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Humanities and Social Sciences / Sciences humaines et sociales

***Around and About Marius Barbeau: Modelling Twentieth-Century Culture.* Edited by Lynda Jessup, Andrew Nurse and Gordon E. Smith.** (Ottawa: Canadian Museum of Civilization, 2008. xiii + 367 p., ill., maps, music. ISBN 9780660197753).

The editors have compiled an extensive and surprisingly coherent composite portrait of Marius Barbeau (1883-1969), one of the most fascinating and complex creators of Canadian cultural life during the interwar years. A biography of Barbeau was published by Lawrence Nowry in 1995, but its essentially chronological approach fails to capture the range of interests integrated by Barbeau in his studies of Canada's First Nations, his natal province of Quebec, and Canadian identity in the dawning age of modernism. In our more specialized contemporary climate, this diversity must be captured by its range of what are now discrete disciplines—from anthropology, folklore, museology, and linguistics to art, sculpture, architecture, music, theatre, and cinema. Five of the 16 papers are in French, reflecting the peculiarly Canadian mixture of Francophone and Anglophone commentary to which Barbeau aspired. Although most of the papers, excepting those of the three editors, are primarily descriptive, their juxtaposition facilitates an overview—no single scholar can capture all of what Barbeau attempted, and in many cases achieved.

The integrating theme of Barbeau's vision was nostalgia, and he applied it similarly both to First Nations and Quebec. The old ways were dying out and his ethnographic and archival documentation preserved their memory for the edification of future generations. He sought out unwritten materials from oral tradition that persisted in rural Quebec and on Indian Reservations, and persuaded contemporary artists and performers to adopt and adapt their motifs in new contexts. Barbeau was an evolutionist; that is, he believed that progress mandated assimilation of old ways in a benign unilateral process of change. His futuristic visions were grounded in a Canadian as opposed to a Quebec culture that could be enriched by the memories of past glories insofar as Canadian popular culture used the multicultural complexity of its three founding nations to counter the stultifying threat of an unmediated modernity. He attempted to bridge the national solitudes and framed the Aboriginal alongside the French and the English.

Andrew Nurse emphasizes Barbeau's cultural politics of a vanishing race, a heritage that has posed severe challenges for contemporary First Nations peoples who are attempting to reclaim their agency and right to self-governance. Objects and explanatory texts—from life histories to cosmologies—were recontextualized by Barbeau and his colleagues for

preservation and display in museum and archive. These modern institutions ignored the ethical questions of intellectual property and cultural resource management that dominate present-day debates. Barbeau was not much interested in the legacy of Canada's colonial heritage.

After training in anthropology at Oxford with R.R. Marett, in 1910 Barbeau took up a position in the Division of Anthropology recently established under the directorship of the young but already distinguished Boas-trained linguist Edward Sapir. And there he remained. Conflict between Boasian historical particularism and evolutionary universalism rarely erupted explicitly but drew the work of government anthropology in contradictory directions. Ironically, it was Franz Boas, who sent Sapir to Ottawa and is often accused of overemphasizing salvage ethnography, that urged Barbeau to study then-contemporary Quebec folklore as well as the Native cultures of Canada.

By virtue of this dual ethnographic emphasis in his career, Barbeau, whether consciously or not, ensured that Canadian modernist culture would not entirely relegate parts of its heritage to the "primitive" in simple opposition to the European-derived. Although there is certainly a flavour of the primitive in his view of Quebec, the potential for racism was mitigated in what Frances Slaney calls the "cultural vitality" of the arts and crafts movement (p.40). Barbeau's Quebec substituted cultural romanticism about rural life for Catholic religion in characterizing the region and grounded its still extant traditions in the peasant culture of medieval France. Gordon Smith argues that folklore served to "organize the culture of modern Canada" into a "pan-Canadian nationalism" (p.213). He contends that Barbeau foreshadows the reflexivity of more recent theoretical approaches, despite occasional lapses into racist discussion of origins.

An elegant paper by Allison Nyce describes the recent Nisga'a (Tsimshian) additional recontextualization of Barbeau's work using the example of the repatriation of the Sagaween totem pole from the Royal Ontario Museum. The pole was appropriated for the museum in the colonial environment of anti-potlatch laws and can only now be "supplemented" by the protocols of Nisga'a oral tradition. These protocols are kept in cultural memory by members of Nyce's own family and can now be reunited with the objects that represent them visually. She cautions: "It is important to remember that it was the adaawak/oral history that held the true history. Barbeau's material supplemented the truth that was continuously held by the original titleholders" (p.267). Barbeau's work is useful to the Nisga'a today in spite of limitations implicit in the time and place of its formulation.

Lynda Jessup frames Barbeau's ethnographic cinema on the Nass River and among the Kwakwaka'wakw as a meeting between anthropology and popular culture. Although Barbeau appears to have been motivated by

eagerness to publicize the work of his museum, his collaboration with local “informants” pioneered in what would now be called collaborative anthropology. George Hunt, long-time collaborator of Boas, and his wife served as important “cultural intermediaries,” both for film production and for the public image of contemporary cultural vitality and agency. The message was mixed, however. Sandra Dyck argues that the nascent tourist industry as well as the emerging Canadian art culture foregrounded landscape and eclipsed the people, both appropriating and popularizing Native Canadian traditional ways of life.

Space does not allow consideration of each paper, particularly those that frame Barbeau among other contemporary creators of Canadian modernism. Various papers deal in detail with his relations to the Group of Seven, for example. Readers will find nuggets of expert analysis and reframing of contemporary relevance alongside the facts and chronicles of more conventional history.

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On the Origins of Cognitive Science: The Mechanization of the Mind. By Jean-Pierre Dupuy, translated by M. B. DeBevoise. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2009. xviii + 210 p., notes, bibl., index. ISBN 978-0-262-51239-8 \$25.00).

Before the rise of cognitive psychology and functionalism in the philosophy of mind and throughout the waning heyday of behaviourism, there was a movement whose name remains familiar but which has largely fallen out of sight and mind. In a much needed historical and philosophical study, Jean-Pierre Dupuy makes a persuasive case that this movement, broadly known as Cybernetics, was critical in the rise of cognitive science and also played a formative role in nothing less than a transformation of our own human self-image—one which Dupuy regards as highly unfortunate.

Cybernetics can be crudely characterized as the investigation of one idea: feedback. Although the construction of machines that regulate themselves via a feedback control mechanism goes back to antiquity it has been authoritatively stated that the abstract concept of feedback is a distinctive “achievement of the 20th century.”¹ Cybernetics hoped for a general mathematical account, and development, of this concept which would usher in a revolution in all of the physical, social and human sciences.

As Dupuy points out, the originators of Cybernetics were among the most gifted scientific thinkers of the last century, including among many others Norbert Wiener, who coined the term “cybernetics” and provided

1 . Otto Mayr, *The Origins of Feedback Control* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 129.