

The annual conference of Canadianists in Grainau, Germany, is one of the largest and most important of its kind. I was invited to address the conference on the basis of my most recent book, *The Next Canada: In Search of the Future Nation* (2000)

GRAINAU 2005

In my book, *The Next Canada: In Search of the Future Nation* (2000), I reported on the elements of Canadian identity embedded in a diverse group of 25-35-year olds across the country, from the perspective of their work, political views, sexual and ethnic cultures, art practices and community involvements. As a member of the 1960s generation – which famously had constructed a cultural nationalism from its experience in the New Left, and in the women’s and environmental movements, and in response to Quebec separatism – I had expected that my interviewees, who grew up in a neo-liberal world of “post-national” values, would have rejected any label of identity smacking of Canadian exceptionalism.

I could choose to react to a generation gap in one of two ways. I could join the chorus of my peers who were widely deploring the social and cultural “deCanadianization” of the post-FTA era - and with it the apparent loss of historical memory and social cohesiveness that still characterized the last truly “Canadian” generation, namely my own, the ubiquitous and perennial Boomers. Or, given the fact that, according to the 1996 national census, there were 4,557,233 Canadians between the ages of 25 and 35, I could make an expedition out into the terrain of the “next” Canada to see if pessimism and defeatism were justified.

What of that reminder from George Grant - gloomy conservative nationalist that he was in the 1960s, in his little, explosive book, *Lament for a Nation: The Defeat of Canadian Nationalism* - that a nation is not a nation just because of roots in the past. He wrote: “Memory is never enough to guarantee that a nation can

articulate itself in the present. There must also be a thrust of intention into the future.”

Are we Canadians only because of roots in a shared past? What happens when the past is unknown or forgotten or blurry or locked up somewhere or simply declared not the point somehow? Take, for example, the man who wrote a Letter to the Editor of the *Globe & Mail* a couple of years ago, in which he took exception to the annual lamentation of the Dominion Institute and its revelation, once again, that Canadians don't know their own history. He wrote: “May Canadians stay history- and ideology-free for many years. In this crazy world, it seems to me, those who learn their history are doomed to fight over it.”

Understanding the “thrust of intention into the future” of the next generation of Canadians became my project. Was there a common desire, I wanted to know, in the disparate expressions of young Canadians as workers, artists, business people, social activists, and politicians? Did they want to extend some meaning of their personal experience forwards into a collective purpose? Was there something they *wanted*, as Canadians in their own time and place?

My book, *The Next Canada: In Search of our Future Nation*, is the account of that investigation. Did I find that “thrust of intention”? In a word, yes. They all surprised me: to a person, they were proud, even defiant, Canadians whose pride resided in one version or another of the statement: “We Canadians take care of each other.”

Having grown up in the suburban sprawl of Wal-Mart and Taco Bell and Cineplex Odeon, they deplored the collapse of what their parents' generation still had, “circles of commitment” in their relations with neighbours. High-tech wizards confessed to a “cultural hunger” for “rootedness,” as though there were something unbearably shallow and lonely-making about their new world of borderless communication. They were telling me that, in their diverse ways, and

where they found themselves, they were resisting assaults on their sense of community with one another.

All my interviewees were insistent about one sense of community in particular: the place/space called Canada. No matter where I turned with my question, “Are you a Canadian? How do you know?” - to an actor at the Edmonton Fringe Festival or an autoworker in Windsor, to a sex researcher in Montreal or a lobster fisher in Nova Scotia, to a Reform Party MP in Edmonton or a food bank director in Toronto, a CBC radio producer in Winnipeg or a women’s shelter volunteer in Vancouver - I was answered much the same way. We take care of each other. Money isn’t our bottom line. We are a compassionate society.

And over and over again people cited publicly funded health care as evidence, summarized as: “I know I’m Canadian because I believe in the social commitment of public health care.” This was unexpected, even shocking. After all, the future of health care is a heated debate across Canada, and I did not think such a contested policy could serve as a foundation for collective identity. But my Next Canadians seemed impervious to the sarcasm of cynics - who typically argue that anyone who depends on a health care plan for an identity should “get a life” – preferring, it seemed, the deeply political value of social justice, which they identified with Canadian citizenship and conscience.

I began to understand that by "publicly funded health care" my interviewees didn't so much mean the thing itself - the creature of policy and bureaucracy - but the *idea*, even ideal, of mutual responsibility and connectedness, what social philosopher Ian Angus, at Simon Fraser University, in conversation with me, called the construction of a “fictive history.” And what I call a language of Canadian *desire*.

Evidence of this *desire* is the intriguing results of the winner of the contest, hosted by the CBC in November 2004, for the Greatest Canadian (in English-

Canada, at least). When the ballots from listeners and viewers were tallied, Tommy Douglas stood tall – the architect of Canada’s first publicly funded health insurance plan when he was premier of Saskatchewan in 1962 and “spoke up for the common man.”

During the 6-week run of the contest, 1.1 million votes were cast and 140,000 names were submitted by the public; for weeks internet forums and blogs were full of commentaries on the top 10 finalists, among whom none were women. Meanwhile in Quebec, a survey revealed that Quebecers’ choice for “greatest citizen” was Rene Levesque, who, in the English-Canadian list, was 69th.

[CNEWS Nov 26/04]

Speaking of entertainment, there was no NHL hockey in the 2004-2005 season.

I concluded my book on an optimistic note, convinced that somehow or other my generation indeed had managed to reproduce the next generation of conscious Canadians. From my generation’s perspective of cultural nationalism, Canada should have been “disappeared” – into American television and franchised coffee shops and Asian sweat shops –yet here they were, young Canadians for whom Canada is still a home place, a specific social and cultural destination worth preserving into the new century.

But even so I was left with a troubling thought, which intensified over the next several months.

By a United Nations index we may have been the best country in the world to live in for a few years but a recent OECD study confirms that Canada is spending 15% *less* on social programs than a decade ago. (Barlow, 7) Was it possible, I wondered, that a generation of satisfied Canadians had arrived for whom Canada was a kind of virtual, feel-good country, while the actual country was under severe stress? Or at least living in a cloud cuckoo land?

Writer and journalist Doug Sanders puts the point succinctly: “Since we actually contribute less to peacekeeping than Ghana or Bangladesh, this [peacekeeping] is pure aspirationalism: We want to be seen as the sort of nation that contributes to peace....While our ecological standards are extremely low, we aspire to being an environmental sort of place by embracing images of trees and rocks. We try to consider ourselves warm-hearted and generous, when we are in fact known around the world for the cold, penny-pinching lack of generosity among our governments and corporations, by promoting symbols of grinning, beer-drinking chumps.” *Doug Saunders, “Aspiration nation: Life is but a brand-name dream,” G&M, July 3/04*

Since 2000, I have been revisiting the conclusion of *The Next Canada*, as that generation and Canadian society as a whole goes through new experiences, most recently the federal election of 2004, and the re-election of George W. Bush in the United States.

The June, 2004 federal election campaign – Paul Martin’s first as Liberal party leader and Stephen Harper’s first as Conservative part leader – was fought as a mobilization of Canadians around collective values of social welfare in the face of the threat – or perceived threat – from the right-wing. The Conservative agenda was viewed in the liberal media as implicit political, military, economic and even cultural harmonization with George W. Bush’s America. As Paul Martin put it on the opening day of the campaign: “Choose your leader. Choose a progressive future. Choose your Canada.” And he explicitly identified “Canada” as a historical space that embraces “its valued tradition of collective responsibility.”

The Conservatives didn’t disappoint. Between June 1 and June 19, statements from various candidates set off flurries of accusations that a Conservative government would compromise abortion rights, human rights for homosexuals, official bilingualism and cultural identity.

Arts and culture are “genuinely in peril” in this election, according to Stephen Waddell, national ED of ACTRA...”We will all be working for the Americans....Canadians are being so overwhelmed by US culture that there is very little space left on television and cinema screens for anything other than news and *Hockey Night in Canada*.” [G&M June 15/04] Margaret Atwood referred to the Conservatives as “body snatchers” in an op-ed piece in the G&M in early June/04

In fact, in its 46-page policy platform, the Conservative Party didn’t mention culture once, not even in the Appendix.

But they did devote eight pages to “Security.” [Todd Babiak, EJ June 10/04] The Foreign Affairs minister alluded darkly to Conservative fear-mongering about terrorist threats to Canada and asked rhetorically, ‘What is the real definition of security? Do you approach it on the basis we are going to increase the police powers of the state and we’re going to co-operate with the Americans in everything they want to do in terms of repression?’” *Jeff Sallot, “Tories would move too close to US, Graham believes,” G&M June 24/04* This was disingenuous, as it turns out. Canada’s own hastily-invoked anti-terrorism legislation has broad public support, even though, in sympathy with the American “war on terror,” we have legislated an Anti-Terrorism Act (formerly Bill C-36) which sanctions arrest without warrant and detention without charge, allows the federal cabinet to usurp judicial powers , and gives courts authority to imprison terrorists for life.

Prime Minister Martin was challenged from the left by the editor of *Catholic New Times*, as a politician in fact “out of step” with Canadian values – as finance minister he had “embraced” privatization, deregulation, smaller government and unfettered free trade rather than secure the social safety net. [Ted Schmidt, March/04]

Our national soul-searching attracted the notice of American public figures. Ralph Nader accused the Conservatives of colluding with corporate Canada in its ambition to privatize Canada's health insurance program. And so a new English verb was born: 'This is part of a relentless effort to...Bushize Canada.'" [*Alan Freeman, "Harper will 'Bushize' Canada, Nader says," G&M June 27/04.*] Filmmaker Michael Moore weighed in with a plea to Canadian voters not to let American Democrats down by electing Stephen Harper. The American ethic, he said, is "every man for himself. Me me me me me. To let people in your country have that ethic take over and destroy the thing that makes you wonderfully Canadian [we're all in this together ethic] is something that must be resisted." *Jay Stone, "Don't be like US, don't vote for Harper, Moore tells Canadians," EJ June 21/04*

Throughout the campaign, politicians and journalists worried about the lack of interest of young people in the proceedings - about three-quarters of the youngest voting-age citizens, an unprecedented proportion, don't go to the polls, even when the campaign is pitched within their register. From the first day, the Liberals portrayed the election as a contest for Canadians' sense of "values" and "Canadian identity," whether this was health care or defence or environment. This identity, for young as well as older Canadians, means "I am not American," not in the traditional sense, for my generation of cultural nationalists for example, as less-than-American or not-quite-American or can-you-tell-we're-not-American? But as in-your-face Canadian. Even the question of health care policy, surely not a young person's first concern, is occasion for inordinate national pride, as I've suggested earlier. One young Edmonton journalist, assigned to the election campaign, and whose columns I followed, asserted unambiguously that "Canadians love a publicly-funded health system that recoils from privatization. A world view that...weeps for Iraq instead of screaming at it." [*Jason Markusoff, "The decision: red with a tinge of orange," EJ, June 29/04*]

More than 40 per cent of respondents In a telephone poll of 500 teens (aged 14 to 18) saw the US as an ‘evil global force.’ Among French-Canadians, that number jumped to 64%. [*Misty Harris, “Canadians teens see US as evil,” EJ June 25/04*] And *Stop Harper* buttons were “super-hot” fashion accessories inspired by Canadian “culturistas” such as Avril Lavigne and Sarah McLachlan, who argued that the Conservative leader is a “culture killer.” [*G&M, June 24.04*]

Yet, here is another young journalist’s account of the audience at cinema on the evening of election day:

“Monday night, just before the polls closed, a local media personality introduced a screening of *Spider-Man 2* at South Edmonton Common. Every seat was taken....The media personality said, ‘Did everyone vote?’ Some clapped and answered politely in the affirmative but the loudest people in the theatre screamed ‘No!’ This wasn’t an evocation of laziness or apathy. This was the ‘No!’ of high school hockey players when asked if they have secret homosexual urgings. It was defiant and proud, filled with negative self-definition.” [*Todd Babiak, “Election naysayers caught in cultural web,” EJ July 1/0*]

Finally, the day after the election: typical headlines pronounced the results, “red with a tinge of orange,” and the “bruised status quo,” with too few right-wingers for the right to unite and defeat the combined centrist and left of centre voters in the Liberal, New Democratic and Bloc Quebecois parties, but with not enough enthusiasm for the Martin Liberals to give them a majority in the House of Commons.¹ At 60.3%, voter turnout was the lowest since 1898. As for the emotions of the capitalist class, “market reaction was muted and the Canadian dollar barely moved.” [*Reuters June 29/04*] If this really had been a campaign waged for our values and identity against the threat of the “toxic” policies imported from the Bush White House – if this was a campaign that could draw

¹ **Election results:** 135 Lib seats (36.7%), 99 Cons (29.6%), 54 BQ, 19 NDP (15.7%)

out such patriotic responses as that of the letter-writer to the *Globe&Mail*, . “I am proud to be able to pay my taxes” – then where were the voters on voting day? Right on cue, the prime minister vowed there would be no new tax cuts until after implementing commitments to improve health care delivery, daycare and the quality of life for aboriginals. [EJ Nov17/04] *Tax me, I’m Canadian*, the Conservatives had mocked, but many Canadians had taken it to heart. Even Paul Martin seemed no longer to believe in the ruthless budgets he had written while Finance minister - all those cuts to provincial transfers, that obsession with refinancing the CPP, the brutal cuts to the CBC.

As expected, since the U.S. presidential election of November, 2004, there has been more soul-searching about Canadian society, especially in contrast with the American. The map showing North America as divided between *The United States of Canada* and *Jesusland* has widely circulated, and issues of the defence of Canadian sovereignty in the face of the Bush/Cheney Doctrine are very pressing. Signs of the times: in 2003 at a hockey game in Montreal, fans booed *The Star-Spangled Banner*. Just days after the US election, former PM Jean Chretien walked into Toronto’s King Edward Hotel for lunch and received the applause of patrons, one of whom shouted out, “Thank you for keeping us out of Iraq!” [G&M Mar 15/04] A website launched as a spoof by THIS magazine invited Canadians to “rescue” American citizens by marrying them. The site got so many hits the weekend after the US election – 350 per *second* – that its servers crashed. Another website, www.canadianalternative.com, aimed at “conscientious, forward-thinking” Americans, lists reasons to move to “Cool Canada”: Canadian Senate recommends legalizing marijuana; more than half of Canada’s provinces allow same-sex marriage; Canada signed the Kyoto Protocol; Canada has no troops in Iraq; and (inevitably) Canada has universal public health care.

Clearly, our traditional self-image as modest and self-deprecating underdog may have to be revised. And our self-esteem only grows as we learn of all the ways in

which we really are different from Americans. A Time/CNN poll found that 59% of Americans believe the prophecies in the Book of Revelations are true and will happen; nearly half, 49%, believe that the father of a family must be “master of the house, a statement only 18% of Canadians found themselves in agreement with. [G&M Apr 26/03]

Earlier, I made reference to what I call a Canadian “language of desire” used in the construction of a “fictive” history or identity, and I want to return to that theme. For it seems, in the light of these two recent elections – the Canadian federal and American presidential – that my concerns of five years ago remain cogent: Was it possible, I wondered then, that a generation of satisfied Canadians had arrived for whom Canada was a kind of virtual, feel-good country, while the actual country was under severe stress? Or at least living in a cloud cuckoo land?

Let me return to that list of attributes of “Cool Canada”: Canadian Senate recommends legalizing marijuana; *a bill decriminalizing minor quantities of marijuana died with the election call* ; more than half of Canada’s provinces allow same-sex marriage; *since the Bill was tabled in the House two weeks ago, the storm of protest from the Conservatives, backbench Liberals, and religious groups has rumbled right across the country*; Canada signed the Kyoto Protocol; *on February 16 this year, when the Kyoto Protocol came into force, there was no Canadian plan to implement it nor has Ottawa imposed any regulations whatsoever in support of its putative target*; Canada has no troops in Iraq; *true*; and Canada has universal public health care; *true, but we also have disputatious stake-holders with no view in sight of the compromise that could be struck between the privatizers and the fans of Tommy Douglas*.

“I know I’m a Canadian,” young interviewees told me, “because I believe in bilingualism and ‘my Canada includes Quebec,” yet, although three-quarters of English speakers outside Quebec wish they could speak French, only 7% can, after three decades of French-immersion programs and 35 years of the Official Languages Act. [Jeffrey Simpson, G&M Feb 28/04]

“The stories we tell each other—in our plays, our books, our films—affirm the importance of the human, the local, the specific: they are the crackly bits that give society texture in the face of the blender forces of globalization,” writes Max Wyman, *The Defiant Imagination*.

Yet it is a fact that “arts & culture” rarely comes up as a concern in public opinion surveys; probably fewer than 1% of Canadians ever rank it as an election issue. “No political party in the western world has won or lost an election on cultural policy.” Under the Liberals’ watch, CBC budgets were slashed ruthlessly, and private Canadian broadcasters have given up on Canadian drama in favour of cheaper reality shows and American imports. [*Todd Babiak, EJ June 10/04*]

For all the public rhetoric about Canadian values and Canadian uniqueness, a recent survey prepared for the federal government revealed that over 50% of professional writers in Canada earn less than \$5000 a year from their writing; the average annual income generated by writing alone is about \$8000. [*Writers Trust*]

“Joe Canadian,” the air-punching, beer-drinking patriot created by Molson’s Brewery a few years ago - I’m not a lumberjack, or a fur trader, and I don’t live in an igloo or eat blubber, or own a dogsled...A toque is a hat, a chesterfield is a couch, and it’s pronounced *zed* not *zee*...*ZED* – an ad that was so massively popular that even people who didn’t drink beer or own television sets could recite its lines - I believe in peacekeeping, not policing, diversity not assimilation –will disappear into the likely merger between Molson Brewers and Coors, an American brewery notorious for “union busting, environmental devastation and racist and homophobic politics,” as the progressive web journal *rabble.ca* reminded us.

The melting of the polar icecap, more than one million children, or 15.6%, living in poverty,² the decade-long squabbling about a national daycare program, unprecedented levels of violence against Aboriginal women –and “not one word” on Aboriginal issues uttered during the election campaign³ - deregulation of public utilities, the fragmentation of the audience for public broadcasting: Which Canada are we living in: actual or virtual?

In that other, *actual*, Canada, a poll found that only 44% of Canadians believe Canada should join the missile defence shield plan [*rabble.ca Dec 15/04*] while the government is still dithering about whether to join up with the American “juggernaut” [*Lloyd Axworthy & Michael Byers G&M Apr 29/03*].

Canada’s much admired “wildness” and “naturalness,” is home to more than 200 terrestrial and 18 marine ecoregions, but 441 species are at risk and our newly-minted Species at Risk Act applies only to species that fall within federal jurisdiction and relies on voluntary measures; it is weaker legislation than that of the United States and Mexico. [*Wilderness Cttee Report Spring 2004*] According to a massive scientific study in Canada and seven other countries with Arctic territory, some time this century, polar bears may disappear from Hudson Bay. Environmental changes in the Arctic are accelerating– shrinking glaciers, melting sea ice, thawing permafrost and changing weather patterns. [*G&M Nov 1/04*] A summit meeting between federal cabinet ministers and top executives of Canadian car makers yesterday failed to reach voluntary agreement on how the industry will cut greenhouse-gas emissions to meet targets under the Kyoto accord on climate change. *Parks Canada* has been starved of funding, including those 13 World Heritage Sites we are responsible for under UNESCO.

² Defined as those living in families whose total income before taxes is below Stats Canada’s Low Income Cutoff

³ Phil Fontaine, national chief of the AFN. [Key areas include] the growing number of aboriginal women working and living on the streets, poverty, land claims and health care on reserves.” *Joel Kom, “Aboriginal issues ignored: national chief,” EJ June 26/04*

"Thirty-two years ago, when I was even dumber than I am now, I went on a hiking trip to Long Beach on the west coast of Vancouver Island. We camped under a cliff on a beach. It was a beautiful spot, but dangerous. Wary that the incoming tide might cause trouble in the middle of the night we built huge bonfires in a line way out onto the beach, thinking that if they were doused by the tide, we would know how dangerous this world was becoming.

"Then we started drinking. As the fires went out, one by one, we became so intoxicated we started cheering, celebrating the extinguishing of each fire with another drink. Later, I woke up in my tent, half drunk and half hung-over, my feet wet and an egg and a loaf of bread floating past my head. We were in the middle of a west coast hurricane, the tide raging, our gear ruined. We struggled up the wind-blasted muddy cliff in the night, clinging to branches, fearing for our lives, cursing our idiocy.

"North American politics are not about hope for a better future anymore. They're about ignoring consequences. And it's becoming more and more evident that we are all sitting drunk on the last beach of a dying planet, cheering as the fires go out." Brian Brett, *Going Too Far*," www.dooneyscafe.com June 26/04; A version of this column appeared June 25/04 in the *Yukon News*

Alongside this hardcore reality, we are invited by theorists to think of Canada nevertheless as an *imagined* community, a proposition, all fluidity and flexibility, an "electric city," as writer B.W. Powe expressed it in *A Canada of Light* (Powe, 45). The ultimate post-modern nation is based on a system of networks and is the sum of its telecommunications links, not its railways. These citizens cohabit in overlapping micro- and sub-cultures of culture, gender, and ethnicity, and for them the perennial Canadian identity crisis is an opportunity to develop a whole series of morphed electronic identities. Are Canadians a techno-culture, an art, a wired community, or a political space? We are invited to relish all the possibilities at once.

What makes many of my generation anxious about post-modernity - that Canada may be only a process of negotiations toward perpetually redefined goals, unhitched from politics and institutions - they offer as virtues for a new age. In this *virtual* Canada, we Canadians are the sum of our values, cultures, desires, disconnected from an actual, market-driven, polluting and digitizing corporation with its regional office in the House of Commons. A younger generation has the capacity to feel at home in a symbolically Canadian media universe, a *semiotic* Canada, while *actual* Canada - its shrinking public spaces, its deregulated public enterprises, its traumatized environment – is under severe stress. This is deeply radical.

I am not a cultural historian nor an anthropologist. And so I am at a bit of a loss as to how to understand how this has happened. How to intervene in pronouncements like that of Pico Ayer on Canada in the 21st century: “the spiritual home of the very notion of an extended, emancipating global citizenship... that seems to arise out of the country’s wide expanses and seeing how they can uncover a different kind of world.” Or as foreign minister Pierre Pettigrew put it: “It is not just a matter of what we do – it is even more importantly a matter of who we *are*.” [emphasis added] In this feel-good Canada, a letter writer to the *Edmonton Journal* is proud to be part of Canada’s contingent of election observers to Ukraine last December - to have contributed to Canada’s tradition of “peacekeeping”!

We are falling in love with ourselves to a degree that obscures the fact that, as public affairs writer Andrew Cohen put it, “Being Canadian doesn’t stop war, keep peace, reconcile foes or feed people. It won’t amount to anything without ways and means.” [Andrew Cohen, *EJ* Nov 16/04]

Cohen is referring to the “ways and means” of diplomacy, military deployment and foreign aid in order to reintegrate *virtual* and *actual* Canada, to use my

terms. But, if we now review what “the next Canada” is shaping up to be in the imagination and desire of Canadians, perhaps we can discern what that reintegrated Canada looks like in their terms.

It bears repeating that our values, our *who-we-are*, are not free-floating but are rooted in a political culture that is already quite old with us, as old as First Nations’ treaties with the Crown, as old as our Constitution, our popular resistance movements, our multiculturalism and official bi-lingualism, our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, our commitment to multilateralism and the flag of the United Nations.

Of all these, our multiculturalism, as it is practised as well as promulgated, is arguably our most celebrated characteristic. (Canada, says Pico Ayer, has “decided to advance a wider, global sense of community and home.”)

Eighty per cent of people who were part of a visible minority did not report discrimination or unfair treatment or said it occurred only rarely, Blacks being most likely to report feeling they had been discriminated against. [*Ethnic Diversity Survey, Stats Canada 2002*] In contrast to the policy of the government of France, for example, wearing Islamic headscarves in our schools is not an issue, just as turbans worn by Sikh members of the RCMP are no longer remarked on. Zacharias Kunuk’s 2000 film, *Atanarjuat (Fast Runner)*, Canada’s first aboriginal-language feature film, won the Cannes Festival’s Camera D’Or; Kunuk was born on a little island off the western coast of Baffin Island in the traditional community of Igloodike in Nunavut, inhabited for 4000 continuous years. He saw no television until 1983, and then only to watch Hockey Night in Canada.

It was moved and seconded and passed unanimously at The Writers Union of Canada’s AGM in 2004, that the Racial Issues Committee wished to change its name, as the mandate of the committee is moving beyond just racial issues, e.g. publishing in Urdu and Punjabi.

Contrary to bellicose accusations of just a decade ago, the lived experience of multiculturalism need not mean ghettoization. Over time, obsolete or dysfunctional definitions of the “core Canadian” change, and we have the institutions to accommodate the new. Our collective self-confidence as citizens of a democratic pluralism grows, and with it confidence in a culture that values diversity. Those of us who believed or hoped that there was some kind of ideal “community” or public into which all diversity and difference would dissolve have been challenged, since at least the 1970s, by those for whom the “public” never did include them: workers, minorities, women, the disabled, children, sexual minorities. In reaction they have formed their own counter-communities or alternative publics. There is no single overarching public sphere; we are getting used to it.

As the perennial leftist columnist Rick Salutin wrote recently, “the term ‘Canadian values’ belongs to an essentialist discourse. It sees them as basically timeless and unchanging instead of open-ended and self-creating....The values involved [in creating the Canadian system] were not Canadian, they were universal.” (“There are more people who share mainstream Canadian political values in the US than there are Canadians.”⁴) But I would argue further that, for all their universality, they have found a particular social space in which to develop.

Public broadcasting, farmers’ wheat pools, Caisses populaires and credit unions, the Canada Council, public hospitals, These are not just collective memories but *shared* (sometimes contested) memories, the product of institutions for which we agree to be collectively responsible. The commitment to such institutions represents both a “we” that remembers and a “we” imagining the future.⁵

⁴ Michael Byers, head of UBC’s Liu Institute, in *timae* magazine, p 18, Nov 1/04]

⁵ Kwame Anthony Appiah, “You must remember this,” *NYRB* March 13/03, p 37

So I am back where I started, with George Grant's idea of a nation as a "thrust of intention into the future." True it is rooted in a culture that emerges from our notorious post-modernism - our ambiguity, flexibility, negotiability, our being Canadian-as-possible-under-the-circumstances. We are, as others have declared, a work-in-progress. Which is another way of saying, I think, that we are a culture of hope.