

The Media Society: Basic Issues and Controversies

Ross A. Eaman, *The Media Society: Basic Issues and Controversies*. Toronto and Vancouver: Butterworths, 1987, 188 pages.

The Media Society was written because, in its author's words, "Canadian students have long suffered from the lack of a Canadian textbook on the mass media." For Canadian teachers of introductory courses in Communications, one or two uneven and quickly-dated anthologies have long been the only alternatives to the standard American texts in the field. Eaman's book, based on a first-year undergraduate course he has taught for years at Carleton University in Ottawa, is a welcome first step towards remedying this lack.

As those who regularly receive examination copies from publishers are aware, producing introductory textbooks for those disciplines which deal with audiovisual media – such as Film Studies or Mass Communications – carries a high level of risk. While literature departments may build introductory courses around perennially-reprinted standard anthologies of canonical primary texts, leaving methodological questions to be worked out in the classroom, media textbooks have come to concentrate on questions of methodology and theory. For obvious technical reasons, they may not include examples of many of the phenomena to be analyzed (e.g., films and television programs), and any attempt to dictate specific examples to supplement analyses within the textbook confronts, especially in Canada, the problem of their availability or relevance. More importantly, perhaps, the theoretical turbulence and rapidity of change within these fields is such that any attempt to fix in stone the important methodological currents or historical developments risks being quickly out-of-date or appearing highly partisan.

The chief virtue of Eaman's book is that it has confronted these risks and to a great extent resolved them. In particular, he has deftly juggled the three demands made on an introductory textbook of this kind: (1) that it provide sufficient historical information on the structure and history of the media in Canada to give students a foundation of sorts; (2) that it provide an overview of the discipline, and in particular of the ways in which particular models of communication have grown up within that discipline; and (3) that it lay out, for stu-

dents, the crucial questions at stake in any attempt to define communication or devise policies to deal with it. Occasionally, it should be noted, this attempt to offer a full-service textbook is not without its problems: halfway through a historical account of the development of broadcasting in Canada, for example, one may lose sight of the discussion of regulatory models which this account was meant to illuminate. Nevertheless, this occasional blurring of levels of abstraction enables Eaman to cover most of the substantive and methodological material one would want dealt with in an introduction to mass communications in Canada.

The Media Society is strongest in its comparison of the philosophical premises underlying different theories of communication. Each chapter sets out, in the form of a logical diagram, the most significant differences and similarities between four main positions (on such issues as "What is Communication?" and "What is the ideal press-state relationship?"), and goes on to discuss these in detail. This discussion occasionally fails to prevent Eaman's own biases from coming into view – as in the treatment of semiological approaches, for example – but the most likely complaint about this procedure will be that it is relativist and noncommittal. In times of greater theoretical certainty within the discipline – such as the late '70s – this criticism may have seemed more appropriate. Given the eclecticism and fragmentation within the field at the moment, however, the project of leading students to work through theories into an understanding of their presuppositions and claims seems more useful than the wholehearted embracing of one position from which we might all, very soon, be attempting to escape.

The likelihood of success of Eaman's book will clearly depend on the extent to which others teaching introductory courses in communications studies are willing to adopt its priorities and procedures as their own. More than most such textbooks, however, it stands alone on its own in requiring neither the context of a course nor the assistance of an instructor to be of use. (It has none of the cluttered layout, take-home assignments or end-of-chapter question sections which limit the readability of most American mass-media textbooks.) Those with an emerging interest in the fundamental concerns of communications studies, and in seeing these brought to bear on the historical and political development of the Canadian media, will surely find it of value.

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Canadian Feature Films Index 1913-1985

Public Archives of Canada – National Film, Television and Sound Archives (now Moving Image and Sound Archives Division). Catalogue No. SA2-163/1987, ISBN 0-660-53364-2. Available in Canada through authorized bookstore agents and other bookstores, or by mail from Canadian Government Publishing Centre, Supply and Services Canada, Ottawa, Ont. K1A 0S9. 816 pages. Canada \$25, other countries \$30.

The prosaic purple cover of this unique and fascinating volume wraps around a wonderful panorama of Canadian film history from early silent steps, sagging fortunes, boom and bust, to a phoenix-like rise.

In a graceful Foreword, Sam Kula, director of the Archive, gives a pithy rundown of the formal establishment in 1972 of the National Film, Television and Sound Archives, when one of its priorities was to develop an acquisition policy. In 1972 D. J. Turner started to document feature film production, buying books and magazines, cutting them up and filing information on each film in a folder. Later, he devised a data sheet to be filled in for individual films and, after joining the Archive in 1974, continued to build on this base to meet the needs of the Collections Development Section in which he works. Turner's tenacity and perseverance over 14 years (so far) has paid off in this remarkable first in Canadian film.

D. J. Turner pays tribute to an army of people in his Acknowledgements, and moves on to an admirably concise Introduction and a clear and uncluttered User's Guide. From 1975, he tracked production on a day-to-day basis while continuing to enhance and enlarge all the early information of the past 60 years. A formidable task (like the film business as a whole) where the glamour is minimal and despair and frustration loom large. A small indication of the thoroughness of Turner's approach can be gained from the number of titles bearing an asterisk – these have all been personally verified from the print.

There are 1,222 feature films listed in numerical and chronological order by date of production. No. 1 is *Evangeline* (1913) and the silent films run to No. 50 *Canada From Coast To Coast* (1932). It's clear that the research on these alone took a great deal of digging and delving, and the footnotes are a delight. Those for *Back To God's Country* (1919) are particularly interesting in view of

Turner's heavy involvement in the restoration of this film, and about which he wrote a first-rate (and excellently produced) booklet for Boise State University, Idaho, when its Canadian Studies Program showed a print earlier this year. In other little human asides, we learn that one actor was replaced in *The Man From Glengarry* (1922) because he "broke his leg," and a woman "Identified her brother-in-law...in a photograph" as one of the uncredited actors in *Madeleine de Verchères* (1922). And it's also noticeable that these early films used locations right across the country, from Nova Scotia, New Brunswick and Newfoundland, to Quebec and Ontario, and on to Alberta and B.C.

Browsing further into the Index, the pervasive American influence is no new thing, and from early days this country was continually visited by 'luminaries' of the U.S. silver screen such as Toby Wing, Charles Starrett (in several roles) and the ubiquitous Lyle Talbot. From 1957 (when this reviewer came to Canada) to 1985, 1,104 films are listed, and there's a big rush of personal memories, from *A Dangerous Age* (1957) and *Now That April's Here* (1958) to Quebec favourites, *Pour la suite du monde* (1962), *À Tout prendre* (1963), *Le Chat dans le sac* (1964), to names – David Secter, Larry Kent, Sid Furie, Iain Ewing, Morley Markson – but enough of memory lane! Here, again, the footnotes are meticulously full of references to fictitious credits, films that were apparently never made, various print versions, Vice Squad interference, and even the faces on the cutting room floor.

This publication is computerized on a data base, leading to the inevitable assumption that it will be updated regularly (as it should be), say every five years. If there are glitches in the information, this reviewer has only found a single serious one so far. There are two persons bearing the name of André Gagnon; one is a cinematographer, director and sometime actor, while the other is a composer, and they're both lumped together under one name.

This superb Index is the answer to those somewhat lazy film students who selfishly wonder, "Where can I find all about Canadian films in one book?" It is indexed to the hilt under film titles, names, titles by year, production companies, CFDC-Telefilm, IQC-SGC and co-productions. To those of us with the hearts and souls of archivists and researchers who love Canadian film, it's an overpowering trip and, to all those dilettantes who think they know everything about the fascinating history of Canadian films, they've met their match in D. J. Turner!

Pat Thompson •