

# CANADA IN THE AGE OF TERROR: THE METAPHYSICS OF THE COTTAGE

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## Abstract

This essay offers a wry analysis of the manner in which elements of Canada's rhetorical culture inflect its response to international affairs. Canada's public and private response to international conflicts in an "Age of Terror" is examined as an instance of disengagement and irony through the metaphor of the "cottage."

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*"Since September 11th, I cannot stop asking myself if, in regard to events of such violence, my entire conception of activity oriented towards mutual understanding - the one that I developed since the theory of communicative action - has not collapsed into the ridiculous."*  
Jürgen Habermas

*"There's a lot to be said for wasting time."*  
Neil Young

What does it mean for a country like Canada to live, as we have repeatedly been told by our political and intellectual elites, in an age of terror? A simple answer might be: Not a great deal. We propose to examine here why this is so.

Let us begin with the phrase "age of terror." It is the mark of a "paradigm shift," the sudden imposition of an interpretive framework that understands and responds to the world in Hobbesian terms. We would be thrown back into something like a state of nature that is hostile and irrational, and where survival requires extreme vigilance and the suspension of the niceties of a civilised order. If we take this claim seriously, we would now be in a not very pleasant world with a new ontology and human condition where we are bound together by the constant threat of chaos. The most mundane acts would take on sinister casts, fear would lurk in the most ordinary of places, and the plate glass of a shopping mall window might at any moment become shrapnel.

There are times and places where such threats are real, where bombs weekly disrupt everyday life, just as human history has been marked by wars, dictatorships, police states and the threat of nuclear annihilation that render fear omnipresent. In this current "Age of terror" however, fear is in large measure hypothetical. In principle, terrorist attacks could occur at any time, and sometimes do, but they are not (yet?) the mark of a generalised condition. The expression "Age of terror" serves rhetorical ends before all else. It seeks to recast the life-world, to enhance suspicion and anxiety, and thus favours the application of increasingly pervasive systems of surveillance and control.

As Marshall McLuhan famously observed, Canada is strategically well-placed to be sensitive to such sudden changes in the *zeitgeist* of modernity. In particular, its peripheral status offers the luxury of peering into the American maelstrom without being fully caught up by its every current. As a result, this facilitates a view both of the world and our American neighbours that we characterise as ironic detachment. Canadians can empathise with the experience of others without feeling particularly implicated, as if watching just another television channel.

## Law, Rhetoric and Irony

This stance has, as we shall see, both advantages and disadvantages. In our 2003 book, *Law, Rhetoric and Irony*, we advanced the argument that what precisely distinguishes Canadian civil culture is the sense of ironic detachment that characterises the state and all social actors as they intervene in the public sphere. In part, this detachment results from a long historical experience: since empires and civili-

sations come and go, what they say about themselves and what they promise are to be taken with a large heap of salt. This is a bitter historical lesson, as Canada's aboriginals, its "First Nations," were the first to find out.

The French promised various forms of utopia, and then they upped and left. The British seemed to bring with them something called "English liberty" whose practices were rooted in a conception of fundamental law that was not fully bogus, but such "liberty" had its intricacies. Britain promised much more than it could actually deliver in one fell swoop. The Quebec Act of 1774, unusual as it was for the times, required a lengthy apprenticeship in an administrative and political culture with a vast and technically complex range of practices. One needed to speak the language and negotiate the procedures of law, the courts and parliaments both in the colony and the *metropole*. In other words, to live in the colony, as opposed to simply on the land, required learning a succession of grammars regulating public symbolic action. What these grammars shared was that they were forms of rhetoric, ways of speaking designed to constitute and influence relations of power.

The development of these rhetorics occurred through a process of "translation," in the dual sense of what happens when you move institutions from one continent to another and, more literally, when you translate between English and French as well as between their particular idioms of law, philosophy, political oratory, journalism, homiletics, and so on. These discourses in their interconnection eventually formed the armature of a civil culture. However, this process required a great deal of time and effort, of stops and starts, punctuated in the interim by varied crises of one kind or another. Furthermore, at least in the Canadian case, no one idiom succeeded in establishing its supremacy. The continuation of the *Coutume canadienne* (better but less accurately known as French civil law) within the British Constitution is a notable case in point.

In Canada, as in other places, social actors learn the rhetorical idioms of the times they happen to be in, while maintaining some familiarity with "legacy idioms." However, for a variety of internal and external reasons, these language games change, and often without prior notice. "Conquest" by a foreign power is an example of a major external change in the language game of civil life. In any case, social actors are often faced with learning something new, and the learning curve is roughly generational: It can take up to a generation to adapt to and master a new dominant language game.

When an idiom or "language game" changes, the game itself, the set of legal and administrative logics and procedures, changes as well. Thus, the periods of mastery or ease with a particular language game are punctuated by periods of varying duration of "cognitive dissonance" in which confusion and uncertainty prevail, until familiarity and competence with new language game is acquired. In a way that parallels the well-known openness of the Canadian staples economy to sudden fluctuations in external demand for changing staples (from fur to lumber to iron ore, and so on), a similar process of rhetorical sedimentation occurs. At any moment, Canada offers an archaeological view (*une coupe*) of strata of past and present rhetorics and language games. Furthermore, these are not fully fossilised. They are only sedimented and leak into one another, because old communicative processes do not ever entirely cease; rather, they blur or bleed into their successors. Thus, for instance, one can still hear 16<sup>th</sup> century idioms in Quebec French,

especially north of Quebec City (as documented in the ethnographic films of Pierre Perrault). French is being spoken of course, but in a form with which contemporary inhabitants of France can no longer identify. Thus, in France, Perrault's films require subtitles, much to the scandal of Quebec's filmmaking community.

Clearly, one cannot speak of a "pure" language at all. But in Canada, impurity is not just a matter of geography and linguistic demography, or of the constant leaking of English words, terms and sounds into French. Canada's linguistic complexity is also a matter of the coexistence and interpenetration of a whole catalogue of "discourses," of the semiotic forms that orchestrate practices across public space. To exaggerate slightly, it is a miracle that in Canada anything can get said at all. This is, of course, what gives rise to such ideas as the "two solitudes," or, factoring in large-scale immigration from numerous other lands and differing linguistic zones, what John Porter (1965) refers to as a "mosaic" (as opposed to a melting-pot). It is this, and the proximity of the population to the American border which gives rise to such "distinctively Canadian" preoccupations as the question of "identity," the problem "national unity" (and its subsets such as regionalism), and the related idea that "communication" is key to what Canada is about. Or rather, as Maurice Charland noted in an often-cited article (1987), Canada's fantasy is that technologies of communication can more or less adequately simulate "communication" itself.

Consequently and paradoxically, Canadians are by nature profoundly sensitive rhetors, attuned to the problems and possibilities of public speech while at the same time sceptical of the kinds of strategies deployed by 'designated' public speakers. As the Jesuits discovered in the 16th century, the first inhabitants of Canada were voluble, and the never-silent forests rang with discourses. Canada was then, and always has been, a very talkative land. And the "proof" of this, for all the communicative problems alluded to above, can be found in the numerous constitutional crises we analyze in *Law, Rhetoric and Irony* (2003). We won't rehearse those analyses here, but only note that Canada has managed to remain a strikingly civil society, in relative terms unmarked by the violence so characteristic of the history of the United States or France — no revolutions, no civil wars. Yes, it has seen unrest, social turbulence and the like, but on the whole has remained a peaceable polity, and this for reasons that have more to do with rhetoricality than is commonly granted.

The usual explanation for Canadian "deference to authority" is the fundamentally repressive character of the central state. After all, or so the story told by elites goes, Canada under the French *ancien régime* was part of an absolutist state. On top of this unchanged architecture, the British would have simply laid a veneer of legal concepts, and things would have continued as before. We don't buy this. As it's told, once the absolutist French state had left the scene, the Catholic Church stepped into the vacuum to keep Quebec in its place, and "peace, order and good government" prevailed from sea to sea, with the occasional rebellion put down *manu militari*. In time, under the concept of "responsible government," local loyalist cliques were granted little fragments of sovereignty by the British Crown in a lengthy, incremental process with Dominion status in 1867, its expansion by the Westminster Statute of 1931, and finally, the patriation of the British North America Act to Ottawa and a new Canadian Constitution in 1982. The usual story does not then proclaim a happy ending, but laments that in the course of things, Canada

had, behind all the legal verbiage, simply slipped from being a British colony to being one of the United States. If not a colony in law, Canada would now be the same thing in fact, with no latitude of its own in matters of trade, and little more in foreign affairs. Its prime ministers and leading politicians would be but toadies to Washington, and, the cruellest cut of all, its 'culture' would be the perpetual victim of predatory American films, broadcasting, and other popular trash.

The amazing thing about this story is that so many otherwise presumably intelligent people actually believe it! It is, with slight variants, the version of Canadian history taught in schools, although in Quebec, the story has an additional twist: the real villains are English-Canadians always trying to eliminate the French language, the Catholic religion, or sacred provincial rights. Indeed, even in the rest of English Canada outside Ontario, there is agreement that one should blame Toronto. Consider how utterly elitist a story this is, and yet also how contradictory! This tiresome account sees only the fearsome shadow of the State, under whose darkness the populace toils in silent sufferance. Furthermore, in this account, Canada has always been this way. And so, if in this story nothing changes or can change, how did this Monarch-ruled Leviathan fall under the sway of the noisy republican another? There is no satisfactory answer for this account is not even a coherent story: It is a bit of a fairy-tale, a nightmare told to small children. That is to say, it is a rhetorical fragment, not to be reflected on too long, just like the "Age of Terror," even though it serves quite distinct interests. The story of a besieged Canada favours a plodding bureaucracy and a whining intellectual class, where the former find its *raison d'être* in administering a society discouraged from actually investing energy in an autonomous civil sphere, while the latter, in state supported sinecures, carps and plays the victim. The rhetoric of terror, works the same way but with more sombre results, favouring the expansion of a security apparatus.

## Rhetorical Styles

As we argued in our book, there is more to Canada than this. Certainly, it is a country of deferred and displaced engagements, but still it is not without tactics. Indeed, the history of Canada is one of a weak though pervasive state and orders of power whose discourses can be received ironically and re-appropriated in kind. In order to render effectively such rhetorical tactics, we had recourse to Robert Hariman's idea of a political style (1995). As a category, style highlights aspects of rhetoric that are not captured in rationalist or epistemic accounts. Rhetorical styles "consist in sets of rules for speech that guide the alignment of signs and situations through a repertoire of rhetorical resources that depend upon aesthetic reactions to social appearance for effect." It is these that account for individual identities, social cohesion and the performances of power. When rhetoric is so understood, it cannot be reduced to informal logic or rational and contingent deliberation.

For rationalist critics, our emphasis upon Canada's rhetorical styles might appear a veiled critique of the irrational or ideological character of the public sphere. After all, "style" could seem incompatible with rational deliberation by "enlightened" polity. We were not saying this, however. We are quite suspicious of anti-rhetorical critiques, including those of deliberative democracy theorists, which idealise some form of Socratic dialogue over the rough-and-tumble of rhetorical exchange. The language through which power is negotiated is rhetorical, and so nec-

essarily suffused with aesthetic qualities. Thus, we identified five related Canadian aesthetic styles. Each was a response to the form of discourse through which constituted authority was exercised.

None of these five forms of discourse placed civil society at the centre of power. Canada, as a profoundly counter-revolutionary country, empowered subjects by providing them avenues to make requests, advance arguments, and even call their leaders to account, but did not offer a full identification between subject and state. During the French reign, power was ritually displayed in what could best be described as a theatrical performance. One might have been impressed and even elevated by the pomp and grandeur of French Royal authority as staged by Frontenac, but only as one fully recognised its theatricality. High display established a radical hierarchy between King and subject. Even so, the French subjects of New France knew that the King's ability to police this modest and distant colony was quite limited. Form outstripped power: Royal pomp established the conditions for the development of an aesthetic sensibility that could combine deferential manners and ironic detachment. That sensibility produced a civil culture that, in France, would be shattered by the Revolution, but in Canada remained as a distinct form of sociability characterised by the privileging of rhetorical excess, by an *esprit de finesse*, but also by the continued exclusion of women from selfhood, as well as the exclusion of large areas of social practice beyond the sway of monarchical hegemony.

The monarchy took on a different rhetorical form after the colony was ceded to Britain, where Royal authority was tempered by the importance of "equity" in the British Constitution. Under the British Constitution, King and subject were identified with the realm, but in a hierarchical relationship with King as caring father. As a consequence, the rhetoric enacting the King's power is remarkably restrained. The King's words cite the source of their authority in the British Constitution and also justify his measures in terms of his paternal love and obligation toward his subjects. This style of enacting power opens onto possible forms of response. In Canada's colonial period, especially before the establishment of legislatures, subjects developed a rhetorical style based in petition. This style eschewed the making of demands. It was characterised by an expression of devotion, an account of some suffering, and a humble request for relief. A contemporary reader might consider this style to be either evidence of false consciousness or a cynical response to oppression. Both such interpretations would fail to appreciate the nature of rhetorical performance. Monarchies are marked by a heightened rhetorical consciousness. This consciousness is not necessarily ironic, but has elements upon which irony is based, including distance and reflexivity. Thus, while the fawning rhetoric of petition that one encounters in the late eighteenth century is clearly marked by artifice and formality, it is not false. The law and tradition provide roles and impose obligations upon both King and subjects. These actors, in turn are faced with the task of performing decorously and artfully from the place where they find themselves. Subjects need not love the King, but must act as if they do when making requests. The King must not appear arbitrary, nor seem to be mechanically executing some law, but must appear animated with the law's spirit. He must seem wise, or more precisely seem to embody prudence. Under the British Constitution, the appearance of equity and prudence is fundamental. In a monarchical political

culture, authenticity is not a value; appearance is everything. Furthermore, appearance and reality are not binary opposites, since the former can only exist as it comes to appear. Appearances guide the formation of policy and the exercise of power. Political effectiveness depends upon their artful management. Subjects must provide Kings with opportunities to appear to rule well.

The third rhetorical style we identified was monarchical republicanism. The advent of parliamentary democracy offered a new way for Canadian subjects, as citizens, to speak to power. Prior to the introduction of parliamentary institutions, the realm was suffused with a familial *ethos*. The presence of legislatures transformed the character of the realm, since subjects could speak, deliberate, and legislate. This republican style, as Hariman describes with reference to Cicero's Rome, equates rhetorical virtuosity with political acumen. Eloquence is prized: There is no conflict between making an argument and offering a good show. Mannered disagreement is fundamental: Parliamentary norms demand that one's opponents be addressed as esteemed colleagues. The republican aesthetic is marked by a combination of distinction and equality. Parliamentarians, and citizens generally, are expected to approach each other as equals, and respectfully weigh each other's words and reasons. And yet, republics value eloquence and political virtue, celebrating leaders who can sustain the polity through speech by calling forth its principles and greatness.

Of course even today, Canada is not formally a republic. Despite a popular belief or sentiment to the contrary, the people are not sovereign. Authority rests with the Crown and the law, itself handed down from Europe's colonial powers. As such, Canada's republican style is muted compared to its American counterpart, remaining deferential to the law and reason's authority. The monarchical republican does not speak as if from the centre of power. Consequently, Canadians are less prone to hero worship, and do not tell Canadian history as a movement from crisis to crisis that required the brilliant intervention of a great orator. Terry Fox, the one-legged cancer patient who attempted to jog across Canada to raise funds for cancer research, is regarded as a greater hero than John A. Macdonald, Canada's heavy drinking first Prime Minister. Nevertheless, the parliamentary style is republican as it privileges egalitarian decorum and eloquence, enables Canadians to speak and listen as citizens, and is attentive to both reason and performance.

The fourth rhetorical style that we noted is monarchical republicanism's antithesis, pertaining to law as bureaucratic instrument. This style is rooted to the country's legal origins, and came to the fore as the aristocratic virtues that tempered law gradually slipped away. In Canada, the law was prior to civil society. Indeed, it constituted the possibility of political speech. The language of law was never hegemonic however, because it was balanced by monarchical and aristocratic traditions of prudence, and ill-formed republican ideas of popular sovereignty. However, as the Canadian state "matured," the place for prudence receded as the monarch became an absent placeholder in the constitution's formal structure. Furthermore, the prince was not replaced by a strong sense of "the people." This legal-bureaucratic style is not predicated upon a set of mutual obligations between King (or state) and citizen-subject. It sees law as prior to political relations and the life world. The law becomes a technical system to be manipulated and applied by a bureaucratic apparatus, with guidance from the executive branch act-

ing in the name of an absent Crown. At the same time, however, it becomes a medium for interest groups with well-trained lawyers to attack state policy, particularly subsequent to the adoption of the Charter of Rights in 1982.

The fifth style we observed is latent to the other four, and is an aspect of heightened rhetorical consciousness. Since antiquity, students of rhetoric have been taught to persuasively argue both sides of any given case. A rhetorical consciousness recognises that no one argument is necessary, that the facts do not speak for themselves, and that public life depends upon the managing of appearances. Irony emerges from this recognition. What irony means is not the same as what it says: What is stated does not cohere with the attitude that is conveyed. As a trope, irony can be used for emphasis, as a strategy of indirection, and as a way of forging a link between speaker and auditor. As a style, it is marked by a tension between commitment and distance. The ironic style in Canada's rhetorical culture recognises rhetoricity, and exploits tensions and contradictions tactically. Canada's ironists, whether nineteenth century feminists or twentieth century Supreme Court Justices, are adept at making arguments that overturn conventional logic in order to advance a new understanding of prudence.

In sum, governance in Canada is one in which, power, authority, and "the people" remain distinct from one another. Political practice does not consist of the exercise of a sovereign will, but rather of technicalities. As a result, Canada has not seen the development of a grandiloquent rhetorical culture. Canadian political rhetoric instead consists of ways of finessing the tension between power, authority and "the people." The tactics used are based in translation, indirection, and deferral. To this corresponds a Canadian way of being a "rhetorical audience," marked by an unwillingness to suspend disbelief. Canadians audiences do not accept the truth of what is being said or the sincerity of those speaking. They form a "cynical audience," highly aware of rhetoricity while ill at ease with rhetoric as an art. The net result is a civil culture marked by a pervasive ironic sensibility across time through the five related rhetorical styles summarised above. Canadian civil culture is marked by gestures and moods of disinvestment. Above all, Canada's civil culture reserves a physical and symbolic space that serves as "other" to the realm of artifice. We like to refer to that space as "the cottage."

## The Metaphysics of the Cottage

Maintaining an ironic sensibility and managing diverse idioms in their complex borrowings can be quite a strain. Fortunately, Canadians are adept at withdrawing from political investments. One can see this clearly after Quebec's sovereignty referenda. They were followed by a period of mental or psychic exhaustion in which civil culture just gets on with everyday post-modern life and settles for fleeting, mobile forms of social appearance. More generally stated, Canadian rhetors require a place to retreat from the burdens of ironising. This is provided by "the cottage" and its attendant metaphysics of appearance.

Most Canadians have either inherited a summer cottage from their families, or have purchased one, or rent one or some equivalent in a mobile home park. On weekends, in summer during the vacation period or even longer if the breadwinner can easily commute, the archetypal Canadian family repairs to the cottage. Cottage season is demarcated by specific rituals: opening the cottage on Victoria

Day weekend, around the third week of May, hosting visiting friends and family on weekends, and closing the cottage, shutting off the water, on Labour Day weekend, at the beginning of September. The cottage is where the gardens, for those who make the effort at least, abound in plaster gnomes, or fake Celtic runes. The walls of the cottage interior are decorated with sentimental plaques or similar *hommages* to one's favourite beer. The furniture is faux, modern rustic, and the open bottles of beer sit in individual Styrofoam containers that serve the triple purpose of keeping the beverage cold, protecting children's feet from broken glass, and displaying the colours of one's favourite hockey team.

The Canadian cottage in many ways serves a role equivalent to the *datcha* in former Soviet bloc countries, and for similar reasons. It is a place just *to be*, removed from the artifices and rituals of social life. But such "Being" is in no sense Heideggerian. Nor, for that matter, does the cottage serve as a base to re-create the hardy aesthetic exploits of Canada's "Group of Seven" painters canoeing in the northern wilds. Even less does it provide for the decadent wholesomeness found in some versions of American survivalism, where adepts wear military clothing and are armed in defence of their threatened individual liberty. "Being" at the Canadian cottage, on the contrary, is a simulation: living *as if* rhetoricality had been left behind in the cities. It is life *as seen on TV*, to the extent that TV pretends to represent a real, especially in commercials for beer and Canadian Tire, the nationwide retail chain of stuff for "out-of-doors" types. On TV, all families are happy, thanks to generous amounts of alcohol and recreational drug-use. The cottage offers the semblance of respite, as one can live out the obligation of pretending to be what one is not. Going to the cottage is figured as "getting away from it all," but it is not a return to nature, although it may be a form of return to childhood. More often, however, it's the plunge into *Gemütlichkeit* as if this were real life.

The cottage allows a psychic space that in urban contexts is usually provided by television, namely regression to a more infantile stage of development. But at the cottage, this is an active form of regression, where grown men attempt to do handstands on the strip of beach by the lake, women scream with glee or protest as they are heaved into the water, and canoes are overturned. It's the acting out of an imaginary simple life, and one that is at the level of the imaginary shared in some of its key details by European fantasies about what life in Canada consists in: a house by a lake, where wild animals such as bear or moose, come to drink around sunrise, and all is peaceful summertime year-round. In such common fantasies, Canadians never dwell in cities; they're all and always at the cottage.

At the same time, the cottage is a real place. There really are cottages, and they really do structure how many Canadians experience their summers. Part of the reality of that experience, however, requires extensive technological support systems. These include All-Terrain Vehicles, motorboats, sonar equipment to detect fish, propane-powered barbecues that have long replaced the coal-burning kind – barbecues themselves are increasingly sophisticated, equipped with electric brochette turners and such. Portable satellite TV dishes are more and more common, so as not to miss important sporting events.

"The cottage" is as a result both real and symbolic. It offers itself as a "real", but it is highly rhetoricised even as it is lived as a space without, or outside, rhetoricality. Indeed, the cottage is precisely the place that one inhabits symbolically that reconstitutes the heightened rhetorical consciousness mentioned above. It is character-

ised by a belief in the unmediated, ahistorical existence of simple pleasures, simple hobbies, benign nature and relaxed civility.

The apparent *ressourcement* provided by the cottage is a civilised, partial escape from rhetoricality that otherwise might express itself in less civilised ways. The “cottage” in this sense is the Canadian antithesis of Frederick Jackson Turner’s American “frontier thesis,” with an ever-shifting line of demarcation between the social and its other.

Furthermore, the cottage is not only a place but also a state of mind that enables a continued sense of detachment, because one knows that it is always a place to escape to. In addition to providing a moveable frontier, it also serves as an equivalent to the bomb shelters of the Cold War. Knowing that the cottage exists to escape to, leads to a certain smugness regarding the world: it’s distant, and who cares anyway. This smugness combines with the sense of invulnerability that journalists used to feel when covering events: the bad stuff only happens to others. However, while journalists have increasingly become targets of recent wars and terrorist kidnappings – the illusion of invulnerability can suddenly be torn away – Canadians retain a sense of being secure. The difference in part, has to do with being on the margins of empire: Canadian are not at the centre of the World Historical Spirit, or of monopoly capitalism, where one is more likely to be under attack, or at least believe this to be the case.

The view from the cottage, with relaxed ironic detachment, has as advantage that one is less inclined to fall prey to ideological manoeuvres and so remains sceptical of stark divisions between good and evil. Detached consciousness on the margins is the privilege afforded the weak, the uncommitted, and the fence sitters. While this might upset republican or moral sensibilities, it is not necessarily “bad.” There can only be a limited number of centres, after all. Most of the world consists in margins. The active exercise of the will to power is only granted to a few. A rhetoric of ironic detachment may seem but a feeble weapon against the arms of power, but then again, rhetoric has always been of little use once the shooting begins. The point, of course, is to have such resources at hand that the shooting *does not* begin.

Seen from the cottage, proclamations of an “Age of terror” become just another rhetorical performance to be regarded with ironic detachment. The sovereign, here the US, is restaging its sovereignty. It is an impressive show, to be appreciated for its theatricality: Regime change, Shock and Awe, WMDs, GWOT, and, if all else fails, Freedom & Democracy. The sovereign issues proclamations that may entail the assent of some, but that above all are rhetorical mobilisations of force.

Proclamation of an Age of Terror opens up occasions for rhetorical response, even if these are not always forthcoming nor indeed much wanted or appreciated: Rallying ‘round the flag finds its counterpoint in dissent, demonstrations, and so on. Habermas wonders whether force collapses the possibility of dialogue and renders his entire theory of communicative action pointless. The quest for mutual understanding is lost in theatricality. Against this drama, the Canadian historical experience with modes of governance offers alternative rhetorical modalities. The styles we discussed above acknowledge orders of power while maintaining a certain distance. Without attempting here to analyze at length the forms of such responses, it remains worth noting that proclamations of the Age of Terror are much like a sovereign’s staging of the legitimacy of authority, and serve to reinforce the

power of its laws. The declaration of the existence of a new kind of war supports a new legal regime, with its own forms of detention, limitations on *habeas corpus*, and technologies of surveillance. Canadian irony is one way of not taking the American sovereign too seriously, at least as long as terrorists do not strike here.

Canadian civil culture over time has developed tactics for coping with worldliness. It is striking how the Canadian electorate continues steadfastly to refuse the blandishments of the Right, whereas American earnestness has on the contrary produced such a deeply divided country. Canada's reluctance to be drawn into highly polarised belief systems applies not only to its internal affairs, but to its view of the world beyond as well: a culture of ironic detachment provides a defence against adventurism. In this sense, the sudden advent of an Age of Terror is inconceivable for Canadians, as it shocks their understanding of the values of civility and toleration, including tolerance for a degree of political corruption. For this reason, some may see Canada as dull, overly cautious, and indeed pusillanimous. This would be an overstatement: For a country with a relatively small population, its military commitment to both World Wars was significant. Canada has done its share, but with ambivalence spawned by irony and guided by prudence, which requires that one has choices to make. The invocation of terror as the new ontological order eliminates such choices, or any choice at all for that matter. Canadian civil culture, with its ironic detachment and its metaphysics of the cottage, offers ways of keeping choices open. This may turn out to be foolhardy in the end. In the meantime, it provides a way of living prudentially. Not such a bad thing, surely.

As we end this essay, careful readers of the inside pages of *The New York Times* in the first week of August may have noted that the top levels of the United States government have announced a terminological shift of some importance (Packer 2005). The US, it now appears, is not in fact fighting a Global War on Terror, but instead "a global struggle against violent extremism." Since June 2005, various people, from Pentagon lieutenant generals to Donald Rumsfeld and other top White House officials, have gone to some lengths to clarify that, as one general put it, "There is no more a war on terrorism than the Second World War was a war on submarines." Instead, the actual struggle is "a war of ideas" – a revised version of the Vietnam War-era struggle for "hearts and minds." This recent clarification is in other words, a belated recognition of the importance of rhetoric, which is in a sense what we have been calling for.

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