Serra Tinic argues in *On Location: Canada’s Television Industry in a Global Market* that the globalization of Vancouver’s production industry is not the outcome of American cultural imperialism but neglect at the federal public-policy level. Key to this neglect is a shift in policy thinking about the nation-building mandate of public broadcasting. Analyzing documents in Canadian broadcasting policy, Tinic notes a major shift away from interregional communication as a means of forging national unity within diversity and towards an official culture that cements an overarching national identity while subsuming regional differences. The author shows that this change in philosophy, coupled with cutbacks to the CBC throughout the 1990s, has led to a centralization of power and decision-making in Toronto and a marginalization of regional voices in television production across the country. Nation emerges as a constraint on regional production, notably in Vancouver, the case study of Tinic’s book.

The result is that Vancouver producers who want to create locally based, place-specific stories cannot access the levers of power to trigger funding for their domestic productions. They must pursue alternative avenues, either working on runaway American productions to help fund their own creative work, or seeking international co-production arrangements, which demand universal stories that eschew the local and the particular. According to Tinic, federal policy has had the opposite effect of cementing national identity, instead fueling feelings of marginality and the establishment of an industry that tells the stories of either another place or no place at all. This argument is Tinic’s most important contribution as it lays to rest tired assumptions about Hollywood North, while constructing a much-needed recent history of the Canadian television industry that speaks to the increasingly global nature of Canada’s cultural industries. She makes her case well, drawing on a variety of methods, including an analysis of policy documents and trade publications, in-depth interviews with members of the Vancouver television community, and textual analyses of several programs.

Much of Tinic’s argument hinges on place-specificity as a good (i.e., as a signifier of cultural integrity), and in her conclusion, she recommends the revision of Canadian content regulations accordingly: “Content, not citizenship alone, should determine the appropriate level of funding and access to the public broadcaster. . . .” She suggests that content regulations “stipulate that stories must draw on the sociocultural specificities of places within the nation. In brief, ‘place’ must be acknowledged rather than erased for content to qualify as ‘national’” (pp. 161-62).

In 1998, the Canadian Television Fund (CTF) introduced a distinctively Canadian bonus that earmarked funding for projects with the recognizably Canadian content Tinic recommends. In 2000, the CTF strengthened its ranking criteria of “visibly Canadian elements,” but abandoned this effort in 2003, amid the industry’s condemnation for trying to define Canadian content. Since Tinic discusses the controversial cuts to the CTF in 2003 as well as the federal report *Our Cultural Sovereignty: The Second Century of Canadian Broadcasting* (2003), released that year, then the lack of attention to this policy seems an oversight. However, this omission may have to do with the time lag between the interviews conducted in 1997 and the book’s publication in 2005. The main focus, to be sure, is on Vancouver in the 1990s, but I was left with questions as to how Tinic’s claims square with developments since then. For example, a chapter devoted to CBC Halifax’s *This Hour Has 22 Minutes* as a successful regionally based model invokes questions about the possible inroads private broadcasters are making with Canadian comedy series such as *Trailer Park Boys, Corner Gas*, and *Robson Arms.*
One of the book’s many strengths, nevertheless, is as a study of modes of Canadian production and the impact of political-economic contexts on television drama that results. What emerges, albeit implicitly, is a continuum with place-specificity acting as a measurement of quality. At one end, Tinic situates folksy programs like *The Beachcombers*, rooted in regionally specific practices and a distinct place yet having national and international resonance. The CBC drama was created in house in British Columbia before regional production was curtailed as a result of shifting funds away from public broadcasting towards private independent producers. At the other end, Tinic discusses industrial television such as *Highlander*, a Canada-U.S. co-venture geared towards an export market, which hides the particularities of its Vancouver production, while adhering to the expectations of genre entertainment.

Falling in the middle is *Da Vinci’s Inquest* for its use of a gritty Vancouver setting, but whose urban iconicity is easily translatable to national and international audiences as a Canadian interpretation of a familiar and trendy American genre—the investigative crime drama. Produced out of house for the CBC with independent producers Barna-Alper and Haddock Entertainment, the series represents the corporation’s new vision for national drama as well as the private-sector producers’ appeal to foreign markets accustomed to urban crime series.

Here, Tinic summons us to see beyond the simple setting as a marker of specificity, pointing towards notions of sensibility that are rooted in specific socio-cultural practices and historical experiences of place. Under these assumptions, *The Beachcombers* beats out *Da Vinci’s Inquest*—a contention not easy to accept. After all, *Da Vinci’s Inquest* is a better series. But then that introduces the much-contested question of quality, which the book tends to evade in its framing of a struggle between folksy populist forms rooted in the margins of lived experience versus national culture that is officially defined at the centre. This construct seems to have emanated from the interview subjects and seems constraining at times.

Nonetheless, the qualitative analysis of interviews sheds complex insights into the policy-and-industrial environment that Vancouver producers must negotiate in order to do their creative work and make a living. Following the pioneering efforts of Mary Jane Miller (1987, 1996), research such as Tinic’s as well as David Hogarth’s (2002) and Sarah Matheson’s (2005) suggest exciting new directions in Canadian television studies, where policy concerns are merged with qualitative criticism of texts and an interest in the conditions for creativity that cultural workers inhabit. Despite the policy significance accorded to television production in Canada, too few books examine the actual outcomes of that policy in qualitative terms, making Tinic’s study a unique intervention and her multi-layered approach to the issue of Canadian content both refreshing and welcome.

*On Location* is highly commendable as a study of modes of television production in Canada, as a critique of Canadian television policy, and as a recent history of the Canadian television industry, as it strives to meet the demands of a global market. Most importantly, the book enjoins us to rejuvenate past debates about Canadian content. The citizenship model of CanCon is not enough, and yet place-specificity as a qualitative marker must be further explored in the interests of programming diversity and interregional communication. With work like Tinic’s inviting more questions and new approaches, the significance of place in Canadian television is an issue that will continue to hold our imaginations. Well organized and coherent with a lucid analysis and a clear writing style, *On Location* is suitable for experts and non-experts alike and should be on the reading list of anyone interested in the place of the local within national and global cultures.
References

Patsy Kotsopoulos
Simon Fraser University