Historical Underdosing: Pop Demography and the Crisis in Canadian History[1]

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Historical Underdosing: To live in a period of time when nothing seems to happen. Major symptoms include addiction to newspapers, magazines, and TV news broadcasts.[2]

Who can doubt that Canadian history is in some kind of crisis? J.L. Granatstein sounded the alarm in *Who Killed Canadian History?*, a scathing exposé of the educational bureaucrats, university administrators, scholars, journalists, and politicians thought to have conspired 'to eliminate Canada's past'; and, judging from the public response to his call to arms, in which he has been joined by other self-styled 'national' historians, including David Bercuson, Robert Bothwell, and Desmond Morton, the crisis is real.[3] Organizations recently launched in the cause of 'promoting greater interest in Canadian history' include Canada's National Historical Society (founded in 1993), the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada (founded in 1994), the Dominion Institute (founded in 1997), and the Citizenship Education Resource Network (founded in 1998). In 1997 and again in 1998 Canadians' 'shocking' lack of historical knowledge formed the backdrop for the House of Commons debate over Bill C-279 – 'an act to promote the observance of two minutes of silence on Remembrance Day.'[4] Even Prime Minister Jean

1 This paper was presented as 'Generation Wars: Demography, History and Popular Memory' at the Tri-University History Conference held at Sir Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, on 6 November 1999.

2 Douglas Coupland, *Generation X: Tales for an Accelerated Culture* (New York: St Martin's 1991), 7

3 J.L. Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?* (Toronto: HarperCollins 1998), 3. See David Jay Bercuson, Robert Bothwell, and J.L. Granatstein, *The Great Brain Robbery: Canada's Universities on the Road to Ruin* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 1984); David Jay Bercuson, Robert Bothwell, and J.L. Granatstein, *Petrified Campus: The Crisis in Canada's Universities* (Toronto: Random House 1997); Ken Osborne, 'Review of Granatstein, *Who Killed Canadian History?*' in *Canadian Historical Review* 80, 1 (1999): 114; A.B. McKillop, 'Who Killed Canadian History? A View from the Trenches,' *Canadian Historical Review* 80, 2 (1999): 269–99; and Bryan D. Palmer, 'Of Silences and Trenches: A Dissident View of Granatstein's Meaning,' *Canadian Historical Review* 80, 4 (1999): 676–86.

4 Hansard no. 72, 12 March 1998, posted at <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

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Chrétien has lamented in the House that 'young Canadians [know] too little about each other and what we have done together.'[5] As if to confirm that the struggle for Canadian history had reached truly Granatsteinian proportions, in late January 1999 McGill University hosted 'the largest history conference ever staged in Canada,' in which 800 educators, filmmakers, publishers, and writers met to deliberate the question: 'Why has Canadian history vanished from classrooms in half the provinces of Canada? Is it dead – or merely buried by school boards and education departments frightened by hard choices and new ideas?'[6]

This paper seeks to problematize the crisis in Canadian history by appeal to three related arguments. The first is that history has largely ceased to inform Canadians' lives, not because of the failure of institutions, but because of the cultural transformation of their understanding of the past occasioned by new media and especially by new ideas about how the past is organized. My second claim is that, along with free markets and small government, so-called neo-conservative ideologues in Canada have sought, deliberately if not systematically, to appropriate Canadian history and to deploy it in support of their contemporary political agenda. My third argument is that this neo-conservative recasting of Canadians' sense of their own history has been abetted by a powerful new literature I call *pop demography*, which banishes older notions of the historical past as a coherent, life-informing narrative in favour of a new, market-based interpretation in which the essential component is the generational cohort and the essential historical dynamic is generational competition. Although I am mainly interested in these phenomena as they apply to English Canada, there is evidence to suggest that they extend as well into Quebec; indeed as I shall demonstrate, these trends are part of a discursive revolution that is at least continental in scope and anchored in the far broader *globalization* discourses that are the hallmark of our times.

Granatstein may view the crisis in Canadian history as one of 'political correctness,' multicultural 'airbrushing,' and bureaucratic bungling, but in my view these phenomena – if they exist at all – are symptoms of a far deeper, essentially cultural, dislocation: history has become largely irrelevant to the lives of ordinary Canadians. If, as Granatstein and others have claimed, history has declined as a core subject area in

5 Ibid., no. 3, 24 September 1997, posted at <http://www.parl.gc.ca>

6 McGill University, *Giving the Past a Future: Conference on the Teaching and Learning of Canadian History* (Jan. 1999). Conference proceedings have been posted in full at <http://www.historymatters.com>.

Canadian high schools, for example, surely this neglect is merely a reflection of the current reality – that one can get along very nicely in contemporary Canadian society without knowing history and without feeling as though one's lack of knowledge is a hindrance. Did not both Prime Minister Jean Chrétien and Premier Lucien Bouchard confirm in October 1999 that one could quite easily rise to the highest political offices in the land without knowing so much as the date of Confederation?[7] Can students, or even their teachers, be expected to rise to a higher standard? I take the view that if Canadians actually still lived within a historical paradigm – that is, if history provided the social, cultural, economic, and political architecture within which they contextualized their lived experience – then surely high school history would be the robust and exciting program that Granatstein imagines it ought to be. One may agree entirely, as I do, with Granatstein's contention that 'history is important ... because it is the way a nation, a people, and an individual learn who they are.' But 'who we are' and how 'we' understand ourselves as social and political actors is determined not merely by teachers, textbooks, and bureaucrats but by far more pervasive (and powerful) discourses about the way the world is organized and how 'we' fit into it. *Relevance* is socially constructed; it precedes *interest*, not vice versa.

It is worth recalling that much of Granatstein's critique of the state of Canadian history had been put forward by historian Michael Bliss in his controversial 1991 Creighton Centennial Lecture. Reviewing the entire panorama of postwar English-Canadian historiography, Bliss argued that, by the 1970s, the project of writing 'national' history had passed from professional historians to a group of 'Via Rail nationalists' who 'identified Canada and things Canadian with ... the age of big government, universal social welfare programs, and subsidized culture.' This new nationalist interpretation of Canada, he suggested, one that had become identified politically with the policies of the Trudeau Liberals, had by the 1980s become 'increasingly unpopular in the minds of a restless electorate, a restless business community, and restless provinces,' yet there were no new 'national symbols or national-isms' in the Mulroney era to take their place. Bliss concluded bluntly that the 'torch had passed from Creighton to the Grants, Bertons, Atwoods, and Gordons, and in their hands it had gone out.'[8]

7 At an international conference on federalism held in Quebec in October 1999, Chrétien pegged the date of Confederation at 1864, and Bouchard, at 1868.

8 Michael Bliss, 'Privatizing the Mind: The Sundering of Canadian History, The Sundering of Canada,' *Journal of Canadian Studies* 26 (1991–2): 5–17. See also

Bliss's indictment not only of recent historiography but of 'progressive' education came at a time when right-wing demands for sweeping social reforms in Canada were gaining momentum. By the mid-1990s, for example, the Reform-allied *Alberta Report* had put the decline of Canadian history at the centre of a campaign to do away with what it called 'political correctness.' Editor Ted Byfield wrote in 1995 that Canadian and American books on the Second World War in particular had become 'a mere propaganda exercise in currently fashionable causes,' including women in the workforce, the interment of the Japanese, the Holocaust, the American decision to use the bomb, and the Allied bombing of Dresden. Concluded Byfield: 'Of the immense sacrifices of white American males, who did nearly all the fighting and dying, there was simply nothing at all.'[9] When *Who Killed Canadian History?* was published, complete with a chapter on Canadians' apparent indifference towards the Second World War, Byfield cited it as clear evidence of his own genius. Granatstein had affirmed that Canada was mired in an official misinformation conspiracy on an Orwellian scale: 'A servile state school system brainwashes the populace, and a slave media, assiduously parroting the party line, pounces on all non-conformity.'[10]

The definitive linking of this historiographical counterrevolution and what was, by the mid-1990s, openly being called a 'neo-conservative' political agenda came in David Frum's *What's Right: The New Conservatism and What It Means for Canada*. Like Bliss and Byfield, Frum struck at the very heart of what he called the 'liberal' nationalist mythology, accusing its leading proponents of an absurd, self-serving historical revisionism, one that systematically recast an essentially conservative Canadian history and culture in the image of 1960s countercultural idealism and 1970s welfare-statism:

> Is it not bizarre to convene symposia on the national identity while systematically wiping away all traces of the past from the nation's currency, its post office boxes, even its flagpoles? Our liberal nationalists celebrated a Canada

Gregory S. Kealey, 'Class in English-Canadian Historical Writing: Neither Privatizing, Nor Sundering,' *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, 2 (1992): 123–9; and Linda Kealey, Ruth Pierson, Joan Sangster, and Veronica Strong-Boag, 'Teaching Canadian History in the 1990s: Whose "National" History Are We Lamenting,' *Journal of Canadian Studies* 27, 2 (1992): 129–31.

9 Ted Byfield, 'How Come We're Paying People to Inflict Social Amnesia on Us?' *Alberta Report/Western Report*, 12 June 1995, 52. See also Virginia Byfield, 'History, Beaten to Death by a Gang,' *Alberta Report/Western Report*, 4 May 1998.

10 Ted Byfield, 'We Don't Teach Canadian History because It's Incompatible with Canadian Culture,' *Alberta Report/Western Report*, 4 May 1998, 52

that never existed. The Canada that sang 'The Maple Leaf Forever,' that hanged Louis Riel, that listened to black-clad priests denounce the theory of evolution, that erected statues to Queen Victoria, that volunteered for the trenches, that shunned the New Deal reforms of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, that made a hero out of Soviet defector Igor Gouzenko – *that* Canada, historical Canada, was erased from our textbooks, its monuments destroyed, its achievements disparaged. Instead of taking pride in the construction of a vast, rich, and free nation, we are instead – as Margaret Atwood argued in a hugely influential 1972 book – humbly to think of ourselves as 'survivors.'

For Frum, the Canadian question was (and presumably remains) a simple one: 'To be a patriot, do I really have to be such a sucker?' Of course not! 'Like a nervous middle-aged man in a James Thurber story, official Canada has rounded a corner, only to bump into the actual Canada heading in the opposite direction. ... Perhaps the best way to understand the politics of our country today is to think of them not as some radical transformation of Canada, but as a simple rediscovery of a country that was there all along.' The evidence for this 'rediscovery' was everywhere to see in contemporary politics, said Frum – in the passage of free trade, the defeat of the Charlottetown accord, the demise of the Conservatives and their replacement with the Reform Party, and Canadians' overwhelming support for provincial governments promising to balance their budgets.[11]

These (and other) elements of the neo-conservative agenda, so artfully cultivated in commerce, in the mass media, and especially in the corridors of political power in Canada, are arguably part of a far larger and more profound discursive dislocation in contemporary Canadian life. Writing specifically of the demise of the 'left-nationalist project' to which he has dedicated his adult life, Canadian philosopher Ian Angus has recently put the case this way:

> [In Canada] we are pressured by forces of globalization that are primarily driven by corporate economic power. These forces are the basis for the pervasiveness of the language of fate in contemporary life. We are repeatedly told that we must adjust to this or that tendency, that we must scramble in order not to lose out and resign ourselves to fit the imperatives of the new world system. ... Independent decision making within the system shrinks to marginal spaces without resources and isolated, private consumer choices. ... It is

11 David Frum, *What's Right: The New Conservatism and What It Means for Canada* (Toronto: Random House 1996), introduction

not a felicitous era in which to speak of political vision and common goals, even less of a philosophy oriented to the destiny of a people.[12]

Surely history, the very catalogue of Canadians' accumulated 'political vision[s] and common goals,' could not be expected to withstand such a profound and broadly based onslaught.

Bliss was correct to note that the task of interpreting Canada's 'public community' had passed in the Trudeau years from the Creightons to the Atwoods, but his claims of its death in the Mulroney era turned out to be greatly exaggerated. By the 1990s the torch had passed to the nation's neo-conservative think tanks, pundits, and lobbyists (the Fraser Institute and the C.D. Howe Institute, most notably), who claimed, along with Byfield and Frum, to have 'restored' Canadian public life to its founding principles. Acrimonious public policy debates (free trade, deficit reduction, 'workfare') marked the 'common sense' revolution in politics, but it was in the realm of discourse that Canadians were slowly, almost imperceptibly, weaned off their earlier ideas of 'social citizenship.' This discursive revolution – a trend that has preoccupied many Canadian popular writers in the mid-1990s – was no less dramatic for having been so subtle, as Canadians increasingly identified their 'quality of life' not with the common good, but with the performance of their mutual funds, and learned to demonize unions, 'welfare moms,' and 'subsidy-receiving pornographers' even as they lionized bank presidents and cyber-billionaires.[13] Whereas citizenship was once understood largely within social and political discourses, it has been transformed by the discourses of the

12 Ian Angus, *A Border Within: National Identity, Cultural Plurality and Wilderness* (Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press 1997), 5. See also Gary Teeple, *Globalization and the Decline of Social Reform* (Toronto: Garamond Press 1995).

13 See, for example, John Gray, *Lost in North America: The Imaginary Canadian in the American Dream* (Vancouver: Talonbooks 1994); Richard Gwyn, *Nationalism without Walls: The Unbearable Lightness of Being Canadian* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 1995); Peter C. Newman, *The Canadian Revolution: From Deference to Defiance* (Toronto: Stoddart 1996); Tom Henighan, *The Presumption of Culture: Structure, Strategy and Survival in the Canadian Cultural Landscape* (Vancouver: Raincoast 1996); James Laxer, *False God: How the Globalization Myth Has Impoverished Canada* (Toronto: Lester 1993) and *In Search of a New Left: Canadian Politics after the Neoconservative Assault* (Toronto: Viking 1996). James Laxer's most recent book, *The Undeclared War: Class Conflict in the Age of Cyber Capitalism* (Toronto: Viking 1998), is nothing less than a single-minded attempt to reverse this discursive shift. See also Linda McQuaig, *Shooting the Hippo: Death by Deficit and Other Canadian Myths* (Toronto: Penguin 1996), and Maude Barlow and Bruce Campbell, *Straight through the Heart: How the Liberals Abandoned the Just Society and What Canadians Can Do about It* (Toronto: HarperCollins 1996).

free market, and especially by its ideological vanguard, advertising. Once understood as social and political actors with legitimate claims on public life, Canadians have in the last decade been reconstituted as essentially commercial actors – 'viewers' to be targeted, 'consumers' to be courted, rich 'cohorts' promising vast profits to the pollsters and pop demographers who can crack their enigmatic cultural codes. This is especially true of Canadian youth – those singled out by Granatstein and others for their ignorance. To judge from the likes of *Maclean's*, the most authoritative voices of young people today are not social workers or teachers or even parents, but pollsters and 'youth-marketing research companies.'[14] As they themselves well know, young people today are 'sold' virtually everything, from baggy pants and piercings to fashionable opinions and even university degrees; and in the marketplace, if almost nowhere else, they command respect.[15]

I would argue that the irrelevance of history – the condition of collective amnesia in which Canadians (and others) increasingly seem to find themselves – is nothing less than an essential component of this new socioeconomic order, and especially of the popular discourses that sustain it. The evidence for this claim is ubiquitous in contemporary Canadian society and may be briefly summarized. First, to cite what has by now become a millennial cliché, we are said to live in a revolutionary age in which social, political, economic, and technological change orients our thinking towards a 'postmodern' future that will be radically different from anything we have known in the past. The 'master narrative,' we are told, is dead; we have reached (or perhaps achieved) 'the end of history.' Second – and this would seem to apply most readily to the young people whose ignorance Granatstein and others find so insufferable – we are informed that we live in a high-tech 'information age' (or 'knowledge-based economy') in which 'new,' highly technical sorts of information are privileged, not only in the workplace but in the schools and in the seemingly endless leisure pursuits now available to us. Third, we hear often that historical differences are today diminishing, as the world embraces globalization and rushes headlong into a transnational monoculture dominated by free markets, the English language, Big Macs, and the Spice Girls. Where historical differences do remain – or where they are 'worsening' as in the former Soviet Union or Rwanda or the Sudan – they are highly suspect; to paraphrase Mackenzie King, some parts of the world just seem to have *too much history*. Fourth, the cohorts for whom historical discourses may actually be relevant are ageing and, in any case, their experiences, though perhaps quaint, have

14 See 'The Year for Kids,' *Maclean's*, 21 Dec. 1992, 58.
15 See 'The Serene Teens,' *Maclean's*, 15 April 1991, 52.

no real bearing on the globalized, postmodern world described above. Finally, we may add what is perhaps the most compelling case of all, the continuing displacement of reading and writing – the *sine qua non* of serious historical analysis – by televisual, entertainment-oriented mass media driven almost exclusively by advertising profits. This profound cultural shift, heralded so dramatically in the 1980s by the likes of Alan Bloom and Neil Postman, has proceeded apace in the 1990s, to the point where historians now spend a good deal of their classroom time de-programming not only the patriotic nostalgia of the *History Channel* but the pseudo-historical fictions of Hollywood.[16] As one teacher put the case recently, the pedagogical goal when teaching Henry James's *Wings of the Dove* these days is simply to prevent 'an examination of prewar European class structure' from degenerating into 'an acrimonious debate over whether or not the decorseted Helena Bonham Carter was "babe-a-licious"' in the movie version.[17]

At the heart of this discursive revolution, starting in the 1980s, has been pop demography, a relatively new, extraordinarily influential body of writing that was once published under the decidedly unscholarly rubric of 'futurism.'[18] With its origins in the rather fantastic – and also fantastically popular – writings of the likes of Daniel Bell and Alvin Toffler in the 1960s and the 1970s, pop demography is now a vast and varied body of writing that seeks to explain the past, the present, and especially the future with reference to intergenerational dynamics. As Harvard demographer Nathan Keyfitz reminds us, true demography – the academic study of 'population variables' – dates from the eighteenth century and is a bona fide scholarly pursuit, complete with its own journals, associations and, most important, methodological standards.[19] Pop demography, by contrast, is a heterogeneous, highly speculative, and

16 See Alan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1987); Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Disclosure in the Age of Show Business* (New York: Viking 1985) and *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology* (New York: Random House 1992); Herbert I. Schiller, *Culture Inc.: The Corporate Takeover of Public Expression* (New York: Oxford University Press 1989).

17 Henry Fassbender, cited in Gary Trudeau, '*Amistad* Is Important. Discuss.' *Time Canada*, Dec. 1997–Jan. 1998, 116. See also Karen Paul, '*EL* Takes You to the Movies,' *Emergency Librarian* 25, 2 (1997): 116.

18 See Robert Fulford, '1960s Prophet Saw the Internet Vision, but Not Its Scale,' *Globe and Mail*, 29 October, 1999. Canada's best-known 'futurist' text, one that anticipated David K. Foot and pop demography, is perhaps John Kettle, *The Big Generation* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 1980).

19 Nathan Keyfitz, 'Demography,' in Adam Kuper and Jessica Kuper, eds., *The Social Science Encyclopedia*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge 1989), 188–191. In the Canadian context, see Roderic Beaujot, *Population Change in Canada: The Challenge of Policy Adaptation* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 1991).

methodologically undisciplined literature written for a popular readership. It is also, today, a cornerstone of North American publishing.[20] Pop demographers, pollsters, 'cool hunters,' and other 'trend-watchers' now have their own specialized periodical literature (*American Demographics, Futurist*); they enjoy a commanding presence in marketing and sales magazines (*Marketing, Adweek, MediaWeek, Marketing News*), in the business press generally (*Forbes, Money, Report on Business*), and even in general-interest periodicals (*Maclean's, Time, Newsweek*). In Canada, as elsewhere, pollsters, including Angus Reid, Allan Gregg, and Michael Adams, are today celebrities, staples of talk television and radio, and even best-selling authors.[21] Canadian pop demographers and so-called cyber-gurus, most notably David K. Foot and Don Tapscott, have achieved even greater international levels of fame and fortune.

Foot, a University of Toronto economist, has, in fact, been at the cutting edge of pop demography since the 1980s. With first edition sales of 600,000 and a second 'millennial' edition on the way, Foot's *Boom, Bust and Echo: How to Profit from the Coming Demographic Shift* (1996) is the best-selling Canadian non-fiction book in history – emerging, even to the author's surprise, as a pivotal text in the discursive revolution of our times. Never one for understatement, Foot claims in the introduction to this book that demography is 'the most powerful – and most underutilized – tool we have to understand the past and to foretell the future' and that, in fact, it 'can explain about two-thirds of everything.' As the book's subtitle suggests bluntly – and this should come as no surprise from an

20 Books in the genre include, but are no means limited to, the following: Rob Nelson and John Cowan, *Revolution X: A Survival Guide for Our Generation* (New York: Penguin 1994); Jason Cohen and Michael Krugman, *Generation Ecch!* (New York: Simon & Schuster 1994); Karen Ritchie, *Marketing to Generation X* (New York: Lexington 1995); David K. Foot (with Daniel Stoffman), *Boom, Bust and Echo: How to Profit from the Coming Demographic Shift* (Toronto: Macfarlane Walter & Ross 1996); Robin Bernstein and Seth Clark Silberman, *Generation Q: Gays, Lesbians and Bisexuals Born around 1969's Stonewall Riots Tell Their Stories of Growing Up in the Age of Information* (Los Angeles: Alyson 1996); Michael Adams, *Sex in the Snow: Canadian Social Values at the End of the Millennium* (Toronto: Viking/Penguin 1997); Robert Collins, *You Had to Be There: An Intimate Portrait of the Generation That Survived the Depression, Won the War and Re-Invented Canada* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 1997); Danny Seo, *Generation React: Activism for Beginners* (New York: Ballantyne 1997); and Don Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation* (New York: McGraw-Hill 1998).

21 See, for example, Angus Reid, *Shakedown: How the New Economy Is Changing Our Lives* (Toronto: Doubleday 1996); Reginald W. Bibby and Donald C. Posterski, *Teen Trends: A Nation in Motion* (Toronto: Stoddart 1992); Reginald Bibby, *The Bibby Report: Social Trends Canadian Style* (Toronto: Stoddart 1995); and especially Adams, *Sex in the Snow*.

author whose credentials include a Harvard PhD, seats on various corporate boards, and a thriving sideline as a consultant to North American corporations – 'demographics are critically important for business.' Foot boasts that the real 'power' of demography is its ability to plot 'long-term trends' and that the 'further ahead in the future you are looking, the more relevant demographics will be to you.' The therapeutic, self-help quality of pop demography – undoubtedly one of the reasons why Foot's work seems to have resonated with so many ordinary people – is pervasive: 'For your own peace of mind, you need to understand that what you have experienced may relate more to demographics than to any personal failings. The more knowledge you have about those demographic realties, the better prepared you are to cope with them – and perhaps find a way to turn them to your own advantage.' So, too, is its 'obvious' applicability, as Foot puts it, to social phenomena: 'Who is more likely to join a gang that "swarms" people and steals their baseball jackets, a senior citizen or a teenager? Who is more likely to attend a chamber music concert, an eleven-year-old or a fifty-one-year-old?'[22]

Boom, Bust and Echo divides the Canadian population into various cohorts, the labels for which have by now become commonplace. 'Depression kids' have lived 'a life of incredible good fortune,' since they missed the Second World War and never had to worry about finding jobs or being promoted; 'boomers' have dominated the postwar demographic landscape by virtue of their numbers alone; 'Generation X,' a term first coined by novelist Douglas Coupland in 1991, comprises 'late boomers,' those born between 1960 and 1966; the 'echo' generation comprises the children of the boomers, born between 1980 and 1995 ('part of a large cohort and that's always bad news'); and 'millennium kids,' born between 1995 and 2010, are the children of the baby-buster women, part of a small cohort and therefore a privileged one. The essential social dynamic described in *Boom, Bust and Echo* – and by Foot in his innumerable radio and television appearances – is that of generational competition, in which each cohort, by virtue of its demographic profile alone, occupies a distinct social, cultural, and economic space that must be continually staked out and defended in relation to the others. To cite only the most dramatic of these supposed rivalries: 'One of the worst things that Gen-Xers have to cope with is their parents – the Depression generation. These are the 55- to 60-year-olds sitting at the top of the corporate ladder, approaching the end of very successful careers, and unable to fathom why their 30-year-old offspring are living at home. Tension is tremendous in these families. Often the father [sic] is certain

22 Foot, *Boom, Bust and Echo*, 2–7

that his own success is based solely on his own merit, while he sees his sons' [sic] failure as a lack of drive and ambition.'[23]

The current debate about the 'ability' of 'future generations' to cover the costs of the baby-boomers' claims on health care and the Canada Pension Plan is but the most obvious evidence of the impact of the pop demography paradigm on Canadian public policy. In the world according to David K. Foot, generational conflict displaces all other forms of social struggle, pitting fathers against sons, mothers against daughters, middle-aged boomers against both the elderly and the young, even the living against the unborn. In this brave new world, Canadians have vested interests rather than traditions, and far from having anything of value to teach each other, each cohort lives in a world of its own making, deeply suspicious of the others and concerned only to prevail in a world of shrinking resources and growing demand for them. Surely *this* is the death of history.

There are many elements in *Boom, Bust and Echo* worthy of serious critique, but I shall limit myself, for the purpose of a brief illustration, to the book's treatment of education in Canada. Foot characterizes the state of the Canadian educational system, circa 1996, in the language of the marketplace, citing data from the OECD: Canada's 'spending on education, at more than 7 per cent of gross national product, is the highest per capita among the G-7 leading industrialized countries. ... We are spending more on education than other countries and getting less in return. In a world economy in which success is based more on knowledge than on natural resources, Canada's relatively poor performance in education threatens our international competitiveness. *Our social cohesion is also at risk'* (emphasis added). Foot's recommendation for Canada's politicians and educational bureaucrats is, predictably, to improve the 'efficiency' of the schools and thereby to increase their output. He subscribes unequivocally to the notion that the demands of the Canadian economy – and the anticipated needs of the labour force in particular – should drive all educational decision making. Questions of pedagogy and curriculum are secondary, as in, for example, his insistence that colleges and universities be integrated: 'An aging population will create more demand for practical courses, of the kind offered by colleges, than for theoretical courses that are the specialty of the universities.' The laissez-faire assumptions behind Foot's analysis of postsecondary education are blunt: 'Rather than sit back and wait for customers, colleges and universities should build their businesses aggressively.' Universities 'can no longer afford to be ivory towers.' Unhurried intellectual reflection – arguably the hall-

23 Ibid., 16–25

mark of a liberal education – will increasingly be offered only to a constituency that is older, not in need of job training and sufficiently leisured and monied to pursue academic study as a lifestyle choice. Not only will seniors 'pay for the chance to work all day looking for dinosaur bones,' but it is also true that the '60-year-old who has a good time on a dinosaur dig with an expert from the department of archeology or who benefits from a college course on home renovation may be favourably disposed when she makes out her will.'[24] Whatever Foot might like to claim about the applicability of population analysis to education reform – or, for that matter, to any aspect of public policy – in *Boom, Bust and Echo* he deploys pop demography in the service of a revolutionary shift in government priorities, towards the marketplace and away from anything resembling a traditional, liberal arts notion of the public good.[25] For Foot, the dictates of the marketplace and the public good are synonymous.

David K. Foot's role in popularizing the application of ostensibly demographic analysis to Canadian social life can hardly be overestimated. Michael Adams's *Sex in the Snow: Canadian Social Values at the End of the Millennium* is a dramatic example of this trend – and more generally of the tyranny now exerted by pop demography over supposedly serious social commentary in this country. Adams is a veteran pollster at Environics and, like Foot, a recognizable television personality. *Sex in the Snow* is centred on the claim, interestingly, that 'more and more Canadians refuse to be constrained by the specifics of their demographics; instead they are determined to be the authors of their own identities and destinies.' Adams elaborates this thesis along what might be called extreme liberal technological lines, arguing that 'the media-rich environment in which we live is making it easier for people to construct for themselves sets of values that are not limited by personal demographic characteristics.' Canadians are free not only to 'invent' themselves but, as he puts it, to 'reinvent' themselves: 'New interactive information technology allows Canadians to explore and express different facets of their own personalities, unburdened by such demographic characteristics as sex, race, or religion. It allows for the personality equivalent of digital compression.' For Adams, since the biological, historical, and especially

24 Ibid., chap. 8 'Rethinking Education'

25 Ontario premier Mike Harris, for one, would seem to agree with Foot's estimation of the province's educational priorities. Speaking in February 2000 to an audience of high-tech workers, Harris quipped: 'Some of the traditional academics say, "Well, Harris doesn't understand university. It's for higher learning. Unless you study Greek and Latin and all these things, you'll never be a real true thinker."' See 'Harris Hits Back at His Critics in Academia,' *National Post*, 11 Feb. 2000.

material conditions of Canadians' lives (class, gender, ethnicity, religion) are not particularly important in the new age of Net-based technologies, they are simply no longer consequential to Canadians' lived experience. Cyberspace, he enthuses, is creating a global culture in which the realities of people's lives (conceived as limits to individual choice) matter much less than the fiction they can imaginatively ascribe to themselves.[26]

Like *Boom, Bust and Echo, Sex in the Snow* breaks contemporary Canadian society into labelled cohorts, which Adams calls 'values tribes.' The methodology ostensibly used, first to demonstrate that Canadians have fragmented into tribes, and, second, to describe the values content of those tribes, Adams calls 'cluster analysis' or 'sophisticated multivariate computer analysis.' (Such jargon itself enhances the mystique of pop demographics). Of Adams's twelve tribes, three are composed of Canadians fifty years of age or older, four of baby boomers, and five of 'post-boomers.' Of the latter, the most socially and culturally significant is the group the author labels 'Aimless Dependents,' the largest of the five youth tribes, comprising 1.9 million Canadians (fully 8 per cent of the total population) in 1995. The content and especially the tone of Adams's treatment of this group – which is often flippant, occasionally grave, and always condescending – hinges on his observation that its members tend to 'approach life in a somewhat unemotional way, scoring low on values measuring an adventurous, open attitude towards life.' The most significant attribute of this tribe is its anxiety and rage – symptoms, says Adams, of 'a very weak sense of being in control of their lives.' Although he does nothing whatsoever to contextualize the socioeconomic plight of these young Canadians, he observes that 'their anxiety is expressed through an obsession with job security' and concludes that 'they have found *nothing satisfactory to replace tradition* and as a result are "slackers without a cause"' (emphasis added). They are, says Adams, 'people who have allowed their fears – and sometimes their laziness or inertia – to shut them off from much of what the world has to offer in terms of social, spiritual and material pleasures. ... Aimless Dependents are poor navigators in the consumer marketplace and in life in general.'[27] Thus does he dispose of the 1.9 million Canadian young people whose life circumstances – family life, social class, ethnicity, education, language skills, cultural capital – have relegated them to the margins of society.[28]

26 Adams, *Sex in the Snow*, 32–9, 126–39

27 Ibid., 105–8

28 For evidence of the bona fide socioeconomic plight of young Canadians in the 1990s, see Marlene Webber, *Street Kids: The Tragedy of Canada's Runaways* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1991); Paul Anisef and Paul Axelrod, eds., *Transitions:*

Robert Collins's *You Had to Be There: An Intimate Portrait of the Generation That Survived the Depression, Won the War and Re-Invented Canada* is another significant text in the pop demography *œuvre*. The book is the outgrowth of a 1995 commemorative article on the Second World War commissioned by *Maclean's*, in which the author interviewed 181 men and women who shared with him 'their memories and opinions.' Instead of 'sharing' their experiences in any informative, historical sense, however, Collins' interviewees are deployed in a relentless defence of the proposition that 'the views and perhaps the values of my generation are seriously out of synch with those of most younger Canadians today.' Says Collins of his cohort, 'We like music with lyrics we can understand. ... We wonder how girls with rings in their lips and studs in their tongues can eat without slobbering. We don't understand how guys can blow their noses with rings in them. We wonder why pre-teens' hands never extend from the sleeves of their jackets.' Privileging technology and superficial stylistic fads over the crucial political, social, and economic interests that Canadians most certainly do have in common, he concludes, 'we differ vastly from our children and grandchildren.' (That Collins does not emphasize the extraordinary similarity of the economic plight of Depression-era youth and the downward mobility of youth today seems to me particularly unfortunate.) If Collins does actually speak for an entire cohort, which is his explicit claim, it is one that now believes itself to be under siege. In response to 'the occasional querulous twenty-something' who has 'cited our free postwar education as yet another example of our alleged joy ride through life,' Collins retorts defiantly, 'this is absurd. ... We earned it!'[29]

To the extent that *You Had to Be There* provides any historical analysis of the formative experiences of 'Generation M[ature],' class, gender, ethnic, regional, and ideological differences are collapsed in favour of a consensus approach centred, predictably, on its members' common age. There is, for example, no analysis of the Canadian economy in the 1930s. The only claim the book makes in this respect – although it is muted by Collins's somewhat nostalgic description of respectable men who were merely 'down on their luck' – is that Canadians were stigmatized for taking relief. There is no analysis of the politicization of the young men

Schooling and Employment in Canada (Toronto: Thompson 1993); John F. Conway, *The Canadian Family in Crisis* (Toronto: Lorimer 1993); Anthony N. Doob et al., *Youth Crime and the Youth Justice System in Canada: A Research Perspective* (Toronto: University of Toronto Centre of Criminology 1995); and Burt Gallaway and Joe Hudson, eds., *Youth in Transition: Perspectives on Research and Policy* (Toronto: Thompson 1996).

29 Collins, *You Had to Be There*, ix–5, 105

in the relief camps, nor the efforts of Canadians on the political left to confront what they saw as the crisis of capitalism. The CCF is mentioned, but only in the context of its attempt to aid Depression-era farmers doubly hurt by drought and the collapse of grain prices; the radical left is not mentioned at all. Far from seeing common themes in Canadians' episodic struggles in hard times, Collins criticizes baby boomers and their children for their abuses of the welfare system his generation built from scratch (even as he claims that 'the Depression left us with an abiding sympathy for people in need'). He might, one presumes, have indulged what has become a popular distinction between the 'deserving poor' of the Depression era and the alleged 'welfare fraud' perpetrators of our own time, but he does not.

Collins's concluding chapter, 'The Way We Are,' evinces most strikingly the defensive and sometimes apologetic tone that pervades the book, starting with the extremely important observation that contemporary Canada is characterized by 'ageism.'[30] Collins states bluntly that younger Canadians now openly 'vent their wrath' on seniors, often stereotyping them as casino addicts and opportunists who expect younger tax-payers to subsidize their affluent retirements. He is correct to reject insulting contemporary stereotypes about the elderly, including their presumed technophobia. (He notes, quite rightly, that many of his generation have been technophiles throughout their lives, and he explicitly condemns David K. Foot for his condescending suggestion that Collins's generation probably does not like to use bank machines.) Occasionally, Collins appeals to intergenerational sensitivity, but not unambiguously: 'We are not without pity for young Canadians in the current merciless job market. Over and over, my age group has expressed genuine sympathy for today's young job-hunters. But all their mewling and snivelling gets under our skin.' The book ends with an allusion to the common experience of his generation and young people in the 1990s, at least insofar as 'both groups are facing a profound biological change' and are 'distrusted or disliked by other generations.' Collins opines: 'I doubt we could penetrate the teenager's private domain of self-absorption, but pre-teens might be receptive. Already, they've been exposed to more information than our parents ingested in a lifetime. Yet perhaps there is something they can learn from us about touch and caring, manners and civility, friendship and humanity.' Regrettably, nothing in the text itself seems to support such an optimistic and important claim.[31]

30 Collins quotes Canadian broadcaster Roy Bonisteel: 'Canadians tend to discard the elderly whenever we can' (251).

31 For an alternative to the pop demography paradigm as it applies to the recollections

Growing up Digital: The Rise of the Net Generation is the most recent book by Canadian Internet booster Don Tapscott, a leading text in the burgeoning field of cyber-prophecy and another excellent example of the discursive revolution spearheaded by the likes of David K. Foot. Building explicitly on Foot's ostensibly demographic model, Tapscott warns gravely that the maturation of the 'Net Generation' (North Americans who were between the ages of two and twenty-two in 1998) is likely to be accompanied by a full-scale intergenerational war: 'Unless the boomers have a change of heart about youth, their culture and their media, the two biggest generations in history may be on a collision course – a battle of the generational titans. ... The writing is on the wall for the techno-phobic, old-style-thinking boomers. Unless they throw out years of conditioning, they will be washed away by the N-Gen tsunami.' Other than a couple of anecdotes about children being able to program their parents' VCRs, Tapscott provides no evidence whatsoever for the utterly dubious claim that baby boomers are technophobic and resistant to change; yet *Growing Up Digital* hinges entirely on the twin propositions that, in marked contrast with their elders, N-Geners experience Net-based technologies as 'transparent' and that this experience, especially as it applies to the world of work, is itself revolutionary: 'Increasingly, N-Geners don't see the technology at all. They see the people, information, games, applications, services, friends, and protagonists at the other end. They don't see a computer screen, they see their friends' messages, their 'zines, their fanclubs, their chat groups, Crash Bandicoot, the Sistine Chapel, the Mayan ruins, and Our Lady Peace.' Technology is only technology, claims Tapscott, for the people who were born before it was invented (a myth now also widely promulgated within the computer industry, most notably in the advertising of corporate giants like IBM, Microsoft, and Cisco). Like many of the children whose online habits he is already celebrating, Tapscott seems incapable of distinguishing between the real world and cyberspace. (Does he really believe that anonymous exchanges of personal data constitute friendship, or that a computer graphic is somehow the equivalent of the Sistine Chapel ceiling?) As for critics of this brave new world, including parents and others who worry that too much time spent in front of the computer is stifling children's social maturation, Tapscott simply dismisses them as

of Depression-era Canadians, see Victor Howard, *We Were the Salt of the Earth! A Narrative of the On-to-Ottawa Trek and the Regina Riot* (Regina: Canadian Plains Research Center 1985); and Barry Broadfoot, *Ten Lost Years, 1929–1939: Memories of Canadians Who Survived the Depression* (Markham: Paperjacks 1975). See also James Struthers, *No Fault of Their Own: Unemployment and the Canadian Welfare State, 1914–1941* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1983).

cowards: 'It is not the N-Gen children who are being robbed of social development, it is those adults who, through fear or ignorance, deny themselves the experience of participating in the great revolution of our times.'[32]

The confusion of the real world and cyberspace is, of course, simply confusion, not transparency. But it is, without question, confusion of the most profitable kind – something Tapscott well knows, since his musings never stray far from the agenda of his primary audience, business: 'Digital kids are learning precisely the social skills which will be required for effective interaction in the digital economy. They are learning about peer relationships, about teamwork, about being criticial.' N-Geners, Tapscott reassures his presumably corporate readership, are hard-working, ambitious, and above all optimistic about their place in the private sector economy: 'Companies want a flexible workforce and they have also found that this is a way to reduce costs by paying workers less and by using people only when necessary. We can anticipate that many N-Geners will actually prefer such arrangements, providing improved work variety and opportunity for skill enhancement and lifelong learning.' (He does not explain why an entrepreneurial and highly independent generation would 'prefer' a system of constantly shifting, insecure, low-wage jobs.) Relatedly, Tapscott embraces the collapsing boundary between education and commerce.[33] In the cyber-classroom, he enthuses, children will teach each other and teachers will be recast as 'facilitators,' standing by as the kids create web pages of their own design. As one of his cyber-teachers reports enthusiastically: 'The kids not only learned about the new media and developed language and presentation skills, they learned about how to interact with clients and meet deadlines.'[34] Surely, *this* is the death of history.

Like Michael Adams and other pollsters-for-hire, who, it is worth recalling, are primarily in the business of asking people for their opinions, Tapscott presumes that what two to twenty-two year olds 'think' has some bearing on the kind of world they inhabit. Giving credence to young Canadians' speculations on their adult careers, for example, or on

32 Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital*, 1–5, 10, 39. Tapscott is the chairperson of the Alliance for Converging Technologies.

33 In place of any serious evidence showing that computer-driven pedagogy improves learning at any level, Tapscott provides a lengthy anecdote about a four year old named Ryan who taught himself to read using a program called *Reader Rabbit* (128). For a thoroughgoing critique of the collapsing boundary between education and commerce, see Heather-Jane Robertson, *No More Teachers, No More Books: The Commercialization of Canada's Schools* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 1998).

34 Vicki Saunders, cited in Tapscott, *Growing Up Digital*, 156

future labour force conditions (something even economists cannot predict accurately) seems absurd; yet it is precisely this sort of opinion-survey methodology, deployed so relentlessly by business in its pursuit of new markets, that gives young people the impression that what they 'think' matters greatly – far more than, say, the social, political, or material conditions of their lives, conditions over which they enjoy virtually no control and in which, as Granatstein and others attest, they show little interest.[35] If, as I would argue, history (and, indeed, the other humanities and social sciences) have as their *raison d'être* the study of people's lived experience within the context of their life circumstances, then this kind of methodology, and especially the discourses it informs, constitutes nothing less than a full-blown intellectual revolt.

Doug Owram's *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* shows how far in the direction of pop demography at least one professional historian has traveled in the last decade. Owram argues that, 'from the time the baby boom was born, it was extraordinarily powerful and from a young age, it thought of itself as a group distinct from previous generations.' (Can generations 'think'?) Taking a page from David K. Foot, he notes explicitly in his preface that his 'Generation X' undergraduates in the 1990s have shown an 'unremittingly hostile' attitude towards baby boomers, even suggesting that the 'intergenerational warfare' of our times itself legitimizes a generational approach to historical research.[36]

Owram is at pains to delimit the precise composition of the generation under study in *Born at the Right Time,* a tortured intellectual exercise that illustrates, paradoxically, the substantial limitations of this approach: 'In what follows, I attempt to re-create some of the primary interests of baby boomers without pretending that everyone in the generation can be captured in such a story. Practicality required that I concentrate on the mainstream of the generation rather than the margins. ... The very poor, the very remote, certain ethnic communities had a very different experience and, just as they did not fully participate in the generational sense

35 This new discourse – one that privileges young people's opinions above all else – has become increasingly evident in my undergraduate classes, where students now routinely substitute autobiographical anecdote for evidence from their assigned readings. The influence of 'talk show' discourses, including the ostensibly democratic notion that all opinion carries equal weight, is also noteworthy in this respect.

36 Doug Owram, *Born at the Right Time: A History of the Baby Boom Generation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1996), ix–xii. The same tendency informed earlier work on the counterculture in Canada. See Myrna Kostash, *Long Way from Home: The Story of the Sixties Generation in Canada* (Toronto: Lorimer 1980) and *No Kidding: Inside the World of Teenage Girls* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart 1987).

of self, so they are not fully part of this story. Nor for that matter, are the very rich, or those who, for whatever reason, did not become tied into the broad youth world of the postwar years.' Having defined 'the mainstream of the generations' so exclusively, Owram proceeds to correlate it explicitly to the youth counterculture of the 1960s and to speak, not of a generation per se, but of a 'shock wave effect,' a 'shared historical moment,' a certain 'outlook and experience': 'As shock wave or a shared historical experience, the baby boom does not run from 1946 to 1962. Those on the sharp upward curve of births created the shock wave effect. Those who were children in the 1950s and grew through teenage years to adulthood in the 1960s and early 1970s can lay some claim to the shared historical moment. Those who came later shared neither in the shock wave effect nor in the cultural influence of the baby boom period.'

By means of such rationalization, Owram backs well away from the generational analysis promised in his subtitle, locating the cultural and historical essence of the 'baby boom generation' in an overwhelmingly urban, middle-class, English-Canadian youth counterculture, one whose defining experience was that of adolescence and young adulthood in the late 1960s. And as one might expect, even this assertion demands extensive qualification: 'Only a small percentage of young people in the 1960s were political radicals, but a much greater number, especially in the universities, grew up in an age in which youth and radicalism were connected. New ideas swarmed over the generation. Though some of these ideas would fade, the radicalism of the sixties shaped the ethics of a generation and defined the political agenda for the next decades.' (Can a generation have 'ethics'?) Having generalized about the baby boom generation from an admittedly small number of youth radicals – a generalization that ignores those young Canadians, possibly the majority, who did not challenge the socioeconomic status quo even in the 1960s – Owram is also forced to concede that many of the 'new' ideas that were 'swarming' around were, in fact, inherited from older Canadians (most notably George Grant) and from thinkers from the even more distant past (including Marx, the social gospellers, the Transcendentalists, Gandhi, and the Existentialists). By the time he has finished whittling the baby boom 'generation' down, little remains of it.[37]

However much he might like to place value on the 'power' of his own generation, I would argue that nothing in Owram's characterization of the baby boom rescues it from the claim now commonly made in studies of the 1950s 'teenager' – that the social construction of this enormously profitable cohort derived not from what Owram calls its 'generational

37 Owram, *Born at the Right Time*, xi–xiv, chap. 9

sense of self,' but from the advertisers, marketers, and promoters who 'discovered' it.[38] Owram's claim that the baby boom generation underwent a 'shared historical experience' may well be true. But he has not, in my view, demonstrated in *Born at the Right Time* that this experience originated from within the cohort itself; indeed, the bulk of his book locates the experiences of the baby boom generation well within a conventional historical framework of continuity and change, emphasizing the dominant role of socioeconomic conditions over which the cohort had virtually no control (including, for example, the extraordinary growth of the Canadian economy in the postwar period, changing child-rearing practices, the rise of the suburbs, educational reform and the massive growth of the universities, the rise of the civil rights movement and of feminism, and the emergence of television, rock music, and other highly profitable cohort-specific mass media). In the end, I would argue, Owram's claim that a 'generational history' is possible or even desirable runs headlong into his own overwhelming evidence to the contrary.

A discourse is, at bottom, a way of talking about something. Discourses are always socially constructed and anchored in power relationships; however socially or politically neutral they might appear, or however permanent or intractable they seem, they are always fluid rather than static, products of shifting patterns of social consensus and struggle, compromise and refusal. When discourses achieve hegemony, they are invisible; they become naturalized. We lose sight of them precisely because they so effectively seem to represent the world as we experience it. A triumphant discourse is, in the words of French economist Jacques Attali, a 'monologue of power.'[39]

Pop demography, as I have tried to sketch it here, is a discourse whose time has come. It constitutes a radical new conception of the relationship of Canadians to each other and to their past, one that reduces social conflict – if not social experience – to competition among generational cohorts. In so doing it challenges all competing discourses,

38 See, for example, Lawrence Grossberg, *We Gotta Get Out of This Place* (New York and London: Routledge 1992). In the Canadian context, see Mary Louise Adams, *The Trouble with Normal: Postwar Youth and the Making of Heterosexuality* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press 1997). Adams notes that, in the 1950s, 'business interests responded to economic and demographic changes by nurturing teen consumerism and targeting youth as a specific market. Teen magazines, rock and roll, teen films, teen columns in newspapers, teen sections in department stores were all products of the "discovery" of the teenager' (42).

39 Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (1977; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press 1985), 9

particularly those centring on seemingly out-of-date notions such as tradition, custom, continuity, narrative, and history. Pop demography is a paradoxical discourse in so far as it simultaneously cuts us off from each other – driving deep wedges into our most immediate sources of identity, community, and tradition (the family, the school, the workplace) – even as it seems to collectivize our experience of the world. It simultaneously accounts for our sometimes overwhelming experience of personal isolation and alienation, even as it reassures us that we share this experience with others. In the world of pop demography, we are alone together. The therapeutic quality of the genre – epitomized in Foot's explicit presumption that his readers are experiencing a sense of 'personal fail[ure]' and are, therefore, in search of 'peace of mind' – derives from the idea that we are part of a larger group whose experience of the world is more or less exactly like ours. It makes appeal, in short, to the same collectivist impulses that have traditionally grounded our sense of identity (class, ethnicity, gender, religion, ideology), even as it sunders the linkages between our actual traditions and our lived experience.

Pop demography is a paradigm whose time has come precisely because it privileges the social categories that have risen to hegemony under neo-conservatism and the economics of globalization. In the most superficial texts of the genre – Adams's *Sex in the Snow*, for example – the essential similarity of people within a cohort (or a 'values tribe') derives entirely from their lifestyle choices and their patterns of consumption. Such a claim might well be laughable in an era of relative socioeconomic stability, but it is extremely powerful in our own times because it accords perfectly with our anxious, fragmented experience of the world. We are encouraged to think of ourselves, at least in the public sphere, as consumers above all – not only as consumers of products and services, but of government programs. Certainly we have come to expect that the advertisers, marketing analysts, music and movie promoters, and sloganeers who today dominate public life situate us subjectively as members of 'niche' markets designated according to ostensibly demographic criteria. We are acutely attuned to the nuances of these commercial strategies, recognizing immediately when we are being 'positioned' within them, whether we are buying chewing gum, mutual funds, automobiles, or university degrees. Pop demography is the pseudo-sociology of our times because it represents the world as we are now so relentlessly urged to see it.

Whither history? Historical discourses, those premised on the viability and especially the relevance of coherent narratives that link the past and the present, are in retreat against this monologue of power. What is

worse, at least from my vantage point, is that the historians, teachers, and others who are deeply worried by this trend have shown a troubling inclination to criticize each other – tinkering with curricula, textbooks, and classroom teaching methods – and too little inclination to confront its broader cultural context. Increasingly, I am drawn to the daunting conclusion that history will only be resuscitated by means of a discursive counterrevolution, one that takes place not in the classrooms, where we already preach to the converted, but in the streets, as it were. Short of an economic or political crisis of truly 'historic' proportions – which would no doubt expose pop demography as the fanciful propaganda that it is – there must be a renewed emphasis on history, not as a sterile academic exercise, but as the organizing principle of Canadians' lived experience. Granatstein is quite correct to call for a return to history as the prism through which people 'learn who they are.' But any such restoration will require a great deal of 'unlearning,' as we attempt to deconstruct and subvert the dominant discourses of our times and to affirm the tangible, life-affirming narratives to which Canadians have a right.