

Baillargeon, Jean-Paul, ed.

**Les pratiques culturelles des Québécois:
une autre image de nous-mêmes.**

Québec: Institut québécois de recherche sur la culture, 1986.

It states the obvious to assert that Quebec has undergone massive transformations in the last quarter century, but this anthology of essays on cultural practices in Quebec offers the reader insight into the substance of this new Quebec. Fifteen authors, (excluding the editor who provides a conclusion), discuss the state of Quebec's cultural activity in their areas of specialty. The mass media are treated, of course, but so are such other forms as popular and art music, theatre, dance, sports and recreation, and tourism. The editor conceives of the work as contributing to reflection and debate on Quebec cultural development, and in this he succeeds, if only because of the volume of information the work contains.

The volume is highly informative. However, its title might mislead the English-speaking reader, for it does not describe cultural practices *per se*, but Quebec's cultural institutions and institutionalized cultural forms. The essays are primarily descriptive, making ample use of statistical data. The book has hermeneutic impulse, and does not attempt to reconstruct the practices of the typical (or atypical, for that matter) Québécois. Rather, we are offered a mirror of cultural practices as reflected in the economic and infrastructural development of particular cultural sectors, as well as the corresponding evolution of forms and formats.

An excellent example of this approach can be seen in Elzéar Lavoie's essay on Quebec radio: "La radio, loisir méconnu." The author sketches the demographics of reception patterns, and then offers a history of Quebec radio, discussing both its economics and the competitive development of radio formats. The author claims that commercial radio is the medium forgotten by analysts preoccupied with television and Radio-Canada. Lavoie asserts that students of Quebec's language and popular culture should well listen to AM radio's voice, the voice of the people. Lavoie's observation here is

particularly apt, for all too often the choice of an object of study has more to do with its novelty or importance to policy-makers, than with the way media are integrated into the life-world.

The institutional tendency of Lavoie's analysis is carried further and explicitly laid out by Claude Martin and Roger de la Garde, in their analysis of the Quebec press ("Si Gutenberg m'était compté. De la Presse d'entreprise aux entreprises de presse"). They assert that we can best understand the press by considering it as an industry. They then proceed with an analysis of its development through an examination of its markets, the impact of new technology on production costs, consumer demographics and revenues. They conclude by noting that the press itself, in competition with other media, is now adopting this industrial viewpoint, as it casts its audience as a consumer rather than as a reader.

Most of the essays in this volume proceed in the same manner. We gain insights into the challenges facing the rapidly expanding television industry, the popular music industry, theatre, dance, and the Quebec novelist. We learn that many non-mass media forms are doing well under government support, notably classical music and theatre. Quebec has experienced a major ratrappage with Ontario in these sectors, particularly with the emergence of a new and expanded francophone middle class. However, dance remains underfunded and underdeveloped, and the province still suffers from a low book-reading rate. The authors typically call for better cultural education (Gilles Pronovost, "Significations et transformations des activités de loisir," cites P. Bourdieu and A. Darel), better government funding, and a creative response by cultural producers.

Two essays in this collection distinguish themselves by their overtly polemical tone. Réal La Rochelle ("Le cinéma québécois, en voie d'assimilation ou de métissage") argues that Quebec's social transformation has given rise to a new commercial cinematic form, neither xenophobically inward-looking (as were Les Plouffes or Duplessis), nor merely American. This new style in cinema, which

includes, for example such award-winning works as Caffè Italia, Montréal, compels and entertains as it speaks both of and to a new heterogeneous and transcultural Québec. For La Rochelle, government film policy should favour this type of commercial cinema, produced by small and creative independents, rather than Canada's few mega-producers who are building a film industry on the Hollywood model. La Rochelle thus rejects the validity of the American cultural imperialism thesis as a frame for analyzing Quebec cultural production. This essay, more than any other, offers us a sense that the Quebec of our stereotypes has vanished in favour of a métis Quebec. This would, it appears, be the Quebec of the postmodern.

The most provocative essay in the collection is penned by Denys Morisset ("Vers un art officiel? Nous y sommes! Vive l'anarchie!"). Morisset decries government sponsorship and funding of the arts. He asserts that the inevitable consequence of such activity is art's banalisation. Civil servants and the bureaucratized artists sitting on the boards of granting agencies would stifle creativity in the name of normativity. The detritus that such a policy produces would be a lifeless official or state culture. He also cites as a glaring example of bad artistic policy the move to popularize artistic production, rendering it a craft, and thus undermining experimentation and discrimination. Morisset blames the adoption since 1960 of the antiquated French model of cultural policy formation for this stagnation. Decrying the MBA hordes, he celebrates the artistic anarchy prevalent in the United States where private sources fund artists for reasons of art, and not bureaucratic expediency. The analysis is less than satisfying, however, because it naively assumes that, freed of state meddling, the creative genius of artists will emerge. The polemic offers no substantial guide to the development of art hors l'état.

Baillargeon, in his conclusion, cites the major factors responsible for the development of Quebec's cultural forms. First, the "Quiet revolution," which includes francophone Quebec's sudden secularization, adoption of North American (consumer oriented) tastes,

and economic growth, led to new forms of cultural activity and consumer behaviour. Second, the limited resources of the Quebec market, competition from both the United States and France, and the fragmentation of audiences or publics because of the multiplication of cultural forms and institutions renders the stability of the cultural system precarious. Third, within the context of a system of cultural production that cannot be economically self-sustaining, state cultural policy and grants have been crucial. His analysis suggests that Quebec's cultural activity exists within a series of tensions and contradictions that cannot easily be overcome, but that indeed are the ground of Quebec's uniqueness.

While Baillargeon's collection of essays does not make for compelling reading, it has fundamental value as a reference work. The fascinating analysis that remains to be undertaken could not proceed without the knowledge that this volume offers. That analysis, presaged by the title of this book, would interpret the living culture of the Québécois, uncovering the sense, contradictions, and consequences of their practices. Such a study would complete the picture Baillargeon offers, particularly for the non-Québécois, making sense of that distinct society's cultural life.

Reviewed by:

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Paletz, David L., ed.

Political Communication Research:

Approaches, Studies, Assessments,

Norwood, New Jersey, Ablex Publishing Company, 1987

If, as the shopworn Chinese adage has it, a journey of a thousand miles begins with one step, it would appear that political communication researchers have a great distance to travel towards uncertain destinations. The 15 articles making up this collection attest to the arguable view that political communication as a field of inquiry is desperately seeking definition. This, in part, is reflected in the editor's admission that the three general categories that