GOADED, IN THE SPIRIT OF HIERARCHY: EXIGENCE,

AUDIENCE AND THE *MACLEAN'S* UNIVERSITY RANKINGS

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ABSTRACT

A rhetorical analysis, this thesis applies a neo-aristotelian framework to an examination of the speaker, audience and messages relationships encompassed within the *Maclean's* University Rankings, a series of annual news reports which provide a ranking of Canadian universities based on a series of variables. As this analysis reveals, the *Maclean's* University Rankings function ostensibly as a public discourse both informational and scientific in its statistical presentation, but beneath this gloss is a subtle promotion and reinforcement of a perception that universities are not properly accountable to the Canadian public and deserve to be publicly graded.

The analysis dedicates a chapter to each of three rhetorical theories: Ernest Bohrmann's Fantasy Theme Criticism, Daniel Boorstin's Pseudo-event and Image construction and Lloyd Bitzer's Rhetorical Situation in order to analyze the artefact from the speaker-audience, audience-message, and speaker-message relationships.

The analysis then concludes that *Maclean's* carefully highlights the financial risk of all choices involving university education (both with pursuing it and with not doing so) to keep readers fearful about the risks involved in specifically selecting a post-secondary institution and more generally about the state of Canadian university education. This fear serves a dual purpose: it offers Canadians an exigence to resolve, while simultaneously serving to strengthen *Maclean's* ethos as a source of expertise on post-secondary education. Highlighting risk enables *Maclean's* to persuade Canadians to accept the magazine as an expert authority in a highly specialized field, able to provide the general population with the clarity necessary to make informed decisions.

Ultimately, this thesis interrogates the rankings' reliance on audience perceptions of risk as a primary means of persuasion; the very act of soliciting trust in "expert opinion" reinforces certain divisive and value-laden hierarchies that underlie the rankings, allowing *Maclean's* to extend its social and cultural authority beyond its traditional function as a source of information and opinion.

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CHAPTER 1
THE *MACLEAN'S* UNIVERSITY RANKINGS AS A RHETORICAL ARTEFACT

Studying human behaviour, ultimately asking the question of why people do what they do, is an area of study that is infinitely fascinating. Many fields of academic study offer answers to this question from a variety of perspectives: for example, psychological study offers the perspective of the individual psyche, sociology offers a look at the behaviour of groups within a larger societal context and historians examine the actions and behaviours of either individuals or groups in history. Rhetorical study offers another perspective into answering the integral question of why people do what they do – it looks at the communication that both individuals and groups employ in order to instigate change in the world.

The very act of requesting a change in the world signifies the persuasive nature of rhetorical communication. It is important to recognize that not all communication is persuasive, or rhetorical, in nature. Some communication simply facilitates an exchange of information – the difficulty for the student of rhetoric is to identify which communication is persuasive in nature and which is not. In fact, the most successful pieces of persuasive communication are often those which appear to be informational – rhetorical theorist Roderick Hart asserts, "that all rhetoric denies itself and that good rhetoric denies itself completely"[1]. While some persuasive messages have an obvious explicit appeal, others make a request of the audience that is much more implicit, or hidden. Requests to an audience may be to take an explicit action, such as voting for a candidate or buying a product, but other, more slippery requests, include adopting a certain attitude or reinforcing an attitude that is already present.

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[1] Roderick Hart, Modern Rhetorical Criticism 2e. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997) 31.

Because communication is pervasive, the scope of rhetorical study is immense. Its focus can be very narrow – examining the influence of one public address by a public leader, for example – to very, very broad – examining all public discourse used to initiate a global social movement. A rhetorical approach looks at the communication that individuals use and closely examines it in order to better understand human behaviour. Rhetoric's primary concern is with the persuasive nature of discourse – as Aristotle defined it, rhetoric's concern is to "discover the available means of persuasion in each case"[2]. Rhetorical criticism takes a piece of discourse and examines it closely to better understand its persuasive appeals, which then provides insight into both rhetor's motivations within that discourse, and also about how particular persuasive appeals function within human communication.

The inherently practical nature of rhetoric also influences which objects are most valuable for rhetorical study – objects which are rhetorically successful, in that they achieve the rhetor's goal of instigating change in the world, offer most insight. Ultimately, by studying rhetorically successful objects, rhetorical critics attempt to uncover further insight into human communication and into how public discourses function within the public sphere.

The artefact I have chosen for this rhetorical study is the *Maclean's* University Rankings, a series of annual news reports which examines universities across Canada and provides a ranking of each institution based on a series of variables. When selecting an object for study, the underlying question of "why do people do what they do?" greatly influenced my selection as I found the *Maclean's* University Rankings provoked that

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[2] Aristotle, "The Rhetoric of Aristotle," in <u>Reading Rhetorical Theory</u>, ed. Barry Brummet (Orlando: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000) 145.

question from many angles – why is the Canadian public so interested in reading the University rankings? Why do universities participate year after year, particularly those in the bottom half? While *Maclean's* is a profit-oriented business, does the publishing of these rankings serve any greater purpose, beyond selling magazines?

Synopsis of the Rankings editions

The *Maclean's* University magazine first appeared in Oct 1991, as a series of thirteen essays in its Special Reports section, with titles including "What Makes a University Great", "Modern Times are Tougher Times", "Choosing the American Way" and "The Road to Success". Embedded within these essays was an early sketch of what would become known in Canadian university circles as the *Maclean's* Rankings, a series of shorter articles which ended with a top-ten ranking of Canadian universities. Universities were ranked on a number of categories, including Student/Teacher Ratio, Operating Budget per Student, Most Residential Beds per Student, Varsity Sporting Results, and Overall "Top School" within three geographic regions (Western, Central and Atlantic).

That inaugural issue met with such popularity and debate[3] that *Maclean's* continued the feature in November of 1992. This 1992 issue more fully developed the framework for the rankings: one introductory essay (titled "Measuring Excellence: *Maclean's* Goes Back to School and Ranks Canadian Universities") followed by a greatly expanded set of categories over which each institution was ranked. The categories were loosely grouped into the six major headings: Student Body; Classes;

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[3] Ann Dowsett Johnston, "Measuring Excellence" *Maclean's* 9 November 1992: 20.

Faculty; Finances; Library; and Reputation. Specific rankings were created for the many categories within each of the headings, including the categories of Average Entering Grade; Proportion of Students with a 75% or Higher; Proportion of Students Who Graduate; Number of International Graduate Students; Number of Students from Out of Province; Class Sizes by Year; Classes Taught by Tenured Faculty; Number of Student Awards; Number of Faculty with a PhD; Number of Awards Per Full-Time Faculty; Number of Humanities Grants; Number of Medical/Science Grants; Library Holding per Student; Library Acquisitions per Student; Alumni support; and, a Reputational Survey. Any one institution might be ranked highest in any one specific category but the data that created these categorical rankings was then compiled to produce the top-five schools in three summary categories (Highest Quality, Most Innovative, Leaders of Tomorrow) and ultimately one Best Overall category, with a ranked list of the top-five institutions. For the next 14 years (1992 – 2005), the format and content stayed very similar, with introductory essays slightly varying, and a graduate survey introduced in 2004.

In addition to the increased number of categories, the other significant development in the format in the 1992 edition was the creation of three institutional peer groupings: Medical/Doctoral, Comprehensive and Primarily Undergraduate. All institutions were placed within one of the groupings and then only ranked against their peers within that grouping. Definitions for the peer groupings were:

Medical/Doctoral: These are universities with a major commitment to PhD programs and research. All have medical schools which set them apart due to the size of research grants.
Comprehensive: These institutions offer a significant amount of research activity and a wide range of programs – including professional degrees – at the graduate and undergraduate levels.

Primarily Undergraduate: These schools are largely focused on undergraduate education, with few PhD programs.[4]

Consequently, this creation of the peer groupings meant rather than one 'Best Overall' institution, the annual *Maclean's* ranking would actually produce three schools which were 'Best Overall', one in the Medical/Doctoral peer grouping, one in the Comprehensive peer grouping and one in the Primarily Undergraduate peer grouping. Each of the 'Best Overall' institutions was profiled in a short article, which included comments from the institutions' presidents, as well as the author's thoughts as to why that particular institution had risen to the top.

Given the increase in the number of categories and the implementation of the groupings, the ranking mechanism increased significantly in complexity and scope. The actual pages devoted to explaining and portraying the rankings became quite lengthy; between 1992 and 2005, there was anywhere between 37 – 75 pages of one issue of *Maclean's* devoted to this 'special report'.

In addition to the actual rankings, the 1992 issue also included a lengthy article titled "A Ratings Road Map", which outlined how the rankings had been designed, the weighting methodology, and data collection procedures. In 1991, the data used had been gathered from public sources[5] and a brief survey of university presidents. By 1992, the data was collected from the institutions themselves, specifically via "a 12-page questionnaire, with a 19-page user's guide that explained every criterion and defined

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[4] Diane Brady, "A Rating Road Map" *Maclean's* 9 November 1992: 30.

[5] Robert Lewis and Michael Benedict, "A Measure of Excellence" *Maclean's* 21 Oct 1991: 12. ABI/INFORM Global. Web. 13 June 2011.

every term within the survey"[6]. Most years, a brief explanation of the methodology was included to assist readers in understanding the complexity, and why there were approximately 190 different ranked lists appearing within any one issue.

The essay content varied with the times and with current trends: in 2000, the introductory essay discussed how the "echo generation"[7] would cause increasing enrolments that exceeded the capacity of the universities while in 2005, the introductory essay was titled "Waging a War for Talent", and discussed how philanthropy was playing a bigger role in enabling universities to attract the best and the brightest.

In August of 2006, an event of indeterminable significance occurred when 11 universities chose to not submit their institutional survey for the 2006 rankings. Their cited rationale was that "it is truly hard for us to justify the investment of public funds required to generate customized data for your survey when those data are compiled in ways that we regard as over-simplified and arbitrary"[8]. Consequently, the 2006 edition of the rankings changed format, using similar categories as in previous years, but also including tables devoted to displaying data collected through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and Canadian Undergraduate Survey Consortium (CUSC). Additionally, the 2006 issue included an increased number of articles, commenting on issues ranging from the food served in residence halls to where current Canadian MPs had attended university to the history of the exam. In fact, as the cover of the 2006 issue

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[6] Diane Brady, "A Rating Road Map" *Maclean's* 9 November 1992: 31.

[7] "Echo generation" is defined as "the children of the generation weaned on Woodstock" Ann Dowsett Johnston,"Measuring Excellence: Keeping an Implicit Promise to the Class of 2000. " *Maclean's* 25 Nov. 1996: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web.

[8] Tom Traves, et al. Letter to the Managing Editor of *Maclean's.* 14 August 2006. Accessed from http://dalnews.dal.ca/2006/08/14/macleans.html

states, the 16th annual ranking is "our largest universities issue ever"[9].

The rankings are the cover story of each annual issue and claim a significant portion of the total magazine content. The glossy full-color cover of each of these issues always features photographs of students, frequently in cap and gown or other easily identifiable student apparel. The mood of these fresh-faced youth ranges from gleeful to apprehensive; there are also numerous photographs throughout the pages devoted to the rankings, of what appears to be students and campus scenes.

So, what began as a series of essays related to post-secondary education including a miniscule and simplistic ranking grew enormously to a matrix of immense complexity and scope. But, by 2006 this exercise may have come full circle as the rankings appeared to have returned to something more similar to their original form – more emphasis on essays and public data as *Maclean's* grappled with the non-cooperation of these rogue universities[10]. *Maclean's* has fiercely committed to continued publication of the rankings issue, with or without University participation.

Scope of this Rhetorical Artefact

For the purposes of this thesis, I chose to narrow my focus to those editions published between 1991 and 2005. The act of rebellion in 2006 is rhetorically significant but incites an additional set of complex questions, which cannot be served within the scope of this thesis. Consequently, I will consider the 15 years of *Maclean's* University Rankings (1991 to 2005) to constitute one coherent rhetorical artefact. Examining the

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[9] Tony Keller, "The University Rankings Issue 2006" *Maclean's* 13 November 2006: 23.

[10] The universities which declined to complete *Maclean's* institutional survey, effective August 2006 included: Dalhousie University, McMaster University, Simon Fraser University, University of Alberta, University of British Columbia, University of Calgary, University of Lethbridge, University of Manitoba, University of Montreal, University of Ottawa and University of Toronto.

artefact within a neo-aristotelian framework – perspectives of the audience, the message and the speaker – I intend to show that the *Maclean's* Rankings serve a persuasive intent, providing a nostalgic road trip for their readers and ultimately serving to mitigate the inherent emotional and financial risks Canadians face when considering the future of post-secondary education.

This thesis is primarily a rhetorical criticism of the *Maclean's* University Rankings. The first chapter provides an introduction to rhetorical study, outlining its theoretical foundations and exploring relationships between rhetoric, hierarchy, identification and risk. The second chapter examines the implicit audience and outlines how it is different from the more explicit audience *Maclean's* suggests. The third chapter considers the message of the *Maclean's* Rankings and provides insight into how the universities' images (how the public perceives them) influence their participation. The fourth and final chapter of analysis examines *Maclean's* as an author and considers why the Canadian public so readily accepted the Rankings as a risk mitigation exercise. Finally, the conclusion discusses the implications of my analysis and how *Maclean's* is able to judge Canadian universities from a variety of perspectives.

The purpose of the analysis chapters is to uncover how the *Maclean's* University Rankings function and to better understand how they are able to reinforce messages of universities as exclusive institutions yet relevant to the Canadian public. In particular, my analysis of the *Maclean's* University Rankings is intended to show how a piece of public discourse, which appears to be informational and scientific in its statistical presentation, actually engages in a subtle promotion and reinforcement of a perception that universities are not accountable to the Canadian public and deserve to be publicly

graded, regardless of the quality of the assessment or the relevance of the assessor. Ultimately, I will show how the *Maclean's* University Rankings tells us something about the Canadian public as a whole, and how willingly we have granted *Maclean's* expert authority comforted by the assurances this so-called expert provides.

The primary difficulty with the *Maclean's* ranking is the relationship that it has to its audience. On the surface it appears to have a sole audience of those researching Canadian universities with the aspiration of undergraduate attendance. But, through this rhetorical analysis, I will establish the multitude of audiences – from those who are comforted by scientific assurances, to nostalgic alumni, to those who view universities as having little to do with contemporary social or economic concerns. The interaction between *Maclean's* and these multi-faceted audiences is alarming because it is likely not apparent to the uncritical eye how *Maclean's* is appealing to these various segments with contradictory messages. The contradictory nature of *Maclean's* messages raises many implications – particularly regarding how Canada's national newsmagazine can promote its own (somewhat contradictory) values and beliefs to an unsuspecting Canadian public.

Central Concerns

This thesis is informed by three central concerns. The first, of course, is to provide an analysis of how my object, the *Maclean's* University Rankings gains its rhetorical appeal among its intended audience, and thus what has made it the most popular edition of *Maclean's*. Even though the scope of my thesis is the first fifteen years (1991 to 2005), at this writing *Maclean's* continues to publish this annual feature. My analysis aims at uncovering what it is about this particular discourse that has made it so popular

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with Canadians that it continues, even after suffering the dissent of 11 universities across Canada.

My second major purpose, beyond contributing to an understanding of this specific object, is to add to our understanding of the larger tradition of rhetoric criticism, particularly within the framework of Lloyd Bitzer's rhetorical situation. I will identify the exigence which *Maclean's* is responding to as one of risk – and ultimately conclude that the *Maclean's* University Rankings reflects the way in which Canadians view ourselves as part of a risk society[11].

Finally, this thesis is concerned with exploring what the discipline of rhetoric has to offer when studying popular discourses and how hierarchy functions in the relationship between universities and the Canadian public as a whole. Though rhetoric has traditionally been thought of as a theory of persuasion and of practical uses of discourses, in the last century Kenneth Burke confirmed how it can be applied to its important symbolic role in human relations, and particularly in understanding the hierarchic motivation which can be revealed through careful rhetorical analysis[12]. Other theorists have followed suit, providing definitions of rhetoric that recognize its inescapable importance to the establishment of community and social identity[13]. This acknowledgement opens doors for critics to explore all sorts of identity-building discourses that had not previously been considered rhetorical, and enables us to better

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[11] "Risk society" is a term developed by sociologist Ulrich Beck. He theorizes that society is currently in the 2nd stage of modernity (as compared to a post-modern society) and that one of the main facets of this 2nd stage is a transition from priorities around accumulation of wealth and progress to a society more concerned with risk avoidance, uncertainty and risk management.

[12] William H. Rueckert, Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations 2e. (Berkley: University of California Press, 1963) 135.

[13] Roderick P. Hart, Modern Rhetorical Criticism 2e. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997) 36.

understand the process of identification that Burke claims is the driving force of rhetorical activity.

In order to accomplish these ends, I will be 1) drawing on a variety of theorists and critics from the disciplines of rhetoric, communication and sociology and 2) utilizing my own experiential knowledge, as both a former student leader and current employee within university administration for nearly a decade.

My critical method will rely on Kenneth Burke's method of cluster criticism, which can "help the critic discover a rhetor's worldview" through the patterns of association and dissociation evident in a discourse[14]. Using cluster criticism as a technique, I will apply Bormann's theory of fantasy-theme criticism, which helps critics uncover decisions made by groups by understanding the fantasy the group has developed. In the third chapter, I will employ Daniel Boorstin's understanding of pseudo-events and how they shape an organization's image. Finally, I will draw on the work of Lloyd Bitzer, Jonathan Shay, and Harald Meig to better understand the relationship between the audience, the constraints of the rhetorical situation, and how the audience creates and craves expertise, in the face of risk adversity.

The analysis of this artefact will apply a neo-aristotelian framework to the *Maclean's* University Rankings so the relationships between the three artistic proofs - *pathos, logos* and *ethos* - will serve as subject themes for each chapter. This analysis will aim to further explore: 1) the audience which consumes the rankings and has incited their frenzied popularity; 2) the implications of the message, how it functions as a pseudo-event and resulting reflections on the universities' image; and 3) the values which

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[14] Sonja Foss, Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice (Prospect Heights: Waveland, 1996) 63.

Maclean's is promoting and how those values align with Canadian values of risk mitigation. Ultimately, "a message is worth analyzing if it tells a story larger than itself"[15] and it is this "larger story" that this analysis seeks to uncover.

Having been the University of Saskatchewan Students' Union President (2001-2002) and being currently employed with the University of Saskatchewan student services division has offered unique insight into and identification with the rhetorical challenge the *Maclean's* Rankings pose for a university, and how the Rankings existence has influenced recruiting, public relations and resource allocation. While I have been privileged to have participated in many strategic conversations about the *Maclean's* Rankings as a rhetorical exigence for the University of Saskatchewan, it must be recognized that this perspective constrains this analysis.

Kenneth Burke recognized the inherent filter that language presents – all individuals are shaped by their background, experiences and occupations. And as such, all individuals have filters, or terministic screens -- which occur "since we can't say anything without the use of terms; whatever terms we use, they necessarily constitute a corresponding kind of screen; and any such screen necessarily directs the attention to one field rather than another"[16]. As such, I recognize that my experiences, both as a former student leader and as a University of Saskatchewan employee contribute to the terministic screens which have filtered this analysis – I write this with particular insight into the perspective of the university, and not as a member of the general public or journalism industry.

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[15] Hart 33.

[16] Kenneth Burke, Language as Symbolic Action (Berkley: University of California Press, 1966) 50.

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Ultimately, rhetorical study allows us to look beneath the surface appeal of the discourses that resonate with a culture in order to discover the patterns of that culture's 'common sense'. Often, this 'common sense' contains a reinforcement of prejudices – rhetorical critics can identify the prejudices which are being reinforced via the enthymematic connections that a piece of discourse requires from its audience. For Canadians, one such surface pattern is a discomfort with the unknown and a comfort with the orderly labelling, defining and categorization of items, all within a neatly labelled hierarchy. Risk serves as an exigence – the impetus for the Rankings – as risk is something that Canadians wish to avoid, manage and contain. Our desire to alleviate risk leads us to readily accept any leader who is willing to offer their perspective and judgment on a complex issue. We are comforted by *Maclean's* reassurances that after reading the Ranking, we are now well-educated, and hence well-protected, against the consequences of poor choices. However, the presentation of this Ranking by *Maclean's* is fraught with contradictions. On one hand, *Maclean's*, as a "Canada's newsmagazine", identifies itself as populist – it serves an egalitarian vision, providing ordinary, working Canadians from all segments of the population with news that is important to them. Yet, the subject of universities is one that is inherently elite – universities, by the very nature of their academic standards and rigor, do not serve the Canadian population equally. The exclusive nature of Universities – they serve to educate the most academically talented segments of the population – contradicts with *Maclean's* populist vision for itself. How can *Maclean's* provide content that is relevant to all segments of its audience (specifically in this case, those who are university alumni and those who are not) when tackling a topic that is inherently exclusive?

CHAPTER 2
RHETORIC, HIERARCHY & THE RHETORICAL SITUATION

Studying the way humans communicate has interested scholars for thousands of years. That humans can influence each other, and even motivate each other to act, signifies the power inherent in communication. In ancient Greece, the study of public communication was particularly shaped by the work of Aristotle, whose handbook, Rhetoric, aimed to assist orators in understanding how to make their persuasion more effective. During this period, the art of public communication was used primarily within the court systems and other arenas for public debate, where an orator addressed an audience desiring to influence and persuade the audience towards a specific decision. Aristotle and many other ancient theorists such as Gorgias, Isocrates, Cicero and Quintilian were consequently interested in exploring the relationships between orators and the audiences, particularly with respect to how an orator influences his audience. The academic field of rhetoric was established to study the very question of how the persuasion occurs – or, to "discover the available means of persuasion in each case"[17].

Since Aristotle's time, the academic study of rhetoric has produced a rich and extensive body of theory. While various theories have changed and extended the study of rhetoric, the concept of influence has existed as a continuous thread, tying both historical and contemporary theories together. While modern-day theorists consider rhetoric in a variety of ways: "adjusting ideas to people, and people to ideas"[18], "inducing co-

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[17] Aristotle, "The Rhetoric of Aristotle," in Reading Rhetorical Theory, ed. Barry Brummet (Orlando: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000) 151.

[18] Donald C. Bryant, "Rhetoric: Its Function and Its Scope," Quarterly Journal of Speech 39 (December 1963): 401-404.

operation"[19] or "function[ing] ultimately to produce action or change in the world"[20], the understanding that rhetors use public messages to influence the thoughts and actions of others has remained constant. Barry Brummett reiterates this vital link by stating "the one term that has most consistently been used throughout history to mean 'influence' is the word *rhetoric*"[21].

While the study of rhetoric and the study of persuasion have remained interchangeable and a constant, many other things have changed. In the last two centuries, there has obviously been a tremendous growth in the methods and avenues used to communicate to a public. The advent of the printing press, telephone, radio, television, the internet and social networking tools has fostered the proliferation of communication opportunities, with individuals receiving thousands of pieces of public communication in any one day. No longer is public communication and influence limited to oratory in the public realm (as was the experience of our Greek ancestors); instead modern rhetorical theorists are interested in the significant influence that also occurs in personal interactions and have consequently enlarged the study of rhetoric to include more diffuse, unconventional 'texts' and a broader range of communicative strategies"[22].

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[19] Kenneth Burke, <u>A Rhetoric of Motives</u> (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1969) 43.

[20] Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation," <u>Philosophy and Rhetoric</u> 1 (1968): 1-14.

[21] Barry Brummett, ed. <u>Reading Rhetorical Theory</u> (Orlando: Harcourt College Publishers. 2000) 1.

[22] Jennifer MacLennan, "Language, Human Communication, and the Ancient Art of Rhetoric," <u>Insider Language: A Canadian Language Reader</u>, ed. Jennifer MacLennan and John Moffatt (Scarborough ON: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada, 2000) 37.

Consequently, contemporary theorists such as Sonja Foss and Kenneth Burke have emphasized the persuasive intent of all communication[23], and have extended the scope of rhetoric well beyond the work of orators in an explicitly persuasive setting. Kenneth Burke, "the greatest rhetorical theorist of the twentieth century"[24], further suggests that rhetoricians should pursue the impact of the rhetor's influence "in places where it is not thought to belong"[25]. This broadened definition of rhetorical artefacts has led to the study of items which *implicitly* persuade – that is, they are designed to persuade an audience, but do not do so explicitly.

Advertisements, political speeches or the opening statements of a court case are easily identified as examples of explicit persuasion whereas implicit persuasion arises within more unexpected realms. Many theorists have contended that other so-called "informational" or "entertainment" items also have persuasive power. For example, while news reports are not designed to explicitly persuade, many theorists have argued that they do exert influence by implication, persuading an audience by the positioning and wording of a story to hold a particular opinion of the event. For example, Knowlton Nash, a former anchor for CBC's *The National*, has written about the media's role in the creation and distribution of war propaganda. He cites a wartime CBC News guide to its editors which warned, "When the news is particularly grave, care should be taken to handle it in a way that will not unnecessarily alarm or depress listeners… If more

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[23] Sonja Foss, <u>Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice</u> (Prospect Heights: Waveland, 1996) 4.

[24] Barry Brummett, ed. <u>Reading Rhetorical Theory</u> (Orlando: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000) 2.

[25] Sonja Foss, <u>Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice</u> (Prospect Heights: Waveland, 1996) 4.

cheerful or encouraging war news is available, use it in the next item" [26]. Nash

underscores this as clear recognition that journalists have the ability to both soften and

alter their audiences' moods and feelings, even with a technique as simple as story

placement.

In addition to news reports, Jennifer MacLennan has argued that television

programs can implicitly persuade by "presenting us with a set of dramatized experiences

anchored in the same network of 'commonsense assumptions' that drive more explicitly

persuasive artefacts"[27]. Additionally, MacLennan argues that implicit persuasion is

particularly prevalent in stories, or narratives, because they "invite our willing

suspension of disbelief in exchange for the entertainment of a good story"[28].

Consequently, many of the objects most rich for rhetorical analysis are those which are

not explicitly persuasive, but the ones which appear to *merely* inform or entertain. Walter

Fisher notes that "persuaders often use narratives to throw the critic off the persuasive

scent" because "most of us relax in the presence of narratives"[29].

With the study of rhetoric expanded to include implicit persuasive elements, it is

easy to understand why all public communication is worthy of rhetorical study. Edwin

Black further suggests that effective communication always has a persuasive element as

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[26] Knowlton Nash, "'Spinning' the News," Inside Language: A Canadian Language Reader eds Jennifer MacLennan and John Moffatt (Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada, 2000) 220-225.

[27] Jennifer MacLennan, "Only in Canada, You Say? The Dynamics of Identity on Degrassi Junior High" Growing Up Degrassi: Television, Identity and Youth Cultures ed. Michele Byers (Toronto: Sumach Press, 2005) 150.

[28] MacLennan 150.

[29] Walter Fisher, Human Communication as Narration: Toward a Philosophy of Reason, Value and Action. (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina, 1987) 20.

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people "look to the discourse they are attending for cues that tell them how they are to view the world"[30]. It is these messages, the cues which tell people how to view the world, where the implicit persuasion can be discovered; embedded within these cues are values-based propositions. Theorists Bernard L. Brock and Robert Scott simplify Black's assertion further by suggesting that all public communication is an invitation from the rhetor to the audience, "to see as I see, know as I know, value as I value"[31]; ultimately they propose that communication is an invitation to participate in shared set of beliefs, a shared set of values.

This understanding of the implicit nature of much of our public persuasion led Roderick Hart to further suggest that the most effective persuasion is often presented in forms not commonly recognized as persuasive[32]. Exposure to commercial advertisements, political speeches and other explicit forms of persuasion naturally incline the audience to employ their critical powers and question what it is that they are being asked to vote for or to purchase. Consequently, while the audience may be naturally hesitant and resistant to explicit forms of persuasion, like advertisements, implicit persuasion is potentially more powerful as the audience is much less aware and likely much less resistant.

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[30] Edwin Black, "The Second Persona" Quarterly Journal of Speech 56 (1970): 112.

[31] Bernard L. Brock and Robert L. Scott, eds. Methods of Rhetorical Criticism (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1980) 19.

[32] Hart 31.

The Scope & Methods of Rhetorical Criticism

<u>Enthymemes and the Neo-Aristotelian Framework</u>

To further explore how such implicit persuasion functions, we must return to Aristotle. He provided the key to understanding implicit persuasion – the enthymeme. Aristotle described the enthymeme as a reasoning structure similar to a syllogism. A syllogism is "the inference of one proposition from two premises"[33] and is participatory, in that the audience must make the inference in order to understand the argument presented. Like the syllogism, the enthymeme presents an argument, but it differs from the syllogism in that one of the premises is unstated[34] and must be supplied by the audience[35]; there is an expectation that the audience will supply this connection from their collective values and common understandings. Aristotle explained how these common understandings can provide an effective basis for persuasion: "because they are commonplaces, everyone seems to agree with them, and therefore they are taken for truth"[36].

The key power of this logical tool is that it is <u>participatory</u> – the audience must work with the rhetor in building the argument, as it is the audience that supplies the missing information, via their own collective understanding or common sense. The significance of this participation is that the audience shares a communal knowledge base, without explicit discussion or consideration. The audience's common sense is not unique to any one individual, but is shared within the community. This community can be

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[33]"Syllogism." <u>Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)

[34] "Enthymeme." <u>Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy</u> (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996)

[35] Aristotle, "The Rhetoric," <u>Rhetoric and On Poetics</u> Ed. Freidrich Solmsen. Trans. W. Rhys Roberts. (New York: Random House/The Modern Library, 1954)1357a.

[36] Aristotle 1395a.

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defined in infinite varieties, whether from a national, ethnic, professional, familial or organizational basis. Any one individual is simultaneously a member in numerous communities and the common sense they draw upon in order to participate in the enthymeme is dependent on the context of the situation. As an example, audiences listening to a Canadian federal political candidate may exist simultaneously as members of a Canadian community, a regional riding community, and a local neighbourhood community. In listening to the speaker, the audience will access their experiences and knowledge from all of their community identities to follow along with the politician's arguments.

While political scenarios are filled with examples of explicit persuasion, such as when a candidate actually asks the audience to vote for their chosen party, implicit persuasion also occurs. In building their argument regarding why their party is preferred, the candidate may make many references to past activities and implicitly request the audience to use their common knowledge and make the necessary associations. For example, a Conservative candidate in the Fall 2008 election might have mentioned the sponsorship scandal; in order for this comment to make sense, the audience will search their memories for their knowledge of an event that could be described as a "sponsorship scandal" and would likely have made associations with the Liberal Party, corruption and dishonesty. The Conservative candidate may not explicitly say that the Liberal Party is corrupt or dishonest, but by mere mention of the sponsorship scandal, the audience is able to make these associations on their own. Again, it is only because of the audience's shared knowledge base that they are able to make these associations. An individual from a foreign country who was not familiar with Canadian politics would hear the reference

to the sponsorship scandal and not be able provide the correct context, thereby missing the implicit connections.

Another excellent example of occasions when audiences are required to make the appropriate assumptions and fill in the blanks correctly is found in many forms of humour. In order to 'get' a joke, the listener must be able to make the implicit connections (follow the enthymematic reasoning structure) required in order for the joke to be found funny. Often, the knowledge base the listener must draw from is specific to their own community or culture; listeners from a different community or culture do not have the same shared base of knowledge and consequently do not understand the reference. This lack of a common knowledge base can explain why someone does not 'get' a joke – they are not able to access (or quickly access) the requisite knowledge to make the enthymematic connection.

Enthymemes appear frequently in human communication and not just for humorous or persuasive reasons. In many ways, the enthymeme represents the community's knowledge base – if you are not part of that community, communication breakdowns can appear. For example, the existence of the *Maclean's* University Rankings, having been published for 20 years and widely discussed in the media, have become a piece of the Canadian collective knowledge base. When speaking to most Canadians, a quick referral to the "*Maclean's* University Rankings" is a reference that is easily understood; members of most Canadian audiences will not require an explanation that *Maclean's* is a weekly, Canadian newsmagazine and that the rankings are published annually and some will know are a source of great debate and contention within most Universities. If the audience were composed of Americans, or Europeans, it is probable

that a much more detailed explanation would need to be provided, as *Maclean's* is not part of an American or European culture.

Requiring the audience to participate greatly increases the power of the rhetor's argument – as Aristotle explains, "the enthymeme must consist of few propositions, fewer than those which make up a normal syllogism. For if any of these propositions is a familiar fact, there is no need to even mention it; the hearer adds it himself"[37]. Because of the participatory nature of this argument structure, Aristotle considered it "the most effective of the modes of persuasion"[38]. Contemporary theorists, such as Roderick Hart and Edwin Black concur that implicit persuasion is the most effective form; as previously mentioned Hart asserts "that all rhetoric denies itself and that good rhetoric denies itself completely"[39]. The effectiveness of implicit persuasion is directly connected to the fact that the audience is required to participate in the enthymeme.

There are numerous methods that the rhetorical critic can employ to most effectively uncover the rhetorical underpinnings of any object. In the early part of the 20th century, Herbert Wichelns sought to re-establish rhetorical criticism as a field of important academic study and suggested "its concern is with the ideas of the people as influenced by their leaders"[40].

The rhetorical examination of a particular piece of discourse is called rhetorical criticism, which, as Thomas Benson notes, "typically starts from the observation that

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[37] Aristotle 1357a.

[38] Aristotle, <u>The Rhetoric and Poetics of Aristotle</u> ed. Friedrich Solmsen. Translated W. Rhys Roberts. (New York: Random House, 1954) 22.

[39] Hart 31.

[40] Herbert Wichelns, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory" <u>Landmark Essays on Rhetorical Criticism</u> ed. Thomas Benson (Davis CA: Hermagoras Press, 1993) 31.

rhetorical acts are the responses of fallible human beings in situations in which certain truth is unattainable and the assent of the audience is unpredictable"[41]. Rhetorical criticism is performed not only to gain insight into the nature of persuasion, but also to understand the audience that is persuaded and the character of the rhetor, or persuader. Roderick Hart notes in his book *Modern Rhetorical Criticism* that, rhetorical criticism is "the business of identifying the complications of rhetoric and explaining them… systematically [and] in a comprehensive and efficient manner"[42]. With respect to the importance of this type of analysis, Hart felt it was a pursuit which would further discover the essence of humanity: "Rhetorical criticism puts us in direct touch with humanness because it examines what humans do most artfully – write – and most instinctively – talk"[43].

In his 1925 ground-breaking essay, "The Literary Criticism of Oratory", Wichelns established rhetorical criticism as a necessary, but forgotten, critical method. He explores Aristotle's artistic proofs – ethos, logos and pathos – and even though Aristotle's work was originally offered as a practical handbook, Wichelns developed it into a framework for conducting rhetorical criticism[44], which was later named neo-aristotelian criticism, as the first formal method of rhetorical criticism[45]. Wichelns concluded that rhetorical criticism "is concerned with effect. It regards a speech as a

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[41] Thomas Benson, <u>Landmark Essays on Rhetorical Criticism</u> (Davis CA: Hermagoras Press, 1993) xii.

[42] Hart 24.

[43] Hart 32.

[44] Wichelns 29.

[45] Foss 23.

communication to a specific audience, and holds its business to be the analysis and appreciation of the orator's method of imparting his ideas to his hearers"[46].

For Aristotle, understanding and appropriately balancing what he termed the three artistic proofs was the primary concern for the effective rhetor. He suggested that the speaker "must not only see that the speech shall prove its point, or persuade, but must also develop a certain character in himself and in the judge"; the speaker must be made trustworthy via his "intelligence, virtue and good-will"[47]. This was Aristotle's concept of *ethos* – the speaker's good character. The appeal that the speaker makes to the audience, the need to "pay attention to the audience's needs, expectations, experience and concerns"[48] is *pathos,* and the actual logic and construction of the argument, or message, is the *logos*. Wichelns suggested that a piece of rhetorical discourse could be examined from each of these three perspectives – speaker, audience and message – to assess its rhetorical function and to further understand whether or not implicit persuasion existed within the object.

While a neo-aristotelian framework can provide substantial insight into the functioning of an object, additional critical tools further help to advance and uncover the rhetorical elements of a complex object.

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[46] Wichelns 31.

[47] Aristotle, "The Rhetoric of Aristotle". Reading Rhetorical Theory, ed. Barry Brummett (Orlando: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000) 161.

[48] Jennifer MacLennan, Effective Communication for Technical Professions (Toronto: Pearson Education Canada Inc., 2003) 7.

<u>Uncovering Community Values</u>

Because the audience is required to access and utilize a collective understanding in order to participate, the very act of participating in this form of implicit persuasion can also reinforce a community's common set of values[49]. The very act of drawing on the collective common sense and implicitly filling in the blanks requires the audience to reiterate and ultimately reinforce their collective understanding – an understanding that includes knowledge, values, goals and morals of the collective.

Because rhetors frequently require the public to draw upon this collective understanding in order to understand their communication, it follows that an analysis of public communication can provide insight into the collective understanding the community is being asked to access. In this sense, rhetorical analysis is a forensic tool – rather than simply determining the most effective way for a rhetor to present a message, rhetorical critics can examine effective pieces of communication to learn more about the audience. As Chaim Perelman and Lucy Olbrechts-Tyteca suggest, "the particular culture of a given audience shows so strongly through the speeches addressed to it that we… can rely on them to a considerable extent for our knowledge of [the community's] character"[50]. For example, in Kenneth Burke's analysis of Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, he attempts to uncover a greater understanding of Nazi culture with the hopes that by discovering "what kind of 'medicine' this medicine-man has concocted, that we may

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[49] Jennifer MacLennan, "Dancing with the Neighbours: Canadians and the Discourse of "Anti-Americanism". Paper presented to the Canadian-American Relations Conference, Organization for the History of Canada, Ottawa, ON. 13-16 May 2004.

[50] Chaim H. Perelman and L. Olbrechts-Tyteca, <u>The New Rhetoric: A Treatise on Argumentation</u> trans. John Wilkinson and Purcell Weaver (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1971) 20-21.

know, with greater accuracy, exactly what to guard against, if we are to forestall the concocting of similar medicine in America"[51].

By examining effective pieces of public discourse, the rhetorical critic can discover insights into the community's character. Because of the pervasive and implicit nature of communication, all forms of public discourses can be examined, not just ones which would be considered explicitly persuasive. Examples of public discourse which modern rhetorical critics find best exemplify the implicit nature of communication include newspapers, magazines, television and movies. Contemporary theorist Norman Fairclough asserts that assumptions grounded in the community's shared values "are implicit, backgrounded, taken for granted, not things that people are consciously aware of, rarely explicitly formulated or examined or questioned"[52]. This common sense underlies effective rhetorical appeals because it is automatically accepted by the audience, since it is already part of their shared collective worldview. Consequently, the audience is able to make the leap from the premise to the conclusion alongside the rhetor, without even realizing the leap has been made. Because the persuasion is implicit – the audience supplies its own connections – there is little resistance to the rhetor's persuasive attempts. During the process of supplying its own connections, the audience can share in a communal experience, which reaffirms their own unstated assumptions from their values and beliefs.

While implicit persuasion often reinforces existing cultural attitudes or values, all persuasive discourse can also alter the audience's perceptions. These public messages

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[51] Kenneth Burke, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle'" <u>Landmark Essays on Rhetorical Criticism</u> ed. Thomas Benson (Davis CA: Hermagoras Press, 1993) 33.

[52] Norman Fairclough, <u>Language and Power</u> (London: Longman, 1989) 77.

exert an influence on how the audience see themselves, inviting them "not simply to believe something, but to be something"[53]. The implications of this are significant; in his essay *"The Second Persona",* Edwin Black suggests that the discourse itself is influencing the audience, which he feels should lead critics to make moral judgment on the discourse itself.

Because all public communication has the capacity to persuade, it is imperative then that rhetoricians consider the values embedded in public discourses, particularly when those messages do not appear to be overtly persuasive. Rhetorical criticism is a useful tool to uncover the community values that are reinforced by the object via its enthymematic structure. As previously discussed, news reports are excellent examples of messages which may persuade on an implicit rather than explicit level. As many critics have argued, the positioning and wording of a news story can persuade the audience to hold a particular opinion of the event(s) described[54].

Pseudo-Events and Image

Daniel Boorstin, in his 1961 book, *The Image*, was particularly interested in how actual news events have been replaced with what he called "pseudo-events", or events which lack spontaneity and whose primary purpose is to be reported or reproduced[55]. A classic example of a pseudo-event is the press conference, which is an event that attracts news reporters yet is not actual news. Instead, it is created solely to achieve a specific agenda of the persuader. Boorstin postulated that these pseudo-events are often

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[53] Black 119.

[54] Knowlton Nash, "'Spinning' the News," <u>Inside Language: A Canadian Reader</u> eds Jennifer MacLennan and John Moffatt (Scarborough, ON: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada, 2000) 220-225.

[55] Daniel Boorstin, <u>The Image</u> (New York: Vintage Books, 1961) 11.

constructed in the explicit hope of fulfilling and maintaining the requirements of a certain *image*, which "is the kind of ideal which becomes real only when it has become public"[56]. Rather than the audience interacting with the actual thing (whether it be an individual, a corporation, a public institution, a government, or a community) it is instead the image with which the audience interacts, so that, "fact or fantasy, the image becomes the thing"[57].

Uncovering the unstated assumptions, the common sense linkages the audience is making, is the fundamental goal of rhetorical analysis. Because public communication allows a community to develop and reaffirm its community values, rhetorical analysis can ultimately uncover those shared communal values. A rhetorical critic can then ask whether the uncovered values really do represent both the community and individuals within it. Ultimately, rhetorical criticism can be used as a forensic tool to uncover and display the values which are presented in any discourse and because of the power of the enthymeme, are potentially hidden from the audience's view. Too often, enthymemes serve to reinforce the existing status quo – an audience reinforces their own prejudices by accepting messages which offer this type of implicit persuasion. The pseudo-event is particularly susceptible – because it exists only to be reported, a pseudo-event often reinforces the status-quo, in that it offers nothing new, or truly news-worthy, to its audiences. Predicting audience response to a pseudo-event is vital to the success of the pseudo-event – its creators are looking to achieve a specific purpose, which can only be maintained if the audience reacts predictably.

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[56] Boorstin 189.

[57] Boorstin 197.

While this type of forensic analysis reveals much about both the artefact and the values of its audience, it also serves a larger purpose. Gaining insight into mechanisms of persuasive appeals ultimately increases our understanding of human communication and the purposes which communication may fundamentally serve.

If rhetorical analysis of implicit persuasion can uncover the common values that an audience must embrace or at least entertain in order to participate in that piece of persuasion, the larger question is what this tells us about how public discourses function to shape or affirm the identity of the public. While enthymemes play an important role in understanding the power of implicit persuasion, Kenneth Burke felt that identity formation and creation of the community was the true reason humans engage in persuasion at all. Because the creation of a community's identity requires a foundation of shared values, goals, attitudes, hopes and fears, Burke argued that such identifications are not simply side effects, but in fact the central aim of rhetoric and persuasion[58]. He felt that the drama of human relations occurred as humans sought consubstantiality with others – "two persons may be identified in terms of some principle they share in common, an 'identification' that does not deny their distinctness"[59].

Fantasy-Theme Criticism

An additional tool useful in the rhetorical study of narratives is Ernest Bormann's method of rhetorical criticism, called Fantasy-Theme Criticism. Bormann, building on the work of sociologist Robert Bales, identified the rhetorical significance of a process

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[58] Barry Brummett, Reading Rhetorical Theory (Orlando FL: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000) 743.

[59] Kenneth Burke, "A Rhetoric of Motives" in Reading Rhetorical Theory ed. Barry Brummett (Orlando FL: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000) 769.

called "fantasy-theme chaining"[60]. Bales identified fantasy-theme chaining as occurring in small groups as the group collectively contributed to and engaged in a verbal dialogue, a fantasy – a fantasy being the creative or imaginative interpretation of events. This fantasy is edited and subtly changed as different members contribute, or chain, until finally the story becomes one in which all members of the group are engaged. The "fantasy-theme" surfaces as the means through which the interpretation occurs via communication within the group. Ultimately, a fantasy-theme tells a story about a group's experience that represents a constructed reality for the participants.

This process occurs on a daily basis and most members of a community are able to identify as having participated in this type of group dynamic. A typical example of this group dynamic can be imagined in response to an unpopular government decision. A group, maybe at a coffee shop, begins a discussion about the decision. One member comments, providing many reasons for why the decision is poor; another member nodding in agreement, adds another comment, further describing the negative impact the decision will have on the local community; a third member adds another "tidbit", maybe a similar example of a previous poor government decision. Each of these members is providing their own creative interpretation of the decision and its consequences. The conversation continues as members reminisce about the government and the poor decisions that have been made. Bales and Bormann both noted that as members become engaged in this type of dialogue, their body language changes, the pitch and urgency of the conversation increases as the contributions continue, altering the "group fantasy" slightly as members contribute multiple times. Once the fantasy has "chained"

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[60] Ernest Bormann, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality", Quarterly Journal of Speech 58 (1972) 397.

significantly, this experience becomes shared within the group and becomes part of the group's collective memory. At a future engagement, only a small reference needs to be made to the government decision and the entire group will quickly remember the lively discussion they had engaged in previously. The memory of that discussion and the shared experience of the dialogue itself ultimately lead to a common-ground basis for community building within small groups of individuals. This common-ground basis is the same type of common sense that is required for enthymematic participation.

Bales noted that these fantasy-theme chains occur as individuals within a group began to dramatize within the group setting and the "content consists of characters, real or fictitious, playing out a dramatic situation in a setting removed in time and space from the here-and-now transactions in the group"[61]. Ultimately, he suggested that fantasy chains were often used "to develop a common culture"[62] between individuals within a group that had no history or previous shared experiences. Bormann expanded the understanding of these fantasy theme chains to suggest that a similar experience occurs in an audience response on a much larger scale, such as audiences hearing a public speech or any other piece of mass media. Ultimately, Bormann reasoned that if you could look at the fantasy themes (i.e. constructed reality) in a small group and learn something about the group's values, you could similarly look at the dramas which chain out in much larger groups or even an entire society and learn something about that society's values. He suggested that these fantasy themes "serve to sustain the members' sense of community", to "impel them strongly to action" and to "provide them with a

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[61] Ernest Bormann, "Fantasy and Rhetorical Vision: The Rhetorical Criticism of Social Reality", Quarterly Journal of Speech 58 (1972) 397.

[62] Bormann 397.

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social reality"[63]. As the group has shared experiences and experiences this shared reality, a greater number of these fantasies appear. Bormann suggested that often these fantasies will begin to show patterns or themes – groups comprised of the same people, who have a history of this shared reality, will continue to build on the same fantasy themes. For Bormann, or for anyone interested in better understanding human behaviour, these fantasy themes are very revealing – once studied, they can reveal significant information about the group's shared reality and ultimately the group's shared values.

Because an analysis of fantasy themes would provide a critic with an understanding of the group's shared values and attitudes, Bormann next postulated that from this understanding, a larger "rhetorical vision" of the group could be uncovered. This rhetorical vision "is constructed from fantasy themes that chain out in face-to-face interacting groups, in speaker-audience transactions, in viewers of television broadcasts, in listeners to radio programs, and in all the diverse settings for public and intimate communication in a given society"[64]. Ultimately, Bormann viewed the creation of a rhetorical vision as the large-scale application of the fantasy-chaining process. While Bales' work focused on actual communicative interactions between group members in person, Bormann made this theory his own through the application of it to larger groups. While a small group can have a rhetorical vision (as is easily imagined in groups with a very specific and coherent religious viewpoint) Bormann ultimately imagined the uncovering of a group's rhetorical vision as being useful for understanding larger groups who may not actually interact together. Examples of such groups could include viewers

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[63] Bormann 398.

[64] Bormann 398.

of a particular television program or readers of a particular magazine. While most (if not

all) of these viewers/readers would never actually physically interact, by receiving (or

"participating" in as Marshall Gregory would suggest[65]) the shared narrative, the

audience was having a shared experience, and from that shared experience, a certain

shared reality was constructed. And, again, it is only within the context of these fantasies

that a larger, more comprehensive 'vision' can be understood.

The practice of fantasy theme criticism theory is particularly useful when a

group's behaviours are observed, and members from the outside (i.e. those who do not

participate in that group) have difficulty in understanding why the group has behaved in

such a manner. The significance of Bormann's theory, from the standpoint of rhetorical

criticism is that the critic can uncover the rhetorical vision, the constructed reality, of the

group by examining the discourses of the group. Bormann felt that his type of forensic

investigation allowed the critic to answer questions regarding "the social relationships,

the motives, the qualitative impact of that symbolic world"[66]. Ultimately, he believed the

method of fantasy-theme criticism would allow the actions of a group to be better

understood. He concluded that actions that make little sense to someone outside of a

rhetorical vision make perfect sense when viewed in the context of that vision, for the

vision provides the motive for action[67].

The application of the fantasy-theme criticism to the *Maclean's* University

Rankings serves as an excellent critical tool. Applying it to the Rankings allows this

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[65] Marshall Gregory, "Ethical Criticism: What It Is and Why It Matters." <u>Style</u>. (Summer 1998): 231.

[66] Bormann 401.

[67] Bormann 407.

thesis to reveal the various fantasy themes that exist , including: 1) the fantasy that alumni share when they read the rankings and reflect nostalgically on their past experiences; 2) the fantasy that non-alumni parents share when they read the rankings and try to join in a manufactured nostalgia – one where they imagine what a university experience will offer their own children; and 3) the fantasy that *Maclean's* creates when they position themselves as experts on post-secondary education and ask their readers to join their jury as they serve judgement to the universities.

Rhetoric and Identity

For Burke, the central motivation for human behaviour was the desire to commune, to identify with others. He felt that effective persuasion was dependent upon effective identification, which in turn arose out of the desire to belong. Burke was primarily concerned with the human experience and the sense that there are repetitive "patterns of experience which seem to arise out of any system of living"[68]. He also argued that one of the primary ways we achieve that sense of belonging is through our rhetorical activity, or public discourse[69]. If we accept that people use rhetoric and persuasion fundamentally in order to create belonging and identify with a community, then rhetorical analysis can be very useful in understanding what type of a community has been created.

Additionally, Burke argued that while a sense of unity, belonging and social cohesion are all benefits of symbolic human communication, the inevitable flip-side is a

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[68] William Rueckert, <u>Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations </u>(Los Angles: University of California Press, 1963) 12.

[69] Kenneth Burke, <u>Dramatism and Development</u> (Barre, MA: Clarke University Press, 1972) 2.

sense of division, isolation and estrangement[70]. Thus, the creation of identity depends not only on the stressing of commonalities, but also on something Burke calls "congregation by segregation," which is the creation of identification by the stressing of some difference shared in common[71]. Burke further confirms the necessity of such dichotomy, when he emphasized that identification always, and inescapably, "implies division"[72]. Because public communication is a primary means "to build community" through linguistic or other symbolic means[73], studying the patterns of shared values and beliefs revealed by the patterns of associations and dissociations throughout its public discourses will be particularly revealing.

In order to better uncover a community's identity through its discourse, Burke used this dichotomy to develop a method of analysis he called cluster criticism. Cluster criticism looks for patterns of association and dissociation, so that the critic can "discover the rhetor's worldview"[74]. Clusters found within a text are groupings which hold something in common. Signifiers of clusters are words, images or ideas that are repeated or given emphasis within a work; as Foss notes, "significance of terms is

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[70] Kenneth Burke, "A Rhetoric of Motives" in <u>Reading Rhetorical Theory</u> ed. Barry Brummett (Orlando FL: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000) 769. Like Burke, Northrop Frye emphasizes the essentially oppositional nature of identify, which, he argues, is always a "way of defining oneself against something else". Northrop Frye, "Conclusion to a Literary History of Canada," <u>Divisions on a Ground</u> (Toronto, Anansi, 1982) 75.

[71] Kenneth Burke, "The Rhetorical Situation," <u>Communication: Ethical and Moral Issues</u> ed. Lee Thayer (London: Gordon and Breach Science Publishers, 1973) 268.

[72] Kenneth Burke, "A Rhetoric of Motives" in <u>Reading Rhetorical Theory</u> ed. Barry Brummett (Orlando FL: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000) 769.

[73] Roderick P. Hart, <u>Modern Rhetorical Criticism</u> 2e. (Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1997) 36.

[74] Sonya Foss, <u>Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration and Practice</u> 63.

determined on the basis of frequency or intensity"[75]. When conducting a cluster analysis, a rhetorical critic asks "What goes with what?" and looks for words, phrases and ideas that have a common theme. Usually, no more than five or six terms will be most significant to the rhetor; these are the key terms. The next step is for the critic to ask, "What opposes what?" Here, the critic is looking for oppositions: possibly groups of words that provide an opposite to the key terms provided; possibly, there will be natural opposition found within the key terms, for example, words related to both god/light/release and devil/darkness/captivity will appear as key terms. Finally, the critic asks, "What leads to what?" Foss notes that when key terms emerge in opposition to other key terms, it often suggests a "conflict or tension in the rhetor's worldview that must be resolved"[76].

The rhetorical critic can use cluster criticism to determine how the rhetor sees the world and what values the artefact is asking the audience to accept, even if only temporarily. Sonya Foss explains that "the task of the critic using this method is to note what subjects cluster about other subjects" and that "the equations or clusters that the critic discovers in a rhetor's artefact generally will not be conscious to the rhetor"[77]. William Reuckert explains that "The object of a cluster analysis is to find out what goes with what and why"[78]. Once the clusters have been identified, the critic will be nearer an

[75] Foss 65.

[76] Foss 66.

[77] Foss 64.

[78] William Rueckert, Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations (Los Angles: University of California Press, 1963) 84.

understanding of the identities, both as expressed by the rhetor and as implicitly accepted by the audience.

Ultimately, it is useful to study the patterns of assumption and inference in discourses that are accepted by a community, in order to gain a sense of the community's shared values. Jennifer MacLennan explains that "Like all other identifications, cultural identities are, inescapably, as much a product of dissociative processes as they are of associative ones, and we necessarily begin to understand who we are only when we can recognize who, or what, we are not"[79]. The strong correlation between a community's public discourse and its identity, as shown through its patterns of association and dissociation, encourage us to view all public communication as rhetorical. Rhetorical analysis can then be used to analyze a piece of public discourse to gain knowledge about the community and how it has built its shared sense of identity. At a higher level, this knowledge can then provide insight into how communication and persuasion function, at a broader level.

Rhetoric & Hierarchy

Burke's emphasis on associative and dissociative patterns is also related to his greater theory of human dramatism. His theory of dramatism offers a method to analyse human symbolic interaction and find meaning in the relationships between the various elements[80]. William Rueckert summarized Burke's vision for dramatism by stating "that

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[79] Jennifer MacLennan, "Dancing with the Neighbours: Canadians and the Discourse of "Anti-Americanism". Paper presented to the Canadian-American Relations Conference, Organization for the History of Canada, Ottawa, ON. 13-16 May 2004 (p14).

[80] Kenneth Burke, "A Grammar of Motives" in Reading Rhetorical Theory ed. Barry Brummett (Orlando FL: Harcourt College Publishers, 2000) 763.

somehow the essences of man, human relations and ultimate reality are to be derived from the dramatistic study of language"[81].

Rueckert further developed Burke's theory of dramatism by describing the seven "interlocked moments" of human drama: the negative, hierarchy, guilt, mortification, victimage, catharsis and redemption. Each of these moments played an important role within human dramas and they are clustered together, "since any one of them, 'logologically'[82] implies all the others"[83]. While further discussion of human dramatism and its seven interlocked moments is beyond the scope of this thesis, the importance of hierarchy will be further explored. It is of particular interest given the very hierarchical essence of any ranking, where one item is denoted as #1 while another is #2, and thus of less importance or stature in the hierarchy. Burke further elaborates on his understanding of hierarchy via his definition of man. While a detailed analysis of this definition is also beyond the scope of this paper, Burke stipulated two criteria in this definition on which I shall focus. He begins his definition of man by identifying man as "the symbol–using animal", and later in the definition, as being "goaded by the spirit of hierarchy"[84].

With respect to the first criterion, Burke felt that insight into human behaviour could be gained by understanding the relationship between symbolic action and the ritual "dramas" that humans participate in through their interactions with others. He viewed the

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[81] Rueckert 129.

[82] This is derived from the word logology, which Kenneth Burke created. Logology is the analysis of language and linguistic action.

[83] Rueckert 131.

[84] Burke's complete definition is: "Man is the symbol-using animal, inventor of the negative, separated from his natural condition by instruments of his own making, goaded by the spirit of hierarchy and rotten with perfection". Kenneth Burke, Language as Symbolic Action. (Berkley: University of California Press, 1966) 16.

use of symbols, via language, as the most significant differentiation between humans and all other animal species, hence his definition of man as a "symbol-using animal"[85]. The symbolic nature of language is both self-evident and very complex. It is simple in the use of words to represent things: for example, the use of the word "apple" to represent the red, spherical, fruit that contains a sweet flesh covered in an edible skin that grows on trees is obviously just a symbol. The word "apple" is just a symbol for that red, round fruit and is not actually the fruit itself. Any word could have been selected in order to represent the red, round fruit and the selection of the word apple itself is somewhat arbitrary. But, the symbolic nature of language becomes increasingly complex when discussing more abstract concepts, when symbols no longer represent an actual physical object, but instead represent another symbol. For example, the word "fruit" is a more abstract symbol as it no longer represents one physical object, but instead represents an entire category of objects, which could include many physical objects, such as apples, bananas, oranges and kiwi. All of these items have something in common, some type of "fruit-ness" that unifies them – the word fruit then, is a more abstract symbol as it does not relate to one specific physical object. As well, the complexity increases as the actual meaning of the word is very contextual – in some cases the use of the word fruit might be in reference to every fruit imaginable (i.e. "I prefer fruit over vegetables") or might have a much narrower meaning (if you are offered an apple and a banana and asked, "Which fruit would you prefer?")

Burke felt that because of the symbolic nature of language and the way in which humans' use of the negative to differentiate between two items (i.e. an apple is <u>not</u> a

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[85] Rueckert 129.

banana), man is able to create various kinds of hierarchic orders[86]. The very essence of a

hierarchy is the identification of some variables, or criteria, in which each object in the

collection or grouping can be assessed against. Each item in the grouping then is allotted

its appropriate spot in the hierarchy dependent on how it relates to the variables. The use

of the negative becomes critical as the assessor must quickly be able to determine how

objects differ and which variables might be most useful in determining a ranking.

Creating a ranking will not be possible if all of the objects are equal in each of the

variables selected. Hierarchic orders can vary immensely in scope – from everything

such as having a favourite shirt (there is a hierarchy among your shirts in which one

shirt, the favourite, is at the top of the hierarchy) to much more abstract and complex

hierarchies related to how one identifies successful individuals (the one with the most

money? power? fame? happiness? possessions?).

The difficulty arises though, when more than one variable is used to determine

the hierarchy and the variables themselves must be ranked, or weighted. Ranking

Canadian universities offers an obvious example of this. For example, even if only three

variables were selected: 1) the faculty-to-student ratio; 2) the amount of operating budget

per student; and, 3) the number of alumni who donate to their alma mater, determining a

ranking is complex as the question quickly arises regarding which of the variables is

most important? How would you rank one school which has a low faculty-to-student

ratio yet has a low amount of operating budget per student in comparison to another

school which has a high percentage of alumni who donate yet has a poor faculty-to-

student ratio? The need for a ranking (or weighting) of the variables themselves becomes

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[86] Rueckert 131.

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necessary and it is in the act of ranking the variables that the assessor embeds values. At the end of the day, in order for a ranking, or hierarchy, to be possible there must be an articulated and weighted set of variables in which each item in the group can be assessed.

The *Maclean's* Rankings offer a unique opportunity to examine the implications of hierarchy as a goad – the nature of the hierarchy added fuel to the increasing competition universities faced when trying to attract new students. Universities were suddenly asked to respond to questions about their position in the ranking, striving to justify or exploit it rather than focusing on the actual important and appreciable differences between institutions. Instead of highlighting unique program or service offerings that would differentiate them from their peers, universities had to respond to their ranked position and try to translate their position (rather than their offerings) to the readers of *Maclean's* – primarily the parents of prospective students, alumni but ultimately to the Canadian public as a whole.

The implications of universities responding to the Rankings within the environment of increased competition are significant – the Rankings allowed *Maclean's* (and subsequently the universities) to reinforce the student-as-consumer orientation. The reality for most middle-class families is that if students-are-consumers, then parents-are-bankers and the result of this transition to a market-oriented view of university education leaves parents as the actual decision-makers about what institution their child should attend, because for the parents it becomes a financial investment. *Maclean's* reinforced the notion that parents needed to carefully consider the return they would see on the investment as they paid for their children's university education. The Rankings therefore

respond, ostensibly, to parents-as-bankers' needs for an instrument to measure risk in hierarchic terms. I will discuss the implications of this perception in chapter 5.

While it is easy to see hierarchies everywhere in the world, the next obvious question is why humans feel so compelled to create hierarchy. Burke proposed that people create these hierarchic orders with the desire to make order out of chaos. However, the pursuit of order becomes problematic because of the inherent "graded, value-charged structure" [87] required by the framework for any ranking. The obvious opportunity for conflict arises when two individuals do not agree on how to rank the variables to be used in the ranking and likely they disagree on the fundamental values on which the hierarchy is based. Another opportunity for conflict arises when individuals view themselves as competing on the same hierarchical ladder. This conflict can lead to competition and a sense of failure for the "lower" party.

Similar to his patterns of association and dissociation, Burke viewed hierarchy as being "simultaneously unifying and divisive"[88], in that it provided opportunity for agreement and consensus, but also for disagreement and division. He felt that anyone who participates in any type of hierarchy experiences "hierarchic motive" in that they are "goaded by the desire to mount the hierarchy, either through action or possession", yet were simultaneously threatened by the fear "of descending the hierarchy, either through action or possession but also by the failure to act or inability to possess certain things"[89]. Burke felt that this hierarchic motive, and the associated guilt resulting from a descent or

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[87] Rueckert 131.

[88] Rueckert 131.

[89] Rueckert 132.

failure to mount the hierarchy was a fundamental, and universal, human condition. Ultimately, he concluded that every hierarchy is "good" because it turns chaos into order, yet it is also a "goad" in so far as division is its inevitable product.

When presented with a hierarchy, the rhetorical critic immediately becomes interested in understanding the values serving as the fundamental basis for the hierarchy. The very nature of the hierarchy insists upon values, as the items or people being assessed against the hierarchical framework must be assessed using certain variables, and the selection and prioritization of those variables implies values. The lesson to be gained from a closer examination of hierarchy is that values are always the fundamental building block of any hierarchy and that a close examination of a hierarchy can reveal those values.

The Rhetoric of Risk

While some theorists, such as Burke, are primarily interested in the motivations behind all human communication, others focus on providing tools for the rhetorical critic. One of the most significant theorists to the practice of rhetorical criticism is Lloyd Bitzer. In 1968, he introduced his theory of rhetorical situation, which attempted to understand the "nature of the contexts in which speakers or writers create rhetorical discourse"[90]. Bitzer saw rhetorical acts as a response to a certain kind of situation – he articulated that "a particular discourse comes into existence because of some specific condition or situation which invites utterance"[91]. He sought to better understand what it was about the situation that required a rhetorical response and proposed three

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[90] Lloyd Bitzer. "The Rhetorical Situation" Philosophy and Rhetoric Vol. 1. 1968. 1

[91] Bitzer 4.

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constituents, which ultimately defined which 'kind of situation' was a rhetorical situation.

The first constituent, exigence, he defined as "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done"[92]. He further elaborated that not all exigences are rhetorical – only those which can be modified by discourse are a rhetorical exigence. So, for example, while a natural disaster may be an imperfection marked by urgency, the disaster itself is not a rhetorical exigence because discourse could not have changed or prevented its occurrence. Instead, the lack of money for supplies to build temporary shelters for the victims could be an exigence because the lack of money is a problem that can be addressed via persuasive discourse. So, a provincial premier's public statement, calling for emergency funding from the federal government to assist the victims of the natural disaster, would constitute a rhetorical situation as it is discourse which seeks action to modify an exigence. According to Bitzer, "an exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse"[93].

The second constituent is audience – the discourse must be addressed to the audience which "consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change"[94]. In the natural disaster example, a premier petitioning the victims of the natural disaster would not be the appropriate rhetorical audience, as the victims are incapable of modifying the exigence and providing

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[92] Bitzer 6.

[93] Bitzer 7.

[94] Bitzer 8.

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emergency funding. Instead, an appropriate rhetorical audience for the premier's discourse would be federal cabinet ministers and senior civil servants – those that have the capacity to make federal funding allocations.

Finally, Bitzer identified constraints as the third constituent. He saw that "every rhetorical situation contains a set of constraints made up of persons, events, objects and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence"[95]. Constraints in the natural disaster example might include politicians from the opposition party, other victims of a natural disaster who might also want the limited federal funding, the extent and nature of media coverage, or there may be actual physical constraints regarding how to get supplies, purchased by the emergency funding, to the actual victims.

In providing this framework for the rhetorical situation, Bitzer provided a very valuable toolset for rhetorical critics interested in examining a particular discourse. By carefully considering the exigence, audience and constraints for a particular discourse, the critic can better understand how the discourse functions and comment on its effectiveness in modifying the exigence.

As I will outline in my analysis of the speaker-audience relationship, risk can be a very powerful rhetorical exigence. Ulrich Beck, a contemporary sociologist, has coined the term "risk society" to describe how Western society is primarily concerned with distributing risk or harm rather than wealth or status (which he argues was the concern of the first-stage modernity era during the Industrial revolution). Risk theorist Jakob Arnoldi summarizes Beck's understanding of the implications of this newly emerging

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[95] Bitzer 8.

risk society as "replacing the traditional values of progress and accumulation with a new ethic emphasizing risk avoidance, transfer, denial, and reinterpretation"[96]. So, as a rhetorical exigence, risk is becoming an increasingly common exigence as people, and particularly leaders in our communities, strive to minimize, avoid, and deny the risks they are faced with every day.

Risk as an exigence also presents other unique challenges. In examining current sociological literature regarding risk, the inherent link between risk and scientific methods is closely examined. As Arnoldi further elaborates, "A central feature of modern scientific reasoning is precisely the idea that the future is caused by the past or, more to the point, that inferences about the future can be made based on knowledge of past events"[97]. He presents a comprehensive overview of the history of risk and its relationship to inductive reasoning and probability, "For risk, probability is of course important because it makes possible assertions about the likelihood of future dangers. Probability, one might say, turns future uncertainty into a scientifically known risk"[98]. In the majority of the natural sciences and in economics, risk is most often defined as the probability of an event, in many cases further calculated by multiplying the probability factor with a numerical measure of the extent of the consequences[99]. Arnoldi argues that "Since the late 1960s or early 1970s risk, in various guises, has come to play both bigger and new roles in society"[100]. However, he warns that a paradox is emerging, especially

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[96] Jakob Arnoldi, Risk. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009) 89.

[97] Arnoldi 28.

[98] Arnoldi 28.

[99] Arnoldi 14.

[100] Arnoldi 5.

with environmental and health risks identified in the last 30 years – many risks, such as those regarding skin cancer or global warming "are often unknown to laypeople without information from scientists. Somewhat paradoxically, they are nevertheless surrounded by uncertainty, as scientists often have difficulty describing the magnitude of the risks with even an approximation of certainty"[101]. Ultimately, the general public is reliant on scientists for information, yet scientists are unable to provide specifics – and in fact, often argue between themselves about the size, scope and threat of many of the risks facing the general public.

This uncertainty increases the fear about these challenges and leaves individuals more confused and unclear about the actual threats. Many have argued that this puts the issue of risk management in the hands of the individual – one must decide which "expert narratives to believe and which risks to take and which to forsake"[102]. For example, as spring transitions to summer, individuals are left to weigh the conflicting advice about a) avoiding sun exposure to minimize the risk of skin cancer, and b) vitamin D deficiencies, which can be remedied with sun exposure. The public is left to individually determine how much sunscreen to apply (or not) rather than following the guidance of one authority on managing the risks related to sun exposure.

The continual presence of risk in our everyday lives presents unique leadership challenges. Leaders throughout our country and communities are frequently presented with risks and must weigh the risk of one outcome versus the risk of another. A current struggle facing the leaders of the City of Saskatoon is the debate regarding curbside

[101] Arnoldi 3.

[102] Arnoldi 94.

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recycling – city councillors must weigh the risk of continuing to overburden our existing landfill with the risk that any implemented recycling system will create an unwanted, and unpopular, burden for civic taxpayers. To further complicate this situation are the constraints of Cosmopolitan Industries (who currently provide jobs in paper recycling for intellectually challenged community members) and existing private enterprises who provide recycling services for relatively small numbers of Saskatoon citizens. Risks include the economic impact of stifling small business enterprise as well as the larger ethical risks of eliminating the Cosmopolitan Industries jobs, provided to disadvantaged members of our community. As well, the constant risk behind any politician's unpopular decision is the possible impact on performance in the next election.

To better understand how leaders respond to these rhetorical challenges, Jonathan Shay has explored how Aristotle's *Rhetoric* functions as a handbook of leadership[103]. Shay believes that Aristotle has provided "a descriptive and normative framework for leading one's fellow citizens" under situations which involve conflicting, incommensurable goods and uncertainty[104]. Shay identified that Aristotle outlines the three interrelated means a leader uses to gain the trust of an audience – these means are the same three artistic proofs, *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*, which have previously been discussed. The additional feature which Shay highlights for the leadership context is that these proofs must be considered as interrelated, not independent, when aspiring to gain the trust of an audience. Shay identified this interrelationship, because while the goals of action arise from the audience's ideals, ambitions and affiliations, or in other words, their

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[103] Jonathan Shay, "Aristotle's Rhetoric as a Handbook of Leadership" Defense and the National Interest. (2000) Accessed on June 11, 2011 from www.dnipogo.org/fcs/aristotle.htm

[104] Shay 1.

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character, an audience will apply their reason towards the means to achieving this goal, and their emotion to assessing how the means is impacting them[105]. Shay felt it was vital that a leader understand the interconnectedness of these three proofs when aspiring to rhetorically gain the trust of an audience.

The *Maclean's* Ranking as a Rhetorical Situation

The *Maclean's* ranking as a rhetorical artefact offers extensive substance for study. It is a rhetorical situation ripe for analysis – complete with exigence, audience and constraints. It combines Burke's hierarchic motivation with Bormann's fantasy-chaining – the audience creates a communally shared experience as they read the rankings, yet it serves to reinforce a divisive hierarchy – overall, an excellent example of human communication which unites while simultaneously dividing. It fulfills Boorstin's vision of a pseudo-event completely – the very essence of a man-made event, solely created for the purpose of being reported. It is an artefact begging for rhetorical analysis – with the aim to identify who is really saying what to whom and for what purpose?

Within this thesis, I will argue that establishing *Maclean's* ethos as an expert on post-secondary education, by policing Canada's most elite institutions, is the actual purpose which the rankings serve. It is no longer enough to report news, nor is it enough to create news – instead the rankings highlight *Maclean's* desire to ascend the hierarchy and arrive as expert, where the universities are accountable to them and submit to their scrutiny. Under the guise of accountability, *Maclean's* is very successful at crafting the rankings so that they appeal to numerous segments of the Canadian public – alumni, non-

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[105] Shay 2.

alumni, parents, and interested citizens, yet offer a distorted view of reality where the news-reporter is now judge and jury on higher education and its role in our society.

Much can be learned about how this example of persuasive discourse functions: how university alumni strive to relive their youth, how the universities scramble to establish their relevance to the Canadian public, and how parents who did not have a university education strive to minimize the risks of a significant financial investment.

Ultimately, I strive to highlight how the Canadian public is very comfortable accepting an authority and, in accepting that authority, become willing participants in a fantasy of *Maclean's* creation – one where *Maclean's* assists the tax-paying members of the Canadian public in calling post-secondary institutions into account. While claiming to empower its readers with a host of useful information, *Maclean's* substitutes rhetorical empowerment for informed judgment. It offers Canadians a spot on a collective judgment panel – where universities are called into account, where they must offer assurances that they provide quality offerings and that parents' investments in their children's education will not be misdirected. Unfortunately, while this fantasy may be pleasing for its participants it does not prompt meaningful conversation about the role universities should play in Canadian society nor does it highlight problems within the Canadian post-secondary system or assist institutions in making substantial and meaningful changes to its programs or service offerings to students.

CHAPTER 3
THE AUDIENCE-MESSAGE RELATIONSHIP

Since the inaugural issue in 1991, the *Maclean's* University Ranking issue continues to be its most popular issue each year and is purchased and read not only by prospective students and their parents, but by the Canadian public as a whole. It is my assessment that this ranking appeals to an audience much larger than just high school students and their parents and that rhetorical analysis can function to help uncover further details regarding what features of this ranking propel it to such a diverse audience of Canadians. The *Maclean's* University Ranking's inaugural issue "was one of the most popular – and hotly debated – issues in the magazine's history. The issue sold out within days and went into a second printing"[106]. While this university ranking may or may not be a useful tool for assisting students and their parents in making the decision regarding which post-secondary institution to select, the widespread public consumption of the ranking issue and the demand for its continued publication make it an object apt for rhetorical study.

As indicated in previous chapters, Aristotle, in describing how persuasion was able to function effectively, described three artistic proofs: ethos, logos and pathos. This chapter considers the *Maclean's* ranking from the relationship between the audience (those who read the Ranking) and the message (the content of the Ranking) – primarily, it provides a closer analysis of the audience that both demands and consumes the *Maclean's* University Rankings. A preliminary scan reveals many audiences to whom the *Maclean's* rankings could be directed: prospective students, prospective students'

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[106]Ann Dowsett Johnston,"Measuring Excellence." *Maclean's* 9 Nov. 1992: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 14 Jun. 2011.

parents, university administrators, university faculty, university alumni, government decision-makers, and/or the general Canadian public. This analysis first considers whom it is that *Maclean's* claims to be targeting and ultimately argues that the actual audience is more subtle and more complex than solely prospective university students and their parents.

The Explicit Audience

In the 1993 edition, *Maclean's* stated that "choosing a university need no longer be an educated guess" and in 1992, their impetus for the rankings was "two editors, both with sons about to go to university, both frustrated with the lack of comparative information"[107]. In 2001, *Maclean's* restates this impetus, as the new editor writes "after 10 years of overseeing the *Maclean's* rankings of Canadian universities, I, too, have a son in his last year of high school, ready to make a choice"[108]. In 2006, *Maclean's* provided a further broadened purpose, as it aimed to also, "give all readers an insight into the workings of Canada's higher education system", as well as assist high school graduates in selecting a university[109]. Consequently, it is apparent that their explicit target audience is those who can use this information to make a more informed choice about which Canadian university to attend. On the surface, this statement identifies an audience of prospective students. But this conclusion is potentially only a superficial assessment as it is unclear who actually makes the decision regarding which institution a

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[107] Ann Dowsett Johnston,"Measuring Excellence. " *Maclean's* 9 Nov. 1992: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 14 Jun. 2011.

[108] Ann Dowsett Johnston, "Choosing the right university an insider's guide. " *Maclean's* 19 Nov. 2001: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 14 Jun. 2011.

[109] Tony Keller. "THE BEST INVESTMENT MONEY CAN BUY. " *Maclean's* 13 Nov. 2006: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 18 Jul. 2011.

student will attend; does the student choose or the student's parents? Rising costs have resulted in parents becoming more likely to financially support their children during their post-secondary years[110] and consequently, these parents' stake in the decision increases. In most cases, they are, at minimum, influential supporters of their child's decision-making process and quite possibly the actual decision-makers themselves. Over the last few years, as the millennial generation began to attend post-secondary studies, many of these parents began playing a greater role in their children's post-secondary education experience. In fact, these parents earned the title of "helicopter parents" because they hover above, just within reach and always ready to swoop in to assist their child, whether the child asks for it or not[111]. Consequently, even *Maclean's* explicit target audience is not particularly clear.

<div align="center">**Content of the Rankings Issue**</div>

While both prospective students and their parents are easily identified as a possible target audience of the Rankings, this audience alone does not explain the widespread popularity of the Rankings. In order to better understand the dynamics of the audience that finds the ranking issue so captivating, a closer look at the content of the ranking issues is necessary. The fifteen editions (1991 – 2005) of *Maclean's* which feature the ranking as their cover stories comprise over 750 pages of material. Each edition is actually published as a compilation of many shorter articles, with unique authors, content and titles. This 'special edition' is released annually in November, and has spawned a subsequent separate publication, *Maclean's* Guide to Universities, which

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[110] Watson Scott Swail, The Affordability of University Education: A Perspective from Both Sides of the 49th Parallel (Washington, DC: Educational Policy Institute, Inc), 2004.

[111] Foster W. Cline & Jim Fay Parenting with Love and Logic: Teaching Children Responsibility (Colorado Springs: Pinon Press, 1990) 23.

is not part of its regular magazine, but is a separate book published in the spring of each year. It includes material from the previous year's ranking as well as additional material on many institutions. This thesis will focus exclusively on the published annual *Maclean's* University Rankings and will not include this companion publication within its scope.

In each university ranking, numerous statistical tables exist, which outline the various data elements that comprise the ranking. Each table ultimately provides a ranked list of institutions and the numerical analysis of each ranked institution with respect to a particular data element. These tables appear on essentially every page and at first glance constitute the bulk of the 50+ pages in any ranking. But, aside from the statistical tables, another common recurring item appears – the introductory essay. This essay introduces each edition and provides an editorial insight into this year's edition. While a statistical analysis of the rankings would provide certain insight – a rhetorical analysis, or analysis of the words and stories within the ranking, offers insight and greater interest to a student of rhetoric. So, in order to gain a better sense of the audience to whom this ranking appeals, I have isolated the introductory essays from the ranking editions from 1991 – 2005 to serve as the object for analysis within this chapter.

Using Fantasy-Theme Criticism to Analyze the Ranking

The first notable feature within this set of essays is the narrative thread that is wound throughout each essay – the essays begin by setting a scene, inviting the reader to suspend their disbelief and imagine that "It's a dreamy September afternoon in Kingston,

Ont., one of those heartbreaking days that fall seems to steal from summer"[112], or that "For 30 years, there was no poetry in the Henry F. Hall building at Concordia University"[113], or that "It is a bleary-eyed group of students who straggle into class at Montreal's McGill University for their 8:30 Monday-morning history lecture on Tudor and Stuart England"[114].

The presence of this narrative thread is significant from a rhetorical perspective, as Wayne Booth, who has extensively studied the relationship between persuasion and narrative, states, "we are at least partially constructed, in our most fundamental moral character, by the stories we have heard, or read, or viewed"[115]. Booth has argued that stories can be a particularly persuasive device as the readers' disbelief has already been suspended and their defences relaxed as they listen to a *mere story*. Marshall Gregory further elaborates that in order for a story to make sense and for the reader to follow along, the audience must become 'participants' in the story and it is at this moment that persuasion can be most effective[116]. The audience must become actively engaged in the story in order for it to make sense and during that active engagement, they are assuming the moral characters, values and tenets as proposed by the story. Ultimately, when analyzing the rhetorical impact of a narrative, both of these critics would agree it is

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[112] Ann Dowsett Johnston, "Measuring Excellence." *Maclean's* 15 Nov. 1999: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 14 Jun. 2011.

[113] Ann Dowsett Johnston, "Measuring Excellence: Keeping an Implicit Promise to the Class of 2000. " *Maclean's* 25 Nov. 1996: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 14 Jun. 2011.

[114] Bruce Wallace, "What Makes a University Great." *Maclean's* 21 Oct 1991: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 14 Jun. 2011.

[115] Wayne Booth, The Essential Wayne Booth ed. Walter Jost. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) 240.

[116] Marshall Gregory, "Ethical Criticism: What It Is and Why It Matters." *Style* (Summer, 1998)

important to ask "What is the audience being asked to believe in order for the story to make sense?"

An additional tool useful in the rhetorical study of narratives is Ernest Bormann's method of rhetorical criticism, Fantasy-Theme Criticism. As outlined in the literature survey, Bormann, building on the work of sociologist Robert Bales, identified the rhetorical significance of a process called "fantasy theme chaining". Bales identified fantasy theme chaining as occurring in small groups as the group collectively contributed to and engaged in a verbal dialogue, a fantasy – a fantasy being the creative or imaginative interpretation of events. This fantasy is edited and subtlety changes as different members contribute, or chain, until finally the story becomes one which all members of the group are engaged in. The "fantasy-theme" surfaces as the means through which the interpretation occurs via communication within the group. Ultimately, a fantasy theme tells a story about a group's experience that represents a constructed reality for the participants.

When using the fantasy theme methodology as a tool for forensic rhetorical criticism, Bormann suggested dividing the analysis into three steps: Step 1) noting the presence of a shared fantasy; Step 2) identifying the fantasy theme; and, Step 3) elaborating on the rhetorical vision being presented[117].

In analyzing the 15 introductory essays found in the *Maclean's* rankings, close reading was utilized to determine common elements, phrases, scenes or descriptions. Sonya Foss, in discussing the practical application of Fantasy-Theme Criticism suggests that one piece of evidence for determining the presence of a shared fantasy is a cryptic

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[117] Bormann 401.

allusion to a symbolic common ground[118]. In an analysis of the introductory essays, the

recurring phrase "Measuring Excellence" appeared significant as it was in the title of

numerous essays and was usually placed prominently on the cover of the issue[119]. This

phrase was used every year as the predominant title for the articles from 1993 – 2000;

often altered each year with a different subtitle such as in 1996 "Measuring Excellence –

Keeping an Implicit Promise to the Class of 2000" or in 1998 "Measuring Excellence –

From the Crucible of Underfunding, Heroes Have Emerged". The repeated use of this

phrase, and in such a prominent location as the title, suggested that it may provide further

details regarding the fantasy that *Maclean's* was inviting their readers to engage in.

Careful consideration of the phrase "Measuring Excellence" led to some

revealing observations. The word "measure" is heavily associated with a scientific,

rational and calculated view of the world. As Burke reminds us, every hierarchy, which

is a "good" in that it makes orderly what otherwise might be chaotic, is a "goad" in so far

as division into higher and lower is inevitable wherever there is ordering[120]. Measuring

acts as a precursor to a hierarchy. "To measure" indicates action upon items that can be

quantified, assessed and analyzed; the act of measurement requires the measurer to

isolate, categorize and label items. This word is very closely associated with science or

the "systematic knowledge of the physical and material world gained through

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[118] Sonja Foss, Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice 2 ed., (Prospect Heights IL: Waveland Press, 1996) 127.

[119] The term "Measuring Excellence" was used as a title of at least one essay during the Ranking Issues published in 2003, 2000, 1999, 1998, 1997, 1996, 1995, 1993, and 1992.

[120] William Rueckert. Kenneth Burke and the Drama of Human Relations. 2e. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1963) 132.

observation and experimentation"[121]. While a thorough discussion of the rhetorical significance that has been associated with science within our modern culture is beyond the scope of this chapter, it may be sufficient to note that the cultural significance placed on things that are "scientific" is substantial. It is only in recent years that cultural critics such as Wayne Booth and Margaret Atwood have begun to question the wisdom in placing absolute value and priority on anything and everything that is "science"[122].

While the actual meaning and use of the word "measure" is revealing, the implications of the act of measurement prove even more significant. The phrase "knowledge is power"[123] comes to mind when considering why the actual act of measurement might be important. In many ways, measurement is an antidote against the 'unknown'; if something can be measured, it can be understood. In this sense, if it can be understood, its power is removed. The word *measure* gains almost magical qualities as it protects from the imagined evils of the unknown. This understanding of the implications of measuring align with *Maclean's* own explanation of the rankings; as previously discussed, they state that they created the rankings to eliminate the "guess-work" in selecting an university; they were seeking to uncover the unknown, to provide "comparative information", or *knowledge*, about Canadian universities.

If "measuring" elicits association to a quantitative world, then the use of the word "excellence" conjures up the qualitative one. "Excellence" can be defined as "the state of

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[121] "Science" Dictionary. Accessed on April 30, 2009 from http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/science

[122] For example, "Margaret Atwood on Science and Writing" Talk of the Nation, NPR, 30 Apr 2004; Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Rhetoric (Malden MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004) 155.

[123] Sir Francis Bacon, Sacred Meditations of Heresies, 1597.

superiority"[124] and has a much more subjective connotation than the word "measure".

For example, most people would not expect to argue over whether or not an item is being measured, but would expect to debate the excellence of any given item. In order for something to be considered in a "state of superiority", it must be in a comparison with another object and there must be qualities which are used to make the determination of superiority. As well, in order for an item to be deemed superior, the automatic implication is that its competitor is inferior. Excellence reminds the reader about the world of degrees, where there is a good, a better and a best. Again, we are reminded of Burke's hierarchy – good, better and best can be easily translated to #1, #2 and #3.

A better understanding of the significance of the word "excellence" can be found by examining Richard Weaver's description of a "god-term", or a single term which acts as an "incipient proposition"[125]. These god terms become incipient propositions because during the very act of reading/hearing one of these god-terms, the reader/hearer makes enthymematic associations between the god-term and a certain set of positive ideals or values – in this sense, the term "proposes" these ideals or values in an "incipient", or partially disguised, manner. Weaver also created a parallel word, "devil-term", for those words or phrases which make the enthymematic proposition towards ideals or values which are generally considered negative. Recent examples of devil-terms that have appeared in American politics would be 'axis of evil' or 'weapons of mass destruction'.

Because god-terms automatically absorb the qualities of those positive ideals with which it is associated, a god-term becomes an expression "by which all other

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[124] "Excellence." Dictionary. Accessed on May 1, 2009 from http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/excellence

[125] Richard Weaver, The Ethics of Rhetoric (Davis CA: Hermagoras Press, 1953) 211.

expressions are ranked as subordinate"[126]. In 1961, Weaver's example of a god-term was

progress as he noted that "Today no one is startled to hear of a man's sacrificing health

or wealth for the 'progress' of the community… and this is just because 'progress' is the

coordinator of all socially respectable effort"[127]. In this, Weaver is suggesting that

progress has a very positive, cultural association – anyone who explains that they are

acting, or sacrificing, in the name of progress will automatically be accepted or

understood as pursuing a noble cause. The power of the god-terms multiply, as Weaver

outlines how many god-terms spur several "uncontested terms"[128]. These terms are

uncontested in the sense that because they are related to god-terms (and consequently

imply a positive association) they are not questioned. If something is described as

supporting or promoting a god-term, it becomes an uncontested term as it automatically

assumes the positive connotations associated with the god-term. An excellent example of

this is a scientist who is conducting scientific research in the name of progress. Because

progress is culturally understood to be acceptable and more often, highly desirable,

anything that is identified as aligned with progress assumes a sense of similar

desirability. In this example, scientific research becomes an uncontested term, as it

acquires the same desirability that is associated with progress. Obviously, uncontested

terms are not always uncontested by every single individual in a society – there are

people who are questioning the limits/values/ethics of scientific research – but generally,

those who question the value of science are considered part of a counter-culture and not

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[126] Weaver 212.

[127] Weaver 214.

[128] Weaver 214.

part of the mainstream culture. It is likely fair to say that uncontested terms are not questioned by mainstream culture but are instead accepted and promoted.

To further complicate matters, uncontested terms can then propagate further uncontested terms, so in this example, items which become associated with scientific research then assume the same positive associations the audience has with scientific research. Current academic examples might be "tri-council funding" or "research chairs" – because these items both support research, most academics would have a positive association to acquiring either – without questioning the process for funding distribution or whether or not the funding might be in the best interest of society. Ultimately, Weaver's concern with uncontested terms is that the very act of association with a god-term means it "will validate almost anything"[129] and the item being associated will not be critically analyzed on its own merits.

The word *excellence* meets Weaver's definition of a god-term, as it is also an expression by which all others are ranked as subordinate – excellence is at the top of any hierarchy. It is also interesting how similar *excellence* is to the notion of *progress* – it would also be true that no one would be startled to hear of a person sacrificing health or wealth in pursuit of excellence in their field… whether that field be sports, arts, academia or politics. In this sense, excellence assumes the same sense of desirability; it is very culturally acceptable to support progress and to pursue excellence.

While both progress and excellence act as god-terms, important differences exist between the two concepts. Progress offers the idea of moving forward, possibly on a journey. It is the idea that you are further advanced towards a goal than you were previously, but you have not reached your goal. In fact, the goal may not even be defined

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[129] Weaver 212.

or ever realized; some would argue it is the progress throughout the journey that is of actual value. Excellence, though, does not have the same implications. Excellence is not about a process; it is about an end-state. An item either meets a definition of excellence, or it does not. While there can be arguments about what qualities contribute to the definition of excellence within a specific context, once the definition is agreed upon, an item will either meet the definition of excellence, or it will not.

In applying the god-term, *excellence,* to the University Rankings, *Maclean's* has imposed severe limitations on the actual social utility of the rankings. As Weaver described, by associating the rankings with the god-term *excellence,* the Rankings, by association, are inherently validated. This validation is not a critical measure – the rankings are not assessed for their actual usefulness or contribution to furthering social values. Instead, they are validated only because of the positive association with the scientific measure of excellence. This implicit association makes it very difficult for readers to critically assess the value and usefulness of the ranking tool.

Examining its social utility has been further hampered by the use of the god-term *excellence* because it describes an end-state, or goal. In many ways, universities are processes and not end-states. They are complex organizations which serve multiple purposes, offer wide varieties of programs and serve some sub-populations better than others. It is ill-conceived to try to summarize them into one end-state and then rank that end-state in a hierarchy. In this way, *Maclean's* does a true disservice to the Canadian public – rather than honestly recognizing the vast complexity within these organizations and championing a process for engaging prospects and citizens into a meaningful

dialogue about the important differences, it capitalizes on the implicit associations with *excellence,* in order to enhance its primary objective – magazine sales.

<u>The Presented Worldview</u>

When taken together as the phrase "Measuring Excellence", the critic can get a sense of the worldview, fantasy, or interpretation of events, that is being presented. The world *Maclean's* is offering is one where nothing is 'un-measurable'; items like alumni loyalty, quality of experience and sense of community can be equated into a measurable data format. And, because it is converted to data, this data can be captured, analyzed and then ranked. The worldview they are offering is one which is very scientific, where items are and can be categorized; it is a world where confusion and ambiguity is resisted, where *Maclean's* can act as a saviour by offering explanations of the unknown. *Maclean's* is offering an escape from confusion; they are offering their readers a place where everything can be labelled, the complex world is interpreted and decisions made will be "the right" ones, as they will be based on hard, solid data. In this sense, data acts as an uncontested term – it is strongly associated with scientific research, which as I have already argued draws positive associations from progress. Ultimately, it becomes incredibly difficult for an audience to question anything that is presented as data, because it is associated with scientific research, which for most Western audiences has a very positive association. This scientific, everything-is-explained worldview outlines the fantasy that *Maclean's* is offering and which its audience is engaging.

<u>Overarching Fantasy Themes</u>

With the shared fantasy identified, further examination of the text is able to reveal the overarching fantasy themes. This analysis was conducted by examining the introductory essays along three different perspectives: 1) examining which characters appear; 2) following the narrative settings presented in each essay; and, 3) identifying which actions occurred or were suggested.

Characters

Throughout the essays, there were three reappearing groups of characters: 1) named, recognizable university administrators, such as Martha Piper[130] or Bernard Shapiro[131]; 2) the interviewed concerned citizen or student, such as 19-year old Christy Brissette from 2002's edition or Ray Wescott, a U of T student mentioned in the 1994 essay; and, 3) an elusive, un-named "alumni parent" persona.

The connections between a piece of post-secondary education journalism and primary sources (such as university presidents) or interviews with prospective or current students seemed very appropriate and fitting to the context. Consequently, it was the third character, the un-named "alumni parent" I suspected would be more revealing from a rhetorical perspective. This "alumni parent" character appeared in four out of the previous six year's editions (2000 – 2005) and the texts from these editions offer rich tidbits regarding this character. The reader learns that "As babies of that well-educated baby-boom generation – the echo boom – beat a path to the post-secondary doorstep in record numbers, the faculty who taught their parents are heading in the opposite

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[130] Martha Piper was the President of the University of British Columbia from 1997 to 2006.

[131] Bernard Shapiro was the Principal and Vice-Chancellor of McGill University from 1994 to 2004.

direction"[132]. The reader learns that it was this "well-educated baby boom" who has produced children who understood "going to university means more than mere vocationalism"[133]. In the 2001 edition, *Maclean's* tells us that "the same well-educated parents who lined up to get their son or daughters into the right nursery school have cottoned on to the fact that there just might not be enough spaces to go around" and that is "these well-educated parents who have put a high priority on the education of their children"[134].

Rhetorically, the concept of alumni parent acts as an enthymeme – in order to understand the concept of educated parent, the reader needs to implicitly make the connection and distinguish these educated parents from the parents without a post-secondary (or even secondary) education. These "alumni parents" appeared frequently enough in the essays that I began to question what role this character had, and how this character was contributing to the overwhelming sales of the rankings issues. Using the skill of the enthymeme, *Maclean's* is able to distinguish the alumni parents from their non-alumni peers. I believe the implications of this are significant and will discuss this educated versus non-educated distinction in later sections.

Settings

With questions regarding the importance of the "alumni parent" character still looming, my analysis transitioned to an examination of the narrative settings found in the

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[132] Ann Dowsett Johnston, "Measuring Excellence" *Maclean's* 17 Nov 2003: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

[133] Ann Dowsett Johnston et al. "The University Crunch" *Maclean's* 18 Nov 2002: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

[134] Ann Dowsett Johnston, "Measuring Excellence" *Maclean's* 20 Nov 2000: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 12 Feb 2011.

essays – ten of the fourteen editions begin with a strong sense of scene or setting. As noted earlier, these scenes ranged from "an 8:30 Monday morning history lecture on Tudor and Stuart England at McGill University" (1991) to "a balmy Friday afternoon in downtown Toronto in late September" (1998) to "a hot muggy morning in Kingston Ontario, the day after Labour Day" (2003). The presence of narrative was particularly striking as the descriptions had a strong nostalgic sense to them. On one level, this was not surprising, as the authors of these essays were older adults, who had university-age children and likely began their university educations many decades previously. It was easy to imagine this university alumni character, one who had experienced undergraduate education on a Canadian campus and could recall their own experiences in a lecture, outside on a Friday afternoon, or returning to classes after Labour Day.

Actions

When considering the element of action in these essays, a marked divide appeared at the Millennium. The group(s) called to act in these essays changed between the editions published in the 1990's and those published after the year 2000. From 1991 to 1999, the directive for action was focused towards the political arena. A typical example of this targeted imperative is from 1998 where it states "Perhaps this will help the political powers-that-be understand just how central these students are to the hopes and ambitions of society as a whole. And perhaps, grasping the truth, those who control the purse strings will understand that this generation deserves the challenge of an innovative learning environment"[135]. But in the years 2000 to 2005, it has become this 'alumni parent' persona that is called to act. In 2003's essay, the essays state that

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[135] Ann Dowsett Johnston, "Measuring Excellence" *Maclean's* 23 Nov 1998: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web 12 Feb 2011.

"pressure for change may come from those well-educated students of the previous generation, namely the baby-boom parents" or in 2002, "The promise of a good education is something these students have grown up with. Now is the time to deliver". Even though un-named, and not famous identifiable figures, these alumni parents appeared to be central characters in this narrative, particularly five years immediately after the millennium.

In further considering this *university alumni* character, another, disguised character appeared – those who are not university alumni. It is only reasonable that of all the prospective university students in Canada, some would have parents who are university alumni and some would not. Given that the number of non-alumni parents is likely to continue to grow in the foreseeable future, *Maclean's* relegation of these parents to a lower position in the hierarchy of implied audiences is significant because it represents a sense of exclusivity that on one hand *Maclean's*, as a populist magazine denounces, and yet serves to reinforce the elite and exclusive nature of universities. Interestingly, one of the facts repeatedly mentioned in these essays is that the number of Canadian students pursuing a university education is rapidly increasing. In 2003's essay, it cites that in 1990 there were 532,000 full-time students enrolled in Canadian universities but then by 2003, Canadian universities had an enrolment of around 745,000 full-time students.

Given the constant narrative thread, the relatively recent appearance of the "alumni parent" as principal audience and the differences in the audiences called to action between 1991 – 1999 and 2000 – 2005, I chose to focus my analysis of the

rhetorical vision to the 2000 – 2005 years. I believe that the relatively new appearance of the *university alumni* persona likely indicates a shift in *Maclean's* rhetorical vision.

Maclean's Rhetorical Vision

In analyzing the essays between 2000 and 2005, examining the combination of settings, characters and actions, one vision did appear. But, surprisingly, it was not a vision of the future, but a vision of the past. It was a very nostalgic vision, one that yearned for the days of undergraduate life long past. This chord is captured perfectly in the ending of 2003's essay, "The whole university experience – with all its richness, opportunity and promise – is what those baby-boom parents remember. And whether you call it seizing the past or claiming the future, it's what they all want for their own sons and daughters"[136]. The voice of the essays is reminiscent – only those who have had the experience themselves can reminisce. The relevant question becomes: are all alumni of our Canadian universities being called to imagine themselves in this educated parent role? And, are the university alumni purchasing these "Special Editions" of *Maclean's* to learn more about gradations of excellence in post-secondary education, or is it because they want to be reminded of their own post-secondary experience of yesteryear? I suggest that the *Maclean's* University Ranking, particularly between 2000 and 2005, is more about nostalgia and less about the proposed pursuit of excellence.

Having uncovered glimpses into the fantasy themes and the rhetorical vision that *Maclean's* is presenting, my analysis would not be complete without a comment

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[136] Ann Dowsett Johnston, "Measuring Excellence" *Maclean's*17 Nov 2003: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

regarding motive. As stated earlier regarding Fantasy-Theme Criticism, its outcome is that actions that make little sense to someone outside of a rhetorical vision make perfect sense when viewed in the context of that vision, for the vision provides the motive for action[137]. With *Maclean's*, the explicit action is obvious; it results in a magazine edition providing rankings of the universities of the Canadian public. As previously discussed, on the surface the 2004 essay provides two motives for this action: information and profit. This essay states that the *Maclean's* ranking started because "Two editors, both fathers of boys in their last years of high school, were hungry for some comparative information. Basic facts – like average entering grades and student-faculty ratios. Information they couldn't find in those glossy campus brochures"[138]. And, like any market-driven for-profit corporation, *Maclean's* wanted to continue to make a profit from their efforts, for also in 2004's edition, Johnson acknowledges "When the first ranking hit the newsstands, it sold out in three days. Three hours in some cities"[139].

Kenneth Burke, who wrote extensively about rhetorical motive, suggested that "it is clear how motives, shorthand words for situations, are assigned with reference to our orientation in general"[140]. In considering the elements contained within any one rankings issue, it would likely be considered poor journalistic style (and not popular with readers) to fill magazine pages with tables of numbers, with no words, no explanations, no

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[137] Bormann 401.

[138]Ann Dowsett Johnston, "How Grads Grade Their Schools" *Maclean's* 11 Nov 2004: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 16 June 2011.

[139] Ann Dowsett Johnston, "How Grads Grade Their Schools" *Maclean's* 11 Nov 2004: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 16 June 2011.

[140] Joseph R. Gusfield. <u>Kenneth Burke on Symbols and Society</u>. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989) 127.

stories. But, as ethical critic Marshall Gregory states, "the exertions that are required just to understand the content, shape and direction of a story in fact involve a complicitous agreement to let the story have its own way with our beliefs and feelings – at least for the time being"[141]. The question then becomes, can the uncovered rhetorical vision provide any insight into what type of complicitous agreement the reader is entering into? And, given the rhetorical vision described, what can be learned about *Maclean's* orientation? As I asked in the beginning of this chapter, what fundamental ethical character is being promoted in these essays?

In attempting to answer these final questions, I returned to the target audience for the rankings. I want to suggest, that contrary to popular belief, these rankings are not targeted to prospective students. Instead, these essays are written for a recurring character, the educated parent, or university alumnus. These essays direct the reader back into the 1960's and 1970's, when the reader was an undergraduate student. The readers are directed to remember back, prior to the complexities of the present day world, prior to the drastic budget cuts, back to a time when low tuition and safe, affordable housing were givens. As the author suggests, just think back to that "8:30 Monday morning history lecture on Tudor and Stuart England" or "sitting outdoors on a hot, muggy morning, the day after labour day" – the author wants the reader to remember back to the 'good ole' days'. The days when a university experience was filled with richness, opportunity and promise – a time when fierce competition, limited access and sky-rocketing costs were not yet imagined.

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[141] Marshall Gregory, "Ethical Criticism: What It Is and Why It Matters." <u>Style</u>. (Summer 1998): 231.

The clues to understanding *Maclean's* orientation – and what fundamental ethical character they are promoting – have already been presented:

1. the scientific world alluded to via the cryptic allusion of "Measuring Excellence" – the need to isolate, categorize and limit;

2. the nostalgia surrounding the central reappearing character of the alumni parent, and;

3. being that "what is not said can be more important that what is said"[142], the resultant contradiction between reinforcing the exclusive nature of universities and their alumni versus providing material that is relevant to the majority of the Canadian population.

Maclean's is promoting a character of contradictions. In striving to fulfill their mission as "Canada's newsmagazine", they must create and present contradictory worldviews in order to simultaneously appeal to conflicting segments of the Canadian public.

In order to appeal to those Canadians who are university alumni, *Maclean's* presents a nostalgic worldview. It reminisces about university experiences in the 1960's and 1970's – offering that as the standard from which university education has declined. As previously discussed, the essays are explicitly directed towards "educated parents", those who can relate to experiences on campuses, in classrooms, with faculty. This

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[142] Jennifer MacLennan in Effective Communication for the Technical Professions (Toronto: Prentice Hall, 2003) 7 outlines nine axioms about the practice of communication that arise from Aristotle's principles of communication effectiveness, which highlights the dynamic between audience, message and speaker. This axiom was originally introduced by Paul Watzlawick et al. Pragmatics of Human Communication. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1967).

audience is the one which *Maclean's* explicitly targets - their impetus for the rankings was "two editors, both with sons about to go to university, both frustrated with the lack of comparative information"[143]. For this audience, *Maclean's* presents an ethos of nostalgia – that of an old friend with whom you can reminisce.

But only 23% of Canadian adults have a university degree[144]. And a much smaller percentage of these adults would have children approaching post-secondary education. If it were true that the rankings only appealed to this small segment of the population, two problems would have occurred: 1) few magazines would have sold and it likely would not have been a profitable enterprise and 2) *Maclean's* would not be fulfilling its mission of providing content relevant to a majority of Canadians.

In order to appeal to a broad enough population, particularly the non-alumni Canadians, *Maclean's* needed to simultaneously promote a different ethos. This ethos is one of empowerment. *Maclean's* is empowering Canadians to take part in the fantasy that *Maclean's* has created – a fantasy where *Maclean's* empowers the working Canadian public (whose taxes fund a substantial portion of the operating costs of any publicly funded university) and allows them a role as part of a jury, whose goal is to offer judgment on Canadian universities. This ethos is unstated – but is particularly apparent when considering the sentiment behind the recurring call to "Measure Excellence". It is a powerful experience to measure, to judge. And when someone trusts you with the tools in order to conduct the measurement, readers cannot help but feel empowered. This sense of empowerment is further enhanced with the several cleverly

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[143] Ann Dowsett Johnston, "Measuring Excellence. " *Maclean's* 9 Nov. 1992: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 14 Jun. 2011.

[144] 23% of Canadians aged 25-64 years old have a university degree. Statistics Canada. Census 2006. Accessed from http://www42.statcan.ca/smr08/pdf/smr08_107-eng.pdf on July 9, 2011.

worded article titles, such as "*Maclean's* Goes Back to School and ranks Canadian universities"[145], "How Grads Grade Their Schools"[146] and "Why universities should be graded, too"[147]. *Maclean's* is grading the universities – offering their own judgment about the universities' performance. And, as part of the shared experience, by reading the rankings, *Maclean's* is inviting its readers to play a role in this performance.

The ability to simultaneously sustain two contradictory ethoi is a slippery slope and *Maclean's* needed a very subtle enthymeme in order to assist. The enthymeme underpinning the rankings is a sense of fear. After participating in the rankings, alumni readers are left to nostalgically continue to reminisce on their own glorious undergraduate experience, yet are fearful that the quality of university education in Canada is in jeopardy. Rankings of universities were not needed in the 1960's and 1970's – costs were much lower, there were fewer institutions to compare and students experienced much less geographic mobility. Alumni also have a just and explicit fear if the quality of education at their alma mater is declining – the perceived value of their degree may lessen if their alma mater descends the ranking hierarchy. For alumni the ranking serves both as a nostalgic road trip and a check on their investment – has their post-secondary investment increased or decreased in value?

For non-alumni readers, fear is also present. In many ways, *Maclean's* goes to great lengths to highlight and reinforce the idea that universities are complex organizations – the long and confusing tables and variables within the rankings serve to

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[145] Ann Dowsett Johnston, "Measuring Excellence: *Maclean's* goes back to school and ranks Canadian universities" *Maclean's* Nov 9, 1992. Vol 105. Issue 45. 20.

[146] Ann Dowsett Johnston, "How Grads Grade Their Schools" *Maclean's* Nov 15, 2004. Vol 117. Issue 46. 31.

[147] "Why universities should be graded, too" *Maclean's* Sep 4, 2006. Vol 119. Issue 35. 2.

remind readers that university are academic institutions – and in a way that makes them inaccessible by the general public. The non-alumni readers are led to feel grateful that this assistance in understanding the complexities is provided.

Yet, at the end of it all, the enthymematic association of fear along with these contradictory ethoi serve to maintain status quo perceptions. The public is asked to continue to believe that universities are exclusive, elite, complex organizations, yet they are of interest to the Canadian public, as the every-day-tax-payer can join *Maclean's* at the top of this hierarchy in keeping them accountable.

CHAPTER 4
THE MESSAGE-SPEAKER RELATIONSHIP

It is not surprising today to hear reference to a politician, corporation, celebrity or any other public figure's *image* – in fact, the very idea that your image, or how you appear to the public, is something separate and distinct from how you actually are has existed for decades. Modern audiences are particularly comfortable with this distinction; it is very common in current media reports to hear reference to image, or more commonly problems with image and how people/companies are working to alter or improve their images. As a random sample from 2011, media reports from February to May were rife with references to image management as Canadian federal politicians geared up for voting day[148].

While a multitude of factors, such as physical features, dress, and body language all contribute to the development of an individual's image, the management of image is particularly relevant to rhetorical study, as verbal communication is often a key way in which individuals alter their image within the public sphere. Many rhetorical and cultural critics have analyzed how a particular public address has shaped or altered the rhetor's public image – examples include analyses of Nixon's 1969 address[149] or Hitler's *Mein*

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[148] For examples, see "Harper as popular as Chretien, despite image" accessed on June 11, 2011 from http://news.nationalpost.com/2011/05/03/harper-as-popular-as-chretien-despite-what-everyone-says/ ; "Image consultants evaluate leaders on campaign trail" accessed on June 9, 2011 from http://www.ctv.ca/servlet/ArticleNews/story/CTVNews/20110408/image-consultants-leaders-scored-110410/20110410?s_name=election2011 ; "Ignatieff ditching 'uptight' image for campaign" accessed on June 13, 2011 from http://fullcomment.nationalpost.com/2011/03/31/john-ivison-ignatieff-ditches-'uptight'-image-for-campaign

[149] Forbes Hill, "Conventional Wisdom – Traditional Form – The President's Message of November 3, 1969" Rhetorical Criticism: Exploration & Practice 2nd Ed. ed. Sonya Foss (Prospect Heights IL: Waveland Press, 1996) 34-49.

Kampf[150]. In these examples, the critics are interested in how the public discourse altered the persona, or image, of the speakers.

But, for cultural critic Daniel Boorstin, interest lies not in how image was altered, but in the very existence of the troubling dichotomy between appearance versus reality. Boorstin is unclear as to why the public is willing to so readily accept a mere image – a shadow of something – rather than demanding actual substance and reality[151].

In response to his concern, Boorstin published his classic 1961 work, The Image, which attempted to understand how and why image has superseded reality and to ultimately warn audiences of the dangers of this "mass disenchantment"[152]. He suggests that "the most we can hope for is that each of us may penetrate the unknown jungle of images in which we live our daily lives"[153]. Within this work, Boorstin provides a very useful framework for understanding both the image, but also its precursor, the pseudo-event. By applying his framework for both of these concepts to the *Maclean's* University Ranking, I will argue that because the Ranking meets his criteria for a pseudo-event, the very image the universities' have of themselves is revealed.

Boorstin begins by discussing expectations. He suggests that "we have used our wealth, our literacy, our technology, and our progress, to create the thicket of unreality which stands between us and the facts of life"[154]. He felt that our "extravagant

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[150] Kenneth Burke, "The Rhetoric of Hitler's 'Battle'" Landmark Essays on Rhetorical Criticism ed Thomas Benson (Davis CA: Hermagoras Press, 1993) 33-50.

[151] Boorstin 137.

[152] Boorstin 261.

[153] Boorstin 261.

[154] Boorstin 3.

expectations"[155] have led us to expect news, with each and every morning newspaper and every time we tune into a news broadcast on the radio or television. He argued that this very basis of exponentially growing expectation has created "the demand for the illusions with which we deceive ourselves"[156]. Boorstin saw that because we expect news at such a frenzied rate, culturally, we have begun to create news, so that there will be something 'new' every time we tune in – he cites this as the transition from "news-gathering" to "news-making"[157]. In order to succeed at "news-making", Boorstin identifies a "new kind of synthetic novelty" which he names "pseudo-events"[158]. He distinguishes the difference between "God-made events" such as natural disasters, with "man-made" events which are "not quite real"[159].

Boorstin presented a set of four characteristics which all pseudo-events have in common:

1. It is not spontaneous, but comes about because someone has planned, planted or incited it. Typically, it is not a train wreck or an earthquake, but an interview.
2. It is planted primarily (not always exclusively) for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced. Therefore, its occurrence is arranged for the convenience of the reporting or reproducing media. Its success is measured by how widely it is reported. The question, "Is it real?" is less important than "Is it newsworthy?"
3. Its relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous. Its interest arises largely from this very ambiguity. Concerning a pseudo-

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[155] Boorstin 3.

[156] Boorstin 5.

[157] Boorstin 7.

[158] Boorstin 9.

[159] Boorstin 11.

event the question "What does it mean?" has a new dimension. While the news interest in a train wreck is in *what* happened and in the real consequences, the interest in an interview is always, in a sense, in *whether* it really happened and in what might have been the motives. Did the statement really mean what it said? Without some of this ambiguity a pseudo-event cannot be very interesting.

4.   Usually it is intended to be a self-fulfilling prophecy[160].

The Rankings as a Pseudo-Event

Boorstin's first criterion identifies the very essence of the man-made event; because it is "planned, planted or incited", it escapes chance, spontaneity or randomness. There is a person, a mastermind, who is deliberately inventing and executing the facets of the pseudo-event; it is not just the reporting of news, or events, which have naturally occurred. Boorstin is very explicit regarding the man-made nature of pseudo-events but continues by making two very important differentiations. His first is the differentiation between man-made and God-made events, but with the caveat that not all organized, planned events are necessarily pseudo-events. Birthday parties, the publication of books and funding allocations can all exist outside of the realm of pseudo-event; instead, Boorstin offers examples of events which would qualify as pseudo-events are press conferences[161], the "news leak"[162] or a celebration created so that an organization can increase its prestige[163].

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[160] Boorstin 12.

[161] Boorstin 19.

[162] Boorstin 31.

[163] Boorstin 10.

Boorstin continues with his second differentiation, that between two types of man-made events: pseudo-events and propaganda. The study of propaganda gained popularity and importance just before World War II and there have been numerous academic articles published related to propaganda and advertising since that time. The Institute for Propaganda Analysis, created in 1937, existed to "educate citizens in the methods and uses of propaganda techniques as a means of defending against the unscrupulous use of language to deceive and manipulate"[164]. One of its publications, How to Detect Propaganda, provides a definition of propaganda as the "expression of opinion or action by individuals or groups deliberately designed to influence opinions or actions of other individuals or groups with reference to predetermined ends"[165]. While Boorstin agrees that propaganda is persuasive communication, he differentiates propaganda from pseudo-events primarily on the means and underlying motives with which they achieve their ends. He felt that the means with which propaganda achieved this persuasion was dependent "primarily on emotional appeal" which appeals to falsehood[166]. He contrasts this to the underlying motive in participating in a pseudo-event – Boorstin felt that pseudo-events appeal to our "honest desire to be informed, to have 'all the facts', and even to have more facts than there really are"[167]. He further

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[164] Jennifer MacLennan, "Background Note for 'How to Detect Propaganda'" Inside Language ed. Jennifer MacLennan and John Moffatt (Scarborough ON: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada, 2000) 261.

[165] Clyde Miller "How to Detect Propaganda" in Inside Language ed. Jennifer MacLennan and John Moffatt (Scarborough ON: Prentice Hall Allyn and Bacon Canada, 2000) 261.

[166] Boorstin 34.

[167] Boorstin 34.

differentiates that propaganda "feeds on our willingness to be inflamed" while pseudo-

events "appeal to our duty to be educated"[168].

The *Maclean's* University Rankings meet this first criterion in an obvious way;

the creation, compilation and publication of the rankings is not a spontaneous event.

Instead, the rankings were a deliberate and conscious creation and their publication each

year, requires the cooperation and assistance of numerous individuals, including the

participating universities. Initially in 1992, *Maclean's,* in consultation with a consortium

of universities across Canada, spent hours and hours creating the original assessment

framework, categories, surveys and data analysis tools. Since the frameworks inception,

it has been 'tweaked' and revised each year – and on an annual basis, every single

participating institution devotes extensive resources to compiling and submitting the

required data. While many institutions would have already had offices devoted to

statistical analysis (in order to meet federal/provincial government reporting

requirements), the additional tasks necessary to provide the required data to *Maclean's*

have undoubtedly required further resources.

While it may be obvious that the rankings are not spontaneous, Boorstin's further

explanation regarding the means and motive underlying an audience's willing

acceptance/participation in a pseudo-event is particularly acute. This "duty to be

educated" and "honest desire to be informed" aligns completely with *Maclean's* explicit

exigence – which was a frustration with a "lack of comparative information"[169] regarding

Canadian universities. *Maclean's* explicitly appeals to its readers' "duty to be educated"

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[168] Boorstin 34.

[169] Ann Dowsett Johnston, "Measuring Excellence." *Maclean's* 9 Nov 1992: ABI/INFORM
Global, ProQuest. Web. 9 Jun. 2011

and positions the ranking as a source of information. Boorstin's suggestion that pseudo-events also try to provide "all the facts, and even to have more facts that there really are" also rings true – ultimately, the rankings take 24[170] categories and affix a measure to them. Then, under the guise of "Measuring Excellence", they create "facts" by letting the reader make the implicit connections between the amount of alumni support or number of residence spots and what type of undergraduate student experience a prospective student can expect to have.

Boorstin's second criterion states that the pseudo-event exists "primarily (not always exclusively) for the immediate purpose of being reported or reproduced"[171]. For any organization that is in the media business, the allure of this element is obvious. The newsmagazine company exists only if it can sell enough newsmagazines to be profitable, and in order to publish newsmagazines, content is needed to fill them. And, as Boorstin reminds us, modern North American audiences "expect anything and everything"[172] which leads editors to face the harsh reality that if news is not naturally-occurring at a speed fast enough to meet expectations, content must be created. The immediacy that Boorstin outlines is also important as it reminds us of the false sense of urgency that becomes apparent in many pseudo-events. Press releases offer hints of an upcoming,

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[170] The number of categories changed slightly over the years. Twenty-four is the number of categories considered in 2004 and included: Average Entering Grade, Proportion with 75% or Higher, Student Retention, Proportion Who Graduate, Out of Province (1st Year), International (1st year), International (Graduate), Student Awards, Class Sizes (1st and 2nd Year Level), Class Sizes (3rd and 4th Year Level), Classes Taught By Tenured Faculty, Faculty with Ph.D.s, Awards per Full-time Faculty, Social Sciences and Humanities Grants, Medical/Science Grants, Operating Budget, Scholarships & Bursaries, Student Services, Total Library Holdings, Library Holdings per Student, Library Acquisitions, Library Expenses, Alumni Support, and Reputational Survey. Ann Dowsett Johnson and Mary Dwyer. "Ranking Canadian Universities" *Maclean's* 117.46 (1990)39.

[171] Boorstin 12.

[172] Boorstin 4.

important announcement; yet, "the release is news pre-cooked, and supposed to keep till needed"[173]. The audience is sent contradictory messages – the announcement is very urgent, important and requires the media's attention, but is not so important that it cannot wait until Friday at 10 a.m. Essentially, media are asked to jump on the 'bandwagon' – they should be interested in this story because they are told that all of their colleagues will be interested.

Again, the correlation between the *Maclean's* University Rankings and this criterion is quite apparent; the *Maclean's* University Rankings exist only because they are successfully marketed as important, and above all, as popular. The success of the issue is measured by how widely it is sold; *Maclean's* touts these issues as the "best-selling ever"[174]. The large amount of news coverage that the rankings receive is not surprising since "pseudo-events produce more pseudo-events"[175]. The publication of the rankings as the primary/initial pseudo-event propagates the proliferation of numerous subsequent, or secondary, pseudo-events. Examples of these subsequent pseudo-events include press releases distributed by both *Maclean's* and many of the institutions, as well as the resulting press conferences, and numerous other media reports regarding the rankings, such as how a home institution has fared, or if there were unusual or significant changes in the relative ranked order. All of these pseudo-events are spawned from the original publication of the rankings. Not only are numerous secondary pseudo-events created each year, but this pattern has been replicated over the last 20 years. Again,

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[173] Boorstin 19.

[174] *Maclean's.* "*Maclean's* University Rankings 2006 – Another Best-seller". Press Release. May 15, 2007. Accessed on June 10, 2011 from http://www.newswire.ca/en/releases/archive/May2007/15/c8865.html

[175] Boorstin 31.

Boorstin views this repetition as being integral to the very nature of the pseudo-event, as "pseudo-events spawn other pseudo-events in geometric progression. This is partly because every kind of pseudo-event (being planned) tends to become ritualized, with a protocol and rigidity all its own"[176].

Boorstin's third criterion asserts that a pseudo-event's "relation to the underlying reality of the situation is ambiguous"[177]; he states that pseudo-events are only interesting because of that very ambiguity[178]. This ambiguity, and resulting 'interestingness', occurs because pseudo-events are easily able to overshadow spontaneous events – pseudo-events are more interesting because they are more dramatic, vivid and intelligible[179]. An excellent example of this is the televised leader's debate for a Canadian federal election – the fact that it is planned and staged allows for increased drama as questions are poised, time factors allotted and as Boorstin notes, on the subject of American presidential debates, "far more interest shown in the performance than in what was said"[180]. The recent 2011 Canadian federal election debate added a new level of drama, as significant news coverage was directed towards questions regarding debate participation, specifically whether or not Green Party leader, Elizabeth May would be allowed to participate[181]. Again, true to its nature, this type of pseudo-event spawns more pseudo-

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[176] Boorstin 33.

[177] Boorstin 12.

[178] Boorstin 11.

[179] Boorstin 39.

[180] Boorstin 41.

[181] Larry Pynn and Amy Minsky. "Greens' Elizabeth May, determined to enter debate, prepares legal action". *Vancouver Sun and Postmedia News*, March 30, 2011. Accessed on June 10, 2011 from http://www.vancouversun.com/news/Greens+Elizabeth+determined+enter+debate+prepares+legal+action/4529114/story.html.

events as the public listens eagerly for interpretations by news commentators, and representatives of all parties issues statements speculating on the probable effects the debate will have on polls[182]. The drama (and irony) in this example lies in the knowledge that performance in a debate only has an "extremely ambiguous relevance" to the ultimate question which is which participant is best qualified to be Prime Minister[183].

The *Maclean's* University Ranking emits a parallel ambiguity – the question for any prospective student "Which University will best meet my needs?" – is overshadowed by the performance, the ranking itself. As with the media's commentary on a debate between candidates running for election, the media subsequently offers interpretations of the rankings, and commentary is offered by university officials regarding their thoughts on their ranked position and how they feel the ranking will impact their enrolment. Like the debates, the original, <u>real</u> question, is lost, only to be replaced by a production, a performance. In other words, individual students' needs get lost amidst the spectacle of this performance.

This ambiguity only increases when the audience examines the uncertain relationship between *Maclean's* and the post-secondary institutions – *Maclean's* is a newsmagazine; it is neither an educational assessment authority, nor a national accreditation agency, nor does it have academic credentials on post-secondary educational administration. Astute audiences begin to question *Maclean's* ethos – on what authority are they able to offer an assessment on Canadian post-secondary institutions? As theorist Jonathan Shay argues, the relationship between the rhetor and

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[182] Boorstin 42.

[183] Boorstin 42. In Boorstin's example, he is referencing the American Presidential election, but his principle can equally apply to Canadian federal politics.

the audience is highly dependent on trust, or the ethos of the rhetor. The rhetor must gain

the trust of the audience and identify leadership opportunities to establish their ethos[184].

It is even possible that, because the universities so readily participated in the rankings (at

least until 2006), that some audiences would have assumed that the universities requested

Maclean's to create the rankings. The publication of the *Maclean's* University Rankings

is an excellent example of a piece of news-creating: an ambiguous question is asked

("Which is the best Canadian University?") and a pseudo-event is born.

Boorstin suggests that the necessity to ask "What does the statement really

mean?" reveals the existence of a pseudo-event, and the *Maclean's* University Ranking

offers many opportunities to pose that question. Prospective students and parents must

ask themselves "How will factor X (whether it be library holdings, class size or number

of faculty with a Ph.D.) affect my (or my son or daughter's) education?" There is an

ambiguous relationship between the assessment categories and the actual experience any

student will have. And, as Boorstin promises, it is really only in the ambiguity that the

pseudo-event becomes interesting – ultimately, every reader must ask themselves what

does the *Maclean's* University Ranking claim to measure? Do their findings accurately

reflect their claims of "measuring excellence"?

The fourth, and final, criterion for a pseudo-event is that it becomes a self-

fulfilling prophecy. As the pseudo-event promotes publicity, intrigue or awareness, the

actual act of reporting on the pseudo-event results in increased public awareness and

interest. As an example of this criterion, Boorstin imagines an organization which

decides to celebrate its 30th anniversary in order to increase its prestige and acquire more

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[184] Shay, 2.

customers. A 30th anniversary celebration party is planned and prominent community

members are invited to speak at the event. These local celebrities are reminded of the

organization's contributions to the community, their loyalty to the region and their

success at remaining in existence for 30 years. This planned celebration becomes a

pseudo-event, one that the organization hopes will be widely reported so as to generate

publicity. There is an ambiguous relationship between celebrating the organization as

being successful, prominent, contributing to the community and the actual celebration of

its anniversary. Ultimately, Boorstin foresees this as a self-fulfilling prophecy – because

the organization promotes its own success at existing for 30 years, prospective customers

are reassured, appreciate the organization's loyalty and contributions and ultimately

become customers, fulfilling the prophecy of continued success[185].

Maclean's created the University Ranking and via this creation established their

position as an authority on post-secondary education in Canada. The universities,

concerned with their image (and the very pressing question of how this will ultimately

impact enrolment levels) began making choices to improve their ranking. The media and

the institutions reported on these choices, giving the ranking credibility and validating it

as an appropriate assessment tool. To further fuel the Ranking as a worthy phenomenon,

some institutions' began to tout their position as a recruitment tool – referencing their

institutions' rank, either overall or in particular categories, when speaking to prospective

students and parents. As each year passed, the publication of the Rankings became more

and more widely reported, and subsequent reports (i.e. pseudo-events) occurred. These

factors ultimately resulted in the financial success of the inaugural issues which

propelled its continued publication. Now, after 20 years of publishing a ranking of

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[185] Boorstin, 9 – 12.

Canadian post-secondary institutions, *Maclean's* is recognized by the public as an authority on post-secondary education in Canada – the prophecy is fulfilled.

The particular irony of the situation is that it was only by having the institutions participate in the ranking did it gain credibility and become profitable enough to continue; yet, over the years the majority of the participating institutions decried the ranking. This ranking mechanism caused innumerable public relations challenges for the majority of the institutions, particularly those in the bottom half; yet, it was the institutions who sustained life to the very object that they decried.

The Relationship Between Pseudo-Events and Image

Aware that the universities were ultimately responsible for the sustained existence of the rankings (at least from 1992 – 2005), the relevant question shifts as to why the institutions might have chosen this arduous path. Boorstin's framework offers insight into this – having established the rankings as a pseudo-event, the universities' motivation for participation is simple – their image. Fortuitously, Boorstin even recognized this growing pressure on universities back in 1961 when he wrote that "today universities, like other institutions – in fact like everybody – are judged by whether they fit into a well-tailored 'image' of themselves"[186]. Boorstin's conception of "image" continues today – whenever a politician considers his/her *public image*, whenever a corporation engages in branding exercise to *invigorate their image*, whenever an individual dresses for a job interview aspiring to a *certain professional image*, it is this very idea – the idea that there is a difference between what appears and what really exists – that persists.

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[186] Boorstin 184.

For Boorstin, the image has a parallel relationship with pseudo-events, "what the pseudo-event is in the world of fact, the image is in the world of value. The image is the pseudo-ideal"[187]. The connection between image and value is not necessarily explicit although it is fairly easily revealed by the phrase 'ought to be'. One just needs to consider their own expectations regarding what 'ought to be' – whether it is how a professor *ought to* talk, how a religious leader *ought to* act or how an ethical corporation *ought to* function. Any time someone is assessed against our own perceptions and expectations, our own idea of how they *ought to be*, we are applying our values to create an idealized *image*, whether it be of a professor, religious leader or ethical corporation.

Boorstin further elaborates on the image, summarizing it as synthetic, believable, passive, vivid, simplified, and ambiguous[188]. Like the pseudo-event, the image is planned, very deliberate; it is created "especially to serve a purpose, to make a certain kind of impression"[189]. He cites the abundance and proliferation of corporate slogans, logos and trademarks, stating that they are not "merely the name, initials or signature of the maker or owner… usually [they are] produced by specialists"[190]. These specialists, usually communication, advertising or marketing companies, are hired to create an image to represent the company – the facets of that image are very carefully considered. Branding, as the business of corporate image creation is frequently called, is "a combination of attitudes, communicated through a name, or a symbol, that influences a

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[187] Boorstin 185.

[188] Boorstin 193.

[189] Boorstin 185.

[190] Boorstin 186.

thought-process in the mind of an audience and creates value"[191]. The goal of a carefully designed brand is to ensure that the public consistently connects a very specific association (usually positive) with the company[192].

The image must be believable; Boorstin notes that if it is to be believed and to "overshadow its original"[193] it must meet the rules of common sense, be vivid yet conservative. His example of Ivory Soap as "99.44% pure" highlights this, as he suggests a claim of a soap being "100% pure" would have been rejected by the public, for its outrageousness and violation of common sense, but 99.44% has an air of conservatism coupled with scientific precision and hence, increased believability[194].

Boorstin also characterized the image as being passive – rather than an individual or corporation actively attempting to strive towards an image, they are already supposed to passively fit into the contrived image. "Once the image is there, it commonly becomes the more important reality, of which the corporation's conduct seems mere evidence; not vice versa. In the beginning the image is a likeness of the corporation; finally the corporation becomes a likeness of the image"[195]. Hence, when a corporation creates an image that highlights environmental responsibility, any environmentally responsible actions the company takes merely reinforce the image – subsequent, irresponsible acts are cast aside because they do not align with the company's existing responsible image.

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[191] Vincent Grimaldi, "The Fundamentals of Branding" accessed on November 24, 2008 http://www.brandchannel.com/features_effect.asp?pf_id=183

[192] Brian D. Till and Donna Heckler, The Truth About Creating Brands People Love (New Jersey: FT Press, 2008) 42.

[193] Boorstin 188.

[194] Boorstin 188.

[195] Boorstin 189.

Because a corporation's image is planned and manufactured, Boorstin notes that "A corporation which decides to rebuild its image has decided less on a change of heart than on a change of face"[196]. The passivity of the image also means that the image itself does not need to have a lot to do with the activities of the corporation – an excellent example of this passivity is when the image is built on a chief executive rather than on the corporation itself[197]. A current example of this is Steven Jobs, the CEO of Apple, Inc. – Jobs has become such an integral part of the Apple image[198], that even false reports of his illness have significant impact on shareholder perception of the health of the company[199]. Ultimately, this passivity leads to conformity or the act of "trying to fit into an image"[200]. While conformity might be the end, Boorstin sees images as the means, because "images themselves are invitations to conformity"[201].

Boorstin continues by stating that an image must be vivid and concrete; he suggests that it is most successful when it appeals to the senses[202]. He also suggests that the image is simplified – it is much less complex than the thing that it actually represents. Obvious examples include product logos and corporate symbols – they are designed as a single image, which is intended to represent the entirety of the product or corporation.

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[196] Boorstin 189.

[197] Boorstin 190.

[198] Leander Kahney, "Apple: It's All About the Brand" accessed on November 24, 2008 http://www.wired.com/gadgets/mac/commentary/cultofmac/2002/12/56677

[199] "Apple denies Jobs heart attack rumour" accessed on Oct 3, 2008 http://www.cbc.ca/technology/story/2008/10/03/jobs-ireport.html

[200] Boorstin 192.

[201] Boorstin 192.

[202] Boorstin 193.

Boorstin summarizes that the "most effective image is one simple and distinctive enough to be remembered"[203]. Finally, Boorstin outlines that the image is ambiguous – "it floats somewhere between the imagination and the senses, between expectation and reality"[204]. It must be ambiguous so that it can handle unpredictable future purposes and possible changes in taste; its very ambiguity also helps it meet the expectations, wishes and needs of a wide variety of people within its target audience. Ultimately, Boorstin warns us that "when we use the word 'image' in this new sense, we plainly confess a distinction between what we see and what is really there, and we express our preferred interest in what it to be seen. Thus the image is a visible public 'personality' as distinguished from an inward private 'character'"[205].

In considering the image as Boorstin has defined it, I return to question of how the universities' understanding of their own images led to their participation in *Maclean's* pseudo-event, the University Rankings. After considering Boorstin's criteria of <u>images</u> and the universities' behaviour, I have identified five key attributes of the image, that it appears, the universities have both imagined and established for themselves.

The Universities' Image

With the very early editions of the rankings (1991- 1993), the universities quickly foresaw that they would be labelled <u>uncooperative</u> if they did not participate. In the 1993 edition, when several institutions had chosen not to participate, an article, subtitled

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[203] Boorstin 193.

[204] Boorstin 193.

[205] Boorstin 187.

"Canadian universities took a test – but many declined to post their marks"[206] appeared. Ultimately, in 2006 when 11 institutions chose to withdraw their active participation, *Maclean's* was quick to suggest that "nobody likes being graded, particularly those used to giving the tests, not sitting them"[207]. It was the epitome of the 'between a rock and a hard place' situation – if the universities did not participate they were criticized and yet when they did participate, they drew criticism from the public on their actual final ranking or on their performance in certain key areas. The ranking provided an excellent source of material for special interest lobbyists – even those lobbying for funding within the institution. An editorial from a proponent of locating the Canadian Light Source in Saskatoon, cited how the addition of the CLS to the University of Saskatchewan community would serve to combat the "bleak picture" as outlined in the *Maclean's* rankings[208].

In addition to being seen as cooperative, the universities strive towards an image of <u>transparency</u>. Almost all post-secondary institutions in Canada are publicly funded, which means that the provincial governments contribute a significant portion of funding towards each institution's operating budget. Because governments receive the majority of their funding from taxes, it is actually the public that provides a significant portion of an institution's operating budget, albeit indirectly. Consequently universities, like governments, are obligated to achieve a minimum level of transparency before the public. One common method of demonstrating this transparency is to publish annual

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[206] Chris Wood. "A Battle for the facts" *Maclean's* Vol 106 Issue 46, 46.

[207] Editorial. "Why universities should be graded, too" *Maclean's* Vol 119, Number 35, 2.

[208] Dennis Johnson, "The Canadian Light Source: A Saskatchewan Opportunity" *On Campus News* 28 Nov 1997. Accessed from http://www.usask.ca/communications/ocn/Nov28/opinion.html on December 10, 2008.

reports, which include financial statements. An additional effort, often shown in non-profit organizations via their Annual General Meeting, is a public meeting where the shareholders/trustees/board members answer questions from the public. The University of Saskatchewan, in an effort to further increase its public transparency, adopted this additional measure in 2007, having an annual Board of Governors' meeting open to the public. It was suggested that this was a "part of a move towards greater transparency and accountability"[209] as a way for the Board members to appear publicly, and, it could be suggested, more directly accountable to the public. Transparency is important to universities because without it, they could ultimately lose, or receive greatly diminished, funding from their provincial government.

The third facet of the universities' image is their desire to appear <u>socially relevant</u>. Only a small (approximately 15%) portion of the Canadian adult public has a university degree[210] and consequently, universities continue to struggle to remain relevant to the majority of the Canadian public. *Maclean's* astutely identified that a low percentage of Canadian adults were university alumni and recognized it must appeal to a much broader audience, if it wanted the rankings to have wide appeal to the Canadian public. As discussed in the previous chapter, *Maclean's* was able to use a nostalgic emotional appeal for the university alumni, but in order to appeal to the broader population, they needed to introduce a compelling exigence. As I will discuss in the next

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[209] Author unknown. "Board holds open meeting" *On Campus News*. 6 Jul 2007. Accessed from http://www.usask.ca/communications/ocn/07-july-06/6.php on December 10, 2008.

[210] Of the Canadian population which is 15 years or older (N= 23, 901, 360), 3,687, 645 people had attained at least a bachelor's degree. Statistics Canada, Population 15 years and over by highest degree, certificate or diploma (1986 to 2006 Census) Accessed from http://www40.statcan.gc.ca/l01/cst01/educ42-eng.htm accessed on December 10, 2008.

chapter, I believe that risk is the urgent exigence they chose – one which would appeal to all Canadians, regardless of their educational background.

While they aspire to be socially relevant, universities continue to combat an "ivory tower"[211] reputation – one which views universities as being filled with academic elites who are separated from the everyday world, doing research that is possibly irrelevant or unimportant to the general public. The publication of the annual *Maclean's* university ranking, while controversial, at least put universities, and more broadly the notion of higher education, into the forefront of at least 2.8 million Canadian's minds[212]. The one (and sometimes only) thing that university academics and administrators alike can agree upon is that universities offer significant contributions to Canada – whether it be via their teaching, research or both. University officials have few avenues in which to spread the message regarding the importance of universities to the Canadian public. In light of competing demands (like health care) on government's limited resources, universities appreciate and recognize the importance of spreading this message, even if the source is a university ranking. By having *Maclean's* devote a significant amount of space and resources towards highlighting post-secondary education (whether it is through the rankings issue, *Maclean's* annual *Guide to Universities*, or through frequent columns and articles), universities can only hope that this attention will assist Canadians in recognizing the importance of post-secondary education (and ultimately assist in their petition for government funds).

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[211] "Ivory Tower".Word Origins. Accessed from http://www.wordorigins.org/index.php/site/comments/ivory_tower/ on December 10, 2008.

[212] This is the number of readers *Maclean's* states that it "enlightens, engages and entertains" each week. *Maclean's.* Accessed from http://blog.macleans.ca/ on December 10, 2008.

As previously explained, the *Maclean's* University Ranking divides institutions into one of three categories: Primarily Undergraduate, Comprehensive, or Medical/Doctoral. One of the defining features of the Medical/Doctoral category is that the institutions in this category must have a strong emphasis on research (in addition to having a medical school). The University of Saskatchewan, along with approximately 14 other institutions, is considered in this category and most of these institutions pride themselves on the strength of their research contributions. Institutions in this category compete for Tri-Council Research funding, for Canada Research Chairs and for numerous additional research grants and funding sources. Given the significant role that research plays at these institutions, it is not surprising that these universities also appreciate how the *Maclean's* University Ranking supports <u>research</u>, further strengthening the universities' image as being research-intensive and research-driven. Like "measuring excellence", research is easily associated with scientific research, which the Canadian public could easily associate as involving a bunch of numbers, graphs and tables. The *Maclean's* University Ranking fits this description precisely – which, like any pseudo-event, supports its self-fulfilling prophetic nature – the ranking gains credibility because it appears to be a piece of scientific data, which is supported (and indirectly created) by the universities, who are experts in scientific research.

Finally, the universities are responding to their desire to be seen as <u>responsive</u>. Over the last decade, universities have spent a lot of time and attention discussing the changing environment, in analyzing demographic predictions and in assessing their desired enrolment levels. The area of enrolment management has become very popular as institutions try to decide what numbers and which types of students they want to make

up their ideal student population. Enrolment management strategies are then developed around determining how to achieve that ideal student composition. Because institutions' only other major source of funding (the first being provincial government support) is tuition, knowing student enrolment numbers becomes increasingly critical to make budgetary allocations and projections. This changing environment is one of increased competition for undergraduate students, a situation where the "well-knownness"[213] of an institution gains increasing importance. Universities want to appear responsive to this increased competition, and consequently have adopted strategies to increase the recognition of their institutional brand. Participating in the *Maclean's* University Ranking at least guaranteed that any institution's name would appear at a minimum of 30 times – the old adage "no publicity is bad publicity" appears relevant as all universities sought to respond to the increased competition. The most likely factor underlying the fear of not participating was a concern that institutions would be seen as unresponsive, or even unaware of the demands of the changing environment. No one wants to be left behind – particularly institutions that are fighting to position themselves as leaders within Canada's new and upcoming knowledge economy[214].

This recent position that the universities find themselves in – one of striving to adopt an image as cooperative, transparent, socially relevant, research-oriented and responsive – should not be surprising given Boorstin's fortuitous warning. In 1961, he warned us that "Universities, the traditional refuge of timelessness, nowadays look for

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[213] Boorstin 168.

[214] Desmond Beckstead and Tara Vinodrai "Dimensions of occupational changes in Canada's knowledge economy, 1971-1996" *The Canadian Economy in Transition Series* (Ottawa: StatsCan, 2003). Accessed from http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/11-622-m/11-622-m2003004-eng.pdf on December 10, 2008.

big names, and enlarge their public relations and press relations departments to make the university itself a celebrity, known for its well-knownness"[215].

Ultimately, there is nothing wrong with the image that the universities imagined for themselves. The desires to be cooperative, transparent or responsive are noble pursuits and having had experience in university administration, I can sympathize with the enrolment pressures and budgetary deficiencies. The point of which I am critical is the fact that the universities allowed *Maclean's* magazine to craft for them this outlet in which they were to justify their image. Rather than being assessed on their actual cooperation, transparency and responsiveness, the universities assented to being measured solely by whether or not they were seen that way. The *Maclean's* University Ranking does not actually measure or assess whether or not a university is cooperative, transparent, responsive, socially relevant or contributing meaningful research. Instead, the ranking has become an outlet for universities to enhance their celebrity and solely to make themselves more well-known for their well-knownness. Under the guise of providing data, *Maclean's* has used the rankings as an exercise in celebrity. The relationship between *Maclean's* and the universities is akin to the one between a Hollywood celebrity and a reporter – the celebrity is a reluctant participant craving the attention and possible benefit news coverage can provide, while being ever wary of the next prickly attack.

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[215] Boorstin 168.

CHAPTER 5
THE SPEAKER-AUDIENCE RELATIONSHIP

To complete this rhetorical analysis, I conclude with the relationship between the speaker and the audience. Earlier chapters in this thesis have explored both the relationship between the public and the rankings (audience-message relationship) and between the rankings and *Maclean's* (message-speaker relationship). The conclusions I have drawn are that 1) *Maclean's* must present a contraction in ethos in order to appeal to both alumni and non-alumni Canadians. They achieve this by highlighting the exclusive nature of universities and a nostalgic worldview for alumni while offering an avenue for all tax-paying Canadians to join in judgment of the universities; and, 2) the rankings, as pseudo-event, reflect the abstract theoretical nature of university scholarship and further perpetuate an ivory tower image, which by nature is exclusive and elitist. The final relationship yet to be explored ignites many further questions: particularly, why is the Canadian public so eager to consume a ranking on post-secondary institutions? Did the public in some ways encourage the creation of this ranking and what does that tell us about the values that *Maclean's* is promoting?

In this final analytic chapter, I will use Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation to frame my analysis; to further understand the speaker-audience relationship I will return to Aristotle and his theory regarding leadership and trust creation. Ultimately, I will conclude that the rhetorical exigence that *Maclean's* addresses is predicated upon risk. *Maclean's* positions the rankings as a response to many risks – the risk of being uninformed, the risk of your child's economic future, and the risk of uncertainty. I will comment on what this tells us about the Canadian public and how we have become so comfortable with risk-mitigation exercises that Canadians sought an expert to turn the

uncertainty of selecting a post-secondary institution into a somewhat calculable risk analysis exercise. Finally, I will outline how *Maclean's* aligned their appeal with values already embedded within the Canadian character to establish their authority in the field and gain the trust of the Canadian public. The nature of risk aversion made the Canadian public ripe for an authority – and in accepting *Maclean's* as authority, the Canadian public has given little thought to the implications of recognizing *Maclean's* as an expert on post-secondary education.

The Rhetorical Situation

As previously discussed in the literature survey, Bitzer outlined three constituents that define a rhetorical situation – exigence, constraints and audience. He defined the exigence as "an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done" and further identified that an exigence is only rhetorical when it is capable of being modified by discourse[216]. Now, in a superficial way, *Maclean's* has identified an exigence – the imperfection is the lack of comparable data on post-secondary institutions. The urgency surrounding this defect is that students (and parents) must make choices about which post-secondary institutions to attend and by providing this particular piece of discourse (the *Maclean's* ranking), this exigence can be resolved.

But, as I have previously argued, this exigence is too narrow – it does not explain the intense and sustained popularity of the rankings to the general Canadian public. The rhetorical audience for this rhetorical situation is much larger than just those exploring their post-secondary options. When considering the wide spread popularity of the rankings and their persistence over the last 20 years, the actual rhetorical exigence must

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[216] Lloyd Bitzer, "The Rhetorical Situation" <u>Philosophy and Rhetoric</u> Vol 1. (1968) 7.

be one more relevant to the Canadian public as a whole. In order to better explore and understand the nature of this exigence, I looked to Bitzer's explanation of the constraints within a rhetorical situation to guide my inquiry into the probable exigence.

Constraints

The constraints of Bitzer's rhetorical situation are "made up of persons, events, objects and relations which are parts of the situation because they have the power to constrain decision and action needed to modify the exigence"[217]. In reflecting on the creation of the *Maclean's* rankings, it is necessary to consider the post-secondary landscape in Canada in the 1980's and early 1990's and to examine how factors within this landscape acted as constraints to this rhetorical situation.

<u>Changing enrolment patterns</u>

The post-secondary landscape during the transition between the 1980's and the 1990's was a complicated one. Funding transfers to post-secondary institutions had generally increased during the 1980's (although in real terms the grants per full-time equivalent decreased as enrolments grew)[218] but with an end to the Mulroney government in 1993, a worldwide economic recession in the early 1990's and a Liberal promise to slash the federal deficit which had ballooned during Mulroney's government, it was not surprising that government transfers to post-secondary schools began to rapidly decline in the mid-1990's. As well, there were 40+ universities across Canada,

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[217] Bitzer 8.

[218] Little, Don. "Financing universities: Why are students paying more?" <u>Education Quarterly Review</u>: Statistics Canada, 1997. Vol 4. No. 2. 14.

not to mention the college, vocational and CEGEP systems, all seeking a greater portion of government funds to maintain (and grow) operations.

But in 1990-91 change was on the horizon. While many prospective students made choices based on geographical proximity, certain areas, particularly within Nova Scotia and Ontario, offered so many post-secondary choices all within a small geographic region that prospective students, shifting to a more consumer mindset[219], began to wonder which post-secondary institution would offer them the most value for their (or their parent's) money. Institutions, eying demographics and participation rates, became aware that the trend of increased demand and hence minimal competition would quickly be ending. Many began to change policies with an aim of increasing their share of an impending stagnant market. So, while universities began to adjust their policies in light of these changes, prospective students, recognizing the plethora of institutions to choose from, began to more carefully examine their options with respect to post-secondary education.

Rising Educational Costs

With demand decreasing as participation rates plateaued and the number of Canadian post-secondary options increased, the actual cost of a post-secondary education was likely an additional constraint. Tuition and fee costs for a Canadian university education were substantial and about to increase – from 1989 to 1994 the proportion of average family income needed to pay tuition and fees rose significantly, from 3.1% to

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[219] James L Fished "TQM: A Warning for Higher Education". The Educational Record (Washington: 1993, Spring) 15.

4.9%. The average tuition across Canada in 1990/91 was $1,464[220] – over the next 15 years, it rose 185% to $4,172[221]. Ultimately, Canada's economic prospects, rising tuition and fee costs, institutional competitiveness for a larger portion of the market share and no obvious scale for comparison between institutions all created an environment ripe to highlight uncertainty – particularly regarding which institution would be the best return on investment.

Education as Investment

While the social implications of viewing post-secondary education as an investment and the transition to educational consumerism is beyond on the scope of this thesis, it is indisputable that post-secondary education can be viewed as an investment from both a personal and a social perspective. Individuals provide their time, money and opportunity cost, while the university education provides them with benefit. The direct economic benefit of a university degree with respect to future employment income has been researched and established – the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC) cites that on average, university graduates earn $1.3 million more over their lifetime, than someone with only a high school diploma[222]. Individuals also benefit greatly from the personal growth and development that a university education provides. From a societal perspective, taxpayers financially support publicly funded universities in return for a social benefit. The president of Princeton remarked in a 2006 alumni newsletter that the social investment of university education is significant – it serves no

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[220] Adjusted to 2005 dollars

[221] Statistics Canada. "University Tuition Fees". September 2, 2004. Accessed on June 1, 2011 from http://www.statcan.gc.ca/daily-quotidien/040902/dq040902.htm

[222] AUCC. "The Value of a University Degree". Accessed on June 3, 2001 from http://www.aucc.ca/publications/auccpubs/value-of-a-degree/docs/value-of-a-degree.pdf

greater purpose than "advancing the ideal of equal opportunity by acting as engines of social and economic mobility. A college education is the most effective way I know of transcending the distinctions – whether of ancestry, wealth, or race – that fragment our society"[223]. As well, the research conducted has additional profound societal implications – as Karen Chad, the University of Saskatchewan Vice-President of Research states, university research exists "to find solutions to pressing societal and scientific challenges"[224].

Viewing post-secondary education as an investment offers significant insight into the exigence in which the *Maclean's* ranking responds. The act of investing can be defined as the devotion of an object (for example, time, money or resources) for the purposes of acquiring some benefit[225]. The very nature of the verb 'to invest' highlights the risk inherent: there is an expectation that benefit will be accrued but, this is only an expectation and not a guarantee; there is always risk involved when making an investment.

Risk as Exigence

The investment of both time and money into post-secondary education carries significant risk. Overall, there is risk that the benefits anticipated will not be realized – regardless of whether those benefits are defined as employment outcomes, personal growth, or skills in a particular field. However, there is also risk in not pursuing post-

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[223] Shirley M. Tilghman "The Social Benefits of Higher Education". Accessed on June 3, 2011 from http://www.princeton.edu/president/pages/20060607/

[224] Chad, K. "Our Vision: Building on 100 Years of Discovery". Accessed on June 3, 2011 from http://www.usask.ca/research/about/

[225] "Invest" (verb used with an object). Dictionary. Accessed on June 9, 2011 from http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/invest

secondary education – those risks might include diminished employment opportunities or diminished personal growth. As well, there are risks from a societal perspective – if universities ceased to educate students, there would be significant impacts on the labour market and economic situation of a country, not to mention arguable larger implications related to crime, poverty and the general civility of the population. But, for the purposes of this thesis, to further examine my hypothesis of risk as the exigence for the *Maclean's* rankings, I sought to further understand the academic study of risk and its relevance to the Canadian public.

Like the study of communication, the academic study of risk is of interest to a wide array of disciplines[226]. Of particular relevance to this thesis is the approach taken by contemporary sociologists – many of whom investigate how our modern day society is responding to uncertainty and risk. As mentioned in the second chapter, Ulrich Beck, a contemporary sociologist, has coined the term "risk society" to describe how Western society is primarily concerned with distributing risk or harm rather than wealth or status. Risk theorist Jakob Arnoldi summarizes Beck's understanding of the implications of this newly emerging risk society as "replacing the traditional values of progress and accumulation with a new ethic emphasizing risk avoidance, transfer, denial, and reinterpretation"[227]. It is this new ethic – based on a foundation of risk avoidance on which *Maclean's* is capitalizing.

This cultural shift, of individuals seeking information in order to manage risks, has placed a new prominence on the notion of 'expertise'. Individuals seek out the

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[226] Jakob Arnoldi, Risk. (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2009) 16.

[227] Arnoldi 89.

opinions of experts to help inform their decisions but often this expert advice conflicts. A common definition of an expert is one who possesses special skill or is well-informed in a particular field[228]. But, this definition of expert does not take into account the relationship between an expert and the public. In this narrow definition, an expert can exist outside of all relationships – anyone with a high level of knowledge in a particular field is an expert, regardless of whether or not they share that expertise with an audience. However, recent theories demonstrate that "expertise" as the public experiences is increasingly a rhetorical construct, involving all elements of the Aristotelian triangle of speaker, audience and message.

Sociologist Harald Meig has examined the ways in which audience (the public) has altered our societal understanding of experts. He states that "The key to understanding expert roles is to take into account the layperson or client. In other words, to look at expert roles as forms of interaction between the expert and his or her client or an audience"[229]. Meig argues that because of our transformation to a risk society, the public's desire for expertise has profoundly changed the way in which experts are both viewed and created. He elaborates, "In society, expert means that you are regarded or addressed as such by someone else. This social conception of expert differs from other ones discussed in this handbook, such as the expert as an outstanding individual nominated by peers and the expert defined by his/her superior performance"[230]. Meig argues that this expanded understanding of expert has profound implications – the

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[228] "Expert", Webster's New World Dictionary, 1968. 68

[229] Harold Meig, "Social and Sociological Factors in the Development of Expertise." Ed. Charness, Hoffman,et al. The Cambridge Handbook of Expertise and Expert Performance. (Cambridge University Press, 2006) 743. Accessed on 6 June 2011 <http://lib.myilibrary.com?ID=56761>

[230] Meig 743.

foundation of the expert interaction is based on the expert-lay dichotomy and the knowledge gradient that is characteristic of this dichotomy[231].

In other words, someone becomes an expert in relation to an audience – their expertise is grounded in the fact that they have more knowledge than a particular audience, not that they have an absolute (or minimum) basis of knowledge. So, for example, a junior professor is an expert, when lecturing to a first-year undergraduate class, because the professor has significantly more knowledge on the particular lecture subject than the audience does. But, using Meig's definition of expertise, that same junior professor is no longer an expert when surrounded by senior members of his or her department. This junior professor's body of knowledge has not changed – it is his relationship with the audience (and more specifically, the knowledge gradient of the relationship) that results in this junior professor being an expert in some relationships and not in others. Ultimately, the status of expert becomes a rhetorical construct – it is a conferred upon an individual by an audience, and consequently dependent upon the individual's ethos. The junior professor in this example may be seen as an expert by some people in his field, and by colleagues in his department who do not work in his specific field. But, this same junior professor may simultaneously be seen as less of an expert (or lower within an academic hierarchy) by other senior members within the same field or department. The junior professor will constantly experience adjustments in his/her ethos (with respect to his expertise) as shifts in the audience occur.

While Meig presents his theory from a sociological, not a rhetorical, perspective, the emphasis on the importance of the audience relationship, in the creation of an expert, has great rhetorical significance. Meig (even though he does not explicitly articulate it in

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[231] Meig 747.

this way) is applying Bitzer's theory of rhetorical situation to create his expanded understanding of an expert – he is outlining how the audience and the constraints of the rhetorical situation act upon the speaker and how it is only within the confines of this relationship that the speaker, as expert, exists.

So, in applying Meig's theory regarding the expert-lay dichotomy to the *Maclean's* Rankings – it is clear that *Maclean's* has positioned itself as the expert on the ranking of Canadian post-secondary educational institutions in comparison to the Canadian public. It is also clear that not only does *Maclean's* position itself that way, but the Canadian public "regards and addresses" *Maclean's* in this way, when they purchase, read, quote and discuss the rankings. In Meig's interpretation, it is the very act of purchasing and reading the rankings by the Canadian public which creates the recognition of *Maclean's* as expert. As well, the universities "regard and address" *Maclean's* as the expert in the rankings by the submission of the requested material and by the frequent references to and citations of the material made by leaders on universities campuses.

Considering the Canadian public as a risk society can help explain why the Canadian public has recognized and accepted *Maclean's* as an expert on post-secondary education. Ultimately, the Canadian public values experts to assist in risk assessment because as a society we are very concerned with risk avoidance. As Meig outlines, "Experts guide us to be better consumers, better parents, better learners, better citizens. But, also, we consume such advice because we seek fulfillment of desires and reduction of worries"[232]. It is the worry, the risk of being uninformed that makes the assurance of an expert so appealing. This in itself is risky because there is no guarantee that the expert

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[232] Arnoldi 173.

will successfully advise the best approach to avoid the unintended outcome, and without critical analysis, we are not clear of the unstated values and elements of the persuasive arguments which the expert is using to 'better inform' us.

Audience - Gaining the Canadian Public's Trust

So, while it may be clear that in purchasing and reading the *Maclean's* rankings, the Canadian public has recognized *Maclean's* as an expert on post-secondary institutions, the larger question remains regarding what this tells us about the audience within Bitzer's rhetorical situation. More specifically, I am interested in what this tells us about the speaker-audience relationship, in this case, the *Maclean's*-Canadian public relationship.

As already discussed, Aristotle offers three interrelated modes of persuasion that a speaker can use while articulating a persuasive argument to an audience: 1) appeal to their reason (logos); 2) appeal to their values (pathos); and, 3) appeal to their character (ethos). In the 2nd chapter, I outlined how *Maclean's* appealed to the audience's values via an emotional approach – they included nostalgic essays, photos of enthusiastic young faces and idyllic campus scenes and reminded the reader that a university experience should be a sacred rite of passage for young Canadians. In the 3rd chapter, I examined how *Maclean's* appealed to their audience's reason, through *scientific* tables, charts, blinding pages of numbers and percentage scores. They offer their *methodology* to support their numerical ranking, as well as their data sources to support their *objective* assessment.

The appeal considered in this chapter is the appeal on the basis of character. Jonathan Shay, in his article "Aristotle's Rhetoric as a Handbook of Leadership" views

the three appeals as interrelated, not separate, because the goals of the action (that which the speaker is persuading the audience to do/act/believe) arises from the audience's own ideals, ambitions and affiliations – the audience's character. Ultimately, Shay argues that Aristotle teaches us that while the speaker may ask the audience to take a particular action, the speaker will only be successful if the goals of this action are in alignment with the audience's own character. Applying Aristotle's teachings to the explicit artefact of the *Maclean's* rankings, an example where the speaker (*Maclean's*) has been incredibly successful in persuading its audience (the Canadian public) to purchase issues of its University Rankings edition, should allow us to gain insight then into the Canadian public's character – its ideals, ambitions and affiliations.

As I have previously argued, the Canadian public accepted *Maclean's* as an expert on Canadian post-secondary institutions. If you view the creation of this expert authority as a leadership opportunity, Aristotle offers insight into the leader-audience relationship, particularly with respect to uncovering the ways in which leaders are able to gain the trust of an audience. Understanding how *Maclean's* was able to gain the trust of the Canadian public will reveal significant insight in the Canadian public's character. As Shay outlines, Aristotle suggested that a leadership opportunity arises when a group is faced with conflicting, incommensurable goods and uncertainty[233]. The leader then, in addressing these two obstacles for the audience, hopes to align their appeal with the audience's own ideals, ambitions and affiliations as that will have the greatest chance of successfully persuading the audience towards some action.

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[233] Jonathan Shay, "Aristotle's Rhetoric as a Handbook of Leadership" Defense and the National Interest. (2000) Accessed on June 11, 2011 from www.dnipogo.org/fcs/aristotle.htm

<u>Conflicting Incommensurable Goods</u>

Maclean's accurately recognized the post-secondary landscape as filled with "incommensurable"[234] choices. Because each post-secondary institution was unique (at least in relation to their location, academic program choices, and reputation) there was no obvious standard basis of comparison between them. The conflict arose in the sense that that institutions were becoming more competitive about recruiting increasing proportions of the student base; prospective students (and their parents) were receiving competing messages about which university would best meet their needs. Several agencies gathered and provided information to the Canadian public regarding Canadian universities:

a) *Federal Government*. While Statistics Canada published general enrolment, finance and demographic data, it was not easily accessible nor obviously relevant. As well, it is likely that the federal government did not feel it had a responsibility to provide comparative data, useful in helping prospective students select an institution. University governance is a provincial responsibility, with most provinces requiring a provincial legislative act in order to create and govern universities.

b) *Provincial Government*. Because the provinces provide funding for universities, the provinces play an important role in assessing and ensuring the appropriate governance structures exist for the responsible management of the institutions. While the provincial government wants to ensure the validity of the education for its people, in many provinces quality assurance councils exist to fulfill this mandate. These councils play an important role to ensure quality of institutional

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[234] In this context, incommensurable is defined as "Having no common standard of measurement" as per the Oxford English Dictionary, as accessed on June 7, 2011 from www.oed.com

programming, but are likely not useful for a prospective student trying to compare institutions.

c) *Independent Agencies*. AUCC (Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada) acts a representative and voice of Canadian universities but its mandate is to "facilitate the development of public policy on higher education and to encourage cooperation among universities and governments, industry, communities, and institutions in other countries"[235]. *Consumer Reports* did not offer any type of comparative information on universities and no federal independent 'watchdog' type organization existed.

d) *Universities*. The institutions themselves were not offering large-scale assessments of their undergraduate programs – as Howard C. Clark, former President of Dalhousie University, states "The hard fact is that Canadian universities have, by and large, not taken seriously the institutional responsibility to assess the value of the education they provide, especially at the undergraduate level"[236]. Each institution offered marketing materials – viewbooks, university course calendars and an ever-increasing presence on websites, but the isolated nature of this information left it completely up to the prospective student to try to compare institutions and understand differences that would be significant for their own individual academic, lifestyle and support needs.

While each agency played an important role in the Canadian post-secondary landscape, each had a very narrow focus. The prospective students were left with a wealth of

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[235] AUCC. Accessed on Feb 13 2011 from www.aucc.ca

[236] Howard C. Clark. Growth and Governance of Canadian Universities. Vancouver: UBC Press, 2005. 56.

information to filter, but none of it specifically targeted to their questions. They remained unclear and confused about how to interpret this abundance of often conflicting information. It is clear that a gap did exist – prospective students and their parents could not easily access concise and understandable data comparing Canadian universities that would provide meaningful and relevant information to assist in their decision-making process. However, I argue that this gap still exists. The *Maclean's* University Rankings have not provided meaningful and useful information to prospective students and their parents – after reading the rankings, students are no clearer about which institution will best meet their own academic goals or offer supports which will best facilitate their success as a post-secondary student. A ranking does not answer any student's individual questions and leaves them no clearer about which institution will best serve their individual needs.

Uncertainty

As well, uncertainty abounded. Canadians were becoming much more aware of the importance of advanced education and the linkage between education and employment prospects. The old adage continued – parents wanted 'better' for their children, desiring their children to enjoy a higher standard of living than they had experienced. And, as already discussed within the context of the exigence for this rhetorical situation, the baby boomer generation had discovered successfully in the 1960's and 1970's that university graduates competed in the labour market with greater likelihood than non-graduates of finding high-paying employment[237].

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[237] Don Little. "Financing universities: Why are students paying more?" *Education Quarterly Review* (Vol 4. No 2) Statistics Canada: Ottawa, 1997. 10.

But, the experience of an economic recession (which was precipitated by Black

Monday in October 1987) further enhanced the sense of uncertainty with the Canadian

public. The labour market was sluggish; in 1989 Canada was just beginning to suffer. In

1989, Canadian unemployment was low at 7.9% (although specific regions had seen

increasing unemployment early in 1989) but by 1992 had risen dramatically to 11.3%[238].

Fears around the impact of this recession were obviously on the minds of *Maclean's*

editors in 1990. Articles highlighting Canada's economic crisis peppered the *Maclean's*

issues throughout 1990. Titles included: "An Economic Forecast for the 1990's"[239], "The

Budget Challenge"[240], "Crisis on the Land"[241],"Economic Worry and the Nature of

Risk"[242],"New Fears of Economic Ruin"[243], "Bay Street Gloom"[244], "The Cost of

Uncertainty"[245], "A Typical Tale of Canadian Bungling"[246], "Skirting a

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[238] Dave Gower. "Canada's Unemployment Mosaic in the 1990s". *Perspectives.* Spring edition. Statistics Canada: Ottawa, 1996. 16.

[239] Peter C Newman. "An Economic Forecast for the 1990s. " *Maclean's* 1 Jan. 1990: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

[240] Tom Fennell et al. "The Budget Challenge. " *Maclean's* 19 Feb. 1990: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

[241] Brian Bergman. "Crisis on the Land. " *Maclean's* 2 Apr. 1990: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

[242] Diane Francis. "Economic Worry and the Nature of Risk. " *Maclean's* 23 Apr. 1990: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

[243] Michael Harrison. "New Fears of Economic Ruin. " *Maclean's* 7 May 1990: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

[244] Brenda Daglish. "Bay Street Gloom. " *Maclean's* 2 Jul 1990: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

[245] D Arcy Jenish. "The Cost of Uncertainty. " *Maclean's* 2 Jul 1990: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

[246] Diane Francis. "A typical tale of Canadian bungling." *Maclean's* 103.34 (1990): 11. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

Recession"[247],"Slowdown in Luxury Land"[248],"ATaxing Time for the GST"[249], "A

Loony Sell-Off"[250], "A Grim Reckoning"[251],"Survival Strategies"[252], "A Recession or an

Economic Earthquake"[253], "Hard Times"[254], "Thriving in Hard Times"[255], "The Color of

Despair"[256], "A Storm After the Calm"[257], "Waiting for the Exports"[258], "Cautious Yule

Shoppers"[259], "Banking in Bad Times"[260], "Stains on the Treasury"[261], "Danger Lies

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[247] H. Jensen and B. Wickens. "Skirting a recession. (Cover story)." *Maclean's* 103.35 (1990): 18. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

[248] B. Wickens and J. Howse. "Slowdown in luxury land." *Maclean's* 103.35 (1990): 32. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

[249] J. DeMont, and H. Quinn. "A taxing time for the GST. (Cover story)." *Maclean's* 103.41 (1990): 24. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

[250] J. DeMont. "A loony sell-off." *Maclean's* 103.44 (1990): 52. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

[251] Bruce Wallace, "A grim reckoning." *Maclean's* 103.45 (1990): 40. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 12 Feb. 2011.

[252] B. Bergman and G. Allen, "Survival strategies. (Cover story)." *Maclean's* 103.46 (1990): 22. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

[253] Peter C. Newman, "A recession or an economic earthquake." *Maclean's* 12 Nov. 1990: 53. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

[254] Bruce Wallace and J. DeMont, "Hard times." *Maclean's* 103.46 (1990): 54. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

[255] J. Daly and P. Chisholm. "Thriving in hard times." *Maclean's* 103.46 (1990): 58. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

[256] B. Came, "The color of despair." *Maclean's* 103.46 (1990): 62. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

[257] G. Allen, "A storm after the calm." *Maclean's* 103.46 (1990): 64. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

[258] H. Quinn. "Waiting for the exports." *Maclean's* 103.46 (1990): 60. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

[259] J. Daly. "Cautious yule shoppers." *Maclean's* 103.47 (1990): 40. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

[260] R. Laver and A. Walmsley. "Banking in bad times." *Maclean's* 103.48 (1990): 44. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

South of the Rio Grande"[262], "The Flight of Industry"[263], "Beware the Creation of a Tory Utopia"[264], "Crushed Careers"[265],and "The Recession Does Not a Depression Make"[266].

Cluster criticism of these titles highlights the extensive presence of fear and anxiety that *Maclean's* was reinforcing; the fearful and dramatic titles of these articles, while designed to engage reader interest, also reflect the general economic worry that Canadians were facing during 1990. This fear and anxiety certainly contributed to the emphasis on uncertainty (particularly about Canada's economic future) and highlighted the growing level of economic risk that the country was experiencing.

Implications – Responding to the Exigence of Risk

So, it is apparent that *Maclean's* seized the leadership opportunity that arose with the incommensurable post-secondary education options that were available to the Canadian public. In an atmosphere of intense economic uncertainty further enhancing the risks that already weighed on the Canadian public's mind. *Maclean's* positioned themselves as a leader, or more specifically, an expert on Canadian post-secondary education and offered their proficiency regarding the complexities of decision-making

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[261] J. DeMont and E.K. Fulton. "Strains on the treasury." *Maclean's* 103.49 (1990): 23. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

[262] "Danger lies south of the Rio Grande." *Maclean's* 03 Dec. 1990: 46. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

[263] P. Chisholm and B. Wickens, "The flight of industry." *Maclean's* 103.49 (1990): 55. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

[264] "Beware the creation of Tory Utopia." *Maclean's* 103.52 (1990): 9. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

[265] J. Daly, "Crushed careers." *Maclean's* 103.53 (1990): 42. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

[266] Peter C. Newman, "This recession does not a depression make." *Maclean's* 31 Dec. 1990: 45. *Academic Search Complete*. EBSCO. Web. 13 Feb. 2011.

for students entering the post-secondary system. And, as already discussed, the Canadian public, like any risk-averse society, found comfort in the assurances that *Maclean's* as expert was able to offer.

While Shay's Aristotelian theory of leadership helps us understand how *Maclean's* was able to position itself as an expert and gain the trust of the Canadian public, more can be learned about the Canadian public from their participation in this relationship.

Given the essential role of uncertainty in our economic systems, economist Jocelyn Pixley asserts that "finance is inherently emotional and that specific emotions in finance arise from the radical uncertainties of money. Since promises are of uncertain reliability; distrust, sometimes fear, inspires all financial action"[267]. It was this distrust, this fear of uncertainty that accelerated the Canadian public's willingness and hunger for information – any information – that would decrease their sense of uncertainty, even if they were vaguely aware that the ranking was flawed. The intense prevalence of fear-inspired economic headlines in the *Maclean's* of 1990 highlights the importance of this in Canadians minds. While a very small percentage of the Canadian population would actually use the information presented to make post-secondary attendance decisions, all Canadians were comforted by the existence of the rankings. The financial insecurity that Canadians faced in the early 1990s, the threat of recession in 2000, and the financial collapse of 2009 kept this economic uncertainty alive and well. Canadians were comforted by *Maclean's* ability to classify, simplify and categorize something as complex as post-secondary institutions – even if the information was not specifically

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[267] Jocelyn Pixley, <u>Emotions in Finance: Distrust and Uncertainty in Global Markets</u>. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 2.

relevant, the process itself diminished Canadian economic anxiety. The world seemed a lot simpler and a lot less scary, when complex institutions were packaged neatly, in clear, categorized tables. Ultimately, *Maclean's* is addressing this emotional response, a fear of economic uncertainty, in their rankings – they provided leadership to an uncertain and confused population and in the process solidified their position as experts in the minds of most Canadians.

However, the larger societal implications of placing trust in *Maclean's* as an expert is cause for concern. As Meig cautions, "Trust in expert systems is perhaps the core dilemma of modernity"[268] – because of the complexity of modern societies, we rely on expert judgment and expert services in many domains of life. But, as sociologist Niklas Luhmann states, "trust in general serves to reduce social uncertainty and can be considered a functional equivalent of power"[269]. So, the very act of soliciting and trusting expert opinion in order to reduce uncertainty has transfers power from the audience, the Canadian public, to *Maclean's* magazine.

Using Bitzer's theory of the rhetorical situation, I have examined the speaker-audience relationship, within the context of rhetorical constraints, exigence and audience. I have argued that the post-secondary landscape offered significant constraints – the changing enrolment patterns and rising educational costs led to the view of post-secondary education as an investment. The nature of investments and subsequent cost versus benefit analysis emphasized the risk involved in post-secondary education – would it provide the anticipated benefit? The risk of this situation acted as the exigence

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[268] Meig 754.

[269] Meig 754.

and in this rhetorical situation, it was this risk that *Maclean's* addressed through the creation of their university rankings. They positioned themselves as experts, offering guidance to assist the Canadian public and ostensibly promising to implicitly minimize the risk associated with investing in post-secondary education. Taking advantage of the leadership opportunity that was created with the incommensurable post-secondary options and the economic uncertainty in Canada in 1990, *Maclean's* accurately identified how to best position themselves, and their rankings, so that it aligned with the character of the Canadian public – a character which was primarily fear-oriented. Transferring their economic anxiety towards any authority willing to bring clarity and certainty to any part of an uncertain world, the rankings appealed to a vast majority of the Canadian public and served to minimize the public's emotional response to the uncertainty of the Canadian economic situation.

The implications of risk, propelled by economic anxiety, as an exigence for the *Maclean's* rankings are unsettling. *Maclean's* has read this fear in the Canadian public and assumed the position as comforting authority. They promote the rankings as a tool for the public – the gift of clarity, to clear the muddled post-secondary waters. However, looking at the Rankings rhetorically allows us to see that this gift may not be as simple and helpful as it appears. Inside is something opaque – the relationships between the rhetor, audience and message are not straightforward, and in fact, are often contradictory.

Maclean's is able to persuade its readers to accept many contradictions. Readers are asked to accept numerous messages simultaneously – and when these messages are uncovered via the tools of rhetorical criticism, certain contradictions appear. While reading the rankings, the audience is implicitly asked to accept these contradictory

messages: 1) universities are exclusive and elite organizations yet ranking these universities is of interest to all Canadians; 2) as tax-payers we must hold universities accountable yet the rankings are the only mechanism which offers this opportunity; 3) post-secondary education is very important to the future of Canada yet the image of Canadian universities is more important than the reality; 4) the universities are complex and incomprehensible organizations yet they can be easily broken into categories, so they can be ranked and compared; 5) a post-secondary education is a worthwhile financial and personal investment yet we should be very afraid about the declining value Canadian universities provide, and 6) *Maclean's*, as an expert, can help minimize the risk surrounding choosing a post-secondary education yet this danger is ever present. The elimination of this risk would not benefit *Maclean's* – the maintenance of this anxiety is in their best interest as it essential to selling copies of their annual ranking.

CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSIONS

I began this thesis by stating that a rhetor's goal is to instigate change in the world. In considering *Maclean's* as a successful rhetor and having analyzed the *Maclean's* University Ranking from a neo-aristotelian perspective, I am able to conclude with insight into what changes *Maclean's* has instigated in the world. My conclusions, as previously outlined in the three analysis chapters can be summarized under the following three themes:

Unavoidable Sense of Conflict

As outlined in the previous chapter, *Maclean's* offers many contradictions to its readers. I conclude that these contradictions were an unavoidable result of the nature of this project – the task of writing about an inherently exclusive organization yet making it relevant to the Canadian public as a whole is inherently conflicted. The pursuit of a university degree is not a universal goal and in accepting this challenge *Maclean's* was forced to frame this topic while considering an audience that would not be united with respect to its views and experiences regarding universities. While some Canadians would be alumni, others would not. Some would aspire for a university education for their children, and others would not. The one thing that united all Canadians with respect to universities were the financial implications – most Canadians reading the *Maclean's* University Rankings would be tax-payers, and as such, would be indirect funders of the institutions. *Maclean's* took this uniting thread and offered the rankings as an opportunity for empowerment – a way in which all Canadians, regardless of whether they were alumni or not, could feel that the universities were accountable to them, their primary funders as tax-paying Canadians.

Frequently, individuals feel powerless with respect to large organizations. Universities are generally very large, bureaucratic organizations with multi-million dollar budgets. Their budgets are complex and there is no way that any one individual can directly see how their tax-dollars are being spent. This leaves individuals feeling very disempowered – universities spend millions and millions of dollars per year and there is little direct and obvious benefit that any one tax-paying Canadian accrues. This experience is in direct contrast to the other major tax expenditure – health-care. While the Canadian health care systems are similarly complex and bureaucratic, at least, when a Canadian, or any members of their family or acquaintances, accesses the Canadian health care system, an individual is left with a sense of what their tax dollars are funding.

Maclean's has taken this 'little-guy-vs.-the-giant' sentiment and exploited it – positioning themselves as the expert, ready to keep the giant accountable. But, rather than offering an actual tool to empower Canadians, *Maclean's* offers the ranking as a court of public opinion, with no actual authority or mandate. Readers are invited to join *Maclean's* in grading those who are normally the grade-providers, thus inverting the traditional power dynamic. As *Maclean's* purports, "In the marketplace of ideas you, dear reader, are the judge"[270].

While participating in this empowerment fantasy may be a pleasing experience for Canadian readers, it is simply a fantasy. The rankings do not actually keep universities accountable – the expenditure of tax dollars is no more transparent with the rankings than it would be without them. In fact, in an ironic twist, some tax dollars are actually spent less wisely as universities devote resources to increasing their position in

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[270] "Why universities should be graded, too. " *Maclean's* 4 Sep. 2006: ABI/INFORM Global, ProQuest. Web. 18 Jul. 2011.

the ranking hierarchy rather than spending them to actually increase transparency, improve student experience or enhance academic offerings.

As previously argued, *Maclean's* does not fulfill its explicit exigence – after reading the rankings, prospective students and their parents are no clearer about which institution will best meet their own academic goals or offer supports which will best facilitate their success as a post-secondary student. A much more useful transparency tool would have been to facilitate and champion an actual process for engaging prospective students and more broadly, all Canadian tax payers, into a meaningful dialogue about the important differences between Canadian universities with an aim to highlight opportunities for substantial and meaningful changes to ensure the institutions are responding to Canadian values and expectations.

Fear of Risk

While it may be reasonable to assume that all tax-payers should have an interest in what their tax dollars are funding, *Maclean's* could not guarantee that this assumption would compel a substantial enough proportion of Canadians to purchase the rankings, year after year. As I have previously argued, *Maclean's* carefully highlighted the financial risk involved with university education (both with pursuing it and with not) to keep Canadian readers fearful about the risks involved in specifically selecting a post-secondary institution and more generally about the state of Canadian university education. This fear served a dual purpose as it offered Canadians an exigence to resolve (i.e. risk that needed to be managed) but it also served to strengthen *Maclean's* ethos – by highlighting the risk, Canadians willingly accepted *Maclean's* as the expert able to provide clarity and help Canadians to make informed decisions.

An additional difficulty for *Maclean's* arose from their desire to print the rankings annually – on one hand *Maclean's* was the expert able to offer sound information, yet they needed to perpetuate this state of fear in order to justify producing the rankings annually. Leaders in any large bureaucratic organization will know how slowly organizations change – and universities are generally renowned for changing very, very slowly. Which makes the production of an annual ranking quite absurd – universities as organizations simply do not change quickly enough that there would be substantial enough changes to require students to consult rankings annually. Yet, *Maclean's* needed to sell magazines every year and by promoting and encouraging this state of fear, they increased the likelihood that Canadians would be interested in the rankings each fall.

Boorstin would likely argue that this problematic cycle is a result of our heightened expectations – news reporters need to create news in order to have news to report. But, *Maclean's* has taken this to new heights as they have become niche experts on Canadian post-secondary education – to ensure that Canadians continue to need an expert, *Maclean's* must ensure that conflict and risk exists within the post-secondary world. While this alarmist position may have been used to highlight actual conflict and risks that exist within the Canadian post-secondary system, unfortunately, this ranking simply serves to maintain the status quo. Canadians are asked to continue to believe that universities are exclusive and complex organizations and that they are inaccessible to the majority of the tax-paying public.

Inverting the Hierarchy

While the actual University Ranking is an obvious hierarchy, *Maclean's* asks its readers to see a larger meta-hierarchy encompassing Canadian post-secondary education. At the top of this meta-hierarchy are the universities; complex organizations within an ivory tower – spending millions of tax payer dollars yet disconnected with the day to day experience of average Canadians. Below the universities in this meta-hierarchy are Canadian tax payers, who provide funds to serve the universities but see little in the way of direct benefit. At the bottom are those that serve the tax payers, such as newsmagazines like *Maclean's*.

However, in creating the University Rankings, *Maclean's* is offering its readers a worldview where this hierarchy is inverted. In this inverted meta-hierarchy, the top position is held by *Maclean's,* the expert, the Canadian authority on post-secondary education. In the middle position on this inverted hierarchy is the Canadian tax-payer who is beholden to *Maclean's* for the wisdom and expertise it provides. And finally, on the bottom of this inverted meta-hierarchy are the universities, held accountable to the Canadian public through the ranking-as-judgment process.

Under the guise of public accountability, *Maclean's* has created an environment where the universities answer to their demands. The outrage *Maclean's* expressed in 2006 when the 11 universities no longer agreed to participate in the rankings highlights their desire to sustain this inverted hierarchy. And their vehement assertion that the rankings would continue, regardless of university cooperation, outlines their commitment to maintaining their elevated position. It is possible that the eleven universities that withdrew from the *Maclean's* Rankings did so in recognition of this inverted hierarchy –

they refused to continue to participate in this inverted meta-hierarchy and sought to re-establish universities as leaders in society, responsible for educating its citizens and using research to solve important societal problems.

Ultimately, *Maclean's* substitutes perceived empowerment for legitimate assessment. It offers Canadians a spot on a collective judgment panel – where Universities are called into account, where they must respond to the hierarchy, offering assurances that they provide quality offerings and that parents' investments in their children's education will not be misdirected.

Final Considerations

While the Rankings ostensibly claim to offer leadership by minimizing uncertainty and helping Canadian students and their parents minimize risk, this rhetorical analysis reveals *Maclean's* leadership as predicated on maintaining a strong degree of conflict, fear and judgment on the part of the readership. Rather than create a meaningful process for making difficult choices regarding post-secondary education, the University Rankings have ensured the status quo remains. They have reinforced existing public perceptions, such as barriers of class, education, political persuasion, etc. and Canadians continue to be uncertain and overwhelmed by the Canadian post-secondary landscape.

Using these conclusions, further areas of study could include how Canadians perceive the role of hierarchies within our society. Are we able to critically assess information that is provided to us? How can we easily uncover the values laden within a hierarchical framework? Is the oversimplification of complicated information into neat and tidy categories a useful tool aimed to broaden our understanding of complex issues? Or, do judgment, fear and uncertainty drive us into an ethos of uncritical acceptance? Is

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Maclean's helping to alter our societal values in this direction? Or, are they just reflecting back to us, the people that we have become? Unfortunately, those questions are beyond the scope of this thesis, but I feel it is important to note that my conclusions are certainly not conclusive in understanding the broader implications of hierarchies, particularly with respect to Canadian societal values towards post-secondary education.

My final comment is of caution. Although ubiquitous in our society, rankings are inherently divisive and value-laden and it is imperative that we remain critical of any hierarchies presented to us. Using risk as a motivator behind a hierarchy becomes particularly troublesome – the concept of risk houses an inherent hierarchy as any activity is easily graded as "less risky" or "riskier" than another. Using fear and risk as enthymematic drivers behind a hierarchy significantly increases the power of the hierarchy and those who control it – as previously discussed, the very act of soliciting and trusting expert opinion in order to reduce uncertainty has granted power to *Maclean's* magazine. The danger in this situation is that balance of power is heavily weighted to the authority, the expert – there are minimal ways in which the Canadian public can ensure that this trust is justly placed, that we retain "control of experts"[271] and it is not the experts who control us.

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[271] Meig 754.

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