

Lyman, Peter. **Canada's Video Revolution: Pay-TV, Home Video and Beyond.** Toronto: James Lorimer & Company, Publishers, 1983.

Reviewed by: Terrence J. Thomas, Library of Parliament (Ottawa).

Pay TV, satellite dishes and video cassette recorders have transformed the content and pattern of television viewing in Canada. The changes should continue, moreover, in the near future with discretionary specialty services (Canadian and complimentary U. S. ones), high definition television, interactive television and further improvements in satellite technology. The structure of the television industry in Canada is indeed in a state of flux, and the implications of all the changes have not been well-charted.

The Canadian Institute for Economic Policy, therefore, asked Peter Lyman "to describe the impact of the new communications technology on the evolution of Canada's cultural industries" (p. xi). Canada's Video Revolution is the result.

The request presented two problems. Lyman had to define Canadian culture and he had to write about technological developments that were advancing so rapidly that his book might appear out-of-date after the inevitable and unavoidable publishing delays. Neither problem is minor, and it is to Lyman's credit that he has written a book that is stimulating and useful, even if, as in the case of the sections on Pay TV, events have overtaken him.

As the book concentrates on television, the view of Canadian culture is that of media programming. Cultural industries are commercial enterprises that deal in entertainment and information instead of the traditional arts-and-culture base. This somewhat narrow view of culture ignores the performing arts but has the virtue of treating culture as a product that is produced, sold and regulated. This economic approach to culture will infuriate some, but it does lead to concrete policy suggestions.

The major policy suggestion made by Lyman is that Canadian cultural industries must become export-oriented and thus more competitive internationally. **To do this, resources must be concentrated on specific projects instead of being scattered.** An important implication of this policy suggestion is that Canadian cultural policy cannot be isolationist.

Chapters Three and Four form the core of the book and provide evidence to support the policy suggestions. Lyman's discussion of technology is knowledgeable as he evaluates the new television services, Pay TV, direct broadcast satellites, video systems and other advances taking place now or coming, in some form, in the near future. For most, the story for Canadian culture is the same -- Canadian consumers are being offered a greater choice of more expensively produced, predominantly American programs.

Lyman recognizes the possible tradeoff between bigger budgets for Canadian programming to compete internationally and the possible decline in Canadian content of these shows. **Meatballs** is an example from the film industry, and inter-

national co-productions may imply international themes. Lyman is fairly confident, however, that Canadian themes can become universal themes, and he argues that big budgets are needed for the survival of Canadian cultural industries.

The organization of the book could have been improved. Some policy suggestions seem to get lost in the middle of chapters. Instead of pulling the reader along to his conclusion, Lyman shuffles back and forth between informed discussions of communication technology and specific proposals for the cultural industries. Some of these specific proposals -- for example, that Pay TV operators "utilize their buying power in foreign markets to open foreign distribution and co-production avenues for Canadian producers" (p. 72) -- are wishful thinking, given existing market structures. Without vertical integration, a Pay TV operator has little incentive to bargain, and make any concessions, for the sake of the producers of television shows.

This is a minor complaint. In general, Lyman is excellent in showing how technology and the market interact to provide constraints on policy. Unless policy makers understand about the relative costs of producing television shows in the U.S. and Canada and about the influence of changes in technology (and related changes in market structure) on costs and prices, cultural policy is doomed to be well-intentioned but ineffective.

Despite some minor weaknesses, Lyman has written a book that is a needed addition to the literature on culture and communication.