

BOOK REVIEW

Richard Collins, *Culture, Communication and National Identity: The Case of Canadian Television*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990).

Collins' trans-Atlantic perspective lends some valuable insights to academic and policy debates on the importance of domestic cultural industries. His continentalist position is clear: though "both communications and the state have been central to Canada's continuing process of nation-building and self-assertion" (5), an out-dated nationalism must give way to the fact of a "weak linkage between national sentiment --- generally strongly held --- and low consumption of Canadian production in what is widely held to be the most important of the cultural industries: television" (339).

The book begins with an historical survey of Canadian broadcasting policies. Finding that these are nationalist-oriented policies, which presume to strengthen national identity by supporting nationalist cultural industries, Collins proceeds to critique the notion and practice of nationalism, both theoretically and within the concrete Canadian context. He criticizes dominant assumptions of dependency and national identity as they have been applied to issues of Canadian regionalism and continentalism. Collins argues finally that the Canadian intelligentsia and other elites assume wrongly the precepts of media imperialism, misunderstand the link between the state and symbolic culture, and perpetuate a false sense of nationalism.

Collins identifies a central, long-standing objective of Canadian broadcasting policy to strengthen cultural identity. Included in the recommendations of the 1957 Fowler Commission Report, this objective persists up to the 1988 House of Commons Standing Committee on Cultural Communication report, which states that "broadcasting policy is Canada's premiere cultural policy" (43). These cultural goals have, however, been blocked by the impossibility of reconciling a majoritarian nationalist vocation with a minoritarian public service (334-35). While the minoritarian goal is to Canada's credit, the nationalist goal is not necessary, and is based on a false premise (140).

Collins argues that central to the variants of nationalism is the view that they serve the objective of obtaining and using state power. To this end, nationalist ideology attempts to enforce a congruence of political will, economic activity and cultural identity. The ideological project is, for Collins however, an outdated one which denies a fact of the contemporary world economic order: nation-states are no longer self-sufficient and are becoming unstoppable, integrated and interdependent. The force of this inevitable process of interdependence is the world economy itself --- something which Canadians could not and should not attempt to influence (xi). Collins objects to the "anterior values of national Canadian-ness" as if these values never existed, but are rather imagined by the Canadian nationalist who is "hostile to the United States, capitalism, television, modernity, and rational thought" (121). The few espousing the rhetoric of Canadian nationalism are merely those who stand in the way of the inevitable world of international competition (xvi, 28, 349).

Among these sorts is the Canadian intelligentsia. They must back down from a position of false authority and give up the practice of dictating the Canadian consumption of foreign culture. They must give up aspirations to control cultural production for their own selfish gains (339) and accept a new world order of cultural and economic interdependence. Collins makes repeated reference to the emerging European Common Market, and predicts that it will face a cultural internationalization similar to Canada's (ix, xiii, 5, 337). Collins, however, avoids the conclusion that the future interdependent Europe is less an acceptance of a new world order, than it is a fear for the survival of independent European states, given a growing threat of American economic expansion (hence, 'Fortress Europe'). Suggesting that Canadians should not similarly resist this same threat, amounts to a failure to distinguish between 'united against' and 'dependent upon', while calling them both 'interdependent'.

The future interdependence of Europe is, for Collins, one in which the increasing demands of broadcast programs are "of interest to different language and cultural communities" (337). Collins argues that Canada's bilingual and multicultural broadcast system provides a perfect laboratory to develop new products for the coming European market. Though claiming that this opportunity is undermined by nationalist broadcasting goals (336), he does not offer a clear explanation. If these goals are to oppose American broadcast culture, are they not also to oppose a narrow cultural and linguistic autarky? Is it not the nationalist policy goal of providing a multi-cultural, bilingual and Canadian

alternative to American broadcasts which has created this bold new model and 'testing ground' for Europe? Canada's option in the new European cultural market was only afforded by the symbolic cultural sovereignty which Collins suggests Canadians give up.

In overview, Collins' rejection of Canadian nationalism (or assumptions thereof) is the basis of his rejection of policy objectives to support cultural identity through a national broadcasting system. Not only is this offered as an academic advancement that is proof that the state and culture must be separated (326-29), but also as support for the current European and North American continentalist agendas. The value of Collins' argument depends upon whether one accepts that Canadian communications policies in support of cultural identity are necessary. That this debate in Canada will not be resolved soon is bitterly acknowledged by Collins who, in the final analysis, admits the shortcomings of his 'martian view' of Canada.

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