

Book Review: What I Did on My Summer Vacation - Cultures in Collision: The Interaction of Canadian and U.S. Broadcast Policies: A Canadian-U.S. Conference on Communications Policy

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Citation Information

Bishop, William. "Book Review: What I Did on My Summer Vacation - Cultures in Collision: The Interaction of Canadian and U.S. Broadcast Policies: A Canadian-U.S. Conference on Communications Policy." *Osgoode Hall Law Journal* 22.4 (1984) : 789-791.
<http://digitalcommons.osgoode.yorku.ca/ohlj/vol22/iss4/10>

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WHAT I DID ON MY SUMMER VACATION

CULTURES IN COLLISION; THE INTERACTION OF CANADIAN AND U. S. BROADCAST POLICIES. A Canadian-U.S. Conference on Communications Policy. Praeger, 1984.

*Reviewed by William Bishop**

Picture it. An itinerant LSE academic who, trying to pay for his vacation, is hocking his shop-worn wares around North American university seminars. He is cornered by one of his hosts. Will he review a book which sounds mind-numbingly boring, something about the interaction of U.S.-Canadian broadcast policies? You can't be serious!? You are? No retreat in sight, the victim of this ambush surrenders with as much grace as he can muster. A U.K. resident asked to list the problems of the world from one to (say) six hundred would not put the Canada-U.S. TV dispute on the list; it might not come close. Imagine, then, the reviewer's misery when, months later and back in London, he can put off the task no longer. Yet, against all this, try to imagine his relief — bordering on shock — at finding that the volume is really quite interesting.

The most revealing exchange for the general reader is between Mark Freiman and Glen Robinson. Freiman rants against the idea of consumer sovereignty in general and against the idea of its intrusion into TV regulation in particular. As is invariably the case in such polemics the writer unwittingly reveals a deep contempt for the aspirations, the choices, the very lives of most ordinary, non-intellectual people. Each idea is merely a peg for the writer's rhetoric rather than a tool for his analysis. For example, because subscription TV is an imperfect register of demand intensity, though a great deal better than advertiser-supported TV, it is dismissed as incapable of achieving Pareto optimality. The deluded man seems actually to believe that sociological theory is capable of "demonstrating" facts about the real world. Bits of semi-metaphysical stuff from Harold Innes even find their way into the brew. Every consumer suffers from "inadequacy of information" and consequent incapacity to "valuate" [*sic*] the TV programme offered — everyone except Professor Freiman his like. All the arguments might equally well be applied to support state censorship of books. A sorry

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confection it makes.

What a contrast is Professor Robinson's comment. In clear, simple, elegant and vigorous prose, Freiman is thoroughly refuted. Robinson's little gem of an essay ought to be read by every cultural *dirigiste* in Canada. I should like to quote all of it, but must content myself with recommending it as an essay which cannot but delight anyone who takes the trouble to chase it up.

A very different kind of pleasure came from reading in tandem Professor Yale Braunstein's paper on the effects of Canadian tax discrimination against use by Canadians of U.S.-based TV advertising. One always gets a satisfying feeling from the presentation of (apparently) convincing counter-intuitive results. Braunstein seemed to have made a strong *prima facie* case, based on an elegant, yet simple formal model, that the effect of the tax dangers was not to increase revenues to Canadian TV companies. Then Parker, as commentator, did the same trick all over again! He convinced me that Braunstein's results depended on an unappealing assumption which when changed led to not only an opposite result, but one more in keeping with the "stylized facts". These papers are applied economics of a very attractive kind — brief, exact, lucid, stimulating.

The most substantial and impressive paper in the volume, by Theodore Hagelin and Hudson Janisch, is almost as much an exercise in diplomacy as in scholarship. They analyse carefully the different attitudes to broadcasting in the two countries and the implications for different types of border cross-over effects. They propose a two-part compromise which meets most, though not all, of the aims of public policy in the two countries. If the two governments were sincere in their publically-expressed arguments of principle, they would probably adopt the Hagelin-Janisch programme. Of course, the reality is that governments use principles not as guideposts, but as rhetorical ammunition. This programme would displease some powerful interests sufficiently to make its adoption unlikely.

A good example of interested displeasure follows the paper in a Comment by Erwin Krasnow of the American National Association of Broadcasters (N.A.B.). The Hagelin-Janisch proposal would not at all help the U.S. border broadcasters and — surprise, surprise — the N.A.B. representative heaps scorn upon it. Yet, he unwittingly reveals that he has not really understood the principles on which Hagelin and Janisch constructed their proposal. He excoriates them for "a confused discussion of property rights", but Hagelin and Janisch are perfectly clear: it is Krasnow who is confused. He refers breathtakingly in the next sentence to border broadcasters "who acquire the right to transmit

a programme to all within reach of their signal." But this is the very point at issue. Who conferred this right on them and when? The idea that a U.S. government licence confers rights in respect of Canadian territory is staggering. "*Whose law?*" is a routine question which many Americans, even educated ones, do not fully comprehend. Perhaps Mr. Krasnow thinks that the border broadcasters acquired rights by prescription. This, too, fails for there is no general principle in the broadcast law of either country which requires compensation for changes in regulatory regimes. Yet, for all that, it is Krasnow's point of view which will prevail, however threadbare the argument. Hagelin and Janisch, after all, have nothing to offer but fine scholarship and imaginative policy analysis — puny weapons in the world of practical politics, alas.

The world of practical politics is also represented in the book by assorted grandees, in this case ambassadorial types. They haven't much of substance to say but, to give them their due, they do manage to say nothing rather well. So, a bright and stimulating volume — and in the world of dreary volumes of conference papers that is rare indeed.

