

CANADIAN TELEVISION TODAY
by Bart Beaty and Rebecca Sullivan
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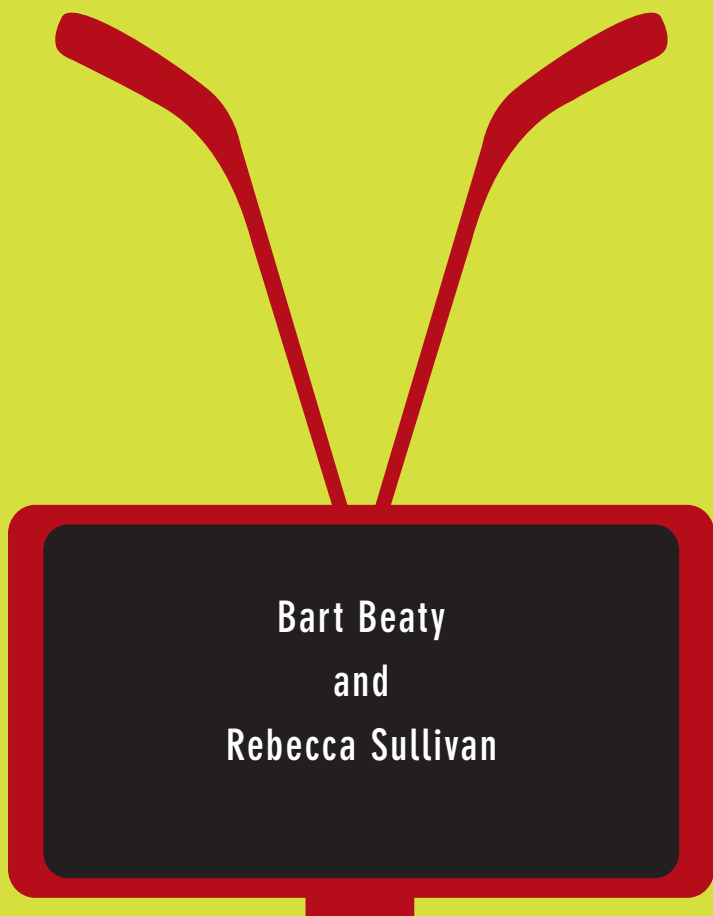
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CANADIAN TELEVISION TODAY



Bart Beaty
and
Rebecca Sullivan

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P R E F A C E

This book is our effort to raise important questions about Canadian media, culture and society and to reach beyond traditional academic borders. The research here derives from work that we have done for the first two volumes of *How Canadians Communicate*, an anthology of essays specifically addressing the contemporary status of Canada's cultural industries and institutions. In contributing to those volumes we found that we have been somewhat constrained by the brevity of our articles, always desiring to explore the implications of our arguments more fully. This is what we have sought to accomplish with *Canadian Television Today*. Rather than writing another history of Canadian television policy, or a journal-length examination of a few chosen contemporary television programs, we have written a work that is neither fully one nor the other. Too long to be a series of journal articles, too brief to be a typical academic monograph, we invite the reader to regard this work as an extended essay that asks the question "Where is Canadian television today? And what are the implications of its current status as Canadians move into the future?" In that spirit, then, we address this book to scholars engaged in issues of media, technology, cultural policy, identity, and nationhood. But we also hope that this book will reach beyond the academic milieu and offer all Canadians the opportunity to discuss more fully the extent of their engagement with the way society is culturally and technologically mediated by television and how one can do better in opening up Canada to multiple voices through this medium.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N

T S

Our initial collaborative writing on Canadian television took the form of contributions to the first two volumes of *How Canadians Communicate*. These books were thoughtfully orchestrated by Maria Bakardjieva, Frits Pannekoek, and David Taras. We are grateful to them for asking us to think more deeply about the present state of Canadian television, and for placing us on the road that culminated in this work. We would also like to thank Joseph Jackson, now a too-distant colleague and friend, for extending to us an invitation to address the Lincoln Commission in 2002. This was a formative experience in the development of our argument in these pages.

This book would not have happened were it not for a conversation between the authors and Walter Hildebrandt, former director of the University of Calgary Press. Walter's vision of a new series of timely books addressing salient issues in Canadian society became the basis for the *Op/Position* series, and we would not have undertaken this work without his enthusiasm for the topic. We have great respect for Walter's commitment to scholarly excellence, and extend our deepest thanks to him for his work on this project.

Bart Beaty would like to particularly thank the Killam Foundation, whose provision of a Killam Resident Fellowship in 2004 provided the requisite time to work on an earlier draft of this manuscript.

We would also like to thank Ann Smith and Marie Babey for their work on the final manuscript.

Our families have been a tremendous source of support over the course of our professional and private lives together. We especially want to thank our son, Sebastian, who arrived in our lives while this book was being prepared and whose presence allows us to keep these issues in perspective.

Finally, we would like to dedicate this work to our teachers at McGill University, Gertrude Robinson and Will Straw. They represent the best of Canadian scholarship, and shared with us their deep commitment to the pursuit of knowledge. Their work on mass media systems, and particularly on the important role that Canadian media have played in the construction of the nation, serves as the foundation upon which we have sought to build. We hope this book honours them for their uncompromising vision of academic research in service to the public good.

INTRODUCTION: CANAD

IAN TELEVISION TODAY

Some may well ask, in this age of conglomeration and media convergence, why bother with a book solely on television? This book is itself an answer to that very question, centrally addressing itself to the issue of how television functions in Canada and matters to Canadians, at this moment in time. That said, there is no short answer to the question: Why? The answer revolves around a series of concerns that range from technology to politics, and from economic futures to cultural traditions. Since the first signals hit the air, broadcasting has played a key role – some would argue the primary role – in defining how Canadians understand themselves as a people. Successive governmental commissions have debated the role of broadcasting in the formation and maintenance of Canada as a sovereign nation-state since the Aird Commission in 1932, which established the conditions for the creation of the Canadian Radio Broadcasting Corporation (later, the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation or CBC), and each has arrived at the conclusion that Canada requires a healthy broadcast infrastructure in order to maintain national cohesiveness. As a result of this governmental prodding, Canada has developed one of the most impressive telecommunication networks in the world, but one which nonetheless has often been criticized for failing in its major duty of bringing Canadian stories to Canadian people. The real culprit, say cultural nationalists, is American broadcasting, which casts a long shadow over “our” territory and lures away audiences with its flashier product. Others respond that the problem is internal, that

second-rate local programming is so dull it can't compete with American network fare. Now, new wireless, digital, and streaming technologies threaten the very existence of television as a distinct medium that can be controlled through regulatory frameworks and governmental policy. Some see this as a problem that requires even greater governmental oversight. We take a decidedly different position. We refuse to perceive Canadian television as the righteous underdog to American domination. Further, we refuse to conceive of television as a provider of discrete, identifiable national culture that is served up to a passive audience. At this current moment in history, television is a revealing object of inquiry because the threat of its own obsolescence – whether political, technological, or economic – serves to highlight a number of intriguing possibilities for rethinking concepts like national culture, media hegemony, and the mass audience.

THE FIELD OF CANADIAN TELEVISION STUDIES

In 2001, when we first began looking into the state of Canadian television, what struck us most was the lack of attention it has received from scholars and critics. Even as the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) was setting up the largest expansion of channel offerings in the world, and court cases were being filed by cable and satellite companies to control how Canadians would receive those channels, the significance of these changes warranted little attention outside the halls of policy makers. The debates, such as they were, played out in submissions to regulators and on the dials of our television sets. The issues had been dealt with more forcefully in the practice of television viewers than in the theories of television scholars. In fact, much of the contemporary literature available on Canadian television comes from governmental agencies. The most important recent study is *Our Cultural Sovereignty*, the culmination of

two years of hearings on the future of Canadian broadcasting by the House of Commons Standing Committee on Heritage. Since its release in 2003, the report has mostly languished in the back offices of parliamentary interns, with only occasional signs of life, and little attention has been paid to its many recommendations. Relying upon political committees to draft the parameters for the public debate on culture (a tendency that has a long history in this country) highlights a major absence in critical cultural debates. In November 2002, we testified before the Lincoln committee that drafted *Our Cultural Sovereignty*. It did not go well. The members of Parliament were easily distracted by their pet issues and the issues of their campaign contributors, and we had little sense that anything of substance had been communicated by us to the committee members in the question and answer panel format of the hearings. This book, then, is our effort to put on paper what we wanted to tell the committee that morning in Ottawa.

We intend this book to be an intervention into the small body of scholarly literature dedicated to exploring Canadian television, and into the wider literature that examines the implications of the medium for Canadian culture more generally. Sadly, much of this writing fails to avoid the trap of nationalist navel gazing and extend the debate about television onto the global stage. To our minds, this is an unfortunate oversight given Canadian television's unique positioning in the economic, political, and cultural life of this country. More importantly, the history, present condition, and future promise of Canadian television offer a completely different way of thinking about cultural issues in international and local, as well as national contexts.

Most of the books on Canadian television that do exist were published before the recent technological revolution brought on by the internet and new digital technologies. Perhaps the best of these is by a British scholar. Richard Collins' *Culture, Communication and National Identity: The Case of Canadian Television* (1990) is now more than fifteen years old, but although some of his examples have become outdated, the ideas behind them are not. Collins uses the lens of television to explore the decoupling of polity from culture, the encroachment of globalizing forces on national borders, and the invocation of the audience as both/either consumer and citizen. In many ways, we are seeking to

continue the conversation he started that was somewhat rudely interrupted by an exploding telecommunications network. However, unlike Collins, we are not going to rehash the histories of the CBC and the CRTC – stories that have been told many times already and which, to our mind, prevent the conversation from moving forward. Also, while Collins hints at the coming forces of globalization and technological convergence, the implications of these shifts were in no way as widely felt then as they are now.

Two of the more current and lively contributions to television studies in Canada are David Hogarth's *Documentary Television in Canada: From National Public Service to Global Marketplace* (2002), and Serra Tinic (2005). Both books emphasize the importance of understanding Canadian television on aesthetic and economic grounds in relation to vast changes in international market trends. The expansion of television as an increasingly global, rather than national, medium has opened up new possibilities in co-productions and increased audience potential. At the same time, it also creates problems for producers looking to create culturally specific dramatic or documentary programming. It also, importantly, puts to the test national funding, sponsorship, and subsidy programs in defining what counts as "Canadian culture."

What is so interesting about these books is the way in which they both grapple specifically with Canadian programming, Hogarth with documentary television as a distinct genre, Tinic with Vancouver-based dramatic programs such as *X-Files*, an American network show, and *Da Vinci's Inquest*, one of the CBC's rare popular successes. This is a decidedly new turn in Canadian television studies, a field that has tended to focus less on cultural production *per se* and more on telecommunications and broadcasting policy. The leaders in this field are no doubt Marc Raboy and Robert Babe. Raboy's *Missed Opportunities: The Story of Canada's Broadcasting Policy* (1990), and Babe's *Telecommunications in Canada: Technology, Industry and Government* (1990) both lead from the scholars' long-standing – not to mention ongoing – public policy work for governmental and non-governmental agencies. In fact, it is

worth pointing out that Raboy, along with David Taras, was the leading research consultant on *Our Cultural Sovereignty*.

More often than not, television is incorporated as one or two chapters in an anthology about Canadian media and culture. In recent years, there has been a noteworthy and long overdue expansion of this field. *The Cultural Industries in Canada* (1996), edited by Michael Dorland, awakened a renewed interest in the status of Canadian media, culture, communications technology, and the policy framework in which they all operate. An argument can be made that its successors in the field are *Mediascapes* (2002), edited by Paul Attallah and Leslie Shade, and *How Canadians Communicate* (2003), edited by David Taras, Frits Pannekoek, and Maria Bakardjieva. These books bring together scholars to discuss different forms of media and culture in order to suggest how they work collectively to shape a sense of national identity. While collections such as these play a crucial role in highlighting distinct aspects of Canadian media and their role in developing a coherent sense of Canadian culture, television merits additional close scrutiny as it bridges the major debates in the field, including technological and economic convergence, nationalism, and cultural value. It also provides key historical and political frameworks that are not always as readily obvious in other areas.

The value of these anthologies and textbooks on Canadian media resides in the way that they have rekindled debates about the role of media in shaping national identity. Additionally, the most recent of these books have highlighted just how unstable the idea of national identity truly is. However, these works often tend to emphasize technological or economic issues as if Canadian culture is simply a by-product of these larger structures. For that reason, we welcome another body of literature that more directly addresses cultural concerns. Books like Eva Mackey's *House of Difference* (1999) and Erin Manning's *Ephemeral Territories* (2003) directly address the idea of Canada as territory, nation, culture, and state. Mackey uses empirical and ethnographic evidence in order to reveal generations of marginalization and de-politicization for cultural and ethnic minorities, thereby challenging the cherished ideal of Canada as a multicultural nation defined by tolerance. Manning deconstructs the language of nationalism and

its attachment to territorialism, the physical manifestation of what is fundamentally a discursive entity. These books point to new directions in Canadian cultural discourse that do not start with the assumption that Canada is a nation deserving of its own unique, identifiable culture, but which demonstrate that such a desire is itself at the heart of a deeply contradictory and ambivalent notion of nationalism that has serious repercussions for a nation's racial, linguistic, and ethnic "others."

These themes of ambivalence, deconstruction, ephemerality, and difference are indebted to the work of Linda Hutcheon and her landmark book *The Canadian Postmodern* (1988). She argues that, as a country obsessed with its borders, Canada is already operating within a quintessentially postmodern framework. She contests the modernist fixation of the nation-state as a site of unity, order, and rationality, suggesting on the contrary that, on aesthetic grounds, Canadian culture bypassed its modernist moment in order to arrive at a place where postmodern values have the upper hand. As she writes, "To render the particular concrete, to glory in a (defining) local ex-centricity – this is the Canadian postmodern" (19). This is, of course, a rather optimistic – and some may say naïve – conclusion to draw from Canada's policies of multiculturalism and continuing anxieties over regionalism. It reflects less the experience of ethnic communities and more the official stance of government on diversity, and a smug belief that the Canadian approach to the management of cultural difference is the best in the world. As the Canadian government's website on multiculturalism pronounces, "The Canadian experience has shown that multiculturalism encourages racial and ethnic harmony and cross-cultural understanding, and discourages ghettoization, hatred, discrimination and violence" (Canadian Heritage 2005). The notion that these social problems, which are offshoots of political and economic disenfranchisement, can be solved culturally through heritage programs and the like is precisely what authors like Mackey and Manning criticize.

Others, like Michael Dorland and Maurice Charland (2002), have countered Hutcheon's claims for postmodernism by arguing that Canada's ambivalence is more like an anxious looking back at missed opportunities than a progressive gaze forward to new potentialities.

Rather than having skipped modernism and moved directly onto post-modernism, Dorland and Charland argue that Canada is a country still in search of its modernist moment of nationalist certainty. They suggest that the forms of symbolic disruption that some identify as post-modern ruptures into the metanarratives of modernity and the unity of the sovereign nation-state are equally tied to political and economic forces of globalization that cannot be stopped by territorial borders (22). Their argument stems from their interest in Canadian civil and legal culture, not in the literary or artistic concerns of Hutcheon. Television, we argue, connects these two positions because it is a form of culture that is highly regulated by the state.

What Dorland and Charland define as Canadian “kynicism” (313), an ironic and reflexive sense of detachment from the ongoing search for an integral national identity, is, as Will Straw suggests, more common to English Canada than Quebec (2002, 96). Indeed, it should be stated quite clearly that it is difficult if not altogether impossible to discuss the situation of Canadian television without separating out the Quebec experience. Unlike the rest of Canada, where audiences for indigenous Canadian programming are consistently small and where the debates about identity are usually framed around the question of whether one exists at all much less how it would be defined, Québécois television is a vibrant but somewhat insulated cultural industry. Furthermore, its cultural distinctiveness from English Canada rests on linguistic, historical, and political grounds that have given that province a far greater sense of a unique and cohesive identity. Thus, while we are for the most part only interested in exploring the case of English language television culture in Canada, the example of Quebec is useful for delineating certain complex ideas around nations, states, and sovereign cultures.

The relationship between nation/state/culture is the major theme of the book. Following closely on that idea is the remapping of multiculturalism in the wake of globalization, which is forcing a major re-evaluation of the very ideas of nations and states. Television as a medium comes more clearly into focus with our third theme of cultural value. As a mass medium and one that has been historically criticized as a debased form of culture, television is often cited as “lowbrow.”

However, it is also a major tool in seemingly endless debates around national culture, particularly those that support protectionist policies. Thus, the value of television migrates along the high/low continuum depending on how it is being discussed, used, and evaluated. Finally, we look even more closely at the example of television as it mutates into a very different medium through changes in its technological and economic structure. These four themes of nation/state/culture, multiculturalism/globalization, high/low, and technological flows can perhaps be neatly framed within larger questions about modernity as opposed to postmodernity. They point to the way that the aesthetic and political value of television as a form of culture has been complicated by its technological and economic value as a form of mass media. At stake then, is a re-evaluation of Canada communication networks and their role in disseminating new forms of identity that can either better approximate or undo altogether the promise of enlightenment goals of tolerance, acceptance, and equality for all. This book is about television first and foremost, but it is also about notions of cultural citizenship and how television can help us to understand our place in national and global mediascapes.

NATION/STATE/CULTURE

The dialectic between nation and state is keenly felt in Canada since it is a country rife with regional tensions, an often-distorted sense of history that relies heavily on geography, and a future strongly linked to immigration. Nonetheless, there is no question that Canada is a sovereign state. We have an autonomous government, an official constitution, and a defined electoral system. We govern according to our own set of laws and accord citizenship to those who are either born here or have passed certain criteria and are committed to making Canada their home, all the things which define state sovereignty. However, it

is not as clear that Canada is a nation. By this, we mean a cultural entity that can clearly define itself and assert conditions of membership based on shared experiences, values, language, and the like. This distinction is not merely semantic, but addresses the idea of the nation as a cultural construct separate from the political or economic structure of the state. The relationship is easier to understand with regard to Quebec. Through its sovereignty movement, Quebec can be seen as a nation struggling to establish statehood by gaining full political and economic control over its territorial boundaries. In contrast, Canada's borders are not challenged by external forces. Nonetheless, Canadian territorialism is challenged internally by the myriad groups who live within the country but who do not share a single cohesive culture. This is by no means a unique situation for Canada. If anything, the Canadian identity crisis at least has the value of openly acknowledging that cultural cohesion is less a reality than a desire by the state to demonstrate its legitimacy. Indeed, cultural strategies of control are far more likely in democratic states where political and economic options of coercion or outright force are no longer legitimate (Straw 2002, 98). The double bind of culture as both a strategy of cohesion and its greatest threat lies at the heart of the decoupling of nation from state. Traditional heritage politics have sought to artificially encapsulate, and therefore preserve, the marginality of other distinct cultures within the discursive borders of a state. This is what Arjun Appadurai means when he talks about how states work to "monopolize the moral resources of community" (1990, 304). It's a policy by which the doors to other cultures are opened, but not so widely so as they could overwhelm the dominant culture.

Of course, this idea becomes problematic when the so-called dominant culture is as poorly defined and transitory as is Canada's. As a colonial territory of Britain that only recently (in global geopolitical terms) shook off that yoke, Canada came late to the nation-building game. Furthermore, unlike other former British colonies like India or the United States, it asserted its independence without a revolution around which its citizens could rally. This is an age-old argument about Canada that Dorland and Charland characterize as one of both counter-revolution and "ressentiment" (2002, 19). A marked

inferiority complex and perpetual looking up to Britain for approval characterized the early stages of culture building in Canada in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. However, as new cultural technologies boomed and mass media were seen to be replacing both the high culture forms of the elite and more rural-based folk culture, Canada's cultural sector became increasingly subjugated by that of the United States. Policies in both television and film ensured open access for American product and curtailed Canada's own cultural activity. What we lacked in Canadian content, however, was more than made up for by decades of rampant communication network building. Thus, the goal of creating a sense of cohesion from sea to sea to sea was met originally and almost exclusively by technological expansion, with very little concomitant initiatives to provide indigenous cultural content. Maurice Charland has termed this "technological nationalism," defined through three contradictory stances. First is the use of technological infrastructure – such as the Canadian Pacific Railway or the CBC – to define nodal points of identity formation. Second is our angst-ridden dependency on foreign markets, a throwback to the idea of Canada as physically and culturally peripheral. Finally and related, the cultural imperative of Canada becomes technology itself with little in the way of actual content or production (2004, 36). As Canada's geographic territory opened up to the north and west, scattering isolated populations across the map, this lack of cultural content in favour of cultural pathways gave immigrant communities the opportunity to maintain a stronger link to their heritage, laying the foundation for multiculturalism, which became an official federal act in 1985.

Despite the fact that Canada has one of the most open and sophisticated telecommunication systems in the world, broadcasting has remained a central political concern for the creation and maintenance of a distinct Canadian culture. While no small amount of ink has been spent in debating the significance of a distinct national culture, in practice very little has been done to achieve it. Straw characterizes this as a form of "ethical incompleteness" (2002, 96) that marks English Canada in particular. It reflects a kind of liar's game in which citizens affirm their support for Canadian culture, whatever that may be, even as they somewhat guiltily continue to reject indigenous offerings in

favour of imported culture, most notably from the United States. Television is probably the most visible example of this attitude. It's the sort of mindset that allows shows like *Canadian Idol* to be hailed as a success, even though it is clearly a knock-off of its even more successful American counterpart. It is a longstanding dilemma with which policy makers and cultural nationalists must regularly contend. Organizations like the Friends of Canadian Broadcasting, a non-profit group that advocates for Canadian content on radio and television and limits on foreign programming, clearly puts ethical concerns of national cohesion ahead of economic priorities. As they state in their goals, "Seeing who we are, how we feel and what we believe is a task worth the investment. It is also a task best met by Canadians" (Friends of Canadian Broadcasting 2005). On the other side of this debate are private broadcasters whose programming goals are more market-driven. However, it would not be fair to say that these private broadcasters are necessarily at odds with cultural nationalists, as they too argue for governmental measures that protect their rights over the broadcasting system to ensure Canadian ownership. To them, it doesn't matter which *Idol* you watch, so long as you watch it on a Canadian-owned station. Either way, both sides rely on a kind of nebulous invocation of "Canadianness" that continues to be defined within a very narrow, anglocentric framework reflecting our colonial legacy.

MULTICULTURALISM MEETS GLOBALIZATION

When pushed to define what distinguishes Canada from other nations, a common tendency is to point to multiculturalism, a policy of inclusion and tolerance where individuals may express multiple aspects of their cultural heritage freely without loss of a sense of identity. As the former prime minister and chief proponent of multiculturalism, Pierre Trudeau, suggested, national identity and cultural identity need not

necessarily be coupled. Thus, a person could consider themselves a Canadian on national terms, but culturally could be many kinds of “hyphenated,” cultural Canadian: Native-, French-, Indo-, Chinese-, and so on (Collins 1990, 26). Thus, just as nationhood and statehood are not necessarily conjoined, neither are nationality and cultural identity. Of course, the obvious assumption within this argument isn’t that state, nation, and culture are equally valued, but in fact that cultural identity is subservient to national identity. It is this conceit of multiculturalism that allows Canada to present a nationalist myth of tolerance and acceptance of clearly identified “others” even as its cultural policies whitewash the very significant differences between those cultures and between them and a predominantly Anglo-European definition of Canadianness.

The arguments for a distinctly Canadian television culture, which is usually defined simply as one free of American influence, tend to follow on the heels of the multicultural defence of Canada. Canada is not a melting pot, say some, but a cultural mosaic. Despite recent data that indicates that Canadians are less likely to actually support the ideals of the cultural mosaic than are our neighbours to the south (Den Tandt 2005), it is a common assumption that there is room in our society for all forms of cultural expression – as long as they are secured under the common rubric of Canadianness. Of course, the problem is that there is no consensus on what that common rubric is or if it even exists at all. “Canadianness” is, in fact, one of the least understood and least clearly articulated concepts in the nation’s lexicon. The result is a kind of reluctantly guilty commitment to a notion of Canadian culture in theory, but not in practice. However, this lack of commitment is not necessarily a problem. Indeed, it may well be the logical outcome of ongoing shifts in the relationship between culture, politics, and economics. Increasingly, cultural policy is pulled in two directions at once, creating a schism. On the one hand, the communications infrastructure – networks, technology, systems, and the like – is the stuff of economics, industry, investment, and development. Culture, on the other hand, to the extent that it is managed by the state, is there to shore up a sense of nationalist identity that serves in turn as the primary defence of the continuation of the state (Straw 2002, 98). In

Canada, this defence is built around the conception of culture through multiculturalism as a distinctly modern, progressive form of nation-building. It is, as Charles Taylor argues, grounded in a two-fold belief in the dignity of persons and the privileging of the individual, both highly modern conceptions. However, this definition of the citizen clashes with the desire of any state to control its boundaries, both territorial and ephemeral (1992, 63).

If, as Eva Mackey argues, national identity is the fundamental form of modern subjectivity, then the logic of multiculturalism could be seen as contradictory. As the argument goes, modernity and nation-building are about the creation of homogeneous cultures, and the erasure of difference. However, Mackey and others point out that nation-building is not only about homogeneity, but also about plurality, and the creation of a consensus-based public in which limited levels of diversity are tolerated and made ancillary to a core identity (1999, 5). In that sense, then, multiculturalism can be regarded as a rather ingenious form of hegemony from within. Ultimately, the defining motif of Canadianness has to be acknowledged as ill-defined. Canadian identity is more clearly a strategy that distinguishes Canada from the national identities of other nations than it is a confident statement of identity. Canada is defined in the abstract as something that the United States, to take the most common comparison, is not: *we* are a mosaic, *they* are a melting pot. The “they” barely needs to be mentioned by name, of course, while the “we” remains rather nebulous. The anxiety over American influence is so keenly felt in Canada that it circumscribes nearly every facet of national cultural policy. In particular, this anxiety defines Canadian television, and it has only increased as technological, economic, and political barriers crumble in the wake of globalization.

As an important paradigm for conceptualizing culture and communication at the current moment, globalization can mean many things. Opponents see it as a nefarious strategy of worldwide homogenization or, more starkly, the Americanization of global cultures. Others see potential in opening up communicative pathways between marginalized or heretofore silenced groups and creating new forms of imagined communities across territories. We are not taking part in

this particular debate, as we recognize that both tendencies operate simultaneously in the way that television is produced, disseminated, and understood. In this sense, television is a critical site for exploring the limits of globalization because it operates across so many different geographies. There is the physical or territorial location, in which broadcasting is a major concern of the state and subject to stringent regulation. There is also the virtual or symbolic geography, in which television flows across physical boundaries and connects audiences to networks of identity that transcend the nation-state (Tinic 2005, 17). Furthermore, television straddles both the public and private spheres. It is on the one hand a crucial instrument of nationalism and public identity formation, while on the other a distinctly private practice undertaken in isolation by atomized audiences who need neither be citizens of the nation nor located within its boundaries (Gripsrud 2004, 212).

In the rush to claim a collapse of boundaries and a new era of free-flowing goods, people, information, and culture, the concept of globalization falters in that it overlooks its connection to nationalism. Rather than see it as supplanting an obsolete, static mode of identity formation, we agree with scholars such as David Morley (2000) and Serra Tinic (2005) in seeing globalization as a new focal point through which to articulate the legitimacy of the nation-state. Television makes this clear in that globalization has been used to justify tearing down regulatory boundaries and untying broadcasting from its nationalist moorings. At the same time, cultural content regulations continue to proliferate to ensure that programming reflects some kind of bounded notion of community and identity and protects the nation from the homogenizing effects of globalization. What is interesting is the way in which both invoke a spectre of the global as the foe of the nation-state and insist upon a decidedly liberal notion of the public sphere grounded in free markets, consumer choice, and individualism. We reject this definition but continue to explore the potential of a globalization that doesn't merely skip over the national to get to the local, but works dialectically across the terrain in order to reveal more nuanced, pluralistic, and democratic forms of nationalism built on multiplicity and difference, in the spirit of multiculturalism.

For Canada, the anxieties now being produced worldwide by globalization have circulated in other forms for generations. As Canadian communication scholars have long pointed out, Canada has been exemplary in creating vast communication infrastructures necessary for linking the country to itself, from the railroads to the CBC to new initiatives in the "Supernet." In many ways, communication systems are the precursors of globalization, ignoring as they do any kind of physical, territorial borders (Collins 1990, 9). The ability of communication systems to dissolve territoriality highlights an interesting aspect of the problem of nationhood. Space, place, and location begin to mean very different things once they can be transcended altogether. Manning argues in her analysis of Canadian identity politics that territorialism isn't as much a physical phenomenon as it is a discursive entity. By that she means that the physical space of Canada only becomes meaningful when it is understood as the foundation for a sense of place. We come to an understanding of what Canada means by translating our surroundings into something meaningful that shapes our relationship to others. Canada, a rural-based, staples economy for so long, has emphasized this sense of space/place in its nationalist metaphors, from the beaver to the maple leaf and our own slogan, "from sea to sea to sea." The rural Canadian mythology is so ingrained that, in 2004, when Statistics Canada announced what everyone already knew, that the country had become a predominantly urban society, it made headlines across the country. The geographical landscape of this country is changing dramatically, while the real battleground remains the discursive landscape of an imagined Canada, a nation rhetorically committed to tolerance, openness, and respect for others.

If multiculturalism really did mean what its proponents say it does, then Canada would be well poised to embrace globalization. However, as trends in television show, the tendency is to look for ways to shore up resistance to globalization in order to create the conditions for the impossible dream of a one-way flow of Canadian cultural goods to the world. Part of the project of this book, then, is to imagine a different kind of multiculturalism that also re-imagines globalization beyond the parameters of the liberal public sphere. The dominant form of multiculturalism has tended toward a homogenization of non-dominant

cultures to the point where they can be reduced to colourful costumes, spicy food, and an annual street festival. In that sense, they remain resolutely “othered,” de-politicized and asked to feel grateful that they are allowed to maintain any sense of hybrid identity at all. Taking as our starting point the groundbreaking ideas of Arjun Appadurai, we wonder what are the possibilities of understanding hyphenated Canadianness not as a form of conjuncture, of erasure of differences, but of disjuncture.

In brief, Appadurai argues that anxieties that globalization will herald homogenization, commodification, or the outright Americanization of culture neglect to note the complexity by which territorialism is giving way to deterritorialism, or the dissolution of borders between sovereign states. In this sense, he suggests that the relationship between the nation and the state is becoming an increasingly unstable one, threatening to break the other apart rather than maintaining a solid centre (1990, 304). At the heart of this deterritorialization are two new forms of landscape, the mediascape, or the free-flow of images and texts that eventually cohere into narratives of identity and location, and the ideoscape, a concatenation of ideas and political beliefs that alter the definition of the state. Together, they, along with the rapid flows of money (finanscapes), networks (technoscapes) and people (ethnoscapes), make possible new territories for cultural infiltration. The results can be either inward or outward looking. In the former, an increased sense of nationalism, distinguished from one’s statehood, makes the qualifier in hyphenated identities more powerful. Similarly, those who remain committed to a state-based sense of identity could be inclined to police the boundaries of nationalism and keep it contained from political influence. Some could argue this has been the tendency of Canadian multiculturalism in its most liberal, nationalist form. Yet, on the other hand, Appadurai suggests that as globalization accelerates the pace of disjuncture between media, ideas, money, technology, and people, new alternatives arise. Rather than fearing this sense of deterritorialization, we can look out onto new landscapes in which disjuncture and difference are not problems to be fixed, but promises to be fulfilled. The mediascape is leading the way, he says, by creating new markets for culture that satisfy the desires of diasporic

populations to maintain a connection to the places that they left behind (1990, 303). As a country based on immigration, Canada is well situated to play a significant role in the globalizing mediascape, but only if it is willing to let go its dreams of unified nationhood in order to embrace the new alternatives provided by genuine multiculturalism.

TELEVISION AND ITS AUDIENCES

Television has occupied a space at the centre of debates over globalization, nationalism, and multiculturalism since it was first launched in Canada. It is still the most powerful form of mass media, and certainly the one that penetrates into the highest number of Canadian homes. Yet, television also suffers from a longstanding feeling of debasement. It has been marginalized and degraded by the belief that it is a low form of culture pandering to the worst kind of taste. Interestingly, that has led to a tension between what the medium is and what many wish that it could become within the context of Canadian nationalism. More than any other cultural form, Canadian television is claimed as the lifeline to the hearts and minds of the nation's people. It can either pump in the kinds of values that will sustain the nation as a whole, or it will clog our national arteries with seductive content from elsewhere. As a result, television is one of the most regulated media and has been the subject of a seemingly endless number of governmental studies, commissions, and hearings. The crux of the problem – at least to those who continue to see it as such – is that by and large, Canadians in overwhelming numbers watch American programming more than home-grown fare. For this reason, the debate over television in Canada has tended to be shaped by the perceived threat of the United States and its globalizing homogenization, and also by the notion that American programming is a cheap succour for passive audiences who simply won't watch what's good for them.

As we have noted, Canada's attempts at creating a cohesive national identity tend to work within strategies of distinction rather than definition. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the relationship to American culture. Straw characterizes the two main thrusts of this defence against Americanism as essentialist and compensatory. The essentialist model, which valiantly struggles to produce a list of universal characteristics that succinctly and definitively create the essence of Canada, is rapidly losing ground in the wake of increasing multiculturalism (2002, 103). The compensatory model is a much more interesting argument. It simply states that what Canadian culture most often provides are those things that other cultures do not. Rather than competing directly with expensive American network dramatic programming, Canadian television offers audiences the stuff that its more commercial counterpart does not provide; in this instance, a tasteful, low-key version of television better suited to the genteel mentality of Canada (2002, 106). From this standpoint, Canadian identity is defined by a fervent desire to be not-American, and this sensibility fuels much of the cultural policy that currently defines television in this country. In this sense, television is made doubly low. First, by its connection to a nation that is seen as the arbiter of all things crass, tacky, and overblown. Second, by its status as a mass medium that strives for popularity over edification. The goal, for cultural nationalists, has long been to raise the stature of television by ensuring that it is provided with content that is more in keeping with the aesthetic and nationalist values of Canada.

Richard Collins defines this as the Beethoven versus Aaron Spelling dilemma and notes that much of the anxiety surrounding mass media has to do with the idea of taking the internationalism of culture out of the hands of the elite (1990, 26). One does not worry about the homogenizing influence of Beethoven because his works are regarded as canonical and uplifting, while those of Spelling, the producer of programs such as *Charlie's Angels*, *Dynasty*, and *Beverly Hills 90210*, are condemned as deadeningly commercial. The class privilege delineated by a cosmopolitanism that can be had only by those who can speak other languages, appreciate other cultures, and travel to other countries has, in recent years, been usurped by the ethnoscape of

immigrants and migratory labourers, substituting, in the minds of conservative commentators, bad forms of globalized popular culture for good forms of elite culture. The fear of these new roving Others is, ironically, made acute not by the culture they import with them – which is actually quite tightly controlled and limited in Canada – but by the threat of cultural assimilation that they pose through the ubiquitousness of American programming. From the point of view of Canadian nationalism, the concern is that the newly arriving multicultural masses will not properly assimilate as hyphenated Canadians, but rather will help to speed the death of Canadian programming on the airwaves by assimilating to the wrong culture, or by failing to appreciate the subtle distinctions between America's *Entertainment Tonight* and Canada's *eTalk Daily*.

The key strategy of a distinctly Canadian television culture can be defined as one of middleness. Canadian television cannot be highbrow because those pretensions threaten to alienate the very audiences that nationalists seek to enlighten and bring into the fold. To create difficult programming would be in opposition to the values of multiculturalism, where plurality, democracy, and tolerance are at a premium. At the same time, Canadian television cannot be low, because that is the position that we have ceded to the Americans, and the occupation of this position would fail to sufficiently distinguish Canada from the culture of the United States. Thus, Canadian television achieves a middle position primarily through its definition of itself as neither/nor.

However, in striving for the open-minded middle, Canadian television seeks to produce that middleness through a rhetoric of choice. As Appadurai notes, the commercialization of values like plurality and diversity in the mediascape has undermined political agency and replaced it with liberal notions of personal choice (1990, 307). Thus, even as Canada invokes protectionist measures to ensure a strong media sector by keeping foreign broadcasters from broadcasting in this country, the country remains one of the most diverse and open television markets in the world. In addition to nearly all that American television has to offer, there is also Canadian programming, specialty channels, subscription services, and more. Thanks in part to decades of infrastructure building, Canada is in a state of highly advanced and

expansive television abundance. Yet, this abundance is of a single type. If there is any area where the country fails to deliver, it is in providing a full range of multicultural programming options. Foreign language services (in Canada, that means other than French or English) are as limited on television as they are elsewhere in the culture, and significantly trail the options available in many other countries. Canadian television, therefore, does not work to disseminate difference so much as to repatriate it. When notions of plurality and difference become part of the hegemonic system of state control over national identity, they are revealed to be little more than commodities to be deployed in the interest of the governing and the industry elite. In other words, fear of homogenization from our neighbour to the south helps support cultural policies that allow for a more subtle form of homogenization from within (Apparadurai 1990, 307). Television, with its promises of attaining a pure expression of middleness, is a chief tool in this strategy.

REDIRECTING THE FLOW

Ever since cultural theorist Raymond Williams spent a lonely night in a Miami hotel room watching American television, no metaphor has been used as thoroughly to define the televisual experience as “flow” (Williams 1989). Now, in the era of globalization where everything from money to people to ideas is seen to be in constant motion, there seems little reason to abandon the term. However, as the traditional north-south axis of encroaching Americanism is increasingly revealed to be an outmoded way of conceptualizing flow, it is necessary to reconsider the term within the wider currents of global scapes. The signs of this change appear everywhere. Debates now rage over the potential of converging media forms as technologies flow into one another, driven by massive capital ventures and international conglomerates.

The promises of interactive WebTV or downloadable “slivercasts” raise the possibility of dramatically altering how we watch and even use the television. It is not altogether clear that in the future television will remain as a distinct medium of broadcasting. Yet, as many critics point out, these futuristic directions often neglect the value of television as a domestic-based medium that provides information and entertainment in a wide range of forms at the touch of a button. For many writers and critics, it is necessary to shift television to something that it is not in order to raise it from its status as low culture. We are not those critics. It is our belief that television, for the foreseeable future, will retain its dominant position even as the medium morphs along with the new flow.

The ideology of need, Williams notes, fuels much of the debate around the future of television. This is a relatively simple but vitally important belief that technology does not create culture, but rather that culture creates technologies. It is an important idea, given Canada’s own intellectual history of technological determinism and our public policy of building ever more expanding communications networks while paying lip service to what they will carry. Rather than suggesting that Canada has been sitting back passively amidst the onslaught of technological progress, we argue that the present shape and future direction of Canadian television is the result of a longstanding and deliberate strategy that has elevated some technologies over others based on the ideological infrastructure of multiculturalism, plurality, and diversity which has taken its most liberal form as “personal choice.”

Thus, part of the polemic of this book is to call for a redirection of flows. This occurs in three ways. First, a move away from our longstanding obsession with the threat of American assimilation and toward a more global outlook in which we open up television to increased foreign language and cultural content. Second, a shift from an understanding of multiculturalism as a form of pseudo-benign paternalism in which other cultures are rendered quaint or are kept resolutely marginalized from the inner circles of political power, and toward a more materially grounded form of multiculturalism that insists on giving ground to the margins and questioning the very need

for a central vision of Canadianness that would trump all other nationalisms. Third, we challenge the tendency under which economic and technological issues have dominated television policy, in favour of placing greater emphasis on the idea of the audience and television as a cultural form; and, in so doing, emphasizing the potential of television as a decidedly public experience. It is in this last point that we consider television to still be of vital importance not only in media and cultural debates but in discussions about the flow of world order on national, global, and local scales. Television, a modern visual spectacle, is one of the key sites for the sorts of symbolic disruption that coincide with massive shifts in the movement of political and economic capital. Its existence is predicated on the values of consumption, not reason. These values have traditionally provided a backdoor entrance for marginalized people into the public sphere (Warner 1994, 397). The goal here, then, is to use the example of Canadian television in order to re-imagine its potential as a form of communicative action, a key player in the symbolic lifeworld of any society. That may be asking too much, as the commodified status of the medium could prove to be a formidable barrier to a radically democratized transformation. Nonetheless, the breaking down of the myths of Canadian television as a perpetual victim of forces beyond the nation's control that leaves it struggling for survival can in turn open up new ways of thinking about nationalism altogether, particularly its increasingly antagonistic relationship to the mediascape.

In the chapters that follow, we examine the state of contemporary Canadian television in order to reveal certain critical disjunctures between the ideals and practices of industry, government, artists, and audiences. In chapter one, "Regulation," the current normative framework for television is laid out. The major stakeholders in the cultural field from the political, economic, and cultural sectors are identified: broadcasters, cable companies, and cultural producers on the one hand; political commissions, regulatory agencies, and lobbying groups on the other. It is the intersecting interests of these two sets of players that are primarily responsible for the shape of Canadian television as it exists today, and the framework in which regulation is negotiated. Two key, interrelated tensions frame the regulatory debates over television, which in the broadest terms can be defined as cultural and

economic imperatives. The separation of these imperatives is muddled by Canada's own quasi-public broadcasting system that includes both a revenue-driven public network and fully private networks that are monitored by the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunication Commission (CRTC), which is ultimately answerable to the federal government. Examples from European and community broadcasting highlight the contradictory status of Canadian television vis-à-vis other forms of programming and regulation. Other government initiatives to increase and improve the standing of Canadian programming, either through Canadian Content regulations or through the allocation of public funds for program creation, as with the Canadian Television Fund (CTF), ensure that television is always on the governmental agenda. However, the cultural and the economic functions of television were severed from each other in the 1990s by the business-oriented politics of Brian Mulroney's Conservative government, leading to an artificial divide that allows the media industry to proceed according to capital-driven goals while shoring up support for its private initiatives through hollow invocations for the need to guarantee Canadian culture primarily through the protection of private ownership.

Chapter two, "Programming," does something that very few works on Canadian television have done: actually consider what's on. While the dismissal of most Canadian television programming by audiences as low-rent Americanism or pious nationalist posturing does, historically and unfortunately, have some basis in truth, there are some provocative examples that both support and belie this attitude. The underlying anxieties over television's status as a lowbrow medium and the need to posit Canada as America's middlebrow other have led to some very interesting strategies in the development of Canadian programming. The most important relationship is between informational and entertainment programming. While Canada is widely held to have excelled at the former, the country is in a never-ending crisis regarding the latter. Nonetheless, there are a number of programs worth investigating in some depth. *Canadian Idol*, the knock-off of the American knock-off of the UK's *Pop Idol*, has been hailed as a tremendous lowbrow commercial success, one of the first times that a Canadian show other than hockey has topped the ratings in recent memory. By contrast, the sitcom *Corner Gas* strives for a distinct form

of Canadianicity with its low-key comedic stylings, its use of well-loved Canadian television and theatre stars from the past, and its setting in rural Saskatchewan. Consistently reaching the lower ranks of the top twenty shows, it is one of the highest rated English-Canadian dramatic programs in recent history. Perhaps the single most successful Canadian television series is an internationally recognized franchise. *Degrassi*, which is currently in its fourth incarnation, has slowly evolved into cult-like status. Originally launched by the CBC but now taken up by CTV, the program represents an international dramatic success story unlike anything that the public broadcaster has been able to come up with in a generation. Instead, the CBC has increasingly turned to the reality market by poaching British television in an effort to create a water cooler show. *The Greatest Canadian* is a reality-based show in which Canadian public figures (it would be too great a stretch to call them celebrities) vie for the right to have their candidate elected the greatest Canadian. In many ways, the show represents the worst kind of nationalist pandering. Yet, the structure of the program, its use of well-known Canadian faces from film, television, sports, and even politics, and the ready support lent to it by other media says something about the power of television to act as a forum for nationalism in the face of globalization.

Finally, in chapter three, "Technology," we explore the delivery system itself in order to understand why some innovations are being hotly debated while others are barely even acknowledged. The face of television is changing from the classical model in which images flow from the screen to a mass audience. In its place is a model that finds the flow originating with the audience itself, as they deftly manipulate the fullest limits of the medium and adapt it to their needs. Yet, despite the fact that the country has invested in some of the most sophisticated technological systems possible, Canada is beginning to lag behind other countries as it insists on defining its technological needs based on ideologies of victimization and survival against the American media juggernaut. We look at three technologies that we feel are dramatically restructuring the way that television is experienced: DVD releases of television shows; digital video recorders that allow audiences to time-shift television according to their own schedules;

and peer-to-peer file-sharing networks that make it possible to download television shows after they've aired. Finally, we explore one technology that is being hotly debated even though its impact will not be anywhere near as keenly felt as the other three: HDTV. High definition television is dominating debate within industry and the CRTC, driven by the fear of American networks outpacing Canadians, while the very structure of the industry is being called into question by new delivery systems.

This is a book that deals with three broad areas of interest: the technology of television, the people who watch it and the programs that they watch, and the regulatory framework that exists in Canada to mediate between the two. At stake, then, in examining television is an understanding of how Canada can accommodate massive shifts in the global technoscape, ethnoscape, finanscape, ideoscape, and crucially, the mediascape. In that sense, television becomes a crucial nexus around which larger issues about national identity, globalization, cultural sovereignty, the spaces of public discourse, and technological dominance are unravelled. It is clear to us that the technological shifts of the past several years – and the coming years – have thrown the issue of what television is and what it could be very much into doubt. Similarly, the changing face of Canada as a nation through immigration, urbanization, and globalization has placed the issue of national identity firmly at centre stage once again. While early evidence about changing experiences of television viewing may hint at the future, we do not know with precise certainty how the existing television technologies will change viewer expectations and uses, nor how newer technologies will rewrite the rules of television. What we do know, however, is that the game is in the process of changing, for better or worse. Likewise, we do not know how Canada will continue to grow as a nation in the coming years. We cannot predict the changes that the country will undergo, nor the political choices that will be made by its citizens. What we can do, however, is to look closely and specifically at where we are now, and determine what the state of Canadian television is at the moment. In so doing, we hope to diagnose some of the obvious failings of Canada's television policy in order to provide a better orientation toward an uncertain future.