

Value Added: Recent Books in the History of Communications and Culture

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Value Added:
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CANADIAN HISTORIANS ARE SUSPICIOUS OF communications and cultural studies. Although they have readily adopted insights from other fields over the last 30 years, communications and cultural studies remain remote from the discipline. The appearance of several new historical works which engage with communications and cultural studies provides hope, however, that this situation is finally changing.

One of these is Gerald Friesen, *Citizens and Nation: An Essay on History, Communication, and Canada* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000). Friesen's study is informed in part by his frustration with the arid debates which characterize the standoff between Canadian social historians and their counterparts in political and economic history. His response is to develop a new approach to the writing of Canadian history – one that is focussed on communication systems and adopts the tools of cultural history. The key assumption informing *Citizens and Nation* is that a comprehensive, inclusive national history is both desirable and possible. Its origins lie in an invitation Friesen received to present a series of lectures to European teachers of Canadian Studies. Friesen sought to use these lectures to develop a broad narrative history, offering epic, nation-building stories as well as tales of “common people”. He found, though, that he could not do so in a manner that was intellectually satisfying. This led him to move away from political, economic and social history, though not too far away from the latter. Friesen praises social historians for challenging the elitism of political and economic readings of Canadian history, and his approach in *Citizens and Nation* suggests that social history must provide the basic content of any history of “northern North America”. Friesen does not believe, however, that social history alone has the intellectual resources to produce a coherent national narrative. Indeed, social history has highlighted disunity in the Canadian story. If not “colony to nation” or “limited identities”, what then? Where can the historian look to find a common heritage that links every person who lived in the northern half of North America?

Friesen's answer does not lie in the Canadian landscape, the national economy, politics, or ways of life. Instead, he would have us examine two cultural categories: shared conceptions of space and time; and characteristic means of communication. Conceptions of space/time are crucial cultural variables as they reflect people's beliefs regarding their place in the universe. Means of communication are similarly crucial as they shape the ways people form communities, negotiate values, share stories, and hence develop a common culture. And people's conception of space/time is, Friesen argues, directly related to the media of communication they use. Thus, he claims that “over the entire course of human history in northern North America common people have experienced four constructions of the dimensions of time and space” that can be correlated with “four dominant communications systems” (p. 5).

Correlation, though, does not necessarily indicate a causal link. It is worth asking whether cultural values prompt the search for new media, or media prompt the search

for new values. Friesen follows Harold Innis in his answer to this question, arguing that “the way in which a society communicates shapes popular assumptions about how the world works” (p. 3). Use of the word “shapes” in this sentence suggests influence rather than determination, and later chapters show this to be Friesen’s view. Innis argued that all media have either a bias towards the dissemination of information through time or a bias towards the dissemination of information through space. These biases can only be recognized when media are compared with one another. It follows that if a society has achieved a certain equilibrium in its “construction” of space/time and it subsequently adopts a new medium as its predominant means of communication, then its perceptions of space/time will gradually be affected by the bias of the new medium relative to the old. Though Friesen does not state it explicitly, this is the logic which informs his analytical categories.¹

The core of the book, then, provides a sketch of each “construction.” The first Friesen describes is the “oral-traditional” construction, in which people view time ecologically and conceive of “the land”/space as an essential component of a living continuum including inhabitants, flora and fauna. Information is transmitted orally, from person to person and generation to generation. Memory is assisted to the extent that family history and tribal legends are both interconnected and tied to specific landmarks in the lived environment. Landmarks, according to Friesen, serve as a form of recorded memory insofar as they act as souvenirs.

Friesen next describes a “textual-settler” construction, in which people view space and time ecologically and biblically. Settlers must accommodate themselves to the environment and seasons, but they also locate themselves in relation to a religious and ethnic heritage. The land is no longer a place where spirits and ancestors walked, but someplace “other”, far from home, an extension through time and space. Memory now is assisted by portable texts rather than fixed landmarks. Perhaps the most archetypal text of this construction is the family Bible, in which both religious and family events are marked.

With the third “print-capitalist” construction, Friesen notes that the human conception of the scale of the world has diminished due to the ubiquity and speed of new communication systems such as the telegraph, trains, radio and (rather oddly) film. Newspapers benefited greatly from these inventions; one of the pleasures of a newspaper is the sense that one is reading the same text at the same time as thousands of others. Readers of the *Globe and Mail* may become conscious of a national community whose members share a simultaneous cultural experience even if they do not share a direct experience of one another. This community, however, is not truly national in scope. Print literacy is dependent on shared alphabetic symbols in a way that direct human contact is not and readers must share a common language. As a result, print media entrenched the Canadian solitudes by institutionalizing language barriers.

“Screen-capitalism” is Friesen’s last category. As he notes, this may not constitute a distinct construction; it may simply be an extension of “print-capitalism”. His

¹ Harold Innis, *Empire and Communications* (Oxford, 1950); Innis, *The Bias of Communication* (Toronto, 1951). I thank Sara Posen, Bohdan Szuchewycz, Jim Leach and Barry Grant for their many helpful comments during the preparation of this review.

argument for it being a new cultural formation, is grounded in the observation that television and computers (but not film) have further accelerated the flow of information available at any given time. These media do not, however, necessarily record information for retrieval later, nor do they provide permanent references to assist memory in the same way that landmarks or text may. Instead, our experience of both television and the internet has so far emphasized the ephemeral.

The second word Friesen uses in identifying each of these four constructions does not refer solely to conceptions of space/time; it also refers to economic relations: traditional, settler, capitalist. The final two eras are not typified by just any rationalization of space/time but specifically capitalist space/time. This begs the question of whether culture adapts to new technologies or whether culture adapts to new economic relations which become manifest through communication technologies. The latter formulation gives political economy a greater role than Friesen acknowledges, at least in the first half of his book. This is a crucial point. Communications based on speech or goose quills were not embedded in capitalist market relations as telecommunications and publishing now are. Each new mode of communication that has been developed over the last two centuries has been commodified and developed for the benefit of specific investors. The development of the telephone, radio broadcasting and the internet provide suitable examples. All three were the products of elite goals and investment, were adopted by common people who promoted socially inclusive uses and were ultimately subordinated to the dictates of the market economy (e.g., even the CBC has always been dependent on advertising revenue). The early history of the telephone and radio seems to be repeating in the unfolding history of the internet, as the early, giddy years of openness and experimentation on the web have already given way to increased surveillance, data encryption and advertising to promote consumption. Elites not only control access to the predominant media of our society, but they also influence the content of that media. This allows them to privilege their own cultural judgments regarding each new medium and how it should be integrated into existing social relations.²

In fairness to Friesen, in chapter five he grants that the economy has an influence over culture at least equal to that of the media of communication (pp. 162-3). However, he is reluctant to place too much emphasis on political economy because he believes that the polarization between social history and political economy has produced disinterested students (p. 138). His concerns are understandable and this writer is certainly sympathetic to his belief that cultural history can blaze a new trail by examining how people integrate new communication technologies into their existing cultural patterns. Surely, however, the relationship between political economy and communications must be explored with the same rigour as that between culture and communications.

For pursuing this relationship in the Canadian context, a good starting point is Robert E. Babe, *Canadian Communications Thought: Ten Foundational Writers*

2 Michèle Martin, *Hello, Central? Technology, Culture and Gender in the Development of Telephone Systems, 1878-1920* (Montreal, 1991); Mary Vipond, "CKY Winnipeg in the 1920s: Canada's only Experiment in Government Monopoly Broadcasting", *Manitoba History* 12 (Autumn 1986), pp. 2-13; Vipond, *Listening In: The First Decade of Canadian Broadcasting, 1922-1932* (Montreal, 1992); Marc Raboy, *Missed Opportunities: The Story of Canada's Broadcasting Policy* (Montreal, 1990).

(Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000). Those familiar with similar books by Leslie Armour, Arthur Kroker or Graeme Patterson will accept the inclusion of scholars such as Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan and George Grant.³ More intriguing is the inclusion of scholars whose work is not commonly associated with the field of communications, such as Irene Spry and C.B. Macpherson, or advocates and practitioners such as Graham Spry and John Grierson. After reading *Babe*, the list makes excellent sense. The 10 have many common links, and the key to their inclusion is that their most influential writing is on Canadian themes. Future commentators may add other writers, but they will have to engage with *Babe*'s selections and the themes he identifies.

In structure, the book is straightforward. A chapter on each theorist contains a brief biographical sketch that situates the subject in place, time and intellectual context. Then *Babe* summarizes each scholar's key ideas and analytical categories. As more Canadian universities create communication departments they will find *Babe* a ready text for an upper-year seminar on Canadian communication theory, especially if combined with a selection of primary readings.

Babe does not attempt a synthesis leading to a new Canadian theory of communication. Instead, he simply notes the common themes which link his 10 writers. Most prominently, each of these theorists approached communications from a critical perspective rather than a functionalist one. This set them apart from their peers in the United States. There, many notable communications scholars worked alongside the private sector to resolve technical issues in broadcasting and advertising, investigating media effects and audience size. By contrast, Canadian scholars were keen to ask questions regarding the long-term, cultural implications of mass communication technology. The critical perspective reveals itself most tellingly in their views on political economy. Each felt that relations of power must be examined in conjunction with communication systems. Further, each felt that a conception of the common good should carry more weight in the organization of communication systems than did the efficiency of market relations. What they saw in the contemporary media landscape did not encourage them. In broadcasting, film, publishing, and news services, the private sector was increasing its control over the interpretation and distribution of information. As a result, *Babe* argues, his theorists were almost "univocal in their condemnation of the market as the chief means of organizing human activity, and by implication, of subordinating communication systems to commercial concerns" (p. 318).

Friesen and *Babe* might agree on the explanation for this apparent consensus. Friesen, discussing the existence of a uniquely Canadian perspective, quotes an opinion advanced by comedian Martin Short: "When Americans watch television . . . they watch television. When Canadians watch television, they watch American television" (p. 195). Canadians tend to be ever-conscious of their neighbours to the south. While sharing many cultural characteristics with them, we are not American.

3 Leslie Armour, *The Idea of Canada and the Crisis of Community* (Ottawa, 1981); Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant* (Montreal, 1984); Graeme Patterson, *History and Communications: Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, The Interpretation of History* (Toronto, 1990).

Recognition of this starts what Friesen calls a “distancing process”. Short and others use this idea to explain the popularity of Canadian comedians in the United States. Canadians may be more incisive when lampooning American culture because they are aware of how things might be different. Some call this attitude self-reflexive and ironic; others call it smug. Babe believes that it cultivates an identity rooted outside of the dominant culture, one that is therefore capable of making judgments informed by alternative values. Following Dallas Smythe, Babe refers to this phenomenon as a “cultural screen”.⁴ This is what makes his 10 theorists both critical and Canadian: all can trace their perspective to a perceived “outsider” status thanks to religious belief, migration or social status (pp. 307-9).

As with any list, it is possible to quibble over what was selected and what was left out. The 10 theorists here clearly reflect Babe’s own left political ideals. Thus, Babe honours the supporters of publicly owned communications agencies, and overlooks those who worked in the private sector. Among those overlooked are John Murray Gibbon, publicity director for the Canadian Pacific Railway, a master of many media and an early advocate of multiculturalism; Byrne Hope Sanders, a magazine publisher who established the Gallup organization in Canada and believed that polling could enhance democracy by scientifically measuring the will of the people; and the multi-talented Bertram Brooker, an advertising executive, artist, and author, who was intrigued by theories of the unity of all being, had a relativistic conception of truth, and sought new ways to communicate his impressions through various media. Each had theories regarding the constitution and dissemination of Canadian culture and fully engaged in the debates surrounding its commodification and industrialization. Indeed, they were Canadian pioneers of market-driven communications. In many ways, they also fit the collective biography which Babe sketches of his 10 theorists.⁵ However, whereas Babe’s 10 viewed themselves as outsiders, these three wanted to become insiders and promoted commercial interests. Perhaps it is not entirely accurate to conclude that it is a Canadian trait to critique the effects of the market on Canadian culture.

Three recent monographs offer scope to test the wealth of ideas which Friesen and Babe present. Paul Rutherford, *Endless Propoganda: The Advertising of Public Goods* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000), Valerie J. Korinek, *Roughing it in the Suburbs: Reading Chatelaine Magazine in the Fifties and Sixties* (Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 2000) and Marie-José des Rivières, *Châtelaine et la littérature* (Montréal, L’Hexagone, 1992) examine somewhat banal aspects of the modern mass media – advocacy advertising and consumer magazines – but reveal the profound insights possible through cultural history. Better still, their works examine that nexus of communications, culture and political economy which Friesen and Babe, together, suggest.

4 Dallas Smythe, *Dependency Road: Communications, Capitalism, Consciousness, and Canada* (Norwood, N.J., 1981).

5 For Gibbons, see Gary Bret Kines, *Chief Man-of-Many-Sides: John Murray Gibbon and His Contributions to the Development of Tourism and the Arts in Canada* (Ottawa, 1988). For Sanders, see Daniel J. Robinson, *The Measure of Democracy* (Toronto, 1999). For Brooker, see Ramsay Cook, “‘Nothing Less Than a New Theory of Art and Religion’: The Birth of a Modernist Culture in Canada”, *Provincial Essays*, 7 (1989), pp. 5-16.

Endless Propaganda covers international developments in advocacy advertising through the 20th century with an emphasis on the West, particularly the United States, Canada and England. Advocacy advertising, or propaganda, is, according to Rutherford, an attempt to promote “public goods”. This is a term borrowed from economics, and refers to items outside the marketplace which are “‘non-rival’, meaning use by one person does not diminish the utility for other consumers”, and “‘non-excludable’, meaning that it is impossible to prevent any person from enjoying this social product” (p. 4). An example might be national defence or clean air. Rutherford asserts that there are actually few goods which meet these criteria perfectly. This is curious, since the definition is crucial to his general thesis. Rutherford finds place within this definition, though, for government propaganda, party political campaigns, corporate institutional advertising and charity fund-raising appeals, as well as public awareness crusades by public and private agencies and non-governmental organizations.⁶

The book, which is both engaging and analytical, is divided into five, chronologically ordered and similarly structured parts. The key insights of a select theorist are first described, then applied to the advertising of a particular decade. This is a clever strategy. The theory informs Rutherford’s analysis of the advertisements, while the advertisements provide examples to illustrate the theory. Together these chapters provide a summary history of propaganda in the West.

Closing out his narrative in the 1990s, Rutherford examines the 1996 American presidential election with reference to Baudrillard’s concept of simulacra. It is clear that Rutherford’s own theoretical sympathies lie here. Baudrillard’s goal is to update structuralist semiotics by introducing to them a new layer of comprehension. Semiotics takes it as given that all communication is dependent on the transmission of symbols, or “signs.” Analytically, a “sign” is divided into two parts: the signifier (a tangible form we can sense, such as sound, text or imagery) and the signified (the idea conveyed by the tangible form). These categories identify the meaning of artefacts within the context of a given culture; they reveal the reality to which the signs refer. According to Baudrillard, however, modern media have collapsed all meaningful knowledge so that surface information is all that remains evident. Now, to know a sign is sufficient, and its correspondence to reality is moot. Indeed, the sign may itself become reality in the mind of the beholder. To denote this new order of comprehension, Baudrillard used the term “simulacrum” rather than “sign”. For Rutherford, the presidential election revealed this sense of hyper reality. It was a simulacrum of a healthy democratic process which masked low voter turn-out. The turn-out was frankly irrelevant. Only the appearance of an election, reinforced nightly by major news outlets, was needed to maintain the legitimacy of the American presidency in the minds of the American public.

What does this have to do with propaganda? Rutherford contends that public goods

6 Other Canadian works on this topic include Robert Bernier, *Le Marketing gouvernemental au Québec: 1929-1985* (Montreal, 1988); Jeffrey A. Keshen, *Propaganda and Censorship During Canada’s Great War* (Edmonton, 1996); Walter I. Romanow et al., eds., *Television Advertising in Canadian Elections: The Attack Mode, 1993* (Waterloo, 1999); Daniel J. Robinson, *The Measure of Democracy: Polling, Market Research, and Public Life, 1930-1945* (Toronto, 2000); Jonathan W. Rose, *Making “Pictures in Our Heads”: Government Advertising in Canada* (Westport, Conn., 2000).

do not exist without propaganda. Most public goods are intangible; they are either ideas and attitudes (such as tolerance) or services (such as public health). In order for something to be conceived as a public good, the collective will of a society must be mobilized through a mass education campaign. This argument implies, then, that public goods are nothing more than simulacra of the just society – a surface reflection of a caring, publicly-spirited community which may be anything but that underneath. Rutherford describes a series of television advertisements for charitable foundations to support this assessment. The viewer is first shown poverty-stricken children trapped in a desolate landscape. Next, the sponsor agency is introduced as a vital agent of salvation offering real hope. Through its ministrations, the children on screen are transformed; they become happy, healthy and grateful. Finally there is the pitch: the viewer can get involved simply by donating money. Whether the viewer responds, the appearance of the “good society” has been upheld; signs have been conveyed which suggest that decent folk are helping the needy, and the viewer need not feel personally responsible for their plight. At the same time, such advertisements mask the agencies’ own self-promotion. They also disguise the relations of power which tie the children to the viewer and implicate the viewer in their plight (pp. 116-37).

There are two weaknesses in this argument. First, there is one questionable assumption underlying Rutherford’s argument regarding public goods: that the collective will of a society will “naturally” view everything as a private good unless otherwise instructed. Several scholars of advertising have persuasively argued the opposite. In their view, the constant and accelerating barrage of commercial advertising during the last century has fostered possessive individualism and private goods. The consequence has been a steady erosion of the populist support for publicly funded agencies and services which had developed over the previous century.⁷ Rutherford is familiar with these arguments, and the second chapter of *Endless Propaganda* details the ways in which access to American television was once closed to many progressive social organizations. Yet he nonetheless concludes that these same social organizations should be faulted for adapting to the new media environment in order to have their messages heard. In so doing, he argues, they have tacitly endorsed the market model and abandoned the values by which to critique it. Again, this seems doubtful, if only because it is too all-encompassing. Organizations do exist which have not abandoned non-market alternatives. The second possible weakness of the main argument is that it relies too heavily on the accuracy of Baudrillard’s vision. An overused example is the opposition to the Multilateral Agreement on Investment. Progressive social organizations interpreted the proposed agreement according to their own set of values despite the mass media’s general acquiescence to the official story. They then succeeded in generating sufficient international unease (if not support) to stall the process of implementation. This was most visible in the “Battle of Seattle”, where protestors helped to scuttle a revised

⁷ See, for example, Stewart Ewen, *Captains of Consciousness: Advertising and the Social Roots of Consumer Culture* (New York, 1976); William Leiss, Stephen Kline and Sut Jhally, *Social Communication in Advertising: Persons, Products, and Images of Well-Being*, 2nd ed. (Scarborough, 1990); Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets, and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York, 1996).

proposal under discussion at the World Trade Organization in 1999. Baudrillard's simulacra apparently cracked, and revealed the still beating heart of genuine experience and informed political engagement.

Valerie J. Korinek's research into *Chatelaine* is welcome for several reasons, and it too reveals an instance when unexpected cultural consequences emerged from the commercial media. The author conducts a type of study popular in the United States and England, but rare in Canada: a systematic analysis of one periodical and its content.⁸ Such studies are premised on the notion that periodicals capture the culture of their readers and era. This is particularly true of those periodicals which faithfully maintain an identifiable community of readers over a significant period of time. Presumably, they have managed to channel the concerns, values and fantasies of these readers into print, even if this is a selective representation of the readers' wishes as interpreted by the editorial staff. Still, such a magazine is a valuable record, and with careful analysis its editorial content as well as its illustrations, graphics and commercial matter reveal the era as it was conceived by its community of readers. Such readings have informed cultural studies in Britain, and this has clearly influenced Korinek's analytical framework and her close reading of *Chatelaine*, between 1950 and 1969, within the context of changing social relations, particularly those affecting the roles of women.

The results are often witty and surprising. *Chatelaine* was a rarity among women's magazines because it had a woman editor for most of its run. The publisher, Maclean-Hunter Publishing of Toronto, controlled a dozen trade journals by the 1920s, as well as *The Financial Post* and three general magazines. Maclean-Hunter added *Chatelaine* in 1928 because it thought that Canadian women were an under-served market for advertisers. The magazine was not central to the company brass, and they ignored it while the balance sheet remained favourable. In Korinek's telling, this benign neglect bore significant results in the late 1950s when Doris Anderson was appointed editor. Anderson infused its editorial content and fiction with progressive social commentary. At that time, its American rivals had nothing similar. In her first years, Anderson tackled common law marriage, birth control and women's sexual pleasure. After 1960, she advanced her "closet feminist" (pp. 31-70, 354-5) politics by addressing women's paid work, equality of the sexes, divorce and abortion, as well as wider social concerns such as poverty and the treatment of Canada's aboriginal peoples. At times, the articles directly contradicted the implicit messages of the magazine's advertisers. From this, Korinek concludes that Anderson was "trying to incite a revolution" (pp. 308-65). Through the magazine's features she revealed the possibility of new social values and new ways of life.

If a revolution occurred, it was through the magazine's readers, and Korinek makes reader response central to her analysis of the magazine. In so doing, she locates her research in a growing segment of cultural studies theory that views the audience as a crucial, participatory component in all communications. Historians have been slow to

8 Scholarly studies have appeared on *Maclean's*, *The Toronto Mail* and *Grip Magazine*. See David MacKenzie, *Arthur Irwin: A Biography* (Toronto, 1993); Carman Cumming, *Secret Craft: The Journalism of Edward Farrer* (Toronto, 1992); Cumming, *Sketches from a Young Country: The Images of Grip Magazine* (Toronto, 1997).

adapt insights from this research to textual analysis. Too often an author's view is privileged while the received view is inferred. Granted, an historian faces some formidable challenges when researching anonymous and probably deceased audience members. However, with this book Korinek joins American historians Susan J. Douglas and Richard Butsch in their recent attempts to integrate audience perspectives into their analyses of media content.⁹ To do so, she consulted two sources: the letters-to-the-editor columns of the magazine itself, and archival records which hold staff memoranda, market research data and additional reader correspondence.

Korinek argues convincingly that Anderson's magazine was not a bastion of traditional femininity, and she counters the view that women's magazines are irredeemable consumer pap. However, her strongest evidence does not appear until the final two chapters of the book on editorial content. Until then, her discussion of short stories, contests and advertising reveals little more than a typical consumer magazine – and a great deal of pap. This is not to say that readers did not enjoy the magazine and use it in ways which emphasized alternative readings. However, when presented in this order, the “closet feminist” ideals of the editorial staff appear to have been swamped by commercial restrictions.

Korinek clearly admires Anderson, and wants to establish her among the leading Canadian feminists of the second wave. However, one wonders if she overestimates the editor's distance from the magazine's non-editorial content. For example, the business staff at Maclean-Hunter is characterized as a cluster of hyper-masculine “urban professionals” driven solely by profit, who conceived readers simply as “numbers”, “figures” and “statistics”. Anderson, meanwhile, is described as having an authentic rapport with her community of women readers (p. 48). Korinek argues this despite Anderson's newly progressive magazine being an advertising vehicle informed by market research. The Dichter Report, drafted by a New York-based media consultant in 1958, spoke of “progressive femininity” and found that Canadian women were already in a “rapid thrust toward independence” (p. 75). It advised the magazine to emphasize middle-class, urban lifestyles, and to avoid (less progressive?) rural or small town ways. Anderson fulfilled such recommendations with advertiser-friendly features. Korinek describes one such feature which had an ambiguous legacy, the “Mrs. Chatelaine” contest. It sought the country's top married homemaker as judged by her mothering, cooking, housekeeping and community service. It also sparked a reaction from some readers who thought the contest was laughably out of touch with the lives of modern women.

Claims regarding the unique qualities of Anderson's tenure might have been tempered by comparisons with other magazines. Korinek refers to several studies of American periodicals, and she discusses their findings in relation to her own. However, she does not offer substantial comparisons with other Canadian magazines. For example, certain other titles at Maclean-Hunter provide interesting comparisons.

9 For the cultural studies literature, see James Lull, *Inside Family Viewing* (London, 1990); Ien Ang, *Desperately Seeking the Audience* (London, 1991); David Morley, *Television, Audiences, and Cultural Studies* (London, 1992). For recent historical research, see Susan J. Douglas, *Listening In: Radio and the American Imagination* (New York, 1999); Richard Butsch, *The Making of American Audiences, From Stage to Television, 1750-1990* (New York, 2000).

La Revue moderne was a Montreal-based women's magazine founded in 1919 and acquired by Maclean-Hunter in 1960. The company renamed it *Châtelaine*, and hired Fernande Saint-Martin from *La Presse* to be its editor. Saint-Martin, guided by market research, pursued an editorial agenda very similar to Anderson's; indeed, the two consulted regularly in the early 1960s. Through her editorial and fiction selections, Saint-Martin consciously advanced a more progressive vision of society than had her predecessor at *La Revue moderne*.¹⁰ Similarly, *Maclean's* itself was not particularly conservative reading during those years when Pierre Berton, June Callwood and Peter Gzowski served as contributors and editors. Noting these things, one might ask if Maclean-Hunter was genuinely neglectful during the Anderson years, or if the company appointed writers like her, Saint-Martin and Berton knowing that they would continue a tradition of provocative *and* entertaining journalism that dated back to the 1910s.¹¹

It is unfortunate that Korinek does not cite an excellent study by Marie-José des Rivières, *Châtelaine et la littérature (1960-1975)*. Des Rivières's chief interest is the fiction published by Saint-Martin, and how it both reflected and influenced changing conceptions of femininity during the Quiet Revolution. For her research, she read every issue published during Saint-Martin's tenure at the magazine, and gathered 296 short stories and book extracts. Des Rivières's analysis of these texts is grounded in a thorough description of the magazine's history, financial structure and non-fiction content.

In her second chapter, des Rivières describes the ideological tension between the magazine's editorials and its advice column (or *courrier du coeur*). Saint-Martin's editorials advocated a progressive, liberal, and secular future for Quebec society. By contrast, Jovette Bernier's advice column was informed by a traditional, conservative and Catholic moral sensibility. Both addressed immediate realities facing Quebec women, and both offered prescriptive writing addressed to the individual reader. The question may be asked, then: which more accurately reflected the culture of the magazine and its readers? According to contemporary market research, Bernier's column was the most read feature of the magazine. Nonetheless, des Rivières asserts that the magazine must be read as a unit, and that the tension between these two poles accurately reflects the uncertainty of Quebec women as they experienced a period of rapid social change. The magazine, thus, can be read as a locus of cultural negotiation where Quebecois writers articulated both traditional and emerging perspectives in relation to day-to-day life experiences. Within this framework, the short stories are as important to an understanding of the magazine's culture as the editorial content. The magazine featured Quebec writers who wrote about women facing contemporary problems. In the lives of fictional heroines, then, the implications of Saint-Martin and Bernier's ideas were fully explored through situations, locations and dialogue which were readily identifiable to readers.

Ultimately, Saint-Martin achieved a certain equilibrium in the apparent "éternelle

10 Marie-José des Rivières, *Châtelaine et la littérature (1960-1975)* (Montreal, 1992), pp. 37-94.

11 Floyd S. Chalmers, *A Gentleman of the Press* (Toronto, 1969); Fraser Sutherland, *The Monthly Epic: A History of Canadian Magazines* (Toronto, 1989), pp. 138-52, 269-81; MacKenzie, Arthur Irwin (Toronto, 1993), pp. 79-147; Russell Johnston, *Selling Themselves: The Emergence of Canadian Advertising* (Toronto, 2001), pp. 242-8.

contradiction” between feminism and advertising (p. 53). She had to maintain a mass audience to ensure that the magazine earned a profit. And as des Rivières notes, the editor could not control the advertisements that appeared in its pages. She could, however, control the messages which emanated from its editorial content and fiction. These features were used to advance progressive social values to that same mass audience – an audience, she felt, which did not encounter these values in other Quebec media (pp. 39-53). In describing these aspects of the magazine’s production, des Rivières offers a persuasive account of the cultural, economic and communication pressures faced by a consumer magazine. Indirectly, she also offers a solid argument for the incorporation of communications and cultural studies concepts into historical analysis.

Each of the books reviewed here makes significant contributions to the study of Canada, though Rutherford might protest that he has set his sights much farther afield. The questions they raise are healthy and productive and speak to the theoretical and analytical richness that issues central to communication and cultural studies can bring to the discipline of history. Friesen’s study, with its analytical framework drawn from the insights of Harold Innis, should prompt historians to pay greater attention to the interplay of cultural values and communications systems. Robert E. Babe’s work provides a timely reminder that the political economy of those communications systems must be factored into our analyses. Paul Rutherford, Valerie J. Korinek and Marie-José des Rivières’s scholarship clearly demonstrate the crucial role that the commercial mass media have played in the flow of information and the development of popular consciousness over the last 50 years. Korinek’s work demonstrates as well, however, that it is possible to work towards an analysis of such media that incorporates Friesen’s common people. Friesen’s work also challenges scholars in communications and cultural studies, inviting them to engage in historical analysis, and to root analyses in the specificity of the messy, on-going experience of life in “northern North America”. Babe and many of his peers have already taken up the challenge. Let us hope historians prove as willing.

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