

A Quiz Show Audition

by strannikov

I'm always getting Marshall McLuhan and Buckminster Fuller mixed up: you know, both bright and articulate, contemporaries, too, for sixty-nine years, at least. One was the esteemed Joyce scholar, the other was the avid paleo-anthropologist famous for scouring the Olduvai Gorge. I'm as chagrined as anyone. However could anyone get Joyce scholarship mixed up with physical anthropology? It's just not done.

"No, you're thinking of Louis Leakey, or his wife Mary, or his son Richard," a correction boomed from the depth of the auditorium.

"No, you're thinking of Anthony Burgess," came another correction from the dark of the balcony. "A Joyce commentator, but no Joyce scholar, not a claim Burgess would have made for himself, I don't much think."

Well, but I still get McLuhan and Fuller mixed up. One was an eminent historian of jurisprudence and criminology, the other was one of the nineteenth century's leading bicycle designers. Again: while it may be easy not to confuse the histories of jurisprudence and criminology with the manufacture of two-wheeled bicycles in the Age of Enlightenment, I anticipate no substantive overlap in topicality.

"Hunh?" the former barked.

"What?" the latter blurted, just as tersely if not more so.

I mean to say, I cannot keep McLuhan and Fuller separate in my mind. One was the so-called "Miner Poet," the "Bard of the Mines" who wrote so movingly of the plight of Welsh slate miners

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until his untimely death at age seventeen, the other was the real brains behind the American trucking industry. I do not commonly confuse the economics of American commercial automotive transport with the poetics of resourceful Welsh miners, but now at least I'm thinking of Luis Buñuel and Luciano Pavarotti: one was the accomplished French air minister, the other unaccountably gave driving lessons in Vancouver.

By the time someone flipped the hall lights on, the auditorium audience had vacated the premises. (Most peculiarly and oddly coincidentally, one of the absent interrogators was named Luciano McLuhan, the other Buckminster Buñuel: one came to television production from a dreary brain-ladling factory in Independence [Missouri], the other had migrated to program development after a short stint as a painter-philosopher of the Execrable Semiotics school and the "Fluorescent Sepia" group, or vice versa.)

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