

# The Interim

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Curriculum Supplement For Schools

The *Interim Plus* is a periodical dedicated to educational matters and specifically designed to assist teachers in integrating relevant life issues in their lesson planning.

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The last edition of the curriculum supplement for this academic year focuses on the negative and positive influence of social media tools that families and its members have to contend with in the modern world. Students of the impact of these technological tools (iphone, smart phone, ipad etc.) recognize that they play a huge role in family communications and that they have the potential to both help and hurt family life. There are three parts to the material: Part A dealing with technology and its general impact on family inter-relationships; Part B exploring in more detail from a clinical psychologist's point of view the dangers of the addiction to such techy devices; and Part C concerned with the impact of media on society, harking back to great communications theorists like Marshall McLuhan and George Grant. Part D addresses the recent policy announcement of foreign aid connected to Trudeau's abortion views. A special word of thanks goes out to Teresa Mervar, the summer intern responsible for the material prepared for Part A.

We wish all of you a wonderful winding down of the academic year, to be followed by a refreshing, peaceful summer vacation.



Begin by putting everyone in partners, each pair will decide who will be Person A and Person B. In the first round, Person A will be the "talker" and Person B will be the "listener." Instruct Person A and Person B to sit back-to-back. Next, instruct Person A to tell Person B their dream job, and why it is their dream job (time it for 3 minutes). Next, they will be switching roles as the "talker" and the "listener." Instruct Person B to explain to Person A one of the happiest moments of their life, whilst still sitting back-to-back (time it for 3 minutes).

Bring the class back together, and as a group have them answer the following discussion questions:

## Part A

### Family Studies/ Parenting/ Social Sciences

This material may be useful in teaching a family studies, parenting, or a social science course. This lesson is based on an article written by Patricia Snow entitled "Look at Me!" from the journal *First Things* in May 2016.

**Class Activity: Communication Exercise**

## Questions

1. How did you feel being the "talker"? Was it difficult? Why?
2. What was it like being the "listener? Was it difficult? Why?
3. What could have made this experience easier?
4. Can this experience relate to what it is like talking to someone who is distracted by their cell phone?

## Age of Cell Phones

As it becomes more and more common for young people to get smartphones, Snow discusses the many difficulties that young people are now facing. For example, researchers are seeing deficits in emotional intelligence and empathy; loneliness, but also fears of unrehearsed conversations and intimacy; difficulties forming attachments but also difficulties tolerating solitude and boredom. Snow explains that in a famous experiment conducted at the University of Virginia in which student subjects were asked to sit alone for a brief time without a device or a book, many students—though they insisted at the outset that they would not—chose to give themselves electric shocks rather than sit alone with their thoughts.



*Teacher prompts:* Do you think if this experiment took place 20 years ago the subjects would react in the same way? Why do you think that is? Do you think the development of cell phones and social media plays a role in these behaviours? How?

## Comparing “cell phone behaviours” to symptoms of Autism.

Note: The proper term to describe a person diagnosed with Autism is “person with autism” rather than referring to them as “autistic.” This helps keep the dignity of the person, implying that they are a person with an illness rather than they are the illness itself.

In Snow’s article, she discusses how the “self-abuse” illustrated by the student subjects in the University of Virginia experiment may remind one of the self-abuse that people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) may administer unto themselves. She goes on to explain a teacher’s observations regarding their student’s behaviour as a

result of the growing use of cellphones. She notes that these behaviours can be comparable to symptoms of ASD, which is a disorder presumed to be caused by a variety of factors such as genetic, environmental, and medical influences.

Common Symptoms of Autism:

- impairment of social relationships (i.e. disinterest in others or the environment around them)
- deficits in communication (i.e. lack of eye contact, unable to read body language or use appropriate body language)
- fixation on certain items or activities
- self-harm

A teacher’s observation of her student’s behaviours with the growing amount of cell phone use:

- lack of eye contact
- unable to read body language
- having trouble listening
- lack of interest in others
- parallel play (usually on their phones)
- can call up on endless information (on their phones)



*Teacher prompts:* Are these similarities surprising? Why do you think there are so many similarities?

Note: the Snow article is not attempting to ask whether or not technology causes Autism Spectrum Disorder.

### Discussion Questions

1. How do you feel when you are talking to someone and they are not listening?
2. How often do you find yourself sitting in silence?
3. How do you feel when you do not have access to your cell phone for a long period of time?

4. Does having your cellphone make you feel more secure? If yes, why do you think that is?
5. Due to cell phones being so advanced do you think it is creating a culture of “impatience” as we are now able to access anything we want in an instant?

### Communication is Key

Snow discusses the treatment of Autism Spectrum Disorder, and how many of the most successful treatments involve intense human interaction provided by a professional, such as Applied Behavioural Analysis. This treatment does not concern itself with when exactly, how, or why a child develops Autism, but tries instead to correct, do over, and even perhaps actually rewire what went wrong, by going back to the beginning, to earlier stages of development when the language one uses with a child is instinctively simplified and attention is everything. Eye contact—which we know is essential for brain development, emotional stability, and social fluency—is the indispensable prerequisite of the therapy. This shows how effective human-to-human interaction is, and that it is so important that it can actually be used as a form of treatment for a serious disorder!

*Teacher prompts:* Do you think the growing rate of cell phone and social media use is seen as a problem to the family structure? Would it be frowned upon if a Nanny who was taking care of children was constantly on her phone? Why is that seen differently than parents who are constantly on their phone?

### Technology, Social Media and Families

Technology has the power to strengthen or loosen



a family’s connection. According to an article by Padilla-Walker, Coyne, and Fraser, engaging in media together as a family may increase connection, especially if family members are in agreement regarding the activity. This includes watching television (co-view) and playing video games (co-play) together. There are many benefits of families who co-view or co-play. Parents are able to actively monitor what their children view, as well as have the opportunity to discuss controversial topics that may come up from what they are viewing. The article also explains that parents who utilize these kind of opportunities are generally more informed about media effects, have more rules regarding media within their homes, and involve their teens in more alternative activities to media. Further, families who use media together are generally more connected.

### Discussion Questions

1. With the emergence of cell phones and social media do you think that families are spending less time together co-viewing or co-watching? How can this impact the family’s connectedness?
2. Which of the above images more accurately reflects your household?
3. Now that young people can easily access information through their smartphones, do you think that they may gain new values that contradict their parent’s values?
4. With the increased use of social media, can you think of any problems that may arise in families who are new to Canada from a different culture?

## Class Activity: Part 1

Technology in itself is not bad. It can be a very useful tool in a variety of ways. Have the class come up with a Pros and Cons list of the impacts of technology (specifically smartphones and social media) in Canadian society, and then on the impacts of technology (specifically smartphones and social media) on families.



*Possible pros:* access to information, access to news sources that are not mainstream, quick communication, everything is conveniently located, etc. Parents can easily keep track of their children, children can easily contact parents and the police if they are in danger, if a parent is out of town they can easily communicate using video calls, can easily take family photos, relatives who live far away can be constantly updated through various social media platforms, etc.

*Possible cons:* reliance on technology, can become addicted, privacy issues, often people do not experience silence or time to reflect, etc. Parents may spend more time on their phones than with their children, less quality time may be spent with the family, less person-to-person interaction.

## Class Activity: Part 2

As a class or in groups consider the following question. How can the prolonged use of social media and smartphones specifically impact the follow-



ing relationships? What complications may arise? What misunderstandings may arise? Etc.

- parent-child
- sibling-sibling
- parent-parent

## Take-home Reflective Activity:

Have the students create a log of the amount of times they use their cell phone and social media in a 24 hour period. This includes recording the amount of times they unlock their phone, the amount of times they open each app, the time spent on each app, the number of people they texted, etc. If a student does not have a cell phone, they can log the amount of time they spend on social media on their computer. They will then write a reflection on their findings. They should answer the following questions as well as include any other observations they have found:

Sources

### Questions

1. Are you shocked at your log? Why or why not?
2. Do you believe you spend an average time on your smartphone/social media? Why?
3. Would certain relationships improve or worsen if you spent less time on your smart phone/ social media? Why?
4. After seeing your log do you feel like you should change your habits regarding cell-phone/social media use? Why or why not?

<http://autismcanada.org/about-autism/characteristics/?gclid=CLTqt6DCmMOCFQEdaQod-VAOKQ>  
<http://www.autism-society.org/what-is/causes/> <http://www.educanada.ca/eng/curriculum/secondary/ssciences9to122013.pdf>  
<http://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/05/look-at-me>  
<http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/doi/10.1111/j.1741-3729.2012.00710.x/abstract> Images: Google

## PART B Increasing Danger of Tech Devices in Life of Families

The book *The Big Disconnect: Protecting Childhood and Family Relationships in the Digital Age* by Catherine Steiner-Adair, Teresa H. Barker (2014) offers some good insights

into the problem and possible solutions as parents confront the digital realities afflicting their children, especially in the very early age group, tots, preschool and early primary grades. Many parents would not be as comfortable with her analysis, commentary and advice regarding the later grades – 7 and up. For the 12-18 year olds, she takes a rather liberal or progressive stance on what kids can and should be doing with internet access in terms of learning about and growing in their own sexual development. She is a renowned American clinical psychologist writing for an American audience, but circumstances are not that different in Canada. Her secular analysis gives many valuable insights but her views on children’s sexual development may raise red flags and give cause for parental concern.

Catherine Steiner-Adair posits that in the last 30 years a revolution has taken place in the ‘living room’ or family rooms of the nation. [although referring to the American home, it applies equally to the Canadian scene] Technology has taken over the entire house, since children increasingly are given televisions for their own bedrooms and tech devices that they can take with them wherever they sit down or lie down, even when walking or driving or getting a ride to or from an organized activity, on vacation or riding the school bus.

She asserts that these digital devices “have become our masters instead of being our servants, informing us, connecting us or entertaining us”. Regardless of where one looks you notice that the number of people of all ages with a smart phone by their ear is truly astounding. People appear to be more connected at all hours of the day or night, or in all places – whether in a restaurant, at a sporting event, a social engagement, or in church, in a park, on the beach, in the library, or at the dinner table right in the home. The cell phone can be such a nuisance that at religious worship an announcement has to be made in advance reminding the worshippers to turn off their digital device.



The school environment is not immune from this incessant social communications buzz either. Once upon a time, cell phones were banned from use on school property, being considered as too distracting and interfering with the learning process. [I can recall from personal experience the

real quandary that teachers found themselves in when faced with students trying to hide their cell phones ringing in the classroom, and the sensitive disciplinary follow-up in ad-



ressing these novel problems. School administrators even had to include in the school’s student code of behaviour references to the prohibition of electronic devices under pain of having them confiscated] However, today the smart phone is a mobile computer with so much potential for good in terms of learning, not to speak of parental desire and or need to have instant communications with their child for safety reasons etc.

We need to be aware of and consider seriously the impact of these devices on our family and social relationships, how much time they take up, how much attention they demand and how

they may disrupt what we should value most, the wholeness of family life. Many people are fixed on their cell phones and feel helpless without them. They fall into a panic mode, unable to function without their smart phones. Children, and very young ones at that, pick up on these behaviours and model them in turn.

Steiner-Adair emphasizes that the family should have “the deepest, most profoundly defining influence on the child’s formation of self – neurological, psychological, physiological, spiritual growth and development”. But, unfortunately, something gets in the way of this happening in many families. The culprit may be technology. According to her, the family has always been the first and most significant teacher “in what it means to be fully human in the best way, from cognitive capacities to qualities of character.” (P.40)

She explains that the “shared rituals or conversations you create with your child around meals, bath and bedtime, playground and drive time – are zones of interaction”. There is something sacred about this time and the meaning attached to each of these special interactions. Everything possible should be done to preserve the special nature of these points of interaction. Nothing should be allowed to interfere with them.

The converse can also be stated. Not only is there danger when the interactions are eliminated or severely reduced, but “children can be ruined by being exposed to too much, too soon, and of the wrong things”. Perhaps too many parents are totally unaware of the impact of these devices on their tots and elementary aged children. There is the real fear of a loss of innocence for the child. Steiner-Adair goes on to state that if “children see too much, hear too much, or experience too much - before they



are neurologically and emotionally ready to process it – it can short circuit their natural curiosity and [they can] be traumatized by premature exposure to the media based adult culture”. How is this so? Except for specific television programs or networks like *Treehouse* little is done to cater to children needs, whether social ones or learning objectives of a very primary or pre-school age children. The fact is that the general culture may be normalizing



things that socially and morally concerned parents “do not approve of, give no permission for it, and for which their children are not ready. – whether lying, cheating, crass sexuality, violence or aberrant behaviour”. The tech devices become intrusive invaders, even predators. Parents need to be extremely vigilant about letting these into their homes.

What about the role of schools? As Steiner-Adair rightly points out, the “internet and tech devices put these things within easy reach for young children; moreover, schools should not be abetting the false culture and its prophets”. As she maintains, schools ought to be a sort of sanctuary for the children, “the last bastion of protection for the innocence



of children, not the first betrayers and manipulators”.

Certainly grandparents of a certain age can probably recall the freedom that they enjoyed when growing up, being able to play outdoors in the neighbourhood from morning to night (depending on age) and in the safety of a neighbourhood

where adults kept a watchful eye on the children, even if the latter were not their own. Many would argue that unstructured, unplugged play is the best way for young children to learn to think creatively, to problem solve, and to develop reasoning, communication and motor skills. (P 53) All of this was playing itself out in neighbourhood activities whether at the playground or on the street with games like street hockey, “aggies”, hop scotch, skipping rope, yo-yo or hula hoop fads, etc.

Over the years, due to social and economic changes, this freedom of child behaviour has disappeared in most neighbourhoods. Even when interacting with friends outdoors today, the children tend to rely on digital devices to share and communicate their thoughts, desires, and exchange information. Technology has largely taken away the concept and freedom of this type of free play. Technology is largely eroding the child’s capacity for sustained attention. A few minutes seems to be the length of what a young person can put up with. (P56)

Another casualty in this development is the art of simple conversation, “it is being lost in the tech jungle”. Teens de-

scribe texting as their primary means of communication. That mode is silent, cool, unemotional. Fewer and fewer people actually phone each other any more. It is not exciting to talk to someone. Many youngsters see talking as boring and restrictive since it places a premium on both listening and responding. A conversation demands a certain commitment, attention, and emotional engagement. Consequently, many young people have lost or never acquire

the valuable skill for listening, and participating in conversation, even within the family.

While technology may offer huge benefits, it also posts immense challenges to child rearing. Through tablet technology a young reader has instantaneous access to the world’s library at her fingertips, but there is the temptation of a vast array of mind-numbing and violent video games. Steiner-Adair notes that “While parents and children are enjoying swift and constant access to everything and everyone on the Internet, they are simultaneously struggling to maintain a meaningful personal connection with each other in their own homes,”

A surprising finding is that on average, children ages 8 to 18 are spending more than seven hours a day on electronic devices. But parents are falling into their own electronic traps effectively withdrawing from family life, lost in their own smartphones and screens, leaving many children feeling neglected and lonely. The “digitalized life,” is taking its toll on family life. No one is free of this digital tyranny, whether the baby, the junior grade child, or the teen and young adult.

She cautions that the new technology can disrupt family life, and change the experience of childhood and the relational dynamics within families. Kids are being exposed to harmful, unsavory aspects of adult life. (P151) Parents should remember that children are only two years old once, only five years old once. Those precious years ought to be cherished and protected. Things need to slow down. Steiner-Adair gives wise advice: “Parents have to know when to push pause, delete and get the children out, or up, or down to play”. They need to realize that “speed derails the normal, natural pace of development”. Too much attention and spending unlimited amount of time on screen and internet does not encourage deep thinking and reflective analysis. Rather, a heap amount of trouble can result unintentionally from internet browsing and unchaperoned chats.

Parents can lose control over the family environment very early if not prudent. Steiner-Adair reminds all “that good parenting starts without technology, in a place where parents listen, set limits, and communicate”.

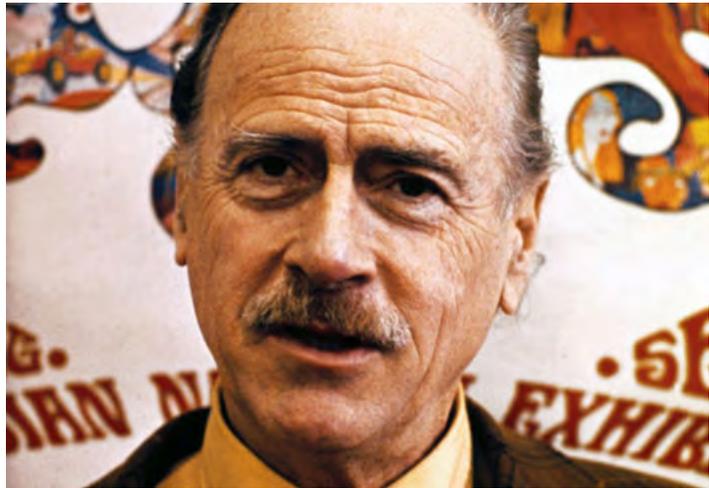
<https://www.bostonglobe.com/arts/books/2013/08/18/book-review-the-big-disconnect-catherine-steiner-adair/>

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<http://www.harpercollins.ca/9780062082428/the-big-disconnect>  
<http://www.goodreads.com/book/show/16248085-the-big-disconnect>  
 youtube source on her presentation at a conference

**PART C**  
**The Emergence of Media:**  
**Humanity's Endgame**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q1552sXvKNc>

This is a very challenging article on the nature of media today and its impact on human society. It is a difficult concept and requires much reflective thinking. But it could prove to be a most interesting piece of writing for the student hungry for deeper understanding of societal forces.



**Marshall McLuhan**

Published: Monday, March 20, 2017, 9:39 pm  
 Author: **Mark Wegierski**

This work of critical writing intends to look at the topic of media in contemporary society. This writing should be seen



as the beginning of further attempts — building on the insights of figures as intellectually diverse as Marshall McLuhan and the lesser-known media theorist Harold A. Innis, Canadian philosopher George Parkin Grant, Noam Chomsky, and Camille Paglia — to extend towards a “unified field theory” of the relations between media and society.

It could be argued that the effect on society of the emergence of electronic mass media (and their im-

**Questions**

1. Are these tech devices a friend or foe to the well being of young children?
2. Is there any space that is a cellphone-free zone?
3. Is it normal for people today to text rather than to speak, whether by phone or in person? Is there any difference among age groups?
4. Have iPads replaced conversation at the dinner table?
5. What is lost along the way?
6. What do kids resent about parents always on their iPhone checking for emails, text messages, distracted, not engaged in any meaningful way in the conversation?
7. Is our relationship to tech devices redefining the way that humans have interacted since time immemorial?
8. What are the differences between children play today versus their play experience 50 years ago? Which is safer and why?
9. Are we authorizing ourselves to behave in a discourteous manner, not giving someone or some other task the attention they deserve?
10. Do people feel tied down, prisoners of the cell phone and accessibility 24/7? Why are these devices addictive for both parents and children?
11. Does the school do everything in its power to protect its children, physically, morally, socially?
12. How are tech and media putting our children at risk?
13. Is tech replacing family primacy? Have these devices, the computer and television become essentially co-parents?
14. What do infants observe when their parents are on their smartphones?
15. Are people truly experiencing a big disconnect from their extreme device dependence? What is the evidence for this conclusion?
16. What is so appealing about these devices?
17. On balance, do you think these digital devices offer more benefits or more negatives? What benefit would you consider most important? Which negative would you consider as most troublesome? Why?

mediate precursors such as cinema) has been profoundly underestimated by most thinkers, or interpreted in banal and fairly trivial terms. One point that can almost immediately be made is that there are considerable differences between the mass media before the emergence of the Internet as a mass medium, and afterwards. It could be suggested that the real birth of the Internet was in 1995, with the creation of the first websites which could be accessed by everyone who had a computer with an Internet connection.

With ever-faster connections and ever-faster microcomputers (personal computers) the Internet spawned all kinds of new media developments that had never really been possible before, or had been prefigured only in some kind of fragmentary form. Thus, to look at the impact of the somewhat earlier media (mainly cinema, television, and the VCR) and then to try to examine the multifarious impacts of the post-1995 Internet, are largely separate questions.

As the Internet develops, we learn through different events and junctures about different aspects of its possible impact – such as the emergence of Amazon, Napster, political blogs, Google, MySpace, YouTube, Facebook, SecondLife, iTunes, Twitter, podcasts, smartphones, and so forth. To briefly look at just one of these developments, Google has become the overwhelmingly dominant search-engine, and has been able to parlay that into vast commercial wealth. The only main alternative to Google one can probably think of today is A9, which is most prominently utilized now (as far as the author knows) by Amazon. There were also reports that some regional search engines in China and Korea were being hugely utilized.

In terms of human consciousness, it could be argued with a broad sweep, that the realm of modern media (mainly cinema, television, and Internet) constitutes a new type of reality, of various dimensions — parts of which can also be stored and recreated for viewing or listening by most people.

Until the emergence of the mass Internet after 1995, the situation was that, while almost anyone could use a camcorder, there was no easy way of widely distributing personal content. In the pre-Internet days, the “video” content that could be given a truly mass-audience constituted only an infinitesimal portion of all videotape filmed. Of course, just having “video” content today theoretically available to everyone on the Web who wishes to view it certainly does not guarantee it a mass-audience. What can be seen is that



much of Web content, even today, is driven by the inertia, resources, and economic as well as cultural power of vast media enterprises, franchises and brands. This weight of inertia goes back three to four decades, at least.

In the pre-1995 days, almost everything in media that was widely available was produced by a relatively small number of different types of professionals, such as Hollywood movie directors and network television producers. And the final say on virtually all the sounds, speech,

and images which could become available to a truly large, mass-audience was further channeled through an extremely small number of effective decision-makers, or “gatekeepers.” However, the weight of the pre-1995 media is such that the hegemony of various media enterprises, franchises and brands, endlessly and almost effortlessly continues. In fact, an argument could be made that such phenomena as celebrity gossip websites have in fact intensified many people’s never-ending excitement over various entertainment and sports celebrities.

While eclectic material can theoretically be made available on the Internet, in most cases, it lacks the “authority,” “cool-factor,” and advertising muscle of such phenomena as Hollywood blockbusters, CNN news programs, or videogames created with multi-million dollar budgets. Indeed, the effect of the Internet is often just to mobilize and intensify a given “fan-base” – rather than to encourage any kind of eclectic philosophical thinking, reflection, or discussion. The Internet has arrived on the scene after more than four decades of extremely in-

tensive image shaping by media such as television and electrically-enhanced popular music (formerly mostly existing in the category of rock music, and now given over largely to rap and hip-hop.)

The notion that so-called “televangelism” may be a major aspect of the current-day media that brings into question the idea that there is overwhelming antinomianism in current-day media culture, is highly dubious. It could be argued that “televangelism” (which in any case may have in fact peaked in the 1980s) is mostly just another form of entertainment, at considerable remove from more traditional understandings of religion and the religious experience. It also frequently trades on highly dubious misapplications of prophetic and apocalyptic traditions. And any serious comparison of the comparative social and cultural reach and influence of Hol-



lywood as opposed to “tel-evangelism” show the former as far, far more salient. In regard to talk-radio, it could be argued that there is little there but a mostly mindless, jingoistic, ersatz patriotism, whose main purpose appears to be to drive America into endless wars abroad.

As far as independent “art” films, documentaries, and so forth, nearly all of them can be seen as intensifying most of the trends and concepts prevalent today in most major Hollywood productions, rather than trying to give voice to a truly serious, constructive critique of current-day society.

It might also be noted that the mass-education system over the last three to four decades mostly failed to encourage any kind of “counter-ethic” to the prevalent media messages and images, thus resulting in the near-destruction of the possibility of nurturing a substantial number of more reflective, cultured, truly literate people in our society.

It could be argued that the real impact of media on human upbringing, conditioning, behaviour, and perception of reality is grossly underestimated. Who could realistically deny that the steady exposure of a generation to various media images, sounds, and speech, does not result in these being often seared into the mind, deeply internalized, and then, in some greater or sometimes lesser way, expressed in behaviour? As opposed to the immediate spoken word, the manuscript, the printed book, or even the mass newspaper, electronic media has raised the ability of a given person or idea to influence society to a hitherto unimaginable degree, and with the near-total exclusion of other persons, ideas, and ways-of-life. Not only does it allow public speech to reach simultaneously tens or hundreds of millions of people, it also raises the possibility of almost continuous, searing, graphic and auditory impact on viewers or listeners. It could be argued that media — unless the small number of its effective decision-makers described above is of strongly divergent viewpoints, or unless other institutions in society confront it very powerfully — may be the perfect instrumentality for total conformity or social totalitarianism, defined as imposing one way of thinking, being, existing, and living on a given population. Eighteenth-century legislation could be seen as inadequate to address this issue.

There is a growing body of literature around the world that



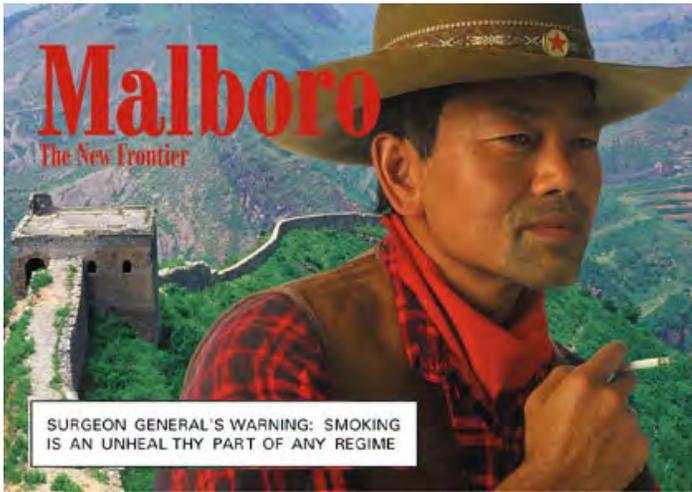
increasingly demonstrates the startling degree of single-mindedness of those who are the effective decision-makers of the media, as well of its most prominent celebrities, which can be described as one of “Americanocentric consumerist liberalism.”

The motivations of the main decision-makers and prominent celebrities of the media can be looked at in light of the three main perceived functions of electronic mass media: advertising, entertainment, information (or news).

There is an easy-to-see trend towards the ongoing unification of these functions, as well as of the blurring of fiction and non-fiction. The first two functions (advertising and entertainment) provide the source of three of the mainstays of media (ultimately derived from the ceaseless need to stimulate consumption in the hypermodern society, and to extend it to every part of the globe): illicit sex, violence, and “flash” (the ever-elusive “cool”; the glorification of speed, technology and technologically-derived special effects). Virtually all of what appeals to most people in television, films, and video today contains some aspect of these three elements, and there is a tendency to hyperintensify all three, across the media, for example, in movies which combine gruesome horror, gratuitous violence, and softcore sex. Because of the media’s profound, continuous, and unrelenting social impact, these three elements become unnaturally accentuated in society at large. Nevertheless, the media also maintains elements of maudlin sentimentalism in order to convince the more putatively decent-minded part of the audience that it is not entirely given over to antinomianism. The predominant texture of this facile sentimentalism, however, is far from a truly reflective, ethical outlook.

What the media calls “information” is centered on the following elements: “telescopic philanthropy,” an ongoing series of morality-plays, which vicariously elicit the sympathies of the viewer, often lacking connection with, or taken out of the context, of extant social relations and global realities; the constant excitation of different types of fears among the public, leaving the viewer in a tizzy of apprehension; and an unrelenting assault on politicians in general (with the exception of a few, often transient, sometimes permanent darlings), and on





the public-political realm as a whole. It could be argued that much of the excitement of fear and insecurity among people is carried out for the sake of encouraging consumption as a vehicle for re-establishing one's sense of personal security. The news also often itself provides large doses of sex, violence, and flash. There is, furthermore, the current of stinging cynicism and crassness in media which reflects the broader philosophical principle that media generally attenuates and rejects any sense of natural limits, boundaries, and social horizons. For all of its posturings, media lacks seriousness. This is also seen in its elevation of the trivial at the expense of the germane, for example, in the three network television specials of the Amy Fisher story in the early 1990s (this teenage girl shot and wounded the wife of an older man with whom she was having an affair); or in the complaints about the cost of personal expenses of prominent politicians as solely defining the issue of waste in government — as opposed to vast, faceless, bureaucratic excesses. What is the model of media representation, semantics, and semiotics? As is the case in any structure, there is an embedded system of references in media (visual, auditory, and spoken), some of these going back to the cinematic age. Their near-universal recognition does not indicate increasing media savvy among the general populace, but rather points to the existence of media as a distinct ontological realm. The day-to-day functioning of the news media is defined by the presentation and elaboration of various “personas,” whether enhanced or diminished; as well as by the expression of concepts in one-word or very short phrases, built up through constant media exposure (and often originated or quickly taken up and transformed in meaning by the media itself). The discourse of media tends in the direction of the ongoing evocation of powerful emotional stereotypes at dizzying speed, rather than of a more thoughtful discussion. Some of the types of single-minded media behaviour are “the feeding frenzy,” or “the wave-effect.” There are different roles played by news anchors (our Virgil-like guides to today's series of calamities); reporters; talk-show hosts; sportstars; rockstars; fashion-models; prominent businesspeople; financial analysts; political analysts; politicians, etc. The sports-industries, which focus the new, emerging city-identities of North America, and which constitute virtually all-pervasive aspects of life today, have largely been created by the possibilities of

widespread media-exposure. As has been frequently noted, the shrine-like position of the television in most households, as well as the increasing amounts of time spent in front of it, point to its enormous significance in most people's daily lives. That considerable numbers of persons are playing videogames rather than watching television, or surfing the Internet rather than watching television, is not too likely to constitute much of an improvement.

The emergence of the Internet does not necessarily appear to be a boon for true freedom and critical thinking. What is often happening is that the Internet is becoming just another television for most people. How many persons are using the Internet mostly for serious purposes, as opposed to various graphical amusements? Ironically, the development of bigger broadband on the Internet, where ever clearer video-streaming becomes possible, is likely to dumb down the content — away from text, where more intelligent ideas can sometimes be more readily expressed.

It could be argued that today, American pop-culture and the world media-culture can be seen as becoming virtually co-terminous. Media is thus, it could be argued, the instrument for American cultural imperialism, for the homogenization, rationalization, and technologization of the world. It is the visibly concrete way in which non-American cultures are attenuated, and opened up to consumption. Probably no country can long resist the excitement proffered by American sex, violence, and flash, which raises the ire of nationalists and traditionalists, who can see no way of confronting the seepage, and sometimes turn to violence and xenophobia. There is something uniquely alluring in this American combination of sex, violence, and flash, as even French cinema and television (which certainly has no lack of explicit sexuality) is becoming rapidly Americanized. It is interesting to note that, in the early 1990s, French protests over including culture in the GATT were one of the agreement's biggest controversies. It is possible to make here, as well, some pointed comments, in the style of Canadian philosopher George Grant, on Canada's own “cultural industries”, and on what is said to constitute Canadian nationalism today – i.e., that the Canadian “cultural industries” today are virtually indistinguishable in their content from one North American (U.S. and Canada) mode of life.

The modern mass media, as an instrumentality which creates instantaneity; which abolishes social and national boundar-





ies and horizons; which bombards one's mind with an unending stream of disquieting images, sounds, and speech; which destroys the quiet discourse of the book, ushering in the postliterate age and "the new illiteracy"; and which tends towards the construction of an autonomous electronic realm, thus attenuates much of what has traditionally been considered the sense of being human. It could be argued that it undermines rooted communities, as well as literary-humanistic culture, and ultimately chokes off the human faculties of real sympathy (for one's immediate neighbor) and real imagination, replacing these with a never-ending, and ultimately pointless, "jangling" of human society, psychology, and core-identity, leading more concretely to increased crime, violence, anomie, as well as the disenchantment of both the public-political realm, and of one's perception of one's stable place in the world. The information traffic or information overload most people are caught in today tends to create a "postmodern blur" of social existence and reality. [probably helps to explain the sense of urgency and always being on the verge of a social nervous breakdown for general society.]

To a large extent, even more traditional media follow in the directions set by the electronic media — for example, the mass-marketing of little but books like those by Stephen King (the jolt of horror), and Danielle Steele (the frisson of sex); the selling of movie-rights before the novel is even written; and the tendency of what was once called *belles lettres* or fine literature to cater to increasingly low tastes. Books are often today simply another form of increasingly vulgar entertainment to be crassly marketed.

The hoped-for arising of a concerted, critical theory of media, is seen as being of utmost importance to maintaining a true sense of humanity today and in the future.

In the processes of our being enveloped ever more deeply in the mass media field, it could be argued that we are becoming increasingly less of what was traditionally considered as being truly human. The emergence of electronic mass-media may ultimately be the endgame for our sense of true humanity.

*Mark Wegierski is a Toronto-based writer and historical researcher. An earlier version of this essay has appeared in Enter Stage Right.*

## Questions for Further Discussion and Analysis

1. How and why has "the effect on society of the emergence of electronic mass media (and their immediate precursors such as cinema) been profoundly underestimated by most thinkers"?
2. What major or important "differences are there between the mass media before the emergence of the Internet as a mass medium, and afterwards"?
3. According to the author in what sense does "the realm of modern media (mainly cinema, television, and Internet) constitute a new type of reality, of various dimensions"?
4. Wegierski concludes that the internet has done little to elevate critiquing skills or ability to think in a reflective way about reality regardless of the field being considered, from media, music, film, politics, education, religion, culture, etc. What evidence does he present? Is he right?
5. Is there too great a concentration of control in the hands of the few in modern media? What is the danger of this according to Wegierski?
6. Why does Wegierski suggest that "media" may be the "perfect instrumentality for total conformity or social totalitarianism" defined as imposing one way of thinking, being, existing, and living on a given population"?
7. If this is applicable to an advanced region like North America, how might this play out in other parts of the world? For the better or for the worse? Might it be worse in some societies, depending on wealth, education level of the masses, cultural traditions, etc.?
8. What is meant by the phrase of "Americanocentric consumerist liberalism"?
9. How is this expressed in the three core areas of media: advertising, entertainment, information (or news)?
10. Because of American control of media, is it really "the instrument for American cultural imperialism, for the homogenization, rationalization, and technologization of the world"?
11. Does this help to produce anti-Americanism in certain countries? Do Islamists use this reality to their advantage? How?
12. Is Canada impervious to this effect or do we suffer more than others because of our own proximity to the United States?

13. Is Wegierski unnecessarily pessimistic in his conclusion that “the emergence of electronic mass-media may ultimately be the endgame for our sense of true humanity”



might come before Parliament related to that issue. In terms of foreign affairs, Trudeau is unabashedly in favor of tying financial aid to the expansion of abortion services. The following editorial presents a hard hitting critique of Trudeau’s policy direction.

### Weaponized aid

(Editorial appearing in the April, 2017 edition of *The Interim* newspaper)



### PART D: Foreign Aid

Foreign aid from developed countries to developing nations can be a great boost to the latter. Sometimes it comes free of any constraints and sometimes it comes with heavy strings attached. Canada has been giving funds to support developing nations as they try to address some of their most vexatious problems – poverty, poor health, illiteracy and poor standard of living. Under Stephen Harper, funds were provided to African nations, for example, but with none of it earmarked for the expansion of abortion services or other reproductive objectives. Justin Trudeau has a quite different policy with respect to abortion, both at home and abroad. Domestically, he has declared that no member of the Liberal party may support anti-abortion measures; in fact any candidate wishing to become the nominee of the Liberal Party in a federal riding cannot be pro-life in his/her orientation politically. He has made it clear that all party candidates must vote in favour of abortion rights on legislative matters that

Last month, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau announced that \$650 million of Canada’s foreign aid budget would be directed to support “sexual and reproductive health programs.” The specific amount of Trudeau’s pledge will go some way to fill the gap created by President Trump’s recent reinstatement of the Mexico City Policy, which prohibits U.S. aid from funding abortion overseas. Of course, this unsubtle slight of America’s laudable policy change will not go unnoticed by the new administration. Yet the real cost of Trudeau’s vain stunt will be the irreparable damage to the poor nations that will be victimized by Canada’s so-called charity.



The first thing to criticize about Trudeau’s announcement is that he did not promise new monies. Instead, the funds in question will come from Canada’s existing foreign aid budget. As Toronto Archbishop Thomas Collins pointed out in his letter to the Prime Minister, “money spent on promoting abortion and contraception could be spent on vaccinating millions of women and girls against malaria or other diseases.” But, instead of saving lives, Canada will actively promote their end, and Archbishop Collins rightly cites this decision as an example of the “ideological colonization” that Pope Francis has powerfully decried.

The parallel with 19th-century imperialism is entirely



appropriate. For, in addition to exporting the West’s pathological practice of infanticide, Canada’s newly promised aid will also be used to lobby governments in the developing world that restrict abortion. Trudeau has, so to speak, furnished the detestable Court Challenges Program with a foreign office. Under the dubious guise of assistance, Canada will – in some cases – now meddle in the democratically determined policies of free countries simply because they are poor. Our so-called aid will, therefore, change the way needy nations rule themselves. Our celebration of diversity, it would seem, stops at our own borders, and our much-vaunted tolerance does not extend to the self-government of other states. Trudeau has, in effect, turned Canada into an agitator which exports ideology instead of aid.

Echoes of colonialism are, thus, not even the most uncomfortable historical parallel which may be drawn. In spending a princely sum to promote its own perverse ideas overseas, Canada’s new policy resembles Saudi Arabia’s aggressive propagation of Wahhabi Islam. The House of Saud has spent billions to build schools, colleges, and mosques across the globe – and it would seem that Trudeau has taken a page from their evangelical book. But whereas the Saudis simply advance an ideology which limits the rights of women to dress, drive, learn, vote, marry, testify in court, and own property, Canada’s proselytization deprives women of the very right on which all of these other precarious freedoms depend: the right to life.

The most accurate historical parallel for Canada’s new course of action is, therefore, also the most troubling. During the Cold War, many free nations were destabilized by the proxy conflict of the world’s superpowers, and Trudeau’s new policy will undermine poor countries in the same way. Democratic processes will be influenced by externally funded lobbying which, if successful, will bring the same effects that they have had elsewhere – lower birthrates and smaller populations. Canada, in other words, will not only subvert the sovereignty of the nations it claims to aid, but its interference will ultimately harm the prosperity, secu-

urity, and the independence of these countries. These inevitable, clear, and calamitous consequences beg the obvious question: if we wanted to undermine the nations that we claim to assist and enthrall them to powers in the region, would we act any differently? Should the \$650 million that Trudeau has promised perhaps be taken from the defense budget instead?

The United Nations has recently warned that the worst famine in a half-century is threatening Africa and the Middle East and, so far, Canada has pledged a paltry \$120 million to the cause, or one fifth for its aggressive promotion of abortion and contraception. But we can no longer conclude that this negligence is simply a terrible misallocation of funds. Chillingly enough, we must note that the famine which now afflicts this region and Canada’s “reproductive imperialism” actually serve the same eugenic end: both will diminish the population of poor countries by different means – starvation on the one hand and prenatal infanticide on the other.

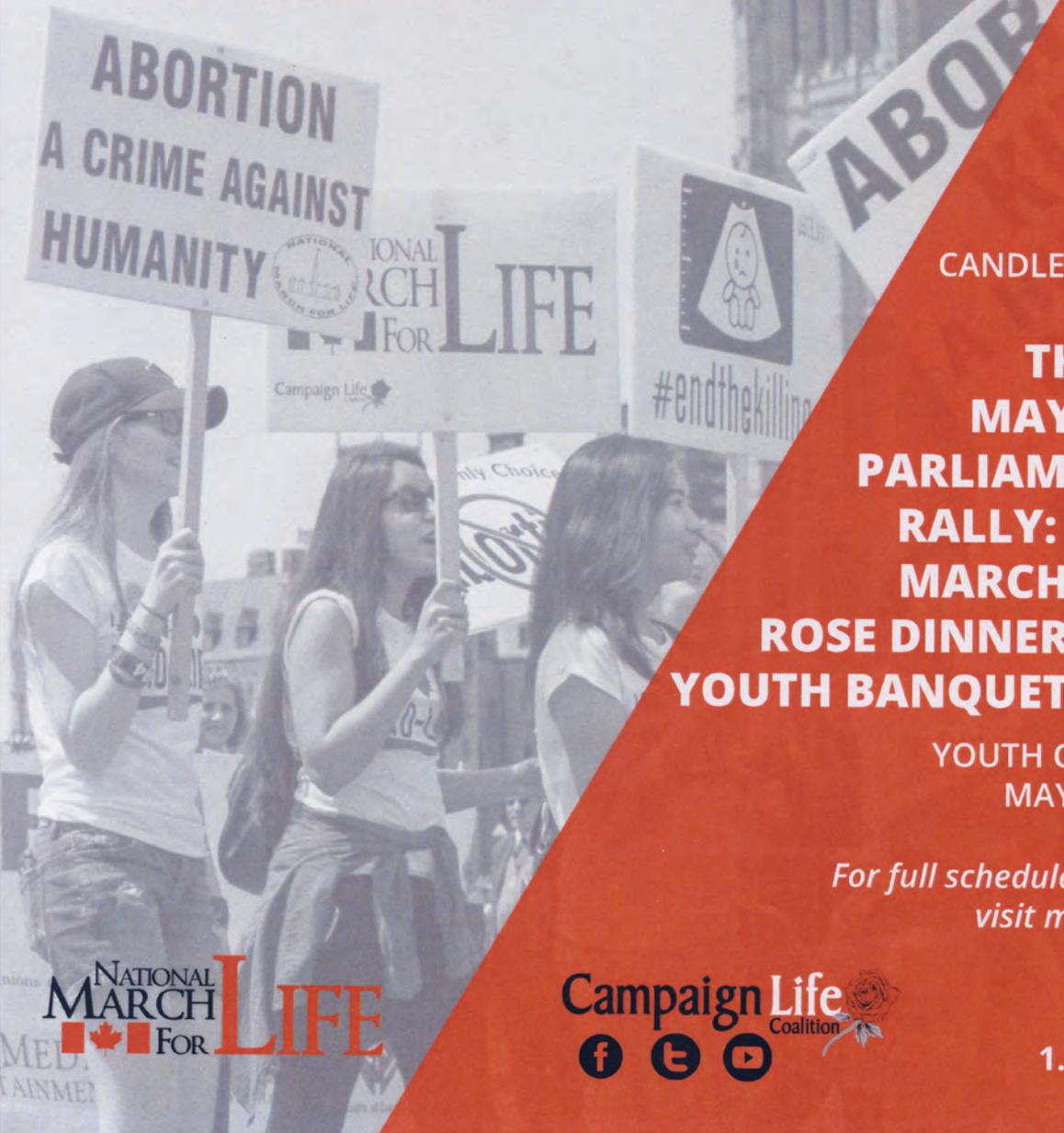
The Culture of Death is the Wahhabism of the West, and its radical clerics are the still-venerated luminaries of the 20th-century Progressive Era whose eugenic ideology is now being put into practice. The “human weeds” that Margaret Sanger dreamed of eradicating are now being menaced by Justin Trudeau’s racist policy of colonial crop-dusting. We must, as Archbishop Collins put it, “do better than imposing a distorted vision of the empowerment of women on ... countries that deserve our support.” And we must also identify and rebuke the genocidal policies that Canada wishes to deploy through its unconscionable use of weaponized aid.

### Questions

1. How is the Trudeau policy regarding foreign aid paradoxically an attack on developing nations?
2. Is the foreign aid policy now a form of “ideological colonization”? In what way?
3. How will Canada’s aid “ultimately harm the prosperity, security, and the independence of these countries” according to the editorial?
4. Is the comparison of the aid to Wahhabism accurate?
5. Why does the editorial conclude that Canada’s foreign aid program is really “weaponized aid”? What is meant by that term? Do you agree? Why or why not?
6. President Trump of the United States cut off abortion-related foreign aid to nations (specifically targeting International Planned Parenthood and its abortion services). Could the Trudeau policy complicate relations with the United States? Why or how?

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**YOUTH BANQUET: 6:00 PM**

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