

# Manufacturing Memories and Directing Dreams: Commemoration, Community, and the Closing of Maple Leaf Gardens

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Article abstract

In February 1999, the Toronto Maple Leafs moved from Maple Leaf Gardens (MLG) to a modern new arena, Air Canada Centre (ACC), events that were telecast live in conjunction with *Hockey Night in Canada*. These were produced shows intended to highlight certain narratives, communicate certain messages, and select for viewing certain elements. An analysis of them reveals important meanings in the confluence of sport, place, and representation, as well as iconographic messages about Canadian identity. In commemorating one arena and inaugurating another, these telecasts operationalized a "discourse of tradition," which produced subjects who shared the preferred memories of MLG that were being celebrated and transferred to ACC.

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**Abstract**

*In February 1999, the Toronto Maple Leafs moved from Maple Leaf Gardens (MLG) to a modern new arena, Air Canada Centre (ACC), events that were telecast live in conjunction with Hockey Night in Canada. These were produced shows intended to highlight certain narratives, communicate certain messages, and select for viewing certain elements. An analysis of them reveals important meanings in the confluence of sport, place, and representation, as well as iconographic messages about Canadian identity. In commemorating one arena and inaugurating another, these telecasts operationalized a "discourse of tradition," which produced subjects who shared the preferred memories of MLG that were being celebrated and transferred to ACC.*

**Résumé**

*En février 1999, les Maple Leafs de Toronto, qui évoluaient au Maple Leaf Garden (MLG), ont déménagé dans un nouvel aréna moderne, le Centre Air Canada (CAC), un événement qui a été télédiffusé en direct dans le cadre de l'émission Hockey Night in Canada. Ces émissions visaient à faire ressortir certains récits, à transmettre certains messages et à choisir certains éléments à diffuser. L'analyse de ceux-ci révèle d'importantes significations concernant la rencontre du sport, du lieu et de la représentation ainsi que des messages iconographiques sur l'identité canadienne. En commémorant un aréna et en en inaugurant un autre, ces émissions télévisées ont opérationnalisé un discours traditionnel, qui a produit des sujets axés sur des souvenirs préférés communs au sujet du MLG, qui ont été célébrés et transférés au CAC.*

We know that there are people who argue that they support the team and not the ground, but they miss the point. The two cannot be separated without compromising the club's identity. Do that and you lose the deep emotional hold that even today football clubs exert over their supporters.

— CHARLTON ATHLETIC FANZINE<sup>1</sup>

In Toronto today, sport's "deep emotional hold" is most commonly associated with the ice hockey Maple Leafs, the standard bearer for the city's professional sports franchises. In a city where fans, fuelled by the media, panic if the club's goaltender has a bad game in the first week of the season, the Maple Leafs still sell out virtually all of their home games 39 years after their last championship. In February 1999, after 67 seasons at their fabled home, Maple Leaf Gardens (MLG), the National Hockey League (NHL) team moved into a brand-new, modern facility, Air Canada Centre (ACC).

The Toronto Maple Leafs hockey team, ACC, the NBA Toronto Raptors basketball franchise, as well as MLG are owned by the corporate entity, Maple Leafs Sports and Entertainment Ltd. (MLSE)—although MLG was recently sold to the Canadian grocery store chain, Loblaw's. Formed in 1998, MLSE was the result of a takeover by then-Maple Leafs' principal owner Steve Stavro of the Raptors' ownership group and its arena construction project.<sup>2</sup> MLSE acquired the Raptors and the as-yet-unbuilt ACC project in 1998 for between \$450–500 million (CDN), having already bought the assets of Maple Leaf Gardens Ltd. (which owned the hockey franchise and the eponymous arena) for \$175 million (CDN).<sup>3</sup> At the time of the merger, MLSE had been pursuing their own arena construction program, atop Toronto's historic Union Station. A primary motivation behind MLSE's acquisition of the Raptors was the desire to realize the revenues that the Raptors' planned arena would bring to MLSE. These were generated by a greater capacity for hockey of 3,000 more seats than MLG, including a substantial number of cash-generating luxury boxes and club seats, which were absent at MLG. And so it was that in February 1999 the Maple Leafs found themselves preparing to celebrate the departure from their home of the previous 67 years and 3 months, as well as the inauguration of a new, state-of-the-art arena.

John Hannigan has provided the fullest examination of the move from MLG to ACC, which he connects to the larger economic and ideological forces that structure the postmodern "fantasy city," the product of "a new urban economy which has its roots in tourism, sports, culture, and entertainment."<sup>4</sup> The effort by commercial sport franchises to create an identifiable brand that is aggressively marketed "isolates sports and entertainment complexes from their surrounding neighbourhoods."<sup>5</sup> Within this strategy, which disregarded the historical significance of MLG in favour of a modern, revenue-friendly entertainment complex, the Maple Leafs' transition to ACC was accompanied by the creation and promotion of "Leafs Nation." This invented community, where fans more resembled consumers, was what Hannigan terms a "mediated community" to acknowledge the complicity of the media in the promotion of Leafs Nation.<sup>6</sup> The marketing of this community, Hannigan argues,

enabled the move to ACC to be framed within a local, shared experience, seemingly extracted from the reality of late-market capitalist impulses.

While Hannigan explores the ideological and political-economic forces motivating the Maple Leafs' relocation from MLG to ACC, this article interrogates the rhetoric surrounding this move by focusing specifically on a critical reading of the televised ceremonies that accompanied them.<sup>7</sup> This transition was marked by extended on-ice ceremonies at both the final MLG game and the first game at ACC, ceremonies that were broadcast nationally in Canada to substantial prime-time, Saturday-night audiences on the English-language network of the publicly owned Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC). Not surprisingly, the public rhetoric surrounding the closing of MLG was similar to the Charlton Athletic fanzine quoted above. Press coverage reminisced about past events at MLG, the presumed importance the arena had played in the life of the city, and the ways in which the building was inseparable from the hockey team. Indeed from the very birth of televised hockey in Canada in 1952—to say nothing of its radio presence for the two preceding decades—MLG had been the primary venue for coast-to-coast *Hockey Night in Canada* (HNIC) broadcasts. MLG was, in some eyes, the home of Canadian hockey, and its closing ceremonies sought to reaffirm the presumed “deep emotional hold” that MLG exerted over fans.

This article, in questioning these assumptions about MLG, addresses the role “place” and the memories associated with place—specifically, the constructed memories of hockey arenas—play in generating and reproducing this “deep emotional hold.” The theme that connected these ceremonies—both the closing of MLG and the opening of ACC—was unmistakably nostalgic, captured in the oft-repeated catchphrase created for the events: “Memories and Dreams.” Left implicit, however, were what memories and whose dreams were being celebrated. What follows, after a summary of these two ceremonies, is a critical consideration of their produced telecasts, within the tradition of what Michael Silk calls “a cultural studies that utilizes the insights of political economy.”<sup>8</sup> This case study of the celebrations closing one hockey arena and opening another recalls the key questions Katharyne Mitchell posed when considering monuments, memorials, and memories: “How will this event be remembered? How will it be commemorated? Memorialized? Sanctified? Spectacularized? At what scale will memory reflect back on itself?”<sup>9</sup> Addressing these questions reveals the ways in which these telecasts actualized a “discourse of tradition” as a way of institutionalizing selected memories of MLG and promoting particular dreams for ACC. These choices articulated specific memories of MLG, reinforced membership in the Maple Leafs' community of fans/consumers, and affirmed the dominant ideologies of commercial North American sport, such as a hege-

monic gender order. All the while these ceremonies omitted historical details inconsistent with the preferred narrative—such as the significant history of sexual abuse of young boys by MLG employees that became public just two years before the building's commemorative closing—and left little space for alternative memories.

### **Sport, Television, and Memory**

As Hannigan and others have outlined, the early-1990s construction boom in North American professional sports dramatically altered the commercial entertainment landscape.<sup>10</sup> The new arenas, ballparks, and stadiums have all had their inaugurations celebrated, while the sites they replaced have all been commemorated and memorialized. These kinds of ceremonies serve a variety of purposes, including providing fans and spectators an opportunity to celebrate their memories of particular places or events. Some scholars, however, have argued that ceremonies act to construct particular memories in order to serve more instrumental socio-economic ends. Commemoration is, according to Mitchell, "an act building on the collective memory of the recent past, but also producing that memory's future through a highly particular form of aestheticized, spectacularized politics."<sup>11</sup> In this way, ceremonies commemorating an older hockey arena and celebrating the move to a newer one—with the rationale for the transition, stated or not, being the realization of greater profits—reflect Brian Osborne's assessment of memorialization as "an attempted agency of legitimization of authority and social cohesion."<sup>12</sup> Anouk Bélanger's work on the 1996 move of the Montréal Canadiens from the 71-year-old Montréal Forum to the new Molson Centre (now the Bell Centre) best exemplifies the political economy of memory in the context of hockey franchises and entertainment complexes. As she observes, "The memories attached to the old Forum became inseparable from the public reaction to the move and to the new building."<sup>13</sup>

Bélanger, however, does not focus on either the ceremony closing the Montreal Forum or the television production of that spectacle. Considerable attention though has been paid to other television sports spectacles, especially scripted "mega-events" such as Olympic and Commonwealth Games coverage—including opening and closing ceremonies—and the use of the media and events to construct and communicate preferred notions of sport, identity, and nation.<sup>14</sup> Despite this, there has been less exploration at the intersection of sport, *place*, *memorialization*, and television.

It is in revealing such a space that an examination of the telecasts of the MLG closing and ACC opening is useful. These broadcasts cannot be considered innocently as unimpeachable narratives telling the story "as it

is” of the closing of one hockey arena and the opening of another. These are not impartial accounts. Rather, they are produced shows intended to highlight certain narratives, communicate certain messages, and select for viewing certain elements (consequently, de-selecting or omitting others). An analysis of them reveals important meanings in the confluence of television broadcasting, professional hockey, and iconographic messages about Canadian (or at least Torontonians) culture. These ceremonies, more specifically the televised representations of them, are not solely cultural texts to be consumed. They are also productive. The sports telecast, in this sense, is, in Stuart Hall’s words “a practice that *produces* meaning, that *makes things mean*.”<sup>15</sup> In examining the meanings produced by (or, at least, observed by the researcher in) texts, it is important to keep in mind Gillian Rose: “An image may have its own effects, but these are always mediated by the many and various uses to which it is put.”<sup>16</sup>

To what ends are the broadcasts under consideration here put? They not only include television conventions, but also the dominant values of sport. Both sport and television are important objects of study because of the ways in which they work to construct as “common sense” dominant social practices and relations. Richard Gruneau, David Whitson, and Hart Cantelon’s standpoint

is that cultural and ideological practices are important sites in the production and reproduction of social order; and in our view it is precisely this “naturalization”—of a cluster of meanings and practices which are integral to a class society and to masculine hegemony...—which sport and television combine to reinforce.<sup>17</sup>

The display of bodies and values consistent with hegemonic masculinity is, as Garry Whannel says, “part of the ideological work that is performed through the representation of sport stars.”<sup>18</sup> As Donald Sabo and Sue Curry Jansen argue, “male images in sport media contribute to the social reproduction of cultural values and structural dynamics of dominance systems within the gender order.”<sup>19</sup> The act of representation normalizes and legitimizes elements of a specific type of masculinity that privileges strength and aggression—and denigrates emotional, introspective, and nurturing qualities labelled as feminine—that are typical of the televisual representation of hockey in Canada. It is important to remember, however, in considering the celebration of two commercial hockey arenas, that not only does the representation of hegemonic masculinity operate in relation to certain femininities, but, as Whannel, Toby Miller, and others have argued, such representations are complicit in “the marginalisation of alternative masculinities.”<sup>20</sup>

The preservation of the gender order is one of the primary outcomes of sport media. However, as Whannel argues, it is difficult to separate this ideological project from the articulation and preservation of discourses about the nation as a whole. "One of the central significances of sporting heroes is precisely the way in which they are available for articulation within discourses about the state of the nation."<sup>21</sup> Indeed, as will become clear—especially through the use of Benedict Anderson's notion of the "imagined community"—the building of and belonging to a "nation" was essential to the commemoration of MLG and the inauguration of ACC. Not only did these telecasts accumulate and sell audiences, they legitimated these efforts by bringing together a community and crafting its unifying message.<sup>22</sup> "In the attempt to win and hold large audiences," as Whannel observes, "popular television is always striving to produce a discourse of unity."<sup>23</sup>

A number of scholars have argued for a critical examination of this discourse of unity, noting, as Rose does, that "it is the economic processes in which cultural production is embedded that shape visual imagery."<sup>24</sup> Gruneau focuses this analysis on sport media when he notes: "Television sports programs ... figure indirectly in winning consent for a dominant social definition of sport ideally suited to a capitalist consumer culture."<sup>25</sup> It is within attempts to win consent for the dominant capitalist organization of sport that Hannigan explains the transition from MLG to ACC and Bélanger positions the Canadiens' 1996 move from the Montréal Forum to the Molson Centre. Both also argue that preferred elements of historical memory—nostalgia—are marshalled to serve these socio-economic ends. Bélanger contends that memories of the Forum and the team were constructed and communicated, in a way that precluded alternative or competing memories, "in order to move them to the new complex in a way that would be financially profitable."<sup>26</sup>

Sport television, however, is what Gruneau, Whitson, and Cantelon label a "constitutive event," which enables "the transformation of a live event (e.g. a hockey game) into a television event (*Hockey Night in Canada*)."<sup>27</sup> This constitutive power can have important ideological implications. As Silk notes, the host feed of the Malaysian broadcaster at the 1998 Commonwealth Games "attempted to construct a particular version of 'the collective memory' and a preferred sense of national identity."<sup>28</sup> The mobilization of "memory" to serve socio-economic ends is an important, if unstated, element of the telecasts considered here. Ceremonies such as these can be used to "reconstruct a purified version of the history."<sup>29</sup> Bélanger, in arguing for a political economy of memory, highlights:

the immense power of contemporary media to produce and

frame memories in hegemonic ways, to manage apparent crises in memory, and even to promote forms of “organized forgetting” in the realm of everyday popular cultural experience” all within “the changing political, economic, spatial, and historical context.”<sup>30</sup>

Television has the power to not only “frame memories” but also to invoke dramatic narratives that smooth out, perhaps even obscure, the socio-economic changes to which both Bélanger and Hannigan refer. The MLG and ACC ceremonies may have been connected to professional sport, and broadcast before and after NHL games, nevertheless they were pre-produced events and should be considered within the conventions of both dramatic television and televised sporting events. The meaningful intersections of these two forms are the ways in which the broadcasting of these two “dramatic” ceremonies invoked the conventions of sports television as a means of communicating a “discourse of tradition.”

### **Reading Arena Commemorations as Texts**

This paper proceeds from the well-established premise that mediated sporting events, in this case sports-related ceremonies, can be considered as “cultural texts” whose ideological meanings and representations are open to analysis. As Mary McDonald and Susan Birrell articulate, such analysis has the potential to not only reveal preferred or dominant readings of these texts but can also be a useful methodology for “uncovering, foregrounding, and producing counter-narratives, that is, alternative accounts of particular incidents and celebrities that have been decentred, obscured, and dismissed by hegemonic forces.”<sup>31</sup> Analyses of sport texts have their roots in cultural studies, and the work of British scholars has been especially influential. Early work exploring sport television has been critiqued for privileging—beyond the mediation of television—a “purer,” perhaps more real, underlying event.<sup>32</sup> Television acts, Whannel argues, to construct an appearance of reality, “the effect [of which] is to naturalise the coverage, minimising audience awareness of the mediating effect of television.”<sup>33</sup>

More recent analyses have abandoned the search for the real sport event and instead turned their attention to the operation of power relations and the nature of representation within the production of mediated texts. Fiske and Hall, among others, argue that a consideration of hegemonic power relations can be useful in exploring preferred, oppositional, and negotiated readings of cultural texts.<sup>34</sup> McDonald and Birrell advocate a consideration not only of the dominant axes of power—e.g., gender, race, ethnicity, social class, age, ability—but also of the intersections of these varied identities. Furthermore, the “linguistic turn” in cultural studies has



encouraged sport scholars to move beyond the distinction between a sporting event and its mediated production to consider these as a text open to analysis. Attention to issues of representation has enabled texts to be deconstructed in search of the narratives that contain ideological representations and the operation of power relations. The narratives constructed around cultural texts are "ideologically coded and affected by larger political struggles related to age, race, and class divisions," which are in turn reflected in the ways sports texts are produced and received.<sup>35</sup> Abandoning the search for the "truth" of a text and considering it within the material processes of its production "opens up," as McDonald and Birrell argue, "other opposing, resistant versions and readings, and it acknowledges the particular social and historical contexts within which the text is constructed and/or consumed."<sup>36</sup>

Highlighting the production process points at some of the limitations of a content analysis that cannot account for every stage in this process, what McDonald and Birrell call the "complex interrelationship of the producer of the text and the readers of text."<sup>37</sup> As Gruneau, Whitson, and Cantelon identify, in invoking the work of Richard Johnson, studies of media and cultural production need to focus on three spheres of interest: (a) the institutional and organizational context of production; (b) the structure and content of the text that is produced; and (c) the audience that reads/decodes/receives this text. They go on to note that too many studies have tended to focus on only one sphere with little attention to the intersections of these three spheres.<sup>38</sup> Given the intersecting interests of MLSE and CBC, a production analysis would offer additional insights to a reading of these texts. And, in the Canadian context, both Gruneau and Margaret MacNeill have examined sport television from this perspective.<sup>39</sup> Additional nuance could come from an examination of the audience reception of televised commemorative ceremonies such as these, as well as an exploration of the sites where this consumption occurs. Rose argues that an understanding of texts that are culturally constructed requires us to examine not only what is seen but *how* it is seen as well.<sup>40</sup> In this vein, there are alternative readings of these telecasts than those presented here.<sup>41</sup> While Ava Rose and James Friedman suggest that televised sport is "a uniquely masculine experience of spectatorship," in the case of HNIC, Sandra Langley makes the argument that the time dedicated to watching this program on Saturday nights has been part of creating distinctly masculine spaces within homes across Canada for over 50 years.<sup>42</sup> This opens up a variety of interpretations for how the ceremonies considered here can be understood from the many perspectives of viewers who do not identify themselves with HNIC's core "target" audience.

Despite the polysemic possibilities of these texts, the ceremonies

examined here invoke codes and conventions familiar to an audience schooled on HNIC and, it is reasonable to conclude, they held some meaning for a considerable number of viewers. The elaboration of narratives contained within these two televised ceremonies helps excavate the effort to present a unified, inviolate history of MLG. For this reason, a critical reading of these texts, even without an extended examination of production details or an analysis of audience reception, can still shine light on "the constitutive meanings and power relations of the larger worlds we inhabit."<sup>43</sup> In this case, these "larger worlds" include the hegemony of a particular masculinity and the normalization of whiteness (among other identities) that pervade the culture of hockey as a form of pan-Canadian identity. A critical reading of these representations, then, "is not to search for facts ... but to search for the ways in which those 'facts' are constructed, framed, foregrounded, obscured, and forgotten."<sup>44</sup>

### *Live from Toronto*

This analysis considers videotaped reproductions of the national, English-language CBC telecasts of two events: post-game ceremonies from MLG, commemorating the final NHL game at the arena, broadcast on Saturday, 13 February 1999, and lasting one hour and 15 minutes; and pre-game ceremonies, carried live by the CBC, on the occasion of the first game at ACC, one week later, Saturday, 20 February 1999, that were 15 minutes long. A critical reading of two short texts can produce a meaningful analysis. McDonald and Birrell argue that the benefit of "using particular incidents as points of analytical access is precisely their particularity."<sup>45</sup> These ceremonies remain texts open to analysis. (In the case of the ACC opening, the production limitations caused by the CBC labour dispute, discussed below, are a component of the text.) These texts are composed of video images and an audio script, both of which are the outcome of selection processes (e.g., camera angles, key messages for announcers to emphasize, etc.), and this analysis seeks to understand both the inclusions and exclusions.<sup>46</sup>

There are important production considerations worth noting about both telecasts. The MLG closing ceremonies were broadcast live, immediately following the Maple Leafs–Chicago Blackhawks game. The Blackhawks had been the Maple Leafs' opponent at the inaugural MLG game and two surviving participants from that match, Toronto's Red Horner and Chicago's Harold "Mush" March—the latter of whom had scored the first goal at MLG—dropped the puck for the ceremonial faceoff to begin the arena's final contest.<sup>47</sup> This game, which was the final regular-season contest at MLG, was the feature game that night on CBC's Saturday-evening national HNIC telecast. However, the post-game ceremonies, titled "Memories and Dreams: A Closing Celebration," were not an exclu-

sively CBC production. The pre-ceremony credits note: "The following Special Presentation has been produced by Maple Leaf Sports & Entertainment, Insight Productions, Doug Grover Productions, [and] Hockey Night in Canada." This ceremony was broadcast without commercials, running uninterrupted for the entire hour and 15 minutes.

It began with Stompin' Tom Connors performing a rendition of his ubiquitous "The Hockey Song" and ended with Anne Murray awkwardly lip synching to a pre-recorded version of "The Maple Leaf Forever," while fumbling to unfold a small piece of paper (presumably the lyrics). In between, the in-house crowd and television audience were introduced to 105 former Maple Leafs players as well as MLG staff and watched a number of videotaped remembrances. The evening concluded with the Leafs players—both current and alumni—at centre ice passing a "Memories and Dreams" flag between themselves and waving it for the crowd.

The television audience for the HNIC broadcast and the post-game ceremonies was substantial, drawing CBC's best hockey audience in nearly three years. The pre-game show drew its highest-ever audience of 993,000, nearly 500,000 above average. The Maple Leafs–Blackhawks game itself was CBC's highest-rated HNIC telecast of the year to-date, with an audience of 1.937 million, 800,000 above average. The post-game MLG closing ceremonies drew the evening's largest audience, 2.614 million Canadians. Comparable to a Leafs playoff, Stanley Cup final, or Canadian Olympic hockey game, this was the highest hockey rating for CBC since 2.6 million people watched Game Six of the 1996 Toronto–St. Louis first-round playoff series.<sup>48</sup>

Despite the audience numbers, the print media response to the MLG closing ceremony was unequivocal. The *National Post* called it "an excessive undertaking sucked dry of subtlety and understatement," while the *Globe and Mail* recalled "a curious evening, an affair that had all the ingredients of an emotional, moving farewell, but little of the result." The *Toronto Star's* media critic, Chris Zelkovich, assessed the ceremony as "painfully long ... [and] definitely not a made-for-TV event," noting "it's doubtful even Bernardo Bertolucci could have made interesting TV out of these ceremonies." Finally, his colleague at the *Star*, columnist Damien Cox, called the post-game ceremony "ponderous." "[I]t was," he noted, "a curious, disjointed evening rooted in dusty nostalgia, with no compelling theme or message other than it has been a very long time since this franchise has accomplished anything."<sup>49</sup>

A week later the Maple Leafs again opened themselves up to similar criticism—although this time not entirely of their own making—as they hosted the opening ceremonies at their new home arena, ACC. These were

broadcast by CBC as part of the regular HNIC telecast (though the same Doug Grover who had orchestrated the MLG closing ceremonies also produced the ACC opening ceremonies).<sup>50</sup> As a result, the broadcast broke away six minutes into the 15-minute ceremony for two minutes of commercials. The distinguishing feature of the ACC opening, however, was the telecast's poor production values.

The week between the MLG closing and the ACC opening, CBC technicians went on strike, putting in jeopardy the Saturday night telecast of the inaugural ACC NHL game between the Maple Leafs and Montréal Canadiens. Negotiations continued unsuccessfully until game day, at which time the CBC adhered to the letter if not the spirit of an earlier agreement not to broadcast the game using CBC personnel. Instead, the American network broadcasting the game, ESPN2, supplied its feed to the NHL, which in turn offered it to the CBC. The Canadian network production staff and on-air personnel—studio host Ron MacLean, personality Don Cherry, play-by-play announcer Bob Cole, and analyst Harry Neale—broadcast the ACC game live from the MCI Center in Washington, D.C. (where they had planned to broadcast the Washington Capitals–San Jose Sharks game in the event of continuing labour strife). Using the NHL feed, the CBC's staff in Washington “broadcast” the Leafs–Canadiens game nationally in Canada. The ESPN2 crew, however, originally had no intention of covering the ACC opening ceremonies, so their camera personnel had spent no time with the ceremony producers scripting and practicing that evening's festivities. As a result, the telecast of the ceremony was disjointed, with the camera missing much of the key action, and lacked any narrative signposts for the audience from either a CBC commentator such as MacLean or ACC public address announcer Paul Morris.<sup>51</sup>

These production difficulties meant that the television audience was never informed of the significance of the choreographed routine performed by Canadian figure skater Kurt Browning, which launched the evening's ceremonies. Furthermore, the denouement of the celebration—the unfurling of banners commemorating the Maple Leafs' Stanley Cup victories and honouring former players—was largely missed by the production team, who selected a wide shot panning across the arena's ceiling, so that it was likely that only aficionados could identify the honourees. The raising of the “Memories and Dreams” flag, which had been used at the closing of MLG, was presided over by two young minor hockey players before the ceremony concluded with the Canadian national anthem. The two teams then began warming up in their respective ends of the ice. Following a set of commercials, the puck was dropped to start the Maple Leafs–Canadiens game.

Again, despite a television audience of 1.52 million—almost twice that for a game at a similar point in the season a year earlier—the response of the print media to the pre-game ceremony was unflattering.<sup>52</sup> The criticisms were triggered by the production problems caused by the CBC labour dispute. The *Toronto Sun* called the ceremonies “low-key,” but the *National Post* was less flattering: “It may have been the worst hockey broadcast in modern hockey broadcasting history ... Perhaps it was hastily put together. Certainly, the camera operators hadn’t been involved in extensive rehearsals because they didn’t know where to point.” Browning’s skating routine was singled out for special condemnation. It was for the *National Post*, “...a visual mess. It may have made some sense to the audience at the Air Canada Centre but on TV, the choreography was non-existent.” And Browning seemed “...in constant danger of plowing down several of the participating hockey players of the future.” Noted Zerkovich of the *Toronto Star*: “They were probably doing something significant, but viewers had no idea what.”<sup>53</sup>

Stephen Brunt, in calling the Memories and Dreams flag a “prefab icon,” noted that “this enduring symbol of all that is Maple Leaf was apparently invented on the spot, a cheap knock off that no one was going to confuse with the Canadiens’ torch.”<sup>54</sup> This is a reference to a torch that all living former captains of the Montréal Canadiens had passed from one to another at the closing ceremonies of the Montréal Forum on 11 March 1996. The torch held significance for the storied franchise because written on the wall of the team’s dressing room in the Forum were words from John McRae’s “In Flanders Fields”: “To you from failing hands we throw the torch, be yours to hold it high.” The Montréal ceremonies were widely praised and had included unscripted moments, such as a 10-minute standing ovation for Canadiens great Maurice “Rocket” Richard.<sup>55</sup> To observers of both celebrations, the MLG commemoration fell flat. The *Montreal Gazette* called them a “poor imitation” of the Forum closing ceremonies, while jingoistically noting that “our city did a far better job of closing the Canadian hockey shrine.”<sup>56</sup> While the Forum closing remains an important point of comparison, there is little evidence to suggest that the Forum ceremonies *directly* influenced the production of events at MLG. Given the importance of anglo-francophone relations to Montréal’s cultural history, the Forum closing ceremonies are deserving of their own detailed examination. As already noted, Bélanger has discussed the Forum ceremonies in the context of the economic promotion of the modern city. Similarly, what MLG management did learn from previous arena commemorations was that the nostalgia associated with historic sports spaces could be marketed to win consent for the move to ACC. As Brunt wrote on the eve of the MLG closing: “the Leafs have done a magnificent job of exploiting their exit, following a pattern already established in Chicago with the Stadium, in Montréal with the Forum, and in many other places.”<sup>57</sup>

## **The Discourse of Tradition**

How then to understand the many layers (CBC broadcasts of events planned and produced, broadcast to a diverse audience) of these ceremonies and the meanings that can be read into them? One starting point is to attempt to understand the perceived need for such ceremonies, to consider why the CBC and MLSE determined that MLG needed commemoration and ACC inauguration.

John Bale offers a useful perspective in this regard, arguing that the affective ties that human beings develop with their material environments can be applied to sports spaces. Borrowing from the work of Yi Fu Tuan, Bale calls this attachment "topophilia." One key element of topophilia is the notion that sport spaces are infused with sacredness by the fans who attend events or follow them on radio, television, and the Internet, as well as by the media that report on these events. Examining British soccer stadiums, Bale observes that "Tuan's recognition of a sacred place as one being identified with overpowering significance must undoubtedly apply to the football stadium."<sup>58</sup>

On one level, positioning sporting places as sacred spaces can be helpful in understanding the significance of the closing of MLG and the need to publicly commemorate the last game there. Indeed, William Kilbourn once observed that: "If I were asked by some stranger to North American culture to show him the most important religious building in Canada I would take him to Toronto's Maple Leaf Gardens."<sup>59</sup> Weekly radio broadcasts that began after MLG opened in 1931 were a key factor in this pan-Canadian popularity. At the time, hockey was among the only radio programming to reach a national audience.<sup>60</sup> Originating in Toronto at MLG, these broadcasts became a national touchstone, and their voice, Foster Hewitt, became a household name across English Canada. Barry Broadfoot recounts tales of Canadians listening to Hewitt during the Great Depression, while Saskatchewan resident Jack Warner recalled in 1994 that, in the 1930s, "we'd gather around the radio on Saturday nights and listen to Foster Hewitt's broadcasts from the Gardens."<sup>61</sup> But if listening to hockey games broadcast from MLG became a ubiquitous Canadian experience, it was not a universal one. Owned by Conn Smythe, who proudly flaunted his loyalty to crown and country, the Maple Leafs and MLG came to represent Anglophone Canada, while promoting what Kidd and others have noted was a particularly masculinist vision of sport.<sup>62</sup>

A fanzine for the English soccer club Chester noted in 1990 about the club's recently departed stadium: "It is more than bricks and mortar."<sup>63</sup> At a press conference following the MLG closing ceremony, former Maple Leafs' winger (and all-around tough guy) Dave "Tiger" Williams invoked

similar sentiments: "The building is just bricks and mortar, which you can get anywhere. What made this place great is the people in it."<sup>64</sup> But what are hockey arenas, if not just bricks and mortar? The answer, clearly, is places of meaning and memory for a great many people. As Bélanger notes of Montréal when the Forum closed in 1996, "it became clear at that time that what might be taken as just a commercial venue in the city had deep social, cultural and political significance for Montréalers."<sup>65</sup> Nevertheless, it is important to keep in mind that buildings have no essential identities, no uncontested histories. And, the need to commemorate "sacred" spaces such as MLG does not entirely explain CBC's participation or the ways in which the messages of these ceremonies were crafted. What these texts offer instead is a mediated definition of place based upon carefully selected and represented memories; selected memories, which are largely visual and aural, constructed to communicate preferred meanings. In the case of the MLG/ACC ceremonies, production decisions intentionally highlighted a story of sport in Toronto that privileged commercial male hockey. These ceremonies invoked what Gruneau, Whitson, and Cantelon have termed a "discourse of tradition" to mark these mid-season telecasts as considerably more important than typical mid-season games, "designed to celebrate the event as one of 'national' significance, a spectacle whose place in national culture goes beyond that of a mere sporting contest."<sup>66</sup>

One purpose of this discourse of tradition was to construct a preferred past as a way of christening the Maple Leafs' new arena. These ceremonies were, to cite Eric Hobsbawm, "essentially a process of formalization and ritualization, characterized by reference to the past."<sup>67</sup> However, as much as the discourse of tradition used the past to inform the present, there were important moments where, when deemed necessary, the present was used to inform the past. These references were most prominent in Ron MacLean's introduction of Maple Leaf alumni from the 1940s. These were men, unfamiliar to all but the most knowledgeable in the audience, who at their advanced age did not appear to fit hockey's physical stereotypes. So MacLean placed Ron Hurst (a "bodychecker" compared to Mike Peca) and Fleming Mackell ("a Theoren Fleury-like star in his day") into terms that contemporary audiences would both understand and presumably value—a process of "reinscription" that is discussed below.<sup>68</sup>

What the use of the present to illuminate a version of the past also makes clear is the importance to these telecasts of intertextual messages. To be truly successful, ceremonies use intertextual references that are easily decoded by community members, which at the same time reinforce membership in an exclusive group capable of this decoding (more on community and membership later). MacLean made this clear at the outset

of the MLG ceremonies by making repeated references to his usual Saturday-night HNIC sidekick, Don Cherry. On his top hat and tuxedo: "I let Don Cherry outfit me just this once." While introducing Maple Leaf alumni Rene Robert: "one of Don's favourites." And introducing Bessie Lampson, a long-time MLG staff member: "She's 100 years old and she was in telling Don Cherry what's going on tonight." Without knowing who Don Cherry is, the hockey ethos he's seen to represent, and the values of hegemonic masculinity he reinforces (to say nothing of his fashion sense), these messages are lost on the audience.

Such ceremonies can be read as implicitly constructing a fan/viewer subject position. From this perspective, the broadcasts tell you that, as a viewer, you have been (or should be) a member of a community with a long-standing tradition. Not only are you a part of the past (at MLG), but you can be a part of the future (at ACC), safe as a member of Leafs Nation, a community whose very purpose is to transcend the differential histories of the two arenas. This presumed an educated viewer who understood the value of MLG, its celebrated memories, and cherished dreams. This continued at the ACC ceremony, where production problems meant that the cameras failed to capture for viewers close-ups of the unfurling of banners celebrating Stanley Cup victories and honouring famous former players. There was no voice-over to tell ACC spectators or the TV audience what was happening or to relate its significance. But it is possible to surmise that what was going on was understood. One of the reasons that the significance of the banners unfurling at ACC and MacLean's references to Cherry might have been decoded by the audience was that the MLG and ACC ceremonies were firmly entrenched within the culture of HNIC and other ceremonies. For the audience, these ceremonies were the culmination of many other viewing experiences, on many other Saturday nights.

Anderson notes the behaviours of newspaper readers that make intertextuality possible while building what he calls an "imagined community":

...each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout the calendar.<sup>69</sup>

In the case of hockey televised in English by the CBC in Canada, Anderson's "ceremony" is repeated every Saturday night from October to June. Sport television may, as Gruneau, Whitson, and Cantelon argue,



transform a live event into a television event (e.g., a hockey game into HNIC), but the two ceremonies examined here go beyond this. The telecasts of 13 and 20 February 1999 were not ordinary mid-season games carried live on HNIC. They were, if you will, the *über-Hockey Night in Canada*. As the centrepiece of CBC's nationally televised Saturday-evening prime-time programming, it is reasonable to conclude that the MLG closing ceremony was significant for Canadians geographically distant from the city of Toronto. It is equally likely that this significance resonated most strongly with Canadians at a particular intersection of gender and racial identities, for as Mary Louise Adams notes: "If hockey is life in Canada, then life in Canada remains decidedly masculine and white."<sup>70</sup>

### **Manufactured Memories and Directed Dreams**

During the MLG closing ceremony, PA announcer Paul Morris noted of "most Canadians": "Even if they didn't live here the way I did, they lived here in their dreams and they'll never forget the great events they've seen at Maple Leaf Gardens." Thus began the evening's focus on the "Memories and Dreams" theme. The substance of the memories and dreams narrative, and the attempts during the ACC opening to invoke "continuity with the past," call to mind Hobsbawm's notion of "invented traditions." This connection is seen most clearly in the ceremonies' "attempt to establish continuity with a *suitable* historic past."<sup>71</sup> The repeated appearance of the "Memories and Dreams" flag is consistent with Mitchell's assertion that:

Memory is sustained through the interplay between collective recollection and repetition ... [where repetition helps in] blurring the differences between individual interpretations of events, and creating a single, highly idealized, composite image.<sup>72</sup>

This continuity is established using paraphernalia, ritualized practices, and "the personification of 'the nation' in symbol or image."<sup>73</sup> During the ceremonies, this "personification of the nation" was most prominent in the "Memories and Dreams" flag that was both symbolically and physically transferred from MLG to ACC. The inclusion of it and other symbols (e.g., Stanley Cup banners) in the MLG/ACC ceremonies clearly delineated the "memories" that were to be celebrated, as well as the "dreams" to be dreamt. A key theme in the MLG ceremony was the celebration of the hockey team's history (which was unquestioningly conflated with the building's history). It was taken for granted that this tradition of success, while only 67 years old, and marked at the time by 32 years of failure to win a championship, was a memory celebrated by all in similar ways.

Throughout both ceremonies the dreams of the Maple Leafs' imagined community were most often articulated as the dreams of children. What these dreams were was less clear. However, much of the rhetoric of the ceremonies made it clear that these dreams, whatever their content, would likely only be realized by playing for the Maple Leafs at MLG (now ACC). In introducing the Maple Leaf alumni enshrined in the Hockey Hall of Fame, MacLean began by claiming that "to live out your fantasies ... is to play in the company of these men." Later, prior to the exchange of the "Memories and Dreams" flag between 1930s star Red Horner and current team captain Mats Sundin—the physical and symbolic transfer of tradition—MacLean introduced the young banner bearers: "This is how it feels, folks, when history turns the page. We have reached a defining moment, and to help us with that, we'd like to call upon our banner bearers. These are some young hockey players who have dreams themselves." This sentiment was revisited at the ACC opening when PA announcer Morris introduced the ceremonial banner raisers as "two young hockey players representing young hockey players everywhere who will one day create the memories and dreams of the Air Canada Centre for us all." Who these players were—Lianne Murphy of the Durham West Lightning and Daniel Clark of the Toronto Colts—and what their dreams were, or even if their dreams had anything to do with hockey, was never revealed. To do so was, in a sense, unnecessary. The audience already "knew" that their dreams must be to play on that ice surface for the Maple Leafs. What other dream could be more desirable?

Throughout both ceremonies, themes emerged and repeated themselves that communicated the preferred memories and dreams. These messages highlighted the building of community, the privileging of a certain type of masculinity, and the conscious omission of elements that were inconsistent with the evenings' dominant narratives and ideal identities.

### *A Nation of Fans/Fans of a Nation*

Both ceremonies invoked symbols and messages that marked out a community of hockey fans and established MLG as the institution around which they celebrate their citizenship. As Anderson argues, even though most community members will never meet each other, invented traditions create an imagined or shared sense of community. This notion is important in understanding the ways that invented traditions and notions of membership in an imagined community were operationalized during these ceremonies to transfer the preferred memories and dreams of MLG to ACC. Anderson notes that "nation-ness, as well as nationalism, are cultural artefacts ... once created, they become 'modular,' capable of being transplanted."<sup>74</sup>

That a televised commemoration would be put to this task, to highlight for an entire community or "nation" desired memories and dreams, is perhaps unsurprising. As Mitchell notes: "The 'spectacular' memorial event is created in order to produce a certain kind of collective memory, generally at the scale of the city and in relation to the production of a nation."<sup>75</sup> In communicating the preferred memories of MLG, elements of the closing ceremony were clearly aimed at a community of presumably like-minded people. On one level, it was assumed that such fans were insightful enough to grasp MLG's historical and socio-cultural significance. The telecast festivities produced, as Hannigan notes, "a discourse of mediated community that suggests a shared social bond and common lifestyle."<sup>76</sup> But this ceremony went beyond community-affirmation. It also reinforced that a key element of community is the desire to belong to Leafs Nation. Belonging to the community meant fans could share in the accomplishments being celebrated and that what had been achieved had, in a sense, been for the fans. So, after the parade of Leaf alumni, MacLean thanked the 105 former Leafs: "For all the fans across Canada, we thank you men for the thrills you've given us."

Perhaps the moment most telling of the power of the imagined Maple Leafs community was revealed by Red Horner, whose 12 seasons playing for the team ended in 1940. During a video-taped reminiscence, Horner recalled: "It was something that I had dreamed about for years and years to wear the Maple Leaf sweater and to be part of the team. It was something that's very, very difficult to put into words." The irony of this statement was that Horner joined the Maple Leafs in 1928. At the time it was a franchise that had been in existence only 11 years and had been named the Maple Leafs for only a single season. Yet, the presumed desire to wear a Maple Leafs' jersey—a dream to which all anglo-Canadian boys were taught by media such as HNIC to aspire—pervades Horner's memories.

The closing ceremony at MLG not only encouraged the desire to belong, it also honoured the community's values, including the celebration of grassroots hockey. But this is an imagined community structured in such a way as to reinforce the NHL's hegemonic position within Canadian hockey. The valorization of hockey's grassroots was a narrative revealed during the introduction of Maple Leafs' alumni. Throughout his player introductions, MacLean celebrated the local origins and junior team affiliations of a number of former Leafs: Garry Monahan ("from Barrie and the Peterborough Petes"), Rod Seiling ("a Toronto Marlie from Elmira"), Jim Morrison ("Barrie Flyers"), Noel Price ("from St. Mike's"), and Marc Reaume ("another St. Mike's grad"). These introductions reaffirmed the NHL's position that it is a supporter of "small-town" Canadian hockey and that hockey is a cohesive element in communities across the country. Yet this obscures the ways in which the NHL has constructed

itself as the pinnacle of hockey success, the ultimate goal for players who are in fact part of a large feeder system where this commercial league dominates all levels of local amateur hockey.<sup>77</sup> Ceremonies such as these celebrate this local connection as a way of preserving the socio-economic order that perpetuates the NHL's hegemonic position.

The MLG ceremony clearly intertwined the Maple Leafs, their arena, and their fans within a single community. If fans were unsure of what membership in this community meant, or what they, as the audience, were intended to take away from this evening, the ceremony left no doubt as to the values privileged by this community. Before the players from the Stanley Cup-winning teams of the 1960s were introduced, video footage commemorating this era was shown within MLG and to the national television audience. Its narration is telling. The 1960s featured

some of the most popular players ever to wear the [team colours of] blue and white ... [They were] hardworking, unselfish players who defined the very essence of the Leafs, the Gardens, this whole country ... They won through sheer effort, strength of heart, and will. And they taught everyone who watched a little bit about *team*.<sup>78</sup>

### *Memorializing Men*

As Sabo and Jansen observe: "The dominant narrative structures in sports media construct and valorize hegemonic masculinity."<sup>79</sup> More specific to these ceremonies is Gruneau and Whitson's assertion that hockey is "a game whose dominant practices and values have been those of a very specific model of aggressive masculinity."<sup>80</sup> It is important to note, however, that this kind of masculine performance is not unique to hockey, as Chas Critcher, for example, notes of English soccer: "There is not football style here and some separate entity called masculinity there. Rather, football articulates or represents masculinity."<sup>81</sup> Not surprisingly—given the intersection between sport and media—a narrative runs throughout these ceremonies that privileges a particular kind of masculinity in hockey settings, which values toughness, perseverance, strength, and the exercise of brute force.

What is interesting about the MLG/ACC ceremonies is the way in which this aggressive masculine discourse is elided with a physical space. Hockey arenas, as spaces, have historically been constructed as masculine, or "men's cultural centres."<sup>82</sup> So it is not surprising that the celebration of two hockey arenas should be infused with rhetoric that reinforces a particular type of masculinity.

This narrative was prominent in MacLean's introduction of the 105 Maple Leaf alumni. In his role as emcee, he sprinkled extemporaneous editorial comments about a number of players into his introductions. These positioned the men, many of whom were unfamiliar to the audience, within the privileged values of hockey. So Stew Gavin was "rugged," Jeff Jackson "tenacious," Dan Maloney an "enforcer," and Kurt Walker was as "tough as they come." Two players, Bob Neely and Allan Stanley, were "strapping." Beyond Stanley, other Hall of Famers were "fearless" (Johnny Bower) and "a tenacious checker, a brilliant goal scorer" (Norm Ullman). Dave Keon, one of only three absentees acknowledged during the MLG closing, was remembered as "always relentless, he would never give in."

Both ceremonies reinforced this brand of masculinity by relying on intertextual references. Gruneau and Whitson note that hockey fans are "a market well primed for macho myth-making and the celebration of fighting skills."<sup>83</sup> So it was not surprising that MacLean, in introducing the alumni, felt confident that his references would not be lost on the in-house or television audiences. His praise of Jim Dorey—"he set a penalty minute record, like a good Kingstonian ought to"—was understood by the knowledgeable fan who grasped that "Kingstonian" referred to Don Cherry (who was born in Kingston, Ontario) and that Cherry valorizes this brand of physical masculinity. Similarly, MacLean's praise of Mike Walton, who "once challenged Gordie Howe to a fight," resonated with older fans. As Gruneau and Whitson remind us: "For generations of Canadian boys a slightly meaner version of the same [aggressive masculine] image was represented by skilled but tough hockey players, the archetype of them being Gordie Howe."<sup>84</sup>

Despite Miller's argument that the increasing attention paid to male bodies—both displayed and gazed at—and "the commodification of sports stars across the 1990s" challenges the dominance of hegemonic masculinity, the MLG ceremony affirmed hetero-normative ideals of sexuality, while at the same time leaving little space for alternative masculinities.<sup>85</sup> MacLean introduced 1960s star Dick Duff as a "heart-throb" during his playing days, one assumes not necessarily for Toronto's vibrant gay community. And, as the evening concluded with Anne Murray's unfortunate rendition of "The Maple Leaf Forever," the camera captured a teary-eyed Tiger Williams. The discourse of tradition ensures that the classic hockey tough-guy can be seen crying without threatening the presumed boundaries of hockey masculinity. This scene should not be read as anti-masculine, but as Williams' solemn recognition of tradition and a demonstrable affirmation of the "correct" way to show respect on the occasion of MLG's closing, the proper time to "soften" masculinity. What is less clear, however, is the audience response to the use of a figure

skater, Browning, during the ACC opening ceremony for, as Adams has noted, the masculinity associated with figure skating is significantly more marginalized than the hyper-masculinity of hockey.<sup>86</sup>

### *Organized Forgetting*

It is well understood that sport media productions involve the selection of material and images as well as choices regarding narrative and storyline.<sup>87</sup> But, as Sabo and Jansen argue, "*What is not said* in sports media reveals as much or more about how hegemonic processes work within the U.S. sports industry *as what is said*."<sup>88</sup> So, on these two evenings in February 1999, the things left unsaid, the history ignored, and the memories not honoured were as revealing as the explicitly celebrated memories and dreams. A two-and-a-half minute video history shown early in the MLG ceremony remembered the Gardens as host to performers such as Elvis Presley, Frank Sinatra, and The Beatles, wrestlers like Whipper Billy Watson, skating shows, circuses, and the 1966 Muhammad Ali–George Chuvalo heavyweight boxing match. This, however, was the only time MLG's role as more than a hockey arena was featured during the evening. No mention was made, for example, of Winston Churchill's address in 1932 or the 1934 rally for Tim Buck, the leader of the Communist Party of Canada recently released from jail, which attracted one of the largest crowds in MLG history.<sup>89</sup> This evening was about hockey, and MLG was to be commemorated almost exclusively as the home to a hockey team and its fans.

But, not everyone within this hockey community was celebrated and remembered equally. Both Anderson and Hobsbawm argue that community and tradition transcend individuals in attempts to become "immortal." Anderson notes that the nation is "much concerned with death and immortality."<sup>90</sup> Similarly, the idea of team goes beyond the players so as to render the team "immortal." Regardless of who plays for the Maple Leafs, their imagined community, housed for 67 years at MLG, survives. MLG, its social order, and economic relations were bigger than the individual players. The players might change, but fans could be sure that the Maple Leafs and their home endured.

The notion that the MLG community transcends its members—allowing the nation to remain, in Hobsbawm's words "eternal and unchanging"—played itself out during the MLG closing ceremony.<sup>91</sup> This was a ceremony that celebrated healthy, alive, present bodies, choosing largely to ignore the deceased or absent. Important former Maple Leafs who were no longer living (e.g., Syl Apps, 1951 Stanley Cup hero Bill Barillko, or the "Kid Line" of Primeau, Conacher, and Jackson) were briefly remembered in video clips, but they were never acknowledged during the live

portions of the ceremony. In noting that recent Maple Leafs' coaches and general managers, as well as former owner Harold Ballard, went unmentioned, the *Globe and Mail* concluded that "[n]ot nearly enough mention was made of departed immortals, such as Charlie Conacher, and Turk Broda and Syl Apps."<sup>92</sup> Hall of Famers were honoured, but only those still alive and present. During this segment, the considerable number of absent or deceased former Maple Leafs who have been inducted into the Hockey Hall of Fame went unrecognized.<sup>93</sup> Banners representing honoured players, many of whom are dead, were raised at ACC, but no mention was ever made of these men, their achievements, or their contributions to the community.

Attempts were also made to re-animate the living alumni present at the MLG closing ceremony who no longer conformed to the masculine ideals privileged by the community. Similarly, using the case of one-time heavyweight boxing champion Muhammad Ali, Whannel argues that public figures can be "reinscribed" by the media, allowing for a potential reinterpretation of their popular image. In the case of Ali, this reinscription, which Whannel attributes in part to the ways that Parkinson's disease "has slowed and limited Ali's own speech," has allowed Ali to be depoliticized and "has achieved what the white establishment could not do—it has silenced him."<sup>94</sup> Although the context was different, the presentation of Maple Leafs stars from the past at the MLG closing can also be read as a reinscription. For many viewers this was the first time they would have seen (or perhaps even heard of) the older Leaf alumni. MacLean's introduction of these men, who were clearly aging and infirm, emphasized the physical, healthy, masculine attributes of the stereotypical hockey player. He in essence reinscribed the visual image with a preferred memory: Gus Mortson was "a hard rock" and as for Bill Juzda, "if you went into the corner with this man, it was worth your life." Similarly, men whose qualities as players favoured skill over physicality were remembered for these attributes, even though they were no longer apparent. Danny Lewicki was a "speedster," Gaye Stewart "led the NHL in goals in 1946," Hank Goldup "once scored four in a game," and Pete Langelles once had "three assists in one period." The use of apparently unimpeachable statistics demonstrated the worth of these men and justified their inclusion in this community celebration despite appearances. They deserved to be at the closing of the Gardens.

Despite Miller's assertion that hegemonic masculinity is increasingly becoming "destabilized," these ceremonies consistently reaffirmed dominant notions of gender roles.<sup>95</sup> On one hand, there was little acknowledgment of or space for alternative masculinities. On the other, the roles reserved for women within commercial sport spaces, especially those valorized by the media, buttress the feminine position within the hege-

monic gender order. At the MLG closing ceremony, women were featured most prominently as staff in food service and ushering roles. Even the older Leaf alumni who needed assistance walking out on to the ice were assisted by female “usherettes” in skirts. The corollary to the masculine discourse that was a subtext throughout the ceremonies was the absence of any true sense of inclusion, revealed in the awkward ways in which the ceremonies’ organizers made attempts at gender inclusion.

As has been noted, the “dreams” theme of these ceremonies was articulated most frequently through the participation of children and youth. At the MLG ceremony adolescents, both male and female, paraded Stanley Cup banners. While at ACC, the “Memories and Dreams” banners were raised by two children: Lianne Murphy and Daniel Clark. They entered the ceremony to the introduction: “two young hockey players representing young hockey players everywhere who will one day create the memories and dreams of the Air Canada Centre for us all.” But will Lianne really have the same opportunity to create memories and dreams at ACC as Daniel? This narrative suggests somehow that the NHL, professional hockey, and ACC are open to gender equity. But as Adams argues, “national sports” such as hockey in Canada—and by extension the celebration of these sports—“afford men—in general, and certain men in particular—an opportunity to represent the nation in a way not open to women.”<sup>96</sup> Indeed, women have been playing ice hockey in Canada since at least the 1890s. In the intervening century, women’s and girls’ hockey organizers have suffered from the stigma of moral physiologists questioning the appropriateness of their participation in hockey, battled a shortage of facilities and resources compared to men’s and boys’ hockey, and received little coverage in a sport media that is fully implicated in the promotion of a masculinist vision of sport.<sup>97</sup> As a result, it stretches believability to imagine that the dreams of competitive female hockey players will be realized anytime soon at gendered spaces such as ACC, at least in comparison to the opportunities afforded their male counterparts.

Adams argues that hockey’s place in Canadian popular culture has not only privileged masculine sport but has also reinforced a white vision of Canada, and there was no acknowledgement of an ethnic or racial imbalance in these two ceremonies. As Pitter articulates, “visible minorities have faced sharp challenges in hockey, challenges that I believe are related to the difficulties that blacks and Aborigines face in being fully accepted as Canadians.”<sup>98</sup> While hockey has celebrated the immigrant experience of white, non-Anglo Canadians, including many of the former Maple Leafs introduced during the MLG closing, such as Frank Mahovlich, “hockey does not seem to have bridged the gap between whites and non-whites in Canada in the same way that it has done for whites of many different backgrounds.”<sup>99</sup> Virtually all of the participants



in the two ceremonies were white, celebrating an imagined community in a city where 36.8% of the population of greater Toronto self-identifies as a visible minority.<sup>100</sup> Unlike the gender disparity, there were no attempts to address this imbalance. The children who paraded the banners at MLG may have been both male and female, but they were all white. And, while the ethnic identity of the kids who participated in the skating routine with Browning at ACC was obscured both by their hockey helmets and the poor production of the telecast, Lianne Murphy and Daniel Clark—the featured “young hockey players representing young hockey players everywhere”—skated to centre ice wearing hockey jerseys but no helmets, making their gender and racial (Caucasian) identities clear. Such images normalize whiteness, as Giroux argues, legitimating the hegemony not only of a particular gender order but also a particular ethnic and racial order.<sup>101</sup> This was highlighted by a video montage honouring MLG staff that visually portrayed men and women of a variety of ethnic backgrounds, but no minorities were included in speaking roles, even while their location in a food service underclass was being reinforced. For the celebration of a hockey arena opened in 1931, it was a community most representative of pre-WW II, white, anglophone Toronto that showed up to the party, one that failed to acknowledge “the significance of racialized identities to the very idea of being Canadian.”<sup>102</sup>

Finally, perhaps the most distressing yet unsurprising omission from the MLG closing ceremonies was the failure to acknowledge the young boys and men who suffered sexual abuse at the hands of a number of the building's employees throughout the 1970s and 1980s.<sup>103</sup> These horrors became public in 1997 when one of the victims, Martin Kruze, stepped forward. His subsequent suicide—three days after MLG employee Gordon Stuckless was sentenced to only two years less a day for his part in the abuses committed on 24 boys—made Kruze the public face of a scandal that revealed “Gardens employees were regularly violating young boys in return for tickets to hockey games.”<sup>104</sup> While “celebrating” such horrors might seem inappropriate to some, in the wake of MLG management's initial attempts “to discredit the victims and cover up the sex scandal,” *Globe and Mail* columnist Brunt asked: “Is there any way to get past the horrors that were being perpetrated behind closed doors, when the Gardens/Leafs allure was used to facilitate the sexual exploitation of children?”<sup>105</sup> Similarly, John Barber wrote, in anticipation of the MLG closing: “The paint in the public areas is still fresh—always has been. But there is now something sinister, the legacy of the abuse, that it can never cover up.”<sup>106</sup> As a result, the absence of any attempts to acknowledge the abuses perpetrated by MLG personnel or to honour Kruze or other victims haunted MacLean's introduction of the segment of the MLG ceremony that focused on the arena's staff: “Well, you can't go through sixty-eight years with the fans and the players

alone. A lot of people have helped to develop dreams and memories experienced here, and we want to take some moments out to thank those people behind the scenes." Even though three men were convicted in connection with the MLG sex scandal, the exploitation of vulnerable young men and women in hockey, "behind the scenes," is more common than publicly acknowledged and, Laura Robinson argues, is a by-product of the game's hyper-masculine culture.<sup>107</sup>

### **(Dis)Continuities: Preserving tradition, privileging modernity**

The celebration of selected memories at MLG not only commemorated the old building, it also invested the new one with similar values. It was possible to transfer a constructed notion of tradition from MLG to ACC because there were, in fact, no fixed measures of this tradition. This ambiguity was captured during these ceremonies, by the words "Memories and Dreams," which pervaded both the visual and oral narrative. They manifested themselves physically on the flag that was paraded into MLG, metaphorically and literally passed from one generation to the next, physically transported to ACC, and then ceremonially raised to the rafters of the new arena.

The transfer of tradition began at the MLG ceremony. The inclusion of the Memories and Dreams flag in the parade of Stanley Cup banners marked this brand-new, hitherto unseen, flag as part of a tradition of historical depth and successful achievement. The significance of this flag was confirmed by its participation in the evening's last ceremonial moment. Red Horner, the last living member of the first team to play in MLG, passed the flag to current Leafs' captain Mats Sundin with the words: "Mats, take this flag to our new home but always remember us." The physical transfer of the Maple Leafs from MLG to ACC was invested with emotional significance; the past gave its blessing to the present.

The transfer took on physical form the day before the first game at the ACC, Friday, 19 February 1999, with a parade from MLG to ACC. The parade was led by the Memories and Dreams flag and the 48<sup>th</sup> Highlanders (the pipe band that has played at every Maple Leafs' season opener, beginning with the first game at MLG in November 1931). Adolescents again paraded the Stanley Cup banners. Even the ice-resurfacing Zambonis took part. (The interesting addition to the parade was a group of striking CBC technicians, protesting the network's plans to broadcast the next evening's game whether or not a settlement had been reached.) The media varied in its estimates of how many Torontonians watched the parade in person: from 10,000 (*National Post*), to 20,000 (*Toronto Star*), to between 50,000 and 60,000 (*Toronto Sun*).<sup>108</sup> Regardless, people turned out to get an up-close glimpse at their heroes,

past and present. They were not disappointed. Cars paraded down Toronto's main thoroughfare, Yonge Street, each carrying a member of the current team and one or two alumni. The message from the team was clear: we're literally bringing the past, our tradition, with us to our new home.

The next night, at the ACC inauguration, the transfer of tradition was completed. The Memories and Dreams flag took its place among the other banners—each of which signified a more tangible accomplishment—in the rafters. PA announcer Morris marked the occasion:

One week ago tonight, the Toronto Maple Leafs marked the passing of an era when Red Horner presented his Memories and Dreams flags [sic] to Mats Sundin ... Tonight, Red's flag commemorating the memories and dreams of sixty-eight years at Maple Leaf Gardens will be raised alongside a new flag commemorating the beginning of a new era of memories and dreams starting tonight at the Leafs' new home, Air Canada Centre.

This second flag, dedicated to ACC, was also raised. It read: "New Memories, New Dreams."

These ceremonies attempt to convey messages of safety and certainty within the discourse of tradition. In Hobsbawm's words, they "attempt to structure at least some parts of social life ... as unchanging and invariant."<sup>109</sup> In reassuring the faithful among the community that tradition will be transferred and enhanced by the move to the new arena, there is no mention of the rationale for building the ACC. This reality though was not lost on media commentators. The *National Post* highlighted "the NHL's changing demographics ... Which, after all, is the reason the Leafs are moving to more up scale digs." For the *Toronto Sun*: "Clearly, the move from the Gardens is as much about economics as it is comfort." Not surprisingly, the *Montreal Gazette* noted, at ACC "the cash cow—the private box—is well represented." But, in winning consent for the move, its most compelling rationale never entered into the ceremonies that set it in motion.<sup>110</sup>

The irony of this conscious omission is that history and memory are marshalled here to support one overarching objective: progress. These ceremonies were more about the disposability of tradition than the privileging of it, in an attempt to maximize the profitability of the franchise's brand. The popularity of "retro" jerseys and other historical sports consumables is a broader example of the financial attractiveness of re-marketing tradition.<sup>111</sup> MLSE took advantage of this trend when a highly

publicized auction attracted fans and collectors who stripped MLG bare, urinals and all.<sup>112</sup>

The flip side of selling tradition is marketing progress. This theme was in evidence at the ACC opening, which began with a time-lapse video sequence showing the new building's construction. As the ceremony wound down and the commemorative banners were unfurled, it became clear that the parade down Yonge Street had moved through both space and time. The banners that in-house fans and the TV audience saw raised were nothing like those that had been lowered at MLG. This state-of-the-art entertainment facility would see its primary tenant's championship victories and memorable players honoured with brand-new, modern artifacts of the team's past.

By the time that Maple Leafs' winger Steve Thomas had scored the overtime, game-winning goal to send ACC's sellout crowd home happy on the night of the arena's inauguration, the transfer of tradition had been completed. The Maple Leafs had been installed at ACC. The move had been so well received that the *Toronto Star*, noting the number of subscribed seats and luxury boxes sold in advance of the building's opening, observed: "Folks seem to want to cry over the end of the Gardens, but no one wants to stay, either."<sup>113</sup> While Leafs Nation had vacated MLG, they had made sure to leave behind nothing they valued.

## Conclusion

As the telecasts of the two commemorative celebrations make clear, the Maple Leafs' community brought to ACC the dominant memories, ideologies, and representations that had made the hockey franchise and the arena financially successful since the 1930s. The telecasts of ceremonies such as these reflect the ways in which, in the words of McDonald and Birrell, "particular groups have access to the important cultural signifying systems (like the media) to proclaim a particular world view."<sup>114</sup> Despite the absence of details concerning production decisions or audience reception, a critical reading of these media texts sheds light on this world view and adds value to analyses such as Hannigan's and Belanger's, who situate the building of modern new arenas within the growing importance placed upon tourist and entertainment economies in the modern city. The transition to these new complexes is accomplished by invoking a discourse of tradition that makes history portable and nostalgia marketable. In Toronto, Leafs Nation—a community of fans/consumers—is a visible example of portable nostalgia.

On one hand, the elements added by these ceremonies transform mid-season games into memorable spectacles; while on the other, these broad-

casts reveal the accumulation of language, symbols, and messages—the discourse of tradition—that marks these ceremonies as extra-ordinary. The MLG–ACC ceremonies did not just close one arena and open another, they also produced a preferred narrative—one “history” of MLG—that reflected a particular world view and its inherent power relations. These preferred memories reinforced membership in the community that surrounded MLG, reassuring all members about the move to ACC. At the same time, these telecasts can be read as affirming the hyper-masculine values of hockey’s dominant gender and racial order while omitting historical details that diverged from the preferred narrative and silencing voices that might recount alternative memories.

## Endnotes

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2. Stavro, now deceased, was bought out in February 2003. MLSE is currently owned by the Ontario Teachers’ Pension Plan (58%), Bell Globemedia (15%), TD Capital Group (14%), and Kilmer Sports (13%). Larry Tanenbaum, the head of Kilmer Sports’ parent company, Kilmer Van Nostrand, is the managing partner of MLSE.
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4. John Hannigan, *Fantasy City: Pleasure and Profit in the Postmodern Metropolis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), p. 2.
5. John Hannigan, “From Maple Leaf Gardens to the Air Canada Centre: The Downtown Entertainment Economy in ‘World Class’ Toronto,” in Richard Gruneau and David Whitson (eds.), *Artificial Ice: Hockey, Culture, and Commerce* (Peterborough: Broadview Press/Garamond Press, 2006), p. 201.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 205.
7. Hannigan makes only passing reference to these ceremonies, in the opening paragraph of his chapter.
8. Michael Silk, “Together we’re one? The “place” of the nation in media representations of the 1998 Kuala Lumpur Commonwealth Games,” *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 18, 2001, p. 278.
9. Katharyne Mitchell, “Monuments, Memorials, and the Politics of Memory,” *Urban Geography*, 24 (5), 2003, p. 442.
10. Hannigan, “From Maple Leaf Gardens to the Air Canada Centre,” pp. 201–202; see also Peter Cook, “Rome of the Carolinas,” pp. 10–23, in Rod Sheard (ed.), *The Stadium: Architecture for the New Global Culture* (Sydney, Aus.: Periplus, 2005).
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15. Stuart Hall, "The Work of Representation," in Stuart Hall (ed.), *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage/The Open University, 1997), p. 24, emphasis original.
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18. Garry Whannel, *Media Sport Stars: Masculinities and Moralities* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 64.
19. Donald Sabo and Sue Curry Jansen, "Images of Men in Sport Media: The Social Reproduction of Gender Order," in Steve Craig (ed.), *Men, Masculinity and the Media* (Newbury Park: Sage, 1992), p. 170.
20. Whannel, *Media Sport Stars*, p. 64; See also Toby Miller, *Sportsex* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), p. 49.
21. Whannel, *Media Sport Stars*, p. 163.
22. See Sut Jhally, "Cultural studies and the sports/media complex," in Lawrence A. Wenner (ed.), *Media, Sports & Society* (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1989), pp. 70–93; and Margaret MacNeill, "Networks: Producing Olympic ice hockey for a national television audience," *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 13, 1996, pp. 103–124.
23. Garry Whannel, "Fields in vision: Sport and representation," *Screen*, 25 (3), 1984, p. 104.
24. Gillian Rose, p. 20.
25. Richard Gruneau, "Making spectacle: A case study in television sports production," in Wenner (ed.), *Media, Sports & Society*, p. 152.
26. Bélanger, p. 76.
27. Gruneau, Whitson, and Cantelon, p. 270.
28. Silk, p. 285, emphasis original.
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30. Bélanger, p. 85. Bélanger attributes "organized forgetting" to P. Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).
31. Mary G. McDonald and Susan Birrell, "Reading Sport Critically: A Methodology for Interrogating Power," *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 16 (4), 1999, p. 295.
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33. Whannel, "Fields in vision," p. 101.
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36. *Ibid.*, p. 292.
37. *Ibid.*
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39. See Gruneau, “Making spectacle,” and MacNeill, “Networks.”
40. Gillian Rose, p. 12.
41. The position of the researcher—in this case, white, heterosexual, male, and middle class—should also not be ignored.
42. Ava Rose and James Friedman, “Television sport as mas(s)culine cult of distraction,” *Screen*, 35 (1), 1994, p. 25; Sandra Langley, “Gender, Talk, TV, Hockey, and ‘Canadian Identity’: Feminist Takes on ‘Television Rejection’,” *Canadian Journal of Communication*, 28, 2003, 413–432.
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45. *Ibid.*, p. 284.
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63. Cited in Bale, p. 131.
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91. Hobsbawm, p. 10.
92. Brunt, "Despite the memories."
93. Uncovering the reason(s) behind this is an instance where details of production decisions would enhance the analysis.
94. Whannel, *Media Sport Stars*, p. 125.
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