An open letter addressing the issues and state of affairs within cultural journals; we solicit opinions, critiques and submissions.

Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory

ONE of the many ironies of North American intellectual life in the 1980s is the way it has moved to institutionalize the previously marginal body of French post-structuralist and/or deconstructive theory. It's a migratory band of scholars (including, where established leaders and self-conceived students gather and move through punishingly superficial conferences, lectures, and writings with a focussed attention more appropriate to social institutions which the theory is meant to deconstruct. It's a one-way choreography of knowledge, which empowers the voices of the previously disenfranchised. No doubt a defense of this practice, but one which has some unfortunate results. It defends itself through a thick wall of jargonization. Is this Hollywood, then, hypnotized by its key performers? No, obviously not—these collected bodies peer suspiciously at selected signifiers and decry their villainous historicity, one another's total loss of meaning, extracting themselves from commitment to them. It is as though this ostensible Death of Meaning in culture of all forms propels its believer priests into a series of encyclopedic solipsistic wakes. There, freed from the tired/vivacious contexts of daily life, distanced from the discourses of Official constraints, in a spell of privileged concentration, they may celebrate this death, these recurrent deaths, as occasions for their own hypnotic speculation (while waiting for their own rebirth as guardians of the Long Wait).

The theory itself springs from an uneasy but fruitful confrontations between thought, power, institutions, and the thinker, which French theorists (of a very particular thought, power, and place) have been brought to the centre of critical theoretical work. The uniqueness of this project is manifested in its encounter with the locations of practitioners in other social and intellectual contexts. The encounter between European and Canadian traditions precipitates a series of reflections and strategies that inevitably raise questions about theory, practice, and place. It is not surprising that there should come into being a Canadian journal dedicated to making real sense of these intellectual confrontations, while imposing its own imprimatur of nationalism on the "writing" of the others' discourse. This exercise could easily become an occasion for saying that already these strategies and intentions of much of this theory can frustrate a renewed perception of our own writings, of our own histories, and lives—and of how they have helped to form how and what we think. These encounters with theoretical projects originating in other cultures but resonating in our own, point to ways of unearthing the very grammar of our thought. Through a very particular appropriation of incommensurability, CJSPT has endowed Canadian Writing with a cosmos. Thus George Grant has been described by Arthur Kroeker as "the Canadian Nietzsche" (more recently, in his Technology and the Canadian Mind, revised to "Nietzschean on history but a Christian thinker of the fatalist kind on the history of justice"). But if Grant is the Nietzsche of Canada, why read Grant? With what voice, what place and time, are we in dialogue? CJSPT always publishes us in this way, forcing us to question why these European, American, or Canadian theorists are chosen. What are they doing there? What are we doing here? And why does the Journal presume that death of meaningful practice which we supposedly inhabit without question, which has been ignored in favour of the seductive nihilism of having no world to use or to come to terms with ours is finally an echo, a shadow of Baudrillard's implied imagina, appropriated so benevolently to the space left by the ostensibly absent of any voice. But the Journal promises that death of meaningful practice which we supposedly inhabit without question, which has been ignored in favour of the seductive nihilism of having no world to use or to come to terms with ours is finally an echo, a shadow of Baudrillard's implied imagina, appropriated so benevolently to the space left by the ostensibly absent of any voice. But the Journal promises that...
Journal of Popular Culture
Journal of Canadian Culture

ONE sense of popular culture is bound up with a feeling that it is the alternative to the "official" media. If the Media are American, there is little point from this perspective: all American popular culture is "official." Canadian Popular Culture becomes a branch-plant activity: all it does is copy what is already being done elsewhere. Thus we learn nothing about ourselves, but in a manner similar to the same old James Stewart movies located in Toronto, simply see ourselves as a carbon-copy of them. We have stopped doing this with literature or even music; we learn to think about growth, identity and community.

Obviously popular culture does have elements which are important and which can be either technologically or, ideologically or experiential. The media are not necessarily technologically American, George Grant notwithstanding, though they may become so. Therefore we are prepared to accept bege- monic paramountcy. If we accept this logically, the problem is now how to fall into the relative passivity of those who sweep everything from into the pool of one giant, useless weapon into the same bag, a position which is as fundamentally silly as it is possible to be. Certainly the most beneficial. The equation that popular culture mass culture = capitalist control of technology = false consciousness is one that dominates most thinking on popular culture. The major fallacy of this equation is that it assumes the passive role of the individual or of the popular culture. Any equation of this kind is that it assumes that the subjectivity of the subject is in the culture of the viewer of the media. The study of Canadian popular culture should not emphasize the strategies of the media, technology, and then impute a consciousness to the individual. This is a false consciousness: such premises would simply return to pleas for reorganizing relations (which would be the media technologies). It should rather take popular culture as the making sense of data, the selective application of whatever symbols and strategies the people have at hand. One must look for the "effects" of the media on popular culture.

Popular culture, of course, a major problem in saying that popular culture is simply what any defined group of a society does, thinks, reads, feels. Such ethnographic eclecticism, however noble its democratic (or sectional) sentiments, ends up writing and doing research on what is not the same as saying that the "culture" is absolute. An example of such an exercise is found in the USA with the study of the work of the Popular Culture Association, where it appears that the important thing is the study- ing of anything that relates to the culture, past, present or future, that is, doing anything great or small or to the appropriation of those elements by individual or mass consumer culture, but in another sense nothing, because none of the major theoretical issues are ever discussed. The study of popular culture becomes an exercise in intellectual slumming: academics may come out of their closets and declare that hockey or baseball or street life or jazz or War or the occult or Mark Twain or even J.G. Ballard can be dabbed around with by Hollywood. This is anything but a major works or judgements or political analysis - popular culture is fun: let's turn the whole world into an industry of Disneyland of the literary imagination.

But the equation of the Association's work and publications should be taken a little more seriously than what the above indicates. After all, not only has the CPA published occasional pieces on Canadian culture, "so the" Journal of Popular Culture, but it has also commenced publication of the Journal of Canadian Popular Culture. But the reader may also attempt to gain an ideological perspective on the culture of Canadians which should not be taken lightly.

The working assumption of the CPA's work in eclecticism: essays on hockey, or film, or Jackie Winter, or on the inauspiciousness of the ballad in W.H. Auden's poetry sit side-by-side, as merely they should. But the CPA's is a genuine and very useful project which establishes an intervention in Canadaian research and which makes a serious contribution to the study of Canadian culture and which may well be neglected, until we consider the kind of social, scientific, and aesthetic differences which lead us to put culture into any context. It is a super-mutant version of what culture is about, and of technological or political connections are unimportant. The CPA is little more than an archive: it offers me nothing that I cannot normally get in a library, or a shopping mall. It does nothing except record what appears to be there; it has no opinion, no connectedness, no self-reflection, no inherent worth; it is a boring, worthless book. And yet, of any sense of choice.

The CPA has not chosen to discuss other journals which deal with popular culture, as if those journals were in a sense quartering its pitch. This is particularly disas- trous when viewing Canadian culture, because the CPA has taken the subject of its own culture as a subject, and in this way, it is devoid of any sense of choice.

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