

Mars Rising: Icons of Imperial Power

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Political and news media imagery saturate the culture of our classrooms as thoroughly as the popular culture imagery that deliberately targets children and youth. Media images such as those of US president G. W. Bush's visit to Canada that we discuss in this paper have become ubiquitous in our culture. In our view they constitute a primary mechanism through which the powerful political and economic forces exert an unrelenting threat on populations around the world. We (1+1+1)* enter this discussion from the point of view of Canadians, one of whom holds dual Canadian / US citizenship, all of whom have extensive backgrounds in the practice of our respective art forms and a broad range of academic study in the arts and media. We are well aware that mass-mediated images are not innocent happenstance. Our research revealed the degree to which every detail of the president's media images had been envisioned, designed, and executed. To understand the images and how they contribute to the pervasive sense of insecurity within current social, political and economic realities, we are obliged to speak first to our reactions; we acknowledge and attempt to accurately foreground our own emotional and intellectual groundings. As we scrutinize the images and attend to their formal composition and content, we also articulate the qualities of these contemporary media images that we observe to be analogous to the composition and aesthetics of ancient religious icons.

Simultaneously we recognize contemporary versions of historical, secular practices of recasting icons to accommodate the designs of Byzantine emperors and contemporary despots.

The Events:

On September 11, 2001 and in the ensuing days and weeks, all of Nova Scotia and the Maritime provinces mobilized to help thousands of stranded American citizens who were forced to land at the first available airport after the attacks in New York and Washington. Their generosity and initiative remained unacknowledged officially¹ for over three years until US President George Bush arrived at Pier 21 in Halifax on December 1, 2004, ostensibly to extend the long overdue thank you. However, this was merely a pretext for his actual message: to assert the necessity of Canadian participation in the ballistic missile defence program, in spite of Canadian's evident antipathy to the project.² Mars, the god of war audaciously insinuated himself into a venue imbued with powerful memories of the terrible cost of his marauding history.

The Images:



Figure 1. Peter Parsons, Front page, Halifax Chronicle Herald, December 2, 2004. Republished with permission from The Halifax Herald Limited.

On December 2, 2004, the front-page image in newspapers and web sites across Canada and around the world showed the image of the US President delivering his speech at Pier 21. It was the global news lead of the day, seen everywhere that the USA's television culture extends. The Halifax Chronicle Herald image featured the president centre front before a collage backdrop depicting moments of Canadian history, leadership, and heroism. On the periphery of the scene sat the stage party of present day political leaders including Prime Minister Martin. In other news venues (i.e. Edmonton Journal, CBC) the selected image was of the president standing in front of an enormous Canadian flag, with the red maple leaf radiating like a halo around him. He dominates the image to the exclusion of anyone else.

As Canadians we were surprised at how personally offended we were by the media spectacle created for the American president at Pier 21. To what did we owe the honour of such a visit. Just for a thank-you extended in person by a 'reigning' U.S. president? We certainly had to congratulate the public relations handlers who had decided upon and dressed the venue. On the surface the photomontages behind the president as he delivered his speech in Rowe Heritage Hall evoked moments of Canada / US entente, and therefore were very impressive. The widely publicized media photos were dynamic and beautifully composed.

The Site:

Pier 21, Canada's Immigration Museum, is an historical interpretive centre that commemorates the thousands of immigrants and refugees who entered Canada through its doors, the soldiers who departed from Halifax to fight in WW2, the celebration for those who returned, and the civilian effort to support these responses to the tides of world events. (See www.pier21.ca). Thus, for Canadians, Pier 21 is a site that celebrates hope and endurance in the realities of all who, though

fleeing war and poverty, could imagine a new and better life in Canada. They had the courage and strength to endure the hardships of climate and geography, discrimination, and hard work that was the reality of their new life. Notwithstanding the lamentable discrimination to which immigrants were and still are subjected, the children and grandchildren of those who arrived at Pier 21 are citizens who now are integral to our understanding of who we are as Canadians.

The individual members of *The (1+1+1)* Collective** each have different connections to the site that underlie our personal sense of indignation over the media spectacle at Pier 21. For example, Miriam writes,

Although my own ancestors arrived via other points of entry, I have visited the Centre with my daughter whose paternal great grandfather immigrated from the Ukraine via Halifax early in the 20th century. After travelling overland to Amsterdam, he had worked on the docks to earn money for his passage to Halifax and train fare to Manitoba. The voyage was prolonged and he relented and spent some of his train fare to buy oranges. Consequently, without money for the train, he was held in detention in Halifax until weeks later, relatives already in Manitoba sent him his fare and he was released and sent on his way. Many years of hard work later, he still remembered the flavour of those oranges and regretted nothing.

For Michelle, having grown up across the harbour from Pier 21, the event evokes strong emotions. She writes,

My grandfather, Albin Forest, worked as a stevedore on the Halifax piers and my father, Marcel, joined the army as soon as he was old enough and sailed off to World War II from Pier 21.

Dad was six when my grandparents came from The Magdalen Islands³ to offer their children a better future. As the oldest, he quit grade school to help support the family. Prospects were scarce in anglophone Halifax for an Acadian with little formal education. In his efforts to fit into an English culture he put another 'r' in the sir-name 'Forest'. When war broke out, Dad saw it as a steady job and a free trip to Europe. He and hundreds of others fresh from basic training shipped out on the *Aquitainia*. As Dad told the story, he spent the whole voyage to Southampton below deck, not because he was seasick, but because he had smuggled a crown-and-anchor game aboard. By the time they reached England he'd won quite a nest egg.

Response

This, then, was the standpoint from which we, as critical observers have formed our view of the event. Whose interpretations of the history, people, and events depicted in the photos that had been incorporated into the stage backdrop was being so elaborately presented? In their welcoming way Nova Scotians, amiably accommodated Ottawa and the White House in manipulating Canadian cultural archetypes and public commonplaces to facilitate the powerful and high-profile intentions of another country. The political became poignantly personal when foreign puppeteers insinuated their leader within our history, assumed dominance, and pasted us into the pantheon of super-power photo-ops. Pier 21 became part of the semantics of U.S. presidential image-making and in the process cast us as the Canadians they wanted us to be.

There have been thorough discussions (Gross, Katz & Ruby, 1988) of the impact of photographic images, the ethical concerns of journalists, photographers, and artists in the production and dissemination of images, and the power relations inherent in making images of "others". However, the images that provoked our question in this instance were

arresting not because of their aesthetic qualities or the objectification of subject by the photographer / viewer. In this case the subject has assumed the role of objectifier and presumed authority over the viewer in the circumstances of the moment. Very different but powerful capacities to control representation and perception of meaning were at work. As viewers we were being “put in our place” and that place was outside.

Looking Carefully

How can we comprehend these images and the implications they insert into our considerations of representation and valuing? Such images are not unique in the history of representation. Cultural icons are used frequently to further political ends, but it is startling to find ourselves not only confronted by that practice but also implicated in our own dilemma of representation as “other”; presumed to be and do only that which the powerful dictate. Although the mechanisms of representation at play employ the highly sophisticated technologies of the 21st century, we contend that the mechanisms themselves impose meanings and propagate a view in the manner established in religious icons, imperial portraits and other politically motivated imagery that appropriates the sensibilities of the icon. What follows is an analysis of the front-page photo from *The Chronicle Herald* (Fig.1) in which we place its elements in an historical context as representations of power.

In representing leadership and propagating authoritative messages, a striking example is the long and influential history of the propagation of Christian doctrine. At one time ‘art’ was synonymous with ‘religious art’. Music and art that glorified the divine received the patronage of nobles, merchants and landowners. Patrons exerted enormous influence upon the themes of the art-works created for them and upon the contexts in which these works were experienced.

In the Byzantine and Russian Orthodox traditions, the painting of icons is considered a form of service to God. A religious icon is

addressed to the faithful. Icons (Byzantine, Russian, Polish) invite the faithful, through prayer, to have access to the divinity of Christ, the Virgin Mary and the saints who intercede on the believer's behalf before the divine. To the faithful icons are understood not as representations of the divine but as openings into it. There is an essentially one-way relationship between icon and prototype (Eastmond, 2003, 75). The eternal, divine, and invisible nature of the signified is not contained in the image. The icon is only the portal through which the faithful may seek communion with the divine. It is not what it is but what it does.

The iconic image does not depend upon the linear perspective to which we are accustomed as heirs of the Renaissance. Linear perspective represents a given moment from the perspective of the viewer placed in one position outside the picture. Elements of the composition are smaller in proportion to their distance from the viewer. The purpose of the icon, however, is to transcend place and temporality. The character of the space in an icon is self-enclosed. As Uspensky describes it, "It is as if we (i.e., our glance, the glance of the viewer) were to enter the picture, and the dynamics of our gaze follows the laws governing the construction of this microcosm" (Uspensky, 1976, 35). The laws are those of the faith and its figurative language. Because there is no one perspective, things become things-in-themselves with which to commune. The icon is a kind of medium to one's belief system.

Of utmost importance in the painting of an icon is the issue of how to facilitate contact between the person praying and the venerated figure. Various techniques are used to differentiate the iconographic subject (i.e., the venerated figure) from lesser figures present in connection with the subject. Pertinent to our discussion of Figure 1 is the iconographic convention of depicting the most venerated figures face-on, not in profile. They occupy the central space of the picture plane. They are usually larger, at rest and not screened by lesser figures. ⁴

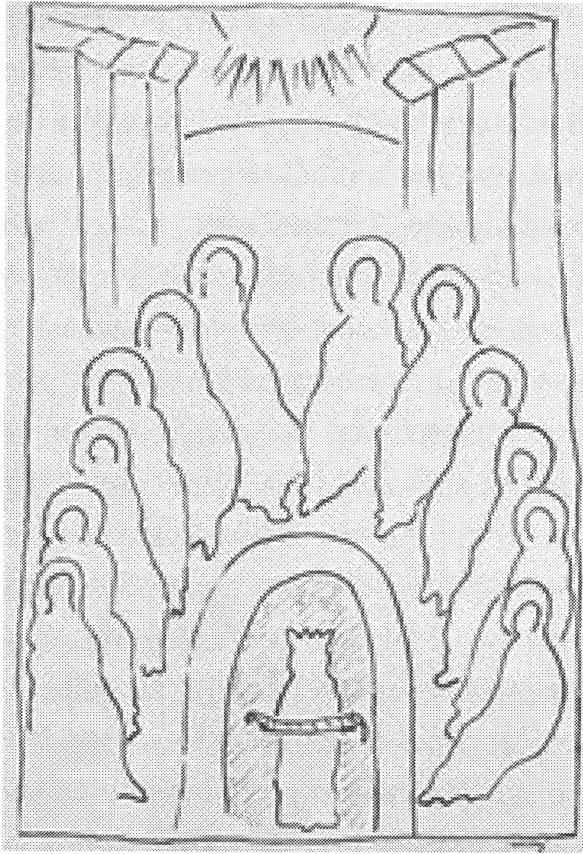


Figure 2. Cartoon of “*Descent of the Holy Spirit*”, *Novgorod School, XVth century*, (Ouspensky & Lossky, 1982).

In referring to the “The Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles”(Fig.2), Ouspensky and Lossky interpret the compositional elements. The semi-circle of apostles represent the unity of the church. The empty, unoccupied place is that of the invisible head of the church. The king stands in a place dark from lack of faith, holding twelve scrolls representing the apostles who enlighten through their teaching (Ouspensky & Lossky, 1982, 207-208).

This icon offers an example of the inverse perspective typical of many forms of pre-Renaissance art. In inverse perspective, “objects diminish in size in proportion to their proximity to the frame, i.e., to the viewer of the picture, and not in proportion to their distance from

the observer as is the case in direct [or 'linear'] perspective" (Uspensky, 1976, 38). Inversely to what we have come to expect, immersed as we are in the visual language of linear perspective, the apostles in this icon are arranged as if seated behind each other. Figures closer to the foreground overlap figures 'behind'; and yet, those figures that, according to linear perspective, appear to be receding into the background, are larger than those whom we perceive to be in the foreground. The compositional device of inverse perspective gives the space the quality of being self-enclosed. There is no sense that images continue beyond the boundaries of the frame. The icon painter places him or herself and the viewer within this represented space. There is no attempt to make figures appear to be 'in' their immediate surroundings. The space between figures and ground is indefinable, making the quality of that space the same in character as that between the viewer and the icon; i.e. between the believer and his or her divine power. The viewer's perspective is part of the doctrinal world of the icon as one is *drawn into* the picture through faith.

The phenomenon of inverse perspective can be understood not from the viewpoint of the spectator outside the picture, but from that of an abstract internal observer located in the depths of the picture. It is as if the picture is oriented from the point of view of the object, (Uspensky, 1976, cites Riegl, footnote 28, 44) in a manner sometimes seen in children's drawings wherein forms appear to be interpreted with reference to an internal observer. It is as if children are inside the pictures they draw. They look at space from the position of the depicted figures (Uspensky, 1976, fn. 28, 44).

Returning to Figure 1, as we 'enter' the photo the foreground of spectators draws the eye according to the conventions of linear perspective. The five stage flats employ inverse perspective into which have been inserted the people on stage. Figures in the photomontages are as large, and in some cases larger, than those on stage.

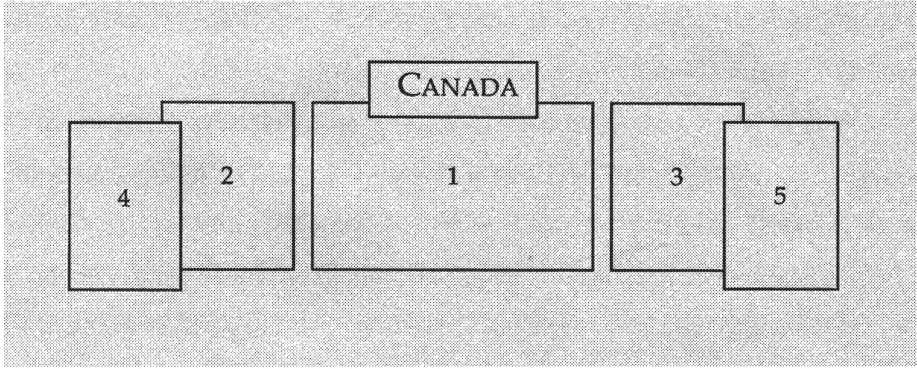
As we analyse the photo elements on stage, we do so using the theatrical convention of referring to left and right as if from the perspective of an actor on that stage. This is also the convention when referring to icons (Uspensky, 1976, 62). Considering that inverse perspective places the viewer within the microcosm of the icon, we 'read' the icon as if we are inside it looking out.

Of the 52 heads that we could count in the front rows of the audience, 38 were male. Someone at right front is holding something before his face - a camera perhaps? From the viewer's perspective, the audience members are backlit since all are attentively gazing into the light from the stage, as if basking in the presidential message. The impression is that of rapt attention, those closest to the president more fully illuminated than those farther back.

The two boxes in front of the president at the rostrum are presumably prompters and/or a television monitor. The boxes are grey like the rostrum and the stage floor and blend with the grey scale in the black-and-white photos behind the speaker. On the front of the rostrum facing the audience, in the place normally used for a logo of the hosting institution, is an image depicting the United States and Canadian flags hanging side-by-side on a blue background. Flanking the sides of the stage are standing flags, the Canadian flags downstage and the United States flag towards the centre. Hanging from the rafters are what seem to be marine signal flags and on either side of the huge word 'CANADA' hang the US and the Canadian flags, just as in the 'logo' on the rostrum. There is one occupied chair, up-stage right from the podium.

The president stands behind the rostrum dressed in a grey suit with a red tie. At stage right and slightly up-stage from the president is the prime minister in grey, seated with the back of his left hand reaching up toward his right ear. Further up-stage, far left are two standing figures. Both are in grey with reddish coloured ties.

The far-left and far-right stage flats are slightly farther down-stage and so serve to frame the inner flats as a three-part composition or triptych as in figure 3 (below).



The background to flat 5 is an image of the harbour looking along the piers. A small passenger liner is being nudged alongside by a tug and facing the viewer, farther up the piers, is another vessel, perhaps a trawler. The water reflects the cargo sheds and the docking vessels. There are three figures superimposed in a triangular way across the bottom half of the flat. One is Winston Churchill and next to him, a uniformed man. These figures appear to be a collage of discrete photos and are partly obscured by the two men on stage. Red tinges the sky and water.

Flat 4 depicts a boy with back to us, holding up something in his right hand, waving to a ship with crowds of servicemen lining the rails. Is this his last look at his father leaving for the front or a first glimpse as he arrives safely home? An image of a seated Winston Churchill with another seated figure to his right is superimposed across the bottom third of flat 4. As in all the other flats, the black and white photographs are haloed in a red glow along the edges of the flat and where the images meet.

Flat no. 3 depicts a relief worker apparently handing something to three girls dressed in headscarves and dark dresses. Other children look on. Across the bottom third is another meeting of seated leaders: F. D. Roosevelt, Mackenzie King and Churchill. The upper two-thirds of Flat 2 depicts a line of soldiers in soft hats, implying that they are part of Canadian peacekeeping forces. Superimposed, as if across from the soldiers, is the image of a child of colour holding a Canadian flag. Across the bottom third of this flat is another image of seated leaders, including Mackenzie King.

Flat 1, the largest and the centre of the triptych, shows a background of black-and-white images of a class of school children, apparently all boys; three men in uniform having a conversation; a soldier stooped down handing something to a child; someone writing on a chalkboard; and another soldier about to hand something to a child wearing a back-pack. In the middle of flat 1 is the shape of the stylised red maple leaf from the Canadian flag. Within its shape is depicted an aerial image of buildings on Halifax harbour in the middle of which is superimposed the two flags, this time as if flying and tipped to touch in the middle. The U.S. flag is stage right; the Canadian, stage left. All of the stage flats and the 'CANADA' sign above appear to have bevelled edges as if individually framed.

How are we to make sense of these compositional elements using what we know about icons? In terms of the importance of contact between viewer and venerated figure, no other individual or image is centrally placed, front on and as close to the viewer as is the US president. All other figures are turned slightly or covered by figures or images in front of them, and the array of heads in the foreground facing the president can only be read as 'the faithful'. Clearly, the president is the iconographic subject of this image, the one through whom one seeks salvation. The fact that he is partly obscured by the rostrum is not a problem since its emblem reinforces his message of cross-border collaboration, as cited from his speech,

From the smart border to the container security initiative to the joint command of NORAD, we are working together. I hope we'll also move forward on ballistic missile defence co-operation to protect the next generation of Canadians and Americans from threats we know will arise (Smith & Jackson, 2004, A1).

The colours on stage are the black and white associated with documentary or historical, (i.e., "truthful") evidence and the red of majesty, of the maple leaf, of revolutionary change, of the two political parties to this event (Canadian Liberals and U.S. Republicans), and of Mars, the red planet, Roman god of war.

The positioning of the stage flats to form a triptych alludes to the three-panel altarpiece that depicts venerated subjects but also represents in its form Christianity's three-personed god, the Trinity. The staging thus mirrors a central point of iconography: to represent the singleness of nature through a triad of persons (Uspensky, 1976). As for the figures depicted on the stage flats, those in the background can be read as types or *tipazh*⁵. In her curatorial essay for a Soviet poster exhibition, Annie Gérin (2003, 19) describes the technique employed with great success by the Soviets to create an atheist state:

Visual and linguistic propaganda served to establish *tipazh*. The essence of *tipazh* was to create positive and negative stereotypes easily identifiable by a handful of particular attributes, such as a red pockmarked nose, a distinct hat or a stooping body. The capitalist, the priest, the prostitute, the worker and the collective farm-worker all became recognizable at a glance. Propagandists fed their publics [sic] rich, vivid and concrete perceptions, rather than relying on abstract generalities.

The *tipazh* depicted on these stage flats are the child refugee, the soldier and the relief worker all pictured behind important figures of state who also serve as types based upon their roles in world affairs.

Because Churchill is depicted at least three times, we may surmise that he is intended to represent our common ally, unflinching in the face of war and tyranny. His speeches come back to us; we hear his famous 1940 speech in the House of Commons, "...whatever the cost may be, we shall fight on the beaches, we shall fight on the landing grounds, we shall fight in the fields and in the streets, we shall fight in the hills; we shall never surrender" (Browning, 1982, 66).

Returning to the use of inverse perspective, the larger figures on the stage flats are larger than the real-life figures on stage. Together with the rapt audience, the photo-figures enclose the world of our political representatives. The viewer is placed in it, as in the enclosed space of an icon and, as in the icon, "the dynamics of our gaze follows [sic] the laws governing the construction of this microcosm" (Uspensky, 1976, 35). The icon is,

a pictorial expression of the teaching of the Church, by representing concrete events of sacred History and indicating their inner meaning. This art is intended not to reflect the problems of life but to answer them . . . Illusory three-dimensional space is replaced by the plane of reality" (Ouspensky and Lossky, 1982, 27).

The plane of reality is that of defending democracy, its champions being the US president and his allies. The irony is that the techniques of iconography do not support the concept of democracy. Religious iconography is a hierarchical system in which the believer accepts their role as supplicant and prays for contact with that which lies beyond.

Imperial Portraits:

Both as "the sign of the presence, a window on the invisible world" of the divine (my translation) (Janocha, 2002, 15) and as a compelling cultural symbol, the potency of icons persist. To exploit them can provoke volatile reactions and accusations of blasphemy and political/

culturally provocation. For example, in 1999 Russian artist Avdei Ter-Oganyan was forced into political asylum in the Czech Republic after staging a performance in which, for a few rubles, he offered, to chop up mass-produced copies of icons. His intended ironical comment on Stalinist antireligious campaigns “and the capitalism of the present, which . . . makes it possible for people to commit blasphemy for money.” (Akinsha, 2002, 72) brought death threats and charges from the Russian Orthodox Patriarch that the artist had attacked the state as well as the church. Other contemporary Russian artists exploited the widely published portraits of President Vladimir Putin through such works as Anton Litvin’s performance in which “the presidential portrait was used as part of a magic ritual, and the artist – girl Pioneer genuinely believed that the supernatural essence of Putin would hear any request and fulfil any desire” (Kravtsova and Matveyeva, 2002, 52). Putin may not appreciate the gesture, but such works reveal the persistence of the alignment of state and religious symbolic authority that originated with Byzantine imperial portraits and has been at play in the promotion of such iconic portraits as those of Mao Zedong, Lenin, Saddam Hussein, and Kim Il Sung. Speaking of Mao’s famous portrait Dal Lago observes that,

The visual ubiquity of the portrait, combined with the power attached to the political and personal prestige of the man, contributed to the creation of a feeling of religious adoration not just toward the Chairman, but toward the image itself, which began to share in the godlike nature of its referent” (Dal Lago, 1999, 49).

In such instances the idealized portrait as a mechanism of representation operated in the certainty that “visuality is the first and most direct space of reception of the original message and therefore

becomes central to the consummation and re-elaboration of the original propaganda" (Dal Lago, 1999, 50).

In order to serve worldly ends, the imperial image must insinuate that the relationship between the monarch being represented and the tradition of image veneration was such that "the honour paid to the image passed to the prototype, and [there was] an identity between the image and its model" (Eastmond, (2003, 75). Imperial images play off their formal similarity to religious icons and derive potency from the conflation of the two in the popular imagination, but inevitable distinctions had to be negotiated, particularly concerning the relationship between image and model. In that imperial rulers were and are living and fallible beings, vulnerable to judgement and overthrow, "the veneration of the image could only work if it [was] accepted that it was only the official body (highly idealized) of the emperor that was being represented." (p. 78). Adoration for the image was reverence for the ideal of the ruler, not the men who momentarily held the position (p.79).



Figure 4: Courtesy of The Canadian Press/Tom Hanson

This image, found on the CBC website, is remarkably less complex than the image on the front page of *The Halifax Chronicle Herald*, but it is nonetheless powerful and carefully crafted. The flag is not merely an attractive fill behind the speaker or a courtesy to the host nation. In the photo the red points of the maple leaf radiate out from the figure evoking, via the formal structure alone, the analogy of the religious icon. Our proposal is not that this president has the arrogance to cast himself as a divinity, but rather that such representations allude to the iconic and exemplify the “imperial images” originated by Byzantine rulers. The implication is that of focused intent to construct the “imperial image” of the President: that the man IS the office – the paternal protector of democracy, freedom, and national security. As the religious icon is a portal to the divine, so is the imperial icon the portal to power, authority, and security. The inference is that to attack (i.e. criticize) the man is a treasonous attack on the office.

The White House press core has appeared to be rigorously disciplined with regard to curtailing criticism of a president who had been buffeted by unflattering reports of malapropisms and a casual attitude towards statesmanship. Every public event and “photo op” is now so precisely orchestrated that not only are there no unflattering photos or video footage in circulation, but every image is calculated to promote this particular man through a very specific iconic alignment with the symbolic imagery of the presidential office, the *tipazh* if you will. All public appearances, including those abroad - as in Ottawa and Halifax – are expertly designed and produced with all the skills and technology of a film shoot. As in Halifax, an advance team led by Scott Sforza, former ABC television producer, now Special Assistant to the Director of White House Communications, is dispatched to the chosen site where stages, backdrops, and crowd scenes of carefully selected individuals are designed and produced specifically for the occasion. Be it Pier 21, Ellis Island, Mt. Rushmore, or the flight deck of

the aircraft carrier, *Abraham Lincoln*, the site is configured so that the calculated lighting, angle, and view through all camera lens will result in a predetermined set of flattering images. Calculated use of symbols and symbolic sites means that the president is seen in profile perfectly set into the fixed alignments of the presidents carved into Mt. Rushmore, with the illuminated Statue of Liberty over his right shoulder, in profile looking upwards to a huge American flag, before the floodlit cathedral in New Orleans, or as in Halifax, posed before an enlarged photograph of Roosevelt and Winston Churchill as if Bush himself had been present at that historical moment of statesmanship (Allen, 2004). For the now infamous "Mission Accomplished" event aboard the aircraft carrier the speech was specifically timed for what filmmakers call, "magic hour light" which cast a golden glow on and around the president. The observation that, "They understand that what's around the head is just as important as the head" (Bumiller, 2003) might also apply to the construction of the image of the president in front of the Canadian flag.

Praxis

Times of war offer different possibilities for analysis of political events. Looking with care at the image of George Bush colonizing Pier 21 and seeing the iconography of traditional icon calls forth questions of how we might bring these new and critical readings of these images to the classroom.

It is difficult to find an icon of our time. It is simpler to find personalities or events- Terry Fox, Justin and Janet, Karla Homulka, 9/11; new priests prostrate before the newly installed Pope, as well as those images produced to seek our allegiance. What is the most recognized image in the world? Research on this question might include the Christian cross, Mickey Mouse and Coca Cola. Without inquiry, images produce a reactive belief, a private automatic response. With reflection, awareness is possible, potentially shared.

Linda has written,

An image that transformed my year was on the cover of the *Globe and Mail* in late fall 2004. I was involved writing and acting in a community show called *Bodies without Borders*, produced by a women's collective of which I have been a member for 4 years. The theme was women's relationships to their bodies and showcased original writing by local women. The work of the collective is to raise money for social justice by supporting global and local initiatives to help the lives of marginalized and hurt women and children through artistic work and fun.

To raise additional monies we had decided to create a calendar using the body as an art form. It was challenging, a precarious idea. We were terrified to stretch into the ancient realm of nude or semi-clad presentation...

On the way to the photo shoot of the cover image (which was to be) a photo of women dressed in lace like material forming a spiral as they lay on the wooden stage of our local theatre, I had stopped at the pharmacy to get some water and to find someone to talk me out of this adventure. Even though I saw this as an act of teaching to our protected small town Canadian community, I was scared.

As I waited in line I looked over and saw the image of a man holding a boy, a father holding his son – the son was naked and covered in blood – the father's face consumed with grief. This was an image of our time, ethnic, cultural, commonplace, with grief as the centre asking us, how do you account for this, this war on bodies, war on lives? Once I saw this image, I knew that I had to participate in the photo shoot. My fear, my mind were

overruled by my soul. Other images of human endeavour must counter the images of war.

Dr. Ibrahim Abdurrahman Farajaje, in his address to the Graduate Theological Union where he is a professor, wrote,

(T)here are some for whom teaching is always taking place in a time of war, in the wars that are carried out in the occupied territories of our inner cities, of the prison - industrial complex, or in the United States colonies in the Pacific Islands. The war is on. For this is a war on bodies, a war on lives - in the interest of the Empire. The powerful amass more power, the disenfranchised become more disenfranchised. This is a war on bodies; this is a war on lives (2003).

He further suggests that in times of war, "we have an obligation to help reshape the discourse... as intellectuals in the public domain".

There has been a recent call to re-establish the traditional curriculum; for example, rather than having the social studies curriculum focuses on current and world events, it should return to lessons on history. As well, Farajaje questions the strong suggestions made by politicians in support of the war in Iraq that Public TV and Radio is biased and ought to give a more balanced view and offer equal airtime to other sides of issues. He argues that reshaping the discourse requires us to be aware of the "call to teachers to expose students to both sides of an issue" (Re-thinking Schools Online. Summer, 2003).

In Social Studies classes across Canada, students are asked to find current events and bring them in to class. Images that we would hide from our children become a part of the morning activities, just following snack and recess. We see Abu Ghraib images that were contained on various sites of the Internet, Guantanamo, coffins carrying soldiers being returned to their parents – a war on bodies, a war on lives. What

is a balanced view? This abstraction and the call to present 'both' sides requires further unpacking.

The possibility that any issue only has two sides is "at best formulaic, at worst propaganda" (Rethinking Schools Online, 2003). One of our jobs at all times and perhaps one of our most significant jobs as teachers, who are teaching in precarious times, is to create "pedagogy of questions" (Rethinking Schools Online, 2003). As teachers we have to be willing and courageous to seek and use the tools of critical viewing. This is particularly important in times when dissent might earn the dissenter or the critical pedagogue the possibility of being labelled treasonous. Are we willing to leave a trace, cast a shadow? "What is a body that casts no shadow? Nothing, a formlessness, two-dimensional, a comic strip character (LeGuin, as cited in Neilson, A. 1999, *Daily Meanings*. p.57).

We are charged as teachers with breathing life into knowledge. We "must risk finding the portals and gaps and entrances, and must find (my own) voice to speak it" (Jardin, as quoted in Clifford and Friesen, in Neilson, A. 1999. *Daily Meanings*. p.62). Risking a radical approach that places us in the mix and does not "segregate knowledge from what happens in the world around us" (Dittmar & Annas, 2004) re-establishes our faith in ourselves as agents of change.

We are teaching in times of Mars: in a war on bodies, a war on lives. As teachers, one of our opportunities is to investigate images that report the events occurring in our lives, our nations, our world by acknowledging the diversity of discourses which Davies and Harre' (2001) have referred to as 'positioning the subject location'. We can question by 'seeing out' (as we might imagine investigatory icons might) from the conceptual repertoire and location of the image-makers and texts. We inform practices of equity and awareness through a commitment to curiosity, troubling the given, and as Gee (1999) suggests, noting the potential and situated meanings. And yet we

cannot make a duality of reflective practice and reaction. Perhaps we can make connection a part of the inquiry, to open the conversation, share our wonderings and help us transverse the precariousness as an act of hope. We seek the courage to leave a trace. Contrary to what Joni Mitchell (1969) wrote in her song, there are more than “both sides now”, and perhaps that is what she meant about life’s illusions, they teach us what we don’t know, displace the implied, unsettle the understood and invoke an opportunity for a reflective critique which is political, soulful and engaged.

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Notes

*Miriam Cooley, Michelle Forrest, and Linda Wheeldon are *The (1+1+1) Collective*. This, and the other artistic and written works that we have produced are holistically collaborative in concept, development, production, and presentation. The order of names only indicates acquiescence to the limitations of linear text.

¹ The appreciation of the individuals who were stranded has of course been expressed many times over.

² See "Bush hits up Canada for help with U.S. missile defence plan" by Amy Smith and David Jackson, *The Chronicle Herald*, Dec. 2, 2003, front page.

³ Les Îles de la Madeleine form a small archipelago off the northeast tip of Prince Edward Island and are part of the province of Quebec.

⁴ Respecting those who believe the icon is a portal, we offer only a facsimile of the basic compositional elements of the icon alluded to in Figure 2.

⁵ *Tipazh*: I believe the word is an amalgam of *tip* 'type' and the suffix *azh*, which carries the sense of something being placed in circulation. There may also be the suggestion of the first syllable of *azhure* 'openwork' which carries the connotations 'up-to-date', 'in order', 'all correct'.