

From the Media Awareness Network



Barry's Bulletin

a popular culture digest for media educators

By Barry Duncan

February 2002

In this month's bulletin:

**The Superbowl II Lord of the Rings II Extra! Magazine
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The Superbowl: A hymn of praise for the American way of life?

We had been warned in advance that the February 3rd Superbowl, the biggest television event of the year, was going to be charged with patriotic messages; indeed, there has been no performance like this except during the Gulf War and in the Reagan years when an astronaut with a jet pack whizzed around the stadium and gestured thumbs up to a wildly enthusiastic audience.

It was a brilliant move to line up five presidents (Nancy Reagan was a stand-in for hubby) to recite passages from Abraham Lincoln while we were bathed in a sea of iconic images. Beautiful scenes, emotive music and presidential voices all blended to deliver a powerful, but highly manipulative experience.

Looking at the pre-game show starring former presidents, it is important in our analysis to show how the effective use of juxtaposition is combined with the cumulative effects of Lincoln's exhortations – "we must rise with the difficulties which unite us in honour." The final image is of a black soldier hugging his daughter while the confident narrator intones, "But lives will change forever; they are part of something great which will stay with them forever, much like the indelible spirit of Americans everywhere."

Key Question: What makes these images, music and words so powerful? To make this exercise meaningful, analyze three short sequences (15-60 seconds) from the Superbowl, indicating the codes and conventions associated with American history and mythology and their connections with the events of September 11.

Here are some of key images and words. If you didn't watch the Superbowl, it is important to realize the highly emotive music that accompanied them.



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Image of the American flag ... "Unite us in honour – bear the responsibility"... The ITC towers collapse... People on the street running frantically (in slow motion)... Firemen to the rescue... Aerial shot of the burned out section of the Pentagon... American flags being lowered by firemen from a building... Lincoln image followed by President Bush Sr.'s words "piled high with difficulty"... Iconic image of five US marines raising flag in World War II at Iwo Jima.

President Ford and image of Lincoln statue... White House... Image of glacier... Galloping horses at sunset... President Bush... Images of Gettesburg and a civil war cannon... Appalachian mountains with clouds in fast motion... Aerial shot of ground zero Manhattan... "government by the people, for the people"... Tilt shot to clouds finally landing on the flags... Football player appears against background of image of JFK saying "Ask not what your country can do for you"... The football player and the president speak the same famous words together.

- If we consider the Superbowl as an extended text, then we would have to figure in all the elements: the pre-game highlights, the game, the commercials, and the half-time performance of U2.
- Discuss the cultural connections in sports as mediated by TV – especially football, the US military and the fighting in Afghanistan.
- Consider the different ways the American flag popped up on the screen , including on the sleeve of Bono at the end of the half-time show.
- How do commercials, such as ones featuring Michael Jordan, and the amazing Budweiser ad showing Clydesdale horses playing football, contribute to the viewer's experience of the Superbowl?
- What are the effects of Paul McCartney's exhortation, "America we love you! Everybody clap your hands for freedom!"

Lord of the Rings: How well does it work as a film?

Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring has much to offer us both as a book and as a film. With a legion of fans, there was great anticipation of the opening of the first part of the trilogy.



Some may regret that the Hobbits have been pushed out of the foreground and reduced to supporting characters. Tolkien's son Christopher, who is the literary protector of his father's works said, "My own position is that the *Lord of the Rings* is peculiarly unsuitable to transformation into visual dramatic form." To what extent do you agree with this observation? What parts of the book translate well? Which ones poorly?



- The taller characters seem to stand astride the little Hobbit world and steal the story away. Do you agree?
- The story is a quest, a journey and a parable of good and evil. What are the classic elements in a quest and how does the story develop the quest themes? How does it compare with other quest stories?
- Compare the film with *Star Wars* and *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone*. Explain which one it resembles more closely.
- The casting of the film is generally outstanding. Suggest some other good actors who might be suitable for the leading parts. How might their style/image conveyed in their performance change our experience of the film?

Extra!: Critiquing the news media



Extra! is a "must" publication for media teachers who want background information on politics and behind-the-news insights. *Extra!* has been delivering the goods since 1986. Published bi-monthly by FAIR, (Fairness & Accuracy in Reporting) which describes itself as "an anticensorship organization, we expose neglected news stories and defend working journalists when they are muzzled. FAIR believes that structural reform is ultimately needed to break up the dominant media conglomerates and promote strong non-profit sources of information." They live up to this mandate. Over the years they have done short, one- to two-page analyses of current events and news reporting. Some of their best material – at least for teachers – include the representation of youth in the media and on multicultural America. (You can visit the FAIR Web site at: www.fair.org.)

The December issue of *Extra!* addresses Sept 11 and the war in Afghanistan. The twelve short articles range from "Patriotism and Censorship" to reports on racial profiling. Many of these articles contain useful statistics on a current issue. For example, the section on news reporting enlightens us on the background of expert guests appearing on broadcast Network News.

Here is an interesting example taken from the section entitled "Sound bites from news reporting as noted by Extra!"

"A left/right dialogue, as the American news business imagines it, is to get a tepid centrist and a hard right-winger and have them argue. So the idea that we have a spectrum of opinion, a continuum of opinion and that you can sample from points all along that continuum, has been less and less true with each passing year."

Ray Suarez, senior correspondent, PBS's *News Hour*. January 2001.

The following are the percentage of groups represented in these sorts of dialogues:



Officials (e.g. military) – 56%
Specialists (e.g. aviation, psychology) – 27%
Corporate representatives – 10%
Religious representatives – 5%
Advocates – 3%

Challenge: How do the network newscasts position themselves in a controversial issue?

Here is a class activity generated, in part, by the above concern.

- Explain what might be considered a right wing, a left wing and centrist position on some current issues. For example, how should we handle the threats posed by terrorism? What would be a range of positions taken?
- After modelling some examples, divide the class so that all the network news broadcasts can all be covered and a survey of the political positioning of the guest experts can be made. Students will determine where each guest expert can be placed on the political spectrum.
- Compare your results with the statistics on the background of network guests noted above.
- What conclusions can be drawn from the results? What recommendations might be made to ensure that guest experts represent a full spectrum of socio-political positions on controversial issues?

Media Clips

Formation of ACME (The Action Coalition for Media Education): A second U.S. national media education organization

Readers will know that a new American media education organization – AMLA (The Alliance for Media Literate America) – was launched last June in Austin, Texas. This ad-hoc group had already been organizing several national conferences, but they lacked an official organization with card holding members and a democratically elected executive. A small group of dissenters have criticized the efforts of AMLA, believing that it has a tainted record: among other things, allegations of undemocratic decision making and a history of corporate connections. It was no surprise, then, that another organization, with spokesperson Bob McCannon, was officially announced in January. This new group is supported by some distinguished academics, such as Sut Jhally and Mark Crispin Miller. The ACME boasts a very activist agenda and 'ipso facto' implies that their rival doesn't.

When you realize how fragile the movement is in the United States, there is, of course, a real danger in having warring groups. Whether the organizing center coming primarily out of New Mexico can be instrumental in creating a national movement is problematic, especially when they claim to be "dedicated to justice, democracy, children, and the search for truth." A tall order, indeed! The excerpt below is taken from their mission statement. We wish ACME well and hope there will be ultimately more benefits than liabilities.



Have you ever wished for a media education organization for activists – one that emphasizes using media literacy to solve media-related problems? Would you like to belong to a group that believes the power of media studies can help students, teachers and media education professionals deal with corporate censorship, racism, commercialism in the schools, news monopolies and the misrepresentation of women and minorities?

Would you like to see media literacy attack addiction, advertising as corporate welfare, environmental damage, media-induced violence, a conditioned citizenry, cultural imperialism, censorship, globalization, sweatshops and much more? Have you ever thought that such an organization could exist independent of Big Media (which helps to cause these problems), adding a powerful emphasis and a positive attitude to media education?

If so, your hopes have arrived in the form of the Action Coalition for Media Education. From October 18 - 20, 2002, the founding summit for ACME will take place in Albuquerque, New Mexico. The ACME Summit will: 1) provide for an exchange of knowledge and strategies; and 2) form a truly independent, action-oriented media education organization. This group and ACME are dedicated to justice, democracy, children, and the search for truth.

For more information or help, please contact Rachel Bowen, Conference Coordinator, at <bowen@aa.edu> or at 505-828-3377. Media education, our kids and our democracy need you. Please forward to interested parties and lists.

Thanks for your attention,

Bob McCannon
www.nmmlp.org

International News

North American media educators tend to know little about media education around the world. There is much we can learn. I solicited news from a handful of countries and for this issue I am printing reports from Hong Kong and New Zealand. I hope you find them worthwhile.



News from Hong Kong

From Alice Lee



1. The Inclusion of Media Education into the School Curriculum

The Education Department of the Hong Kong SAR Government positively responds to the lobbying of the inclusion of media education in the school curriculum. At present, Hong Kong is in the process of educational reform. Under the slogan of "Learning How to Learn," critical thinking and active learning have become an essential part of the new curriculum. Media education is considered capable of playing a great role in the reform.

The Education Department has encouraged school teachers to include media education in their classrooms. According to its recent evaluation, media education has penetrated into the subjects of General Studies, Civic Education, Economic and Public Affairs, Social Studies, Government and Public Affairs, Religions Studies, Ethics and Religious Studies, and Liberal Studies.

In order to further enhance Humanities/Civic and Moral Education teachers' competency in conducting media education in local secondary schools, the Education Department is organizing four identical in-service teacher-training courses outside school hours during the period from September 2001 to March 2002. The courses are conducted by the members of the Hong Kong Association of Media Education (HKAME).

2. Media Education for Children

The Radio Television of Hong Kong, a government-owned media organization, has lately produced a media education television program that is targeted to a young audience entitled "Why Is It Not Suitable for Children?" (12 episodes). The program was broadcast from October 2001 to January 2002.

This is the second media education program for Hong Kong audience. The first 10-episode media education television program was broadcast two years ago.

3. Media Education Development in Hong Kong

A recent study conducted by the Hong Kong Association of Media Education in Hong Kong (HKAME) indicates that over 180 schools and organizations in Hong Kong have been conducting media education. So far, six volumes of media education curriculum kits have been published. The seventh one is on the way.

A three-year media education program entitled "Media and Information Literacy Education" (MILE) is now being conducted in Hong Kong by Breakthrough, which is a local youth organization.

The program includes setting up media education resource centers, holding teacher and parent workshops, publishing media education textbooks, and running an interactive media education Web site. The address of the Web site is <http://mile.bt4u.com>.



News from New Zealand

From Geoff Lealand



There is a positive climate for media education in New Zealand, with continued growth in both secondary and tertiary teaching, new developments in national assessment, and a supportive Ministry of Education. From 2003, Media Studies will be a subject area in the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), as well as remaining as Unit Standards on the National Qualifications Framework. During 2002, a team of experienced media teachers will be working on guidelines and exemplars for Media Studies for NCEA.

Further growth continues in media courses in universities and polytechnics. Teaching has been assisted through the publication of New Zealand textbooks, such as Lealand & Martin, *It's All Done With Mirrors: About Television* (Dunmore Press, 2001) and Farnsworth & Hutchison eds. *New Zealand Television: A Reader* (Dunmore Press, 2002). The National Association of Media Educators (NAME) provides significant support for New Zealand teachers and strong links have been forged with Australian colleagues. In April 2003, there will be another Teachers Research Course Committee-funded conference for New Zealand media teachers, to be held in Hamilton.

Dr. Geoff Lealand
Screen and Media Studies, University of Waikato, Hamilton, NZ

Recommended Resources



Scanning Television Two is in the works!

Arguably the best known set of videos for media teachers in North America is the *Scanning Television* series (four videos) produced in 1997 by Gary Marcuse and John Pungente, accompanied with an excellent teaching guide written by Neil Andersen. These videos, most of them selected from CITY-TV's weekly *Media Television* program, provide interesting and useful background on the work of the media industries together with valuable social comment. They are excellent discussion starters. The good news is that the same team is now producing *Scanning Television Two*. The advisory team of reviewers is evaluating and making recommendations of videos drawn from a large selection.

The result: the final edit should make an impressive media education package available in Fall 2002 through Harcourt Canada. Stay tuned!

For more information, contact: Marcuse@smartt.com.

Is the Medium Really the Message?

McLuhan: Wise Guy

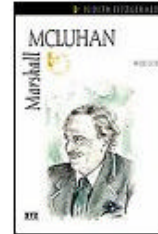
Judith Fitzgerald, XYZ Publishing, 2001
E-mail: xyz@telus.net or contact Theatre Books, Toronto.

In the last five years, there has been an amazing renaissance of Marshall McLuhan's reputation and inevitably a proliferation of books about or compilations of his works. The point has been made that the communication dynamics of our hyper kinetic, wired, global village makes the



Canadian guru's observations on communications, formulated thirty or forty years ago, amazingly relevant. But the problem with reading McLuhan is that his writings are more a series of 'exploratory probes' (his words) than neatly organized linear prose. His discourse is always playful, full of wild metaphors ransacked from a host of disciplines. It seems that this very mixture is analogous to the way we process today's media and popular culture through 'pattern recognition.'

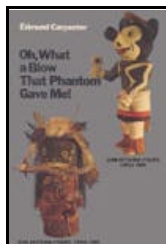
As one of seven graduate students in his communications course in 1961—the time he was formulating his thesis on the properties of the media – I was privileged to be in a class regarded by many of his colleagues as crazy and frankly useless for any ambitious grad student. At the end of McLuhan's evening class, my head was spinning, trying to make connections with his diverse subject matter. Insights often would not be made until days or months, yes, even years later.



Now Judith Fitzgerald, a Toronto poet and critic, has written a brief and fascinating book *McLuhan: Wise Guy*. We are offered an intellectual adventure which aims to help us understand his ideas by deconstructing his thinking patterns and their relationship to his seminal influences and background.

"*Understanding Media* is not a book that begins at the beginning and ends at the end. McLuhan stressed this fact repeatedly, pointing out that he encouraged a dip-and-dive approach to his mosaic, or collage-like, reflection of probes, observations, and assertions. To make his points – he shamelessly admits – he prods, pokes, fudges facts, spouts aphorisms (or what he calls "verbal hand grenades"), spews wisecracks, and stops at nothing to illuminate his views (including several controversial ones)." – Page 97.

McLuhan: Wise Guy is an easy read and Fitzgerald has done a masterful job of conveying the spirit of the man and the spirit of the times.



Footnote to McLuhan: Anthropologist Edmund Carpenter and his classic book *Oh, What a Blow that Phantom Gave Me!*

In the early 1960's I took Carpenter's class on myth and ritual at the University of Toronto. One of the most stimulating and charismatic teachers anywhere, Carpenter was a close colleague of Marshall McLuhan and they co-wrote some seminal works in communications. Like McLuhan, Carpenter's work is being rediscovered. To repeat: both of these visionary scholars are just as relevant today as they were thirty years ago.

This is to announce the digital publication of Edmund Carpenter's *Oh, What a Blow That Phantom Gave Me!* on the University of Virginia Web site at: <http://faculty.virginia.edu/phantom>.

Based on his work as a communications consultant in Papua New Guinea from 1969-1971, Carpenter examines the phantom-like effects of media, arguing that media covertly shape the ways we perceive and experience the world. The book became a minor classic when first published in 1972 and is now considered by many to be among the foundational works in the growing fields of Media Ecology and Visual Anthropology.

The full text of Carpenter's classic, along with supplementary maps and photos, is now on-line. This digital publication will grow to be much more than just an electronic version of the book. In the spirit of Carpenter's work – which always seeks to maximize the potentials of the medium – this site will be a multi-media and multi-sided presentation, with videos, pictures, maps, and commentaries accompanying the text.



We are now seeking submissions commenting on Carpenter's work. These commentaries may be about the work in general or more focused on any one of the 80 entries in the book. If interested, please contact:

Michael Wesch wesch@virginia.edu Department of Anthropology University of Virginia.

The National Film Board of Canada: an Impressive Track Record

Responsible for showing Canada to Canadians and then to the world, The National Film Board of Canada has long had a reputation as one of the world's most comprehensive sources for the production of outstanding documentaries and animation films. In the last ten years, budget cuts have reduced the scope of its work and its educational division is but a shadow of its former self. For the record, the inception of Canadian media education in the 1960's, a time when we called it "screen education" was derived largely from the NFB. Films like *Nobody Waved Good-bye*, *No Reason to Stay*, *Sixty Cycles* and, of course, the award-winning animation of Norman McLaren (*Neighbours*, *The Chair*) were sources for discussion and debate and for explorations in the possibilities of the film medium.



To consolidate its resources pertaining to media education, the NFB has produced a catalogue entitled *Media Education 2001 – Visual Language*. Listing over 25 videos, the material ranges from *Mr. Bear's Song* to the six-part *Manufacturing Consent* with Noam Chomsky. The best-known material is derived from two packages: *Constructing Reality: Exploring Media Issues in Documentary*, a six-video set (with a superb 288-page resource guide) and *Media and Society*, a three-video package (with guide) comprising of Images of Women, Advertising and Consumerism, and Cultural Sovereignty. These videos do not contain recent material. They are generally taken from NFB films going back, in some cases, fifty years. Regrettably the rights for these two packages are not available outside of Canada.

Moving on to more current fare, the following are two short reviews of recent NFB videos of interest to media educators.

My Father's Camera

(60 minutes)



This film is an exploration of the history and the social implications of home movies, covering primarily the 1930's to the 1960's. The filmmaker, Karen Shopsowitz, is ideally equipped to tell the story – her father was an avid amateur filmmaker who shot plenty of film about his family and their very cinematically covered vacations. Most of the extracts we see are rough shod – people who tend to look goofy because a camera unexpectedly caught them off-guard. But many are especially poignant, such as the one where a mother looks at the footage of her deceased parents and realizes that this is all that visibly remains of their lives.

Several historians and social critics regard the material as powerful testimony to what we really value, how we regard our families and their special (often tacky) rituals.

I think an imaginative media teacher could work with the material to explore how personal history can be played against the backdrop of social history. Today, of course, we use video cameras and the days of 8mm have all but vanished, and there is a different texture to 8mm compared with video. Pondering the difference between the two formats would be a great footnote to exploring McLuhan's thesis about the unique properties of different media.



Salt

(78 minutes)

Four high school girls at the MIND alternative school in Montreal are encouraged to make films about subjects that are central to their lives: critiquing mainstream education; exploring the independent music scene; engaging in the scary practice of self-mutilation and exploring the underground punk culture. The results reveal interesting autobiographical background and a real sense of teen sensibility. As well, we are given insights into the young filmmakers' artistic choices for dealing with such diverse subject matter. The first film about the education system uses a prolonged tracking shot as we go from room to room through the filmmaker's eyes, discovering and expressing how conventional schooling impedes her personal growth.



The other films have some memorable moments: trying to extract a definition about who or what constitutes punk; the scary fascination of a girl explaining her motivation for self-mutilation. I think that most students would like both the subject matter, which is guaranteed to interest young people, as well as the special school context for this project. There is nothing slick about this production; rather, it is the sense of authenticity that makes it so memorable.

For more info on the NFB contact www.nfb.ca/store or call 1-800-267-7710

Upcoming Events

SPROCKETS: April 12-21

The Toronto International Film Festival celebrates its fifth anniversary in presenting the best in children's cinema from around the world to school groups and family audiences. Because the Ontario school curriculum has mandated media literacy, SPROCKETS has now added media literacy workshops for teachers to be held February 27, March 5 and April 4. For more information, contact Wendy Blushke at (416) 934-3275 or wblushke@torfilmfest.ca

2002 Summer Institutes and University Courses

Appalachian State University will offer two one-week sessions in Media Literacy. The first session will offer the gateway class in Media Literacy and will run on the Boone, North Carolina campus from the afternoon of Sunday July 21 through Thursday July 25th. The course will be taught by David Considine. Housing can be arranged on campus.

The advanced class [Media Literacy and Curriculum Development] will run in the university's New York City loft, from Sunday July 28th to Saturday August 3rd. It will be team taught by Kathleen Tyner, author of *Literacy in a Digital Age* and David Considine. Seats are limited. For more info regarding both classes, visit their Web site at www.ci.appstate.edu/programs/edmedia/medialit/.

The Association of Media Literacy in Toronto tentative summer media institute. We will be deciding shortly whether or not to offer a media education summer institute to be held in the second or third week of August. Inquire at bduncan@interlog.com.

Vancouver, BC: A two week summer media institute – both for beginners and advanced levels is expected to be held in early July. Inquire at Pungente@sympatico.com.

Rose Pacatte will be teaching Media Education 11 at the University of Dayton's Institute for Pastoral Initiatives June 24-28, and John Pungente is teaching an introductory media literacy



course in the first week of June. For more information visit:
<http://www.daughtersofstpaul.com/mediastudies/daytoncourse2002.html>.

Popular Culture Conference to be held in Toronto March 13-16

The Popular Culture Association (PCA) stages the largest pop culture conference in the world, a veritable bonanza of pop culture stuff, from *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* as social empowerment to the hidden meanings in recent pop song lyrics. There are dozens of panels on every conceivable topic. Typically, three short papers are read – 20 minutes each – followed by a discussion. Having attended three previous PCA conferences, I can only say that there is some terrific stuff, well presented. There are also some presentations that convey mind-numbing boredom. To survive, you have to be willing – and many of us are – to walk out and attend other concurrent sessions.

<http://www2.h-net.msu.edu/~pcaaca/annual02/pcaaca02.html>.

The Final Word

Despite the wake-up calls that US TV news had received on Sept 11, it's moving back to show business as usual. Think of how much money is being poured into promoting personalities, as opposed to posting correspondents in the world's hot spots. They say everything changed on Sept 11. Don't buy it. The one thing that needed to change – US TV news – only got worse.

Antonia Zerbisias, *Toronto Star* Television critic, January 27 2002,
commenting on a just-released report on the
decline of quality news coverage.

Barry Duncan is an award-winning teacher, author, consultant and founder and past president of the Ontario-based Association for Media Literacy. Co-author of the best selling text book, *Mass Media and Popular Culture*, he has presented workshops and keynote addresses to thousands of teachers in Canada and around the world. You can contact Barry at baduncan@interlog.com.

