

CULTURE



CANADIAN CULTURE, AMERICAN-STYLE

Picture the border: 8,900 km of timberland and brush, rivers and lakes, prairies and plains, mountains, fields, superhighways and country roads. On one side is a powerful and energetic nation of 220 million and on the other - a smaller but no less vital and progressive one of 23 million, 17 million of whom speak the same language as their huge neighbour. American tastes and styles flow freely across this border every day - on television, radio, in books, papers and magazines, in films, even in our schools. Is it any wonder that Canadians have absorbed so much American culture?

There are other factors, of course. We share many of the same interests and habits of mind. To a large extent we share a common inheritance, and to the rest of the world we present an outlook that is distinctly North American. However it is the geography and the economics of communications, particularly mass communications, that make it so difficult to resist the influx of the American cultural stream.

Basic production costs for original work, be it a novel, a magazine, or a television program, are comparable on both sides of the border. As the American market is so much larger it is easier for producers there to recover their investment, and it is profitable for them to sell their wares in Canada at a fraction of the original cost. Finding the money for Canadians to develop as many products, of equal calibre and equal appeal to the smaller Canadian market, is extremely difficult. Because of these economics, and because the Canadian people expect quality, many American media products have been imported into Canada. . . and with them, American culture.

THE UNCERTAIN MIRROR

Canadians are different from Americans, due in part to Canada's different political tradition and to Canadian society, as a whole more heterogeneous than American society with its "melting pot" philosophy. However there

is a similarity of lifestyles and, for English-speaking Canadians, a common language which makes it easier to absorb American cultural values through the media.

This is not the case with most French-speaking Canadians, especially those living in Quebec. Since the days of New France, French-Canadian society, surrounded by English-speaking people, has sought to protect its language and culture. This language difference has provided a degree of insulation from other cultures and strength for their own.

The spoken and written American word, such as in radio and magazines, has had minimal appeal, but popular American television programs and films are imported and dubbed in French. There are imports from France, but in the main French-language productions originate in Quebec. This has proven a tremendous stimulus for creativity in the communications and entertainment arts, provided vehicles for French-Canadian talent, and strengthened the cultural dynamic. French-Canadians have seen themselves through the medium of television and this has brought a new sense of community, a pride in their heritage and in their accomplishments. As a result they are more determined than ever before to preserve their language and their distinctive culture. This is important in order that they survive as a people.

A MATTER OF SURVIVAL

So it must be for Canada as whole, that Canadians retain a cultural identity so as to remain a distinct people. To this end, Canadian cultural institutions and mass communication systems have been strengthened and Canadian talent - both English and French - has been encouraged with financial and economic incentives.

For instance, in the early days of radio, when it was found that many Canadian stations were becoming extensions of American systems, a concerned government formed the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. The CBC provided an east-west network that linked the various regions of the country and provided a measure of Canadian programming. Today CBC /Radio Canada operates a French and an English radio network, both

financed by public funds.

Television developed essentially the same way. CBC-TV has its own stations in some areas, and is affiliated with private stations in others. Via two networks it broadcasts from coast to coast in both official languages. However TV production costs are so high CBC-TV must generate funds from advertising revenues, as well as rely on Federal Government support.

Canadians have acquired a taste for the rich variety of American programming and large audiences are what draw advertisers. CBC-TV has had to take more American programming than it wished to keep a defensible share of the potential audience and the advertising dollars needed to produce Canadian shows. There are also private networks and stations which carry an even higher proportion of foreign programming.

Many areas of Canada are within direct reach of American television stations, and with the growth of cable systems even more Canadians are tuning in to American programming. The problem is not as acute for French-speaking Canadians as the majority of the programming is locally produced in Quebec, both for private stations and for the CBC French network.

THE CRTC-WATCHDOG OF THE INDUSTRY

The Canadian Radio Television Telecommunication Commission (CRTC) is the regulatory body both for the CBC and the private stations. In recent years the CRTC has adopted rules that provide for a minimum percentage of Canadian content on the CBC and the private stations and networks. Radio stations must carry a minimum proportion of Canadian music, a measure which has stimulated the recording industry. Cable systems are required to develop community programming.

WHAT PRICE HOLLYWOOD?

Since the advent of motion pictures, Canada has been the U.S.A.'s biggest customer and Hollywood the biggest producer. Today many films are imported from Britain and Europe but American productions, with their cultural values, still dominate the "Big Screen" in English-Canadian theatres, as do dubbed versions in French. Because of lack of opportunity at home, many of Canada's finest directors, writers, actors, and actresses have found their niche in Hollywood.

But things have been happening. Canada has the National Film Board which has won an international reputation for its documentary films. In recent years the NFB has branched out into feature film-making, particularly in French. The Canadian Film Development Corporation was established in 1967 to provide financing for private production. Generous tax concessions have been granted investors in Canadian films. As a result, more and better films are being made in both languages in Canada today.

THE THREE R'S WERE NOT OURS

In 1969 it was estimated that four out of every five magazines read by Canadians were American or American-controlled. Canadian publishing houses attempting to serve a smaller market were hampered by in-

adequate financial resources. Advertising dollars constitute the major part of a magazine's income and it was in this area legislation was sought.

In 1965, Parliament passed an Act disallowing income tax exemption for any advertising directed at the Canadian market placed in foreign-owned or controlled publications. Exempted from this Act were *Time* magazine and *Reader's Digest*, both of which published Canadian editions in Canada. This exemption caused considerable controversy and consequently it was removed in 1976. *Time* ceased to publish its Canadian edition, but the American edition is readily available on the newsstands. *Reader's Digest* has fulfilled government requirements that it be 75% Canadian-owned and, by the end of 1977, 80% Canadian or Canadian edited content.

Canadian book publishers have had economic problems too, with two publics to serve - one English and one French - spread over great distances, resulting in high distribution costs. They are often in competition with foreign concerns which have subsidiaries in Canada and which also publish Canadian books. Regulations were adopted to restrict importation of foreign editions of Canadian books back into this country. Public interest has been growing in Canadian writing and there is an increasing demand for more Canadian textbooks in the schools.

CHARLIE BROWN IS HERE TO STAY

A new nationalism is growing up in Canada, and Canadians are aware of the cultural pressures from the United States. They realize, as does the Government, that home-grown talent and productions need support and encouragement in order to thrive. The Canada Council, established in 1957, supports the arts, as well as studies in the humanities and social sciences. It has been a great boon to theatre, serious music, ballet, creative writing, painting, sculpture, and the publishing industry.

Canadians want the best of both worlds. They want television programs from American sources - as well as Canadian productions. They read American comic strips and columnists in Canadian-owned newspapers, and many people can't live without the *New York Times* on Sunday. Yet they want to see a strong Canadian publishing industry.

The problem of living next door to a large, dynamic, friendly culture will not go away, but steps are being taken to temper the situation and reinforce our own culture. There is no equivalent situation in the United States, but if there were unquestionably the U.S. Government would act in a similar manner.

Canadians have been enriched by the best of American creative achievement. Thus for Canada, there is no question of a policy of cultural isolation, nor is there any desire to stop the free flow of ideas and cultural materials across the border. The object rather is to provide the stimulus and the financial and economic support so that Canadian culture has a chance to grow, and to be seen, heard, read, understood and enjoyed in its own distinctive way.

"Canada is in the American orbit and will remain so for the foreseeable future. Canadians could not resist that even if they wanted to, and not many of them do want to. Culturally, both nations should run their own show, and the way to run a cultural show is to let a thousand flowers bloom..."

-Northrop Frye

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