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AFEC

RE-INSCRIBING A MONUMENT: VIMY IN THE CANADIAN CONSCIOUSNESS

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This essay focuses on the efficacy of Walter Allward's immense Canadian National Vimy Memorial built at Vimy Ridge in France and unveiled in 1936. Like other battlefield memorials located far from their primary audiences, the Vimy Memorial must deliberately intervene into Canadian consciousness in order to remain relevant. Drawing on Pierre Nora's notion of "successive presents," I examine the means by which that intervention occurs over time and how, also exacerbated by the often great distance between monument and audience, the monument functions as a heterotopic space. The essay also addresses types of memory and consciousness – state, national, collective, and individual – and their inherent malleability, and the points at which they might become fused.

Cet article s'intéresse à l'impact de l'immense monument de Walter Allward, construit à Vimy Ridge en France et inauguré en 1936. Comme d'autres monuments commémoratifs situés sur les champs de bataille très loin des publics pour lesquels ils sont principalement destinés, le monument de Vimy doit pourtant toucher directement la conscience des Canadiens afin de jouer son rôle. En m'appuyant sur la notion de « présents successifs » de Pierre Nora, j'examine la manière dont cela se produit dans le temps, et comment, en dépit de la grande distance entre le monument et son public, Vimy fonctionne comme un espace hétérotopique tel que le décrit Michel Foucault. Cet article examine également les types de mémoire et de conscience – de l'Etat, nationale, collective, et individuelle – qui prennent de multiples formes mais qui peuvent à certains moments fusionner.

In the 1996 foreword to the English edition of Pierre Nora's *Lieux de mémoire,* Lawrence Kritzman wrote: "The reader will find in the essays that make up *Realms of Memory* an exhilarating intellectual project whose exemplarity lies in its power to translate the vicissitudes of national self-consciousness and the disjunctions between the original meanings attached to memory sites and the heuristic processes currently used to describe them" (foreword, NORA 1996-8: xiv). Those memory sites are often embodied in what Aleida and Jan Assmann have called the *Schriftlichkeit*, the literality or the medium such as a site, a text, an object, or a ritual that offers a tangible structure on which to build social memory (ASSMANN & ASSMANN 1994: 114-40). That social memory can and does change, in the moment as well as over time, often subjected to the same vicissitudes of national self-consciousness. Both are moulded and remoulded by the constituents involved: the state, the individual and the collective.

This essay focuses on the massive Canadian war memorial at Vimy Ridge in northern France, commissioned by the Canadian government in the

1920s and unveiled in 1936 (fig. 1). It sits on the edge of the Douai Plain at the precise site where the four Canadian divisions fighting together for the first time took the ridge in April 1917. Designed by the Canadian sculptor Walter Seymour Allward in a *moderne* streamlined classicism, the monument consists of a giant plinth that supports two 27-metre tall pylons, one representing Canada and the other France. *Canada Bereft*, also widely known as *Mother Canada*, stands at the front and centre of the plinth. Her head shrouded and bowed, looking down on the ridge upon which so many soldiers fell. The plinth is engraved with the names of the 11,285 Canadian soldiers who died on the battlefields of Northern Europe but whose bodies had not been found. The monument thus functions as a cenotaph as well as a marker of the site of battle[1].

A monument is often monolithic and imparts permanence yet it is as malleable as memory is intangible and amorphous. Proceeding from this premise, this paper examines the heuristic process of the Vimy monument; when and how the monument has resonated in the Canadian consciousness since its conception in the years immediately following the Armistice. The discussion is two-pronged: to consider the ways in which the monument resides in Canadian memories, and how those memories function in various forms of consciousness over time. Some aspects of the discussion could apply to the many other monuments, both large and small, that were built on the World War I battlefields of Europe, as well as the battlefield cemeteries, since these monuments and cemeteries physically inhabit a space often very far from the populations that ostensibly constitute their primary audience. These sites must enter and re-enter the personal, collective and state consciousness – "successive presents" to use Nora's words – of countries and former imperial dependents in an exceptionally deliberate fashion and in ways that are distinctively different from how they are experienced by the local French and Belgian populations (NORA 1996-8: xxiv). Furthermore, variances in the social and nationalistic constructs of one country to another also augur distinctions.

Monuments are rife with paradoxical dialectics. They are about commemoration, commissioned by people who wish to keep a memory alive. They are also only so much stone or bronze. As many have acknowledged, there is nothing as invisible as a monument. They succeed in their purpose only

[1] For a detailed description of the memorial, see VETERANS AFFAIRS CANADA (18 December 2015), http://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/memorials/overseas/first-world-war/france/vimy.

if they engage an audience; there has to be a dialogic component [2]. The actual design of a monument – subject portrayed, composition and size – can activate that engagement. Monuments also depend upon factors beyond their own physicality to engage the audience and to remain relevant. Location is critical: in a church, a public square or on the battlefield. Ritual also tends to be necessary: the unveiling, key anniversaries and other events held at the locus. Media is also essential: word of mouth, the printed word, the printed image, radio, film, and now the internet disseminate the monument and associated rituals to a much wider audience than to those who can actually physically visit the memory site.

The Vimy Memorial functions on several levels of memory and consciousness: the state, the national, the collective, the universal, as well as the individual or personal. At the time the monument was commissioned by the Canadian government in the early 1920s, state, national and collective memory had become essentially fused. During the war, the Canadian government, like every other country involved in the conflict, had amplified nascent threads of nationalism in order to recruit soldiers and rally citizens. Such bellicose nationalism succeeded in inculcating a sense of collective national identity that would live on after the war (BOTHWELL, DRUMMOND & ENGLISH 1987; THOMPSON & SEAGER 1985; BROWN & COOK 1974: 250-338; VANCE 1997). The battlefield memorials are very much a part of this; although almost always characterized as not being about victory, many and particularly the Menin Gate, the Memorial to the Missing of the Somme at Thiepval, and the Vimy Memorial are, in their very existence, suffused with triumphalism. These and other battlefield monuments were, ultimately, initiatives that emerged from the Battle Exploits Memorial Committee, formed by the British government only three months after the end of the war to divvy up the various battlefields amongst the victors, including the various entities of the British Empire (HUCKER 2007: 280). Thus, the battlefield monuments sit emphatically on the spoils of war. The Vimy Memorial, along with many other major war monuments, were also products of competitions, an effective if not altogether sophisticated way to perpetuate bellicosity (HUCKER & SMITH 2012: 17-8). Furthermore, many of the designs – arches and pylons in the case of Vimy, the Menin Gate and Thiepval – semiotically potently embrace victory.

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[2] The efficacy of monuments as place holders of memory has come under scrutiny by NORA 1996-98; YOUNG 1993; YOUNG, ed. 1994; HUYSSEN 1995; HUYSSEN 2003.

Magnitude was also the order of the day and was a defining feature of emphatic self-expression. The Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., a project rankled with controversy in the post American Civil War era up to its conception in 1911-12 (unveiled in 1922), is a near contemporaneous example. A few years later Hitler would push such expression into vainglorious megalomania. Magnitude is also a function of the universal and it is in this context that most people are more comfortable situating the Vimy and several other World War I memorials. The visitor and/or viewer is overwhelmed by the architectonic scale of the monuments, the row upon row of the 11,285 names on the Vimy Memorial, the 54,389 on the Menin Gate, or the 72,195 on the Thiepval memorial, and by the situation of the monuments near the vast cemeteries filled with thousands of grave markers, and on the ridges and plains of the expansive battlefields. In this manner, the memorials thus function as cathartic expressions of grief and loss. At Vimy, the cathartic is exacerbated by the allegorical figures; besides *Canada Bereft,* other descendants of the Art Nouveau represent Grief, Truth, Knowledge, Sympathy, Sacrifice, Hope, Faith, Charity, Honour, Justice, and Peace. Allward called his monument a "sermon on the futility of war"[3]. The sense of the universal is also exacerbated by the fact that Allward did not design the monument with specifically Vimy in mind. The location of the Canadian cenotaph-monument was not decided until after his design had been selected.

Paradoxically, the universal is rendered personal via the same characteristics of scale, the multiple and the serial. As such, the large battlefield memorials (Menin Gate, Thiepval, and Vimy) also constitute a new kind of monument design. Rather than passive figures on pedestals or monoliths that demand the viewer stay in one spot, the visitor/viewer walks on these battlefield monuments and becomes involved in an interactive experience. At Vimy, the visitor is invited up on the massive plinth to search for the name of a loved one while at the Menin Gate or the Memorial to the Missing of the Somme, the visitor is enveloped in the arches. Time also plays a critical role as the length of time to traverse the monument and to find one name amongst the thousands increases the solemnity of the already sobering experience. In this way, personal loss and grief are transmuted into the universal. This is the same tactic that Maya Lin would use to advantage in the Vietnam War Memorial over fifty years later.

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[3] In "Canada's Wonderful Memorial to her Missing," *British Empire Service League*, 9 (1933), quoted in HUCKER & SMITH 2012: 25. Allward's statement about the futility of war is not pacifist, as it appears at first blush, but more in keeping with the idea of the soldier as the Prince of Peace and the fight for victory of civilization over barbarity. See VANCE 1997: 27-8, 34-72.

The distinctiveness of the situation of the monuments on the battlefields needs further consideration. The idea of locating the monuments at the battle sites, although not new (Gettysburg was the first), was unusual. Commemorative monuments were traditionally erected in churches or public squares, places that have other primary purposes, whether that be worship or meeting points, gatherings, riots, or simply shortcuts from points A to B. As a consequence, monuments suffer from the dialectic of remembering and forgetting. They are supposed to be constant reminders but because they are woven into the fabric of our everyday lives, they become invisible. The act of ritual – often the annual day of remembrance – brings the monument and its purpose back into focus. By contrast, the monuments on the battlefield, coupled with the war cemeteries and the battlefields, function as destinations of remembrance. They do not try to muscle into our daily lives like their urban counterparts but rather draw people out to them. We have to enter the space of the monument on its terms, not ours. As a consequence, the monument and the act of pilgrimage are ostensibly utterly co-dependent. Allward and the architects and sculptors of the other battlefield memorials (the Menin Gate and the Memorial to the Missing of the Somme were designed by Reginald Blomfield and Edwin Lutyens respectively) were aware that not everyone would make the physical pilgrimage. This conundrum is resolved by the design of the monuments. Even if we are not there, we can access the monuments through photographs and film, and now digital media; these modes of *Schriftlichkeit* – the "literalness" as described by Jan and Aleida Assmann[4] – allows the distant audience to interact virtually with the monuments. We see ourselves walk across the plinth or through the arch. We marvel at the vast scale. We actuate the time it takes to read name after name after name after name.

This imagined experience is in line with Foucault's concept of heterotopias, spaces that are actual places and yet operate outside of normal real space (FOUCAULT 1998: 237-44). The large battlefield memorial is comparable to the examples of the cemetery, the garden and the museum that Foucault describes. They are heterotopias of compensation, "another real space, as perfect, as meticulous, as well arranged as ours is messy, ill-constructed, and jumbled" (FOUCAULT 1998: 243), a compensation that is exacerbated knowing that these elegant serene cenotaphs rise from garden-like settings that

[4] The physicality of media marks the point when the myth becomes transformed into literality/literalness – the Assmanns' *Schriftlichkeit*. In the case of Vimy, the myths are generated by both the battle and the monument. (ASSMANN & ASSMANN 1994: 121-23).

were once utterly the obverse, a cacophonous, fractured, broken world of cratered battlefields. In a Wagnerian ascension from the ruins of war in concert with other tropes associated with nineteenth-century High Diction that permeated the war and the response to it, the battlefield memorials sanguinely invoke not only an immediate ruined past but also a salvaged present and the (utopic) promise of a civilized future[5].

Such idealistic mythologizing of a temporal cycle of civilizing renewal is paradoxically atemporal, a universal that is reinforced in the case of the battlefield memorials by their unmitigated classicism. However *moderne* they may be, the monuments are ponderous expressions of classicism that evoke atemporality and permanence. Yet that permanence is constantly being destabilized by the distant location of the monuments from their primary audience. This is where Nora's "successive presents" come in, deliberate interventions that push the battlefield monument into our consciousness and generate actual or imagined experiences of the monument. As these experiences accrue into the monument's future, always heuristically, they are a natural corollary to accumulated yet sharply delineated time inherent in Foucault's heterotopias (FOUCAULT 1998: 243).

The competition, commission and the construction of the Vimy memorial mark the monument's first layer of time. The process was a storied affair, beginning with a competition in 1920-21 for which the precise site had not yet been chosen, although Vimy Ridge was favoured. Allward's design was selected unequivocally by the three-person international jury (Canadian, British, and French), which also for aesthetic reasons recommended that the monument be erected on Hill 62 in the Ypres Salient. The site was immediately challenged because although Canadian soldiers had fought bravely in the Salient alongside other troops, the battle for Vimy Ridge was more emphatically Canadian since that was where all four divisions of the Canadian corps fought together for the first time and, as one, secured the ridge. The argument held the day and Hill 145 at the crest of the ridge became the site of the monument.

Actual construction of the monument began with the time-consuming painstaking excavation of the ground which was riddled with tunnels, dugouts, battle detritus (including live munitions) and human remains. Further delays

[5] WINTER 1995/2014; VANCE 1997. On the monument and Wagner, see HUYSSEN 2003: 30-48.

were incurred by the search and transportation to the site of the ideal stone for the monument, ultimately Seget stone in Croatia on the Eastern Adriatic, a quarry that had not been used since the time of Diocletian[6]. By the late 1920s, there were rumblings of concern about the delays and significant cost overruns, but nationalistic fervour still held sway; the war was still too close in time and had also come to be seen as the catalyst for the emergence of a "Canadian" national identity, although one that was Anglo-centric and thus did not reflect the true multi-ethnic profile of Canada. Will R. Bird, a former corporal from Nova Scotia who had served in Europe from 1916-1919, captured the essence of the moment in his somewhat precocious and very successful tour guide of the Western front, commissioned in 1931 by *Maclean's* magazine and published in 1932 both as weekly columns and in book form under the title *Thirteen Years After*. Appearing immediately after his war memoir *And We Go On* (1930), Bird wrote for the same audience, the regular Canadian soldier who had spent years in the thick of battle. Suffused with nostalgia of soldierly bonhomie, his exceedingly detailed account of the terrain, battlefields, villages, roads, and people as they were both during the war and in 1931 presupposes an intimate knowledge of the region. His guide also acted as a surrogate for thousands of Canadian veterans who could not join the many tourists who made the journey to France and Belgium to see the sites for themselves (BIRD 1932)[7]. Pausing at the site of the Vimy memorial and devoting an uncharacteristic seven pages of dense text accompanied by photographs of the memorial under construction and the surrounding park, Bird skillfully pulled his audience in behind him to consolidate his counter attack on the monument's naysayers "who hurl[ed] impatient questions" (BIRD 1932: 68, 73-9).

An especially innervating moment was the unveiling of the Vimy Memorial in July, 1936. As in the war, the national and collective coalesced with the universal and the personal. Pointedly, the event was called a

[6] The details and chronology of construction are discussed in BRANDON 2006; HUCKER 2007; HUCKER & SMITH 2012. While workers waited for the stone to arrive, they stabilized and preserved some of the tunnels, dugouts and trenches with boards and cement. Some of the shell-shattered landscape was cleared although the rippled profile was preserved, thousands of pine trees were planted to serve as backdrops to the monument, and two rows of maple trees were planted along the principal drive to the monument. Seget stone was used to build Diocletian's Palace at Spalatro (Split).

[7] Battlefield tourism was generally strong in the years after the war. Bird recounted meeting many tourists and Thomas Cook, amongst other agencies, organized tours (VANCE 1997: 56-7, 60; BRENDAN 1991: 258). Most were former soldiers or relatives of the dead making a pilgrimage, fewer simply wanted to see the devastation. Bird also noted numerous British and a few Canadian former soldiers who chose to settle permanently in the region.

pilgrimage, a very particular kind of ritual that is about a personal, individual quest but which is also part of a larger collective experience. Sponsored by the Canadian Legion (another byproduct of World War I, founded in 1925), over 6,400 "pilgrims" – veterans, their relatives, and relatives of the missing – boarded five ships in Montreal for a two-week tour of England, France and Belgium, organized by Thomas Cook. Everyone was issued with berets and special passports (fig. 2). The scale and organization of the event recalled the mass movement of thousands of troops years before and re-invigorated the soldierly bonhomie and patriotism that had begun to wane by the middle of the decade amidst the hardships of the Depression. Notably, the pilgrims paid their own way, a point that still rankles for many but which reifies that for veterans and their families, the personal, collective, and national were still fused. The atmosphere on the ships was affable, but once off the ships the mood became more tempered as the tour took pilgrims to vast battlefields and war cemeteries. The climax was, of course, the unveiling of the monument on 26 July, when King Edward VIII, in what would turn out to be his only official public appearance, removed the draped flag from *Canada Bereft* in front of over 100,000 people.

After the formalities, the pilgrims were encouraged to walk up on the monument. Paradoxically however, the elaborate ceremony and the huge crowds – "fearfully huge"[8] as one pilgrim described them – inhibited the full spectrum of experience that being at the monument could offer, for on such an occasion the personal as well as durational interaction with the monument was constrained. The personal was caught only later, after the visit to the monument, in the reflections that pilgrims recorded in their diaries and collected in their scrapbooks (fig. 3). Media also played a significant role: for those who could not attend the unveiling, the event was radio broadcast across Britain and all of Canada. Supplemented by the multitude of images that had been published in the press, this meant that an even vaster audience could imagine being at the unveiling in real time. Ironically, perhaps it was easier for those who listened and looked from afar to achieve the personal since they could imagine being in the crowd but could also, at the same time, banish that crowd and walk alone on the plinth and along the walls while they ran their fingers across the seemingly endless rows of names engraved on the walls.

The immediate early life of the monument was bound up with World War II and it was not long before the monument became a tool of blatant

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[8] 26 July 1936, unpublished personal diary of the unveiling ceremony and tour. Private collection.

jingoism, via the press. On 1 June 1940, at the height of the German sweep of France and evacuation at Dunkirk, the Montreal *Daily Star* published an account of the destruction of the memorial by the Nazis, calling it a deliberate attack of "fiendishness": "German fliers smashed this beautiful remembrance to bits. Bombs tore dead Canadians from their graves" (quoted in DURFLINGER 2007: 294). The report was unconfirmed and it took several days to determine that the monument was in fact undamaged. However, the intended effect of the article had been achieved. For example, Alex Walker, who was the Dominion president of the Canadian Legion, responded with "Four years ago…we reaffirmed our loyalty to our 60,000 fallen comrades. Today, ex-Servicemen throughout the Dominion are crying for revenge against these German savages" (quoted in DURFLINGER 2007: 294-5). Despite aerial photos of the monument corroborating its continued existence, it would be another two years, after the British had secured the Douai Plain and it became clear that the monument was unscathed, that the hawkish rumours of the monument's destruction were no longer of use to the war machine.

After World War II, little was heard of the monument. The Second World War, with its attendant seemingly inexplicable horrors, had clipped the monument's promise of peace and salvage of civility, and although the monument continued to resonate with nationalism, that particular manifestation of nationalism became connected with a moment in time. In Canada, as in the rest of the victor nations, people turned away, as Jay Winter concludes, from commemorative modes of nationalism, overwhelmed by the unspeakable and uncivilized horrors of the war (WINTER 1995/2014: 225-9). In post-war Canada, like the United States, any evocation of nationalism became bound up with progress and the new, climaxing in the case of Canada with Expo '67. Pilgrimages were still made to Vimy and other tourists also travelled there but these became small group forays that stood outside the collective and, as such, were not representatives of a larger public. Likewise, but for different reasons, the monument had little profile within the realms of academe. For military historians, the monument had little to do with the actual battle so was either often not discussed or simply uncritically illustrated. For art historians, monuments, though usually designed by one person but requiring the approval of a patron, committee or jury, did not fit within the definition of art according to the then prevailing Modernist ethos of the privileged autonomy of the genius creator. Additionally in Canada the Group of Seven and its legacy saturated art

historical scholarship for decades[9]. The distant location of the monument further exacerbated its invisibility.

Pierre Berton, Canada's prolific popular historian, began to pull the monument back into the Canadian popular public realm when in 1986 he published *Vimy*, an account of the 1917 battle. A quintessentially Bertonesque account – well-researched, lucidly written and suffused with, but not soaked in, nationalistic rhetoric – *Vimy* ends with Berton's four-page description of the monument within his larger soliloquy of emerging national identity at the cost of so much death and destruction (BERTON 1986: 301-8). Fifteen years later in 2001, Norm Christie, a self-styled military historian, used television to reach yet a wider audience. In *For King and Empire,* a six-part mini-series, he opens each episode lamenting that Canadians have forgotten World War I and then proceeds to chronicle Canada's participation in the battles on the Western Front (CHRISTIE 2001). As with Berton's *Vimy* the monument serves as backdrop and the nationalism evoked in both is a descendant of the uncomplicated Anglo-centric nationalism of the interwar years.

Notably, both Berton and Christie use the personal, employing individual soldiers' memoirs and letters, to leverage the battle, and by extension the monument, into the reader's/viewer's realm. Christie takes it further by inviting viewers to post his or her own relative's war experience on the program's website[10]. The soldiers' words, although documented in written memoirs and letters, hover on the border of oral history and are akin to the "communicative memory" aspect of oral history defined by Jan and Aleida Assmann. Associated with one generation, such memory is constantly subjected to the ambivalence of ephemerality (ASSMANN & ASSMANN 1994: 119-20). Berton and Christie "rescue" these memories and make them solid through print and electronic media. Here once again the personal is pulled into the collective by also making these memories the foundational building blocks of constructed social histories. Christie consolidates this unity from singularity by amplifying the synaesthetic in his narrative: different voices play the roles of the various soldiers reading aloud the memoirs and letters; extensive original film footage shows craters erupting and men going over the top (without acknowledging that quite a lot of it was staged); and contemporaneous black and white photographs show broken dead bodies on the ground or, worse,

[9] See BRANDON 2006 for further discussion of war art and the Vimy Memorial vis-à-vis Modernism.

[10] Norm CHRISTIE, *For King and Empire, Canada's Soldiers in the Great War*, http://www.kingandempire.com.

suspended in barbed wire. Christie also uncovers shrapnel balls and other war detritus – such souvenir hunting is common and another means of solidifying memory – amidst the threat of encountering still live munitions, and he wanders solemnly through the war cemeteries. The tactics are affecting[11].

In the same year that Christie produced *For King and Empire*, the Vimy Memorial was a primary character in Jane Urquhart's international bestselling novel *The Stone Carvers.* This time the battle was the backdrop to the monument. Although fundamentally about commemoration, in this fictitious account the personal rises to the fore and the national drops back as Tilman, the deuteragonist, struggles to quell the demons of war, having participated in the unspeakably horrific battle at Vimy. The universal is also entirely denuded as Klara, the protagonist, carves the features of her dead and missing lover on the face of the torch-bearer on the memorial who forever looks toward the sky, never to be seen by anyone but the carver. Walter Allward, who catches Klara in the act, is at first appalled but soon realizes that his universalizing allegorical monument becomes so much more powerful precisely because the layer of the personal had been woven into it. Klara and Tilman are German-Canadians and Klara's lover Eamon is an Irish-Canadian Catholic, two cultural ethnicities that were not bellicose agitators for war but were nonetheless caught up in it. In this way, unlike Berton or Christie, Urquhart teases out the reality of the multi-ethnic complexities of World War I and post-war Canada that lay below the Anglo-centric sheen of collective and state nationalism.

Urquhart's quiet nuancing is an interesting counterpoint to the monument's monolithic universal message, a message that continues to be embraced as a corollary to a persistent and unequivocal nationalism. In the 1990s, veterans and other groups began making loud noises about the deteriorating state of the monument, falling as it was into disrepair, damaged by sixty-five years of uneven rates of freezing and thawing between the concrete core and stone facing. This coincided with a worldwide upsurge of commemoration, often with a nationalistic flair, associated with the 50th anniversary of the Second World War, the passing on of Holocaust survivors, the turn of the millennium, and 9-11. Governments, for their part, once again became interested in funding large-scale, often hubristic, projects. At Vimy what followed was a seven-year program under the auspices of Public Works Canada and the Department of Veteran Affairs that consisted of the renovation

[11] For more analysis of *For King and Empire,* see WILLIAMS 2009: 205-36.

of the monument and the building of a new interpretative centre. The cost was $20 million, quietly shouldered by successive Liberal and Conservative governments. The program culminated with a re-dedication of the monument by Queen Elizabeth II on 9 April 2007, the 90th anniversary of the battle. This time the pilgrims consisted of 5,000 Canadian high school students accompanied by many veterans of later wars, along with another 20,000 people, mostly Canadian and French.

Meanwhile, the new Canadian War Museum was opened in 2005, another product of the new era of commemoration, and most of Allward's full-scale plaster renderings of the figures on the monument were finally given a permanent home. The museum chronicles battles and wars from the beginning of European settlement until the present day and inherent to the story is a teleology of a nation coming into its own by proving itself on the battlefields of World War I, reaffirming it in World War II, and then moving on to become a proud nation of peacekeepers. The Vimy figural models articulate the righteousness of Canada's fight for peace and civilization in World War I. This sentiment is likely exacerbated because the figural models are disengaged from the monument and interact with the museum visitor almost at eye-level on a one-to-one basis. The models are located in the aptly named Regeneration Hall, around the corner from which are two large bronze plaques from the former Eaton's department store in Toronto that list the names of 578 employees killed in both world wars. These plaques could thus act somewhat as stand-ins for the names on the Vimy Memorial. The models and the plaques are a sombre prelude to the huge LeBreton Gallery which is filled with tanks, trucks and other military equipment that are, in fact, the real draws for so many of the museum's visitors.

In academic circles Jonathan Vance examined the modes and meanings of memory, and the construction of nationalism in wartime and post-war Canada in *Death so Noble*, published, perhaps coincidentally, on the 80th anniversary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge (1997). His work embraces a wide range of popular culture, including the Vimy Memorial and other war memorials, and his focus is the residual use of nineteenth-century High Diction modes of abstraction and ideals, to which people and the state defaulted in the face of unprecedented carnage and loss on the battlefields. In the case of Vimy and the plethora of other war memorials built on the battlefields and across Canada, the use of allegorical figures and symbolic motifs are entirely consistent with his thesis. Laura Brandon, the curator of art at the Canadian War Museum, further analyzed the iconography of the Vimy Memorial while

investigating the measure of its impact, in the highly successful *Canvas of War* exhibition in 2000-2001, in connection with the installation of the figural models in the new museum, and in her study of the waxing and waning of the perceived relevance of Canadian war art in general. The latter, provocatively titled *Art or Memorial*, challenges the prevailing Canadian art historical canon and the Modernist ethos in general and was published in 2006 on the eve of the 90th anniversary of the battle (BRANDON 2006). *Vimy Ridge, A Canadian Reassessment*, an anthology of primarily military history essays that offers a revisionist assessment of the battle stripped of much hubris, was published the following year. The final part of the book contains three essays that focus on the aftermath and memory of the battle. One, by Jacqueline Hucker who was the Parks Canada historian associated with the restoration of the monument, chronicles the building of the monument and discusses its regenerative symbolism[12].

Hucker ended her essay by stating that the restoration of the monument "serves as evidence of a new generation's determination never to forget Canada's contribution and sacrifice in the First World War" (HUCKER 2007: 288). She was no doubt being unintentionally ironic since the monument had been built to be a permanent reminder of Canada's contribution to safeguarding civility and peace yet it actually took the re-ignition of commemorative nationalism sparked by the World War II anniversaries in the 1990s – combined with the major restoration campaign – to re-activate that memory. By 2007 the commemorative had become rooted in what was by then a global culture of memory, a veritable industry that spans everything from the trauma of the Holocaust, war, and 9-11 to heritage (more evocative in the French "*patrimoine*"), the everyday, and the retro (HUYSSEN 1995, 2003; LOWENTHAL 1985, 1997, 2015; SAMUEL 1994). Everyone is encouraged to remember. With the looming anniversary of World War I, there was and continues to be an enormous amount of grist for the memory mill. In Canada this is bound up with the seminal formative role that the war, and particularly Vimy, has played in national memory. As such, the Vimy Memorial has taken centre stage. Yet its relevance, like any other monument, and especially those on the battlefields, continues to be dependent upon ritual and ceremony as well as on other media to get the message out. The reciprocity of the personal and the collective has also become entrenched.

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[12] A special issue of *The Journal of the Society for the Study of Architecture in Canada*, also dedicated to the monument, was published in 2008.

In 2012 Valerie Cousins, editor of Sanderling Press, a small Ottawa-based publishing firm, produced a richly illustrated 116-page book about the Vimy memorial, written by Hucker and Julian Smith, the chief architect of the monument's restoration. She conceived of the project after visiting Vimy and noted with dismay that there were no publications in the new interpretive centre "that captured the monument and battlefield as I had experienced them. I wanted to take away a memento that captured the beauty, the scale and the emotion that I had felt on our visit" (foreword, HUCKER & SMITH 2012: x). Transmuting her experience into that of all who may have visited the monument, the book aims to perpetuate and disseminate the viscerally personal encounter.

In April of the same year, the monument was also once again engulfed by high school students, marking the 95th anniversary. These tours are sponsored by the Vimy Foundation, a citizens' initiative founded in 2006 to, according to their mission statement, "preserve and promote Canada's First World War legacy as symbolized with the victory at Vimy Ridge in April 1917, a milestone where Canada came of age and was then recognized on the world stage"[13]. All participants wear bright red jackets emblazoned with a motif associated with Vimy – often a profile of the monument itself – as well as the insignia of the tour operators, EF Tours (Education First). These groups of young tourists resembling so many hockey teams are a striking contrast to the platoons of almost as young soldiers a hundred years before. To accentuate the affective experience, the personal is invoked by having each student research the life and death of one World War I soldier in preparation for the trip[14]. The popularity of these tours is remarkably ironic in light of the marginal emphasis placed on history in the Canadian high school curriculum: are school boards outsourcing history and letting remembrance take the place of history?

Beyond the high school tours, the commemorative tour industry is in full swing. Of the many, many tours that are available, Norm Christie offers exclusive tours limited to 6 or 7 adults that can also include what Christie calls "Shrapnel Balling" which is souvenir hunting in farmers' fields, an activity that is likely appealing to fellow military enthusiasts[15]. In late 2014-early 2015

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[13] THE VIMY FOUNDATION, http://www.vimyfoundation.ca.

[14] "Vimy Ridge, the Hundredth Anniversary," http://www.eftours.ca/educational-tours/collections/canadas-history-tours/vimy-2017 & Promotional video, EF Tours: "See what an EF Tour is Really Like," situated at the end of the descriptions of each type of tour.

[15] Norm CHRISTIE, *The Great War Tour*, http://www.battlefields.ca/first-and-second-world-war-battlefield-tours; http://www.battlefields.ca/shrapnel-balling.

Christie also aired another mini-series about World War I, this time within the frame of tourism. *The Great War Tour* follows the same formula as *For King and Empire* but, notably, two of the six episodes in the new series are entirely dedicated to commemoration, one focusing on war cemeteries and the other on the building and unveiling of the Vimy Memorial[16]. Christie's uncomplicated Anglo-centric militaristic nationalism once again courses through the episodes, underscored by his assertion that Canadians do not know their history because the Liberal governments of William Lyon Mackenzie King (1921-30, 1935-48) "intentionally erased [it …] to protect his vote in Quebec, and to hide the fact that he didn't serve in the Great War", a strategy that echoed, Christie claims, in the anti-militaristic stance of subsequent Liberal Prime Ministers[17].

Christie's brand of nationalism is entirely consistent with the official Canadian identity promoted by Stephen Harper's federal government (2006-2015). Indicative of his conservative ideology, Harper industriously worked to bring Canadian identity back to what Yves Frenette called its "pre-liberal past, with militarism and monarchism as the main anchorage points" (FRENETTE 2014: 53). This included $28 million directed to bicentennial commemorations of the War of 1812 that, for the most part, teleologically celebrated the war as a foundational milestone in the formation of Canada, notwithstanding the fact that the idea of Canada as an independent nation had yet to be conceived. Much of the funding supported exhibitions, re-enactments, stamps, coins, school packages, and computer applications that reached out to diverse audiences. The Vimy Memorial was likewise firmly embraced by the Harper government. *Canada Bereft* was portrayed on the 2007 anniversary edition of the Canadian two-dollar coin, a new Canadian $20 polymer bill carrying an image of the memorial entered circulation in November 2012, and the memorial is also featured on pages 22 and 23 of the new Canadian passport. Like the War of 1812 initiatives, this is gigantism on a horizontal scale, spreading out through the population and firmly penetrating at a subliminal level. Paradoxically, such means of dissemination can be far more effective than a massive monument

[16] Although six episodes were produced, four were aired separately from the other two. Christie calls the last two the "lost episodes": one is a two-hour director's cut of the first episode about General Sir Arthur Currie and the other is about Christie's own family and his "Great War roots". CHRISTIE, *The Great War Tour,* http://www.battlefields.ca/great-war-tour-tv-documentary-completed/.

[17] Quoted in Robert SIBLEY (6 April 2015), "Ninety-eight years later, historian finds 'missing' soldiers from the Battle of Vimy Ridge," *National Post*, http://www.news.nationalpost.com/news/world/ninety-eight-years-later-historian-finds-missing-soldiers-from-the-battle-of-vimy-ridge.

that is routinely ignored or neglected except at significant anniversaries and events[18].

But Stephen Harper did like monuments. A multi-figure monument on Parliament Hill entitled "Triumph through Diversity", unveiled in late 2014, affectively portrays the range of everyday people who were involved in the War of 1812. The plaque that accompanies the monument, entitled "The Fight for Canada", describes the figures as:

> The key combatants that came together to defeat the American invasion: a Métis fighter firing a cannon; a woman bandaging the arm of a Voltigeur; a Royal Navy sailor pulling a rope; a First Nations warrior pointing to the distance; a Canadian militiaman raising his arm in triumph, and a member of a British Army unit, specifically the Royal Newfoundland Regiment, firing a musket[19].

Each figure is about two metres tall and all are situated on three low plinths that are only slightly above ground level thereby further strengthening the link with the viewer. Were this the nineteenth century, the monument would have been a statue (high on a pedestal) of General Sir Isaac Brock or one of the other military or political leaders active during the war. Instead, the monument continues with the trope that was so firmly set in World War I and its aftermath of the regular soldier and citizen as the hero of war. By emphasizing the cultural diversity of the participants, it is also a clever retaliatory co-opting of Liberal multiculturalism in support of Harper's militaristic agenda.

The War of 1812 monument did not cause much of a stir, except for a few commentaries about its prominent position on Parliament Hill[20]. The cost was not huge, its design and profile are consistent with other recent monuments on or near Parliament Hill, and despite how much attention the Harper government directed at the War of 1812, the war simply remained too remote for most people to really care about. Such was not the case for another war memorial with which the Harper government was involved. In 2013, senior

[18] Beyond the annual Remembrance Day celebrations, the National War Memorial in Ottawa sadly came to international attention in October 2014 when Corporal Nathan Cirillo was fatally shot while on ceremonial sentry duty at the memorial.

[19] The text on the plaque also draws connections between the monument and other war memorials in the National Capital region in Ottawa. The monument was designed by Adrienne Alison.

[20] John GEDDES (March 2013/23 July 2014), "War of 1812 Monument does not belong on Parliament Hill," *Macleans*, http://www.macleans.ca/news/canada/why-the-war-of-1812-memorial-doesnt-belong-on-parliament-hill/.

officials of Parks Canada, the federal office that has oversight over national parks, designated a peninsula at Green Cove in Cape Breton Highlands National Park in Nova Scotia for the Never Forgotten War Memorial. The project is the brainchild of Tony Trigiani, a Toronto-based entrepreneur. The memorial is to honour "all Canadian and Newfoundlanders who gave their lives overseas in defence [sic] of this great nation"[21]. Ironically, and paradoxically, given the dialectic of location and consciousness that has been explored throughout this paper, one of the reasons Trigiani wanted such a remote site was precisely so that it would be noticed. Montreal and Toronto already have too many monuments thus his could be lost in the mêlée. By siting his monument on Cape Breton Island it would become a destination – a place of pilgrimage in its own right – and thus, like the battlefield memorials, would be more invested with significance than an urban venue. The design of the memorial consists of the "We See Thee Rise Observation Deck" and "The Commemorative Ring of True Patriot Love" – phrases from Canada's national anthem – culminating in a 30-metre high (later reduced to 24 then 20 metres) statue of *Mother Canada* that reaches out across the Atlantic "with outstretched arms to embrace each and every one of Our Fallen who lost their lives in overseas conflicts, peacekeeping roles and Canadian missions"[22]. Because the monument is a personal act by a self-described "enthusiastic patriot", the government could be absolved of any charges of vainglory. Here the personal becomes transmuted into the state.

The Vimy Memorial was co-opted into a dialogue with the Green Cove memorial. The *Mother Canada* figure was "lovingly and respectfully modelled after the statue of *Canada Bereft* in Vimy, France" and its outstretched arms are "in a line of sight to the Vimy Memorial in France, welcoming lost Canadian soldiers home"[23]. The design of *Mother Canada* also had the "blessing" of the family of Walter Allward[24]. Lastly, the project was slated to be finished in 2017 in time for both the centenary of the Battle of Vimy Ridge and Canada's sesquicentennial.

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[21] Never Forgotten War Memorial, http://www.nfnm.ca/.

[22] Never Forgotten War Memorial, http://www.nfnm.ca/. The proposed monument also features metal plaques listing the international cemeteries where Canadian soldiers are buried. Parks Canada also gave Trigiani's foundation $100,000 for a website and research.

[23] Lewis MACKENZIE (1 April 2016), "Feds Kill Idea to erect Cape Breton's Never Forgotten War Memorial, Sloppily." *Ottawa Life Magazine,* http://www.ottawalife.com/2016/04/feds-kill-idea-to-erect-cape-bretons-never-forgotten-national-memorial-sloppily/.

[24] CBC New (3 July 2015), "Mother Canada name already taken, says Vimy Foundation," http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/mother-canada-name-already-taken-says-vimy-foundation-1.3136813.

But what kind of dialogue is this? The Never Forgotten War Memorial has been divisive from the start. The Friends of Green Cove, backed by former senior Parks Canada employees, protested the site, charging that the location was ecologically sensitive. Many commentators pointed out that the site is actually Mi'kmaw territorial land. Local communities were divided over the potential of economic gains that might be gleaned from commemorative tourism. And, the aesthetics of the design were roundly challenged as being outdated and too reminiscent of statues in former communist states[25]. In regards to the last, even the partner in the design firm that sketched the initial rough concept for the memorial has indicated that the plans for an original small statue (the size of a light-post) ballooned out of control in Trigiani's hands[26]. The Vimy Foundation, where one would expect full support for the idea, also joined in the fray because the Never Forgotten War Memorial Foundation took out a trademark on the name "Mother Canada" thereby preventing the Vimy Foundation from using the phrase in conjunction with the Vimy Memorial[27]. Coinciding with the time when the Harper government closed nine veterans' offices across the country, many, many people also commented that the Memorial Foundation's money and that of the government could be better spent helping Canada's surviving veterans.

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[25] Jill CAMPBELL MILLER (6 July 2015), "A Monument to the Past? The Never Forgotten War Memorial Project," *Active History.ca,* http://www.activehistory.ca/2015/07/a-recollection-of-the-past-the-never-forgotten-national-war-memorial-project/; FRIENDS OF GREEN COVE, http://www.friendsofgreencove.ca/; Bruce CAMPION-SMITH (30 December 2013), "New memorial envisioned to honour Canada's war dead," *The Toronto Daily Star*, http://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2013/12/30/new_memorial_envisioned_to_honour_canadas_war_dead.html/; Jane TABER (7 March 2014),"Placement of 'Mother Canada' statue has Cape Bretoners on war footing," *The Globe and Mail*, http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/national/placement-of-mother-canada-statue-has-cape-bretoners-on-war-footing/article17382958/; Elizabeth RENZETTI (14 March 2014), "'Mother Canada' statue in Cape Breton – so many questions, so little restraint," *The Globe and Mail,* http://www.theglobeandmail.com/globe-debate/mother-canada-statue-in-cape-breton-so-many-questions-so-little-restraint/article17506478/. There is much commentary for and against the project on the internet.

[26] Charles MANDEL (2 February 2016), "Mother Canada statue spiraled out of control, design firm partner alleges," *National Observer*, http://www.nationalobserver.com/2016/02/02/news/mother-canada-memorial-spiralled-out-control-design-firm-partner-alleges; CBC RADIO (3 February 2016), "Design Firm says 'Mother Canada' was never intended to be a giant statue," *As it Happens*, http://www.cbc.ca/radio/asithappens/as-it-happens-wednesday-edition-1.3432101/design-firm-says-mother-canada-was-never-intended-to-be-a-giant-statue-1.3432104.

[27] CBC NEWS (3 July 2015), "Mother Canada name already taken, says Vimy Foundation," http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/nova-scotia/mother-canada-name-already-taken-says-vimy-foundation-1.3136813.

Ultimately, on 5 February 2016, Parks Canada announced that, after having reviewed the project, the Never Forgotten War Memorial would not be built on Parks Canada land[28]. This was four months after the defeat of the Harper government in a federal election. Ringing as all this does of commemorative nationalistic jingoism, perhaps we might be well-advised to be wary of the hubris of remembrance[29].

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[28] PARKS CANADA (5 February 2016), CEO Statement on Never Forgotten War Memorial, http://www.pc.gc.ca/eng/pn-np/ns/cbreton/plan/NFNM-MNNJ.aspx.

[29] Tony Trigiani, for his part, is not giving up: Amy DEMPSEY (28 February 2016), "The Mother Canada memorial dream that won't die," *The Toronto Star,* http://www.thestar.com/news/insight/2016/02/28/the-mother-canada-memorial-dream-that-wont-die.html.

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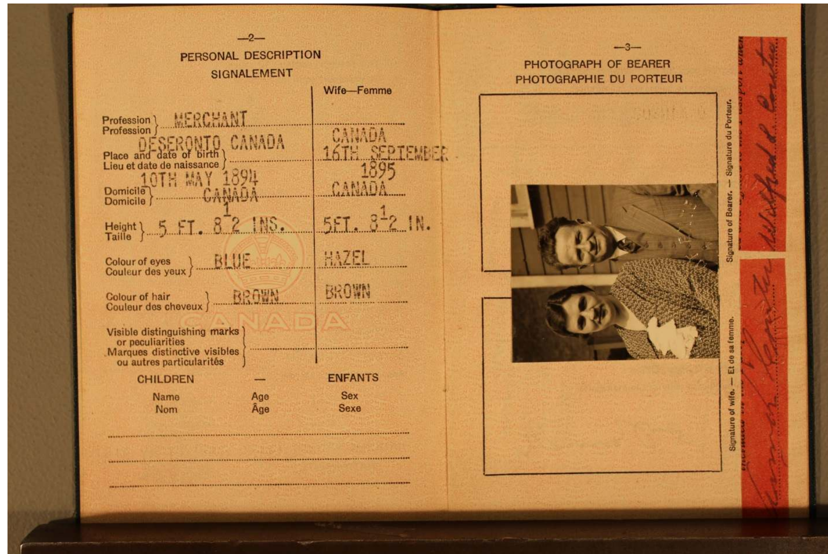
List of images

Fig. 1: Walter Allward, Canadian National Vimy Memorial, unveiled 26 July 1936. Vimy, France. Photo copyright: Guillaume Bavière (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0/, no changes made.)

Fig. 2: Canadian Vimy Pilgrimage passports on the occasion of the unveiling of the Vimy Memorial, 1936. Private collection. Photo: Joan Coutu.


—2—

PERSONAL DESCRIPTION
SIGNALEMENT

		Wife—Femme
Profession / Profession	MERCHANT	
Place and date of birth / Lieu et date de naissance	DESERONTO CANADA 10TH MAY 1894	CANADA 16TH SEPTEMBER 1895
Domicile / Domicile	CANADA	CANADA
Height / Taille	5 FT. 8 1/2 INS.	5FT. 8 1/2 IN.
Colour of eyes / Couleur des yeux	BLUE	HAZEL
Colour of hair / Couleur des cheveux	BROWN	BROWN
Visible distinguishing marks or peculiarities / Marques distinctive visibles ou autres particularités		

CHILDREN — ENFANTS

Name / Nom	Age / Âge	Sex / Sexe

—3—

PHOTOGRAPH OF BEARER
PHOTOGRAPHIE DU PORTEUR

Signature of Bearer. — Signature du Porteur.

Signature of wife. — Et de sa femme.

Fig. 3: Diary, scrapbook and beret of the Canadian Vimy Pilgrimage, 1936. Private collection. Photo: Joan Coutu