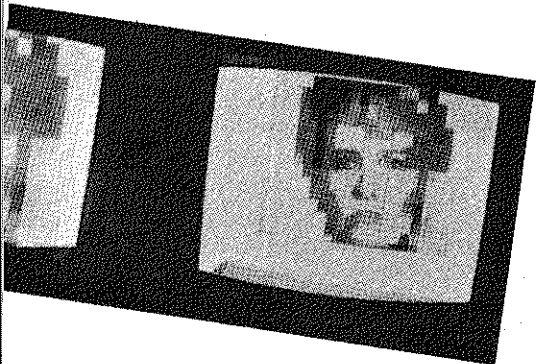
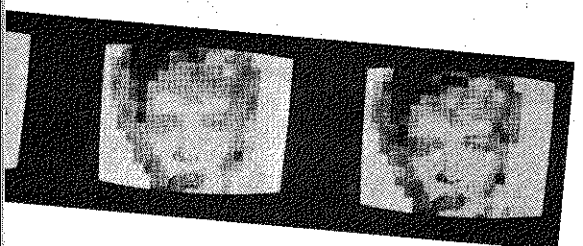
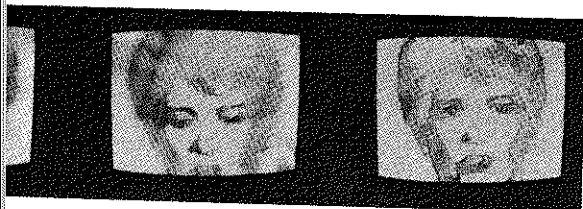
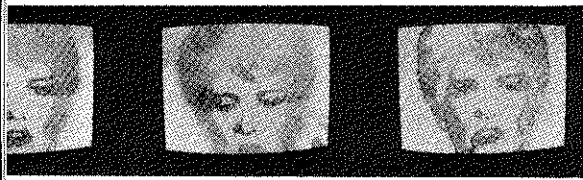
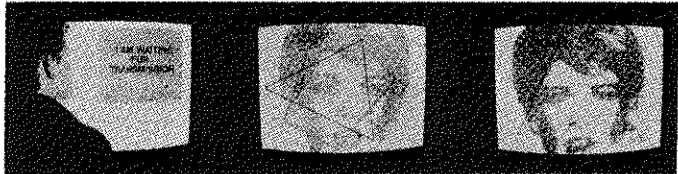


Closed Circuits: The Sellout of Canadian TV.By Herschel Hardin
Douglas and MacIntyre, 1985**Jolts: The T.V. Wasteland and the Canadian Oasis**By Morris Wolfe
James Lorimer, 1985

"The CBC is writing the autobiography of Canada. It's important that it be well written."
Morris Wolfe

"It was best not to risk anything."
Herschel Hardin

There is something unseizably complacent about the Canadian soul. Indeed, it is less an uncertain sense of self than an unacknowledged sense of complacency that informs Canadian identity.



Hardin's *Closed Circuits* confronts this situation. The book takes us through a nightmare of complacency: the complacency of our entire broadcasting system but supremely, inescapably, the complacency of the Canadian Radio-Television Commission (the CRTC), that self-appointed guardian angel of the Canadian Broadcasting Act.

Hardin's book is not complacent. It is angry. As founding president of the Association for Public Broadcasting in British Columbia (APBBC) and as general manager of Capital Cable Co-operative, he has spent the last fifteen years not only as a media critic but as a participant. *Closed Circuits* documents the failure of the CRTC, since its inception in 1968 to the present day, to insure that Canadian broadcasting might be at least basically Canadian.

Set up at enormous cost to the tax-payer yet productive of nothing, the CRTC has been a regulatory body that has been too pusillanimous to regulate. Except for holding firm to its decision in 1970 that 30% of all music on Canadian radio should be Canadian -- thus ultimately allowing Canadian rock stars like Corey Hart and Bryan Adams to develop and, if they choose, to remain in Canada -- the CRTC has bungled every regulatory decision that it has been confronted with, from the establishment of our privately owned networks like Global Television and CTV, throughout the cable hearings to the bringing of Pay-TV. Hardin is particularly angry because as a believer in public broadcasting, at each stage of these proceedings, alternate models were offered to the CRTC

and were refused -- refused in favour of maintaining federal authority and of making a buck rather than establishing a meaningful broadcasting system.

The story is so well-known that it is boring to reiterate. Although mandated to *regulate* the private sector, the CRTC has always played into its hands. Indeed, Hardin cites a number of cases where Commissioners have left the CRTC and gone to work in the private sector. If the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is Canada's national disappointment, The Canadian Radio-Television Commission is Canada's national shame.

At the same time, there is something unhelpful about Hardin's account of all these inequities. Whether dealing with the realm of broadcasting, of journalism, or of the Commission itself, Hardin's attacks are all directed at the evil, corrupt, and hypocritical people involved in these activities rather than at the institutional structures that corrupt them or, at least, render their nobler gestures ineffectual. Also, as a British Columbian, Hardin can with reason cast the blame on the myopic centralist thinking of Ottawa. Throughout the '70s, the federal Liberals were so preoccupied with the separatist factions within Quebec that they would not even consider creative, public-spirited provincial applications, such as those put forward at different times both by Saskatchewan and by British Columbia.

What we need if we are going to change things is an analysis of how that centralist thinking operates as a system of control within the federal economy. We are not helped by a list of all the "stupid" people and of the terrible things that they have done. We have to understand more completely how the Treasury board, through its complex system of "enveloping," maintains a strangle-hold over whatever any other government department might want to initiate. For Hardin to fill his book with accusations is, finally, to empty it of politics.

For instance, take the case of Moses Znaimer and of CITY TV--"the little station that didn't," as Hardin refers to it. Znaimer began with one plan for his station and ended up with another. Setting out to challenge the "mediocrats" in Ottawa, he ended up in collusion with them. Hardin tells this story totally in terms of Znaimer's

demonstrable hypocrisy. Yet there is another story here that would be less personalist in its thrust and more political in its analysis. It would situate the station within the political and economic systems of power that operate between the city and the province, between the province and the nation, and between what often *feels* like private initiative and public restraint. It would *analyse* and lead to *understanding*, not just accuse everyone for what has not been done.

Nevertheless, in spite of its accusational tone, Hardin's book describes a situation that could have developed differently -- a situation that would have given more power to the provinces and that would have created a public broadcasting system independent of the futility of advertisements. The system we now have is one almost totally dependant on merchandising -- a situation, approved, of course, by the Treasury Board! In such a situation, programming ceases to matter as a broadcasting priority. It simply becomes (to paraphrase Roy Thompson) the stuff you put between ads. Corporate stupidity in the public sector becomes a necessity to allow this situation to continue. Grey matter is not encouraged to intervene within this grey area. To alter this collective stupidity, one would have to alter the priorities of the whole of Canada.

One would have to posit values other than the values of late capitalism, other than the short term profits to be gained from merchandising. But this cannot be done, certainly not now, simply within the broadcasting system. When even our educational systems marginalize our own achievements, it is naive to think that the battle for a national broadcasting system would be easy to win. Had there been more courage and foresight within the public sector in Ottawa, had there been more grey matter, there might have been a different scenario. But in the '80s, with the short-sighted fiscal priorities of the Conservative Party in place, any effective changes, whether in education or in broadcasting, will have to involve radical changes within the country as a whole.

Is there a political party in this country that would present these changes as a priority within any election campaign? Would it be elected if it did? I too am angered and sickened by what has happened to our broadcasting system, with what I can hear happening minute by minute to CBC FM. But raving at individuals is not going to change anything. Concerned Canadians will have to work on consciousness-raising sessions for enough of our population to make education and culture a political issue at the national level. Working within education, I am not without hope. But there is still an extraordinary amount of work that needs to be done to overcome the self-ignorance and its attendant complacency that infects the national spirit.

In the struggle that is always before us, Hardin's book will help--through the documentation that it contains and through the record of noble battles fought and lost. So might *Jolts*. A very different work from *Closed Circuits*, *Jolts* actually values the Canadian achievement in television, whatever the problems, compared to the "wasteland" of the United States.

More anecdotal than analytical, Wolfe takes us through a variety of Canadian television programs, largely produced by the CBC, and speculates about the values they contain that he feels are positively Canadian. Citing past work like Margaret Atwood's *Survival*, Herschel Hardin's earlier work, *A Nation Unaware*, Edgar Friedenberg's *Deference to Authority*, and June Callwood's *Portrait of Canada*, Wolfe situates himself within that great tradition of Canadian nationalists who celebrate Canada's cultural achievement and/or lament the character traits that can be found within the traces of our culture which have been made available to us.

Wolfe begins by regretting the impoverished state of television criticism, which I think does an injustice to Michael Arlen in New York and to Joyce Nelson in Toronto -- though it is true that these writers work more on the theoretical level than on the program-by-program descriptive level that Wolfe himself adopts. Wolfe's own theoretical contribution, however, to the discourse about television resides in his having invented the concept of jpm's -- jolts-per-minute.

Throughout his book, Wolfe claims that there are generally more jpm's in American shows than in Canadian ones -- an interesting concept that allows him to relate the pacing of television programs to the energy with which they are tied to their advertising strategies. And if we notice nowadays that films made with the help of the Broadcasting Fund of Telefilm Canada have more jpm's than Canadian films had previously, then we must join in Herschel Hardin's howl against yet another federal institution, Telefilm Canada, that is putting the concept of profits over any concept of culture.

Wolfe, of course, doesn't howl at all. His is a "sensible" book. It is even a light-hearted book. If, finally, we might feel that in its casualness, its informality, it is part of the national complacency, it is also complaisant. It is fun to read as it must have been fun to write -- sitting home a lot and watching television with his children, being pleased with much of what he finds within those programs that he feels are distinctly Canadian.

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Take Two: A Tribute to Film in Canada

Edited by Seth Feldman
Toronto, Irwin Publishing, 1984

Every few months a new film book that focuses on a particular national cinema appears in the bookstores. All of these books, whether written by socialists, cultural nationalists, or bureaucrats, aim to define and affirm the uniqueness of a given nation's cinema. They are written to defend against the imperialist flood of US culture that swamps most western and Third World nations. *Take Two* is such a book.

A collection of essays edited by Seth Feldman, *Take Two* provides several good answers to the question of what is an authentic Canadian or Quebec film. Unfortunately, it doesn't dwell much on whether that question is the most useful one to ask. Rather it sets out to prove that good films are made in Canada -- and succeeds. As its subtitle suggests, the book was motivated as much by public relations as by serious scholarship. Published to coincide with Toronto's 1984 Festival of Festivals, the book was designed to complement the international focus of the festival with the best in Canadian and Québec cinema.



The book doesn't shy away from dredging up some of the past fiascos and dark episodes -- the red scares at the NFB, the tax shelter rip-offs, and the god-awful dreck beneath contempt (let alone analysis). But the book is primarily a leap to the defence of Canadian cinema and as such it valorizes the entire output of some filmmakers in the name of Canadian creativity. In the process it settles into the conventions of auteurism and consequently lays the blame for most of the fiascos at the feet of the state -- a state in turns timid, censorious, short-sighted, and miserly. Polarizing the discussion between individual creativity and insensitive institutions in this way tends to close down the distinctions that should be made among films