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Feeling Canadian: Television, Nationalism, and Affect

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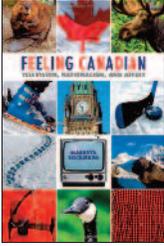
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Feeling Canadian: Television, Nationalism, and Affect. By Marusya Bociurkiw. Waterloo, ON: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2011, 178 pp. ISBN 9781554582686 (pbk).

The Québec referendum, *Loving Spoonfuls*, Trudeau's funeral, Joe Canadian, and 9/11 are all explored in Marusya Bociurkiw's *Feeling Canadian*. Bociurkiw examines the convergence of affect and nationalism in selected media super-texts from 1995 to 2002. With material primarily from the CBC, as well as the National Library and Archives, CTV, W, Knowledge and Vision networks (see chapter 2, "The Televisual Archive and the Nation"), Bociurkiw takes an interdisciplinary approach to her study of affect in Canadian television; grounded in affect theory (see chapter 1, "Affect Theory") she employs feminist theories of memory, Frankfurt School theories of production and political economy, television theories of the super-text, and queer and post-structural theories to create a work that is relevant, as a whole or in parts, to film, media, Canadian, and cultural studies and to critical scholars in anthropology, post-colonial studies, and feminist/queer studies. The book, originally Bociurkiw's doctoral thesis (Bociurkiw, 2004), has seven chapters framed by an introduction, a conclusion, and a coda.

The author argues that marginalized identities within Canada's seemingly hybrid national identity are erased, suppressed, and/or vilified in order to market Canadian national identity both to us and to the world via media displays of affect. Bociurkiw appears in the book on both a critical and personal level, as she weaves autoethnographic vignettes on her queer Ukrainian childhood throughout. Her voice allows readers to see the issues of identity and difference from the perspective of the individual. For example, in chapter 4, "An Otherness Barely Touched Upon," Bociurkiw relates how her mother invited a news crew to her home to film the family's Ukrainian Christmas. Young Marusya is replaced with ethnically garbed and coiffed Maria whose love for being Ukrainian outshines Bociurkiw's "sullen resentment and ethnic shame" (2011, p. 87). The vignette propels the chapter outward into an analysis of how cultural food discourses, like *Loving Spoonfuls*, displace the immigrant and his/her painful experiences within the greater national discourse.

Further developing the author's thesis are chapter 3, "Whose Child Am I?" (on the Québec referendum; this chapter also appears in Druick & Kotsopolos, 2008) and chapter 7, "Homeland (In)Security" (on 9/11 and the 2002 Winter Olympics). Both chapters deal with popular cultural texts that undulate with the pain and vulnerability from symbolic divorces and actual deaths. The chapters speak to each other because they each echo how the discursive work of nation-building is contradictory (e.g., Canadians as Americans and versus Americans), exclusory (e.g., ethnic others), and tied to globalization (e.g., media branding of nationhood). The chapters evoke a national machine that sells itself through media affect with little regard for the individual lives affected by the resulting cultural schisms.

Cultural schisms lie behind high production value documentaries, such as *Canada: A People's History* (CPH), which Bociurkiw tackles in chapter 4, "Haunted Absences." The irony of the documentary is exposed when, for instance, the producer states that

white film crews taught Aboriginal actors how to hunt muskox. Bociurkiw offers the CBC series *North of Sixty* (NOS) as an Aboriginal centric counter-text to CPH. Bociurkiw offers such a compelling argument for the cultural significance of NOS that readers might wonder why it is not the focus of a chapter. At the same time, Bociurkiw uses NOS to highlight Aboriginal issues that are underexplored in the media, such as residential school experiences, addiction caused by abuse in residential schools, and recovery programs grounded in Aboriginal spirituality and culture. Her analysis, while elsewhere thorough, misses that the series originally centred on a White, male protagonist played by actor John Oliver in a fish-out-of-water story (i.e., another Joe Canadian).

Love him or hate him, Joe Canadian, as the polarizing personification of the nation, appears throughout the book. Departed Prime Minister Trudeau, whose funeral is the subject of chapter 6, “National Mania, Collective Melancholia,” is an effective foil for Joe. Where Joe Canadian is unabashedly heteronormative and humble, Trudeau vacillates between a queer sensibility, often dressing in capes and ascots with red roses in his lapels, and that of staunch militarist, imposing martial law during the October Crisis and befriending Fidel Castro. Bociurkiw examines the forces that propelled Trudeau into a “national body,” onto which a nation projected its hopes and fears, as well as the national performance of mourning and melodrama that was captured in broadcasts of his funeral. Yet, at the end of the day, it is to Joe Canadian that we return as the coda ends with the “I am Canadian” performance that ended the 2010 Olympic Winter Games.

Filmmakers use a coda to induce audiences to sit through the credits for an extra scene or sequel. Bociurkiw’s coda explores the 2010 Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver. As seen in chapter 7, the Olympics foster an insidious nexus of nationalism, capitalism, and affect, as seen in programming and advertisements. Bociurkiw evokes the Nazi construct of *heimat*, where race and homeland become one and this is eerily reified in the coda in the analysis of the use of the Riefenstahl film *Olympia* to promote the games. Against this backdrop of Riefenstahl imagery, Bociurkiw critiques the blurring of fast food commercials with sports coverage, as well as nationalistic sentiment and the instances of racist figure skating commentary. It is interesting that Bociurkiw does not explore the homophobic treatment of US skater Johnny Weir (i.e., American as queer other) by two Québécois Canadian journalists. This episode and its outfall fit perfectly with the ethos of this work, where America and Americans are used to juxtapose and define Canadian identity.

This book is coherent, as the reader follows similar threads of critical thought through the deconstruction of various super-texts, in what could also be read singularly or in combination as a collection of essays. Bociurkiw’s personal vignettes help to personalize the book within the context of a queer life lived against a nationalist backdrop, without sounding overly indulgent or nostalgic. Hopefully, the author is offering us a coda with the promise of a sequel that further develops the 2010 Olympics, *North of Sixty*, and other super-texts in the years since 2002.

References

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