life by linking individuals more directly and immediately than ever before. Broadcasting reordered people's external gyroscopes so that the country came to mean something to them beyond the confines of their immediate circumstances, their towns, or their provinces." - David Taras

Those who first envisioned a public broadcasting system in Canada had at least three preliminary objectives in mind. As outlined by David Taras in *Chilled to the Bone: the Crisis of Public Broadcasting*, the primary goal was to counter the cultural influence of the United States.²² Canada has always fallen within the orbit of American broadcasting and the fear was that unless the country took dramatic action, it would lose its distinct cultural identity.²³ In this logic, Canada had to produce an alternative that would attract the mass of the Canadian audience. The challenge was to counter American influence by creating a distinctly Canadian media culture that "would generate its own stars, its own memorable and popular programs, and its own allegiances."²⁴ From its inception the CBC has had the capacity to conserve Canadian culture by

²⁰ Robert McChesney, "Public Broadcasting: Past, Present, Future," *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 237.

²¹ Robert McChesney, "Public Broadcasting: Past, Present, Future," *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 232.

²² David Taras, "Chilled to the Bone: The Crisis of Public Broadcasting," *Power & Betrayal in the Canadian Media*, (Broadview Press, 2001), 120.

²³ David Taras, "Chilled to the Bone: The Crisis of Public Broadcasting," *Power & Betrayal in the Canadian Media*, (Broadview Press, 2001), 120.

²⁴ David Taras, "Chilled to the Bone: The Crisis of Public Broadcasting," *Power & Betrayal in the Canadian Media*, (Broadview Press, 2001), 121.

transmitting traditions, achievements, sensibilities and memories to future generations.²⁵

A second strategic objective was to unify the country by bridging the gap that existed between French and English speaking Canadians, and between different regions of the country.²⁶ Taras claims that Canada's public broadcasting system was originally designed to create mutual understanding in regards to Canadian national culture, as the CBC served "two audiences, and two publics with one policy, one mandate, and one institution."²⁷ The third objective of the CBC was to facilitate patriotism.²⁸ The hope was that a public broadcasting system would promote citizenship and community values. A vast country like Canada needed a medium of communication like CBC radio and television to enrich its citizens, not just as individual citizens but as members of a community, a region, a province, and a country.²⁹ It was believed that no other institution could do more to promote understanding and sharing among Canadians than public service broadcasting and the CBC.³⁰ Parallel to the optimistic agricultural metaphor mentioned earlier, "successful sowing (broadcasting) will, given the right conditions of growth, yield a rich harvest sometime in the future when universally distributed information, education, and entertainment results in an enlightened socially and culturally empowered (and presumably happy) population."³¹ Undoubtedly, television as an apparatus to transmit was originally

²⁵ David Taras, "Chilled to the Bone: The Crisis of Public Broadcasting," *Power & Betrayal in the Canadian Media*, (Broadview Press, 2001), 121.

²⁶ David Taras, "Chilled to the Bone: The Crisis of Public Broadcasting," *Power & Betrayal in the Canadian Media*, (Broadview Press, 2001), 121.

²⁷ David Taras, "Chilled to the Bone: The Crisis of Public Broadcasting," *Power & Betrayal in the Canadian Media*, (Broadview Press, 2001), 121.

²⁸ David Taras, "Chilled to the Bone: The Crisis of Public Broadcasting," *Power & Betrayal in the Canadian Media*, (Broadview Press, 2001), 122.

²⁹ David Taras, "Chilled to the Bone: The Crisis of Public Broadcasting," *Power & Betrayal in the Canadian Media*, (Broadview Press, 2001), 122.

³⁰ David Taras, "Chilled to the Bone: The Crisis of Public Broadcasting," *Power & Betrayal in the Canadian Media*, (Broadview Press, 2001), 120.

³¹ Jostien Gripsrud, "Broadcast Television: The Chances of its Survival in a Digital Age," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, (Durham: Duke University, 2004), 210-23.

celebrated for the medium's possibility of enlightening electronic contact with the masses. In relation to Anderson's work on nationhood, CBC television celebrated the possibility of enlightening electronic contact with an imagined community.

Until recently, however, many in television studies believed the tele-visual medium betrayed this original promise, declaring it the problem child of communication technologies.³² Treated as part of mass society, television was routinely analyzed as a bad object and blamed for social, political, cultural, and behavioral outcomes.³³ As outlined by John Hartley, this was in large part a symptom of twentieth century intellectual politics; as cultural elites viewed the television medium as the latest technology in a long line of media which failed to uplift the masses.³⁴ Yet, in light of the apparent prejudice against the entire medium, public broadcasting was taken to represent the best kind of television, and in effect held moral superiority over private broadcasting. Functioning to deliver the efficient distribution of essential information to all citizens and the production of a shared national identity, public broadcasters such as the CBC represented a national resource. In an attempt to construct a public commons, proponents of public broadcasting argued that the system had the ability to reorder people's external orientation so that the country came to mean something to them beyond the confines of their immediate vicinities and circumstances, their towns, or their provinces.³⁵

³² Wade Rowland, "Television," *Spirit of the Web: The Age of Information from the Telegraph to Internet*, (Toronto: Key Porter, 1999), 175.

³³ John Hartley, "From Republic of Letters to Television Republic? Citizen Readers in the Era of Broadcast Television," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, (Durham: Duke University, 2004), 386-417.

³⁴ John Hartley, "From Republic of Letters to Television Republic? Citizen Readers in the Era of Broadcast Television," in *Television after TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, ed. Lynn Spigel and Jan Olsson, (Durham: Duke University, 2004), 386-417.

³⁵ David Taras, "Chilled to the Bone: The Crisis of Public Broadcasting," *Power & Betrayal in the Canadian Media*, (Broadview Press, 2001), 118.

From the beginning, public service broadcasting was considered a potent and galvanizing force in Canadian life. With its perceived ability to revitalize the public sphere and renew a sense of citizenship, the development of the television cut across individuals and groups, re-organizing them as parts of larger ensembles.³⁶ As a nationwide resource, public broadcasting was ultimately framed in the language of entitlement as the citizen expected to be plugged into the national culture because the television was plugged into the network. Broadcast policy in Canada preserves this relationship by stating that programming provided by the Corporation should “reflect Canada and its regions to national and regional audiences, actively contributing to the flow and exchange of cultural expression.”³⁷ The character of the CBC’s content and form is then highly mediated, carrying considerable cultural and social meaning based on integration and loyalty to a larger society in which they perform. In assessing the CBC’s role a nation-building organization, it is necessary to be mindful of the institutional dispositions and the accompanying discourses that determine the character of content (and form) and what gets delivered to the Canadian public.

In connection to *Hockey Night in Canada*, the television program provides a locale to investigate the founding principles of the CBC’s broadcasting model in practice. As broadcasting has transformed domestic relations and social configuration, media events such as *Hockey Night in Canada* have privileged the home. Dayan and Katz outline that the home is where the historic version of the event is on view and then entered into collective memory.³⁸ While normally the home represents a retreat from the space of public deliberation, Dayan and Katz argue that the home has become a public space with media events like *Hockey Night in*

³⁶ Richard Dienst, *Still Life in Real Time: Theory after Television*, (Durham: Duke University, 1994), 3-25.

³⁷ Canada. Canadian Broadcasting Act. 1991.

³⁸ Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 22.

Canada. In relation to Anderson's notion of the imagined community, viewer-participants of the program are joined with people in the room, at the game, and all over the country, in watching and experiencing these spectacles. As the home becomes public space, the CBC has seemingly made use of *Hockey Night in Canada* in part to fulfill its mandate to connect Canadians from coast-to-coast, within an imagined national community. This will be important to remember when I turn to empirical cases such as the CBC's airing of the 1972 Summit Series, which was one of the first televised media events that displayed Canadian hockey as more than just a game.

Nation-Building & Canadian Culture

"If you write a nation's stories you needn't worry about who makes its laws. Today, television tells most of the stories to most of the people, most of the time." - George Gerbner

Concerned with nation building and interconnection, Canada's public broadcaster has always been in the business of storytelling. As outlined by Gail Valaskakis in *Telling Our Own Stories*, "stories are not just entertainment, stories are power. They reflect the deepest, the most intimate perceptions, relationships and attitudes of a people. Stories show how a culture thinks."³⁹ It can be understood that we construct who we are in the process of identifying with the images and cultural narratives that dominate our ways of seeing and representing the world.⁴⁰ In accordance with communications policy in Canada, programming is expected to be "predominantly and distinctively Canadian, while contributing to a shared national consciousness and identity."⁴¹ With specific reference to the CBC's broadcasting model, it has been argued that Canada is not a 'nation-state,' nor a 'state-nation,' but rather a 'nationalizing

³⁹ Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, "Telling Our Own Stories: The Role, Development and Future of Aboriginal Communications," in *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise*, ed. Marlene Brant Castellano, Lynne Davis, Louise Lahache, (UBC Press, 2001), 76.

⁴⁰ Gail Guthrie Valaskakis, "Telling Our Own Stories: The Role, Development and Future of Aboriginal Communications," in *Aboriginal Education: Fulfilling the Promise*, ed. Marlene Brant Castellano, Lynne Davis, Louise Lahache, (UBC Press, 2001), 76.

⁴¹ Canada. Canadian Broadcasting Act. 1991.

state.’⁴² Here the term ‘nationalizing state’ is intended to convey Canada’s ongoing involvement in identity building projects.⁴³ In correlation to Louis Althusser’s notion of the ideological state apparatus, the CBC as a distinct and specialized institution in Canadian society, functions predominantly by ideology.⁴⁴ Therefore, by transmitting living scenes into the home, the televisual medium is still part of the public domain, much like churches, schools, trade unions, and newspapers.⁴⁵ Althusser held that in relation to this plurality of state apparatuses, our choices, intentions, preferences, were the consequence of ideological practice.⁴⁶ Deconstructing the role of the CBC as an ideological state apparatus allows for further analysis into the institution’s practices.

A detailed look at the CBC’s top ten *Greatest Canadian* list (as voted by English-speaking viewers in 2004) may reveal some insight into the CBC as a cultural institution and Canada as a ‘nationalizing state’. The list is as follows:

1. Tommy Douglas
2. Terry Fox
3. Pierre Elliot Trudeau
4. Sir Fredrick Banting
5. David Suzuki
6. Lester B. Pearson
7. Don Cherry
8. Sir John A. Macdonald
9. Alexander Graham Bell

⁴² Brian S. Osborne, "From Native Pines to Diasporic Geese: Placing Culture, Setting our Sites, Locating Identity in a Transnational Canada," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31, no.1 (2006), 155.

⁴³ Brian S. Osborne, "From Native Pines to Diasporic Geese: Placing Culture, Setting our Sites, Locating Identity in a Transnational Canada," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31, no.1 (2006), 155.

⁴⁴ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 81.

⁴⁵ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 80.

⁴⁶ Louis Althusser, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Media and Cultural Studies: Keywords*, ed. Meenakshi Gigi Durham and Douglas Kellner, (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 83.

10. Wayne Gretzky⁴⁷

While not a scientific poll by any means, there are a number of themes presented in the CBC's top ten list that are prominent. Most evident is the fact that the list is populated by white males with one exception. The list includes no native Canadians, no women, no military leaders, and no great artists.⁴⁸ To this end, the *Greatest Canadian* list generated by Canada's national broadcaster presents a concise collection of Canada's most cherished values across the nation.⁴⁹ Relying on national myths, the list encompasses the quintessential Canadian icons of universal health care, anti-Americanism, peacekeeping, communications, and of course, hockey.

From this example we can observe how the politicization of collective memory in a 'nationalizing state' is socially constructed through its representation in such state-scripted memory machines as national broadcasts, chronicles, monuments, public displays, and sporting events.⁵⁰ According to Brian Osborne, the CBC can be viewed as one component of the memory machine as it generates initiatives that enhance participation in and commemoration of, the experience of the national culture and heritage. From a critical perspective, established collective memories in Canada such as hockey, relate to past values and norms that continue to be iconic, even though they may no longer connect with emerging new values and culture.⁵¹ While broadcast policy in Canada aims to achieve a multicultural notion of nationhood that is more open and alive demographically, it can be argued that the CBC still adheres to a nationhood that presumes to derive identity from conformity, with a set of pre-established cultural markers.

⁴⁷ "The Greatest Canadian," *CBC.ca - Canadian News*, <http://www.cbc.ca/greatest/> (accessed November 2009).

⁴⁸ Bruce Dowbiggin, *The Meaning of Puck: How Hockey Explains Modern Canada*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 70.

⁴⁹ Bruce Dowbiggin, *The Meaning of Puck: How Hockey Explains Modern Canada*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 70.

⁵⁰ Brian S. Osborne, "From Native Pines to Diasporic Geese: Placing Culture, Setting our Sites, Locating Identity in a Transnational Canada," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31, no.1 (2006), 155.

⁵¹ Brian S. Osborne, "From Native Pines to Diasporic Geese: Placing Culture, Setting our Sites, Locating Identity in a Transnational Canada," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 31, no.1 (2006), 155.

Consequently, what gets defined as culture (and how it is defined) has always been a matter of negotiation between the powerful and less powerful social groups. Richard Dienst theorizes that television captures multiple cultural forms and remakes them into a unifying singular cultural form that serves both state and commercial interests by dispensing ideological messages in local currency.⁵² Public television can then be regarded as restrictive strategies to close the system against other kinds of images, as broadcasting becomes fully plugged into the system.⁵³

The success of broadcast television as a national resource is due in part to its ability to fulfill the imperatives of ‘liveness.’ As the television’s underlying ontology and one of its most defining qualities (distinguishes it from the cinema), liveness offers the possibility, however illusory, of “touching the real.”⁵⁴ Its ability to be on the screen in your living room, added a dimension of distant vision to the electronic presence associated with the medium, lending to a sense of flow which overcomes extreme fragmentation of space.⁵⁵ Ideologically, liveness encourages viewers to accept what they see on television as accurate and authentic, because it is apparently “really happening”, even though it is blatantly reconfigured through highly mediated narration strategies.⁵⁶ Characterized as a window, the television medium activates ‘aesthetics of presence’ to showcase its ability to supposedly transport the viewer live to localities around the nation, and the world.⁵⁷ Richard Dienst has described this tele-visual window as the field of total visibility. In terms of public broadcasting, when live transmissions are performed by institutions

⁵² Richard Dienst, *Still Life in Real Time: Theory after Television*, (Durham: Duke University, 1994), 3-25.

⁵³ Richard Dienst, *Still Life in Real Time: Theory after Television*, (Durham: Duke University, 1994), 3-25.

⁵⁴ Mimi White, “The Attractions of Television: Reconsidering Liveness,” in *Mediaspace: Place, Scale, and Culture in a Media Age*, ed. Nick Coudry and Anna McCarthy, (London: Routledge, 2004), 75-91.

⁵⁵ Mimi White, “The Attractions of Television: Reconsidering Liveness,” in *Mediaspace: Place, Scale, and Culture in a Media Age*, ed. Nick Coudry and Anna McCarthy, (London: Routledge, 2004), 75-91.

⁵⁶ Mimi White, “The Attractions of Television: Reconsidering Liveness,” in *Mediaspace: Place, Scale, and Culture in a Media Age*, ed. Nick Coudry and Anna McCarthy, (London: Routledge, 2004), 75-91.

⁵⁷ Jeffery Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*, (Durham: Duke University, 2000), 124-66.

like the CBC, liveness can be interpreted as a public phenomenon as viewers feel connected to all other people experiencing the broadcast. Jeffery Sconce advances this claim by stating that the television's "most insidious feature is the ability to provide the compelling illusion of 'being there' ...as one of the participants in a public arena, when of course the television actually transports the viewer no further than the couch."⁵⁸ In correlation to Dienst, the fantasy of the television is its total feel of instantaneous visibility.⁵⁹ Proximity and liveness have always been key aesthetic values of the television, as the medium established itself from the outset on the premise that it was closest to the real. For Sconce, however, what had once been an active arena of cultural practice became with the television, a passive mode of reception that left the audience in a form of cultural stasis, "transported and exiled away from real culture, real affect, and the real world."⁶⁰

This section demonstrates how television is a product of human practice. As a result, the character of television content and form is founded by social purpose. By advancing the notion that media is not given, but rather constructed and highly mediated, it can be argued that there is nothing determinant of technology. Instead, the television medium locates itself based on social negotiation. Understanding the structural dynamics of broadcast television is essential in analyzing the CBC's commitment in defending hockey's status quo, and what has traditionally been defined as Canadian.

⁵⁸ Jeffery Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*, (Durham: Duke University, 2000), 124-66.

⁵⁹ Richard Dienst, *Still Life in Real Time: Theory after Television*, (Durham: Duke University, 1994), 3-25.

⁶⁰ Jeffery Sconce, *Haunted Media: Electronic Presence from Telegraphy to Television*, (Durham: Duke University, 2000), 124-66.

The Great Melting Rink: Hockey as a 'Unifier' in the Canadian Mosaic

"Hockey is Freudian for Canadians – it puts the 'id' in our collective memory." - Rosie DiManno

Coinciding with its founding principles and objectives, the CBC was particularly instrumental in creating a national sports culture. Remarkably, the CBC's radio and television program *Hockey Night in Canada* succeeded in creating a new public gathering place, and a sense of belonging and identification. As outlined by Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada* broadcasts had become well established as a Canadian national ritual. By the end of the 1930's radio broadcasts of *Hockey Night in Canada* had the capacity to bring Canadian's together around a common interest.⁶¹ Never before had so many Canadians in all corners of the country, regularly engaged in the same cultural experience at the same time. In effect, *Hockey Night in Canada* began to create for hockey, a deeply rooted iconic place in Canadian culture.⁶² Importantly, hockey did not and could not become a common passion until its association with communication technology. With the advent of television, broadcasts of *Hockey Night in Canada* began to be televised in 1952, allowing Canadians to watch NHL hockey every Saturday night from autumn to spring.⁶³ Almost immediately *Hockey Night in Canada* became the CBC's most popular television show drawing audiences as large as 3.5 million English Canadians, and 2 million French Canadians by the early 1960's.⁶⁴ Consistently among the highest-rated programs on Canadian television, *Hockey Night in Canada* has

⁶¹ Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 101.

⁶² Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 101.

⁶³ Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 105.

⁶⁴ Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 105.

maintained its popularity among Canadians today. Just this year, the program recorded its highest average audience for a single game in 2010 on May 12th, with 4.24 million viewers.⁶⁵

In order to conceptualize the notion of hockey as being an allegory in Canadian culture, it is necessary to question the stories Canadians tell themselves about what it means to be Canadian, and how hockey is presented as quintessentially Canadiana. Here, the relationship between Canada's public broadcaster and storytelling, lends to the role of hockey as a source of community identity and collective memory. On both local and national levels, hockey has created a sense of place for Canadians, evident in one of the world's most common connotation in sport, "rooting for the home team".⁶⁶ People understand teams as representative of distinctive communities and identities associated with regionalism, patriotism and the national psyche.⁶⁷

The marriage between hockey and CBC television has generated a powerful source of national pride in a country divided by vast spaces and great differences in language and culture. To this end, media spectacles such as the 1972 Summit Series and the 2010 Winter Olympic Games provide useful insight into the nation's love affair with hockey. In correlation to international events, this segment will also interrogate hockey culture at a local level in Canada. The CBC's most recent community-based initiative entitled *Hockeyville*, which airs annually on *Hockey Night in Canada*, will provide the foundation of this inquiry. As a great unifier in the Canadian mosaic, these media spectacles promote strong feelings of commonality and allow Canadians to feel like they are part of the national community.

⁶⁵ CBC Media Sales and Marketing, "CBC's Hockey Night in Canada Draws 4.239 Million Viewers to Montreal/Pittsburgh Game Seven," *cbc.ca* (accessed May 2010).

⁶⁶ Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 201.

⁶⁷ Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 201.

Hockey Night in Moscow: The Summit Series – Canada & the Soviet Union

“Canadian players and fans alike, became united through a common belief in the strength of the enemy, and they struggled to deal with the USSR’s emergence as a compelling other.”

– Brian Kennedy

In his book *The Meaning of Puck*, Bruce Dowbiggin suggests that every nation begins with a transcendent myth and is sustained by moments that support that myth. For instance, in the case of the United States, Americans have total recall of where they stood when they heard about the John F. Kennedy assassination, 9/11, or the inauguration of President Barack Obama – moments where the national will was galvanized and every citizen was called to the flag.⁶⁸ It can be argued that where the US has a surfeit of such moments, Canadian history is less generous with such moments.⁶⁹ Author Bruce Dowbiggin puts forward the notion that hockey fills this void for Canada. The “where were you when” moment for older generations could possibly be Canada’s win over the Soviet Union in the iconic Summit Series, which continues to serve as a celebrated moment in Canadian history.⁷⁰

Envisioned as a strategic form of sports diplomacy, the 1972 Summit Series between Canada and the Soviet Union mobilized patriotic interest among Canadians like no other cultural event before.⁷¹ As one of the most memorable events in modern Canadian history, the nation followed the dramatic series on CBC live television broadcasts. The significance of the international competition was heightened exponentially due to the wider context of Cold War politics. The series quickly became a showdown between ‘our system and theirs.’ In this sense,

⁶⁸ Bruce Dowbiggin, *The Meaning of Puck: How Hockey Explains Modern Canada*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 15.

⁶⁹ Bruce Dowbiggin, *The Meaning of Puck: How Hockey Explains Modern Canada*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 15.

⁷⁰ Bruce Dowbiggin, *The Meaning of Puck: How Hockey Explains Modern Canada*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 15.

⁷¹ Brian Kennedy, “Confronting a Compelling Other,” in *Canada’s Game: Hockey and Identity*, ed. Andrew C. Holman, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2009), 47.

it is not surprising that the Summit Series still represents a unique triumph in modern Canadian history, “as a brave western warrior vanquished the evil Soviet empire” during the Cold War.⁷² In *Confronting a Compelling Other*, Brian Kennedy upholds that the 1972 Summit Series provided both a visible other through which Canadians could create a sense of self-identification, and a set of cultural symbols that would come to bind them together as a group.⁷³ Canada’s victory in the Summit Series not only reaffirmed the notion that hockey was Canada’s game; it also marked a triumph of Canadian virtues and liberal democracy over the Soviet system.⁷⁴ It is often said that during the final game of the series ‘Canada had stood still’, as Canadians coast-to-coast huddled around television sets to cheer on its national team. It was estimated that 18 million people watched at least some of the final game on CBC, meaning 82.5 percent of the Canadian population at the time.⁷⁵ In this wider context, the Summit series presented Canadians with a touchstone moment to mark their participation in a shared culture that was made possible by live television on the national broadcaster.

Vancouver 2010: The Winter Olympics

“The country itself felt like a team.” – Michael Ignatieff

While it is fair to say that scores of younger Canadians would not find much resonance in a Summit Series played over thirty years ago, hockey has nevertheless continued to generate national pride and patriotism whenever Canadian teams compete at the international level. In relation to 1972 Summit Series, the Winter Olympic Games offer Canada a constant opportunity

⁷² Bruce Dowbiggin, *The Meaning of Puck: How Hockey Explains Modern Canada*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 16.

⁷³ Brian Kennedy, “Confronting a Compelling Other,” in *Canada’s Game: Hockey and Identity*, ed. Andrew C. Holman, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2009), 47.

⁷⁴ Brian Kennedy, “Confronting a Compelling Other,” in *Canada’s Game: Hockey and Identity*, ed. Andrew C. Holman, (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s UP, 2009), 47.

⁷⁵ Chris Zerkovich, “Gold-medal Hockey Game Watched by Record 16.6 Million,” *The Toronto Star*, March 1, 2010.

to reconfirm its hockey supremacy, and reignite cultural symbols that bind Canadians together. In the past decade, Canadians have supported their national hockey team in staggering numbers. During the 2002 Winter Olympics Games, a combined 15 million Canadians tuned in to watch their men's and women's hockey teams win gold on the international stage.⁷⁶ Most recently, at the 2010 Winter Olympic Games an all-time record for television viewing in Canada was set as Canada won gold in both men's and women's hockey. It was reported that 26.5 million Canadians watched some part of the men's gold-medal hockey game, meaning that 80 per cent of the country tuned in at some point.⁷⁷ Hosted in Vancouver, Canada, the 2010 Olympic Games delivered the five largest television audiences in Canadian history, and three of which were Team Canada hockey games.⁷⁸

Proponents of hockey's ability to unite Canadians across all lifestyle groups would advocate that landmark sporting events such as the Olympic Games represent nation-building at its best. Motivation for this social phenomenon can be grounded in the ability of spectators to declare their identification with Canadian culture in a very public way.⁷⁹ In a country where hockey seems to be part of the introduction, the sense of community generated around professional teams at an international level produce the deepest connections with people. By this logic, hockey becomes a locale to practice being Canadian, and a way to fit in. In light of Canada's success at the 2010 Olympic Games, Michael Ignatieff suggests that the international competition revealed a "deep longing of all Canadians for more moments like this, when we feel

⁷⁶ Bruce Dowbiggin, *The Meaning of Puck: How Hockey Explains Modern Canada*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 17.

⁷⁷ Chris Zelkovich, "Gold-medal Hockey Game Watched by Record 16.6 Million," *The Toronto Star*, March 1, 2010.

⁷⁸ Chris Zelkovich, "Gold-medal Hockey Game Watched by Record 16.6 Million," *The Toronto Star*, March 1, 2010.

⁷⁹ Joe Friesen and Les Perreux, "The Great Melting Rink," *The Globe and Mail*, May 21, 2010.

we are one great people, from coast to coast, one team undivided, at one with our dreams and with each other.”⁸⁰

If we compare and contrast the Summit Series and the 2010 Olympics as separate sources of imagined communities, much more can be learnt about the type of nationhood they accentuate. Similarly, both media events broadcasted cherished images and stories that are assumed to belong to all Canadians. On both occasions, television broadcasts of hockey had created a sense of national consciousness that transfixed the nation. Even as both media events equally presented spectators with the ability to declare identification with Canadian culture, they differed in one very important way. As mentioned earlier, the 1972 Summit Series aired live on the CBC. The coverage presented the iconic version of what *Hockey Night in Canada* broadcasted on a weekly basis. In this way, the television program bridged a national sports culture with the CBC’s mandate to contribute to the development of national unity, and provide for the continuing expression of Canadian identity. In contrast, the 2010 Olympic Games were broadcasted on one of Canada’s largest privately owned network CTV. Indeed problematic for the CBC, the private network was able to promote the same strong feelings of commonality and comradeship that the public broadcaster had always prided itself on. Mindful of a changing media landscape, the CBC has launched a community-based project entitled *Hockeyville*, which re-focuses its iconic connection to the older, intergenerational tradition of *Hockey Night in Canada*. Much like the Summit Series, *Hockeyville* embodies similar notions of Canadian folklore, collective experience, and ritual participation. Further analysis into the CBC’s

⁸⁰ Michael Ignatieff, "With These Games Canada Has Made a Statement to Itself," *The Globe and Mail*, March 3, 2010.

Hockeyville will explore how these broadcasts integrate societies in a collective heartbeat, and evoke a renewal of loyalty to society.⁸¹

The CBC's Hockeyville

"The thing about hockey in Canada as opposed to hockey in other countries is that the sport percolates far deeper into our national soil and thus affects everything that goes in it."

- Douglas Coupland

Together with the National Hockey League (NHL), the CBC has facilitated a search for the Canadian community that best embodies the spirit of hockey and hometown pride.⁸² The competition allows Canadians to share photos and grassroots hockey stories that essentially support a community's bid to be crowned *Hockeyville*. As Canadians, the impact of these images and the stories they tell transform each of us, and the communities in which we live. This notion of community identity also carries ideological messages. *Hockeyville's* emphasis on community and family as a stabilizing tradition is instructive of the myth-value invested in Canadian hockey. In symbolic dialogue, hockey embraces icons of community and family which are key factors of the dominant ideology in Canada. The imagery and stories personified by the CBC's *Hockeyville* support the notion that the state of the family may act as a marker for the state of society in symbolic discourse, even a pseudo to religious commitment. Quoted for a news article, Rose Tekel, a religious studies professor, claimed that the similarities are too apparent to ignore. In this logic, Tekel suggests that hockey rituals such as the retirement of an exceptional player's jersey are rooted in religious traditions and practices, illustrating a sense of spirituality.⁸³ Myth values vested in Canadian hockey such as community involvement, family

⁸¹ Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994), 9.

⁸² "CBC Hockeyville 2009 Official Website," www.cbc.ca/sports/hockey/hockeyville/about/ (accessed October 25, 2009).

⁸³ Andrew Chung, "Why we pray for a Stanley Cup," *The Toronto Star*, May 27, 2009.

values, and tradition, are exemplified by commercial advertisements that air during *Hockey Night in Canada*. Most notably, Canadian fast-food chain Tim Hortons seems to gravitate towards imagery that links hockey with traditional Canadian values, in large measure through a careful application of down-home, folksy branding.⁸⁴ With its nostalgic appeal, Tim Hortons personifies the essential Canadian story presented by the CBC and *Hockey Night in Canada*. The late writer Pierre Berton once described the coffee chain as “a story of success and tragedy, of big dreams and small towns, of old fashioned values and tough-fisted business, of hard work and of hockey.”⁸⁵

In many cases, these Canadian values are linked effortlessly with hockey legends, ‘cut from Canadian cloth.’ To reflect on the CBC’s *Top Ten Canadians* list once more, it could be said that former hockey legend Wayne Gretzky best embodies the myth-value vested in hockey. Often referred to as the greatest hockey player of all time, Wayne Gretzky has had a strangle hold on the Canadian conscience to this day.⁸⁶ Through his excellence in the game of hockey, Gretzky is an example of the media’s ability to create heroes out of ordinary men.⁸⁷ In *The Meaning of Puck*, Bruce Dowbiggin sheds light on how the Wayne Gretzky story reflects long-established culture in Canada. With reference to his small town immigrant experience, Gretzky glorifies the symbolic discourse surrounding traditional community identity. When portrayed as a hero, his seemingly ‘stock’ Canadian characteristics are interpreted as ideal and the norm.⁸⁸

⁸⁴ “Investing in an icon: Why everyone wants a piece of Tim Hortons.” *The Ottawa Citizen*, March 19, 2006.

⁸⁵ “Investing in an icon: Why everyone wants a piece of Tim Hortons.” *The Ottawa Citizen*, March 19, 2006.

⁸⁶ Bruce Dowbiggin, *The Meaning of Puck: How Hockey Explains Modern Canada*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 76.

⁸⁷ Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 85.

⁸⁸ Bruce Dowbiggin, *The Meaning of Puck: How Hockey Explains Modern Canada*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 76.

In this sense, hockey acts as a successful purveyor of all that is mainstream and comfortable in Canada's dominant culture.

While hockey memories of sight and sound are without a doubt the stuff of nostalgia, this section has illustrated the cultural implications of hockey in Canada that make it the stuff of identity as well. Mediated through communication technology, hockey continues to maintain a powerful grip on the imagination, and collective memory of Canadians. As a primary cultural institution in Canada, the CBC has remained central to the formation of social identity in contemporary culture. Similarly, *Hockey Night in Canada* has remained a central pillar of the CBC's broadcasting operation. Maintaining its commitment to hockey, Canada's public broadcaster has introduced several 'nationalizing' events that support and perpetuate dominant culture in Canada.

A Great Canadian Myth: Hockey, the CBC, and its Disconnects

"While the CBC is constitutionally bound to contribute to the development of national unity and identity, in fact it may stand at a distance from the populations it serves." - John Hannigan

Canada's sense of hockey and what it means to the nation is also being challenged by political and cultural debates throughout the country. On one hand, in times of uncertainty and in a country increasingly characterized by difference, hockey's comfortable familiarity and its ability to convey a sense of Canadian identity, have engaging and enduring appeals.⁸⁹ On the other hand, traditional images of Canadian identity are at odds with deeply rooted inequalities and conflicts in society. With strong connections to the CBC, hockey's place as a central dimension of Canadian popular culture can be seen as ambiguous on several levels. With reference to Michael Warner's notion of audience and publics, this section will discuss *Hockey*

⁸⁹ Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 201.

Night in Canada by way of multiculturalism, and gender issues. Regarding multiculturalism, consideration will be given to the changing face of Canada and its relationship to the game. Incorporating gender issues will introduce a complementing angle to the different relationships Canadians have with hockey. The CBC's role as a public broadcaster will also be explored in this segment.

To consider the connections between Canadian myth and hockey, it would be useful to explain what is meant by the idea of myth in this essay. In the context of *Hockey Night in Canada*, Richard Gruneau and David Whitson effectively illustrate Roland Barthes concept of myth in a way that is useful to this study. In the most basic sense of the word, myth is most often used to suggest something that is fundamentally false. Gruneau and Whitson outline that "it implies a contrast between the world of fable or superstition and a reality that the fables often disguise."⁹⁰ Relying on Roland Barthes influential book *Mythologies*, this general notion is modified in a thought provoking way. For Barthes, "myths are not so much a denial of some actually existing truth as they are a form of cultural discourse – a way of speaking – about the world people live in."⁹¹ By this logic, the conventional notion of hockey lore as being something naturally Canadian is particularly telling of Barthes interpretation of myth, and how history can be confused with nature.⁹² With reference to CBC's television, the myth of hockey in Canadian popular culture is circulated by means of signifiers such as *Hockey Night in Canada* that continually link hockey with the physical environment. Gruneau and Whitson advise that this discourse of 'nature' creates a kind of cultural amnesia about social struggles and vested interests

⁹⁰ Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 132.

⁹¹ Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 132.

⁹² Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 132.

between gender, social class, and ethnic groups, which have always been part of hockey's history in Canada.⁹³

Multiculturalism

"Despite hockey's long-standing cultural enshrinement in Canada, immigration patterns are reprogramming our national DNA" - Reg Bibby

The changing face of Canada and its relationship to the game lends to the cultural shifts that are taking place across the country. *Maclean's* magazine recently noted that boy's hockey registration has been stagnant in recent years despite a rising population, as an increasing number of boys are turning to alternative sports.⁹⁴ In terms of sports registration among youth, new trends in immigration have sparked significant interest in other sports in Canada such as basketball, soccer, and cricket. At the forefront, soccer has replaced hockey as the sport with the most participation in the country, as the vast majority of Canadian immigrants come from countries that are unfamiliar with hockey.⁹⁵ As a result, the sport of hockey finds itself in a position where it has to "quickly win the interest of new Canadians before their incumbent interests potentially shift the market-balance, and hockey loses its dominating hold on the Canadian population."⁹⁶

Kevin Weekes, a former NHL goalie and now a CBC *Hockey Night in Canada* commentator suggests that hockey does not truly reflect Canadian society: "From my own experience, your parents immigrate here and they turn the television on, and they don't hear a

⁹³ Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 132

⁹⁴ Mark Moore, "Appraising Our Game," *Saving the Game: Pro Hockey's Quest to raise its Game from Crisis to New Heights*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006), 24.

⁹⁵ Mark Moore, "Appraising Our Game," *Saving the Game: Pro Hockey's Quest to raise its Game from Crisis to New Heights*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006), 25.

⁹⁶ Mark Moore, "Appraising Our Game," *Saving the Game: Pro Hockey's Quest to raise its Game from Crisis to New Heights*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006), 24.

name that sounds familiar, or a face that looks familiar.”⁹⁷ In an attempt to attract new audiences to the game of hockey, the CBC now broadcasts *Hockey Night in Canada* in Punjabi, the fourth most-spoken language in Canada after English, French, and Chinese.⁹⁸ Picking up on a brief yet successful experiment, the CBC decided to broadcast *Hockey Night in Canada* on a weekly basis starting in October of 2007. The viewership has multiplied many times over as the weekly broadcast average is now close to one hundred thousand viewers.⁹⁹ *Hockey Night in Canada Punjabi* host (and CBC Calgary reporter) Harnarayan Singh states that, “we have been getting amazing feedback....I’ve heard how families including grandparents, now watch the game together. Many parents and grandparents would earlier watch the game but they would mute it because they don’t understand what the commentators are saying. Now, they are much more involved.”¹⁰⁰ With reference to ‘traditional family circles’ the symbolic discourse that pertains to hockey is once again maintained and reproduced on CBC television.

While steps are being taken by the CBC to extend the game to a variety of different communities in a variety of different ways, critics argue that hockey is still inherently part of the dominant, upper-middle class culture in Canada. The famously controversial personality of Don Cherry can be seen as evidence of this prevailing culture in hockey. As a member of the CBC’s *Greatest Canadian* list, Don Cherry has gained his fame in Canada as a co-host of the *Coach’s Corner* segment during *Hockey Night in Canada* which is televised coast-to-coast on Canada’s public broadcaster. Bruce Dowbiggin illustrates Don Cherry’s distinctive mannerisms which for some, are at odds with the progressive image of Canada today:

“To the delight of his supporters and frustration of his opponents, Cherry proudly projects his own face onto the country and tells Canada to be proud of a past that school districts wish to

⁹⁷ Erin Anderssen, “Nazem Kadri: Canada’s new game face,” *The Global and Mail*, October 16, 2009.

⁹⁸ Raveena Aulakh, “Play-by-play in Punjabi Scores Big Time,” *The Toronto Star*, February 16, 2009.

⁹⁹ Raveena Aulakh, “Play-by-play in Punjabi Scores Big Time,” *The Toronto Star*, February 16, 2009.

¹⁰⁰ Raveena Aulakh, “Play-by-play in Punjabi Scores Big Time,” *The Toronto Star*, February 16, 2009.

ignore or expunge...He projects the 'chivalrous' codes of honor among the hard men of hockey onto a broader map...At a time when Canadians are urged to adopt values of tolerance and multiculturalism, Cherry unapologetically plays favorites from the old days."¹⁰¹

Don Cherry has stretched his mandate on *Hockey Night in Canada*, commenting too frequently on social political and cultural matters with little to do with the actual game of hockey. In the process, Cherry has reaffirmed the Anglo-Canadian roots that are still alive today in the sport of hockey.¹⁰²

Gender Issues

"...the association of girls and women to the game tended to be defined only through the participation of the men in their lives." - Sandra Langley

For supporters of hockey and its importance to Canadian culture, the 2002 and 2010 Olympic gold medals won by the women's national hockey team, and the rising participation of girls in amateur hockey epitomize contemporary inclusive values of Canada.¹⁰³ Although the profile of women's hockey has increased dramatically over the past decade, hockey in Canada has traditionally been a site of gender divide.¹⁰⁴ In the essay *Gender, Talk, TV, Hockey, and Canadian Identity*, author Sandra Langley discusses the television program *Hockey Night in Canada* in relation to an actual hockey night in Canada. The latter is referred to as a "cultural ritual within a gendered social order."¹⁰⁵ Langley argues that while for many men, the watching of Saturday night NHL hockey games on the CBC has signified a symbolic connection with

¹⁰¹ Bruce Dowbiggin, *The Meaning of Puck: How Hockey Explains Modern Canada*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 134.

¹⁰² Bruce Dowbiggin, *The Meaning of Puck: How Hockey Explains Modern Canada*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 135.

¹⁰³ Bruce Dowbiggin, *The Meaning of Puck: How Hockey Explains Modern Canada*, (Toronto: Key Porter Books Limited, 2008), 17.

¹⁰⁴ Sandra Langley, "Gender, Talk, TV, Hockey, and Canadian Identity: Feminist Takes on Television Rejection," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 4th ser. 28 (2003), 416.

¹⁰⁵ Sandra Langley, "Gender, Talk, TV, Hockey, and Canadian Identity: Feminist Takes on Television Rejection," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 4th ser. 28 (2003), 416.

childhood memories and family experiences at the rink, the association of women to the game has traditionally been defined through the participation of the men in their lives.¹⁰⁶ Canadian sports historian Bruce Kidd, has stated that “hockey arenas have long acted like men’s cultural centre’s in cities and towns across the country.”¹⁰⁷ From a critical perspective, claims that suggest hockey is the sport of national obsession are again contentious, and debatable. Historically, the lack of a female experience in Canadian hockey is instructive of the dominant white-male culture, as those who do not fit this description (in terms of hockey in Canada) are constructed as deviant, or presumed as too distant from the centre of ‘our’ Canadian culture or identity to warrant much attention.¹⁰⁸

Importantly, gender issues in hockey must also consider prejudice against women within the realm of sports reporting and journalism. As of 2009, women are still the minority when it comes to sports reporting. Maintaining an emphasis on the CBC, its *Hockey Night in Canada* broadcast employs only one woman reporter, former Olympian Cassie Campbell-Pascal. According to the Associated Press Sports Editors (APSE), women hold just over ten percent of all sports-related journalism jobs.¹⁰⁹ Malcolm Kelly, director of the Sports Journalism program at Centennial College in Toronto, argues that while sports departments once resembled frat houses, women are beginning to enter the field in growing numbers.¹¹⁰ Although there is a new level of acceptance of women in sports journalism, it remains largely a ‘boys club’.

¹⁰⁶ Sandra Langley, "Gender, Talk, TV, Hockey, and Canadian Identity: Feminist Takes on Television Rejection," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 4th ser. 28 (2003), 416.

¹⁰⁷ Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 192.

¹⁰⁸ Sandra Langley, "Gender, Talk, TV, Hockey, and Canadian Identity: Feminist Takes on Television Rejection," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 4th ser. 28 (2003), 432.

¹⁰⁹ Jordana Rapuch, "Playing Ballsy," *Ryerson Review of Journalism* Summer 2009: 48-53.

¹¹⁰ Jordana Rapuch, "Playing Ballsy," *Ryerson Review of Journalism* Summer 2009: 48-53.

Working through *Hockey Night in Canada*'s potential for multiple meanings, Michael Warner's notion of *a* public, as distinct from *the* public and any bounded audience is clear. From a variety of perspectives, this study draws attention to the fact that several senses of the word 'public' get intermixed, as a sense of totality is brought out in speaking of hockey as being quintessentially Canadian. Multiculturalism and gender are case in points that whenever one is addressed as *the* public, there are others assumed not to matter in the process of imagining Canada as a national community. For that reason, a public is self-organized. Warner states "a public is a space of discourse organized by nothing other than discourse itself."¹¹¹ Importantly, the sense of Canadian identity experienced when watching *Hockey Night in Canada* on the CBC, exists only by virtue of being addressed. As Canada's national broadcaster, the CBC's circularity is essential to the development of this social phenomenon. In terms of its mandate to defend the public interest, this notion of *a public* is problematic for the CBC as an identity building organization that has effectively institutionalized hockey as a Canadian tradition.

In Defense of the Public Interest: Back to Basics for the CBC?

"The public broadcaster is too many things to too many people" Canadian Senate Report (2006)

As mentioned earlier, public broadcasting has been a cornerstone institution in the majority of developed nations and political democracies throughout the twentieth century. Nonetheless, public broadcasting has been locked in an almost continuous fight to maintain its social position, if not survival.¹¹² In *Public Broadcasting: Past, Present & Future*, Robert McChesney affirms that the decline of public broadcasting reflects a neo-liberal political climate, in which "the rule of profit is regarded as the natural, most efficient and democratic regulatory

¹¹¹ Michael Warner, "Publics and Counter Publics," *Public Culture* 1st ser., 14 (2002), 50.

¹¹² Robert McChesney, "Public Broadcasting: Past, Present, Future," *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 240.

system.”¹¹³ Whatever space may have existed for public broadcasting in the past is under sustained attack as commercial values now dominate the media and political culture.¹¹⁴ In this changing landscape, neo-liberalism requires public broadcasting to be subject to market discipline. For McChesney, the CBC is far from being a purely public television broadcaster, as it is dependent upon both government funding and advertising revenues. Often referred to as a hybrid institution of both public and private enterprises, CBC television underscores several conditions of concern that are particularly problematic considering the present crisis of public broadcasting.

A recent *Canadian Senate Report (2006)* on news media in Canada has advised that the public broadcaster is too many things to too many people. Specifically, the report draws attention to the CBC’s broad mandate and limited budget. The extent of the CBC’s mandate has led to unnecessary competition with the private sector. CBC’s English and French television networks, at least since the 1950s, have tried to be full-service networks, providing a wide range of programming – news and information, public affairs, drama and sports.¹¹⁵ At the same time, the fall in value of the CBC’s parliamentary appropriation has forced the Corporation to increase its reliance on earned revenue, largely television advertising dollars.¹¹⁶ This in turn has forced CBC television to focus on ratings rather than on its core mandate of public service broadcasting. Consequently, the 2006 Senate Report recommended that the CBC leave coverage of professional sports and the Olympics to the private sector, allowing for more thorough coverage of Canadian issues often ignored by commercial television. Despite the good intention of the

¹¹³ Robert McChesney, "Public Broadcasting: Past, Present, Future," *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 242.

¹¹⁴ Robert McChesney, "Public Broadcasting: Past, Present, Future," *Rich Media, Poor Democracy*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1999), 228.

¹¹⁵ Canadian Senate. Final Report on the Canadian News Media. S. Rept. June 2006.

¹¹⁶ Canadian Senate. Final Report on the Canadian News Media. S. Rept. June 2006.

Senate's recommendation, the CBC's need for advertising revenues has maintained the rank of *Hockey Night in Canada* as a central pillar of the public broadcaster's television operation. Bringing to light several causes of concern, economic hybridity may in fact transform the audience into consumers rather than citizens, as the CBC has been denied sufficient funding commitments from the Canadian federal government.

In an attempt to challenge the notion of hockey as an all-encompassing form of Canadian identity, this section examined how hockey has become something whose lore, traditions, and major organizations seem natural in the Canadian mosaic.¹¹⁷ This naturalization of hockey has been easily manipulated by those with interest in defending hockey's status quo and what has traditionally been identified as Canadian.¹¹⁸ By exploring the relationship between hockey, multiculturalism, and gender, it is evident that the sport's role in Canadian identity is constructed in a way that marginalizes or excludes certain components of our collective experience. While the CBC is constitutionally bound to contribute to the development of national unity and identity, it may in fact stand at a distance from the populations it serves. In a world of media concentration and cross-media ownership, the importance of the CBC as an alternative source of programming may be greater than ever.

Hockey and the Cultural Economy: Spectacle and Commodity Form

"... despite our propensity, as sports fans, to be nostalgic, we must recall that sports such as professional hockey have been businesses for a considerable amount of time and that, ultimately, they have become extensive industries." – Julian Ammirante

Evident to this point, Canadians have experienced hockey as a community practice, and also as a commercial product. As outlined by Mark Moore in his chapter *Balancing Business*

¹¹⁷ Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 132.

¹¹⁸ Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 132.

and Sport, professional hockey is driven and defined by a financial bottom line, a measuring of accounts, and a dollar figure, as owners pay athletes to play and charge customers to watch.¹¹⁹ Professional hockey, like all other professional sports has a fundamental dual identity as both a 'larger than life' spectator sport, and an ever-branching business. For Moore, these two identities and their bond are involved in "every facet of professional hockey, every decision made, and every factor determining it's every fate."¹²⁰ For that very reason, Canada's national past-time has been transformed into a continental business largely controlled by the mega rich and the NHL. This becomes problematic for Canadian identity as it is ever more difficult to distinguish the sport of hockey from professional organizations like the NHL. By investigating Canada's cultural economy, this section will concentrate on how the organic conception of hockey in Canadian culture continues to be removed by virtue of excessive commercialization.

Media Dependence

"A professional sports league or sporting event is not a natural product" – Julian Ammirante

As the NHL evolved into hockey's premier professional organization in North America, the business of broadcasting sports developed at a tremendous pace. From the Canadian perspective, hockey has always been a successful television product in Canada, with the CBC's long running *Hockey Night in Canada* attracting large nationwide audiences and becoming, over the years, something of a national institution.¹²¹ In *Manufacturing Players and Controlling Sports*, author Julian Ammirante puts forth the notion that professional sporting events such as

¹¹⁹ Mark Moore, "Balancing Business & Sport," *Saving the Game: Pro Hockey's Quest to raise its Game from Crisis to New Heights*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006), 350.

¹²⁰ Mark Moore, "Balancing Business & Sport," *Saving the Game: Pro Hockey's Quest to raise its Game from Crisis to New Heights*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006), 350.

¹²¹ Julian Ammirante, "Manufacturing Players and Controlling Sports," in *Canada's Game: Hockey and Identity*, ed. Andrew C. Holman, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2009), 196.

the NHL are not natural products.¹²² Sporting events are wholly artificial entities created and kept alive by rules developed for that purpose, as the media plays a key role in marketing spectator sports, and exaggerating the significance of performances.¹²³ For Ammirante, such ideological support should not come as a surprise. Sporting events around the world generate massive interest, and this is a fact that has not been lost by television broadcasters similar to the CBC.

Furthermore, in the essay *Sport vs. Media*, David Altheide and Robert Snow argue that television as an institution of mass entertainment embodies a particular logic and strategy that alters the characteristics of sport. Fundamentally, the authors propose that the concerns of television and hockey as a game are poles apart. While broadcast television is concerned with making an economic profit; for players and fans hockey can be a matter of action, drama, skill, and the outcome of a contest.¹²⁴ As a result, when television enters the relationship, the character of hockey is changed and distorted. Altheide and Snow illustrate that commercial television is primarily oriented to using programming as a way of drawing viewers to for-profit messages. In the most basic sense, television stations and networks generate a profit through the familiar ratings game. Since the cost of advertising is based on audience ratings, the goal of stations and networks is to generate the largest possible viewing audience.¹²⁵ Essentially, programs such as *Hockey Night in Canada*, act as commercials for commercials. Following this model the CBC's television operation has been enormously successful in generating ratings

¹²² Julian Ammirante, "Manufacturing Players and Controlling Sports," in *Canada's Game: Hockey and Identity*, ed. Andrew C. Holman, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2009), 195.

¹²³ Julian Ammirante, "Manufacturing Players and Controlling Sports," in *Canada's Game: Hockey and Identity*, ed. Andrew C. Holman, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2009), 195.

¹²⁴ David L. Altheide and Robert Snow, "Sports Versus the Mass Media," in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 7, (1978), 189.

¹²⁵ David L. Altheide and Robert Snow, "Sports Versus the Mass Media," in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 7, (1978), 189.

through NHL hockey. Like other mainstream sports, hockey fits nicely into prime time as broadcasters have managed to draw upon every aspect of popular entertainment in its *Hockey Night in Canada* program. Hockey embraces “controlled violence, problem solving, excitement, a fast pace, lots of color and visual power, and the ideal norm of humility and sportsmanship.”¹²⁶ Through the exploitation of these qualities, professional hockey has maintained its function as a commercial entertainment commodity. In correlation to Douglas Kellner’s interpretation of media spectacle, hockey has long been a domain of the spectacle with events like the NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs, the Olympics, and the Summit Series, attracting massive audiences, while generating huge advertising rates. Kellner advises that these cultural rituals celebrate some of Western society’s deepest values (i.e. competition, winning, and success), and corporations are willing to pay top dollar to get their products associated with such events.¹²⁷ Kellner’s notion of a media spectacle can be furthered to interpret the ‘larger than life’ style of reporting sporting news.¹²⁸ As a key element to the popularization of hockey, the media has transformed ordinary male athletes into heroes. This type of sensationalism is rooted in commercial interest to sell everything from advertising audiences, tickets, merchandise and newspapers.¹²⁹ Effectively, the link between professional hockey and television has distorted the character of the sport which has infused the collective memory of a nation. This becomes problematic for Canadian identity as it is more difficult than ever to distinguish the sport of hockey from professional organizations like the NHL.

¹²⁶ David L. Altheide and Robert Snow, “Sports Versus the Mass Media,” in *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 7, (1978), 189.

¹²⁷ Douglas Kellner, “The Sports Spectacle, Michael Jordan, and Nike,” *The Media Spectacle*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 63-70.

¹²⁸ Douglas Kellner, “The Sports Spectacle, Michael Jordan, and Nike,” *The Media Spectacle*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 63-70.

¹²⁹ Douglas Kellner, “The Sports Spectacle, Michael Jordan, and Nike,” *The Media Spectacle*, (New York: Routledge, 2003), 63-70.

Professional vs. Amateur Sport

"I always turn to the sports section first. The sports page records people's accomplishments; the front page has nothing but man's failures." - Earl Warren

Amateur hockey offers a different perspective from which to look at sport. In his book *Saving the Game*, author Mark Moore suggests that at the core of amateur sport is the notion of sportsmanship. Billions of people around the world, of different ages, backgrounds, circumstances in life, and levels of ability, participate in amateur sport. What unifies all these people and various athletic activities are the nature and spirit of sport. Beyond professional leagues or bodies, amateur sport fosters values of striving, learning, growing, and the development of important life lessons that are not always found in the classroom.¹³⁰ Moore advocates that "amateur sport encourages self-realization, and gives us a vehicle for self-expression. In a culture of conformity, sports offer people a chance to distinguish themselves through pursuit of a chosen athletic activity."¹³¹ In addition, against what medical experts are calling an epidemic of obesity, amateur sport offers a vital forum for physical exercise in the modern, urban world.¹³² By and large, amateur sport is the stuff of pride, volunteer work, sociability, and wholesome community-based entertainment.

Coinciding with the unprecedented commercialization of hockey, the CBC has strategically based several of its current initiatives on core merits of amateur sport. Of its most recent ventures, the CBC's partnership with *Right to Play* emphasizes the interplay between hockey's dual identity as a community practice, and a commercial product. Much like *Hockeyville*, the CBC has showcased its affiliation with *Right to Play* during its NHL hockey

¹³⁰ Mark Moore, "Balancing Business & Sport," *Saving the Game: Pro Hockey's Quest to raise its Game from Crisis to New Heights*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006), 350.

¹³¹ Mark Moore, "Balancing Business & Sport," *Saving the Game: Pro Hockey's Quest to raise its Game from Crisis to New Heights*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006), 350.

¹³² Mark Moore, "Balancing Business & Sport," *Saving the Game: Pro Hockey's Quest to raise its Game from Crisis to New Heights*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Ltd., 2006), 350.

broadcasts. Headquartered in Toronto, Canada, *Right to Play* brings sport to under-privileged youth in 23 countries throughout the developing world.¹³³ With more than 500,000 children currently involved in the program, *Right to Play* strives to create a new social value by building stronger local communities.¹³⁴ It is argued that these communities can be improved through play and sport, which are underutilized as cost effective tools in childhood development.

As a central feature to global mass entertainment, sport has become one of the most powerful and far-reaching communication platforms in the world. *Right to Play* advocates that because global sport events offer the capacity to reach vast numbers of people worldwide, they are effective platforms for public education and social mobilization.¹³⁵ In this logic, the organization argues that sport has the potential to be one of the most cross-cutting of all development and peace tools. According to the mandate of *Right to Play*, sport “is increasingly being used to promote health and prevent disease, strengthen youth development and education, foster social inclusion, prevent conflict and build peace, foster gender equity, enhance inclusion of persons with disabilities, and promote employment and economic development.”¹³⁶ Drawing on sport’s potential to empower, motivate, and inspire; the organization prides itself on representing a new pillar of the developmental aid industry that is concerned with the psychological and social effects of war and poverty. Here, the non-governmental organization proposes that sport is inherently an effective tool in developing and showcasing people’s strengths and capacities: “By shining a light on what people can do, rather than what they cannot

¹³³ “Introduction to Sport for Development and Peace,” *Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group*, Right to Play, 2008, <http://www.righttoplay.com/> (accessed November 10, 2009).

¹³⁴ “Introduction to Sport for Development and Peace,” *Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group*, Right to Play, 2008, <http://www.righttoplay.com/> (accessed November 10, 2009).

¹³⁵ “Introduction to Sport for Development and Peace,” *Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group*, Right to Play, 2008, <http://www.righttoplay.com/> (accessed November 10, 2009).

¹³⁶ “Introduction to Sport for Development and Peace,” *Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group*, Right to Play, 2008, <http://www.righttoplay.com/> (accessed November 10, 2009).

do, sport consistently promotes hope and a positive outlook for the future – ingredients that are essential to the success of all development and peace endeavors.”¹³⁷ In this way sport can be used to encourage people to become more physically active, build self-esteem, and foster positive social connection with others, which are inextricably linked to the maintenance of a healthy well-being.¹³⁸

Certainly the value of amateur sport is important to the development of society and we must see them succeed; however, the discrepancy between the goals of *Right to Play* and the goals of the CBC’s broadcast television operation is somewhat paradoxical. Mindful of the cultural economy, professional hockey is emblematic of the overuse of symbolic discourse by commercial interests. The CBC’s relationship with *Right to Play* draws attention to a prevalent notion that there is something unique about certain sport commodities and sporting events that enable them to be set apart from ordinary commodities like automobiles and cell phones.¹³⁹ In *Hockey Capital*, Andrew Ross argues that while Canada does not have a national car, or national movie, Canadians wholly accept hockey as its national sport. For Ross, “there is popular acceptance of this concept, even if there is not always acceptance of the content.”¹⁴⁰ As the national broadcaster relies on the cultural mass of amateur organizations to further the capitalist content of sport, *Hockey Night in Canada* remains a locale where many Canadians mark their participation in a shared culture. Despite the fact that the CBC was officially developed as a tool for the fostering of national and cultural identities, the tendency within the media industry seems

¹³⁷ “Introduction to Sport for Development and Peace,” *Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group*, Right to Play, 2008, <http://www.righttoplay.com/> (accessed November 10, 2009).

¹³⁸ “Introduction to Sport for Development and Peace,” *Sport for Development and Peace International Working Group*, Right to Play, 2008, <http://www.righttoplay.com/> (accessed November 10, 2009).

¹³⁹ Julian Ammirante, “Manufacturing Players and Controlling Sports,” in *Canada's Game: Hockey and Identity*, ed. Andrew C. Holman, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2009), 180.

¹⁴⁰ Andrew Ross, “Hockey Capital: Approaches to the Study of the Sports,” *Business and Economic History* 3, (2005), 2.

to consider the viewing public as a commodity, creating a gap between policy discourse, and the actual performance of broadcasters.¹⁴¹

Though it is inaccurate to identify Canada's national sport entirely with commercial enterprises, the role of major professional leagues and the sports media industry have become increasingly dominant over the last century. In this sense, the organic conception of hockey as Canadian culture has been removed from that culture by virtue of excessive commercialization. For Gruneau and Whitson, there is a need to separate the tradition of community hockey from the tradition of commercial spectacle, as amateur sport is undeniably closer to the games essence than professional organizations.¹⁴² Nonetheless, Canadians find it hard to surrender the idealistic belief that professional sports are different from other commodities that are produced and sold on the marketplace.¹⁴³

Conclusions

At first glance, a hockey rink can be an equal playing field. Every game starts at zero-zero, and rules are in place to maintain fairness for both teams regardless of race, colour, or creed. At best, these qualities allow sports broadcasting to transcend politics and social difference, and sports coverage itself takes on the fair play in turn. Yet, when the camera is turned back on the media itself, the games equal playing field becomes less transparent. It is at this juncture where the CBC's *Hockey Night in Canada* provides a lens to study expressions of Canadian culture. By exploring the media narrative that has undoubtedly assisted in the construction of a national psyche in Canada, this study has argued that many major themes play

¹⁴¹ Eric Thomas, "Canadian Broadcasting and Multiculturalism: Attempts to Accommodate Ethnic Minorities," *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 3rd ser., 17 (1992), 12.

¹⁴² Richard Gruneau and David Whitson, *Hockey Night in Canada: Sport, Identities and Cultural Politics*, (Toronto: Garamond P, 1993), 26.

¹⁴³ Julian Ammirante, "Manufacturing Players and Controlling Sports," in *Canada's Game: Hockey and Identity*, ed. Andrew C. Holman, (Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2009), 203.

out in the sport of hockey, including identity politics, nationhood, and collective memory.

Undoubtedly, *Hockey Night in Canada* has been successful in creating an imagined community, as cherished images and stories broadcasted on the CBC are assumed to belong to all Canadians. With an emphasis on nationhood, the ability of this media event to transfix the audience suggests that hockey is noteworthy as a central dimension of popular culture in Canada. At the same time, the ability of *Hockey Night in Canada* to bridge a national sports culture with the CBC's core mandate must be analyzed rather than romanticized. As such, hockey's deeply iconic place in Canadian society must consider a complexity of stories from a variety of perspectives.

The overall significance of investigating the cultural production of hockey in Canada is grounded in the lack of academic study in the field of sport as culture. While sport is a long way from being the most important pillar or practice of culture in society, hockey's presence across Canada is too strong to be ignored. Through Canada's obsession with the sport of hockey it may be possible to better understand the dynamics at play in the nation's cultural, socio-political and economic realms.

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