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The Spectacle of Champlain

Commemorating Québec

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This essay examines the process of foundation through which Samuel de Champlain's public image as the founder of Québec has been instituted both historically and during Québec City's 400th anniversary commemorations in 2008. Through analyzing the official commemorative event, Rencontres, I demonstrate how Champlain's memory is deeply informed by spectacularized forms of politics. In particular, I argue that the Québec 400 places Champlain as the founder of a culturally diverse Québec by underlining the peaceful encounter between French colonizers and indigenous peoples. By relying on a strategy of familiarity that builds on the politics of spectacle and a semiotics of space, this discursive move solidifies the normative Québécois subject's ability to legitimately manage national space and define its own boundaries. I end by arguing that commemoration stands out as an important technique of the nation-building project in Québec.

Introducing Samuel de Champlain and the Québec 400

Throughout 2008, Québec and Canada commemorated the 400th anniversary of the founding of Québec City by Samuel de Champlain with an extremely popular series of public events. Not surprisingly, the Canada-Québec political quarrel played itself out in a number of different guises during this period. In English and French-language media, questions were consistently raised about the significance of the commemorations. Did the founding of Québec City by Samuel de Champlain in 1608 constitute the founding of the nation of Québec? Or did it mark the origins of Canada, as Canadian Prime Minister Harper maintained?

This paper veers away from the popular infatuation with this ‘two founding nations’ discourse (see Bannerji, 2000; Mackey, 2002) to focus specifically on the ways in which the Québec 400 constructs a normative Québécois national subject. In this regards, two main questions animate my inquiry: How is the past used to construct boundaries around normative Québécois subjects? How do discourses on cultural pluralism play a role in defining this normative Québécois national subject? Through participant observation and online content analysis, I analyze the major commemorative event at the Québec 400 and consider the making of the normative Québécois national subject.

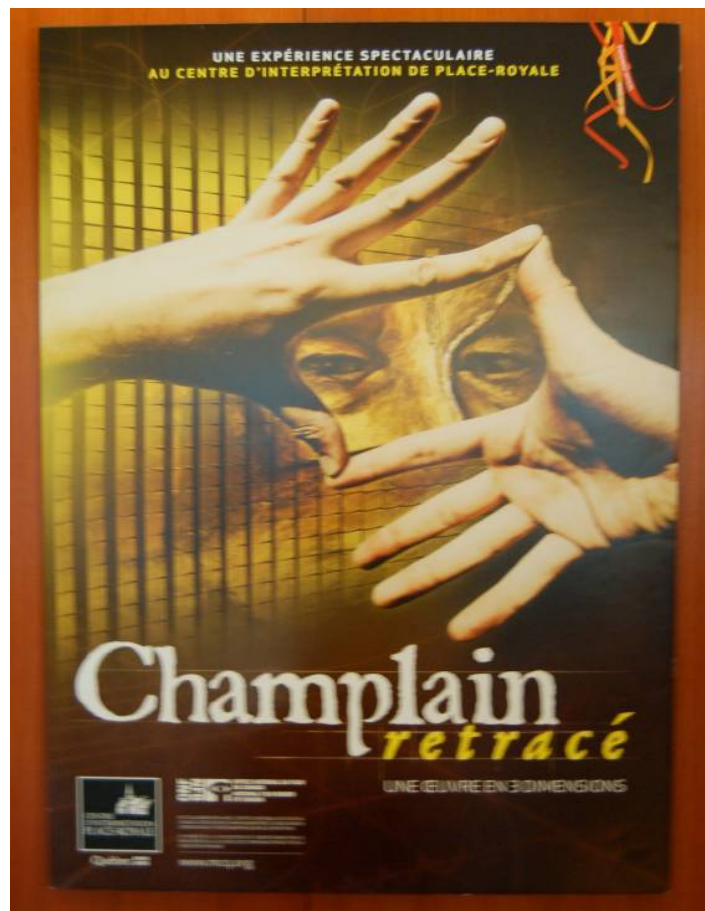
In the first section of this paper I examine the process of foundation through which Samuel de Champlain becomes the father of Québec. This historical process involves the construction of both a literal and figurative face for Champlain and the instantiation of a founding moment, both of which lead to his eventual monumentalization in the Old City of Québec. From there, I analyze the Québec 400’s official commemorative event, the *Rencontres* [Encounters] multi-media show, in order to study how Samuel de Champlain is imaginatively re-constituted as the founder of the liberal ethic of cultural pluralism common in Québec and in Western liberal democracies more broadly (Hage, 2000; Brown, 2006). This is accomplished both through the seemingly benevolent indigenization of the Québécois subject and in the racialized modes through which *Rencontres* understands the colonial encounter. I conclude by arguing that the discursive attempt to re-signify the encounter between indigenous peoples and white settlers as one based on equality re-constitutes white settler forms of power and privilege common to settler societies and articulates particular forms of Québec nationalism.

Remembering Champlain, the Founding Hero

There were two notable moments during my time in Québec City in 2008 where the significance of Champlain’s image came into full focus. Both occurred in close proximity to each other along near the St-Lawrence River in the Port area of the city. The first was at the Musée de la civilisation du Québec (MCQ), at the permanent exhibit *Le temps des Québécois* [Québec’s Time]. The second was at the Centre d’interprétation de Place-Royale, during the *Champlain retracé* [Facing Champlain] film showing (2008).

Le temps des Québécois was first launched in 2004 and provides a synthesis of the major events that have shaped present-day Québec. It is a rather traditional museum exhibit; it features a linear progression through a series of objects, artifacts, audio-visual productions, and textual panels. According to the MCQ website (2009), the exhibit addresses five key themes: Québec’s social, political, and economic history; Québec’s urban society; the growth of Québec’s rural regions during the nineteenth century; Québec society’s cultural diversity; and Québec modernity. Among the many

diverse items displayed in the exhibit are busts of early colonizers; models from a variety of landscapes; paraphernalia from the Montréal Canadiens hockey team; and objects such as books, clothes, and letters from various periods. Samuel de Champlain is given a prominent place among the exhibit's key figures. Near the beginning of the entrance to the exhibit, a bust of Champlain stands tall, overlooking a drawing of L'Abitation [The Dwelling], his original settlement, and a model of Le Don de Dieu [The Gift of God], Champlain's ship during his 1608 voyage. An accompanying panel puts words to the celebratory display: 'Founder of Québec and talented explorer. Champlain is also the author of travel narratives and re-usable maps. We don't have a portrait of him, but in the nineteenth century, artists invented a face for him' (Field notes, 2008, my translation). This postscript about Champlain's image caught my attention. How exactly did artists invent his face?



The official poster for *Champlain retracé, une oeuvre en 3 dimensions*. The film was shown at the *Centre d'interprétation de Place-Royale*, near the Port of Québec. Photo by Darryl Leroux, 5 July 2008.

The National Film Board of Canada (NFB) film *Champlain retracé*, which I saw the day after I visited the MCQ, re-iterates this same point about the invention of Champlain's face. In fact, as producer Marc

Bertrand explains in the NFB documentary about the making of *Champlain retracé*, the film was inspired by the same nineteenth century search for Champlain's face to which *Le temps des Québécois* refers (National Film Board of Canada, 2008). *Champlain retracé* follows the protagonist Méliissa Hébert, a fictional descendant of the first colonists in New France, on her creative journey to paint a portrait of Champlain. Before doing so, she enters a mystical world where time and space have no bearing, in order to get a clearer picture of the essence of Champlain. This takes her through a wealth of material, including texts, maps, drawings, prints, and artifacts. The film's script acts as a metaphor for the fact that no 'real' portrait of Champlain exists, only one invented by nineteenth century artists eager to put a face to the man anointed the founder of French Canada. In the end, Hébert creates a painting that obscures Champlain's face, showing only his eyes, the defining feature of his adventurous spirit.

While wandering through the summer streets of Québec City and darting down the dark corridors of its cultural institutions, these two stories about the invention of Champlain's face struck a chord inside me. His likeness was present everywhere I turned: in shop windows, museum exhibits, postcards, paintings and prints, book covers, and/or on street corners featuring Champlain impersonators.



A mural of Samuel de Champlain in the Lowertown area of Québec City. The orange banners are the official colours of the Québec 400. Photo by Darryl Leroux, 6 July 2008.

The sharp features of his nose, his dark, flowing hair, his piercing eyes, and his signature hat were unmistakable. And yet, here came the suggestion that all of this was invented. I was deeply intrigued by the subtle claims in *Le temps des Québécois* and *Champlain retracé*, neither of which provided its audience with any resolution. This paper

follows up on these two presentations of Champlain's *literal* image as I examine the multiple efforts in the Québec 400 to construct Champlain's *public* image as founder of Québec and father of the Québécois. Through interrogating Champlain's public image in the Québec 400, I argue that Champlain is remembered as the founder of the liberal ethic of cultural pluralism recently embraced in Québec. In some ways, Champlain becomes the ideal subject envisioned by this liberal intercultural discourse: confidently Québécois, tolerant of differences, unfazed by change. The following section presents the *process of foundation* through which Champlain's public image was created, before turning to its very recent manifestation during the Québec 400.

The Process of Foundation: Memory and Building a Public Image

This section examines the making of Samuel de Champlain's public image in order to tease out the spectacularized politics at play during the Québec 400. To begin, historian Michel-Rolph Trouillot, writing about the Columbus quincentenary in the United States in 1992, argues that the making of a 'public face' through commemoration necessarily depends on the singularization of a specific historical moment; in Champlain's case, the founding of Québec City on July 3, 1608. 'The creation of that historical moment,' Trouillot explains, 'facilitates the narrativization of history, the transformation of what happened into that which is said to have happened' (1995: 112-13). It is the relationship between what Trouillot calls the 'sociohistorical process' (i.e., what happened) and our narratives about that process (i.e., what is said to have happened) that straddles the theoretical line between a materialist and empiricist history and a social constructivist account. Trouillot underlines the tension between these two often-competing models of history-making, opening up the possibility to examine how and under what conditions Champlain enters into our narratives about the past.

In particular, Trouillot argues that the isolation of a single moment creates an historical *fact*: on this day, in 1608, Champlain founded French civilization in the Americas. What I call a *process of foundation* relies on two interconnected phenomena. First, as Trouillot explains, chronology replaces process. In other words, we are left with a series of moments that all lead to Champlain's triumphant landing in 1608. Among them are Champlain's much-earlier settlement at Port-Royal in 1604; his eventual return to New France with the blessing of King Henry IV; and his arrival in Tadoussac aboard the *Don de Dieu* in the spring of 1608. This heroic narrative occults his numerous travels to the Americas before 1608, including several earlier attempts at founding permanent settlements. Second, as Trouillot argues, once historical processes are sublimated to linearity, social contexts fade away. Again, in the example of Champlain, little attention is paid to the Wars of Religion ravaging Western France at the time, wars that were perhaps, at least peripherally, responsible for Champlain's desire to escape Western France (Fischer, 2009). The heroic narrative on

display during the Québec 400 expunges the political, economic, historical, and social contexts for his travels. Trouillot (1995) explains this process further:

As a set event, void of context and marked by a fixed date, this chunk of history becomes much more manageable outside of the academic guild. It returns inevitably: one can await its millennial and prepare its commemoration. It accommodates travel agents, airlines, politicians, the media, or the states who sell it in the prepackaged forms by which the public has come to expect history to present itself for immediate consumption. It is a product of power whose label has been cleansed of traces of power. (114)

The naming of Champlain as the father of the nation and the selection of the founding date have taken many different forms in the past century-and-a-half in Québec. Champlain has not always enjoyed the unique popularity he did during the Québec 400. In fact, he was a figure among many other prominent French-Canadian (male) figures during much of the past four centuries. As Québec historians Ronald Rudin (2003: 177-80) and Denis Martin (2004: 354-58) have documented, only since the last part of the nineteenth century has Champlain slowly emerged as the father of the nation.[1]

In conjunction with Trouillot's work on the selection of a founding moment, Denis Martin (2004) argues that the making of Champlain's public image depended on finding a literal face for Champlain. In 'Discovering the Face of Champlain,' Martin explains how nineteenth-century historians ready to make Champlain the father of French Canada scoured the portrait collections of famous seventeenth-century French artist Balthazar Moncornet looking for an image of Champlain. Though no 'official' image of Champlain was found, shortly thereafter, in 1854, a portrait attributed to an unknown French artist appeared throughout French Canada. Today, it is widely held that this portrait is based on Moncornet's representation of Michel Particelli d'Emery, superintendent of finance under Louis XIII and Louis XIV. Martin explains how the 1854 portrait, almost certainly a forgery and based on another man's image, spawned a small industry of Champlain paintings and engravings in the latter half of the nineteenth century (2004: 357). So great was the appetite for a legitimate founding hero that even though the portrait's authenticity was put into question from its very first appearance, Particelli remains Champlain's face to this day.

The largest public outpouring christening Champlain the symbolic father in the nineteenth century came in the guise of a campaign to erect a large monument on the Terrasse Dufferin next to the Château Frontenac in Old Québec, perhaps the most iconic public space in the Old City. Once historians succeeded in exposing Champlain's face and creating an accompanying persona that were widely recognized throughout French Canada, an epic monument became possible. Rudin (2003: 86-155) has explained how the campaign, lasting well over twenty years and culminating in the erection of an immensely

popular monument in 1898, solidified Champlain's place as *the* most important French-Canadian historical figure.[2] By the time of the unveiling, the significance of Champlain's image was secured. 'In September 1898,' explains Denis Martin, 'the unveiling of the statue by Paul Chevré conferred on Champlain something of the immortality that the historians had been seeking for him for a half-century. What would Québec City be today without his image?' (2004: 357). Indeed, given the prevalence of Champlain's image in the public sphere during the Québec 400, it is difficult to imagine the celebrations without his commanding presence.



The Champlain Monument on the Terrasse Dufferin.
Photo by Darryl Leroux, 6 July 2008.

Champlain's iconic monument also served an important purpose in selecting a founding moment. As we now know July 3 has become Québec's official founding date, contributing to Champlain's public image as father of the nation. Yet, this date has only very recently been instituted as such. Until the 1950s, July 3 was a summer day among many others. It was then that a local historical society began leaving a flower wreath at the base of the Champlain monument to mark the day (L.G. Lemieux, 2008). At the end of the 1970s, Québec City mayor Jean Pelletier also marked the date by laying a wreath, and since then every subsequent mayor has undertaken the ceremony, instituting July 3 as *the* official founding date, further authorizing Champlain as the founding father. To take this logic a step

further, an official founding time of day was selected in 2008. Early in the year Québec City Mayor Régis Labeaume wrote a letter to the mayors of Canada's 400 largest municipalities asking them to mark the occasion of Québec City's founding by ringing out municipal and church bells at exactly 11am, the time officials, recreating tidal records, deduced that Champlain's boat was most likely moored 400 years previously. With the help of Québec City Archbishop Marc Ouellet, more than 900 municipalities, parishes, and a wide variety of other bodies rang their bells at exactly 11am on July 3, 2008 (Société du 400e anniversaire de Québec, 2008a). The anniversary date now includes not just a date, but also an exact time, solidifying Champlain's landfall as the founding moment.

To point to the recent construction of the founding moment, we could look no further than the two-week tercentenary commemorations in 1908; the largest commemorative events Canada had ever seen, larger than all other events celebrating Canada's founding fathers *combined* (Nelles, 1999). The events in 1908 began on July 19, fully two weeks *after* July 3 (Rudin, 2003: 163). The lack of adherence to the now-official July 3 anniversary in 1908 stands in stark contrast to 2008, where all major events, even the entertainment and protest events, took place on this date and in some cases, at the exact official time. In this striking shift during the Québec 400, one that solidifies Champlain's place as founder through singularizing and elevating the founding moment, we are witness to the tensions in history-making Trouillot highlights in his work: the shifting relationship between 'what happened' (i.e., Champlain arrived in Québec City) and 'what is said to have happened' (i.e., Champlain founds French civilization in the Americas). The purpose of such an analysis is not to dwell on the exact events of the past, for instance, when precisely Champlain landed in Québec or how many people were aboard his ship, but to build an understanding of how those events are part of a process of history-making that signifies the event for the present. One of the most salient effects of the process of history-making that I witnessed in Québec City in 2008 was the adoption of the language of 'encounter' to describe the meeting between French settlers and indigenous people.

In fact, the semantic description of Champlain's endeavour has shifted considerably over the past century. From 'discovery' in the tercentenary (see Nelles, 1999; Rudin, 2003) to 'founding' in the lead-up to 2008, we find 'encounter' as the signifier-of-choice to describe Champlain's venture during the Québec 400. Here is an explanation of the theme from the City of Québec's 400th anniversary website:

Québec is a natural site of encounters, large and small, historical and contemporary; a theatre of memorable *rendez-vous*.

Québec is the encounter between Europe and the Americas, the First Nations and the first migrants, and between France and England.

It is also the meeting place of a river and two mountain chains, of fresh water and salt water, of Lowertown and the Old City, of old walls and glass towers.

It's still the meeting place for lovers cast under the spell of the sites, for welcoming residents and visitors from around the world, it's the story of a citizen's love for their city.

In Québec, everything bears the marks left over by these successive encounters: the landscape, the architecture, the culture, the economy, the population as well as the warmth and the art of living.

And thus the essence of the programming for the 400th anniversary of Québec is born: sharing with people from here and away this centre of unique encounters. (Ville de Québec, 2008, my translation)

In his work studying the Columbus quincentenary celebrations in 1992, Trouillot foreshadows the use of the language of 'encounter' in future large-scale commemorations. In his words, '[Encounter], then [is] one more testimony, if needed, of the capacity of liberal discourse to compromise between its premises and its practice. "Encounter" sweetens the horror, polishes the rough edges that do not fit neatly either side of the controversy. Everyone seems to gain' (1995: 114-15). Yet, as Trouillot argues, the liberal terms of the encounter discourse prevent describing historical and contemporary inequalities from the point of view of those who continue to be subjugated by colonial regimes, most notably here, the indigenous peoples of the Americas. Instead, the 'encounter' invites everyone to celebrate as equals, terms, he argues, the encounter between Europeans and indigenous peoples has never made possible.

Besides obfuscating inequitable power relations in the contact zone[3] through a specific socio-spatial epistemology, another distinctive effect of using the language of *encounter* is temporal, in that it foregrounds the events leading up to the 'founding,' leaving what happened between Europeans and indigenous peoples after 'contact' to the historical dustbin, performing the process of history-making Trouillot describes above. In other words, the teleological lens cast by the encounter logic stops at the meeting, often of equals on a level playing field, leaving what happened afterwards to one's imagination, or in the case of the Québec 400's major commemorative event, *Rencontres*, to Champlain to re-narrate. In this way, 'Commemorations' as Trouillot explains, 'sanitize further the messy history lived by the actors. They contribute to the continuous myth-making process that gives history its more definite shapes: they help to create, modify, or sanction the public meanings attached to historical events' (1995: 116).

Actually, one of the most significant ways in which Champlain, the man, is represented in 2008, is through a consistent focus on his

ability to bring people together. He is no longer simply a cartographer and explorer, but most tellingly, he is transformed into a founder of the liberal ethic of cultural pluralism common in Québec. Through this discursive re-signification, Champlain becomes the father of contemporary Québec. To illustrate this remarkable shift, I now turn to my analysis of the Québec 400 celebrations in 2008.

The Encounter: A Heroic Spectacle

The most widely disseminated event organized by the Québec 400 organizing committee, the show *Rencontres* [Encounters], narrates 400 years of Québec history, and was planned as the centrepiece of the commemorative events. At \$3.5 million (CDN) and attracting large crowds of upwards of 40,000 people per day, it was the most popular historical representation during the Québec 400. Three daily performances took place from July 3 to July 5 on the grounds of the Québec National Assembly building, on a stage that was nearly one square kilometre in area.

The flagship event of the Québec 400 predictably adopted the official 'Encounter' theme as its inspiration. The Québec 400 organizing committee's website offers us an introduction to *Rencontres*:

Samuel de Champlain in person, portrayed by Yves Jacques, an actor originally from Québec City, will recount 400 years of history through 10 impressionist and musical tableaux...Fifteen singers accompanied by 15 musicians, six vocalists, 25 acrobats, a number of dancers and performers along with a chorus of adults and children will bring this show, based on the history of the Capital, but also inspired by the history of Québec and the rich heritage of the French-speaking world, to life. (Société du 400e anniversaire de Québec, 2008a, my translation)

We see in this official description of the event the performance of history involved in the Québec 400 commemorations, one that tells the imagined Québécois subject something about him/herself through spectacle. Actor Yves Jacques demonstrates this in a full-page interview in the Québec City newspaper *Le Soleil* following the first two showings: 'We are perhaps more representative of history than any history book. Canada is born in 1867. Sorry, but we're not celebrating the birth of Canada, but the birth of Québec, and through this, the French fact in the Americas. It is obviously a spectacle with nationalist tendencies' (Moreault, 2008, my translation).

In her comparative study of the centennial and bi-centennial celebrations in Australia and the United States, Lyn Spillman (1997) has explained spectacle as an expression of constructed social bonds that transcends the heterogeneity of the imagined national community. Building on Benedict Anderson's work, she claims that 'Appeals to national spectacle and symbol could seem to transcend difference to create the sort of imagined community bicentennial organizers wanted to claim' (1997: 130). In some ways, it is precisely

the ambiguous nature of spectacle, its imaginative rendering of the past that allows it to make equally inspired claims of collective belonging where no such consensus exists.

John J. MacAloon, in his study of Olympic spectacle in relation to his development of what he calls a 'theory of cultural performance,' also explains the role of large-scale performances in modern society:

Cultural performances are more than entertainment, more than didactic or persuasive formulations, and more than cathartic indulgences. They are occasions in which, as a culture or society, we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatize our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others. (1984: 246)

Building on MacAloon's work, David Roberts, in his genealogy of the concept, argues that, 'spectacle, as its name indicates, signifies a separation of actors and spectators, which is almost inescapable once the social group exceeds a certain size' (2003: 55). In the case of *Rencontres*, we see just such a spectacle, one that builds a distinct separation between actors on stage and spectators in the crowd by relying almost entirely on special effects and entertainment as a form of remembering the 'past.' Peter Hodgins explains such uses of the past as a 'spectacularization of memory' that constructs 'audiences as being incapable of concentrating for more than a minute, driven by the need to see, touch, and manipulate the past' (2004: 105-6). I demonstrate through my analysis of *Rencontres* how the Québec 400 spectacularizes memory in its evocation of the past.

Katharyne Mitchell builds on such an analytical frame by directing us to the relationship between the material and symbolic which a 'spectacle approach' reveals about public memory: 'The grand spectacle...is frequently recoded through time, but always contains the interplay of the "fixed:" monument, stage, building, flags or lights, and the "mobile:" commemoration, ritual, march, pageant, meeting, event' (2003: 444). She goes on to explain that there are several processes that render memory a collective project. Among the most salient are the

Social production of memory and fixation of memory through repetition; the semiotics of space, where the use of monuments (such as the Statue of Liberty) are of crucial importance; the use of commemorations as a 'practice of representation' that enacts and gives social substance to the discourse of collective memory...and the role of memorialization as an attempted agency of legitimization of authority and social cohesion. (Mitchell, 2003: 443)

Mitchell's theoretical insights are instructive in *Rencontres'* case as well. The show offers a popular rendition of Québec history through a number of significant symbols, relying as it does on what I call a *strategy of familiarity* that engages a number of different senses, such

as sound, sight, and touch, and a semiotics of space; all contribute to the construction of a persuasive historical narrative. And as Mitchell describes, this 'grand' spectacle relies on the interplay between several fixed and mobile signifiers, to call subjects into its epic story of intercultural encounters.[4] Ultimately, it is their organization under the banner of celebration that brings them together as *spectacle*. In this way, *Rencontres* 'builds on the collective memory of the recent past, but also produc[es] that memory's future through a highly particular form of aestheticized, spectacularized politics' (Mitchell, 2003: 443). The politics of the spectacle are on full display during *Rencontres*, the official commemorative event.

The most salient feature of the spectacle during *Rencontres* was the way in which Champlain was represented as a cosmopolitan, intercultural man. As I suggested previously, Champlain becomes the ideal subject envisioned by discourses of tolerance and cultural pluralism; discourses Wendy Brown (2006) explains have proliferated in Western liberal democracies since the 1980s. Champlain's genius, as expressed in *Rencontres*, lies precisely in his openness to diversity. *Rencontres* does not so much celebrate Champlain's mapping or navigational skills; instead, it highlights his ability as a manager of difference who brings diverse peoples together. The Québec 400 organizing committee released a 45-minute documentary on the making of *Rencontres* as part of its special commemorative DVD package in late 2008. In the documentary, entitled *De la création à la scène* [From Creation to the Scene], the show's director Pierre Boileau, echoing the statements in the film *Champlain retracé* and the exhibit *Le temps des Québécois*, explains the show's intentions: '[We want] to invent Champlain, to invent our own Champlain, and I believe this one will remain in History' (Société du 400e anniversaire de Québec, 2008b, my translation). The *new* Champlain the Québec 400 *invents* is the tolerant Champlain, conveniently re-constituting him as the founder of today's secular, intercultural Québec.

The Champlain-as-intercultural-man discourse is evident during several key moments in *Rencontres*, none more apparent than the opening scene, 'The Encounter,' where Champlain explains the relationship between French settlers and indigenous people to the crowd. I will now describe and examine this scene, before turning to the contradictory signs that put the intercultural man into question during the rest of the event.

The show begins with Champlain high above the assembled crowd, perched at the top of the National Assembly building: he is a bronze statue surveying his surroundings. As the music begins, Champlain rids himself of a bronze-coloured mask and matching overcoat, signalling to the audience that he has come alive. Champlain's opening statement[5] sets the stage for the romantic and nostalgic tone of the event:

Québec. My beautiful. My sweet. My city. Four hundred years ago on this day, regardless of what historians might say, I, Samuel de Champlain, founded you in the name of his Royal Highness Henry IV and made of your vast wilderness, the first lady of New France!

As Champlain descends nearly 30 metres to the ground, balanced by pulleys and ropes, he alerts the audience to his 400-year presence overlooking the capital city he founded so long ago:

What? You are surprised by my return? But I never left you. Ha, never! Me, miss your Fête-Dieu [Corpus Christi], your Winter Carnivals, your endless upheavals, never in four hundred years. I was there on high, observing, I saw everything, heard everything. Yes, even that Ma'am. You have no secrets.

The crowd laughs loudly in anticipation of things to come as Champlain's charming smile is beamed to spectators via several large screens provided for the overflow crowds along Avenue Grande-Allée, one of Québec City's major arteries. Instead of cars, the street was filled with people sitting or standing in the road, as it was closed to traffic on the days *Rencontres* was presented to the public. The smells of cigarette smoke and sweat mingled together on the humid premiere afternoon on July 3. Champlain, positioning himself as the patriarch of Québec history, is accompanied by a troupe of acrobats, smeared in bronze face paint and dressed much like Champlain, each one acting as a statue coming to life from the façade and grounds of the building. Featured among the twenty-five 'living' monuments is an all-star cast of Québec's founding fathers, who all occupy a place of honour on the grounds of the National Assembly. Once he arrives on the grass from the top of the building, Champlain leads the group of performers into a makeshift stream, spilling from the majestic Fontaine de Tourny—an anniversary gift to the city from the Québec-based Simons corporation—to the main stage. As he leads the founding fathers down the stairs of the National Assembly towards the crowd, Champlain continues,

Québec, you made yourself so beautiful for our meeting. Do you see that beautiful river, just like a poem? And over there that Old City, surrounded by the walls of History? And over there, that new fountain that spits its joy...look at you Québec, as beautiful as when you were born.

Champlain wades into the stream, re-telling his much earlier voyage up the St-Lawrence:

Remember our arrival? We made our way up the [St-Lawrence] River, and the shorelines, like a welcoming embrace, pulled us towards them...Hey, what do you see over there? Movements you say. A forest that walks? Let's get closer. Row faster. Along the shorelines, among the trees, are strange shapes. Are they giant birds? Or beasts?

The water splashes around Champlain's ankles, as he walks slowly through the stream, gesturing grandly towards the audience in the VIP section along its banks. After a long pause, he answers his seemingly rhetorical question with flourish:

No! Not birds, nor beasts. Such a surprising vision: men, women and children, feathers in their hair. We thought we were alone in the New World, but they were coming to meet us.

As Champlain makes his way up the St-Lawrence, hopping from stone to stone, a melancholic song spelling out the life of European mariners plays in the background, propelling Champlain through the water and eventually onto the stage. Champlain's men move to the beat of the music, paddling through the choppy water. *Belle Virginie* [Beautiful Virginia] is a traditional French-Canadian folk song:

Belle Virginie, don't worry
I am a talented mariner
And I know the whole earth
And I am sure of my ship
There will be no sinking
While I'm on the waters
Belle Virginie, until I return
Be faithful to our love
I promise you, my dear
To return to this country
Where we will get married
Goodbye my Belle Virginie

The tone is somber, as Champlain heroically navigates his way through the St-Lawrence to centre stage, in front of thousands of spectators. The Québec 400 organizing committee provides some added background on the logic of this opening scene:

The show opens on the façade of the National Assembly with acrobats, disguised as the bronze statues that adorn the building, personifying the Europeans that set out to discover a new world. On the ground level, the Tourny fountain is at the centre of a 360-degree stage, on which is set a dome representing the globe. On this structure, two shapes representing Québec and Europe move,

shift and illuminate throughout the tableaux. (Société du 400e anniversaire de Québec, 2008a, my translation)

Just as the music comes to an end, Champlain, feather in his hat and astrolabe swinging from his belt, climbs onto the stage and recounts his first encounters with indigenous people, who, in his account, taught the French to survive in the harsh, unfamiliar climate. Champlain explains, while staring intently into the eyes of well-known Québec-based Innu musician, Florent Vollant:

The first encounters were fragile. But little by little, we found friendship. We were hungry and they fed us. We were cold and they showed us how to dress. We were suffering, and they showed us how to boil bark, or to smoke grasses.

As the founding fathers continue to paddle in the background stream, Champlain places his hand on Vollant's shoulder in friendship. The low, rhythmic sound of drums fills the stage, as Vollant, along with his band, plays a drum-infused, Innu and Anishnaabe-language folk song, 'Nikana,' around a burning campfire. Champlain looks on encouragingly. As soon as the slow, lilting song ends, a new upbeat song begins in the background. As the sound rises, Champlain continues to expound on the importance of the early encounter with indigenous peoples, when he states: 'Between us is produced a type of alchemy and the embrace between the Aboriginal [*Amérindien*] and European gives us a new species...the *Québécois*!' The crowd cheers for the first time since Champlain's opening descent and the sounds of French-Canadian music reverberate loudly, featuring a prominent accordion and fiddle. Many audience members sway to the up-lifting rhythm, one quite common in both 'traditional' French-Canadian music and the contemporary Québec folk/pop genre *néo-trad* (neo-traditional). With the pounding beat carrying the crowd, Champlain explains that in the early settlement period he inaugurated an 'order of good cheer' that stipulates that at 'all times and all places we must celebrate our presence in New France.' Champlain dances joyously, as barefoot background singers wearing French-Canadian sashes move to the music.

Importantly, in *Rencontres*' narrative the 'encounter' between French settlers and indigenous peoples produced a new people, the *Québécois*. In a rather sweeping discursive move, Champlain re-defines not only the very terms of the colonial encounter, but also its historical import. Whereas traditional French-Canadian understandings of the colonial encounter focus on indigenous intransigence, especially in the form of 'Iroquois savageness' (see Sioui, 1992), this new narrative collapses all conflict into a happy story of embracing respectability. During the Québec 400, finding signs of this formerly hegemonic narrative was quite like finding a needle in a haystack. Not impossible, but certainly not an altogether easy task. This is not to suggest that highlighting the warm relationship between French settlers and indigenous allies is a new phenomenon, but such

narratives have traditionally been constructed in explicit contradistinction to a shared indigenous enemy.

Post-colonial theorist Sara Ahmed has focused on the vital role of the figure of the stranger in forming national subjects. In particular, she has argued for an understanding of the encounter between Self and Other as one deeply invested in processes of inclusion and exclusion or incorporation and expulsion. In her analysis, these processes 'constitute the boundaries of bodies and communities, including communities of living (dwelling and travel), as well as epistemic communities' (Ahmed, 2000: 6). Whether the process itself is inclusive or exclusive, Ahmed claims that the relationship between Self and Other is crucial to subject formation, as she explains: 'Given that the subject comes into existence as an entity only through encounters with others, then the subject's existence cannot be separated from the others who are encountered' (2000: 7).

Jocelyn Letourneau's work on the history of Québec nationalism dovetails with Ahmed's theorization. Letourneau (2006) explains how the dialectic between Self and Other constitutes the background for the loser mythology current in present-day formulations of Québec nationalism.[6] This paradigm, as Letourneau calls it, expresses a clear vision of an enemy to the Québécois subject. 'The story of the search for Self,' Letourneau explains, 'is a story of bravery in the face of a storm, of persistence through difficulty, and of recklessness in the face of adversity—all ways to conjure up the spectre of disappearance' (2006: 170, my translation). A pillar of this national narrative in Québec is what Letourneau identifies as the story of the Other's fault. In this narration, the Other is responsible for Québec's failure to meet its historical destiny as an independent nation-state on the international stage. Whether through the figures of early Canadian Prime Ministers Sir John A. Macdonald or Sir Wilfrid Laurier or later in Prime Ministers Pierre Elliott Trudeau or Jean Chrétien, the Other can be an outside (British) or inside (French) enemy (Letourneau, 2006: 174-75). In other words, the Other, in its many manifestations, is either Outside-the-Self (i.e., English Canada) or an Other-in-the-Self (i.e., the French-Canadian traitor).

In many ways, the figure of the threatening Iroquois played the role of the visible Other who constitutes the normative Québécois subject throughout much of Québec's history. Yet, given the history of British colonialism in French Canada, the figure of the Other has also been complicated by a 'double colonization' process (see Gomez, 2007). Colonized by the British, yet itself a colonial society founded through French imperial ideologies, Québec inherited a unique position in North America. In the case of *Rencontres*, the figure of the indigenous Other is *incorporated* into the Québécois subject. There is no visible indigenous resistance; instead we are invited into a story of the creation of one people. In this way, Champlain re-signifies the colonial encounter as one between equals, eager to 'get to know' each other.

There are several instances of such fanciful narrative constructions in *Rencontres*. Champlain expresses the liberal encounter discourse well at the very beginning of *Rencontres*, when he suggests that indigenous peoples along the shores of the St-Lawrence 'were coming to meet us.' His arms outstretched, Champlain is ready to return the embrace. From there, Champlain explains how indigenous peoples facilitated the settlers' early existence through teaching them essential survival skills. In this way, the liberal logic is upheld: everyone contributed equally to the early French settlement. Without indigenous peoples, there could be no settlement. Champlain then makes the next logical step: the result of this encounter is the making of a new people. No longer indigenous, no longer French, the new people are *Québécois*. This encounter logic presents subjects with a narrative where everyone seems to gain. This is a move towards incorporation. Champlain's grand gestures towards how 'we must celebrate *our* presence in New France' points to the universality of this subject position. Having incorporated the indigenous Other as *Québécois* only moments before, Champlain is free to speak for *all* the subjects in the 'contact zone,' since, after all, there is now only one subject.

In addition to this *universal*, 'raceless' position, Champlain articulates a *particular* socio-spatial epistemology in the very way he expels current indigenous political and territorial claims. If Champlain was indeed watching Québec for the past 400 years, he would be hard-pressed to miss the fact that there exist in Québec indigenous peoples who see themselves as *distinct* from French settlers. The excision of the continued indigenous resistance to white settler colonialism is understandable to Champlain from the *particular* socio-spatial epistemology of white settlerism. It might make little sense from the vantage point of an indigenous person who continues to resist colonialism and in fact refuses to identify as either *Québécois* or Canadian. The resistance indigenous peoples in Québec continue to organize, partly through the difficult work of re-constituting the various violences of colonialism, contest this version of the indigenized *Québécois*.^[7] The *Québécois* subject in *Rencontres* is outwardly constituted not only as distinct from Canadians (English vs. French), but as the *same* as indigenous peoples.

It is not that this phenomenon is particularly surprising. Nor do I want to suggest that highlighting 'Iroquois savageness' is a *better* way to celebrate the past. But the discussion of war and battles in the contact zone makes the ambivalences, the contradictions in the narrative discernable. They more readily open the door to competing readings of the past. Given that the indigenous Other in *Rencontres* is reclaimed as the Same, an essential component of the *Québécois* subject Champlain inaugurated, how do we analyze the making of this subject position? One way, I argue, is to open the door to the contradictory nature of the narrative by questioning the representation of violence in the spectacle, an analytical task to which I now turn.

Following the opening scene, Champlain introduces 'L'Acadie,' the second scene, which tells the history of the French-Canadian population of the Eastern provinces of Canada (New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and Prince Edward Island). Importantly, it is here that we are introduced to the normative Québécois subject's ability to sympathize with historical forms of violence, thereby putting the earlier representation of the encounter between French colonizers and indigenous peoples into question. After telling several jokes about the history of British colonialism in Québec, Champlain says: 'And we aren't the only ones to have experienced upheavals. Acadians have also experienced their share of misery...and two-hundred and fifty years after the Great Upheaval, Acadians, whatever we do to them, persist.' Champlain descends the stairs at the front of the stage and greets Acadian artist Marie-Jo Thério as she disembarks from a horse-drawn carriage. Nearly one hundred women in period dress surround her, singing in unison in the background, 'We didn't give up...today, 3 million Acadians continue to sing.' From there, Thério, playing the piano, performs a long and moving rendition of *Evangéline*, a popular Acadian folk song recounting the story of a young Acadian couple separated by the 1755-1762 British deportation of thousands of Acadians to the 13 British North American colonies, France, and Britain. Here is an excerpt:

But the English arrived
In the Church and they shut in
All the men from your village
And the women had to spend
The night on the shore
With all the crying children
In the morning they loaded
Gabriel on a large ship
Without a goodbye, without a smile
And all alone on the dock
You tried to pray
But didn't have anything else to say...

There exists today

borderlands 9:1

People who live in your country
And who remember your name
Because the ocean speaks of you
The south winds carry your voice
From the forest to the plains
Your name is more than Acadia
More than the hope for a homeland
Your name exceeds its boundaries
Your name is the name of all those
Who, despite being unhappy
Believe in love and hope.

Despite the attempts to present a seamless story of *togetherness* and *belonging* throughout *Rencontres*, the 'spectacularized politics' of the event creep up in this second scene. It is heartbreakingly melancholic, marking as it does the deportation and ethnic cleansing of the Acadians by the English in the eighteenth century. The entire scene explicitly highlights Acadian resilience in the face of great suffering, in this case due almost entirely to forced displacement, dispossession and in many cases, death. This suffering is caught viscerally in the image of crying children in *Evangéline* and through the haunting voices on stage.

We can see here how violence and suffering are not altogether foreign to *Rencontres'* narrative. Not to diminish Acadian suffering, but Scene 2, coming right on the heels of Scene 1, which effectively incorporated the indigenous Other and expelled contemporary indigenous resistance to colonialism, points to a major contradiction in the encounter narrative. Quite unlike Scene 2, there are no crying children in the opening scene, faced with the displacement, dispossession, and death of entire communities due to French colonial practices. The politics of spectacle are made clear here, in the very way that Scene 1 de-politicizes indigenous resistance. How are Québécois subjects to make sense of present-day indigenous resistance to Québec and Canada when they are presented with such a fanciful construction? The normative Québécois subject constructed through the Québec 400 is faced with an epistemological dilemma: How could present-day indigenous movements against colonialism be legitimate if the 'encounter' was so peaceful and amicable? Such an epistemology is based on a shared understanding of the contact zone on the part of the normative Québécois subject.

This example of racial liberalism makes present-day social and political inequalities almost entirely incomprehensible to white subjects since it relies on the historical ignorance of the subordination of various racialized people (Mills, 2008). I do not want to suggest that the normative Québécois subject cannot grasp the visceral nature of colonial violence, for instance, as we can see in the example of Scene 2 of *Rencontres*, where Acadian suffering is made understandable. On the contrary, the scene works to bring the Québécois and Acadian subjects together through a shared understanding of violence at the hands of British settlers. Instead, it is to question how certain discourses call subjects into being, while others simply do not. Remembering the Acadian deportation gives the Québécois subject a reason for the ongoing displacement of indigenous people. The Québécois serve as a bulwark against the dangers of (English)-Canadian and American hegemony. Remembering the encounter between indigenous peoples and French settlers as one constituting a new people, serves a similar discursive strategy: the Québécois not only absolve violence in the encounter, but they also ensure their place *protecting* indigenous claims, since they are one and the same people.

During the transition between scenes, Champlain leads Thério off-stage, offering her his deepest sympathies. *Rencontres* ends several scenes later after a revolving door of Québécois musical icons from the 1960s and 70s, including Claude Dubois, Diane Dufresne, Michel Pagliaro, Robert Charlebois, and Gilles Vigneault. Up-and-coming acts such as Arianne Moffat and the band Karkwa also performed songs written by Québécois songwriting legend Félix Leclerc. The show ends with all performers assembling on stage to sing Québec's unofficial national anthem, *Gens du pays* [Countrymen]. Champlain introduces the final scene with these words:

Québec. Québec. Québec. The "Order of Good Cheer" is re-established once-and-for-all. We had a city, a country to build. Here it is. After 400 winters, 400 miseries, four centuries of upheavals, of laughter, of tears, of fires, of blood, the soul of Québec sings the joy of its Fathers' labour and of promises kept.

The final sing-along took place in the pounding rain, as the sky above the National Assembly, threatening as it was on the afternoon of July 3, finally opened up. The audience, clutching umbrellas and makeshift raincoats, waved their arms enthusiastically during the entire scene. As the performers continued to sing the anthemic chorus, Champlain had the final word: 'The rain marks the end of this marvellous show. I would like to thank my singer, acrobat and dancer-friends. I will return to my bronze statue on high, but Québec, never doubt that I'll keep you in my sights...and in my heart!' The show ends with Champlain's hand firmly clutching his chest.

Understanding the Encounter

Several days after seeing *Rencontres*, I travelled to Wendake, the Huron-Wendat community in the suburbs of Québec City. The community had just inaugurated its new Hotel-Museum, just in time for the Québec 400. The opening exhibit *Territoires, mémoires, savoirs* [Territories, Memories, Knowledge] featured panels, images, music, video, and objects depicting approximately 1,500 years of Huron-Wendat history. The most salient aspect of the exhibit for my purposes here is one that responds directly to Scene 2 of *Rencontres*. In the 'History' panel at the entrance to the exhibit, the year 1534, over 100 years after the founding of the Wendat Confederacy in 1430, is marked as 'The Beginning of the Great Upheavals.' Not much else is said about the date, but it can be no coincidence that 1534 also denotes the year of French sailor Jacques Cartier's first voyage to northeastern America. The exhibit marks the arrival of the French as irrevocably changing the course of Wendat history, quite similar to *Rencontres's* representation of the British deportation of Acadians. Interestingly, in the exhibit 1534 marks the beginning of the upheaval, denoting a process with no accompanying end-date. As a result, the process, presumably European colonialism and settlerism, is ongoing. Nowhere else is this counter-story on display during the Québec 400, where the spectacle presents a teleological representation of the past beginning with European settlement and leading to the development of the great institutions of European modernity, including the nation-state. Roger Simon considers the politics of history-making when he raises the question of what types of possibilities spectacle produces in relation to building historical consciousness:

The projections and identifications made within spectacle, and the consequent defences it elicits, both require and enact leaving ourselves intact, at a distance, protected from being called into question and altered through our engagement with the stories of others....Our attentiveness while not "inactive," is compliant; it does not engage in the praxis of making and re-making our historical consciousness. (2005: 144)

Not only do the forms of spectacle on display in Québec City fail to engage subjects in a process of interrogating their historical consciousness, but in their heroic depictions and festive atmosphere they play an important role in forming subjects: 'Spectacle invites us to read particular narratives on the terms of the moral certainties we hold dear,' Simon explains, 'allow[ing] us to disavow any requirement that the terms on which we are moved might throw ourselves into question, into destabilization' (2005: 20). By re-affirming the 'moral certainties we hold dear,' through, for instance, incorporating the indigenous Other, *Rencontres* builds a normative Québécois subject who is uniquely benevolent.

This normative Québécois subject is also safely left intact by relying on a *strategy of familiarity* that interpellates subjects into its story of the past. *Rencontres* uses easily identifiable symbols, such as the

Champlain monument at the top of the National Assembly building to call subjects into its historical narrative. It is no coincidence that the highly visible monuments adorning the National Assembly building and grounds were selected as 'actors' in *Rencontres*. In the *De la création à la scène* documentary, director Pierre Boileau explains that the site and monuments were selected precisely because of their familiarity to the planned audience (Société du 400e anniversaire de Québec, 2008b). Jean Leclerc, the President of Québec 400 organizing committee's board of directors, takes this a step further, when he enthuses at the prospect of having huge crowds for *Rencontres*, in an interview the day before the first showing: 'But the National Assembly is a symbolic site. It's here that power is exercised, it's the site of power' (J. Lemieux, 2008, my translation). Consequently, *Rencontres*' very premise hinges on a semiotics of space where the use of monuments is of crucial importance. In this way, *Rencontres*' narrative legitimacy and construction of memory depends upon meanings embodied by the monuments on the Assembly grounds and the politics of their authority. The normative Québécois subject interpellated into *Rencontres*' narrative will necessarily recognize the Assembly's legitimate authority and its monuments' inherent familiarity.

It is also important to consider how the liberal discourse of cultural pluralism on display in *Rencontres* through the encounter logic prevents the discussion of violence on the part of the French in any explicit form. Instead, this discourse authorizes a historical narrative narrowly related to Québécois nationalism, in which Champlain and his forebears create a new people, the Québécois, a seemingly benign and perhaps even mutually beneficial relationship between the French and indigenous peoples. While this discourse might seem more 'inclusive' or perhaps even more 'just,' in following the liberal discourse of cultural pluralism, it also ignores particular forms of violence, a key in constituting normative Québécois subjects.

Avril Bell, a New Zealand Paheka (white settler) studying the history of Maori and Paheka relations, demonstrates how forgetting colonial-era violence serves an important discursive strategy to white settler subjects. 'This historical amnesia,' she argues, 'blocks any real attention being paid to addressing contemporary inequalities that must be understood as colonialism's ongoing legacy' (2006: 263). Instead, such constructions solidify political-economic relations favouring white settler material power and privileges at the expense of ongoing forms of indigenous resistance. Yet, the story of white racial domination is decidedly *not* what Champlain is meant to express in *Rencontres*, one that positions Champlain as benevolent in intention, if not effect. I have sketched out an analytical way to account for the apparent discrepancy between the attempt to re-narrate colonial history as an encounter between relatively equal human beings and the re-constitution of white forms of power and privilege in this same move.

Towards an Understanding of Post-Colonial Commemoration

My analysis proposes no easy reconciliation among remembrance of the past, contemporary modes of subject formation, and forms of nationalism in Québec. The discourse of cultural pluralism I uncover in the Québec 400, despite recent policy debates on the limits of tolerance or accommodation, is still quite popular in Québec and Canada. With its deep ideological roots in Western liberalism, it provides a set of safe possibilities for white subjects. After all, who would argue against tolerance or accommodation, especially when one has the power to decide when and where each is warranted, and which individuals and practices *to tolerate or accommodate?*

Rencontres, the Québec 400's major commemorative event, productively mobilizes this discourse by relying on the process of foundation that has anointed Champlain the father of Québec. Champlain's public image, based as it is on the historical production of his literal image and of the founding moment, is further solidified through the commemorative events. Champlain appears as the original bearer of the liberal ethic of cultural pluralism, providing a historical link to present forms of nationalism in Québec.

History is not immune to the political machinations of any society; on the contrary, the politics of cultural pluralism play an integral role in the making of history in twenty-first century Québec. As a key component in the production of history, commemoration stands out as an important technique of the nation-building project in Québec. My analysis, building as it does on a broad literature interrogating the making of subjects through commemoration, points to a recent manifestation of the politics of commemoration in Québec.

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Notes

1. In his introduction to the edited collection *Commemorations*, John Gillis (1994: 7-8) explains how professional historians stepped in to fabricate new histories in the nineteenth century as a way to

consolidate nascent national affiliations (e.g., French, English, German). Historian Patrice Groulx (2001) makes a similar argument in the context of Québec in his essay on Benjamin Sulte, 'the father of commemoration' in French Canada.

2. As part of this process of making Champlain the 'founding father of the nation,' Groulx (2001: 64) lists a number of Champlain monuments inaugurated during this period: Québec (1898), Saint John in New Brunswick (1904), Ottawa and Orillia in Ontario (1915), and Lake Champlain (1907) and Plattsburgh (1912) in New York State.

3. Mary Louise Pratt (1992: 6) refers to the contact zone as 'the space of colonial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.'

4. Québec formally adopts an 'intercultural' approach to the management of cultural pluralism, as opposed to Canada's 'multicultural' approach. See Leroux (2010) for an analysis of how these approaches converge.

5. I translated all passages from *Rencontres*, whether in the two performances I saw in Québec City on July 3 and 5, 2008, or from the special *Rencontres* DVD package the Québec 400 organizing committee released later in 2008 (Société du 400e anniversaire de Québec, 2008b).

6. In his overview of the narrative pillars of Québec historiography, Letourneau introduces the term 'loser mythistory' to describe the tendency in Québec to focus on an 'episteme of lack.' As he explains 'Public discourse remains under the influence and stranglehold of those who see the Québécois adventure from the angle of continual defeat and tell it like a story of losers' (2006: 180, my translation).

7. For example, in the afterglow of the Québec 400, the Huron-Wendat registered a land claim on 15 October 2008. The claim, covering nearly 24,000 sq. km, includes the cities of Québec and Trois-Rivières.

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