
The essays brought together in *How Canadians Communicate* provide an overview of the contemporary state of Canada's major mass media industries and, as such, should prove to be very useful in any introductory or mid-level undergraduate course in Canadian media studies. The strengths of the collection are found in its remarkable thematic cohesiveness, the authoritative and varied academic and industry experience(s) of its authors, and its focus on contemporary issues and practices. The essays in this book come together in a highly effective manner as evidential manifestations of the broad effects wrought by weakening policy regimes, industry consolidation, and the impact of new media as they relate to Canadian identity and national cultural sovereignty. Pan-authorial cohesiveness is a rare and welcome feature in a collection of this type and, taken alone, would be enough to recommend the book. Interestingly, the book's major weakness stems from its major strength: a laudable thematic cohesiveness introduces a trade-off whereby the sustained emphasis of its key themes tends to reiterate these themes at the expense of a broader variety of perspectives and/or objects of study. The trade-off between cohesiveness and comprehensiveness is only an issue where the text might be used as the sole resource for a course on Canadian communications. The book's strengths certainly outweigh its weaknesses and it is a good addition to the relatively limited body of introductory and/or survey literature on Canadian communications.

Billed as a media and cultural studies text, the emphasis on media policy and industry practices, combined with the relative lack of material dealing with textual content and audience reception, places the book more in the field of media studies than that of cultural studies. Mass media histories are briefly outlined only where necessary, and telecommunications technologies and industries are excluded. Those interested in a collection inclined toward histories of media and telecommunications technologies would do well to consult Daniel Robinson's new book: *Communication History in Canada* (2004). While other collections offer more comprehensive surveys of the same domain (most notably, Michael Dorland's *The Cultural Industries in Canada* (1996) and Benjamin D. Singer's *Communications in Canadian Society* (1995)), their discussions of policy, industry consolidation, and the impact of new technologies and media are necessarily limited by their publication dates. *How Canadians Communicate* is thus a welcome updating of the material found in these collections. Paul Attallah and Leslie Regan Shade's recent collection *Mediascapes: New Patterns in Canadian Communication* (2002) is an excellent contemporary survey of the area, but it too could be usefully complemented by the thematic emphases of *How Canadians Communicate*.

The first of the book's three sections, “Government and Corporate Policies,” consists of three essays: Richard Schultz's assessment of the increasingly limited role of governmental regulation of mass media; Vincent Carlin on media convergence, and Frits Pannekoek's discussion of the impact of new media on memory institutions (museums, archives, and libraries). The use of Canadian identity as a key theme is here revealed to be the book's major (and self-imposed) weakness inasmuch as it introduces problems that are difficult to fully address within the confines of the collection.

While issues of Canadian identity and cultural sovereignty are obviously not limited to this text, their inclusion has a tendency to cloud rather than clarify the current state of affairs because they are rarely addressed in ways that reveal or clarify exactly what it might be that could, or should, constitute such an identity. This would not be a problem if it were not for the fact that the collection is explicitly concerned with the promotion and/or defence of Canadian identity and cultural sovereignty in the face of threats from corporate consolidation, deregulation, befuddled policymaking, the technological reorganization of mass
media production and distribution, and the continuing threat of being “absorbed” by global (primarily U.S.) media juggernauts. Similarly, the idea that there is such a thing as a singular(ly) Canadian identity, or if this is even desirable remains largely unaddressed. Taras’ introduction does provide a concise overview of the intertwined nature of technology, policy, and media industries as they relate to Canadian identity and national cultural sovereignty, but not in enough detail to address this thorny central issue.

The second and largest section of the collection, “Canadian Media and Canadian Identity,” consists of a series of essays each devoted to a particular mass medium: Christopher Dornan writes on newspapers, Aritha van Herk discusses book publishing and distribution, Rebecca Sullivan and Bart Beaty address television, Cora Voyageur details the state of Aboriginal media, Malek Khouri addresses film and the debate surrounding Canada’s “branch plant” film economy, and Will Straw discusses the Canadian music industry. While each essay in this section provides a good survey of the cultural industry in question, the trade off between cohesiveness and comprehensiveness is evidenced in there being but one article on each major mass medium (and, unfortunately, nothing on Canada’s radio industry). The strength and utility of the section comes from the way in which the essays resonate with one another with respect to the book’s thematic foci.

The third section, “New Media and Canadian Society,” focuses on the varied social impacts of computer mediated communication (CMC): Maria Bakardjieva addresses the domestication of technology via a discussion of Internet use(s) in the home, M.A. Herbert, P. A. Jennet, and R. E. Scott provide an overview of the Canadian government’s Telehealth initiative, and Graham Longford and Barbara Crow discuss the varied composition of telework and its differing effects on workers. The essays in this section are interesting and valuable contributions in their own right, but seem somewhat out of place in relation to the rest of the book. Given the book’s focus on cultural industries, one would expect this section to be framed around the issue of CMC as an emergent cultural industry akin to other mass media. Nonetheless, this section is particularly striking insofar as it demonstrates the degree to which CMC has woven its way through the everyday lives of Canadians.

How Canadians Communicate is a worthy, if somewhat limited, collection of essays that is perhaps best utilised as a means by which to address the intertwined influences of consolidation, policy, and technology on Canadian cultural industries.

References

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