50 YEARS OF CANADIAN CULTURE: THE ROOTS OF OUR MODEL AND THE BIG, NEW THREAT

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THE BEGINNINGS

Looking back over 50 years, we can see that much has changed in Canada's cultural landscape. It is tempting to call these changes "revolutionary" because of their immense impacts on national identity, creative expression, and communications. If that is too grand a word, let us settle for "transformative". In the 1960s, our country had limited capacity to create large-scale cultural products such as feature films, recorded music, books and professional theatre. There were essentially no policies or programs to promote a Canadian presence in the modern world of cultural industries or the performing arts. Canada was not entirely a cultural desert though it often felt like one, especially outside the main metropolitan cities.

But this feeling was deceptive. Political and social factors that would propel a 'Canadian cultural revolution' had in fact been gathering strength; they would have tremendous influence over the next few decades. Several important initiatives began in the period after the Second World War, notably the modern cultural vision set out in the 1951 Report of the Royal Commission on National Development in the Arts, Letters and Sciences. The Massey Commission (named after its Chairman, Vincent Massey) led to the founding of Canada's National Library (in 1953) and to the Canada Council (in 1957) to support the creative arts, the social sciences and humanities.

By the time we reached Centennial Year, 1967, a handful of energetic cultural institutions had already taken root. The decade-old Canada Council was already the authority for national arts funding. The Stratford Festival had just celebrated its 14th birthday. The Manitoba Theatre Centre was now nine years old. In Montréal, two companies born

in the 1950s, the Théâtre du Rideau Vert and the Théâtre du Nouveau Monde, had brought stability to French-language theatre, creating demand for the newly-formed National Theatre School. Three ballet companies were operating (in Winnipeg, Toronto and Montréal). A small number of authors in both English and French were achieving wide recognition. The National Film Board, Canada's only significant film producer, had evolved from wartime propaganda into the genres of animation, documentaries and some feature films.

CBC and Radio-Canada were omnipresent in 1967. They were the only options for live-to-air and filmed broadcasting. The new technology of television already dominated culture and entertainment. Performers and writers for the small screen were household names: people such as Juliette, Norman DePoe and Patrick Watson or, on the French-language side, René Lévesque, Denise Pelletier and Roger Lemelin.

Private television in Canada was still in its infancy. In 1967, the CTV network shared only a minimum of news coverage and programming, mainly American, among its member stations. The French-language TVA network was just an informal arrangement between three stations in Québec. Private radio, particularly in English, was dominated by American recorded music presented by Canadian DJs and supported by local advertising: it was a lucrative business.

The period around 1967 stands out for its optimism. Canada had made an outsized contribution to victory in the Second World War, emerging with a strong 'can-do' spirit. Together with massive economic and demographic changes, our political system became both more activist and nationalist, which was reflected in a raft of new social policies. The Canada Pension Plan, Old Age Security, Medicare, and the Maple Leaf flag injected a progressive spirit into the symbols of nationhood. Cultural initiatives were part of this, with the creation of a national broadcasting regulator (the CRTC), a national film development agency (Telefilm), and the adoption of tax measures to protect advertising revenues in newspapers, magazines and broadcasting.

Across the country, there was a huge menu of Centennial Year projects, topped by the tremendous success of Montréal's Expo 67. In cultural terms, Expo was far more than an entertainment spectacle. A new face for Canadian identity was forged by the quality of the Canadian-themed exhibitions, the brilliance of the National Film Board's immersive "Labyrinth" experience, the Bell Canada 360-degree tour across the land, plus many provincial exhibitions. Centennial projects vastly expanded Canada's capacity for cultural performance. The results were breathtaking, and 50 years later they still remain the cornerstones of cities across the country: Ottawa's National Arts Centre, the Provincial Museum in Edmonton (now the R.A.M.), the Vancouver Museum, arts centres in London, Saskatoon, Winnipeg, Charlottetown and St. John's, plus many local libraries and the Grand Théâtre in Québec City (which opened in 1972).

But the 1967 celebrations soon collided with simmering conflicts between French and English Canada. The detailed work of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, set up in 1963, confirmed that there was systemic discrimination against French speakers and the French language. The 'B and B Commission' recommendations

eventually reshaped how English Canada viewed French language communities and linguistic rights. It also led to a profound shift in our perception of ethnicity and identity. This was captured in the words of Prime Minister P-E Trudeau in October 1971, who described how Canada would officially promote "a policy of multiculturalism within a bilingual framework."

The disputes that took centre stage after 1967 defined the country for the next thirty years – literally an entire generation. While we often focus on their constitutional and economic dimensions, these conflicts had two cultural questions at their core. First, how could the French fact of Canada – its language, history and culture – best be preserved and expanded? Second, how could the identity of other peoples of Canada, with their own voices and spaces, best be protected and promoted?

Politics and the arts are closely related, a basic truth which explains and justifies the use of state power to protect national symbols, linguistic rights, and cultural voices. But just as politics can be used to promote the arts, it can also cast a shadow over them. The tense dynamic between Ottawa and Québec challenged artists and the wider public. It still does. Any contemporary political leader who does not understand this dynamic will soon enough discover that it is the 'third rail' of Canadian public life (as Stephen Harper learned in Québec during the 2008 election campaign).

A HOME-GROWN MODEL

Against this occasionally tense backdrop, a unique Canadian cultural model took shape over the years. I describe this as an 'affirmative cultural model' that uses state power and private creativity to promote expression, production and distribution. The state power is seen in a combination of careful incentives, promotional policies and regulatory restrictions, tying together federal measures and complementary (sometimes competing) provincial initiatives.

The interventionist tools deployed in this affirmative model have become more sophisticated over time. They include: stable funding for the Canada Council, focused on individual artists or arts groups; capital financing for presentation venues; funding for national arts training schools; Canadian content regulations (quotas) for radio and television; broadcast licensing requirements to balance different genres of content; distribution and ownership rules plus funding and tax credits for films, books, magazines and recorded music; and, support for museum projects.

Many of these cultural activities are directly administered by government departments, or by Crown agencies that act as regulators, creators and distributors of content and services. These include: the CBC, the CRTC, Canada Council for the Arts, Commissioner of Official Languages, Copyright Board, Telefilm, the National Film Board, the national museums, and Library and Archives. Provinces have similar cultural agencies.

Six main elements define the affirmative model for culture. These are:

1. Promotion of Canadian content choices through measures that encourage artists, writers, performers and producers;

2. Respect for freedom of expression and cultural choice (including foreign choices);

3. Access to Canadian choices to ensure the presence of Canadian cultural content in the distribution system;

4. Use of a wide range of tools to assist Canadian content, such as direct funding, regulations and licensing, and tax concessions;

5. Promotion of partnerships between different levels of government, and between private, public, international and not-for-profit interests;

6. Preservation of cultural heritage through designated institutions, legislation and tax measures.

Arts and culture constitute a large ecosystem, having a continuum of activities, beginning with individual creativity and continuing through production, distribution and marketing to consumption, memory, and retrieval. Interventions through public and private initiatives take place at many points along this continuum. The overarching goal is the promotion and protection of "Canadian Voices, Canadian Choices" (in the words of a 1988 government document). This is neither 'protectionist' nor 'restrictive', as Canada remains exceptionally open to foreign cultural products.

How far have we come since the 1960s? Simple comparisons over 50 years are not possible because detailed, consistent data about culture only began to be collected in the 1990s. However, we do have a good overview of more recent years, and the numbers are impressive. Here are some highlights reported by Statistics Canada ("Measuring Economic Impacts of Culture – 2014"):

-There were 703,900 people employed in cultural occupations in 2010 (or 4% of jobs in the economy).

-The direct GDP contribution of cultural industries was $53.2 billion (or 3.4% of total GDP).

-In comparative terms, the contribution of arts and cultural industries to GDP is more than double the total combined contribution from agriculture, fishing, forestry and hunting.

Today, federal programs, together with municipal and provincial programs, aim at a full range of cultural sectors. Programs for official languages and multicultural events, together with newer initiatives focused on Indigenous expressions, expand the scope for cultural promotion. Some highlights from 2014-15 (reported by the Department of Canadian Heritage) provide a sample of what is happening:

-In book publishing, Canadian-owned firms published approximately 80% of all Canadian-authored books, and accounted for about 60% of total domestic sales. The book fund run by the federal department supported 6,439 Canadian titles.

-In music recording, Canadian-owned companies released 87% of Canadian recordings. However, multinational companies generated most industry revenues (about 73%).

-Federal support in other cultural areas reached 1,115 not-for-profit performing arts compan-

ies (such as orchestras, theatres and dance groups), as well as 600 performing arts festivals in more than 250 communities. In the museum sector, which largely falls under provincial jurisdiction, there are now 2,500 not-for-profit heritage institutions, with about 50 of these being large-scale while the others are smaller and local.

THE NEW THREAT

In comparison with what was produced some 50 years ago, this is a time of plenty. There has been a blossoming of Canadian content in virtually every sector of cultural production (with the notable exception of daily newspapers, which have been shutting down to a worrying degree, though that is a global problem). The strengths of different regions are notable, as are the recent efforts to promote Indigenous cultural expressions. International recognition of Canadian artistry has also expanded greatly.

But this is also a time of great threats, as Canada faces new challenges from the American cultural colossus and from the digital disruption of production and distribution models. If cultural activists from the 1960s were transported into our era, they would know nothing about the Internet and digital processes but they would easily recognize the Californian business model of treating Canada as a regional market for American distributors, with no interest in Canadian voices and no sensitivity to our smaller economies of scale or our French culture. It was the invention of a Canadian cultural model beginning in the 1960s, supported by successive Liberal and Conservative governments, which enabled cultural industries and arts expression to emerge and flourish here.

Today's rapid rise of digital distribution systems owned by American Internet giants is, by far, the greatest threat to Canadian cultural expression. The operation of Netflix, Amazon, Facebook and similar cultural platforms, whether in 'streaming' or 'aggregating' content, risks repeating what happened to Canada when the Hollywood studios took control of production and distribution in the young film industry. The federal government's response to the Internet threat (first identified in 1996 by the Information Highway Advisory Committee) has been marked by denial and confusion. Both the CRTC and political ministers have repeatedly refused to use the well-developed tools of the Canadian cultural model, under the premise that the online world is a 'neutral' platform and not technically subject to democratic governance.

Yet cyberspace is, at the end of a day, a space like any other. Just as the Canadian government, starting in the 1960s, took a more proactive approach to ensuring that there would be Canadian voices in books, television and music, so too can it make a mark online. There are available options for positive interventions in the Internet world through legal and financial measures to promote and sustain local creativity. The European Union has started to blaze a trail in this regard, setting,... for example, quotas for European content on Netflix and Amazon. Once, it was Canada that led in devising sensible solutions for defending cultural diversity, and the world came to study our model. Now, it is our turn to learn from others, if we wish to protect cultural sovereignty and national expression.