



Horizon Canada: The New Way to Discover Canada

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On seeing some of the advance and post-publication publicity for *Horizon Canada* and—more so—when I acquired the first issue (with which issue 2 came 'free'), I had wanted to write about this part-work. But even had I not been so motivated, I would have been when some of the information about its funding became clear.

The two stories I have seen (both in the *Toronto Star*: Don Braid, 'Publishers Clashing at Their Peril', March 16, 1985, p.B5 and Beverly Slopen, "'Encyclopedia Wars" on the Horizon', March 24, 1985, p.B7) bring out information about *Horizon Canada* that relates to the claim made in its publicity that its 120 issues cumulatively make up an *encyclopedia* of 3,360 pages (with over 4,000 photographs, maps and illustrations). One critic (quoted by Braid) says that it will have 'only 472 articles by 350 writers'. In the publicity's claim there is a clash with already announced *Canadian Encyclopedia* (three volumes, 8,000 articles, 5,000 contributors) from Hurtig Publishers Ltd., the English edition of which is to be published in the fall of 1985. In 1980 the *latter* project received \$4 million from the Alberta government; Hurtig raised a further \$7.5 million (Braid) or \$7.8 million (Slopen) himself, with no federal funding (except for the French translation to appear from Stanke Publishing, Montréal, in 1987). In contrast, *Horizon Canada* received \$4.2 million (Braid) or \$4.6 million (Slopen) from Serge Joyal, Secretary of State in the Trudeau government, early in 1984. The total budget is 'about \$11 million including \$1 million spent on advertising' (Slopen). I'll write that again: the 120 issues of *Horizon Canada* have received *over four million dollars* in federal funding (and raised some further \$7 million) for a magazine which is selling (according to Michael MacDonald, co-chairman of its Board of Trustees) over 200,000 copies of the English language edition alone ('...in French, the sales are double the projections of the rest.'). The magazine is produced by Transmo Publishers and distributed by Maclean Hunter (efficiently; I found my own copies in a *small* IGA supermarket on College Street in Toronto.)

Before I briefly review the contents thus far (issues 1 through 4) I just want to add a further hinge or two to this *Horizontate*. According to the inside front cover *Horizon Canada* is 'published by the Centre for the Study of Teaching Canada Inc., a non-profit organization devoted to promoting and publishing research on Canada'. Its chairman is Benoît Robert, Université Laval, Québec (the co-chairman, Michael MacDonald, is at Mount Allison University, New Brunswick). Since 1970 the federal Secretary of State has been funding the Canada Studies Foundation ('incorporated in 1970 as an in-

dependent, non-profit organization...' according to its Fall 1982 report). This Foundation has two locations and two names; for its Ontario Institute for Studies in Education Toronto address it is known as the Canada Studies Foundation/La fondation d'études du Canada, but for its Université Laval, Québec, address it is known as Le Centre d'études en enseignement du Canada/The Centre for Studies of Teaching of Canada. But that squeak is rather minor if we return to the cash-nexus more generally and think, briefly, just what *over four million dollars* from federal funds might have done across Canada in, say, \$10 to \$15,000 amounts? Might have done, for example, for *HERizons: women's news magazine* (Winnipeg) or for *INCITE* (Toronto). Two final acerbic queries: most funding for periodical publications requires 'demonstration-effects'—i.e. successful demonstration of survival for three issues (which of course means that the contents can be reviewed and the appropriateness of the content assessed). Press reports indicate funding for *Horizon Canada* in 'early' 1984. Secondly, it looks to me as if the copies were printed up and distribution intended for a much earlier date than finally proved possible—issues 1 through 4 are copyrighted 1984 and have as their legal deposit date 'CAN OCT 84'. So, for me, all of this does indeed offer new ways 'to discover Canada'.

Alas, I wish I could say as much about the contents. They remind me of a vulgar comment by a militant Chartist on the flood of state funded historical, geographical and cultural materials intended to 'force civilization downwards' in 1830s England: 'Quaint facts to f**k up your mind'. Telling us 'You'll never see Canada the same way again.' (it is generally rather heavily Althusserian in its interpellation practices!) one enclosure with issue 1 asks:

DID YOU KNOW...

- That it was a murderer's son who established the first white settlement in Newfoundland?

and adds a further nine examples of such meretricious rhetoric. The fold out poster (itself a little gem, opening with the possessive-collective 'How much does your family really know about Canada?' and giving enough Disneyland iconography to keep poor old Roland at work for a week) asks:

Did you know that...

...among the tens of thousands of people who set out prospecting for gold in the Klondike at the end of the 19th century, only a handful became millionaires?

and adds a further eleven quaint questions.

But this is, of course, 'only' publicity, only marketing, only signalling the significance of the commodity. Each issue has four articles, plus (inside the back cover) a 'Discoveries and Inventions' item and (outside the back cover) a 'Masterpiece' of Canadian painting: the former has celebrated Canadianicity via insulin, standard time zones, snowmobiles (Skidoos) and kerosene. The back covers have been supplemented by articles on The Group of Seven (issue 2) and the painters of the Rockies (issue 4). The latter hap-

pily glosses an alliance of 'commerce' and 'Art' in the CP Railway's provision of free travel passes and commissions to painters, graphic designers and photographers to 'promote' the Rockies.

It is this mixture of quaintness and innocence which in the end produces more than sardonic disquiet (given the funding levels and the existing extent of sales); it produces an anger about the marginalization (at best) and pervasive silencing *established* by this 'voice' of history (his-story almost completely in text and image for the first four issues, aside from an article on Emma Albini, opera singer, in issue 4). There is a tone here which in its pleasantries and drooleries, quirks and 'amusing' asides, is incessantly didactic but conceals its own teaching (and authority) in those persisting tautologies of the petty-bourgeoisie admirably identified as *myth* by Barthes (*Mythologies*, Paris, 1957). Here, in all their 'appealing' human-ness are 'the facts', whether about 'The Genius of Baddeck' (Alexander Graham Bell, issue 1), 'Canada at Bat' (baseball, issue 3) or 'Furs and Rivalries' (issue 4). It would be less than I am arguing—although important to indicate—if I were simply to illustrate how the magazine's quaintness and innocence erases any discussion of social differences, either by 'simple' silences (class, gender, ethnicity) or by blandness: the native peoples are either archeologized or anthropologized ('Time Before Time' in issue 1) or absorbed into a curious 'partnership' (issues 2, 3 and 4). Child labour is depicted as a 'ghastly side effect' of something called the 'Industrial Revolution in Canada' (issue 3; this article concludes, describing 1918 or so: 'With most children now in school instead of the factory, one of the worst excesses of Canada's Industrial

Revolution was over.'). Or, again, a charming little vignette—under the classification 'Social Life'—'Red Coats in the West', about how 'The RCMP made the Canadian West a peaceable frontier for settlers and Indians in the years following Confederation' (issue 2), blithely recounts the 'social service support' role of the Mounted Police between Batoche (1885) and 'the tragic confrontation in the streets of Winnipeg during the General Strike of 1919'. (But then the author of this *fabula rasa* is the RCMP staff historian.)

So that could and, in my view, *should* be argued (the product is, after all, heavily sold as 'educational' and oriented to school projects), but I want to finish differently. What is mythic about this history is central to its petty-bourgeois voice: it is the discourse of facticity (garlanded, as I wish to repeat again, with quaintness and charm). It produces, and is designed to produce, a tautological closure. Today, children, 'things' are better; this, that, *then* was 'The Past'—full of Heroes and Icons (some of them a little fearful, just to remind readers about Progress); today 'we' are different. Difference (mostly lacking anyway) is not a kind of complexity—simply beyond the reach of innocence and light-artery—it is what produces historical experience, a sense of not simply divergent, nor yet only contradictory, but antagonistic understandings of who we are and how we came to be, to live, to speak, as we do. This magazine is 'at one with' the Canadian Studies Foundation in arguing (but implicitly) its tautological closures around a pre-concerted agenda, a known 'Canada' that produces certain effects—its size, the pattern of its 'settlement'. A history which is not simply powerless (lacking in any tracing of power relations, and worthless in helping us to understand today and tomorrow) but, in the end, people-less. It is, like all myth, frozen (and what, to be sure, could more securely echo back that standard Great White North icon that stands in, again and again, for the Canadas), and, essentially, there... once upon a time.

So I do not believe with this (and so much else: the provincial and federal documents, maps, imagery are all from the same tapestry) that it is a question of balance (facts missed here, evidence lacking there) or even, in any usual sense, bias: it is the quality of understanding produced, made possible, encouraged. Stanley Ryerson, through this format, would be empowered and silenced simultaneously. It is about confirming a certain repertoire of identifications which, as is true of all petty bourgeois myths, allows a simultaneous smug satisfaction at *not* being there (then, one of those) *and* being what one is. In that sense (not least for the \$4 million federal investment, which I suspect has more than a little to do with a certain 'opening to' a popularization of the history of one version of New France-Québec) it is *impressive*, but I am thinking as I write of the press-gang that identified 'volunteers' for the Navy by forcing a shilling into their hands; 'taking' the shilling they became sailors. Most identifications work like that. These, here, need to be understood both in terms of who they leave out and how the narrow resulting history is accomplished. There's too much below and beyond this horizon.

Philip Corrigan

*Think,
briefly, just
what over
four million
dollars from
federal funds
might have
done across
Canada in,
say, \$10 to
\$15,000
amounts*