

2009-2010 ATKINSON SERIES:

Northern Lights: Keeping Canadian Culture Ablaze

Canadian film scene still waiting for happy ending

In an old arena in Toronto's west end, a hockey player hauls off and punches his opponent in the jaw, knocking him down. The victim sprawls dramatically across the ice and struggles to rise.

This isn't a real fight and it isn't a real hockey game. The action at the Weston Arena is being staged for a movie entitled *Score: A Hockey Musical* and the battling players are surrounded by filmmaking paraphernalia and a full production crew.

Sporting knee-high snowmobile boots to keep the cold from rising up through his feet, director and producer Michael McGowan follows the action on a monitor.

More than four million Canadians watched Game 6 of the Stanley Cup finals in June. When it opens in cinemas across Canada Oct. 22 in the wake of its gala premiere at the Toronto International Film Festival earlier this month, *Score* will be lucky if it reaches a few hundred thousand viewers. A Canadian movie-house audience of a million would make it one of the most successful English Canadian movies of all time.

When asked about his ambitions for *Score*, the 44-year-old McGowan replies, "World domination. I say it facetiously but I'd love this to be a global success, a film they talk about through the ages..."

"Does it feel like the right time for a hockey musical? It does."

Welcome to the new Canadian cinema, where a young director producing an unabashedly Canadian film with a determinedly populist slant is ready to take on both Canada and the world. If he

succeeds, it will be nothing short of a miracle: the story of the Canadian movie industry is a long litany of insurmountable obstacles and repeated failures. Will this finally be the one that breaks the curse?

The all-but-impossible challenge of finding mass audiences for Canadian films stands as the starkest example of how difficult it is to create a Canadian popular culture in the shadow of the United States.

Currently, English Canadians spend less than one per cent of their movie money on

Canadian movies. Although most domestic screens are now owned by a Canadian company, Cineplex Entertainment, exhibitors choose the movies that will fill seats. With multi-million marketing budgets and global celebrities at its disposal, Hollywood rules Canadian hearts just as completely as it does American ones.

A decade ago, Ottawa got tired of the math. Telefilm, which ponies up almost half the budget of any major Canadian film, seldom gets its "investment" back. The Liberal



At Toronto's Weston Arena, director Michael McGowan and actor Noah Reid work on a scene from *Score: A Hockey Musical*.

government of the day decided it could demand better results.

It set five per cent of Canadian box office as a target, a number that would be achieved by blending Quebec's much healthier numbers with a mere two-per-cent target for English Canada. But that meant doubling English Canadian numbers — and it proved impossible.

Except for 2005-06, when Quebec produced the boffo family drama *C.R.A.Z.Y.*, the five-per-cent target has never been reached. In 2009, the overall figure was 3.3 per cent, with a mere 0.8 per cent in English Canada.

And many industry veterans believe the goal itself is wrong-headed.

"The five-per-cent box office is a mirage," declared outgoing Telefilm executive director Wayne Clarkson in an interview last December, arguing that the target should be retired. "The purpose was to make the policy measurable..."

"Cinema *d'auteur* is a wonderful thing, invitations to international festivals are a wonderful thing, but part of the problem in English Canada was that we were isolated from the audience."

With songs by the Barenaked Ladies, Marc Jordan and Olivia Newton-John and a feel-good story about an NHL hopeful who doesn't do violence, McGowan's *Score* is hardly isolated from Canadian audiences. In a nation known for the wry Denys Arcand's wry bourgeois comedies and the dark Atom Egoyan — if it is known for any filmmakers at all — McGowan is a different breed.

"When you are trying to make films in English Canada, you might as well start with the biggest market you can appeal to..." he says. "Better hockey than synchronized swimming."

When the five-per-cent policy was first launched, there was great fear Telefilm was abandoning quality in favour of quantity, and some still scoff at Telefilm's obsession with more populist films. But most agree there is no point trying to make mainstream romantic comedies or action flicks in Canada. The country lacks both the budgets for these movies and the stars.

"Nobody will pay 10 bucks to see two people they don't know kiss," says distributor Mark Slone, a senior vice-president at Alliance Films.

The idea inside and outside Telefilm is to

court Canadian audiences through accessible films with an indie flavour, quirky charmers like McGowan's previous film, *One Week*, or heart-stopping small movies such as Sarah Polley's *Away From Her*.

"It's populist but it's not the standard studio fare," says Stephanie Azam, who oversees English-language feature film at Telefilm, of *Score*. "We are really good at combining artistically worthy and commercial in Canada."

Optimists in English Canada talk about a new spirit of co-operation borrowed from Quebec, where a small, chummy industry greatly benefits from its geographic concentration in Montreal. The English-language industry used to routinely denounce half-hearted distributors who signed deals so that producers could get Telefilm funding but then didn't release the movies theatrically, or exhibitors who wouldn't make space for Canadian movies on their screens. Today, there is more talk of teamwork.

"It was a very adversarial system," Slone says. "Everybody pointed fingers at each other when it flopped. We have told Telefilm we will only go ahead with films where everyone is marching in the same direction."

One recent example is *Gunless*, the Paul Gross comic Western which benefited from \$1 million in marketing by Alliance and was launched on 150 Canadian screens in late April. After hearing Cineplex executive vice-president Michael Kennedy complain about people phoning him out of the blue and asking him to show Canadian movies he had never heard of, Slone made sure Kennedy visited the set, where Gross was creating the role of an American gunslinger in a peaceable Canadian town.

The reviews were tepid, the weather in Toronto on opening weekend was distractingly gorgeous, and the box office was disappointing, but Cineplex still kept it on 50 screens going into its third weekend, says *Gunless* co-producer Niv Fichman. "They are rooting for us. It got all the chances."

Unfortunately, rooting was not enough, and the movie had all but vanished from cinemas by its fourth weekend. Despite the presence of gorgeous Okanagan scenery and Gross, about the closest Canada gets to a boffo movie star, the movie seemed to epitomize Canadian film's odd removal from audiences, its inability to create plausible

icons of popular culture that seize hold of the imagination.

For the \$4 million Telefilm invested, *Gunless* reached less than 70,000 Canadians at movie houses, hardly an efficient cultural spend when compared to the 500,000 a Canadian television show could easily reach with each \$1.5-million episode.

Where *Gunless* might eventually build its numbers is on TV: the CBC is a co-producer — but it has yet to commit to airing the movie.

Effective television exposure is often the missing link in Canadian film. All other industrial nations other than the United States heavily subsidize domestic movie-making (and 43 of the 52 states offer tax credits for film production), but those that do it more successfully, such as France or the United Kingdom, require that their broadcasters invest in films and air them.

"There is a complete and total partnership between film and TV [in Europe]," says Piers Handling, CEO of the Toronto International Film Festival. "CBC, CTV and Global are not partners in Canadian film."

Recently, CBC did sign a deal with Telefilm to get broadcast rights to Canadian films earlier in the game in exchange for promoting the theatrical release with TV ads. The broadcaster thus hopes to nab three or four new Canadian films a year, rather than waiting several years before it gets rights. But it is not looking for art-house fare.

"We're actually looking for movies that will fit into our Sunday night lineup strategy, mainly family-oriented..." says Kirstine Stewart, interim executive vice-president, CBC English Services.

New technology may also hold some promise. Digital projection will ultimately free distributors from the heavy costs of making multiple celluloid prints. (For the next few years, they will be shouldering part of the capital costs of the new equipment instead.) Also, the digital files will give exhibitors much more flexibility in scheduling screens because they will no longer be limited by the number of prints available. Both those advantages may give smaller-budget movies a leg up.

You can also distribute films more cheaply online for home viewing. The National Film Board has digitized its collection and offers Canadians hundreds of full-length documentaries and animated shorts on its website for free.

Any notion Canadian films might have a powerful Internet afterlife, however, would first have to come to terms with the logistics of charging viewers, clearing digital rights and not cannibalizing the audiences from other platforms. As an in-house producer, the NFB has a distinct advantage because it often fully controls the rights to its films, although it has also siphoned money off other budgets to clear rights it doesn't hold, such as those for music used in documentaries. It has decided to allow streaming but not downloading from the site, and reports that to date this has not eaten into its DVD sales.

Given those possibilities, Telefilm increasingly wonders if the very notion of a box-office goal is out of date. "I don't care how you watch it," says Clarkson. "I draw the line at cellphones, but video on demand, DVD, airplanes, trains — who cares? What I care is that Canadians are getting access."

But Clarkson suspects the Internet will prove another broken promise in a string of distribution disappointments from cable to

specialty and pay TV.

The simple solution for Canadian film is obvious — obvious but politically all but impossible. If backed by increased production and significant marketing budgets, screen quotas for Canadian film would build audiences. But they might also trigger a trade war with the United States, despite the cultural exemption in the free trade deal. Both Mexico and South Korea have been forced to lower cinema quotas to sign trade deals with the U.S.

A more politically realistic idea, at least in terms of international relations if not domestic politics, would be a small tax on every movie admission that would then be used to fund more Canadian film. A 75-cent levy on every movie ticket in Canada, for example, could instantly double Telefilm's \$90-million feature film fund.

This is the system used in France, a nation that can report an impressive domestic box-office share averaging 38 per cent in the past decade and that produces internationally

recognized films. It's an idea that cleverly piggybacks a domestic industry on the power of Hollywood.

Would consumers balk? Only if they saw the goal as unworthy. And to the extent Canadians think about it at all, Canadian film tends to have a bad reputation with audiences. Filmmakers agree that part of their problem is a psychic one: if they could just get a few solid hits, they would turn their image around.

Remember Baby Duck and CanLit? Now the cognoscenti sip a Niagara Riesling as they read Yann Martel.

"There is a certain pride in seeing Canada and Canadian scenery and a Canadian story," says Hussain Amarshi, whose Mongrel Media is distributing *Score* and hoping for that box office breakthrough. "That is something we have not mined..."

"Everybody wants a \$10-million Canadian film."

Australian filmmakers have strong hold on home audience

On a baking-hot roadside in South Australia, against a backdrop of the low, spreading mountains they call the Flinders Ranges, 15 people gather around a broken-down car.

One of them is actor David Lyons, who plays the car's driver. The rest include the director, the cameraman, the gaffer, the key grip and the boom operator, plus the special effects technician who will produce a great puff of steam off an engine that has supposedly overheated. They bustle and tinker while the actor stands under a white parasol held by an assistant and tries not to sweat.

It's a good day on the set of *Swerve*, a contemporary thriller with a noirish bent that takes place in the Australian outback. The sun is shining but a stiff breeze keeps the flies away and the heat just bearable without blowing up great clouds of dust.

The cast and crew of *Swerve* have previously survived temperatures as high as 50 on their first day of shooting and have witnessed a dust storm move in across the plain.

It can be a hard, hard business making movies in Australia: the heat, the flies, the dust — not to mention the stiff competition from Hollywood blockbusters.

"If we were able to drag Australia across the Pacific and stitch it on the U.S. we would be you," says Ross

Matthews, head of production investment at Screen Australia, the government agency that plays the same role as Telefilm Canada, advancing money to commercial film productions that seldom do well enough to pay it back. "We have the advantage of accent and distance."

They help: Australian film has a firmer place in Australian society than Canadian film does here, and a stronger hold internationally.

A popular image of America eclipses all Canadian versions of the New World, especially in the European imagination. Australia, on the other hand, has achieved iconic status, partly thanks to the sweep of its cinema.

"We know that country so well because of its cinema," observes Canadian film producer Niv Fichman. "The spirit of how Australia was formed is probably more ingrained in the public mind in Canada than how Canada was formed."

Fichman points to Baz Luhrmann's recent film entitled simply *Australia*: what Canadian filmmaker would dare?

Luhrmann's first success was his winsome 1992 movie, *Strictly Ballroom*, which helped earn Australia a boffo reputation for amiably offbeat, small budget films. In 1994, *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert*, the cult classic about drag queens in the outback, deftly combined a distinctive landscape with

a sassy contemporary tale — a feat Canadian directors might envy.

The Australian industry laments its low share of the national box office in comparison to that of Britain, but it does significantly better than Canada. With a population slightly smaller than English Canada's, Australia has averaged five per cent in the past decade compared to English Canada's usual one per cent, and it has had some notable successes recently, including the buddy comedy *Wog Boy 2: The Kings of Mykonos*, the crime drama and Sundance winner *Animal Kingdom*, and *Mao's Last Dancer* by veteran director Bruce Beresford.

Most weekends you can find an Australian movie in the country's cinemas: the musical *Bran Nue Dae*, a gleeful retort to grim depictions of aboriginal people that includes the show-stopping lyric, "There's nothing I would rather be/Than to be an aborigine," opened on 232 screens across Australia in January, a reach that would be rare for a Canadian film.

One of the significant differences between Canada and Australia is that the big American studios do not distribute solely their own products there, because they can also make money on Australian movies.

For example, 20th Century Fox recently released the Australian romantic drama *Matching Jack*, while Sony is distributing the contemporary Australian western *Red*

Hill both domestically and internationally, leading some in the industry to talk about an Australian “genre” revolution as the industry turns to the action flicks, comedies and romances that are the staples of popular cinema.

Our powerful images of Australia’s tough characters and harsh landscape are largely formed by historical dramas dating back to its cinematic golden age in the 1970s and 1980s — films including Peter Weir’s *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and Beresford’s *Breaker Morant* — or by Paul Hogan’s iconic *Crocodile Dundee*.

But rather like Canadians bored with a culture defined by *Anne of Green Gables* and *The Stone Angel*, Australian filmmakers have increasingly rejected an approach they have deemed out of touch or stereotypical. After the quirky comedies of the 1990s, a more gritty, more urban cinema has developed, ranging from small films such as *Three Blind Mice*, about three sailors’ ugly romp in Sydney the night before they ship out to Iraq, or bigger ones like *Little Fish*, in which Cate Blanchett plays a former heroin addict.

In turn, there is now a reaction against that realism and a feeling box office numbers will only be improved with more populist fare.

“Not all Australians are recovering drug addicts,” observes Helen Leake, producer on the thriller *Swerve*. It’s a \$4-million film in which the hero comes across a car accident that features a dead man, a suitcase full of money and a beautiful woman, still very much alive.

In Canada, received wisdom says there is no point competing with \$100-million American action movies, but Leake believes that smaller players should attempt genre pictures.

“People enjoy them and if they are done well they will have their own Canadian or Australian feel... that dryer sense, not so much in your face.” For Leake, the idea that there’s no contest with the Hollywood blockbuster “sells Canada short.”

“People like to see their own country on film.”



Bran Nue Dae, starring Geoffrey Rush, centre, is a comic and musical celebration of Aboriginal culture in Australia. It opened on 232 screens across Australia in January, a reach that would be rare for a Canadian film.

Is a national Canadian culture important? If so, what would it be?

It’s a sunny Sunday afternoon in Paris, and the streets of the Latin Quarter are teeming with life. People are strolling, shopping, lounging in cafés and queuing up around the block to see a new romantic comedy featuring two bankable French stars, Romain Duris and Vanessa Paradis.

By 5 p.m., the 5:15 showing of *L’Arnacoeur* is sold out and the disappointed stand outside the Odéon cinema discussing their options: a war movie about the round-up of Parisian Jews, an ethnic family story by renowned French playwright Yasmina Reza or one American film, *Shutter Island*.

Here are the French, doing what the French do: seeing their own films. Among the citizens of Western industrialized nations, they are unusually enthusiastic about this activity. Only Americans see more of their own movies.

Hollywood’s dominance of the world’s screens is so complete that many national cinemas have disappeared — if they ever existed at all. Yet the French still spend between 35 and 45 per cent of their movie money on French movies. English Canadians, by contrast, spend about one per cent.

That number has always offended my sense of fairness. Because they carry stories and symbols, cultural goods are not just another consumer product.

A movie has an importance that a watch or a coffee pot does not. Is there not some weakness, some heartache, some fatal invisibility in always watching ones that take place in a foreign country? Does this not matter?

The French think it matters a lot: their government regulates movie distribution and heavily subsidizes the national film industry, helping to produce those impressive box-office percentages.

Canada’s government is not as generous,

but operates on the same principle. Ottawa subsidizes the cultural industries with various loans, grants and tax credits, and requires both radio and TV broadcasters to offer specific percentages of Canadian content. Some of these measures have proved highly successful, others much less so, but without them there would be no Canadian popular culture.

If you ask cultural bureaucrats or film and television producers why we do this, the answer you usually get has become something of a cliché: we are telling Canadian stories to Canadians. I have spent more than 20 years as a Canadian cultural journalist always believing Canadian content was the first story I should be pursuing — daily journalism is nothing if not local — but as I have watched Hollywood’s hierarchy of celebrity tighten its hold on Canada’s newsrooms that pat answer has seemed increasingly insufficient.

“It reminds me of a barn door squeaking open, white people, on a farm,” agrees filmmaker Sarah Polley, who herself once played the lead role on the pastoral CBC series *Road to Avonlea*. “Being Canadian is an evolving thing, we have so many people here. “Telling Canadian stories to Canadians’ sounds like the way I am Canadian, white and middle-class, is for everybody.”

It is hard to find much philosophical support for cultural nationalism these days. In the universities, political thinkers are queasy about nationalism, an unease they would trace back to the Holocaust and follow forward to Bosnia.

Cultural thinkers, meanwhile, reject attempts to define, let alone mould, national identity as paternalistic and exclusionary. This leaves the stewards of cultural institutions and regulations without much intellectual grounding for their mandate.

Meanwhile, the reach of the Internet and the efficiency of digital technology are softening national boundaries in culture and communications and may erase them outright as they become the sole highway and only vehicle for all media. The digital age will recognize few of our regulations as a flood of foreign content rapidly becomes an ocean.

We need a new answer, some deeper and more inclusive reasoning for what critics simply dismiss as parochial protectionism, and we need it now. If we want a Canadian popular culture we will have to be nimble and inventive, but most of all passionate in our belief that culture matters and that we should produce some ourselves.

Does it? Should we? Why?

Let's start here: place matters. It has become fashionable to dismiss geography, with the argument that a nation of "netizens" will define themselves by interests rather than citizenship.

"Geography has become irrelevant," Douglas Coupland writes in his new biography of media guru Marshall McLuhan. "Our online phantom world has become the new us." On the ground, the reality is a bit different. Place does not merely determine the passport you carry or the elections in which you vote; it defines your economic opportunities and shapes the fabric of your daily life whether you are running along the Bow River Pathway in Calgary or waiting for a bus in Mississauga.

Many Canadians enthusiastically identify themselves as such – witness the reaction to the Vancouver Olympics – and still delight in discussions about differences between themselves and Americans.

"I am not sure I feel comfortable calling myself a nationalist," muses Polley, "but I do feel a sense of place is really important to me, as it is to all sorts of artists I respect. To have a sense of home – not that it's better than anybody else's – that matters."

Without resorting to facile jingoism or toxic nationalism, place and self-respect are linked. You like your place, you feel good about yourself.

"One theory is that national, regional and civic self-image are a kind of seamless extension of self-image," says British policy consultant Simon Anholt, whose national brands index links economic success to national reputation. "That would explain why people root for the home team right up

to when we watch a Hollywood apocalyptic movie, we root for the humans against the aliens. It would also follow that you gain self-esteem from place."

Anholt's index polls citizens in 20 countries asking what they think of 50 nations including themselves. Canadians, like most citizens of the G8, believe they live in the best country in the world, while foreigners rate this as the best governed country and home to the friendliest people.

They rank our culture only 14th, however, and Canadians share some of that uncertainty: in 2009 we ranked our own culture second after that of the United States, based on a series of questions about sports, heritage and contemporary culture.

"...it is taking Canada a bloody long time to fall apart."

COMMUNICATIONS SCHOLAR/
RICHARD COLLINS

Anholt points to Italy, where the combination of historic art, contemporary design, soccer and la dolce vita land the nation a top spot on the cultural index, as the best example of what culture does for a country. "It gives pleasure and pride to the populace," he says, "and a distinctive edge internationally."

Sports are an obvious way people build that pride of place – many Canadians who have never played hockey felt Olympic gold somehow reflected back on them.

But the joy of other forms of popular culture is that they offer more complex narratives than that of physical triumph, ones full of potential for multiple interpretations and rich ambiguities. You don't need to define what is Canadian to think that different Canadians might take particular delight in various cultural expressions created by their fellow citizens.

Brian Boyd, an English professor from New Zealand and author of *On the Origin of Stories: Evolution, Cognition, and Fiction* (2009), argues that fiction is an evolutionary adaptation that trains our brains in such strategically crucial concepts as recognizing

the motivations of others and understanding the possibility of our own or another's mistaken belief.

"Stories, whether true or false, appeal to our interest in others, but fiction can especially appeal by inventing events with an intensity and surprise fact rarely permits," Boyd writes. "Fiction fosters cooperation by engaging and attuning our social and moral emotions and values, and creativity by enticing us to think beyond the immediate..."

Although Boyd notes that stories are used to win attention for the storyteller and reinforce community values, his argument is not necessarily one for a national culture or for cultural subsidy – any Canadian parent can sing a song to her child; any Canadian storyteller can weave a tale for his friends. But it is a forceful reminder of popular culture's ability to awaken our imaginations, and of the power we attribute to those who create it.

I figure that filmmaker James Cameron, who happens to have been born in Kapuskasing, Ont., was the most successful storyteller of 2009-10 if we are to judge him in evolutionary terms: with *Avatar*, he got the attention of more than 300 million people and held it for more than 2 1/2 hours. Not coincidentally, he was also the most economically successful.

It would be pointless to dream of the day when a Canadian who had stayed in Canada achieved such a feat: Canada will never have a large enough home market to serve as a launching pad for global cinematic blockbusters. But neither Canadians nor any other people would want to simply hand over all professional storytelling to Hollywood.

Why? Because if place generates self-respect, so does culture. In his 2008 book *A Fair Country: Telling Truths About Canada*, the philosopher and novelist John Ralston Saul accuses Canadian elites of harbouring colonial attitudes, always looking over their shoulders to check what is being done in the mother country, or now the United States.

His is a damning and painfully perceptive account of the mindset of those Canadian media leaders whose claims to cosmopolitanism are merely cover for a lack of ingenuity at home. It's a phenomenon that manifests itself every year at the commercial broadcasters' "upfronts," the presentations of their new seasons to advertisers and the media.

At the CanWest upfront in June, for example, executive vice-president of content Barbara Williams trumpeted what shows she had just bought in L.A. and boasted of no less than 15 prime-time hours of simulcast American dramas. The commercial broadcasters' business model is based on simulcasting U.S. shows, but the idea that such coattail-riding is worth bragging about strikes me as sad.

Canadian governments have embraced the notion that cities and communities need to be creative but, to judge from their funding, they don't seem to have given much thought to who is going to do all this creating. Meanwhile, Ottawa's talk of a digital economy focuses on technology rather than content. If we want a creative economy, we had better start by figuring out how our creative industries are going to survive past next year.

On their blogs and their fan sites, young, wired Canadians show great confidence as potential creators. But if the only place for professional creation is abroad, the only acceptable references either generic or American, we will suffer a continuing brain drain as the new generation of so-called prosumers follow the natural talent flow southwards. More worryingly, those left behind will only be the wannabes, the might-have-beens, the losers.

If we can build the confidence and offer the opportunities that will keep them here, what kind of culture do we want them to create?

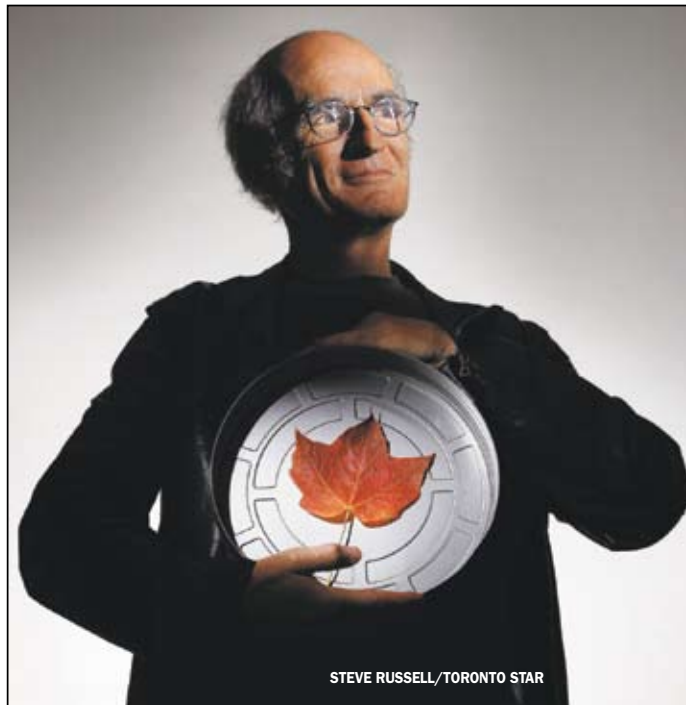
Not a national one, please, if a Canadian national culture is that tired thing fashioned by media types rabbiting on about a soul defined by shinny on the frozen pond or the ability to perform sex in a canoe.

These experiences are not touchstones for most Canadians — I can confess without regret that I have never attempted either. And neither sentiment nor nostalgia is going to nurture a successful culture in Canada: traditional justifications of Canadian content regulations, on the grounds it builds a national identity crucial to our survival as a country, are too dated to be useful.

While in Quebec, a homogenous francophone population concentrated in one province can be effectively addressed by

film and television as a single audience, the population of English Canada is too multi-faceted to be described as a nation. We are a multicultural country— and that is, after all, something of which we are immensely proud.

“There is no single way any more to represent Canadian identity,” says Marusya



National Film Board chair, Tom Perlmutter

Bociurkiw, a filmmaker and media scholar at Ryerson University. “God knows the CBC tries, but it fails. I think we have to give up trying . . . these are moribund discussions that evade what is interesting about Toronto or about Canada.” That’s why many Canadians no longer feel comfortable with the notion that the CBC should “contribute to [a] shared national consciousness and identity” as the broadcaster’s mandate states — which they see as naïve.

Bociurkiw is typical of contemporary communications scholars in questioning a direct link between popular culture and identity.

Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, authors of the 2009 book *Cosmopolitan Communications: Cultural Diversity in a Globalized World*, respond to anxieties about the Hollywood onslaught by questioning the idea that the media are a “hypodermic needle,” inoculating consumers with their values. Their book argues that family and peer groups probably have a greater and more lasting impact.

British scholar Richard Collins, author of *Culture, Communication and National Identity: The Case of Canadian Television* (1990), believes a matchup between geographic identity and national citizenship is not necessary to political stability. He notes that Canada’s anxiety about American popular culture is perpetual and yet, Quebec referendums notwithstanding, the confederation itself seems solid.

“From the 19th century, Anglo Canadians at least were mainly consuming American media, American magazines, American books,” he said in an interview. “If this has been the case for more than 100 years, it is taking Canada a bloody long time to fall apart.”

Or be culturally subsumed into the United States. With his research on North American values, Toronto pollster Michael Adams has concluded that Canadians, who would have overwhelmingly elected Al Gore and John Kerry if permitted to vote in the U.S. presidential elections of 2000 and 2004, are at no risk of mentally becoming American.

So we are not going to cease to exist because of a lack of Canadian culture. Still, all of us, not just cultural producers, are going to be more productive and fulfilled if we create popular culture here.

The question of what kind of culture remains, however, a thorny one for a country committed to multiculturalism and admired for its ability to successfully model the new post-nationalist nation state.

Bart Beaty and Rebecca Sullivan, communications professors at the University of Calgary and co-authors of *Canadian Television Today* (2006), argue that we have to get over our political anxiety about American culture and genuinely open ourselves to the world. They are highly critical, for example, of the long delay in finding a spot on the Canadian cable dial for Al Jazeera, the Arabic news network, and see a rich international mix as part of the solution.

“I am sympathetic to the argument we need Canadian content as long as there is a country called Canada,” said Beaty who wrote *Canadian Television Today* after the frustrating experience of testifying before

a Parliamentary committee on culture that simply would not listen to his argument. “We might define it differently than we did in the past — it might be a show about Vietnamese Canadians living in Edmonton — but we do need to talk about who we are and where we are.”

That sounds good, starting from a position of self-confidence rather than one of anxiety. Beaty was one of the first people I interviewed during my Atkinson Fellowship year. By spring I despaired of finding cultural executives ready to grasp the bull by the horns in the way he and Sullivan had — until I talked to Tom Perlmutter.

Perlmutter is chair of the National Film Board of Canada and the person who has reinvigorated that august institution by insisting the films in its vaults be made available to the world online. “Traditional notions of identity are static, like the mirror; we hold it up and here you are,” he says. “That’s not where we are. . . . Something very different is going on in Canada.”

How are we going to figure out what that is? How are we going to talk about it? Through culture, of course, Perlmutter argues. It is culture that can guide us through the thickets of identity and place in the global forest.

One day about a year ago, just as I was beginning my research, my son came home from kindergarten singing a song I did not recognize: “When I get older, I will be stronger. . . .” he sang, his five-year-old voice warbling a happy promise. By winter, “Waving Flag” was everywhere, and I’d learned it was a peace anthem written by a Somali refugee in Canada who was making a more desperate promise of redemption for himself and his homeland.

K’naan is heavily influenced by American hip hop and traditional Somali music; in both his songs and his public statements he has taken strong stands on Islamic culture and African politics. But he is also a citizen to whom Canada gave a home and a musician nurtured by the Canadian music industry.

I think this is a better place because of him and his music. “That’s a Canadian song,” I told my son the next time I heard him singing it. “The guy who wrote it lives here in Toronto.”

9 Myths about Canadian culture

1 **FICTION:** Canada is a small country and a small market.
FACT: Canada is the 14th largest economy in the world, and English Canada is home to an estimated 26 million people. The cultural firmament is full of examples — Danish film, Quebec TV — where smaller populations sustain local content. English Canada’s challenges have to do with the cultural and physical proximity of the U.S., and with the country’s geographic spread.

2 **FICTION:** Canadians just don’t want to watch Canadian TV shows.
FACT: If that were true, Canadians would be the only people in the industrialized world who preferred American shows to domestic shows of comparable quality. U.S. shows do consistently outrank Canadian shows in ratings, but they have significant advantages over Canadian shows. Simulcasting means American shows appear twice on the dial. Canadian shows tend to be relegated to times when fewer people are watching, and they usually offer half the number of episodes, making it more difficult to build audiences. Nonetheless, Canadian shows do score with audiences: CTV’s *Flashpoint*, the highest rated Canadian drama last season, drew an average of 1.5 million viewers.

3 **FICTION:** Canadian shows would get the ratings if they were any good.
FACT: After the U.S. and the U.K., Canada is one of the most significant exporters of TV programming in the world. Canadian shows regularly appear on U.S. specialty channels and European networks. CBC’s *Being Erica* is seen in 21 countries including Turkey, Poland and the U.S.

4 **FICTION:** They are shoving Cancon down our throats.
FACT: Canadian content regulations in radio and television have ensured there are Canadian choices that would not otherwise exist, but Canadians also have easy access to most American television, as well as all U.S. movies, music, books and magazines.

5 **FICTION:** Canadian movies are just bad.
FACT: How would you know? When have you ever seen one? It is estimated that Canadian films account for only 3 per cent of screen time in Canadian cinemas.

6 **FICTION:** The CBC is lavishly funded by the taxpayer...
FACT: At \$33 per citizen per year, the CBC is one of the worst funded public broadcasters in the industrialized world. Only the United States and New Zealand pay less per capita for public broadcasting. Routinely cut and seldom increased, the CBC’s parliamentary appropriation, in today’s dollars, is worth \$500 million less than it was in 1991.

7 **FICTION:** ...unlike the commercial broadcasters, who have to survive without any government money.
FACT: There is no such thing as a free market in Canadian broadcasting. The commercial broadcasters are protected from competing American signals by regulation and also receive government subsidies for their Canadian programming in the form of tax credits and grants provided to TV producers.

8 **FICTION:** You can’t regulate the Internet; the CRTC might as well close up shop.
FACT: It’s not just the censors in Beijing who are looking at a national government’s ability to exercise some control over the Internet. In the United States, the broadcast regulator is attempting to establish rules for net neutrality; the Australian government upholds obscenity laws it created for the Internet in 1999. The question for the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission (CRTC) is whether any kind of Canadian content regime on the Internet would be fair or effective.

9 **FICTION:** Canadian ownership is key to providing Canadian content.
FACT: The link between domestic ownership and domestic content is weak, depending more on producers’ business models than their patriotism. For a Canadian-owned broadcaster, it is easier to make money airing U.S. shows than producing Canadian ones. On the other hand, it is possible to make money on Canadian books and music, two areas where foreign companies do produce Canadian content.

Quebec TV is beloved by Quebecers



Dany Turcotte, left, host of *La petite séduction*, welcomes pop star Marjo to the Radio-Canada TV show that is a big hit in Quebec.

In a working quarry in Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague, Que., pop star Marjo is pressing the button on two tonnes of dynamite to explode 10,000 tonnes of rock from an ancient dolomite shelf.

That was how the spring season began on *La petite séduction*, a Radio-Canada TV show in which small francophone communities in Quebec, Ontario or New Brunswick attempt to win the hearts of television and music personalities. Part travelogue, part celebrity love-fest, the show is homey and hokey: the children of Saint-Louis-de-Gonzague also painted stones for Marjo, whose advance press had explained she liked rocks and nature.

Homey, hokey and a solid performer in the ratings, *La petite séduction* is guaranteed a spot somewhere in the top 30 shows in the francophone market every week it appears, and its season finale was the third most popular show that week after a pair of hockey matches.

It is also typical of the virtuous cycle of Quebec's popular culture, in which a well-established star system builds audiences

across media: the show is inspired by the 2003 Quebec movie *La grande séduction* (released in English as *Seducing Doctor Lewis*), about a fictional fishing village trying to snag itself a local doctor.

Petite séduction host Dany Turcotte is a comic well-known to Radio-Canada audiences because he also plays the role of "court jester" on the top-rated talk show in the province, *Tout le monde en parle*. His guests on *La petite séduction* include a parade of Quebec comics, actors and musicians, all busy solidifying their fan bases.

In marked contrast to English Canada, Quebec is a textbook case of national identity and popular culture mutually reinforcing each other.

"They have created their own TV universe," notes Arnie Gelbart, president of the bilingual Montreal film and TV production company Galafilm. "Both the commercial (TV) audience and the CBC audience prefer local content and local actors. It is self-reinforcing... It's a cocoon, and it's 180 degrees different from English Canada."

In English Canada, American hits aired by commercial broadcasters, such as *Survivor*, *Grey's Anatomy* and *Criminal Minds*, rule the ratings.

In francophone Canada, that list is dominated by Quebec game shows, talk shows, reality contests, soap operas and dramas, some of them created by Radio-Canada but the bulk of them produced by the commercial broadcaster TVA.

A hit such as *Le Banquier*, TVA's adaptation of *Deal or No Deal*, can draw audiences as big as 1.5 million in a market of seven million francophone Canadians, six million of whom live in Quebec. That would be like drawing five million viewers in English Canada, a feat that no game show, Canadian or American, would ever achieve.

Of course, Quebec is protected from Hollywood's influence by the language barrier, but many European TV schedules, which have increasingly featured dubbed American content in prime time since the introduction of new commercial channels in the 1990s, are put to shame by Quebec's originality. There is something more at play

here than language.

“People love TV here,” says Eric Salvail, host and producer of the improv comedy show *Dieu Merci!*. “They watch a lot and they feel privileged to watch their own shows. It’s as if that’s sufficient for them; they don’t need to go elsewhere.”

The track record in film is not as impressive, but Quebec can still boast that every year at least 10 per cent of Quebec box office is spent on Quebec films, an achievement 10 times that of English Canada’s sad showing. In a good year, that number can climb into the high teens.

At 18.5 per cent, 2009 was a very good year, driven by the father-son police caper *De père en flic* (*Father and Guns*), the most successful French-Canadian film ever made. It took in \$10.5 million at the box office, entertaining an estimated 1.2 million Quebecers.

Although Quebec has delighted in its own soaps since the arrival of TV in Canada, this vigorous local ecosystem is relatively new. The top-rated shows in Quebec in the early 1980s included French-language versions of *Little House on the Prairie*, *CHiPs*, *Quincy M.E.* and *The Thorn Birds*.

“The 20 most watched programs in Quebec were dubbed versions, *Dallas* or whatever,” says Denise Robert, the powerful producer behind *De père en flic*, *Mambo italiano* and the films of Denys Arcand. “Slowly we built our own star system and a good production industry.”

The turning point arrived in the late 1980s

and early 1990s when first the hockey drama, *Lance et compte* (*He Shoots, He Scores*), and then the sketch comedy show *La petite vie*, both of them broadcast on Radio-Canada, garnered huge ratings — the latter could draw two-thirds of Quebecers to their TV sets.

Commercial producers woke up and smelled the money. By the late 1990s, Quebecers had been weaned off dubbed American shows, while in film the achievement of *Les Boys*, which made \$6 million at the box office in 1997, proved they were just as receptive to their own movies.

“This didn’t happen overnight,” stresses Gelbart, who like many Quebec film and television producers points to a more generous funding system in Quebec as part of the explanation. SODEC, Quebec’s cultural industry investment fund, spends \$35 million each year on feature film and television, more than Telefilm’s annual investment in the province’s movie industry.

In comparison, the Ontario Media Development Corporation grants \$4 million to feature film and has no comparable fund for TV.

Quebec also benefits greatly from the geographic concentration of both its industry — “You can get \$6 million (in financing) without taking a cab in Montreal,” remarks former Telefilm executive director Wayne Clarkson — and its audience.

“Quebec is much more homogenous, whereas English Canada is several Canadas,”

says Patrick Roy, president of Alliance Vivafilm. The Quebec distributor saw that clearly when he released the hugely successful *Bon Cop, Bad Cop*, about the rivalry between a Toronto police officer and his Montreal counterpart, into the English-language market. “It did well in big centres with a bilingual audience, but we realized it was not a film that could go anywhere. It was a reality that spoke to Ontario and Quebec but couldn’t go to B.C.”

Like many of Quebec’s homegrown comedies, it was too specific to travel well: the movie’s international release was largely limited to film festivals and DVDs. Quebec cineastes do envy their Anglophone counterparts’ ability to drum up some international sales with their English-language product.

Still, Roy feels films have to be specific rather than generic to succeed. And if Quebec producers can offer a gentle word of advice for their Anglophone counterparts, it is one about mindset.

You can’t beat Hollywood, they say, but you can seduce your own audience by doing your own thing.

“In English Canada I always hear it won’t work,” remarks Robert. “Here we set our minds to winning.”

Quebec must-see TV

Quebecers love their own TV. The following are examples of the more popular shows in the francophone market:

Tout le monde en parle. Radio Canada’s Sunday night talk show is consistently one of the top two or three shows in Quebec and makes CBC’s *The Hour* look staid. Based on the French show of the same name, it assembles a mixed bag of guests from politics, entertainment and sports, sets them up as teams, and encourages them to humorously debate

current events while also discussing their personal lives.

Yamaska. TVA’s new prime-time soap set in present-day Granby, Que., takes the small-town drama and strips it of the folklore as it follows three generations of three families. They were brought together when their three sons were involved in a near-fatal water-skiing accident at the start of season one, which did nicely in the ratings and drew the younger viewers the network sought. The parental disapproval,

marital tensions, business rivalries and romantic entanglements returned for a second season last week.

Dieu Merci! TVA’s improvisational comedy show is based on *Thank God You’re Here*, a highly successful Australian format adapted for Quebec by host and producer Éric Salvail. Weekly guests, most of them Quebec actors and TV personalities, enter a scene of which they have no foreknowledge to be greeted by the words “Dieu merci!” and then have to bluff their way forward.

An American adaptation flopped after seven episodes, but the Quebec version is entering its fourth season and regularly placed in the province's top 10 shows in 2009-2010.

La Poule aux oeufs d'or. Now in its 18th season, TVA's Wednesday night game show is linked with a Loto-Québec ticket of the same name, which translates as the hen with the golden eggs. Players participate in a series of games of chance until the winner is presented with the choice between an envelope of money or a golden egg that contains a jackpot — or a much smaller cash prize. The prizes for the lottery tickets include a chance of appearing on the show, which is hosted by Guy Mongrain and is consistently in Quebec's top 10.

Les Parent. This half-hour Monday night Radio-Canada sitcom has a very simple premise. The Parent family — Mom, Dad and three boys aged 8 to 14 — encounter the problems of any contemporary family, including housework, homework and holidays. Each episode picks a theme and then plays out a series of skits and jokes around that. The show is now entering its third season, and the Russians recently bought the format.

Canadian children's programs a hit, both here and abroad

In a dimly lit Toronto office, the funny pictures on Joey So's computer screen shine brightly. So is a director at the Canadian animation company Nelvana and co-creator of a cartoon called *Sidekick*, which premiered on YTV this month. Showing off the storyboards for the series, he demonstrates how, with a few flicks of an electronic stylus, the befuddled young Eric Needles can be reproduced in the next frame, saving the animator the bother of redrawing the figure.

Eric is an orphan who's all set to work for the superhero Maxum Man, but Maxum has gone missing, and now Eric must find his own way in a mysterious world in which grown-ups can leap tall buildings in a single bound. "He is sort of winging it in the superhero world," observes So.

Sidekick is aimed at 6- to 11-year-olds. The exploits on those storyboards should allow kids to identify with the young hero, but they go easy on the violence.

"We have a good sense of what is acceptable and what is not acceptable," says So, who has worked at Nelvana for 15 years. "We can't do real violence, so we look to slapstick, physical action with a sense of humour, cartoon humour... Nobody gets hurt."

Children's television in general, and animation in particular, is a real Canadian forte. Treehouse and YTV, the specialty channels owned by Nelvana's parent company, Corus, pack their schedules with Canadian cartoons to meet their respective 70- and 60-per-cent Canadian content requirements. In 2009, eight of the 10 most watched shows for English-speaking 2- to 6-six-year-olds were either Canadian or Canadian co-productions, all of them aired in heavy rotation on Treehouse, while for the 6 to 12s, three of the top 10 were Canadian.

Meanwhile, Canadian kids' shows

produced by everyone from animation giants like Nelvana and Cookie Jar to a live-action newcomer such as *Sinking Ship* are shown around the world, and international producers eagerly seek out Canadians as co-production partners.

In Ontario, where much of the industry is located, media producers earned 83 per cent of their sales revenue in the children's category in 2009, most of it from outside Canada.

"Kids animated shows are the most popular audiovisual export of this country," says Chris Bartleman, an executive vice-president at DHX Kids, which co-produces such public-broadcaster favourites as *Super Why!*, *Animal Mechanicals*, *Martha Speaks* and *Dirtgirlworld*.

It shouldn't be long before *Sidekick*, which has already been sold to a South African broadcaster, goes global, but when it does it won't be carrying the flag. There will be nothing to identify it as particularly Canadian — no canoes, no hockey arenas — except perhaps So's sense of both humour and propriety.

"Why do people internationally look up to Canadian content for kids? It has to do with the values," says Michael Hirsh, one of the original founders of Nelvana and now CEO of Cookie Jar.

Children's television is the only area in audiovisual culture where people still feel comfortable talking about values and how public funding supports them. Few funders and fewer creators want to dictate what message a TV program for adults should convey; many critics feel the CBC's obligation to contribute to a shared national identity is naively prescriptive.

But the children's realm is all about role models and educational content. It is one rare cultural area where Canada can claim to

be exporting its values to the world.

“Canadians have different values,” continues Hirsh. “We are a cross between the European and the American. For example, we are more ethical than some, so that’s reflected in the programs, and people like that for their kids.”

These distinctions may sound far-fetched or self-congratulatory, but researchers at the University of Montreal’s Centre for Youth and Media Studies who are analyzing the content aimed at 2- to 12-year-olds on both specialty channels and public networks have found the shows (the majority of which would be Canadian and all of which are chosen by Canadian programmers) belie stereotypes of violent kid vids.

The shows score low on violence and very high on informal education, happy characters and scenes depicting social relationships, ecological behaviour and cultural activities.

The Canadian content is popular with children but it is also sought after by foreign broadcasters who like to pair up with Canadians on co-productions.

“(We have) shared social and cultural values —” writes Adrian Mills, head of business and planning for BBC Children’s, in an email exchange, “a passion and deep-rooted respect for the audience. . . I think that’s about provenance — both U.K. and Canadian children’s content grew from the public-service tradition. And in spite of the huge economic forces that now drive the industry, we’ve managed to hold on to those values.”

Mills adds that European broadcasters also like the way “Canadian producers can bring an ‘American’ sensibility to a program — particularly in animation or live-action drama for older kids — but in a toned-down, safer kind of way which some consider more palatable than the undiluted product.”

Of course, those tax credits and grants don’t hurt either: Canadian producers’ ability to bring government funding to the table gives them clout in the international markets. British producers have been looking for new money since advertisers pulled back from children’s programs after a 2006 law banned advertising junk food to kids.

Since 1996, the American broadcast regulator has set quotas for educational content, a gift for Canadian producers: Cookie Jar, an increasingly transnational company, is responsible for programming the Saturday morning block on CBS.

Although the international market has become fiercely competitive with the flood of Asian cartoons available, Canadian producers believe they will maintain their place by offering quality work.

“You know who the good producers are and where the quality product is,” says Jocelyn Hamilton, vice-president of programming at Corus Kids, “and in this case it’s in Canada.”

Inside Canada, however, broadcasters’ spending on children’s television is dropping, as is children’s share of the Canadian Media Fund (which underwrites TV programming using levies on cable revenues and tax

dollars). Hamilton attributes the decline to an artificial high created in the late 1990s as the new specialty channels built up their inventory.

The Alliance for Children and Television, on the other hand, believes it reflects a complacency about the success of kids TV and notes with surprise that children’s fare was not even mentioned in the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission’s most recent decision about expenditures on Canadian programming.

Alliance executive director Caroline Fortier says international numbers are softening too as Canadian producers have less product to offer their partners.

Can we keep asking commercial success in international markets to underwrite our children’s television?

“If they sell around the world, that’s gravy, but let’s remember 50 per cent of the budget comes from Canadian taxpayers,” says J.J. Johnson of Sinking Ship Entertainment, the small Toronto company that has reinvigorated live-action programming with shows such as *This is Daniel Cook* and *Are We There Yet?* “What sometimes happens when you have an eye on the international market, you make it a little more universal, you soften it around the edges. Are you serving a Canadian audience?”

Johnson has first-hand experience of that pressure to compromise. With the American kids channel Nick Jr. as a co-producer, his company creates an educational show called *Dino Dan*, in which live human characters meet up with animated dinosaurs. Coprolites — or fossilized dinosaur dung — are a major source of information on the show.

“Nick Jr. has never said poo on air,” he explains. “It was a four-month discussion back and forth and finally we were allowed to do it. In Canada, the broadcasters, it was no problem...”

“We have a policy the show is more important than the broadcaster. Nick Jr. is a great partner, but they are 20 per cent of the budget and the rest is Canadian. Canada should have final say.”

The dino poo stayed, offering one small example of Canada wielding what the U.S. State Department would call soft power.



NELVANA/CORUS

Eric Needles dives into the world of superheroes in YTV’s *Sidekick*, which premiered in September.

Canada's video game industry is a going concern



DeathSpank, a video game set in a swashbuckling medieval world, was produced in Vancouver for PlayStation and Xbox.

With only a broadsword and some magic spells to defend him, our hero trots steadily through a cavern of moldering bones, cheerfully annihilating the living skeletons that attack him.

Welcome to *DeathSpank*, a long-awaited role-playing video game created by a company called Hothead and released this summer for PlayStation and Xbox's new online services. It was followed by a sequel, *DeathSpank: Thongs of Virtue*, this week.

Set in a quasi-medieval world and filled with cartoon violence, there is nothing about *DeathSpank* that would suggest it originates from a studio in Vancouver's Yaletown, but the Canadian government did invest half a million dollars in the project to get it up and running.

The video game is a medium still searching for cultural legitimacy, but neither critics (who tend to review it simply in terms of how well a game plays) nor parents (who bemoan their children's addiction) are likely to oblige it any time soon. Advocates, meanwhile, say the stereotype of games as mindless shoot-'em-ups ignores the increasing importance of complex storytelling in the genre, and add that Canadian storytelling abilities honed in the television and film industries are now paying off in the video game industry.

Probably more important than Canadians' abilities as storytellers, however, are their abilities as animators and computer programmers. The success of our video game industry is the economic argument for the cultural industries writ large.

The whole Canadian interactive media industry, which includes games, iPhone apps and lots of online content, is worth about \$4 billion annually and employs some 50,000 people. By comparison, the Canadian music recording and performance industry is worth approximately \$1.2 billion and, the Canadian television broadcasting industry, about \$5.5 billion.

"It's a highly educated workforce that is paid well," says Sean Murch, head of business development at Next Level Games in Vancouver, which has created games based on the Spider-Man and Super Mario characters. "The impact on GDP is higher than most industries."

Murch was part of a recent industry delegation that successfully convinced the B.C. government to create a 17.5-per-cent tax credit on the industry's labour costs in the province so that it could compete with its counterparts in Ontario and Quebec, where similar credits are available.

Next Level is typical of much of the industry in Canada: it is developing games for foreign companies based on foreign intellectual property. Canadian publishers developing games for the big-name game consoles themselves are few and far between, although that may change as digital distribution brings costs down.

DeathSpank is the creation of American game designer Ron Gilbert, who had long sought a publisher for a game based on the gleefully rampaging anti-hero he had invented, and joined Hothead Games to make

that happen. The collaboration was made possible because the game is available only online: Hothead did not need to go to the expense of physical distribution and instead signed a distribution deal with an American publisher while still holding on to the intellectual property it had created.

At the moment, Canadian characters are really only present in online content linked to Canadian TV shows; it is Canadian know-how that foreigners come looking for.

"I take the view that it's talent development (that federal funding pays for)," says Anne Loi, senior vice-president at DHX, a film and interactive company that specializes in children's entertainment. "Not the flag and the beer, but nurturing Canadian talent so the minute they are trained they don't skip off and go to another country."

The industry plays that job-creation role well: for example, Ubisoft, a multinational company based in France and the fourth largest game company in North America, opened a Montreal studio in 1997, attracted by a bilingual workforce trained in the movie industry. Today, it's one of the largest game studios in the world, employing 2,000 people.

Foreign publishers can get labour tax credits but don't qualify for federal grants to develop content, which are adjudicated and stipulate there be no excessive violence in games. But the Canadian companies, which are often being bought by multinationals in a field where there are no restrictions on foreign ownership, remain small and are at a real disadvantage because they lack capital.

"We need to be able to underwrite the growth of Canadian companies or we are just going to grow them and sell them off to whoever has the capital, usually the U.S. or Japan," warns Ian Kelso, president and CEO of Interactive Ontario.

Kelso is also willing, however, to make the argument that the industry is of more than economic significance to Canada.

"The games industry has grown as a narrative medium," he says. "We are seeing stories that present complex moral issues... There are value-based choices brought you by the authors."

The video games industry has found the money. Its quest for meaning continues.

Canadian pop music may well have outgrown Cancon rules

On a sticky August night at the Air Canada Centre, Michael Bublé is getting ready to wrap it up. After an evening of crooning covers, he turns to one of his own compositions. The band plays the opening notes of “Haven’t Met You Yet,” and 20,000 fans roar their approval. Soon they are singing the chorus.

When Bublé picked up the single-of-the-year Juno for that song in the spring, he thanked Canadian radio “for playing the heck out of this thing.”

Most Canadian radio stations are required to play at least 35-per-cent Canadian music, and Bublé is an example of the bright shiny scene those regulations have helped build since they were instituted in the 1970s.

But Canada is famous for another kind of music scene, one more gritty than shiny, one peopled by independent artists who aren’t often heard on commercial radio.

“Radio play was never a big deal,” says Charles Spearin, a member of Broken Social Scene, the famed Toronto indie rock band, which spent the summer touring four continents. “It was never a serious part of the equation for Broken Social Scene... Most of our fans hear about us from the Internet.”

As indie music scenes in Vancouver, Toronto and Montreal have flourished in the past decade, building enthusiastic audiences in Canada and internationally without much support from radio play, some in the industry have come to consider the regulations largely irrelevant.

“It will get abandoned at some point

because the analogue broadcasters are continuing to fund cultural imperatives when the shift has taken place to the Internet,” says veteran music journalist David Farrell, a strong critic of the regulations. “The government will have to fold its hand. There will be whining, but they are mature industries.”

With unpaid downloading still eating

TV dramas, let alone Canadian movies, Canadian music holds a firm place in local hearts.

“It was the regulations that created the opportunity, but it is not the regulations that created the desire to listen to the music or buy the music,” says singer-songwriter Jim Cuddy of Blue Rodeo, who thinks the rules should be maintained. “I really do think it

satisfies the audience: Canadians don’t want to be fed music to which they don’t relate. They want to see the Tragically Hip. They went to school with those guys. Nobody knows Beyoncé.”

It’s that sense of personal connection with a singer sharing his or her emotions that is the power of pop music, a power amplified by the rebirth of live performance as artists look to recoup lost recording sales. It makes local a virtue rather than a liability and yet also creates an

easily exportable product based on universal emotions, compared to films or television shows, which are more obviously rooted in a particular place.

At a huge advantage when they work in English, Canadian artists perform very well internationally, making Canada a major international exporter of recorded music. Of course, it also helps that the price of entry is low: it costs little to record a CD in your basement compared to the price tag of even the most indie of independent films.

The Canadian content regulations helped establish a virtuous cycle and build both industry infrastructure and a Canadian star



Broken Social Scene, here at the Toronto Island Music Festival in 2010, gained their recognition through the Internet, without much support from radio.

away at record label revenues, it is hard to convince anyone in the music industry that these are good times.

But Canadian popular music remains a major cultural success story. A quarter of the music purchased by Canadians in 2009 was made by Canadians, thanks in part to Bublé, the rock band Nickelback and the country artist Johnny Reid, all three of whom produced top 10 albums last year.

Nielsen SoundScan numbers (which include both CDs and paid downloads) show 2008 was softer, at 22 per cent, but there’s usually at least one Canadian album in the Top 10. In comparison to Canadian

RICK MADONIK/TORONTO STAR

system — the single most important element of a successful cultural industry, it would seem, based on how often insiders mention it.

But many observers point to the great irony that the flourishing indie music scene with which Canada is so identified was created by artists — Broken Social Scene, Arcade Fire, Sarah McLachlan — who got little radio play in their crucial early years.

“The broadcasters will play it safe and, if they can get away with it, play the old, the tried and the true,” observes Terry McBride, CEO of the record label and artist management company Nettwerk, which represents McLachlan “...It was her success outside of Canada that made radio inside Canada start to pay attention.

“I am not a big fan of Cancon,” he continues. “I am a big fan of FACTOR (the Foundation Assisting Canadian Talent on Recordings) and Starmaker. If you took FACTOR out of this, there would have been no reason for me to sign acts. I wouldn’t have been able to afford it: Sarah McLachlan would not have happened without FACTOR.

FACTOR is funded both by the federal government and voluntarily by broadcasters. It currently spends about \$14 million annually helping bands tour, cut demo CDs or build websites. The Radio Starmaker Fund, meanwhile, is dedicated solely to marketing and is funded by levies on radio broadcasters’ revenues.

Canadian musicians say the funds are crucial. “FACTOR doesn’t give you enough money to live comfortably, but it does give you enough to keep going,” says Spearin of Broken Social Scene. “It’s the one every musician knows: it makes a big difference.”

Small independent record labels have also played a key role. As they have lost revenues to downloading, the big labels — whose Canadian subsidiaries have recorded and distributed lots of Canadian music over the years — have pulled back from their historic role as talent scouts. Small labels such as Arts & Crafts, which represents BSS, and Paper Bag Records, also in Toronto, or Montreal’s Constellation Records have filled the void.

Most of them use what is known as a 360-degree contract, the model pioneered by McBride at Nettwerk, wherein artist management, recording, touring and merchandising are all brought under one

roof. It’s the business model that has done the most to help the industry withstand the loss of record sales, and has won Canada international attention.

“People still listen to music in the car; you can’t go for a run without an iPod... Arts & Crafts and Nettwerk and a few others that happen to be Canadian say the music industry is very healthy, it’s the recording industry that is a problem,” says Kieran Roy, general manager at Arts & Crafts. He explains that the Internet is a mixed blessing for small labels, attracting fans through such devices as music aggregator websites but also reaching tech-savvy types who are most likely to download music without paying.

Canadian music radio is going to have to get more inventive, too, if it is going to withstand what is coming.

Creatively fossilized by the automation that favours limited playlists and pre-recorded DJ voice tracks, radio will soon confront a digital future where all those wonderful music streams available on your computer will be available in your car. Who would listen to their local music station if Seattle’s rich radio mix was available at the flick of a dial, pessimists ask. How will Canadian radio survive?

By being uniquely Canadian, replies Denise Donlon, executive director of CBC Radio.

“People’s online real estate is an extension of your existing brand,” Donlon says. “If Canadian content is in the existing brand it is going to be in the online brand.”

CBC Radio has been pushing Canadian music hard in recent years. Its online Radio 3 plays only Canadian music, and with the relaunch of Radio 2 last year, CBC stepped into the indie gap that commercial radio had left open, dedicating Radio 2 Drive, the 3-to-7-p.m. show, to Canadian music that wasn’t getting airplay.

Host Rich Terfry, himself a hip-hop artist who goes by the moniker Buck 65, estimates the show is 80-per-cent Canadian. It’s a bit of a turnaround from Terfry’s early days trying to find 30 per cent Cancon, as the regulations then required, for the hip-hop campus radio show he hosted at Dalhousie University.

“The Canadian content requirements were the bane of my existence,” he recalls.

Consumed by the copyright issue and the question of creating a business model

around downloading, the Canadian music industry has yet to begin debating the future of regulations that many feel are now tangential to its success anyway. But the issues surrounding downloading and Canadian content are linked.

If Canadian terrestrial radio begins to suffer such significant competition from international digital radio that Canadian content regulation becomes less and less effective at building the Canadian industry, direct subsidy will be even more important. However, the current subsidy system relies heavily on contributions from the radio industry.

Where will new money come from? From the same Internet service providers whom the music industry increasingly petitions for a share of the profits they make selling consumers their access to downloading sites.

“The government needs to see what content is going down those pipes and create an ecosystem,” says McBride. “I am not saying sue the ISPs: they should put aside a percentage of their profits and pay the musicians who made the profits...

“I used to be in the copyright debate. I exited three years ago because it doesn’t matter to the general public. The public doesn’t see borders. Regulations won’t work.”

Three nights after Bubl  finished his Toronto gig, the Montreal indie rock band Arcade Fire was in town, performing on Olympic Island. Like Bubl , who was determined to shrink the cavernous Air Canada Centre by stepping out into the crowd for his finale, lead singer Win Butler knelt down on stage during the encore and tried to touch as many fans as possible. The crowd of 5,000, with their tattoos and piercings, were a very different set from the middle-aged women grooving to Bubl , but they also responded ecstatically to artists who were giving it their all.

With a few swift clicks, anyone can download Arcade Fire’s chart-topping new album, *The Suburbs*, or Bubl ’s *Crazy Love*, and never pay a cent. But for those who bought concert tickets, there was something more than music on offer — an abundance of generosity and gratitude wafting to and fro in the thick summer air.

The downloading debate:

when it comes to copyright, it's impossible to satisfy everyone

The Canadian Recording Industry Association believes unpaid downloading of music can be stopped — with “legal deterrence” if necessary. It welcomes the copyright bill tabled by the Conservative government in June, but thinks Bill C-32 isn't tough enough on file-sharing websites.

The Canadian Music Creators Coalition, on the other hand, thinks its industry shouldn't sue fans. It has little good to say about the proposed legislation, calling it “all locks and lawsuits.”

Little wonder Canada seems incapable of passing a new copyright law: if the music industry itself can't agree on an approach, you have to pity a government trying to strike a balance among a host of contradictory but legitimate voices, including those of entertainment companies, artists, educators, researchers and Internet users.

Some want tough laws to protect copyright material including music, movies and TV shows from file-sharing; others say downloading is here to stay, get used to it. Some argue the big entertainment companies are demanding draconian protections that don't acknowledge consumers' rights. Others say file-sharing is theft, pure and simple.

The government has waded through this morass to offer up a bill that attempts to balance copyright protection with fair dealing. But as the bill moves towards second reading this fall, even its supporters are calling for amendments.

Meanwhile, a growing band of creators argue that Canada, which has lagged behind other Western countries in updating its copyright laws, could get ahead of the curve by licensing downloading instead of banning it.

“The people who enjoy (downloaded) music, are they are pirates or are they music fans?” asks Eddie Schwartz, the man who wrote “Special Girl” and “Hit Me With Your Best Shot” and president of the Songwriters Association of Canada (SAC), which advocates a licensing scheme. “Turn it into a business model.”

Schwartz argues that the Digital Millennium Copyright Act in the United States has done little to stop illegal file-sharing, which still accounts for the vast majority of music downloads despite recent increases in digital sales.

So instead of going after users or file-sharing websites, as the American industry has done with some legal success but a lot of bad publicity, the SAC

suggests users opt to pay a few dollars a month for a downloading licence. The revenue would be distributed to participating copyright holders, including artists and record labels. People who chose not to buy a licence but kept downloading would be subject to fines.

Like the current international licensing of music for live performance and broadcast, the scheme could eventually be reciprocal, with a Canadian agency

object surrender flag up the pole. There is no incentive there for business models...”

Downloading music is still a source of legal debate in Canada, where law that predates the practice permits making copies of legally acquired music for personal use. Levies on blank CDs and cassette tapes were designed to compensate artists for that private copying, but the proposed law will not extend that

compensation scheme to current technology, while Canadian courts have previously rejected attempts to apply the levies to MP3 players. Still, some user-rights advocates argue downloading is not necessarily illegal.

The government takes the position downloading is “generally not permitted” but with the new bill lowers penalties for copyright infringement for non-commercial purposes while allowing consumers to create personal copies in limited instances, such as uploading their CDs onto an iPod or making a backup copy. It also extends the notion of fair dealing to include some educational uses of copyright material and satire or parody.

Its most controversial provision, however, is the one that allows producers to install digital locks on CDs and DVDs and forbids users from picking them, thereby apparently trumping even such permitted uses as making backup copies. All three opposition parties have said that part of the bill needs rethinking, while proponents of licensing also want it amended to make room for their scheme.

“We could draft a made-in-Canada solution,” says NDP digital critic Charlie Angus, adding he could support an amended bill. “As much as the lobbyists like to paint us as a haven for pirates, like Somalia or Bulgaria or something, many people are looking to Canada to see if we can develop a compromise that moves things forwards instead of trying to push consumers backwards.”



Eddie Schwartz, president of the Songwriters Association of Canada, suggests music downloaders pay a monthly license fee that would be distributed to copyright holders.

passing money back to foreign artists, and foreign countries in turn paying for Canadian music.

The idea, which attempts to monetize file-sharing instead of stopping it, is based on a long-standing Canadian tradition of copyright collectives. Levies on blank CDs raise money that goes back to musicians. Canadian authors and book publishers get fees for the photocopying of their work. But unlike the existing levy on blank CDs or current proposals to place direct levies on the revenues of Internet service providers, the beauty of the licence is that those who are not copying don't have to pay.

Critics of the SAC proposal, however, fear it institutionalizes copyright infringement.

“Legalizing theft that way — it's a mug's game,” says Graham Henderson, president of the Canadian Recording Industry Association, arguing that Canada's market for legitimate online music services lags far behind that of the United States and Europe because of confusion about the current Canadian law. “It's an

Digital Waterloo for Cancon rules?



CTV PHOTO

Canadian productions like CTV's *The Bridge* have been made possible by profits generated from rebroadcasting American programming.

The sky is falling on Canadian television. At least that is what Chicken Little says. It's raining Internet TV, video-on-demand and multi-platform content, and Chicken figures that Canadian content regulations might as well be scrapped.

If you can get whatever you want, whenever you want, what is the point of telling Canada's

TV broadcasters that half their prime-time schedules must be Canadian? Or insisting cable companies distribute more Canadian channels than American? It's unfair to burden broadcasters and broadcast distributors with rules unknown to the freewheeling Internet.

On the other hand, Chicken's dear colleague Ostrich believes there is still plenty of life

in conventional television schedules and conventional television audiences. Canadian broadcasters are still making enough money airing U.S. shows in their protected market that they can be required to produce some Canadian shows, too. And the cable companies that help fund those shows are hardly suffering. Scrap the system and the Canadian television industry goes down the tube.

Are Canadian content regulations so out of touch with digital realities they should be dropped? Or do the rules that built an industry still have legs?

"It's a new frontier, but some kind of organization will come along," replies John Riley, president of Astral Television Networks and the man who invented the Chicken Little and Ostrich labels for a recent industry debate on the subject. Call him an ostrich with one eye peeking out of the sand. "Does it mean we are powerless to do anything because the wave is bigger (than previous technology)? I don't think so."

This was the year the television industry finally started to publicly debate the possibility that Canada's broadcasting model, which has used popular American content to underwrite Canadian shows and Canadian channels for decades, won't work in the digital age.

The future of Canadian content regulation on television is the most concrete policy decision that needs to be made in Canada's cultural arena. Debate on deregulation revolves around two conflicting visions of the future and how much room it will have for Canadian TV.

On the one hand, Internet visionaries argue geographic divisions are being swept away, and they assume Canadians will be able to get U.S. content directly from American sources. They see Canadian content regulations as laughably obsolete and impossible to transfer to the infinite online world.

On the other hand, across the broadcasting sector, people as varied as union leaders and TV executives think there's still money in owning Canadian rights to U.S. content. They don't want to dismantle regulations that have nurtured a Canadian broadcasting and production industry.

Who is right and what should Canada do? That is the toughest issue I wrestled with during a year's study on the future of our cultural industries.

I was often tempted to recommend total deregulation: let Canada's commercial broadcasters loose in the world, the real world where they will neither be forced to produce Canadian content that doesn't make them money nor protected by their ability to substitute their ads for American ones in a U.S. signal when they are simultaneously airing the same show. The "sim sub" system is, as one academic told me, the narcotic of Canadian broadcasting, addicting the commercial networks to American shows and shackling them to American schedules, forcing Canadian shows to the sidelines.

Dismantle it, and CTV and Global would have to reinvent themselves as distinctively Canadian broadcasters — or wither away. (Visiting Australia, an ocean away from the Canada-U.S. border, I was inspired by a commercial TV schedule that was full of Australian soaps and reality shows made without public money and that left the public broadcaster, ABC, free to concentrate on the non-commercial. Wouldn't it be lovely?) The argument for deregulation has the attraction of intellectual purity.

It is not, however, a practical position: It ignores the business models of Canadian television and the fact that those models are still functioning, producing profit for broadcasters and cable companies, which can reasonably be expected to keep contributing to Canadian programming. Premature deregulation would simply jettison hundreds of millions of dollars currently spent on Canadian programming, even if some of that programming may be airing on Friday nights in July.

The solution is to track the effects of the regulations assiduously and adjust them quickly when needed — a difficult task for any government bureaucracy and particularly difficult for the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, which has to weigh evidence from all interested parties in public hearings before it can issue decisions.

The risk, meanwhile, is that the regulator will get dragged into horse-trading with private broadcasters over Cancon, diverting public attention and money from the only real solution for Canadian content in our digital future: a properly funded CBC.

The Issue

Federal regulations require networks such as CTV and Global to air 50 per cent Canadian content in prime time, and 55 per cent the rest of the time. Specialty channels, many of which are owned by the networks, have varying requirements, sometimes heavier than that. The specialties are also required to spend a percentage of revenue on Canadian production, a rule that was recently reinstated for the networks on the understanding they could spread their Cancon quotas across their various channels.

Meanwhile, Canadian cable and satellite subscribers must buy a basic package that includes a range of Canadian channels before they can select any discretionary services, while in any package cable and satellite distributors offer, they have to include a preponderance of Canadian channels.

As consumers turn to the Internet for television programming they enter a world where choice is infinite and geographic boundaries are harder to maintain. Are the regulations obsolete?

CHICKEN LITTLE'S PERSONA: forward-looking charmer

Despite his alarmist moniker, this one is a seductive charmer with the big vision. His plan acknowledges that Canadian commercial networks have a mixed record delivering Canadian content and cuts them loose to make their way as best they can in an increasingly competitive environment while making more space for the CBC.

OSTRICH'S PERSONA: cautious realist

This one is a sensible sort who isn't going to be stampeded into change and knows enough about the nuts and bolts of Canadian broadcasting to see the many flaws in the charmer's big vision.

CHICKEN'S SOUND BITE

"The game is over." Richard Collins, British communications professor and author of *Culture, Communication and National Identity: The Case of Canadian Television*.

OSTRICH'S SOUND BITE

"Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater." Charlotte Bell, vice-president, regulatory affairs, CanWest.

CHICKEN'S ARGUMENT: deregulate

The regulations will quickly become impossible to sustain as consumers and advertisers move to the Internet, where industry observers predict we will be watching about half our TV by mid-decade whether at home or on a mobile device — although that guesstimate may exaggerate the extent to which the distinctions between conventional television and alternative platforms will remain meaningful.

In this content-rich, consumer-driven environment, the regulations will unfairly burden legacy media as they try to compete with on-line offerings. If we want Canadian content, the only remaining tools we will have are the subsidies paid to Canadian television producers to make Canadian shows and to the CBC to air them. One vocal critic of regulation is the C.D. Howe Institute, which published a report in January arguing that the regulations fashioned for linear television are unsustainable.

"Canada has always tended to implement its policies on the distribution side," says Lawson Hunter, co-author of the report, entitled "Scrambled Signals: Canadian Content Policies in a World of Technological Abundance." "What we are saying is you are losing control of that distribution channel, so you had better find another way."

OSTRICH'S ARGUMENT: wait and see

The rumours of the death of television have been greatly exaggerated: recent numbers show no decline in viewing. Despite the prevalence of PVRs, people still see and recall TV ads — unlike those on the Internet, which they either don't notice or can't stand. Television did not kill radio, and Internet television won't kill linear TV: everyone will still turn to it for sports, contests and special events while some of us will continue to prefer the curated offerings of old media.

To remove content regulation from Canadian television would destroy a system of Canadian production the country has worked for decades to build, and would either suddenly enrich broadcasters by freeing them from previous obligations or drive them under by also eliminating the protections they currently enjoy in return for those obligations.

The broadcasters don't like to talk about regulation, but they tend to be proponents of the keep-the-regs approach. That may sound counterintuitive, but the broadcasters are not only obliged by regulation to provide Canadian content, they are also protected from foreign competition by Canadian ownership rules and by their right to drop their ads into competing U.S. signals.

CHICKEN'S SHIBBOLETH

What about geo-blocking, a system that can stop users from accessing content from another country? Won't it allow Canadian TV broadcasters to carve out some space for their programs on the Internet? If you go to Hulu.com, the TV site run by ABC, NBC and Fox, you'll find you can't download the shows because the Canadian rights are controlled by CTV or Global.

The visionaries often talk as though geo-blocking does not exist, and if you press them they dismiss it with a wave of the hand, saying anyone with any technological savvy can use geo-spoofing to hide their location and watch the content they want. They insist the Internet knows no national borders.

CHICKEN'S ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Deregulators tend to be big-picture types who have identified an upcoming destination without figuring out the road map. In particular, they have yet to grapple with sim sub. (It's why you don't see the fancy American ads on the Super Bowl; CTV's ads appear in both its signal and the one from CBS.) Some visionaries will suggest that as linear TV dwindles in importance, simulcasting will become a less reliable source of revenue anyway.

OSTRICH'S SHIBBOLETH

Wait-and-seers tend to see geo-blocking as a necessary and effective form of territorial rights protection. They believe that while some people will break rules, most respect them. Anecdotally, what does seem true is that users will respect geography if it delivers the content they want — catching up with an episode of ABC's *Desperate Housewives* on the CTV website, for example, rather than turning to a service outside Canada — but will quickly turn to illegal downloading sites for any foreign content they can't find that way.

OSTRICH'S ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM: same pachyderm

Broadcasters also avoid the topic of sim sub because they tend to focus discussion on the obligations they carry rather than the protections they enjoy. They consider it a basic mechanism for protecting their program rights, since the cable and satellite companies are permitted to carry American signals with the same programs they have purchased at great expense.

In English Canada, ads on shows such as *House* or *Grey's Anatomy* help pay for the Canadian programming — even if that programming may be relegated to the summer or Friday and Saturday nights. Sim sub is the double-edge sword of Canadian television: it finances the system and supports a Canadian ad industry, but also ensures Canadian prime-time schedules are determined in L.A., not Toronto. If you simply removed sim sub, the broadcasters might be forced to reinvent themselves as small and uniquely Canadian services. More probably, they would go bankrupt overnight. It's a piece of deregulation that could not happen easily.

THE CABLE GUY DANCES WITH THE ELEPHANT

Despite their very public brawling in 2009 over whether the cable and satellite companies would pay the broadcasters for their signals, the two sides have a shared interest in preserving territorial rights for programming. That's how they reap the subscription and ad revenue, whether it's on linear television, video-on-demand or on-line. The CRTC has already decided to simplify the rules determining how many Canadian channels the distributors must carry: as of 2011, consumers can build their own packages as long as they include more Canadian channels than foreign. Even proponents of deregulation aren't talking about going further than that.

IF IT AIN'T BROKE...

If the network broadcasting model looks troubled, the specialty narrowcasting model is doing nicely, thank you very much. With lower overheads, increasingly comparable ad rates and that prized subscription revenue, Canada's specialties posted \$3-billion revenue in 2009. Deregulating these channels would potentially throw away the hundreds of millions they spend on Canadian production under the CRTC's expenditure requirements, although no doubt they would continue to make some Canadian content: Canadian producers for the specialties have become adept at selling their lifestyle and children's shows to parallel services in the U.S.

SIDSWIPED BY CHICKEN'S PLAN: the Canadian film industry

Canadian film producers and distributors depend on licence fees and investments from broadcasters, particularly in the pay and specialty sector, to make up the budgets of Canadian movies. A deregulated specialty sector with no obligation to screen Canadian film would leave an annual hole estimated at around \$20 million in Canadian film funding.

SIDSWIPED BY OSTRICH'S PLAN: the CBC

As the commercial broadcasters' business model comes under pressure from the Internet's wide offering, tinkering with regulation or attempting to find them new sources of revenue may distract attention from resolving the role of the CBC. For example, the CRTC's recent decision forcing distributors to negotiate a price for broadcasters' signals came up with a solution for the commercial networks but left the CBC out in the cold.

THE DANGER OF CHICKEN'S PLAN

The baby will indeed go out with the bathwater. If deregulation is to be applied fairly, it should be applied to all players. If you drop Cancon requirements for broadcasters, why would you maintain them for cable and satellite distributors? If you release broadcasters and distributors from their obligations, should you not also release them from the protection of sim sub and foreign ownership restrictions? If carried to its logical conclusion, deregulation would dismantle the commercial broadcasting industry in Canada.

THE DANGER OF OSTRICH'S PLAN

Canada will waste effort and especially money propping up an unpromising commercial broadcasting model when it should be concentrating its efforts on the one broadcaster that can be a standard bearer for Canadian content in the digital age: the public one.

How to make the CBC viable in the digital age

Broadcaster's latest makeover has shows like Allan Hawco's *Republic of Doyle* winning big ratings. But will populism provide a future in the digital world?



STEVE RUSSELL/TORONTO STAR

Actor Allan Hawco on the set of his hit crime series, *Republic of Doyle*, in St. John's, NL. The program's 800,000 viewers have helped the CBC win prime-time audience share during its October-to-April season.

TV actor, writer and producer Allan Hawco is hurrying across Military Rd. in his native St. John's, scurrying from one location to another on the set of *Republic of Doyle*, when a passerby asks for his autograph. "My mother," the man says, "loves your show."

She is in good company: more than 800,000 Canadians savoured the retro flavour, salty characters and picturesque settings of *Republic of Doyle* last season. Built around the well-worn formula of two mismatched private investigators, in this instance the impulsive Jake Doyle — played by Hawco — and his acerbic father, Malachy, *Republic of Doyle* is a cozy crime show, the kind of safe bet that has helped boost the CBC's prime-time audience share during its October-to-April season.

The show returns for a second season in January.

Getting a million viewers for any Canadian show apart from *Hockey Night in Canada* is highly ambitious. But that is the goal the CBC set for itself in 2005, and the results are starting to show.

Everybody's ratings were up in 2009-10 as the new, portable "people meters" began recording a lot of casual viewing that had previously been missed, and sports ratings in particular went through the roof.

But the CBC still regularly placed shows in the top 30, especially the entrepreneurship contest *Dragons' Den*, the family ranch drama *Heartland* and that unabashed bid for Canadian hearts, *Battle of the Blades*.

Critics have accused the broadcaster of dumbing down, their ire fuelled by CBC's awkward attempt to update *The National* last season with more chat and fewer chairs, and its use of the U.S. game shows *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune* to lure viewers to the Canadian programs that follow.

But as the CBC parted company this summer with Richard Stursberg, the chief architect of the populist agenda, managers reiterated their commitment to big numbers.

"We are here to serve a public, not to serve a niche," says Kirstine Stewart, the general manager of CBC English television and now Stursberg's temporary replacement.

The CBC is on the right track here: ratings are a good measure of Canadians' engagement with their public broadcaster. Of course, they aren't the only measure, and as digital realities take hold the CBC can build on its popular success to offer diversity, too.

But first, the public broadcaster needs those eyeballs, not only for financial reasons – about a third of the budget for both English- and French-language television is raised through advertising – but also for political ones.

Drawing million-plus audiences and rebuilding a place in Canadians' imaginations will give the CBC crucial visibility as the model of the generalist TV network comes under increasing pressure from one that is multi-platform and Internet-based.

Being perceived as a winner rather than the perpetual underdog may also be key to getting the attention of politicians, who are long on promises for the chronically underfunded CBC but short on action. The Liberals made a commitment to stable, multi-year funding in their first election Red Book in 1993, and both Liberals and Conservatives have repeated that promise many times since – but neither party has delivered.

3RD SEASON AVERAGE: 990,000 VIEWERS



CBC family drama Heartland, set in Alberta, focuses on a ranch that's a haven for abused and neglected horses.



Hubert Lacroix, president and CEO of CBC/Radio-Canada, says the broadcaster's lack of capital is making it hard to make the 2011 switch to digital.

The CBC's \$1-billion parliamentary allocation sounds like a lot, but when the amount is adjusted for inflation, the broadcaster is receiving \$500 million less than it did in 1991.

BEFORE ANYONE GIVES the CBC more money, however, we all need to decide what we want the CBC to be.

"If we are serious about having a national public broadcaster – and it's not always clear that we are – we need to give it a clear mandate and properly fund that mandate so it's not forced to get *Jeopardy* and *Wheel of Fortune* and their ad money to fund other programs," says Alan Sawyer, a consultant in digital media. "If we are serious about it we have to go big: here is what we want."

So, what do we want? Stursberg's argument was that in an environment dominated by the American programming on CTV and Global, the CBC's English service distinguishes itself simply by being Canadian. Not by being

non-commercial or high-minded, but by offering Canadian versions of commercial programming formats.

The alternative is to reduce the CBC to some sort of PBS North, funded by many but watched by few.

The argument applies neatly to entertainment and drama but not as effectively to news and information programming, where Canadians still have lots of Canadian alternatives on the commercial channels and can therefore expect the public broadcaster to offer higher standards of journalism and alternative approaches.

However, the either-or argument, populist or elitist, is unnecessarily polarizing. Funded, however skimpily, by all taxpayers, the CBC needs to reach many audiences. And in English Canada, serving the entire population with a single, general-interest channel is a particularly difficult task. Canadian content is not, after all, a specific

1ST SEASON AVERAGE: 1.5 MILLION VIEWERS



Craig Simpson and Jamie Sale perform in CBC's Battle of the Blades.



Kirstine Stewart, interim executive vice-president of CBC English Services, is fully on board with the ratings push.

programming niche.

“The idea of TV having the ability to bring people together around a single dramatic show is gone,” observes Bart Beaty, a communications professor at the University of Calgary and co-author with Rebecca Sullivan of *Canadian Television Today*. “I find it impossible to teach TV to my students. No matter what you throw out — are you watching this, are you watching that... they have no common references.”

As audiences fragment, the CBC has been forced to centralize, cutting back on the regional programming that recognized at least one aspect of Canada’s diversity. It is the first area CBC executives mention when asked where they would like to expand.

In France, on the other hand, there are five public TV channels including ones aimed at the regions, youth and the country’s overseas possessions. Britain’s BBC has four ad-free channels, while the independent, ad-supported Channel 4 has a mandate to be innovative and culturally diverse.

TO GENUINELY SERVE the reality that is Canada, the CBC sure could use a CBC2.

The switchover to digital transmission (set for August 2011, although few of the broadcasters appear ready) will offer the potential of transferring programming from the CBC’s two digital channels, Bold and Doc, onto a standard-definition channel that could be squeezed in beside the main high-definition channel on the same over-the-air signal. (In the United States, PBS is already using this multicasting technology to run educational programming on the side.) Or the CBC could use that extra digital space to offer the CBC News Network, currently only available on cable and satellite, over the air.

The Internet also provides a much more efficient delivery method for any kind of programming you might want the CBC to be

offering alongside mass-market television.

The public broadcaster is already a leader in Internet TV, especially in Quebec, where Radio Canada’s Tou.tv offers a full programming slate, not only as catch-up viewing but also as simultaneous webcasting.

difficult to clear the various rights.

Some of these ideas can be executed cheaply by using the efficiencies of digital distribution to reach more people with more varied programming. Others would cost money: moving programming off cable and specialty channels would lose the CBC that subscription revenue while adding to the bill for programming rights, for example.

Where would we find the money for a CBC2, whether over the air or online?

Once Canada switches over to digital transmission, an obvious source would be revenue from government auctions of the highly valuable spectrum used for wireless applications. Other countries call this “the digital dividend.”

But the Canadian government, like some slum landlord handing out eviction notices while planning luxury condos, has not even offered to provide the \$50 million the CBC needs for new transmitters. Industry Canada says money from the spectrum auction — the last auction, in 2008, raised \$4.2 billion — will go to general revenues. Nor does the government have plans to give citizens discount coupons to buy the converter boxes they will need for older TVs.

“We are surprised, puzzled maybe, that the government doesn’t see there is a solution that makes everybody happy,” says CBC/Radio-Canada president Hubert Lacroix, pointing out that the broadcaster’s lack of capital

is hampering its ability to meet the 2011 deadline.

But beyond paying for its digital conversion, the spectrum money should be invested in the CBC’s programming. Why? Because the CBC is ideally poised to be a standardbearer for Canadian content in the digital future.

The public broadcaster has been multi-platform since it added television to its radio services in the 1950s. It is now a leader in

1ST SEASON AVERAGE: 800,000 VIEWERS



CBC’s Republic of Doyle, starring Allan Hawco, is a cozy crime show set in St. John’s.

4TH SEASON AVERAGE: 1.7 MILLION VIEWERS



Dragons’ Den has exceeded the CBC’s goal of mounting shows that draw more than a million.

If Bold and Doc came out of the digital subscription ether, their diverse offerings, including Canadian and foreign documentaries, arts programs and specialized sports, could also be offered free online, rather in the way the CBC currently offers the all-Canadian Radio 3 online.

Archive material could be added to the mix: Canadians should have easy access to old CBC shows, but the broadcaster has moved painfully slowly on this file, finding it

moving content onto digital platforms and in positioning itself as an integrated content company rather than simply a TV and radio broadcaster.

Because it mainly commissions its own programming rather than buying American shows, it more effectively controls the rights across platforms. It can do product placement for Kraft in *Little Mosque on the Prairie* and sell digital downloads of *Being Erica* on iTunes. And while it has to balance its budget, because it's a non-profit it is philosophically much better suited to the share-and-share-alike model on which the Internet grew up. All that is needed is a plan and some cash.

In France, public television executives can reach into their desk drawers and pull out the contract they recently negotiated with the French government. It fits on one page, runs until 2012, and involves goals for "heritage programming," including drama, documentaries, performing arts shows and children's cartoons. For each year, there is a budget attached. Both sides have signed off: the broadcaster knows what is expected and how much money will be available to achieve the goal.

It seems simple, and yet, 17 years and three prime ministers after that Red Book promise, Canadian leaders are still incapable of giving the CBC a brief for the 21st century and a budget to cover it.

DESPITE THE CLOUDLESS sky and the backdrop of cheerful houses painted mustard yellow, brick red and bright blue, the atmosphere on Colonial St. in St. John's is fraught. It's 6 p.m. on a summer day, *Republic of Doyle* will soon lose its light, and there's still another scene to shoot across the street in Bannerman Park.

No Canadian television production can afford departures from the shooting schedule nor the second production crew that would save time when moving between locations. Assistant director George Jeffery checks the last take and bellows, "We're on the wrong set!" which is the cue for the cast and crew to strike out for the next location.

Hawco leads the charge, hurrying out into Military Rd. and into the arms of the autograph-seeker. He stops to chat and signs his name. There's always time for fans.

How to improve Canada's chintzy patchwork of multicultural broadcasting



Luke Nguyen hosts an Australian Special Broadcasting Service program about the food of southern Vietnam.

At 11:00 a.m., it's the news in Hindi. Half an hour later, it will be Arabic.

Welcome to Australia's Special Broadcasting Service, a public, ad-supported multilingual and multicultural broadcaster independent from ABC, the country's ad-free public broadcaster.

After a morning of newscasts beamed in by satellite from as many as 14 countries, including Turkey, Japan, France and Russia, SBS switches over to a lively cross-cultural mix of programming. There are Australian game and cooking shows, and American or British dramas, all in English, but also, with subtitles, a cop show from Denmark, a crime series from Austria and movies from Spain, Sweden, Korea and China — as well as international documentaries and English-language newscasts devoted largely to foreign news.

It makes Canada's patchwork system of ethnic broadcasters and multicultural cable channels, with their cheaply produced community news shows and foreign newscasts underwritten by a steady stream of U.S. sitcoms, look pretty chintzy.

For a country that prides itself on its multicultural makeup, Canada could do a better job not merely of offering foreign-language content to ethnic communities but also of including cross-cultural dialogue in its broadcasting system by making international content, rather than simply American content, available to all.

"For years, Canadian regulators have stymied the growth of a truly multicultural television industry in this country..." write Bart Beaty and Rebecca Sullivan in their 2006 book *Canadian Television Today*. "Canada should cast wide its doors and welcome in as much third-language programming as possible..."

Beaty and Sullivan are fierce critics of a Canadian system that prevents viewers from grabbing foreign satellite signals out of the air and protects the business interests of local ethnic broadcasters, rather than allowing ethnic audiences direct access to what is often higher quality programming available from their native lands.

They suggest opening the door to all signals — and, some territorial blocking notwithstanding, the Internet increasingly makes that possible, letting viewers hunt out soccer matches or newscasts from around the world.

Others suggest the CBC, which remains resolutely divided along the French-English axis despite a mandate to reflect Canada's multicultural nature, could act as an online hub for programming from overseas broadcasters that would introduce all Canadians, not just specific ethnic communities, to "the best of the rest."

Danish crime, anyone? Live coverage of cycling's Tour of Spain? Or how about travels through Vietnam with Australian chef Luke Nguyen?

France's nightly public television is free of ads, but not of problems



The Theatre Antique d'Orange in southern France will be the scene of a live TV performance of *Andromache* next year. The prime-time broadcast will have no commercials, thanks to President Nicolas Sarkozy's ban on advertising after 8 p.m. on public television.

Next June, the famed Comédie-Française theatre troupe will take to the stage of an ancient Roman theatre in Orange in the south of France to perform the classic tragedy *Andromache* — live for the folks at home watching on TV.

This is French public television as it was meant to be, with France's best actors performing classics of the dramatic canon in prime time. Or, at least, it is French public television as President Nicolas Sarkozy believes it should be.

Sarkozy, who is often accused of meddling in French broadcasting in the manner of Italian media baron-turned-President Silvio Berlusconi, has pushed the public network back to its roots with his ban on advertising after 8 p.m. and embattled plan to eliminate it altogether. The stage plays, once a staple of French television, were being aired late at night because they didn't get big ratings.

French public channels depend on advertising for about a quarter of their

income. For the CBC, that figure is about one-third. And while France is reaffirming its public broadcaster's cultural mandate, Canada's public broadcaster is busily embracing ratings and the ad dollars that come with them.

But for those who think CBC-TV could be saved by aping the distinctively non-commercial model of CBC Radio, France's attempt at ridding the public airwaves of ads is a warning of just how tricky the task might be.

Although the idea of copying the BBC model of an ad-free public broadcaster had sometimes been advocated by the French left, Sarkozy's plan drew howls of outrage from political opponents and television journalists, who feared the public channels would be starved of resources. It ignited a debate in France about the role of public television.

"When we had this debate, some people said, 'Great, you will no longer be restricted

by the ratings and it will be opera every night,'" recalls Thierry Langlois, who served as director of acquisitions and cross-channel programming for France Télévisions until earlier this month and is now director of audio-visual at France's national film agency. It's an argument that is familiar to followers of the CBC.

"We said, 'No, you don't air programs nobody is going to watch. You want an audience: public television is expensive. If nobody is watching you have to question its legitimacy.'"

That debate has calmed, however, and more than a year after public TV went ad-free in 2009, the main reaction of the French public to their new television landscape is one great big Gallic shrug.

Indeed, to a foreigner it might be difficult to notice any change, since no broadcaster in France breaks into a program with ads for the first hour, and France 2, the main public channel, still features long breaks for its nightly lottery draw, public service announcements and corporate sponsorship spots.

The major adjustment for the French is that without the ads after the nightly news at 8, France 2 can now start its main entertainment a quarter-hour earlier in the evening, a move that has proved very popular with audiences.

The differences in programming on France 2 — which carries a few American series but also historical and contemporary French dramas, biographies of French writers, political and cultural talk shows, and documentaries — are also small.

"It's not a radical change," said Sylvie Kerviel, television editor at the newspaper *Le Monde*. "We weren't talking about trash TV before; it was already a fairly dignified offering. This has permitted the earlier scheduling and a few more cultural programs. They won't get huge ratings, but it's their mandate."

If the programming philosophy is steady-as-she-goes, what remains greatly in doubt are the funding formulas behind it. Sarkozy was widely accused of making the shift as a gift to his friends in commercial broadcasting – Martin Bouygues, chairman and CEO of the Groupe Bouygues, which owns the main commercial network, TF1, is godfather to Sarkozy's son. But they haven't exactly thanked him: private broadcasters have lobbied continuously against a new tax on their ad revenues designed to help fund France Télévisions. The European Commission has okayed that tax and a similar one on Internet service providers, but an appeal from the broadcasters is still pending.

Meanwhile, the taxes have not raised as much as forecast. The French government had to come up with an extra €450 million

(about \$620 million Canadian) for France Télévisions in 2009-2010 rather than raise the €116 million (about \$160 million Canadian) licence fee French citizens pay to fund public broadcasting, and the European economy is suffering.

Critics think the completion of Sarkozy's plan, removing the daytime ads, is no longer realistic, and the French government finally agreed this month to give the broadcaster a two-year reprieve, until 2013. French parliamentarians are now pushing to keep daytime advertising permanently.

France can look enviously to Spain, which followed the French lead and took all advertising off its two public television channels as the country moved to digital transmission earlier this year. Spaniards flocked to the new uninterrupted programs, and the result was a nice ratings boost for

the public network just as it was facing competition from newly launched digital channels.

In France, meanwhile, TF1 and its 40-per-cent American schedule rule the roost, boasting 96 of the top 100 shows in 2009, the first year of ad-free public TV. It's a situation decidedly reminiscent of the relationship between top-rated CTV and CBC.

In France, the dubbed version of *House* can draw 10 million viewers, while France 2 learnt a hard lesson last year when its live broadcast of Molière's *The Miser* drew less than a million.

This season, programmers have decided live theatre must feature boulevard comedies like the Georges Feydeau farce slated to air later this season or major theatrical events – preferably set in antique Roman theatres.



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Digital freedom comes with a high cost



Ian Kelso, president of the industry trade association Interactive Ontario: “We need an ongoing vision of what kind of economy and what kind of society we want to build.”

In the future, everything will be free. By 2017, we will all be able to turn on our wireless TV sets, laptops, mobiles, reading tablets and music players to enjoy any show, movie, book or song we want from anywhere in the world, whenever we want, however we want.

Of course, we will still have to pay the service provider, and the bill will be hefty considering how much bandwidth we will all be using.

Oh, and there will be an awful lot of intrusive ads locked into the programs too. And there won't really be that much choice either. The quality stuff will all be hidden away on various subscription tiers.

All the video will come from a few vertically integrated mega-providers in Hollywood that will control both the

entertainment and its distribution, while the only books ever published will be those that stand a good chance of becoming Amazon bestsellers.

Recorded music will be reduced to promotional downloads used to sell concert tickets and the back catalogue of the 20th century. Diversity of choice, including much international content and any Canadian content, will have withered away.

The consumer will rule — over a scorched earth.

Utopian visions of our digital future rapidly crumble into dystopian fragments when you begin to ask exactly how this wonderful world of wirelessly distributed digital entertainment will work. In their insistence that all geographic boundaries will give way to the mighty Internet,

technological enthusiasts often talk as though copyright, a system of protecting intellectual property by geographic territory, were meaningless.

And yet it is rights protections, in their various forms, that feed the people who produce content. No rights, no content. Or, at least, not much content in the rich middle that lies between the blockbuster and the video of somebody's cat doing funny tricks.

Paradoxically, the gospel of free may hasten the evolution of the Internet into a medium dominated by a few giant distributors. And since the endangered middle ground is where most Canadian content lies, Canada needs to take a hard look at what the digital future means.

“Canadians are watching a lot of content on U.S.

sites, like YouTube, and the

advertisers are chasing them,” says digital media consultant Alan Sawyer, who has identified what he calls an attention trade deficit on the Internet where Canadians see lots of foreign content but foreigners seldom seek out Canadian content. “If the only distribution vehicles are American sites — if there is no promotion and prominence for Canadian content — we will lose the battle both economically and culturally.”

This year, as Britain passed its digital economy act and New Zealand continued with its second digital strategy, the Canadian government belatedly woke up to this issue and began conducting online public consultations in the spring. Hosted by Industry Canada, those conversations were heavy on talk of economic opportunity and

consumer choice, and light on discussion of content and where it might come from.

And yet it is the ability to create and control intellectual property that most producers believe will define the winners in the world of web 2.0. Their utopian vision is one in which the great mediators, the broadcasters and the studios, are forced out of the way as creators get direct access to audiences. That's a formula that could potentially add a lot of Canadian content to the mix, because it would democratize distribution.

So, how do we get there from here — to the utopia of real diversity rather than the dystopia of complete freedom among limited choices?

Whatever their take on the pros and cons of the Internet, most observers agree that direct content quotas of the kind that have ruled Canadian radio and TV since the 1970s are impractical.

"If you were to tell Google if YouTube is to be available in Canada you have to contribute to Canadian content funds or have Canadian content quotas, you won't get anywhere," says Sawyer, who believes subsidies are the only alternative.

Google itself argues that the very need for quotas has evaporated.

"You don't have to worry any more about the old question that has consumed Canadian broadcasting for the past 30 or 40 years, which is how do you reserve space on the dial for Canadian content, because the dial is infinite," says Jacob Glick, Google Canada's policy counsel. "Today, if people just wanted to consume Canadian content online all day, they could."

But would they find it in their online travels? Canadian is not a genre, after all. And would they be satisfied with its quality if they did find it? There are some steps the Canadian government should be taking to ensure a future of accessible, popular and high-quality Canadian content. Some of them are simple and practical, some of them more philosophical.

1 Put the cultural horse back in front of the economic cart, recognizing that a vibrant Canadian popular culture can offer both personal enjoyment and economic opportunities for all Canadians, not simply high paying jobs for the relatively few people who work in the cultural and digital

industries. Closer co-operation between the departments of Canadian Heritage and Industry Canada is needed so that cultural goals get more than lip service.

2 Pass a new, unified broadcasting and telecommunications act that incorporates the two realms, recognizing that they increasingly overlap and that Internet service providers (ISPs) are now major cultural distributors.

3 Use the new act to extend the system whereby levies on cable revenues fund Canadian television programming to one where levies on ISP revenues would fund Canadian content. (Currently such levies are impossible because of a Federal Court of Appeal ruling that ISPs are not broadcasters.)

4 Expand the small amounts now available to subsidize Canadian content on new platforms and recognize that some of the most effective funding in the cultural industries in the past has gone directly to emerging talents to help them reach audiences.

5 Make sure producers don't get subsidies for content without also getting money for marketing and guarantees of prominent display for what they create. Shelf space on the Internet is infinite; prominent positioning is not. The Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission, long accustomed to the linear and finite offerings of TV and radio schedules, is considering how catalogues of on-demand programming can be regulated. For starters, it has asked cable operators to track the percentage of Canadian content in their video-on-demand offerings.

6 Nurture existing cultural institutions that already have a strong on-line presence, especially the CBC and the NFB, so that they can act as hubs not only for Canadian content but also for online communities. Encourage the principle that content Canadian taxpayers have previously paid for should be freely available on line — and enable the necessary rights negotiations to ensure that.

7 Immediately extend to new media the advertising tax credit system that allows businesses to claim their ad buys on Canadian TV and radio and in Canadian publications as a business expense. This would encourage businesses to advertise on Canadian websites.

DO WE ALSO NEED a digital strategy? CRTC chairman Konrad von Finckenstein has called for a royal commission on the digital future, but those in the field say it is developing so quickly it may be very hard for policy-makers to keep up.

"A digital strategy is probably not something we need," observes Ian Kelso, president of the industry trade association Interactive Ontario. "We need an ongoing vision of what kind of economy and what kind of society we want to build."

How about a non-partisan flying squad ready to swiftly pass on recommendations based on a digital philosophy? That philosophy would be based on two notions: that all Canadians, rural or urban, deserve affordable access; and that the efficiencies of the Internet and digital distribution should be exploited as a golden opportunity for Canadian producers to reach Canadian audiences, and for Canadian citizens to reach each other.

"Canada is a big country," observed Kelso. "One thing the Internet does well is bridge gaps."

The year 2017 marks the 150th anniversary of Confederation, and the 50th anniversary of the great flowering of Canadian culture and Canadian confidence that marked the centennial year. In six years' time, we want to be a band of "netizens," "prosumers" and professional cultural producers involved in continually shifting dialogues with each other and with the world about who we all are and the place we inhabit.

The one-way model of old media is giving way to a conversation: Canadians need to be more than eavesdroppers.

A teen's-eye view of the digital future

"My kids never watch TV anymore. They are always on the computer."

It's a common remark from the parents of teens and young adults. Probe a little deeper and you may discover that contemporary youth, like young people before them, are too busy socializing to watch TV – in this case by texting their friends or logging on to Facebook. Or you may find out they are watching TV shows and movies on their computers, downloading them from file-sharing sites.

To get a glimpse of the future, we asked the class of 2010 what media they owned and how they used it. Some of them watched TV, some of them didn't, but only one of the five interviewed couldn't name a favourite TV show.

The women were loyal texters; the men weren't. All but one had downloaded music without paying, although one of the young people had stopped the practice at her father's urging while another buys his favourites. The remaining two, on the other hand, routinely download not only music but also pirated movies.

With the exception of a bilingual Quebecer who watches French-language movies, none of them named a single Canadian movie or TV show when asked about the content they consume.

Name: Dylan Tate-Howarth

Age: 18

Currently: Foundation year student studying history, philosophy and English at the University of King's College, Halifax, where she lives in residence.

Technology: Laptop, cellphone and iPod nano, and access to two TVs (with a DVD player but no cable) and two computers in the family home in Toronto.

Recreational screen time: "In the middle of writing an essay, I will check my email and Facebook. I am in front of a screen a lot." She estimates total time, including school work, at five hours a day including two hours a day on Facebook and occasional texting. Watches no live TV but streams shows on the Internet and rents movie DVDs.

On the player: Current favourites include Bob Dylan, The National and Broken Social Scene.

Shows and movies: *The Office*, *Mad Men*.

Downloading: Fills her iPod from CDs she already owns via iTunes or, occasionally, with legal samples. Never downloads music or video from file-sharing sites but watches TV shows wherever she can find them online, occasionally on broadcasters' websites but more often on sites such as

Megavideo, which has been accused of copyright infringement.

Canadian content: "In terms of TV and movies, I don't really know a lot of the time whether they are Canadian or American. I listen to a lot of Canadian music. There are really good things like CBC Radio 3, which is a podcast that has indie Canadian music..."



Olivier Soudin, 18, of St. Bruno, Que., is a fan of Quebec film, but said he considers English Canadian movies "the same as American ones."

Name: Olivier Soudin

Age: 18

Currently: First year student at the English-language Champlain College St.-Lambert in St.-Lambert, Que. Lives

with his family in St.-Bruno, Que.

Technology: Cellphone, iPod touch, Blu-Ray PlayStation 3 and Wii, and family computer and TV.

Recreational screen time: One hour TV and computer, minimal texting.

On the player: Michael Jackson.

Shows and movies: *Saturday Night Live*, *Friends*, *My Wife and Kids*, often time-shifted from satellite. Watches little French-language TV but regularly rents Quebec movies including *Les tríos p'tits cochons*, *Bon Cop*, *Bad Cop* and *De père en flic*. Also rents Hollywood movies and goes to the cinema every few months.

Downloading: "If I really like a song, I would get it on iTunes." Doesn't know how to download a show or movie.

Canadian content: "I watch more Quebec movies. I consider (English) Canadian movies the same as American ones. They are just in English. I don't know what the difference would be."

Name: N.M.

Age: 18

Currently: First-year liberal arts major at York University. Lives with her family in Woodbridge.

Technology: Cellphone, laptop and iPod, and computer, five TVs and one PVR in the family home.

Recreational screen time: Five hours mainly online using Facebook, Tweeting and blogging.

On the player: 7,000 songs downloaded via MediaFire, including music by Muse and Blitzes Trapper as well as the entire discography of Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin, The Doors and The Beatles.

Shows and movies: Keeps MTV and MuchMusic on in the background while computing but watches no TV drama. Downloads a movie most weekends; recently watched *The Runaways* and *Get Him to the Greek*.

Downloading: "It's called torrenting... I use it to download movies that are still in the theatre or on DVD... There are two different kinds. Either someone has taken a video camera into the theatre and has recorded the movie, but those usually are very bad quality. A lot of the time if you wait maybe two weeks, three weeks after the movie is released, a press copy will show up on the Internet and will be available to download because someone got hold of it somehow. And that's how you get a decent copy of the movie while it is still in theatres." Has also downloaded copies of brand-name computer programs from the Internet.

Canadian content: "I don't know."

Name: E.L.
Age: 17

Currently: First-year engineering student at the University of Alberta in Edmonton, where he lives with his family.

Technology: Cellphone, iPod touch and laptop, and computer, 2 TVs, PVR and Xbox in the family home.

Recreational screen time: Three hours a day mainly watching TV, on Facebook or downloading music.

On the player: Any contemporary music as long as it is not country. Has about 3,000 downloaded songs on his iPod and estimates he owns three CDs.

Shows and movies: *The Office* and *Lost* as well as *Two and a Half Men*, *The Simpsons* and *Seinfeld* reruns. He often watches recorded episodes off the PVR or catches up with previous seasons by downloading them from the Internet. Goes to the movies half a dozen times a year, sometimes rents DVDs, and often downloads movies that are no longer in the theatres.

Downloading: "I can get it all for free."

Canadian content: "I don't really know that much about Canadian stuff. I don't really notice a distinction between Canadian and American stuff."

Name: Ailey Jarvis
Age: 18

Currently: First-year kinesiology student at the University of Calgary, where she lives in residence.

Technology: Cellphone, iPod touch and laptop, and personal computers, TV, Wii at her family home in West Vancouver.

Recreational screen time: Five hours a day including texting, some TV and some computer use.

On the player: Country, Top 40, soundtrack of the TV show *Glee*.

Shows and movies: *Glee*, *Grey's Anatomy*, *Gossip Girl*, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show*, *Wipeout*, mainly watched live with occasional catch-up viewing on broadcaster websites.

Downloading: "We used to get it on LimeWire, which is a free download site, but it's not as safe and it's not really right not to pay the artist, so now we only buy our music." Never downloads movies or TV shows.

Canadian content: "I am uneducated... You don't really know which shows are Canadian. It's not really pointed out, so I am not sure what is available."



Kate Taylor

Kate Taylor is a Canadian arts journalist, critic and novelist. The daughter of a Canadian diplomat, she was born in France and raised in Ottawa and Europe. She studied history and art history at the University of Toronto, and completed a Masters in journalism at the University of Western Ontario in London, Ont.

She worked at the London Free Press and Hamilton Spectator before joining the copy desk at the Globe and Mail in 1989. She became an arts reporter at that paper in 1991 and served as the Globe's authoritative and provocative theatre critic from 1995-2003, winning two Nathan Cohen Awards and a nomination for a National Newspaper Award with her reviews. Since 2003, she has worked as a columnist, critic and feature writer in the Globe's arts section, with a special interest in cultural policy.

Kate Taylor is also an award-winning novelist. Her 2003 novel *Mme Proust and the Kosher Kitchen* won the Commonwealth Prize for best First Novel - Canada/ Caribbean region; the Toronto Book Award and the Canadian Jewish Book Award. Her second novel, *A Man in Uniform*, is a detective story set in late 19th-century France and was published by Doubleday Canada in 2010.