

## Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

**AUGIE FLERAS, *Mass Media Communication in Canada*. Toronto: Thomson-Nelson. 2003, 420 p., Index.**

An individual carefully clips words, letters from newspaper articles, and painstakingly pastes them on a blank sheet of ordinary paper to form a message, thus hiding and disguising identity from the recipient of the message, and perhaps even purpose. The visual presentation of the message startles, even shocks the recipient, eliciting fear, beyond and before the reading, examining, and understanding of content. The methodical construction of the message is congruent in intent and impact. The minute scrutinization by professionals reveal that the carefully chosen, clipped words strung together brands the sender. Through deconstruction, they decode the hidden and disguised purpose and identity, arresting the sender.

Clipped words and letters from newspaper text on a white, blank background spells out *Mass Media Communication in Canada*, a visual message in a glance accurately representing Fleras' theme: the effective, intentional and inadvertent hidden, disguised identities, messages, and emotions missed, dismissed in the text, context, and images of mass media communication (MMC). Media literacy, the decoding of media messages inoculates and stops the messages intentional or inadvertent impact.

The graphic title demonstrates Guerrilla Marketing—taking both the context and content of a message, and mapping it onto an unlikely arena while maintaining the integrity and effectiveness of the message. The fear factor in the title addresses the scope, urgency and risk missed, denigrated, and dismissed, as painstakingly documented by Fleras through case studies and examples. These support his unflinching contention that with "Canada one of the most advanced media systems in the world (2)," "failure to develop an intellectual self-defense is tantamount to a failure in citizenship (4)." He takes straight on the dismissal and denigration of MMC as a serious realm of scholarly study given "the real business of economics or politics (6)." Business gives serious consideration to MMC. The paucity of media literacy needs to be considered seriously.

An evaluation through MMC's Janus twin-marketing, reveals more about how well the text represents the nature of the book, than any comparison between Fleras' limited number of competitors. My conclusion: the text conveys what it sets out to do—overwhelmingly so, and not nearly enough.

Where Fleras talks about the emotional content and emotional connectedness as a primary principle in MMC, my mind turns to how Emotion Marketing teaches to identify the key emotions of the problem, and be the 'emotional' solution. While workplaces struggle to overcome the dichotomy between reason, rationality, logic versus emotion through the introduction of emotional intelligence, marketing considers emotion a primary element. A retired editor illustrated how "news" becomes news through clever headlines, bylines, sound bytes, and framed to tap into and trigger hot social concerns that sells newspapers and more importantly "grabs eyeballs" for advertisers. In fact, advertisers want more than to "grab eyeballs." They work on accessing "brain cells" and "brain matter" triggering short and long-term memory with memory hooks: memorable, emotionally contagious experiences.

Where Fleras discusses how the "media content is routinely and systematically organized (read manufactured) around a conflict format (11)," my mind turns to the 2000 Conflict Resolution Conference. Journalists Trudie Richards and Suki Starnes systematically walked their audience through "Fighting Frame in News Reporting," a videotaped newscast showing how the images were not representative of even the location in the news much less the people involved, and how the newscast escalated a complaint amongst the stakeholders into a conflict that had not previously existed.

Where Fleras explains the "playful inversions" methodology by which he reveals the hidden, disguised messages, marketing considers it standard creative thinking strategy. This text could easily be reconfigured into a marketing manual. These few examples from a marketing lens suggest the content of the eleven chapters is thorough, with comprehensive examples, balanced analysis, and representative of MMC. After all, marketing manufactures MMC.

Fleras is earnest and diligent in his coverage to support his plea for media literacy. He achieves balance using principle sociological theories, sometimes alternating paragraph by paragraph to reveal the multiple perspectives occurring at the same time. The results: the mind-boggling complexity of how mediascapes create mindscapes and mindfields. Fleras' plea for media literacy might receive more serious consideration if linked to the dollars spent on R&D of human behavior for consumerism versus by organizations that address the fall out from it, and the number of marketing graduates and the salaries available to them.

The overwhelming resources in the marketing quadrant magnify the question: To what extent is MMC a contested site? To what extent is marketing a significant socializing force? Which is a long, necessary way of saying that Fleras just may be the Canadian Derrida or Chomsky of MMC. The opportunity exists to teach media literacy cross-referencing marketing, and to inform marketing through media literacy.

The one, main weakness of the text relates to audience. Fleras endeavors to produce a text that critically engages undergraduate students, inoculating them (27-30) while perhaps attracting some of them to take on MMC as a field of study. Fleras' writing propensities impress professors. The concern is that undergraduate students will feel bombarded by the sheer volume of text and bypass reading in favor of the less is more axiom: class graphics, pictures, and interpretation. If he were writing for students, he would need to examine their demographics and learning preferences.

**Rose Marie Borutski** *Practising Sociologist, Coquitlam, BC.*

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