The New American Vortex: Explorations of McLuhan.

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We shall not cease from exploration.

ABSTRACT

To encounter and digest the oeuvre of H. Marshall McLuhan on his own terms, this study deploys a strategy not dissimilar to that of Poe's sailor who survived his descent into the maelstrom by studying the action of the vortex and catching hold of a recurring form. Here, McLuhan's career-spanning concern with "communication" may be seen as just such a recurrence — his concern with communication is evident at every turn of his effort to update the Great English Vortex of 1914 and develop a second vortex in mid-century America. Having taken hold of this central concern, this study uses the procedure he developed to expose the "theory of communication" of any figure in the arts and sciences, and applies it to McLuhan himself.

In this process of folding McLuhan in on himself, five loosely chronological chapters are used to reveal the four historical "phases" of his career, and to show that McLuhan cannot properly be understood apart from:

1. The great tradition of Ciceronian humanism and the Ciceronian ideal —the *doctus orator* — a figure in whom eloquence and wisdom coalesce.
2. The programme of the figures frequently referred to as the Men of 1914: James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis.

In the final analysis, McLuhan is shown as having updated and transformed both — the Ciceronian ideal and the programme of the Men of 1914 — to become something of a singularity in the midst of what he saw as an Electric Renaissance: a paramodern (neither modernist nor post-modernist) *doctus orator*.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In the H. Marshall McLuhan Collection there is a note from the archivist that reads:

> A careful study of the McLuhan papers will reveal that they are not just collections of biographical data. They are blue prints for heightening awareness and encouragement for increasing intellectual development. They are records of how the fires in young minds were set.

The note resides in the last folder of the 225th of 228 boxes that make up the collection. Having started with box one, by the time I encountered it I was in a position to concur. The H. Marshall McLuhan Collection is more than a "blue print," it is an invitation for exploration, an education, and it set in motion an intellectual adventure.

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

INTRODUCTION

So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years—
Twenty years largely wasted, the years of l'entre deux guerres
Trying to use words, and every attempt
Is a wholly new start, and a different kind of failure
Because one has only learnt to get the better of words
For the thing one no longer has to say, or the way in which
One is no longer disposed to say it. And so each venture
Is a new beginning, a raid on the inarticulate
With shabby equipment always deteriorating
In the general mess of imprecision of feeling,
Undisciplined squads of emotion. And what there is to conquer
By strength and submission, has already been discovered
Once or twice, or several times, by men whom one cannot hope
To emulate—but there is no competition—
There is only the fight to recover what has been lost
And found and lost again and again: and now, under conditions
That seem unpropitious. But perhaps neither gain nor loss.
For us, there is only the trying. The rest is not our business.[1]

Herbert Marshall McLuhan (b.1911 – d.1980) began his extensive exploration of the works of the great English painter, novelist, and essayist, Percy Wyndham Lewis (b.1882 – d.1957) during the late 1930s. The pair eventually met in July 1943 while McLuhan was teaching at St. Louis University, Missouri. Lewis's biographer, Jeffrey Meyers, documents their fortuitous encounter and records how McLuhan discussed "the possibility of Lewis reviving the *Enemy* and doing 'Thirty Personalities of America.'" [2] Meyers also notes that "when McLuhan returned to St. Louis, he began a lively correspondence … and said he was preparing to open a second front in America and lead a new

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[1] T. S. Eliot, "East Coker, part V," in *Four Quartets* (London: Faber and Faber, 1958), 21–22.

[2] Jeffrey Meyers, *The Enemy: A Biography of Wyndham Lewis* (London and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 280.

offensive for Lewis's books and pictures."[3] True to his word, McLuhan set about establishing a second front. It was, however, only one small part of a much larger campaign. By 1949, just four years after the detonation of the first atomic bomb, we see McLuhan had set out to create his own second vortex in America. As McLuhan notes in his unpublished book-length work "The New American Vortex" (c. 1949), Wyndham Lewis is right in regards to the need to develop a second vortex in America. And, he adds, it must be studied like Poe's fisherman in the maelstrom — for "the New American Vortex … is already the dynamic focus of world culture."[4]

> Once "Western Man" was the object of my particular solicitude. He was ailing, in fact in a decline – it was denied me to foresee what would so shortly befall, and I sought to heal and reinvigorate him. He was, of course, past help, and now is dead. He only breathed his last a short while ago, but to me he seems as far away as Cro-Magnon Man. I cannot regret him, I find, in the slightest degree. I feel no loyalty toward him. All my loyalties today are for a far more significant and imposing person, namely Cosmic Man (or "Cosmopolitan," as they would have said last century). This man I have seen and talked with in America. So I know what he will be like when his day comes, and *he is everywhere*.[5]

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[3] Ibid.

[4] McLuhan, "The New American Vortex (I)," MS., 1. Here McLuhan can be heard evoking the work of Ezra Pound. As Hugh Kenner notes, Pound's lifelong guiding theme, his guiding artistic principle, is something he called "patterned energy." In 1914, Kenner asserts, Pound was using the example of the whirlpool or vortex to describe what he meant — the vortex is not the water but a patterned energy made visible by the water. Hugh Kenner, "Portrait of a Mentor," in *The Elsewhere Community* (Concord, On.: House of Anansi Press, 1998), 27.

  "The New American Vortex" is an unpublished, book-length collection of published and unpublished essays included in the Marshall McLuhan Collection (held at the Canadian National Archives, Ottawa). The archivist for the collection indicates that the work appears to have been assembled by McLuhan c. 1949.

[5] Wyndham Lewis, *America and Cosmic Man* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat, 1969), 242. Emphasis mine. Originally published in 1948.

From the time McLuhan began writing "The New American Vortex" he understood himself to be working in the great tradition of Ciceronian humanism, and he was consciously modelling his operations on the ideal of that tradition— the *doctus orator*:

> This tradition has been a continuous force in European law, letters, and politics from the time of the Greek sophists. It is most conveniently referred to as the Ciceronian ideal, since Cicero gave it to St. Augustine and St. Jerome, who in turn saw to it that it has never ceased to influence Western society. The Ciceronian ideal as expressed in the *De Oratore* or in St. Augustine's *De Doctrine Christiana* is the ideal of rational man reaching his noblest attainment in the expression of an eloquent wisdom … Thus, the *doctus orator* is, explicitly, Cicero's sophistic version of Plato's philosopher-king.[6]

On one hand, McLuhan's complex and intricate combination of rhetoric and philosophy (or eloquence and wisdom), permitted him to "waver" between positions and modulate his discourse according to the audience he was addressing and the "medium" in which he was working. As Jerrold Seigel notes:

> [Cicero's] ideal orator would be a Stoic in his most philosophical moments, a Peripatetic in his ordinary, common-sense moments, but fundamentally a skeptic all the time. He spoke as a philosopher to philosophers, as an everyday man to everyday men, but always with an eloquence that was properly and uniquely his. The philosophy he joined to rhetoric was free in some moments to range wherever the demands of rational consistency took it…[7]

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[6] McLuhan, "Edgar Poe's Tradition," in *The Interior Landscape: The Literary Criticism of Marshall McLuhan 1943–1962*, ed. Eugene McNamara (New York and Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1969), 212–213. In "Edgar Poe's Tradition" McLuhan documents the unbroken line of Ciceronian humanism as represented by the tradition of the American South.

[7] Jerrold E. Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism: The Union of Eloquence and Wisdom, Petrach to Valla* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press,

On the other hand, however, McLuhan's particular interpretation and transformation of humanism and his praxis as *doctus orator* committed him, like Lewis, to fight for the "individual." On no uncertain terms, McLuhan is for reason, the rational nature of man, the freedoms and responsibilities attendant with democracy,[8] and the individual as "a complete musical work" rather than merely a "note in the musical score of society."[9]

> If there is no private independent personal substance such has always occupied the thoughts of the sages, then all matters of authority and obedience are frivolous, all services and disservices indifferent and equal. If there is no personal identity, indefeasible

1968), 29. It needs to be noted that McLuhan's operations as *doctus orator* do not necessarily resign him to being "fundamentally a skeptic."

[8] Particularly of a Jeffersonian stripe. See McLuhan, "The Southern Quality," in *The Interior Landscape*, 196. McLuhan did not support "democracy" for its own sake. As McLuhan notes to Stearn several years later: "Here perhaps my own religious faith has some bearing. I think of human charity as a total responsibility of all, for all. Therefore, my energies are directed at far more than mere political or democratic intent. Democracy as a by-product of certain technologies, like literacy and mechanical industry, is not something that I would take very seriously. But democracy as it belongs very profoundly with Christianity is something I take very seriously indeed," (McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," in *Media Research: Technology, Art, Communication*, ed. Michel Moos (Amsterdam: G+B Arts, 1997), 46).

[9] McLuhan, "An Ancient Quarrel in Modern America," in *The Interior Landscape,* 224. Here McLuhan is using an analogy provided by Meiklejohn as a means of casting light on the conflict between Hutchins and Dewey at the University of Chicago. McLuhan argues that Hutchins' pedagogical philosophy is underpinned by a belief that the state ought to be an association of autonomous persons. Dewey, by contrast, McLuhan argues, regards the collective as the basic unit and is orientated towards making the individual useful to the state rather than making the individual ruler of himself and the state. Ibid. McLuhan's support is not exclusively for Hutchins. We see later in the article that he indicates that he favors some third position, a middle way between the disputants: "intimate association with the scientific spirit, whether inculcated by logic and dialectics or by the physical sciences, can very well afford to be postponed to the stage of graduate study," (Ibid., 231).

and intransient, then human society can only be the "Penal Colony" evoked by Franz Kafka.[10]

His early commitments are nowhere more visible than in another early, unpublished essay, "Snowballs or Tennis Balls Professor Hook." Here the early McLuhan declares: "I am a Catholic. Therefore, but not only therefore, I can accept the notion of man's fixed rational nature."[11] He continues, stating that because of his conviction in man's rational nature (on several grounds in addition to his Catholicism): "I hate Hitler, and anything that even makes a show of diminishing the dignity and rational potency or act of man. I detest therefore the commercial spirit and consumer mentality. I hate fashion, in pants or philosophy, as the spirit of the zeitgeist."[12] McLuhan also declares: if there is no rational nature then there is no man, merely things, configurations of matter in space-time, designated "men." These "things," he adds, may conceivably assume totally new configurations in the future just as they are assumed to be different in the past. The problem of course, McLuhan reminds us, is that if the designation "man" is an utterly arbitrary and whimsical pattern of energy, then to talk of political freedom is absurd. If man, as a pattern, "has an appetite for freedom today then why not a pattern for servitude tomorrow?"[13] Emotional preferences for democracy or science,

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[10] McLuhan, and Barrington Nevitt, *Take Today: The Executive As Dropout* (Don Mills, ON.: Longmann, 1972), 262–263.

[11] McLuhan, "Snowballs or Tennis Balls Professor Hook," MS., 1.

[12] Ibid.

[13] Ibid., 9–10.

McLuhan claims, have no more validity than an emotional rejection.[14] "Freedom," he declares, "posits a specific nature."[15]

In view of the strength of these statements it is relatively unsurprising that we also find McLuhan's commitments are clearly evident in the plainly stated goal of his "New American Vortex" — to enable America to "fulfil some of its broken utopian promises."[16] McLuhan afforded America a special place in his vision because it was the dynamic focus of world culture (rapidly in the process of becoming a world environment), and also because he apprehended that American political philosophy was grounded in the Christian basis of the uniqueness of the individual.[17] Nowhere else, McLuhan claims elsewhere, is this made the "exclusive focus of social promises."[18] Ergo, to help America fulfil some of its broken utopian promises, this

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[14] Ibid., 16.

[15] Ibid., 10. And so too education. The consequences of education, McLuhan argues, are unimportant unless man has a nature that the education is designed to develop or maintain. Ibid., 11.

[16] The Jeffersonian tradition, McLuhan asserts, "is still intact," and could be readily revived by a frank educational program based on the curriculum provided by the "admen": "should the energy that animates the admen be transferred to the world of political speculation and creation, American could still fulfil some of its broken utopian promises," (McLuhan, "American Advertising," MS., 13 in "The New American Vortex.")

[17] I am uncertain whether McLuhan is entirely right here. To determine the validity of McLuhan's claims would require an extensive survey of all the World's religions through the lens of what I will provisionally call a techno-cultural hermeneutic. It is a task that is well beyond the scope of this work.

[18] By contrast, at least as McLuhan apprehended and accounts for the matter, in Europe the only "choice" had been between Hegel or Machiavelli. In both of these "systems," McLuhan states, "man" is represented as a closed system. McLuhan, and Barrington Nevitt, "The Man Who Came to Listen," in *Peter Drucker's Contributions to Business Enterprise*, eds. Tony H. Bonaparte and J. E. Flaherty (New York University Press, 1970), 35–54.

seemingly "most forlorn of causes,"[19] *is* to fight for the "individual," the rational nature of man, freedom, and democracy — and to do so on a grand scale![20]

To realise the goal, McLuhan sets his "New American Vortex" to work on two tasks: (1) To digest not only the work of Wyndham Lewis, but all of the lights he saw as making up the brightest constellation in all English letters: James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Wyndham Lewis, "*on their own terms*."[21] (2) To put the work of these "Men of 1914"[22] "in touch" with society and before an American audience. McLuhan's rationale appears to have been that he saw and heard in the works of these "serious artists" a "detailed history of the future."[23] In *Finnegans*

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[19] McLuhan, "The Southern Quality," in *The Interior Landscape*, 186. Here McLuhan adds: "Every human cause has now the romantic charm of a "lost cause," and the irrelevance of proposed human ends is only equalled by the likelihood of the annihilation of human beings," (Ibid.).

[20] It appears that McLuhan hoped that by focusing on the North American scene and the English speaking world, his work would beget positive change, by way of resonant echo, beyond the reaches of the American continent.

[21] McLuhan, "The New American Vortex (I)," MS., 12. Emphasis mine.

[22] Joyce, Eliot, Pound, and Lewis are often referred to as the "Men of 1914" or the "Late, Radical Modernists." See Vincent Sherry, *Ezra Pound, Wyndham Lewis and Radical Modernism* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

[23] "The percussed victims of the new technology have invariably muttered clichés about the impracticality of artists and their fanciful preferences. But in the past century it has come to be generally acknowledged that, in the words of Wyndham Lewis, '*The artist is always engaged in writing a detailed history of the future because he is the only person aware of the nature of the present*.' Knowledge of this simple fact is now needed for human survival. The ability of the artist to sidestep the bully blow of new technology of any age, and to parry such violence with full awareness, is age-old. Equally age-old is the inability of the percussed victims, who cannot sidestep the new violence, to recognize their need of the artist. To reward and to make celebrities of artists can, also, be a way of ignoring their prophetic work, and preventing its timely use for survival. The artist is the man in any field, scientific or humanistic, who grasps the implications of his actions and of new knowledge in his own time. He is the man of integral awareness,"

Wake, for example, McLuhan felt that James Joyce had announced the arrival of a new "intellectual dawn"[24] and a new and as yet un-named Renaissance (that I will provisionally call the Electric Renaissance).[25] He also apprehended that the work of the "Men of 1914" provided something of a "social navigation chart" for the maelstrom of the 20th century.[26] Subsequently, while privately revolted by the new multi-sensuous stress concomitant with electricity and the rapid succession of new media forms,[27] McLuhan's traditional humanist commitments pushed him beyond "parochial habits of mind"[28] (and the "personalism which is the negation of every civilized agreement and effort")[29] and into

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(McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, 1st MIT Press ed. (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1994), 65). Emphasis mine.

[24] In the opening section of "The New American Vortex" McLuhan claims that: "What happened in America is this, we are suddenly back at the morning daylight world of our first age, the Jeffersonian era." He continues, noting that when Joyce ended the artificial night in *Finnegans Wake* with the prospect of an intellectual dawn, "the dawn had begun *in fact*." Consequently, he adds, the study of the new American Vortex will be "an affair of intellectual daylight because the action of the storm can be studied completely objectively," (McLuhan, "The New American Vortex, typescript (I)," MS., 1–2).

[25] Observing the projected changes or effects in McLuhan's early writings we can see that McLuhan appears to have apprehended the distinct possibility of realising a kind of neo-Baroque order and new analogical synthesis informed by the unity of the arts and sciences, head and heart, rhyme and reason. Dialectics might, finally, lie beside metaphysics, aesthetics with unity of sensibility, and we might see again an end to cultural and psychological fragmentation — "*Reamalgamergence*!" C.f. McLuhan, "Proposal for a Newspaper Column," MS., n.pag. cited in chapter two; and James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, Minerva paperback ed. (London: Minerva, 1992), 49.

[26] *Understanding Media*, 66.

[27] McLuhan disclosed his "private" reflections on the matter to Gerald Stearn: "My own observations of our almost overwhelming cultural gradient toward the primitive — or involvement of all the senses — is attended by complete personal distaste and dissatisfaction. I have no liking for it," (McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," 65).

[28] McLuhan, "Edgar Poe's Tradition," in *The Interior Landscape,* 217.

[29] McLuhan, "The Southern Quality," in *The Interior Landscape,* 205.

a public role where he might try to cooperate with and energize the positive features of the new situation.

McLuhan appears to have regarded the act of putting the work of the Men of 1914 before an American audience as a kind of surgical operation — a form of "organ transplant,"[30] or "corporate optometry."[31] This is clearly the case in terms of McLuhan's offensive for Lewis's books and pictures. McLuhan co-opted Lewis's outputs and offered up Lewis's precise and "painterly eye" to Modern man who had lost the use of his own as a "tool for apprehending and manipulating the current world."[32] His practise in this respect is perhaps no more evident than in one of the first rounds fired from his second front, "Wyndham Lewis: Lemuel in Lilliput" (1944):

> To read the "pamphlets" of Lewis is to become aware not only of the forces arrayed against reason and art, but it is to have anatomized before one's eyes every segment of the contemporary scene of glamorized commerce and advertising, and, above all, of the bogus science, philosophy, art, and literature which have been the main instrument in producing the universal stupefaction.[33]

Similarly, McLuhan saw that the outputs of Eliot, Pound, and Joyce served not only as a tool and discipline for awakening "heroic fortitude" in men,[34] but their respective works acted to cleanse the stream of speech, update sensibility, and train perception. The training of perception, in particular, McLuhan considered to be the necessary propaedeutic for the

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[30] *Take Today*, 139.

[31] McLuhan to Edward Hall, 24 August 1964.

[32] McLuhan to Felix Giovanelli, Sunday 1949. The "painterly eye" might also be described as the "tactile-eye." See Sheila Watson, "Wyndham Lewis and Expressionism," (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1965).

[33] McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis: Lemuel in Lilliput," in *The Medium and The Light*: *Reflections on Religion*, eds. Eric McLuhan and Jacek Szklarek (Toronto: Stoddart, 1999), 181.

[34] McLuhan, "The New American Vortex, typescript (I)," MS., 12.

re-invigoration of morality and prudence given that both are necessary

virtues of the free citizen and ruler in civil society:

> Freedom, like taste, is an activity of perception and judgment
> based on a great range of particular acts and experiences. What
> fosters mere passivity and submission is the enemy of this vital
> activity.[35]

As McLuhan's oeuvre began to take shape he continued to put the

work of the Men of 1914 before a North American audience. Lewis, in

particular, he began to "plug" like a "Belgian rattlesnake":[36]

> I have finally decided to plug him [Lewis] in *Folklore* [*The
> Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*]. The problem was to
> see how to do it to his advantage, since much of the book is likely
> to appear trivial and distasteful to him and reader alike (I'm tired
> of that book). But the time is now ripe to push Lewis forward.
> That wasn't clear months ago.[37]

McLuhan continued to "plug" Lewis throughout the entire course of his

career. The degree to which McLuhan's own written outputs at times

mimed and/or echoed that of Lewis is perhaps no more apparent than in

his *Counterblast* of 1954 and *Counterblast* of 1969:[38]

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[35] McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (New York: The Vanguard Press, 1951), 22.

[36] A nickname given to the Lewis Machine Gun by German soldiers in 1914.

[37] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 7 January 1949.

[38] The term "counterblast," McLuhan says, does not imply an attempt to explode Wyndham Lewis's *Blast* of 1914–5. Rather, "it indicates a need for a counter-environment as a means of perceiving the dominant one," (McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Counterblast*, (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1969), 4–5).

Figure i. (Wyndham Lewis, *BLAST: Review of the Great English Vortex* I, ed. Wyndham Lewis (London and New York: John Lane, 1915), 4–5)

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BLAST

THE SPECIALIST
" PROFESSIONAL "
" GOOD WORKMAN "
" GROVE-MAN "
ONE ORGAN MAN

BLAST THE

AMATEUR
SCIOLAST
ART-PIMP
JOURNALIST
SELF MAN
NO-ORGAN MAN

5

BLAST HUMOUR

Quack ENGLISH drug for stupidity and sleepiness. Arch enemy of REAL, conventionalizing like
gunshot, freezing supple
REAL in ferocious chemistry
of laughter.

BLAST SPORT

HUMOUR'S FIRST COUSIN AND ACCOMPLICE.

Impossibility for Englishman to be
grave and keep his end up,
psychologically.
Impossible for him to use Humour
as well and be persistently
grave.
Alas! necessity for big doll's show
in front of mouth.
Visitation of Heaven on
English Miss
gums, canines of **FIXED GRIN**
Death's Head symbol of Anti-Life.

CURSE those who will hang over this
Manifesto with SILLY CANINES exposed.

Figure ii. (McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Counterblast* (Toronto and Montreal: McClelland Stewart, 1969), 120–121).

BLESS THE ARTIST'S VISION OF THE PRESENT visible to him because of the freedom from the constant or STABILIZED ENVIRONMENT

BLESS THOMAS KUHN'S STRUCTURE OF SCIENTIFIC REVOLUTIONS for bridging art and science beyond the HOPES OF C. P. SNOW
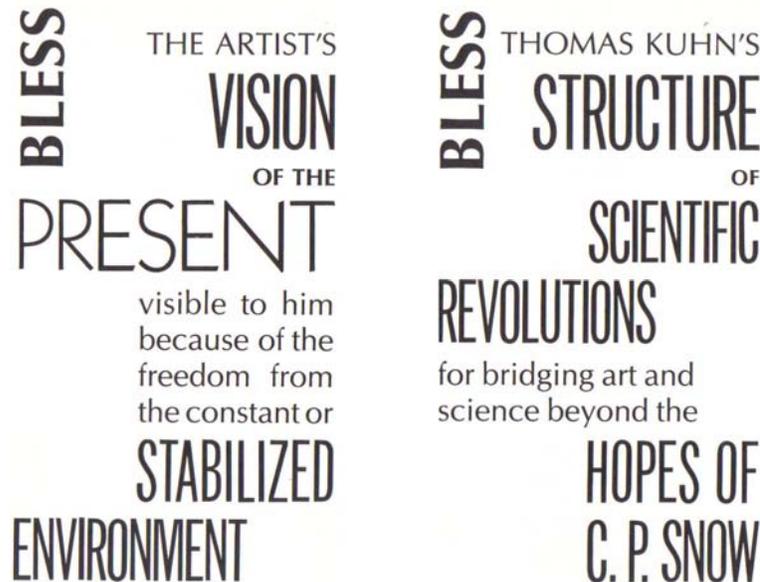
While it is debatable as to whether the later McLuhan is still fighting to enable America to realise its broken utopian promises,[39] we find that,

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[39] He was, however, still observing America. As McLuhan notes in one of the *McLuhan Dew-Line Newsletter's*; put simply, 20th century America has taken all the necessary steps to abolish the American way of life. McLuhan, "Agnew Agonistes," *McLuhan Dew-Line Newsletter* 2, no. 4, (January–February 1970): 8.

several decades after having been "ejected from the mechanisms of his [Lewis's] personality,"[40] he is still using Lewis as a tool — to present "the role of the artist" as the figure dedicated to preventing us from becoming well adjusted, "impercipient" robots — "servo-mechanism only."[41]

Plugging Lewis across the width and breadth of his career was not only consistent with his elected fight, it was necessary. Lewis, McLuhan claims, was "perhaps the first creative writer to have taken over the new media *en bloc* as modes of artistic and social control."[42] The degree to which Lewis was successful in this regard led McLuhan to assert that: "No one attempting to formulate a philosophy radically different from that which has gained almost universal ascendancy during the last 20 years can neglect him."[43] Despite his admiration for Lewis's artistic exegesis of the new patterns of power to shape human awareness and behaviour, however, McLuhan had seen how the work of this "one man army corps" was like an "H-bomb let off in the desert. Impact nil."[44] As McLuhan states in *Counterblast* (1954), Lewis was too late:

> In 1914, a few weeks before the War, Wyndham Lewis the painter put out *BLAST*. He set out to create a new vortex of thought and feeling consistent with the changed conditions of life, work, and society. He was too late. The imbalance of thought and feeling in the new technological world of England and Europe was extreme. The explosion of 1914 did not do the work of *BLAST*. *BLAST* was full of energy, hope and new vision. Those who crept back from the battlefields had none of these. The work of reorientation of

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[40] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 3 May 1949.

[41] McLuhan, and Eric McLuhan, *Laws of Media: The New Science* (Toronto, Buffalo and London: Toronto University Press, 1988), 78, 65.

[42] McLuhan, "Third Program in the Human Age," *Explorations* 8 (1967): 17. Originally published in 1957.

[43] McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis, Painter and Writer," MS., 4.

[44] McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 22 June 1951.

technological man was left to America in the twenties. America was not ready. America Botched it.[45]

It is my contention that, today, the place and significance we can afford McLuhan is analogous to that which he affords Wyndham Lewis. This is not to say that McLuhan should be made popular. I am inclined to believe that McLuhan, read on his own terms, is not unlike his observation of Lewis: "[Lewis] is not only extremely unpopular, but he is also quite incapable of being popularized."[46]

> Lewis pleases nobody because he is like an intruder at a feast who quietly explains that dinner must temporarily be abandoned since the food has been poisoned and the guests must be detached from their dinners by a stomach pump.[47]

Rather, it is to claim that anyone after him, who would set themselves the task of understanding media and grappling with our present-day media ecology, would do well to regard McLuhan's oeuvre at least as a point of departure.[48] It is also to assert that McLuhan, like Lewis, has not been read on his own terms. In the greater weight of purportedly critical scholarship and commentary there is still a shortage of works that encounter McLuhan by starting with what he actually said and did.

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[45] McLuhan, *Counterblast* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1954), n.pag.

[46] McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis: Lemuel in Lilliput," in *The Medium and the Light*, 197. While many figures have tried to popularize McLuhan, their successes have been, at best, brief; and at worst, the "iconic" McLuhan offered up for public consumption has been profoundly distorted. For an extended treatment of McLuhan's unpopularity see Liss Jeffrey, "The Heat and the Light of Marshall McLuhan," (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1997), 267, 314.

[47] McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis: Lemuel in Lilliput," in *The Medium and the Light*, 179.

[48] I use the word "oeuvre" on account of Jean Baudrillard's description of McLuhan as a "musician." Jean Baudrillard, interviewed and trans. Caroline Bayard and Graham Knight, "Vivisecting the 90s: An Interview with Jean Baudrillard," *C–Theory* (1995), http://www.ctheory.net/articles.aspx?id=66.

Consequently, McLuhan remains substantially misunderstood. To make some small steps toward addressing this issue by trying to re-read and digest McLuhan *on his own terms* is the task I have set for my little echo of McLuhan's original "New American Vortex."

McLuhan on McLuhan

While deliberating on McLuhan's relationship to Wyndham Lewis operates as a lens through which to view McLuhan's significance and what needs to be done (to read him on his own terms), it is through the lens of McLuhan's relationship to T. S. Eliot that we can approach *how* my echo of McLuhan's "New American Vortex" seeks to encounter and digest McLuhan on his own terms.

Much like Eliot, McLuhan is a critic of his own work while engaged in making it. His work emerged from dialogue — and dialogue is ever self-correcting. At every turn McLuhan is attending deeply to the central problems, with art itself, as opposed to merely reacting.[49] Consequently, as with Eliot, McLuhan's oeuvre is replete with precise guidelines for how he wanted to be read. Unlike Eliot, however, he did not keep his "art" and "critical" activities separate. As far as McLuhan was concerned, Eliot's practise in this regard was a failed endeavour. Despite Eliot's extensive efforts to write essays full of patient counsel, McLuhan saw that T. S. Eliot had not been read on his own terms and, consequently, had been praised and condemned for all the wrong

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[49] See McLuhan, "The Function of Criticism," MS., n.pag in "Great Tom." "Great Tom" is an unpublished, book-length volume that contends with the poetics of T. S. Eliot. The finding aid for the McLuhan collection suggests that the manuscript was produced during the late 1970s and early 1980s. I believe that the archivist is mistaken here. McLuhan's correspondence with Hugh Kenner reveals that McLuhan was working with Kenner on the essays that comprise the volume from as early as the mid-1940s.

reasons.[50] Instead, McLuhan sought to weave his counsel into his works, and he frequently indicates that this is what he is doing.[51] This is, perhaps, nowhere more evident than in McLuhan's "Reviews of the Poetry of Ezra Pound" where he states: "The moment that it is seen that a practising poet, in his criticism, is necessarily concerned with his own technical problems, his comments on other writers become a perfect key to himself."[52] While McLuhan is not a practising poet, at least not in the conventional sense, he is definitely a "serious artist," functioning in a mode not dissimilar to that of T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound:

> **Question**: Do you consider yourself an artist?
> **McLuhan**: Entirely. Always have been, nothing else.
> **Question**: Then why the doctorate and academe?
> **McLuhan**: I have never attempted to win the respect of my colleagues … I go against the grain.[53]

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[50] McLuhan, "From LaForgue to Dante," MS. 1. Here McLuhan also comments on how Eliot has been read as irreverent iconoclast in the 1920s, religious fascist in the 1930s, and Christian mystic in the 1940s. It is worth mentioning insofar as McLuhan's own reception has followed a similar trajectory as seen in criticism of the 1960s, 1980s, and 1990s.

[51] McLuhan also draws his reader's attention to how, beneath the level of surfaces and explicit statement, all works of art direct "right making" — that is, they provide the terms on which they would be "read," critiqued, and commented on (and for this reason, McLuhan adds, art is non-moral but accidentally becomes involved in moral questions). See McLuhan, "Introduction to Character," MS., 38 in "Character Anthology."

"Character Anthology" appears to have been an early, unpublished anthology of McLuhan's early essays. The finding aid for the McLuhan collection indicates the essays were written during the 1940s. In addition to an introduction (to character writing and character writers), the anthology carries essays on: Sir Walter Scott, Jane Austen, Charles Lamb (2 versions), George Crabbe, Robert Browning, Lord Byron (2 versions), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (2 versions), Wordsworth, Keats, and Shelly. The collection also contains an essay on the "The Sonnet" and the "Sonnet and Ballad."

[52] McLuhan, "Reviews of the Poetry of Ezra Pound," *Renascence* 4, no. 2 (1952): 216.

[53] McLuhan, "Genius or Whimsy? Some McLuhanisms." *The Sunday Post of Canada*, 13 May 1979. C.f. Ezra Pound, "The Serious Artist," in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1913).

In many respects, then, McLuhan is also not unlike his description of Henry A. Kissinger, but even more complex. Kissinger, McLuhan states, "…is neither a bureaucrat nor a professor nor a politician, but all of these things at once."[54] McLuhan is neither an artist nor a scientist nor educator, but all of these things at once, and some. As an artist–scientist–educator and inheritor of the legacy of the Men of 1914 (or high modernists), McLuhan is an artist who expanded the domain of "art." He is a teacher and educator who expanded the domain of pedagogy. He is also a scientist who "updated" science by reinstalling a rejuvenated "old" science of grammar. His encyclopaedism and "multi-media" artistry makes him something of a singularity. On these grounds McLuhan's comments in his "Reviews of the Poetry of Ezra Pound" can be taken to apply to McLuhan too. McLuhan, however, does not merely provide "criticism" concerned with his own technical problems as a key to himself, he goes further. McLuhan provides us with a procedure or method by which we might encounter him. Ergo, my bid to read McLuhan on his own terms will be done by applying McLuhan's procedure or method to McLuhan, effectively folding McLuhan on McLuhan.[55]

To explicate my procedure, provide further rationale for my choices, and to approach the thesis statement that this work "argues," we need to pause briefly and digress in order to consider some additional features of McLuhan's work. At the outset of his public career McLuhan had observed that the modern world was committed to the full extension

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[54] McLuhan, "A Media Approach to Inflation," *New York Times*, 21 September 1974.

[55] The term "fold-in" is used by McLuhan in his review of *The Naked Lunch* and *Nova Express*. There, McLuhan refers to Burroughs' employ of "Brion Gysin's cut-up method" as "the fold-in method," (McLuhan, "Notes on Burroughs," in *Media Research*, 86). I have *not* used "fold-in" in the above to indicate that the following work deploys the method of Gysin.

of communication by every means;[56] and that, for good or ill, the crux of the 20th century was to be the union of information and power.[57] Arguably, his guide in the matter is none other than James Joyce. In and through McLuhan's early reading of Joyce he apprehended that Joyce had rightly anticipated that the very processes of communication had become the natural base for all operations and strategies of culture.[58] Subsequently, McLuhan made the strategic decision to get out of English and relocate his project, bringing it under the aegis of communication theory and practise in 1951. From 1951 he used "communication" as a beachhead from which to conduct a program of unremitting observation and analysis of the communication(s) and information revolution of the second half of the 20th century.[59] He held the beachhead from the invention of the video tape recorder until his death in the same year as the Sinclair ZX81 personal computer became publicly available. The new site was, apparently, ideal. His relocation pushed McLuhan into the centre of his milieu, and from there he could address and dialogue with the leading minds of his day. McLuhan's appreciation of the adequacy of the beachhead for the task can be heard in his comments in "The Later Innis":

> Communication theory and practise has been fostered by numerous separate approaches to the common problems of our separate world. There has been no spectacular sponsor of such study, no doctrinaire approach to distort flexibility and sensitive awareness of its complexity. But such study seems inevitably to hold the key of unification of proliferating specialisms of modern

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[56] McLuhan, "Reading in an Age of Pictures," MS., 4.

[57] McLuhan, "A New Journey for the Magi," MS., 1.

[58] McLuhan "Notes on the Media as Artforms," MS., 4–6.

[59] "The 'information age' with its intense and all-involving "rim spin" had begun in World War I with its universal reliance on espionage and the appraisal of industrial war potential around the world. The speed-up of innovation had become the crux of warfare and business competition alike," (*Take Today*, 77).

knowledge. In this study the physicist can profitably confer with the student of poetry or philosophy. In moving towards this harmonizing of the arts and sciences, Innis appears as indisputable pioneer.[60]

One of the projects McLuhan sought to undertake during the early 1970s from his beachhead was to inaugurate a "World Communication Series" that would discuss the "theory of communication" of every major figure in the arts and sciences, from Plato to the present.[61] He appears to have understood the proposed series as a new kind of "criticism" that would cross all frontiers, disciplinary lines, and divisions.[62] Writing to Judith Greissman, McLuhan states:

> The World Communication Series would take as beach-head for the operation the fact that in the Western world there has been no concern with establishing, by anticipation, the effects of innovation. The concern with effect is necessarily a concern with impact upon a particular time and culture. [63]

In the same letter McLuhan also offers an outline of the procedure that he envisages would underpin his proposed series:

> As a natural procedure for approaching any figure in the arts or sciences, past or present, there is (a) consideration of the available resources accessible to the poet, painter, scientist, etc. There is then (b) the exact pattern to which these materials are subjected in order (c) to achieve optimal engagement with the problems of

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[60] McLuhan, "The Later Innis," MS., 11–12. McLuhan's "Later Innis" is, perhaps, another site where we see very clearly that McLuhan's comments on other artists and writers are frequently the best key to his own work.

[61] As for the list of topics, McLuhan states that "everybody of note in any culture of the world is eligible, from both the arts and sciences, past or present." That said, however, he suggests that "it would seem natural to pull out the ones that are already getting major attention in college courses. This ensures a beach-head or ready-made public as a starting point only," (McLuhan to Judith Greissman, 14 July 1971).

[62] Ibid.

[63] Ibid.

perception and learning of the given culture at that time. For example, Virgil's *Aeneid* has been called "a minority report on the Augustan empire". This focuses at once a possible, though controversial, feature of Virgil's effect. Do you see anything undesirable in touching on the controversial?[64]

When he is writing to potential authors for the series McLuhan offers a similar yet slightly varied procedure. For example, writing to Max Nanny in a bid to get him to "do a bit on Pound's theory of communication," McLuhan suggests that the components Nanny ought to include in his discussion are:

(a) A look at the components that Pound inherited at his situation re the cultural impasses of his time.

(b) A look at his public, or the situation as he saw it.

(c) The steps he took to modify his public…[65]

In the same letter McLuhan indicates that the procedure is necessary given that Pound "is always figure/ground," and is "always concerned with the public and the effects and changes to be introduced into that public."[66] It is my contention that McLuhan is, in many respects, not dissimilar to his own assessment of Ezra Pound. McLuhan is ever-

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[64] Ibid.

[65] McLuhan to Max Nanny, 27 July 1973. There are several additional variations of the procedure. For example, McLuhan writes to Sheila Watson: "TOC [Theory of Communication] means: what did this man seek or envisage as an *effect* of his work for his time or culture. The western world has had no place for *effect*, only for *input* or "content"/ The user is the content of any form of expression …. TOC study requires the notice of (a) the components available to the man, including the traditions and the problems of his culture (b) how did he shape these components? (c) what *effect* did he seek? e.g. Newton was seeking apologetic proof of existence of God via mathematics. That was the *effect* he sought. The themes and traditions he had to work with are known, what he *did* to these is known," (McLuhan to Sheila Watson, 7 September 1971).

[66] McLuhan to Max Nanny, 27 July 1973.

vigilant, always figure/ground, and always and everywhere concerned with effects. His relocation to "communication theory and practise" is itself case in point. For this reason, to guide my exploration of McLuhan that attempts to read and digest him on his own terms, I will apply McLuhan's procedure for examining Ezra Pound's "theory of communication" to McLuhan.

Another reason I have settled on the procedure is that McLuhan, as we shall see, was exceptionally prolific over a period of forty years. In face of the enormity of his corpus it seemed logical to try and employ much the same strategy employed by Poe's sailor to survive his descent into the maelstrom. Poe's sailor survived not only by studying the action of the vortex, but by clutching on to a reoccurring form — a cylindrical water cask. McLuhan's repeated and ongoing concern for "communication" offers itself as just such a reoccurring form. Consequently, through the lens of McLuhan's career-spanning concern with communication, I will examine and explore the interplay between: Tradition and the components McLuhan inherited in relation to the cultural impasses of his time; his public, or the situation as he saw it, and the steps he took to modify his public. In so doing we will find that McLuhan, read on his own terms, cannot be understood apart from:

1. The great tradition of Ciceronian humanism and the Ciceronian ideal —the *doctus orator* — a figure in whom eloquence and wisdom coalesce.

2. The programme of the figures frequently referred to as the Men of 1914: James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T. S. Eliot, and Wyndham Lewis.

In the final analysis, McLuhan is shown as having updated and transformed both to become something of a singularity in the midst of

what he saw as an Electric Renaissance: a paramodern (neither modernist nor post-modernist) *doctus orator*.

Career of a Neo-Renaissance Man

Before we continue further I would like to add some additional notes on McLuhan's procedure, which is now also my procedure. What needs to be stressed is that this work is *not* orientated towards the production of a biography. In place of a biography, McLuhan's procedure applied to himself drives towards an exploration of his oeuvre by way of a historical study of a career.[67] Hugh Kenner's opening remarks in *Wyndham Lewis* are admissible here:

> I had better make it clear that this book is not a biography but an account of a career, and that the Wyndham Lewis that figures in it, not always resplendently, is a personality informing a series of books and paintings, not the London resident of the same name who created that personality and may be inadequately described as its business manager and amanuensis…[68]

Of course McLuhan was not a painter, nor did he live in London. But, if we substitute McLuhan's name for Lewis's in the section cited, it serves well to point toward the essential character of the "McLuhan" encountered in this dissertation. McLuhan's "theory of communication" (and his significance), as with any figure under consideration by way of this procedure, will not be found solely in his biography, authorial intent, objects of his perception, his audiences and reception, what he said and did, nor the wider reality and ground for both McLuhan and his

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[67] Insofar as the history of "history" is intimately bound up with rhetoric, the primary mode of this dissertation is rhetorical rather than poetic. This matter is discussed at some length in Chapter Three.

[68] Hugh Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis* (Norfolk, Connecticut: New Directions, 1954), vii.

audiences; Nor will McLuhan and his theory of communication be revealed by exploring his life and work solely in terms of its static and unchanging aspect (*Being*); or in terms of process, in its dynamic and transformative aspect (*Becoming*).[69] McLuhan's legacy is one of both "debts" and "credits,"[70] and his "theory of communication" is a *ratio* that emerges from the interval and interplay between a complex matrix of relationships.

There is another reason why I have sought to explore McLuhan by way of a study of a career — it is consistent with the task of reading McLuhan on his own terms given his frequently acknowledged debts to I. A. Richards and the New Criticism:[71]

> *It confirms my notion that I got into media study through the new criticism*, although Harold Innis certainly gave me "an extra boost in his *Bias of Communication*." Innis simply asks about all innovations — what was the human response, the satisfactions, the transformations of attitude and outlook, etc. *This calls for a study of percepts rather than concepts, a matter which is very uncongenial to most people but easy for anyone trained in the new criticism*.[72]

McLuhan was among the early pioneers of the New Criticism in America. While he quickly moved beyond the New Criticism, insofar as he saw it as a collection of age old strategies re-invoked after a period of

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[69] The latter is particularly important here given McLuhan's place in an age of rapid technological evolution and his continual modulation of his praxis in view of the changing ground and situation of his day. There has been more in the way of technological change since the 19th century than in all prior human history.

[70] See Ezra Pound to Marshall McLuhan, 21 July 1952. Discussed in Chapter Three.

[71] My comments should in no way be taken as an attempt to diminish the extensive contributions of McLuhan's biographers Philip Marchand, and Terrence Gordon; and the documentary work of David Sobelman. To the work of these men this study owes a great debt.

[72] McLuhan to William Wimsatt, 20 December 1973. Emphasis mine.

disuse (or in other words, ancient grammar),[73] he remained committed to many of its core principles. In particular, McLuhan appears to have staunchly supported the bid of the New Critics to redress the critical errors of earlier, 19th century dialectical modes of inquiry with its predilection for deep interest in the private life and psychological make-up of the artist. His early commitment to the New Criticism is readily apparent in his unpublished manuscript on the work of T. S. Eliot. Here, McLuhan contrasts the New Criticism with the work of Sainte Beuve. McLuhan makes the case that Sainte Beuve sought to formally substitute psychology for criticism in and through his claim that to understand an author's work we need first understand his biography. New Criticism on the other hand, McLuhan notes, sought to admit biographical information (or any information beyond the text itself for that matter), for consideration only insofar as it assisted with a "due response to the vitality of the work before us."[74] Siding with the New Critics, McLuhan then presents Sainte Beuve's program as a flight from the work itself — a flight grounded in the prevailing "biologism" and the assumption that literature is "self-expression."[75] For McLuhan, Sainte Beuve's project represented a confusion of both mind and provinces of knowledge, and was utterly at odds with the central tenets of contemporary art. Arguably, McLuhan's efforts to have us engage with his work in a manner at least sympathetic with a New Critical orientation can be seen in the extensive efforts he made to keep his private and public lives separate.[76]

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[73] McLuhan, "The New Criticism," MS., 1–3.

[74] The New Critics appear to have held that the omission of biographical information aids the greater realisation of another set of possibilities – judgement as a function of a works inclusiveness and quality and richness of internal relations.

[75] McLuhan, "Mr Eliot's Cubist Aesthetic," MS., 13, 15 in "Great Tom."

[76] A matter taken up at some length in Chapter One and developed throughout.

Another reason I have made my exploration of McLuhan a study of a career is that it provides a platform from which to encounter the width and breadth of his contribution. McLuhan's corpus is extensive, and is not merely a heap of splendid fragments. Rather, it is deeply informed by a unity of underlying pattern. To date, however, the greater weight of McLuhan's critics and commentators have overlooked what McLuhan actually said, not treated what he said about his own work seriously, sought to contend with his "media" studies independently from his "literary" studies, and, generally, tended to forgo the whole in favour of the part.[77] To present McLuhan on his own terms, however, requires treatment as a whole.[78] With a view to treating the whole, and in such a way as to keep his work always before us, this study makes extensive use of materials drawn from various archival sources including the: H. Marshall McLuhan Collection (National Archives of Canada, Ottawa), the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Archive, the McLuhan Collection and Sheila Watson Fonds at the University of St. Michaels College (University of Toronto), the Barrington Nevitt Papers and Laure Rièse Papers (also at the University of Toronto), The Edward T. Hall Papers (Arizona University), The Hugh Kenner Papers (University of

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[77] Admittedly, this has much to do with the strictures of form. Neither the journal article nor symposium offer the chance to really get into McLuhan in any depth. Apparently, there is also a shortage of publishers willing to commit to book length works that might have undertaken the kind of project I am attempting here.

[78] In pursuit of this goal, it appears that McLuhan's concluding notes in "The Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of his Time," that: "…non existent vistas and sanctions are the primary features of this work," apply equally well here. McLuhan, *The Classical Trivium: The Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of His Time*, ed., W. Terrence Gordon (Corte Madera, CA: Ginko, 2006), 252. In trying to canvass the whole I have sacrificed much in the way of parts and particulars.

Please note that all subsequent references to "The Place of Thomas Nashe" are taken from *The Classical Trivium*.

Texas), Daniel Cappon Collection (York University), Wilfred Watson Papers (University of Alberta), and the Norbert Wiener Papers (Massachusetts Institute of Technology). [79]

McLuhan Descending a Staircase

In addition to archival research, which forms the backbone of this study, I have also endeavoured to heed the advice of Donald Theall, in whose work this dissertation has its genesis.[80] Theall has argued that we need to pay attention to those who knew him and the traditions of scholarship that speak about him and to him.[81] Consequently, from this study's inception, I have sought to engage in a dialogue with the leading exponents of McLuhan Studies and the figures that have known and worked with him. Much of this study is merely a record of the best "talk" that ensued,[82] organised in accord with the best advice. Some of the best advice I have received has come via McLuhan's son, Eric McLuhan.

[79] McLuhan's official biographer, W. Terrence Gordon, has stated his preference for citing published materials wherever possible rather than their original counterparts: "in order to remind interested readers of the opportunity to examine the fuller context of my quotations," (Terrence W. Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan: Escape into Understanding: A Biography* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 355). In contrast, I have cited from as much unpublished material as possible. My rationale is that we are only at the dawn of McLuhan Studies. The way forward is only to be had by a concerted effort to re-examine the width and breadth of the H. Marshall McLuhan Collection and to seek out new material. McLuhan neither seeks nor deserves merely an interested reader. Rather he, as with others in the "tradition" he participates, seeks a perfect reader with a perfect case of insomnia.

[80] And, ultimately, whose contributions I seek to complement by way of this study, particularly by playing up Wyndham Lewis to his extensive and comprehensive treatment of McLuhan's relation to James Joyce.

[81] Donald Theall, *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), x.

[82] Above all others, I owe an un-payable debt to the New York based "artist," Bob Dobbs for the time we have spent dialoguing about McLuhan.

During the earliest days of this study, Eric McLuhan suggested that the way this study should be conducted was to try to get inside McLuhan's mind (to read him on his own terms?). Subsequently, I discovered Eric McLuhan's advice is consistent with McLuhan's appraisal of Townsend's successful exegesis of Ruskin. Townsend's technique, McLuhan notes, does not present a mere view of Ruskin. Rather, it extends from having installed himself in Ruskin's mind in order to note the logic of his inconsistencies and conflicts. McLuhan continues, arguing that the success of Townsend's method is that it enables a *reconstruction* of the processes of Ruskin's mind, leading to *multiple, simultaneous views of the same object*.[83] In short, the McLuhans are in accord — the way in is to be found by breaking and entering: "the task is slipping in, with a burglar's jemmy … the point being to 'touch' the poetry."[84] "The hand," used to touch the poetry, as McLuhan and Parker state in *Through the Vanishing Point*, "has no point of view."[85]

Following the McLuhans advice, with a view to rendering multiple, simultaneous views of McLuhan in a manner not dissimilar to Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending the Staircase*,[86] the action of "The

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[83] McLuhan, review of *Ruskin and the Landscape of Feeling: A Critical Analysis of his Thought During the Crucial Years of his Life, 1846–56*, by Francis G. Townsend, MS., 1.

[84] McLuhan, "The Difficulties of Yvor Winters," MS., 13.

[85] McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Through the Vanishing Point: Space in Poetry and Painting* (New York, Evanston, and London: Harper Colophon, 1969), 35.

[86] "Marcel's Classic 'Nude Descending a Staircase' was a major manifesto of the electric age. The industrial hardware of the assembly-line had been enveloped by the new environment of the Magnetic City and the wired planet. As soon as the machine went inside the electric circuit, the mechanical forms of the industrial world that emanated from the Gutenberg technology of uniform, repeatable, and moveable types became transformed into "art." New technologies in supplanting their predecessors translate them into "art" forms. The old form is enhanced by obsolescence. Ruins and antiques nourish the creative imagination of artists and poets. Humanism and ruins are synonymous," (McLuhan, "Duchamp," MS., 1).

New American Vortex: Explorations of McLuhan" loosely mimes the contours of a whirlpool. While my primary mode of organisation is chronological, points traced are retraced several times from a different vantage so as to admit some measure of "light through."[87] To address the evolution of McLuhan's praxis I employ five chapters to reveal four "phases" of his career that roughly correspond to the decades: 1940–50 (Chapter One), 1950–60 (Chapter Two), 1960–70 (Chapters Three and Four), and 1970–79 (Chapter Five). Each chapter loosely follows a three fold movement in accord with the procedure I am employing. The first part of each chapter largely contends with McLuhan's labour to acquire some aspect of the great tradition and/or feature of the Men of 1914's praxis.[88] Secondly, I examine how he saw his audiences and the situation of his day. And finally, I provide a fairly comprehensive account of what he actually said and did during the period under consideration, and indicate how, through his praxis, McLuhan transformed his "traditional" inheritance.[89]

1. RECONSTRUCTION (1911–1951)

Turning now to a brief survey of the contents of each of the chapters that follow, chapter one opens with a brief account of McLuhan's early

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[87] McLuhan's use of "Light On" and "Light Through" are discussed at some length in Chapter Two.

[88] One of the omissions of this study is that I do not contend with McLuhan's relationship and debts to both Jacques Maritain and Éttienne Gilson. That said, the essence of the matter can be expressed briefly. McLuhan uses his fellow Catholics, Maritain and Gilson, as a counterpoint to the Men of 1914. The Men of 1914 are in turn used by McLuhan as a counterpoint to Maritain and Gilson largely on the grounds that he saw that the pair were ignorant about contemporary art.

[89] I might also add that each of the chapters also corresponds, loosely, to one of the five divisions of rhetoric. However, this is not a major feature of the work and I will not elaborate for risk of inviting misunderstanding.

studies of George Meredith and Gilbert K. Chesterton. Through the lens of these two figures we are furbished with a provisional portrait of McLuhan as we will come to know him. Like Meredith, McLuhan is a figure in whom poetic inspiration and intellectual power are equally balanced. And like Chesterton, McLuhan's traditional commitments guided the use of his formidable arsenal and powers for purposes other than the making of "esoteric" art.[90] The crux of the chapter is McLuhan's first "great labour" — his PhD years where he traces the history of the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic), and western pedagogy. Through his labour, we see McLuhan come to inherit the great tradition of Ciceronian humanism and commit to the tradition of the ancients, grammarians, and analogists, and give his assent to the doctrine of the *Logos*. McLuhan's commitments here are brought into sharper focus by showing his "opposition" to the "tradition" of the "moderns," anti-Ciceronians, Nominalists, Calvinists, and Machiavelli.[91]

On the other side of his first great labour, we see McLuhan is very much the "traditional" Renaissance humanist facing a sub-human chaos or post-human age, dominated by art forms that have little to no relationship with what has formerly been known as art, from the fox-hole of teaching. His first efforts to address the situation of his day are, following Erasmus, dedicated to educational reform. In the course of updating the tradition for the new situation (which essentially amounted to a bid to transpose an essentially European construct into a mode

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[90] It is relevant to note that nearly everything McLuhan says about these two figures has been said of McLuhan by his critics and commentators.

[91] In many respects, a better fix on the forces opposed to the grammarians and Ciceronian humanists can be seen in: Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1954); and Walter J. Ong, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, paperback ed. (Cambridge, MA. and London: Harvard University Press, 1983).

congenial to the North American mind), however, we see McLuhan begin to find new skins for old wine. By the chapter's end McLuhan appears not unlike his account of Edgar Allen Poe and/or T. S. Eliot — that is, a figure who grounds his practise in tradition yet is not a traditionalist.[92]

3. REVELATION (1944–1964)

McLuhan, as much as any serious intellectual of the period, was taken up with the question: "what form of critical discourse will be able to communicate critical consciousness, from one to another in the mass media of the global village?"[93] In chapter three, which is intended to work as a pair with chapter one, we retrace much of the terrain covered in chapter one but focus on McLuhan's search for an appropriate solution to the question. We establish how and why McLuhan saw the work of the Men of 1914 as being intimately related to the ancient, patristic, Ciceronian humanists. We also trace McLuhan's second great labour where, following the directives of Erasmus, he engages in a substantial exploration of "the cults." The first movement terminates with an in-

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[92] There are a number of omissions in the chapter, not least of which being an adequate treatment of McLuhan's relationship to Francis Bacon. Jonathan Miller was the first critic to introduce the significance of Bacon for McLuhan's oeuvre. Jonathan Miller, *McLuhan* (London: Fontana, 1971), 18. Donald Theall has also stressed the significance of Bacon. Theall argues that McLuhan read Bacon as a "PR man," and possibly saw himself as the Bacon of the electric age. Donald F. Theall, *The Medium is the Rearview Mirror: Understanding McLuhan* (Montreal and London: McGill-Queens University Press, 1971). Theall has also used Bacon to illustrate what he offers as McLuhan's key contributions — that McLuhan showed us that if there is to be a new science of techno-cultural artefacts it must be based on interpretative history combined with pre-enlightenment histography and exegesis as represented in Bacon and Vico. Theall, *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan*, 97.

[93] Glen Willmott, *McLuhan, or Modernism in Reverse* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 207.

depth account of McLuhan's exploration of Ovid and the form known as the *epyllion* or little epic.

On the other side of McLuhan's second great labour we find him, in some respects, following Samuel T. Coleridge, who, McLuhan notes, "prophetically enacts a history of art and poetry of the century that followed him," by way of his (Coleridge) development from poet of rhetorical statement to master of symbolic ritual.[94] McLuhan brings the full resources of his second labour to bear on the problem of critical form, the fruit of which being his "best" books, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*. Here, we also see what might be regarded as McLuhan's key departure from or modification of the great tradition — in updating the tradition for North America and the Electric Renaissance, McLuhan sets about teaching the suspended judgement (grounded in understanding of the creative process and the "character" and grammars of new media forms).

2. RESURRECTION (1951–1957)

In much the same way as chapters one and three operate as a pair, so too do chapters two and four. Both tend to depart slightly from the three-fold movement and focus instead on McLuhan's application and transformation of his traditional inheritance — what McLuhan said and did in view of the situation of the day. However, where chapters one and three overlap, chapters two and four contend with quite distinct phases of McLuhan's career. In chapter two the focus is on what he did after his relocation from English to Communication. McLuhan comes out of the fox hole of teaching and begins to operate more as a scientist (and also an inventor). We survey the essential features of McLuhan's "method," his

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[94] McLuhan, "Coleridge," MS., 24.

commitment to dialogue, and also observe the development of his vocabulary and key terms.[95]

4. REPLAY (1964–1973)

McLuhan is largely recognized as a figure of significance because of his fame. Consequently, it is here, where we contend with McLuhan's operations at the height of his fame, that I bring to bear the full weight of materials that have been accumulating the previous three chapters. And it is in chapter four we begin to see the "threads" developed in the previous three chapters begin to cohere for the first time. In chapter four we encounter McLuhan as *doctus orator*, an encyclopaedic figure in whom wisdom and eloquence are united, and whose praxis is both trivial and quadrivial. It is also here that we see McLuhan, simultaneously, as something of an heir to the legacy of the Men of 1914. The crux of the matter is that McLuhan transformed and reinvigorated the ideal of the *doctus orator*, for the electric age, largely by way of "juggling" the artistic strategies of the men of 1914.[96] This can be seen clearly insofar as, like Thomas Nashe, McLuhan is a put-on artist, pamphleteer, and professional conversationalist using Joyce and Lewis in place of Aretino.[97]

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[95] My key omission here is that I have very little to say about *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*. Again, my rationale is that this has been done by several other commentators.

[96] Through use of the term "juggling," like Bob Dobbs, from whom I have borrowed the phrase, I am trying to stress McLuhan's use of, yet non-identification with any one of these figures. McLuhan appears to have seen that no single figure on their own provided a complete "picture." Rather, the "single luminous logos" was had by way of the interplay. See McLuhan to John Dunaway, 1 September 1976. Cited in the following chapter.

[97] Something of this matter has already been indicated earlier by way of setting excerpts from Lewis's *Blast* alongside McLuhan's *Counterblast*.

In chapter four we are also afforded a clearer picture of what differentiates the later McLuhan from the earlier. While there are many similarities (not least of which being how he "replays" his earlier pattern of engagement in a new key) there are a number of significant differences. The McLuhan of chapter two is focused primarily on the trivial disciplines, his primary axis is north-south, his prose is largely Ciceronian, and his mode is that of the educator-cum-scientist. The later McLuhan of chapter four, by contrast, is focused primarily on the quadrivium, his primary axis is east-west, his prose admit a greater admixture of Senecanism, and his mode is primarily that of the artist.[98]

5. EXPLORING NEW FRONTIERS (1970–1979)

In lieu of a formal conclusion, in this fifth and final chapter I undertake something of a survey of terrain covered in the previous four chapters by coming at old matter in a new way. The focus of the chapter is McLuhan's "religious" commitments and his dialogue with the Roman Catholic Church. Where chapter four goes a long way towards establishing McLuhan's "debts" and identity with the tradition of Ciceronian humanism and the Men of 1914, here we emphasise McLuhan's "credits" and his role as a "stranger" to both. McLuhan, the "agent of Rome,"[99] was just as much the "enemy" of the Church as of the secular world.[100]

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[98] One of the key omissions of this chapter is the issue of McLuhan's health. The matter is treated extensively in the respective biographies by Philip Marchand and W. Terrence Gordon.

[99] "In England and in Austria and Germany I was openly and explicitly called (in Corinne's presence) an undercover agent of Rome. This is the Jonathan Millar charge in his *McLuhan,"* (McLuhan to Sheila Watson, 4 September 1971). In the letter McLuhan also documents his encounter with the hostility of John Wain. Wain apparently made a similar charge to that of Miller, to which McLuhan replied, "…but I never mention

Having, then, recast much of the preceding material in a new light, chapter five moves to contend with a new phase in McLuhan's career — his path back from an indirect to a more direct mode of operation and, eventually, his reoccupation of the role of scientist. The chapter concludes rather abruptly by laying the foundation for a consideration of two of McLuhan's major works that were only completed after his death.

At this juncture, before beginning this work proper, only one further matter remains. My readers have suggested that the following departs from what is "traditionally" expected of a doctoral dissertation (particularly in the wake of the ascendancy of dialectics in the humanities). Consequently, it has been advised that certain readers may benefit from some explicit guidance as to how to engage with and read this dissertation. With a view to providing such guidance I ask that the reader be aware of four issues. Firstly, the reader is advised to expect an experimental work — one that is, perhaps, not completely successful beyond opening up completely new ground. Secondly, the reader is discouraged from a search for closure, at least at the level of explicit statement. This work is an exploration and the co-presence of multiple simultaneous points of view militates against closure — a feature of McLuhan's procedure he was at pains to highlight in his correspondence with Griessman:

> The entire series is innovative insofar as there have been no treatments of any major figures in these terms. *That fact alone suggests the folly of finality as a goal.* If the series succeeds in opening

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religion." He also recounts how Wain responded, asserting "*that is the proof*," (Ibid).

"The left wing," McLuhan adds, "have me classified as enemy, and that's a lot of public."

[100] I use the term "enemy" to denote the posture and role of the artist as formulated by Wyndham Lewis. This matter is explored at some length in the following chapter.

up completely new ground over and over, I think it may serve
uses that go far beyond the quest for prestige and respectability.[101]

Thirdly, the reader should not be surprised to encounter McLuhan, at times, as a figure not unlike Ruskin,[102] and always like Cicero's ideal orator.[103] Apparently "contradictory" statements made by McLuhan are frequent throughout this work, often side-by-side or in close proximity. I have made no effort to lessen or resolve these tension(s) or absolve McLuhan of his contradictions and/or ambivalence on the grounds that they are an integral feature of his praxis and his theory of communication.[104] Finally, and perhaps most importantly, the reader also ought to be prepared to encounter several rhetorical tactics not dissimilar to, or at least sympathetic with, McLuhan's own rhetorical praxis. As I have indicated earlier in this section, this work is intended to be an echo. This is, perhaps, most evident in this work's use of footnotes, which are legion. The notes to this text often operate as a subplot, moving in parallel with the "primary" text, providing digressions, additional views, enriching and enlivening rather than directly contributing to and fortifying a linear and connected argument. In sum, and in view of these

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[101] McLuhan to Judith Greissman, 14 July 1971

[102] McLuhan has appeared to several of his critics in a fashion not dissimilar to his own description of Ruskin. Ruskin's mind, McLuhan notes, appears to be a "catchall for any situation" and he could "concoct a theory to fit any situation." Further, McLuhan notes of Ruskin that he had an eye that couldn't help see when something did not fit with one of his "quack" theories and never failed to change his theory in view of the absence of fit. McLuhan, review of *Ruskin and the Landscape of Feeling: A Critical Analysis of his Thought During the Crucial Years of his Life, 1846–56*, by Francis G. Townsend, MS., 1.

[103] C.f. Jerrold E. Seigel, *Rhetoric and Philosophy in Renaissance Humanism: The Union of Eloquence and Wisdom, Petrach to Valla* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1968), 29. Cited earlier in this section.

[104] McLuhan's "ambivalence" is elegantly captured by Sorel Etrog's use of hinges in place of eyes and mouth in his portrait of McLuhan. See Figure xxi in Chapter Five.

issues, the reader is advised that this dissertation can be fruitfully read as a *fellow explorer*, in the same spirit as McLuhan himself "read" the traditions — classical, humanist, modernist — which informed his life and work, and by adopting an analogous posture to McLuhan's own in the face of these texts.

> Let us go then, you and I,
> When the evening is spread out against the sky
> Like a patient etherized upon a table.[105]

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[105] T. S. Eliot, "The Love Song Of J. Alfred Prufrock," in *The Wasteland and Other Poems* [sound recording] read by Ted Hughes (London: Faber Audio Books, 1996).

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RECONSTRUCTION (1911–1951)

> Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour. It involves, in the first place, the historical sense, which we may call nearly indispensable to anyone who would continue to be a poet beyond his twenty-fifth year; and the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order. This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional. And it is at the same time what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity.[1]

After the serious business of swimming around in the "great Menippean silence" of McLuhan's oeuvre of the 1960s,[2] James Costigan emerged, altered in some fundamental way. Initially, Costigan set for his doctoral dissertation the goal of extricating McLuhan's "qualitative" communication theory. It appears that he sought to render McLuhan's "theory" in propositional form, as a cluster of "ideas." In pursuit of his goal he devotes a substantial portion of his dissertation to debating the merits of various definitions of "communication" and "communication theory" taken from other "theorists." Along the way, however, Costigan appears to have changed his mind. He concludes his dissertation with a note that we need to approach McLuhan's works as "fellow explorers,"

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[1] T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Critiques and Essays in Criticism: 1920–1948*, ed. Robert W. Stallman (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1949), 378.

[2] See F. Anne Payne, *Chaucer and Menippean Satire* (Madison, Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1981), 16; and McLuhan to Michael Hornyansky, 3 February 1976. The relation of McLuhan to the Menippean tradition is taken up in chapter five.

and he asserts that it is "fruitful to approach McLuhan's works as he intended them to be."[3] Heeding the advice of James Costigan, I have taken McLuhan's invitation to Allen Maruyama, who also made McLuhan the subject of his doctoral studies, as my point of departure for an examination of McLuhan's first "great labour," seen through the window of his earliest works. Writing to Maruyama McLuhan notes:

> One very large area of my work that you do not cover is my relation to traditional Catholic learning which I picked up specially in my PhD thesis years. My study was on the history of the trivium and the quadrivium as they related to scriptural exegesis and to literature and science from ancient to modern times. I think it would be misleading to publish anything without having had a chance to study this work. At one time, when I was first becoming interested in the Catholic Church, I studied the entire work of G. K. Chesterton and the entire group from the pre-Raphaelites and Cardinal Newman through to Christopher Dawson and Eric Gill. All of this really is involved in my media study, but doesn't appear at all.[4]

Meredith and Chesterton

Before getting into McLuhan's PhD thesis years and his study of Thomas Nashe we need, firstly, to briefly digress and examine McLuhan's earlier studies of two figures commonly regarded as high-profile and controversial, professional conversationalists: George Meredith and Gilbert K. Chesterton.

Born in Winnipeg (1911), McLuhan began his tertiary education in Canada as a student of Engineering at the University of Manitoba. In an unpublished autobiographical note McLuhan states that his interest in Engineering stemmed from his interest in structure and design.[5] After

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[3] James I. Costigan, "Communication Theory in the Works of Marshall McLuhan," (PhD diss., Southern Illinois University, 1970), 162.

[4] McLuhan to Allen Maruyama, 27 August 1973.

[5] McLuhan, "Autobiography for H. W. Wilson Co.," MS., n.pag.

one year, however, he read himself out of Engineering and into English, where he went on to earn his first B.A. and M.A. degrees. For his Master's dissertation McLuhan conducted a study of George Meredith. Although it would be reasonable to expect that in later life McLuhan came to see Meredith, as James Joyce had, as an obtuse sentimentalist with a split mind, his dissertation, "George Meredith as Poet and Dramatic Novelist," presents him as a "towering" and "complex genius" who bridged the gap between the 18th and 20th centuries.[6] In "George Meredith" McLuhan praises Meredith's vivid use of metaphor, his economy, compression, use of proportionality, ability to combine both prose and verse, and how his synthetic mind exhibits both "poetical inspiration and intellectual power" developed in equal degree.[7] Meredith, McLuhan argues, is not a philosophic spectator interested in disembodied thought, but rather he has a poet's concern with human passions, motives, and an "attitude toward Earth and nature rather than a hypothesis amenable to logical demonstration."[8] Further, McLuhan states that it is "impossible to call him [Meredith] a radical or a conservative given his poet's sensibility and consequent sympathy with both positions."[9]

Following the award of his Master's degree from Manitoba, McLuhan was awarded a scholarship to Cambridge University. Rather than immediately embarking on further post-graduate studies he set about acquiring an additional Bachelors and Masters degree in English. This, however, is terrain that is more than adequately covered by both

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[6] McLuhan, "George Meredith as Poet and Dramatic Novelist," (MA diss., University of Manitoba, 1934).

[7] Ibid., 36, 14.

[8] Ibid., 40.

[9] Ibid., 37–38.

Gordon and Marchand in their respective biographies. For our purposes what is of interest is that during his undergraduate years at Cambridge McLuhan was working on the first of three essays he would write on Gilbert K. Chesterton.[10] It is necessary to look at McLuhan's essay, "G. K. Chesterton: A Practical Mystic," albeit briefly, as it gives us an insight into the workings of McLuhan's mind, his temperament, and when paired with his earlier work on Meredith, it goes a long way to setting the stage for our exploration of McLuhan's PhD thesis years.

In his first essay on Chesterton McLuhan contrasts Chesterton, as a "practical mystic," with the "mystagogue." Chesterton, McLuhan argues, does not hide mysteries but reveals them.[11] McLuhan then proceeds to explore Chesterton's use and mastery of paradox.[12] He claims that when it is clear that there are two sides to everything, practical and mystical, "then the meaning and effect of Chesterton can become clear."[13] For Chesterton, McLuhan asserts, existence has a value more than optimism or pessimism, which leads him to consciously cause "a clash between appearances to sow the truth transcending the conflict."[14] It is here that we see that, in many respects, McLuhan's study of Chesterton has the "pagan" George Meredith as its other "surface."[15] While

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[10] McLuhan began reading Chesterton in 1932, before taking on Meredith for his Master's dissertation. The significance of Chesterton for McLuhan's oeuvre has already been well established. For the most accurate appraisal see Donald Theall, *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 207, 97.

[11] McLuhan, "G. K. Chesterton: A Practical Mystic," *Dalhousie Review* 15, no. 4 (1936): 457.

[12] McLuhan finds Chesterton is able to maintain his "position" insofar as he has double vision, having "fixed his attention on the present and past because he is concerned for our future," (Ibid., 462).

[13] Ibid., 455.

[14] Ibid., 460.

[15] In "George Meredith," McLuhan documents Meredith's rise, from the "low estate of a pantheist" to "the high estate of a pagan." A "pagan," McLuhan notes, was a person who

"opposed" on matters of religion, both Chesterton and Meredith, as McLuhan presents them, are similarly engaged in the task of causing a clash between appearances to sow the truth transcending the conflict. In the case of Meredith, McLuhan argues, this can be seen in his use and understanding of high comedy and the comic spirit: "…if you believe our civilization is founded in common sense (and that is the first condition of sanity to believe it) you will, when contemplating men, discern a spirit overhead."[16] Meredith's comic characters, McLuhan argues, appear as puppets, which he uses as a "sword of common sense" and "instrument of social improvement." It (comedy) is not, however, a sword used out of spite. Since comedy knows men so intimately, it is not contemptuous of human folly.[17] Rather, Meredith's use of comedy, McLuhan claims, is a means for consummating a synthesis of existing dualities. The battle of opposites exposes the one object — life itself.[18]

McLuhan's First "Great Labour"

In addition to working on his essay on Chesterton, when McLuhan got to Cambridge he appears to have spent the bulk of his time un-learning much of what he had learned at Manitoba, and also contemplating the "avant-garde" in all spheres of the arts and sciences. Something of McLuhan's mind at work during the period can be seen through the lens of his later recollections of his first encounter with the work of Jacques Maritain:

"could take nature naturally." McLuhan adds: "Had Christianity never been heard of, no one could have been freer from any vestiges of its influences than George Meredith," (McLuhan, "George Meredith as Poet and Dramatic Novelist," 36).

[16] Ibid., 70.

[17] Ibid., 67, 38.

[18] Ibid., 83.

Part of the excitement in reading Maritain was the awareness that he was saying something new about something very old, so that there was the excitement of discovery and of sharing this discovery with one's contemporaries. I discovered Maritain simultaneously with the work of I. A. Richards, and T. S. Eliot, and Ezra Pound, and James Joyce, and Wyndham Lewis. All of these people seem to relate to each other in many different ways, and each seems to enrich the other. Along with the work of contemporary painters and ballet and the world of Sergei Eisenstein and music, one had the experience of a very rich new culture, in which the great intellectual Maritain was a notable ornament. Maritain helped to complete the vortex of significant components in a single luminous logos of our time.[19]

For our immediate purpose the most significant figure listed above is the English painter and writer, Percy Wyndham Lewis. The substance of McLuhan's doctoral work (through which he encountered "traditional Catholic learning") is a comprehensive survey of the history of the trivium and Western pedagogy which he uses to shed light on the Elizabethan poet, dramatist, pamphleteer, and professional conversationalist, Thomas Nashe.[20] The immediate significance of Lewis is that he appears to have served as the catalyst for McLuhan's choice of Nashe for a project that, by his own admission, might have been better had he used Francis Bacon or John Donne:

What the present study tries to do directly for Nashe, it does incidentally for his contemporaries; so that if Nashe appears to be a kind of appendix to a chapter in the history of education, he is really intended to be a focal point. Bacon or Donne would have served this function better in some ways than Nashe …. The problem of understanding Thomas Nashe is the same problem as that of discovering the main educational traditions from Zeno,

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[19] McLuhan to John Dunaway, 1 September 1976. In this letter McLuhan is responding to an inquiry from Professor Dunaway asking if he had been influenced in any way by Maritain. John M. Dunaway, in discussion with the author, 27 June 2007.

[20] Despite McLuhan's intensions, "The Place of Thomas Nashe" has only recently been made accessible to the general reader.

> Isocrates, and Carneades through Cicero, Varro, Quintilian, Donatus, Priscian, Jerome, and Augustine. Once one has established the main traditions as they are formulated by St. Augustine, one knows how to tackle the Middle Ages.[21]

Lewis's role as catalyst becomes evident when we consider not what is *in* McLuhan's account of how his study of Nashe evolved into a history of the trivium and Western pedagogy, but rather what is left *out* of it. What is missing is an adequate account of how he became interested in Thomas Nashe in the first place. McLuhan's earlier studies of Meredith and Chesterton certainly go a long way to alerting us to McLuhan's interest in controversial professional conversationalists. They also reveal McLuhan's concern with figures who contend with both "sides" of a debate and are dedicated to something of a universal approach to the one object (life). Yet neither, however, point to Nashe. Bob Dobbs has suggested that it is probable that McLuhan's selection of Nashe as the focus for his doctoral work was inspired by Wyndham Lewis.[22] There is evidence to support his claim. McLuhan's official biographer, W. Terrence Gordon, documents how Gertrude Stein came to lecture at Cambridge in 1936 during McLuhan's undergraduate years. Gordon goes on to note that after her lecture McLuhan asked Stein: "What, as an author concerned with the subject of time, do you think of Wyndham Lewis's treatment of it?"[23] McLuhan's question appears to indicate his awareness of Wyndham Lewis's "Analysis of the Mind of James Joyce" in *Time and Western Man*. The relevant point here is not

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[21] *The Classical Trivium*, 6. McLuhan's preference for using either Bacon or Donne was on the grounds that they were more complex and comprehensive writers and he believed it would have been possible to relate them more completely to their age.

[22] Bob Dobbs, in discussion with the author, 22 February 2007.

[23] W. Terrence Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan*, 62. Gordon goes on to note Stein's apparent tirade in face of McLuhan's question.

merely to establish how early McLuhan was acquainted with Lewis's work, rather it is to establish that in *Time and Western Man* it is Lewis who identifies the significance of Thomas Nashe. In the chapter, "Analysis of the Mind of James Joyce" Lewis devotes some attention to the new book Joyce is writing after *Ulysses* (presumably the work in progress that would become *Finnegans Wake*). In the course of his assessment of Joyce's work in progress Lewis identifies Nashe to be "at present the chief source of Joyce's inspiration — associated with his old friend Rabelais, and some of the mannerisms of Miss Stein…"[24] Lewis continues: "[Joyce] employs the manner of Nash [sic] — though again somewhat varied with echoes of Urquhart's translations. He has fallen almost entirely into a literary horseplay on one side, and Steinesque child-play on the other."[25] Lewis goes on to bless "the original, the brilliant rattle of that Elizabethan high-spirited ingenuity," and praise him as a prose writer. Despite his monotony, and saying "nothing," "from start to finish," Lewis asserts that Nashe is "one of the greatest as far as execution is concerned."[26] Having then established Joyce's debts to Nashe, Lewis returns to the main task of the essay which, as the title suggests, is his diagnosis of "time mind" which he in turn dismisses in favour of his own allegiances to space! Presumably, the young McLuhan, who was to some degree enamoured with both Lewis and Joyce, saw that retrieving for study a figure who had all but dropped from public view held out the opportunity: (a) to deepen his understanding of both Lewis and Joyce (as

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[24] Despite Lewis spelling Nashe without the "e," he is still talking about the same Elizabethan.

[25] Wyndham Lewis, *Time and Western Man*, Beacon paperback ed. (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 106. Originally published in 1927.

[26] Ibid.

in many respects Nashe is common ground for both), [27] and (b) to re-trace
and reconstruct, with a view to deepening his understanding, the dispute
that separated the leading minds of his day. Further, in view of
McLuhan's penchant for seeing all four "sides" of a matter — the pagan
and Christian, and how both a pagan and Christian might treat both
sides of a debate — it is not improbable that a young McLuhan might too
have intuited that in Nashe he might find the ways and means of going
beyond both Lewis and Joyce by way of reconciliation.

Turning now to McLuhan's PhD itself, McLuhan introduces "The
Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of His Time" as a first step in a
new phase of scholarship. [28] Earlier studies of the "journalist par
excellence of his time," [29] McLuhan argues, are marred not only by their
short-sightedness but for omitting due consideration of Nashe's
rhetorical purpose, which amounts to neglecting his basic assumptions as
an artist. Having created an opening, McLuhan conducts what could be
called a study of Thomas Nashe's "theory of communication," effectively
using the same "procedure" I am currently applying to McLuhan
himself. [30] McLuhan examines Nashe's traditional roots, noting that: (a)

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[27] It is worth keeping in mind here the observations of Timothy Materer: "Lewis himself
wrote in a tradition that stems from Thomas Nash through Tobias Smollet and Charles
Dickens, and this tradition remains deep in the texture and tone of his prose," (Timothy
Materer, *Vortex: Pound, Eliot, and Lewis* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press,
1979), 204).

[28] As with his study of Meredith, McLuhan argues that Nashe has not been studied
seriously, and that he was, as a result, praised for reasons which would have baffled
and annoyed him, and there had been no real attempt to consider him on his own terms.

[29] It is relevant to note that McLuhan's portrait of Nashe is underpinned by a sense of
wonder: "in view of the power of the Calvinists in Cambridge and in London, and in view
of Nashe's violence in assaulting every principle of exegesis and preaching they held, to
say nothing of his flaunting the contrary principles and practise in his pamphlets, it is
truly wonderful that Nashe survived as long as he did," (*The Classical Trivium*, 224).

[30] McLuhan *does not* describe his dissertation in terms of "communication theory."

Nashe had "a definite philosophy of rhetoric and a precise notion of its function in the society of his day,"[31] (b) borrowed his rhetorical equipment and purposes mainly from the great patristic exemplars of the styles of the second sophistic, and (c) took on board a belief in the indivisibility of both the Christian and Ciceronian ideals — the patristic union of poetry, eloquence, and theology as formulated by St. Augustine and Erasmus:

> It was not merely the ideals of ancient *grammatica* as the basis of Scriptural exegesis which Nashe was asserting. In a passage of *Strange Newes* he states the plenary ideal of Ciceronian eloquence, showing his full awareness of the way in which the Fathers had adapted Cicero to the needs of Christian preaching.[32]

McLuhan also examines how Nashe worked with and transformed his inheritance, applying his knowledge to the situation of his day: Nashe was "consciously the moral satirist, employing, like Juvenal, the grand style,[33] frequently in conjunction with low images, in strict accord with his inherited doctrine of rhetorical decorum."[34] Further, McLuhan shows how Nashe adopted the Ciceronian position that the orator must please, and that his works present "an almost uninterrupted texture of patristic implication."[35] McLuhan also examines the changes Nashe sought to effect on his public, noting how his style and techniques were seen and understood as a badge that marked him as a skirmisher in theology for the Patristic party within the Anglican Church.

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[31] *The Classical Trivium*, 241.

[32] Ibid., 223.

[33] McLuhan claims that everywhere one looks in Nashe: "one encounters the figures of the high style: metaphor, allegory, hyperbole, paradox, ecphrasis, and the dramatic devices which the rhetoricians referred to as prosopopoeia," (Ibid., 242).

[34] Ibid., 241.

[35] Ibid., 213. McLuhan also goes so far as to claim that: "without a clear perception of his militant adherence to this patristic legacy, no method or clarity can be found in his work," (Ibid., 241).

In view of his survey of Nashe's "theory of communication"
McLuhan concludes that neither Nashe nor his age is comprehensible
without an understanding of the disciplines and history of the trivium.[36]
Once Nashe is considered in this new light, that is in the light of the
"war" amongst the disciplines of the trivium (grammar, rhetoric, and
dialectic) where the proportion between these "perennial modes" of
human experience and activity[37] is ever changing as each tries to subdue
the others into its own image and likeness during the struggle for
priority in the work of interpreting and explaining scripture, man, and
nature,[38] McLuhan asserts that Nashe, and the previously unsolved
problem of his quarrel with Gabriel Harvey, is fully understandable in
terms of much the same issues that pitted Reuchlin, Erasmus, Agrippa,
More, Rabelais, Aretino, and Von Hutten against their scholastic
contemporaries. In other words, McLuhan claims that the Nashe-Harvey
quarrel shows itself as the old theological quarrel, between grammar and
rhetoric, on one hand, and dialectics on the other.[39] It is the same quarrel

[36] It is here, perhaps, that we see the significance of James Joyce who, McLuhan later
makes a point of noting, studied the trivium with the Jesuits. McLuhan, "James Joyce:
Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 23. McLuhan opens the article by
recounting Joyce's celebrated retort to a critic of his puns: "'Yes, some of them are trivial
and some of them are quadrivial.' For, as usual, Joyce was being quite precise and
helpful. He means literally that his puns are crossroads of meaning in his
communication network, and that his techniques for managing the flow of messages in
his network were taken from the traditional disciplines of grammar, logic, rhetoric, on
one hand, and of arithmetic, geometry, music, and astronomy, on the other," (Ibid.).
[37] The study, McLuhan states: "offers merely one more testimony that there is no one
way of studying Western society of literature which doesn't consider, and constantly
reconsider, the entire tradition from its Greek inception…In the history of Western
culture, every chapter begins with the Greeks," (*The Classical Trivium*, 8).
[38] McLuhan asserts that conflict between the disciplines is not necessary. Rather,
conflict only arises when one wishes to become supreme.
[39] McLuhan notes: "it is obvious that the major problem facing any student of Nashe is to
explain how Nashe's writings could, in his day, have been regarded as mainly

that informs Swift's *The Battle of the Seven Arts,* and one McLuhan is at pains to show is not strictly between Catholics and Protestants, but rather a dispute about method:

> Nashe was, thus, a fully enlightened protagonist in an ancient quarrel whose origins we have carefully noted in the time of Abelard and John of Salisbury. It was not a quarrel between Catholic and Protestant, but a dispute about methods of exegesis in theology and preaching, concerning which some Catholics and Protestants held patristic views and some held to scholastic positions. Thus Nashe could claim Erasmus, More, Rabelais, Aretino, and Agrippa on his side without being accused of Catholic views; and he could, with perfect consistence, describe the Calvinist position of the Harveys, with its seemingly "advanced" character, as nothing but "drifat duncerie" borrowed from medieval scholastic philosophy.[40]

Ciceronian Ideal

Nashe and his "theory of communication" is, however, merely the ostensible focus of a study that goes much deeper. He features only insofar as he is an expedient test case for McLuhan's exploration of what amounts to the patristic legacy (the root of "traditional Catholic learning"). To focus his exploration of these diverse matters McLuhan

concerned with matters of 'church controversies,'" (Ibid., 213). The fact that this was patently obvious for all of Nashe's contemporaries while largely invisible by McLuhan's day, is, arguably, the tacit theme of the thesis.

[40] Ibid., 226. That said however, Nashe's opponent, Gabriel Harvey, is clearly shown by McLuhan to have been tied to the Calvinist position and the scholastic orientation of Ramus (dialectics and rhetoric), and like the greater weight of Calvinists and Puritans, McLuhan shows how Harvey had adopted a hostile view towards eloquent language, and sought the separation of the arts and eloquence, and employed rhetoric instead of grammar as the mode of exegesis in order to get rid of all figures of speech in Scripture: "whereas true eloquence according to Cicero was the product of learning and wisdom, Ramus taught that one need only seek the forms of natural reasoning in the poets and orators, to which, if need be, one added the cosmetic of phrase and elocution," (Ibid., 225).

uses the continuity of the Ciceronian ideal,[41] as represented in the figure

of the *doctus orator*, "the perfect Ciceronian formulae."[42] In short, the

Ciceronian ideal (which can be found to be clearly illustrated in several

places in Cicero's *De Oratore*), is the figure steeped in the encyclopaedia

or circle of the arts,[43] in whom eloquence and wisdom or philosophy are

united — the practical, completely rounded, versatile and encyclopaedic

individual citizen whose activities are directed towards the practical

exercise of political prudence:

> If there is one word which is oftener used by Cicero, or which
> better describes his position than another, it is *humanitas*. Our own
> understanding of the concept today is not unlike that of Cicero's
> and Scipio's.[44]

McLuhan shows how the ideal, the image of the *doctus orator,* was then

taken up and transformed by St. Jerome and St. Augustine and their

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[41] McLuhan's reason for using the "ideal" as a locus of convergence rather than Cicero's own particular articulation of that ideal appears to have been that he regarded the achievement of Cicero to be second-rate beside the best of the Greeks, and his influence to be out of all relation to his intrinsic worth. Further, as McLuhan sees the matter, the Ciceronian ideal is itself a point of convergence of several earlier traditions. *The Classical Trivium*, 65.

[42] Ibid., 66.

[43] Ibid., 64. Cicero assumes the "prior acquisition of the prospective orator is, of course, that grounding in linguistic disciplines together with the introduction to the encyclopaedia of the arts which was provided by any competent *grammaticus*," (Ibid., 66)

[44] Ibid., 64. The remainder of the quote includes a citation from Arnold: "Scipio himself did not perhaps formally become a Stoic, but he introduced into Roman society the atmosphere of Stoicism, known to the Romans as *humanitas*: this included an aversion to war and civil strife, an eagerness to appreciate the art and literature of Greece, and an admiration for the ideals depicted by Xenophon, of the ruler in Cyrus, and of the citizen in Socrates," (Vernon Arnold, *Roman Stoicism,* 381). McLuhan adds: "Thus, the more one explores the doctrines of the Sophists and the Stoics the more Ciceronian the Hellenic tradition seems to become."

successors (including Erasmus),[45] and how, following Augustine's formulation of the seven liberal arts, it became a cemented feature of Western pedagogy, serving as the basis for Aristocratic education. To consolidate the significance he affords the Ciceronian ideal, McLuhan also offers in "Nashe" a short exposition of the ancient feud between the Ancients and Moderns:

> The quarrel between the ancients and the moderns is a revival, or continuation, of the quarrel which Cicero waged with the philosophers, and which the medieval dialecticians waged against the grammarians. So deeply ingrained is the Ciceronian ideal in the pattern of our culture that even Wordsworth can be seen in relation to it. His antipathy to the Ciceronian, Dr. Johnson, and his emphasis upon the feelings, rather than the words, of poetry led him to range himself on the side of the moderns and scientists. *A consideration of the Ciceronian ideal and tradition, therefore, has claims to being one of basic importance in the history of Western culture, and its comparative neglect must be ascribed to the impercipience of the ubiquitous, rather than to mere indifference, on the part of scholars.*[46]

Trivium

Given the import of the trivial disciplines I will now briefly outline how McLuhan understands each of the three: grammar, dialectics, and rhetoric. Grammar, McLuhan shows, is concerned, primarily, with language, its structure, reading, and the fundamental question: what is actually said?[47] To aid our reconstruction of the full scope of what

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[45] See *The Classical Trivium*, 66. It is also necessary to emphasise that McLuhan asserts the full status of the Ciceronian doctrine concerning the orator does not seem to have been fulfilled until the thirteenth century.

[46] Ibid., 68. Emphasis mine.

[47] In many respects, Gordon, the editor of *The Classical Trivium*, presents an excellent summation of McLuhan's account of grammar in introduction: "*Grammatica*, or grammar … is not to be understood in the sense of parts of speech, sentence structure, or any other narrow sense belonging to either prescriptive grammar or modern linguistics. In the widest meaning of the term, and particularly in relation to dialectics and

constituted ancient grammar, the praxis of the grammarians, and the

origin for the claim that wisdom and eloquence are inseparable,

McLuhan suggests that grammarians are what we today would call

critics, cultural historians, and aestheticians.[48] He also includes in

"Nashe" a lengthy disquisition on: (a) the ancient doctrine of the Logos,

(b) how the pre-eminence of grammar and the Ciceronian ideal is

established and maintained by the great doctrine, and (c) the debates that

ensued concerning the ancient doctrine, particularly between the

analogists and anomalists:

> The Logos or universal reason is at once the life and order which
> are in all things, and in the mind of man. When the Romans found
> it impossible to translate Logos by any single word they therefore
> adopted the phrase *ratio et oratio* (reason and speech); in modern
> language it seems clearly to include also the broad notion of
> "Universal Law" or the "Laws of Nature."[49]

> Confronted with the great doctrine of the Logos, it is, perhaps
> easier to understand how grammar and etymology should have
> been esteemed as means of investigating both the nature of deity
> and the natures of phenomena.[50]

> M. Terentius Varro … gave an elaborate account of the great
> grammatical dispute between the analogists and the anomalists
> .… The analogists argued for the view that there is a universal
> grammar since language is the effect of reason which is the

rhetoric…grammar is the art of interpreting not only literary texts but all phenomena. Above all, grammar entails a fully articulated science of exegesis, or interpretation," (Ibid., xi). In later works McLuhan asserts that *Grammatica* also embraces what we designate as textual criticism, philology, literary appreciation, creative writing, and history of culture. See McLuhan, "'Introduction' to Reason and Tradition," MS., 6.

[48] The "reconstruction" McLuhan saw as necessary given "the eclipse of grammatical method by mathematics after Descartes reduced the art of grammar to mere matters of accidence and syntax, and has served to reflect the same insignificance upon ancient grammar," (*The Classical Trivium*, 17–18)

[49] Ibid., 22.

[50] Ibid., 20.

analogy of the universal Logos. At the level of conjugations and declensions, this view tended to strengthen the notion of regularity. The anomalists, one might suppose, were Epicureans who denied the doctrine of the Logos, though I have been able to find no evidence for this. They asserted that in speech there is no order. All is based on arbitrary custom. Plato's *Cratylus* broaches the question of analogy and anomaly in such a way as to indicate that the dispute was of ancient origin even in his day, but the issues, of course, are drawn on a plane loftier than that of conjugations and declensions. Socrates refutes the superficial anomalist doctrine of Hermogenes at great length. Hermogenes says, "I have often talked over this matter, both with Cratylus and others, and cannot convince myself that there is any principle of correctness in names other than convention and agreement..." Socrates replies that "I should say that this giving of names can be no such light matter as you fancy, or the work of light or chance persons; and Cratylus is right in saying that things have names by nature, and that not every man is an artificer of names; but he only who looks to the name which each thing by nature has, and is, will be able to express the ideal forms of things in letters and syllables." The general incredulity concerning Socrates' seriousness in this dialogue is an adequate measure of the modern failure to apprehend the nature of grammar in the ancient and medieval worlds; and much of Plato's power over St. Augustine's and the medieval mind is owing to his great, though not exclusive, respect for the method of grammar in philosophy. It is quite impossible to make any sense of the scope and intensity of the strife between the analogists and anomalists unless the philosophic implications are perceived. The Stoics, of course, are analogists to a man, although Varro, himself, as well as Cicero, Caesar, Pliny, and Quintilian, freely admits the influence of custom or usage on language.[51]

In many respects, then, it might be more appropriate to say that grammar, at least as McLuhan presents it, is not only a method and practise, but is also constituted by the interplay between a cluster of doctrines:[52] (a) that Man is distinguished from the brutes by speech, (b)

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[51] Ibid., 26–27.

[52] The central figure for McLuhan's understanding and presentation of grammar is Philo-Judaeus of Alexandria. Philo, McLuhan asserts, was the direct master of what is known

the secrets of nature need to be approached via language and vice-versa, (c) nature is the font of all arts, (d) the encyclopaedic or liberal arts serve for the exegesis of nature,[53] and, finally, (e) that exegesis is necessarily inclusive of four simultaneous levels of explanation.[54]

In contrast with McLuhan's presentation of grammar, his account of both dialectics and rhetoric is more complex. Put simply, McLuhan presents dialectics as "a way of testing evidence or the study of kinds of proofs for an argument, a method of dialogue, or simply logic."[55] However, he acknowledges that this simple definition is not the whole of the matter, largely on the grounds that: (a) a history of dialectics by a dialectician does not exist, apart from the brief remarks of Aristotle, and (b) dialectics and rhetoric are, in large measure, inseparable; and the dividing line between the two is ever shifting. McLuhan brings the matter to a head by way of contrasting the respective positions of Cicero with that of Aristotle:

> Cicero had made the genus of rhetoric to be politics, identifying rhetoric with wisdom, eloquence with philosophy. Aristotle, however, had made rhetoric something narrower by defining it as the art of persuasion in civil, judicial, and deliberative causes.[56]

as the Patristic school, and established the basic modes and techniques of patristic theology—that is, of theology as it was practised from the time of Origen until the time of Abelard.

[53] *The Classical Trivium*, 136.

[54] Ibid., 27. McLuhan offers a quote from: *De Lingua Latina*, Loeb translation, Book V, vii–viii: "Now I shall set forth the origins of the individual words, of which there are four levels of explanation. The lowest is that to which even common folk has come…The second is that to which old-time grammar has mounted, which shows how the poet has made each word which he has fashioned and derived …The third level is that to which philosophy ascended, and on arrival began to reveal the nature of those words which are in common use....The fourth is that where the sanctuary is, and the mysteries of the high priest."

[55] W. Terrence Gordon, introduction to *The Classic Trivium*, xi

[56] *The Classic Trivium*, 105.

Subsequently, McLuhan devotes considerable attention in "Nashe," to formulating a history of dialectics, relying heavily on French scholar, Léon Robin:[57]

> Zeno's method, defined with such exact precision, is what, since Aristotle, has been called the "dialectical." With reference to a given question, from a "probable" answer — that is, one approved by an imaginary interlocutor, or by some philosopher, or by common opinion — you deduce the consequences which it entails, and you show that these consequences contradict each other and the initial thesis, and lead to an opposite thesis, no less "probable" than the first .... To his method we owe, if not the application of dialogue to philosophical inquiry, at least a certain way of disentangling and debating questions, which is equally found in the rhetoric of the Sophists and in Socratic philosophy.[58]

In his presentation of the disciplines that constitute the trivium, particularly in terms of his presentation of dialectics and rhetoric, McLuhan, like Swift, is by no means unbiased. Rather, he makes his bias an overt feature of the work, stating that: "in any study of the history of the trivium it is unavoidable that one adopts the point of view of one of these arts."[59] In McLuhan's case, dialectics is described in grammatical terms from a rhetorical point of view.[60] Or in other words, McLuhan "sides" with St. Augustine and Cicero rather than Aristotle:

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[57] The term "dialectics," McLuhan argues, does not enjoy a consistent pattern of usage. For evidence he cites Léon Robin: "The fact is that the word 'dialectic' had a strong tendency in Plato to mean 'the ideal method, *whatever that may be.*' Insofar as it was thus merely an honorific title, Plato applied it at every stage of his life to whatever seemed to him at the moment the most hopeful procedure. In the same way, he applied the abusive terms 'eristic' and 'Sophistry' on every occasion to whatever seemed to him at that time the danger most to be avoided," (*The Classical Trivium*, 39–40).

[58] Ibid.

[59] Ibid., 41.

[60] Ibid., 43.

As already seen, St. Augustine is the learned grammarian in his theological works, Quintilian's *poetarum enarratio* becoming with him a *psalmorum enarratio*. The *De Doctrina Christiana* is in the history of Christian culture the exact counterpart of the *De Oratore* of Cicero. It is the charter of Christian education. And grammar, as we have seen, plays a predominant role in this scheme because of its prime importance for the theologian. Yet the fourth book is given over to rhetoric, to the modes of making known the meaning which grammar and the other arts have ascertained. The doctrines of Cicero are repeatedly invoked as authoritative for the Christian orator … constantly dealing with great matters. Yet the Christian orator will naturally consider his audience and the occasion and the theme, saying little things in a subdued style in order to give instruction, moderate things in a temperate style, in order to give pleasure, and great things in a majestic style, in order to sway the mind. He quotes Cicero's celebrated formula that an eloquent man must teach, delight, and persuade. [61]

Rhetoric, McLuhan argues, ought to be afforded an expanded province, and include all five divisions: *inventio* (discovery), *dispositio* (arrangement), *memoria* (memory), *elocutio* (style), and *pronunciato* (delivery) rather than the three as outlined by the anti-Ciceronian, Ramus.[62] Further, McLuhan appears to concur with the patristics that dialectics may rightly be annexed by grammar or rhetoric on the grounds that the function of dialectics is not to *discover* truth but to arrange and order what is already known:

Dialectics is thus ancillary to rhetoric, since its function is always to organize empirical knowledge, whether grammatical or medical or legal, into some form of art. There are many arts, says Cicero,

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[61] Ibid., 73.

[62] Ibid., 49. The modern misconception and distrust of the art of rhetoric dates from the sixteenth century success of Ramus in handing over to dialectics the first two branches of rhetoric (discovery and arrangement), leaving to rhetoric only embellishment (elocutio), memory, and pronunciation or delivery. For further elucidation of the matter see Walter J. Ong *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue*, paperback ed. (London and Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1983). Originally published in 1958. Ong was one of McLuhan's students.

but the great ones are politics, war, and eloquence. The mediocre arts consist of philosophy and its many branches, mathematics, physics, ethics, logic, grammar, etc. All these are branches of knowledge requisite to a man of good breeding and to the orator. *Eloquentia* is supreme among all these arts, since it is the art in virtue of which (and Cicero thinks of art as a virtue or power which enables us to act) the orator is able to direct all the other arts for the advantage of human life.[63]

McLuhan also claims that the "mistake" of the dialecticians was to have set their discipline up as an end in itself by separating from the trivium and the main body of classical culture — a mistake, he argues, has involved Western thought in confusions from which it has not yet recovered.

Despotic Power of Art

McLuhan was awarded his PhD in absentia on the 11th of December 1943.[64] Shortly after he was accepted for a teaching post at Assumption College, Windsor (March 1944); and two years later, he went on to join the teaching staff of St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto (September 1946).[65] In a letter to his former student Hugh Kenner, McLuhan refers to his activities following the award as being characterized by his "classroom bias."[66] His self-characterization is apt given that his recorded observations of the situation and public of his

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[63] *The Classical Trivium*, 45.

[64] In the same year T. S. Eliot's *The Four Quartets* was published in full, the English began using microwave radar to put an end to night bombing raids by Germany, Albert Hofmann began to suspect that LSD was hallucinogenic, and J. W. Mauchly published his argument that computers with vacuum tubes would be faster then electromechanical computers.

[65] McLuhan's first posting as a teacher of English was St. Louis University in 1937. He had been working on his doctoral thesis while teaching.

[66] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 12 March 1949.

day largely stem from his position within the North American university system. Perhaps McLuhan's "classroom bias" is nowhere more apparent than in "Education of Freemen in Democracy: The Liberal Arts." Here McLuhan indicates that he "sees" the problems of his day emanating from the erosion of confidence in the conviction that had hitherto underpinned the Western pedagogic enterprise — that excellence of speech in men would bring them in closer association with the supreme eloquence, which is the Word of God, and that the consequent imposition of the cultivation of speech, as a normal and political virtue, was also a means to salvation:[67]

> In this extensive but lucid order of the encyclopedia of the arts, Cicero's ideal stands out very sharply. Eloquence, which implies wisdom, is a principal means by which the integrity of our nature is achieved once more, for eloquence operates on the passions of men via the imagination, controlling men for a common social good. Thus eloquence and political prudence are inseparable concepts for Cicero, for John of Salisbury, for Vincent of Beauvais and for Francis Bacon, to mention only a few.[68]

McLuhan's correspondence of the period reveals that he believed that the University had been hijacked by American business interests who had foisted upon the academy a dialectically organized curriculum; one that was increasingly moulded by the engineer, architect, inventor, and mathematician. As McLuhan saw it, while a curriculum organised along dialectical lines afforded terrific gains in terms of the "scientific" control of nature, such a curriculum was and/or is unable to satisfy ones

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[67] McLuhan, "Education of Freemen in Democracy: The Liberal Arts," *St. Louis University Studies in Honor Thomas Aquinas* 1 (1943): 48. McLuhan continues: "For without great discipline in language, how were men to render themselves fit to read scripture? Without ardent cultivation of eloquence, how could men prepare to preach the word of God? These questions resound in the Fathers and the answers gave us the sermons of St. Bernard and the *Divine Comedy*," (Ibid.).

[68] *The Classical Trivium*, 187.

appetite for intelligibility, tending instead to promote the domination of life by a creed of savage simplicity, and leave the public famished, cut off from contact with intelligible Being:

> You see, American business, excluded from the lib. [liberal] arts curriculum, conquered the college for all that. The dialectically organized curriculum omits all emotional education. That is entirely in the hands of the symbolic stadium. You see how perfectly this ties up with the "real life" of the outside world—the alumni. Lethal nostalgia and revenge on the pedagogues. From outside the school the business man conquers the curriculum. What need to fool with actual courses?[69]

McLuhan's diagnosis of the situation of his day also centres on his observation that poetry was out of touch with contemporary life.[70] Writing to Ezra Pound McLuhan registers how the vortex the "musketeers" created had become "a kiddies slide in subsequent work of the Spenders, Sitwells, Audens and co … Thanks to Freud, thanks to lack

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[69] McLuhan to Felix Giovanelli, 10 May 1946.

[70] One of the off-shoots being that education was marred by a breach between popular and serious learning, and the hard "sciences" were out of touch with reality. As McLuhan outlines in "Typhon in America": "Equally obvious to those who have thought of the interrelatedness of things is the fact that physical laws as described by Einstein and Newton are of the utmost triviality beside psychological and spiritual laws which visible operate in human affairs …. It is a mark of a feeble and vulgar mind to be impressed by the size of the solar system and ignore the grandeur of the internal dimensions of moral life and rational free will," (McLuhan, "Typhon in America, typescript (I)," MS., 68). McLuhan's "Typhon in America" is listed in the finding aid for the McLuhan collection in the sub-series for *The Mechanical Bride* and it is grouped with the two scripts titled "Guide to Chaos." It appears the archivist made the choice on the grounds that Typhon is seen as the working notes for *The Mechanical Bride*. I believe the archivist to be mistaken here insofar as it is substantially different "book" with its own unity. The finding aid for collection offers an approximate date of 1949 for the scripts, yet the collections include essays written throughout the 1940s. "Typhon" is comprised of four handwritten manuscripts, and three typescripts. It should be noted that my references to "Typhon" refer to the typed scripts.

of sustained attention."[71] Despite T. S. Eliot having compared the discoveries of James Joyce with those of Albert Einstein, McLuhan saw that Joyce had not found an audience willing to read him on his own terms.[72] In McLuhan's opinion, Joyce's fellow "musketeers" had fared little better. Writing to Ezra Pound in 1948 McLuhan notes:

> The prime difficulty of your poetry – *The Cantos* – so far as contemporary readers are concerned is the intensely masculine mode. This is an age of psychologism and womb-worship. Your clear resonance and etched contours are intolerable for twilight readers who repose only in implications.[73]

It is, however, McLuhan's reflections on the place and function of symbolist art that brings us to the very crux of his diagnosis of the period — that the age was one of "participation." In his early articles of the period McLuhan documents what amounts to a second "great betrayal."[74] In "Another Aesthetic Peep-Show," he records how the "artists," who had for decades been "cut adrift from all conceivable context," had been made custodians of values, and priests of culture due to the default of philosophy and religion.[75] McLuhan replays the theme two years later in his introduction to Hugh Kenner's *Paradox in Chesterton*:

> The rational efforts of men have been wholly diverted from the ordering of appetite and emotion so that any effort to introduce or

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[71] McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 15 July 1948. The "Musketeers" are the Men of 1914; Joyce, Eliot, Pound, and Lewis.

[72] McLuhan appears to have remained convinced that despite having discovered the quantum universe; the very physicists who had ushered in the atomic age remained steadfastly Newtonian at heart. McLuhan to Edwin C. Garvey, 10 November 1976.

[73] McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 16 June 1948.

[74] Cf. *Understanding Media*, 37.

[75] McLuhan, "Another Aesthetic Peep-Show," *Sewanee Review* 53 (1945): 675.

discover order in man's psychological life have been left entirely to the artist.[76]

During this early period McLuhan records how, from the 1920s, "creative types" began to occupy roles that would help transform "advertising" into a "manufacturer's weapon for gaining control of the market," which in turn meant taking control of politics and the social ends of the whole society.[77] McLuhan attributes the success of these "creative types" to their ability to transform the discoveries of Flaubert, Baudelaire, and the Symbolist's, from "art" that enrages the man in the gallery into the means for selling millions of shirts in the marketplace.[78] Advertising, with its appeal to collective emotion, McLuhan would later note, "has set up national brands and tokens for communal participation," and that the use of these well known brands serves "to foster a sense of mystic communion when you use them."[79] Writing to Harold A. Innis at the end of the period with which this chapter contends McLuhan states the matter plainly:

> The whole tendency of modern communication, whether in the press, in advertising, or in the high arts, is towards participation in a process, rather than apprehension of concepts. And this major revolution, intimately linked to technology, is one whose consequences have not begun to be studied, although they have begun to be felt.[80]

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[76] McLuhan, introduction to *Paradox in Chesterton*, by Hugh Kenner (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1947), xv–xvi.

[77] McLuhan, "review of *The Responsibilities of American Advertising: Private Control and Public Influence, 1920–1940*, by Otis Pease," MS., 2–5.

[78] McLuhan saw evidence of their success in the fact that the discontinuous rhythms of industrial man (and his multiple, simultaneous awareness) appear in Kandinsky, Picasso, Jazz music, the format of the newspaper, and the layout of a Woolworths store.

[79] McLuhan, "The Age of Advertising," *Commonweal* 58, no. 23 (1953): 555.

[80] McLuhan to Harold A. Innis, 14 March 1951.

McLuhan understood "this kind of action for direct social control," as executed by the "advertisers," as political, and indicative of a massive shift in the nature of power and governance — from control *of* men's appetites to control *through* their appetites, orchestrated by way of "a magical shift to the centre of the poetical process, as Mr Eliot among others has revealed to our time."[81] One of those "others" was of course Joyce, who McLuhan saw as having revealed that language had reassumed "its position as an instrument for precise management and control of past and present."[82] Further, as Joyce had rightly anticipated, the very processes of communication had become the natural base for all operations and strategies of culture,[83] and the plasticity of human experience could now be modelled in any shape desired:[84]

> As an artform, the Happening does not so much as address the audience as *include* the audience. It expects the audience to immerse itself in the "destructive element," as it were. At various times in the history of the theater, the audience has been included in the show to a considerable degree. In the newspaper it is decidedly the audience that *is* the show. Such in large degree is the nature of language. It is a Happening that includes all publics and all past perceptions in an inclusive Donnybrook of coincidences and adjustments. *Once Joyce discovered language in this way, he knew he had found the means to transform the entire human community into a work-force for the artist*.[85]

In view of the situation, as McLuhan writes to Innis, the task at hand is to study the arts and communication: "as mechanical media have popularized and enforced the presence of the arts on all people, it

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[81] McLuhan, "Eliot and the Manichean Myth as Poetry," (address to the spring symposium of the Catholic Renascence Society, 19 April 1954), MS., 10.

[82] McLuhan, "Mr. Eliot's Technique of the Interior Landscape," MS., 3–4.

[83] McLuhan "Notes on the Media as Artforms," MS., 4–6.

[84] McLuhan, "Rhetorical Interlace in *Dubliners* and Ovid," MS., 10.

[85] McLuhan, and Wilfred Watson, *From Cliché to Archetype* (New York: The Viking Press, 1970), 198. Emphasis mine.

becomes more and more necessary to make studies of the function and effect of communication on society."[86] Or, as he notes elsewhere around the same time, we now feel that we must decide what the true function of art is in society because we feel its despotic power as never before. We must, McLuhan argues, develop a true theory of learning and communication because the whole of technics is now behind the business of packaging information.[87]

One of the reasons that McLuhan's proposed first base of operation is *understanding* rather than action is that he appears to have been decidedly ambivalent about the operations of the "symbolic stadium." His ambivalence is nowhere more evident than in his later observations on William Shakespeare:

> If Shakespeare were alive he would be in an ad agency drawing down huge salaries and all you cannot name … they pay damn well and they are great patrons of the arts. They are the only folk art we have.[88]

On one hand, he saw the North American post-war reconstruction and the redirection of the war-time propaganda machine and entire Hollywood apparatus toward ostensibly economic ends as a new, world information war. It differed from earlier hardware wars only insofar as the casualties of the latter are imperceptible in terms of symptomatic physical carnage.[89] The "carnage" of information war is largely invisible:

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[86] McLuhan to Harold Innis, 14 March 1951.

[87] McLuhan, "Reading in an Age of Pictures," MS., 7–8.

[88] McLuhan, "It Will Probably End the Motor Car," *Cinema Canada* 30 (August 1976), 37. Kirwin Cox, the interviewer, responds, "but ads are designed to manipulate?" To which McLuhan replies, "of course, but so is any drama. Shakespeare dramas are all highly manipulative."

[89] After all, the economics of advertising had by that time taken on the scale of a military operation. McLuhan, "The Age of Advertising," *Commonweal* 58, no. 23 (1953): 556. Undoubtedly McLuhan's observations are informed by his never having been directly

"…it aims not only at providing mental dim out by means of a huge crescendo of sensation but the reduction of all constituents of consciousness to a single wave line."[90] As McLuhan notes in the "Typhon in America," the great mistake, of course, is to suppose that what went on physically in Birkenau does not go on psychologically in America and England. "Intellectually, spiritually and emotionally this is precisely what we have been doing for some decades."[91]

> There is no difference in result between our entertainment industry and Asian or Soviet brainwashing programs. Our revulsion at these is irrational as we have developed more complex and subtle ways of achieving the same end.[92]

> Far from being a conscious conspiracy, this is a nightmare dream from which we would do well to awaken at once. Return again, Finnegan … At the moment the sleeper stirs and writhes. It is nice to be enfolded in the comfort of the collective dream as long as it is greater than the pain. We have nearly passed that point whereby consciousness will come as a relief.[93]

On the other hand, however, McLuhan appears to have seen some services in the wake of the second great betrayal. Advertising was providing an educational program and common language for a country that might otherwise dissolve in anarchy.[94] Further, the operations of the

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involved in armed combat. McLuhan remained a civilian throughout the Second World War, and his direct experience of "war," as it is conventionally understood, was restricted to life at Cambridge, England (c. 1939–40).

[90] McLuhan, "Typhon in America, typescript (I)," MS., 14.

[91] Ibid., 24. Please note, there is a break in the pagination in typescript I of "Typhon in America." The page cited is from the second part of the script.

[92] McLuhan, "The Subliminal Projection Project," MS., n.pag.

[93] *The Mechanical Bride*, 128.

[94] McLuhan, "American Advertising," MS., 2 in "The New American Vortex." It is possible that McLuhan also agreed with Otis Pease who regarded advertising as one of the only force that was at work against Puritanism. See McLuhan, review of *The Responsibilities of American Advertising: Private Control and Public Influence, 1920–1940,* by Otis Pease, MS., 3.

"symbolic stadium" had restored "language," if not to intellectual

respectability, then at least to a position where ancient theories of the

"Logos type" were recognized in some quarters as having practical

application. Writing to Harold Innis in 1951 McLuhan notes:

> Many of the ancient language theories of the Logos type which
> you cite in *Empire and Communications* for their bearings on
> government and society, have recurred and amalgamated
> themselves today under the auspices of anthropology and social
> psychology. Working concepts of "collective consciousness" in
> advertising agencies have, in turn, given salience and practical
> effectiveness to these magical notions of language. But it was most
> of all the esthetic discoveries of the symbolists since Rimbaud and
> Mallarmé (developed in English by Joyce, Eliot, Pound, Lewis and
> Yeats) which have served to recreate in contemporary
> consciousness an awareness of the potencies of language, such as
> the Western world has not experienced in 1800 years.[95]

School Master of North America

Having traced, albeit briefly, the substance of McLuhan's first "great

labour" and how he saw the situation of his day, we now come to how

McLuhan transformed and applied his traditional inheritance. The

following proceeds in two steps. Firstly, I will examine McLuhan's first

base of operations as a teacher of English within the North American

University system. Secondly, I seek to retrace this terrain from another

vantage, through the lens of his early journalism and letters.

As soon as McLuhan arrived at St. Michaels College at the

University of Toronto he set out with the goal of targeting those

illiterates who have had the misfortune of academic misguidance, and

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[95] McLuhan to Harold A. Innis, 14 March 1951.

the "self taught swimmers," young enough to be furnished with some
tools and some directives:[96]

> The appeal must be to the young, who are deprived of the
> linguistic tools that might nourish their own perceptions …. at
> first hand at all the traditional sources. The young are tired and
> easily discouraged when they see all the ground that they have to
> make up. In the name of what should we bother to rack ourselves
> to repair that damage?[97]

It appears that he regarded the university as "increasingly important as a
place for ambush only."[98] This is not to say that he did not take his
teaching commitments seriously. On the contrary, from the onset, and
certainly after completing his doctoral work, McLuhan appears to have
modelled his activities and teaching strategy on Erasmus of Rotterdam
(who features extensively in "The Place of Thomas Nashe").[99] Like

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[96] It would appear that McLuhan regarded his move to the Toronto as a form of exile.
During the late 40s and early 50s Toronto was a dreary, desolate, cultural backwater. In
his correspondence with McLuhan, Lewis mentions how McLuhan, on several
occasions, had expressed his annoyance at being so far from New York. Wyndham
Lewis, To Marshall McLuhan, 17 January 1954 in *The Letters of Wyndham Lewis*, ed.
W. K. Rose (London: Methuen and Co., 1963), 554. Further, McLuhan often noted that
the only apparent advantage of living in Toronto was that it served as an ideal
"observation point," from which the nineteenth century might look at those further south
trying to live in the twentieth. McLuhan, "Education in the Electric Age" *Interexchange* 4,
no. 1 (1970): 4.

[97] McLuhan to Dorothy Pound, September 1948.

[98] McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 30 July 1948. "Consider the Nashes as semi-savage jobs
done just before the waves of current education have washed them down. Too late to
be usefully revived. Only hope of a kid in school today is that he will be so emotionally
retarded that he is unable to "adjust" himself at high-school age. His energies remain
intact for college. Or else that he is at once brainy but so savagely hostile to the world
that there is no danger of adjustment. The latter are the Rimbauds (who in USA become
gangsters?) But what are a guy's chances at college?," (McLuhan to Felix Giovanelli,
n.d.).

[99] Liss Jeffrey has rightly noted that McLuhan tried to do for the classroom what
Erasmus did for the classroom of his time. Liss Jeffrey, "The Heat and the Light of

Erasmus, McLuhan set about trying to rebuild the edifice of grammar that had been "razed," not by the "tragedy of Luther," but by what McLuhan calls the Education Revolution of the mid-19th century — the continued rise of the quadrivium, and subsequent displacement of the linguistic disciplines by mathematics, particularly mathematical physics (which became infused with the spirit of dialectics following Descartes):[100]

> Erasmus could think of no better way of routing them than by rebuilding the edifice of *grammatica* which they had razed. One need only glance at the numerous works which he wrote for grammar-school use, and the vast number of editions which they went through, to see how much he deserves the title of the Schoolmaster of Europe.[101]

Initially, McLuhan appears to have regarded teaching the New Criticism and the late radical modernists (the Men of 1914) as entirely consistent with his self-appointed task of reconstruction. McLuhan appears to have understood the New Criticism as a collection of age old strategies re-invoked after a period of disuse (or in other words, ancient grammar) offering a perspective that "is at once ancient and modern."[102]

Marshall McLuhan: A 1990s reappraisal," (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1997). Similarly, Gary Genokso has portrayed McLuhan as a creative media artist and intellectual jester in the tradition of Erasmus, Joyce, and Rabelais, who played the clown to infiltrate specialist discourses so as to satires them. Gary Genosko, *McLuhan and Baudrillard: The Masters of Implosion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 13. The reason I suggest a comparison of McLuhan's early activities with those of Erasmus is that the full spectrum of McLuhan's post-war operations closely mirrors the three main aspects of Erasmus' legacy as they feature in "Nashe" including: (a) Erasmus' stance toward pagan wisdom, (b) his activities as a satirist, and (c) his pedagogic program. It is also not irrelevant that McLuhan thought that Erasmus saw himself as an actor.

[100] McLuhan argues that while the usurping of the linguistic disciplines was pronounced after Descartes, the rise of the quadrivial arts could be felt as early as the ninth century.

[101] *The Classical Trivium*, 166.

[102] McLuhan, "The New Criticism," MS., 1–3.

> The use and continuance of the allegorical and etymological methods by the Stoics and Plato, as well as by Philo, St. Augustine, and St. Bonaventure, *is not a carry-over from a primitive world-view*. So considered, it is temptingly easy to conclude, as it has commonly been concluded, that the "poetic" cosmology and the grammatical "science" of antiquity and of medieval times still carried a considerable infusion of uncritically-held mythology. This primitive magic was finally ejected during the Renaissance and the period of the Enlightenment. However much this account may satisfy the emotional needs of the modern world, it certainly does not satisfy the needs of historical explanation … The Logos, far from being a piece of naïve animism, is metaphysical in character.[103]

He also saw the New Criticism as being congenial to ancient theories of the "logos type," or magical views of language, common with the Symbolists (as with Eliot, and Joyce), and the Anthropologists (e.g. Bruhl, Malinowski and E. Cassirer).[104]

> In our own time the methods of anthropology and psychology have re-established grammar as, at least, a valid mode of science. Full justification for this statement is found in Count Korzybski's *Science and Sanity*, which makes claims for linguistic study (grammar in the old sense) which extend far beyond the modest position of Cratylus.[105]

Such "theories," McLuhan notes in "The New Criticism," encourage a view of the *word* as being charged with a mysterious life that unites individual and collective consciousness in a common action.[106] Language,

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[103] *The Classical Trivium*, 24. Emphasis mine.

[104] McLuhan, "Metaphor – The Analogy of Improper Proportion," MS., 4 in "The New American Vortex."

[105] Ibid., 17.

[106] McLuhan, "The New Criticism," MS., 6.

as a whole, is thus taken as correspondent with the most secret potencies of the mind and universe alike:[107]

> It was not only in antiquity but until the Cartesian revolution that language was viewed as simultaneously linking and harmonizing all the intellectual and physical functions of man and of the physical world as well.[108]

In the early days of his teaching McLuhan appears to have been confident that his teaching efforts, as with those of his peers, for example Tate and Brooks, who were also pioneering the New Criticism in America, might have some positive effect. Writing to Felix Giovanelli immediately after the war, McLuhan registers a "modest confidence in renewal of the human condition" stemming from "the quiet cultivation of a positive *grammatica*…"[109] His confidence was, however, relatively short lived. McLuhan quickly came to the conclusion that the New Criticism, or at very least its primary object of study, poetry and literature, was not immediately congenial to the North America minds present in his classroom. This problem was not entirely unanticipated. The perpetual breakdown in procedures is apparently the latent heritage of the great tradition which is forever faced with the obstacle of discovering new techniques for the implanting and transmission of knowledge.

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[107] I. A. Richard's *Practical Criticism*, in particular, appeared to McLuhan as having re-embraced an ancient orientation towards texts and reading in its requirement for multi-levelled, and we might also add, multi-sensuous exegesis.

[108] Ibid., 16.

[109] "…stirrings, however dim, of a genuine culture. Knowledge and supply of a real pabulum. That's where, I too, take my stand. The view is horrible, but the garden is there too," (McLuhan to Felix Giovanelli, 10 May 1946).

Enter the Maelstrom

Searching for ways and means of overcoming the impasse, McLuhan appears to have "discovered" that it was not the verbal universe that provides the first base of poetry for North Americans. [110] Rather, he saw that the American child finds his untaught delight in the poetry of technology and powered objects of motion.[111] The "problem" was that:

> In the school room officialdom suppresses all their natural experience; children are divorced from their culture. They are not permitted to approach the traditional heritage of mankind through the door of technological awareness; this only possible door for them is slammed in their faces. The only other door is that of the high-brow. Few find it, and fewer find their way back to popular culture.[112]

The significance McLuhan attributed to this early discovery is apparent in McLuhan's later claim that: "I think the largest discovery that I made in my life concerns the space orientation of East and West, and America and Europe."[113]

> North American children respond esthetically to the powered objects in their world. Streetcars, locomotives, airplanes and motorcars are the first objects of delighted contemplation. But in the classroom the student is confronted with verbal culture in book form. For the European, on the other hand, verbal culture is

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[110] Before reading himself out of Engineering, one of McLuhan's early interests was sailing, and he was technically minded enough to build himself a small boat. Admittedly it sank, but he appears to have treasured and kept the plans: "How to Build a Racer for $50."

[111] McLuhan, "Tennyson and the Romantic Epic," MS., 1. In other words, McLuhan discovered the North American bias was neither oral nor literate, but activist, romantic, and kinetic. See McLuhan, "Typhon in America, typescript (III)," MS., 33–34.

[112] McLuhan, *Counterblast* (Toronto: Toronto University Press,1954), n.pag.

[113] McLuhan, interviewed by Joseph Foyle, 16 March 1972. In many respects, McLuhan appears to have been working out in his classroom similar issues to those which led Winston Churchill to call Britain and America two nations divided by a common language.

as much an object and area of spontaneous delight and play as machinery for us. The conclusion is obvious. We can master verbal culture and European art only by approaching it at first as a technical problem, just as some Europeans have mastered our sports, jazz, machinery, and architecture by translating it into their verbal cultures.[114]

Undoubtedly the fact that McLuhan was a Canadian had some bearing on his discovery in much the same way that only the American, Ezra Pound, could pull together both the Paris and London groups of 1912-1921.[115] Being Canadian appears to have predisposed McLuhan to "double-vision":[116]

EUROPEANS CANNOT master these new powers of technology because they take themselves too seriously and too sentimentally. Europeans cannot imagine the Earth City. They have occupied old city spaces too long to be able to sense the new spaces created by the new media.
THE ENGLISH have lived longer with technological culture than anyone else, but they lost their chance to shape it when the ship yielded to the plane. But the English language is already the base of all technology.[117]

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[114] McLuhan, "Notes on the Media as Art Forms," MS., 12.

[115] McLuhan, "The New American Vortex (I)," MS., 7.

[116] In one of his earliest published articles for the Manitoban student newspaper, "Canada and Internationalism," (1 December 1933), McLuhan argues that Canada has a "grave responsibility" on the world stage. 34 years later, McLuhan would idealize Canada as an outpost for observation on the grounds that it was a land of multiple borderlines, sharing the American way, without American goals or responsibilities. This, for McLuhan, made Canada an international detached observer, with a recognized world-art role in making visible the vast man-made American environment (rapidly becoming a world environment). McLuhan, "The Marfleet Lectures," in *Understanding Me*: *Lectures and Interviews*, eds. Stephanie McLuhan, and David Staines (Toronto: McClelland Stewart, 2003), 119.

[117] McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Counterblast* (Toronto and Montreal: McClelland Stewart, 1969), 55.

McLuhan's practise of comparing and contrasting French and English, and European and American modes of sensibility is evident from his earliest years.[118] Further evidence of McLuhan's Canadian double-vision can be seen in his portrait of the contemporary scene as being constituted by the French production of the art of industrial man, while "we [the Anglo-Americans] have produced the folklore of industrial man." Together, McLuhan notes, French art and Anglo-American folklore are merely "two levels of the same collective dream, from which sleepers are about to awaken."[119]

Leavis and Giedion

Following his discovery, or perhaps concomitant with it, McLuhan appears to have concluded that the reconstruction of the edifice of grammar in North America required the transposition of the grammatico-rhetorical tradition into a mode congenial to the Anglo-American mind. In engineering terms, a "bridge" needed to be built from the technological to the verbal, which was the same task, McLuhan asserts, faced and conquered by Edgar Poe.[120]

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[118] Writing to his mother, Elsie McLuhan, in 1934, McLuhan writes: "the English are rather lacking in imaginative sympathy with other ways and ideas than their own," (McLuhan to Elsie McLuhan, 15 November 1934). In the letter McLuhan also reflects on the relationship between the Scottish and the French, and how the French traditions and influences never penetrate westward beyond the "earthlike impenetrability of the Torontonian consciousness."

[119] McLuhan, "The Poet and the Press," MS., 8.

[120] McLuhan, "The Function of Criticism," MS., 29 in "Great Tom." "Poe, as with Henry James, Pound and Eliot had undertaken to 'technologize' the traditional verbal world of the European, in contrast to the Europeans like Le Corbusier and Giedion have undertaken to verbalize our technology," (McLuhan, "Space, Time and Poetry," *Explorations* 4 (February 1955): 56–62).

McLuhan's approach to bridge building was to fuse the methods of Leavis with the anonymous history of the Swiss historian of architecture, Siegfried Giedion.[121] Despite having indicated a preference for Leavis over both Richards and Empson, McLuhan held that Leavis was unable to provide the kind of plenary critical judgement to which he aspired.[122] While Leavis had conducted forays into popular culture (as seen in *Culture and Environment*), McLuhan saw Leavis as an observer of what he thought *should* be going on, rather than an observer of all culture, that is *everything* that is going on.[123] This appears to have cut him off from seeing the nutritive, organic ecology by which all levels depend on the lower ones (e.g. Bach and popular dance rhythms, and how Mallarmé and Joyce were assisted by the Press).[124] McLuhan voiced his dissatisfaction with Leavis in his correspondence with Walter Ong and Father Clement McNaspy: "The trouble with Leavis is that his passion for important work forbids him to look for the sun in the egg tarnished spoons of the daily table," and "his failure to grasp current society in its intellectual modes, say in the style of *Time and Western Man* or Giedion's *Space Time and Architecture* … cuts him off from relevant pabulum."[125] By

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[121] McLuhan first met Giedion, 14 May 1943.

[122] McLuhan, "Tennyson and the Romantic Epic," MS., 9.

[123] For example, McLuhan suggests that the New Critics do not show much of an awareness of comic books. McLuhan, "The New Criticism," MS., 12. In later years, however, McLuhan was more inclined to celebrate Leavis rather than distance himself from his contribution. See McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," in *Media Research*, 47.

[124] Mallarmé, McLuhan noted, laughed at people who thought that the press was a great threat to culture. Mallarmé regarded the press as a rudimentary form of the ultimate encyclopaedic book, charged with the techniques and materials of an art greater than any the world has seen. McLuhan, "The Poet and the Press," MS., 11, 15.

[125] McLuhan to Walter Ong, and Clement McNaspy, 23 December 1944. Richard Cavell even offers Giedeon's *Mechanisation Takes Command* as the most viable intertext for

contrast, McLuhan apprehended that the anonymous history of Giedion
was orientated towards not only looking for but studying in depth just
such technological artefacts as egg tarnished spoons and extended to
consider Cadillacs and ashtrays[126] — anonymous history accepts "the
entire world as an organised happening."[127] Ergo, anonymous history
was a necessary component of McLuhan's "bridge":

> It is characteristic of Coleridge's encyclopaedism … that it locates
> the arts foremost among human interests as providing the
> material and the guide for every type of interest and pursuit. Not
> only the archaeologist but the anthropologist and sociologist,
> equally with the historians and reconstructors of the phases of
> human culture, repair today to the arts to acquire the disciplines
> and techniques necessary for their creative analysis. It has taken a
> full century to move from the stage of artistic awareness of Edgar
> Poe to that of Siegfried Giedion. Poe put crime detection on a
> scientific basis by bringing into play the poetic process of retracing
> the stages of human apprehension. It is likewise the procedure of
> Wordsworth's *Prelude* and Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*. And this
> process of arrest and retracing, which has been consciously
> followed by the poets since the end of the eighteenth century
> (when used by a cultural historian and analyst like Siegfried
> Giedion) *provides the very technique of empathy that permits insight
> into the processes and impulses behind the products utterly alien to our
> own immediate experience*.[128]

The Mechanical Bride. Richard Cavell, *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography*
(Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 44.

[126] McLuhan, "Environment as a Programmed Happening," MS., 20. In a later interview
with David Sohn, McLuhan states: "the more humble, the more menial the bit of
evidence, the more it tells about anybody, historically…I had a painter friend, Wyndham
Lewis who used to point out that an abandoned table of food and dishes would permit
you to reconstruct an entire group…the disarray permits reconstruction. The set table
tells you nothing," (McLuhan, interviewed by David A. Sohn, "A Conversation with
Marshall McLuhan," Nd., 21).

[127] McLuhan, "Environment as a Programmed Happening," MS., 20.

[128] McLuhan, "Coleridge as Artist," in *The Interior Landscape*, 116. Emphasis mine.

By fusing the methods of Leavis and Giedion, McLuhan appears to have arrived at a new method that was neither exclusively orientated towards the study of verbal nor technological artefacts. A bridge can of course be crossed in both directions. For his North American students this meant that they could approach the verbal world and literature through their technological orientation and bias.

Another way of talking about McLuhan's Leavis-Giedion fusion and attempt to make a "bridge" from the technical to verbal world would be to say that McLuhan "reopened" the book of nature so as to render "the book of the world" as "an inexhaustible source of insights and discoveries."[129] In "The Place of Thomas Nashe," McLuhan uses Etienne Gilson's commentary on Bonaventure to provide an account of how grammatical exegesis was, in the great tradition, taken as applicable to both books, and that nature too can be read as a book: "the lost language of which was analogous to that of human speech."[130]

> From the time of the neo-Platonists and Augustine to Bonaventura and to Francis Bacon, the world was viewed as a book, the lost language of which was analogous to that of human speech. Thus the art of grammar provided not only the sixteenth-century approach to the Book of Life in scriptural exegesis but to the Book of Nature, as well.[131]

> Just as there is an immediate and literal sense of the sacred text, but also an allegorical sense by which we discover the truths of faith that the letter signifies, a tropological sense by which we discover a moral precept behind a passage in the form of an historical narrative, and an anagogical sense by which our souls are raised to the love and desire of God, so we must not attend to the literal and immediate sense of the book of creation but look for its inner meaning in the theological, moral and mystical lessons that it contains. The passage from one of these two spheres to the

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[129] McLuhan, "Environment as a Programmed Happening," MS., 20.

[130] *The Classical Trivium*, 7.

[131] Ibid.

other is the more easily effected in that they are in reality inseparable. If things can be considered as signs in the order of nature, it is because they already play this part in the order of revelation. The terms employed by any science designate things; those which Scripture employs also designate things, but these things in their turn designate truths of a theological, moral, or mystical order. We have then done nothing but apply to the sensible world the ordinarily accepted modes of Scriptural exegesis in treating bodies and souls as allegories of the creative Trinity, and it is only in this way that the universe has revealed its true meaning.[132]

It is within this system of analogy, rooted in the ancient notions of the Logos and grammar, and seeking the light of revelation, that Bonaventure's fellow Franciscans Grosseteste and Bacon envisaged the importance of their physical experiments. There is thus no inconsistency but propriety in the fact that Roger Bacon, like Erasmus and Francis Bacon, asserted the primacy of the art of grammar in approaching both Scripture and the book of nature.[133]

McLuhan's Leavis-Giedion fusion also appears to have aligned his praxis, at least in some measure, with the alchemists. As McLuhan shows in "Nashe," the great alchemists, the Paracelsians from Raymon Llull to Cornelius Agrippa, were grammarians, and the great grammarians are, for reasons to be made clear, also alchemists:

There is thus not the least incongruity in the fact that eminent humanists like Pico Della Mirandola and Cornelius Agrippa are also alchemists. The grammatical method in science, therefore, persists as long as alchemy, which is to say, well into the eighteenth century. But from the time of Descartes the main mode of science is, of course, mathematical.[134]

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[132] Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, 229–230, in *The Classical Trivium*, 36.

[133] *The Classical Trivium*, 145.

[134] Ibid., 17.

McLuhan's alignment with the alchemists is perhaps nowhere more evident than in view of his efforts to bring advertising into the classroom as an object for study:[135]

> Why don't we simply have a look at ads as art forms? The Constructivist taught us to look at machines as art forms. There is no reason why you can't look at advertisements as art forms … If you do begin to look at ads as art forms you have to accept them as a means of probing the environment. And they can be highly effective probes. It is only the esthete and his desire for the elite consumer package who is put off by this.[136]

McLuhan appears to have decided that "advertising" can be regarded as the main channel of intellectual and artistic effort in the new world. Ergo, advertising represents a structure of significance and embodiment of human experience that can serve as a portal into the ceaseless currents of the historical process:

> After a session last night with the Economics and Sociology folk on *The Mechanical Bride* I'm wondering how it will strike you. They had to report a degree of communication of exactly zero .… Even so obvious an idea as using ads *as windows* rather than targets is hard for them. That the ad men have a much wider range of social data available than the sociologist doesn't please them to reflect on.[137]

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[135] In "The New American Vortex," McLuhan clearly states that he regards studying these forms to be a political act. "Market research provides the world with a spectacular externalized paradigm of its inner drives…Creative political activity today constitutes studying these paradigms as an educational program directed at self knowledge and self criticism," (McLuhan, "American Advertising," MS., 5 in "The New American Vortex.").

[136] McLuhan, "An Interview With Marshall McLuhan," *The Structurist* 6 (June 1966): 66.

[137] McLuhan to Norbert Wiener, 10 November 1951. Emphasis mine. "Striving constantly…to anticipate and control events on the inner, invisible stage of the collective dream, ad agencies and Hollywood turn themselves unwittingly into a sort of collective novelist who reveal the passions of the age," (*The Mechanical Bride*, 97).

When an advertisement is made into an item of inventory and brought into the classroom, it is transformed. What was formerly considered "lead" is remade as "gold":

> My study of media came from the study of highbrow poetry. I think the only way a country ever gets culture is by giving proper mythic treatment to its own vulgar activities. If you look at your own culture closely enough it will turn into highbrow. You can transform the most vulgar materials of your world. It is only the lazy consumer who doesn't do this.[138]

Naturally, as McLuhan experimented with his Leavis-Giedion fusion it appears that he saw that what worked for advertising worked equally well with and for any of the objects of existence generally considered most trivial and anterior to life. Consequently, such features of contemporary life as "the bestsellers list," from which the mandarins and literati recoiled, could readily be reconstituted as a valuable resource and index to the audience that purchased the books on the list. "A bad book" McLuhan would later argue, "is a valuable index to panics and fears" of "countless millions of somnambulists."[139]

Wyndham Lewis

At this point we need to pause, leave behind McLuhan's activities in the classroom, and retrace this terrain from another vantage in such a way as to lay a foundation for the following chapters.

McLuhan's first "great labour" was conducted with one eye on the past, and the other on the figures he regarded as the brightest

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[138] McLuhan, "It Will Probably End the Motor Car," *Cinema Canada* 30 (August 1976), 37.

[139] McLuhan, and Robert K. Logan, "The Microcosmic Library," MS., 5 in "The Future of the Library, An Old Figure on a New Ground." This work is an unpublished book completed in 1979.

constellation in all English letters:[140] James Joyce, T. S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, and Wyndham Lewis. The concluding note of McLuhan's "Nashe" even suggests that James Joyce may have functioned as a palimpsest through which he apprehended and grappled with both the patristic legacy and Elizabethan satire:

> In applying some basic facts concerning the trivium and the patristic motivations of the *translatio studii* to Thomas Nashe, we have seen that supposedly nonexistent vistas and sanctions are the primary features of his work. What is true of Nashe is equally true of his contemporaries. One is, therefore, faced with the fact that while much excellent and indispensable work has been done on the Elizabethan period, we have scarcely begun to see its intellectual and literary life in an Elizabethan light. Many facts contributed to make it an age of rhetoric, and even of conflicting rhetorics; but we have long persisted in viewing it in the light of the violent reaction against what Huxley called "the pestilent cosmetic of rhetoric." It required, perhaps, the advent of such a successful devotee of the second sophistic as James Joyce, to prepare the ground for a scholarly understanding of Elizabethan literature.[141]

Despite the significance McLuhan affords Joyce, it is, however, with Wyndham Lewis that we need to start.

As with all the Men of 1914, McLuhan's commentary on Lewis, runs the entire course of his career.[142] It is however, a fragmentary affair. This may be indicative of the fact that McLuhan's understanding of Lewis never fully stabilized. Alternately, it could be argued that McLuhan preserves something of Lewis's own ambivalence that stems

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[140] McLuhan, "From Laforgue to Dante," MS., 2.

[141] *The Classical Trivium*, 252–53. Further evidence for the claim that Joyce is McLuhan's primary palimpsest can be seen in a letter to Felix Giovanelli (c.1946–1949). Here, McLuhan indicates that, today, Cicero's *De Oratore* "gets its principle meaning….from Joyce's *Ulysses*," (McLuhan to Felix Giovanelli, n.d.).

[142] The following material that contends with McLuhan's relationship to and reading of Lewis departs from the loose chronological scheme I am using.

both from his dual place as painter and writer,[143] and his practise of leveraging several personalities as part of his artistic/survival strategy.[144] Ambivalence aside, McLuhan was certain of Lewis's significance:

> Wyndham Lewis's *The Art of Being Ruled* … is probably the most radical political document since Machiavelli's Prince. But whereas Machiavelli was concerned with the use of society as raw material for the arts of power, Lewis reverses the perspective and tries to discern the human shape once more in a vast technological landscape which has been ordered on Machiavellian lines.[145]

As previously mentioned, McLuhan saw Lewis as "perhaps the first creative writer to have taken over the new media *en bloc* as modes of artistic and social control." Like Joyce and Eliot, yet in a way distinct from them, Lewis made the press, radio, movie, and television modes of his vision and made them instruments of his art.[146] Joyce and Eliot, McLuhan regarded as also having done so, but on a smaller scale.[147]

For McLuhan, Lewis's value, like that of T. S. Eliot, was not only in terms of his artistry, it was also theological.[148] But unlike his appraisal

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[143] "When Lewis opts for eye values and rationality and civilization, he was at the same time creating and sponsoring, graphically and verbally, art forms that are audile-tactile," (McLuhan to Sheila Watson, 17 February 1971).

[144] Writing to Kenner in 1949 McLuhan takes special care to note how, in *Count Your Dead* and *America, I Presume,* Lewis tried on the persona of the big, extrovert, dumb-ox, British clubman, and how, via the mask of the oaf with the elephant gun, Lewis was able to "bang away at other game," (McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 3 May 1949).

[145] McLuhan to Harold A. Innis, 14 March 1951.

[146] McLuhan, "Lewis's Prose Style," MS., 5.

[147] McLuhan, "Third Program in the Human Age," *Explorations* 8 (1967): 17.

[148] McLuhan held that Eliot, following years of Pounds masterly tuition, successfully married Paul and Apollo, theology and art. In an interview for CBC's "Critically Speaking Program," McLuhan outlines how Eliot's *The Wasteland* is concerned primarily with the condition of man existentially when deprived of faith: "Eliot restored the use of ancient myth for modern poetry in that poem as a means of revealing life lived according to two contrasting kinds of love and two kinds of death," (McLuhan, "T. S. Eliot," *Canadian*

of Eliot, Lewis stands as the only one of the Men of 1914 of whom McLuhan asserts that theology is absolutely necessary for a full understanding. Lewis's theory of art and communication, McLuhan noted, is a traditional one. The artist-hero or genius is a god intoxicated man. Lewis's triadic view of spirit, intellect, and sense is the neo-Platonist and Buddhist view of the opacity of intellectual knowledge and illusory character of the human self. Art is, therefore, spiritual and capable of impregnating the world with reality.[149] Further, McLuhan claims, Lewis, like Eliot, Yeats, and Pound, assumes the Pythagorean and neo-platonic doctrine of the spirit and imagination as a divine or superhuman power. As McLuhan notes writing to Wilfred Watson, several years later:

> Talk about blind spots in regions of maximal impact! Looking at
> *The Diabolical Principle* just now I read loud and clear that art must
> be totally environmental. It must be the content of nothing
> whatever. Ergo, the VORTEX = the totally environmental ….
> Lewis wants nothing less for Art than the power to create total
> environments for Life and Death. There must be no art as content
> of some other set of skills or interest.…I find it a bit staggering to
> confront Lewis as a man who really wanted to be *Pontifex maximus*
> of a magical priesthood. I suppose Yeats, Joyce and Pound had
> similar aspirations. Their priesthood was to create new worlds of
> perception. They were to be world engineers who shaped the
> totality of human awareness. Their pigments and materials were
> not to be paint or words but all the resources of the age. Such were
> the Pharaohs. They made of the world a perception Lab .… The
> mode of great Art. The environment as ultimate artefact.[150]

Lewis, however, McLuhan held, rejected the way of connatural gnosis and emotion favoured by Bergson, Eliot, and Theosophy, in which

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Forum 44 (February 1965): 243–244. Transcript of a talk given on CBC's "Critically Speaking Program," 10 January 1965).

[149] McLuhan, "Nihilism Exposed," review of *Wyndham Lewis*, by Hugh Kenner, *Renascence* 7, no. 2 (Winter 1955): 97.

[150] McLuhan to Wilfred Watson, 4 October 1964.

emotion is used as the principal window on the soul. Rather, "there is in Lewis a Manichean abjuration of delectation." [151] Lewis, says McLuhan, is a mystic or visionary of the comic, moving towards the pole of intelligibility instead of that of feeling:[152]

> Lewis makes great and grim comedy of the horror of spirit shackled to the dying animal or human body. His own point of view in comedy is expressed as opposite to Bergson's when he says that laughter results from the spectacle of things (that is, persons) trying to behave as though they were alive. Bergson found the key to laughter in persons behaving as though they were things. Bergson had not the courage of his own philosophical position.[153]

It is precisely Lewis's Gnosticism and his consequent "un-worldliness" that makes Lewis "so intense … and evaluation so fearless,"[154] and for McLuhan, so valuable. Unlike Joyce, who expressed ambivalence in regard to both Gnosticism and Catholicism, McLuhan finds that Lewis has value and importance in the technological age because of his courage to push his Gnosticism to the extreme:

> It just happens that in the new age of technology when all human arrangements from the cradle to the grave have taken on the hasty extravaganza aspect of a Hollywood set, the nihilist philosophies of neo-Platonism and gnosticism have come into their own. Existence is an empty machine, a cheap art work, they have always said. The soul is a shabby mechanism, the body a monstrous one. The spirit or artist says to body and soul, a plague on both your prisons. And now in the twentieth century when nature has been abolished by art and engineering, when government has become entertainment and entertainment has become the art of government, now the gnostic and neo-Platonist and Buddhist can gloat: "I told you so! This gimcrack mechanism

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[151] McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis: His Theory of Art and Communication," MS.,12–13.

[152] Ibid.

[153] McLuhan, "Nihilism Exposed," review of *Wyndham Lewis,* by Hugh Kenner, *Renascence* 7, no. 2 (Winter 1955): 98.

[154] Ibid., 99.

is all that there ever was in the illusion of human existence. Let us rejoin the One."[155]

And it is precisely the courage of Lewis in pushing the Cartesian and Plotinian angelism to the logical point of the extinction of humanism and personality that gives his work such importance in the new age of technology. For, on the plane of applied science we have fashioned a Plotinian world-culture which implements the non-human and superhuman doctrines of neo-PIatonic angelism to the point where the human dimension is obliterated by sensuality at one end of the spectrum, and by sheer abstraction at the other.[156]

McLuhan states that the situation was so obvious to Lewis in the 1920s that he devoted the next two decades to warning us and explaining the anti-human nihilism emanating from modern philosophy and physics, and everyday activities in commerce and social engineering.[157]

Wyndham Lewis also served McLuhan as a palimpsest on the themes and method of Julien Benda.[158] Given that McLuhan only makes less than a handful of passing references to Benda, I will defer to McLuhan's former student, Vincent Sherry, to help elucidate Benda's significance.[159] Sherry presents Benda as a significant figure in a pan-European dialogue; who extended and built upon an older enlightenment tradition of empirical inquiry into the relationship of human physiology, particularly the faculties of perception and cognition,

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[155] Ibid.

[156] Ibid., 98.

[157] Ibid. "Electrically, mans struggles are with principalities and powers, and Lewis presents the struggle more vividly that any other writer of the 20th century," (McLuhan, "The Lewis Vortex: Art and Politics as Masks of Power," MS., 6).

[158] McLuhan to Larry Henderson, 20 October 1975. In a similar way, Ezra Pound serves McLuhan as palimpsest on the themes and methods of Benda's contemporary, Rémy de Gourmont. This matter, however, must await further elucidation.

[159] If not immediately apparent, then the significance of Benda for McLuhan's emerging oeuvre should become readily apparent in the following chapter.

on the political meaning of aesthetic experience.[160] Benda's problematic, as Sherry presents it, was the situation in France in and around 1780 wherein music had entered into an easy alliance with the proto-revolutionary doctrine of mesmerism. In face of the situation, Sherry argues that Benda expanded his analysis of style, and the objective analysis of social meaning of sense impressions, into disquisitions on the social function of art. His starting point in these matters is the fabric of sentient and perceptual life, which he took as the sole locus from which political and philosophical concepts could be adduced. Benda's systematic "(quasi-) scientific" analysis of the human senses, particularly the physiology of eye and ear, provided Benda with what Sherry calls a "pseudo-scientific language" that enabled him to construct a distinctly aesthetic understanding of social phenomena. In the main, however, Sherry asserts that Benda's aesthetic critique of mass society proceeds from a physiology of hearing. His disquisitions on music examine music's pathology, physiologically and psychologically, and identify its alarming social ramifications. Benda, Sherry asserts, heard an internal, essential connection, between musical sensation and populist collectivism:

> Music reaches the vital core of the listener, they proposed, and joins all members of the audience in a spurious but formidable unity. The fellow feeling induced in this way represents a form of mob bonding. The excitable mass emerges as the political image – the direct result – of this provocative melding through sound.[161]

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[160] Sherry argues that the "pan-European dialogue" includes figures such as: Henri Bergson, Georges Sorel, Gustave LeBon, Wilhelm Worringer, Theodore Lipps, the Italian Futurists, and José Ortega y Gasset. Sherry asserts that while these figures did not all agree they were engaged in a single consistent enterprise: "Their inquiry into aesthetics verged ever on social statement," (Sherry, , 4).

[161] Sherry, 4. The group solidarity can thus be seen as prefiguring the democratic solidarity that would topple the "ancient regime" in 1789.

The ear is thus shown up by Benda as the intellectual weak point in the body politic, the soft spot through which people can be collectivized and manipulated for the purposes of total war. Consequently, Sherry argues that Benda turned his efforts to retuning the musical myth of social hierarchy to the more severe measures of the eye. In contrast to the merging of the "democratic ear," Benda held that the aristocratic eye divides. Separating the viewer from the object of sight, the eye achieves the distinctions on which clear conceptual intelligence relies. The eye thus provides Benda with the emblem and instrument of a ruling intellectual elite.[162] Similarly, Wyndham Lewis, McLuhan would argue, spent his whole life simply saying Western man is an eye man:

> If he abandons the primacy of the eye in structuring his experience he is finished. Lewis spent his whole life in a magnificent rebuttal of the ear men of his time – and got nowhere because he was not a moralist. He didn't know how to rally that great backlog of Protestant moral fury to support his hypothesis.[163]

Analogical Synthesis

Writing to Wyndham Lewis in 1944, nearly one year after their initial meeting, McLuhan says that he feels "a stirring need to work towards making more of my studies and life around me intelligible."[164] He also registers his belief that his "fencing … these past few years" is indicative of a "kind of indeterminacy in my life and milieu," and that his work to date has largely been cultivating "a sort of negative capability, trying to achieve a readiness to act in some unforgettable way when that should

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[162] Sherry, 53, 5

[163] McLuhan, "Communication Media: Makers of the Modern World," in *The Medium and the Light*, 44.

[164] McLuhan to Wyndham Lewis, 17 July 1944.

define itself."[165] With the benefit of hindsight, it appears that McLuhan's

defining moment was still some ways off. Between 1944 and 1951

McLuhan continued fencing. He appears to have concluded that an

adequate interim pursuit would be to apply "the methods of Lewis and

Leavis … with all the energy and order denied them from faith and

philosophy."[166] This appears to have entailed marrying the *grammatica* of

Leavisite New Criticism, with its sympathies toward four-levelled

(poetic) exegesis, [167] to a Lewisean rhetoric and visio-tactile discipline (the

eye and hand of the painter) of empirical observation of the language of

forms and gestures:

> The particular means by which Lewis has extricated himself from
> the ideologic machine of our epoch with its inevitable labelling
> process – "liberal," "socialist," "reactionary," fascist,"
> "individualist," realist," "romantic," "extrovert," etc. – *is that of the
> painter's eye*. There are of course, other possible means; but his
> early scholarly approach to the history of art … had shown him
> how very unfriendly European life has been to the production of
> good plastic art.[168]

To gain further insight into McLuhan's Leavis-Lewis fusion, particularly

the synergetic aspect of the fusion that McLuhan hoped would result in

gains more than the sum of its parts, we need to explore what McLuhan

meant by: "…all the energy and order denied them from faith and

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[165] Ibid. Addressing his fellow Catholics around the same time, McLuhan registers that he is "conscious of a job to be done…one that I can do, and truly, I do not wish to take any step in it that is not consonant with the will of God." McLuhan continues, "What an object lesson a Christian has today in seeing so much good produce so much ill. Not for a moment do I imagine that I can frame a course of action which will do good," (McLuhan to Clement McNaspy, 15 December 1945).

[166] Ibid.

[167] "Four level exegesis is back in favour again as the staple of the New Criticism," (McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 25).

[168] McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis: Lemuel in Lilliput," in *The Medium and the Light*, 190. Emphasis mine.

philosophy."[169] What "faith" means in terms of McLuhan's relation to Leavis is relatively easy to apprehend — namely "faith" is what enabled if not forced McLuhan to "look" where perhaps he otherwise would not have. Like Chesterton, McLuhan appears to have been something of a Thomist connaturally.[170] Rather than committing him to "intellectual suicide," his Catholicism and "Thomism" pushed him to the very heart of contemporary chaos and committed him to *explore*:[171]

> The point of the preceding diagnosis is this: that whereas St. Thomas was a great abstract synthesizer facing a unified psychological world, the modern Thomist has an abstract synthesis of human knowledge with which to face psychological chaos. Who then is the true Thomist? The man who contemplates an already achieved intellectual synthesis, or the man who, sustained by that synthesis, plunges into the heart of the chaos? I say "sustained", not guided by, that synthesis; because the

[169] McLuhan converted to Roman Catholicism in 1937. It is a matter well traced in several other works, not least of which being the excellent biographies by Gordon, and by Marchand. Ergo, I will not contend with the history of the matter here.

[170] "The specific contemporary relevance of Chesterton is this, that his metaphysical intuition of being was always in service of the search for moral and political order in the current chaos. He was a Thomist by connaturality with being, not by study of St. Thomas. And unlike the neo-Thomists his unfailing sense of the relevance of the analogy of being directed his gaze not to the schoolmen but to the heart of the chaos of our time," (McLuhan, introduction to *Paradox in Chesterton,* by Hugh Kenner (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1947), xi–xii). McLuhan had identified himself as a Thomist on arriving at the University of Toronto. William J. Buxton, "The 'Values' Discussion Group at the University of Toronto, February–May 1949," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 29, no. 2 (2004): 198. On the basis of documentary evidence it appears that he first extensive exploration of Aquinas (conducted with Donald Theall) did not take place until the early 1950s.

[171] Used here both in its "normal" sense of investigate, and to invoke the etymological root of "explore." It also predisposed him to a deeper exploration of the past: "The role of the Catholic humanist is to cultivate a more than ordinary reverence for the past, for tradition, while exploring every present development for what it reveals about man which the past had not revealed. To be contemporary in this sense is no mere snobbism, not a matter of faddishness. It is an arduous but rewarding business," (McLuhan, "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters," in *The Medium and the Light*, 158–59).

> Catholic Thomist does not know the answers to contemporary problems in social and political ethics. He knows only when a particular line of action is promising and analogically consistent, whether it will tend to support a valid solution, and whether it is in conformity with reason and being. But he is the reverse of fecund in such proposals.[172]

McLuhan makes this explicit in "Delinquent Adults Behind the Supercomics." Here McLuhan states his intention to apply some of the literary analysis techniques developed in recent years to comics, movies, and advertisements on the grounds that the function of the literary critic is to apply reason to literary productions. Literature, McLuhan argues, is "the storehouse of human values," and it is the critic's role and function, as key-holder to the storehouse, to operate as the custodian of those public values.[173] McLuhan then moves to present comics, as with movies and advertisements, as "literature," and also as a site where our compensation dreams and unexpected frustrations in our own lives can be expressed. His concerns about the *content* of contemporary comics, movies, and advertising are readily apparent:

> The lifestyle of the high school girl or boy is rigidly determined, not by parents or educators but by the words, tones and gestures of the heroes and heroines in the pulps …. We know that the physical shapes of men and women can be altered by their dreams … how much more readily the mind of man takes imprints.[174]

In the face of these "compensation dreams," McLuhan, exercising his role as key-holder of the storehouse, declares that our minds have been severed from any contact with human values by our headlong plunge into haste and turbulence. Ergo, McLuhan finds the proposition, that a

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[172] Ibid., xvii

[173] McLuhan couples the claim with the caveat that that the perfect critic does not exist and never will.

[174] McLuhan, "Delinquent Adults Behind the Supercomics," MS., 10–11.

man might go right on to "self knowledge and self control," and also "make the world safe for atom bombs by contemplating the latest atomic blonde whipped up by the plastic surgeons of Hollywood," to be absurd:[175]

> The answer then to the question whether anything of serious value can be taught to a mind punch-drunk and groggy with the thrills and outrageous stimulation of daily life is simple. The answer is no.[176]

He goes on to declare that we are anesthetized by drugs of our own concoction and no longer in control of our lives or environment.[177] In face of the "problem" he suggests that "we all get busy with formal diagnosis."[178] "Faith," he holds, is critical in the task of diagnosis given that: "to be rational and critical about the matter shown … requires an act of faith because more reason would say we are too far gone for anything to be done by reason."[179] Leavis, with his "unmistakable prissy ponts [sic] parentheses … cough-sniff style,"[180] as we have already seen from another vantage, had failed to face up to the new.[181]

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[175] Ibid., 15.

[176] Ibid., 13.

[177] Ibid., 16.

[178] Ibid., 15.

[179] McLuhan's diagnosis comes to rest on fear, and how fear breeds hate, and in turn, hate breeds lust for violence and death. He states, therefore, that the first thing to tackle is fear by way of attacking bad philosophy and lack of religion, that appear to operate as a source of mental fear and insecurity. He continues, "only supernatural faith can bring mental security and freedom and generate energy to be rational about the irrational mess." People act against reason because they can survive so long as they think it is a dream. "If it is shown to be real they could go mad," (Ibid., 21).

[180] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 3 May 1949. McLuhan use of "ponts" should read "ponce."

[181] McLuhan is not alone in his assessment of Leavis' "failure." McLuhan's contemporary, George Steiner has also registered Leavis's abdication from his

What McLuhan means by energy and order apparently denied Wyndham Lewis is a more complex matter. In "Lewis's Prose Style" McLuhan presents Lewis as "an avant-garde by himself," who, in his activities as a writer, "set out to educate the eye by means of deft organization of gestures."[182] Lewis did this, McLuhan asserts, by translating what he sees into terms of painting, and then translating these terms of painting into words, which embody, as it were, the same gestures.[183] It is Lewis's "trained eye of the painter to whom the cut of every garment, every gesture, every contour is a richly expressive language,"[184] and his scholarly program for extraction from the "ideologic machine," that McLuhan saw as a necessary corrective for "the modern man" who "has long lost the use of his eyes," and "only has ears … for the Napoleonic thunder of Beethoven … or the tom-tom and African bottom-wagging of swing calling to rut."[185] That said, however, McLuhan also claimed that "a Catholic" can read such books as Lewis's with "approval insofar as he finds them a revelation of the hollowness of merely human hopes." Lewis, as we have seen, McLuhan apprehended

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responsibility to face up to the new. George Steiner, *Language and Silence,* Abridged ed. (London: Pelican, 1969), 246.

[182] McLuhan, "Lewis's Prose Style," MS., 2.

[183] Ibid., 1–2. McLuhan adds that Lewis's "early novels provide passage after passage with nothing so much as a package of materials with directions for making a painting. A good deal he left for the reader to do, but the results enable a reader to see," (Ibid., 1).

[184] Lewis's "painterly eye," tactile-eye or visio-tactile method (the eye not disassociated from our other senses), McLuhan saw was entirely sympathetic with an understanding of language as gesture, shared by the modern symbolists, anthropologists, and the semi-magical "views" of the ancient patristic fathers: "Our idea of language as gesture, as efficacious, and as representing a total human response is a much better base for a study of the figures and arts of speech that any merely rationalistic approach can provide," (McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 25).

[185] McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis: Lemuel in Lilliput," in *The Medium and the Light*, 181.

as standing with the great pagan tradition of neo-Platonism and Gnosticism in seeing existence, as such, as the ultimate sham. For Lewis, at least as far as McLuhan saw it, to exist is damnation, and to exist humanly is to fail.[186] Naturally, as a Roman Catholic, but not solely because of his Catholicism, McLuhan was opposed to such an assessment of life. Further, while McLuhan celebrated Lewis's clinical and accurate diagnosis, and championed aspects of his method, McLuhan differs from Lewis insofar as he understood the creative imagination not as a superhuman emanation from "spirit," as Lewis apparently did, but as an intellectual power.[187] His commitments, couched in traditional Catholic terms, are expressed clearly in a letter to John Mole:

> Your piece on me brings to mind that I am a Thomist for whom the sensory order resonates with the divine Logos. I don't think concepts have any relevance in religion. Analogy is not concept. It is community. It is resonance. It is inclusive. It is the cognitive process itself. That is the analogy of the divine Logos. I think Jasper, Bergson and Buber as very inferior conceptualist types, quite out of touch with immediate analogical awareness that begins in the senses and is derailed by concepts or ideas.[188]

McLuhan is even more explicit in *Through the Vanishing Point*:

> Perhaps the most precious possession of man is his abiding awareness of the analogy of proper proportionality, the key to all metaphysical insight and perhaps the very condition of consciousness itself. This analogical awareness is constituted of a perpetual play of ratios among ratios: A is to B what C is to D, which is to say that the ratio between A and B is proportioned to the ratio between C and D, there being a ratio between these ratios as well. This lively awareness of the most exquisite delicacy

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[186] "…To exist humanly is to be self-condemned or damned to the material incarnation of selfhood," (McLuhan, "Nihilism Exposed," review of *Wyndham Lewis*, by Hugh Kenner, *Renascence* 7, no. 2 (Winter 1955): 99.

[187] See the discussion of an Aristotelian-Cognitive model of art as discussed in Chapter Three.

[188] McLuhan to John W. Mole, 18 April 1969.

> depends upon there being no connection whatever between the components. If A were linked to B, or C to D, mere logic would take the place of analogical perception. Thus one of the penalties paid for literacy and a high visual culture is a strong tendency to encounter all things through a rigorous story line, as it were. Paradoxically, connected spaces and situations exclude participation whereas discontinuity affords room for involvement. Visual space is connected and creates detachment or noninvolvement. It also tends to exclude the participation of the other senses.[189]

In short, McLuhan, like Varro, the Stoics, Vico,[190] and Gerard Manley Hopkins,[191] is an analogist. As he notes to Kenner, in contrast with the "brittleness" of the Kantian, where a "single scheme of concepts has to hold everything."

> We [analogists] are in position of being able to use any insights whatever. Any kind of knowledge is grist to an analogist. But to a Kantian every new fact is a potential threat to his entire world. E.g. Newton's system now obsolete because of subsequent observations. Progress = obsolescence, destruction. Ritual slaughter of old by young. Unilateral causal connections.[192]

As an analogist McLuhan is predisposed towards an appreciation of a particular kind of order and means of revealing that order. What McLuhan appears to mean, then, is that "faith" (as a way of seeing and knowing), facilitated his apprehension of an analogical order *behind* appearances. In other words we could say that in contrast with the "emptiness" that infuses and resides behind Lewis's paintings and writings, McLuhan saw and felt "fullness," as it were:[193]

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[189] *Through the Vanishing Point*, 240.

[190] McLuhan, "Essay on Bacon," MS., 16. McLuhan also regarded St. Thomas Aquinas as an analogist. See McLuhan to Edwin C. Garvey, 10 November 1976.

[191] McLuhan, "Dramatic Action in the 'Windhover'," MS., 3.

[192] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 16 March 1949.

[193] McLuhan appears to have read Lewis, at least his in his paintings, as being disinclined to reveal any approximation of an analogical order behind appearances.

In a universe with a metaphysical substructure which we have disclosed the only suitable process of explanation must consist in discerning, beneath the apparent disorder and diversity of things, the tenuous strands of analogy which connect them with one another and reunite them all to God. Hence this prodigious quantity of resemblances, correspondences, proportions and conformities in which some have tried today to see only mental gymnastics, a delight of the imagination or, at best, an inebriation of the soul which tries to forget its human condition, but in which in fact we must see first and foremost the only means of exploration and interpretation exactly adapted to St. Bonaventure's universe.[194]

McLuhan's attempts to apply the methods of Lewis and Leavis, and what he meant by "with all the energy and order denied them from faith and philosophy" can be best seen in what McLuhan actually did. Arguably, we can see the early McLuhan's project most clearly across a triad of articles written between 1943 and 1946: "Medieval Grammar as the Basis for Bacon's *Novum Organum*" (1943), "Baroque and the Disassociation of Sensibility" (1945), and "An Ancient Quarrel in Modern America" (1946). The unity of this triad of works is readily apparent insofar as each is underpinned by questions and issues surrounding methods of exegesis and interpretation, and the implications of these methods as manifested at the level of science ("Medieval Grammar"), art ("Baroque"), and politics ("An Ancient Quarrel").[195] In "Baroque and the Disassociation of Sensibility" McLuhan makes the unity of the triad explicit. He also makes clear exactly what he saw his "energy and order" permitted him to *try* and do what Lewis could not — to create a new analogical synthesis.[196] Across all of these articles McLuhan indicates that

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[194] Gilson, *The Philosophy of St. Bonaventure*, 229, in *The Classical Trivium*, 143.

[195] Or, in other words, the relationship between the ordering of speech and order in other spheres, be it nature or human relationships.

[196] McLuhan, "Baroque and the Disassociation of Sensibility," MS., 16. McLuhan adds that it is more difficult in our age than that of the Baroque on account that, in contrast to

the project at hand is to reunify sensibility and bring all the arts and sciences back into a humanistic orchestra.[197]

In the wake of his early trilogy, McLuhan embarked on a three-pronged offensive with a view to aiding the realisation of a new analogical synthesis and bring about "an age of greater splendour than the Baroque."[198]

1. A Volume of Books to Read

Lewis, McLuhan observed, had sought to counter the frantic activity of the mechanical world by offering a program for the artist of severe critical discipline and self-extraction from the ideological machine that entailed an arduous course of detachment and scrutiny of over 400 years of art, science, and philosophy:[199]

> Lewis sought no disciples, nor does he offer a program or solution, rather his contribution is a critical discipline. Lewis is a stimulant, a mode of perception, rather than a position or practise.[200]

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the Baroque period, "there are more elements and more chaos. Our age is prolific in megalomania and rhetoric and propaganda," (Ibid.). What needs to be stressed here is that McLuhan is not trying to *invent* an analogical synthesis. Rather, he sought to cooperate and energize a synthesis that he "discovered" as already present in some diffuse fashion: "Today, with all our technology, and because of it, we stand once more in the magical acoustical sphere of pre-literate man. Politics have become musical; music has become politics. Government has become entertainment, and vice versa. Commerce has become incantation and magical gesture. Science and magic have married each other. Technology and the arts meet and mingle," (McLuhan, "Space, Time and Poetry," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 13. ed., W Terrence Gordon. (Corte Madera, CA.: Ginko, 2005), 9).

[197] McLuhan, "Baroque and the Disassociation of Sensibility," MS., 16. McLuhan adds: "we are still looking for an Orchestra director." One can only wonder if McLuhan had himself in mind.

[198] McLuhan, "Baroque and the Disassociation of Sensibility," MS., 16.

[199] McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis: Lemuel in Lilliput," in *The Medium and the Light*, 189.

[200] McLuhan, "A Critical Discipline," *Renascence* 12, no. 2 (Winter, 1960): 94–95.

Following Lewis, McLuhan writes to Felix Giovanelli outlining his intention to create a volume of books to read that would serve similar ends.[201] McLuhan notes that his volume would aim to provide an orientation and a *paideuma*, "to make possible for the young the development of a contemporary mind and sensibility."[202]

> My list of books aims to cover all the arts and sciences. In their inter-relationships. Not so much the *ekuklios paideia* as the cycle of the arts as *one thing* …. But true education must provide the tools for managing a situation in which such systematic debasement is the only rule. True education has got to be at least as efficient as the process of debasement. It has to have equal passion as it and equal unity or concentration.[203]

McLuhan adds: "they are the books that would enable a man to read and enjoy *Finnegans Wake*"[204] — McLuhan having attributed Joyce with having created "the most luminous analogical order for the unique experience of that age."[205]

2. Starting a Magazine

In addition to his volume of books to read, McLuhan also notes to Giovanelli that he is planning to start a magazine. It was not to be "for Canadians by Canadians," but "something serious."[206] Further, McLuhan is clear that he does not wish to imitate *Sewanee*, *Kenyon* or *Partisan Review*. Rather, he states, his magazine would be: "something with a

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[201] The first appears to have been inspired by Ezra Pound, who will be discussed in the following chapters. Prong's two and three mime Lewis' *Blast*, and his foundation of the Rebel Art Centre, London.

[202] McLuhan to Felix Giovanelli, nd.

[203] Ibid.

[204] Ibid.

[205] McLuhan, "One Wheel, All Square," *Renascence* 10, no. 4 (Summer, 1958): 199.

[206] McLuhan to Felix Giovanelli, 5 May 1946

strongly practical bias in the direction of estimating and prescribing detailed procedures in schools and colleges plus a department persistently focused on the hatred of Being manifest everywhere at every level at present."[207] The extent of McLuhan's meditations on starting a magazine can be seen in a letter to Kenner in 1949. After apparently meditating on the "failures" of *Scrutiny*, McLuhan suggests how even a small magazine could get great attention if it pursued a definite program (as opposed to merely providing coverage), had "an abiding sense of relevance," and invented new goals as it achieved its initial objectives — all of which McLuhan found lacking in *Scrutiny*.[208]

3. Founding an Adult Milieu

The real crux of McLuhan's offensive, however, is his bid to found an adult milieu. Writing to Father Clement McNasby in 1945, McLuhan mentions that it would be easy to set up a school that would utilize the encyclopaedic learning of our age. The question rather was whether such a project was desirable?[209] Two years later, McLuhan appears to have concluded that the creation of a milieu was not only desirable but absolutely necessary — the re-unification of sensibility, the fusion of "thought and feeling," and "the metaphysical intuition of being," is, he asserts, only to be had as "the fruit of a milieu rather than mere individual striving."[210] With a view to realising an adult milieu McLuhan begins to champion the project in several of his essays of the period. For example, in his survey of the Luce triumvirate, "Time, Life and Fortune" (1947), McLuhan argues that, should there be any kind of renewal, it

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[207] Ibid.

[208] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 23 February 1949.

[209] McLuhan to Clement McNasby, 15 December 1945.

[210] McLuhan to Walter Ong, 5 November 1947.

"cannot come from above. It can only take the form of re-awakened critical faculties," and millions of individual acts of will.[211] Further, the only possible course to such a renewal, McLuhan states, might only be charted after we "turn it off." Every mechanical agency of communication in the world should be suspended for six months, he claims. No press, TV, movies — just people finding out who lived near them.[212] McLuhan continues, asserting that the only practical problem that remains today is that *of restoring human dimensions so a merely human order can become relevant and practical once more*.[213]

A more developed argument for the foundation of an adult milieu can also be found in another of McLuhan's early, book-length unpublished works, "Typhon in America."[214] Here McLuhan's Leavis-Lewis fusion is evident in the very title that offers a reference to the respective works of the grammarian, Francis Bacon's *Wisdom of the Ancients* (where he treats the war between Jupiter and Typhon), and Wyndham Lewis's *America and Cosmic Man*.[215] In a manner not dissimilar to Bacon, McLuhan uses the myth of the war between Jupiter and

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[211] McLuhan, "Time, Life and Fortune," MS., 20.

[212] Ibid., 20. McLuhan adds: "it would be agony…all psychological drugs cut off." He would repeat the charge, twenty two years later in his correspondence with the editor of *Playboy*: "it might be highly desirable to suppress all forms of TV for a five year moratorium in order to save millions of lives," (McLuhan to A. C. Spectorsky, 27 November 1969).

[213] McLuhan, "Time, Life and Fortune," MS., 21. Emphasis mine. McLuhan adds: "A more humbly envisaged machine would have helped but rational hope in that quarter is gone … The shape and rational form of man is now irrelevant." The machine is power. Subsequently, practical politics mean the machine must assume increasingly powerful form. Ibid., 21.

[214] Or perhaps Lewis's *America, I Presume*.

[215] The marriage of grammar and Lewisean rhetoric is further evident in McLuhan's invitation to his reader to swarm over the work's four levels. He asserts that what might at first appear as whimsical vaguery, actually goes progressively deeper into the effects of Promethean and/or Vulcanian technologies on the total human response.

Typhon[216] to show that in contemporary America, "ludicrously described as a man's world,"[217] Jupiter is once again bereft of his sinews.[218] He asserts that "a big, kinetic, thrill packed space-time existence," has usurped a masculine role, and negated every "rational value," leaving every American man carrying the corpse of his father. The remainder of the original tale is then held out by McLuhan as the key to a course for recovery:

> As long as the masculine role of detached speculation and intellectual authority is exercised in any public or socially significant group, no matter how small, Jupiter retains his sinews.[219]

If Jupiter is to defeat the monstrous Typhon, then the god of eloquence and messenger of the gods to men, Mercury, is required to intervene and restore unto Jupiter his sinews. Consequently, McLuhan lobbies for contemplation,[220] and two to three hours a day of extremely vigorous conversation (which he regarded as a minimal requirement for the mere continued existence of the male being), as the necessary means for the restoration of a masculine role to society.[221] Further, McLuhan asserts, we should scorn every kind of utility as now understood and stress purely speculative and disinterested pursuits — we should (at least temporarily) abandon know-how in every form, all the arts of adjustment and adaptation, and focus on the creation of an adult milieu, ignoring every

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[216] Juno, angry at Jupiter for having brought forth Pallas without her assistance, brings fourth from the earth a giant monster called Typhon. Typhon then goes to war with Jupiter, and after an initial victory, takes Jupiter prisoner and cuts the sinews out of his hands and feet.

[217] McLuhan, "Typhon in America - typescript (III)," MS., 61.

[218] Ibid., 38.

[219] Ibid.

[220] Ibid., 46.

[221] Ibid., 64–66.

kind of success except the successful awakening and evocation of mature and disinterested minds.[222]

Challenge and Collapse

Despite McLuhan's energetic and enthusiastic pursuit of what might be seen as quixotic goals and plans, we also see in his works of the closing years of the 1940s elements of collapse. In "Time, Life and Fortune" we see McLuhan come face-to-face with the question: how do you indict an age at a time when "the Anglo-Saxon will pay any price for a device of self deception," which leaves him free to pursue a destructive appetite with a benign countenance?[223] Faced with the "problem" McLuhan registers that determining exactly *who* to indict is itself largely an impossible task:

> Because the areas in which perception is cultivated or even tolerated have been ever more rapidly circumscribed, the artist and the intellectual have had to turn to unmasking clichés and the mass mechanisms of sensibility as part of the business of survival. Even in this role of the enemy of bloated inanities and glossy fakes, both artist and intellectual find the ultimate enemies of the human to be extremely elusive.[224]

Further, while McLuhan deemed the creation of an adult milieu to be the necessary propaedeutic for revival, we see in his correspondence with the great "gang-leader" Ezra Pound, [225] he was unsure as to how to achieve it:

> How do you get 10 competent people together in one city and keep them there to talk, think and write? I haven't met anyone who even imagines the need for such a group. It can't be done in

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[222] Ibid., 81.

[223] McLuhan, "Time, Life and Fortune," MS., 11–12.

[224] Ibid., 2–3.

[225] McLuhan, "The Personal Approach," *Renascence* 13, no. 1 (1960): 42.

NYC, no university contains more than one or two potential allies. So it can't be done at a university unless one has the power to hire.[226]

"Typhon" too was a failure. Despite its merits, prospective publishers felt that there was no audience for the work. Apparently, only a handful of McLuhan's graduate students demurred. If the precondition for any art is, first, its ability to operate as a trap for attention,[227] then "Typhon" had failed. In many respects, McLuhan's assessment of Wyndham Lewis's failure, "impact nil," might easily apply to his own. Unable to rouse the admen's zombies from their slumber, "Typhon" was just as impotent as Lewis's *Blast* of 1914. It also appears that McLuhan was having trouble developing and articulating his proposed analogical synthesis. As McLuhan writes to Walter Ong:

> In view of the spectacular indiscretions of my introduction to Kenner's book on Chesterton I may add that Gilson concluded his course on St. Augustine … with the proclamation of the present need for the fusion of the Thomistic synthesis with Augustinian psychological awareness. That is what I meant in my preface. I was simply unequipped to clarify a perception which has long bothered me.[228]

In sum, McLuhan appears to have been faced with yet another breakdown in ordinary procedures, but this time it was more substantial. Just one year after the publication of "Time, Life and Fortune," McLuhan writes to Felix Giovanelli (1948):

> It has taken me a long time to take stupidity and indifference for granted as a universal and irremediable human condition. Pound has never reached this point .… All his strategies depend on the

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[226] McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 15 July 1948.

[227] McLuhan, "Culture without Literacy," MS., 8. It should be noted, however, that McLuhan tried, deliberately making "Typhon" rowdy and energetic in a bid to arouse the slumber of an audience assumed to be at least half-asleep.

[228] McLuhan to Walter Ong, December, 1947.

prior condition of alertness and eager appetite for truth. Hence Pound is largely ignored and Eliot widely misunderstood. But Wiley old possum (Eliot) was the shrewder man and I dislike him for his virtues.[229]

The full gravity and magnitude of the collapse, however, McLuhan reserves for his correspondence with Pound. Here we see McLuhan, the *doctus orator*, face-to-face with a post-human age of non-communication:

No college, business or city is run by human persons anymore. I have yet to meet someone who knows what they are doing let alone why …. Abdication of the human motive is now plain. How to tackle the situation of zombie and sleepwalkers. You can't argue, they agree and move on. There is no more disagreement.[230]

He registers that there are aspects of the contemporary situation that he found impossible to satirize:

Current illusion is that science has abolished all natural laws. Nature now pays 5 million %. Applied science now the master usurer. To hell with our top soil. We can grow potatoes on the moon tomorrow. How you goan to expose that while there is still human "life" on the planet? .... *Life* Jan1/51 War assets issue. Pin-up girls featured as major asset. I have *tried,* in forthcoming (March) *Mechanical Bride* to devise a technique for elucidating this scene. It can't be satirized. Trouble with duffers like Geo. Orwell is that they satirize something that happened 50 yrs ago as a threat of the *future*! Effect is narcotic.[231]

Because words themselves, have become drugs:

Since then the word has been used to effect a universal hypnosis. How are words to be used to unweave the spell of print? Of radio commercials and "news"-casts? I'm working on that problem. *The word is now the cheapest and most universal drug*. Consider the effect of modern machinery in imposing rhythm on human thought and

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[229] McLuhan to Felix Giovanelli, 5 September 1948.

[230] McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 30 July 1948.

[231] McLuhan to Ezra Pound, January 1951, in *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, ed. Matie Molinaro, Corrine McLuhan, and William Toye (Toronto, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 219.

feeling. Archaic man got inside the thing that terrified him — tiger, bear, wolf —and made it his totem god. To-day we get inside the machine. It is inside us. We in it. Fusion. Oblivion. Safety. Now the human machines are geared to smash one another. You can't shout warnings or encouragement to these machines. First there has to be a retracing process, a reduction of the machine to human form. Circe only turned men into swine. Our problem is tougher.[232]

Life as Artform

In view of the challenges, and what we might call the eventual collapse of his early efforts, McLuhan appears to have decided that an entirely new strategy was needed. We can hear a faint echo of what McLuhan had in mind in his correspondence with Felix Giovanelli. At some point in September 1948 McLuhan writes to Giovanelli registering the need "to get out a volume of strictly creative work" so he can speak out of "both sides of his mouth at once."[233] What I am about to show, as a way of wrapping up this early period and laying foundations for an exploration of McLuhan's praxis after 1951, is that McLuhan did embark on a creative project, and that the necessary propaedeutic for it was his bid to make an artform of himself — Herbert Marshall McLuhan became Marshall McLuhan, the creative man.[234]

During the later half of the 1940s, before stating his intentions to get out a volume of creative work, McLuhan appears to have dedicated a lot of time to "getting into" T. S. Eliot. Even before he had met with Wyndham Lewis, McLuhan was working on a book-length manuscript on Eliot called "Great Tom" with his student Hugh Kenner. McLuhan's

[232] McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 22 June 1951. Emphasis is mine.

[233] McLuhan to Felix Giovanelli, September, 1948.

[234] Liss Jeffrey has also argued that one of McLuhan's most strategic works was himself, and that his public personae is part and parcel of his rhetorical theory and practise. Jeffrey, 38.

commentary on Eliot reveals that he is decidedly ambivalent about him, and that he regarded Eliot as by no means simple or consistent with himself.[235] Despite his ambivalence, however, T. S. Eliot appears to be the catalyst for, if not McLuhan's "great labour," then certainly his subsequent transformation of his traditional inheritance. I would contend that, despite McLuhan's ambivalent posture in terms of Eliot and his "virtues," the reason McLuhan was able to exert such an influence on his time, while having chosen a policy for his work which, like that of Eliot, appeared to many as rash, perverse, and without hope,[236] was that, following Eliot's exhortation, McLuhan undertook a clinical and systematic appraisal of the successes and failures of his predecessors.[237] Naturally, his exploration extended to include Eliot himself.[238]

McLuhan read Eliot as having shown that the project imposed on the modern artist during an age of great knowledge and dissolution was to re-work, in contemporary conditions, the vision of Dante.[239] We can, albeit faintly, see and hear the degree to which McLuhan took on Eliot's charge through his claim that: (a) the last Canto of Dante's *Paradise*

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[235] McLuhan, "Eliot and the Manichean Myth as Poetry," 6. The source of McLuhan's ambivalence towards Eliot, or all the Men of 1914 for that matter, is readily apparent in view of McLuhan's letter to Dunaway. No single figure provides a full account, rather all of these figures (the Men of 1914) are seen as complementary. Further, in view of McLuhan's survey of his predecessors, it appears that McLuhan acquired, like Joyce, "the means for digesting all the ideas of his contemporaries without relying on any of them as a prop or frame of reference," (McLuhan, "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters" in *The Medium and the Light*, 172).

[236] See, McLuhan "Prelude to Prufrock: Documents and techniques," MS., 1 in "Great Tom."

[237] McLuhan, "Mr Eliot's Cubist Aesthetic," MS., 10 in "Great Tom."

[238] In some measure we have seen in the introduction how McLuhan saw Eliot's strategy of separating his counsel from his criticism as a failure.

[239] It is relevant to note that Lewis's *Human Age* is widely regarded as a reworking, in modern terms, of Dante's *Divine Comedy*.

represents the highest point poetry can reach, and (b) like Dante, the creation of art ("to get out a volume of strictly creative work…") depends, first of all, on the artist becoming a true poem:

> The work of art is not an illustration of the thoughts of the maker or anyone else's thought, but the final manifestation of thinking itself. The medium cannot be separated from the message …. In our world we would be better off adopting the premise that art is not a way of making a living but a way of living.[240]

> It is human consciousness itself that is the greatest artefact of man. The making and shaping of consciousness from moment to moment is the supreme artistic task of all individuals. To qualify and perfect this process on a world environmental scale is the inherent potential of each new technology.[241]

To get a better glimpse of why and what kind of poem, we first need to retrace, albeit briefly, McLuhan's study of his predecessors. One of the best sites for the task is his collection of essays that make up the unpublished volume, "Character Anthology."[242] Here McLuhan examines a tradition of writers united by a common ethical and rhetorical theory and practise, and their adherence to the ancient rhetorical doctrine of decorum. McLuhan looks to demonstrate the unity of this "tradition of rational excellence,"[243] that extends from the first to

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[240] McLuhan, "Comments on Art Colleges," MS., 1

[241] McLuhan, "The Emperor's Old Clothes," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 20, ed. W Terrence Gordon (Corte Madera, CA.: Ginko, 2005), 14.

[242] In many respects, "Character Anthology" serves as something of an inventory of the techniques and tactics that McLuhan would employ in his future work.

[243] That McLuhan asserts, includes such writers such as Johnson, Pope, Dryden, Spencer, Chaucer, Nashe and Languard. McLuhan, "Introduction to Character," MS., 1, 4 in "Character Anthology." "Character Anthology" appears to have been an early, unpublished anthology of McLuhan's early essays. The finding aid for the McLuhan collection indicates the essays were written during the 1940s. In addition to an introduction (to character writing and character writers), the anthology carries essays on: Sir Walter Scott, Jane Austen, Charles Lamb (2 versions), George Crabbe, Robert Browning, Lord Byron (2 versions), Samuel Taylor Coleridge (2 versions), Wordsworth,

nineteenth centuries (and includes the likes of Thomas Nashe),[244] by showing how the "tradition" shares a common conception of human nature — man as a rational animal. The essence of the matter is that these "character writers" draw their characters from moral philosophy, and then either praise or blame them for how well they hit the golden mean.[245] McLuhan's study then shifts to explore how artists of this tradition were forced to contend with the psychological effects of the alienation of the sensitive and integral individual from a decaying and vicious society.[246] It is here that the work is linked with another of his major unpublished works of the period, "The New American Vortex." Here McLuhan develops the theme of the alienated artists, and reveals how Pope, Jonson, Crabbe, and even Jane Austen stood in a friendly relationship to a still intact social and intellectual tradition. McLuhan also reveals, however, that after Austen: "no serious artist exists save in drastic opposition to society because life around him [sic] had become sub-human chaos."[247] From Austen, McLuhan argues, "the centre of consciousness," begins to move in the face of decay; from man in rational

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Keats, and Shelly. The collection also contains an essay on the "The Sonnet" and the "Sonnet and Ballad."

[244] See *The Classical Trivium*, ix. Here McLuhan cites A. F. Leach's, *Educational Charters and Documents*: "It is hardly an exaggeration to say that the subjects and methods of education remained the same from…the first century to the mid-nineteenth century of the Christian era."

[245] For example, for the reasonable mean, "courage," there are two extremes, cowardice and rashness — the middle point being the site of virtue.

[246] In "Character Anthology" McLuhan takes special care to emphasise that while the relationship of a writer to society does not determine the value of his work, it does largely determines the themes and the modes of artistic organisation of their work.

[247] McLuhan, "Footprints in the Sands of Crime," MS., 1 in "The New American Vortex."

society, to man suffering in exile from society, to rational man opposed to irrational society, e.g. Byron.[248]

As we have seen in an earlier section of this chapter, McLuhan saw that the situation had changed again since Byron. With the "second great betrayal," artists, in some respects, began to re-integrate with society. The "serious artists," however, remained either in exile or in the process of alienating themselves completely. They did this, McLuhan argues, on the grounds that they deemed it necessary for any figure who sought to be of any use at all in creating a new vision. In view of his survey, McLuhan sided with the serious artists — the Men of 1914. Unlike Dante, whom he implies was able to hold the same road as society, McLuhan held, following Lewis, that "in a mindless age, every insight takes the character of a lethal weapon." [249] Both the "man of goodwill" and "serious artist," must be "the enemy of society."[250]

That said, however, McLuhan also saw that the "serious artist" had a function to perform and that this required some commerce with the crowd or herd. Returning to the study of his predecessors, McLuhan saw that Yeats advocated for the use of masks for the task, "to avoid the hot faced bargainers."[251] Byron, on the other hand, McLuhan deemed, had failed. Byron (like Henley and Kipling), McLuhan saw, "suffered from a radical defect of intelligence," that led him to an extreme form of despair and defiance — "the despair of willing desperately to be

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[248] McLuhan, "Typhon in America, typescript (I)," 59. on the grounds that: "briefly, it comes to this … the human person, confronted with a huge social mechanism can see no way of fitting in without self-obliteration."

[249] McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 22 June 1951.

[250] Ibid.

[251] McLuhan deemed that becoming a "character" entailed assuming an unassailable social position, and an inner life so intense that one is indifferent to all social demands; e.g the Dons of Cambridge. McLuhan, "Culture Without Literacy," MS., 15.

oneself." [252] Baudelaire, in contrast to Byron, McLuhan saw as having succeeded, offering "the sole artistic alternative to mere defiance" — exploration and contemplation.[253]

There is, however, another facet to McLuhan's development of his "poem." McLuhan was a practising Catholic and Christian. As I have already noted, McLuhan converted to Catholicism in 1937. At the same time he was working out an artistic strategy he was also dwelling on the practise of Christianity.[254] Traditionally, the Christian has navigated by way of the paradox of being in the world but not of it:

> As Thomas More shows, Christian irony or paradox is the basic mode of Christian awareness and "inescapable modality" of secular life. That is "irony arising from the conflict of City of God and Man within him."[255]

It appears that in approaching both matters simultaneously McLuhan concluded that the "serious artist" and "Christian" were required of their role, time, and age to occupy positions that were analogous — Neither "serious artist" nor Christian had any place as a member of society or its counter-culture,[256] yet both were required to interface with the world if not be at the very centre of their network and milieu. In brief, it appears that McLuhan saw that the artists drive to exile or alienation while also

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[252] McLuhan, review of *William Earnest Henley*, by Jerome H. Buckley, MS., n.pag.

[253] Ibid.

[254] It was a meditation that would extend the full course of his career, and extended even to contemplating dress; e.g. in "International Motley and Religious Costume," McLuhan argues that there is no possibility of returning to private dress for those awake to the hostile values of the world. McLuhan, "International Motley and Religious Costume," MS., 4–5.

[255] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 4 March 1949. It is relevant to note that McLuhan appears to have regarded Thomas More as a Menippean satirist.

[256] Something of the spirit of the enterprise can be heard in McLuhan's claim that he is committed to going "against the grain," (McLuhan, interviewed by anon., "Genius or Whimsy? Some McLuhanisms," *The Sunday Post of Canada*, 13 May 1979).

having commerce with the herd, so as to enact some form of marriage between two psychic states of total immersion (Dionysian revelry?) and dispassionate survey (Apollonian concern with structure?),[257] was comparable to the traditional Christian paradox and "inescapable modality" of secular life.[258]

Running the risk of katachronism, McLuhan's later articles and letters can be used to help illustrate his thinking at this juncture. McLuhan, as we see elsewhere, held that the refusal "to take the world seriously," and the devaluation of worldly objectives in a manner that parallels "the cool spirit" of the gentleman and the amateur, was the latent heritage of Christianity.[259] He develops the theme in "Identity, Technology and War." Here McLuhan notes how every human is engaged in making an identity for himself, Christians included. The Christian, McLuhan states, "feels the downward mania of the Earth and its treasures and is just as inclined to conform his sensibilities to man made environments. He knows he constantly has to create another identity that does not conform to the gravity and solemn masks of time and space."[260] As such, Christianity, with its definite support for the idea of a private, independent, metaphysical substance of the self,[261] made it an excellent strategy for avoiding participation in the world environment; and without it, McLuhan notes, men have tended to adjust

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[257] McLuhan, "Comments on Art Colleges," MS.

[258] As McLuhan would later ask Rodger Calverly: "this of course is the Christian role in relation to the world is it not? The world can only be seen and understood by those alien to it." McLuhan to Rodger Calverley, 7 November 1973.

[259] McLuhan, and Barrington Nevitt, "The Man Who Came to Listen," in *Peter Drucker's Contributions to Business Enterprise*, eds. Tony H. Bonaparte, and J. E. Flaherty (New York: New York University Press, 1970), 40–44.

[260] McLuhan, "Identity, Technology and War," *U.S. Catholic Jubilee* 35, no. 1 (1970): 37.

[261] That said however, there is a paradox involved here insofar as McLuhan also identifies the Church as a tribal affair.

themselves by what Levy Bruhl called "participation mystique."[262] The
difficulty was, and this is the crux of the matter, McLuhan came to see
that under electric conditions all former artistic strategies and the
traditional Christian modality of being in the world became problematic:

> Some feel that Christianity's existence must always stand in the
> tension between being in the world and standing outside it.
> Kierkegaard was keenly aware of this, as were St. Paul and, later,
> Martin Luther. But the tension between inner and outer is a
> merely visual guideline, and in the age of the X-ray *inner and outer
> are simultaneous events*.[263]

A Duet in Everything

In view of his survey, it appears that McLuhan took from Baudelaire his
commitment to exploration and contemplation, from Lewis the charge
that reworking the vision of Dante would have to be done as the enemy,
and from all the artists after Austen a commitment to detachment, not
merely a tactic, but a way of life and "survival strategy":

> The need to retain an attitude of complete clinical detachment is
> necessary for survival in this kind of work …. The road to
> understanding media effects begins with arrogant superiority. If
> one lacked this sense of superiority—this detachment—it would
> be quite impossible to write about them. It would be like an
> octopus attacking the great pyramids.[264]

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[262] McLuhan, "Crack in the Rearview Mirror," *McGill Journal of Education* 1, no. 1
(1966): 31–34.

[263] *Through the Vanishing Point*, 254. Emphasis mine. "The new media have blurred the
boundaries of inner and outer. The omnipresence of news and views has merged man's
inner and outer life. Uninhibited mechanization is totalitarian at many levels. And this
fact is merely another facet of the cycle mechanization, in returning us to the state of
collectivized, emotional consciousness of archaic man," (McLuhan, "Space, Time and
Poetry," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 13, 10–11). Originally published in 1955.

[264] McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," 70.

It also appears that, to manage his involvement with the herd, McLuhan turned again to Lewis. McLuhan apparently saw that Lewis's strategy, possibly as articulated in his "Code of the Herdsman," was the most viable strategy for involvement with the world/herd under electric, X-Ray conditions:

> Cherish and develop, side by side, your six most constant indications of different personalities. You will then acquire the potentiality of six men. Leave your front door one day as B; the next march down the street as E. A variety of clothes, hats especially, are of help in this wider dramatization of yourself. Never fall into the vulgarity of being or assuming yourself to be one ego. Each trench must have another one behind it. Each single self — that you manage to be at any given time — must have five at least indifferent to it. You must have a power of indifference of five to one. All the greatest actions in the world have been five parts out of six impersonal in the impulse of their origin. To follow this principle you need only cultivate your memory. You will avoid being the blind man of any moment. B will see what is hidden to D.[265]

Subsequently, with a view to "inventing himself properly," both as a "serious artist" and as a Christian, McLuhan appears to have taken up Lewis's aesthetic, becoming a "duet in everything":[266]

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[265] Wyndham Lewis, "Code of the Herdsman," Ginko Press, http://www.gingkopress.com/_cata/_lite/_codehea.htm (accessed 22 November 2006). It might not be irrelevant that critics have discerned as many as six distinctly different voices in Swift's *Tale of a Tub*. Edward Timms, "The Christian Satirist: A Contradiction in Terms?," in *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 31, no. 2 (1995): 110.

[266] Or coming at the matter another way we could say that McLuhan adopted the "tradition" posture of the Christian satirist, the *homo duplex*, as a necessary measure to conduct a satirical programme without recourse to anonymous authorship. Edward Timms, 104. "The versatility with which Erasmus deploys the contrasting voices of satirist and Christian has led him to be identified as the archetypal *homo duplex*," (Ibid.).

McLuhan as *homo duplex* is captured in the two portraits of McLuhan by one of his friends, York Wilson. See York Wilson, "Marshall McLuhan, Abstract Portrait" (1976) and "Marshall McLuhan" (1978).

The entire aesthetic of Wyndham Lewis presents the case for paradox, as in "Vortex No. One—Art Vortex—Be Thyself":

> You must talk with two tongues, if you do not wish to cause confusion.
>
> You must also learn, like a Circassian horseman, to change tongues in mid-career without falling to Earth.
>
> You must give the impression of two persuaders, standing each on a different hip—left hip, right hip—with four eyes vacillating concentrically at different angles upon the object chosen for subjugation.
>
> There is nothing so impressive as the number TWO.
>
> You must be a duet in everything.
>
> For, the Individual, the single object, and the isolated, is, you will admit, an absurdity.
>
> Why try and give the impression of a consistent and indivisible personality?
>
> You can establish yourself either as a Machine of two similar fraternal surfaces overlapping.
>
> Or, more sentimentally, you may postulate the relation of object and its shadow for your two selves.
>
> There is Yourself: and there is the Exterior World, that fat mass you browse on.
>
> You knead it into an amorphous imitation of yourself inside yourself.
>
> Sometimes you speak through its huskier mouth, sometimes through yours.
>
> Do not confuse yourself with it, or weaken the esoteric lines of fine original being.
>
> Do not marry it, either, to a maiden.
>
> Any machine then you like: but become mechanical by fundamental dual repetition.
>
> For the sake of your good looks you must become a machine.
>
> Hurry up and get into this harmonious and sane duality…[267]

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[267] Wyndham Lewis cited in *From Cliché to Archetype*, 161–162. Immediately following this quote from Lewis, McLuhan and Watson cite Rosalie Colie on paradox from *Paradoxia Epidemica*: "…paradox equivocates. It lies, and it doesn't. It tells the truth, and it doesn't…The one meaning must always be taken with respect to the other—so that the Liar paradox is, literally, speculative, its meanings infinitely mirrored, infinitely reflected, in each other," (Ibid., 162).

McLuhan's adoption of Lewis's aesthetic, when combined with his Christianity, appears to have afforded him some measure of levity. His subsequent way of being in the world and general approach to his scholarly activities became infused with a serious commitment to play,[268] even while his vision grew steadily more apocalyptic.[269] It also means that from this point on, McLuhan largely "disappears" behind his mask or persona, and would make his Christianity a private matter: "…There is no need to mention Christianity — merely it is enough that it be known that the operator is a Christian."[270]

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[268] "…specialists have little sense of humour. Early Christians called themselves 'fools in Christ' and there world became for them a playground. They could literally laugh their way to the Lions," (McLuhan, "Popular Cultural Mosaic," MS., 14).

[269] "Apocalypse is not gloom. It is salvation. No Christian could ever be an optimist or pessimist, that is a purely secular state of mind," (McLuhan, "Future Church: Edward Wakin Interviews Marshall McLuhan," *U.S. Catholic* 42, no. 1 (January 1977): 7). Eric McLuhan suggests that a deeper understanding of McLuhan's posture in this regard might be had via Ellul. See Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom* (New York: Seabury Press, 1967). Chesterton's *Orthodoxy* is also an invaluable resource for a better grasp of McLuhan's posture here.

[270] McLuhan to Clement McNaspy, 15 December 1945. McLuhan's strategy itself in a variety of ways. In the first it means that his Christianity, which was made a private and personal matter, was largely kept out of his public works until the final decade of his career, during the "new religious age." This, however, is not to say that his "private" self was inactive. On the contrary, through his "private" correspondence McLuhan sought to influence ordained ministers within the Church. For example, in 1947, we see McLuhan trying to guide the Jesuit Walter Ong to revive the Patristics by way of a study on the figures of speech: "What is now needed is a great revival of patristic study in light of these things. But current translations of the Fathers won't do for this purpose I fear. How grand if you, Walter, could do a series of selections from the fathers, Latin and English on opposite pages -English translation capturing all the effects of the figures of speech," (McLuhan to Walter Ong, December 1947). In classical rhetoric the figures of speech, thought, and emotion were accepted as basic postures of the mind — basic attitudes and states of feeling and emotion. See McLuhan, "La Révolution de l'Informatio," (address, *Biennale Internationale de l'Information*, le Toquet, 20 June 1973), 11.

> I would not hesitate to add personally to you that only supernatural means are proportioned to the needs of the case. I deliberately keep my Christianity out of all these discussions lest perception be diverted from structural process by doctrinal sectarian passions. My own attitude to Christianity is, itself, awareness of process. As John Culkin says, "I don't believe in shoulding on people.[271]

It was not just his Christianity that McLuhan made "private," it was everything he regarded as personal. As McLuhan notes in a letter to Margaret Mead:

> If I were to write personally, I would have to indicate that my own role of exploring and understanding situations tends to exclude the moralistic observation or political action ... I am not entirely sure why I choose to avoid a personal manifesto of my feelings or attitudes in such matters. This may be merely personal to myself, but I am always baffled when people ask me how I am feeling. As a form of greeting, it makes me wince with its callous and careless unconcern masquerading as good-will. Sometimes I stop these people and ask them point-blank: "Do you really want to know? Because it may take quite a while to tell you!" Perhaps some of this centers into my feelings about personal expression concerning the odious and sickening manifestations of human greed and aggression. I would wish to avoid any appearance of moral superiority in confronting human depravity. It is so easy to borrow virtue by juxtaposing oneself with viciousness.[272]

His public scholarship, on the other hand, will tend to deal with the Church and religious themes in much the same way as any Western intellectual that acknowledges that the history of the West is inconceivable without a history of the Church, e.g. "The Place of Thomas

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[271] McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 23 July 1969.

[272] McLuhan to Margaret Mead, 25 January 1973. McLuhan adds, "On the other hand if one has a name or a position which could be used to mitigate evils, it would be unpardonable to refrain."

Nashe in the Learning of his Time."[273] There is, for example, little in *Take Today* that does not apply equally well to the Church and modern American corporation.[274]

Theory of Communication?

To leap ahead slightly, we can get a glimpse of the product of McLuhan's life–as–artform in view of his ambivalence as to whether he did or did not have a theory of communication. While making communication theory and practise a central concern, and going to some lengths to illuminate the "theory of communication" of every major figure in the arts and sciences, McLuhan was ambivalent as to whether he had one himself. Writing to Walter Ong, McLuhan claims to have a "theory," and asserts: "my theory is only acceptable to a Thomist for whom consciousness as analogical proportion among the senses from moment to moment, is quite easy to grasp."[275] On the other hand, however,

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[273] After all, the Catholic Church is one, if not the most enduring figures of Western History. It has enjoyed a continuous life that extends beyond the lifespan enjoyed by representative government.

[274] That said, McLuhan's public-private divide was far from water-tight. Particularly during his earlier years McLuhan often came close to making very public claims, e.g. "Snowballs or Tennis Balls Professor Hook" (that we have discussed in the introduction). Further, during the mid-1950s, when McLuhan is exploring the "cults," he is of necessity drawn into making "theological" statements. For example, in "Paganism on Tip Toe," McLuhan notes that "the Augustinian view of the two cities cannot do for us to day." The Thomist, he says, cannot regard either the body nor the body politic as mere obstacles to salvation. "For us the question is as complicated as Eliot's poetry and is not merely a matter of turning back to the old Fathers." McLuhan, "Paganism on Tip Toe," *Renascence* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1955): 158. McLuhan was under no illusion that the ills of contemporary life could be "cured by a study of St. Thomas unless that study is seen as a propaedeutic to a program or strategy bearing on our current situation," (McLuhan to Walter Ong, 5 November 1947).

[275] McLuhan to Walter Ong, 18 November 1964.

McLuhan frequently denied he had any theories about anything whatsoever, expressing instead a preference for studying "the pattern minus the theory."[276] For example, writing to William Kuhns, McLuhan claims that his "…canvasses are surrealist, and to call them 'theories' is to miss my satirical intent altogether."[277] Further, despite indicating to Ong that his "theory of communication" is essentially Thomistic and Christian in nature, McLuhan is equally ambivalent when talking about a "Christian theory of communication." Writing to the Hammond's in the early seventies McLuhan states: "It is time that we tried to mount a Christian theory of communication."[278] This statement appears to be in response to a lifelong concern with the puzzling absence of such a theory:[279]

> A theory of communication begins with the public and the effects on publics of a service provided in any medium. A Christian theory of communication would seem to be somewhat lacking.[280]

Elsewhere, however, McLuhan states definitively that the Church is all communication and that Christianity is, effectively, a theory of communication:

> Christianity proclaims its communication theory loud and clear. Every aspect of the Christian thing is communication and change and transformation. As such, Christianity and the Graeco-Roman thing are antithetic, and yet Christianity has been the main means of propagating the Graeco-Roman thing, even to the extent of depriving those areas that reject Western civilization of

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[276] McLuhan to the Editor, *Toronto Star*, 21 June 1978.

[277] McLuhan to William Kuhns, 6 December 1971. McLuhan adds: "As you will find in my Literary Essays, I can write the ordinary kind of rationalistic prose any time I choose to do so. You are in great need of some intense training in perception in the arts."

[278] McLuhan to Opal and Marion Hammond, 8 May 1973.

[279] McLuhan to Bruno James, 15 January 1976.

[280] McLuhan to Monsignor Panciroli, 19 February 1975.

Christianity. There is surely a great mystery about the wedding of dogma and politics.[281]

Writing to Father Shook, McLuhan is even more explicit:

> Although the church began, and continues, with a communication theory or doctrine, Western philosophy has had none since the Greeks. That, in Western philosophy I have been able to find no doctrine of the changes which man inflicts upon his entire psyche by his own artefacts. The Old Testament is full of awareness of these changes, which St. Paul, 1 Romans 1, calls "vain imaginings" etc. Christianity is itself a theory of communication, an announcement of change in the structure of the human being, body and soul, since Christ. Christianity also explains the sort of changes which will necessarily take place in those who do not avail themselves of the new Christian resource.[282]

McLuhan is no more "consistent" when he discusses what actually constitutes a theory of communication. In his later correspondence we see McLuhan employ at least three different variations.

1. Audience Study:
> Since "communication" means change, a theory of communication most naturally concentrates on the sort of public with which they felt themselves to be confronted. It is this public which always affects the structures which the performer chooses to adopt, and it is this public which he seeks to shape and alter in some way.[283]

2. Study of Transformation and the Interplay Between Figure and Ground:
> Nobody has ever written, or even mentioned, "Plato's theory of communication." From Plato and Dante to Wordsworth and Bertrand Russell, nobody has ever noticed what the theories of communication were. A communication theory means, basically, discussion of: "What did he think had happened to him that should also happen to his public?" Newton, for example, devoted his entire life to apologetics and scriptural exegesis. He thought

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[281] McLuhan to Barbara Ward, 9 February 1973.

[282] McLuhan to Father Shook, 20 June 1972.

[283] McLuhan to Ralph Cohen, 13 July 1973.

that mathematics would end all the problems of Christian apologetics. His main scientific endeavours were spent on commentaries on the Book of Daniel, which have never been published. Communication theory for any figure requires the including of the ground for that figure and the study of the interplay between the figure and its ground.[284]

3. Study of Effects:

What I call a "theory of communication" is a study of the effects of a work on a particular public. The Shannon-Weaver model of information theory (encoder, channel and de-coder) simply ignores the law of the situation, i.e. The Shannon Weaver model is identical to the bias of Western man which excludes the possibility of environmental influence. In fact, the environment presupposed by the activity of communication is categorized as "noise" in the Shannon Weaver paradigm. [285]

Here, the first definition is "artist" or author centric. The artist is figure, but McLuhan implies that the first matter is the audience as "formal cause" (ground). The second is similar, but McLuhan places a greater emphasis on the *interplay* between artist (figure) and audience (ground). The third and final definition is, arguably, the most complex. It is audience centric and McLuhan sets the artist (figure)/audience (ground) dynamic in relation to a broader figure-ground relationship as constituted by the technological environment of the day.[286] Further elucidation and comment is possible here but the relevant matter is that contradictions, paradoxes, and a frequently wavering position are part of McLuhan's praxis. If we accept the assumption that McLuhan's "comments on other writers" might offer "a perfect key to himself," then it is clear that his ambivalence, or double talk (or double-double talk), stems from having updated praxis of the *doctus orator*[287] by adopting

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[284] McLuhan to Barbara Ward, 9 February 1973.

[285] McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 26 August 1975.

[286] The terms figure and ground are discussed in chapter two.

[287] C.f. Seigel, 29.

Lewis's case for paradox (if not "Code of the Herdsman") as an integral feature of his artistic praxis. Further, if we accept that McLuhan is in fact what he says he is, "a serious artist,"[288] then we are also afforded a way of *making* sense of McLuhan's statements *à propos* his "theory of communication." The first base in the matter is his comments on art history.

In his "New American Vortex" McLuhan presents the world of art criticism as being dominated by two basic approaches — one dialectical and the other humanist. The first, McLuhan presents as extending from Hegel and includes such figures as Riegl, Worringer, and Spengler. For this "school," McLuhan asserts, society and the arts are understood merely as the clothes of the time, and means to express or illustrate a set of "ideas." The second school, McLuhan presents as extending from the humanism of Burckhardt and includes figures such as Wölfflin, Giedion and Moholy-Nagy. This "school," McLuhan claims, are the humanists.[289] For the humanists, he asserts, "ideas" merely serve as preliminary means to bring perception and judgment to an even riper fulfilment by contact with society and the arts. In sum, the first treats "ideas" as an end. Ultimately, their approach remains divorced from the senses and sensibility, and they are forever turning away from art. The second, by contrast, understands "ideas" merely as a beginning and invitation to come again and again at art. Without labouring the matter unduly, to take McLuhan on his own terms, since we have already established him as a humanist, requires a mode of encounter more akin to that practised by the second "school." There is, then, little point in getting "hung up" on McLuhan's "contradictions" and paradoxes. Rather, if we are to come

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[288] C.f. McLuhan, "Genius or Whimsy? Some McLuhanisms," *The Sunday Post of Canada*, 13 May 1979). Cited in the Introduction.

[289] McLuhan, "Encyclopaedic Unities," MS., 1–2 in "The New American Vortex."

at McLuhan's work as "fellow explorers" we can see his "ideas" (or in this case competing definitions and contradictions) as an invitation to encounter the richness that emerges from contemplating them. With this in mind, returning to McLuhan's mosaic of contradictions *à propos* his "theory of communication," we can see immediately that there is a logic (or analogic) at work. McLuhan does not just contradict himself — he does so twice; once in terms of a secular theory of communication, and once in terms of a Christian theory of communication. Arguably, what springs from the interplay of these four positions is a third matter:

> There is a kind of illusion in the world we live in that communications is something that happens all the time, that it's normal. And when it doesn't happen, this is horrendous. Actually, communication is an exceedingly difficult activity. In the sense of a mere point-to-point correspondence between what is said, done, and thought and felt between people—this is the rarest thing in the world. If there is the slightest tangential area of touch, agreement, and so on among people, *that* is communication in a big way. The idea of complete identity is unthinkable. Most people have the idea of communication as something matching between what is said and what is understood. In actual fact, communication is *making.* The person who sees or heeds or hears is engaged in making a response to a situation which is mostly of his own fictional invention. What these critics reveal is that the mystery of communication is the art of making.[290]

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[290] McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," 69. The critics McLuhan refers to in the quoted section are F. C. Bartlett (*Remembering*) and I. A. Richards.

2

RESURRECTION (1951–1957)

A man is made drunk with his boat or restaurant as he is with a merry-go-round: only it is the staid, everyday drunkenness of the normal real, not easy always to detect. We can all see the ascendance a "carousel" has on men, driving them into a set narrow intoxication. The wheel at Carisbrooke imposes a set of movements upon the donkey inside it, in drawing water from the well, that it is easy to grasp. But in the case of a hotel or fishing-boat, for instance, the complexity of the rhythmic scheme is so great that it passes as open and untrammelled life. This subtle and wider mechanism merges, for the spectator, in the general variety of nature. Yet we have in most lives the spectacle of a pattern as circumscribed and complete as a theorem of Euclid.[1]

While cultivating "a sort of negative capability,"[2] McLuhan was in the throes of reassessing his relationship to the discipline, "subject," and the teaching of English.[3] English, in the Anglo-American West, was the supposed heir to Greek, Latin, and the Classics; McLuhan saw it as stillborn, and not really a subject at all:

The question of training in sensibility, the education of the passions, the fluid interplay of thought and feeling in the development of value judgements apropos of particular works of art (inseparable from development of value judgements with reference to the entire social milieu) — the way in which the liberal arts should be focussed to recreate the total loss of human community in contemporary life — This question no Thomist has ever faced .… You can see how this raises the question of literature. Strictly, French, English, Latin etc are not subjects. They can't be taught. One can only train sensibility in these areas. Literature is not a subject but a function — a function inseparable from communal existence. That it should be taught — these 150 years—according to the modes of a debased scholasticism … [is]

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[1] Wyndham Lewis, "Inferior Religions," in *The Complete Wild Body*, ed. Bernard Lafourcade (Santa Barbara, CA : Black Sparrow Press, 1982), 149.

[2] C.f. McLuhan to Wyndham Lewis, 17 July 1944. As discussed in the previous chapter.

[3] Writing to his mother, Elsie McLuhan, in 1950 McLuhan mentions that: "he might yet turn to poetry at last," (McLuhan to Elsie McLuhan, 5 January 1950).

the first fact to be exploded with the maximum amount of noise. I myself have some plans to make such a noise fairly soon, but many people are needed to co-operate in such matters.[4]

In his correspondence with Harold Innis we see that McLuhan was certain that the practise of teaching English needed to be changed:

…As a teacher of literature, it has long seemed to me that the functions of literature cannot be maintained in present circumstances without radical alteration of the procedures of teaching. Failure in this respect relegated Latin and Greek to the specialist; and English literature has already become a category rather than an interest in school.[5]

In both "The New American Vortex" and "Typhon in America," however, we can also see that he was ambivalent as to what ought to be done. On one hand, as we see in "The New American Vortex," his conventional concerns are readily apparent. Here McLuhan argues: "If the task of transforming the admen's zombies into rational beings is to be achieved," then the primary task of any literary training is the neutralization of the material and social environment of the student. He continues, stating that the way that these materials are to be "tamed" is by admitting them into the classroom. Then, and only then, "can there be any serious consideration of literature," which is necessary (with unremitting observation, analysis, and conversation) as "the indispensable propaedeutic to human revival."[6] Similarly, in "Typhon in America," McLuhan states that the main objective of the work is to provide a "counterblast" — to immunize students against the

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[4] McLuhan to Walter Ong, 18 May 1946. Emphasis mine.

[5] McLuhan to Harold A. Innis, 14 March 1951.

[6] McLuhan, "A Strategy for a New English School," in "The New American Vortex," MS., 5.

environment.[7] On the other hand, however, we see elsewhere in "The New American Vortex" (and certainly in light of his own evolving pedagogic program), that McLuhan appears to have been entertaining the possibility that instruction, if not an entire education, in general subjects might be achieved simply through the exegesis of advertising and other cultural artefacts, in lieu of "literature."[8]

Impact Nil!

During his deliberations, McLuhan appears to have had additional and not entirely unrelated concerns. From the late 1930s two themes dominate his oeuvre: "creativity" and the post-Machiavellian impulse to re-engineer humanity. Both are visible in seed form in an early unpublished essay, "Creative Thought Versus Pragmatism" (1937). Even though, by McLuhan's own admission, the essay is not great, it warrants some attention. Here McLuhan laments the devitalisation of modern philosophy and scientific technique.[9] It is also here that McLuhan locates the impulse for remaking human nature in the shortcomings of the "Pragmatists" and Henri Bergson.[10] Bergson, with the "Pragmatists,"

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[7] McLuhan, "Typhon in American, typescript (I)," MS., 1. It as an objective, McLuhan asserts, is more radical than that of Nietzsche. Ibid., 4.

[8] "In the course of the *enarratio* or commentary on a poet, the grammarian was expected to offer general instruction in all of the arts: agriculture, medicine, architecture, history, rhetoric, logic, music, astronomy, geometry, and the rest. 'Education in general subjects was thus acquired by accident of this literary exegesis,' says de Labriolle in building up the background of the fourfold exegesis of scripture," (*The Classical Trivium*, 31). McLuhan is citing de Labriolle, *History and Literature of Christianity*, 6.

[9] McLuhan appears to have seen the modern philosopher and scientist as oblivious to the "total life of mind" on account of their "dim and occasional perception of the relation of one field of investigation to another;" (McLuhan, "Creative Thought and Pragmatism," MS., 1).

[10] Via engineering conditions that would minimize the operations of consciousness

McLuhan asserts, fails to see that "in every case the mind remains vital and superior to the instruments it contrives."[11] Consequently, McLuhan argues that Bergson remains convinced that: "thought was not the most significant feature of finite being, because of the fragmentary and lifeless character of the methods, concepts, techniques, and science which it produced."[12] The "Pragmatists" on the other hand, McLuhan asserts, commit "intellectual suicide" by assuming that because "thought was first employed by man in adapting himself to his environment that beyond this it has no function or significance."[13] The problem, McLuhan saw, is that the shortcomings of both set them on a path that might desire a totalitarian remaking of human nature:

> The ideal implicit in instrumentalism is ultimately *to dispense with consciousness*. There would be neither occasion nor function for thought when problems of control had been solved for every phase of life. We should cease to think and we would be born, live, love, and die with ease and efficiency and a minimum of awareness. But we all know that *mental life is quintessential life*. The only conceivable ideal is not that we should discard it but that we should have it more abundantly.[14]

The essence of the matter, expressed in the language of *Take Today*, is that McLuhan appears to have deemed that Bergson and the Pragmatists were frozen at the controls.[15] For McLuhan, as it had been for Lewis, "all techniques … are treadmills;" a certain type of effort exerted upon them will inevitably produce the same effect. But there is no growth or

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[11] McLuhan, "Creative Thought and Pragmatism," MS., 4.

[12] Ibid., 3.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid. Emphasis mine. During the same year, in a letter to his brother Maurice (Red), McLuhan expresses comparable sentiments via his meditations on the theology of Sorley (1921). An engineered heaven on earth, which McLuhan reads as Sorley's "state of perfection," is for McLuhan, "a state of dullness, like an English Sunday, where the minds asks no questions," (McLuhan to Maurice McLuhan, 1937).

[15] *Take Today*, 5.

development and there is nothing of intrinsic worth in such instruments. "They are not things of beauty whose loveliness increases ever."[16] Subsequently, McLuhan asserts that the moment they (techniques) cease to be useful in terms of assisting life, they should be discarded. And yet, McLuhan adds, "the tendency of techniques is not only to extend their pretensions beyond their sphere but beyond the period of their true usefulness."[17] Bergson and the Pragmatists, McLuhan implies, had not discarded their instruments after their "period of usefulness," remaining instead, as servomechanisms. Against their narrow intoxication, McLuhan sets philosophy the duty of "preserving a constant balance between crystallized thought and fluid thinking."[18]

After studying at Cambridge, McLuhan's concern with the dual themes persists, and can be seen in such works as "Personal Principle and Creative Process in *The Bridge* by Hart Crane," and again in "The New American Vortex." In the latter, the unity of the two themes and their significance are made readily apparent. McLuhan places both Poe's technical innovations and Machiavellian political philosophy on centre stage.[19] Running the risk of katachronism, we can best see McLuhan's articulation of the problematic in a later article, "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters" (1954). Here McLuhan documents how the "widest possible extension" of the innovations and discoveries of Poe to the

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[16] McLuhan adds: "Both traditional logic and scientific technique are simple instruments differing only in degree from a slide rule or an adding machine. They are tools that assist life but they fall stillborn from the mind that makes them. They lack the most essential features of mental life, namely its freedom, its vitality, and its creativity," (McLuhan, "Creative Thought Versus Pragmatism," MS. 1).

[17] Ibid., 2.

[18] Ibid.

[19] See McLuhan, "Catharsis and Hallucination from Machiavelli to Marx," in "The New American Vortex."

transformation of all common life and politics provides the intellectual matrix of the new world society:

> Today with the revelation of the poetic process which is involved in ordinary cognition we stand on a very different threshold from that wherein Machiavelli stood. His was a door into negation and human weakness. Ours is the door to the positive powers of the human spirit in its natural creativity. The door opens on to psychic powers comparable to the physical powers made available via nuclear fission and fusion. Through this door men have seen a possible path to the totalitarian remaking of human nature. Machiavelli showed us the way to a new circle of the Inferno. Knowledge of the creative process in art, science, and cognition shows us either to the earthly paradise or to complete madness. It is to be either the top of Mount Purgatory or the abyss. The whole of nineteenth-century art and science is charged with the implications of the poetic process and its discovery. Our own century has seen that process put to work in the so-called mass media.[20]

Subsequently, returning to McLuhan's "New American Vortex," one of the tasks he sets the work is:

> For the only step after that decisive event was to represent the whole of human experience in light of that supreme power of the human mind to make and forge, render and interpret, human society …. To purge the dialect of the tribe, to recapture the plenary scope and conditions of human anatomy, to see the creative act in all its analogical relations … with politics, history, metaphysics and theology, and make art not only a matter for universal contemplation but a tool and discipline for awakening heroic fortitude in men. That is the significance of *Finnegans Wake* and *Four Quartets*.[21]

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[20] McLuhan, "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters," in *The Medium and the Light,* 160. It is also worth noting McLuhan's employment of Dantesque imagery here.

[21] McLuhan, "The New American Vortex (I)," MS., 12. The "decisive event," being that Joyce, Eliot, and Pound updated and extended the achievements of Mallarmé: "the first artist to have brought the purgation of means and matter of art to the point where the matter of poetry was the poetic act itself," (Ibid., 15–16).

The "New American Vortex" however, like "Creative Thought versus Pragmatism," remains unpublished. Effectively, then, both works can be said to have had the same impact as "Typhon in America" — nil! While published, McLuhan also deemed his later volume, *The Mechanical Bride* (which deals with similar themes), to be something of a failure too. Writing to Hugh Kenner in 1951 McLuhan states: "*The Mechanical Bride* is something that happened before the Flood. *Assumed an audience* …. It is a wedding announcement found 1000 years from now in a block of concrete."[22]

The Circassian Horseman

In the wake of his deliberations and in view of his "failures," McLuhan made the decision to get out of English in 1951 — the period of his "kind of indeterminacy" was over.[23] Writing to Hugh Kenner McLuhan registers his intent to change direction:

> I have lost interest in English as much as Joyce had lost interest in Literature. I am prepared to step out of English field today or tomorrow whenever the right bid appears …. I'm ready to quit English because there is no business going forward there at all. *There's nothing to sell and nobody to buy* …. I don't think there is anymore need for Literature. Homer is not literature. Was not produced as such…[24]

In the same letter he implies that his readiness to quit English and "literature" was in part motivated by having observed how Eliot and Pound had got out of "literature" via drama:

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[22] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951. Emphasis mine.

[23] C.f. McLuhan to Wyndham Lewis, 17 July 1944. As discussed in the previous chapter.

[24] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951. "Literature may have come to an end in 1870 but poetry, rhetoric and metaphysic have come increasingly alive since then," (McLuhan, "New Media as Political Forms," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 14, 11).

> Eliot is trying to get out of literature too, via drama. *Wasteland* ain't literature. Nor the *Cantos*. Hence absurdity of trying to present them in English courses. The profs are right to that extent. Opposition is always valid as defining a dead attitude, a dead nerve, a useless obstruction.[25]

In his later essay, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," McLuhan indicates that he had also seen that Joyce too had escaped "literature" via drama:

> The analogical relation between exterior posture and gesture and the interior movements and dispositions of the mind is the irreducible basis of drama. In the *Wake* this appears everywhere. So that any attempt to reduce its action, at any point, to terms of univocal statement results in radical distortion.[26]

> Whereas the ethical world of *Ulysses* is presented in terms of well defined human types, the more metaphysical world of the *Wake* speaks and moves before us with the gestures of being itself. It is a nightworld and, literally, as Joyce reiterates, is "abcedminded." Letters ("every letter is a godsend"), the frozen, formalised gestures of remote ages of collective experience, move before us in solemn morrice. They are the representatives of the age-old adequation of mind and things, enacting the drama of the endless adjustment of the interior acts and dispositions of the mind to the outer world. The drama of cognition itself. For it is in the drama of cognition, the stages of apprehension, that Joyce found the archetype of poetic imitation. [27]

What McLuhan did not mention to Kenner is that he had also seen that the "right bid," was the emerging field of "communication."

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[25] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951.

[26] McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 33. In "Reading in an Age of Pictures," McLuhan mentions that *Finnegans Wake* is prophetic and dramatic and is not literature but drama that fits into no known category of art.

[27] Ibid., 32. In "From LaForgue to Dante" McLuhan asserts that *Finnegans Wake* is a drama of speech itself, carefully related to the liturgy of the Mass. A Wake is a secular ritual of communion between the living and the dead. McLuhan, "From LaForgue to Dante," MS., 6–7.

From the onset of the 20th century the world's top minds in both

the arts and sciences were dealing with problems of communication since

classical physics was usurped by the discovery that the universe was not

composed of continuous and progressive phenomena.[28] By the late 1940s,

and certainly by the early 1950s, communication had emerged as the

major preoccupation of both the physical and social sciences.[29]

Consequently, McLuhan saw that communication, in the wake of the

breakdown in the ordinary procedures of both arms of the grammatico-

rhetorical tradition,[30] might serve as a new "focus" for his erudition of

encyclopaedic scope,[31] and as the ground for a general education given

that "communication" facilitated the study of both the individual and

society.[32] Further, the field of communication was new, and therefore,

wide-open. As McLuhan saw it, there were no studies of either Plato or

Shakespeare's theory of communication.[33] The new field was also non-

doctrinaire,[34] which suited the fact McLuhan had no desire to participate

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[28] Donald F. Theall, "Communication Theories in Modern Poetry: Yeats, Pound, Eliot and Joyce," (PhD diss., University of Toronto, 1954).

[29] Theall also notes how, naturally, from these concerns "arose a gradual preoccupation with the actual media of communications (the written and oral language) and ultimately with the impact of the new media of communications, the press, the radio, cinema and television," (Theall, "Communication Theories in Modern Poetry," 1–4). Something of the accuracy of Theall's claim can be seen in John Russo's comparison of McLuhan and I. A. Richards which finds that Richards anticipates McLuhan's interest in both communication(s) and media. John P. Russo, *I. A. Richards: His Life and Work* (London: Routledge, 1989), 498–499, 522, 498.

[30] See McLuhan, "Environment as a Programmed Happening," MS., 16.

[31] McLuhan, "The New American Vortex (I)," MS., 12.

[32] McLuhan, "Notes on the Media as Artforms," MS., 6.

[33] McLuhan, "English Literature as Control Tower in Communication Study," MS., 4.

[34] That said however, McLuhan appears to have had suspicions insofar as he remained ambivalent towards the term. In the minutes and notes from the Culture and Communication Seminar, McLuhan suggests that, perhaps we (at the seminar) should

in the artificial maintenance of historic rivalries.[35] The newness of the domain meant traditional arguments might be circumvented with ease. In addition, communication was the word that makes the market. Becoming known as a "communication theorist," might provide access to a ready-made and rapidly growing international audience comprised of the world's top minds, help to facilitate dialogue between these minds, and ultimately, serve as the foundation for the creation of an adult milieu.[36] Subsequently, McLuhan writes, firstly to his colleague at the University of Toronto, Harold A. Innis, and shortly after to Norbert Weiner, outlining his intention to "switch the entire emphasis to communication."[37]

> This makes an opportunity for me to mention my interest in the work you are doing in communication study in general. I think there are lines appearing in *Empire and Communications* for example, which suggest the possibility of organizing an entire school of studies …. It seems obvious to me that Bloor Street is the one point in this University where one might establish a focus of the arts and sciences, and the organizing concept would naturally be "Communication Theory and Practice." A simultaneous focus of current and historical forms. Relevance to be given to selection of areas of study by dominant artistic and scientific modes of the particular period. Arts here used as providing criteria, techniques of observation, and bodies of recorded, achieved experience. Points of departure, but also return.[38]

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use Giedion's term "inter-relation" as it is "not so loaded with suggestions," (Anon., "Discussion with Professor Giedion, 23 February 1955," n.pag.

[35] As McLuhan noted to Foyle: "If it is not new then we are participating in a traditional argument, acknowledged by one side and not the other" (McLuhan, interview by Joseph Foyle, 16 March 1972, 4).

[36] C.f. McLuhan, "The Later Innis," MS., 11–12, cited in the introduction.

[37] McLuhan to Norbert Wiener, 10 November 1951. It should be noted however that McLuhan remained a teacher of English for the remainder of his life.

[38] McLuhan to Harold A. Innis, 14 March 1951.

Almost immediately, just days after writing to Innis announcing his relocation, we see McLuhan begin to try and start a dialogue with the top minds of his day. For example, McLuhan writes to the founder of cybernetics, Norbert Wiener:

> For example, it may interest you to know that the electron valve you describe on pages 173–174 represents a principle discovered in 1870 by Arthur Rimbaud and applied to poetry and painting since that time. Your account of the uses of the vacuum tube in heavy industry is an exact description of the poetic techniques of Joyce and Eliot in constructing their works. Their use of allusion as situational analogy effects an enormous amplification of power from small units, at the same time that it permits an unrivalled precision. Their stripping of rhetoric and statement corresponds to your observation that "it is no longer necessary to control a process at high-energy-levels by a mechanism in which the important details of control are carried out at [or as] these levels." Stephane Mallarmé made this observation about his own poetic technique in 1885.
>
> In short, appearances and pedagogical limitations aside, there never is or can be a dichotomy between the top-level perceptions and procedures in the arts and sciences of an age.[39]

Later that same year he also writes to Ezra Pound, outlining his intended course of action to be conducted from his new beachhead:

> I am an intellectual thug who has been slowly accumulating a private arsenal with every intention of using it. In a mindless age every insight takes on the character of a lethal weapon. Every man of goodwill is the enemy of society. Lewis saw that years ago …. We resent or ignore such intellectual bombs. We prefer to compose human beings into bombs and explode political and social entities. Much more fun. Lewis clears the air of fug. We want to get rid of people entirely. And it is necessary to admire the skill and thoroughness with which we have made our preparations to this. I am not of the "we" party. I should prefer to de-fuse this gigantic human bomb by starting a dialogue on the

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[39] McLuhan to Norbert Wiener, 28 March 1951.

side-lines to distract the trigger-men, or to needle the somnambulists.[40]

Network

McLuhan's first major project in 1951 was to be a newspaper column called *Network*.[41] In light of his surviving meditations on the project, it appears that he intended his first article to take a fraction of his earlier contributions to the University of Toronto's Values Discussion Group to a wider audience. As Buxton reports, McLuhan had sought to present the arts as "a medium for unifying many fields," in contrast with the "common practise among laymen to consider art as separate from life," and subsequent ready acceptance of "the dichotomy between art and life."[42] In his proposal for a newspaper column McLuhan puts forward a more developed outline of the processes of the artist, and by extension the role and function of art and artist in society:

1. The artist in any age is the first and final clue to these processes (cognitive).

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[40] McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 22 June 1951. "The vast verbal clatter of talk of political justice and freedom stands in the way of social engineering," (McLuhan, "Snowballs or Tennis Balls Professor Hook," MS., 10). It is relevant to note here that the only figure McLuhan identified as a "trigger man" was Henry Kissinger: "…Henry Kissinger seems to be the current triggerman in this planetary game among the intervals of first, second, third and fourth worlds…," (McLuhan, "A Media Approach to Inflation," *The New York Times*, 21 September 1974, 29). During the late 1940s and early 1950s it appears that McLuhan deemed that John Lindberg, a Swedish nobleman associated with the United Nations and author of *The Foundations of Social Survival*, held an analogous position to that of Kissinger in the 1970s. See McLuhan, "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters," 173.

[41] It seems probable that *Network* grew out of his meditations on the need to start a magazine as mentioned in chapter one.

[42] William J. Buxton, "The 'Values' Discussion Group at the University of Toronto, February – May 1949," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 29, no. 2 (2004): 191.

2. The artist is engaged in perpetual discovery and criticism of his own process of cognition.

3. He [the artist] retraces these processes in order to disassociate them from all alien admixture.

4. By isolating and projecting, externally in objects, his own processes of awareness he achieves style.

5. The cognitive process raised to critical self awareness is the creative process in any field.

6. It is for this reason that all modern discovery naturally appears as a branch of aesthetics.

7. Creation in the arts and science is the process of retracing the stages of apprehension which have resulted in insight.

8. The artist of any age provides first and final clues to the process of reconstruction since he is typically engaged at the centre of the network of his milieu.

9. By isolating and externalizing his inner drama in carefully ordered objects and situations he offers the arrested means of contemplation to his time, an indispensable way of clarifying ordinary imprecision and confusion of the endless crowd messages circulating in the social network.

10. By current extensions of self awareness of the techniques of apprehension and communication make practical a "reamalgamergence" of the domains of time and space, knowledge and power.[43]

By the time McLuhan outlines his intent to bring his work under the aegis of communication theory and practise,[44] he indicates to Kenner that *Network* is no longer to be a newspaper column, but is to take the form of a single mimeographed sheet to be "sent out weekly or fortnightly to a

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[43] McLuhan, "Proposal for a Newspaper Column," MS., n.pag. Please note that I have itemised and numbered the contents of the "proposal."

[44] Effectively, McLuhan indicates that he intends to use Innis' work as a beachhead. The value being that, at the time, Harold Innis was the Dean of Graduate Studies at the University of Toronto, and together, with McLuhan's friendship with the vice-president of the University of Toronto, Claude Bissell, his (Innis's) work provided a powerful base from which to promote a new program, and guaranteed strong internal political support for such a program even if the Department of English considered McLuhan a maverick. Donald Theall, personal email to the author, 22 February 2006.

few dozen people in different fields."[45] The sheet, McLuhan adds, is to present an "intellectual landscape of an exciting kind," printed "on arse-wipe." The reason being, he says, is that it might "recall us to a sense of the human dimension" by inverting the situation of the "throwaways" (e.g. *Time*) "that appear on deluxe stationary, which "carries the unmistakable smudge of the inveterate arse-hole."[46] *Network*, McLuhan adds: "is not designed to substitute one class of message for another. It is an attempt to change the situation itself, just as telephones, radios, [and] television did."[47] Rather than ignoring "both Deluge and Babel," *Network*, McLuhan continues, "assumes extant social categories and functions" have gone, and that a "catastrophe has already occurred. It is not an effort to ward it off."[48]

In addition to indicating an end to his earlier program of recovery, reconstruction, and associated rear-guard activities directed towards resisting "that swift obliteration of the person,"[49] McLuhan's comments to Hugh Kenner on the aims and objectives of *Network* register the beginning of McLuhan's new offensive program of *resurrection*.[50] *Network*, McLuhan notes, is "a dove launched from an ark to discover not whether

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[45] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Ibid.

[49] McLuhan to Clement McNasby, 15 December 1945.

[50] My use of a "religious" tone is intended as McLuhan was well aware that what applied to the Classical Heritage of the West also applied to the Church, and presumably, visa-versa. Writing on D. H. Lawrence, McLuhan states that he is well aware that Catholics can learn from such a writer as Lawrence: "If the Christian 'myth' as a real operative element in our collective culture is dead, it is Lawrence who felt this most deeply and agonizingly; and it is he, too, who has seen most clearly that if it is ever to be recovered it will be, not by programmes of research, still less by moral exhortation, but resurrection," (McLuhan, "review of D. H. Lawrence and Human Existence, by William Tiverton, 1951," MS., n.pag.).

there is land but whether there are men."[51] Ergo, the new task McLuhan

sets *Network* is to "attempt to establish a primitive oral tradition

(dialogue) Mute and Jute once more."[52] The object of *Network*, McLuhan

states is: "to *impose* (at first) a nerve hook-up between social organs

which have lost touch with each other."[53] The way he suggests this is to

be achieved is by "illustrating the underlying unities of form which exist

where diversity is all that meets the eye."[54] Then, he notes, "it is hoped

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[51] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951. Something of McLuhan's shift in emphasis and orientation is echoed in "The New Criticism," that he appears to have written around the same time. Here, McLuhan argues: "The concern of the New Criticism for literary values and trying to prop up falling standards may be mistaken. We have conducted a merely defensive campaign and left the students entirely at the mercy of the new technological art around us," (McLuhan, "The New Criticism," MS., 13).

[52] Ibid. Mutt and Jute are characters in James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake*. See James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, Minerva paperback ed. (London: Minerva, 1992), 16–18. Here McLuhan is playing on and modifying Joyce's phrase, Mutt becomes Mute — something he does at regular intervals.

"…Mutt and Jute, and their mutual misunderstandings. These two characters exemplify not only the problematic confusion after Babel but at the same time the rivalry between two suitors of the same woman, two inhabitants of the same city or land, and all the enemy brothers of the book. Mutt and Jute are the prehistoric prototypes of antagonistic Shem and Shaun," (Geert Lernout, "The Beginning: Chapter I.1," in *How Joyce Wrote Finnegans Wake: A Chapter-by-Chapter Genetic Guide*. Ed. Luca Crispi and Sam Slote (Madison and London: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2007), 57).

[53] The "object" of *Network*, McLuhan says, "is not to spin or project analogies," "but to use them to illicit dialogue, to stimulate social organs and areas remote from our own." McLuhan adds: "the analogies may be smoke, but they are to be smoke signals also." Network, notes McLuhan, is pure experiment. As a "communication hook-up between live minds," "anything spoken over that hook-up is merely tentative," (McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951). McLuhan had expressed his commitment to the program of a "true analogist" two years prior. See McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 16 March 1949.

[54] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951. In his initial letter to Innis McLuhan writes: "I have been considering an experiment in communication, which is to follow the lines of this letter, in suggesting means of linking a variety of specialized fields by what might be called a method of esthetic analysis of their common features," (McLuhan to Harold A. Innis, 14 March 1951).

there will be a feedback of related perception from various readers which will establish a continuous flow."[55]

In the same letter, McLuhan indicates that *Network* is to "go to top men in many fields." His hope is that: "If 30–60 men can be found, gradually, and encouraged to talk to one another instead of to the robots … then something may come of it."[56] He also indicates that not only is *Network* intended to reach the highest calibre of people,[57] but it is geared to bypass those in the field of English (save Kenner). *Network*, McLuhan states, is intended for the "few people (of whom Harold Innis here is one…) who are highly trained in non-humanities so called, and who are immensely better equipped to revise the procedures in the humanities than the Brooks or Leaviss or Woodhouses (to take 3 wildly different bearings)." "These men," McLuhan states, "don't have to be told about the inadequacies of N.Y. [New York] Times or Luce stuff …. They know that culture is everything that's going on. Not just something that some people think *should* be going on."[58]

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[55] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951

[56] Ibid. The calibre of people McLuhan is talking about can be seen in his comments on Cleanth Brooks, of whom McLuhan notes: "I would '*hardly'* consider a suitable recipient. *Nor* anybody who should be saved from him. They are all amateurs."

[57] *Network* is clearly built on the failure of his earlier works to *make* an audience, by way of judicious use of a mailing list, and concentrating on smaller, elite audience. See McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951.

[58] Writing to Ezra Pound, McLuhan expresses similar sentiments: "I don't know whether you have heard about the present crowd at Mass. Inst. of Tech.? [[Massachusetts Institute of Technology] They show more promise than all the literary blokes on this continent. They are what you and Lewis used to refer to as 'serious characters.' At any rate my idea is to by-pass the literary cliques and characters altogether," (McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 5 January 1951).

James Joyce

What the elite audience that McLuhan sought to target with *Network* needed to learn, or at least as he saw it, was "that there is a way by which they can communicate with each other." They, including "the Giedions, the Gilsons, (and perhaps the Mumfords)," McLuhan says to Kenner, "…*need* to know much that has happened." They need to know: "how the techniques which they idly suppose to be their own private tools are doing very different work in other fields."[59] They also "need top insights into *Finnegans Wake* … Joyce is of immediate concern to the non-literate blokes. For that reason I'm not much concerned with getting Joyce across to those who think they are interested in him already.[60]

Given McLuhan's indication that he would "plug" Joyce on account of the significance of *Finnegans Wake*, we might do well to pause and briefly consider his commentary on Joyce (which spanned his entire career).[61] Joyce, at least as McLuhan saw it, had met the challenge of the new global unity resulting from telegraph, radio, and television, by the

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[59] Ibid.

[60] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951. "In a book which should be out in a few days from Vanguard Press (*The Folklore of Industrial Man*) I have tried to face that situation you describe on page 161 of your last book. It has been my experience, too, that those best fitted to receive traditional and artistic culture are not those with a nostalgic preference for it, but those who are responsive to the modes of technological cognition. In a word, it is easier to teach the arts (especially contemporary arts) to those who are participants in our technological culture than to those who sit on the sidelines registering distaste and incomprehension," (McLuhan to Norbert Wiener, 28 March 1951).

[61] I will touch on the contribution of James Joyce throughout the remainder of this study. In the main, however, I "downplay" Joyce in this dissertation in favour of Lewis as much has already been made of McLuhan's debts to Joyce. A comprehensive survey of McLuhan's relation to Joyce can be found across Donald Theall's erudite trilogy: *Beyond the Word: Reconstructing Sense in the Joyce Era of Technology, Culture, and Communication; James Joyce's Techno-poetics,* and *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan*. It is my hope that I have offered some complement to his contribution.

extension of the resources of language to include and reveal an inter-cultural unity through the very process of cognition and the process of art creation. In this respect, Joyce had successfully realised the task McLuhan saw as befitting new electric man:

> Perhaps we could sum up our problem at present by saying that technological man must betake himself to metaphor in contriving a new unified language for the multi-verse of cultures of the entire globe. All language or expression is metaphorical because metaphor is the seeing of one situation through another one.[62]

McLuhan also charges Joyce with being the first figure in Western history to mount a truly comprehensive theory of communication.[63] Joyce, McLuhan argues, not only revealed in the commonplace a profound existentialist metaphysics, but he showed that communication itself is the common ground for the study of the individual and society. Further, McLuhan saw Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* as: "the dramatization of every event known to archaeologists, anthropologists, physical scientists … which concerns the development of oral speech, inner speech, writing and writing as the direct means of physical and social architecture – walls, cities, families, societies, myths and religion."[64] To this study, McLuhan states, Joyce contributed not just awareness but a demonstration of individual cognition as the analogue and matrix of all communal actions, political, linguistic and sacramental:

> **What the Thunders Said…**
> Thunder 1: Paleolithic to Neolithic. Speech. Split of East/West. From herding to harnessing animals. baba bad babble. Black sheep, Ali Baba.
> bababadalgharaghtakamminarronnkonnbronntonneronn
> tuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntoohoohoordenenthurnuk!

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[62] McLuhan, "Culture Without Literacy," 21.

[63] McLuhan to Ralph Cohen, 13 July 1973.

[64] McLuhan, "Radio and Television in *Finnegans Wake*," MS., 2.

Thunder 2: Clothing as weaponry. Enclosure of private parts. First social aggression. kod husk Perkodhuskurunbarggruauyagokgorlayorgromgremmit ghundhurtthrumathunaradidillifaititillibumullunukkunun!

Thunder 3: Specialism. Centralism via wheel, transport, cities: civil life.
klik of wheel   clique in society. klas klikkaklakkaklaskaklopatzklatschabattacreppycrottygrad daghsemmihsammihnouithappluddyappladdypkonpkot![65]

Ideas Consultants

Network was never published, nor was it necessary. By 1952 McLuhan was afforded tenure at the University of St. Michael's College in the University of Toronto. That same year Harold Innis died, and shortly after, McLuhan's decision to relocate his project bore fruit by way of funding from the Ford Foundation. The Ford Foundation monies enabled McLuhan and Edmund Carpenter to co-found a new duet in the form of the Seminar in Culture and Communication, and a journal called *Explorations*. Before exploring these key projects, which are his most substantial achievement of the period (and certainly his first step towards establishing him as a figure of significance for both

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[65] McLuhan, and Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village* (Toronto: Penguin, 1968), 46–48. The section includes McLuhan's exegesis of seven more thunder-words. Discussing his later collaboration with his son, Eric McLuhan, McLuhan went on to note: "…basically we found that the four books of the *Wake* are allocated to the four levels of traditional exegesis. The ten thunders on the other hand are arranged as two five act plays, complementary and reciprocal. The first five concerning the drama of the Royal divorce, of eye and ear, and the second five is the festivity of the remarriage and the reassembly of Humpty Dumpty, the *sphairos*. Just as extraordinary as any of this was the discovery that the five characters of the *Wake* are enactments of the five parts of classical rhetoric, and that the five act structure covers the same five parts of rhetoric twice," (McLuhan to Dr. Cixous, 16 May 1974).

Communication and Media Studies), we need to digress, briefly, and consider another of McLuhan's "failed" projects of the period — Ideas Consultants. [66]

In 1955 McLuhan served as the catalyst for the formation of a small group called Ideas Consultants.[67] In addition to simply looking to make some money to offset the high costs of family, Ideas Consultants appears to have been intended to effect, via the sale of "ideas" directly to industry, much the same ends as *Network* — a "…complete revision of metaphysics and sensibility."[68] The "ideas" the group formulated for sale were diverse. While the main focus of the group appears to have been innovations in advertising, packaging, and design, the group also sought to sell "ideas" relating to the development of: (a) children's "educational toys," (b) audio technologies,[69] (c) non-specialist modular mechanics,[70]

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[66] In many respects, Ideas Consultants can be seen as anticipating the present-day enterprises formerly-known-as-advertising-agencies. For example, Saatchi and Saatchi Worldwide now touts itself as an "Idea Company."

[67] To date, this endeavour has received scant attention from critics, apparently, partly due to an academic bias that tends to exclude from discussion McLuhan's non-writing activities. Even McLuhan's biographers have tended to treat Ideas Consultants solely in terms of it being a money-making venture to offset the high cost of family. See Philip Marchand, *Marshall McLuhan, The Medium and the Messenger*, 1st MIT Press ed. (Cambridge, Mass,: MIT Press, 1998), 109; W. Terrence Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan*, 168. That said however, another reason Ideas Consultants has never been examined in any length is McLuhan's own efforts to keep his name out of such ventures as Prothex, See, McLuhan to Bill, 17 March 1973. Please note, no surname is indicated on the letter.

[68] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 4 March 1949.

[69] On the grounds that all speed up in intercommunications creates a need for the spoken rather than written word.

[70] Ideas Consultants proposed the creation of a portable combustion engine, that, when coupled with various modular additions, would free the user to use a singular mechanical engine to achieve a wide variety of ends including: mowing the lawn, killing rodents (via an extension from the engine's exhaust); charging the car battery, powering

(d) mechanisms for collective decision making,[71] and (e) copyright

reform.[72] While several of the groups inventions are clearly informed by

the same impulse as *Network*, e.g. the creation of airborne gift packages

(that would release prizes to stimulate neighbourhood discussion); and

hot, sealed airline dinners for everyday life (intended "to save work,

stress, and promote a more complete social life");[73] the idea most

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headlights, paint sprayer, drainage pump, generator, a small boat, garden cultivator, drag or circular saw, and concrete mixer.

[71] Ideas Consultants also provided the template for shows such as *America's Most Wanted (*20th Century Fox production that premiered in 7 February 1988). They made an offer to Walter Thompson Company to create a situation whereby 100, 000 minds would be brought to focus on a single problem. This was to involve taking a problem from management, sales, or industry, selecting a sponsor, dramatizing the problem for television, and then asking the viewing public to provide the solution for a reward.

[72] Ideas Consultants attempted to reform Canada's existing copyright law, by lobbying for a new basis for protection and reward that took into account new kinds of creativity in our technological culture.

[73] Fragments from the Ideas Consultants file at the Library and National Archives indicate that some of the ideas the group put forward included: Diet dinners — frozen meals set up to suit diet and reducing needs; soundproof, temporary inner walls; Tourist tape recordings — providing all travellers with recorded information, Transparent trainer potties, Nursery record album — a collection of traditional melodies to accompany such sets as *Childcraft*, Hit parade of the centuries – including "this was a song Shakespeare heard everyday," Television platters — to make movies and television programs available for sale like gramophone records, Vocational guidance information – posters, radio shows etc…informing youth of new jobs that have become available in times of accelerated change, Miniature prefabs — e.g. the junior prefab western village, dog house, or any other kinds of structure, Stout and Ale for Lunch in 6–8 ounce containers, Street balloon advertising in the place of sandwich boards, Make-your-own monster plastic toys — for Kellogg cornflakes or any packaged item, Gift subscriptions of flowers, Travel havens for hay fever sufferers — providing package tours to pollen free areas for the new, large, travel clientele; Cord reducer — operating on the same principle as the fishing reel, Telephone recorder and caller identification — to record the number dialled by the person making the call, Oversize book clip — a clip for library books too large to fit on the shelf, Personal soap dispenser in semi-liquid form, Aluminium pop containers, Luminous car paint, Peel-Aid — bandages mounted on a continuous strip of adhesive, and toiletries in single use capsules, Illuminated panels — as a service for subways,

illustrative of the harmony between Ideas Consultants and *Network* (if not McLuhan's wider project), can be seen in relation to what appears to be McLuhan's own invention, *Prohtex*.[74]

Working in association with his cousin, the biochemist Ross Hall, McLuhan and Hall had developed the necessary chemicals for absorbing urine odour, cheaply, simply, and in a way that could be included in any kind of fabric (apparently via a sort of band-aid principle). Perhaps, on the surface, *Prohtex* does not lend itself to further scrutiny. When seen in light of his comments in *The Mechanical Bride*, however, we begin to sense the harmony between this innovation and his project at large. In *The Bride* McLuhan takes issue with the "cult of hygiene" and its implied "disgust with the human organism which is linked with our treating it as a chemical factory."[75] By contrast, writing about *Prohtex*, McLuhan cast the invention as a response to the serious flaws of conventional deodorants, and by extension, the very cult of hygiene he saw that was in revolt against the age old human notion that healthy body odour is not only an aphrodisiac but a principal means of establishing human affinities. The Airwick type of device, McLuhan argues, simply numbs the faculty of smell and does not eliminate the odour itself. Similarly, he notes that personal deodorants, while stopping the flow of perspiration, inhibit odour-producing bacteria and end up harming skin tissue. The failure of both kinds, for McLuhan, is that they "prevent that basic human communication which occurs at all times by means of the aura or aureole

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buses, and street cars to focus attention of passengers by flashing street names and vehicles stops.

[74] While *Prohtex* originated from the Ideas Consultants milieu, the project was pursued by McLuhan until the early 1970s, by which time he and his family were well and truly financially secure.

[75] *The Mechanical Bride*, 61.

of unique non-excretory odours *which characterise every human being.*"[76] Legitimate body odour, which McLuhan notes is as authentic as a finger or voice print, is simply obliterated by current ideas of deodorant. By contrast *Prohtex*, McLuhan states, not only eliminates the excretory components in personal clothing, but permits selection and stress from among the natural components of ordinary body odour in a way which perfumes do not. Thus, *Prohtex* transforms body odour into a prime asset by selective control, and eliminates the need for bacteria killing chemicals and perfumes that blanket body odours and may destroy natural human inter-communication.[77] As McLuhan would note to Bill: "[*Prohtex*] does, in fact, make of each individual a unique medium and message. To that extent, I'm sure that we're on firm ground for launching a very natural product with universal appeal."[78] In sum, *Prohtex* can be seen as a direct attempt to effect the kind of change McLuhan appears to have sought via much of his literary criticism — it reaffirms the individual and works towards the restoration of the body to speech. As McLuhan had noted earlier to Kenner: "…Hopkins has failed to restore body to our speech. Eliot and Pound haven't enough body either. Without that complete revision of metaphysics and sensibility indicated briefly in the Winters essay there can be no real change."[79] Ideas Consultants however, never sold a single idea, *Prohtex* included.

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[76] McLuhan to Bill, 17 March 1973. Emphasis mine

[77] Ibid.

[78] McLuhan to Bill, 17 March 1973.

[79] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 4 March 1949. It appears that McLuhan deemed that one of the only figures who had succeeded in this respect was James Joyce. The "Winters essay" to which McLuhan points appears to be "The Difficulties of Yvor Winters or Rhymer Redivus." Here McLuhan takes issue with both Kantian and Marxist aesthetics. The real animus of the work is however directed at dualistic philosophy and the eclipse of analogy.

Culture and Communication Seminar

Prior to bringing his work under the aegis of "communication," McLuhan had noted to Hugh Kenner that "for us non-academic mavericks," applying for bursaries is largely a waste of time, and more like "buying a sweepstake ticket."[80] After relocating to the growing field of communication, however, one of McLuhan's funding proposals, submitted with Edmund Carpenter outlining their desire to conduct an inter-disciplinary research project in "communication," piqued the interest of the Ford Foundation who subsequently awarded $43,000 to the pair. With the award of the funds, McLuhan and Carpenter set in motion a seminar in culture and communication (to be held at the University of Toronto), and a journal called *Explorations*.[81]

To conduct the seminar, McLuhan (English) and Carpenter (Anthropology) assembled a small group of University of Toronto faculty members to begin a dialogue on "communication."[82] The group included: Carl Williams (Psychology), W. T. Easterbrook (Economics), and J. Tyrwhitt (Architecture and Town Planning).[83] McLuhan was appointed chairman of the group and subsequently set about trying to do for

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[80] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, nd, n.pag. Please note that several letters in the Hugh Kenner Collection from the Harry Ransom Humanities Research Center at the University of Texas are not dated nor carry any identifying numbers.

[81] The latter was intended to: (a) ballast the seminar by providing an impressive outlet for the work of the participants, (b) give the seminar the power to drive the standards of work to be met by outside critics, (c) act as a steering device towards many other groups working on related problems. McLuhan, "Report on the Ford Seminar at University of Toronto," 9.

[82] Looking back from the 1970s McLuhan would remark that the University of Toronto was a peculiarity. The federation of independent jurisdictions, of the Roman Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, Anglican, Presbyterian, and Secular universities into a single complex made for "an orally resonant environment of diverse dialogue that encourages the maverick individual," (McLuhan, "The University: Where It Is At," MS., 4, 8).

[83] See McLuhan, "Report on the Ford Seminar at University of Toronto."

"communication" and "media studies" what had taken place in the world of physics several years prior. [84] As McLuhan notes in a later letter to Edward T. Hall:

> Reading Heisenberg has made me feel that my media studies are at the state that nuclear studies had reached in 1924. But my heart sinks, because those nuclear studies were being urged forward by eager teams, and media studies enjoys no such support at all. But I am bold to say that many of the same techniques and concepts are needed for advancing media studies as were used for nuclear studies. But there is the huge difference, that media studies involve human lives far more profoundly than nuclear studies ever have done, or ever can do. [85]

It also appears that McLuhan, following Lewis, sought, through the seminar, to help bring the North-American mind to the level of verbal awareness of the present-day technological environment:

> As technology advances, verbalization declines – verbalization, that is to say, of the esthetic or human meaning and implications of technology. It needed a great poet-painter like Wyndham Lewis to bring the English mind (some of it) to the verbal level of awareness of this century. Book culture, which was all that came to America from Europe, was an excellent matrix for technological development, but proved mainly useless in educating eye and ear to emotional literacy about technology. [86]

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[84] McLuhan does not appear to start using the term "environment" (or anti environment) until the 1960s, following the launch of Sputnik and the concomitant explosion of ecology and/or environmentalism. Between 1951 and 1957 McLuhan tends to use "situation" or "vortex." The latter he equates with "total environment." See McLuhan to Wilfred Watson, 4 October 1964.

[85] McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 5 April 1962. Perhaps, it is more accurate to suggest that McLuhan sought to take "media studies" well beyond what happened in the world of physics. See "Typhon in America" where McLuhan asserts: "equally obvious to those who have thought of the interrelatedness of things is the fact that physical laws as described by Einstein and Newton are of the utmost triviality beside psychological and spiritual laws….," (McLuhan, "Typhon in America, typescript (I)," MS., 68).

[86] McLuhan, "Space, Time and Poetry," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 13, 13–14.

In pursuit of these ends, McLuhan, in his role as "Emperor," the creator of a new situation, set about "programming" and modelling the seminar on "operations research," involving the non-specialist exchange of gifted "amateurs," as employed by the Allied war effort during the Second World War.[87] The environment or "control situation"[88] he made privileged speech, and as a consequence, "work" at the seminar meant non-stop dialogue and exchange:

> Since most of our investigation is done orally. A great deal of my own research takes the form of oral discussion with friends and associates. I make most of my discoveries while actually in the process of uttering (i.e. outering) observations and ideas … our work is a creative exploration by dialogue.[89]

The coupling of the seminar with *Explorations* required seminar participants not only to talk, but also translate the talk of the seminar into print:

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[87] It might also be said that the operations of the group developed out of McLuhan and Easterbrook's earlier experiences with the Rockefeller funded "Values" Discussion Group at the University of Toronto. See William J. Buxton, "The "Values" Discussion Group at the University of Toronto, February – May 1949."

[88] We might say that McLuhan created "a control situation of low intensity: "And where outering is usually in HD [high-definition], with high stress on one sense or organ, art is outering in LD [low-definition] with compensating stress on variety of organs. Thus we got off the hook by control-situation of low intensity. And whereas high intensity means low participation and servitude, low intensity means high participation, yet can also be servitude; for the native is much more the servo-mechanism of his canoe than of the wheel. We can be more enslaved to our native tongues than to an acquired language. Is this what Lewis means by stressing the need to speak out of both sides of our mouth at once. Is art the second language that frees us from being servo-mechanisms of those primary technologies in which we outer our sense and organs directly?," (McLuhan to Wilfred and Sheila Watson, 27 May 1962.)

[89] McLuhan to John Nicholson, n.d. It is relevant to note that prior to establishing the seminar, McLuhan had mentioned to Pound that: "Nowdays there is no conversation at all. Teachers distrust talk as much as businessmen. It is a mirror in which they too readily see their own vacuous plight. So they won't have it. The first element is mud," (McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 22 June 1951).

To the visual alphabetic camp Joyce prescribed harmony, as to the auditory and analphabetic he prescribed the a b c deed. The return to tribalism and civilization as founded on the written word can only be avoided, said Joyce, if we constantly, and in all human affairs, translate the audible. That is the meaning of the *Wake*. Joyce in the *Wake* is the embodiment of common sense (the *sensus communis*) which constantly translates all sense modalities into one another.[90]

Together, the seminar and *Explorations* might be said to be an engine or circuit. In some respects, Ideas Consultants too might be seen as integral to the circuit insofar as it was also a bid to re-create an interface between city and university:[91]

Perhaps what has happened, in the past century especially, has been the completion of the cycle of mechanization of human learning and communication. But that cycle began in pre-history. We became aware of it only at the advanced stage when writing occurs. *Writing is the translation of the audible into the visible. The translation is literally, metaphor*. Recorded history is thus set upon a metaphor. Before the invention of that metaphor men had been shaping not visual but acoustical space …. For a culture of readers it seems strange to define speech as a series of acoustical gestures for arresting the mind. We had long ceased to speculate on this mystery until the mechanization of speech, image and gesture brought the wheel full circle.[92]

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[90] McLuhan, "Melodic and Scribal," *Renascence* 13, no. 1 (1960): 51.

[91] In "The University and the City" (1970) McLuhan outlines how the City, as dynamic "ground," retrieves and creates the figure of the university as dialogue. The university, as figure, fosters a dialogue ordered to the pursuit and contemplation of the knowledge of the nature of things. The city is ground to such a university, and is concerned with the application of such knowledge. It is here that we see the value in the Ideas Consultants project. However, later in the article we also see McLuhan outline the conditions that would make the same project meaningless: "The University as figure in an urban ground however looses this characteristic when it reaches the proportions of being an environment." Or in other words: "the *genius loci* is lost at the moment the spirit is swamped in the material ground," (McLuhan, ""The University and the City" MS., 1–4).

[92] McLuhan, "Space, Time and Poetry," 9. Emphasis mine.

Space, Time, Eye, and Ear

While "communication" served, initially, to unite the group, the minutes and notes of the seminar record the painful early stages of the group's activities. Members of the group appear to have struggled to get acquainted with each other's fields and their respective methodologies. A way forward was only achieved following McLuhan's bid to have seminar participants acquaint themselves with something in common. Subsequently, during the first year, McLuhan had the seminar focus on the work of Harold A. Innis (*Empire and Communications*, and the *Bias of Communication*). And for the second year, he had the seminar focus on the work of Siegfried Giedion (*Space, Time and Architecture*, and *Mechanization Takes Command*).[93] The strategy worked. In addition to permitting the group an opportunity to participate in a common activity beyond the "dialogue" itself, the work of Innis and Giedion furbished the seminar with the "primitive" common terms, "space" and "time."[94]

The "language" of the group grew quickly to include additional pairs of non-specialist, mutually supplementary antagonistic terms, befitting "Mute [Mutt] and Jute."[95] Perhaps the most significant additions

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[93] Writing to Tyrwitt several years later McLuhan records how successful the approach was with his media students: "I have been using *Mechanization Takes Command* with my media students. It helps to get them away from the content approach to media. The content approach is a total hang-up in the U.K. and the U.S.A. alike, and results from the inability to know figure from ground…," (McLuhan to Jacqueline Tyrwitt, 24 March 1972).

[94] It might easily be argued at this point that both Innis and Giedion served primarily as the means by which to get Lewis and Joyce in through the "backdoor." As I have already established, space and time were key to both Lewis and Joyce.

[95] It is relevant to note Campbell and Robinson synopsis of *Finnegans* Wake (which McLuhan was well aware of): "Running riddle and fluid answer, *Finnegans Wake* is a mighty allegory of the fall and resurrection of mankind. It is a strange book, a compound of fable, symphony, and nightmare — a monstrous enigma beckoning imperiously from the shadowy pits of sleep …. What, finally, is *Finnegans Wake* about? Stripping away

were "eye" and "ear." These two primary organs of perception were then used with space and time to probe and talk about various kinds of spaces.[96] The seminar minutes and notes record how, eventually, this practise led to the discovery of "acoustic" or auditory space by the psychologists. "Acoustic space" was quickly appropriated by McLuhan who saw it as a valuable tool to unify many aspects of a diverse field.[97] In his articles of the period, that might be said to be a refined record of the best conversation of the milieu, McLuhan characterizes "acoustic space" (or, on occasion, "auditory space"), the space created by the "ear," as "boundless." "Acoustic Space," he claims, does not present any continuum. Rather, he asserts that "acoustic space," as with the other non-visual spaces (e.g. osmic, kinetic, proprioceptive, and haptic), is entirely discontinuous:[98]

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its accidental features, the book may be said to be all compact of *mutually supplementary antagonisms*: male-and-female, age-and-youth, life-and-death, love-and-hate; these, by their attraction, conflicts, and repulsions, supply polar energies that spin the universe. Wherever Joyce looks in history or human life, he discovers the operation of these basic polarities. Under the seeming aspect of diversity — in the individual, the family, the state, the atom, or the cosmos — these constants remain unchanged. Amid trivia and tumult, by prodigious symbol and mystic sign, obliquely and obscurely (because these manifestations are both oblique and obscure), James Joyce presents, develops, amplifies and re-condenses nothing more nor less than the eternal dynamic implicit in birth, conflict, death, and resurrection," (Joseph Campbell, and Henry M. Robinson, *A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake* (Novato, CA: New World Library, 2005), 3, 12–13).

[96] Here the significance of Julien Benda should also be readily apparent.

[97] McLuhan was just as much a benefactor of the milieu as any of the other participants. In many respects, McLuhan's operations as "chairman" were that of the emperor-cum-clown. See *Take Today,* 120. Subsequently, his role at the seminar can be taken as more akin to the role of dialogue "facilitator" as outlined by David Bohm. See David Bohm, *On Dialogue,* ed. Lee Nichol (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

[98] McLuhan to P. F. Strawson, April 17, 1969. It is relevant to note at this point that a systematic account of McLuhan's "anthropology" has yet to be conducted — perhaps it is because of McLuhan's "wavering" on the matter. McLuhan occasionally refers to the

The essential feature of sound, however, is not its location, but that it be, that it fill space .… Auditory space has no point of favoured focus. It's a sphere without fixed boundaries, space made by the thing itself, not space containing the thing. It is not pictorial space, boxed in, but dynamic, always in flux, creating its own dimensions moment by moment. It has no fixed boundaries; it is indifferent to background. The eye focuses, pinpoints, abstracts, locating each object in physical space, against a background; the ear, however, favours sound from any direction. We hear equally well from right or left, front or back, above or below. If we lie down, it makes no difference, whereas in visual space the entire spectacle is altered. We can shut out the visual field by simply closing our eyes, but we are always triggered to respond to sound. Audition has boundaries only in terms of upper and lower thresholds.[99]

By contrast, the eye, McLuhan asserts, also on account of its "character" (bounded, directed, and limited), is "the only sense that provides a continuum in space."[100]

Had you considered that visual space has very peculiar properties not shared by any of the other senses, namely, space that is continuous, connected, homogenous and static, i.e. Euclidean and resulting from the abstraction of the visual faculty from its interplay with the rest of the sensorium.[101]

"conventional" five-fold sensorium. At other times, however, he claims he operates with a Lucretian four-fold sensorium. See McLuhan and Bruce R. Powers, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 132. Further, in the late 1960s McLuhan appears to at least accommodate Daniel Cappon's uses an eight-fold sensorium (a combination of inner and outer senses); and insofar as McLuhan was steeped in traditional Catholic learning he would have been well aware of the ancient patristics' use of a ten-fold sensorium (where the five outer senses are mirrored as inner senses). This matter demands further elucidation, but can only receive mention here.

[99] McLuhan, and Edmund Carpenter, "Acoustic Space," in *Media Research*, 41.

[100] McLuhan to P. F. Strawson, 17 April 1969.

[101] McLuhan to W. K. Wimsatt, 20 December 1973.

As the seminar turned its attention to the scrutiny of "sensory modes as they respond to technologies,"[102] various "technologies" were seen (or heard) to impose or cause or promote either visual or acoustic effects:[103]

> Artists have always known that any art form has the power of imposing its own assumptions on the beholder. *Any medium of communication is, like an art form, an extension of a particular sense.* Speech is an extension of all our senses at once. The mix or proportion of our senses made external to us ("uttered" = outered), the ratio or mix or proportion of our sense involved in speed or radio or photography, imposes non-verbally the parameters or frame of all human operations. The unspoken and even subliminal assumptions in any pattern of human association are dictated by the available means of codifying experience and moving information.[104]

For example, "visual space," McLuhan would frequently assert, has tended to be a product of alphabetic writing. By contrast, as he asserts in "Printing and Social Change," the telegraphic press created or caused acoustic effects:[105]

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[102] McLuhan, "Little Epic," MS., n.pag.

[103] "Visual space alone of all the space discriminated by our various senses is continuous, uniform and connected. Any technology that extends the visual power imposes these properties upon all other spaces," (McLuhan to Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, 11 May 1964).

[104] McLuhan, "Popular/Mass Culture: American Perspectives," in *Understanding Me*: *Lectures and Interviews*, eds. Stephanie McLuhan, and David Staines (Toronto: McClelland Stewart, 2003), 17. The operative assumption here is that the arts are seen as constituting the essential type of communication. See McLuhan, "Symbolist Communication," MS., 4.

[105] It is here that the charge that McLuhan was a "technological determinist" arises. For example see Theodore Roszak, "The Summa Popologica of Marshall McLuhan," in *McLuhan: Pro & con*, 268; Raymond Williams, *Television: Technology and Cultural Form* (New York: Schocken, 1975), 126; and Toby Goldberg, "An Examination, Critique and Evaluation of the Mass Communication Theories of Marshall McLuhan," (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1971), 509. To which McLuhan would reply: "I am not here

> If one studies the character of auditory space, the space preferred in oral culture, the central fact that emerges is that an auditory space is a spherical field of simultaneous relations. Such a field of relations is precisely what comes into existence by means of the telegraphic press. Space and time are reduced to the point where the globe as seen on the page becomes a simultaneous field of relations. That is to say, the press has become essentially auditory even while remaining a visual experience. This is the kind of reversal which overtook the manuscript with the advent of print.[106]

We can see another example in McLuhan's later comments made to Barbara Ward:

> Electric speed is approximately the speed of light, and this constitutes an information environment that has basically an acoustic structure. At the speed of light, information is simultaneous from all directions and this is the structure of the act of hearing, i.e. the message or effect of electric information is acoustic, even when it is read in a newspaper with a mosaic of world-wide items under a single date-line. The Symbolists long ago, and Yeats, Joyce, Pound, Eliot in this century, spent their entire lives expounding the aesthetics of the resonant intervals of acoustic space. The same resonant intervals have become the basis of modern quantum mechanics.[107]

Again, the procedure itself might be said to follow that of Joyce, whom McLuhan attributes with having (re-)discovered that all technologies are events of human biology. As McLuhan notes to both Ralph Cohen and Sheila Watson:

> Ralph Waldo Emerson wrote: "The human body is a magazine of inventions .... All the tools and engines on earth are only

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engaged in trying to prove a materialist determinism of historical change, since the very idea of determinism, of lineal cause and effect, supposes a continuity and connectedness that never existed in any historical situation," (McLuhan, "The Hidden Information Environment," (Address to the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, Toronto, 15 April 1977), MS., 7).

[106] McLuhan, "Printing and Social Change," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 1, 30.

[107] McLuhan to Barbara Ward, 9 February 1973.

extensions of its limbs and senses." Joyce uses the "magazine" metaphor throughout the *Wake* apropos "the magazine wall where the maggies seen all", i.e. the magi, the wise people saw the entire story of human technology in the structure of the human body.[108]

After talking to you last night it occurred to me that the real gap in Lewis's knowledge concerned the power of technologies to be environmental in entire independence of art as environmental …. *Technologies are extensions of the body. Even electric technology is such. However, the psychic and social saturation resulting from electric extension of the nerves is much swifter than effects of mere extensions to our physical being, such as clothing, or wheel, or mirrors*. The environmental role of art in the thought of Lewis is spiritual rather than physical. This may have led him to ignore the effects of technology. Yet it was precisely new technologies turning old environments into art form that has peopled the earth with "apes of God." He is literally inclined to regard the artist as a god. The spiritual rival of technology in creating both the "demon of progress" and the "apes of God" is what seems to have preoccupied him. Naturally in the electric age this rivalry is far more intense than ever before …. Lewis seems to have thought that the environmental was merely a war between good and bad art.[109]

Light On and Light Through

Additional terms emerged from the dialogue and the group's efforts to

discuss the common features of their respective disciplines and

methodologies. Another set of terms that McLuhan appears to have

appropriated from the dialogue was the contrast between "light *on*" and

"light *through*." The phrase "light through" appears to have arisen from a

comparison between symbolism (and other discontinuous modes) and

television. "Light on," by contrast, was used to illustrate an analogical

relationship seen to exist between modes of prose and poetry that admit

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[108] McLuhan to Ralph Cohen, 13 July 1973.

[109] McLuhan to Sheila Watson, 8 October 1964. Emphasis mine.

a greater admixture of rhetoric and "connection" with film.[110] In short, discontinuity and juxtaposition permit "light through" where connection and linearity work by "light on":

> With TV, the viewer is the screen. He is bombarded with light impulses that James Joyce called the "Charge of the Light Brigade" that imbues his "sealskin with sobconscious inklings." The TV image is visually low in data. The TV image is not a still shot. It is not photo in any sense, but a ceaselessly forming contour of things limned by the scanning-finger. The resulting plastic contour appears by light through, not light on, and the image so formed has the quality of sculpture and icon, rather than of picture. The TV image offers some three million dots per second to the receiver. From these he accepts only a few dozen each instant, from which to make an image.[111]

The distinction and contrast also enabled McLuhan to point at different organisational principles operative in the plastic arts. For example, McLuhan presents the painting of Kepes as having the quality of light through:

> From the air at night, the seeming chaos of the urban area manifests itself as a delicate embroidery on a dark velvet ground. Gyorgy Kepes has developed these aerial effects of the city at night as a new art form of "landscape by light through" rather than "light on." His new electric landscapes have complete congruity with the TV image, which also exists by light through rather than by light on.[112]

By pressing the analogy further, light on and light through become terms that permit the verbalisation of technologies and their effects. They also

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[110] See McLuhan, "The Electronic Revolution: Revolutionary Effects of New Media," in *Understanding Me*, 2.

[111] *Understanding Media*, 313. As an aside, it is interesting to note how McLuhan appears to be setting the "scanning-finger" of television in relation to the "writing on the wall" as interpreted by Daniel at Belshazzar's feats.

[112] Ibid., 129.

become a means of comparing and contrasting "objects" and sensibilities

across different periods of history:

> In the first place, television does not present a visual image, but an
> X-ray icon which penetrates our entire organism. Joyce called it
> "the charge of the light barricade"—part of the Crimean war
> against mankind. Stained-glass images are not visual either, since
> they are defined by light through, as in Rouault paintings. The
> structure of these images is audile-tactile, as in abstract art, both of
> Symbolist and Cubist kind.[113]

In sum, keeping in mind that it is a short summation and that it would be

relatively easy to add more items here,[114] "light on" establishes a basis for

the contemplation of the analogical relationships between: symbolism ~

television image ~ the paintings of Kepes and Rouault ~ cubism ~

sculpture ~ icon ~ stained glass windows (where "~"denotes what Levin

calls "significant comparability").[115]

Dialogue

What needs to be stressed at this juncture is that neither the terms (e.g.

time and space, eye and ear, light-on and light-through), nor the various

characterizations of technological effects, nor the analogies that emerged

are the most significant aspects of McLuhan's praxis here.[116] Rather, the

"tools" and "language" of the seminar ought to be considered

subservient to the "dialogue" which they created and sustained.

Dialogue is both the method and primary end of both the seminar and

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[113] McLuhan to Barbara Ward (Lady Jackson), 9 February 1973.

[114] One of the omissions at this point is a discussion of the later Krugman report. See
Herbert E. Krugman, "Brain wave Measures of Media Involvement," *Journal of
Advertising Research* 11, no. 1 (1971): 3–9.

[115] See Richard Levin, *The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama*. (Chicago and
London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 10.

[116] It is McLuhan's commitment to dialogue and efforts to create dialogue that has made
him so difficult for some of his critics and commentators.

Explorations. The small handful of general and universal terms were appropriated on account of their adequacy for discussing changing patterns of organization and sensibility and for enabling seminar participants to communicate across their various domains by eliminating unwanted specialist noise — a procedure McLuhan referred to as "frequency modulation":

> There is a real, living unity in our time, as in another, but it lies submerged under a superficial hubbub of sensation. Using Frequency Modulation techniques, one can slice accurately through such interference, whereas Amplitude Modulation leaves you bouncing on all the currents.[117]

The elimination of specialist noise was integral to the dialogue that was mandated to transgress disciplinary lines.

McLuhan appears to have understood dialogue as a kind of interface, and process, requiring at least a double act of translation. Or, in other words, dialogue, as McLuhan both understood and practised it, is not "debate." Nor is it "dialectical." McLuhan presents dialogue in "Culture Without Literacy" as an act of making and re-making: "For the dialogue compels each participant to see and recreate his own vision through another sensibility."[118] Alternatively, as McLuhan and Nevitt state in the later work *Take Today*, dialogue is, "a process of creating the new" that "came before, and goes beyond, the *exchange* of 'equivalents' that merely reflect or repeat the old."[119]

The significance McLuhan affords dialogue is readily apparent when we consider that the very goals, aims, and objectives of the seminar

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[117] McLuhan to Harold A. Innis, 14 March 1951.

[118] McLuhan, "Culture Without Literacy," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 6, 20.

[119] *Take Today*, 22.

itself were subject to and arose out of dialogue.[120] McLuhan's rationale for affording dialogue a pre-eminent place can be seen in his own later writings, where he, both privately and publicly, presents dialogue as the ideal at every level of communication. For example, in a letter to David Riesman, McLuhan writes:

> I have long had an indifference to any form of attention that is not based on perceived insight. Opinions, pro or con, are of no interest unless they are backed up by discoveries and knowledge that would contribute to dialogue.[121]

In a later television appearance McLuhan argues that "human dialogue" is and must ever be the basic form of all civilization (the alternative to which is violence):[122]

> Thus the basic requirement of any system of communication is that it be circular, with, of course, the possibility of self-correction.

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[120] The Minutes of the fifth meeting record a discussion whereby Carpenter proposes that "language" was the basic study of the seminar. Others however, probably McLuhan himself, say that the mainline work of the seminar was the distortion of message by the medium of the book, newspaper, radio, television. McLuhan's correspondence of the period indicates that other aims and objectives were probably tabled e.g. that the seminar examine popular culture. Writing to Walter Ong, McLuhan notes: "With symbolism and pop kultch I find the snag to be that people are predisposed to discuss it but not look at it. We must devise a group which can do this and gradually make its example felt. It is useless to theorize the situation," (McLuhan to Walter Ong, 16 August 1954).

[121] McLuhan to David Riesman, 31 January 1972.

[122] McLuhan, "Television is Cool and Radio is Hot," *Monday Conference*, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 27 June 1977. That said however, McLuhan also acknowledged that violence is not always negative – only accidentally so. Writing to the editor of *Playboy* McLuhan notes how: "T. S. Eliot's poem, *The Wasteland* is an act of violence and creative innovation directed towards re-establishing aesthetic and social order," (McLuhan to A. C. Spectorsky, 20 January 1970). Further, as McLuhan would later note: "…prayer, being one of the most extreme forms of violence, since it is conducted by supernatural force," (McLuhan, "Violence of the Media," MS., 1).

That is why presumably the human dialogue is and must ever be the basic form of all civilization.[123]

We can also see the significance McLuhan afforded dialogue in his diagnosis of his time. Throughout his entire oeuvre McLuhan presents the absence of dialogue, with its inherently "self-corrective nature," as one of if not *the* most problematic feature of the contemporary situation. In his review of *A Gerald Manley Hopkins Reader* McLuhan notes how "…modern communication has no feedback." A figure on the radio, he states, might still "be an isolated private figure with no experience of his audience." This "divorce" between artist and public, he argues, seems inherent in new media, and is fatal for the arts given that "it starves and misguides them."[124] McLuhan's terminology here is less than adequate. We can, however, get a better approximation of what he is trying to point at by supplementing his comments with others of the period. In "Culture Without Literacy" McLuhan argues:

> The radical imperfection in mechanical media is that they are not circular. So far they have become one-way affairs with audience research taking the place of genuine human vision, heckling and response. There is not only the anonymity of press, movies and radio but also the factor of scale. The individual cannot discuss a problem with a huge, mindless bureaucracy like a movie studio or a radio corporation. [125]

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[123] McLuhan, "Culture Without Literacy," 20.

[124] McLuhan, "A Hopkins Reader," review of *A Gerald Manley Hopkins Reader*, by John Pick, MS., 9.

[125] McLuhan, "Culture Without Literacy," 20. The ramifications of which are also clearly delineated in the article: "…the ordinary desire of everybody to have everybody else think alike with himself has some explosive implications today. The perfection of the *means* of communication has given this average power-complex of the human being an enormous extension of expression," (Ibid., 5).

And writing to Hugh Kenner in 1951 McLuhan emphasises how, in the absence of dialogue, technologies tend to consume their human operators:

> They *assume*, (consume) the consumer. Any instrument under human control acquires human characteristics (point not understood by Norb. [Norbert] Wiener). But any instrument that goes out of human control (via commercial appetites) swallows the operator *and* consumers. Not just figuratively. "Man will become dirigible" means both "directable [sic] like a missile" and "inflated, conceited, empty, inhuman, stratospheric.[126]

Throughout the rest of his career McLuhan continues to experiment with new ways of discussing the absence of dialogue. Perhaps, his most successful "formulation" was to talk about media as extensions and/or ablations. Writing to Wilfred and Sheila Watson during the early 1960s McLuhan states: "Having a look at W L's [Wyndham Lewis's] *Inferior Religions* … was a shock. Right there on the first page was my media theory — media as ablations of sense and function." McLuhan continues: "Pre-literate man outers his whole body in his arts. But also, it is the *outered thing*, not the outering, that exercises the ablative or numbing and hypnotising effect. Man becomes a puppet of what he outers of himself." This, McLuhan adds, is the "theme of Blake's *Jerusalem* …. It is the innering of what has been outered that hypnotizes,"[127] and by extension, deprives man of his ability to dialogue. Disregarding for a moment the problems in his "formulations," any of these conditions: (a) man as "dirigible," (b) outering as exercising an ablative or numbing and

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[126] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951. The letter is also significant as it is one of the sites where McLuhan indicates that his attention has shifted from being primarily interested in "content" to a more comprehensive survey that includes "form." He says to Kenner that the media… "are dramatic components in *our* situation, and it is not what they say but what they *do* that has to be considered," (Ibid.)

[127] McLuhan to Wilfred and Sheila Watson, 6 May 196?. Please note that the identification of the exact year of this letter is problematic.

hypnotising effect, or even, (c) instruments extending their pretensions beyond their sphere and beyond the period of their usefulness (as outlined earlier in my discussion of "Creative Thought and Pragmatism"), bring us to the crux of the matter. As McLuhan understood and practised dialogue, it is the counterpoint of all these conditions. Dialogue requires fully conscious, inter-dependent "individuals" to be in *touch*. "Touch," McLuhan argues, is the space of the gap, the resonant interval, *not the connection*. It is the gap, rather than the perfect, singular circle that permits change:

> If there were any connections there could be no change. The action is where the gap is, change requires the resonant and abrasive interval … whether in the tragic flaw of characters or the chemical bonds of Linus Pauling. The gap created by the complementary forms of white and coloured, of affluence and poverty, war and peace … all engender change.[128]

Without the possibility of real change, that can only come from detachment, a state of freedom, and individual human autonomy — being "in touch" — there can be no dialogue:

> I had not thought of outering as a rectangular wall, but prison it is. Even in the concept of feedback, crude as it is, the return message turns the receiver into a servo-mechanism.[129]

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[128] McLuhan to the Editor of *New Society*, 10 March 1970. Similarly, writing to the editor of *Playboy* that same year, McLuhan argues that without the discontinuity or interval or gap that comes from "getting in touch" there cannot be the sudden confrontation or awareness which opens the eyes to error. This, he notes, is why the tragic hero must learn through suffering and experience. McLuhan to A. C. Spectorsky, 20 January 1970.

[129] McLuhan to Wilfred and Sheila Watson, 27 May 1962. In "A Fresh Perspective on Dialogue," McLuhan develops the themes, noting that when one sense or faculty is extended in isolation, e.g. eye or ear, because the extension (and consequent ablation) constitutes as William Blake explained a rigidly enclosed system which reinvades the open system of human awareness with metamorphic power. McLuhan, "A Fresh Perspective on Dialogue," *The Superior Student* 4 (January/February 1962): 5.

And without dialogue, McLuhan saw, man is merely inclined to "think (and innovate and act) in those modes suitable to and controlled by the media themselves."[130]

> It would be well to bear in mind the observation of Wyndham Lewis about the man who is in harmony with his technologies — "the well-adjusted man is a robot" – his humanity has been put off and he is a servo-mechanism only.[131]

> New communications media, even before they become so familiar to be unseen, lead the communicators to think (and innovate and act) in those modes suitable to and controlled by the media themselves.[132]

In the absence of dialogue, McLuhan saw that man is inclined to either one of two extremes: "robotism,"[133] or its twin, "angelism."[134] The former, according to McLuhan, is a state of pure adaptability,[135] conformity,[136] and somnambulism (possibly engendered by deep audience participation in their own audience participation). The later, Angelism,

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[130] McLuhan, "Technology and Media," MS., 8.

[131] McLuhan, and Eric McLuhan, *Laws of Media: The New Science* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1988), 65.

[132] McLuhan, "Technology and Media," (paper presented at the Sixth ICOHTEC Symposium, 18 August 1977) MS., 8.

[133] "The term 'robotism' therefore, as we use it, does not mean the mechanically rigid behaviour of 'Rossum's Universal Robots,' as Karel Capek used the word in his 1938 play. Rather robotism in this context means the suppression of the conscious 'observer-self,' or conscience, so as to remove all fear and circumspection, all encumbrances to ideal performance. Such a man, as Suzuki says, 'becomes as the dead, who have passed beyond the necessity of taking thought about the proper course of action…Therefore to say I will live as one already dead' means a supreme release from conflict," (*The Global Village*, 67).

[134] *The Global Village*, 69.

[135] McLuhan, "Coping in a Troubled Society," (Paper presented at the Centaur Enterprises Symposium, 1978), MS. n.pag.

[136] McLuhan, interviewed by anon., "Genius or Whimsy? Some McLuhanisms." *The Sunday Post of Canada*, 13 May 1979.

McLuhan presents as a state of: "…rigidity of point of view which is largely a consequence of linear and visual logic. It is best characterized as promoting confrontation and fragmentation, some of the chief elements in the illusion of objectivity."[137] Where Angelism emphasizes "the eye over the ear," Robotism emphasises the ear over the eye.

Organising Ignorance for Discovery

McLuhan also repeatedly held up dialogue as the best mode of pedagogy, for both teacher and learner: "The Dialogue is a zeroing in on target procedure which exacts from teacher and learner a speed and rigor of precision unknown to literary procedures and the book as teaching machine."[138] Dialogue, McLuhan saw, with its "everyway roundabout that swarms over problems," fosters a co-operative and co-creative rather than a passive, consumer approach to learning:[139]

> Speedy oral processing of problems permits that they be tackled from many directions simultaneously, in the pattern which James Joyce revived for *Finnegans Wake*: an "every way roundabout with intrusions from above and below." Even the metaphor of the theatre which More invokes, calls to mind a similar switch in method in drama, for the medieval stage had been cyclic and simultaneous in presenting many scenes and episodes at once like a three-ring circus.[140]

McLuhan also appears to have regarded dialogue as a pre-eminent tool for research given that it creates a space for observation from *within* the situation:

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[137] *The Global Village*, 69.

[138] McLuhan, "Project in Understanding New Media, 'Media Log'," MS., 7.

[139] McLuhan, "A Fresh Perspective on Dialogue," *The Superior Student* 4 (January/February 1962): 2–6.

[140] McLuhan, "Printing and Social Change," 14.

> What I am suggesting is that it is somewhat unrealistic to offer any merely external history of the media of communication, since their history in shaping the inner life of man and society has been and is inseparable from their outer action. Moreover, the boundaries between inner and outer effects of the media are confused.[141]

Perhaps an even better understanding of McLuhan's preference for dialogue as a research procedure can be had in and through his contrast of the "theoretical" approach with the "mosaic method" (the later, in effect, being another name for dialogue realised in print). In "General Introduction to the Languages and Grammars of the Media," by way of commentary on the work of Georg Von Bekesy, McLuhan shows how the theoretical approach tends to formulate a problem in relation to what is already known, extends accepted principles, and then tests experimentally. By contrast, the mosaic approach, on account of its polyphonic nature (dialogue), McLuhan argues, takes each problem for itself, with little reference to the field in which it lies, and seeks to find the relations and principles that hold within the circumscribed area.[142] Throughout the essay McLuhan presents the "theoretical approach" as conceptually inadequate and futile. His grounds for the charge is that "theory," in this sense, is arguably, steadfastly Newtonian, and mono-logical, proceeding in a linear fashion, by connection. Further, he asserts, it seeks to observe from a *single* point of view. By contrast, McLuhan argues that the mosaic approach (which Bekesy champions for research of acoustic problems and phenomenon) is superior given that it works by discontinuity and simultaneity. Further, the mosaic method proceeds, as it were, from the gaps in knowledge — from ignorance.

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[141] McLuhan, "A Historical Approach to the Media," *Teachers College Record* 57, no. 2 (Spring 1955): 106.

[142] McLuhan, "General Introduction to the Languages and Grammars of the Media," MS., 2–3.

It is in considering "ignorance," and his practise he referred to as "organising ignorance for discovery" that we are brought into the very heart of McLuhan's procedure. Starting from "ignorance" and "organising ignorance for discovery" informs his rhetorical praxis in the role of *inventio* — "ignorance" supplies the starting point for any dialogue:[143]

> To be able to dialogue with modern people caught in extremely complicated situations requires precisely the encyclopaedic range of awareness of the ancient humanist. That is, the complexity of the contemporary world demands a *nonspecialist preparation of awareness* which is almost poetic in its scope and sensitivity to pattern. *The answer to all contemporary problems are to be found in the problems themselves through dialogue* in the eco-world: you've got to have somebody to listen to you, just as they need somebody to listen to them. Opposition to the mainstream is for steering past breakdown to breakthrough.[144]

McLuhan makes several claims about the practise and procedure throughout his work. He asserts that proceeding via ignorance is necessary under electric conditions: "In an information environment the most valuable resource is the recognition of specialists' ignorance."[145] He also claims that: "understanding the entrance to knowledge through the backdoor of ignorance is basic to an understanding of media and technology."[146] As McLuhan notes to Fredrick Wilhelmsen:

> Recently I have been aware that my own concern in media is entirely with causes. My approach to the causes is backwards

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[143] In many respects, McLuhan's procedure of "organising ignorance for discovery," particularly insofar as it is paired with his use of figure and ground, also serves McLuhan's rhetoric in the role of *Memoria*. See McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto, Buffalo, and London: University of Toronto Press, 1962. Reprinted 2000), 105–107. This matter can only receive mention here.

[144] *Take Today,* 292. Emphasis mine.

[145] Ibid.*,* 287.

[146] McLuhan, "At the Flip Point of Time – The Point of More Return?," *Communication Journal* 24, no. 4 (Autumn 1975): 102.

from effects. This is an approach used in symbolism from Poe to Valery. There are strong intimations of the method in Wordsworth's idea of poetry as "emotion recollected in tranquillity", i.e. tracking backwards from effects to cause by replay. It is everywhere in Coleridge whose idea that knowledge could best be acquired by starting with a man's ignorance. In effect, Coleridge is saying that the area of assimilation and cultural environment creates a vast ignorance in each of us. Once this area is spotted it is easy to fill in the conditions and assimilations that create it. Symbolism initiated the technique of separating the effects from causes, studying the effects in order to learn the causes. It is the technique of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, and necessarily the technique of Darwin's *Origin of Species*.[147]

Despite being everywhere present in his works, McLuhan does little to explicate or provide a systematic account of his procedure. If pressed to provide a short answer, McLuhan would probably say that organizing ignorance for discovery entails attending to the resonant interval, the gap between matter and form, and the *interplay* between figure and ground. Perhaps one of the reasons McLuhan never explicated his procedure is that if his "procedure" were to be systematized it would probably be shown as strange and complex amalgam of what he saw were the common features of: Cicero, Nicholas of Cusa, Freud, Bill Key, Henry James, Dixon, Poe, Aquinas, Lusseyran, Coleridge, Robert Martin Adams,[148] operations research, and the new physics. It is also probable that any attempt to systematize his approach would fail. The crux of the matter is that "organising ignorance for discovery" is an essentially wild, undomesticated, and playful way of swarming over a complex situation. It is an "intuitive, all-at-once method of intellectual grasp,"[149] that tries to get beyond mental sets, habits, and acculturated biases and assumptions.

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[147] McLuhan to Fredrick Wilhelmsen, 18 January 1971.

[148] Robert M. Adams, *Nil: Episodes in the Literary Conquest of Void During the Nineteenth Century*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966).

[149] *Take Today*, 102.

Something of the wild nature of the procedure should be evident in the following excerpt from *Take Today*:

> Discoveries issue from "the resonant interval" of quantum mechanics rather than the visual connection of rational systems. Many people of professional demeanour "shun the punman," having been warned that verbal play is the lowest form of wit …. James Joyce knew that any word was a storehouse of innumerable human perceptions that could be released by abrasive interplay with other words. Given any two words, he could invent a verbal universe. The following fugue or dance of tones and gestures, if read aloud, provides a dramatic account of organized ignorance.
>
> ### The Past-Present Future of Invention
>
> In the ignorance that implies impression that knits knowledge that finds the nameform that whets the wits that convey contacts that sweeten sensation that drives desire that adheres to attachment that dogs death that bitches birth that entails the ensuance of existentiality. *Finnegans Wake*.
>
> Starting with the gap of ignorance that generates many-layered perception, Joyce moves to the interweaving of new patterns of knowledge.[150]

While I have claimed here that McLuhan's "method" largely defies systematization, we can observe clearly several concrete applications of the procedure. For example, for the analysis of "literature," organising ignorance for discovery might simply entail attending to the important things that men did not say — the great "silences."[151] The operative assumption here is that:

> The thoughts of every age and the experience of all men are open to the poet but he cannot avoid the language of his time. It is in the

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[150] *Take Today*, 102–103. The citation included as part of this quotation is taken from *Finnegans Wake*.

[151] McLuhan, "Literature as Material for British History," MS., 8. As I have already shown, the great silences are of great significance in terms of McLuhan's earlier study of Nashe.

language of men at large that the pressure of social and intellectual tendencies can be read. For where but in men's principle means of communication are we so likely to detect the beginning and nature of change in their relationships, and in what they felt and had to say to each other?[152]

For the analysis of "media" it might, by contrast, entail attending to the gaps between various media: "Spoken Word (Mirror of the mind: canon is mirror of the voice, when one voice repeats or reflects;"[153] "The content of writing is speech; but the content of speech is mental dance, non-verbal ESP."[154] In both these examples McLuhan is drawing attention to the fecund properties of the "gaps" that exist between the mind, speech, and writing:

> The art and science of this century reveal and exploit the resonating bond in things. All boundaries are areas of maximal abrasion and change. The interval or gap constitutes the resonant or musical bond in the material universe. It is where the action is. To the naïve classifiers a gap is merely empty. They will look for connections instead of bonds. They will seek the authors' point of view instead of their probing of process. Such readers will expect value judgements instead of understanding. With medieval dread they abhor vacuums. But by directing perception on the interfaces of the processes in ECO-land, all gaps become prime sources of discovery.[155]

Alternately, "organising ignorance for discovery" might simply try to locate what is missing. For example, McLuhan asks a class during an Address at Georgetown University: "What is missing from our knowledge of media that would give us the power of prediction and control over their impact on variously assorted cultures and

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[152] Ibid., 9

[153] *The Global Village*, 171.

[154] McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Counterblast*, 23. Here I owe a debt to Bob Dobbs for calling these quotations to mind and elucidating their significance.

[155] *Take Today*, 3.

situations?"[156] Here organising ignorance for discovery involves exploring what a figure does not know as a shaper of their knowledge. The essence of the process requires recognizing the complementary process whereby ignorance shapes knowledge just as knowledge shapes ignorance. It follows then that every new bit of knowledge reveals tremendous new tracts of ignorance. McLuhan deemed the procedure necessary given that: "it seems to be a human characteristic to hide the effects of our actions when they move into disservices."[157]

Figure and Ground

Once new tracts of or an area of "ignorance" is determined, even faintly, McLuhan tends to shift modes and begins sharpening the "discovery" for use as a probe, to provoke, initiate or stimulate further dialogue:

> In view of the fact that Harold Innis was never understood simply because he worked with causality at all times, and since all my critics seem incapable of recognizing any form of causality except that of direct visual connection, I am eager to probe the absence of causal awareness in our world. It is the absence of this that drives our literati to value judgements and points of view, devoid of all understanding whatever.[158]

> …I shall continue to probe the world of Sassure and his progeny, starting with their ignorance of the visual vs. acoustic spaces and organization, and keep you in touch with my findings. When I revise *Understanding Media* this summer I shall include chapters on information theory and on linguistic structuralism and semiology. Current information theory and communication theory offers no means of studying anything but the transportation of data. Transformation is not for them, but it is transformation that is my

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[156] McLuhan, "Address at Georgetown University," MS., n.pag.

[157] McLuhan, "At the Flip Point of Time – The Point of More Return?" *Communication Journal* 24, no. 4 (Autumn, 1975): 102.

[158] McLuhan to Fredrick D. Wilhelmsen, 18 January 1971.

main concern and it is this which intrigues the Europeans with my work.[159]

To assist in both the task of discovering ignorance and sharpening ignorance into a probe, McLuhan appropriated another set of terms in use at the seminar that had been taken from Gestalt psychology — *Figure* and *Ground*. I will defer at this point to the McLuhans who offer a more than adequate account of the terms in the *Laws of Media*:

> "Figure" and "ground" entered Gestalt psychology from the work of Edgar Rubin, who [in] about 1915 used those terms to discuss aspects of visual perception. They have here been broadened to embrace the whole structure of perception and of consciousness. All situations comprise an area of attention (figure) and a very much larger area of inattention (ground), two continually coerce and play with each other across a common line or boundary or interval that serves to define both simultaneously. Shape of one conforms exactly to the shape of the other. Figures rise out of, and recede back into, ground, which is con-figurational and comprises all other available figures at once .… Ground provides the structure or style of awareness, the "way of seeing" Flaubert called it, or the "terms on which" a figure is perceived. The study of ground "on its own terms" is virtually impossible; by definition it is at any moment environmental and subliminal. The only possible strategy for such study entails constructing an anti-environment.[160]

Perhaps McLuhan's own use of figure and ground is best seen in terms of his attempts to grapple with both the ordinary use of "medium," and "unfortunate" use of the term "Mass media."[161] In a later address to the

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[159] McLuhan to W. K. Wimsatt, 6 March 1974.

[160] *Laws of Media*, 5. In "The Later Innis," McLuhan mentions how Gestalt comes close "to our own tradition of…un-theoretical positivism," (McLuhan, "The Later Innis," MS., 10–11).

[161] McLuhan, "Notes on the Media as Artforms," 5. McLuhan adds: "The use of the term mass media has been unfortunate. All media, especially languages, are mass media so far at least as their range in time and space is concerned."

International Committee for the History of Technology (ICOHTEC), for example, McLuhan uses the terms as general analytic principles: (a) to collapse the conventional understanding of the terms media and medium, and (b) to break the monopoly of discourse about media and medium stemming solely from concern with "efficient" cause. In this address, McLuhan notes how: "Communication is the act by which the descriptive parameters of the state of nature, including human nature at one point in space-time, are made known to another."[162] McLuhan continues, arguing that the term communication is also used to include the means by which one set of parameters (the information) is transmitted: "The medium, in ordinary use, the term refers only to the figure, not the ground."[163] By extension then, a point that the McLuhan's make explicit in the *Laws of Media*, the respective approaches of Deutsch, Shannon and Weaver, and Weiner's use of the terms "media" and "medium," is problematic on two counts. Firstly, they are "frozen" and "dialectical … born of technology and quite unable of itself to see beyond or around technology."[164] And secondly, their approach "neglects the vital environmental surround" (the ground) which extends beyond a mere geometric configuration (or more precisely, the graph of the communication net), thus failing to provide them with a real place of observation. As McLuhan notes to Edward T. Hall in 1975:

> The Shannon-Weaver model of information theory (encoder, channel and de-coder) simply ignores the law of the situation, i.e. The Shannon-Weaver model is identical to the bias of Western man which excludes the possibility of environmental influence. In

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[162] McLuhan also takes care to note that all communication is partial.

[163] McLuhan, "Technology and Media," (Paper presented at the Sixth ICOHTEC Symposium, 18 August 1977), MS., 3.

[164] As the McLuhans note in *Laws of Media*: "Dialectics – logic and philosophy – represent in the trivium the extreme of left hemisphere operation as it uses no ground but alphabetic writing itself," (*Laws of Media*, 233).

fact, the environment presupposed by the activity of communication is categorized as "noise" in the Shannon Weaver paradigm. Visual space is the only kind of space that is figure minus ground.[165]

McLuhan apprehended that Deutsch, Shannon and Weaver, and Weiner, as with Maritain,[166] Julian Jaynes, Levi-Strauss, and Noam Chomsky, were working: "figure minus ground in the Cartesian tradition."[167] By contrast, McLuhan presents his own enterprise, and approach to "media," as starting with *ground*:

> My writings baffle most people simply because I begin with ground and they begin with figure. It begins with effects and works to causes. Once it is understood that the hidden ground of our time is information moved at the speed of light … then it becomes easy to see.[168]

Radio, then, according to McLuhan, is "merely a name for all of the electric and simultaneous services which create the instantaneous surround of information, that is itself acoustic in form and structure."[169] Similarly, as McLuhan argues in the "The Poet and the Press," the principles of "cinema" were discovered before the moving picture camera was perfected."[170] The matter is stated plainly in a letter to Melvin Kranzberg: "Structurally, in figure/ground terms, the ground proceeds and includes the figure before the figure, as such, emerges to perception." Hence, McLuhan adds, one can predict how causes will shortly follow the achievement of effects.[171] The example McLuhan uses is the relation of the bicycle to the car: "The bicycle literally paved the

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[165] McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 26 August 26 1975.

[166] McLuhan to Anne Muggeridge, 14 February 1978.

[167] McLuhan to Edmund Carpenter, 23 March 1973.

[168] McLuhan to Franklin R. Gannon, 12 June 1973.

[169] McLuhan, "Untitled Article On The Vietnam War," MS., 3

[170] McLuhan, "The Poet and The Press" MS., 3.

[171] McLuhan to Melvin Kranzberg, 10 July 1976

way for the motor car. That is the effects of the car came first, namely paved highways."[172]

In later life, McLuhan would talk about his use of figure and ground by presenting his work as being primarily concerned with causality, or more specifically, what McLuhan refers to as "formal causality":

> My own approach to the media has been entirely from formal cause. Since formal causes are hidden and environmental, they exert their structural pressure by interval and interface with whatever is in their environmental territory. Formal cause is always hidden, whereas the things upon which they act are visible …. This matter of formal causality and the environments created by the media is so big that I hope your new academic set-up will be able to take hold of some of it.[173]

The study of formal causality, at least as McLuhan conceived it, is the study of *ground*. As Eric McLuhan casts the matter, "formal cause" is the configuration of the ground and reciprocally it is the shape of the figure. Therefore a figure might have one efficient cause but has many and diverse effects (formal) that preceded it. Formal cause is found in the prior restructuring of the ground and its continuing dynamic relation to its ground.[174] "Efficient causality" on the other hand, which McLuhan saw as the sole concern of the leading lights of "communication," is largely preoccupied with figures. As Eric McLuhan notes, efficient

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[172] Ibid.

[173] McLuhan to John Culkin, 19 June 1975. It appears that while McLuhan borrowed Aristotle's terms, he was ambivalent about Aristotle's formulation of how the causes actually worked. As Patterson has noted, although both McLuhan and Innis were interested in "formal causality," what McLuhan meant by formal causality was something quite different from Aristotle or Taylor, formal cause is used not in the sense of classification of forms but in their operation. Graeme H. Patterson, *History and Communications: Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, the Interpretation of History* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1990), 135.

[174] Eric McLuhan, "The Logos and Formal Causality," MS., 2.

causality "has nothing to do with effects." Neither does material or final. "Only efficient cause is diachronic, all others are synchronic and simultaneous. Formal cause is the only one concerned with effects and is synchronic — hence the paradox that effects come before causes."[175]

Writing to Barbara Ward McLuhan implies that his "method" of starting with the ground is derivative of the work of Q. D. Leavis:

> When Q. D. Leavis did a study of *Fiction and the Reading Public*, there was an uproar because she had ventured to suggest that highly literate people could lead moronic lives through most of their waking hours. It is the only study ever made, in English, of a reading public. That is, *the study of ground for the figure of the novel*. The ordinary study concentrates on figure minus ground, i.e. the content of the novel is studied and the kinds of readers and their relation to the novel are ignored. Visual man likes to assume a merely neutral transportation process as between the figure and the ground, ignoring the complex changes that take place in both figure and ground during all communication [handwritten addition: except for H. A. Innis's *Empire and Communications*.][176]

The extent that McLuhan's thinking developed along these lines is evident in his early review of Fredrick Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent.* Here McLuhan takes issue with Wertham's deliberate isolation of the crime comic from the entire culture in which it operates.[177] That said, however, merely starting from ground is not the whole of the matter. McLuhan also presents his concerns as ultimately being with the *interplay* between figure and ground. Writing to Jacqueline Tyrwitt, McLuhan notes:

> It is this figure-ground relationship that constitutes the dynamic of any culture, and it is totally lacking in the *Ekistics* magazine. *Ekistics* is run on general systems approach … The general systems

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[175] Ibid., 1–2.

[176] McLuhan to Barbara Ward, 9 February 1973. Emphasis mine.

[177] McLuhan, review of *Seduction of the Innocent*, by Fredrick Wertham, *Shenandoah* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1955): 53–57.

people are completely unable to relate figure and ground so they merge them by translating the cultural ground (or the ground of any situation they consider to be worth studying) into another figure by a statistical approach of fragmentation. Statistics can never provide a gestalt or a, figure-ground interface.[178]

In "The Future of New Media," McLuhan states: "the meaning of a new medium is not merely its definition but what it actually does as a figure in its *changing* context or ground."[179] An example of McLuhan's figure and ground analysis directed at observing the "interplay" between figure and ground can be seen in "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters" where McLuhan considers "writing" initially as figure, then as ground, and finally as a figure again against a new ground:[180]

> In the first place, then, pre-literate societies based on a monopoly of the spoken word, are static, repetitive, unchanging. They are, as it is said, "time-bound." Such societies find it difficult to explore space or to extend their communications horizontally. Writing is a tremendous revolution in such a world. For writing is the translation of the vocal or audible into spatial form. Writing gives control over space. Writing produces at once the city. The power to shape space in writing brings the power to organize space architecturally. And when messages can be transported, then comes the road, and armies, and empires. The empires of Alexander and the Caesars were essentially built by paper routes.

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[178] McLuhan to Jacqueline Tyrwitt, 24 March 1972. *Ekistics* is a term coined by K. A. Doxiadis in 1942 to refer to the science of human settlement. The magazine of the same name, which became very influential in the second half of the 20th century, had its origins in a private mimeographed sheet available to only a few experts (much like McLuhan's *Network*).

[179] McLuhan, "The Future of New Media," MS., 1. Emphasis mine.

[180] In the language of drama this might be called "situational irony." However, McLuhan is here reporting "situational irony" as an *effect* of speed-up in technological innovation. The effect this has on a reader might be said to be not unlike Empsons' description of the value of double irony — that is, it combines breadth of sympathy with energy and judgement, permitting a balance among all materials being judged. William Empson. *Some Versions of Pastoral: A Study of Pastoral Form in Literature* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1966), 57.

> But today with instantaneous global communications the entire planet is, for purposes of inter-communication, a village rather than a vast imperial network. *It is obvious that writing cannot have the same meaning or function for us that it had for earlier cultures.*[181]

Audience as Formal Cause

At this point we need to pause. So far I have sought to approximate the operations of the seminar by weaving together a selection of McLuhan's writings and correspondence.[182] I have also sought to build a foundation for further consideration of McLuhan's outputs by explicating his key terms and processes. We now turn, in the remainder of this chapter, to examine McLuhan's writings of the period directly in and through taking a look at one of McLuhan's most significant articles of the period, "Acoustic Space," co-authored with Edmund Carpenter. Here we will see how all the terms and processes discussed so far are brought to bear as McLuhan and Carpenter attempt to do for a wider audience what had transpired within the small group at the University of Toronto. Our starting point in the matter is, firstly, to consider McLuhan's evolving relationship to his audience.

As *doctus orator* McLuhan's fundamental and life-long orientation is to regard his audiences as the formal cause of his works:

> Since "communication" means change … It is this public which always affects the structures which the performer chooses to adopt, and it is this public which he seeks to shape and alter in some way.[183]

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[181] McLuhan, "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters," 161–62. Emphasis mine.

[182] There is little in the way of an actual record of the proceedings at the seminar itself beyond the limited account included notes and minutes of the seminar.

[183] McLuhan to Ralph Cohen, 13 July 1973. "Any theory of communication must be based on the public to be served or improved," (McLuhan to Bruno James, 15 January 1976). In both of these quotations McLuhan can be seen as anticipating the later vogue of reader response theories.

In other words, McLuhan's "orientation" towards his audiences is "receiver" rather than "sender" centric. It is an "orientation" McLuhan shows, also informs the work of Chesterton, Nashe, Pound, and Aquinas, and resides at the very heart of the praxis of the *doctus orator*. McLuhan's meditations on the matter can be seen clearly in "G. K. Chesterton: A Practical Mystic" where he identifies Chesterton's commitment to his audience as being the reason why he did not seek a path that entailed "the purely esoteric use of his powers that might have gone into the creation of fine art."[184] In "The Place of Thomas Nashe," McLuhan goes to great lengths to show how Nashe's similar commitments led him to adopt the Ciceronian position that the orator must, firstly, please their audience(s). And in "The Possum and the Midwife*,"* McLuhan celebrates Pound's similar orientation: "[Pound] liked to put on his public," and is always concerned with "the attention of the audience."[185] McLuhan makes his own commitment to his audience explicit during a later interview with Gerald Stearn: "I'm trying to get my audience involved … So I use their language. The language of their environment."[186]

> When I arrived at Wisconsin, I confronted classes of freshmen and I suddenly realized that I was incapable of understanding them. I felt an urgent need to study their popular culture: advertising,

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[184] McLuhan, "G. K. Chesterton: A Practical Mystic," 463, 461, 459. McLuhan states, Chesterton was "vividly aware of his public and their need to be cheered and straightened out" and so chose a way that would see him become "a champion of the English poor." His oeuvre, McLuhan claims, might rightly be regarded as "a splendid effort to rescue civilization weakened by capitalism from the logical conclusion of capitalism," (Ibid., 459).

[185] McLuhan, "The Possum and the Midwife," (Ezra Pound Lecture, University of Idaho, 25 April 1978), MS., 15.

[186] McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," 47. In a later interview conducted by Frank Kermode McLuhan explicitly states that he is not trying to have any *private* meanings. McLuhan, "The Future of Man in the Electric Age," in *Understanding Me*, 57.

games, movies. It was pedagogy, part of my teaching program. To meet them on their grounds was my strategy in pedagogy: the world of pop culture. Advertising was a very convenient form of approach .… I had thirty or forty slides and gave little talks to student groups. I invited them to study these ads.[187]

We can also see McLuhan's commitment to starting from his audience's needs in his various bids to provide his students with a way into Joyce through their technological bias. In "The American Novel through Fifty Years: John Dos Passos," McLuhan presents Joyce's technique in relation to the vacuum tube of television. He replays the theme in "Radio and Television in *Finnegans Wake*" by presenting the simplest way to get at Joyce as being via technique, which can be easily apprehended by considering the principle of the electronic tube.[188] And, in "New Media as Political Forms," McLuhan again replays the procedure. To enable a sympathetic reconstruction of Joyce's achievement he encourages reading *Finnegans Wake* aloud as a means of apprehending Joyce's "Optophone," an instrument for turning images into sounds.[189]

In view of his failures, as documented in chapter one and at the start of this chapter, McLuhan undertook a second "great labour," beginning in 1951 (which I contend with in the following chapter). The motive for his labour was his audience centric orientation, and the fruit of his labour was that he developed a new way of writing. For our immediate purposes, the crux of the matter is that, firstly, he saw that

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[187] McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," 47.

[188] McLuhan, "Radio and Television in Finnegans Wake," MS., 6–7.

[189] McLuhan, "New Media as Political Forms," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 14, 5. It is important to note that McLuhan's private "reading" of Joyce may have been quite another matter entirely. In all of these examples he is providing a "bridge." As he states in "Notes on the Media as Art Forms," it can be discarded after the period of its initial usefulness: "Once the bridge has been crossed in either direction the bridge is no longer necessary. It functions only as a grammar and crib in early stages of reading a new language," (McLuhan, "Notes on the Media as Art Forms," MS.,12).

any bid to actually communicate with and transform an audience must be made out of the language and idiom of that audience. Secondly, he also saw that: "Conventionally, society is always one phase back, is never environmental."[190] Ergo, the language of his audience (barring "slang") is in fact the language of the recently obsolesced environment. In face of the situation McLuhan concluded that to talk directly of the present and the "hidden ground" would be next to pointless:

> No more extreme instance of this delusion could be mentioned than our present image of TV as a current variation on the mechanical, movie pattern of processing experience by repetition. A few decades hence it will be easy to describe the revolution in human perception and motivation that resulted from beholding the new mosaic mesh of the TV image. Today it is futile to discuss it at all.[191]

Subsequently, in the wake of his second great labour, McLuhan apprehended that the present and the hidden ground had to be approached using old, obsolete clichés taken from the preceding environment. Further, and this is the key, these clichés had to be shown as *effects*, as figures.

The matter can be easily illustrated in terms of McLuhan's use of the orality/literacy dichotomy. McLuhan saw that the recently visible oral-literacy dichotomy was an effect of the new situation that was not leaning too heavily on any one means of encoding experience and representing reality.[192] As McLuhan notes in "The New Criticism": "I would draw your attention to the fact that with the radio, movie and television, *the word has become audible once more*."[193] The newly audible

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[190] McLuhan to Charles Silberman, 18 October 1965.

[191] *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 273.

[192] McLuhan, "A Historical Approach to the Media," *Teachers College Record* 57, no. 2 (November 1955): 104–10.

[193] McLuhan, "The New Criticism," MS., 11.

word creates the same ambivalent relation to the written word and pictorial image that underpinned the metaphysical poets, [194] and with it, there is a break with: "our four century preoccupation with print" that "has fixed our attention on so limited an aspect of the media."[195] Consequently, both orality and literacy, which have at various times been "grounds" (as shown earlier in the excerpt taken from "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters") become "visible" as *figures* for the first time. In view of the discovery, studies that emphasise the oral-literate dichotomy can be seen as effects (that precede causes) of the situation:

> That print increasingly hypnotized the Western world *is nowadays the theme of all historians of art and science alike, because we no longer live under the spell of the isolated visual sense*. We have not yet begun to ask under what new spell we exist. In place of spell it may be more acceptable to say "assumptions" or "parameters" or "frame of reference." No matter what the metaphor, is it not absurd for men to live involuntarily altered in their inmost lives by some mere technological extension of our inner senses?[196]

When we read McLuhan closely we find that he apprehended that it is not just the orality-literacy dichotomy that was "obsolete." So too were number and letter,[197] and "time" and "space." As McLuhan notes in a later essay, "Spatial Form in Tudor and Stuart Poetry": "Space" has become visible as "the hidden dimension of much experience,"[198] because "by the twentieth century, visual space was obsolesced in all fields."[199]

> In 1872 the Oxford Mathematician, Charles Dogeson (Lewis Carol), had published a fable called *Through the Looking Glass*, to

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[194] McLuhan, "Symbolist Communication," MS., 4;

[195] McLuhan, "A Historical Approach to the Media," 106.

[196] *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 183. Emphasis mine.

[197] *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 178.

[198] McLuhan, "Spatial Form in Tudor and Stuart Poetry," MS., 1.

[199] *Laws of Media*, 39.

introduce his readers to the non-Euclidean world of space-time. He was years ahead of Einstein and Minkowski.[200]

In this new light, the operations at the seminar are recast anew. In many respects, the dialogue at the seminar can be likened to how McLuhan describes the practise of the scholastics who "went to work, operations research style to solve new problems by banging old clichés together."[201] The seminar participants, who were the first into that "silent sea," banged together clichés or figures or effects to find the name-form and character of the new and as yet unnamed, invisible ground — the "formal cause" of all of these things. In the material that we have considered so far the discussion of "light on" and "light through" is perhaps best illustrative of the process insofar as both the verbal and plastic arts (poetry and painting) are used to look at the present technologies (television and film), and each is used to cast further "light" on the other in order to reveal the new ground.

McLuhan's writings of the period are likewise recast. As I have already noted, many of McLuhan's writings, particularly those in *Explorations*, try and do for a wider audience what transpired within the University of Toronto group. That is they try to establish some basis for understanding (and therefore coping with) present day conditions and

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[200] McLuhan, "Changing Concepts in Space in the Electronic Age," (Lecture for the Graham Foundation, 24 April, 1964), MS. n.pag.

[201] McLuhan, "Communism: Hard and Soft," *McLuhan DEW-Line Newsletters* 1, no. 6 (December 1968): 2. McLuhan notes therein that the scholastics were oral dialoguers who had memorized the basic philosophic components needed in their dialogue. Every scholastic was an encyclopaedia of such lore. The scholastic procedure worked at a time when books were too slow. Paradoxically, McLuhan holds, similar conditions pertain in the mid twentieth century for exactly the opposite reasons. "For us there are too many books and they issue too quickly."

restore the possibility of dialogue by bringing their reader to encounter their own world as a stranger might:[202]

> I see that assuming the role of a "stranger" provoking a dialogue has been an incitement to global thinking. Although I began with one role, I have played many parts in this "Commentary." The "stranger" has become the guide; the passenger, the driver. Since this multi-role-playing is inevitable in an electronic world, one hopes that the put-on has also been a turn-on.[203]

Rather than presenting the "findings" of the seminar in "packaged" form, McLuhan's writings replay and make a drama of the banging of clichés in a manner than enables his readers to reconstruct the findings of the seminar (this matter is discussed further in the following chapter). In some respects, McLuhan's praxis in his writings is not dissimilar to that of jazz musicians whose performances are composed by improvisation, by way of transforming a store of formulae according to the need of the moment.[204] The comparison with jazz is particularly apt particularly

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[202] In letters there has traditionally been two primary ways of achieving this end. The first displays a strange world, yet one that has so many analogues to his that as he looks, the reader sees his own reality, but in truer colours. The second seeks to lure the spectators to the point from which, inevitably, the world will appear as the artist sees it. The spectator then, from the new vantage afforded by the work, paints the picture for himself but with the artist's colours and expert eyes. The first is the impersonal and objective method and the second, personal and subjective. The second method seems more assured of a positive result for lesser effort of intelligence is required. McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis: His Theory of Art and Communication," MS., 15–16. At various times, as we have seen and shall see more of, McLuhan avails himself of both procedures. For example, writing to Ezra Pound McLuhan in 1951 indicates that his method is more akin to the latter: " [my] basic procedure is "to slap an alien culture over the actual one. The real one is killed and the alien one worn as a party mask," (McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 5 January 1951).

[203] McLuhan, "Roles, Masks and Performances," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 12, 26.

[204] McLuhan, "Extracts From Statements Handed to the Secretariat in Writing – Professor Marshall McLuhan," in *Place and Function of Art in Contemporary Life*, Report of an International Symposium Organised by UNESCO, 6–10 September 1976 (Paris: UNESCO, 1977), 27.

insofar as, like a jazz performance, the occasional dissonant note is struck.[205] McLuhan appears to have been quite aware that his own language was at times "problematic" as he explored the silent sea and uncharted rocky outcrop:

> Another very useful remark was made to me by a student who said: "Why are your letters to the newspapers so plain and your other writings so difficult and obscure?" This question highlights the difference between exposition and exploration. Anything that I know I can explain quite simply and directly. I can package it. Nearly everything I write is concerned with areas of *exploration* in which I am actively engaged in discovery. That is why I say "I have no point of view." Anyone engaged in exploration uses every available approach, every available foothold, every accessible crevice to which to cling as he scales the unknown rock-face. The actual process of dialogue and discovery is not compatible with packaging of familiar views.[206]

Acoustic Space

One of the best sites to observe the nature of McLuhan's writing of the period more closely is in "Acoustic Space." The essay, published in *Explorations*, starts from "ignorance," and "puts on" its primary audience by way of an excerpt from *Alice in Wonderland*:

> We often have difficulty understanding a purely verbal notion …. We feel happier when *it* is visible; then it's orientated in a way we understand. For, in our workaday world, space is conceived in terms of that which separates visible objects. "Empty space" suggests a field in which there is nothing to see. We refer to a gasoline drum filled with pungent fumes or to a tundra swept by

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[205] C.f. McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951 in regards to the possibility that some of the analogies he offers may be "smoke," purposeful "mistakes" intended to generate dialogue.

[206] McLuhan, Education in the Electronic Age," *Interexchange* 1, no. 4 (1970): 11–12.

howling gales as "empty" because nothing is visible in either case.[207]

The procedure of "putting on" the audience (which will be taken up at some length in chapter four), is outlined in brief in a letter to Joe Keogh:

> Apropos dialogue, it is done with mirrors, of course, only you hold the mirror up to the public. Was it not Perseus who thus beheaded Gorgon by looking at it in a mirror of art, as it were? By holding the mirror up to the public you literally confront the Gorgon of tangled impressions and biases. You "put them on" this way, as well, and you can sort through their problems at will …. This kind of effect you cannot get by simply adopting a point of view on anything.[208]

The "gorgon of tangled impressions" here stems from Western man being "drunk," to use Wyndham Lewis's phrase, with print, a technology that extends the eye in isolation (leading to calling space "empty" because nothing is visible).

Having "put on" their public, McLuhan and Carpenter present a dramatic dialogue, using whole cultures in place of literary forms. The "acoustic space" of preliterate, oral cultures is put forward as a "counterpoint" to the biases (and grievances: the "difficulty understanding a purely verbal notion") of literate or "visual Western man":[209]

> Not all cultures think this way. In many preliterate cultures the binding power of oral tradition is so strong that the eye is subservient to the ear. In the beginning was the Word: a spoken word, not the visual one of literate man…[210]

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[207] "McLuhan, and Edmund Carpenter, "Acoustic Space," 39. C.f. F. M. Cornford, "The Invention of Space," In *Essays in Honour of Gilbert Murray*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1936.

[208] McLuhan to Joe Keogh, 11 April 1973.

[209] See McLuhan, McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," in *Media Research*, 53–54.

[210] "McLuhan, and Edmund Carpenter, "Acoustic Space," 39.

In the dialogue that follows, each sensibility is examined on its own terms, and each is then seen through the lens of the other (the acoustic world is seen through the lens of visual space, and visa-versa). In many respects, the dialogue exhibits inherently Lewisean traits insofar as these mutually supplementary antagonistic "modalities" are set "against each other's throats" in accord with Lewis's practise of combative dialectics:

1. Beyond Action and Reaction we would establish ourselves.
2. We start from opposite statements of a chosen world. Set up violent structures of adolescent clearness between two extremes.
3. We discharge ourself on both sides.
4. We fight first on one side, then on the other, but always for the SAME cause, which is neither side or both sides and ours…[211]

Neither sensibility is permitted to prevail. Rather, both sensibilities are held in near perfect balance, in much the same manner as Joyce's treatment of the trivium and quadrivium in *Ulysses*:[212]

> These two labyrinths are counterpointed throughout *Ulysses*. The one is "Eastern," Hermetic, earthly and cloacal, proceeding by peristaltic convulsions to metamorphosis (e.g. the Marxian materialistic dialectic of history). The other is "Western," a cognitive labyrinth cognizant and constitutive of the world of analogy. As a true analogist Joyce attempts no reduction of these realities, but orders their ineluctable modalities to the reconciliation of vision rather than of fusion. But roughly, the two modes correspond to quadrivium and trivium.[213]

As a more developed portrait of both literacy and orality and visual and acoustic space emerges, the reader, at least potentially, comes to see the inhabitants of both these spaces as "half-witted." Neither is

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[211] Wyndham Lewis, "Manifesto," in *BLAST: Review of the Great English Vortex* 1, ed. Wyndham Lewis (London and New York: John Lane, 1915): 30–31.

[212] In this respect, "Acoustic Space" is something of an oddity in McLuhan's oeuvre. See McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 3 September 1976 cited in chapter five.

[213] McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 28.

shown to be in possession of a unified sensibility.[214] "Civilized" or western or literate or visual man is "half-witted" because sight encourages him to subdue all other senses. "Tribal" or "pre-literate" man, on the other hand, at least as he appears in the dialogue, is "half-witted" since he lives not by the eye but by the ear and by touch. Further, the reader also comes to see that both preferences and/or biases are in fact *learned* — both at the level of individual sensation (psychology), and at the level of the colossal system of preferences and biases we tend to call culture (anthropology):

> It is therefore worth recalling that the child must learn to see the world as we know it. At or shortly after birth, his eyes are as perfectly developed a camera mechanism as they will ever be. In a sense they are too perfect and too mechanical, since they present him with a world in which everything is inverted, double, laterally reversed, and devoid of depth. In the course of time, by a tremendous tour de force of learning, he turns the world right side up, achieves binocular fusion, and reverses the lateral field so that he now sees his father as one person, erect, whole, and bilaterally oriented.[215]

The immediate effect is that the reader's assumption that visual space is the "common sense norm" (that informs the "problem" with which the essay begins) is collapsed:[216]

> **Powers**: Now that the reader has read the material on the hemispheres and the media, visual and acoustic space, what is the chief thought you'd want him to retain?
> **McLuhan**: That he's not living in a natural environment. If he's civilized, he's living in Euclidean space – closed, controlled, linear,

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[214] McLuhan, and Edmund Carpenter, "Acoustic Space," 42.

[215] Ibid., 40.

[216] "The Western world is hung-up on the problem of visual versus acoustic space, seeming unable to let go of the "common sense" visual, even as it flounders in the acoustic ground," (*Laws of Media*, 111).

static – abstracted from the world around him. Like language, it is an attempt to manipulate as well as interpret the world.[217]

Potentially, then, the reader is afforded a chance to view the world as a stranger. The reader's own individual assumptions, private reflexes and collective biases, are brought to the level of consciousness for examination, and s/he is invited to begin a dialogue with his or her own "self," culture, and other cultures. In many respects, McLuhan's later letter to Barbara Ward is illustrative of the "spirit" of the enterprise:

> The above is not intended as an attack on the visual man or a defence of acoustic man. The qualities of life attainable by each are quite different, and *it is no longer necessary to be locked up in any one of these pockets exclusively* …. When the entire Western world is going inward via electric information, and the entire Orient is going outward via Western hardware and technology, how is it possible to make value judgements? We already know the qualities and satisfactions to be attained by both these modes of the visual and the acoustic. Shall we simply say "A plague on both your houses — I mean both your city house and your country house!" We can't take either of these houses very seriously. [218]

Coming at the matter from another angle we could say that the newborn stranger assumes a new posture in relation to "self" and world that is pragmatic, tentative, and also not dissimilar to McLuhan's own posture in relation to Aristotle and Plato. While I may have given the impression in my discussion of figure and ground that McLuhan is in favour of hylomorphic figure and ground interplay (which McLuhan saw as Aristotelian, and thus "seems more earthy and rooted"),[219] this is not the case at all. He is neither Platonic,[220] nor Aristotelian.[221] As McLuhan states

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[217] *The Global Village*, 130.

[218] McLuhan to Barbara Ward (Lady Jackson), 9 February 1973. Emphasis mine.

[219] McLuhan to Jane Bret, 3 January 1973.

[220] "Movie is f/g [figure/ground] pictorial form, while TV is iconic, merges figure and ground. The Platonist, with his specialised and merely visual archetypes (figures without

in "The Difficulties of Yvor Winters or Rhymer Redivus," that he is adamant that he never set out to prove the superiority of hylomorphism over dualistic philosophy.[222]

"Acoustic Space" also has a second movement where we can observe McLuhan and Carpenter's use of the obsolete dichotomy to get at the present. It is here that we also see how the essay works on four levels: (1) Literal, (2) Analogical – as A:B/C:D, (3) Moral (arising from 1 and 2), and (4) "Prophetic."[223] Perhaps, the best way into the matter is to start by noting that the essay also works in "reverse." At the conclusion of the piece we find new "ignorance," a new "problem."

> Today we are experiencing the emotional and intellectual jag resulting from the rapid translation of varied visual and auditory media into one another's modalities.[224]

To address this issue, in the second half of the article the obsolete, orality-literacy dichotomy, is shown to be: (a) an effect of the new ground, and (b) to have some bearing on the present state of rapid translation of varied visual and auditory media into one another's modalities:

> Poets have long used the word as incantation, evoking the visual image by magical acoustic stress. Preliterate man was conscious of this power of the auditory to make present the absent thing. Writing annulled this magic because it was a rival magical means of making present the absent sound. Radio *restored it*. In fact, in evoking the visual image, radio is sometimes more effective than sight itself. The squeaking door in *Inner Sanctum* was far more terrifying over radio than that same door seen and heard on

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ground, rather than merging with ground) gets a sense of divinity from his abstraction of figure from ground," (McLuhan to Jane Bret, 3 January 1973).

[221] "I find nothing of use in Aristotle's approach to *cause*. It seems merely conceptual. A way of classifying," (McLuhan to Fredrick Wilhelmsen, 18 January 1971).

[222] McLuhan, "The Difficulties of Yvor Winters or Rhymer Redivus," MS., 11.

[223] McLuhan, "The Possum and the Midwife," 4–5.

[224] McLuhan, and Edmund Carpenter, "Acoustic Space," 44.

television, because the visual image that sound evokes comes from the imagination.[225]

By introducing features of the new electric surround McLuhan and Carpenter create a four part analogy that might be cast either as: (a) The new electric surround is to mechanized print as literacy is to orality, or (b) The new electric surround is to orality what mechanized print is to literacy. What this means for the reader is that by tracking backwards from effects, causes or the ground or formal cause of the condition of "rapid translation" are revealed (information movement at the speed of light?). The present is thus approached in a manner not dissimilar to how McLuhan approaches the situation in "The Effect of the Printed Book on Written and Oral Language in the Sixteenth Century." Here McLuhan presents the "ignorance" of the effects of the printed page in the 18th century as analogous to present day "ignorance" of newer electric forms:[226]

> Printed grammars since the 18th century created a fog based on the concept of correctness. Once this concept, unconsciously derived from the form of print itself, was pervasive, any hope of study of the actual dynamics of our language situation was obliterated. Our new media with their complex influence on language are similarly blanketed today.[227]

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[225] Ibid., 43.

[226] Approached spatially, and taking McLuhan writings of the period as a simultaneous whole, we might say that his outputs anticipate his later tetrads: "various aspects of the tetrad have, unknowingly, formed parts of our earlier studies, collaborative as well as private," (*Laws of Media*, 8). For example, if we consider three of the excerpts already cited: (a) "The Effect of the Printed Book on Written and Oral Language in the Sixteenth Century," (b) "Acoustic Space," (c) "Radio and Television in Finnegans Wake," we have, effectively, a "tetrad" for radio. Radio (broadcasting), obsolesces print, retrieves the word as incantation (advertising etc.), and reverses into talking pictures. Tetrads will be taken up further in the following chapter.

[227] McLuhan, "The Effect of the Printed Book on Written and Oral Language in the Sixteenth Century," *Explorations* 7 (March 1957): 108.

As a four part analogy, the article also serves as a "bridge." And like any bridge, it can be crossed in both directions. On one hand, the historic scene can be taken as having some bearing on our present day situation. On the other hand, our present day situation can be seen as helping us understand, possibly for the first time, our own history. Just as in Eliot's idea of Tradition, where the whole of "literature" has a simultaneous existence, here we see that the same holds true of entire cultures over and above "literature." As McLuhan notes in "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters":

> He who would discuss humanism and literature today must know something about the history of media of human communication, because so rapidly have the media changed of late that print and letters have been dethroned by radio, TV, movies, and mechanized pictorial communication in general. I wrote a book, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*, on the role of the literary humanist confronted by the hostile forces of non-literary communication. But when I wrote that book I had not become aware, for example, that printing (the mechanization of writing 400 years ago) had liquidated 2,000 years of manuscript culture. Printing was as savage a blow to a long-established culture as radio, movies, and TV have been to the culture based on the printed book. Today, therefore, when writing, speech, and gesture have all been mechanized, the literary humanist can get his bearings only by going back to pre-literate societies.[228]

It is from the interplay of the literal (that simply describes, compares and contrasts the differences between two cultures) and the analogical (where the dialogue between orality and literacy is shown to have some bearing on the present situation) that we see the additional levels of "Acoustic Space" come to the fore — the moral and allegorical levels broached by the essay. On the moral level "Acoustic Space" is a call to action — to

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[228] McLuhan, "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters," 161.

exploration and contemplation. McLuhan's comments in "The Medium is the Message," have some bearing here:

> My own work has tended more and more to center on the misunderstandings and clashes that occur between these two basic types of order in experience and organization: the visual and the auditory. The basic patterns for ear and eye found in most of the media are in their messages typically non-verbal. And it is even more confusing at first for some to learn that the mosaic of a page of telegraph press is "auditory" in basic structure. That, however, is only to say that any pattern in which the components co-exist without direct lineal hook-up or connection, creating a field of simultaneous relations, is auditory, even though some of its aspects can be seen. The items of news and advertising that exist under a dateline are interrelated only by that dateline. They have no interconnection of logic or statement. Yet they form a mosaic whose parts are interpenetrating. Such is also the kind of order that tends to exist in a city or a culture. It is a kind of orchestral, resonating unity, not a logical unity of discourse. *It is not necessary to be satisfied with such a state of affairs once it is understood.*[229]

"Acoustic Space" also makes a similar declaration — there is no need to remain hung-up in frozen postures like Dante's figures in hell, nor is there reason to exist in a mode as patterned, "circumscribed and complete as a theorem of Euclid" (as outlined by Lewis).[230] Rather, as McLuhan makes explicit elsewhere: "knowing, as we do, the constituents

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[229] McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 17, 9. Emphasis mine.

[230] McLuhan writes to Sheila Watson in the early 1970s, noting that Ovid, taught Joyce, Eliot, Pound, and Lewis "how to contemplate effects minus causes e.g. all of Dante's people are hung up or frozen in postures that record a mass of preceding causes which are totally concealed." The "metamorphic trick" McLuhan notes, is to eliminate all evidence of the causes that led to that state; e.g. in the *Human Age* "Lewis gives all the effects of electric technology as angelism without including the ground," he suppresses the grounds that caused these effects. The technique, McLuhan adds: "is to arrest an action and suppress the cause for the arrest. By involving himself in the moment of arrest, the reader is expected to retrace or dream back. This is the mythic method of Ovid and the symbolists alike," (McLuhan to Sheila Watson, 20 January 1971).

of both civilized and tribal cultures, of both private, rational and individual and corporate, mystical tribal man, it becomes our privilege and responsibility alike to mix and harmonize these factors even as the Greeks chose to alter the Dionysian fury with Apollonian detachment."[231] After all, the fruit of reconciliation, as McLuhan notes elsewhere, are periods of "great cultural flowerings," and "may well be the key to the greatest manifestation of human culture." [232]

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[231] McLuhan, "My Last Three Books," Untitled Article, MS., 8. He adds: Today we can maintain visual value only if we chose to moderate the intensity of the acoustic resonance – like turning down the intensity of the rock concert to engage in dialogue."

[232] McLuhan, "Writings on Individualism and Nationalism," MS., 8. In "Reading in an Age of Pictures," McLuhan suggests that the Platonic dialogues are representative of a kind of balance between written and spoken discourse which may well be the key to the greatest manifestation of human culture. He also suggests that a similar balance is characteristic of the Elizabethan sermon and drama in an age before print had become all pervasive. The age of Dante and Aquinas also saw a balance between oral and written learning and inquiry. McLuhan, "Reading in an Age of Pictures," MS., 6.

3

REVELATION (1944–1964)

The vortex is the point of maximum energy,
It represents, in mechanics, the greatest efficiency.
We use the words "greatest efficiency" in the precise sense – as
they would be used in a text book of MECHANICS….
THE TURBINE
        All experience rushes into this vortex. All the energized
past, all the past that is living and worthy to live. All
MOMENTUM, which is the past bearing on us, RACE, RACE-
MEMORY, instinct charging the PLACID,
        NON-ENERGIZED FUTURE.
The DESIGN of the future in the grip of the human vortex. All
the past that is vital, all the past that is capable of living into the
future, is pregnant in the vortex, NOW.[1]

Appended to the "Theory of Communication Note" that contains one of

the variations of the "procedure" I am using as both guide and

framework for this study, there is a line that reads: "Xian [Christian]

theory of communication …. Saints as part of God's plan of teaching."[2]

Notes of this kind are liberally scattered throughout the entire H.

Marshall McLuhan collection. Literally hundreds of them can be found,

written in margins, on the backs of envelopes, and on scraps of paper. To

avoid them, as with McLuhan's reflections and meditations on

"religious" considerations, would be as much a distortion as ignoring

Isaac Newton's apologetics, scriptural exegesis, and commentary on the

Book of Daniel.[3] Contending with the "religious" dimension of

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[1] Ezra Pound, "Vortex," in *BLAST: Review of the Great English Vortex* I, ed. Wyndham
Lewis (London and New York: John Lane, 1914), 153.

[2] McLuhan, "Theory of Communication Note," MS., n.pag.

[3] Newton's works on the book of Daniel was never published because, like his
alchemical *opus*, it was a scandal to scientists who could not link it to his work despite
Newton saying that it was directly connected to his maths, astronomy etc. McLuhan,
"The Future of the Book," MS., 9.

McLuhan's oeuvre, however, is a difficult task. The world of faith appears differently depending on whether viewed from the inside or from without. If McLuhan's "faith" and works are viewed from the outside, we would be faced with the challenge McLuhan levels at one of his critics, Professor Moses: "Gnostic Prof. [Professor] Moses … attempts to understand Catholic matters and to reduce them to non-Catholic modes of apprehension."[4] Agnosticism too, at least as understood by McLuhan, offers no real alternative as a mode of exploration given its imprecision. The agnostic, McLuhan argues, will continue to call Blake and Gerard Manley Hopkins "mystical."[5] The only viable alternative then, if we are to grapple with McLuhan on his own terms, is to attempt to observe from within, and to approach McLuhan's oeuvre in a manner not dissimilar to McLuhan's own approach to Hopkins in "The Analogical Mirrors." Here McLuhan presents Hopkins as: "…not a nature mystic at all, nor a religious mystic, either, but an analogist. By stress and instress, by intensity and precision of perception, by analogical analysis and meditation he achieves all his effects."[6] The following chapter seeks to make some initial steps in this direction.[7] Our starting point in the matter is to briefly re-trace materials covered in the previous chapters from a different vantage, beginning with McLuhan's doctoral work.

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[4] McLuhan, "Literature and the Press," MS., 5.

[5] McLuhan, "Dramatic Action in the Windhover," MS., 4.

[6] McLuhan, "The Analogical Mirrors," in *The Interior Landscape*, 65.

[7] And in so doing, lay the foundations for Chapter Five, where the "religious" dimension to McLuhan's work will be examined at some length.

Decorum

In "The Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of His Time," McLuhan argues that the ancient principles of decorum, as taught by the grammarians and rhetoricians, had a great influence on European literature:

> The doctrines of decorum which guided the entire practise of antiquity and the Middle Ages, were rigorous only because they were related to a complete and harmonious system of ethics, politics, and rhetoric. When the continuity of this system of rational ethics is considered, the continuity of the peripheral doctrines in literature is less astonishing. The length of life enjoyed by these doctrines is commensurate with the extension of the study of patristic theology in Europe. As long as patristic theology propped up by the classics was the main concern of the leaders of the educated world, that is until after the time of Donne and Bossuet, the entire body of associated grammar, poetic, rhetoric, and politics remained intact. At least the so-called Neo-classicism of the seventeenth century has no intelligible explanation apart from this fact; and Neo-classicism does not survive patristic theology.[8]

Consequently, he makes the history of decorum — its rise, eclipse, and re-appearance — a central feature of the work. Nashe's adherence to the ancient doctrine of rhetorical decorum is presented as the very crux of his "theory and practise of communication," and McLuhan supports his claim by way of a myriad of examples. For example, commenting on Nashe's *Summer's Last Will and Testament* McLuhan notes:

> In the prosopopoeia or speeches of *Summer's Last Will* Nashe employs the usual dramatic and rhetorical decorum. Will Summer uses low imagery and speaks prose. Spring is represented as irresponsible, and praises poverty. Solstice praises contentment and freedom from ambition. Harvest uses yokel imagery and speaks prose. Bacchus is given prose. Having made Will Summer drink, the latter rises to give an oration against wine, in verse. The wine, as it were, confers a new person upon him, and hence a new

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[8] *The Classical Trivium*, 96.

> decorum. Winter attacks learning. Almost every device of sophisticated oratory occurs in this little-read play.[9]

By contrast, René Descartes, whom McLuhan affords a special place in his dissertation, is shown to have violated the ancient guiding principles and, as McLuhan would later note, "cut the throat of poetry."[10] While McLuhan does not make it explicit, he also implies in his concluding note on James Joyce that the long standing eclipse of decorum (which in some respects had necessitated McLuhan's study of Nashe) had come to an end.

Having completed "The Place of Thomas Nashe," McLuhan proceeded, rather systematically, to explore several of the "unanswered" questions raised in his dissertation, including those pertaining to the relationship between the order of speech and language and the order of nature, and the impact of rhetoric on character writing and portraiture. He also re-examined the eclipse and re-appearance of the ancient doctrine of decorum. In his subsequent studies McLuhan shows how Nashe's sense of decorum informs his role and praxis as an "artist." Nashe, McLuhan argues, is a role-player and mask-wearer who "put on" his audience:[11]

> Now comes my main suggestion — the dramatic Renaissances in all European countries were transitional means of interrelating the old medieval public and the new reading publics of the age of print. Mask wearing and role-playing, the posture of the player for the stage quite naturally occurred to everybody at a time when coherent and homogeneous reading publics simply did not exist.

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[9] *The Classical Trivium*, 246.

[10] McLuhan, "Metaphor – The Analogy of Improper Proportion," MS., 1 in "The New American Vortex."

[11] In his correspondence we see that McLuhan was ambivalent as to whether Nashe's strategy had in fact met with success. E.g. writing to Ralph Cohen McLuhan observes that "Thomas Nashe, in the later 16th century, is still groping for a mask that will relate him to a reading public," (McLuhan to Ralph Cohen, 7 October 1970).

Today, when reading publics are crumbling into new diversity
and incoherence, one can notice this revival of self dramatization
as a means of exploring and creating new publics. Mere person-to-
person writing, of the assured 18th century stamp, is the result of
a lengthy processing of readers.[12]

In contrast with "The Place of Thomas Nashe," however, McLuhan's
subsequent explorations stress how the eclipse of decorum was a
function of Gutenberg technologies and the Addison-Steele discovery
that furbished "honest Iago" with his plain, equitone prose (rather than
the "ideas" of Descartes):[13]

The Addison-Steele discovery of equitone prose, in addition to
creating a fixed point of view, enabled the author to become a
"man of letters." He could now approach the large, homogenized

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[12] McLuhan to Ralph Cohen, 7 October 1970. McLuhan's exploration of decorum was a
life-long pursuit, and necessarily so insofar as his project was so intimately bound up
with changes in the media environment. As McLuhan states in the "What I Learned on
the Project, 1959–60" section of his *Report on Project in Understanding New Media*: it is
not who is speaking or to whom, but *what* is speaking to whom – if a person is speaking
into a Public Address system the *who* and the *what* are profoundly transformed.
McLuhan, What I Learned on the Project, 1959–60 – section V," in *Report on Project in
Understanding New Media* (Washington: National Association of Educational
Broadcasters, 1960), 1. Please note that the work does not have continuous pagination.

[13] McLuhan's extended meditations on the theme, the conflict between the (corporate)
Lion and the (individual) Fox, can be seen in "Masks, Roles and the Corporate Image."
McLuhan begins by documenting how the charismatic and corporate image of the
monarch, and once sacred King, was reduced to secular, individual status. He
continues, noting that as the corporate and social roles collapsed in the 17th and 18th
centuries, the role-less man without a mask came forward as the type of sincere and
unaffected person. Earlier, this barefaced, honest "Iago," or role-less malcontent
individualist appeared to traditional society as dubious and ambivalent. But it became
the only viable pattern for the gentleman. The faithful mask wearers and role players
lack adaptability and mobility. In an increasingly specialist and individualist world the
man in the mask began to be seen as hypocritical, and "the absence of a mask became
the mark of virtue." McLuhan adds: It is helpful to keep in mind that "the mask is not an
extension of the wearer but, a putting on of the collective powers of the audience,"
(McLuhan, "Masks, Roles and the Corporate Image," MS., 63).

> public of a market society in a consistent and complacent role ….
> Till the discovery of equitone prose, the writer had to wear a
> corporate, tribal mask of some sort, as did Swift. The medieval
> clown dominates the role of writer until the Addison-Steele
> discovery of mass-production flow of equitone.[14]

McLuhan also re-charts the reappearance, or perhaps "rediscovery," of
the classical doctrine of decorum from the technical innovations of Edgar
Allen Poe (rather than James Joyce). That said, however, McLuhan rarely
dwells on Poe and his technique of working backwards from effects
(choosing incident and tone to fit). Rather, he exhibits more concern with
the "revolution" of Flaubert and the symbolism of Mallarmé.[15] Mallarmé,
McLuhan argues in the "Prelude to Prufrock" section of his volume
dedicated to the poetics of T. S. Eliot, transformed the ancient principles
of decorum and "…gave such principles their utmost metaphysical
extension by making each object, each state of mind, and each person
dictate impersonally its own decorum to the poet."[16] As McLuhan notes
in "Jacobean Drama," the magic of symbolism consisted in finding a
power latent in *things* which could be released by juxtaposition and
correspondence. It is a discovery, McLuhan says, comparable to atomic
fusion, and: "it imposed on the poet not only self-effacement but a labour
of precision in choice and arrangement of images, situations, and
rhythms."[17] In other words, the symbolist artist is merely to *order*, not
forge, the signatures of existence. This is done, he says, firstly, by finding
appropriate analogies, and then adjusting their distance to the point of
maximal vibration. This is a device of counterpoint and orchestration
which permits the emergence and manipulation of inexhaustible

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[14] McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Counterblast*, 25.

[15] Mallarmé and the French Symbolists having taken Poe into French letters.

[16] McLuhan, "Prelude to Prufrock: Documents and Techniques," MS., 148

[17] McLuhan, "Jacobean Drama," MS., 1.

harmonies.[18] The order in which artists put "their" materials is by way of discovering the orchestral analogies in things themselves.[19] The artist thus seeks to allow existence to speak for itself in and through becoming a "medium," an impersonal cosmological agent. McLuhan saw and understood this as an innovation that had a profound bearing on rhetoric — personal rhetoric was finished! The dramatic speaking voice would neither have the same dimensions or the effects it once had:

> The sudden reversal whereby the audience becomes the speaker and the speaker assumes the collective mask of the image he presents was a revolution that involved all subsequent writing.[20]

Perhaps the only thing more revolutionary was Mallarmé's choice of vehicle for his new symbolist vision, which McLuhan saw was taken from the telegraphic press itself:

> Mallarmé saw the modern press (telegraphic) as a magical institution born of technology. The discontinuous juxtaposition of unrelated items made necessary by the influx of news stories from every quarter of the world, created, he saw, a symbolic landscape of great power and importance. (He used the word "symbol" in its strict Greek sense —sym-*ballein* — to pitch together, physically and musically.) He saw at once that the modern press was not a rational form but a magical one, so far as communication was concerned. The very technological form was bound to be efficacious far beyond any informative purpose .… The same symbolist perception, applied to cinema, showed that the montage of images was basically a return via technology to age-old picture language. S. Eisenstein's *Film Form* and *Film Technique* explore the relations between modern developments in the arts and Chinese ideogram, pointing to the common basis of ideogram in modern art, science and technology.[21]

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[18] McLuhan, "Prelude to Prufrock: Documents and Techniques," MS., 6–7.

[19] McLuhan, "The Poet and the Press," MS., 15.

[20] McLuhan, "The Lewis Vortex: Art and Politics as Masks of Power," MS., 5.

[21] McLuhan to Harold A. Innis, 14 March 1951. A comprehensive survey of the significance McLuhan affords the "ideogram" would include a discussion of how the work of Ezra Pound operates as something of a palimpsest through which McLuhan

The second phase of McLuhan's exploration was to examine how the developments of Flaubert and Mallarmé were taken up into English letters by the men of 1914. He documents how Ezra Pound, following Mallarmé, also realised that the telegraphic mosaic had solved the problem of creating the new poetic vision for our time:

> The poet Ezra Pound saw that the telegraph press, with its mosaic coverage of world events under a single date line, had solved the problem of creating the new poetic vision for our time. In contrast, he pointed to the helpless fumbling of educated but conventional minds that scorned the popular media as major resources for innovation and insight …. Pound also saw that the telegraph mosaic of news items was an organization of experience that bridged the ancient Oriental and Western forms.[22]

He also offers Eliot's *Tradition and the Individual Talent* as the best account of Flaubert's revolution as it was taken up and transformed by the Men of 1914:

> It has been said by A. N. Whitehead that the greatest discovery of the nineteenth century was the discovery of the technique of discovery. That technique consists in the retracing of any process of generation or cognition. Bertrand Russell noted as complementarity that the greatest discovery of the twentieth century was the technique of "the suspended judgement" —not single but multiple models of experimental exploration. The need to suspend points of view and private value judgments is indispensable to the programming of total environments.
>   T. S. Eliot, in "Tradition and the Individual Talent," gave classic statement to the theme of strategy of "the suspended judgement." Citing the role of platinum as catalyst in effecting new chemical combination, Eliot observed:
> "The mind of the poet is the shred of platinum. It may partly or exclusively operate upon the experience of the man himself; but, the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him

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encountered the work of Ernest Fenollosa. The matter is readily apparent in McLuhan's correspondence. See McLuhan to Eric McLuhan, 28 December 1970.

[22] *Take Today*, 140–141.

will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material."[23]

By the mid-twentieth century, and certainly after the inauguration of the computer-satellite matrix, McLuhan appears to have seen that Pound and Eliot brokered ordinary awareness. James Joyce was another matter entirely:

> T. S. Eliot's famous account of "the auditory imagination" has become an ordinary form of awareness; but *Finnegans Wake*, as a comprehensive study of the psychic and social dynamics of all media, remains to be brought into the waking life of our world.[24]

In "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," McLuhan makes the case that the revolution(s) of Flaubert and Mallarmé has a direct bearing on Joyce's rhetorical conception of the decorum of style. Rhetorical decorum, McLuhan notes, demands ideally that style be a function of the things being said or done. Joyce, McLuhan argues, took this precept literally so that he has no style whatsoever, because he never speaks to the reader directly in his own person:

> Like Alice, Joyce pushed all the way through the Narcissus looking-glass. He moved from the private Stephen Dedalus to the Finnegan corporate image. The mirror, like the mind, by taking in and feeding back the same image becomes a wheel, a cycle, able to retrieve all experience.[25]

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[23] *Take Today*, 97. "What happens is a continual surrender of himself as he is at the moment to something which is more valuable. The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality … It is in this depersonalization that art may be said to approach the condition of science," (T. S. Eliot, "Tradition and the Individual Talent," in *Critiques and Essays in Criticism: 1920–1948*, ed. Robert W. Stallman (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1949), 380).

[24] McLuhan to *Playboy Magazine*, February–March 1970, quoted by Bob Dobbs, "McLuhan and Holeopathic Quadrophrenia," in *The Legacy of McLuhan*, eds. Lance Strate and Edward Wachtel (Cresskill, N.J.: Hampton, 2005), 84.

[25] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 163.

His aesthetic demands that each thing be revealed to the reader on its own terms — each thing has its own style or signature:[26]

> In the *Wake* Shem the penman is, like Moses, an "outlex." The seer cannot be a rhetor. He does not speak for effect, but that we may know. He is also an outlet, a shaman, a scapegoat. And the artist, in order that he may perform his katharsis-purgative function, must mime all things …. As mime, the artist cannot be the prudent decorous Ulysses, but appears as a sham. As a sham and mime he undertakes not the ethical quest but the quest of the great fool. And to be all he must empty himself. Strictly within the bounds of classical decorum Joyce saw that, unlike the orator, the artist cannot properly speak with his own voice. The artist can have no style of his own but must be an "outlex" through which the multiple aspects of reality can utter themselves. That the artist should intrude his personal idiom between thing and reader is literally impertinence.[27]

What McLuhan appears to have read in Joyce's development of the rhetorical conception of the decorum of style is that he had gone further than both Eliot and Pound. This, in turn, enabled Joyce to do for the multiplicity of new media forms what Nashe does for wine in *Summer's Last Will and Testament*. In short, McLuhan read Joyce's decorum as permitting him to isolate the operation of the mind (and the individual and social aspects of cognition) under the influence of various media, and in so doing reveal the very "character" and "grammars" of the various new media forms and their audiences (who appear to be acting in accord with the strictures of these forms). Through his achievement, McLuhan appears to have seen that Joyce had won not only his

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[26] McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," MS., 15.

[27] McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 31–32.

detachment from these forms, but also, by extension, the means of living simultaneously in all cultural modes while quite conscious:[28]

> Joyce is, in the *Wake*, making his own Altamira cave drawings of the entire history of the human mind, in terms of its basic gestures and postures during all phases of human culture and technology. As his title indicates, he saw that the wake of human progress can disappear again into the night of sacral or auditory man. The Finn cycle of tribal institutions can return in the electric age, but if again, then let's make it a wake or awake or both. Joyce could see no advantage in our remaining locked up in each cultural cycle as in a trance or dream. He discovered the means of living simultaneously in all cultural modes while quite conscious.[29]

McLuhan states the significance of Joyce's discovery plainly in "Wyndham Lewis: His Theory of Art and Communication": "There is no need to re-immerse ourselves in the Primitive Time flux of blood and incest, we have, as *Finnegans Wake* also proclaims, the means of permanently awakening from the repetitive nightmare of history."[30]

Straddling Two Worlds

As I have already indicated, McLuhan's exploration of these matters was not for their own sake. Rather, it was because he was involved in a clinical and systematic appraisal of the successes and failures of his predecessors with a view to calculating a strategy for his own critical and artistic practise. What appears to be the case is that, in the wake of his

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[28] Provisionally, we might say that McLuhan saw that Joyce held out the means for realising not only cross-cultural, but inter-temporal and/or inter-mythic-stage dialogue (a way for individuals and collectives patterned by different media can talk and listen to each other). The value in such an enterprise should be all too apparent today as the "West" and the "Nations of Islam" have resorted to "war" as mode of interface.

[29] McLuhan, and Quentin Fiore, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (Great Britain: Penguin, 1967), 120. Emphasis mine.

[30] McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis: His Theory of Art and Communication," MS., 2.

initial forays (that would continue for the remainder of his career),

McLuhan saw some small glimmer of hope in the electric age:

> Our liberation from the dilemma may, as Joyce felt, come from the new electric technology, with its profound organic character. For the electric puts the mythic or collective dimension of human experience fully into the conscious wake-a-day world. Such is the meaning of the title *Finnegans Wake*. While the old Finn cycles had been tribally entranced in the collective night of the unconscious, the new Finn cycle of totally interdependent man must be lived in the daylight of consciousness.[31]

Subsequently, he registers his intent to follow Eliot and Joyce in a letter to Hugh Kenner in 1949:[32]

> To such principles of decorum Joyce and Eliot have committed us ….. The whole problem is uppermost in the 4 *Quartets* in E's [Eliot's] discussion of language in the 5th section of each quartet. The problem of decorum is the problem of *le mot juste*. The adequate rhythm etc. The kind and degree of being adequate to the kind and degree of experience and knowledge rendered. Eliot has made (once more) of decorum a problem in metaphysics and theology. Joyce too.[33]

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[31] *The Gutenberg Galaxy,* 269.

[32] McLuhan was not alone in his early assessment of Joyce's value: "It is here that Mr. Joyce's parallel use of the *Odyssey* has a great importance. It has the importance of a scientific discovery .... In using the myth, in manipulating a continuous parallel between contemporaneity and antiquity, Mr. Joyce is pursuing a method which others must pursue after him. They will not be Imitators, say more than the scientist who uses the discoveries of an Einstein in pursuing his own, independent, further investigations. It is simply a way of controlling, of ordering, of giving a shape and a significance to the immense panorama of futility and anarchy which is contemporary history," (T. S. Eliot, "*Ulysses*, Order, and Myth," in *James Joyce: Two Decades of Criticism*, ed., Seon Givens (New York: Vanguard Press, 1948), 201; cited in McLuhan to T. C. Clark, 6 December 1974).

[33] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 3 May 1949. In a brief section devoted to *le mot juste* in *Take Today*, McLuhan and Nevitt note*:* "The 'right' word is not the one that names the thing but the word that gives the effect of the thing. Experience is play, and meaning is replay and re-cognition. Far from being normal, successful communication is a rarity. It requires not only repetition of a common language, but also demands participation of

And it appears that he committed himself to trying to afford his audience(s) the same privilege that Joyce enjoyed:

> Electronic man has no choice but to understand processes, if he is to be free. To free himself from servitude to his own artefacts has become the main program of the new ecological age that began with Sputnik.[34]

Concomitant with this goal was his bid to afford his audience some ability, through understanding process, to "predict" the future by studying the present: "Since it is no longer safe to wait for the harsh judgement of results, we must discover how to *anticipate effects with their causes* in order to avoid the 'inevitable' by 'programming Fate.'" [35] Or, as McLuhan states in "Media Alchemy in Art and Society," "nothing is more important than anticipating future technological developments."[36]

> Social navigation and survival depend on recognition of the processes, and knowledge of the diversity of Environmental "rim-spins" and epicycles that we have created by our own innovations.[37]

With a view to realising this goal McLuhan saw that the task at hand was not dissimilar to that faced by the Men of 1914 prior to World War I — the responsibility of acclimatization — to update the sensibility of his North American audience from a 19th to a 20th century consciousness. This entailed, firstly, communicating the "technique of the

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both author and audience in the process of remaking from their old components a pattern that only the author may have perceived. Communicating the new is a miracle," (*Take Today*, 142).

[34] Ibid, 7.

[35] Ibid, 6.

[36] McLuhan, "Media Alchemy in Art and Society," *Journal of Communication* 8, no. 2 (Summer 1958): 63.

[37] McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business* (New York and Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 7.

suspended judgment" (as achieved by Eliot and Pound) as it is also the "technique" of not having a point of view:

> For it is by retracking the process of cognition that our century has recovered the power to suspend judgement and to achieve an inclusive consciousness. To transform ourselves into probes and to abandon the traditional visual obsession with fixed point of view are the necessary prelude to extending not just our nerves but the symmetrical ratios of consciousness into the environment.[38]

In turn the "technique of the suspended judgement" affords, among other things, the means of: (a) abstracting oneself from "the biases and consequences of ones own culture,"[39] and (b) anticipating the effects "…of, say, an unhappy childhood on an adult, and offsets the effect before it happens."[40] As McLuhan notes to Edward T. Hall:

> It would seem that that there is another kind of learning conceivable in which there would be no closure whatever, but an ever wide-awake acceptance of total structure, perhaps what Bertrand Russell had in mind when he spoke of the great achievement of the twentieth century, as the discovery of the technique of the suspended judgement. "That would be apprehension without closure, and depends on total awareness of the creative process…[41]

> This is a very different thing from the numbing or narcotic effect of new technology that lulls attention while the new form slams the gates of judgment and perception. For massive social surgery is needed to insert new technology into the group mind, and this is achieved by the built-in numbing apparatus discussed earlier. Now the "technique of the suspended judgment" presents the possibility of rejecting the narcotic and of postponing indefinitely the operation of inserting the new technology in the social psyche. A new stasis is in prospect.[42]

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[38] McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Counterblast*, 139.

[39] McLuhan, "The Humanities in the Electronic Age," MS., 6.

[40] *Understanding Media*, 62.

[41] McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 5 April 1962.

[42] *Understanding Media*, 63.

Secondly, it involved "plugging" *Finnegans Wake*, or more accurately, translating and applying the achievements of Joyce,[43] and doing so in a manner that would make and/or reach a general audience:[44]

> In America, all serious writing is done by professionals for professionals. There is no serious reading public but only a writing public. Outside a few specialized journals the whole output of print in America is intended as aspirin. Potential writers and artists are thus compelled into the fox-hole of teaching. (Teaching is not a fox-hole as such, but only because there can be little serious teaching done amidst current conditions.) Thus nobody in America in the past thirty years has ever faced the problem of writing a serious book for a general public. Such writers as have stayed out of teaching have automatically appealed to a ready-made audience as is constituted by the Marxian socialists. Lewis, however, sets out to create an audience for himself.[45]

Despite announcing his intention to get out of English and commitment to the principles of decorum of Joyce and Eliot, we can also hear McLuhan's hesitation in his later correspondence with Kenner. McLuhan probes Kenner, possibly seeking reassurance for his decision:

> Do you think the boys in your classes are potential consumers of literature? Or are they already back at a phase of the culture cycle which calls for an oral-musical-pictorial mode of manipulating their experience? I fondly ask.[46]

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[43] "If men were able to be convinced that art is precise advance knowledge of how to cope with psychic and social consequences of the next technology, would they all become artists? Or would they begin a careful translation of new art forms into social navigation charts?," (*Understanding Media*, 66).

[44] This is not to say that he intended to make his work "simple." As he notes to one of the contributing editors for *Rolling Stone*: "Since my work is supposed to be difficult a lot of people have taken to simplifying it," (McLuhan to Michael Rogers, 28 March 1973).

[45] McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis: Lemuel in Lilliput," in *The Medium and the Light*, 182.

[46] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951.

In short, McLuhan's decision to follow Eliot and Joyce brought as many problems as it solved, and it left him straddling two worlds. While having seen the reappearance of the ancient doctrine in modernist poetics and nearly all spheres of avant-garde art, McLuhan also saw how entrenched the decorum of "honest Iago" and his equitone prose had become, particularly within the academy. His observations are readily heard in "Joyce, Mallarmé and the Press," where he states: "Literature has become the territory of the intellectual bureaucrat job holder or sponsor of a continuous literary decorum."[47] Consequently, by virtue of institutional strictures arising from his "position" in the fox-hole of teaching, McLuhan's critical activities had to be anchored to, and in accord with, a "scholarly decorum" — one that McLuhan saw as obsolete, impotent, and incapable of engaging a general audience. In many respects we might surmise that, prior to 1951, McLuhan's "position" was analogous to that of Chesterton: "Mr Chesterton does not fight with the hope of success but for the continuance of a cause and witness to truth."[48]

McLuhan began his first public forays beyond the strictures of academic decorum in and through *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*. While the work is essentially "critical," he avails himself to some of the techniques of discontinuity by juxtaposing printed adverts with his confrontational yet otherwise conventional prose. As his correspondence indicates, however, he considered *The Mechanical Bride* to be a failure on at least two grounds (which in McLuhan's mind were not unrelated). In the first, McLuhan appears to have felt like something of an unwitting dupe of sectarian struggles (that will be discussed at some

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[47] McLuhan, "Joyce, Mallarmé and the Press," MS., 9.

[48] McLuhan, "G. K. Chesterton: A Practical Mystic," *Dalhousie Review* 15, no. 4 (1936): 460.

length in the following).[49] Secondly, his editors chopped the work to pieces:

> Am having fun with Ev. of Vanguard. Her most recent gesture was to omit the Mechanical Bride section from the book. Along with "What the Public Wants", "Great Books", "Da Vinci to Holmes" etc…etc…These sections contain matter offensive to *her*. Rocked in the cradle of a jeep. Yet she wanted Mech [Mechanical] Bride as title for the bridecake. Cake to be cut in March they say. A still birth so far as I'm concerned.[50]

Something of McLuhan's resignation at this juncture, and his concerns about his breach of scholarly decorum, can be observed in his correspondence with Hugh Kenner:

> If I weren't held back by a 1000 cautions (which stem from my position):
> > (a) As Catholic,
> > (b) As at St. Mic's, [Michael's]
> > (c) As tied to decorum of the profession.
> > I could let her rip and become a one man circus on the campus. I dread the effect of the appearance of *Folklore* as putting, perhaps, weapons in hands of the unfriendly.[51]

In view of what McLuhan did, as we have seen in the previous chapters, we would have to say that McLuhan's resignation and "failure" was fortuitous. Meditating on his failure(s) apparently led McLuhan to deem that words have become drugs, and "you can't shout warnings or

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[49] Writing to Wyndham Lewis McLuhan states that the "*Mechanical Bride* was written in all innocence of "these quarrels," (McLuhan to Wyndham Lewis, 7 February 1954). Also see McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 3 December 1952.

[50] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951. Another reason that McLuhan deemed the work to be a failure is outlined in the "The Hot and Cool Interview." There McLuhan states: "*Mechanical Bride* is a good example of a book that was completely negated by TV. All mechanical assumptions of American life have shifted since TV; it has become an organic culture," (McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," in *Media Research*, 46). The interview was originally conducted by Gerald E. Stearn in 1967.

[51] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, n.d. [approx 1949–51].

encouragement to these machines."[52] Subsequently, the early-McLuhan placed a lesser emphasis on "writing,"[53] and chose instead to dramatise himself[54] and achieve his cultural objectives by other means, e.g., the creation of an adult milieu.

McLuhan's Second "Great Labour"

While availing himself of other means, McLuhan continued his search for new ways and means of writing and sought to better his understanding of the "quarrels" and sectarian struggles he felt that he had entered with *The Mechanical Bride*. It was not until his "self-initiation," following three years of intensive research into the "cults" (1951 to 1954), that McLuhan reported that "the world of the arts and of science" had taken on "a much more intelligible character." [55] It is this period of development that I will call McLuhan's second great labour.

Returning to McLuhan's quest to make or reach a general audience, we see that he felt himself to be faced by at least two problems. The first is how to find a form that would resonate with the sensibilities of a contemporary audience that he saw, following the late 19th century turn of artistic consciousness to the restoration of ritual to the whole of life, were returning to collective liturgical participation due to the oral

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[52] McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 22 June 1951.

[53] McLuhan's rationale can be heard in his correspondence with Ezra Pound where he expresses his distain both for the "publish or perish motto" and the culture it represents. McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 22 June 1951. Further, writing to Hugh Kenner McLuhan states: "Essays won't turn tides. Rub out too quickly," (McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, n.d. [04 Poet of Situations]).

[54] Arguably, adopting the decorum of Eliot and Joyce, but applying it performance, rather than on the printed page.

[55] McLuhan to Wyndham Lewis, 7 February 1954.

bias of the new electronic culture.[56] As McLuhan notes in a later letter to Lynn White:

> One of the dynamisms of culture that I have been working with in the past two or three years , and for which you probably have endless examples in your experience, is the process by which the new environments created by technologies on the one hand, scrap their immediate predecessors while *retrieving much older technological environments* …. The liquidating of the tribal encyclopaedia of the bards … was done by phonetic literacy, but there was *retrieved something of great antiquity, namely pre-tribal metaphysical man*. Gutenberg scrapped the scribe and the schoolman, but *retrieved the whole of pagan antiquity*. Mechanical industry scrapped the craftsman and retrieved the idea of work as sacrament, cf. Carlyle *Past and Present*. The electric wiring of the planet has scrapped mechanical industry and *retrieved the occult and the primitive*. Within this larger rhythm there are a great many subordinate ones. Some of these appear in the book that I did with Professor Wilfred Watson, *Cliché to Archetype* … We discovered that the archetypal forms were old clichés dredged up by more recent clichés.[57]

The second problem was that the form had to be consistent with his understanding of Catholic theory and practise of communication. McLuhan's concerns in this regard are made explicit in his review of *Melville's Quarrel with God*. Here McLuhan states that Thompson's book raises the question: "As the arts are manifestly linked to pagan rituals and rebirth as understood by secret societies … what is to be the

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[56] In "Popular Cultural Mosaic" McLuhan and Fishwick write: "Today's world is flooded with inferior deities. Electronic lines of force create a pantheon of neon and nylon deities." Everybody is a Pope these days – instead of convictions there are kinections. They continue: Religion as ritualistic festivity is far from dead, "electric simultaneity has resurrected it … Liturgy and ritual will mushroom like never before. Secular rituals will flourish too," however, "Just what god is being worshipped by such rituals is seldom asked," (McLuhan, and Marshall Fishwick, "Popular Cultural Mosaic," MS., 20–21).

[57] McLuhan to Lynn White, 17 August 1970. Emphasis mine.

Christian and Catholic attitude toward them?"[58] It is a question,

McLuhan asserts, that needs answering, particularly given: (a) The

Catholic Church had severed its ties with secret societies in 1738, (b)

Thomist theologians remained isolated "from the main currents of

awareness,"[59] and (c) modern communication radically extends the range

of pagan experience:

> Moreover, the modern Christian is subjected to the pagan symbols
> and rituals in novels, poems, operas, radio plays and movies, in
> entire innocence of their efficacious and magical character. Do we
> have a communication theory adequate to this situation? Is
> innocence protection? As Father White wrote concerning "Jung
> and the Supernatural" … "A living symbol does something to us;
> it moves us, shifts our center of awareness, changes our values"
> …. In other words, the symbols of our environment, commercial
> and artistic, are not just signs whose reference has to be
> understood for them to be efficacious. That is [a] Cartesian and
> Lockean theory of communication which never fitted the facts. But
> Catholics today still hold to that theory of communication, and it
> hands them over bound and helpless to the consciously
> manipulated pagan rituals of art, literature and commerce. The
> measure of our unawareness and irrelevance can be taken from
> the fact that no Thomist has so far seen fit to expound St. Thomas's
> theory of communication by way of providing modern insight
> into our problems.[60]

In view of the dual challenge, McLuhan followed the directives of

Erasmus (encountered during his earlier doctoral work):

> For Erasmus, as for Jerome, the classics are an incidental means
> which the young student will cultivate "*cautim ac moderate*" in
> order to form his style. The real end of these studies is the
> understanding of Scripture, and the student must beware of
> contamination by pagan manners…Antiquity must be approached
> with the utmost caution. In short, Erasmus concludes:

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[58] McLuhan, "The Heart of Darkness," review of *Melville's Quarrel with God*, by Lawrence Thompson," MS., 3.

[59] McLuhan to Walter Ong and Clement McNaspy, 23 December 1944.

[60] McLuhan, "The Heart of Darkness," MS., 8.

> "...it will prove useful to have gone over the whole of pagan literature, provided it be done at the appropriate time of life, with moderation, with prudence, and with a discerning mind; moreover, young men should go through it as pilgrims and not stay there as inhabitants; last, and not the least, while doing so they should refer everything to Christ."[61]

McLuhan renewed his exploration of the relationship between the secret societies and the arts,[62] and sought to examine the changing role and function of art and artist, and probe the relationships between ritual, "doctrine," and technique.[63]

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[61] *The Classical Trivium*, 162–163. In "Strike the Set," McLuhan notes how new art is made by invading the old arts and ravaging them for materials for new forms. McLuhan, "Strike the Set," *McLuhan Dew-Line Newsletter* 1, no. 11 (May 1969), 7. He echoes the theme again in "Agnew Agonistes," adding: "since change itself has become the staple of our existence, it would seem natural that we should all be deep students of the fabulous phoenix and its ways of alteration and renewal," (McLuhan, "Agnew Agonistes," *McLuhan Dew-Line Newsletter* 2, no. 4, (January–February 1970): 7). In "Maritain on Art," McLuhan notes how, in the Manichean scheme, the artist is the Promethean adversary of God, the supreme cultural hero …. He assumes knowledge of good and evil and thereby becomes a God. As such he is suffering for man and God. He is the ape of Christ. He is the devil. He follows the way of destruction – the phoenix. "Pitted against an evil world and Evil God, he seeks to make all things new in his imagination …. Such were the views of Blake, Coleridge, Melville and Poe, but such are the views of all the worlds religions except Christianity," (McLuhan, "Maritain on Art," MS., 3).

[62] I say "renewed" as, to some extent, McLuhan's exploration began in 1944. See McLuhan, "Personal Principle and Creative Process in *The Bridge* by Hart Crane," MS. He also would have encountered much of this material in his survey of Church Councils and Controversies that would undoubtedly informed his dissertation on Nashe.

[63] In some respects, McLuhan's primary object for analysis is neither "doctrine," nor the historical conditioning of doctrine, but rather the impact and effects of doctrine — not what was said but what was felt to have been said.

Ezra Pound

During the "grisly business" of his second great labour McLuhan made use of the extensive library of St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto. He also probed his academic colleagues,[64] fellow Catholics (including the Jesuit, Walter Ong),[65] and Wyndham Lewis and Ezra Pound, on the grounds of their complicity in the practise of using ritual for the basis of their artistic activity. Pound in particular appears to have been instrumental in helping McLuhan navigate his dilemma.

McLuhan first met Pound in 1948. Their meeting and the subsequent dialogue that ensued in no way shook McLuhan's conviction that Ezra Pound was one of the most significant figures in all English letters given his Herculean efforts to bring the English speaking world back in step with Europe:[66]

> As Mr. Pound saw it, the job was to acclimatize seventy years of French discovery within a single decade. And with the assistance of Wyndham Lewis, T. E. Hulme, T. S. Eliot, and Joyce, that job was mainly done by 1922. But it could not have been done without Mr. Pound's intense concern for technique.[67]

In Pound, and also in T. S. Eliot, McLuhan found a model of a new kind of "artist" — the artist–scientist–educator. Pound's understanding of the

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[64] "Here at Toronto in past 2 years I have been checking these doctrines with a wide variety of colleagues. They are all highly-instructed and enthusiastic Manichees. Of course, they are split East and West in ritual sense. The East crowd are mystic-magical boys, the West humanist-rationalist. Catholic and Christian culture is and always was in their book a wretched ragout for convicts," (McLuhan to Walter Ong, 15 June 1953).

[65] Writing to Ong McLuhan notes: "I don't know what you know, but I know there isn't a living artist or critic of repute who isn't playing their game. I mean their rituals and doctrines as basis of artistic organization," (McLuhan to Walter Ong, 31 May 1953).

[66] See Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era* (London: Faber, 1972).

[67] McLuhan, "Pound's Critical Prose," in *The Interior Landscape*, 78. In the same essay McLuhan attributes Pound's ability to bridge the technological and verbal worlds to his early life in "technological America," where "the most authentic aesthetic experience was widely sought and found in the contemplation of mechanical tools and devices."

artist's vocation, at least as McLuhan describes it, is to be "the antenna of the race," a sensitive recording instrument and probe into all the arts and sciences.[68] Similarly, McLuhan describes Eliot as a poet who had taken it upon himself to express, with the greatest intensity, the experiences of his time:[69]

> Poetry is discovery. It is discovery of the world you live in, your total environment. The poet makes us more aware of all experience and helps us to discriminate — above all, as Joseph Conrad wrote, "to make us see", and by seeing he meant feeling, hearing, seeing, understanding. One poet calls his poems antennas, and they are: probes, or antennas, into an otherwise silent world. Poetry, then, is an exciting means of exploring the world you live in and of deepening your awareness and understanding of that world, and your response to it.[70]

As McLuhan notes in "Great Tom," the present, for Pound and Eliot, "was revealed only after first having acquired the entire past, at which point the constituents fall into place. Pound, McLuhan states, evokes it by "vortices," and Eliot by the "auditory imagination." Then, and only then, was the poet able to exercise his primary function, which was not to transmit messages but provide new awareness and orientation.[71] Further, in Pound, McLuhan appears to have found a "serious artist,"[72] that shared a commitment to his audience similar to his own, and who had also built his oeuvre in and through wrestling with a problematic also not unlike his own. Subsequently, McLuhan began to probe Pound on the

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[68] McLuhan, "Pound: The Playboy of the Westend World," MS., 2–3.

[69] McLuhan, "From LaForgue to Dante," MS., 10.

[70] McLuhan, and Richard J. Schoeck, "General Introduction," to *Voices of Literature* II, ed. McLuhan and Richard J. Schoeck (Toronto and Montreal: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1965), v.

[71] McLuhan, "Introduction," MS., 1 in "Great Tom." McLuhan adds: Eliot, sends his readers exploring Latin, Greek, French and Sanskrit "as new kinds of perception."

[72] See Ezra Pound, "The Serious Artist," in *Literary Essays of Ezra Pound*, ed. T. S. Eliot (London: Faber and Faber, 1913).

matter of his complicity in the use of "secret cult knowledge."[73] In July

1952 McLuhan writes:

> Your own tips are always exact. But they are of little help to the uninitiated. Once a man has got onto technique as the key in communications it's different. But somehow the bugbear of *content* forbids that anybody be interested in *technique* as *content*. For example you, Eliot and Joyce use as central guide in all matters of letters, sounds, phrases, situations the whole traditional lore on the diverse labyrinths of the Cumaean Gates. Rock labyrinth. Water labyrinth and so on. It's taken me a long time to get wised up. Why couldn't one of you have given some tips on this matter 30 years ago? I can see of course how Yeats never did develop the mastery of these labyrinths that you Joyce and Eliot have done. Is there some secret cult knowledge in these matters. Masonic? Something no critic should know?[74]

In what appears to be his reply to McLuhan's letter of 16 July 1952,

Pound does not deny his complicity in the matters to which McLuhan

alludes. Instead, he offers McLuhan a portrait of the serious artist in right

relationship with his materials, history, and tradition: "…and yr/ crit/

writing will become a lot livelier when yu start looking for credits rather

than debts // not matter much."[75] Arguably, Pound merely reiterates the

charge of Erasmus (and Jerome) — the serious artist is engaged in a

constant dance of translation and transformation of *all* the materials that

he inherits.

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[73] Pound's apparent "complicity" is taken up and developed by McLuhan's former student, Leon Surette. See Leon Surette, *A Light From Eleusis: A Study of Ezra Pound's Cantos* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1979).

[74] McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 16 July 1952. McLuhan may have been off-beam here, or perhaps he is merely playing "student" to the "master" and trying to get a more comprehensive answer by agitating.

[75] Ezra Pound to Marshall McLuhan, 21 July 1952.

East and West

In the following year, McLuhan writes again to Pound. He continues to probe Pound on the matter and expresses his disgust at what he thought he had found:

> Last year has been spent in going through rituals of secret societies with fine comb. As I said before I'm in a bloody rage at the discovery that the arts and sciences are in the pockets of these societies. It doesn't make me any happier to know that Joyce, Lewis, Eliot, yourself have used these rituals as a basis for art activity.
>> Monopolies of knowledge are intolerable
>> The use of the arts for sectarian warfare! ugh.
>> The use of the arts as a technique of salvation!
>>> as a channel of supernatural grace!
>> The validity of the rituals is entirely in the cognitive order.
>> Art is imitation of the process of apprehension.
>>> clarification of [the process of apprehension].
> Now that I know the nature of the sectarian strife among the Societies I have no intention of participating in it any further, until I know a good deal more. To hell with East and West.[76]

Before we consider what McLuhan omits from this letter — the extent that he had taken onboard Pound's guidance with a view to formulating or consolidating a "Catholic" position — we need first to digress, and consider what McLuhan meant by East and West.

In "Eliot and the Manichean Myth as Poetry" (1954), McLuhan approaches East and West by setting up a problem: If we grant that human existence is a state of damnation two possibilities follow: (a) we can retrace the stages of our fall into matter and so escape, or (b) devise some means for the extinction of personality. The pagan world, past and present, McLuhan argues, is divided between these two alternatives.

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[76] McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 28 February 1953.

McLuhan calls one East and the other West.[77] The West, which is alternatively called by McLuhan the Time School and/or Vertical, McLuhan identifies as dualistic. It tends, he notes, to set the sign or the work of art as a link between two worlds, between heaven and hell. It is concerned with the world as time process, as becoming, and escaping time into eternity by means of art and beauty. The West or Time or Vertical school, seeks to escape space by way of continuity and dialectic. Art is followed as a continuous labyrinth in which we may struggle upwards by means of will power and ethical struggle. We can, the "West" holds, retrace the stages of our fall into matter and so escape. It (the orientation of the "West") is aristocratic, and tends to assert the individual will against the "hoi polloi." For McLuhan, Yeats is an exemplar. By contrast, the East, also called by McLuhan the Horizontal and/or Space School, looks to set the work of art and symbol the collective task of communication rather than the vertical task of elevating the choice of the human spirit above the infernal depths of material existence. The Horizontal or Space school seeks to appeal to the intuition, emotion, and collective participation in states of mind for communication and transformation of the self, ultimately seeking to transform and merge, or annihilate personality. The "extinction of personality" is sought by way of moving from intensity to intensity, towards a final flash of awareness and extinction by way of discontinuous arrangements in space. Time is thereby lost, and escaped, in and through simultaneous

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[77] McLuhan, "Eliot and the Manichean Myth as Poetry," (address to the spring symposium of the Catholic Renascence Society, 19 April 1954), MS., 4. For McLuhan, both these possibilities are Manichean.

juxtapositions. For McLuhan, T. S. Eliot's alliance is mainly Eastern, with the Horizontal or spatial school.[78]

In later life McLuhan appears to have continued to research both East and West. He also appears to have taken steps to nuance his account of the East-West dichotomy by using four "models" of art.[79] While not a feature of any of his published works (indicating they were not refined, tested, and made ready for public consumption), they deserve mention here.

1. Voluntaristic or Ethical theory

According to a Voluntaristic (or Ethical) theory, art, on an intra-personal level, is a means of self-discovery and self-expression. Art objects are understood as an expression of the power of the will to dominate material world. On an inter-personal level, the voluntaristic or ethical theory holds that the social function of art is the education of the will, and the shaping of character. It is, therefore, closely aligned with the romantic notion of creation as an outpouring of some sort, which for McLuhan is merely psychological view of art, devoid of metaphysical perception. Writing in "Joyce, Mallarmé, and the Press," McLuhan suggests that a voluntaristic or ethical theory ought to naturally yield to a

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[78] McLuhan, "Eliot and the Manichean Myth as Poetry," 5–6. In many respects, McLuhan's terminology is wanting here. Both vertical and horizontal are spatial terms, yet "horizontal" is used here by McLuhan to describe an essentially auditory or acoustic, non-visualisable order. As I have already noted, however, McLuhan often struggled for terminology when exploring. His dedication to using words in the common stock and lack of interest in "tidying up captured territory" often militates against the kind of "consistency" or "accuracy" obtained by use of specialist terms or some private idiom. See McLuhan, "Medieval Grammar as the Basis for Bacon's Novum Organum," MS., 4.

[79] McLuhan, "Communication Theories: Supplement to English and Communication Seminar," MS., 1.

cognitive theory, however, on account of sectarian disputes, tends to foster an anti-cognitive attitude:

> If the world is not opaque and if the mind is not of the earth earthy, then this moral view of art should yield to the cognitive view. However that may be, the cathartic, ethical view of art has led to doctrinaire hostility to the use of discontinuity in art…and indifference to all popular art. And in the past century with every technological device advancing the discontinuous character of communication the stand taken by the cathartic and ethical school has enveloped the entire world of popular culture in a haze of esoteric nescience, disguised, however, as a profound moral concern with the wider hope and the higher things. Joyce had a phrase for this anti-cognitive attitude, "the cultic twallette."[80]

2. Magical View of Art

In stark contrast to the voluntaristic or ethical theory is a magical view of art. At the intra-personal level, art is a means of uniting the observer with the core of existence by establishing immediate relationships. It is irrational in means, yet super-rational in effect. On an inter-personal level, the social function of art as conceived by a magical view is purgative, on one hand, and on the other, a means of uniting the group with the traditions and the collective consciousness.

3. Aristotelian and Platonic Cognitive Schools

Roughly, the voluntaristic or ethical theory or cathartic school corresponds with the West, and the Magical view is Eastern. McLuhan however held that there were two additional "cognitive" schools, differing as to whether they stem from Plato or Aristotle. The Aristotelian-Cognitive view of art, which appears to be the model closest

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[80] McLuhan, "Joyce, Mallarmé, and the Press," in *The Interior Landscape*, 12–13.

to McLuhan's own,[81] sees, at the intra-personal level, the Art process as an analogue of perceptual process.[82] The Art object is seen as an externalization of the interior drama of sense, imagination, and understanding. On the inter-personal level, Art is a means of communicating by participation in the cognitive processes of other minds. Therefore, Communication is an analogue of the creative process, and every moment of perception is a creative moment. By contrast, the Platonic-Cognitive view of Art, at the intra-personal level, takes Art as corresponding to a higher reality. The Art object is taken as a static model of an intellectually conceived archetype, rendered visible by statement. At the inter-personal level, the Platonic-Cognitive view understands the social function of art to be refinement through recognition of the non-physical realities behind the veil of existence. Group unity is achieved via formal education in the arts. Therefore, the main value of the arts is for the enlightenment of elites.

During the course of his exploration, the Catholic "position" McLuhan appears to have arrived at was that the East-West dichotomy was, on one level, nonsense,[83] both for the artist and Christian. Writing in "Coleridge as Artist" McLuhan explains why:

> At the theological level the Hellenic dualist finds the quarrel insoluble on the assumption of the eternity of matter. The Oriental and the Romantic monist simply fuse inner and outer, matter and spirit, seeking an H-bomb formula of annihilation for ego and existence alike. For the Christian there is no problem since he accepts the revelation that the world was made from nothing as well as the dogma of the resurrection of the body. *But for the*

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[81] C.f. McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 28 February 1953. In the previous chapter I noted that McLuhan was neither Aristotelian nor Platonic and that his first commitment was to dialogue. Here, we see that the matter is not quite that simple. This matter, however, can only receive mention here.

[82] C.f. *Through the Vanishing Point*, 240.

[83] McLuhan, "Poetry and Society," *Poetry* 84, no. 2 (1954): 94.

practicing artist there is no point in the quarrel since works of art are not made from ideas or doctrines but, like ourselves, must come into existence by a process which is indifferent to the winds of doctrine. Yet if the artistic process must always be the same the conditions of art and the artist are always changing.[84]

On another level however, McLuhan found the "doctrines" of East and West valuable and significant.[85] As he notes in his "Heart of Darkness":

> The arts from Homer to the present day indeed form an ideal order as Mr. Eliot has said, because they have been representations of the spiritual quest of the pagan rebirth rituals. "Rebirth" in pagan ritual amounts to retracing the stages of descent of the soul in the hell of matter and chaos which is existence. As such, the pagan rituals are in reality representations of the process of abstraction, or the stages of human apprehension. From this point of view, may *not the pagan rituals be valid as art and metaphysics in spite of their own assumptions*, but impotent as religion?[86]

And, further, consolidates in "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial":

> One significance of Stephen's surname Dedalus (the French form of Daedalus) is that Daedalus, the inventor of the labyrinth, was accredited with having been the first to reduce the ancient initiation rituals to the form of art. That is to say, Daedalus was the first to grasp the relation between the pagan rebirth rituals and the labyrinthine retracings of the artistic process. The pagan rituals were imitations of nature *in sua operatione*, because the soul imprisoned in existence could only be released by retracing the

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[84] McLuhan, "Coleridge as Artist," in *The Interior Landscape*, 118–119. Emphasis mine. Earlier in the same article McLuhan notes how the quarrel, between the Greek and Oriental way "in actual fact...is pointless so far as art goes since both kinds are inevitably dynamic, following the stages of cognition, which are equally the base of religious ritual and human creation,"(Ibid., 117–118).

[85] For example, in a fragment of an essay on Francis Bacon, that appears to have been part of the materials being used to revise his doctoral thesis for publication, McLuhan notes: "one would have to go to the Rosicrucian's or to C. G. Jung to find today a ready comprehension of the significance of the ancient doctrine of the Logos for the study of physics," (McLuhan, "Essay on Bacon," MS., 18).

[86] McLuhan, "The Heart of Darkness," 5. Emphasis mine.

stages of its fall and descent through the various degrees of material being. Necessarily, therefore, all artistic imitation first arose from the pagan liturgies or mysteries. If Daedalus was the first to note this relation, Joyce was the first to see in these ancient rituals of descent and return the perfect externalization, in drama and gesture, of the stages of human apprehension. The retracing of any moment in cognition will thus provide the unique artistic form of that moment. And its art form coincides with its quiddity, except that the artist arrests what is otherwise fleeting.[87]

In view of the "significance," McLuhan suggests to Walter Ong, in the same year as "Heart of Darkness" was published, that, at very least, the East-West dichotomy might in some way inform Catholic strategy and apologetics:[88]

> From gnostic point of view (i.e. masonry also) Catholic Church is engaged in Devil Worship. It is, via its sacramental system, earthy, obscene, corrupt, diabolic. But not invalid. These cultists have never questioned validity of our worship. They question the object. They are sure we are devil-worshippers. Since they have the utmost respect for the devil and think he too should be worshipped as part of God, they respect the Catholic Church and allow it a limited existence. But this view of the Church which is axiomatic for them seems to us unappreciated among Catholics. *It should have something to do with our strategies and apologetics.* I do not know of any facet of contemporary art science or study that is not firmly fixed in extreme Manichean doctrine.… [89]

During the same year, in "Maritain on Art," McLuhan goes further still. Here McLuhan reflects on Jacques Maritain's treatment of the arts and

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[87] McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 34.

[88] The section just cited prior McLuhan continues: "M. D. Chénu, O.P., has explained the larger pattern of the *Summa* of St. Thomas to be based on the Neo-Platonic theme of emanation and return which pagan rituals have derived and expressed in the pattern of solar movement: 'This brief scheme … is utilized by St. Thomas not as a commodious frame in which he can dispose at his pleasure the immense material of his sacred doctrine, but as an order of knowledge, which produces intelligibility at the heart of revealed truth' [*Cross Currents* II 2, p. 72]," (Ibid).

[89] McLuhan to Walter Ong, 15 June 1953.

the use of pagan wisdom, and he presents Maritain's project as "bolder than that of Rimbaud," the Symbolists, Blake, Coleridge, Melville, and Poe, insofar as Maritain attempts to *transmute* "the diabolical intentions of the big forces that tend to both the deification and destruction of man *by invading their arcane and appropriating their magical doctrine for Christian wisdom*."[90] McLuhan continues, noting that Maritain's strategy is the same as that of Aquinas in the face of the challenge from the Albigensians and Averroes. While entertaining the possibility that Aquinas may not have been fully successful (and that, perhaps, the question as to the success or failure of St. Thomas remains unanswered), McLuhan states: "no other strategy is thinkable."[91] Subsequently, in the early months of 1954, McLuhan registers that his own project would follow similar lines to that suggested by Pound, and pursued by Maritain. In an address given to the spring symposium of the Catholic Renaissance Society, McLuhan argues that the inevitable program for any Catholic, for whom time and space are not sectarian problems, is to avail himself of all techniques: "for a Catholic," McLuhan states, "it is easy to *admire and use each position*."[92]

McLuhan's readiness to avail himself of both positions appears to have been energized by his belief that, under electric conditions, both "positions" had become obsolete. In "Poetry and Society," also published in 1954, McLuhan argues that the invention of the machine, while a

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[90] McLuhan, "Maritain on Art," MS., 3.

[91] That said however, McLuhan also appears to have been struck by the inadequacies of Maritain's *Art and Scholasticism*. Writing to Wilhelmsen McLuhan states: "At no point does Maritain understand formal causality in art or philosophy. That is to say, he is totally unaware that formal causality consists in "putting on" the public proper to the activity involved. The nearest he comes to specify formal cause is to assign it to the artistic processes within the mind," (McLuhan to Fredrick D. Wilhelmsen, 17 June 1975).

[92] McLuhan, "Eliot and the Manichean Myth as Poetry," MS., 8–9.

product of the West and individual genius, was also something of a Trojan horse. As an environment shaper, the effects of "the machine" were primarily "horizontal." McLuhan's registers his discovery in several articles of the period. For example, in "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," McLuhan notes:

> But the principle relevance of the newspaper with reference to rhetoric and decorum concerns the one-day world of the press and advertisement alike, a fact linking the press to solar ritual. The press exists primarily as a means of spatial communication and control. Its time-binding powers are quite puny.[93]

Consequently, McLuhan saw that the introduction of electricity and the machine resulted in something of a temporary triumph for the "space men."[94] Under electric conditions, the Horizontal poets tended to cope better and at least appear to have more to say. On these grounds McLuhan was able to say to the politicians of his day: "the Beatles really do speak with authority in the electronic age."[95] That said however, McLuhan appears to have held that effects of the machine came as just as much of a surprise for Eastern doctrinaires. New communications technologies rapidly eclipsed the efforts and artefacts of *all* individual artists, a theme that features extensively in the essays that make up *The Interior Landscape*. For example, in "Coleridge as Artist," McLuhan notes:

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[93] McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 42.

[94] C.f. McLuhan, "Nihilism Exposed," review of *Wyndham Lewis*, by Hugh Kenner. *Renascence* (1955): 98. The work of Lewis, McLuhan argues, serves as an invaluable exposé of nihilism, and index of the spirit of our times. (Ibid., 99). Subsequently, McLuhan champions Lewis for his intense and fearless "pagan unworldliness carried to its ultimate mystical point," and his subsequent derision in "the greatest satires in our language" of "the many who share his philosophy but who have lacked the courage to live or express it." McLuhan adds: "They have had their revenge; but too easily, for they control the press and all the means of artistic reputation – so they have suppressed Wyndham Lewis."

[95] McLuhan, "The Public and Private Sectors in the Electric Age," MS., 1–2.

This has more than a neo-Platonic doctrinal interest at the present time when the instantaneity of communication between all parts of the world has brought into involuntary juxtaposition the whole diversity of human cultures. What century is it today in Peking or Jerusalem or Moscow? *Yet the very speed of communication between these entities so discontinuous in space, time, and experience makes for simultaneity in which linear history is abolished by becoming present.*[96]

Ovid and the Epyllion

At this point we need, again, to pause and retrace. So far we have seen the lineaments of McLuhan's thinking and have focused little on the contents of his second great labour other than to look briefly at McLuhan's diagnosis of the impact and effects of the respective "doctrines" or "attitudes" of East and West. We turn now to focus on content, in particular, materials arising from McLuhan's extension of his exploration of the "cults" to include Ovid, and a little discussed form known as the *epyllion* (also known by its anglicized name, "little epic").[97]

Between 1951 and 1954 McLuhan conducted an extensive study of Ovid and his *Metamorphoses*. The initial seeds of McLuhan's interest in Ovid date from at least as early as his doctoral work.[98] However, during

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[96] McLuhan, "Coleridge as Artist," in *The Interior Landscape*, 116. Emphasis mine.

[97] Theall, who had collaborated on this aspect of McLuhan's research, recounts how McLuhan's exploration of the *epyllion* was bound up with his interests in esoteric questions of literary history, his concern with and practise of Menippean satire, and interest in the Rosicrucians, Freemasonry, and other occult operations as they informed literary debates of the seventeenth and eighteenth century. Donald Theall, *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 194. It appears that the fruits of their collaboration were intended for publication as a volume, titled "Little Epic." The McLuhan Collection holds a sub-series of seven files that include: "Chaucer," "The Little Epic: the Greeks," "Joyce's Use of Epyllion," "Swift and Ovid's Metamorphoses" (by Sheila Watson), and three additional folders of notes and essay fragments.

[98] In "The Place of Thomas Nashe" (*The Classical Trivium*) McLuhan uses the work of E. K. Rand to show how, beneath *The Romance of the Rose* lies a profound

the period under consideration, McLuhan's exploration of Ovid's technique and use of a form McLuhan referred to as the *epyllion*, led him to conclude that Ovid provided a "history of technology,"[99] and was also the figure at the back of the Men of 1914.[100] Ovid, McLuhan held, taught Joyce, Eliot, Pound, and Lewis "how to contemplate effects minus causes."[101] As McLuhan notes to Etienne Gilson:

> Joyce, Pound, and Eliot use Ovid pervasively and technically. It was my study of these men that made me aware that the tracking backward from effects to hidden causes, to the reconstruction of mental states and motives, was a basic pattern of culture from Poe to Valéry.[102]

McLuhan elaborates in a letter to Peter Bruckner by way of meditating on Pound's *In a Station of the Metro*:

> "The apparition of these faces in a crowd/petals on a wet, black bough." The first line presents the situation; the second presents the effect on the sensibilities. The discovery that you could present effects directly and that one could bypass the cause of the effect, led to many developments in the arts in the past century. In a sense, it is embodied in my phrase "the medium is the message" in the way I present the effect of the medium on the sensibilities in a way that bypasses causes, at least those causes most people locate in the content.[103]

McLuhan called this action, which is one of the resources of the *epyllion*, "the mode of arrest," and he celebrated the "metamorphic trick," which he saw as being accomplished by playback by means of sub-plot:[104]

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acquaintance with Ovid, and beneath *The Divine Comedy*, obviously an acquaintance with Virgil.

[99] McLuhan to Eric McLuhan, 28 December 1970.

[100] McLuhan continued his study of Ovid until his last days, and retraced this terrain while collaborating with his son, Eric McLuhan during the 1970s.

[101] McLuhan to Sheila Watson, 20 January 1971.

[102] McLuhan to Etienne Gilson, 19 January 1971.

[103] McLuhan to Peter Bruckner, 5 January 1971.

[104] McLuhan to William Kuhns, 6 December 1971.

The metamorphic trick is to eliminate all evidence of the causes that led to that state. E.g. in the *Human Age* Lewis gives all the effects of electric technology as angelism without including the ground … suppressing the grounds that caused these effects. The technique is to arrest an action and suppress the cause for the arrest. By involving himself in the moment of arrest, the reader is expected to retrace or dream back. This is the mythic method of Ovid and the symbolists alike.[105]

The power of the *epyllion* to affect metamorphosis, McLuhan held, resides in the simple and elegant structure of the form that consists, in its most basic aspect, of a pair of plots or situations, each serving as a digression or subplot for the other.[106] These two plots, prime plot and sub-plot (referred to as the digression), McLuhan states, are not connected, but paratactic.[107] The ordering principle of the double plot or juxtaposition of two momentary environments or digressions, McLuhan claims, operates by the metaphorical method of *hendiadys*.[108] Writing to Hugh Kenner during the early 1950s, McLuhan goes so far as to say that the mode of the *epyllion* and its construction by way of interfacing two situations constitutes something of a minimum system for "all artistic organization," both East and West:

Here's a new basic insight which I pass on for its stimulus value … The heroic couplet as hokku! As ideogram. As double-plot. As condescended essence of all artistic organization. As extended metaphor. As always analogy in 4 terms…[109]

From Ovid, McLuhan's explorations moved to examine the use of the form throughout history. While debate as to whether the *epyllion* is in

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[105] McLuhan to Sheila Watson, 20 January 1971.

[106] McLuhan, "Joyce's Use of Epyllion," MS., 1.

[107] McLuhan to William Ryan, 5 June 1964. Arguably, Ovid's entire *Metamorphoses* is digression stacked upon digression.

[108] McLuhan, "Joyce's Use of Epyllion," MS., 2.

[109] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, n.d.

fact an accredited form of antiquity continues,[110] McLuhan asserts, that the *epyllion* can be traced from its inception in antiquity. The *epyllion*, he argues, can be shown to be the basic form of the Greek pastoral. Its origin, McLuhan argues, is liturgical, ceremonial, and pastoral. In contrast with the major epic, with its concern with heroes (children of the gods), and pushing them (the hero) through the houses of the zodiac, the *epyllion*, McLuhan states, is concerned with the gods and the drama of cosmic energies, and tends to avoid the cycle of the major epic in favour of concern with a single ordeal or mental state.[111] McLuhan also notes that the *epyllion* can be seen as a response to a new, heterogeneous public that arrived with the development of cities, commerce, and the separation of art and ritual; a situation, McLuhan asserts, the *epyllion* met with comedy, ambivalence, and hidden meanings for the esoterically inclined. Because the esoteric meaning of the *epyllion* relates to the cosmic powers, McLuhan adds, it was considered to have higher theological significance than the major epic.[112] For this reason the *epyllion* is often referred to as an aetiological poem, concerned with ultimate ends and ultimate causes (compared to Homer's concern with proximate or moral causes). Further, McLuhan asserts, the "meaning" of the *epyllion* was as speculative as modern physics is today. The *epyllion*, McLuhan held, is a representation of cosmic law and drama that we now call myth. As such, it can also be understood as an attempt at science and philosophy before the awareness of the individual given that natural phenomenon were

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[110] A debate McLuhan attributes to the forms "thousand faces."

[111] McLuhan, "The Little Epic: The Greeks," MS., 4.

[112] Ibid., 4–5, 15, 11.

regularly conceived of in terms of human experience and human experience was conceived in terms of cosmic events.[113]

McLuhan also held that the *epyllion* was tied up in religious controversy involving the competing claims of Olympic and Dionysic faiths and questions pertaining to divinization and the attainment of godhead by man. The major epic, based on heroes who had assumed fixed Olympic status, McLuhan claims, tended to be allied with the Olympic, while the *epyllion*, with its concern with the world of change and becoming, was allied with the Dionysiac.[114] The reason, McLuhan implies, is that this form is ideal for effecting changes in a reader's outlook and experience. The suggestive power of two otherwise unrelated plots is so strong that it brings in other ideas at the back of the metaphor, working by way of ripples of association. The wider the separation between levels, the greater the impact achieved.[115] The form then, McLuhan states, leveraging off the effect created by the sub-plot acting upon the prime plot, is not only capable of embodying the complementarity of Hertz's dictum (that "the consequence of the images are the images of the consequences"), but is trans-mutative.[116] The action emerging from the interface of the plot, as the carrier or container, and

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[113] "I am going to introduce Eric Havelock to a University of Toronto audience. In his *Preface to Plato* (Oxford University Press, 1963) he explains how the phonetic alphabet evoked a private image of the substantial individual. I understand this much better now than even he explains it. The unique technology of the phonetic alphabet was the fact that its components were phonemes (meaningless bits) rather than morphemes (meaningful bits). Magically, the fission of the phonetic alphabet is to isolate the visual sensory factor from all the other senses, and to constitute the image of the private person. We are now playing this drama in reverse in the electric age," (McLuhan to Pierre Elliott Trudeau, 26 March 1974).

[114] Ibid., 24.

[115] McLuhan, "Joyce's Use of Epyllion," MS., 3.

[116] McLuhan to William Ryan, 5 June 1964.

the subplot, the older form in the role of context, spiritualized the whole in such a way that the reader experiences timelessness. Hence, McLuhan concluded, the very essence of the *epyllion*, if not the *raison d'etre* of the form, is the "eternal moment," resulting from the spiritualising process and the resultant manipulation of time.[117] As McLuhan states in his manuscript on Tennyson and the Romantics, the manipulation of time as ritual gesture remains the inevitable resource of the *epyllion* (or little epic). The *double-ness* is a principal means of snatching actions from time into eternity with its accompanying recurrent imagery.[118]

In addition to exploring what amounts to the ancient pro and con factions of the pagan world in regard to the use of the form and its effects, McLuhan also explored the use of the *epyllion* throughout history. He asserts that the form enjoyed popularity from the Greek and Roman worlds through to medieval literature. According to McLuhan, Dante uses the *epyllion* always and everywhere in his *Commedia*,[119] and it is the basic Renaissance form for the short poem. Further, he also notes that the form has an important place in the Christian tradition. On one hand, McLuhan notes: "… the Christian bias was against the ritual efficacy of the juggling of narrative order."[120] On the other however, McLuhan held that the Gospel of St. John opens with a perfect little epic pattern of interplay between the World and the Word, leading him to state: "what may in fact be true," is that "this type of parallelism so dear to the arts and the ancient world, was also used as a principal mode of meditation upon the mystery of creation and redemption."[121]

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[117] McLuhan, "The Little Epic: The Greeks," MS., 11–2.

[118] McLuhan, "Tennyson and the Romantic Epic," MS., 27.

[119] Yet "no Dante scholar has ever pointed this out," (McLuhan to S. P. Rosenbaum, 17 January 1972).

[120] McLuhan, "Tennyson and the Romantic Epic," MS., 24.

[121] McLuhan, Letter to William Ryan, 5 June 1964.

McLuhan's exploration of the Christian use of the form tends to focus on Chaucer. Building on Baldwin's *Unity of the Canterbury Tales*, McLuhan argues that Chaucer adapted the structure of Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and was able to transform the eternalizing ritual of the *epyllion* (the ability of the *epyllion* to manipulate time) into a Christian form, directed toward Christian ends. The key to Chaucer's Christian-humanist synthesis and subsequent transmutation of the form, McLuhan shows, was accomplished by fusing *epyllion* with the whole Christian awareness of personality — providing his natural phenomena (the pagan impersonal myth and science of both Greece and Rome) with human voice or personalities.[122] The fusion, of an essentially pagan technique with Christian anthropology and understanding of personality, McLuhan argues, enabled Chaucer to both encompass and surpass the externalising techniques of the pagan use of the form.[123] The prime example for McLuhan is Chaucer's bar scene where normal time is broken into and the pilgrims are described as he, the narrator, *will* come to know them. The effect, McLuhan finds, of the curious montage of past, present, and future, is that we readers are precipitated into a nebulous time and carried off toward a far-off holy place.

In addition to Chaucer's use of the form, McLuhan also explored the use of the form by the Elizabethans. As the Elizabethans had realized, McLuhan argues, the form provided an answer to the question as to how to write on many levels simultaneously, and present the ineluctable.[124] Something of the Elizabethans' success in these regards, McLuhan

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[122] McLuhan, "Little Epic, notes," MS., 3–4. In a hand-written fragment also in the "notes" McLuhan writes: "Ovid permitted Xians [Christians] to take entire pagan world with tongue in cheek. In a word metamorphose it. Neo Pagans want it straight."

[123] McLuhan, "Tennyson and the Romantic Epic," MS., 28.

[124] McLuhan, "The Aesthetic Moment in Landscape Poetry," in *The Interior Landscape*, 159.

appears to have held, was inherited by Alexander Pope. In the letter to Kenner, where McLuhan effectively offers the equation: Ideogram~heroic couplet~hokku~double~plot~*epyllion* (little epic),[125] McLuhan proceeds to take a line from Alexander Pope's *Rape of the Lock*, and break it down to reveal the ineluctable or what in McLuhan's terms is the "hidden ground":

> (a) hungry judges soon the (b) sentence sign and (c) wretches hang that (d) jurymen may dine …. These are extremely complex lines. You see the AB:CD relations present many levels of analogy. Each one is analogous to the other level etc. But the cannibalistic features of these lines are at least equal to Swift's *Modest Proposal*. The judges are hungry for flesh not justice. The wretches hang as meat is hung *that* jurymen may dine…[126]

McLuhan continues, stating that the same scene is used in two ways that neutralise one another, and subsequently reveal "the nihilism lurking in all levels of society."[127]

In view of his exploration of the history of the form McLuhan was led to conclude that:

> The *epyllion*, by creating an interface or continuous parallel between two worlds, one past, one present, is a mythic, motivational genre *of the greatest importance in the history of European literatures*. It never had a higher cultivation than in the twentieth century. More's Book I is the retrieval of the medieval archetype world, and his Book II is the cliché-probe of his own time, retrieving the past.[128]

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[125] Where "~," according to Levin's idiom, designates, "significant comparability." See Richard Levin, *The Multiple Plot in English Renaissance Drama*. (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 10.

[126] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, n.d.

[127] McLuhan uses a similar example in "Tennyson and Picturesque Poetry," in *The Interior Landscape*, 141–142.

[128] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 165. Emphasis mine. Here, McLuhan is referring to Thomas More's *Utopia.*

Wordsworth, McLuhan argues, uses the *epyllion*, as does Tennyson,

Browning, the Symbolists, and the moderns in general use it freely as

desired:

> Edgar Allan Poe's rediscovery of the transforming power of the
> interval was a retrieval of the Ovidian technique of
> metamorphosis by the use of double plots or actions. W. B. Yeats
> had discussed it as the technique for creating "the emotion of
> multitude." This "magical" parallelism was the mode beloved by
> Dante and Shakespeare. It is the pattern used by James Joyce in
> *Ulysses* to bridge the ancient and modern worlds by a continuous
> parallel or interface between myth and realism, order and
> anarchy. In the detective story Poe discovered the missing clue as
> the bridge for all scientific research: the Cyclopean and
> encyclopaedic scanning of the total field by the omission of the
> private point of view. The bridge between the corporate scientific
> probe and the personal viewpoint was made by the deliberate
> organization of ignorance, by the suppression of data.[129]

Ezra Pound and T. S. Eliot too, McLuhan saw, used the form extensively

to fabricate values on several levels. Eliot, McLuhan claims, makes heavy

use of major plot and subplot, and the resultant effects issuing from

currents of action flowing between these polarities which enrich,

concentrate, and enliven. Similarly, while Pound uses the term

"ideogram" to describe the form of his poems (and he thinks of a poem

as single ideogram, and each block of his *Cantos* as an ideogram that

presents analogous perception in succinct form),[130] McLuhan regarded

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[129] *Take Today*, 10.

[130] McLuhan, "Introduction," in "Great Tom," MS., 1. Pound's ideogramatic method is
build around the assumption that the Chinese written language was ideographic and
non-phonetic in nature, and that the characters were constructed on the principle of
mimesis. Building on Fenollosa, Pound argues that where the phonetic language is
abstract, in reading Chinese we do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but
watching things work out their own fate. The Chinese written language, Pound holds,
"bears its metaphors on its face," and while "there is little or nothing in a phonetic word
to exhibit the embryonic stages of its growth," Chinese etymology "is constantly visible."

him in his *Cantos* as being consciously bardic, oral, and belonging to the ancient tradition of the *epyllion* and the work of Ovid. Each of Pound's *Cantos*, McLuhan finds, employs plot and subplot in various combinations, and their interface constitutes a metamorphosis.[131] Pound, by way of his "ideograms," McLuhan asserts, makes no explicit connections. Rather, in a bid to "present emotional and intellectual complexes in a single instant," he sets items, ideas, texts, and phrases side by side without comment or conjunction in analogical ratios, "in accord with the Aristotelian principle of metaphor."[132]

Of all the writers who employed the form it is James Joyce that McLuhan singles out for special attention.[133] Joyce was, for McLuhan, the master in the use of the form, albeit due to a large debt owed to Pound, and possibly to a lesser extent, T. S. Eliot.[134] McLuhan apprehended that Joyce not only completed what Chaucer started, but went further than Chaucer. Joyce, McLuhan claims, realised that the use of two levels enabled temporal transcendence. However, he also saw that when additional levels are employed, spatial transcendence automatically follows — endowing the form with a more pronounced metaphysical character.[135] McLuhan's interest in Joyce, however, extended beyond his

See Earnest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, ed. Ezra Pound (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1969).

[131] McLuhan, "Pound: The Playboy of the Westend World," MS., 1.

[132] McLuhan, "Introduction," in "Great Tom," MS., 1.

[133] McLuhan used Wyndham Lewis, on the other hand, as a guide in regards to what the form of the epyllion, and its retrieved use in the 20th century meant. McLuhan notes that while including Lewis in the figures who learned from Ovid, he was also "no admirer of the form," and, apparently, regarded it as a "swoon upon death," fostering a connatural merging with the indiscriminate flux of life. McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis: His Theory of Art and Communication," MS., 16–17. This matter, however, requires further exploration as McLuhan implies elsewhere that Lewis does in fact employ the *epyllion*.

[134] See McLuhan, "Pound's Critical Prose," in *The Interior Landscape*, 79.

[135] McLuhan, "Joyce's Use of Epyllion," MS., n.pag.

technical mastery. McLuhan appears to have held that Joyce had also pursued a project that was not dissimilar to that of Maritain, which, as we have seen, McLuhan had taken up as his own:

> Joyce is the single poet voice in our century not raised merely against this view but in wild laughter at its arrogant confusion. Far from turning his back on it *he invaded it and took it up into the analogical drama of his art*. For only the artist of analogical vision can freely adopt actual existence to the exigencies of art."[136]

> For it was Joyce who first abandoned vertical or horizontal symbolism for horizontal symbolism. He lived amidst the orgy of Swedenborgian, Gnostic, and neo-Platonic symbolism which still envelops us. And he never ceased to have fun with its pagan confusion.[137]

As with Lewis and Pound, McLuhan saw Joyce was also in the business of using "occult" knowledge in his artistic praxis. "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial" is replete with an inventory of Joyce's appropriation from the lore and techniques of nearly every "religious" tradition the world has known. For example, commenting on Ulysses, McLuhan notes:

> One of the little epics contained analogously within the larger action of *Ulysses* concerns the wanderings of a cake of lemon soap…At one level the soap is a common and cloacal variant on the ritual labyrinth traversed by Bloom that day (Pope's *Rape of the Lock* is a similar comic epic ending in a similar apotheosis). The soap says from the heavens:
> > We're a capital couple are Bloom and I;
> > He brightens the earth, I polish the sky.
> At another level the soap is a sign of grace uniting earthly and stellar, hermetic and astrologic, East and West labyrinths…[138]

Yet in Joyce's hands, the form of the *epyllion* was not only the means for the use of "each position," but a means of bridging the worlds of East

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[136] McLuhan, "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters," in *The Medium and the Light*, 171. Emphasis mine.

[137] Ibid.

[138] McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," In *The Interior Landscape*, 27.

and West, and forging a creative synthesis of the "intuitive and more comprehensive faculties" of the East and the visual and "rationalistic bias of the West."[139]

Age of Discontinuity

Having traced, albeit briefly and at great speed, McLuhan's second "great labour," we turn now to consider how he saw the situation of his day. The task is more difficult than it was for the early McLuhan. As we have seen in the previous chapters, in his writings of the period McLuhan uses obsolete clichés to point toward the ground of the present.[140] It is even more difficult as McLuhan, in a bid to contend with the age of discontinuity, shifts further towards the full deployment of Symbolist techniques, use of the *epyllion* (which might also be called the art of the "rip off" where the "ground" is purposely suppressed so that his reader can discover it),[141] and starts "swarming":

> My approach to the media is never from a point of view, but is in fact a "swarming." Since this is an inexhaustible process, it has to be arbitrary. There is no one position from which to approach any

[139] See McLuhan to The Pontifical Commission for Social Communications, 23 January 1976.

[140] Edward's commentary on Lewis might be used to approximate McLuhan's own praxis here: "Lewis makes large demands on a reader's ability to draw inferences, and any uncertainty about what inferences he would have wished to exclude or include can cause serious problems of interpretation, to the extent that what the text does not say may be taken as its real meaning — to be revealed as an occult encoding. For this Lewis is responsible because, despite his self presentation as a clear, straight talking man who says what he means, he was a Modernist, and he is rarely more than logically clear: in the picture as a whole there is no fixed perspective," (Paul Edwards, *Wyndham Lewis: Painter and Writer* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2000), 287).

[141] McLuhan to William Kuhns, 6 December 1971.

> medium. It would be quite easy for me to rewrite every page in ten different styles and patterns.[142]

Perhaps, then, the best we can do is offer a series of still shots of McLuhan's three most striking images he used to present a world which: "On every front, in every department of daily life, acceleration of information and services has translated us from a simple straightforward pattern of effort and rewards into a crazy mosaic of contradictions."[143]

> Today, with all our technology, and because of it, we stand once more in the magical acoustical sphere of pre-literate man. Politics have become musical; music has become politics. Government has become entertainment, and vice versa. *Commerce has become incantation and magical gesture*. Science and magic have married each other. Technology and the arts meet and mingle.[144]

1. The Abolition of Nature and Rise of a New Species

From at least the mid-1950s McLuhan begins to register the abolition of "nature":

> John Lindberg is a Swedish nobleman long associated with the League of Nations and now with the United Nations. Catholics will be interested in his history of theology underlying the politics of Plato's *Republic* and the Western art of ruling and being ruled since Plato. Himself a Manichean resigned to the ordinary necessity of rule by myth and lie, Lindberg argues in his concluding chapter that the new conditions of global inter-communication compel us to scrap the rationalist Manichean hypothesis in favour of a plunge into faith and the City of Love. His march towards this city of the future is headed by a banner quote from Bergson's *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*: "The

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[142] McLuhan to Donald Theall, 6 August 1970. McLuhan's rationale for the "swarm" is stated in *Understanding Media*: "There is little possibility of answering such questions about the extensions of man without considering all of them together. Any extension, whether of skin, hand, or foot, affects the whole psychic and social complex. Some of the principal extensions, together with some of their psychic and social consequences, are studied in this book," (*Understanding Media*, 4).

[143] McLuhan, "The Electronic Age – The Age of Implosion," in *Media Research*, 29.

[144] McLuhan, "Space, Time and Poetry," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 13, 9.

essential function of the universe which is a machine for the making of gods."

The revolutionary situation which faces us would appear to have suggested to Lindberg that the man-made machine is the new universe for the making of gods. And whereas the machine of nature made whatever gods it chose, the machines of man have abolished Nature and enable us to make whatever gods we choose. *Perhaps a better way of saying this would be to suggest that modern technology is so comprehensive that it has abolished Nature*. The order of the demonic has yielded to the order of art.[145]

He also registers the appearance of a new "species." As McLuhan notes in "A Historical Approach to the Media":

It would be possible to develop an elaborate theory of the various media of communication in Darwinian terms of natural selection. The media can be viewed as artificial extensions of our sensory existence … The cultural environment created by the externalization of the modes of sensation now favour the predominance of one sense or another, and *these species struggle through various mutations in a desperate attempt at adaptation and survival*. Improvements in the means of communication are usually based on a shift from one sense to another and this involves a rapid refocusing of all previous experience. It is, therefore, a simple maxim of communication study that any change in the means of communication will produce a chain of revolutionary consequences at every level of culture and politics.[146]

By the 1960s McLuhan shifts to consolidate his earlier reports on the spawning of a new species resulting from the "prodigious biological event" represented by the discovery of "electromagnetic waves":[147]

Today, the new species are, thanks to the speed up of intercommunication, those environments which had formerly been habitats. All media or technologies, languages as much as weaponry, create new environments or habitats, which become

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[145] McLuhan, "The God-Making Machines of the Modern World," in *The Medium and the Light*, 198. Emphasis mine.

[146] McLuhan, "A Historical Approach to the Media," 104.

[147] McLuhan, "Article for Encounter," MS., 11.

the milieu for a new species or technologies. The evolutionary habitats of the biologists since Darwin were the old nature which has now been transcended by the satellite and radar."[148]

As McLuhan notes to Edward T. Hall, today: "there is less inclination to separate biology and technology. The social body is becoming socially biological to a degree previously unimaginable…"[149] It is a theme McLuhan had broached earlier in "Culture Without Literacy":

> The fact that human nature, at least, imitates art is too obvious to labour. But the fact that with modern technology the entire material of the globe as well as the thoughts and feelings of its human inhabitants have become the matter of art and of man's factive intelligence means that there is no more nature. At least there is no more external nature. Everything from politics to bottle-feeding, global landscape, and the subconscious of the infant is subject to the manipulation of conscious artistic control. Under these conditions the activities of Senator McCarthy belong with the adventures of the *Pickwick Club* and our talk about the Iron Curtain is a convenient smoke-screen likely to divert our attention from much greater problems.[150]

2. Global Theatre

In addition to the abolition of "nature," McLuhan saw that in the age of discontinuity, space too had been abolished. The "co-existence of cultures in all phases of process in media development," makes all times "contra-punctual" (e.g., even the pygmies have wireless):[151]

> Many analysts have been misled by electric media because of the seeming ability of these media to extend man's spatial powers of organization. Electric media, however, abolish the spatial

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[148] *War and Peace in the Global Village*, 190.

[149] McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 7 October 1964.

[150] McLuhan, "Culture Without Literacy" in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 6, 14–15.

[151] McLuhan, "What Fundamental Changes are Foreshadowed in the Prevailing Patterns of Educational Organization and Methods of Instruction by the Revolution in Electronics?" (Paper presented at the 14th National Conference on Higher Education, Chicago, 3 March 1959), 3.

> dimension, rather than enlarge it. By electricity, we everywhere resume person-to-person relations as if on the smallest village scale.[152]

> In the electric age, however, history no longer presents itself as a perspective of continuous visual space, but as an all-at-once and simultaneous presence of all facets of the past. This is what T. S. Eliot calls "tradition" in his celebrated essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent." Eliot's concept seemed quite revolutionary in 1917, but it was in fact a report of an immediate and present reality. Awareness of all-at-once history or tradition goes with a correlative awareness of the present as modifying the entire past. It is this vision that is characteristic of the artistic perception which is necessarily concerned with making and change rather than with any point of view or any static position.[153]

And the language of gesture had been retrieved (due in large measure to photography). With the computer-satellite matrix, however, as McLuhan outlines in *War and Peace in the Global Village*, "the electronic culture of the global village confronts us with a situation in which entire societies communicate by a sort of 'macroscopic gesticulation,' which is not speech in the ordinary way."[154] Given that gesture is very much the "language" of the stage, drama, and liturgy, McLuhan complemented his image of the "global village" with that of the "global theatre" — the site where the new "beast epics" of North America would unfold:[155]

> When Sputnik went around the planet in 1957 the earth became enclosed in a man-made environment and became thereby an "art" form. The globe became a theatre enclosed in a proscenium arch of satellites. From that time the "audience" or the population

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[152] *Understanding Media*, 255.

[153] *Through the Vanishing Point*, 257.

[154] *War and Peace in the Global Village*, 17.

[155] Responding to the question "is television a monster?" McLuhan replies: "Yes. It's literally a tribal monster like the Minotaur from Greek mythology trapped in a maze of sensation. This Bull-man monster swallowed humans lost in the maze. And that's exactly what TV does. Some of our young are fed to the Minotaur every year," (McLuhan, interviewed by Vicki Cobb, "Marshall McLuhan on the Evils of TV," MS., 13).

of the planet became actors in a new sort of theatre. Mallarmé had thought that "the world exists to end in a book." It turned out otherwise. It has taken on the character of theatre or playhouse. Since Sputnik the entire world has become a single sound-light show. Even the business world has now taken over the concept of "performance" as a salient criterion.[156]

3. The Classroom Without Walls

In addition to these two images, taken from the domains of biology and drama, he also used pedagogic imagery. By 1956 McLuhan took up the metaphor of the "classroom without walls" as his primary designation for the information age.[157] McLuhan began making the comparison between the "puny" education students received within the traditionally conceived classroom, and the far greater teaching that goes on outside it during the later 1940s. By the 1950s McLuhan uses the theme frequently and stresses the growing disparity between the factory-like, 19th century world of the classroom, organized on mechanical lines (with its classified data), and the intricate, organic, and complex world of electronic information. For example, in *Counterblast* (1954):

> The CITY no longer exists, except as a cultural ghost for tourists. Any highway eatery with its tv set, newspaper, and magazine is as cosmopolitan as New York or Paris.
> The PEASANT was always a suburban parasite. The farmer no longer exists; today he is a 'city' man.
> The METROPOLIS today is a classroom; the ads are its teachers. The classroom is an obsolete detention home, a feudal dungeon.
> The metropolis is OBSOLETE. Ask the Army.
> The INSTANTANEOUS global coverage of radio-tv makes the city form meaningless, functionless. Cities were once related to the realities of production and inter-communication. Not now.[158]

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[156] McLuhan, "Roles, Masks and Performances," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 12, 22.

[157] McLuhan, "Educational Effects of the Mass Media of Communication," (Paper presented to a discussion group on the occasion of the inauguration of Hollis L. Caswell as President of Teachers College, Columbia University, 21 November 1955).

[158] McLuhan, *Counterblast*, (Toronto, Toronto University Press, 1954), n.pag.

McLuhan consolidated his use of the metaphor throughout several of his works of the 1960s, including "The Emperor's Old Clothes" where McLuhan remarks: "…we naturally begin to look at the environment as a huge teaching machine that can translate us out of the human dimension altogether."[159] And, in *Understanding Media* McLuhan sets about documenting the preceding evolutionary phases of the "classroom without walls":

> The telegraph translated writing into sound, a fact directly related to the origin of both the telephone and phonograph. With the telegraph, the only walls left are the vernacular walls that the photograph and movie and wirephoto overleap so easily. The electrification of writing was almost as big a step into the nonvisual and auditory space as the later steps soon taken by telephone, radio, and TV.
>> The telephone: speech without walls.
>> The phonograph: music hall without walls.
>> The photograph: museum without walls.
>> The electric light: space without walls.
>> The movie, radio, and TV: classroom without walls.[160]

Apocalypse

Seen through a Lewisean lens, that is, "to take new media *en bloc*,"[161] it appears that McLuhan saw that the age of discontinuity had both services and disservices. The primary disservices stem from the fact that the electric environment is a closed system. As McLuhan notes to John Snyder:

> That electro-magnetism as such is an extension the central nervous system is a persistent theme of Teilhard de Chardin in *Phenomenon*

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[159] McLuhan, "The Emperor's Old Clothes," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 20, 8. C.f. McLuhan's commentary on Lewis Mumford and the mega-machines of North American in Chapter Five.

[160] *Understanding Media*, 283.

[161] McLuhan, "Third Program in the Human Age," *Explorations* 8 (1967): 17.

of Man. It is a concept familiar to biologists and psychology alike. It has very much to do with the instant speed of electric structures and the brain. Such speed makes inevitable the handling of vast quantities of information in a highly structured and, indeed, "mythic" way. Under electric technology today man lives mythically, as it were, simply by virtue of the speed which he is confronted by consequences of every kind of action. This factor is completely altering our forms of government at this moment. No less, it is altering the forms of our educational establishment and our legal structure. *As you know, electric systems, unlike literacy and mechanism, are not open, but closed systems.* Electric or instant circuits, by the same token, are not centralist, but de-centralist, in form. Our entire Western world has been structured by centrist forces, and is very much confused by electric technology.[162]

This closed system or "seamless web" (and subsequently, absence of dialogue), McLuhan appears to have seen as giving rise to something of a (new) "totalitarian synthesis," to use Vincent Sherry's phrase for describing Pound's problematic:[163]

In the same way the entire globe becomes a single computer or what de Chardin calls a *noosphere,* the advent of satellite broadcasting makes every one of the more than two hundred and fifty cultures of the globe immediately present to each other as are the telephone subscribers of a single town. The dialogue between cultures will become as pervasive as back-fence gossiping. But, as information movement expands in this plenary way, the business and politics and diversions of mankind fuse into a *single uninterrupted action.*[164]

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[162] McLuhan to John J. L. Snyder, 14 August 1963. Emphasis mine. McLuhan's relationship to the work of Teilhard de Chardin is discussed in chapter five.

[163] Sherry, 4. As an aside, it is valuable to note that the extent of McLuhan's meditations on the "new totalitarian synthesis" was apparently lost on critics like Luis Beltrán and, arguably, every contributor at the *Pour Comprendre 1984/ Understanding 1984* conference save Barrington Nevitt. Nevitt argues that while both Orwell and McLuhan were satirists, Orwell applied the ground rules of the first industrial revolution and is thus relevant to the 19th rather than 20th century. Barrington Nevitt, "McLuhan and Orwell's Nineteen Eight-Four," paper presented at *Pour Comprendre 1984/ Understanding 1984* (Paris: Canadian Commission for UNESCA, 14–16 December 1984): 97–113.

[164] McLuhan, "The Electronic Age – The Age of Implosion," 35.

In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan states: "As automation takes hold, it becomes obvious that information is the crucial commodity,"[165] and "we see ourselves being translated more and more into the form of information."[166] "Each stick of chewing gum we reach for is acutely noted by some computer that translates our least gesture into a new probability curve or some parameter of social science. Our private and corporate lives have become information processes."[167] McLuhan continues in a later section of the work:

> Once we have surrendered our senses and nervous systems to the private manipulation of those who would try to benefit from taking a lease on our eyes and ears and nerves, we don't really have any rights left. Leasing our eyes and ears and nerves to commercial interests is like handing over the common speech to a private corporation, or like giving the earth's atmosphere to a company as a monopoly.[168]

That said, however, McLuhan also registers that there were also services in the wake of Sputnik. With the launch of Telstar, McLuhan appears to have seen a brief, period of hope. As McLuhan states in "Open Mind Surgery":

> Rational man may really get his first innings out of this computerized universe. Up till now he has been a kind of straw blown around by his technologies.
>   One of the reasons we can now recognize the new technologies is they yield to one another so rapidly.[169]

Put simply and bluntly, McLuhan saw that the rapid succession of media forms acted as a revelation:[170] "We are living right on the edge of

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[165] *Understanding Media*, 207.

[166] Ibid., 57.

[167] Ibid., 51–52.

[168] Ibid., 68.

[169] McLuhan, "Open Mind Surgery," in *Understanding Me*, 153.

Apocalypse, more than any other time in human history. All prophecies of the end will appear very strongly – but the end is not supposed to be grim, it is supposed to be very happy."[171] "Perhaps now," McLuhan states, "when things happen at very high speeds, a formal causality or pattern recognition may appear for the first time in human history."[172] So while that new star up there (Telstar) is a new potential threat, in its not yet fully developed, embryonic stage, it remains useful as an anti-environment and, by extension, enables us to apprehend more clearly the contours and lineaments of the present. Or in other words, one of the effects of Telstar, at least potentially, was that it might help facilitate a better grasp and understanding of the language of forms:

> Yet today, as never before, the task of the humanities is to keep clear and lively the modes of discourse and the forms of mental life. More than ever before humanists are called on to understand many new languages born of the new forms of new knowledge. Nor will these new languages obviate the older ones. *Jet travel and satellite broadcasting will foster the grasp of languages, ancient and modern, in a simultaneous cultural transparency.* The concept of history of the philosopher Heidegger recommends itself as a natural model for the humanities in the electric age. It is the idea of the poetic of history, of history as a kind of unified language, the inner key to the creation of which can be grasped by a deepening sense of the spiritual energy encompassed in the ceaselessly growing life of words. The ideal Marriage of Mercury and Philology, of spiritual values and perfected method, will be consummated, if ever, in the electronic age.[173]

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[170] McLuhan, "The De-Romanization of the American Catholic Church," In *The Medium and the Light*, 56.

[171] McLuhan, "Marshall McLuhan's Message of Faith," *Sunday Post of Canada*, (20 May 1979). McLuhan's use of the term "Apocalypse" appears to be in the traditional and technical sense of an "uncovering" or "revealing."

[172] McLuhan, "The Future of Morality: The Inner Versus the Outer Quest," MS., 10–11.

[173] McLuhan, "The Humanities in the Electronic Age," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 7, 18.

School Master Redux

We now come to the third and final section of this chapter where we encounter how McLuhan transformed and applied his inheritance acquired through his second great labour. Much as in chapter one, we begin, firstly, with McLuhan's new pedagogic enterprise, conducted in the "classroom without walls" in a bid to ensure that "rationale man" was not cheated of his "first innings." Here we see that, as with the earlier period, he continues to try to meet his cultural objectives by working with, in, and through expensive public technologies. Unlike the efforts of the earlier McLuhan, however, who largely limited his pedagogic enterprise to his local university (barring a brief radio appearance), the later McLuhan's purview and domain of engagement is much broader. Secondly, we engage with McLuhan's written outputs of the period and how he appropriated and adapted the *epyllion* to create his Broadway musicals and his most famous books, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*.

By 1960, the communication seminar and *Explorations* duet had come to a close. McLuhan's access to expensive public technologies had effectively dried up, and his attempts to get further funding from the Ford Foundation had not met with any success. Shortly after the launch of Sputnik, however, during what appears to have been one of many attempts to secure funding from other sources, McLuhan applied to the National Association of Educational Broadcasters (NAEB) for a grant to provide a report on an approach to media, and a syllabus for teaching about the nature and effects of media for what in New Zealand we would call secondary schools.

The appeal of the project for McLuhan appears to have been that he saw "Media study" was for the 1960s what "communication" had

been in the 1950s — a new "beachhead." Media study was a new field.

As McLuhan states in the report:

A. Nothing has yet been done to bring understanding to the effects of media in patterning human association.
B. That such an understanding is possible and media assumptions do not have to remain subliminal.
C. The absence of such understanding was testimony to the power of media to anesthetize those very models of awareness.[174]

Media studies held out the prospect of (if not made inevitable): (a) a unified field approach to human knowledge (as it has little if anything to do with content or subject matter), and (b) potentially closing the gap between art and science. Further, McLuhan also saw that the provision of a report for NAEB might serve as a much needed "pilot model" or "social navigation chart"[175] for the kind of changes that the educational establishment in its entirety would have to undergo as a function of Telstar.[176] As McLuhan would later note in *Understanding Media*:

> At this moment, for example, we are quite in the dark about the political implications of Telstar. By outering these satellites as extensions of our nervous system, there is an automatic response in all the organs of the body politic of mankind. Such new intensity of proximity imposed by Telstar calls for radical rearrangement of all organs in order to maintain staying power and equilibrium. The teaching and learning process for every child

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[174] McLuhan, "Report on Project in Understanding New Media," MS., 2–4. McLuhan's *Report on Project in Understanding New Media* appears to have gone through a number of revisions. The sub-series for the Report in the McLuhan collection contains several scripts that appear to have been working drafts, including the "Project in Understanding New Media" "Sample Syllabus," Media Logs I, II, and III, and an interim report.

[175] C.f. *Understanding Media*, 66.

[176] "…for the artist in various fields are always engaged in making *pilot models of coming modes of experience* …. The artist is acutely aware of any change in the bias among our senses. He at once provides a new image of experience in terms of this altered ratio. He acts as a kind of psychic and social navigator, providing new strategies of culture to cope with the new challenges in the patterns of experience," (McLuhan, "Media and the Changing Concepts of Spatial Form," MS., 2–3).

will be affected sooner rather than later. The time factor in every
decision of business and finance will acquire new patterns.
Among the peoples of the world strange new vortices of power
will appear unexpectedly.[177]

McLuhan's proposal was accepted in June 1959.[178] He immediately
set to work on what was eventually entitled *Report on Project in
Understanding New Media*, and he completed it in 1960.[179] Perhaps one of
the reasons McLuhan was able to complete the work so swiftly was
because he had: (a) to some degree, anticipated the effects of the
computer-satellite matrix, and (b) pedagogic reform had been a feature of
his meditations since at least 1951, if not the early 1940s.

Turning to the contents of McLuhan's *Report on Project in
Understanding New Media* we see that he effectively presents both case
and means for a massive reform of the entire North American system of
"secondary education." In the opening sections of the report McLuhan
builds his rationale for a new approach to media on the grounds that the
educational establishment has, for some time, been bypassed by the
entertainment industry. In many respects, the problematic McLuhan
outlines in the report deviates little from a similar charge he makes
earlier in "Space, Time, and Poetry":

> For a century it has been evident in North America that great
> frustration of mind and purpose has resulted from the gap
> between official and unofficial education. Official institutional
> instruction at all levels has tried to maintain the priority of
> traditional verbal and written culture. Unofficial culture has been
> mainly non-verbal and visual. Unofficially the young have

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[177] *Understanding Media*, 99.

[178] W. Terrence Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan,* 180.

[179] To date, several critics have identified the report as laying the foundations for *The
Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*. Consequently, the report itself is often
glossed over, both in terms of its content, and as a significant feature of McLuhan's
praxis.

responded spontaneously and enthusiastically to the new technological environment. Their sensibilities have been shaped by the new machine forms which are themselves the product of the artistic imagination in mathematics and physics. But these forms and the popular culture linked to them have no official recognition in the traditional curriculum of verbal culture .… There does exist, then, a two-way bridge between the traditional and technological worlds which are at war in Western culture. But it has been officially ignored or condemned. To travel this bridge requires of the traveller an acquaintance with the language and techniques of poetry on the one hand, and of the language and techniques of painting, architecture, and the visual world on the other. Few are prepared to acquire both languages and so the war between these worlds continues, waged witlessly in classroom.[180]

Returning to the contents of the report, McLuhan argues that the question as to how education is going to cope with these new forms [electric media] is yet to be envisioned. Present day educators, McLuhan states, appear inclined to think that their former objectives are still valid even though our assumptions and parameters have changed.[181] As McLuhan and Nevitt would note in *Take Today*:

> The British public-school system in the nineteenth century became an accelerated process of "transmogrifying sons of grocers into haughty young bloods." Later, when the goals and objectives of the new industrial elites of England were dislocated by the invasion of electric-information systems, the ideals of the public schools collapsed. The division that had seemed natural in the nineteenth century world of plentiful consumer goods became repugnant and meaningless with the transfer from producer to consumer ideals.[182]

In view of this breakdown in current procedures McLuhan argues that: "we must battle down the familiar observation" and "we need to throw off the horse collar of earlier experience" so as to come to grips with the

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[180] McLuhan, "Space, Time and Poetry," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 13, 11.

[181] McLuhan, "Report on Project in Understanding New Media," MS., 8.

[182] *Take Today*, 265.

new.[183] To leap ahead slightly, *Understanding Media* is replete with items of inventory that reveal the "price" paid for not breaking with familiar observation. Perhaps the most relevant for a North American audience being in regards to the designation "entertainment":

> Failure to foresee the phonograph as a means of entertainment was really a failure to grasp the meaning of the electric revolution in general. In our time we are reconciled to the phonograph as a toy and a solace; but press, radio, and TV have also acquired the same dimension of entertainment.[184]

> Thus, the commercial interests who think to render media universally acceptable, invariably settle for "entertainment" as a strategy of neutrality. A more spectacular mode of the ostrich head-in-sand could not be devised, for it ensures maximal pervasiveness for any medium whatever.[185]

> Meantime, entertainment pushed to an extreme becomes the main form of business and politics. Electric media, because of their total "field" character, tend to eliminate the fragmented specialties of form and function that we have long accepted as the heritage of alphabet, printing, and mechanization.[186]

Having established a case for at least considering change, the greater weight of McLuhan's report is dedicated to his new program, "syllabus," and his proposed reforms of four fundamental areas of the pedagogic enterprise including: (1) the objective of "education," (2) the classroom, (3) the "object" of study, and (4) methods of reading and writing.[187]

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[183] Ibid., 12.

[184] *Understanding Media*, 277.

[185] Ibid., 305.

[186] Ibid., 277.

[187] It should be noted that McLuhan's reforms are not a "private" matter. If the private McLuhan was the subject of this study then more would need to be made of comments such as those McLuhan made to Jean-Daniel Belfond. When asked: "do you think the children of today should try and get back to the old methods of education?" McLuhan

1. A New Objective

At the very heart of McLuhan's report is his charge that, in the face of the collapse of earlier goals, North American "secondary" education needs a new objective. McLuhan suggests that we simply adopt the goal of "sustaining civilization."[188]

While not a significant feature of the report itself, McLuhan's diagnosis of his time extends well beyond the mere eclipse of the modern educational establishment by the "entertainment" industries. As McLuhan saw it, the Western world was caught up in something of a complex drama of "self-liquidation,"[189] particularly since information began moving at its terminal velocity.[190] As McLuhan writes in *Understanding Media*:

> Acceleration is a formula for dissolution and breakdown in any organization. Since the entire mechanical technology of the Western world has been wedded to electricity, it has pushed toward higher speeds. All the mechanical aspects of our world seem to probe toward self-liquidation.[191]

> This principle applies to all media study. All means of interchange and of human interassociation tend to improve by acceleration. Speed, in turn, accentuates problems of form and structure. The older arrangements had not been made with a view to such

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replies: "I never make any value judgement. On the other hand, if you want me to make my personal preferences explicit, I would certainly wish to get rid of electricity. Because I know at the speed of light, Western man cannot continue to exist without a body. Because when you do not have a body, you have no natural law, there is no gravity, no morals. Electronic man has no morals," (McLuhan, "Understanding Television," 8 November 1978).

[188] McLuhan, "Report on Project in Understanding New Media," MS., 8.

[189] *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 269.

[190] "No further acceleration is possible this side of the light barrier," (*Understanding Media*, 57–58.)

[191] Ibid., 256.

speeds, and people begin to sense a draining away of life values as they try to make the old physical forms adjust to the new and speedier movement.[192]

When information moves at the speed of signals in the central nervous system, *man is confronted with the obsolescence of all earlier forms of acceleration*, such as road and rail. What emerges is a total field of inclusive awareness. The old patterns of psychic and social adjustment become irrelevant …. Our electric extensions of ourselves simply by-pass space and time, and create problems of human involvement and organization for which there is no precedent.[193]

It is relevant to note here that the "self-liquidation" of the West was but a small component of a larger, global dynamic. As McLuhan would later remark to Edward Wakin:

Never before has the entire world been organized on two patterns, both of which are in a state of interchange and simultaneous metamorphosis. The West is "going East" under the impact of speedup of information movement. The speed of the electric circuit drives man from outer to inner interests, thus Orientalizing the West by means of its own technology. Meantime, the East is "going West" as it acquires more and more of the old Western "hardware" setup. The East, as well as Africa and Latin America, now seeks to create for itself the nineteenth-century world of consumer services and packages that the West is sloughing off via the inspiration of its electric circuitry."[194]

For McLuhan, this drama of "self-liquidation" was a potentially violent situation:

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[192] Ibid., 95.

[193] Ibid., 104–105. In these three excerpts we see that McLuhan is not merely dealing with speed-up in a one dimensional way. His vision is richly paradoxical — on one hand speed-up "improves," and on the other it destroys and makes obsolete. This dual action creates change, and as change by acceleration becomes the norm it flips into its opposite, stasis (when there is only change there is, effectively, no change — no difference that makes a difference). See Gregory Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity* (New York: Dutton 1979), 99.

[194] McLuhan, "Our Only Hope is Apocalypse," in *The Medium and the Light*, 60.

> The mosaic is a world of intervals in which maximal energy is transferred across the gaps. This is the "massage" effect. *The Gutenberg Galaxy* is a world in which energy is generated in the intervals, not by the connections. And the massage—the shaping, the twisting, the bending of the whole human environment by the technology—*the reconditioning of the entire human environment by this technology—is a violent process, like all new technologies often revolting, as well as revolutionary. That is why Joyce calls them "thunders." All revolutionary events are nauseating.*[195]

The effects of the "acoustic" electric environment, he saw, were at least as hostile to phonetic literacy and its institutions, including the "traditional" educational apparatus, as Gutenberg technologies *had been* to earlier oral and scribal culture(s), and *are being* to Oriental and African cultures:

> We know from our own past the kind of energy that is released, as by fission, when literacy explodes the tribal or family unit. What do we know about the social and psychic energies that develop by electric fusion or implosion when literate individuals are suddenly gripped by an electromagnetic field, such as occurs in the new Common Market pressure in Europe? Make no mistake, the fusion of people who have known individualism and nationalism is not the same process as the fission of "backward" and oral cultures that are just coming to individualism and nationalism. It is the difference between the "A" bomb and the "H" bomb. The latter is more violent, by far. Moreover, the products of electric fusion are immensely complex, while the products of fission are simple…[196]

In sum, McLuhan appears to have seen that: "the ultimate conflict between sight and sound, between written and oral kinds of perception and organization of existence is upon us."[197] Civilized man and his values ("civilized" being used here in the technical sense in the same way that he would use the term in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*: "…to mean detribalized man for whom the visual values have priority in the organisation of

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[195] McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," in *Media Research*, 73. Emphasis mine.

[196] *Understanding Media*, 50.

[197] Ibid., 16.

thought and action"),[198] were in danger of being swept away by the tribal tide:

> Failure to understand the organic character of electric technology is evident in our continuing concern with the dangers of mechanizing the world. Rather, we are in great danger of wiping out our entire investment in the pre-electric technology of the literate and mechanical kind by means of an indiscriminate use of electrical energy.[199]

While violence was the probable outcome, given that technological change tends to necessitate a quest for identity,[200] McLuhan appears to have held that it was not inevitable: "Violence can be avoided if we comprehend the processes of decentralism and retribalization, and accept its outcome while moving to control and modify the dynamics of change."[201] As McLuhan observes in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* it was possible that:

> Two cultures or technologies can, like astronomical galaxies, pass through one another without collision; but not without change of configuration. In modern physics there is, similarly, the concept of "interface" or the meeting and metamorphosis of two structures. Such "interficiality" is the very key to the Renaissance as to our twentieth century.[202]

Realising this possibility, "sustaining civilization," is then the task of finding or creating ways and means for co-existence. Thus McLuhan's fight for sustaining civilization is not a rear-guard action. He was aware that "traditional civilization" could not stand without a change in

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[198] *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 27.

[199] *Understanding Media*, 248.

[200] See *War and Peace in the Global Village.* That violence is a quest for identity is a persistent theme of the work.

[201] McLuhan, "Playboy Interview: A Candid Conversation with the High Priest of Popcult and Metaphysician of Media," in *Essential McLuhan*, eds., Eric McLuhan and Frank Zingrone (London: Routledge, 1997), 258. Originally published in *Playboy* Magazine, March 1969.

[202] *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 149.

configuration. For McLuhan, "sustaining civilization" means creating a new orchestral "…synthesis of these two basic modes, the electric and the literate," or finding "the societal equivalent of the corpus callosum,"[203] so as to moderate the "fierceness of this conflict" between the "civilized" eye, and "tribal" ear, in a way that leaves these respective constituents intact and in play.

2. Reforming the Classroom

McLuhan also argues that the classroom, at least in its four-walled aspect, requires transforming. This of course was not a new charge for McLuhan, who had said to Innis nearly a full decade earlier:

> The new media, which are already much more constitutive educationally than those of the class-room, must be inspected and discussed in the class-room, if the class-room is to continue at all except as a place of detention. As a teacher of literature, it has long seemed to me that the functions of literature cannot be maintained in present circumstances without radical alteration of the procedures of teaching. Failure in this respect relegated Latin and Greek to the specialist; and English literature has already become a category rather than an interest in school and college.[204]

While McLuhan does not dwell on how this is to be achieved, he asserts that it was a matter of some urgency insofar as one of the big issues in the computer age, which is also a multimedia age, is that we simply "cannot achieve a homogeneous experience as a condition for training the young."[205]

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[203] McLuhan, and Robert K. Logan, "The Double Bind of Communication and the World Problematique," MS., 9. In brief, the corpus callosum is the structure in the human brain that "connects" the left and right cerebral hemispheres.

[204] McLuhan to Harold A. Innis, 14 March 1951.

[205] McLuhan, "Report on Project in Understanding New Media," MS., 13.

3. New Subject

McLuhan also argues for a new object of study — "the media" themselves: "The only practical liaison between in-school and out of school training in the matter of entertainment industries, is instruction in the modes and effects on human perception of the media themselves."[206] McLuhan's rationale is stated plainly: "the very same media that have dissolved the older media and technologies" can be transformed into the very "means of sustaining civilization."[207]

　　To support his claim, McLuhan devotes a large part of the report to matters of art history. Here we see McLuhan argue that the traditional art objects, e.g. paintings and poems and "literature," that had previously served as the objects for attention within the classroom, have been eclipsed by the new media. Given that it is a major theme across his oeuvre I will supplement the comments he makes in his report with excerpts from his other works and correspondence. The crux of the matter is expressed in a later letter to the Canadian Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau:

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[206] McLuhan, "Project in Understanding New Media, 'Media Log I,'" MS., 2. "Just as we now try to control atom-bomb fallout, so we will one day try to control media fallout. *Education will become recognized as civil defence against media fallout.* The only medium for which our education now offers some civil defence is the print medium. The educational establishment, founded on print, does not yet admit any other responsibilities," (*Understanding Media.*, 305). Emphasis mine.

[207] McLuhan, "Report on Project in Understanding New Media," MS., 8. Since modern entertainment is total, it, therefore, "must be the object of all points of education," (McLuhan, review of *Seduction of the Innocent,* by Fredrick Wertham. *Shenandoah* 6, no. 2 (Spring 1955): 53–57). McLuhan reiterates the charge again in *Counterblast*: "We must substitute an interest in the media for the previous interest in subjects. This is the logical answer to the fact that the media have substituted themselves for the older world. Even if we should wish to recover that older world we can do it only by an intensive study of the ways in which the media have swallowed it," (McLuhan, and Parker, *Counterblast*, 135).

> The function of art in relating us to ourselves and to our world and in freeing us from the adaptive or robot role, has changed entirely in the electric time. The art product as such becomes relatively insignificant compared to the process of making and of participation in that making.[208]

In other words, under electric conditions, it is the massive new media environments themselves that are the avant-garde requiring the same type of intensive study formerly reserved for the older arts.[209] Or, as McLuhan and Nevitt note in *Take Today*, "art" is now what we have to respond to:

> Reaction is the age-old attempt to adjust to the old, which is seen as "present" and "future." At instant speeds all reaction and adjustment are- inevitably too late to be relevant. To keep up we must be far ahead. It would have been proper to say "ahead with the poets and the artists," if they had not become so eager to adjust to the consumer mores. *Now they are what we have to adjust to*. Whereas the arts used to be navigational, the role of the arts can no longer be the same in the satellite age, when the Earth has become art form itself.[210]

The formerly private, alienated artist (who used to work with inexpensive materials), had been afforded a central role in the operations of vast new public technologies: "It may well be that the artist will now merge with the media rather than staying outside as ironic spectator and commentator."[211]

> But, at present, the artists have yielded to the media themselves. Experimentation has passed from the control of the private artist to the groups in charge of the new technologies. That is to say, that whereas in the past the individual artist, manipulating private and inexpensive materials, was able to shape models of new experience years ahead of the public, today the artist works with

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[208] McLuhan to Pierre Elliott Trudeau, 26 March 1974.

[209] McLuhan, "Media and the Changing Concepts of Spatial Form," MS., 3.

[210] *Take Today*, 216. Emphasis mine.

[211] McLuhan, Project in Understanding New Media, "Media Log II," MS., 3

expensive public technology, and artist and public merge in a single experience.[212]

Because new electric media merge artist and public in a single experience, McLuhan argues that avant-garde experimentation in the arts is no longer to be found in the private artist.[213] The artist, as understood as a private individual, McLuhan states: "can no longer provide the years of advance awareness of developments in the pattern of human experience" which will inevitably emerge from new technological developments.[214] In short, even the "artist" is left groping for the means of defining new dimensions of experience that have no rapport whatever with previous space or modalities of sense perception. As McLuhan notes later at a UNESCO symposium: "Ordinary realties transcend science fiction so much that the artist is at a loss. What is he [the artist] going to invent that has not already been transcended by ordinary experience?"[215]

4. New Method

In addition to offering a new "object" for study, McLuhan also proposes a new method for studying the new "object." The "media," McLuhan argues, ought to be studied via grammar on the grounds that the media are languages (in the sense that they are syntactic patterns of experience). As per the "traditional" *Ars Grammatica*, this entailed: (a) *Scientia*

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[212] McLuhan, "Exhibit I, New Media and the New Education," MS., i. in "Report on Understanding New Media," MS.

[213] McLuhan, "Media and the Changing Concepts of Spatial Form," MS., 3.

[214] See McLuhan, "Extracts From Statements Handed to the Secretariat in Writing – Professor Marshall McLuhan," in *Place and Function of Art in Contemporary Life*, Report of an International Symposium Organised by UNESCO, 6–10 September 1976 (Paris: UNESCO, 1977).

[215] McLuhan, "Extracts From Statements Handed to the Secretariat in Writing – Professor Marshall McLuhan," MS., 10.

interpretandi, and (b) *Ratio recete scribendi et loquendi*[216] — a way of interpretation and/or reading, and a way of writing. In many respects McLuhan's rationale for a new method is better heard in his later article, "The Medium is the Message":

> We can begin, then to consider the relevance of grammars for media which have become languages all within our own century. Whatever may be the educational advantages of traditional grammars now apply to our new media. Yet one of the effects of the new auditory media has been to dissuade people from the cultivation of grammar. *May it not be that the translation of the auditory structure of a language into a grammar or visual structure is ultimately necessary in order to confer personal adequacy of control over experience*? But as we regain auditory space via the electronic revolution, we fail to see the relevance of visual grammar?
>
> May not the translation of one sense into another, and of one language into another, be the irreducible modality of education, just as it is the irreducible mode of nuclear investigation? May not this training confer the detachment and criticism necessary for viable civilized man anywhere, anytime?[217]

He also asserts that the new media must be studied like the artists study them: "We must all become creative artists in order to cope with even the banalities of daily life."[218] While McLuhan, as we have seen, effectively devalues the outputs and artefacts of the individual artist, he does not devalue their "processes":

> Alfred North Whitehead mentions in *Science and the Modern World* that the great discovery of the nineteenth century was the discovery of the technique of discovery. *The art of discovery itself is now a cliché, and creativity has become a stereotype of the twentieth century*.[219]

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[216] Martin Irvine, *The Making of Textual Culture: 'Grammatica' and Literary Theory, 350–1100* (Cambridge, New York, and Melbourne: Cambridge University Press), 69.

[217] McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 17, 21. Emphasis mine.

[218] McLuhan, "Exhibit I, New Media and the New Education," MS., xiv.

[219] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 58. Emphasis mine.

On the contrary, McLuhan claims that while "creativity" is the new *cliché* and the artist can no longer provide the years of advance awareness because there is no time to adjust, we still need to know and understand exactly what is happening.[220] Ergo, we all need the ability of the artists to discern the forms of technological change in their full cultural dimensions.[221]

More light can be shed on McLuhan's argument if we revisit McLuhan's "problematic" — the "seamless web" or "closure" or the absence of dialogue. As McLuhan notes in *Understanding Media*:

> The concept of "idol" for the Hebrew Psalmist is much like that of Narcissus for the Greek mythmaker. And the Psalmist insists that the beholding of idols, or the use of technology, conforms men to them. "They that make them shall be like unto them." This is a simple fact of sense "closure." The poet Blake developed the Psalmist's ideas into an entire theory of communication and social change. It is in his long poem of "Jerusalem" that he explains why men have become what they have beheld. What they have, says Blake, is "the spectre of the Reasoning Power in Man" that has become fragmented and "separated from Imagination and enclosing itself as in steel." Blake, in a word, sees man as fragmented by his technologies. But he insists that these technologies are self-amputations of our own organs. When so amputated, each organ becomes a closed system of great new intensity that hurls man into "martyrdoms and wars." Moreover, Blake announces as his theme in Jerusalem the organs of perception:
>
> If Perceptive Organs vary, Objects of Perception seem to vary:
>
> If Perceptive Organs close, their Objects seem to close also.
>
> By continuously embracing technologies, we relate ourselves to them as servomechanisms. That is why we must, to use them at all, serve these objects, these extensions of ourselves, as gods or minor religions.

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[220] McLuhan, "Exhibit I, New Media and the New Education," MS., xiii.

[221] Ibid., ii.

> Physiologically, man in the normal use of technology (or his variously extended body) is perpetually modified by it and in turn finds ever new ways of modifying his technology. Man becomes, as it were, the sex organs of the machine world, as the bee of the plant world, enabling it to fecundate and to evolve ever new forms. The machine world reciprocates man's love by expediting his wishes and desires, namely, in providing him with wealth.[222]

McLuhan appears to have seen that compliance with our new technologies or environments is mandatory: "There is, for example, no way of refusing to comply with the new sense ratios or sense 'closure' evoked by the TV image."[223]

> In the same way, the outering or extension of our bodies and senses in a "new invention" compels the whole of our bodies and senses to shift into new positions in order to maintain equilibrium. A new "closure" is effected in all our organs and senses, both private and public, by any new invention. Sight and sound assume new postures, as do all the other faculties. With the telegraph, the entire method, both of gathering and of presenting news, was revolutionized. Naturally, the effects on language and on literary style and subject matter were spectacular.[224]

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[222] *Understanding Media*, 45–46. Similarly, McLuhan notes to Hall: "If the various foci of our culture are ablatives of human organism, then their "exploitation" is surely a translation of that organic posture into another material or matter. For example, chair as ablative of squat, when translated into wood becomes an ablative absolute or closed system. As such it reinvades the human organism effecting new "closure." That is to say, any ablation of human sense, organ, or faculty when translated into the new matter that is non-organic, rearranges the ratios among the organic factors. Thus wheel, as ablative absolute of feet in movement, effects a closure that is road and is acceleration of inter-action and exchange, creating totally new patterns of interdependence. And chair creates the closure that is table, calling into play a totally new set of organic attitudes and postures," (McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 21 February 1961).

[223] *Understanding Media*, 45.

[224] Ibid., 251–252.

He also saw that mandatory closure has a number of very negative side effects. Perhaps the first of these being that it kills the "imagination"[225] and creates a situation where the inertia of older patterns of closure militate against any encounter with the new and with the present:

> Ordinary human instinct causes people to recoil from these new environments and to rely on the rear-view mirror as a kind of repeat or *recorso* of the preceding environment, thus insuring total disorientation at all times.[226]

Only the "artist," McLuhan asserts, has the ability to forgo closure: "The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity," [227] and avoid "sensory completion offered by the earlier environment,"[228] because "he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception."[229] The artist, as McLuhan shows across his oeuvre, avoids closure, firstly, by understanding: "Only the artist has the power to

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[225] "Imagination is that ratio among the perceptions and faculties which exists when they are not embedded or outered in material technologies. When so outered, each sense and faculty becomes a closed system. Prior to such outering there is entire interplay among experiences. This interplay or synesthesia is a kind of tactility such as Blake sought in the bounding line of sculptural form and in engraving," (*Gutenberg Galaxy*, 265).

[226] *Through the Vanishing Point*, xxiii.

[227] *Understanding Media*, 18.

[228] "In F. C. Bartlett's *Remembering*, there is extensive illustration of the principle that perception itself is a kind of remembering. Almost in the moment of perception, a simultaneous afterimage or effect occurs in the subconscious….But the afterimage which we provide to complement such sensation is an altogether different case," (*Through the Vanishing Point*, 5). Similarly, Hildebrand's *Problem of Form* (1893), McLuhan asserts: "had extensive influence in getting attention for the action of sensory completion as the accompaniment of all perception. It was this necessary "closure" or sensory completion that yielded 'significant form' as compared with ordinary or uncompleted experience of forms," (Ibid.).

[229] *Understanding Media*, 18.

elevate it [the afterimage or effect] to the conscious life." [230] In other words, the artist knows that "closure" is relatively predictable phenomenon:

> Depending on which sense or faculty is extended technologically, or "autoamputated," the "closure" or equilibrium-seeking among the other senses is fairly predictable. It is with the senses as it is with color. Sensation is always 100 per cent, and a color is always 100 per cent color … Yet if sound, for example, is intensified, touch and taste and sight are affected at once. The effect of radio on literate or visual man was to reawaken his tribal memories, and the effect of sound added to motion pictures was to diminish the role of mime, tactility, and kinesthesis.[231]

And secondly, the artist avoids submitting to any closure for an extended period because their study is intimately paired with their praxis of translating their experiences into new matter, and by extension, perpetually modulating their media "diet": "In our age artists are able to mix their media diet as easily as their book diet."[232]

> Now that we have considered the subliminal force of the TV image in a redundant scattering of samples, the question would seem to arise: "What possible immunity can there be from the subliminal operation of a new medium like television?" …. It is the theme of this book that not even the most lucid understanding of the peculiar force of a medium can head off the ordinary "closure" of the senses that causes us to conform to the pattern of experience presented. The utmost purity of mind is no defense against bacteria, though the confreres of Louis Pasteur tossed him out of the medical profession for his base allegations about the invisible operation of bacteria. To resist TV, therefore, one must acquire the antidote of related media like print.[233]

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[230] *Through the Vanishing Point,* 5. After all, "Our perception of both times and spaces is *learned.*," (Ibid., 9).

[231] *Understanding Media*, 44.

[232] Ibid., 53.

[233] Ibid., 329.

SI/SC Charts

The primary vehicle for McLuhan's programme, orientated towards "sustaining civilization" by preserving the best of our literate heritage while also off-setting some of the disservices of 20th century electric technologies, is his experimental, "Structural Impact versus Subjective Completion Charts."[234] Proceeding in a linear fashion, McLuhan's SI/SC charts, firstly, invite a student to encounter several different media forms, either contemporary or historical,[235] and contemplate the effects of their encounter on their sensibility.[236] McLuhan's rationale is heard in "Media and the Changing Concepts of Spatial Form." Here McLuhan argues that if we wish to find how it is possible for new media to change our ways of feeling and thinking, the answer is not to be found in the content but in the immediate effect on our sense lives: "The ways we hear, see, touch or feel ourselves … alter the matrix of thought and most intimate attitudes toward one another."[237] Following a period of "observation" and involvement with a form, the student is then required to "chart" his or her encounter using the four terms of the SI/SC charts. The first set of terms employed by McLuhan's SI/SC charts are "Structural Impact" (SI) and "High Definition (HD), and the second set is "Subjective Completion" (SC) and Low Definition" (LD).[238] Both SI and

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[234] McLuhan states: "there is no point in being apologetic because the entire procedure is experimental," (McLuhan, 'Report on Project in Understanding New Media," MS., 27).

[235] Electronic Man, McLuhan argues elsewhere, has to train his perceptions in relation to a total environment that includes all previous cultures on the grounds that: "It is not only that a new medium creates a new environment, which acts upon the sensory life of its inhabitants. The same new environment acts upon the older literary and artistic forms as well," (*Through the Vanishing Point*, 259.)

[236] The teacher's role, is thus transformed into dialogue partner and/or fellow explorer.

[237] McLuhan, "Media and the Changing Concepts of Spatial Form," MS., 3.

[238] Arguably, LD is the closure effected by the "Freudian censor." As McLuhan notes to Hall: "I think that it can be shown that all intense experiences whatever are automatically

SC are "qualitative," "subjective," and pertain to the operations of individual sensation and consciousness. Both HD and LD are "objective" and refer to the amount of "information" available to a beholder ("information" being used in the technical sense as it is used by information theory and cybernetics).[239] Using the first pair of terms, under the heading "structural impact," a student is required to record their sensory impressions and simply describe what is taking place. Then, under the heading "high definition," a student is required to describe the amount of information that the medium provides. The second step of the procedure concerns itself with "closure." Under the heading "subjective completion," the student is required to note the effect of the impression or consequences of the experience as it is processed by them.[240] Similarly, under "low definition" the student is required to describe the "information" they must bring to the encounter to make sense of it. McLuhan notes in the report that structural impact (SI) and subjective completion (SC) are like the old pair, seeing and

suppressed or translated into low definition (in effect "forgotten") in order that they may participate in that normal closure, which is the readjustment of the ratios among existing components of experience. What I am saying is normal learning is really this kind of forgetting or translating, (McLuhan to Hall, 5 April 1962).

[239] McLuhan, "Project in Understanding New Media, 'Media Log III,'" MS, 1. McLuhan adds: The information theory people (as well as Game theory people), are unaware that they are dealing with two media at once. By contrast, McLuhan asserts when we speak of information, we speak of one medium coming through another medium.

[240] It is what McLuhan would call the technique of arrest: "The technique of the arrest is to give not the thing, but the effect of the thing. This is the fascination of child behaviour and child art. The child experiences the world in very low definition. SI [sensory input] in LD [low definition], but his SC [sensory closure] is in HD [high definition]. This is the formula for poetic experience and activity. The ordinary person has experience. The poet reports the consequences of the experience rather than the experience itself," (McLuhan to Eric McLuhan, 28 December 1970).

knowing,[241] and together, the four terms bring to the fore the self-evident principle that sensory impressions are not the sensory effect obtained — regardless of intent, there is a gap or interval that we fill in, as we transform sensory inputs into conceptual "images."[242]

The net effect of undertaking the task is that the student becomes engaged in a perpetual dance or act of translation,[243] as empirical observation and emotional experience must be translated into new matter: "'Grammar' as applied to any media of communication, therefore implies the ability to translate the modal powers of that medium into some other medium..."[244]

Rather than dwell further on the operations of the charts, however, it is perhaps better to defer to the example McLuhan offers for Television:

1. **Structural Impact**. Simply describing what is talking place. The SI or image of television is a mosaic of translucent points. It is a two dimensional image. There are no still shots that follow in sequence. It has a tactile quality (interplay of senses).
2. **Low Definition**. The television image is low in information. The character of the viewer being the screen at whom the images are directed from the monitor? Does this not strongly suggest that the viewer is in an extremely introverted role? There is a lot to fill in.
3. **Subjective Completion**. Maximum participation of all senses.

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[241] McLuhan, "Report on Project in Understanding New Media," 27.

[242] At the very least, then, it appears that McLuhan hoped that his SI/SC charts would permit the student to avoid looking at the new in terms of the old — using an old SC (sensory closure) for new SI (sensory input), which McLuhan held is the formulae for total confusion, leading to a disassociation of sensibility, and, ultimately, a diseased and schizoid state.

[243] C.f. McLuhan, "Melodic and Scribal," *Renascence* 13, no. 1 (1960): 51; cited in Chapter Two.

[244] McLuhan, "Report on Project in Understanding New Media," 11.

4. **High Definition**. The television image as present constituted is of Low Definition of quality. This automatically involves the television view in a good deal of do-it-yourselfness and in strengthening the feeble image.[245]

On completion of the exercise, McLuhan would have the students "chart" their encounter. The final rendering of McLuhan's SI/SC Chart for Television can be seen below.[246]

Figure iii. (McLuhan, *Report on Project in Understanding New Media* (Washington: National Association of Educational Broadcasters, 1960), 137)
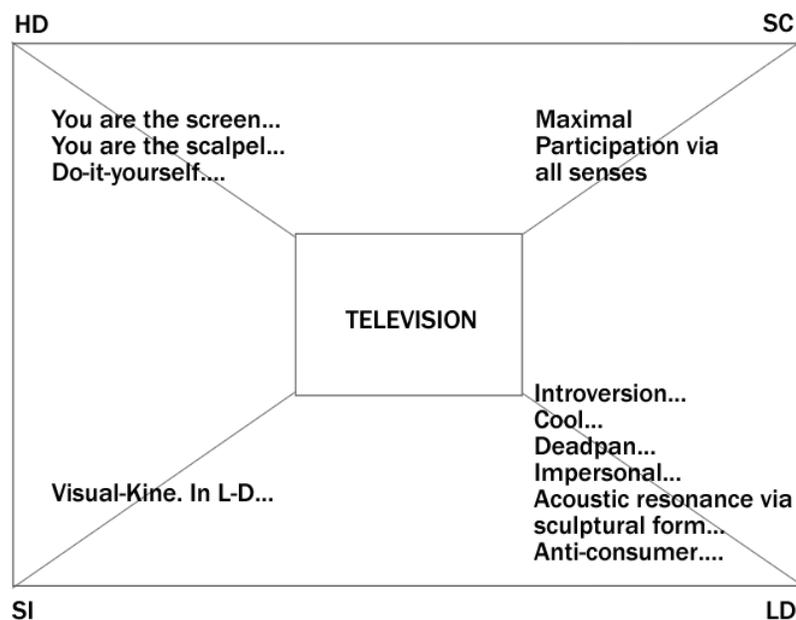
Presumably, McLuhan intended these charts to be compared, contrasted, and used to stimulate further dialogue in the classroom directed towards exploring the "the dynamic symmetries and contours of media."[247]

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[245] McLuhan, *Report on Project in Understanding New Media*, (Washington: National Association of Educational Broadcasters, 1960), 134–135.

[246] Please note that I have reconstructed this figure.

[247] McLuhan, "Report on Project in Understanding New Media," MS., 27.

Creative Means For Coexistence

Having traced the content of the *Report on Project in Understanding New Media* at the level of surfaces, we need now to retrace from a different vantage and consider the *effects* McLuhan sought by way of his reforms or "the actual cultural changes," albeit tacitly, "…projected by the individual work in question."[248] After all, "understanding" is only half of the equation:

> Understanding is half the battle. The central purpose of all my work is to convey this message, that by understanding media as they extend man, we gain a measure of control over them. And this is a vital task, because the immediate interface between audile-tactile and visual perception is taking place around us. No civilian can escape this environmental blitzkrieg, for there is, literally, no place to hide. But if we diagnose what is happening to us, we can reduce the ferocity of the winds of change and bring the best elements of the old visual culture, during this transitional period, into peaceful coexistence with the new retribalized society.[249]

As we have already seen, McLuhan's SI/SC charts go a long way to putting students on the road to understanding by helping facilitate a better grasp of the language of forms. Of greater significance, however, are the effects that issue from the "action" or practise they require.[250]

1. Involvement and Detachment (A New Way of Reading)

Had the primary audience of the report not been so sensitive to criticism, McLuhan might have used a different rationale for his approach to media. In place of his argument that "the educational establishment had,

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[248] McLuhan to Judith Greissman, 14 July 1971.

[249] McLuhan, "Playboy Interview," 265. Or, as McLuhan states in *Understanding Media*: "Since understanding stops action, as Nietzsche observed, we can moderate the fierceness of this conflict by understanding the media that extend us and raise these wars within and without us," (*Understanding Media*, 16).

[250] This matter is omitted from the report.

for some time, been by-passed by the entertainment industry," he might just have easily stated, as he did for his later interview for *Playboy*, that the North American pedagogue had been resolute in ignoring the student as "formal cause" of their very enterprise:

> Because education, which should be helping youth to understand and adapt to their revolutionary new environments, is instead being used merely as an instrument of cultural aggression, *imposing upon retribalized youth the obsolescent visual values of the dying literate age*. Our entire educational system is reactionary, oriented to past values and past technologies, and will likely continue so until the old generation relinquishes power. The generation gap is actually a chasm, separating not two age groups but two vastly divergent cultures. I can understand the ferment in our schools, because our educational system is totally rearview mirror. It's a dying and outdated system founded on literate values and fragmented and classified data totally unsuited to the needs of the first television generation.[251]

By contrast, while McLuhan's report is written for the managers, administrators, and decision-makers, and seeks "top-down" ends — to confer upon the student the detachment and "freedom," required of civilized man in any age[252] — he appears to have built his report from the "bottom up," from how he perceived the needs of students, who he saw,

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[251] McLuhan, *"*Playboy Interview," 249–250.

[252] "The point is, rather, how do we become aware of the effects of alphabet or print or telegraph in shaping our behaviour? For it is absurd and ignoble to be shaped by such means. *Knowledge does not extend but restrict the areas of determinism. And the influence of unexamined assumptions derived from technology leads quite unnecessarily to maximal determinism in human life. Emancipation from that trap is the goal of all education.* But the unconscious is no escape-hatch from a world of denuded categories any more than Leibnitzian or any other monism is a resolution of Cartesian dualism. There is still the full ratio or interplay of all the senses in concert, which permits light through. That concert comes to an end with the stepping up of one sense by technology, and by the insistence of light on. The nightmare of light on is the world of Pascal: "Reason acts slowly and with so many views upon so many principles which always must be present, that at any time it may fall asleep or get lost, for want of having all its principles present…" (*The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 247). Emphasis mine.

were at least bewildered by,[253] if not simply bored by the obsolete modes

of the school system. As McLuhan writes in *Understanding Media*:

> The effect of electric technology had at first been anxiety. Now it
> appears to create boredom. We have been through the three stages
> of alarm, resistance, and exhaustion that occur in every disease or
> stress of life, whether individual or collective. At least, our
> exhausted slump after the first encounter with the electric has
> inclined us to expect new problems.[254]

In and through his four key reforms and, more significantly, his SI/SC

charts, McLuhan sought to capture the attention of the bored student and

perform something of a "Judo" throw on them:[255]

> Such a judo move, requiring total participation of the dissatisfied
> students in a creative enterprise might produce some amazing and
> permanently valuable results. It would certainly be a very
> wasteful enterprise in many respects. But that would not be
> new.[256]

He knew the students were already deeply involved in the new media

and the electric surround. Subsequently, he sought to leverage off their

"involvement" and the multi-sensuous stress of his day, and transform

"media study" into a student-driven, DIY (do-it-yourself) enterprise.[257]

To "do" McLuhan's charts the student must become deeply *involved* with

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[253] McLuhan, "The Invisible Environment: The Future of an Erosion," *Perspecta* 11
(1967): 164

[254] *Understanding Media*, 26. McLuhan notes in "Prospect" how Kierkegaard had
registered the *Concept of Dread* during the age of the telegraph. See McLuhan,
"Prospect," *Canadian Art* 19, no. 5 (September/October 1962): 366.

[255] "One strategy for encountering the new student curiosity and intrusiveness regarding
the conduct of schools and colleagues could be called judo," (McLuhan, "Adopt a
College," *This Magazine is About Schools* 2, no. 4 (1968): 51).

[256] Ibid.

[257] See McLuhan, interviewed by Nathan Cohen, for CBC-TV Television program,
"Encounter," (6 November 1960).

a *variety* of "media."[258] By becoming so involved, and approaching new media forms as the object of study, rather than "inevitable patterns of utility,"[259] the electric environments that the students had formerly sought to merge with are recast as a collection of objects and forms requiring detached contemplation. Further, to conduct the exercise (to create a series of SI/SC charts), a student is effectively forced to mix and modulate their media "diet" in the same way that the "artist" does and McLuhan himself had done.[260] Effectively, then, the student is forced to avoid submitting to any singular "subjective closure" for an extended period. "Media study" is thus remade as something of a new "Art of Being Ruled,"[261] and becomes a "means of enduring stupidity and boredom," if not a source of enjoyment:

> For the untrained awareness, all reading and all movies, like all travel, are equally banal and unnourishing as experience. But to

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[258] "…if we maintain lively dialogue with, and among, the technologies we can enlist them on the side of traditional values instead of watching those values disappear," (McLuhan to The Editor of *Life*, 1 March 1966).

[259] McLuhan, "The Electronic Age – The Age of Implosion," in *Media Research,* 22.

[260] Further, by extension, the new "genius" would be well aware of the potential disservices of our inventiveness — "We have reached a stage of awareness of the self imposed environment as such." And, at this point, "it became possible to discern the psychic and social consequences of our own inventiveness," (McLuhan, "The University in the Electric Age: The End of the Gap between Theory and Practise," *The Varsity Graduate* 11, no. 3 (December 1964): 62). By extension, the "new" genius of the West might well abstain from the "if it can be done, it should be done" approach of the earlier geniuses of the Western enterprise: "These media, being extensions of ourselves, also depend upon us for their interplay and their evolution. The fact that they do interact and spawn new progeny has been a source of wonder over the ages. It need baffle us no longer if we trouble to scrutinize their action. We can, if we choose, think things out before we put them out," (*Understanding Media,* 49).

[261] McLuhan, Diary, 9 June 1967. McLuhan notes that he has suddenly realised that: "media studies is an x-ray approach = grammar." He adds: "Art of Being Ruled = awareness of techniques by which one is shaped = feedback."

the student of media structures, every detail of the total mosaic of the contemporary world is vivid with meaningful life.[262]

2. Ideogramatic and Phonetic (A New Way of Writing)

In "Printing and Social Change," published the same year that McLuhan began his NAEB report, McLuhan goes a long way towards fleshing out the problematic that he was grappling with and trying to address through his four key reforms:

> Somehow we must unriddle the complex of new messages involved in this new situation which has been created by print technology itself. So far nothing has been done to explicate the situation because *we still imagine that these forms of codifying information can coexist without transforming one another. This attitude, now suicidal, is yet a natural legacy of print culture.* Is it not, therefore, an obligation of the beneficiaries of that great culture to organize some research into the new situation? .... *In the new time which must be one of co-existence and pluralism there will be a basis for the simultaneous use of print and of all other media as well.* To discover that basis now before we exhaust ourselves in moral denunciation and pointless clashes is urgently indicated.[263]

Arguably, McLuhan's SI/SC charts are just such a bid to rise to this challenge in a way that the Schoolmen (both medieval and of his day) had not. As McLuhan notes in *Understanding Media*:

> If we persist in a conventional approach to these developments our traditional culture will be swept aside as scholasticism was in the sixteenth century. Had the Schoolmen with their complex oral culture understood the Gutenberg technology, they could have *created a new synthesis of written and oral education*, instead of bowing out of the picture and allowing the merely visual page to take over the educational enterprise. The oral Schoolmen did not meet the new visual challenge of print…[264]

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[262] *Understanding Media*, 195.

[263] McLuhan, "Printing and Social Change," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 1, 30.

[264] *Understanding Media*, 71. Emphasis mine

The crux of the matter is that McLuhan did not see the hostility of the new electric surround to print as being entirely problematic. Phonetic literacy, McLuhan argues, is not without its disservices and there is much to which print blinds us. As McLuhan indicates in his interview for *Playboy*:

> The phonetic alphabet did not change or extend man so drastically just because it enabled him to read …. But the phonetic alphabet was radically different from the older and richer hieroglyphic or ideogrammic cultures. The writings of Egyptian, Babylonian, Mayan and Chinese cultures were an extension of the senses in that they gave pictorial expression to reality, and they demanded many signs to cover the wide range of data in their societies - unlike phonetic writing, which uses semantically meaningless letters to correspond to semantically meaningless sounds and is able, with only a handful of letters, to encompass all meanings and all languages. This achievement demanded the separation of both sights and sounds from their semantic and dramatic meanings in order to render visible the actual sound of speech, thus placing a barrier between men and objects and creating a dualism between sight and sound. *It divorced the visual function from the interplay with the other senses and thus led to the rejection from consciousness of vital areas of our sensory experience and to the resultant atrophy of the unconscious*. The balance of the sensorium – or Gestalt interplay of all the senses – and the psychic and social harmony it engendered was disrupted, and the visual function was overdeveloped. This was true of no other writing system.[265]

By contrast, non-phonetic forms of writing and the electric surround, particularly television, McLuhan saw as fostering the interplay of the senses:

> Most technology produces an amplification that is quite explicit in its separation of the senses. Radio is an extension of the aural, high-fidelity … photography of the visual. But TV is, above all, an extension of the sense of touch, which involves maximal interplay of all the senses. For Western man, however, the all embracing extension had occurred by means of phonetic writing, which is a technology for extending the sense of sight. *All nonphonetic forms of*

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[265] McLuhan, "Playboy Interview," 241.

writing are, by contrast, artistic modes that retain much variety of sensuous orchestration. Phonetic writing, alone, has the power of separating and fragmenting the senses and of sloughing off the semantic complexities. The TV image reverses this literate process of analytic fragmentation of sensory life.[266]

For good or ill, the TV image has exerted a unifying synesthetic force on the sense-life of these intensely literate populations, such as they have lacked for centuries. The TV image is not a still shot. It is not photo in any sense, but a ceaselessly forming contour of things limned by the scanning-finger. The resulting plastic contour appears by light through, not light on, and the image so formed has the quality of sculpture and icon, rather than of picture. The TV image offers some three million dots per second to the receiver. From these he accepts only a few dozen each instant, from which to make an image ….. The TV image requires each instant that we "close" the spaces in the mesh by a convulsive sensuous participation that is profoundly kinetic and tactile…[267]

In sum, McLuhan saw that the situation was a double-bind — both the old and new are a mixed blessing. Print fragments, it inclines us to specialise and to reject from consciousness vital areas of our sensory experience. As a consequence or side-effect we are robbed of intuitive and ecological awareness, and become unable to see patterns crucial for survival:

Literate man, once having accepted an analytic technology of fragmentation, is not nearly so accessible to cosmic patterns as tribal man. He prefers separateness and compartmented spaces, rather than the open cosmos. He becomes less inclined to accept his body as a model of the universe, or to see his house-or any other of the media of communication, for that matter-as a ritual extension of his body. Once men have adopted the visual dynamic of the phonetic alphabet, they begin to lose the tribal man's obsession with cosmic order and ritual as recurrent in the physical organs and their social extension. Indifference to the cosmic, however, fosters intense concentration on minute segments and

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[266] *Understanding Media*, 333. Emphasis mine.

[267] Ibid., 315.

specialist tasks, which is the unique strength of Western man. For the specialist is one who never makes small mistakes while moving toward the grand fallacy.[268]

The electric environment, on the other hand, encourages ecological perception.[269] Pushed to extreme, however, it erodes our capacity for analytic thought and inclines us towards loss of control over our complex technological machinery (both hardware and software) which sustains our present mode of existence and makes possible our survival (arguably, in an over populated and under-resourced planet). McLuhan's SI/SC charts appear to try to navigate this double bind by creating a hybrid form of writing that attempts to bridge ideogrammatic and phonetic modes. His SI/SC charts require the use of phonetic literacy, and its modes of reading and writing, in a high degree. They also attempt to offset the disservices of the phonetic alphabet and the Addison-Steele equitone by rendering "writing" in a form not unlike "concrete poetry"[270] and reminiscent of medieval illuminated manuscripts. In other words, his SI/SC charts draw attention to the transforming interval. They call to mind the disparity between inputs and completion, and how we effect different kinds of "closure" or fill in the lacunae depending on which "medium" we are using.[271] In doing so they seek to bring vital areas of

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[268] Ibid., 124.

[269] McLuhan, "The Future of New Media," MS., 27.

[270] In "concrete poetry" the typographical arrangement is just as important in conveying the intended effects as the "conventional" aspects of poetry.

[271] Thus making them more like the Chinese character, or more accurately, as McLuhan understood the operations of the Chinese character through the lens of Pound and Fenollosa. As McLuhan notes in a letter to his son Eric: "I have looked at the preface to the *I Ching* translation by James Legge … Legge writes that the key to the book which I had unconsciously acted on in all my translations of other classics, namely, that the written characters of the Chinese are not representations of words, but symbols of ideas, and that the combination of them in composition is not a representation of what the writer would say, but of what he thinks." McLuhan continues: "Chinese characters

our sensory experience to the level of consciousness (e.g., "the non-verbal power" of various forms to impose their "own assumptions on the audience"),[272] in a way that conventional prose in phonetic scripts cannot. In sum, a new "space" is created for phonetic literacy, and visual values are propped up in a way that cooperates with and capitalizes on the positive features of the new situation. The resulting sensibility is, arguably, analytic and empirical, and painterly and poetic — a state of being perpetually poise at the frontiers of several kinds of space.

Centre in Culture and Technology

In the end, nothing came of McLuhan's *Report on Project in Understanding New Media*. It was shelved by the NAEB. McLuhan, however, simply kept going, and shifted his interests to establishing a new duet. While funding had not been secured to continue the seminar and *Explorations* from the Ford Foundation, McLuhan appears to have been able to lever the support of the president of the University of Toronto, Claude Bissell, to establish the Centre in Culture and Technology[273] and resume

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are presented not as SI, but as SC. The characters are not the thing but the effect of the thing. This explains in one sentence the entire interest of Fenollosa for Pound. It also explains in one sentence the entire nature of Haiku," (McLuhan to Eric McLuhan, 28 December 1970).

[272] McLuhan, "Project in Understanding New Media, 'Media Log I,'" MS., 5.

[273] During the course of the original seminar McLuhan had earned the support of Claude Bissell, who later became president of the University of Toronto in 1958. W. Terrence Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan*, 162, 179. Perhaps, something of the extent that the Centre was intended to operate "on the lines" of the original seminar can be seen in McLuhan use of what he would identify as an obsolete dichotomy as its very name. McLuhan states in *Understanding Media* that: "Automation is information and it not only ends jobs in the world of work, it ends subjects in the world of learning. It does not end the world of learning .… It ends the old dichotomies between culture and technology, between art and commerce, and between work and leisure," (*Understanding Media*, 346–47). Further, as McLuhan notes to Joe Keogh: "Apropos your presenting something at the

Explorations.[274] Subsequently, the University of Toronto's board of governors approved the establishment of the Centre, and appointed McLuhan as director on the 24th of October 1963. The principal work of this new centre of culture and technology, McLuhan notes in a letter to Bissell, was to be the perfection of "a complete theory of cultural change."[275]

> What we seek today is either a means of controlling these shifts in the sense-ratios of the psychic and social outlook, or a means of avoiding them altogether. To have a disease without its symptoms is to be immune. No society has ever known enough about its actions to have developed immunity to its new extensions or technologies.[276]

Centre this year, let me mention that our theme is to be obsolescence as a necessary part of the creative process," (McLuhan to Joe Keogh, 22 September 1970).

[274] Explorations would be published in the *Varsity Graduate*, as a magazine within a magazine

[275] McLuhan to Claude Bissell, 11 October 1963. One of the projects undertaken at the Centre towards this end was the development of sensory profiling kits. The goal of which was to help discern the "base" sensibility of various individuals and cultures. As McLuhan notes in Understanding Media: "…the effect of the entry of the TV image will vary from culture to culture in accordance with the existing sense ratios in each culture," (*Understanding Media*, 45). Something of the extent that the work of the Centre proceeded to work out the different starting points can be seen in the later work, *From Cliché to Archetype*: "In every tongue there is a phrase that indicates the feeling of complete knowledge or mastery of some matter while indicating the sensory bias of the whole culture. In English we may say, 'I know it like the back of my hand' (visual?). In Russian they say, 'I know it like the palm of my hand' (iconic tactile?). In Spanish they say, 'I know it as if I had given birth to it' (proprioceptive-visceral?). The Americans say, 'I know it inside out' (kinetic-manipulatory?). The Thailanders say, 'I know it like a snake swimming in water' (the dance of thought among words?). In German they say, 'I know it like the inside of my pocket' (tactile-interface?). In French they say, 'I know it au fond' (auditory-resonant?). The Japanese, masters of touch or interval, say, 'I know it from head to toe,'" (*From Cliché to Archetype*, 136). TV then will have a different effect on each of these cultures. This matter demands more attention, but can only receive mention here.

[276] *Understanding Media*, 64.

>Hitherto most people have accepted their cultures as a fate, like climate or vernacular; but our emphatic awareness of the exact modes of many cultures is itself a liberation from them as prisons.[277]

Shortly after, *Explorations* resumed as a magazine within the *Varsity Graduate* in 1964.[278]

The Centre in Culture and Technology demands its own history, which is well beyond the scope of this study.[279] I would, however, like to briefly touch on two aspects of the project given that, in many respects, the stated objective of the centre, "the principal work," was merely the "juicy piece of meat."[280] Arguably, the Centre was intended to beget a series of resonant echoes, and the very *form* of the Centre in Culture and Technology was engineered: (a) with a view to reforming the structures of higher-level education, and (b) to act as something of a "pilot model" for a new kind of classroom. Our starting point in the matter is to revisit

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[277] *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 76.

[278] Gordon states that the aim of the centre was to bring together scholars and researchers from all branches of science, technology and the humanities, and arts for the purposes of determining the effects of any technology on culture, society, and institutions. Gordon also records the original members of the centre as: Allen Bernholtz (Architecture), Daniel Cappon (medicine), B. M. Carpendale (Mechanical Engineering), W. T Easterbrook (Political Science), E. Llewellyn-Thomas (medicine), Arthur Porter (Industrial Engineering), Carl Williams (Psychology), Harley Parker (Design, Royal Ontario Museum), Ed Rogers (Anthropology), and McLuhan. W. Terrence Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan*, 193, 195.

[279] It is a history that is yet to be written.

[280] "For the 'content' of a medium is like the *juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind*. The effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as "content." The content of a movie is a novel or a play or an opera. The effect of the movie form is not related to its program content. The "content" of writing or print is speech, but the reader is almost entirely unaware either of print or of speech," (*Understanding Media*, 18). Emphasis mine.

McLuhan's "The Humanities in the Electronic Age" (1961), wherein

McLuhan states the aim plainly:

> Our existing ideas of educational organization are still of the centre-margin pattern of institutionalized structure that is taken for granted by the baffled administrator as he meditates on the explosion in student population and the explosion in learning. How is this centre-margin pattern to be maintained and TV fitted into it? How is the entire community to receive a higher education and present standards of instruction to be maintained? *The answer is simple and it has been rendered many times by other new structures in the electronic age: decentralize*. Create multiple new centres. Abandon centre-margin patterns of the old hierarchy of specialties and functions. Enthrone the living dialogue in centres and between centres, since the entire new technology of our age demands this greatest of all humanist forms of instruction, not as an ideal, but as a daily necessity of action in every area of our communities.[281]

Where McLuhan's SI/SC charts appear to have been a calculated bid to

rise to the challenge of the new and avoid the mistakes of history (the

inability of the Schoolmen to respond adequately to the challenges

foisted on them by Gutenberg technology), the Centre, by contrast, can

be seen as McLuhan's bid to use the "successes" of history so as to ensure

the continuity of higher-level education.[282]

McLuhan appears to have seen that the conditions of his day were

analogous to that faced by St. Patrick (a continuous parallel?), and

subsequently he sought to meet the implosion of electric energy in our

century not with explosion or expansion, but by decentralism and the

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[281] McLuhan, "The Humanities in the Electronic Age," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 7, 16.

[282] Higher education was, for McLuhan a necessary corollary to secondary school reform. As McLuhan, notes to F. A. Ireland at the School of Graduate Studies, "the separation of studies can only be cured by pervasive and benign invasion of all levels of school and college by the highest levels of graduate study, (McLuhan to Mrs. F. A. Ireland, 19 February 1964).

flexibility of a small centre. As McLuhan notes in the "Breakdown as Breakthrough," when the Roman organisation was breaking down, St. Patrick initiated the extension of Roman civilized bureaucracy to the tribal Gaelic world by monasteries, the only form of mini-state that was able to survive the break-up of empire. The centre in some respects was just such a mini-state, a centre-without-margin's pattern afloat in the silent, Sargasso Sea of information flows at the speed of light:

> Speed-up creates what some economists refer to as a *center-margin* structure. When this becomes too extensive for the generating and control centre, pieces begin to detach themselves and to set up new center-margin systems of their own. The most familiar example is the story of the American colonies of Great Britain …. Land powers can more easily attain a unified centre-margin pattern than sea powers. It is the relative slowness of sea travel that inspires sea powers to foster multiple centres by a kind of seeding process. Sea powers thus tend to create centres without margins, and land empires favour the centre-margin structure. Electric speeds create centres everywhere. Margins cease to exist on this planet.[283]

In addition to founding a "mini-state," McLuhan sought to make the premises of the Centre a programmed environment on the grounds that he saw that computer-modulated, responsive environments were the natural successor to curricula,[284] and also the necessary program of the "artist" of the electric age:

> Art can be seen as an attempt to extend consciousness. The job of art is now to extend consciousness itself into the environment, to create an environment which is itself completely conscious. The artist is able to create responsive human environments in which the solicitude of the human occupant is paramount and his is able to invest the environment itself with consciousness. This is a much more exciting enterprise than artists have ever undertaken.[285]

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[283] *Understanding Media*, 91.

[284] McLuhan, review of *The Popular Arts*, by Stuart Hall and Paddy Whannel. MS., 4.

[285] McLuhan, "An Interview With Marshall McLuhan," *The Structurist* 6 (June 1966): 65).

The minutes of the Centre record how it was envisaged that one of the prime uses of the building where the Centre was to be housed would be to provide a variety of computer-programmed experimental environments to enable the group to carry out tests under a variety of conditions. The minutes also record that the goal was to create a room that could be changed (including shape, lighting, and olfactory components) to discover the precise effects for the learning process. As McLuhan notes to Edward T. Hall:

> Apropos [sic] the Centre, it suddenly dawned on me that what we are talking about is optometry for whole cultures and for all the senses. It is possible to design a computer-controlled space in which the geometry of the room, as well as all its other sensory components, could be precisely varied. Groups of students could be taught various types of problems under controlled conditions. Depending on their cultural and perceptual bias, one could discover exactly the focus for the various senses which would enable them to learn any given problem in math or biology or language at maximal speed.[286]

The Centre was, however, never realised in this form — there were no buyers for this kind of operation. Consequently, the Centre came to be housed in the much humbler coach house, and operations assumed a pattern not dissimilar to the initial communications seminar.[287]

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[286] McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 24 August 1964.

[287] A developed history of the Centre would explore Wilfred Watson's claim that the operations at the Centre were akin to underground theatre. Watson, one of Canada's minor poets, admired McLuhan as a fellow poet and saw the McLuhanesque dialogue as improvised poetry. Paul Tiessen, "'Shall I Say, It is Necessary to Restore the Dialogue?': Wilfred Watson's Encounter with Marshall McLuhan, 1957–1988," in *At the Speed of Light There is Only Illumination: A Reappraisal of Marshall McLuhan*, eds. John Moss and Linda M. Morra (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 2004), 115.

Broadway Musicals

Before turning to examine *Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media* we
need to consider another of McLuhan's "failed" projects — his
"Musicals." While none of them were ever performed, the short
digression is necessary on the grounds that McLuhan's "Musicals" serve
to highlight the extent that writing is but a sub-set of his total activities,
and reveal the extent that McLuhan was aware that there was terrain and
transformations of a kind that no prose writer could approach.[288]

During the same year that he completed the NAEB report,
McLuhan also sought to produce a Musical about the U.S.S.R and the
U.S.A on the grounds that the form of the musical "is the only form that
can cope with the speed at which both countries have to reverse roles
and attitudes."[289] It appears that McLuhan had been thinking about the
project, or ones similar, for some time. For example, in the section of *The
Mechanical Bride* where McLuhan meditates on co-education, he notes
how Broadway would soon be ripe for a Rodgers and Hammerstein
musical on the subject of male and female.[290] While we do not have the
title of McLuhan's proposed Musical, we know from his documents that
it was to be structured using the *epyllion* and the "storyline" was to hinge
on the basic dynamic whereby the West is moving East (plot), and the
East moving West (subplot).[291] The idea for a musical, says McLuhan, "is

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[288] It is for this very reason that one of the projects McLuhan never attempted was an
examination of television advertising in the manner he had pursued in *The Mechanical
Bride*, and later *Culture is Our Business*. Both of these works merely look at the impact
of electricity and television on print advertisements.

[289] McLuhan, "Idea and Outline for a Musical to Concern U.S.S.R and U.S.A," MS.
n.pag. "In other words, the entire musical could be built on the figure of chiasmus which
is the mode of both cognition and recognition."

[290] *The Mechanical Bride*, 53.

[291] Another way of casting the plot-subplot relation would be to say that the West is
moving East and the East moving West constitutes the plot, and the subplot would be

to enable this huge drama of concentric reversal of spheres to unfold as an East-West review of games and entertainment." The scene is set, he says, for a play that involves the mutual exchange of top-brass arriving in each country simultaneously with the view "to making the global village a nicer place for all." All the thrills and surprises of the musical, McLuhan holds, would arise from this dynamic, and eventually, these teams would unexpectedly hit upon an extraordinary over-all pattern of mutual transformation which is already far advanced globally. In his proposal McLuhan adds: to "handle these serious matters in a gay Musical would provide both illumination and catharsis for a frantic and anxious world." Instead of grim teams of armament inspectors, he notes, let us have light-hearted study of popular institutions.[292]

McLuhan's bid to write a musical concerning the U.S.S.R and U.S.A was not his only attempt. In the 1970s McLuhan writes to Tom Wolfe asking whether he would help write a Broadway drama for stage and/or screen called "Every Man in his Media (or Medium)." McLuhan notes that this project would be possible given that he had just "discovered" that Ben Jonson's *Every Man in His Humors* provides the natural model for such a play on media.[293] "Everyman in his Media (or Medium)" says McLuhan, would have various media masquerade as real

the "near east" where the same changes are taking place more rapidly. McLuhan adds that "this mutual process of discovery and understanding can proceed on two or three levels at once." For example, he suggests the U.S.S.R might be cast as feminine, and the U.S.A as masculine.

[292] McLuhan, "Idea and Outline for a Musical to Concern U.S.S.R and U.S.A," MS. n.pag. At the time McLuhan appears to have been writing this "musical" the "Cold War" was at its height, the Cuban missile crisis had only just past and the Vietnam War was starting.

[293] McLuhan often referred to *Finnegans Wake* as a drama or play, where the characters are the media themselves. See McLuhan, "Television is Cool and Radio is Hot," *Monday Conference*, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 27 June 1977.

life cultures of differing stature, tempers, and humours. The "naturally" occurring conflict and interaction between various media themselves, he states, would provide the production with the full variety of dramatic effects.

Road to Finnegans Wake

Throughout this chapter (and in both preceding chapters), I have largely presented something of a rhetorical exegesis of McLuhan's oeuvre, and concerned myself with the various strategies he employs — as a study of a career dictates. This approach has two disservices which are brought to the fore when considering the weight of McLuhan's works of the period, including his "musicals," *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, and *Understanding Media*. Firstly, as McLuhan notes in "Poetic versus Rhetorical Exegesis," rhetorical exegesis can go on forever without reaching the point of critical evaluation. Secondly, while rhetorical exegesis works magnificently to unearth the means by which an author's inherited materials are orchestrated for "persuasion" (used here in the broadest possible sense of invoking action), the weight of McLuhan's writings of the period (barring his *Report on Project in Understanding New Media*) are not orientated towards "persuasion" in this sense.[294] *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*, for example, are not primarily designed to produce action. Rather, while works of prose, they are a kind of "poetic history"[295] — they are an action, they are a drama, and they are intended primarily for contemplation and exploration.[296] In both *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media* (which are most profitably approached

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[294] This is a matter is taken up at some length in the following chapters.

[295] C.f. McLuhan, "The Humanities in the Electronic Age," 18.

[296] C.f. McLuhan to Walter Ong, 18 May 1946

as a pair), McLuhan can be seen as having taken up the decorum of Joyce, and operating like Eliot and Pound as an artist–scientist–educator engaged in the poetic task of seeking to "improve perception through language."[297] Ergo, to take these works on their own terms requires taking on a greater admixture of poetic exegesis.[298] What this means for us here is that, firstly, we must see that if either of these works promotes a course of action or inculcates morality (both of which are rightly the domain of rhetoric), it should be regarded as secondary. Secondly, our concern should be with the intensity and pressure under which the fusion among diverse components or vehicles of the action takes place. Our starting point in the matter is to refine the charge that these works are "poetic history."

In the *Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media* McLuhan presents a comprehensive study of the psychic (individual) and social (corporate) dynamics of all media (as he apprehended Joyce had done).[299]

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[297] McLuhan, "The Meaning of Television to Children," (Report on Children and Television: A Consultation. Sponsored by the National Council of Churches, 11–15 January 1965, Toronto), 33.

[298] For this insight I owe a considerable debt to the former student of McLuhan, collaborator, and friend, Donald Theall. Theall has argued comprehensively that we should read McLuhan as a poet. Donald F. Theall, *Beyond the Word: Reconstructing Sense in the Joyce Era of Technology, Culture, and Communication* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 265. Theall has also offered an image of McLuhan is that of "comic poetic historian" or, a "twentieth century poet-satirist," (Donald F. Theall, *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan* (Montreal: McGill-Queens's University Press, 2001), 48, 65). McLuhan, Theall argues, produced social scientific poetry or media-poetics (Ibid., 143). He develops a poetic strategy for considering all artefacts as media, a poetic sociology that applies traditional interpretative (hermeneutic) approach to human artefacts (media) (Ibid, 71), and was trying, like Pound, to produce news that stays news – that is a poetic product that has value not in what it says but what it is (Ibid., 40).

[299] C.f. McLuhan to *Playboy Magazine*, February–March 1970, quoted by Bob Dobbs, "McLuhan and Holeopathic Quadrophrenia," 84.

In both, McLuhan approaches "media," the "extensions of man,"[300] in the broadest possible sense by making the designation "media" include *all* human artefacts. Central to his operation is to show how "media" are words, languages, myths, games, staples, and above all, active metaphors.[301] "Media," McLuhan shows, operate in pairs, and further, as with literary metaphors, are constituted by two figures and two grounds in dynamic and analogical relationship:[302]

> The word "metaphor" is from the Greek *meta* plus *pherein*, to carry across or transport. In this book we are concerned with all forms of transport of goods and information, both as metaphor and exchange. Each form of transport not only carries, but translates and transforms, the sender, the receiver, and the message. The use of any kind of medium or extension of man alters the patterns of interdependence among people, as it alters the ratios among our senses.[303]

> All media are active metaphors in their power to translate experience into new forms. The spoken word was the first technology by which man was able to let go of his environment in order to grasp it in a new way. Words are a kind of information retrieval that can range over the total environment and experience at high speed. Words are complex systems of metaphors and symbols that translate experience into our uttered or outered senses. They are a technology of explicitness. By means of translation of immediate sense experience into vocal symbols the entire world can be evoked and retrieved at any instant.[304]

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[300] It appears that both McLuhan and Edward T. Hall got the "idea" of media as extensions from R. Buckminster Fuller: "Buckminster Fuller coined the word in this context and has used the idea of the total of man's technology, including architecture, as 'mechanical extensions of man,'" (Edward T. Hall, To McLuhan, 9 March 1962). Where "Bucky" got it from, Hall says he does not know.

[301] The theme of media as myths deserves more attention than I have afforded it. For a brief introduction to the theme see McLuhan, "Myth and Mass Media," in *Myth and Mythmaking*. ed. Henry A. Murray (New York; Braziller, 1960).

[302] See *The Global Village*, 3.

[303] Ibid., 89–90.

[304] *Understanding Media*, 57.

The *Gutenberg Galaxy* explores the entire operation of literacy,[305] including "… the print phase of alphabetic culture,"[306] and the preceding phases, particularly the rise of the phonetic alphabet as "indispensable prelude."[307] By contrast, *Understanding Media*, much like "Every Man in his Media (or Medium),"[308] concerns itself with all forms of transport of goods and information. Together the pair provides a comprehensive and encyclopaedic exploration of the impact of media on man:

> Because of today's terrific speed-up of information moving, we have a chance to apprehend, predict and influence the environmental forces shaping us — and thus win back control of our own destinies. The new extensions of man and the environment they generate are the central manifestations of the evolutionary process, and yet we still cannot free ourselves of the delusion that it is how a medium is used that counts, rather than what it does to us and with us. This is the zombie stance of the technological idiot. It's to escape this Narcissus trance that *I've tried to trace and reveal the impact of media on man, from the beginning of recorded time to the present*.[309]

McLuhan's treatment of all history, with a view to training perception, revealing the present, and providing new awareness and

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[305] The work is encyclopaedic, and it traverses the domains of: politics, business, theology (both liturgical and ecclesiological), economics, law, mathematics, physics, business, medicine, and philosophy.

[306] *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 45–46.

[307] Ibid., 152.

[308] The matter is most clearly illustrated in terms of McLuhan's comments on the telegraph: "The most that can be done by the prose commentator is to capture the media in as many characteristics and revealing postures as he can manage to discover. Let us examine a series of these postures of the telegraph, as this new medium encounters other media like the book and the newspaper," (*Understanding Media*, 254).

[309] McLuhan, "Playboy Interview," 239. The Narcissus image is discussed further in the following chapter.

orientation, is not, however, via what he calls the naïve or direct mode —
simply considering the past from the standpoint of the present:[310]

> Toynbee is very generous in providing examples of widely varied
> challenge and collapse, and is especially apt in pointing to the
> frequent and futile resort to futurism and archaism as strategies of
> encountering radical change. But to point back to the day of the
> horse or to look forward to the coming of antigravitational
> vehicles is not an adequate response to the challenge of the motor
> car. Yet these two uniform ways of backward and forward looking
> are *habitual ways of avoiding the discontinuities of present experience
> with their demand for sensitive inspection and appraisal*.[311]

As McLuhan notes in "The Victorian Mode," the simple, linear
perspectives of the past, that began with Petrarch, ended with Gibbon.
From that point on, he asserts, "history" became lost in a multiplicity of
simultaneous views that awaited cubist manipulation,[312] as was
accomplished by James Joyce:

> The continuous parallel between ancient and modern provides a
> "cubist" rather than linear perspective. It is a world of a "timeless
> present" such as we meet in the order of objections in a Thomistic
> article, but also typical of the nonperspective discontinuities of
> medieval art in general. *History is abolished not by being disowned
> but by becoming present.* "History is now," as Eliot sees it in *Four
> Quartets*. This "cubist" sense of the past as a dimension of the
> present is natural in four-level scriptural exegesis and ancient
> *grammatica*. It is necessary to enjoyment of *Ulysses* or the *Wake*
> with its theme that "pastimes and past times," that the popular
> press, popular games, and ordinary speech are charged with the
> full historic weight of the collective human past.[313]

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[310] See McLuhan, "Literature as Material for British History," MS., 5.

[311] *Understanding Media*, 70. Emphasis mine.

[312] McLuhan, "The Victorian Mode," MS., 3.

[313] McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 45.
Emphasis mine.

Following Joyce, McLuhan's treatment of history is what he calls "oblique," and dramatic (and it is what I have called poetic).[314] Here we find McLuhan's comments on the efforts of Gilson have some bearing on his own praxis:

> Looking back a moment at the poetic process and the detective story, I suggested that Gilson has used the method of reconstruction in the history of philosophy as a new creative technique which permits a new kind of communication between the present and the past. The reader of Gilson is typically given not a view or theory of the past but an experience of it. But the past as experience is present. It is available once more as nutriment. Previous theories of the past really amounted to a way of disowning it or of explaining it away.[315]

> Gilson does not set out to produce a theory or view that will unify the philosophical disputes of the past. He reconstructs the disputes. He enables us to participate in them as though we were there. We see that they were real. The questions had to be put that way at that time. And being put that way there were no answers, only wrong answers possible. By repeating the process of participation several times we are liberated from both past and present. We don't arrive at a simple unifying concept but are put on the road to achieving a wisdom. And the road to this wisdom is by way of sympathetic reconstruction, involving the abeyance of personal prejudice and preconception.[316]

To orchestrate his "poetic history" in both *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*, and to enable "reconstruction," McLuhan

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[314] Which, among other things, permits a "historian" to un-imagine the present and have no point of view whatsoever.

[315] McLuhan, "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters," In *The Medium and the* Light, 158. In the same essay McLuhan adds that: "The role of the Catholic humanist is to cultivate a more than ordinary reverence for the past, for tradition, while exploring every present development for what it reveals about man which the past had not revealed. To be contemporary in this sense is no mere snobbism, not a matter of faddishness. It is an arduous but rewarding business," (Ibid., 158–59).

[316] McLuhan, "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters," In *The Medium and the* Light, 155.

forgoes linear, connected, Addison-Steele equitone prose and adopts, instead, a "mosaic" pattern and makes the *epyllion* the structural ordering principle of both works (the interfaced situation). He appears to have had several reasons for doing so. Firstly, McLuhan felt that the form was resonated with the sensibility of his audience (still caught one phase back with TV). The *epyllion*, as I have already outlined at some length, was a response to a heterogeneous reading public, and arguably, the retrieval of city religions and an "occult" or liturgical sensibility. As McLuhan notes in his correspondence with Barbara Ward, the *epyllion* shares the same "audile-tactile" character also possessed by R. Buckminster Fuller's "Byzantine domes," the sensibility of the Eastern Church, and more importantly, television:

> Let me begin with your concern about "the effect of visual, communal images (via television) upon the survival of literacy." In the first place, television does not present a visual image, but an X-ray icon which penetrates our entire organism. Joyce called it "the charge of the light barricade"—part of the Crimean war against mankind. Stained-glass images are not visual either, since they are defined by light through, as in Rouault paintings. The structure of these images is audile-tactile, as in abstract art, both of Symbolist and Cubist kind.[317]

Secondly, the *epyllion* would imbue both works with additional vitality and energy as the structure of the *epyllion* mirrors the action of "active metaphors," creating a harmonious union between what he is talking about and how he is talking about it.

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[317] McLuhan to Barbara Ward, 9 February 1973. Also see *Take Today*, 120; and McLuhan to John Mole, 29 January 1974.

The Gutenberg Galaxy is "built" on a frontier,[318] and, literally, wears its organisational pattern "on its sleeve."[319] The title itself implies an interface. As McLuhan notes to Edward T. Hall:

> As for the circumstances of the outering of sense and faculty which we may call technologies, this involves an intensification or acceleration of that sense or faculty (something that happens all the time through the accidents of climate and material, plenty or scarcity), and results in a center-margins pattern. This is what we mean by an "explosion" population or learning. It is a kind of solar system. The other structure, which precedes such explosion, tends to be of centers without margins, or "field" or galaxy structure, in which the dialogue or interplay is among centers and not between center and margin. It is the return to field or galaxy under electro-magnetic conditions of information movements that dissolves the age-old center-margin patterns that have constituted the Western world for many centuries.[320]

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[318] "It is not the aim of this book to do more than to explain the configuration or galaxy of events and actions associated with Gutenberg technology .… But for the readers of this book it is hoped that we can deepen our understanding of both the typographic and the electronic revolutions," (*The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 141).

[319] The original cover for the work exhibits two interlocking G's (a smaller "G," in reverse, inside the curvature of the lager) in the image of a Vortex: "The structural theme of *Spiral* presents the oscillation of two simultaneously and complementary cones or spirals, constituting the synchronic worlds of birth and death. Spiral is not a diachronic or lineal structure but synchronic and contrapuntal interplay in a resonating structure whose centre is everywhere and circumference nowhere," (Sorel Etrog, and Marshall McLuhan, *Images from the Film Spiral* (Toronto: Exile Editions, 1987), 125). McLuhan adds: "[Sorel] Etrog comes from a rich audile-tactile background and tradition in iconic art. His imagery is always of stark confrontation and his work is always multi-levelled and multi-sensuous in ways that are not easily described in conventional literary terminology."

[320] McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 25 March 1962. In an earlier letter McLuhan wrote to hall stating that he has just finished a study of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, and states: "it proceeds on the assumption of your page 79. He notes however the immediate problem of *Understanding Media* … Your page 79 thus becomes even more crucial to my work," (McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 27 January 1962). Here McLuhan is referring to Hall's *Silent Language*. On p. 79 McLuhan reads Hall as declaring that "ablation" is the "key to human technologies," (McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 6 February 1962).

Understanding Media too is built on a frontier situation:

> *After three thousand years of explosion, by means of fragmentary and mechanical technologies, the Western world is imploding*. During the mechanical ages we had extended our bodies in space. Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man – the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media.[321]

In sum, both develop from the same "vortex." Again, as McLuhan notes to Hall:

> The Copenhagen school talks my language …. Heisenberg's distinction between rotational and non-rotational systems as creating quite distinct spatial configurations corresponds exactly to my divisions between centre-margins and centres without margin systems …. Thus, the centre-margin system is explosive (fission), and the centre-without-margin system is implosive (fusion). The centrifugal system corresponds to that outering of sense and faculty, with all the consequent products familiar in fission, whereas implosion results in quite different products. It seems to be that an oral society is imploded, and a literate one exploded.[322]

McLuhan also employs this fundamental organising principle to manage the relationship between the two works. *Understanding Media* looks "back" at *Gutenberg Galaxy* as providing: "the necessary background for studying the rapid rise of new visual values after the

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[321] *Understanding Media*, 3–4. Emphasis mine.

[322] McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 5 April 1962.

advent of printing from movable types."[323] *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, on the other hand, looks "forward" to *Understanding Media*: [324]

> But it has been the business of *The Gutenberg Galaxy* to examine only the mechanical technology emergent from our alphabet and the printing press. What will be the new configurations of mechanisms and of literacy as these older forms of perception and judgment are interpenetrated by the new electric age? The new electric galaxy of events has already moved deeply into the Gutenberg galaxy. Even without collision, such co-existence of technologies and awareness brings trauma and tension to every living person. Our most ordinary and conventional attitudes seem suddenly twisted into gargoyles and grotesques .… These multiple transformations, which are the normal consequence of introducing new media into any society whatever, need special study and will be the subject of another volume on *Understanding Media* in the world of our time.[325]

The structural ordering principle is mirrored again *within* each work by way of several additional dichotomies included in a bid to chart the "subordinate rhythms."[326] The *Galaxy* itself is divided in two, and also contends with several additional dichotomies, including (but not limited to): eye and ear, light on and light through, hot and cool, Newton and Berkely, matching and making, simple and complex, invention and suspended judgement. Similarly *Understanding Media* employs the dichotomies: ear and eye, America and Europe; West and East, Euclidean and non-Euclidean, tactile and visual, sequential and simultaneous, fragmentation and involvement, square and triangle, mechanism and

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[323] *Understanding Media*, 201.

[324] According to Eric McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media* were only considered related to the extent that *The Galaxy* represents one chapter of *Understanding Media* properly expanded. By extension, he implies that the same could be done for each of the chapters of *Understanding Media*. Eric McLuhan, Personal Communication, (27 July 2006).

[325] *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 278–79.

[326] McLuhan to Lynn White, 17 August 1970.

cybernation, mass production and custom-built, linearity and feedback. There are of course a great many more of these essential dichotomies throughout each work.

McLuhan's use of the *epyllion*, however, extends well beyond merely using the device of interfacing situation. In both the *Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*, like Chaucer, and following Joyce, McLuhan fuses the *epyllion* with Joyce's study of the psychic and social dynamics of all media. In other words, McLuhan takes Chaucer's fusion (of the *epyllion* with the whole Christian awareness of personality) further by providing the new nature (media) with "human" voice or personalities,[327] and human personalities with the voices of new nature (media). It is a complex matter and can perhaps best be observed in terms of concrete particulars, e.g. McLuhan's treatment of Spengler as a singing telegram for "Radio" where he reveals the dual, simultaneous action of "media" to impose their assumptions, and, as McLuhan had argued in the NAEB report, "anesthetize" its users awareness of those "assumptions":[328]

> Had Spengler taken the time to discover the origins of both number and Euclidean space in the psychological effects of the phonetic alphabet, *The Decline of the West* might never have been written. That work is based on the assumption that classical man, Apollonian man, was not the product of a technological bias in Greek culture (namely, the early impact of literacy on a tribal society), but rather the result of a special tremor in the soul stuff that embosomed the Greek world. This is a striking instance of how easily men of any one particular culture will panic when some familiar pattern or landmark gets smudged or shifted

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[327] McLuhan, "Little Epic, notes," MS., 3–4.

[328] A more frivolous study of McLuhan's career would not be out of place in suggesting that McLuhan's meditations on the dual action of various liquors; to both impose their own assumptions, and simultaneously "anesthetize" its users awareness of those "assumptions" went a long way to informing McLuhan's own understanding of the effects of media. The same study might also seek to re-examine the copious amounts of Gin (that "Spirit" in a bottle) consumed at the Monday night seminars as pedagogic aid.

because of the indirect pressure of new media. Spengler, as much as Hitler, *had derived from radio a subconscious mandate* to announce the end of all "rational" or visual values. He was acting like Pip in Dickens' *Great Expectations*. Pip was a poor boy who had a hidden benefactor who wanted to raise Pip to the status of a gentleman. Pip was ready and willing until he found that his benefactor was an escaped convict. Spengler and Hitler and many more of the would-be "irrationalists" of our century *are like singing-telegram*.[329]

By treating all media and everyone in their media or medium in this way, McLuhan is effectively: "making his own Altamira cave drawings of the entire history of the human mind, in terms of its basic gestures and postures during all phases of human culture and technology."[330] Ergo, in these two works he is, to some extent, providing a translation of *Finnegans Wake* for a general audience — he is applying Joyce and making a "social navigation chart." It is little surprise then that at every juncture or interface we find an action not dissimilar to how McLuhan describes the action of *Finnegans Wake*:

> "One world burrowing on another" is a typical pun which invokes the two-way process of borrowing and burrowing plus the image of burial mounds and the tree-pillar cults which themselves were modes of communication between the living and the dead. Every word in the *Wake* is dramatically active in this kind of way, following not a road of meaning but carrying us on an every-way roundabout with intrusions from above and below.[331]

McLuhan does at the level of the sentence or paragraph or chapter what Joyce does in the *Wake* at the level of individual words. Every "point" of interface is explored in terms of a four-fold action or process in a variety of analogical ratios to one another. The reader with some familiarity with McLuhan's work will recognize this as the pattern of his later "tetrads,"

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[329] *Understanding Media*, 112.

[330] *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*, 120.

[331] McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," In *The Interior Landscape*, 46.

which McLuhan and Powers describe as: "taken as a whole," as "a manifestation of human thinking processes."[332] In brief, McLuhan's "laws" are the four questions that he would later render in schematic form as shown below:[333]

> (a) What does it enhance?
> (b) What does it obsolesce?
> (c) What does it retrieve that had been obsolesced earlier?
> (d) What does it flip into when pushed to the limits of its potential?[334]

Figure iv. (Tetrad for the Computer in McLuhan, and Bruce R. Powers, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 104)

Computer

A. Accelerates calculations to speed of light

D. Reverses into simultaneous pattern recognition

C. Retrieves quantitative power of numbers

B. Erodes mechanical sequence
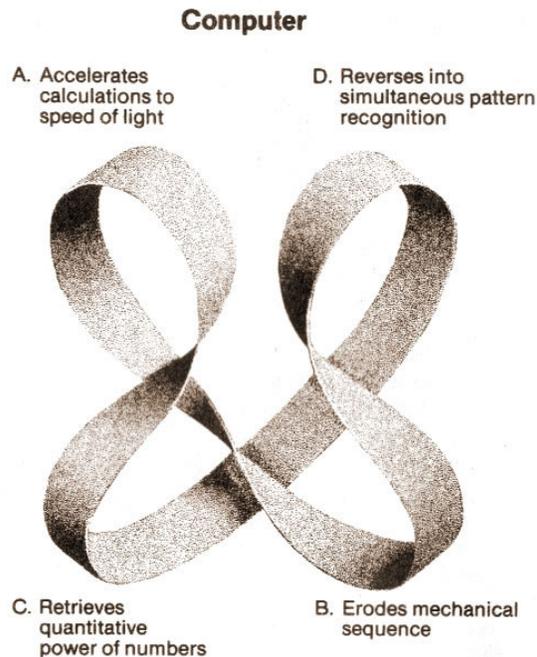
Fig. 8.1.

Returning to the *Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*, we see that the primary "interface" is one of amplification and ablation, and obsolescence. Or in simple terms, how the new supplants the old by

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[332] McLuhan, and Powers, *The Global Village*, 6.

[333] Writing to Wimsatt McLuhan notes how he is turning to state the Laws of Media "in schematic form in order to avoid various prose misunderstandings," (McLuhan to William Wimsatt, 1 November 1973).

[334] McLuhan, "The Laws of the Media," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 19, 6.

amplifying or accelerating existing processes, rendering the "slower"

form obsolete:[335]

> *It is a persistent theme of this book that all technologies are extensions of our physical and nervous systems to increase power and speed*. Again, unless there were such increases of power and speed, new extensions of ourselves would not occur or would be discarded. For an increase of power or speed in any kind of grouping of any components whatever is itself a disruption that causes a change of organization. The alteration of social groupings, and the formation of new communities, occur with the increased speed of information movement by means of paper messages and road transport. Such speed-up means much more control at much greater distances.[336]

Just as McLuhan retrieved the *epyllion* under the electric conditions, at

every interface he also shows how the new, in addition to rendering the

old obsolete, reaches back and retrieves something from the ancient past:

> It must often have puzzled the scholars and physicists of our time that just in the degree to which we penetrate the lowest layers of non-literate awareness we encounter the most advanced and sophisticated ideas of twentieth-century art and science. To explain that paradox will be an aspect of the present book.[337]

> We have no more difficulty in understanding the native or non-literate experience, simply because we have recreated it electronically within our own culture. (Yet post-literacy is a quite different mode of interdependence from pre-literacy). [338]

And finally, McLuhan also reveals how anything pushed to extreme

"flips" or reverses its characteristics (chiasmus):

> Is it not evident in every human situation that is pushed to a point of saturation that some precipitation occurs? When all the available resources and energies have been played up in an

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[335] *Understanding Media*, 8.

[336] Ibid., 90.

[337] *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 26.

[338] Ibid., 46.

organism or in any structure there is some kind of reversal of pattern.[339]

Arguably, the effect issuing from the sum of these devices is that McLuhan achieves a quality of "timelessness" not dissimilar to that achieved by Chaucer[340] and praised by Pound:

> It is the presentation of such a "complex" instantaneously which gives that sense of sudden liberation; that sense of freedom from time limits and space limits; that sense of growth, which we experience in the presence of the greatest works of art.[341]

The new and recently obsolesced environment is seen both in terms of the ancient past, and also the future. The present is seen through the lens of the past, and the past is seen through the lens of the new. As McLuhan and Powers note of their "tetrads":

> The trick is to recognize the four-fold pattern of transformation before it is completed. At full maturity the tetrad reveals the metaphoric structure of the artefact as having two figures and two grounds in dynamic and analogical relationship to each other. The resonating interval defines the relation between figure and ground

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[339] *Understanding Media*, 30.

[340] The question of "tone" is taken up in Chapter Five. McLuhan asserts that "tone" of timelessness that Chaucer achieves is "sombre," probably in the same sense as the liturgical "mood" of Easter in the Catholic Church. I am not sure that the same "tone" can be said to have been realised by McLuhan.

[341] Ezra Pound, "A Stray Document," in *Make It New: Essays by Ezra Pound* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), 336. Like Pound's account of the workings of Chinese characters, McLuhan's tetrads bear their "metaphors" on their face." In them, as with the Chinese character (at least according to Fenollosa and Pound), we "do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but to be watching things work out their own fate" — the etymology of technologies, which are "words," are "constantly visible." See Earnest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, Ed., Ezra Pound (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1969), 9, 25. C.f. McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 45 cited in Chapter Three.

and structures the configuration of ground. Through comprehensive awareness *we may see both past and future at once*.[342]

Having attracted or made an audience,[343] both works set about involving the reader in the act of reconstruction. Here the interfaced situation is crucial as the "ground" (information moving at the speed of light) for the figures (dichotomies) is omitted or suppressed. The reader is thus required to contemplate and weight the relationships between figures with a view tracing back from effects to causes (to find what is missing). As McLuhan notes to Sheila Watson:

> The technique of metamorphosis is to arrest an action and to suppress the causes of the arrest. From contemplation of the arrested image, the viewer is expected to involve himself in the elaborate re-tracing or dreaming back. This is the mythic method of Ovid and of the Symbolists alike. I hit upon it myself in *Understanding Media* in the chapter on "Narcissus as Narcosis" … When I say "the medium is the message" I am using the Ovidian method of giving the effect and suppressing the causes. It is a way of giving the figure minus the ground.[344]

Effectively, then, both works operate to place their reader outside of history without disowning it. By having the reader reconstruct the flux of history within him or herself the reader is, potentially, "liberated" from history in and through coming to see the extent to which their own biases are historically conditioned. McLuhan is quite explicit regarding his aims apropos *The Gutenberg Galaxy* in his correspondence with Edward T. Hall: "…why I wrote the *Gutenberg Galaxy* was in order that they might discover from whence they have derived their assumptions about the

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[342] *The Global Village*, 3. Emphasis mine.

[343] In some respects this is the most important thing. C.f. *Understanding Media*, 329. This matter is developed at some length in the following chapter.

[344] McLuhan to Sheila Watson, 20 January 1971.

other media."[345] Further, both works, insofar as they offer multiple "rehearsals," can be regarded as providing a toolkit that permits the anticipation of patterns of "closure":

> It is, however, the twentieth century step beyond this method of invention which is needed for understanding the origin and action of such forms as the wheel or alphabet. And that step is not the backtracking from *product* to starting point, but following of *process* in isolation from *product*. To follow the contours of process as in psychoanalysis provides the only means of avoiding the product of process, namely neurosis or psychosis.[346]

In the later "Hot and Cool Interview," McLuhan is as explicit *à propos Understanding Media* as he was about the *Gutenberg Galaxy* with Hall: "literally, *Understanding Media* is a kit of tools for analysis and perception. It is to begin an operation of discovery. It is not the completed work of discovery. It is intended for practical use."[347]

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[345] McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 14 May 1962.

[346] *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 45.

[347] McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," 59.

4

REPLAY (1965–1973)

Television kills telephony in brothers' broil. Our eyes demand their turn. Let them be seen! And wolfbone balefires blaze the trailmost if only that Mary Nothing may burst her bibby buckshee. When they set fire then she's got to glow so we may stand some chances of warming to what every soorkabatcha, tum or hum, would like to know.[1]

By 1966 the "corporate image" of McLuhan "exploded" onto the stage of the global theatre as a figure of international celebrity.[2] In the era of Jordan Belson's use of McLuhan to announce the arrival, via science and psilocybin, of the "transfinite realm," mysticism, and the newly emergent exchange with the magicians, alchemist, and wonder workers of antiquity,[3] McLuhanism was born.[4] McLuhan's critics of the period describe him as "winning disciples" and adepts across the Western

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[1] James Joyce, *Finnegans Wake*, Minerva paperback ed. (London: Minerva, 1992), 52. Originally published in 1939.

[2] See Tom Wolfe, "Suppose He Is What He Sounds Like, The Most Important Thinker Since Newton, Darwin, Freud, Einstein, And Pavlov –What If He Is Right?" in *McLuhan: Hot & Cool,* ed. Gerald E. Stearn (New York: The Dial Press, 1967), 15–34. Wolfe recounts how the two primaries of Generalists Incorporated, Howard Luck Gossage and Gerry Feigen, worked to transform McLuhan into something of the world's first pop-intellectual-cum-prophet-scientist.

[3] Jordan Belson, "Toward Cosmic Consciousness," in *Expanded Cinema*, ed. Gene Youngblood (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1970), 19, 136–137. Arguably, what Belson is pointing to here is the intellectual and political climate of mid-late 1960s North America. It is a milieu or "environment" some authors have sought to "name" by invoking the emergence of a "planetary mythology," and/or pointing to the rise and popularity of figures who resonated with if not contributed to the creation of the "counter-culture" of the day, including: Teilhard de Chardin, R. Buckminster Fuller, Timothy Leary, Karl Jung, and Joseph Campbell etc.

[4] Or "*MacLuhanisme*" as the phenomenon was known in France. See Gary Genosko, *McLuhan and Baudrillard: The Masters of Implosion* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999).

world at a rate and scale that cannot be "explained by mere rational argument."[5] Dame Rebecca West calls McLuhanism a "new religion with a vague creed;"[6] for Erik Barnouw, McLuhanism is a "holy new cult,"[7] and Alexander Ross describes McLuhanism as "the hottest intellectual fad since Zen Buddhism."[8]

Figure v. (Peter Whalley, "The Tedium is the Message — Marshall McLuhan")

THE TEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

ANON

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[5] Neil Compton, "The Paradox of Marshall McLuhan," in *McLuhan: Pro and Con*, ed. Raymond Rosenthall (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968), 107. It is relevant to note that whenever given the opportunity, McLuhan was quick to distance himself from all "McLuhanites."

[6] Dame Rebecca West, *McLuhan and the Future of Literature, English Association Presidential Address, 1969* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969), 4.

[7] Erik Barnouw, "McLuhan Reconsidered," *SR* (1966): 19. In many respects, charges of this kind were replayed during the "McLuhan Renaissance" of the "cyberdelic" 1990s when McLuhan was resituated at the intersection of "speculative and cultural formulations" across a broad range of critical and aesthetic contexts, and alongside such figures as: Foucault, Jameson, Kittler, Harraway, Barthes, Virillo, and Deleuze and Guattari. Michel A. Moos, "Marshall McLuhan: The Messenger's Medium," in *Media Research*, 145.

[8] Alexander Ross, "The High Priest of Pop Culture," *Macleans* (1965): 13.

Figure vi. (Duncan MacPherson, "Ottawa's Guru")[9]

During this period, when his celebrity was at its zenith, McLuhan was exceptionally fecund. He appeared extensively on television, radio, and in a number of high-profile magazines. He was a prolific public speaker, and his services were solicited by big-business and government alike.[10] Further, in addition to publishing over 100 articles,[11] he "authored," or perhaps more accurately, "co-produced," a series of works with: Richard Shoeck and Ernest Sirluck (*Voices of Literature* and

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[9] The caption reads: "not to worry – I remember when they used to consult tea-cup readers." Similar sentiments are expressed by Barnouw: "'The medium' (McLuhan) brings us a message we must accept … largely on the authority of his crystal ball," (Barnouw, 9).

[10] For a brief survey of McLuhan's "fame" and his activities of the period, including his short period at Fordham University. See Lance Strate, introduction to *The Legacy of McLuhan*, 1–21.

[11] McLuhan also contributed extensively to the two main anthologies of criticism: *McLuhan, Hot and Cool*, and *McLuhan: Pro and Con*. A selection of McLuhan's earlier literary criticism, compiled by Eugene MacNamara, was published as *The Interior Landscape*, and *Explorations* 8 was republished as *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations*.

Patterns of Literary Criticism), Jerome Agel and Quentin Fiore (*The Medium is the Massage* and *War and Peace in the Global Village*), John Simon (*The Medium is the Massage* LP record), Harley Parker (*Through the Vanishing Point* and *Counterblast*), The Human Development Corporation of New York (*McLuhan DEW-Line Newsletters*), Wilfred Watson (*From Cliché to Archetype*), and Barrington Nevitt (*Take Today*).

McLuhan's late-1960s duet of public performance and co-production of "books" or "teaching machines," as he would call them, generated and released vast amounts of energy. His "teaching machines" fuelled his celebrity, and his celebrity translated into further consumption and contemplation of his "teaching machines." Despite, however, being the most productive phase of his life, particularly in terms of authoring "books," the McLuhan explosion appears to have provoked a reaction in a section of his colleagues, critics, and commentators analogous to Wyndham Lewis's change in direction after *Tarr*. In the following excerpt, taken from Paul Edwards' commentary on the career of Lewis, we might easily substitute McLuhan for Lewis and the *Gutenberg Galaxy* for *Tarr*:

> It is easy to imagine how exasperated Lewis's friends must have become; in 1921 he had been the most innovative and accomplished painter in England, apparently on the brink of international success, and *Tarr* had shown him to be a novelist of great potential as well. Now, perversely, he had apparently abandoned what he was good at, and turned to the writing of deliberately provocative sociological and philosophical treatises …. But for Lewis, what he was doing was of the utmost importance. He was producing nothing less than a map of the future as it might be, and a means of navigating there which would avoid the pitfalls and the alluring blind alleys that had proved so destructive in the recent past.[12]

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[12] Edwards, 304.

Put-On Artist

Perhaps one of the best ways to begin an exploration of McLuhan's praxis during this period is through the lens of the "put-on." While touring the South Pacific in the late-1970s McLuhan was interviewed on the Australian Broadcasting Commission program, *Monday Conference*. The weight of the interview is taken up with McLuhan discussing dialogue as an alternative to violence, and his charge that the task at hand is to understand media because: "If you understand the nature of these forms you can neutralize some of the adverse effects and foster some beneficial effects."[13] During the interview, however, McLuhan is asked: "If the world had not discovered your great thinking and writing how would you go about creating a demand for it?" McLuhan replies: "I'd put people on ... putting people on means teasing them, challenging them, upsetting them, befuddling them; any comic puts on his audience by hurting them." McLuhan continues, no longer talking about the "put-on" as a hypothetical possibility, but rather as a description of *his* praxis:

> The technique of putting people on *in my case* consists simply in pointing to things that they [the audience] have ignored, the things that concern them very nearly but have been pushed aside as insignificant ... A put-on is a situation that I study a great deal.[14]

It is probable, if speculative, that McLuhan's appropriation and transformation of the phrase "put-on" was, to some degree, informed by Jacob Brackman's use in "The Put-On," in *The New Yorker* (24 June

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[13] McLuhan, "Television is Cool and Radio is Hot," television, *Monday Conference*, Australian Broadcasting Commission, 27 June 1977.

[14] McLuhan, "Television is Cool and Radio is Hot."

1967).[15] Regardless of the source, McLuhan appears to have deemed the phrase adequate. One of the first recorded usages of the phrase by McLuhan is in "Pound: The Playboy of the Westend World" (1968). There, McLuhan takes up what is essentially a slang phrase, apparently in the common stock in North-Eastern America during the late 1960s, and applies it in his discussion of Ezra Pound's sense of decorum, authorial praxis, and relationship to his audience. He also uses the phrase in the article to describe how the new tribal politics that came with the radio brought Hitler, Mussolini, Stalin, Churchill, and Roosevelt — "tribal chieftains," who *put-on* their people as their mask and transformed politics into a masquerade of images.[16]

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[15] Jacob Brackman, "The Put-On," *The New Yorker*, 24 June 1967. McLuhan's literary agent, Matie Molinaro, appears to have kept a close eye on the press clippings. In the article Brackman makes two references to McLuhan.

[16] McLuhan, "Pound: Playboy of the Westend World," MS., 3. Emphasis mine.

Figure vii. (McLuhan, *Culture is Our Business* (New York and Toronto: McGraw-Hill, 1970), 134–135)

ARE YOU PUTTING US ON?

Glasses are now fun and games, masks, theater costume.

Dorothy Parker's quip "Men seldom make passes . . ." is dead.

"My Consumers, Are They Not My Producers?" (Joyce)

Young African writers today face the dilemma of having written and printed books in languages for which there are no readers at all.

The audience creates the author as much as the author creates the taste by which he is to be enjoyed.

The teen-age market was invented by the Beatles. In politics, as in war, youth is now a major factor. The TV set introduced the viewer as screen, the public as participant. It puts us on.

A century earlier, Baudelaire described the process in his envoi to his reader: Hypocrite lecteur mon semblable mon frere. The producer and the consumer make each other.

The process puts the public into total bondage to the sponsors and the programmers and their media.

ARE YOU PUTTING US ON

You should. You'll be prettier when you do.

And it's free! Come try on bright new eyes, dewy new lips, glowing new skin tone. Our Merle Norman studio artist designs this complimentary make-up just for you . . . to show how pricelessly pretty you can be! Sound like fun? It is . . . at Merle Norman Cosmetics Studios everywhere. Just look us up in the phone book.

MERLE NORMAN COSMETICS

The term "put-on" appears to have provided McLuhan with a way of talking with a general audience about the latest thinking about form and gesture. For example, in "Roles, Masks, and Performances" McLuhan uses the phrase to discuss the magazine as performance:

> While puzzling over my role as commentator on this issue of *New Literary History*, I have tried to see the magazine itself as *performance* …. There is a sense in which a magazine is a vortex of energy, a mask which the reader puts on in order to perceive a field of action that would otherwise be outside his ken …. If a reader must put on a magazine as a mask or a pattern of energy in order to organize his perceptions, the contributors must also put on the public created by the magazine, creating a reciprocal and complementary action. It is especially difficult for me as an outside commentator to focus both aspects of this process simultaneously. Perhaps I will be permitted the role of "the

stranger" used by Plato to promote the ends of dialogue and avoid the specialist exchanges of an "in-group."[17]

Nearly a decade after his initial use we find McLuhan still employing the phrase, this time to point to what he considers to be the failure of Jacques Maritain: "At no point does Maritain understand formal causality in art or philosophy. That is to say, he is totally unaware that formal causality consists in 'putting on' the public proper to the activity involved."[18]

Not With Words of Wisdom

McLuhan uses "put-on" in a variety of ways elsewhere in his corpus. For example, writing to the Editor of *Commonweal* he uses the phrase to point to the orchestration of the arts of the trivium for therapeutic ends by a writer or performer or speaker: "My observation about the role of the performer or speaker, as 'putting on' the public as a sexual act, reverberates with Dr. Jonson's observation about a woman's preaching being like a dog walking on its hind legs. Jonson intuitively grasped the sexual posture involved, but chose not to push it to the full figure."[19] McLuhan continues:

> I was not concerned with theology in my observations, but merely rhetoric and psychology. The speaker or performer has inevitably to "put on" his public as a corporate mask, and this involves simultaneously the three roles of the logos: the logos *prophorikos*

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[17] McLuhan, "Roles, Masks and Performances," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 12, 3–4. Originally published in 1971. McLuhan concludes, stating: "I see that assuming the role of a "stranger" provoking a dialogue has been an incitement to global thinking. Although I began with one role, I have played many parts in this "Commentary." The "stranger" has become the guide; the passenger, the driver. Since this multi-role-playing is inevitable in an electronic world, one hopes that the put-on has also been a turn-on," (Ibid., 26). Here, McLuhan appears to be invoking the image of Plato's "Athenian stranger" (often said to resemble Socrates) who appears in Plato's *Laws*.

[18] McLuhan to Fredrick Wilhelmsen, 17 June 1975.

[19] McLuhan to the Editor (*Commonweal*), 9 February 1978.

(the uttered or spoken), the logos *spermatikos* (the embedding of the seed in things), and finally, the logos *hendiathetos* (the mode of inner resonances).[20]

McLuhan develops the matter in a letter to Ralph Cohen. Since the letter remains unpublished, I will cite it at length:

> The attached forms the first part of a larger essay which was an attempt to back-track the Christian Doctrine of the Logos to its roots. In this first section, attention is on the structure and nature of the Greek oral *logos* .… it was discovered while writing it that the oral logos, under the influence of phonetic writing was shattered, and over a period of time the pieces were arranged into various systems. One system that seems to have "stuck" with the Western tradition was the Stoic system of the three-fold logos: they are the logos *hendiathetos*, the logos *prophorikos*, and the logos *spermatikos*. These three in turn, would seem to give rise to what was later called the trivium.
>
> As suggested in this first section, the logos *spermatikos*, as the principle of embedding, seems to underlie ancient Grammar (as the art of exegesis and etymology). The "uttered" logos, *prophorikos*, seems to be at the back of rhetoric, and the logos *hendiathetos*, as inner speech and thought, appears to be the principle of logic and philosophy .… I think it has some relevance to your thoughts about the divisions of rhetoric. The five divisions have nothing to do with the lineal parts of an oration. The divisions are simultaneous and synchronic whereas the parts are diachronic. About the time of Ramus and Gutenberg the synchronic seemed to disappear from ordinary awareness. Today electric information has restored the synchronic, the simultaneous and the mythic as you well know from your linguistic studies.[21]

In addition to the manipulation and use of the verbal arts, in the introduction to *Faces of Canada* McLuhan implies that "putting on" an

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[20] Ibid.

[21] McLuhan to Ralph Cohen, 19 January 1978.

audience also entails the orchestration of the quadrivial arts, particularly music:[22]

> W. B. Yeats points out in his *Autobiographies:* "Style, personality – deliberately adopted and therefore a mask – is the only escape from the hot-faced bargainers and money changers" … One of the functions of the portraitist, such as George Lonn, is to translate our everyday world of the merely individual pursuit into a style or a tradition. *The draughtsman, in creating masks for his subjects, endows their image with a musical idiom and rhythm. The role of the portraitist is to put on his audience as costume of an era and to endow his subjects with the corporate energy of that time.* By drawing the individuals of a time into the vortex of the group-energy developed in the interplay of interests and motives of an age, the portraitist hands back to the individual *figures* and *ground* which they share as a style. The confrontation between the individual and the tradition, between the figure and its ground, *creates the vision of a time.*[23]

Returning then to McLuhan's comments on *Monday Conference*, we find that on one level he is indicating that his practises, to some degree, involve "miming" the operations of the "media" themselves (yet inverts or flips their operation by calling attention to the process). This is a matter I will develop later in this chapter. On another level, however, he is announcing himself as a *doctus orator,*[24] the "man trained in the skills of

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[22] The *epyllion*, which operates by way of resonant interface, is just such a musical idiom, or "oral-musical-pictorial mode" of manipulating experience. C.f. McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951.

[23] McLuhan, introduction to *Faces of Canada,* by George Lonn (Toronto: Pitt Publishing Co., 1976), 9. Emphasis mine.

[24] McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 28. For a more complete elucidation of the posture see, Ibid, 26, and *The Classical Trivium*, 66, 70, 71, 83, 135, 155, 192, and 198.

encyclopedic wisdom and eloquence,"[25] and his praxis as both trivial and quadrivial:[26]

> If St. Augustine's *De Musica* affords a view of the traditional way of seeing the relation between metrics and astronomy, his *De Doctrina Christiana* links the trivium and quadrivium business of scriptural exegesis and sacred oratory. It amounts to an adaptation of the Ciceronian ideal of the *doctus orator* to the new task of the Christian theologian and teacher.
>
> In this regard Cicero's *De Oratore* is itself a charter of classical humanism, an attempt to unify the Graeco-Roman culture in a vision of the ideal orator. As such it underlies not only St. Augustine and St. Jerome but most medieval and Renaissance books of advice to princes and courtiers.[27]

McLuhan's comments *à propos* the "put-on" and the orchestration of both the trivial and quadrivial arts brings us back to one of McLuhan's earlier essays, "Joyce, Aquinas, and the Poetic Process." Here McLuhan discusses the operation of what he calls the "Thomistic article," or what he occasionally refers to elsewhere as the basic Scholastic form of disputation:

> Anyone familiar with the persistent use which Joyce makes of the labyrinth figures as the archetype of human cognition, will have noticed the same figure as it appears in the dramatic action of a Thomistic "article." There is first the descent into the particular matter of the "objections." These are juxtaposed abruptly, constituting a discontinuous or cubist perspective. By abrupt juxtaposition of diverse views of the same problem, that which is in question is seen from several sides. A total intellectual history is provided in a single view. And in the very instant of being presented with a false lead or path the mind is alerted to seek another course through the maze. Baffled by the variety of choice, it is suddenly arrested by the "*sed contra*" and given its true bearings in the conclusion. Then follows the retracing of the

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[25] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 160.

[26] McLuhan, "James Joyce, Playboy of the West-end World," MS., 3; Also see McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 26.

[27] McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 28.

labyrinth in the "*respondeo dicendum.*" Emerging into intellectual clarity at the end of this process, it looks back on the blind alleys proffered by each of the original objections. Whereas the total shape of each article, with its trinal divisions into objections, is an "S" labyrinth, this figure is really traced and retraced by the mind many times in the course of a single article…[28]

Further elucidation of the action of the "article" is provided by Eric McLuhan in his later discussion of St. Thomas Aquinas' theory of communication. Here we see how the "trinal divisions" of the "article" can also be cast as a five-fold movement:

(1) The "Utrum" (*inventio*) identifies the area of weakness or illness addressed by the physician.
(2) The objections (*dispositio*) detail the wounds, the forms that the disease takes.
(3) Sed contra (*elocutio*) displays the healthy condition by way of contrast.
(4) Respondeo (which could be written using the physician's abbreviation for a prescription, the familiar R-sub-x) gives the medicinal prescription.
(5) The replies to the objections show the medicine being applied to the wounds, the healing process.[29]

In "Joyce, Aquinas, and the Poetic Process" McLuhan is, arguably, not only describing Joyce's appropriation of Aquinas' procedure (applied Aquinas), he is also describing *his* procedure (applied Joyce) — his practise of "putting on" the audience, or, more accurately, since the article was published in 1951, the direction he would later take in a portion of his writings. The "Thomistic article" employed by Joyce, as it is described by McLuhan, involves the orchestration of all the trivial arts (dialectics being employed in a subordinate role), and renders the

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[28] McLuhan, "Joyce, Aquinas, and the Poetic Process," in *Joyce's Portrait: Criticisms and Critiques*, ed. Thomas E. Connolly (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1962), 249–250. The essay was originally published in 1951.

[29] Eric McLuhan, "St. Thomas Aquinas's Theory of Communication," *McLuhan Studies* 6, http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/mcluhan-studies/v1_iss6/1_6art2.htm.

materials in a musical and ideogrammic way. As McLuhan notes to Pound in the same year as the article was published: "Scholastic *article* form as used by Aquinas (e.g. in his *Summa Theologia*) is ideogrammic. Each article a short intellectual drama."[30] Further, insofar as McLuhan's praxis of "putting-on" his audience involves pointing out things that the audience have ignored (organising ignorance for discovery), a practise that shares some familial relation to that of the comic or comedian,[31] McLuhan indicates that he believes he is operating in the tradition of the learned-clown of the Christian West and updating it.[32] It is a role that McLuhan, as a Christian, appears to have found particularly congenial:

> To take mere worldly things in dead earnest betokens a defect of awareness that is pitiable. From the first days of Christianity there grew a habit, in some quarters, of spiritual clowning, of "playing the fool in Christ," as St. Paul put it. Paul also associated this sense of spiritual confidence and Christianity [sic] play with the games and sports of his time. Play goes with an awareness of huge disproportion between the ostensible situation and the real stakes. A similar sense hovers over the game situation, as such. Since the game, like any art form, is a mere tangible model of another situation that is less accessible, there is always a tingling sense of oddity and fun in play or games that renders the very earnest and

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[30] McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 5 January 1951 in *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*, ed. Matie Molinaro, Corrine McLuhan, and William Toye (Toronto, Oxford, and New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 218. Elsewhere McLuhan notes: "…It is therefore the symbolist with their intense focus on the poetic process as linked to the stages of apprehension who have freed us for the first time to see St. Thomas. But the symbolists are for all that Plotinian," (McLuhan to Walter Ong, 16 August 1954).

[31] McLuhan writes to Pierre Trudeau in the late 1960s noting that an integral part of his "method" entails collecting funny stories as they are an "infallible index of public grievances: "You can pinpoint the areas if grievance by the jokes in circulation," (McLuhan to Pierre Trudeau, 14 April 1969).

[32] To say that McLuhan played the clown is not new. It has been made by both Donald Theall and Gary Genosko. Theall in particular is noteworthy as throughout his works he supplements the image of the "clown" with that of the trickster, the shaman etc… Donald Theall, *The Medium is the Rearview Mirror: Understanding McLuhan* (Montreal and London: McGill-Queens University Press, 1971), 31, 45.

> very serious person or society laughable .… Scholars have often
> pointed out that Plato conceived of play dedicated to the Deity, as
> the loftiest reach of man's religious impulse.[33]

The sum of these two aspects, of the *doctus orator* and clown, is not dissimilar to McLuhan's portrait of James Joyce. In "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial" McLuhan identifies Joyce as *doctus orator,* and he reveals how, under electric conditions, Joyce's assumed role as teacher of perception moved him to take not the prudent and decorous ethical quest, but that of the sham-man, outlet or scapegoat, which is the "quest of the great fool."[34] Further, as McLuhan notes in *War and Peace in the Global Village*, "Joyce was not only the "greatest behavioural engineer who ever lived, he was one of the funniest men."[35]

> Apropos the training of perception of media and the making
> known their constitutive characteristics, I must be bold to state
> that my own work during the past thirty or more years has been
> mainly devoted to this end. For me, it began with the study of
> poetry and the allied arts...[36]

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[33] *Understanding Media*, 243–44. The inter-relation of the practise of the comic and training perception is, perhaps, nowhere more evident than in view of McLuhan's public lectures. Describing his practise to Ernest Sirluck, McLuhan notes that if you tell two or three stories of a somewhat different character or bilingual or Newfie [Newfoundlander] jokes and then follow them with a remark in a somewhat serious tone — "of course all funny stories are grievances" — what follows is a silence as the audience thinks about how to prove you wrong. This, McLuhan states, "then permits you to switch into any topic that is now your main address," (McLuhan to Ernest Sirluck, n.d.).

[34] McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 31–32.

[35] *War and Peace in the Global Village*, 4–5.

[36] McLuhan to Monsignor Panciroli, 19 February 1975.

Joyce and the Symbolists

It is little surprise, then, that during the period under consideration

McLuhan also sought to stress his "debts" to the French Symbolists and

James Joyce:[37]

> This idea of training all our resources upon a complex world
> which needs perception very badly, this idea that the future of the
> future is the present, this idea that if you examine the present
> deeply enough you will find all possible futures, this became a
> very common idea to the Symbolists and to people around the
> later nineteenth century. It's an idea that gives art a profound role
> as teacher of perception rather than as a conveyor of some
> precious content.[38]

In some respects it is puzzling that he felt the need to stress the obvious.

The relation of McLuhan's praxis to that of the Symbolists is clearly

evident when we compare his observation of how the Symbolists sought

to train perception by awakening their audience "to the nature of the

physical bond that is the space between situations,"[39] with virtually any

of McLuhan's works after 1951. For example, in *Take Today* we see that,

like the Symbolists, McLuhan and Nevitt also sought to awaken their

audience to the "tactile interval,"[40] the gap, and "space" between things

and situations:

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[37] "…no body could pretend serious interest in my work that was not completely familiar
with all the works of Joyce and the French symbolists," (McLuhan to Marshall Fishwick,
31 July 1974). Further, McLuhan frequently attributed his entire understanding of media
to "people like Flaubert and Rimbaud and Baudelaire," (McLuhan, "The Medium is the
Message," in *Understanding Me*, 93.

[38] McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message," in *Understanding Me*, 93. The mere fact that
he felt this was necessary is itself a ready index to the audience with which he felt
himself confronted.

[39] McLuhan, "Roles, Masks and Performances," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 12, 7–8.

[40] "Tactility is the world of the interval, not the connection, and that is why it is antithetic
to the visual world …. the social, the political and artistic implications of tactility could
only have been lost to human awareness in a visual or civilized culture which is now

> Einstein, Heisenberg, and Linus Pauling have baffled the old mechanics and visual culture of the nineteenth century by reminding scientists in general that the only physical bond in Nature is the resonating interval "interface." Our language, as much as our mental set forbids us to regard the world in this way. It is hard for the conventional and uncritical mind grasp the fact that "the meaning of meaning" is a relationship: a figure-ground *process of perpetual change*.[41]

There are any number of additional examples we could cite here. One of the more pertinent, however, particularly in view of the war in Vietnam, can be seen in McLuhan's correspondence with Pierre Trudeau:

> There is a basic political principle that may or may not be Hegelian in pattern. It follows the structure of the wheel and the axle. Between the wheel and the axle there must be "play." This play is "touch." When the interval between wheel and axle is too small, they seize up and there is neither wheel nor axle. When the interval is too large, the wheel falls off. The principle that the resonant interval between the wheel and axle is where the action is would seem to apply quite well to war, and politics, and many social situations. Let me illustrate: the Western world is going eastward via electricity. That is, it is going inward and abandoning its outer goals. The Eastern world, on the contrary, is going outward via our nineteenth-century technology and is acquiring outer goals and objectives. Between these two vast components moving antithetically, there is a resonant interval, a gap. As with the wheel and the axle, the gap is where the action is. At the moment this gap is Vietnam.[42]

Perhaps McLuhan's bid to stress the obvious was to encourage his hearers and readers to go beneath the content because it is there we find that McLuhan's praxis reveals an even deeper affinity with the Symbolists and Joyce. Since the inauguration of the "classroom without walls" McLuhan had outlined how the ground for pedagogy had

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dissolving under the impact of electric circuitry," (*Through the Vanishing Point*, 264–265).

[41] *Take Today*, 86.

[42] McLuhan to Pierre Trudeau, 5 January 1973.

assumed pre-modern dimensions.[43] Consequently, his assumed role as *doctus orator* carried a responsibility not dissimilar to that of the medieval teacher operating under conditions where there was no educational bureaucracy and apparatus to guarantee "a ready-made audience … a full house and a long run."[44] In the classroom-without-walls, as McLuhan outlines in "Learning in the Global Village," "the educator will naturally have a high stake in generating interest and involvement for his students."[45] Necessarily, generating interest and involvement entails the task of renewal. As McLuhan notes to Fredrick (Fritz) Wilhemsen:

> I find it staggering to consider that with the wiping out of the trivium by Descartes, philosophy and art ceased to address themselves to the public as their formal cause. Whether it is Plato or Descartes, the formal cause of the philosophy, the primal shaping energy is in the interplay between the maker and his public. *Since the public is never stable, art and philosophy have constantly to be renewed in order to perform their function of directing perception and awareness* …. Let us look into this matter further, Fritz, because the time is ripe for a major revolution.[46]

If McLuhan was to be successful in the task, and, by extension, be of any service to his audiences, his bid to renew and rejuvenate had, like the

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[43] See McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Counterblast*, 134.

[44] McLuhan, and George Leonard, "Learning in the Global Village," in *Radical School Reform*, eds. Beatrice and Ronald Gross (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969), 109.

[45] Ibid., 110. While not a universal practise, several universities of the medieval period operated under the auspices of a "student initiated" system where professors were paid directly by the students. At Bologna, for example, students were afforded the power to hire and fire their teachers so that they were able to get the instruction that they needed. As an aside, it could be argued that the profession of teaching in the age of the Internet has become more "medieval" in light of websites like: www.ratemyteachers.com, www.ratemyprofessors.com, and their "national" variants.

[46] McLuhan to Fredrick Wilhelmsen, 17 June 1975.

Symbolists and Joyce, to be grounded in an intensive study of the new materials available for "expression."[47]

Turning now to consider McLuhan's study of new materials available for expression, we find that his exploration was conducted not with a view to finding how new developments had eroded the values of the preceding age,[48] nor to find how to use new means for old purposes.[49] Rather, in and through his exploration, McLuhan set out to find the new goals contained in the new means, and to find ways of exploiting "new technology in order to establish new plateaus for perception."[50]

> New Cliché, new technology retrieves unexpected archetypes from the rag-and-bone shop. New means create new ends as new services create new discomforts. New speed-up, a new rim-spin put around any slower organisation, destroys the slower one…[51]

We are also brought back to the "situation" McLuhan said on *Monday Conference* that he studied "a great deal" — the put-on. However, this time, the put-on is in its other aspect, as a mode of diagnosis. At the very heart of McLuhan's study of the means available is the attention he

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[47] As McLuhan states in "The Medium is the Message": "They [the Symbolists] began to study the materials with which they worked in order to be faithful to style … They began to study not what they wanted to express, but what were the means available for expression. When they began to study these materials, they quickly discovered that the medium is the massage or message," McLuhan, "The Medium is the Message," in *Understanding Me*, 93.

[48] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 175.

[49] Ibid., 202. "New means create new goals and erase old ones. During speed-up means and goals merge in process," (*Take Today*, 194).

[50] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 175. The price of failure in this task, at least as apprehended by McLuhan and Harley Parker, is clearly outlined in *Through the Vanishing Point*: "Failure to notice the new opportunities is also failure to understand the new powers. This means that we fail to develop the necessary controls or antienvironments for the new environment. This failure leaves us in the role of mere automata," (*Through the Vanishing Point*, 245).

[51] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 46.

affords the "double figure-ground relationship," that gives rise to the process of continual mutual transformation, whereby "the media" transform the public, and the public goes on transforming the techniques and consciousness of the author or artist who would master it. Perhaps McLuhan's most articulate exposition of the process can be seen in his commentary on a familiar phrase of Baudelaire's in *Envoi to Les Fleurs du Mal*:[52]

> There is something rather mysterious about the process of the "put-on" which is inseparable from communication. Baudelaire's famous phrase, "*hypocrite lecteur, mon semblable, mon frere*," captures the entire process. The reader is hypocrite in the very act of putting on the author's poem as his mask, for in reading the poem he is perceiving the world in a very special way, using what another poet, S. T. Coleridge, called "willing suspension of disbelief for the moment." When we put on any man-made mask such as painting, poem, or music, or when we read a book or a newspaper, we are looking at the world in a very special way, altering our own perceptions by an artistic act of faith in the process in which we are engaged.
>
> The second part of Baudelaire's phrase, "*mon semblable, mon frere*," draws attention to the reciprocal part of the action. Whereas the reader or the user of any form puts it on as his mask, as an extension of his own perception and energy, the author or maker has also to put on his public, the potential reader or user of whatever he has made. The maker tends to project his own image as the mask of the user or reader which he endeavours to "put on." This complex process of communication, by which the medium is "put on" by its users in order that they may experience some alteration and extension of their own perception and powers, includes the "putting on" of the user by the medium. Commercially, this latter operation is referred to as "giving the public what it wants" or "the customer is always right." The complexity of this process is such that even literary critics have

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[52] "Even the question of the 'put on' assumes a familiarity with the world of the mask and the persona as presented by Baudelaire and Pirandello and others. These are structural matters that do not involve personal points of view, even though they do involve a wide range of aesthetic awareness which would require a very considerable essay to explain," (McLuhan to the Editor (*Commonweal*), 9 February 1978).

despaired of ever unravelling it. Critics of the press, on the other hand, are accustomed to labelling the whole thing as degrading, even as Shakespeare did with his own profession of acting.[53]

As McLuhan notes in "Roles, Masks and Performances," one reason, if not *the* reason, that this process is so complicated is that it is difficult for an outside commentator (of the community) to focus on both aspects of the process simultaneously. The only figure, McLuhan argues, that is afforded such a view is the "stranger."[54] Regardless of how difficult the process is to study, McLuhan regarded this dynamic, albeit under various names and guises, as residing at "the very heart of any communication activity" and "certain to remain the central issue so long as readers are human and not merely robots."[55]

Given the significance McLuhan invested in this dynamic it is little surprise then that we find his meditations on the process — the power and satisfaction it engenders both author and reader — strewn across his entire corpus. For example, in *The Mechanical Bride*, his study of the "put-on," though not named as such, informs his exegesis of the modern factory, be it North American car-assembly plant or Nazi gas chamber:

> Great physical and industrial power rests on a multitude of powerless individuals, many of whom are deeply resentful of their condition. The smaller and meaner the man, the more he craves to possess not limited human powers, with all the effort of cultivation and all the responsibility that implies, but superhuman power. (That is the meaning of the Squinky comic books, and of "Superman.") The sadistic craving for enormous physical powers to revenge or compensate for human futility will always drive such people to link themselves to vast impersonal enterprises. They will follow automatically any road which promises to bring

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[53] McLuhan, "At the Moment of Sputnik The Planet Became a Global Theater In Which There Are No Spectators But Only Actors," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 5, 16–17.

[54] McLuhan, "Roles, Masks and Performances," in *McLuhan Unbound* 12, 3–4.

[55] McLuhan, "La Révolution de l'Information," (address, *Biennale Internationale de l'Information*, le Toquet, 20 June 1973).

them to that goal. So that to be a switch thrower in a big plant looks better to them than any lonely task, however human.[56]

Shortly after the *Mechanical Bride,* in "Conspicuous Co-existence and How it Affects Markets" (1957), McLuhan refers to the process in his analysis of the phenomenon of movie stars: "we create these gods by paying to see them."[57] In his later works, McLuhan is equally alert to how the process underpins the popularity of the sports pages:

> The first items in the press to which all men turn are the ones about which they already know. If we have witnessed some event, whether a ball game or a stock crash or a snowstorm, we turn to the report of that happening, first. Why? *The answer is central to any understanding of media …. Because for rational beings to see or re-cognize their experience in a new material form is an unbought grace of life.* Experience translated into a new medium literally bestows a delightful playback of earlier awareness. The press repeats the excitement we have in using our wits, and by using our wits we can translate the outer world into the fabric of our own beings….[58]

In *Understanding Media,* McLuhan also reveals how the process underpins the art and science of the copy writer to create that situation where we feel better satisfied when we use well known brands: [59] "The copy writer has to be a strip-tease artist who has entire empathy with the immediate state of mind of the audience. Such, indeed, is also the aptitude of the popular novelist or song writer."[60] In *Culture is Our*

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[56] *The Mechanical Bride,* 128.

[57] McLuhan, "Conspicuous Co-existence and How it Affects Markets," MS., 3.

[58] *Understanding Media*, 211.

[59] See McLuhan, "The Implications of Cultural Uniformity, Draft III," MS., 1.

[60] *Understanding Media,* 196. This is what makes advertising such a valuable resource to study as it follows: "that any widely accepted writer or entertainer embodies and reveals a current set of attitudes that can be verbalized by the analyst." Or, as McLuhan had noted earlier to Norbert Wiener: "That the ad men have a much wider range of social data available than the sociologist doesn't please them to reflect on," (McLuhan to Norbert Wiener, 10 November 1951).

Business, McLuhan makes his remarks in *Understanding Media* even more poignant by way of juxtaposing a Warner's advertisement with his meditations on interrogation.

Figure viii. (*Culture is Our Business*, 72–73)

PSYCHOLOGICAL INTERROGATION

All preliterate societies are communist, just as they are tribal. They have never experienced nationalism, since that is one of the visual effects of phonetic literacy.

Vietnamese youngsters, when interrogated, say: "I did not know what it was to have a native land, because I did not know what native land means." (Look, April 16/68, p. 38)

When they fail to "talk" under torture, they are given "psychological interrogation": "You want to die as a Vietcong hero, but don't be so hopeful. I'll tell you how you will die. Under an American truck without anyone knowing it. I will arrange the accident."

To the tribal man this accidentality breaks the corporate bond with his people. He knows no private identity and seeks none.

The TV generation is postliterate and retribalized. It seeks by violence to "scrub" the old private image and to merge in a new tribal identity like any corporation executive.

This Warner's ad faced the story of the young Vietnamese.
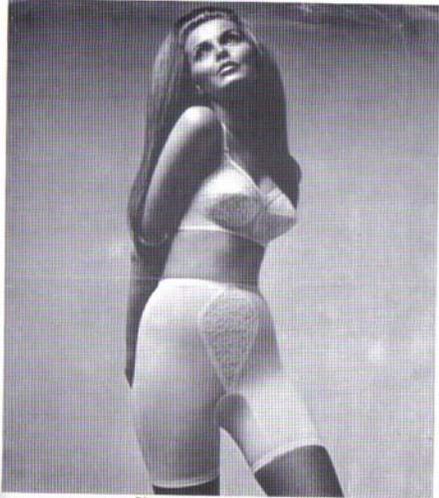
If nature didn't, Warner's will.

ESP and Media as Weapons

McLuhan's exploration of the new materials available for expression was conducted not only by probing the power of the "new media" we "put-on" as both extension and ablation. Using time to provide the "macroscopic distance that the telescope does for the heavens,"[61] he studied the entire history of technical innovation, and probed the relations between our extended physiology, cognition, consciousness, and organisation, and also explored media as metaphors, myths, staples,

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[61] McLuhan, and Parker, *Counterblast*, 22

games, and also as weapons.[62] The first and central actor in his exploration is "language" itself (as the first extension of our central nervous system and parent of the subsequent succession of extensions):

> **Language** was the **first outering of the central nervous system**. In **language** we put **all** of **ourselves** outside. Then we **retraced** and began to hedge our bets by putting out **single senses** like **wheel** (feet), **hammer** (fist), **knife** (teeth-nail), **drum** (ear), **writing** (eye). **Each** of these **altered** both private and corporate **images**, **creating** great pain and **alienation**.[63]

His approach is thus firmly rooted in the grammatical tradition of exegesis:

> One specifically Hebraic contribution to allegorical exegesis must, however, be mentioned, since it could never have come from the pagan world and because it was to develop into a study of the greatest scope. Whereas the Greeks and the Romans studied the analogy of deity in the forms of nature and the character of reason itself, Philo "regards history as a theodicy, vindicating the ways of God to man ... philosophy as the inner meaning of the Scriptures, revealed by God in mystic communion with His holy prophets" ... *Thus the very events of history are a gigantic and complex statement to which the methods of grammatical exegesis are applicable*; and this point of view is as helpful for the understanding of Dante as of Milton, not to mention subjects of greater extent.[64]

As I have already noted, one of McLuhan's guides for his exploration was James Joyce. Following Joyce, McLuhan found that all new technologies work to transform their "predecessors;" e.g. writing

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[62] McLuhan's treatment of media as "staples," which would entail a more nuanced assessment of McLuhan's relationship to Innis, is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of the present work.

[63] Ibid, 42.

[64] *The Classical Trivium*, 29.

transforms speech by arresting or freezing its action and by making speech its "content."[65]

> The natural effect of any new technology is to create a new environment for itself. In effect, an environment is a special organization of available energies. As an energy system, an environment is a process. It reprocesses the earlier environments. *Old environments are the nutriment of new ones. As they are assimilated by the new energy system, the older systems are transformed into art forms*. From the cliché environment to the archetypal content, the new environmental system turns the old environments into anti-environments. That is one way of perceiving what a work of art is.[66]

In turn this led to the discovery that each new extension served to modify the "visual-acoustic metaphor on which all civilization rests,"[67] and affect the balance between the "two basic extreme forms of human organization" and their "innumerable variants or 'parti-colored' forms" issuing from the extension(s) of the civilized eye or the tribal ear.[68] On account of the violence and energy issuing from these clashes between our various modes of "extra sensory perception,"[69] both historic and contemporary, McLuhan was led to cast the matter, as Joyce had, in terms of "war": "Each of the media is also a powerful weapon with which to clobber other media and other groups. The result is that the

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[65] McLuhan, and Parker, *Counterblast,* 23. McLuhan adds: "but the content of speech is mental dance, non-verbal ESP. The content of film is a collection of media within media. The 'message' is all of them at once," (Ibid.)

[66] McLuhan, "The Emperor's Old Clothes," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 20, 3.

[67] McLuhan, and Parker, *Counterblast,* 15

[68] *Take Today*, 22.

[69] See McLuhan, "Electronics as E.S.P.," *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations* (New York: Something Else Press, 1967), n.pag.

present age has been one of multiple civil wars that are not limited to the

world of art and entertainment…."[70]

> James Joyce in *Finnegans Wake* headlined TELEVISION KILLS
> TELEPHONY IN BROTHERS BROIL, introducing a major theme
> in the *battle of the technologically extended senses* that has, indeed,
> been raging through our culture for more than a decade. With the
> telephone, there occurs the extension of ear and voice that is a
> kind of extra sensory perception. With television came the
> extension of the sense of touch or of sense interplay that even
> more intimately involves the entire sensorium.[71]

Figure ix. (McLuhan, and Quentin Fiore, *War and Peace in the Global Village* (Toronto: Penguin, 1968), 106)
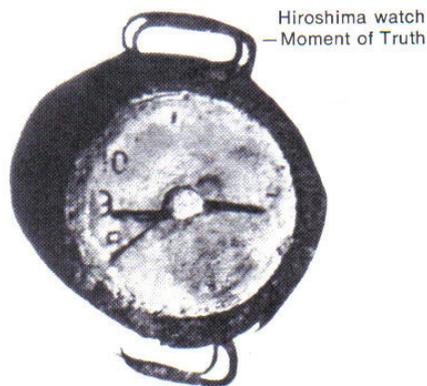
A record of McLuhan's observations of the ceaseless pressures and

tensions arising from the absence of consensus between our various

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[70] *Understanding Media*, 20–21. Echoes of McLuhan's experiences with Ideas
Consultants are heard elsewhere in the work where McLuhan elaborates on the theme:
"Any innovation threatens the equilibrium of existing organization. In big industry new
ideas are invited to rear their heads so that they can be clobbered at once. The idea
department of a big firm is a sort of lab for isolating dangerous viruses. When one is
found, it is assigned to a group for neutralizing and immunizing treatment. It is comical,
therefore, when anybody applies to a big corporation with a new idea that would result
in a great 'increase of production and sales.' Such an increase would be a disaster for
the existing management. They would have to make way for new management.
Therefore, no new idea ever starts from within a big operation. It must assail the
organization from outside, through some small but competing organization," (Ibid., 251).

[71] *Understanding Media*, 265–66. Emphasis mine.

modes of extended and "dilated senses,"[72] and what needs to be done in the face of the subsequent "wars" engendered, is readily seen in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, *Understanding Media*, and his correspondence of the period:

> Since in our time the new media have very decisively externalized our individual senses, making separate closed systems of these … is now our misery owing to the need for a consensus among these ablations of individual sense? And is not our attempt to compensate for the absence of such consensus by means for enriched programming in the separate media, a complete fallacy, or a mistaken strategy of culture?[73]

Of special interest, particularly in terms of our current exposition of McLuhan's exploration of materials available for expression, is his treatment of the "war" between the book and new electric forms. In both *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*, as we have already seen, McLuhan documents how the rise of an explosive, centre-margins (or fission pattern), issued from the advent of the Gutenberg printing press and the form of the book having assumed a constitutive position in terms of the structuring of patterns of human inter-association.[74] In these two works he also shows how newer electric forms and the implosive, centre-without-margins (or fusion) patterns they engender[75] "clobbered" the

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[72] McLuhan, "Article for Encounter," MS., 22.

[73] McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 21 February 1961.

[74] In turn this also saw the eclipse of the pre-Gutenberg world that "assumed resonance and music as the physical basis of social order," (*Take Today*, 19).

[75] "We live today in the Age of Information and of Communication because electric media instantly and constantly create a total field of interacting events in which all men participate. Now, the world of public interaction has the same inclusive scope of integral interplay that has hitherto characterized only our private nervous systems. That is because electricity is organic in character and confirms the organic social bond by its technological use in telegraph and telephone, radio, and other forms. The simultaneity of electric communication, also characteristic of our nervous system, makes each of us present and accessible to every other person in the world," (*Understanding Media*, 248).

book, forcing it to cede "much of its monopoly," both "as a channel of information" and "as a cultural form."[76] When McLuhan says that the book is obsolete, however, he does not mean that the book as *figure* is directly obsolesced. Rather, he tries to show that when the book form had been "clobbered" by its progeny, it becomes an old *figure* against a new *ground* of electric information and service environments far beyond the scope of the book. Confronted with the new electric surround, the book form is simply too slow to operate in a centralising role.[77] Subsequently, as he states in *Understanding Media*, the "formal structure of the printed word, as of mechanism in general," stands forth "like a branch washed up on the beach."[78] This is, however, not the end of the matter. McLuhan states in *Understanding Media*: "A new medium is never an addition to an old one, nor does it leave the old one in peace. It never ceases to oppress the older media until it finds new shapes and positions for them."[79] While "clobbering the book," Television and Satellite, McLuhan saw, had found the form a new role as "teaching machine,"[80]

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[76] McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Counterblast*, 98–99. I have used the quotations from *Counterblast* as they represent a more highly compressed and refined expression.

[77] There are any number of instances in McLuhan's work that might be used as examples, perhaps none quite so potent as McLuhan's use of the comments of the former Nazi Armaments Minister, Albert Speer, in a speech at the Nuremberg trials. See *Understanding Media*, 247.

[78] *Understanding Media*, 174.

[79] Ibid., 174. McLuhan notes elsewhere that one principle effect of new art forms is to awaken or reactivate older forms to a new life and manifestation. McLuhan, "A Phantom City Phaked of Philim Pholk or Where the Hand of Man Never Set Foot," lecture, National Film Board, 7 August 1964.

[80] McLuhan appears to have seen that the process by which Television and Satellite retrieved the book form as teaching machine was analogous to how Telstar had released radio, and then television, from their former centralising function: "Centralism of organization is based on the continuous, visual, lineal structuring that arises from phonetic literacy. At first, therefore, electric media merely followed the established patterns of literate structures. Radio was released from these centralist network

and also conferred "on the printed word a crucial role in staying the return to the Africa within."[81]

> One of the major pressures of TV has been to encourage the "teaching machine." In fact, *these devices are adaptations of the book in the direction of dialogue*. These teaching machines are really private tutors, and their being misnamed on the principle that produced the names "wireless" and "horseless carriage" is another instance in that long list that illustrates how every innovation must pass through a primary phase in which the new effect is secured by the old method, amplified or modified by some new feature.[82]

In its new role as "teaching machine," McLuhan saw that the form of the book was freed up to rehearse and re-enact all the roles it had ever played in human history.[83] So freed, at least potentially, it could assume a new role as the main instrument for training perception and critical preparation for aesthetic experience in general.[84] In McLuhan's terms, the book form had become anti-environmental:

> All the earlier groupings that had constituted separate environments before electricity have now become anti-environments or the content of the new technology. As such, the old unconscious environments tend to become increasingly centres of acute awareness. The content of any new environment is just as unperceived as the old one had been initially. As a merely automatic sequence, the succession of environments and of

pressures by TV. TV then took up the burden of centralism, from which it may be released by Telstar. With TV accepting the central network burden derived from our centralized industrial organization, radio was free to diversify, and to begin a regional and local community service that it had not known, even in the earliest days of the radio "hams." Since TV, radio has turned to the individual needs of people at different times of the day, a fact that goes with the multiplicity of receiving sets in bedrooms, bathrooms, kitchens, cars, and now in pockets," (*Understanding Media*, 306).

[81] *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 45.

[82] *Understanding Media*, 292. Emphasis mine.

[83] McLuhan, "The Future of the Book," in *Understanding Me*, 177–78.

[84] McLuhan, "What the Mass Media Mean for the Teacher of English," MS., 3.

the dramatics thereto appertaining, tend to be rather tiresome, if only because the audience is very prone to participate in the dramatics with an enthusiasm proportioned to its unawareness. In the electric age all former environments whatever become anti-environments. As such, the old environments are transformed into areas of self-awareness and self-assertion, guaranteeing a very lively interplay of forces.[85]

Programming the Environment

From 1957 there is also another feature of McLuhan's study of materials that demands attention — his study of the computer-satellite matrix. In and through his study McLuhan had come to see that the introduction of every new technology produced conditions, albeit fleeting and brief, whereby "human" actors might mould the new situation, brought about by new technologies, into the service of more "human" ends:

> Technologies begin as anti-environments, as controls, and then become environmental, needing the endless spawning of new anti-environments as controls. Dreams are anti-environment for the physiological sleep. Private consciousness is anti-environment for collective unconscious as environment …. All technologies are collective unconscious. *All arts, science and philosophy are anti-environmental controls that are ever merging into the environmental and losing their power to create awareness of environment.* When arts fail to cope with the environment by being anti-environment then there can be a shift to a rapid succession of innovations as ersatz anti-environments.[86]

In short, new technologies, while in their infancy, operate as anti-environments shedding light on the dominant environment. Consequently, with the arrival of Sputnik and the inauguration of the computer-satellite matrix, McLuhan set about trying to discover the new

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[85] McLuhan, "The Relation of Environment to Anti-Environment," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 4, 14.

[86] McLuhan, and Parker, *Counterblast*, 30–31.

possibilities inherent in the new situation. Echoes of his discovery can be heard in his meditations on Apollo 11:

> Apollo 11 included the entire population of the world as its cast. The occupants of the space capsule were the directors of a world theatre. Operation Apollo was the biggest educational TV program ever devised to date. More people learned more in a shorter time than ever before in the History of mankind. The audience was world-wide and totally participant in the operation. This is the inevitable dimension and structure of the "magnetic city"— the term that Wyndham Lewis uses in *The Human Age* for electronic man.[87]

By giving us not just a photographic image of planet earth but a TV image,[88] he saw that the technological matrix that accompanied and made possible the space program (and made beaming the TV image back to earth and across all nations possible), gave us instant access to all pasts,[89] and involved all the inhabitants of "Spaceship Earth" in a drama of plenary cultural retrieval:[90]

> By beginning our probings of the varieties of space with cave paintings, we can more easily illuminate the concept that there is a parallel between preliterate and postliterate cultures. The primitive lived in a world in which all knowledge and skill were simultaneously accessible to all members of the group; contemporary man has created an information environment that *embraces all technologies and cultures in an inclusive experience.*[91]

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[87] *Take Today*, 83.

[88] "If there is, indeed, a terrible nihilism in the photo and a substitution of shadows for substance, then we are surely not the worse for knowing it. The technology of the photo is an extension of our own being and can be withdrawn from circulation like any other technology if we decide that it is virulent. But amputation of such *extensions* of our physical being calls for as much knowledge and skill as are prerequisite to any other physical amputation," (*Understanding Media*, 173).

[89] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 119

[90] To borrow a phrase coined by R. Buckminster Fuller.

[91] *Through the Vanishing Point*, 6. Here we can also begin to see why McLuhan was retrieved in the 1990s as something of a "prophet" of the World Wide Web.

Further, in going around the planet, Sputnik (which was followed by

Telstar and other commercial communications satellites), McLuhan

asserts, transformed *the planet itself* into an art form. Quite literally, the

planet itself was "framed." Having effectively obsolesced or supplanted

"nature," the computer-satellite matrix created the conditions whereby

"art became the norm."[92]

> When we put satellites around the planet Darwinian nature
> ended. The earth became an artform subject to the same
> programming as media networks and their environments. The
> entire evolutionary process shifted, at the moment of Sputnik,
> from biology to technology. Evolution became not an involuntary
> response of organisms to new conditions but part of the consensus
> of human consciousness. Such a revolution is enormously greater
> and more confusing to past attitudes than anything that can
> confront a mere culture or civilization.[93]

In making the planet itself "art," McLuhan also claims that

Sputnik creates a situation that calls into question the very role and

function of art and artist: "Whereas the arts used to be navigational, the

role of the arts *can no longer be the same in the satellite age*, when the Earth

has become art form itself."[94]

> The Balinese, who have no word for art, say "We do everything as
> well as possible." This delightful observation draws attention to
> the fact that primitive art serves quite a different end from
> Western art. Like the Balinese, however, Electronic Man
> approaches the condition in which it is possible to deal with the
> entire environment as a work of art. This presents no solution to
> the previous problem of decorating the environment. Quite the
> contrary. The new possibility demands total understanding of the
> artistic function in society. It will no longer be possible merely to
> add art to the environment.[95]

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[92] Ibid., 98.

[93] McLuhan, and Parker, *Counterblast*, 143.

[94] *Take Today*, 216. Emphasis mine.

[95] *Through the Vanishing Point*, 6–7.

Naturally, his own program of the "serious artist" required adjusting. We can hear echoes of what McLuhan deemed to be the new program for the "serious" artist under Satellite conditions in an interview with Eli Bornstein:

> How, then, does the artist respond to an electric world in which everything is at once? I suggest that his most imaginative response is first *to point out the existence of this world* (as it shapes us), and not to be misled into interest in the old machinery of the industrial age. Secondly, the artist tends to respond by *pointing out that this all-at-once environment has now itself become a work of art*. For the first time in history we have enough power, energy, and ability to program the entire human environment as a work of art. The artist has begun to enter on this kind of enterprise with a whole variety of sallies and witty performances – some of them merely Pop art performances. If you take a piece of the environment and put it inside an art gallery this is a way of announcing that, from now on, the environment itself is a work of art … It is a sort of anticipation of the immediate future in which we are going to tackle the business of programming or shaping every aspect of the human environment as a human artefact. This surely implies that we must shape it so as to heighten human awareness – rather than black out perception.[96]

Coming at the matter from another angle we can say that, while the computer-satellite matrix was in its infancy, McLuhan saw that the task of the serious artist was to facilitate the birth of and cooperate with the positive features in the present. In the case of satellite McLuhan appears to have seen that the opportunity is one of shaping or *programming* the environment so as to heighten human awareness and make "a dialogue among cultures which is as intimate as private speech."[97] As McLuhan notes to Edward T. Hall:

> In the electronic age, we have finally outered all our selves again, that is, all our senses our now outside us electronically in a

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[96] McLuhan, "An Interview With Marshall McLuhan," *The Structurist* 6 (June 1966): 65.

[97] *War and Peace*, 90–91.

simultaneous field, and we can, if we choose, adjust the ratios of those things to the focal point of con-sciousness [sic]. For surely the latter is a ratio among the five senses. Other creatures would seem to have a fixed ratio merely.[98]

Programming the environment, at least as McLuhan presents the matter, is not solely a "top-down" enterprise, although it would be relatively easy to come to this conclusion if afforded only a small section of his works:

> The need of our time is for a means of measuring sensory thresholds and a means of discovering exactly what changes occur in these thresholds as a result of the advent of any particular technology. With such knowledge in hand, it would be possible to program a reasonable and orderly future for any human community …. We have no reason to be grateful to those who haphazardly juggle the thresholds in the name of innovation.[99]

> I know it sounds rather science fictional, but if you understood cybernetics you'd realise we could do it today. The computer could program the media to determine the given messages a people should hear in terms of their over-all needs, creating a total media experience absorbed and patterned by all the senses. We could program five hours less of TV in Italy to promote the reading of newspapers during an election, or lay down an additional 25 hours of TV in Venezuela to cool down the tribal temperature raised by radio the preceding month…[100]

Rather, it is both a corporate and individual undertaking — it is the responsibility of all individuals to be involved in this supreme artistic task as a matter of necessity:

> When a man-made environment circumvents the entire planet, moon, and galaxy, there is no alternative to total knowledge programming of all human enterprise. Any form of imbalance proves fatal at electric speeds with the superpowers released by the new technological resources representing the full spectrum of

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[98] McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 6 May 1962.

[99] *Through the Vanishing Point*, 253.

[100] McLuhan, "The Playboy Interview," 263.

the human senses and faculties. *Survival now would seem to depend upon the extension of consciousness itself as an environment.* This extension of consciousness has already begun with the computer and has been anticipated in our obsession with ESP and occult awareness.[101]

Joint Effort in the Age of Paratroopers

Having now briefly considered McLuhan's study of the "put-on," the wars between media, his diagnosis of the new American vortex, and opportunities inherent in the new situation, we turn now to see how he applied his understanding to the situation of his day. Our starting point in the matter is to reconsider McLuhan's use of the myth of Narcissus in *Understanding Media*:

> The Greek myth of Narcissus is directly concerned with a fact of human experience, as the word Narcissus indicates. It is from the Greek word narcosis, or numbness. The youth Narcissus mistook his own reflection in the water for another person. This extension of himself by mirror numbed his perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. The nymph Echo tried to win his love with fragments of his own speech, but in vain. He was numb. He had adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system.[102]

McLuhan goes on to state that the "point" of the myth is "the fact that men at once become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves."[103] Or, as McLuhan and Parker argue in *Counterblast*:

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[101] *Take Today*, 14.

[102] *Understanding Media*, 41.

[103] Ibid., 40–41. McLuhan adds: "There have been cynics who insisted that men fall deepest in love with women who give them back their own image. Be that as it may, the wisdom of the Narcissus myth does not convey any idea that Narcissus fell in love with anything he regarded as himself. Obviously he would have had very different feelings about the image had he known it was an extension or repetition of himself. It is, perhaps, indicative of the bias of our intensely technological and, therefore, narcotic

Media tend to isolate one or another sense from the others. The result is hypnosis. The other extreme is withdrawing of sensation with resulting hallucination …. Any medium, by dilating sense to fill in the whole field, creates the necessary conditions of hypnosis in that area. This explains why at no time has any culture been aware of the effects of its media on its overall association, not even retrospectively.[104]

While not mentioned in any of his works, we might speculate that McLuhan found another lesson in the myth of Narcissus that has direct bearing on his own operations during this period. Disregarding for a moment Echo's limitations as imposed by Zeus, perhaps McLuhan saw that the nymph failed because she did not work in and through the medium with which Narcissus was hypnotized. The failure of Echo is, then, in some respects, analogous to McLuhan's earlier assessment of the failure of Henry James as seen in his correspondence with Hugh Kenner during the late 1940s and early 1950s. Writing to Kenner, McLuhan asserts that James had no rational roots of civilized consciousness in him. His "puritan, individualistic, anti-social, anti-political mind could only apprehend civilization as an aesthetic object, that is, as an opportunity for the achievement of personal refinement."[105] "Civilization," McLuhan asserts, is thought of by James as a *vehicle* for the individual, not as an organic part of him.[106] By contrast, as we have already seen, McLuhan held that "it is somewhat unrealistic to offer any merely external history of the media of communication."[107] McLuhan operates simultaneously from the inside and outside. Unlike James, his posture is one of

culture that we have long interpreted the Narcissus story to mean that he fell in love with himself, that he imagined the reflection to be Narcissus!"

[104] McLuhan, and Parker, *Counterblast*, 23.

[105] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, n.d. [03 Henry James].

[106] Ibid.

[107] McLuhan, "A Historical Approach to the Media," *Teachers College Record* 57, no. 2 (November 1955): 106.

involvement *and* detachment. What this means in terms of his artistic, pedagogic, and scientific program is perhaps nowhere more evident than in "Prospect." After deliberating again on the myth of Narcissus, McLuhan states: "we live in the unconscious age," and if people go unconscious we can only reach them through the unconscious: "An inevitable fact of dealing with people in a trance *is that you have to talk to them in the language of dreams*."[108] In other words, to try to save Narcissus and "wake the somnambulists,"[109] McLuhan saw that you have to try and work in and through the "medium" with which your audience is hypnotized.[110] To this end McLuhan made the decision to take his programme out of the classroom,[111] rather then perpetuate: "The current disasters in our schools and communities as we try to subject the students to the old visual disciplines of literacy, without considering that these students have been transformed by their electric environment."[112] After all, it was, according to McLuhan, the age of the paratrooper:

> If education has now become the basic investment and activity of the electronic age, then the classroom educator can recover his role only by enlarging it beyond anything it ever was in any previous culture. We cannot hope simply to retain our old prerogatives. Our bridges are gone and the Rubicon is yet to cross! We have either to assume a large new role or abdicate entirely. It is the age of paratroopers.[113]

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[108] McLuhan, "Prospect," *Canadian Art* 19, no. 5 (September/October 1962): 366.

[109] C.f. McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 22 June 1951.

[110] As I have stressed earlier, the first base in any and all artistic activity is getting attention.

[111] Wyndham Lewis's *The Apes of God* and *The Childermas* are both off shoots of a project called "Joint," that Lewis began working on in 1921—22. Edwards states that Lewis's intentions in "Joint" were satirical and Rabelaisan. "Joint," the main character, is a schoolmaster. Edwards, 317.

[112] McLuhan to John W. Mole, 29 January 1974.

[113] McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Counterblast*, 134.

New Duet

In addition to enlarging the sphere of his pedagogic operation, McLuhan appears to have seen that a new kind of duet was necessary. The coexistence of two fundamental patterns of organisation or energy systems created, among other things, a "generation gap." On either side of the "gap," to employ something of a convenient fiction, there were two audiences or cultures. On one hand there were the teenagers, "turned on," adapted to, and "numbed" by the new electric service environment. The "turned on," McLuhan saw, sought to put-on the new electric service environment or Zeitgeist in a bid "…to enhance his power."[114] On the other hand there were the "squares," the older generation. "Turned off" by the new electric surround, the "squares" persisted in a "somnambulistic" strategy of upholding and championing the form of the book as the archetypal form of culture. This, of course, is an over-simplification. McLuhan's understanding of the young-old axis (or East-West axis for that matter) is not dissimilar to his earlier treatment of the North-South axis in "The New American Vortex." While McLuhan makes great use of the North-South axis in his early essays, including "An Ancient Quarrel in Modern America" and "The Southern Quality," in "The New American Vortex" we see McLuhan argue that the axis is not strictly geographic, but rather that the North-South axis of European heritage as it exists in America will be "*in every college and every individual mind*."[115] In other words, the action of the vortex is operational at the level of individual human cognition (intra-personal communication), and all levels of social arrangement (inter-personal

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[114] *Take Today*, 204. McLuhan and Nevitt add: "We now know the *Zeitgeist* to be the hidden service environment created by our own technologies. We are both their 'content' and their servants."

[115] McLuhan, "The New American Vortex (I)," MS., 4. Emphasis mine.

communication); but, increasingly, under electronic conditions the "dialogue" takes place internally in a corporate consciousness:

> All our teenagers are now tribal. That is, they recognize their total involvement in the human family *regardless of their personal goals or backgrounds*. Their recognition of the uniform sphere of the electronic information environment renders obvious the *squareness* of all previous arrangements. But even *American businesses are split in the same way* about whether to pursue visual goals or to create environmental images…[116]

> It may sound paradoxical to say that as the world retribalizes, those societies that already enjoy the tribal state of family unity also experience severe distress. At the same time that the civilized or individualist (i.e., visual, print-orientated; see *The Gutenberg Galaxy*) world is reduced to communal involvement, nonliterate societies, whether in the Mideast or the Far East or Africa, are brought into much more intense interface among themselves. The new intensity of interface via new proximity inflames tribal man, just as it exposes him to the whole spectrum of consumer values enjoyed by the Western world during the past century.[117]

While an over-simplification, considering McLuhan's "two audiences" can serve as a lens through which we can observe his new duet and also to allude to what he perceived were the costs and consequences of not addressing both sides of the "equation":

> When the generation gap widens too far and too fast, abrasion yields to head-on clash, the loss of identity, and the violence of civil war. The Cavaliers and Roundheads, as much as the American Civil War, were a result of technological imbalance and innovation.[118]

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[116] McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Counterblast*, 142.

[117] *Take Today*, 268.

[118] Ibid., 264–265

Turning now to the "turned on," McLuhan saw that, in the absence of adequate anti-environmental controls,[119] they automatically rejected all facets of "the old visual culture, regardless of its value or relevance."[120] What they had ignored, McLuhan saw, was the dangers and disservices of acoustic space as they set about unconsciously (re)immersing themselves in a new world of panic terrors:

> Until WRITING was invented, we lived in acoustic space, where all backwards peoples still live: boundless, directionless, horizonless, the dark of the mind, the world of emotion, primordial intuition, mafia-ridden. Speech is a social chart of this dark bog.[121]

Figure x. (McLuhan, and Quentin Fiore, The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects (Great Britain: Penguin, 1967), 66–67)

> Primitive man lived in a much more tyrannical cosmic machine than Western literate man has ever invented. The world of the ear

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[119] "We have designed schools as antienvironments to develop perception and judgment of the printed word, but we have provided no training to develop similar perception and judgement of any of the new environments created by electric circuitry," (*Through the Vanishing Point*, 243–244).

[120] McLuhan to John W. Mole, 29 January 1974.

[121] McLuhan, and Parker, *Counterblast*, 13.

is more embracing and inclusive than that of the eye can ever be. The ear is hypersensitive. The eye is cool and detached. The ear turns man over to universal panic while the eye, extended by literacy and mechanical time, leaves some gaps and some islands free from the unremitting acoustic pressure and reverberation.[122]

They had also ignored the services of literacy. As McLuhan states in "Murder by Television," the habits of civilized detachment and analytical objectivity are by no means the same as the new habits of all men involved in all men:[123]

WRITING turned the spotlight on the high, dim Sierras of speech; writing was the visualization of acoustic space. It lit up the dark.[124]

The unique innovation of the phonetic alphabet released the Greeks from the universal acoustic spell of tribal societies. Visual detachment via the written page also gave the power of the second look – the moment of recognition. This broke people out of the bondage of the uncritical and emotionally involved life.[125]

Subsequently, McLuhan saw that the task at hand was to re-establish some basis for detachment:[126]

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[122] *Understanding Media*, 155. "Civilization is built on literacy because literacy is a uniform processing of a culture by a visual sense extended in space and time by the alphabet. In tribal cultures, experience is arranged by a dominant auditory sense-life that represses visual values. The auditor- sense, unlike the cool and neutral eye, is hyper-esthetic and delicate and all-inclusive. Oral cultures act and react at the same time. Phonetic culture endows men with the means of repressing their feelings and emotions when engaged in action. To act without reacting, without involvement, is the peculiar advantage of Western literate man," (Ibid., 86).

[123] McLuhan, "Murder by Television," MS., 4. The article contends with the sort of reaction, depth participation and involvement indicated by the Kennedy event on TV, which McLuhan saw as bringing the issue into focus and having had important analogues for educators.

[124] McLuhan, and Parker, *Counterblast*, 14

[125] *Take Today*, 39.

[126] McLuhan's use of "detachment," as I have tried to show in the previous chapter, is somewhat paradoxical and imbued with tension. An echo of the sense in which he uses

> **Question**: Do you think it is our job as educationists to increase the capacity of the students to come to grips with this experience of a new technology?
> **McLuhan**: They are totally at grips with it and what we want is to give them some detachment.
> **Question**: How are we to facilitate this coming to grips with it?
> **McLuhan**: You could not do anything more than you have done by simply providing this new electric environment for them. The involvement is total in this new environment. What we have to provide is some detachment. For example, if you wanted the kids to withdraw from involvement in the new electric environment, you should just programme it in your school system as necessary for examinations. Put the hit parade on examination and all the comics books and all the movies …. and examine every week in them and you will find a total desertion of the whole enterprise. If there is anything but hypocrisy in our protests about the vulgarity of our programming, we should do this… [127]

In the late 20th century, if McLuhan was to "put-on" the users of the electric service environment with a view to affording them a better picture of themselves and the world they inhabited, then he had either to orchestrate "shows" of his own making,[128] or become a celebrity or figure of notoriety so as to appear as content. Whether this suited his personal

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the term can be heard during an interview on CBC radio: "The word cool has a kind of mystical meaning that is not unlike the Hindu idea of detachment. The Hindu idea of detachment means complete involvement in an action and detachment in action … and that's cool … when people are merely involved action but not detached from the action, that's square, or hot. Most people think of cool as merely detached from action, but the word cool as used in jazz music and as I use it in its slang sense for the media means a medium which uses all of you. It uses all of you but leaves you detached in the act of using you," McLuhan, "A Pop Philosopher," radio, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, http://archives.cbc.ca/IDC-1-69-342-1818/life_society/mcluhan/clip4.

[127] McLuhan, "Education in the Electronic Age," *Interchange* 1, no. 4 (1970): 7.

[128] Gordon notes how McLuhan was also involved in developing a number of proposals for TV series, including "Up Against the Wall" which was to feature the audience as actor. W. Terrence Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan,* 217. Further, the *Report on Project on Understanding New Media* sub-series of the McLuhan Collection indicates that he was in the process of developing materials for TV or film to complement his proposed syllabus.

and private temperament is beside the point. For the record however, it appears that McLuhan would much rather have remained an "idiot":

> **Question:** Marshall McLuhan, you say that TV has turned the world into a global village, am I right? Will it turn us all into global village idiots?
> **McLuhan:** Again, there are worse fates. An idiot means a very private person, that's a Greek word meaning a very private person. I am losing my idiot status steadily. I am becoming less and less private. I'd much rather be an idiot.[129]

Professional Conversationalist

To realise the first half of his new duet there were no shortage of obstacles to overcome. By the late 1960s radio, television, and magazine forms pushed increasingly towards offering various forms of pornography and what McLuhan appears to have understood as "improper art." Like Joyce and Lewis, McLuhan operated with a clearly formulated distinction between proper and improper art. In brief, he appears to have held that proper art promotes contemplation and improper art rouses the passions. Further, as McLuhan and Parker note in *Counterblast*, "the format and tone of some press styles may make the very concept of truth irrelevant."[130]

> The most urgent and reliable facts presented in this way are a travesty of any reality. The technological format of the *New York Times* is far more significant than any single report it could ever print …. Editorial policy is of minute effect compared to the artform of the page itself. Until we understand that the forms

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[129] McLuhan, "Do you like TV?," television program, *Sunday*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 19 March 1967. *The CBC Digital Archives Website*, http://archives.cbc.ca/IDCC-1-69-342-1835/life_society/mcluhan/. Here McLuhan is using "idiot" in a very special and technical sense. As McLuhan noted to William Jovanovich, the Greek "*idiote*" refers to a private or separate being (a highly technical achievement related to the phonetic alphabet). McLuhan to William Jovanovich, 3 September 1965.

[130] McLuhan, and Parker, *Counterblast*, 122.

projected at us by our technology are greatly more informative
than any verbal message they convey, we're going to go on being
helpless illiterates in a world we made ourselves.[131]

Arguably, the same charge might apply equally to the formats of radio
and television. More importantly, however, from McLuhan's
"perspective" was that from the mid-1960s the major networks were
increasingly consumer-driven: "There is no more division between the
poet and his audience, between producer and consumer."[132] McLuhan's
analysis of the situation is brought to light in view of his commentary on
the present drama of "international translation of Shakespearean
archetypes."[133] Through McLuhan's eyes, the "global theatre" brought
with it something of a return to medieval awareness and role playing:

> Since Sputnik and the satellites, the planet is enclosed in a man-
> made environment that ends "Nature" and turns the globe into a
> repertory theatre to be programmed. Shakespeare at the Globe
> mentioning "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women
> merely players" (*As You Like It*, Act II, Scene 7) has been justified
> by recent events in ways that would have struck him as entirely
> paradoxical. The results of living inside a proscenium arch of
> satellites is that the young now accept the public spaces of the
> earth as role-playing areas. Sensing this, *they adopt costumes and
> roles and are ready to "do their thing" everywhere*.[134]

He saw that the "whole TV generation," were inclined to act in a "clown-
scapegoat role":[135]

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[131] Ibid. Emphasis mine.

[132] Ibid., 138.

[133] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 10.

[134] Ibdi., 9–10. Emphasis mine. It is perhaps relevant to note that in 1963 the hamburger chain, McDonald's adopted the clown "Ronald McDonald" as a registered trademark. The effectiveness of the campaign, and presumably the adequacy of the image of the clown has led to "Ronald McDonald" becoming the most recognizable figure for North American children, second only to Santa Claus.

[135] *Culture is Our Business*, 288.

> Like the artist-priest Stephen Dedalus, the clown is a probe.
> Whether it's Al Capp or Walt Kelly or Pat Paulsen, or the
> medieval jester, the clown attacks power. He tested the tolerance
> for us all. He tells us were the new boundaries are on the changing
> frontiers of the Establishment. The clown is merciless, without
> conscience, yet he gets our sympathy because he is a scapegoat.
> He uses the language of gesture…. [136]

That said, McLuhan also saw that the audience or user of the new electric services, having been made the content of a total environment of electric services, were, simultaneously, also experiencing a powerful and immediate sense of being emperor or "content kings of the earth."[137] McLuhan and Nevitt develop the theme in a later work, *Take Today*:

> Strangely, it is just at the moment when the user becomes the
> public at large that a change in attitude toward the medium takes
> place. *Until the moment of inclusiveness it is natural for elites and
> specialist tastes and preferences to be accepted by the users of the
> medium.* However, at the moment, when the entire public is
> involved in the medium, there occurs the cry of "what the public
> wants." It is as if some flip or reversal occurred that enabled the
> user to say with emphatic voice: "I am the content of this medium.
> I am the monarch of all that this medium reaches. Any outside
> considerations are mere interlopers." *It is almost as if the medium
> had returned to the condition of a primal wilderness, where each
> individual feels like the king or an emperor and would tend to regard any
> intruder with suspicion and rivalry.* Paradoxically, then, it is at the
> moment when public attention occupies every phase and feature
> of a new service environment of technology that there is heard, on

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[136] Ibid. "The emperor and clown are complementary. The clown is the emperor's private self seeking contact with the people and situations that he embodies corporately in his role. The clown is free to spoof the emperor, to test his moods for the benefit and entertainment of the court. The clown is a type of audience researcher or consultant, just as our audience researchers and consultants have become the clowns of our culture. Today we see the emergence of a new type of executive who can switch roles from clown to emperor to probe the environment through his own awareness," (*Take Today*, 202).

[137] McLuhan, "Putting On The Media: The User As Content, The Reader Is The Content King, The Viewer Is Monarch Of All He Surveys," MS., 4–5.

one hand, the dogma of what the public wants, and, on the other hand, the arguments against the dilution and pollution of commercialism.[138]

When the dogma of "what the public wants" is in ascendance, McLuhan saw that a "door" was closed on most chances for an English Professor to discuss what conventionally passed as poetry while appearing "on" the news media of his day.[139] Rather, he had to work through the "media" on its own terms.[140] It was not a situation for which McLuhan was unprepared. The *doctus orator* is, traditionally, a politically prudent figure in whom eloquence and wisdom are united, equally able to delight and persuade.[141] Further, in and through his studies of his

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[138] *Take Today*, 146–147. Emphasis mine. "It may indeed prove true that the service environments created by the electric media are so extensive and inclusive that their users become natural monarchs, if not tyrants, who will brook no interference from other media. In electric surrounds the user as content can only experience rivalry in the form of static or short circuit. For sponsors to attempt to "put on" an electric service environment such as radio or TV seems to present some of the brash effrontery of a royal usurper. When Shakespeare wrote his dramas of power politics among the medieval and Renaissance kings, the natural image for power, legitimate or illegitimate, was clothing. The media viewers and users regard those who would put on the electric media as private or stylish garments, as the usurpers of an integral and absolute territory," (Ibid., 147).

[139] In 1941 McLuhan had been given such an opportunity. See McLuhan, "How to Read a Poem," Radio talk for St. Louis "University of the Air," 21 November 1941.

[140] Even the "news" obeyed the doctrine. As McLuhan notes in "Agnew Agonistes," the News is putting on the audience with all its favourite patterns and expectations: "It is a complex dramatic art form that repeats and smears and scrubs and purges all the special sector events and passions that a particular community finds congenial," (McLuhan, "Agnew Agonistes," *McLuhan DEW-Line Newsletters* 2, no. 4 (January/February 1970): 10).

[141] "When the three arts are arranged according to the needs of rhetoric one has the Ciceronian ideal of the *doctus orator*, the man of political prudence, the wise counsellor of princes, the courtier-ideal of the Renaissance, the ideal of the epic poet as eloquent moral guide and political philosopher, joining wisdom and delight as in the ideal of Spenser and Sidney," (*The Classical Trivium*, 103, note 1).

more immediate predecessors, McLuhan had seen that Wyndham Lewis had operated under similar conditions. In *Rude Assignment* Lewis notes how he had sought the attention of an audience by using a sensationalist title:

> The title of the magazine, *The Enemy*, has a sinister sound, just as *Blast* … had an explosive one. The selection … was merely on the principle of giving the sensation-loving public what it wants. – All children enjoy being startled…[142]

In addition, Q. D. Leavis, one of McLuhan's guides in the matter of audience study, had also gone to some lengths to indicate that "giving them what they want" was not necessarily to be despaired:

> I am not sure that you do not underestimate the extent to which the existence of any real channel of "communication" between any artist and his public depends on his managing a symbolisation of something which was previously the property of that public: in this sense the crime of "giving the public what it wants" has another and not necessarily evil meaning … I think the intrinsic qualities of a work of art are impotent unless they can symbolise, reflect, and focus in a convenient form, something that is already to some extent present in the mind of the man who hears, sees, or reads the work. Thus any art that I appreciate appeals because it symbolises (not necessarily formulates explicitly) something that is already in my fund of experience…[143]

Something of the opportunity McLuhan saw in the new situation is echoed in a later article, "The Future of Art." Rather than deploring the mass audience and seeing the "new" in terms of the obliteration of old landmarks (as he notes, is often the case of representatives of the old mechanical culture and environment), McLuhan makes it quite explicit that he regards the new situation as burgeoning with possibilities. The

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[142] Wyndham Lewis, *Rude Assignment: A Narrative of My Career Up-To-Date* (London: Hutchinson, 1950), 196.

[143] Q. D. Leavis, cited in *From Cliché to Archetype*, 173.

new audience, deeply involved in one another by means of electric circuitry, was sharing in the creative process itself! While, in the main, they were taken up with the ancient routine of regarding the patterns of the previous environment with nostalgic reverence, there was also scope for massive transformation. Should the energies of the mass be redirected towards dialogue and exploration, McLuhan appears to have seen that we might see the emergence of the first "citizenry" of an electric republic. Subsequently, McLuhan took up the mantle of pre-eminent professional conversationalist of his day, and committed himself to trying to translate his serious agenda and program of training perception through the strictures of popular forms firmly commanded by the Anglo-American predilection for, if not addiction to, "entertainment."

From 1965 McLuhan began leveraging off his growing fame and celebrity, taking the opportunities afforded him (and manufactured for him) to appear on talk shows and other formats that favoured dialogue:[144]

> To "make the news" is literally to obtain a bit of corporate image building for ones own use. It is an unavoidable aspect of "communication," by which a figure in the news, or related to some media, creates an interface with the great social energy that is organised in the form of various media.[145]

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[144] It should be noted that McLuhan had to some limited degree made a number of television appearances throughout the early 1960s. The cost, as Theall points out, was that McLuhan had to allow others, e.g. Tom Wolfe, to construct images of him that may not have been "true." Theall notes that McLuhan's ambivalence and ambiguity was capitalised upon by Wolfe, who realised that McLuhan let others construct images of him. Wolfe, Theall argues, makes assertions about the influence of Innis and Bergson on McLuhan that are not true – they simply were not McLuhan's main influences. Donald F. Theall, *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 89. This, however, was not a problem for McLuhan, and would only become an "issue" for later scholars who had taken up the task of assessing his legacy and resuscitating his image.

[145] McLuhan to George Bain, 4 October 1972.

He went on "stage," and began to do exactly what he advised then Prime Minister, Pierre Eliot Trudeau to do — conduct a series of dialogues with what amounts to a rotating nucleus of participants,[146] in a bid to offer and capitalise on the need of TV for "a new type of dialogue that crosses many fields."[147]

> TV is revolutionizing every political system in the Western world. For one thing, it's creating a totally new type of national leader, a man who is much more of a tribal chieftain than a politician. Castro is a good example of the new tribal chieftain who rules his country by a mass-participational TV dialog and feedback; he governs his country on camera, by giving the Cuban people the experience of being directly and intimately involved in the process of collective decision making. Castro's adroit blend of political education, propaganda and avuncular guidance is the pattern for tribal chieftains in other countries. *The new political showman has to literally put on his audience as he would a suit of clothes and become a corporate tribal image* — like Mussolini, Hitler and F. D. R in the days of radio, and Jack Kennedy in the television era.[148]

For the task or role — to "put on" his audience — McLuhan crafted what he considered to be a charismatic image (keeping in mind that McLuhan defined charisma as: "looking like a lot of other people—anything *except one's self*!")[149] This meant using a public rather than private voice and,[150]

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[146] See McLuhan to J. M. Davey, 22 March 1971. It is important to remember that by the 1960s all formats of electronic "news media" were recordable and re-playable. In a sense they offered a "medium" for authoring that at least approaches the permanence of "books."

[147] *Take Today*, 89.

[148] McLuhan, "Playboy Interview: A Candid Conversation with the High Priest of Popcult and Metaphysician of Media," in *Essential McLuhan*, 247.

[149] McLuhan to Pierre Elliott Trudeau, 26 March 1974.

[150] Clearly McLuhan also owes a debt to his mother Elsie McLuhan, the elocutionist. From his earliest days it appears that McLuhan had a well developed and prodigious memory that he used in his performances to bestow his corporate image with an almost magical power. C.f. Wyndham Lewis, "Code of the Herdsman," Ginko Press,

like Charlie Chaplin, taking up the garb of middle class respectability

augmented by a small group of items. [151] For example, McLuhan

occasionally wore a toupee made by a wig-maker recommended by Jack

Paar. At other times, we see him in his "tribal" tartan, or with a cigar

(baton?),[152] looking not dissimilar to Groucho Marx *sans* painted

moustache (McLuhan often sported a "real" one):[153]

> Picasso has long been a fan of American comics. The highbrow,
> from Joyce to Picasso, has long been devoted to American popular
> art because he finds in it an authentic imaginative reaction to
> official action. Genteel art, on the other hand, tends merely to
> evade and disapprove of the blatant modes of action in a powerful
> high definition, or "square," society. Genteel art is a kind of repeat
> of the specialized acrobatic feats of an industrialized world.
> Popular art is the clown *reminding us of all the life and faculty that we
> have omitted from our daily routines. He ventures to perform the
> specialized routines of the society, acting as integral man*. But integral
> man is quite inept in a specialist situation. This, at least, is one way
> to get at the art of the comics, and the art of the clown.[154]

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http://www.gingkopress.com/_cata/_lite/_codehea.htm (accessed 22 November 2006).
Cited in Chapter One.

[151] In this respect McLuhan could be said to have taken on and updated T. S. Eliot's
strategy of rigorous neatness (albeit in a suit too large) when he arrived in London at a
time when the world was still reeling from the costume strategies of the aesthetes.
McLuhan to A. C. Spectorsky, 27 November 1969.

[152] Writing to the editor of *Playboy* Magazine McLuhan suggests that Nixon could put on
his public by way of some sort of gesture or role playing (i.e. wearing a fake
moustache). The gesture, McLuhan states, would get him what he desires – the hearts
of his audience. McLuhan to A. C. Spectorsky, 27 November 1969.

[153] McLuhan, "Agnew Agonistes," 9. Here McLuhan states that the private face and
dress has to be banished in favour of the corporate mask in all levels of public life, but
this is not a matter of "saving appearances." It is literally a matter of "making the news"
by creating a new image, a new mask, a new vortex of power.

[154] *Understanding Media*, 167.

Figure xi. (Carle Sharfe, "Best Actor in a Totally Discontinuous Role," photograph. "Planet of the Dead," special issue of *The Innis Herald* 11, no. 5 (April 1978): 7)

BEST ACTOR IN A TOTALLY DISCONTINUOUS ROLE.

Arguably, the sum total of his various postures was serio-comic. The extent that McLuhan went to maintain this posture is readily evident in view of three snap-shots taken from the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation archive. The first is from the *Sunday* Program (19 March 1967):

> **Question:** What do you think Marshall McLuhan ought to do if he wants to be taken more seriously?
> **McLuhan**: Marshall McLuhan is taken far too seriously <audience applause> I certainly wouldn't do anything to increase that. [155]

During an interview with Robert Fulford conducted one year earlier we can see McLuhan in a much more "serious" posture, presenting the attention afforded his own work as an effect:

> **Fulford**: You've been writing about the mass media for a good many years and now you're an object of the mass media, how has this changed your view if at all?

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[155] McLuhan, "Do You Like TV?," television program, *Sunday,* Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 19 March 1967. *The CBC Digital Archives Website*, http://archives.cbc.ca/IDCC-1-69-342-1835/life_society/mcluhan.

>   **McLuhan**: Let me instead explain why this has happened. Because you see suddenly, if you have noticed, the mood of North America has changed very drastically. Things like the safety car couldn't have happened ten years ago.
>   **Fulford**: Why is that?
>   **McLuhan**: It is because people have suddenly become obsessed with consequences of things. They used to be obsessed with mere products and packages and launching these things out into markets and into the public. Now they've suddenly become concerned about what happens when these things go out onto the highway, what happens when this kind program gets on the air, what happens … they want safety air, safety cigarettes, safety cars and safety programming. This need for safety is a sudden awareness that things have effects. *Now my writing for years has been concerned with the effects of things, not their impact but their consequences, after impact…*[156]

And finally, while dialoguing with the "hot" Norman Mailer on *The Way It Is* (26 November 1967), we see the "cool" McLuhan refuse to commit to any moral position,[157] and say whether the current state of affairs is a good or bad thing:

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[156] McLuhan, "Oracle of the Electric Age," television program, *This Hour Has Seven Days*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 8 May 1966, *The CBC Digital Archives Website*, http://archives.cbc.ca/IDCC-1-69-342-1834/life_society/mcluhan/.

[157] Not only did the absence of a moral "position" make McLuhan good content. As McLuhan understood it, where moralistic vitriolic precedes understanding the first casualty is dialogue: "VALUE JUDGEMENTS DESTROY DIALOGUE, WHICH DEMANDS THE SHARING OF IGNORANCE," (*Take Today*, 292). Further, McLuhan also saw that moral outrage tended to have effects opposite to intensions: "Moral rage is the escape hatch for the impotent and flatters every type of villain," (McLuhan to John Rowan, 17 December 1969).

During his study of his predecessors McLuhan had dwelt on the activities of the English reformer, W. T. Stead. Stead, McLuhan notes, was "a reformer burning with zeal to make the English nation conscious of social evils the rest of the press was afraid to look into." In a bid to awaken the nation he adopted a series of sensational methods, which extended to getting himself prosecuted. However, McLuhan adds: "the noble crusading of Stead led the press straight into the gutter," (McLuhan, "The Newspaper," MS., 8–9).

> **McLuhan**: Norman, do you remember a phrase of Edmund Burke, "I do not know how to draw up an indictment against a whole people?" Now I wouldn't know how to value the Western world, which we are demolishing by our new technology, or the Oriental world which we are westernizing, we're demolishing the oriental world …. I do not know whether that's good or bad because I wouldn't know how to make a value judgement on such a scale.
> **Mailer**: We'll, I'm prepared to…[158]

Hijacker

At this point we need to pause. Next to his correspondence, by weight and impact, McLuhan's public performances constitute the most significant feature of his oeuvre. His public performances are also one of the hardest aspects of his praxis to discuss. The sheer number, scope, and variety of his performances are, potentially, overwhelming. Discussing his performances is made more difficult given that, while not a decorous Odysseus (for reasons I have already discussed), McLuhan had a finely tuned sense of decorum that afforded him perfect pitch for his time:

> The ideal orator will be a man of encyclopedic knowledge because learning precedes eloquence. And because he will be the type of the perfect citizen he will be eloquent about everything which concerns corporate life. *But eloquence implies great tact, a sense of the propriety of word and things as befits each contingency*. Bloomsday is a prolonged demonstration of Bloom's learned sense of decorum. But decorum in language or action is of all things, observed Aristotle, in common with antiquity, the hardest thing to hit, *calling, as it does, for an agile perception and adjustment to the fluctuating circumstances of times , places, and persons*.[159]

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[158] McLuhan, "McLuhan and Mailer Go Head to Head," television program, *The Way It Is*, Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 26 November 1967, *The CBC Digital Archives Website*, http://archives.cbc.ca/IDCC-1-69-342-1838/life_society/mcluhan/. It is relevant to note that this appears to have been recorded earlier as McLuhan underwent brain surgery to have a brain tumour removed in late November 1967.

[159] McLuhan, James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 29–30. Emphasis mine.

This enabled him to modulate his performances according to format and circumstance, and to wear as many masks as there were media.[160] Occasionally he appears as the great explainer, at other times as the man with the best questions of his day. More often than not he is both. In view of the variety and scope, there are a number of elements of McLuhan's performances that warrant attention. We could look at how he described his performances as a form of corporate psychiatry, or how, from the 1960s, McLuhan frequently identified his approach as a form of structuralism and advocated "structural" awareness:

> My own interest in studying media is a "systems development" approach. "Systems development" is a structural analysis of pressures and strains … "Systems development" is opposite of "systems" in the philosophical sense. It is concerned with the inner dynamics of form.[161]

We might also look at how he stressed the necessity of paying attention to the "artists,"[162] or how McLuhan sought to promote dialogue with and clarify the stream of speech of his interlocutors. [163] We could also explore how the "McLuhan" present in his "performances" operates in an impersonal mode, and identifies, almost completely, with the creative

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[160] Certainly, McLuhan's life-long study of rhetoric and his position within the University (giving lectures) helped in this regard.

[161] McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," in *Media Research*, 74. It is important to stress that McLuhan's "structuralism" was not that of the movement commonly thought of as "structuralist," but rather "began with I. A. Richards but developed very much through Siegfried Giedeon, the Swiss art historian and especially through my studies in classical rhetoric," (McLuhan to Marshall Fishwick, 17 December 1975).

[162] "Art is at least 60 years ahead of technology in its structural awareness of coming patterns and activity," (McLuhan, "The Hidden Information Environment," lecture, American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, Toronto, 15 April 1977), 11.

[163] His efforts in this direction are often forceful, confrontational, and often at the cost of rapport.

process.[164] McLuhan not only declined to take any fixed moral stance, but refused to have any point of view at all. Rather, on "stage" he is, literally, a living work of art.[165] Through his primary pigment, of spoken word and gesture, McLuhan danced the tetrad (singular, chain, or cluster) relevant to the question or circumstance at hand in a bid to reveal process and an analogical sense of being. All of these elements are valid and valuable avenues to explore further, but for now they can only receive mention. Arguably, the crux of McLuhan's performances can be had in view of his comments on *Monday Conference*, mentioned at the start of this chapter, in light of his comments in "Putting on the Media: The User As Content, The Reader is the Content King, The Viewer is Monarch of All He Surveys." In the latter, McLuhan discusses the theme of the user as emperor-cum-clown (that we have already cited from *Take Today*).[166] He also notes there that it is possible to hijack the whole culture, or world, by simply *diverting its course or function*:

> Whereas hijackers used to rob "hootch" from other "bootleggers" for delivery to their own customers, today the hijacker says in effect: "You run your show, but I'll tell you where to land and deliver." He avoids interference in the operating process, whether of aircraft, business, or country, as he renames the game. Now hijacking has shifted from "hardware" to "software," and that has changed the nature of the game.[167]

As I have shown elsewhere, the "normal" operations of the formats of "news media" of McLuhan's day was to put us on and submerge perception "and motive in a collective sound-light show of turbulent

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[164] "The tetrad, taken as a whole, is a manifestation of the human thinking process," (*The Global Village*, 6.

[165] We are reminded of McLuhan's commitments to becoming a true poem as seen in Chapter One.

[166] McLuhan, "Putting on the Media: The User As Content, The Reader is the Content King, The Viewer is Monarch of All He Surveys," MS., 8.

[167] *Take Today*, 81.

sensation."[168] McLuhan sought to hijack their operations. Firstly, by becoming "content," and secondly, by diverting the normal course and operations of these formats. The essence of McLuhan's hijacking procedure, which shares some semblance to the praxis of judo or jujitsu, entailed turning the forms upon themselves. In the case of television it required harnessing the forms ability to reveal process. As McLuhan notes in *Understanding Media*:

> What can TV do that the classroom cannot do for French, or for physics?" The answer is: TV can illustrate the interplay of process and the growth of forms of all kinds as nothing else can.[169]

At every turn during his performances, while being "processed" by these forms, McLuhan calls attention to the forms themselves and the processes they engender: "The technique of putting people on *in my case…*" While the tactics he employed are many, and none alone ensured success, the goal was always the same — to transmute the effects of "Eastern" forms into the means for "*awakening* perception and sustaining and nourishing vital impulse."[170] In so doing McLuhan sought to shock the user into recognition, thus giving them a "second look," and an opportunity to see themselves and their world clearly.[171] He presumed that this would be enough for those able to "hear" his message to eject them from the enduring mechanisms of participation mystique, and in so doing, establish some small base for detachment and dialogue.

Was he successful? On one hand we have to say no. To many of his interlocutors, deeply involved in the work of presentation itself, McLuhan's "foot-work" was often too fast and fancy, leaving his "jests"

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[168] Ibid., 177.

[169] *Understanding Media*, 332.

[170] *Take Today*, 177.

[171] T. Eric McLuhan, "Menippean Thunder at Finnegans Wake: The Critical Problems," (PhD diss. University of Dallas, 1982), 92–93.

of honour bemused, confused, and stunned.[172] Viewers and listeners were often left in a similar state.[173] On the other hand, McLuhan certainly achieved limited success, particularly outside the academic arena. For a short period, McLuhan, not unlike his portrait of Jacques Maritain in "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters," made himself felt outside the Catholic world for having mastered the central cultural discoveries of his time.[174] Further, as something of a modern day Heraclitus, McLuhan did have some impact on the language of his day. Several of his phrases, used in a bid to clarify the stream of speech, e.g. "the medium is the message," and "the global village," entered the current idiom and worked to aid and facilitate the re-examination of what is understood and meant by the term "media."[175] As all his critics attest, even the most hostile, he forced us to "look!"[176]

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[172] Leaving one to wonder if his operations in these "recorded" environments were not part of a long-range operation (blasting and bombardiering?) intended for a later audience to digest.

[173] That said, however, it was also this quality that prolonged McLuhan's staying power and value to the networks and magazines as good content.

[174] See McLuhan, "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters," in *The Medium and The Light*, 158–59.

[175] "Take, for example, the shift of English into an interrogative mood, since the arrival of "How about that?" Nothing could induce people to begin suddenly to use such a phrase over and over, unless there were some new stress, rhythm, or nuance in interpersonal relations that gave it relevance," (*Understanding Media*, 276).

[176] See Anthony Burgess, "The Modicum Is the Messuage;" John M Culkin, "A Schoolman's Guide to Marshall McLuhan;" Tom Nairn, "McLuhanism: The Myth of Our Time;" Christopher Ricks, "McLuhanism;" and Irving J. Weiss, "Sensual Reality in the Mass Media," all in *McLuhan: Pro & Con*. Also see Dennis Duffy, *Marshall McLuhan* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969); Jonathan Miller, *McLuhan* (London: Fontana, 1971); and Toby Goldberg, "An Examination, Critique and Evaluation of the Mass Communication Theories of Marshall McLuhan" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin, 1971).

Pamphleteer

McLuhan's performances also created a demand and readership for his "teaching machines" — the other half of McLuhan's late-1960s duet. To encounter his "teaching machines" or books we need to reconsider his diagnosis of his "two audiences."

McLuhan saw that the common "needs" of both stemmed from a general unawareness of the life and language of forms, particularly the services and disservices of the form of the book. The "turned on," as we have seen, rejected the services of print outright. By contrast, the "squares" (or "print-orientated bastards," as McLuhan and Nevitt refer to the specialist, literate man in *Take Today*),[177] clung to a variety of private or corporate specialisms as a way of holding onto an identity.[178] What the "squares" ignored is the fact that "the mere act of reading" under "normal" conditions is "a lulling and semi-hypnotic experience,"[179] inducing a "staid, everyday drunkenness of the normal real, not easy always to detect."[180]

> All media of communication are clichés serving to enlarge man's scope of action, his patterns of association and awareness. These media create environments that numb our powers of attention by sheer pervasiveness. The limits of our awareness of these forms does not limit their action upon our sensibilities…[181]

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[177] "The phrase "print orientated bastards" was something that Barry Nevitt snuck in at the last, knowing that I hate the phrase," (McLuhan to Donald and Louise Cowan, 13 May 1975).

[178] The complement to such strategies of preserving identity, as McLuhan notes in a letter to Edward T. Hall, is the defence, at all costs, of vast tracks of ignorance. McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 23 July 1969.

[179] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 178. It is relevant here to note how McLuhan regarded "ablation as the key to human technologies," (McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 6 February 1962).

[180] C.f. Wyndham Lewis, "Inferior Religions," 149.

[181] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 57.

Something of the "lulling" action McLuhan saw resulting from reading

phonetic scripts is documented in *Laws of Media*:

> A third, and perhaps most significant, effect of the alphabet
> derives from its direct and regular use of the subconscious by
> interiorization: "The acoustic efficacy of the script had a result
> which was psychological: once it was learned you did not have to
> think about it. Though a visible thing, a series of marks, it ceased
> to interpose itself as an object of thought between the reader and
> his recollection of the spoken tongue" (Havelock, *Origins*, 46).
>   The formal structure of visual space involves the
> suppression (interiorization by means of the subconscious) of all
> ground as a guarantee of abstract, static uniformity. When the
> visible letter ceased to interpose itself as an "object of thought," it
> too became a (suppressed and subliminal) percept minus a
> concept. A correlative effect of the alphabet on the reader, in
> splitting apart percept and concept, was to lend to the concept a
> similar dependence, making it a figure without a conscious
> ground.[182]

And his works are replete with the implications of being so "lulled." For

example, as McLuhan and Parker reveal in *Counterblast* (1969), one of the

effects of long periods of exposure and adaptation to the modes of

phonetic literacy is not only hypnosis, but a predilection to regard all

forms as "neutral":

> To the person of the book culture, habituated to think of the book
> as neutral environment serving his independent mind, it is heresy
> to say that the impact of these forms is quite separate from
> anything they happen to be used to say or express. [183]

This was, for McLuhan, a form of somnambulism that serves as a major

impediment to coming to grips with the present and with the new

electronic surround:

> But it is only necessary to notice the patterns of learning and
> association before print or before writing to discover that the

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[182] *Laws of Media*, 15.

[183] McLuhan and Parker, *Counterblast*, 78.

> message or information conveyed by the supposedly neutral medium is not the major component of such situations.[184]

He offers a similar diagnosis in "The Relation of Environment to Anti-Environment":

> The visual sense, alone of our senses, creates the forms of space and time that are uniform, continuous and connected. Euclidean space is the prerogative of visual and literate man. With the advent of electric circuitry and the instant movement of information, Euclidean space recedes and the non-Euclidean geometries emerge. Lewis Carroll, the Oxford mathematician, was perfectly aware of this change in our world when he took Alice through the looking glass into the world where each object creates its own space and conditions. To the visual or Euclidean man, objects do not create time and space. They are merely fitted into time and space. The idea of the world as an environment that is more or less fixed, is very much the product of literacy and visual assumptions. In his book, *The Philosophical Impact of Contemporary Physics* Milic Capek explains some of the strange confusions in the scientific mind that result from the encounter of the old non-Euclidean spaces of preliterate man with the Euclidean and Newtonian spaces of literate man. The scientists of our time are just as confused as the philosophers, or the teachers, and it is for the reason that Whitehead assigned; they still have the illusion that the new developments are to be fitted into the old space or environment.[185]

To come at the matter from another angle we can say that the "squares" were just as incapable of dialogue as their "turned on" counterparts. Simply put, McLuhan understood that there is no "perception" without dialogue, merely repetition and concept. Dialogue, by contrast, is an opening up, exploration, mutual advance, making and change. Dialogue

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[184] Ibid., 78.

[185] McLuhan, "The Relation of Environment to Anti-Environment," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 4, 15.

is a dynamic synthesis of the new and "energized past, all the past that is living and worthy to live." [186]

> In a book like *Propaganda* by Jacques Ellul, you will find that his theme is that all technologies together and the whole of society in action is propaganda …. propaganda is the entire way of life of the society. Naturally, the people in any culture are brainwashed by that culture, yet propaganda ends where dialogue begins. By this Ellul implies that until you are prepared to encounter your entire culture in dialogue or self-conscious discourse you cannot "un-brainwash" yourself …. You might say that all environments are total and are brainwashers and are irresistible until encountered in dialogue. So I suggest that only the artist can provide the necessary counter dialogue to offset the psychic effects of environments.[187]

Make it Strange

In view of the somnambulism of the man conformed to print, McLuhan appears to have deemed that:

> **Our obsession with the book as the archetype of culture has not even encouraged us to consider the book itself as a peculiar and arty way of packaging experience.**
> But until the book is seen as a very specialized form of art and technology we cannot today get our bearings among the new arts and the new media.[188]

Ergo, he surmised that a way forward might be had by cooperating with and amplifying the effects of the electric surround on the form of the book — making the book itself a thing of even greater strangeness.[189] By "over-heating" the book, he appears to have seen that he might be able to force the form into revealing itself and its services and disservices:

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[186] Ezra Pound, "Vortex," in *BLAST: Review of the Great English Vortex* I, ed. Wyndham Lewis (London and New York: John Lane, 1914), 153.

[187] McLuhan, "An Interview With Marshall McLuhan," *The Structurist* 6 (June 1966): 67.

[188] McLuhan, and Parker, *Counterblast*, 93.

[189] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 59.

> The poets and artists are masters in anticipating such gaps decades before they become dangerous. The poet and artist are in charge, as it were, of intensifying perception of the present and refurbishing the perception of the traditional forms of culture. *Instead of merely discarding traditional forms, the poet and artist and inventor are engaged in supplying the ancient forms with youthful vigour*. It is perhaps a type of cultural transplant of organs from one host body or culture to another.[190]

Further, it appears that McLuhan calculated that by taking the book in this direction, making it even "stranger," he could also maximize the ability of the form to operate as an anti-environment. Given that the book is the parent of much subsequent technology, when recast as "teaching machine" the book, McLuhan saw, could operate as a tool for the training of perception in the life of forms in their totality, and also as a means and lens through which the life and operations of all other media might be observed:

> It is the artist's job to try to dislocate older media into postures *that permit attention to the new*. To this end, the artist must ever play and experiment with new means of arranging experience, even though the majority of his audience may prefer to remain fixed in their old perceptual attitudes.[191]

> Since all media are extensions of ourselves, or translations of some part of us into various materials, any study of one medium helps us to understand all the others.[192]

> But for us in the 1960's, print has much of the quaint receding character of the movie and the railway train. In recognizing its hidden powers at this late date we can learn to stress the positive virtues of print but we can gain insight into the much more potent and recent forms of radio and television also.[193]

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[190] *Take Today*, 139. Emphasis mine.

[191] *Understanding Media*, 254. Emphasis mine.

[192] Ibid., 139.

[193] *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 259–60.

Before addressing McLuhan's teaching machines head-on we need first to digress briefly. As I have already noted, McLuhan made most of his "discoveries" in the act of talking. Ergo, he needed an audience and/or partner with whom to dialogue. McLuhan's celebrity and "fame" provided access to a new set of collaborators beyond his immediate circle at the University of Toronto. In addition to serving as a fresh set of dialogue partners, McLuhan's new collaborators would help facilitate "access" to new audiences. Further, they also afforded McLuhan an opportunity to "wrap up" and "put away" many unfinished projects.[194] For over two decades McLuhan had made more "discoveries" and accumulated more "data" than he could ever hope to publish. As something of an occupational hazard, studying "formal causality" and heeding the advice of Joyce to make inventory,[195] McLuhan had "subject files" filled to over-flowing with a wealth of refuse; copies of advertisements, half-finished essays, and a vast back log of observations, analogies, and epiphanies scribbled on envelopes, and in the margins of books. In short, by the mid-1960s McLuhan was in a position not dissimilar to when he was preparing to pen *Network* in the late 1940s and early 1950s: "I can write 20 issues of *Network* because I've been bottled up for 10 years. And in the past 2 years I've made so many discoveries that I can never hope to appear in a magazine again except for old articles."[196]

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[194] It is here that we might mention the contribution of McLuhan's secretary Margaret Stewart. Deprived of Stewart's skills, at very least as a stenographer, McLuhan surely would not have written as much as he did.

[195] "In this book we turn to the study of new patterns of energy arising from man's physical and psychic artefacts and social organizations. The only method for perceiving process and pattern is by *inventory of effects* obtained by comparison and contrast of developing situations," (*Take Today*, 8).

[196] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951. This is one of the reasons why the H. Marshall McLuhan Collection at the National Archives of Canada is such a valuable resource.

Voices of Literature

Turning now to the works themselves, we find that McLuhan's initial collaboratively authored "books" only make small steps in the direction I have outlined. His first efforts were directed at complementing his earlier attempts to reform the North American educational apparatus by providing texts for both secondary and tertiary level studies. The first was the two-volume poetry anthology for high school use, *Voices of Literature* produced with Richard Shoeck. In the general introduction McLuhan and Shoeck present *Voices of Literature* as an aid to grappling with the "why," "how," and "what" of poetry. They present poetry as a matter of immediate contemporary relevance — as news that stays news (as Ezra Pound had put it). They also offer a structural approach to poetry largely by offering poetry as an action analogous to engineering:

> What is poetry? The essential qualities of poetry are economy or compactness, concreteness or particular-ness, and intensity. First, it is economical. Whitehead compares the style of a poet to that of an engineer: when making a poem or when making a bridge, neither wastes his material. That is why great poetry always seems packed with meaning: it is. Second, it is concrete; it deals with the particular and the immediate—witness Hopkins:
> Glory be to God for dappled things—
> For skies of couple-colour as a brinded cow;
> For rose-moles all in stipple upon trout that swim.[197]

McLuhan and Shoeck emphasise the dramatic dimension of poetry — that is poetry as action, made with words rather than ideas:

> What makes poetry unique is that it exists in and through words; language is its medium, as movement is that of dance, sound that of music, and line and colour that of painting. Language is the

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[197] McLuhan, and Richard J. Shoeck, general introduction to *Voices of Literature*: *Sounds, Masks, Roles* I, eds. Marshall McLuhan and Richard J. Shoeck (Toronto and Montreal: Holt, Rinehart and Winston of Canada, 1964), iii.

> pigment of the poetic image. An ever-closer attention to words —
> to individual words — develops a feeling for language that makes
> possible the discovery of poetry and enables us to hear the voices
> of poetry.[198]

And they draw attention to the "verbal universe" and the life of words

by advocating a return to the formerly traditional approach of reading

poems out loud:

> One of the great rediscoveries of our times is the importance of
> hearing poetry read aloud; this rediscovery has come about partly
> through the effects of radio readings, followed by 'live' readings
> by poets at concerts, and partly as a result of new dimensions of
> recording. In this book such 'live' reading will be one of the
> features stressed (together with careful attention to word play as a
> cue to the larger patterns of a poem). Shakespeare's first two
> editors—they were also business associates and friends—knew
> this power of the spoken word when they urged the buyers of the
> First Folio, a valuable book in many ways, to
>   "Read him therefore, and again and again."
> We now know that for them this meant reading aloud. Readers of
> this book will find that reading poetry aloud is fun, and that
> reading aloud leads to many discoveries, particularly when it is
> shared. [199]

Perhaps, the most significant feature of *Voices of Literature* is that

McLuhan and Shoeck break open and present the otherwise old, worn-

out, and read-to-death collection of poetry as potentially new and

unexplored territory. In view of the "rediscovery" of our time (reading

out loud), McLuhan and Shoeck offer their reader a chance to make

genuine discoveries of their own:

> Modern readers may well discover beauties that were missed by
> silent readers of an older generation, and the editors will rejoice to

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[198] McLuhan, and Richard J. Shoeck, general introduction to *Voices of Literature* II, eds.
Marshall McLuhan and Richard J. Shoeck (Toronto and Montreal: Holt, Rinehart and
Winston of Canada, 1965), vi.

[199] *Voices of Literature* I, iii.

receive from the readers of this book any such discoveries that they may make.[200]

Their rationale can be heard in McLuhan's address to the Provincial Committee on the Aims and Objectives of Education in the Schools of Ontario:

> **Question**: What about instruction in the traditional sense?
> **McLuhan**: Children reject any form of instruction, the answers to which are already known. The indispensable ingredient in motivation in the young is, "We are given this job because nobody knows the answer." They will buy that, but if you tell them, "you go and find the right answer to this; I already know the right answer," they won't buy that. There is no involvement possible. At best all they can do is match your wits. They cannot use theirs.[201]

McLuhan and Shoeck reaffirm their commitment to not offering packaged insight throughout the two volumes as they adopt a role of co-explorers or dialogue partners. Each of the poems and substantial excerpts are juxtaposed not with "packaged" insights and tired synopses, but with a series of often jarring questions or probes of contemporary relevance. The goal of course was simply to restore dialogue within the classroom situation.

Patterns in Literary Criticism

The second of McLuhan's collaborative ventures is a different matter entirely. I have only mentioned it here on the grounds that it conceivably works as part of a much larger circuit to cement McLuhan's ability to put-on (insofar as the first act of the put-on is to grab attention) a

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[200] Ibid. The significance of the approach saw McLuhan repeat it again in *Through the Vanishing Point*: "we hope that our readers will be moved to inundate us with new suggestions of how to exploit this approach," (*Through the Vanishing Point*, 2).

[201] McLuhan, "Education in the Electronic Age," *Interchange* 1, no. 4 (1970): 7.

"square" audience who might otherwise baulk at the prospect of casting their eye over his later works.

McLuhan found collaborating with Richard Shoeck satisfactory. Following *Voices of Literature* McLuhan and Shoeck, with Ernest Sirluck, became the general editors of a Literary Criticism series called *Patterns in Literary Criticism*. The series was targeted at the highest levels of tertiary study and the specialist. In a draft statement to prospective volume editors Sirluck notes that the Chicago-Toronto Literary Criticism Series is intended to "present volumes of carefully selected criticism, chiefly reprint, on subjects of central literary importance." He continues, "the series as a whole will range over a very wide field — ancient, medieval, and modern; literary genres and individual writers; theory and practises; the impingement of other cultures on English; sources, influences, and analogues; etc … but each individual volume will have a very sharp focus, enabling it to cover its particular subject thoroughly."[202] Sirluck adds that the volume editors will be internationally recognized specialists in their field, and the standards of scholarship and critical rigor envisaged for the series are the highest attainable. Each volume is to have an interpretative introduction by the editor surveying the major critical traditions of the subject, analyzing and evaluating its present state, and relating the contents of his volume to the whole. In addition, each volume was to include fifteen or twenty reprint essays, articles, or coherent portions of longer works, together with at least one hitherto unpublished study; with a view to showing the main lines of early development and more comprehensive purview of the subjects present state. In sum, *Patterns in Literary Criticism* was to be as "scholarly" and conventional as to be had in the day.

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[202] Ernest Sirluck to Marshall McLuhan and Richard Shoeck, 29 July 1962.

McLuhan's involvement with the series came to a halt a decade later as his relationship with Shoeck and Sirluck deteriorated. McLuhan's correspondence shows that he became increasingly agitated by what he interpreted as being left out of the loop.[203] The matter came to head over McLuhan's concerns about a prospective volume in the series edited by James Sambrook. McLuhan took issue with what he saw as Sambrook's suppression of a central aspect of the pre-Raphaelite programme. After a heated exchange over several months, McLuhan concluded that Professor Sambrook's revisions were not adequate, and the situation at-large, in relation to his role in the series, was not resolved to his satisfaction. Subsequently he resigned his position and requested that his name be taken from the masthead. McLuhan's correspondence with his fellow general editors on the matter is worth citing insofar as we hear echoes of his own programme and interests:

> *The central concern with technique and skill in the arts is what gave the pre-Raphaelites their eminent right to power as healers of the wounds inflicted on the human psyche by the industrial system in which life and work and art had been fragmented and separated ….* The integrity of these factors was not as intensely pursued by the pre-Raphaelites as by the symbolists in France or by the symbolist followers in England and Ireland. Yeats and Pound and Joyce and Eliot pushed the inter-relation of craft and vision even further than the pre-Raphaelites, but to present the pre-Raphaelites without full recognition of their very large effort in this direction of unification of interests would be an extreme form of distortion of their aims and activities.[204]

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[203] The history of the *Patterns in Literary Criticism* series is a matter in its own right. There are a series of letters from 1971 to 1972 that indicate that McLuhan is unhappy about the series that carries his name, largely on the grounds that he had been excluded from planning and execution. The correspondence also reveals how McLuhan's sense of exclusion is debated by Shoeck. In the end McLuhan's association with the enterprise appears to have been dissolved in 1973.

[204] McLuhan to Ernest Sirluck, 21 February 1973.

McLuhan, Fiore, and Agel

Having fulfilled the obligations of his role as English Professor and, arguably, cemented his credentials in the world of literary criticism,[205] McLuhan was in a position where he might begin to address a more general audience, beyond the confines of classroom and academy. His first ventures in this direction were *The Medium is the Massage* (1967), *War and Peace in the Global Village* (1968), and *The Medium is the Massage* long-playing record (1968), all of which were conceived and coordinated by Jerome Agel. For the task Agel paired McLuhan with graphic designer, Quentin Fiore, and John Simon of Columbia Records for the production of the LP.

Both *The Medium is the Massage* and *War and Peace* "put-on" the user of the book form, and they employ all the resources of the *epyllion*, using the interfaced situation as their basic organisational principle: "*The Medium is the Massage* is a look-around to see what's happening. It is a collide-oscope of interfaced situations."[206] As in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media* the central dynamic is an interface between an explosive, centre-margins or fission pattern, and an implosive, centre-without-margins, or fusion pattern:

> *Printing, a ditto device*
> *Printing, a ditto device*

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[205] Which might be seen as a necessary precondition for "putting on" a world notorious for its various "snobberies."

[206] *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*, 10. Similarly, as McLuhan notes to the Deanes: "Have a new book just about ready called *War and Peace in the Global Village*. The sub-plot is the effect of the computer. The main plot is simply that every new technology creates a new environment that alters the perceptual life of the entire population. Since violence is the inevitable means of quest for identity when the old image, private or corporate, is smudged by the new technology, war is automatic as a means of recovering identity," (McLuhan to Philip and Molly Deane, 15 December 1967).

Printing, a ditto device confirmed and extended the new visual stress. It provided the first uniformly repeatable "commodity," the first assembly line – mass production.
It created the portable book, which men could read in privacy and in isolation from others. Man could now inspire – and conspire. Like easel painting, the printed book added much to the new cult of individualism. The private, fixed point of view became possible and literacy conferred the power of detachment, non-involvement.
Printing, a ditto device
Printing, a ditto device…[207]

Figure xii. (*The Medium is the Massage*, 40–41)

electric circuitry,

an extension of the central nervous system

Media, by altering the environment, evoke in us unique ratios of sense perceptions. The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act—the way we perceive the world.

When these ratios change,

men change.
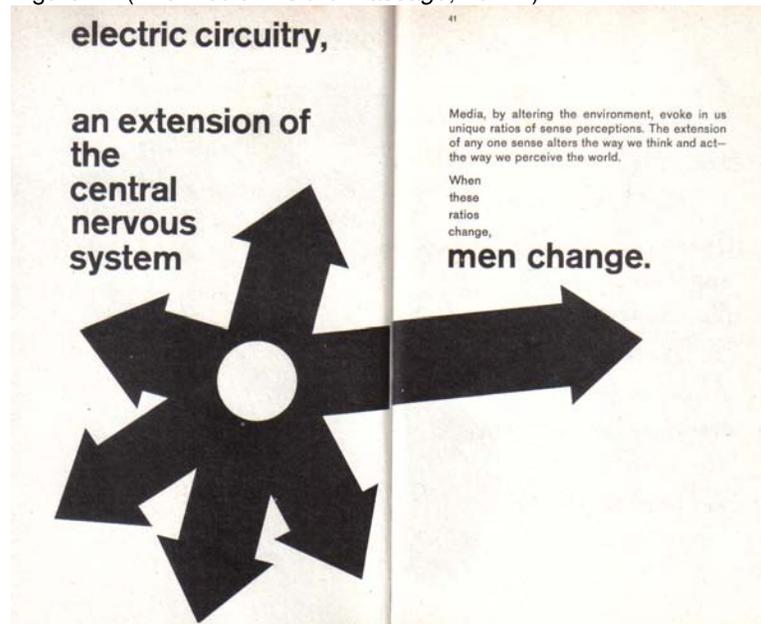
The dialectic, as it is rendered in terms of print/electric circuitry, is of course "obsolete" (for reasons I have already outlined in the "Programming the Environment" section of this chapter). As McLuhan and Nevitt detail in *Take Today*, the situation was considerably more "advanced" than outlined in these cribs to the language of forms:

The moment of Sputnik extended the planet. Something happened to the stellar system at that moment. The possibility of "retuning the sky" was born. Previously, the "extensions of man" related to his body, anything from his skin (clothing) to his central nervous

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[207] *The Medium is the Massage*, 50.

system (electric circuitry). Each and all of these extensions affected the transactions between men and their previous environment. The *extension* of the *planet itself* meant that the technology was not transported by individual or collective man but by his previous environment – the Earth. It became a totally new game with new *ground* rules. Our *ground* was literally the sky. An aerial perspective had come to despotize (from the Greek *despotein*: for inclusive vision from above; it is the Greek for knowing something "inside out"). Whereas previous extensions had altered the speed of human motions in a great variety of ways, freely hybridizing with one another, the new extensions of the planet seemed to call despotically for a new harmonizing of the spheres of action, influence and knowledge.[208]

Further, when McLuhan is in a discussion with those more closely acquainted with his works, he does not show how phonetic writing *creates* the individual, rather that it *retrieves* the individual from some pre-tribal state. As McLuhan notes to Joe Keogh:

> As you know, the theme of *From Cliché to Archetype* … is that every new technology scraps the environment created by the preceding one, but at the same time retrieves a very much older mode of experience. Gutenberg scrapped the scribe but retrieved antiquity. Electricity scrapped industrialism and retrieved the occult. Havelock's *Preface to Plato* shows how the phonetic alphabet scrapped tribal man *but retrieved the primordial role of Individual and pre-tribal awareness*.[209]

Revelation of Form

Rather than dwell on McLuhan's practise of using obsolete dichotomies, his diagnosis of the hidden ground of the 1960s, or his use and transformation of the *epyllion*,[210] I will now look at what are, arguably, the

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[208] *Take Today*, 293–94.

[209] McLuhan to Joe Keogh, 6 July 1970. Emphasis mine. This matter can, however, only receive mention here.

[210] Material largely covered in Chapter Two and Chapter Three.

key features of the *Massage* and *War and Peace*. Firstly, how McLuhan and Fiore use the *form* of the book to simultaneously get "the man of print to see that its form is biased culturally,"[211] and reveal the services and disservices of the form. Secondly, how the pair transform the "book" into a lens or probe or set of tools through which the contemporary situation might be apprehended (and by extension, open up the possibility for "dialogue," and equip their reader to undertake their "programming" responsibilities — to be better *makers*).

One of the first features of *The Medium is the Massage* and *War and Peace* that critics stress, both then and now, is the extent to which they appear to be a mere repetition of McLuhan's earlier works. In some respects they are right. *The Medium is the Massage* and *War and Peace* replay the goals McLuhan sought in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*. Further, there are no substantially new themes in either. In a manner not unlike Eliot or Joyce, McLuhan constructed both from recycled fragments of earlier works. In each, however, he modulates and re-mixes his limited number of themes to achieve new effects and applies them to new situations for fresh vision. Seen as a new kind of prose/poetry it would be relatively easy to praise McLuhan for achieving new levels of compression and economy that he had not approached since *Counterblast* (1954). He can, of course, be seen as responding to a situation where attention spans were on a rapid decline. The praise would, however, be partly misplaced. McLuhan was not making literature or any other approximation of genteel art. Like *Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*, *The Medium is the Massage* and

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[211] McLuhan, "Writings on Individualism and Nationalism," MS., 1b.

War and Peace are cribs to new languages.[212] Arguably, the key to these latter works can be seen in McLuhan's reply to Dwight MacDonald:

> Macdonald's is the kind of confusion that comes to the literary mind when confronted with a drilling operation. Repetition is really drilling. When I'm using a probe, I drill. You repeat naturally when you're drilling. But the levels are changing all the time. Macdonald thinks that's repetition. There is a complete unawareness of what is going on in the book. *His remark that the book might have been an article reveals another fallacy of the literary mind*—that the purpose of facts is for classification. The idea of using facts as probes—as means of getting into new territories—is utterly alien to them. They use facts as classified data, as categories, as packages.[213]

One of the reasons that these works could not have been articles is that the form of the book itself is significant.[214] McLuhan is not in the business of trying to convey "ideas" here (that could be expressed in another format):

> In social terms the artist can be regarded as a navigator who gives adequate compass bearings in spit of magnetic deflection of the needle by the changing play of forces. So understood, the artist is not a peddler of ideal or lofty experiences. He is rather the indispensable aid to action and reflection alike.[215]

He is "putting on" the user of the book form with a view to transforming them — this is the "artistry" of recycling and translating "older" art into

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[212] In many respects the *Massage* and *War and Peace* are throwaways, pamphlets even, intended to be discarded as soon as a reader is equipped with a cursory knowledge of the language of forms and launched on their own project of exploration. This is not to say that they do not have staying power. As with everything that is "put on," there is a change in these works with every reading.

[213] McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," 59, Emphasis mine

[214] As an aside, McLuhan attributes Erasmus with realising that the "pamphlet" was a new weapon provided by the printing press, and he documents how he became a great pamphleteer, writing on every popular topic. McLuhan, "The End of the Gutenberg Era," MS., 7.

[215] *Through the Vanishing Point*, 238.

a new form of "social navigation chart." Consequently, it is the integration of form and content, McLuhan's text and Fiore's design, at the level of the book form itself that ought to command our attention.

As I have already noted, McLuhan and Fiore set out to make the book and printed page an even greater "thing of strangeness."[216] At the heart of McLuhan and Fiore's endeavour is their bid to involve the reader in an imaginative exploration of the form itself by way of making what amounts to a self-aware book — the book itself is, in a sense, an *actor*, and it is always "talking" about itself:

> Anything that raises the environment to high intensity, whether it be a storm in nature or violent change resulting from a new technology, such high intensity turns the environment into an object of attention. When an environment becomes an object of attention it assumes the character of an anti-environment or an art object.[217]

Examples of McLuhan and Fiore's *Massage* (or operation) could be taken from any one of the book's pages. However, the most striking is a sequence, beginning on page 34, which establishes the form of the book as a physical or concrete object, to be held and read in a particular way.[218]

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[216] McLuhan, "What the Mass Media Mean for the Teacher of English," lecture, 45th Convention of the National Council of Teachers of English, 24 November 1955.

[217] McLuhan, "The Relation of Environment to Anti-Environment," 11.

[218] Similarly, *City as Classroom* begins with the students experience in and of the classroom and school.

Figure xiii. (*The Medium is the Massage*, 34–35)
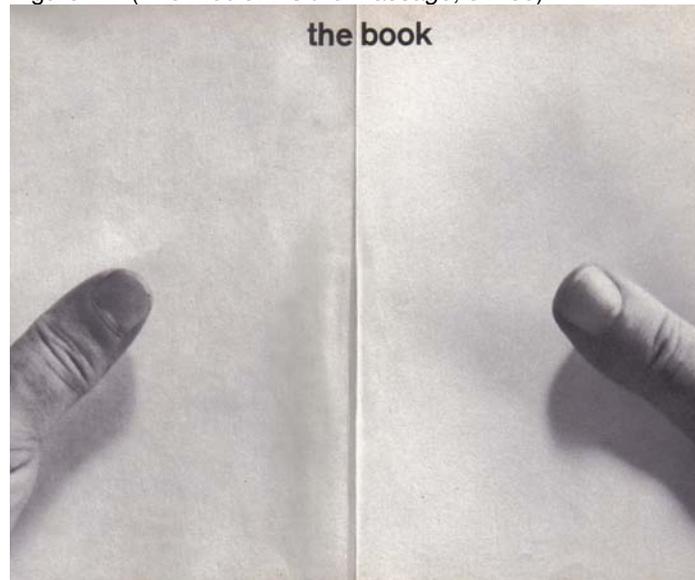
Figure xiv. (*The Medium is the Massage*, 36–37)
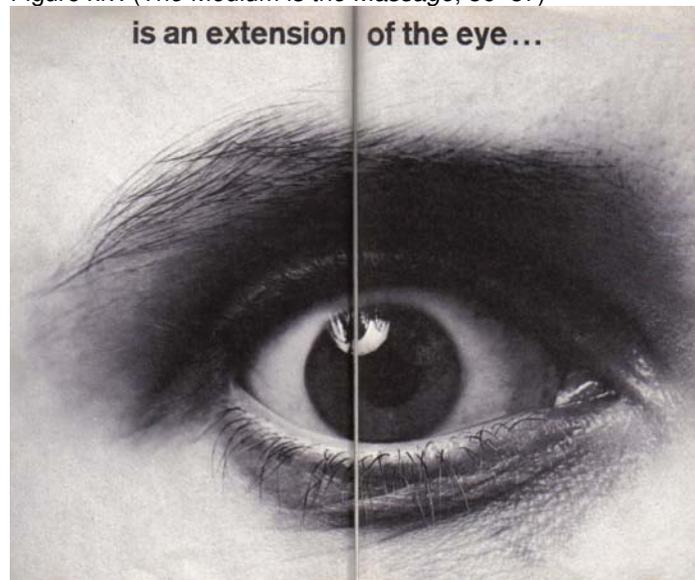
After having established that when the ratios of the senses change, men change (both in terms of how "we think and act – the way we perceive the world"),[219] the next major "step" in the sequence involves folding the text back upon itself:

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[219] *The Medium is the Massage*, 41.

Western history was shaped for some three thousand years by the introduction of the phonetic alephbet, a medium that depends solely on the eye for comprehension. The alphabet is a construct of fragmented bits and parts which have no semantic meaning in themselves, and which much be strung together in a line, bead-like, and in a prescribed order. Its use fostered and encouraged the habit of perceiving all environment in visual and spatial terms-particularly in terms of a space and of a time that are uniform,

c,o,n,t,i,n,u,o,u,s

and

c-o-n-n-e-c-t-e-d

The line, the continuum

– this sentence is a prime example – [220]

McLuhan and Fiore then look to show how the form of the book fosters a gigantic system of preference for space and time as uniform. It is not done by way of formal dialectical argument, but via non-linear leap (like the action of "thinking" itself).

Figure xv. (*The Medium is the Massage*, 53–54)

The Renaissance Legacy.
The Vanishing Point = Self-Effacement,
The Detached Observer.
No Involvement!

The viewer of Renaissance art is systematically placed outside the frame of experience. A piazza for everything and everything in its piazza.

The instantaneous world of electric informational media involves all of us, all at once. No detachment or frame is possible.

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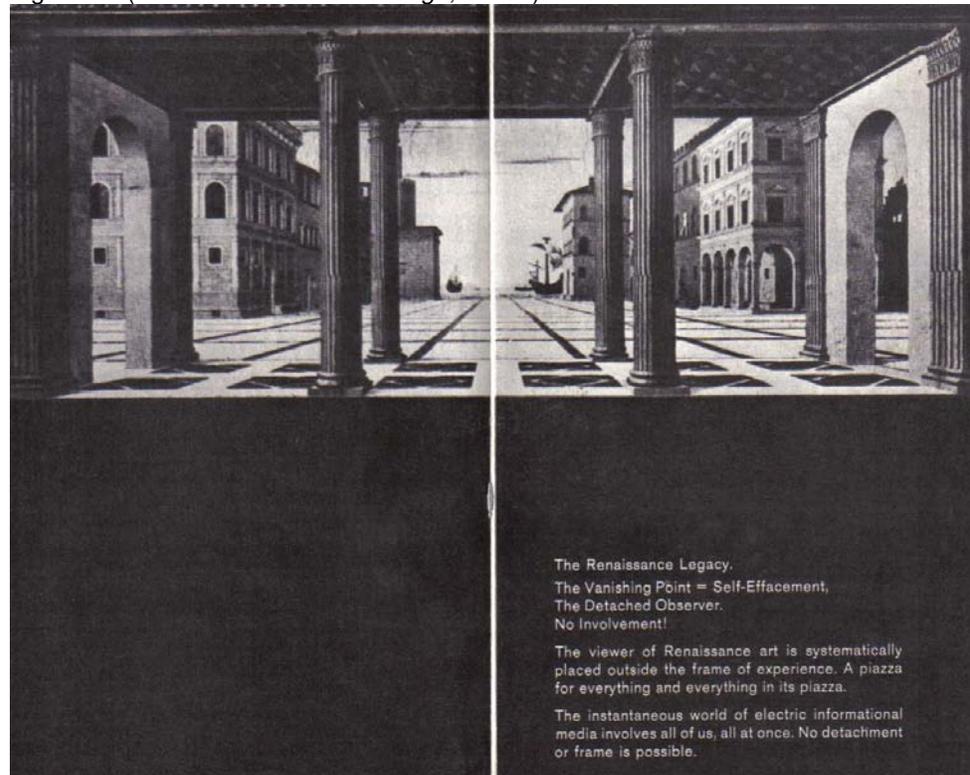
[220] Ibid., 44. Emphasis mine.

The procedure is then repeated. McLuhan and Fiore retrace the action by way of a more direct assault on the "lulling and semi-hypnotic experience," of reading.[221] They begin again by establishing the book form as concrete object by forcing the reader to hold the "book" in a mirror (where they will see not only the page, but also themselves).

Figure xvi. (*The Medium is the Massage*, 55–56)

tion of occupations and
a separation of that mode
called 'practice,' from
ion from executive 'doing,'
is then assigned its own
abide. Those who write
ence then suppose that
in the very constitution
—John Dewey

"....compartmentaliza...."
interests bring about
of activity commonly
insight, of imaginat
Each of these activities
place in which it must
the anatomy of experi
these divisions inhere
of human nature."

On the following pages, the reader's "normal" impulse is again violated as the reader is required to turn the book "upside down." By violating the "normal" rules, and by making the act of reading itself a "poetic act," "reading" is revealed as a specialised pattern of learned activities:

> The art of remaking the world eternally afresh is achieved by the careful and deliberate dislocation of ordinary perception. Even the surrealist had this ambition — to attain a fresh vision of the world by unexpected juxtapositions of ordinary things.[222]

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[221] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 178.

[222] *Take Today*, 139.

Figure xvii. (*The Medium is the Massage*, 57–58)
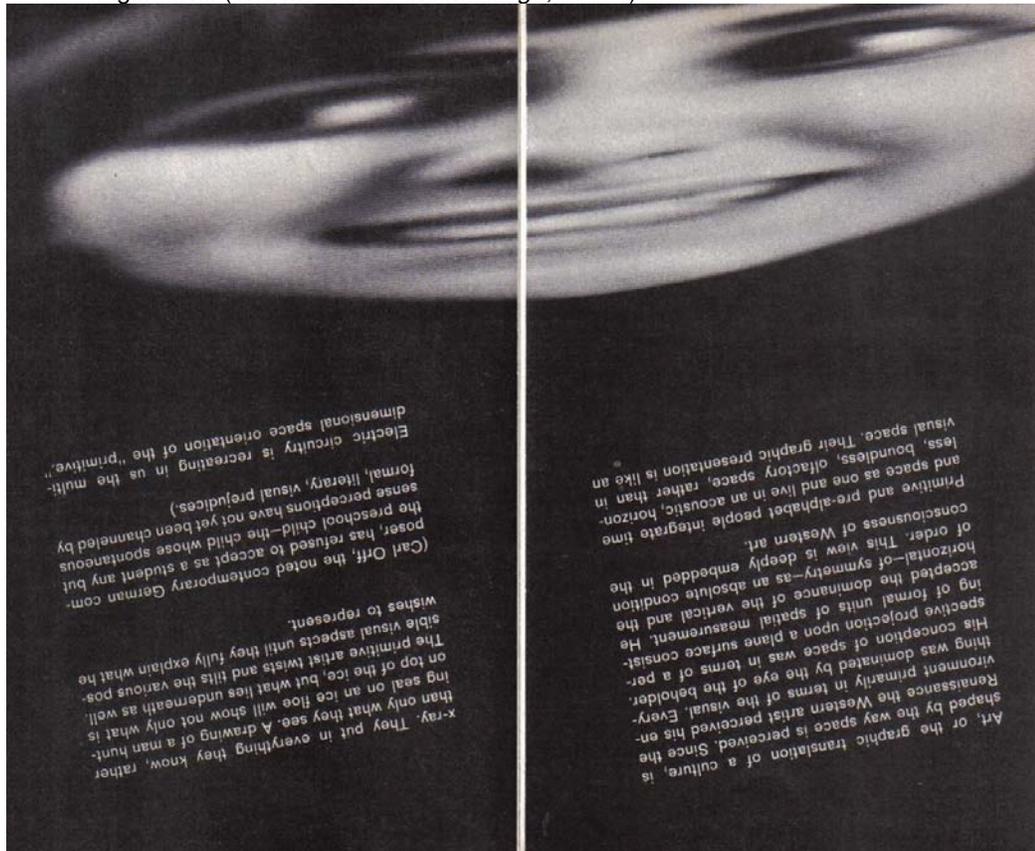
The sequence is brought to a close when the "shadow side" of the
"Renaissance legacy," and arguably, the disservices of succumbing to the
s-p-e-l-l of print and the book form are writ large.

Figure xviii. (*The Medium is the Massage*, 60–61)
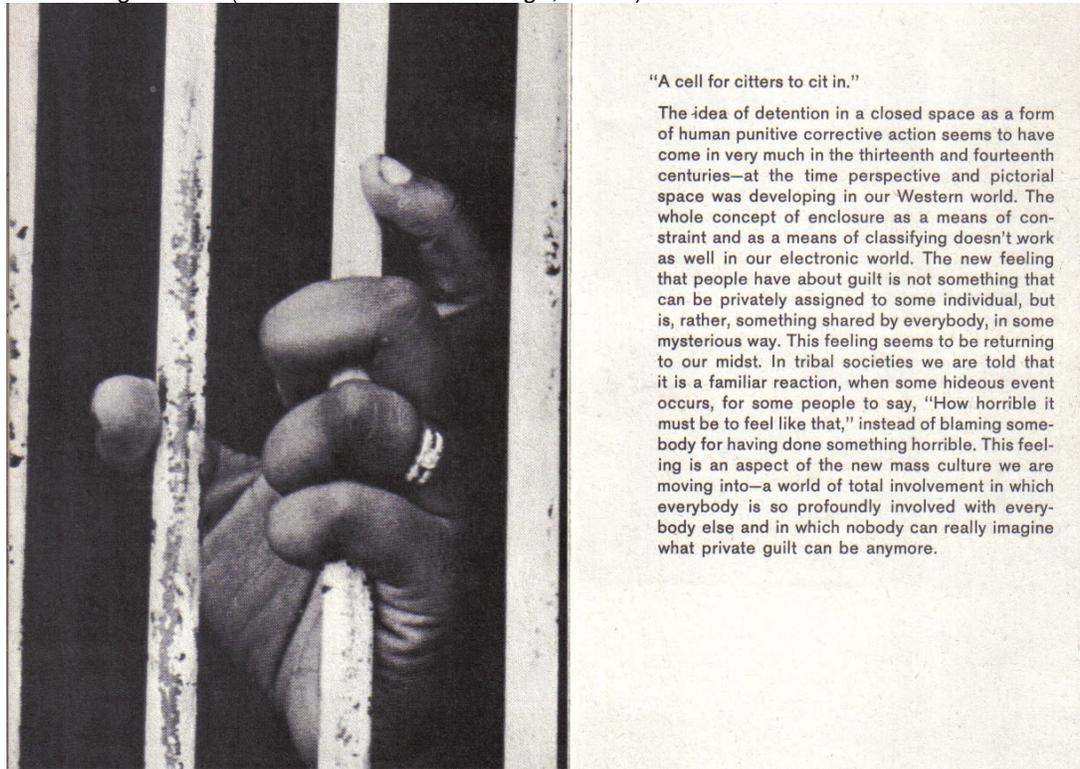
"A cell for citters to cit in."

The idea of detention in a closed space as a form of human punitive corrective action seems to have come in very much in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries—at the time perspective and pictorial space was developing in our Western world. The whole concept of enclosure as a means of constraint and as a means of classifying doesn't work as well in our electronic world. The new feeling that people have about guilt is not something that can be privately assigned to some individual, but is, rather, something shared by everybody, in some mysterious way. This feeling seems to be returning to our midst. In tribal societies we are told that it is a familiar reaction, when some hideous event occurs, for some people to say, "How horrible it must be to feel like that," instead of blaming somebody for having done something horrible. This feeling is an aspect of the new mass culture we are moving into—a world of total involvement in which everybody is so profoundly involved with everybody else and in which nobody can really imagine what private guilt can be anymore.

What is important to stress at this juncture is that McLuhan and Fiore do not give their reader a package to swallow. Rather, they afford an opportunity for their reader to become involved in an imaginative exploration of the form, and thus placed on the "road" to knowledge:

> The user of any medium or any technology is the content of that form. The reader is the content of any poem or of the language he employs, and in order to use any of these forms, he must put them on. The process of putting these on involves the reader in an imaginative exploration by *which he discovers the possible extent and limitations of a medium*. To the specialist or visual man, this put-on or play that is inherent in every moment of consciousness appears unreal, a sham. It is very easy for the Pirandellos or Genets to startle the literal-minded visual man with the evidence that his life is necessarily faking and making.[223]

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[223] McLuhan, "Roles, Masks and Performances," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 12, 8.

Today, particularly since the likes of *WIRED* magazine have adopted the style of these two works as something of a template, the tactics of McLuhan and Fiore might appear trite. In their day, however, the techniques employed to create the self-conscious book/book-as-actor were uncommon outside the sphere of avant-garde design and advertising.[224] Subsequently, it seems viable to say that McLuhan and Fiore are successful on a number of counts. The "square" reader has, on the best possible "reading," been afforded a second look at some of the disservices of print. It could be argued that McLuhan and Fiore successfully break into visual space and help reinstall a sense of wonder. The world is made new, strange, and declared to be uncharted and fit for exploration.[225] At the same time, however, McLuhan and Fiore offer some measure of psychic security. The new trackless and opaque terrain is also rendered more benign in and through the revelation of operative processes. The goal or realised effect is that its literate reader might be brought to share in a new set of pleasures, or something of the "joy" that McLuhan expresses in a letter to Joe Keogh:

> My metaphysical approach is not moral. That is why I get such very great joy from contemplating these forms of culture. Your review overlooks this side of my work and teaching. The language

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[224] As McLuhan notes in *Counterblast: "*BLAST, typographically, is unique in the history of English literature. Lewis told me that he had found it impossible to get it set up by any London printer whatever. He finally found an alcoholic ex-printer who agreed to set it up exactly as Lewis required in return for large supplies of liquor …. Certainly the present work makes no claim to be literature, but it is just as difficult now as in the time of Lewis to get any prose or verse set up in headline type," (McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Counterblast*, 4–5).

[225] C.f. *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 32. Here McLuhan outlines the conditions of panic terrors resulting from a pattern of total interdependence. Subsequently, McLuhan can be seen here as responding to present needs in a way that he envisaged was the most relevant and helpful.

of forms is a source of perpetual joy and discovery that is quite inexhaustible.[226]

Stylistics

In addition to revealing the effects of the form of the book, both in terms of services and disservices, McLuhan also sought to create "teaching machines" that would provide a set of tools to aid in the observation and comprehension of the contemporary situation. McLuhan would frequently cast the matter using the slang of his day — he wanted to show "where it was at," and enable his audiences to "tune in" to the present. To see how McLuhan sought to make visible the new we need to briefly reconsider his study of Nashe and how Nashe appropriated the techniques of Aretino. As McLuhan notes in a letter to Tom Wolfe:

> Cicero and Varro in the Roman world kept alive and flourishing the idea of language as an inclusive traditional consciousness. They taught it as a key to the mysteries of being and of power. Their program was taken over by St. Augustine as the charter of medieval education. Both *the exegesis and the stylistics* of the Church Fathers enhanced the whole tradition. Christian humanism in the 16th century gave the Patristic program [i.e. that of the Church Fathers] a mighty boost. Peter Ramus thought he had devised an instrument for cutting it down to manageable size. Francis Bacon thought that the linguistic program could be extended to the entire book of Nature. Thomas Nashe used all aspects of the Patristic program for polemic and satire. Hence I called my dissertation "The Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of His Time." *Nashe is a Patristic humanist using all the latest journalistic techniques of Aretino to promote the traditional program*. This brought him into head-on conflict with the Puritan left-wing of the English Church.[227]

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[226] McLuhan to Joe Keogh, 6 July 1970. This is the one-way advantage that we have over all media — we can enjoy studying them even as they assume and consume us.

[227] McLuhan to Tom Wolfe, 25 October 1965.

McLuhan's dissertation on Nashe ends with James Joyce. One of the reasons is that the new electric forms are for Joyce, what mechanical technologies of print are for Aretino, and subsequently, Nashe. The crux of the mater is this — Joyce and Nashe, both of whom are participants in the Menippean-Varronian-Lucianic tradition, frequently employ a mode of amplification called *ethopoeia* or, as some prefer, *mimesis* (that McLuhan regarded as the "mode" of the "put-on"). This is made explicit in "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial." Not only are writers in this tradition inclined to imitate the best of their predecessors, but, in updating their tradition, they mime and infuse and organise their works using the "style(s)" of their day. One of the effects this has in terms of the work of James Joyce, as McLuhan notes in "New Media as Political Forms," is that for those looking for the rectilinear embrace of the printed page Joyce appears as surrealist, magician, or clown.[228] The same charge could be levelled at McLuhan too in view of *The Medium is the Massage* and *War and Peace*. McLuhan shares, to some degree, the "theory of communication" shared by Nashe and Joyce (and to some extent Pound and Eliot).[229] Like Joyce, McLuhan also builds his "poetic" structures on the simple social and artistic facts of the media of his day: "I'm trying to get my audience involved in perceptions.…"[230] Quite literally, McLuhan's procedure of "put on" involves miming the media themselves. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* McLuhan used the mosaic of the telegraphic press and its headlines. *The Medium is the Massage*, by contrast, is infused with the chatter of the telephone, jazzy talk of the radio DJ, the cartoon etc....[231]

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[228] McLuhan, "New Media as Political Forms," MS., 1.

[229] See McLuhan, "The Possum and the Midwife," lecture, University of Idaho, 25 April 1978.

[230] McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," 73.

[231] "…By this discovery, Addison and Steele brought written discourse into line with the printed word and away from the variety of pitch and tone of the spoken, and of even the

Figure xix. (*The Medium is the Massage*, 110–111)[232]

The ear favors no particular "point of view." We are enveloped by sound. It forms a seamless web around us. We say, "Music shall fill the air." We never say, "Music shall fill a particular segment of the air."

We hear sounds from everywhere, without ever having to focus. Sounds come from "above," from "below," from in "front" of us, from "behind" us, from our "right," from our "left." We can't shut out sound automatically. We simply are not equipped with earlids. Where a visual space is an organized continuum of a uniformed connected kind, the ear world is a world of simultaneous relationships.

Reminders-(relics of the past)-in a world of the PRINTED word - efforts to **introduce** an AUDITORY dimension onto the visual organisation of the **PAGE**: all effect information, **RHYTHM,** inflection, pauses. Until recent years, these EFFECTS were quite **elaborate** – they allowed for all sorts of **CHANGES** of type faces.

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hand-written, word. This way of bringing language into line with print must be clearly understood. The telegraph broke language away again from the printed word, and began to make erratic noises called headlines, journalese, and telegraphese … that still dismay the literary community with its mannerisms of supercilious equitone that mime typographic uniformity," (*Understanding Media*, 205–06).

[232] "Yet in spite of the extreme fragmentation or specialization of human action necessary to achieve the printed word, the printed book represents a rich composite of previous cultural inventions. The total effort embodied in the illustrated book in print offers a striking example of the variety of separate acts of invention that are requisite to bring about a new technological result," (*Understanding Media,* 174).

> The NEWSPAPER layout provides more variety of **AUDITORY** effects from typography than the **ordinary book page** does.[233]

Again, there are any number of examples we could use here but the crux of the matter is that what appears to many of his critics as an unwarranted assault on *good taste* (which McLuhan and Parker refer to as the "first refuge of the witless"),[234] is in fact a bid to: (a) grab attention,[235] and (b) to offer *style as a way of seeing* (if not anticipating the future, which is the present). In both *The Medium is the Massage* and *War and Peace* McLuhan appears to have hoped that his readers would study the stylistic assumptions underpinning these works. Had they done so they might observe how, like the later Coleridge,[236] McLuhan takes the "mosaic" pattern to greater extremes than in his earlier works, and becomes master of the fragment and atomized phrase. In the language of *From Cliché to Archetype,* McLuhan's prose "style" is modelled on the art of the mini-module.[237] In addition to giving his work a circuit-like quality (enabling a reader to effectively start reading anywhere), his compressed, energized, and iconic prose, organised by way of interfaced situations (*epyllion*), share many similarities with oriental Haiku:

> What Zen appears to have discovered long ago is what the Symbolists discovered in the C19th. Namely, the way to make a

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[233] *The Medium is the Massage*, 117.

[234] McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Counterblast*, 3.

[235] "The game or play without an audience is a rehearsal. It would have no content. The audience/public is the user of all sport and thus their ultimate content. The public makes or turns on the game. If the public is user, and hence the content – it is understandably why these forms must always put on or project the changing image of the public," (McLuhan, "Putting on the Media: The User As Content, The reader Is the Content King, the Viewer is Monarch of All He Surveys," MS., 6.

[236] "Coleridge's development from poet of rhetorical statement to master of symbolic ritual prophetically enacts a history of art and poetry of the century that followed him," (McLuhan, "Coleridge," MS., 24).

[237] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 155.

poem, or anything, is to achieve absolute fidelity of the learning and making process.[238]

In short, both these works look to provide the "experience" bereft of the mechanisms that normally engender that experience, i.e. mass media,[239] and offer "a second look" (cognition and recognition).

Meditating on the techniques McLuhan employs and the stylistic assumptions informing his work might be prolonged almost indefinitely. The task can be reduced, however, by deferring to Eugene Schwartz who provides one of the best accounts of McLuhan's "style."[240] With a view to making McLuhan's practise of miming the media explicit, and the "reading" of McLuhan more fruitful, Schwartz crafted an essay about McLuhan's style to accompany the issue of the *McLuhan DEW-Line Newsletters* that carries *War and Peace in the Global Village* as a gift to subscribers. In light of McLuhan's apparent violation of nearly all the principles of "scholarly decorum," and the criticism he got for his style (since departing from his connected, linear, and lucid style seen fifteen years prior when McLuhan was publishing *Explorations*), Schwartz invites McLuhan's readers to consider three characteristics of his style:

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[238] McLuhan to William Jovanovich, 10 January 1966. Another similarity between McLuhan's prose (when employing the *epyllion*), and some Haiku is that both, to some extent, effect "timelessness." See McLuhan, "The Aesthetic Moment in Landscape Poetry," MS., 7-8.

[239] McLuhan and Nevitt argue that the book, no matter how popular, is "not a mass medium, since it never finds its public simultaneously," (*Take Today*, 176). Similarly, McLuhan and Robert K. Logan make the case that the user of the "book" retains his physical body and identity. Further, "the book" does not provide an environment of resonating information that merges with the social scene. By contrast, they assert, electronics and electronic communication make the user discarnate — it is the sender that is sent. McLuhan, and Robert K. Logan, "The Future of the Book," MS. 1 in "The Library, Old Figure in a New Ground."

[240] Eugene Schwartz, "A Second Way to Read *War and Peace in the Global Village* Or McLuhan Made Linear," 13.

(a) ear-ness,[241] (b) all-at-once-ness, and (c) discontinuity. He also invites a comparison of McLuhan with Pablo Picasso. In view of these considerations, Schwartz argues that a reader will not only be able to read McLuhan's *War and Peace* and other books in linear and non-linear ways, but also "go from there to achieve a deeper understanding of other 20th century writers including Joyce, Eliot, Yeats, and "the overwhelming appeal of pop-rock groups… *all which depend on the same structural elements as Dr. McLuhan's style*."[242] Schwartz continues, noting that McLuhan's style is an attempt to contend with complexity. In contrast with McLuhan, circa 1954, the later McLuhan, Schwartz argues, drives for energy and compression. Clarity is sacrificed for effects as "the McLuhan sentence is an attempt to parallel, with the written word, the total impact of the new electronic media on our day."[243] Radio, TV and computer all have characteristics in common – information at the speed of light, which blurs details, and cause-effect relationships are drastically compressed so as to appear simultaneous. McLuhan, Schwartz argues, uses the same process for the basis of his style. He condenses, compresses, and aphorises to present multi-perspective montages of the same phenomena. Further, Schwartz presents "the iconic concept" as the "key" to McLuhan's structure. McLuhan's iconic concept "is an attempt

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[241] Schwartz makes the case that McLuhan, following Yeats, writes for the ear as well as the eye: "His lines are meant to be heard as well as seen. They gain levels as soon as they are read aloud and they get new meanings with the aural puns," (Ibid., 9).

[242] "In Françoise Gilot's book *Life With Picasso* the painter notes that: 'When I paint, I always try to give an image people are not expecting and, beyond that, one they reject. That's what interests me. It's in this sense that I mean I always try to be subversive. That is, I give a man an image of himself whose elements are collected from among the usual way of seeing things in traditional painting and then reassembled in a fashion that is unexpected and disturbing enough to make it impossible for him to escape the questions it raises,'" (*Through the Vanishing Point*, 242).

[243] Schwartz, 7.

to produce pattern, in writing, through absolute essentiality." It is an attempt to create instant truth. McLuhan, he notes, deliberately violates accepted rules, by eliminating "verbal road signs," which lets "thoughts crash into each other head on."[244] Consequently, much of McLuhan's prose lacks the connecting statement. Rather, discontinuity is a central organising principle in his work – and that once one understands continuity and discontinuity the reader will be able to understand not only McLuhan but Salvador Dali. Like Dali, in McLuhan we see the seemingly unrelated share the same space.[245]

McLuhan and Harley Parker

Following the publication of *The Medium is the Massage* (book and record) and *War and Peace in the Global Village,* McLuhan discontinued his relationship with Agel and Fiore, turning down an offer from Agel to produce another book with Fiore on education.[246] Part of his rationale for discontinuing his relationship appears to have been that he perceived that both works were only partially successful. As we have already seen, the *Medium is the Massage*, in particular, works well in terms of pointing out what has been ignored and aiding the discovery of how "literate" assumptions are derived. Further, both the *Massage* and *War and Peace*

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[244] Ibid., 8.

[245] Ibid., 13.

[246] In a letter to McLuhan, Jerome Agel says that Bantam wants "you, me and Fiore to do a third book on education." Agel proceeds to offer McLuhan an $8000 advance just for coming to speak to them for a couple of days, and notes that McLuhan "would not have to write the manuscript," (Jerome Agel to McLuhan, 11 October 1968). Perhaps, one of the reasons that McLuhan declined the offer is that he appears to have been negotiating with Gerald Stern to do a book on education. Writing to a representative of Doubleday McLuhan's literary agent Matie Molinaro, indicates, however, that Stern and McLuhan were unable to come to a satisfactory collaboration agreement. Matie Molinaro to Stewart Richardson, 21 December 1970.

certainly point out the existence of the new electric surround, how it shapes us, and how this all-at-once environment has now itself become a work of art. But if we accept that the audience is the formal cause of Schwartz's essay, then, we can see in the fact that Schwartz felt a need to push McLuhan's readership to examine his stylistic assumptions, that for a certain segment of McLuhan's audience, these works had failed. Either they missed a section of their audience on account of their "packaging," or a substantial segment of the audience, the users of these works, were utterly divorced from the arts — questions of "style" were simply not on their agenda, and by extension, they were innocent of the necessary perceptual and linguistic apparatus needed to undertake a study of the stylistic assumptions of these works.[247] Perhaps, it was a bit of both. The relevant matter, however, is that McLuhan appears to have concluded that Schwartz's approach was not dissimilar to Eliot's offer of "patient council."[248] That is, while well intentioned, it was ultimately futile and impotent. Ergo, what was required was to embark on a new set of collaborative ventures where he might continue to experiment and explore and reach out to other audiences — something he would have continued to do even if the McLuhan-Fiore-Agel collaborations had been wildly successful.

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[247] Even a cursory examination of early criticism of McLuhan's oeuvre reveals the extent that McLuhan's "style" created all kinds of confusion. See Milton Klonsky, "Mc2Luhan's Message Or: Which Way Did The Second Coming Went?" in *McLuhan: Pro and Con*, ed. Raymond Williams (New York: Funk and Wagnals, 1968), 125–139; Kenneth Burke, "Medium as Message," in *McLuhan: Pro and Con*, 174; Deborah Holmes, "The Cybernetic Caveman," in *The McLuhan Explosion: A Case Book on Marshall McLuhan*, eds., Harry H. Crosby, and George R. Bond (New York: American Book Co., 1968), 49–55; Dennis Duffy, *Marshall McLuhan* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), 54; Thomas Kuhns, *The Post-Industrial Prophets: Interpretations of Technology* (New York: Weybright and Talley, 1971), 176.

[248] C.f. McLuhan, "From LaForgue to Dante," MS., 1.

McLuhan's commitment to experimentation and continued renewal can, perhaps, be seen best in light of the *McLuhan DEW-Line Newsletters*, produced between 1968 and 1970 with the Human Development Corporation. The *DEW-Line*s are experimental, both in terms of their "content," and "format." The many variations in format include an essay that invites its reader to shuffle and re-shuffle the pages, a combination of booklet and slides,[249] a series of posters, an LP record, and an (intellectual) Card Deck described as "a contemporary I-Ching."[250] We can also see McLuhan's commitment to ongoing experimentation and renewal in his works produced with his friend, the Canadian artist, Harley Parker, *Counterblast* (1969) and *Through the Vanishing Point*. In view of the "problems" we have just discussed with the *Medium is the Massage* and *War and Peace*, *Through the Vanishing Point* can be seen as his most effective response. Here, McLuhan and Parker set out to achieve, by more "direct" means, what McLuhan had earlier sought to do by trying to get his audience to examine and study "his" stylistic assumptions, whiles also "putting on" a new readership — the users of books on art and poetry.

Broadly speaking, *Through the Vanishing Point*, as McLuhan writes to William Kuhns, is a new kind of criticism:

> Have you been *Through the Vanishing Point*? It is an entirely new means of approaching the arts as sensory organizations and probes for guiding human perception. I think it as the natural successor to the New Criticism.[251]

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[249] McLuhan, "Ad Verse Ad Junkt," *McLuhan Dew-Line Newsletter* 1, no. 12 (June 1969).

[250] In many respects, the multiplicity of formats employed by McLuhan in the DEW-lines make them the closest print analogue of McLuhan's practise of wearing of multiple masks in and through his performances. However, the *McLuhan DEW-Line Newsletters* can only receive mention here.

[251] McLuhan to William Kuhns, 5 January 1970.

He develops the matter in his correspondence with Joe Keogh, indicating that *Through the Vanishing Point* presents a programme that moves out of the orbit of a dialectical "school" of art criticism (grounded in "matching" and "categorization"):

> Your review proceeds in the most conventional mode of classification as a means of attaining knowledge. You cannot speak of the pursuit of the knowledge of forms and of the modalities of sensory space as a passing literary fashion. What had preceded the Symbolist quest for forms was by comparison a mere arrangement of experience according to concept classification. Bogging down in concepts seems to be a perpetual hazard to human life. It has befallen the "new theology" in large measure. To say, therefore, that *Through the Vanishing Point* is "the last of the modern movement that began with Eliot and Joyce" is meaningless, unless we are to think of abandoning the quest for forms altogether. Kenner is merely a commentator and classifier. He is not seeking any new insights into the experience of our time at all. He is happy to limit himself to a parasitic life on those who do seek such insights. In other words, he is an academic. I am not a "culture critic" because I am not in any way interested in classifying cultural forms. I am a metaphysician, interested in the life of the forms and their surprising modalities. That is why I have no interest at all in the academic world and its attempts at tidying up experience. I hope you will not get sidetracked into this academic pattern by trying to play their game.[252]

On the surface, *Through the Vanishing Point* takes the appearance of an anthology of poetry and painting, from the Altamira cave paintings to the present "cave art" of Madison Avenue. The examples of painting and poetry used are juxtaposed with discontinuous commentary, aphoristic probes, and questions —all done with a view to training perception and offering a language with which to discuss these sister arts and their inter-relations:

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[252] McLuhan to Joe Keogh, 6 July 1970.

When two or more environments encounter one another by direct interface, they tend to manifest their distinctive qualities. Comparison and contrast have always been a means of sharpening perception in the arts as well as in general experience. *Indeed, it is upon this pattern that all the structures of art have been reared*. Any artistic Endeavour includes the preparing of an environment for human attention. A poem or a painting is in every sense a teaching machine for the training of perception and judgment.[253]

Quite literally, the work is a toolkit and an education (training in perception) in how to "read" both poetry and painting in a way that transcends merely literate assumptions. It is also something of a "gymnasium" for the mind and perceptual apparatus as McLuhan and Parker guide their reader through an exploration of different kinds of "space,"[254] and changes in spatial preferences and sensory modes:[255]

The present study strives to guide the reader *through the sensory mazes evoked by technologies old and new* and to explain why, in

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[253] *Through the Vanishing Point*, 238. Emphasis mine.

[254] See McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 24 December 1968. Here McLuhan notes to Hall that in *Through the Vanishing Point*, he and Parker use poetry and painting as areas in which to illustrate the different modes of space e.g. tactility, the space of the interval; sight, the space of the connection, hearing, the space of the total sphere etc.. We stress the changes in spatial preferences and sensory dominance of from cave art to colour TV. McLuhan adds that questions of space, and spatial preferences is central to questions of identity.

[255] McLuhan's development of his analysis of sensory modes takes on new dimensions in *Through the Vanishing Point* and he goes even further in *From Cliché To Archetype*. This matter can, however, only be noted here.

terms of spatial form in poetry and painting, the Medieval and primitive worlds have so much in common.[256]

Coming at the work from another angle we can say that it clearly develops on the foundations of what McLuhan deemed was the humanist "school" of art criticism (which we have seen in Chapter One stems from Burckhardt and includes Wölfflin, Giedion and Moholy-Nagy). That is, "art" is used here to bring perception and judgment to an even riper fulfilment and is, in turn, brought into further contact with society and the new technological arts (rather than used to illustrate some set of "ideas"):

> In many sections of the book the reader will encounter a concern with the differences between iconic and illustrative modes in art and poetry. It is our purpose to provide a contemporary audience with the *tools for discovery of a common ground among the manifestations of art in the world*.[257]

In many respects, then, *Through the Vanishing Point* is not dissimilar to *Voices of Literature*, and like this work, *Through the Vanishing Point* is also directed towards illuminating the world of "verbal space":

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[256] *Through the Vanishing Point*, 7–8. Here, perhaps, we also see the extent to which McLuhan's operation can be described as "applied Joyce: "Joyce underlines the skill of Bloom's social decorum in a peculiarly witty way. Homer's Odysseus learns from Circe that after passing the Sirens there were two courses open to him. One is by way of the Wandering Rocks, which Jason alone had passed in the *Argo*. The other is the way of Scylla and Charybdis, rock and whirlpool. Odysseus avoids the labyrinth of the Wandering Rocks. But Bloom navigates both labyrinths safely, thus excelling Odysseus. The Rocks are the citizens and society seen in abstraction as mindless, Martian mechanisms. The "stone" men are children of the sun, denizens of space, except from time, and linked with the Druidic culture. Opposed to them are "The Dead" (see last story in *Dubliners*) children of the moon, the Celtic twilight ("cultic twalette"), moving in the aquacities of time, memory, and sentiment," (McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 30).

[257] *Through the Vanishing Point*, 2.

> Our manner of juxtaposing a poem with a painting is designed to illuminate the world of verbal space through an understanding of spaces as they have been defined and explored through the plastic arts. The verbal medium is so completely environmental as to escape all perceptual study in terms of its plastic values.[258]

Unlike *Voices of Literature*, however, McLuhan and Parker are quite explicit regarding their goal of using "verbal space" as a bridge and means to take their visually-biased reader "through the vanishing point."[259] That is, McLuhan and Parker take their reader (the user of the book) outside and beyond a sensibility patterned by literacy and the strictures of visual space, and into new multi-sensuous terrain (where all the senses are in interplay). McLuhan and Parker do this so that the users of the book might be afforded the chance to encounter both: (a) the new technological landscapes and translucent art forms which bear little to no semblance with any of the forms discussed in the work, and (b) the variety of parallels now existing between pre-literate and post-literate cultures:[260]

> *It seems to be much easier for literate people to grasp the nonvisual in art if it is mediated through the world of sound.* In effect the superpository method heralded the advent of the awareness of electronic structures that extended the scope of our visual powers. In literary terms, the revival of parataxis means the decline of the "story line" as a means of organizing verbal structures.[261]

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[258] Ibid., 1–2.

[259] "Would you be tempted to try your hand at an analogous poem called THROUGH THE VANISHING POINT? This is quite a good deal more interesting that through the looking glass…," (McLuhan to Wilfred Watson, 9 April 1961).

[260] See *Through the Vanishing Point*, 254. "However, it was science and engineering that created the new experiential environments of work and living that are now *being increasingly reflected* in the arts. In a prophetic way this new involvement of whole populations in these hidden dimensions of energies had been fully indicated by the artists and poets in the later nineteenth century," (Ibid., 28).

[261] Ibid., 26. Emphasis mine.

By beginning our probings of the varieties of space with cave paintings, we can more easily illuminate the concept that there is a parallel between preliterate and postliterate cultures. The primitive lived in a world in which all knowledge's and skill were simultaneously accessible to all members of the group; contemporary man has created an information environment that embraces all technologies and cultures in an inclusive experience.[262]

From Cliché to Archetype

Space permitting, it would be desirable to afford the works I have only been able to mention briefly more attention (and also include a discussion of works I have not touched, including *The Medium is the Massage* LP and *Counterblast*). Strictures of form and my commitment to examining the "whole" (even at the expense of "parts"), however, militate against doing so. Instead, we must now turn to encounter two of McLuhan's most overlooked works, *From Cliché to Archetype* and *Take Today*.[263] Here we can see how McLuhan continued to experiment and

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[262] Ibid., 6. "Last night I was reading *Finnegans Wake* pages 492 to 505 … In these pages Joyce runs through the letters of the alphabet from A to Z as a social cycle … He explicitly indicates the return to primal undiscriminated auditory space then begins again the discovery of the vertical plane and enclosed space, numbers and measurement. Joyce is quite explicit that (page 501) as the alp ends its cycle we move out of visual space into discontinuous auditory space again. This he mentions as the return to "Lewd's Carol," that is, through looking glass into the world of non-Euclidean space once more, lewd, ignorant, tribal, involved totally as in group singing," (McLuhan to Jacqueline Tyrwhitt, 11 May 1964). "Lewd Carol" being a multi-levelled pun, that point also to the Oxford Mathematician Charles Dogeson (Lewis Carol), who sought to take his readers "through the looking glass" and introduce his readers to the non-Euclidean world of space-time.

[263] One of the factors that has contributed to these works receiving scant critical attention is that McLuhan himself has expressed his dissatisfaction with them: "The *Cliché to Archetype* thing could have been so much better if I had been able to do it alone and to have used the rhetorical figures as ideal examples of C/A [Cliché/Archetype]. We really will have to get down to text and creases in order to cinch

reach new audiences. Examining these works also serves as a way of wrapping up and putting away the period under consideration, because, in both, we can see McLuhan's praxis of "putting on" various audiences most clearly.

While *From Cliché to Archetype* goes beyond all of McLuhan's previous works,[264] it is very much aligned with McLuhan's programme of revealing the transforming action of new media, restoring dialogue, and preparing an audience for their responsibilities *à propos* programming the environment.[265] As McLuhan and Parker note in *Through the Vanishing Point*, the cliché to archetype theme is merely another way of contending with transformation resulting from new technologies.[266] The extent to which the work is aligned with McLuhan's earlier efforts can also be seen in his correspondence with John Wain:

> The new *Cliché to Archetype* … has really a very simple theme that consists of the poetic process. It is the theme of Yeats and his essay

the full implications of frustration and hang-up and arrest as the metamorphic moment of epiphany…," (McLuhan to Eric McLuhan, 28 December 1970).

[264] In some respects, *From Cliché to Archetype* completes the "journey" by showing a way *back* from the popular to the world of high arts. C.f. McLuhan, *Counterblast* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1954).

[265] As McLuhan says to Wilfred and Sheila Watson: "…this way we can help people in many fields to develop interests in many other fields…," (McLuhan to Wilfred and Sheila Watson, 15 December 1967). Ironically, at some point during the writing of *From Cliché to Archetype* McLuhan and Watson stopped talking to one another and their "dialogue" was mediated by McLuhan's secretary, Margaret Stewart. For an account of the conditions under which the book was written see Wilfred Watson, "Marshall McLuhan and Multi-Consciousness: The Place Marie Dialogues," *Boundary 2* 3, no. 1 (Autumn 1974): 197–212.

[266] *Through the Vanishing Point*, 259. It is a theme he had been trialling for sometime in earlier articles and his correspondence. For example, See McLuhan, "New Media and the Arts," MS. Writing to Clay Felker the following year McLuhan notes Cliché is the new technology acting on the psyche and society. Archetype is the old technology elevated into art form by the processing of the new technology. McLuhan to Clay Felker, 31 July 1965.

on "The Emotion of Multitude." The archetype is born of the encounter of clichés. The mere title of *Finnegan* alludes to the formula: the repeat of the old Finn cycle — the replay, as it were, of its clichés, results in the AWAKEning. It is in Gertrude Stein's famous phrase: "A rose is a rose is a rose." The encounter of the clichés results in AROSE. Eliot uses it everywhere. The banal coming and going of the women, and the banal subject, Michelangelo, forces an intuition of metaphysical exhaustion. In his essay on Dante, Eliot reveals the same process as central to Dante. Dante got it from Ovid whose technique of metamorphosis consists in arresting processes in full flight.

Thought you would be interested in these observations. Each new medium is a cliché that burrows and borrows and barrows, or dumps, earlier clichés. Media as environments are quotation devices, as it were — they hook and scrap and hoick all at once. The electric media retrieved the unconscious, the old clichés of tribal man, and scrapped private identity and consciousness built up over centuries of repressing the corporate and tribal life, etc.[267]

Before getting into the particulars of the work we need to briefly consider how several factors conspired during the 1960s to make it necessary. Firstly, McLuhan saw that there was a resurgence of interest in the "archetypes," by literary critics whose work was deeply infused by psychoanalysis.[268] Secondly, and more importantly, McLuhan appears to have become increasingly agitated by figures such as Northrop Frye, and to a lesser extent, his fellow Catholic Jacques Maritain:[269]

It seems to me that with Frye the archetypes are an extreme form of nominalism, and that this is not surprising in so extreme an instance of the Protestant ethos as himself. I would like to have

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[267] McLuhan to John Wain, 8 December 1970.

[268] We can see the seedling of McLuhan's interest in "archetypes" in his correspondence with Walter Ong during the early 1950s. See McLuhan to Walter Ong, 15 June 1953; and McLuhan to Walter Ong, 14 October 1954.

[269] "[Maritain]… resorts over and over to the transcendentals or the archetypes to validate art…," (McLuhan to Fredrick Wilhelmsen, 17 June 1975). "I was amazed to find that he [Maritain] conceived the art process as direct contact with the archetype, minus any figure-ground interplay," (McLuhan to Anne Muggeridge, 14 February 1978).

your thoughts on the possibility of the so called archetypal situations as modes of collective habitus.[270]

The essence of the matter is that McLuhan was faced with a readily identifiable group, on his "home turf,"[271] acting as a major impediment to the realisation of his goals. Frye, and to a lesser extent Maritain, are representative of a group of university people; academics, lecturers, professors, and professional writers at large whose work McLuhan saw as being deficient on two main counts. While in possession of the best modes and means for training perception (a position that "literature" and literary criticism in many respects still holds) as "teachers" they had effectively abdicated their role of teaching the youth by neither meeting the students on their own terms and in view of their needs,[272] nor going beyond the classroom itself (remaining, instead, cloistered). Further, while abdicating their responsibilities, they had not abandoned either their posts or pay checks.[273] Rather, these "university people" remained

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[270] McLuhan to Walter Ong, 14 November 1960. McLuhan expressed his dissatisfaction with Frye again in a letter to Sheila Watson: "It is Frye's peculiarity that he can cope only with the Emperor's old clothes. This he calls archetypes. The Emperor's new clothes, that which is new and environmental, he ignores. It is this environmental world that is the concern of the artist. He tidies it up. He probes, and patterns, and shapes it. Archetypal critic, Mr Frye, classifies the work of the artist .… I am sure you can count on the Frye passage to be basic Orphic Symbolism that was familiar to Lewis," (McLuhan to Sheila Watson, 28 December 1965).

[271] McLuhan was, after all, still a Professor of English.

[272] Commenting on Northrop Frye in *From Cliché to Archetype* McLuhan states: "Today the entire world of rock poetry and of the related forms of jazz, of song and speech and dance, has created a complex world of genre that no professor of literature can ignore if he has any concern about maintaining contact with his students," (*From Cliché to Archetype*, 87).

[273] As an aside, in "Adopt a College" McLuhan proposes a new approach to educational reform. He suggests that, for one year, teachers should abandon their posts (but not their pay-checks), and leave the entire educational apparatus to the students. See McLuhan, "Adopt a College," *This Magazine Is About Schools* 2, no. 4 (1968): 50–55.

well insulated by bureaucratic structures, continuing to teach, and write well and voluminously for other professional writers on all manner of literary assumptions without ever noticing literary technology.[274] Therefore, they were not only in the business of perpetuating irrelevant strategies and modes of sensibility at odds with the new electric surround, but, effectively, they served to hamstring an institution that McLuhan saw as having a crucial role to play in fashioning the environment itself as a work of art to maximize awareness and learning.[275]

In view of the situation, McLuhan and Wilfred Watson set out to "put on" and transform this audience. Using the medium with which their audience is hypnotized (the book), their "starting point," found on p. 55, is the largely ignored "green-as-grass," "quick-as-a-fox," "brown-as-a-berry," "as-right-as-rain" *cliché*.[276] Why is it, McLuhan and Watson ask, that "cliché" is almost verbal in its association and "archetype" should seem to relate so exclusively to literature when anything that can be observed about the behaviour of linguistic cliché or archetype can be found plentifully in the non-linguistic world? Having started with doubt, and having outlined something of a quest, McLuhan and Watson move to show that what their audience has ignored is that both cliché and archetype can be verbal and non-verbal, written (software) and

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[274] See McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 14 May 1962. McLuhan would level the same charge against "science" in Take Today: "General Systems science, mathematical models, and computer languages alike are *media*. They impose their own "grammars" and hidden assumptions upon the user as *content. But science, the child of literacy, has hitherto ignored the effects of literacy upon itself*," (*Take Today*, 136). Emphasis mine.

[275] McLuhan, The University in the Electric Age: The End of The Gap Between Theory and Practise," The Varsity Graduate 11, no. 3 (December 1964): 64. Also see McLuhan, "The University: Where It is At, Draft II," MS., 1–2.

[276] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 55

"technological" (hardware).[277] They find and present evidence for their
charge by way of an etymology of "cliché," which turns out to have been
derived from printing (the die-maker's great contribution to language):[278]

> The very word "cliché" derives from the mechanical process of
> printing, as we have noted. The Gutenberg technology of
> imposing and impressing by means of fragmented and repeatable
> units was the cue for all succeeding mechanization of the social
> and educational and political establishments. As various
> technologies have succeeded print, it has become more and more
> the home of the archetype.[279]

The next "phase" in their operation then is to parade the
ignorance emanating from having pushed aside literary technology itself
as insignificant. This is done throughout the work, and by way of a host
of figures. For example, McLuhan and Watson provide several examples
of the "hardening of Frye's categories":

> Working entirely from the medium of the printed word, Professor
> Frye has developed a classification of literary forms that ignores
> not only the print process as it created a special type of writer and
> audience, but all other media as well.[280]

> By ignoring the oral tradition of both preliterate and postliterate
> cultures, Professor Frye sets up a system of classifications that
> apply to a recent segment of human technology and culture — a
> segment that is rapidly dissolving. If we are restricted to Professor
> Frye's categories of printed literature, the entire history of genre
> from Homer to the present — a subject enriched by thousands of
> poets and scholars in explicit commentary on their works — is
> resigned or ignored.[281]

Insofar as we are moving in linear fashion through a very non-
linear text, McLuhan and Watson then offer a more "healthy" way of

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[277] Ibid., 19.

[278] Ibid., 54–55.

[279] Ibid., 119.

[280] Ibid., 85.

[281] Ibid., 87.

understanding both cliché and archetype that takes into account the complementarity of *Eye* and *Ear* and the full interplay of the senses. Arguably the *Sed contra* moment can be found on p. 15:

> The conventional idea of the cliché as anaesthetic should be contrasted to the archetype as inducing somnambulism. Textbook cliché ("as green as grass," "quick as a fox") may at any moment be sharpened into probe, e.g. "far away pastures look green," "the grass is always greener on the other fellow," or "crazy like a fox." In contrast, the Northrop Frye definition of archetype is: "A symbol, usually an image, which reoccurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole." It doesn't matter that in the phrase "as a whole" Frye is using textbook cliché, since he is insisting that the archetypal experience is a pleasing form of somnambulism.[282]

In view of the audience at hand, McLuhan and Watson fortify their charge by their examples taken from Yeats,[283] Joyce,[284] and a host of other artists, including Shakespeare, who have forged their art from clichés.[285] They also set out to show how:

> The archetype is a retrieved awareness or consciousness. It is consequently a retrieved cliché – an old cliché retrieved by a new cliché. Since a cliché s is a unit extension of man, an archetype is a quoted extension, medium, technology, or environment.[286]

> Any cliché, pushed to a high degree, is scrapped in favour of a new cliché which may be the retrieval of an old one – e.g., old cliché as new archetype = old archetype as new cliché.[287]

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[282] Ibid., 15.

[283] Ibid., 126–27.

[284] Ibid., 99.

[285] "What is common to all these approaches is the awareness that cliché is not necessarily verbal, and that it is also an active structuring, probing feature of our awareness. It performs multiple functions from release of emotion to retrieval of other clichés from both the conscious and unconscious life," (Ibid., 54–55).

[286] Ibid., 21.

[287] Ibid., 50–51.

What needs to be stressed at this point is that McLuhan and Watson do not so much as enter an existing debate, but seek to circumvent or "leap-frog" the old by way of the entirely new. As McLuhan notes to Watson:

> I agree with you totally about strategy of taking over the Frye world of literary genres via media as metaphors. However, in terms of capture, the Frye audience as opposed to the Frye field, the concept and title *Cliché to Archetype* may prove very effective. *Actually we are not really engaged in the conquest of the Frygean empire as in the discovery of a totally new empire*.[288]

From Cliché to Archetype is a complex work that is made more complex and strange insofar as McLuhan and Watson have made it deliberately labyrinthine. The work does not proceed in linear fashion. Rather, it is a cut up, organised by themes running from A to Z. The "introduction," for example, is found under "I" and starts on p. 116. The only deviation from the scheme is the "notes," which should appear under "N," but appear at the end of the work. In this respect, the work bears some semblance to p. 492-501 of *Finnegans Wake* that runs through the history of culture in terms of the alphabet.[289] The crux of the matter, I believe, is that McLuhan and Watson are trying to make the form of the book itself exemplary of the cliché to archetype process (book-as-actor).[290] The form of the book is made to operate as a "retrieval system," and it calls attention to this fact by miming other well recognized retrieval systems such as dictionaries and indexes.[291] By organizing the work in

[288] McLuhan to Wilfred Watson, 16 July 1964.

[289] McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 14 May 1964.

[290] "I have a huge bundle of materials accumulated for CA [*From Cliché to Archetype*]. I see the form of the book as exemplary with many illustrations from art and literature and many from all the arts and sciences," (McLuhan to Wilfred and Sheila Watson, 15 December 1967).

[291] "Examples of retrieval systems occur in the Phoenician alphabet, dictionaries, indexes, computers, tables of engineering standards, etc…What these forms retrieve are archetypes or old processes," (*From Cliché to Archetype*, 22).

this way clarity is sacrificed for effects that issue from turning the spotlight on the alphabet itself:

> The entire page is devoted to tracing the "meanderthalltale" (line 25), the labyrinthine ways of alphabet technology as a kind of prototype of all cliché or breakthroughs. One of the principle effects of "allforabit" specialism is not only the production of a "hoard of objects" (line 8) but the endless tossing of the same onto the middenheap. New technology as an automatic means of scrapping or rejecting the preceding culture creates the "liberorumqueue" (line 24), the endless production "to con and we can" (line 25).[292]

Take Today

There are many matters broached in *From Cliché to Archetype* that must remain untouched. Instead we turn now to consider *Take Today: The Executive as Dropout*, produced with Barrington Nevitt. In many respects *Take Today* belongs in the following chapter. I have, however, chosen to treat it here because in *Take Today* we can see again how McLuhan continued to experiment and address new audiences. Further, throughout *Take Today* we can also see more clearly how McLuhan adopted and modified the "Thomistic article," or method of the *respondeo dicendum*, to orchestrate his art of "putting on" his audience.[293]

Broadly speaking, *Take Today* tries to do for the business world and a North American managerial class what *From Cliché to Archetype* tried to do for the "literati" — to put on the user of the work/book and bring them to see themselves, their world, and the new situation more

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[292] Ibid., 125.

[293] Arthur Kroker has also discussed McLuhan's uses of the "Thomistic article," See Arthur Kroker, *Technology and the Canadian Mind: Innis/McLuhan/Grant* (Montreal: New World Perspectives, 1984), 68–69.

clearly.[294] Unlike *From Cliché to Archetype*, *Take Today* is not quite as labyrinthine. It has both a clearly identifiable starting and end point in the form of a "pro-log" and concluding "eco-log." That said, however, *Take Today* is quite similar to the aforementioned. Like *From Cliché to Archetype*, the main body of the text is devoted to a threefold movement: (a) "objections," or the area of weakness,[295] taking the form of an inventory of "hang-ups"[296] and "effects,"[297] (b) a display of a "healthy condition" (*sed contra*), and (c) *respondeo*. It should be stressed that this is not done in a linear fashion. The contours of the "Thomistic article" are traced and retraced at several points throughout the work, which, as McLuhan notes to Ted Lee: "…(is *a maze*) with three themes: Electric services shift the entire human endeavour, from hardware to software and packages and servicing. All jobs tend to become roles. At electric speeds all operations decentralise. The three themes are interrelated and interfacing."[298]

The "objections," the various starting points for engagement, are taken from a comprehensive survey of the "disciplines" that make up the business enterprise; e.g. management, economics, accounting, statistics, and forecasting. The essential matter is that the inventory of "objections"

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[294] Rightly or wrongly McLuhan and Nevitt felt that management presented itself as a new beach-head and ready-made audience: "How to achieve these ends in actual human organization has been the study of many philosophic minds. In our time, such study has tended to come under the name "management" … there is the silent assumption that the relevant *ground* against which to consider patterns of human organisation is business," (Ibid., 262). "The great advantage that the perceptive businessman enjoys over the conventional academics is his recognition of at least some consequences of innovation," (Ibid., 49).

[295] C.f. McLuhan to Joe Keogh, 11 April 1973. Cited in Chapter Two.

[296] Ibid., 4.

[297] Ibid., 8.

[298] McLuhan to Ted Lee, 27 July 1976.

"are juxtaposed abruptly" and paraded before the reader so as to provide a "discontinuous or cubist perspective" and "total intellectual history … in a single view."[299] While a comprehensive list of all the "ignorance" on parade would be extensive, we can get a glimpse of McLuhan and Nevitt's operation by considering a handful of examples:

> (a) Nobody has tried to assess the ways in which uniform coinage may have prepared the ground for the unique form of the Greek phonetic alphabet.[300]
>
> (b) No economist, including Marx, has discussed either innovation or the action of products in creating their *own* environments.[301]
>
> (c) "Keynes overlooked the rapid change of the monetary medium from "hardware" (bullion) to "software" (credit and promises)."[302]
>
> (d) "C. P. Snow is quite innocent of any knowledge about the dynamic origins of literacy, or of science in relation to literacy."[303]
>
> (e) "What Max Picard missed in his rich study of silence is the *ground* for speech and all the emergent institutions was the haptic or tangible, tactile character of silence. It is the interval in the *figure-ground* relation of sound and silence. The *very structure of the age of information is inevitably the structure of discontinuity and resonance*."[304]

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[299] McLuhan, "Joyce, Aquinas, and the Poetic Process," in *Joyce's* Portrait, 249–250.

[300] *Take Today*, 39.

[301] Ibid., 63, 59, and 68.

[302] Ibid., 77.

[303] Ibid., 127. McLuhan and Nevitt add at this point: "Without the long written tradition of the West there would be no science. What Snow calls "two cultures," are the figure-ground interface of the components of the same culture…," (Ibid).

[304] Ibid., 226.

This total "intellectual history" is then used to prepare the way for

McLuhan and Nevitt's display of the "healthy condition" (revealed by

way of contrast). Again, this is done at several "points" and in several

different ways:

> The poet Ezra Pound saw that the telegraph press, with its mosaic coverage of world events under a single date line, had solved the problem of creating the new poetic vision for our time. *In contrast*, he pointed to the helpless fumbling of educated but conventional minds that scorned the popular media as major resources for innovation and insight.[305]

> *In contrast* to the thought of Huizinga and Thomas Kuhn is the science fiction fantasy of Lewis Carroll (the speculative mathematician Charles Dodgson.) In Carroll's world the *ground* rules are given a complete holiday as he swings into a twentieth-century orbit in good Queen Victoria's golden days. Between the philosophical quests of Huizinga and Kuhn's severe exposés of scientific limitations in our next chapter, the playful world of Caroll is pure donnish delight. (*The reader of this book is likewise expected to enjoy freedom of travel on both sides of the looking glass*.)[306]

> The Jules Verne mind accustomed us to space voyages anywhere. His was also the age of Edgar Allan Poe's *Descent into the Maelström,* and of De Quincey's *Opium Eater. By contrast*, our time compels us to voyage in a present that includes all times and spaces. Neither evolution nor progress is directional or sequential. EVERY-WHERE IS NOW-HERE IN ECO-LAND.[307]

The real crux, however, is McLuhan and Nevitt's prescription — that

their reader needs to go "through the vanishing point":

> All ideologies based on Western industrial civilization have failed to go "through the vanishing point" for direct perception of "where it's at." Whether starting from "left" or "right," their concepts and private points of view now converge "beyond the fringe" in the nineteenth century. Such ideologies, persisting as

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[305] Ibid., 140. Emphasis mine.

[306] Ibid., 121. Emphasis mine.

[307] Ibid., 297. Emphasis mine.

"past times" for "critics of critical criticism," are powerless to cope with the patterns of development emerging in today's global theatre.[308]

Going "through the vanishing point" entails more than a mere shift from a 19th to 20th century consciousness. [309] It entails the recovery of the imagination and ability to "make":

> It is this naïve obsession with "hardware" and visual models that makes Marxism easy for the literati to comprehend. Once science went through the vanishing point into acoustic or resonant space, both scientists and economists were left on the wrong side of the looking glass, because they were mostly unable to make what Bertrand Russell cited (on the first page of his *ABC of Relativity*) as the indispensable preliminary act needed for grasping Einstein: *"What is demanded is a change in our imaginative picture of the world…"*[310]

As McLuhan noted earlier in the *Gutenberg Galaxy*: "Imagination is that ratio among the perceptions and faculties which exists when they are *not embedded or outered in material technologies*."[311] Ergo, McLuhan and Nevitt do not advocate a shift from a Newtonian worldview or imaginative picture to one informed by the new physics — which constitutes a mere shift from eye mode to ear mode. As we can also see in the *Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan deemed that the new physics was just as conformed to its media or medium as the earlier Newtonian vision was to literacy:

> Non-Euclidean geometries familiar to our time *also depend on electric technology for their nutriment and plausibility*, and this is no more seen by mathematicians now than the relations to alphabet and print were seen by mathematicians in the past. It has been assumed till now that so long as everybody is hypnotized by the

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[308] Ibid., 278.

[309] Ibid., 46.

[310] Ibid., 69.

[311] *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 265. Emphasis mine.

same isolated sense or spell, that the resulting homogeneity of mental states will suffice for human association.[312]

Rather McLuhan and Nevitt prescribe the recovery of the perceptual *complementarity* of both eye *and* ear,[313] paired of course, as we have noted in the previous chapter, with "a comprehensive study of the psychic and social dynamics of all media."[314] Or in other words, the occupation of both side of the "looking glass" and neither side exclusively. Then, and only then, McLuhan and Nevitt appear to have deemed, was there scope for "programming the environment":

> The familiar idea of "making the news" now yields to making the world itself. For the best part of a century, we have been programming human consciousness with retrievals and replays of the tribal unconscious. The complementary of this process would seem to be the "natural" program for the period ahead: *programming the unconscious with the recently achieved forms of consciousness*. This procedure would evoke a new form of consciousness radically different from former consciousness. Everybody becomes a voluntary participant in creating diversity without loss of identity. Man is the content of the environment he creates, whether of "hardware" or "software," whether of consciousness or unconsciousness. There is therefore no technical alternative to "humanism," even though for many this would include the divine grace of the superhuman. INNOVATION IS OBSOLETE. SO IS OBSOLESCENCE, AS INFORMATION SPEED-UP TRANSFORMS MAN AND HIS WORLD INTO ART FORM. FINN-AGAIN-ARRAY-SURRECTION.[315]

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[312] *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 183.

[313] *Take Today*, 140.

[314] McLuhan to *Playboy Magazine*, February-March 1970, quoted by Bob Dobbs, "McLuhan and Holeopathic Quadrophrenia," 84.

[315] *Take Today*, 297.

5

EXPLORING NEW FRONTIERS (1970–1979)

> You say I am repeating
> Something I have said before. I shall say it again.
> Shall I say it again? In order to arrive there,
> To arrive where you are, to get from where you are not,
>   You must go by a way wherein there is no ecstasy.
> In order to arrive at what you do not know
>   You must go by a way which is the way of
> ignorance.
> In order to possess what you do not possess
>   You must go by the way of dispossession.
> In order to arrive at what you are not
>   You must go through the way in which you are not.
> And what you do not know is the only thing you know
> And what you own is what you do not own
> And where you are is where you are not.[1]

By the early 1960s McLuhan seems to have achieved a harmonious union between his assumed role and way of being in the world, his way of seeing and his mode of uttering or outering "himself" — his outputs begin to appear simultaneously radical and new, and profoundly ancient and traditional.[2] His achievement at this juncture serves to bring us back to reconsider his relationship to a figure we have so far treated primarily as a point of departure, T. S. Eliot. The path that led McLuhan to the realisation of this "goal" (harmonious union) began with his decision, following Eliot's exhortation, to undertake a systematic appraisal of the successes and failures of his predecessors.[3] In reconsidering McLuhan's relationship to Eliot, however, we find that he is not merely a point of

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[1] T. S. Eliot, *Four Quartets*, read by Ted Hughes (London: Penguin Audio, 1997).

[2] Rosenthall finds McLuhan's texts "imbued with the hues of instant mysticism," (Raymond Rosenthall, "Introduction" to *McLuhan: Pro & con.*, 12). Similarly, Tom Wolfe finds McLuhan writes in "in an ancient priestly-aristocratic idiom," (Tom Wolfe, *The Pump House Gang* (New York: Bantam, 1968), 124.)

[3] McLuhan, "Mr Eliot's Cubist Aesthetic," MS., 10 in "Great Tom."

departure but also one of return. Entry into the matter can be had in light of McLuhan's comments on Eliot's in "American Criticism and the Demons of Analogy" and "Prelude to Prufrock: Documents and Techniques," written around the time he was calculating his own strategy after having been confronted with the reality of a post-human age of non-communication.[4] Here McLuhan documents how Eliot's *Four Quartets* and *Ash Wednesday* are built on his successful wedding of an artistic strategy, that developed from Mallarmé, with a mode of spiritual purgation of the "religious mystics."[5] McLuhan calls Eliot's fusion, his "negative *way*,"[6] the "way without ecstasy," and he sets Eliot's mature poetry in relation to the life and work of two great explorers — St. John of the Cross (the Spanish poet and mystic),[7] and Nicholas of Cusa (the Renaissance polymath and author of *De Docta Ignorantia*). The first he does overtly and directly. The second, Cusa, McLuhan merely alludes to by presenting Eliot's "way without ecstasy" as the "path to go where you do not know through ignorance."[8] In so doing, McLuhan points not only to Cusa but beyond, to the relation between Eliot's *way* and an apophatic "school" of theology (*via negativa*), that extends from Pseudo–Dionysius the Areopagite,[9] through Eckhart to Cusa, and to the present day (e.g.

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[4] McLuhan to Ezra Pound, 30 July 1948.

[5] It is relevant to keep in mind that McLuhan saw Mallarmé as developing his poetics from Poe, whom McLuhan regarded as a Grammarian opposed to the Calvinist divines. See McLuhan, "Edgar Poe's Tradition," *Sewanee Review* 52, no. 1 (1944): 26–27.

[6] The theme has since also been explored by Eloise Knapp Hay, *T. S. Eliot's Negative Way* (Cambridge, MA., and London: Harvard University Press, 1982).

[7] McLuhan, "Prelude to Prufrock: Documents and Techniques," MS., 85 in "Great Tom."

[8] McLuhan, "American Criticism and the Demons of Analogy," MS., 3.

[9] Or "Dionysus the whoever-he-was," (Paul Rorem, *Pseudo-Dionysius: A Commentary on the Texts and an Introduction to Their Influence* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 17). Rorem is also valuable in terms of showing the influence Dionysus the whoever-he-was on Thomas Aquinas.

Raymond Panikkar).[10] Having then established what he considered to be the basic coordinates of the poetics of the mature Eliot, McLuhan rehearses his diagnosis elsewhere. For example, in "Eliot and the Manichean Myth as Poetry," McLuhan presents "Mr Eliot's last four plays" as "spiritual exercises in the annihilation of personality."[11] And in his review of the *Composition of Four Quartets*, McLuhan reveals more of the "apophatic" dimension of Eliot's work by arguing that his use of a five part structure for each quartet represents an attempt to weave several quite unrelated strands together in an emotional whole, "so there isn't really any heart of the matter."[12] Through the very structure of his poetry, he asserts, Eliot "hid the metaphysical structure while giving endless clues to surface matters."[13] By extension, he implies that Eliot consolidated and developed upon the Symbolists' deployment of the techniques of juxtaposition in the name of democracy,[14] and brought the poetic devices and techniques used to elevate the reader to the status of artist back into the service of metaphysics and religion.[15] Eliot, McLuhan

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[10] The "apophatic" tradition is closely aligned with a predominantly Eastern (Byzantine), Christian mystical "tradition" of "Holy Fools" and mystic experience generally. See Donald F. Duclow, *Masters of Learned Ignorance: Eriugena, Eckhart, Cusanus* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006).

[11] McLuhan, "Eliot and the Manichean Myth as Poetry," (address to the spring symposium of the Catholic Renascence Society, 19 April 1954), MS., 14.

      Another way of coming at the matter, which McLuhan appears to have done during the late 1940s, is via Eliot's Buddhist or crypto-Buddhist sensibility: "Maritain has given all clues to 4Q's [*Four Quartets*] so far as Buddhist theme involved as way of natural mysticism. Teaching Eliot is only way for such as me to get into him thoroughly. Buddhism not the false way at all. Hook-up with Mallarmé nicely," (McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, [04 Poet of Situations], n.d.).

[12] McLuhan, review of *Composition of Four Quartets*, by Helen Gardner (1978), MS., 3.

[13] Ibid., 4.

[14] McLuhan, "The Aesthetic Moment in Landscape Poetry," in *The Interior Landscape*, 159, 160.

[15] See McLuhan, "Joyce, Mallarmé, and the Press," in *The Interior Landscape*, 16.

reveals, weds poetry and theology, and is simultaneously material and transcendental.[16]

The significance of McLuhan's description of Eliot's "negative way," and one of the reasons Eliot must also be regarded as a point of return, is that Eliot's *way*, in many respects, is not dissimilar to McLuhan's *way*. Following his survey of his predecessors, McLuhan forged his own artistic strategy by updating the tradition of Ciceronian (or pragmatic) humanism, largely by way of appropriating, juggling, and transforming the techniques and strategies of the Men of 1914. In the broadest of outlines, keeping in mind that it would be easy to conduct a focused and specialist study of this matter alone, we can say that from 1951 McLuhan anchored his praxis in his fusion of an essentially Lewisean aesthetic with the principles of decorum of Eliot and Joyce — the sum of which entailed the creation of an artistic persona comprised of duet between one part "personal" and/or "private" person, and one or more parts "Finnegan corporate image."[17] In taking this route McLuhan (re)discovered a strategy that was in accord with his understanding of Catholic theory and practise of communication and Christian living in general. It enabled him to live "in the world but not of it" under X-Ray

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[16] "In so far as the poet offers neither picture nor correspondence but a drama proportioned to the action of understanding he can be both material and transcendental," (McLuhan, "Sonnet and Ballad", MS., 7 in "Character Anthology").

[17] See *From Cliché to Archetype*, 163. Cited in Chapter Three.

One of the factors that influenced McLuhan's "fusion" (rather than conformity to one "side" or the other) was that he saw that Joyce felt that he had to forfeit his salvation in order to be a truly impersonal artist — that figure who had undergone total self abrogation so as to engage "in a break-neck gamble with the secret forces of being," (McLuhan, "Joyce, Mallarmé, and the Press," MS., 1–3).

conditions,[18] when "separation" is largely impossible, but

"unwordliness" is readily achievable:

> So far as the church is concerned, this flip out of the visual literate world after 2500 years would seem to call into question the whole Graeco-Roman basis of Christian bureaucracy and emotions. The church, mystically considered, is tribal, and now the secular world is becoming totally tribal, and *the separation of church and the world becomes more and more difficult*.[19]

> The new matrix is acoustic, simultaneous, electric — which in one way is very friendly to the Church. That is, the togetherness of humanity is now total. Everybody is now simultaneously in the same place and involved in everybody. The present Church demands an extreme unwordliness. *But that's easy now. It is easy to be unworldly.* What it means, though, is that everything we've been accustomed to is obsolete now.[20]

It also helped McLuhan to practise the Christian habit of dying to the self each day, and its corollary, being born again and forging and re-forging an identity that is neither conformed to space nor time, through a life of prayer:

> Prayer is a form of dialogue between God and his creatures which maintains the real human community within the superhuman orbit. Personally, I can think of no other basis for existence.[21]

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[18] "19th century man, with his feet firmly on the ground finds it impossible to live with the electric age with its x-ray vision," (McLuhan, and Barrington Nevitt, "Medium, Meaning, Message," MS., 3).

[19] McLuhan to Larry Henderson, 20 October 1975. Emphasis mine.

[20] McLuhan, "Our Only Hope is Apocalypse," in *The Medium and the Light*, 65. Emphasis mine.

[21] McLuhan to Peter Bruckner, 23 February 1971. Similar, McLuhan notes to Taylor: "… I can say that I do not think of God as a concept, but as an immediate and ever present fact, an occasion for continuous dialogue," (McLuhan to James Taylor, 15 January 1969).

From this foundation "McLuhan"[22] was then able, like Pound, Lewis, and Eliot under Pound's tutelage, to put his learning into the service of his audience(s). He set about trying to facilitate dialogue by confronting the contemporary issues and problems of his day, probing the lineaments of power, offering a programme of "severe critical discipline,"[23] providing tools for recovery (or resurrection?), and training perception:

> The measure of our unawareness and irrelevance can be taken from the fact that no Thomist has so far seen fit to expound St. Thomas's theory of communication *by way of providing modern insight into our problems*.[24]

Like many of his contemporaries and forbearers, including the ancient grammarians, McLuhan conducted his programme on the basis that he had a modest confidence in the human person — although man is without certain graces, he is capable of a high degree of harmonious excellence, and "recovery" is possible:[25]

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[22] C.f. Hugh Kenner, *Wyndham Lewis*, vii. Cited in the Introduction.

[23] See McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis: Lemuel in Lilliput," in *The Medium and The Light*, 189. "Intense and orderly training in the full resources of language is a major means of bringing order to the emotions as well as thoughts of man …. It is a discipline in the fullest sense and inseparable from moral training," (McLuhan, "Education of Freemen in Democracy: The Liberal Arts," 49–50).

[24] McLuhan, "The Heart of Darkness," MS., 8. Arguably, McLuhan can be seen here offering his understanding of "translation" and the "transmission" of tradition. "Carrying across," or handing over, entails re-making —the (re)creation of an "objective correlative." Coming at the matter from another angle, as McLuhan notes in a review of the poetry of Eliot: "For us the question is as complicated as Eliot's poetry." The question of the relation between Christian culture and paganism "is not merely a matter of turning back to the old Fathers," (McLuhan, "Paganism on Tip Toe, review of the Poetry of T. S. Eliot," *Renascence* 7, no. 3 (Spring 1955): 158).

[25] The path to recovery, as Gilson notes, begins and extends *from* the senses, or in McLuhan's terms, from "percept" rather than "concept" (which is the reverse of the "pattern" of Adam's knowing prior to the fall). Etienne Gilson, *The Philosophy of St.*

The scriptural exegetists will hold, as Francis Bacon held, that Adam possessed metaphysical knowledge in a very high degree. To him the whole of nature was a book which he could read with ease. He lost this ability to read this language as a result of his fall; and Solomon alone of the sons of men has ever recovered the power to read the book of nature. *The business of art is, however, to recover the knowledge of that language which once man held by nature.* The problem as to which of the arts should have priority in the work of explaining man and nature had arisen among the pre-Socratic philosophers. Grammar, or allegorical exegesis of natural phenomena, as well as of folk myths and even the works of Homer and Hesiod, enjoyed many advantages for the task.[26]

Unlike his contemporaries (including his fellow Thomists), however, the starting point for McLuhan's programme of service after 1951 was *after* the catastrophe — of both the "Deluge" and "Babel"[27] — inside the "twilight kingdom of shattered civilizations."[28]

…Pullman and Satters a dialogue of Shem and Shaun. You should certainly look into this closely for a Joyce chapter. Eliot's deep interest in Lewis indicates awareness of his centrality to these esthetic issues. Our job vis-à-vis Joyce, Pound, Lewis, Eliot is to elevate these matters to a level where coherence of the landscape

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Bonaventure. Trans. Dom Illtyd Trethowan and F. J. Sheed (London: Sheed and Ward, 1940), 441.

[26] *The Classical Trivium*, 16. Emphasis mine. C.f. "If man by his ingenious extensions creates new dimensions and new environments *he also has another creative power for making himself aware of these new forms and giving himself cognizance of their effects.* This is the power of art. If technology creates environments that brainwash man, art creates anti-environments that heighten consciousness. Presumably this is why the artist appears as anti-social – because he is creating awareness in place of adjustment – for adjustment is brainwashing," (McLuhan, review of *Cyborg: Evolution of the Superman*, by D. S. Halacy Jr., MS., 3). Emphasis mine.

[27] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 30 January 1951. Cited in Chapter Two.

[28] Where the social and communal bond is weakened to the point where each person is isolated in their own mental prison, dreading the demands of rational freedom and responsibility, or personal give and take. And where, fearing sight and self-knowledge, people prefer to grope/group/herd together and avoid speech. McLuhan, "The Hollow Man," MS., 13–15 in "Great Tom."

is evident. They assumed a steady progression of awareness would set in. *But the reverse has occurred. "A tawdry cheapness shall outlast our days."*[29]

This observation brought him into a relationship with his time that made him appear as something of a singularity, a "prophet" crying in the wilderness.[30]

Resonance

McLuhan's extensive commentary on Eliot provides several additional points of departure and return. One of the most significant at this juncture is his reading of Eliot's articulation and deployment of the "objective correlative." As McLuhan notes to Eugene Schwartz:

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[29] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 3 May 1949. Emphasis mine. In the closing sentence we see McLuhan referring to Ezra Pound's "Hugh Selwyn Mauberley," in *Personæ: Collected Shorter Poems of Ezra Pound*. London. Faber and Faber, 1952), 198.

[30] The image of the "prophet" is frequently employed by McLuhan's commentators. For example, Peter Drucker argues that the image of the "prophet" serves to frame the style of McLuhan's discourse and provides an "archetype" that accounts for McLuhan's fate — namely that McLuhan embodies the "paradox of the prophet" in that his very success is his failure, for the prophet whose time has come no longer shocks but entertains. Peter Drucker, *Adventures of a Bystander* (London: Heinemann, 1979), 244, 254–5. James Carey uses the image too, portraying McLuhan as a representative of a species of "secularized, religious determinism," "poet of technology," and "prophet of the collapse of all tradition," (James Carey, "Harold Abram Innis and Marshall McLuhan," in *McLuhan: Pro and Con*, ed. Raymond Rosenthal (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968), 306). We also find the image in the work of Cohen, O'Neill, and Levinson. See Hart Cohen, "Revisiting McLuhan," in *Revisiting McLuhan*. ed. Hart Cohen (Brisbane: Australian Key Centre for Cultural and Media Policy, 2000), 7; Michael J. O'Neill "Hold the 21st Century! The World Isn't Ready: International Relations and the Bias of Technology," in *The Legacy of McLuhan*, 68; Paul Levinson, "McLuhan's Space" *Journal of Communication* 40, no. 2 (1990): 169–173; Levinson, *The Soft Edge* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997); and, Levinson, *Digital McLuhan: A Guide to the Information Millennium* (New York: Routledge, 1999).

> Some of the Romantics had avoided the problem of artifice by stressing poetry as the over-flow of powerful emotions, the expression of one's inner being … Authenticity seemed to lie in this fact of self-expression. It was among the enfeebled descendants of that school of aesthetics that T. S. Eliot dropped a little bomb in 1919. In his essay on Hamlet ["Hamlet and His Problems"], he casually asserted: "The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is finding an 'objective correlative' in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that emotion…"[31]

McLuhan read Eliot's "objective correlative" as solving the problems of communication evoked by his immediate cultural milieu — namely, the (re)discovery of the discontinuous nature of matter (physics), and the usurping of the printed page as the primary medium in favour of communication by wireless telegraphy (communications). Further, as McLuhan notes to Walter Ong, Eliot's technical achievement (that elevates the reader to the status of artist), also cleared the way for a deeper understanding of the Patristics:

> All Platonic and Patristic "philosophy" the basic component (xian [Christian] doctrine aside) is aesthetic. Not the analogy of being but symbolic or metaphorical analogy is involved. *Something is made not defined* … What is made is an objective correlative which is closely related to the mode and nature of our psychological makeup.[32]

In short, McLuhan apprehended the *resonance* between two *figures* — the poetics of Eliot and the writings of the early Church Fathers,[33] and two

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[31] McLuhan to Eugene Schwartz, 30 July 1970.

[32] McLuhan to Walter Ong, November 5, 1947. Emphasis mine. C.f. Hugh Kenner, *The Pound Era*, 61 á propos Pound's reduction of "the whole of art" to "concision…"

[33] A (resonant) "bond" that extends beyond technique. Eliot's view, as McLuhan notes in "Typhon in America," is that everyone is responsible for the sins of the society to which they belong. It is a view, he adds, that is the "original" view of individualist responsibility for community welfare (out of which emerges the vision of the *res publica*) that existed prior to what he refers to as the Machievellian split and the subsequent rejection of the

grounds — the 20ᵗʰ century quantum universe and electric telecommunications, and the orchestral cosmology of the ancients ("in the beginning was the word"):

> Bacon's organic approach, I suggest, is derived from the multi-levelled exegesis of the book of nature and scripture alike. *The simultaneity of all levels in ancient grammatica coincides with the twentieth century quantum mechanics which is concerned with the physical and chemical bond of nature as the "resonant interval."* The acoustic simultaneity of the new physics co-exists with the "synchrony" and structuralism in language and literature and anthropology as understood in Ferdinand Saussure and Levi Strauss. For St. Bonaventure likewise "synchrony" or acoustic simultaneous structuralism presented no problems …. Today the submicroscopic world of electronics has once more attuned our senses to the acoustic properties of natural phenomenon and the arts, *rendering contemporary* both the "science" of Bacon and the science of theological exegesis, long familiar to the commentators on both the natural and Sacred Page.[34]

As we see in the "Einsteinian Space-Time Relativity" section of McLuhan's tetrad charts for the evolution of ideas, the new physics retrieved the "immeasurable void" that is analogous to the "void(s)" that the Patristics frequently grappled with, e.g. in trying to explicate the relationship of God the Father with his creation, and the use of human language to talk about the "Holy Mystery":[35]

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basic conviction and definition of mans rational soul and his abiding shape and human. McLuhan, "Typhon in America, typescript III," MS., 78–80.

[34] McLuhan, "Bacon, Ancient or Modern?," *Renaissance and Reformation* X, no. 2 (1974): 94–95, 98. Emphasis mine.

[35] In the closing years of his life McLuhan offered another parallel — between T. S. Eliot and Empedocles. In "Empedocles and T. S. Eliot," McLuhan notes how Aristotle could not apprehend Empedocles, and that it is only now, when both the Greek and Newtonian 'nature' can be seen as merely visual systems of classification, that the nature of Empedocles resumes its relevance. He adds that Eliot's *Four Quartets* can be understood as the fulfilment of Empedocles cosmology: Burnt Norton (air), East Coker (earth), Dry Salvages (water), Little Giddings (fire). McLuhan, "Empedocles and T. S.

Figure xx. (Tetrad Charts for the Evolution of Ideas: Theories of Motion, in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 19. ed., W. Terrence Gordon (Corte Madera, CA.: Ginko, 2005), 14–15)

	Aristotle's Law of Motion	Impetus	Inertia (Newton's 1st Law of Motion)	Acceleration (Newton's 2nd Law of Motion)
Intensifies	prime mover Zeus	transitory character of Motion	isolation (*abstraction of figure from ground*)	causative sequence (*continuous force*)
Obsolesces	animism	prime mover	change (*interaction of figure and ground*)	inertia
Retrieves	moral order Heraclitus	animism (*Divine Animal*)	homeostasis (*static balance*)	kinetic equilibrium
Reverses into	impetus	inertia (stasis)	acceleration	simultaneity (*interaction-retroaction electric polarity*)

	Reaction (Newton's 3rd Law of Motion)	Copernican Revolution	Einsteinian Space-Time Relativity
Intensifies	action/reaction Simultaneity (*equilibrium*)	the sun as central	interplay & flux of space/time (*interchangeability of figure/ground*)
Obsolesces	the sequential	the earth	absolute space and Time (*Newtonian measuring sticks*)
Retrieves	Euclidean geometry; Aristotle	Aristarchus (*sun-centred*)	non-measurable void (*resonant interval*)
Reverses into	relativity (*disequilibrium – Quantum mechanics*)	relativity	the next law of Physics (*not yet discovered…*)

This alone goes a long way towards helping explain McLuhan's readiness to "update" his traditional inheritance by way of appropriating from the Men of 1914 — keeping in mind of course that a readiness to update is the latent heritage of the great tradition. As McLuhan notes in his doctoral work:

Eliot," in Helle Lambridis, *Empedocles: A Philosophical Investigation* (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 1975).

There is a luminous page of his study of *The Spirit of Medieval Philosophy* in which Professor Gilson points to the self-confidence of the Middle Ages that they could improve on the Ancients: "The medievals felt it incumbent upon them to gather up the spoils of this always incomplete success and push on the advance. They saw themselves providentially placed at the crucial point where the whole heritage of ancient thought, absorbed by Christian revelation, was now to multiply a hundredfold. The age of Charlemagne struck men's minds as the coming of an era of enlightenment: *hoc tempore fuit claritas doctrinae*, wrote St. Bonaventure in the full thirteenth century. Then was effected that *translatio studii* which, handing on to France the learning of Rome and Athens, entrusted to Reims and Chartres and Paris the task of adapting this heritage to, and integrating it with, Christian Wisdom'"[36]

McLuhan's observation of the non-linear character of "history" under electric conditions also serves to cast new light on his deployment of the *epyllion* and his tetrads. As I have already shown at some length, one of the resources of the *epyllion* is its ability to orchestrate and reveal just such "continuous parallels."[37] Subsequently, the *epyllion* can be seen as a necessary vehicle for revealing and/or telling the "time" under electric conditions:[38] "In the electric age, however, history no longer presents

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[36] *The Classical Trivium*, 90–91.

[37] "Much of the novelty of the *Portrait*, *Ulysses*, and the *Wake* is an illusion resulting from inattention to technical developments in the arts since Newton. That manipulation of a continuous parallel between modern Dublin and ancient Ithaca was the transfer to the time dimension of a "double-plot," a technique which has been the staple of all picturesque art for two hundred years. De Gourmont observed that one achievement of Flaubert had been the transference of Chateaubriand's panoramic art from nature and history to the industrial metropolis," (McLuhan, "Joyce, Mallarmé, and the Press," in *The Interior Landscape*, 9).

[38] C.f. *Understanding Media*, 70 and McLuhan's commentary on "history" under electric conditions in the Road to *Finnegans Wake* section of Chapter Three.

In his review of *Changing Concepts of Time* McLuhan shows how Innis, bereft of any knowledge of Flaubert and recourse to means of rendering an immediate an inclusive vision of complex social processes, struggled to provide an accurate account

itself as a perspective of continuous visual space, but as an all-at-once and simultaneous presence of all facets of the past. This is what T. S. Eliot calls 'tradition' in his celebrated essay 'Tradition and the Individual Talent.'"[39] The same might be said for McLuhan's tetrads which, like the *epyllion*, are also a rendering of the four parts of metaphor, albeit in an ideogram:[40]

> A four-part analogy is a *figure-ground* structure. (In metaphor there are two *figures* and two *grounds* in ratio to one another.) Apropos the four-part structure which relates to all human artefacts (verbal and non verbal), their existence is certainly not deliberate or intentional…[41]

The tetrads, however, place us in even closer proximity to McLuhan's fundamental coordinates. Firstly, they can be seen as an attempt by McLuhan to present an "image," as articulated by Pound (and, arguably, realised by Eliot in his "objective correlative"), designed to help bring his predominantly North-American audience to the level of verbal awareness of the present-day technological environment (eloquence):

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of history under electric conditions, and was, subsequently, led into making his prose unnecessarily difficult. McLuhan, "Review of Changing Concepts of Time, by Harold A. Innis (1952)." MS., n.pag.

[39] *Through the Vanishing Point*, 257.

[40] "When these questions had been considered with regards to dozens of media and technologies, there came a surprising discovery, namely that all extensions of man, verbal or non-verbal, hardware or software, are *essentially* metaphoric in structure, and that they are in the plenary sense linguistic, a fact long accepted by the Bambara and Dogon tribes, among many others," McLuhan, "The Laws of the Media," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 19, 7.

It is relevant to note that the four parts of metaphor, two figures and two grounds, is also a description of the *epyllion* (in its most basic form) and the "split brain" according to Robert Ornstein. As Ornstein notes in *The Right Mind*, the "split brain" can be accurately described as a situation involving two systems (figures?) contained within two larger complexes (grounds?). See Robert Ornstein, *The Right Mind: Making Sense of the Hemispheres*. New ed. (New York: Harvest, 1998), 79.

[41] McLuhan, "The Laws of the Media," 7.

> An "Image" is that which presents an intellectual and emotional complex in an instant of time. I use the term "complex" rather in the technical sense employed by the newer psychologists, such as Hart, though we might not absolutely agree in our application. [42]

Secondly, they are also an attempt to build a better "reader" by updating the "tradition" that uses grammar and etymology to investigate and natural phenomena (reading the book of the world):

> A brief consideration of Stoic philosophy will serve to indicate how the study of language and poetry could become completely wedded to the study of physics and ethics. Vernon Arnold's fine study of *Roman Stoicism* points out the influence of the Chaldeans, who "in or about the year 2800 B.C., mapped out the constellations as we now know them, traced the orbits of the planets, and predicted their future movements," and whose work was "stimulated by the belief that the skies displayed a written message to mankind." From the Chaldean teaching, Arnold goes on to say, citing the authority of Cicero and Seneca, "two principles seem to have survived, those of the inexorable tie between cause and effect called 'fate,' and of the interdependence of events in heaven and on earth." For the Stoics, however, the doctrine of fate is quite reconcilable with the doctrine of the Providential government of the world, and "further, beside the personal and material conceptions of the deity, they adopted and developed a conception which exercised an extraordinary influence over other systems, when they attributed the exercise of all the powers of deity to the divine Word, which from one point of view is the deity, himself, and from another is something which emanates from him and is in some way distinct." Confronted with the great doctrine of the Logos, it is, perhaps easier to understand how grammar and etymology should have been esteemed as

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[42] Ezra Pound, "A Stray Document," in *Make It New: Essays by Ezra Pound* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1935), 336. Like Pound's account of the workings of Chinese characters, McLuhan's tetrads bear their "metaphors" on their face." In them, as with the Chinese character (at least according to Fenollosa and Pound), we "do not seem to be juggling mental counters, but to be watching things work out their own fate" — the etymology of technologies, which are "words," are "constantly visible." See Earnest Fenollosa, *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, Ed., Ezra Pound (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 1969), 9, 25. C.f. McLuhan, "James Joyce: Trivial and Quadrivial," in *The Interior Landscape*, 45 cited in Chapter Three.

means of investigating both the nature of deity and the natures of phenomena.[43]

In the Kingdom of the Blind

There are several additional matters that could be raised at this point. Not least that Eliot's articulation of the "objective correlative" (and Pound's articulation of the "image") might well be regarded as central to McLuhan's aesthetic and poetic analysis of new media forms.[44] However, since this matter is readily borne out in McLuhan's own writings it is more expedient at this juncture to see how McLuhan's appropriation of Eliot's techniques, particularly those that shift his readers from a passive to active role, set him on a path that would result in the McLuhan "explosion" reversing its character. Our starting point in the matter is to consider another of McLuhan's dichotomies used extensively during the late 1960s and early 1970s: the contrast between "making" or "total dramatic participation," and "matching" or "spectatorship."[45]

In *Through the Vanishing Point* McLuhan presents the modern telegraphic press as a "magical," symbolist structure that demands that

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[43] *The Classical Trivium,* 20. Here we also see how McLuhan's work relates to the quadrivial "discipline" of astrology. This matter can, however, only receive mention here.

[44] See McLuhan, "Media Alchemy in Art and Society," *Journal of Communication,* volume 8, 2 (summer 1958): 63–67. C.f. McLuhan, "The Aesthetic Moment in Landscape Poetry," in The Interior Landscape, 165 and *Laws of Media*, 15. Further, it is, arguably, McLuhan's "expanded" reading of the implications of the "objective correlative" that informs his realisation of the significance of John Lindberg's *The Foundations of Social Survival*: "…But, he argues, we now have the key to the creative process which brings all cultures into existence (namely the extension into social institutions of the central form and mystery of the human cognitive process). And it is this key which he proposes to deliver into the hands of a world government," (McLuhan, "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters," in *The Medium and the Light*, 174).

[45] McLuhan to Wilfred and Sheila Watson, 15 December 1967.

its reader or user enter "darkness," or space of the interval between items, and become a "maker" rather than "matcher":

> The daily newspaper is an interesting example of this fact. The items in daily news press are totally discontinuous and totally unconnected. The only unifying feature of the press is the date line. Through the date line the reader must go, as Alice went, "through the looking glass." … Once he goes through the date line, he is involved in a world of items for which he, the reader, must write the story line. *He makes the news*, as the reader of a detective story makes the plot.[46]

Despite the new orientation evoked and required by the form, McLuhan reveals how both the reader of the form and the journalist largely remained in a state of perceptual retardation.[47] One of the symptoms, as he notes in "The Genuine Original Imitation Fake," is that the journalistic fraternity remain confused in the face of questions concerning "fake" versus "real" art. The reason, he asserts, is that the journalists struggle with the transition from "matching" to "making" — they continue in their quest for the hidden selves behind the "images" given that they "are still working on matching rather than making as the criterion for truth":[48]

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[46] *Through the Vanishing Point*, 251. Emphasis mine. Here we also see McLuhan imply that those figures involved in creating "content" for the new electric forms often exhibit sensibilities that are at odds with the actual forms to which they are contributing. This matter can, however, receive only passing mention here.

[47] "Ordinary human instinct," McLuhan and Parker state, "causes people to recoil from these new environments and to rely on the rear-view mirror as a kind of repeat or *recorso* of the preceding environment, thus insuring total disorientation at all times," (*Through the Vanishing Point*, xxiii).

[48] McLuhan, "The Genuine Original Imitation Fake," *McLuhan DEW-Line Newsletters* 2, no. 6 (May/June 1970): 8. Later in the piece McLuhan turns to a discussion of how the work of Flaubert, Baudelaire and the Symbolists has become the basis of modern advertising — given that advertisers have to "put on" their publics to create the image the public requires. He adds that, as a result, the public becomes co-producer instead of consumer, which is a transition from the real, personal, private image to an acceptance

> Many of the misconceptions about art, phoney and phonetic, are rooted in the common illusion that the genuine or the truth or the real is a faithful matching or repeat in one material of something that exists in another material.[49]

Subsequently, in a bid to train perception and update the sensibility of his audience, McLuhan set about trying to facilitate the transition and an understanding of both "sides." A substantial part of his duet of the period was devoted specifically to this task: "The function of new art is to reorganize perception and impulse. The role of art may be to tune human senses and faculties in new strategies of relevance," without which we become robots, that is become adjusted and drift into lethargy.[50] For example, in *Take Today* McLuhan asserts: "To illustrate that changeover, from *matching* to *making*, from acquisition to involvement, and from job holding to role playing is the object of the present book."[51] He also set about deploying a number of rhetorical tactics in his performances dedicated (at least in part) to realising the same ends.

One site where we can see McLuhan at work in this regard is an interview by Mike Wallace that took place during the early years of the "explosion." As one would expect, Wallace's questions prompt McLuhan to traverse and replay several of his core themes. Eventually, however, Wallace seeks to get at the "private" and personal man behind the

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of the fact that *the most real thing about us might be what we put on of others and of the extensions of ourselves in technology* (Ibid., 8). Emphasis mine.

[49] Ibid., 4. McLuhan adds that, in his essay on "Hamlet," T. S. Eliot seems to be saying that all art is a fake — to "make" something is, essentially, to "fake" since all making is factitious by definition — "the artist," as "maker," is always in quest of a colossal fiction.

[50] McLuhan, "The Implications of Cultural Uniformity," MS., 8.

[51] *Take Today*, 265. "Being a role player is really being an impostor – what we need are more impostors," McLuhan, "Watergate — Participatory Torture, Says McLuhan," Excerpts from McLuhan's address at Osgoode Hall, 17 October 1973. *Campus* 6, no. 3 (November 1973): 4.

"mask" by way of quizzing McLuhan on his Catholicism and his "puzzling" absence of a moral stance.[52] Wallace asks: "If there is none of the moralist in you, then why did you convert?"[53] Wallace's question here, with its "if-then" logic, drives to get inside the monad,[54] the singular "point" of observation that would supposedly bring all the lines of his prior investigation into an intelligible focus. It appears that Wallace assumes that communication is "something that happens all the time,"[55] and that once a single or privileged point of observation is established then the weight of McLuhan's "dazzling" observations can be rendered intelligible, able to be categorized, and shown as emanating from and able to be *matched* back onto this single node — McLuhan is a Catholic and this is all you need to know![56] In other words, consciously or

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[52] By the mid-1960s it was widely known that McLuhan was a convert to Roman Catholicism. The history and more personal and private matter surrounding McLuhan's conversion is well documented in the biographies of W. Terrence Gordon and Philip Marchand.

[53] McLuhan, interviewed by Mike Wallace, "Marshall McLuhan and Mike Wallace: A Dialogue," The Diebold Research Program Document, PP10 (New York: The Diebold Group, 1966): 6.

[54] In "Mr. Eliot's Cubist Aesthetic" McLuhan conducts a comparison between the fully developed cubist sensibility of T. S. Eliot with that of the newspaper journalists of the day. The cubist sensibility, McLuhan asserts, seeks to see and know its objects scientifically, without any sort of illusion or flattery. If the object under observation is in motion, it is perhaps snapped, temporarily, but always put back in motion again by way of a series of stills. By contrast, McLuhan shows that the sensibility of the contemporary journalist seeks to know its object by getting "inside the monad," (McLuhan, "Mr Eliot's Cubist Aesthetic," MS., 4–5, 6 in "The Great Tom").

[55] C.f. McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," in *Media Research*, 69. Cited in Chapter One.

[56] In some respects, Wallace can be regarded as a "counterpoint" to James Costigan, who, as we have seen in Chapter One, was faced with similar dilemma — how to read and make sense of McLuhan. During the course of his study and meditations of McLuhan's oeuvre, however, he took the other path — that is, he opted for a programme of "making" rather than matching, claiming that we need to approach

otherwise, Wallace seeks to shift the attention of the audience away from McLuhan's written works and his "performance" during the interview, and deny both any independent artistic status. Essentially, Wallace seeks to "consume" McLuhan and effect a reverse transmutation, from gold to lead[57] — to transform McLuhan's art and utterance into a biographical and/or historical document of his "personality," moral character, "beliefs," and in so doing perhaps also clear the way for some wider discussion (necessarily speculative) of his "ideas" and the context and conditions of the day.[58] Faced with Wallace's question, McLuhan deliberately refuses to answer his interlocutor directly. Rather, he offers a short monologue, which on closer inspection can be seen as something of a cubist portrait or polyphonic medley inviting multi-levelled interpretation, albeit delivered with one voice. There are four elements to McLuhan's reply, and in none of them do we see the "conventional" appeals to *ethos* or *pathos*: (1) McLuhan asserts that one of the most deplored sins of Roman Catholicism is moral judgement: "To judge anybody is considered very grave." "Moralism" he asserts, "has been the bane of religion because it converges out various focal points," and "any theologian," he claims, "will bear him out" on this matter. (2) McLuhan continues, offering what appears to be a "personal" or "private" comment: "I have no objection to morals or propagating morality

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McLuhan's outputs as he intended them to be, as fellow explorers (and, by extension, as fellow "makers").

[57] Keeping in mind that McLuhan's "gold," as much as that of Ben Jonson or the Madison Avenue creative-type, was made from refuse — the egg tarnished spoons, ashtrays, Cadillacs, advertisements, and a good many other items of "junk" considered anterior to the mainstream of life.

[58] See Alvin Kernan, *The Cankered Muse* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 2.

because I am sure that it makes life more liveable."[59] (3) McLuhan then suggests that a head-on approach to any "problem" is not a very serious strategy of encountering reality because attacking a thing head-on is really a form of secret support. (4) Finally, McLuhan concludes his "monologue," noting that people regard the Church as a moral institution while it has done much to keep people in touch with all sorts of realities, not just moral.[60]

In some respects the example cited above is not great. It is a record of a conversation exhibiting little in the way of the energy and compression that McLuhan achieves through writing and rewriting. It does, however, enable us to see how McLuhan actively sought to create ample gaps for audience participation, which in turn are presumably intended to facilitate the contemplation of the contrast between Wallace's conformity to his "idols" — of simplicity, point of view, and "matching" — and McLuhan's full developed post-Cubist sensibility befitting electric conditions.

The McLuhan–Wallace dialogue also establishes a platform from which we can consider some of the characteristics of McLuhan's pattern of response during the "explosion" because his response here is not an

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[59] McLuhan adds that he is not in favour of sexual promiscuity any more than "metaphysical" promiscuity.

[60] It is just this sort of posturing that led Hugh Kenner, McLuhan's former student, to portray "McLuhan" as a multi-faceted entity: "there is not one McLuhan but three: the genius, the gear stripper, and what you imagine the Delphic Oracle must have been like. Within these three resides a "goblin" that unnerves criticism by the "paradigmatic force of his routine exercises," (Hugh Kenner, "Understanding McLuhan," in *McLuhan: Pro and Con*, 24). Similarly, from outside of the academy, Bob Dobbs presents "McLuhan as cyborg and floating, winking tetrad," given his "conscious strategy of mirroring and testing the conventional 'schizophrenic' lives of the ordinary citizen," (Bob Dobbs, "McLuhan and Holeopathic Quadrophrenia: The Mouse-That-Roared Syndrome," in *The Legacy of Marshall McLuhan*, 87).

anomaly. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s McLuhan frequently presents his works as developing out of a deep intra-personal dialogue, and he uses the private/corporate Finnegan image dichotomy extensively:

> **Belfond**: do you think the children of today should try and get back to the old methods of education?
> **McLuhan**: I never make any value judgement. On the other hand, if you want me to make my personal preferences explicit, I would certainly wish to get rid of electricity. Because I know at the speed of light, Western man cannot continue to exist without a body. Because when you do not have a body, you have no natural law, there is no gravity, no morals. Electronic man has no morals.[61]

McLuhan not only refused to make "public" value judgments for his audience, he refused, publicly and privately, to offer anything in the way of overt theological statement (other than occasionally registering his assent to *all* Catholic doctrine). For example, in the now famous "Hot and Cool" interview, McLuhan acknowledges that while his work has "profound religious meaning" he has no intension of making it explicit:[62]

> There have been many more religious men than I who have not made even the most faltering steps in this direction. Once I began to move in this direction, I began to see that it had profound religious meaning. I do not think it my job to point this out. For

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[61] McLuhan, "Understanding Television: An Interview with Dr. Marshall McLuhan," (8 November 1978), MS., n.pag.

[62] Rather, McLuhan stressed that he would have preferred that the theological and "religious" dimension of his work be dealt with by "theologians" and those within the Church hierarchy: "I would prefer that most questions of that sort be dealt with by theologians, but they do not seem to be interested…," (McLuhan, "Keys to the Electronic Revolution: First Conversation with Pierre Babin," in *The Medium and the Light*, 45). Similarly, McLuhan writes to Henderson: "I have often tried to interest Catholic philosophers and theologians in the fact that the electric age is incompatible with the Graeco-Roman basis of the visible church, but have so far failed to interest a single one. There is an even more sinister aspect to electronic man, — he is discarnate. This fact will shortly create chaos in the ranks of the theologians," (McLuhan to Larry Henderson, 20 October 1975). C.f. Rorem's discussion of Letter 8: Issues of Hierarchy and Authority in *Pseudo-Dionysius*, 18–19.

example, the Christian concept of the mystical body — all men as members of the body of Christ — this becomes technologically a fact under electronic conditions. However, I would not try to theologize on the basis of my understanding of technology. I don't have a background in scholastic thought, never having been raised in any Catholic institution. Indeed, I have been bitterly reproached by my Catholic confreres for my lack of scholastic terminology and concepts.[63]

Similarly, writing to Allen Maruyama "privately" McLuhan states:

I associate myself with the Greek or Roman tradition of man's rationality and its relation to natural law. I accept all of the Catholic revelation and doctrine concerning man's nature and its relation to the sacraments. I have no hesitation in generalizing on this basis but I do not consider it my business when discussing the technological extensions of man.[64]

Perhaps the only overtly theological statement McLuhan ever made was in regards to the Incarnation during an interview with Babin:

A new doctrine is needed that should have been promulgated one hundred years ago: at the instant of Incarnation, the structure of the universe was changed. All of creation was remade. There was a new physics, a new matter, a new world. The doctrine would enable modern man to take the Church much more seriously. The moment God touched matter its very structure was altered, its potency was enormously enhanced. So was man's. Modern science is aware of this, not necessarily as revealed truth, but simply as truth.[65]

In short, McLuhan's rhetoric during the "explosion" is directed towards trying to get his audience active, to participate and *make* — to think for themselves! Nearly every tactic he deploys is dedicated to this end, including his appeals to *logos*, to rationality by way of *apophasis*, and his adoption of Eliot's tactic of presenting himself as an explorer, unwilling

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[63] McLuhan, "The Hot and Cool Interview," 46.

[64] McLuhan to Allen Maruyama, 11 January 1972.

[65] McLuhan, "The De-Romanization of the American Catholic Church," in *The Medium and the Light*, 55.

to explain.[66] Further, as we see in "Education in the Electronic Age," he deliberately went out of his way to be difficult:

> Here is another thought for you that is very controversial. I don't see any point in making anything but controversial statements. There is no other way of getting attention at all. I mean you cannot get people thinking until you say something that really shocks them; dislocates them. That is the way the arts work; the painters, the poets, all work like that. They work by dislocation of attention. That is why new styles are necessary for perception. The function of arts is training in perception. It is not instruction. It is to train your ability to see and use your senses.[67]

His comments here are entirely consistent with his comments in his review of *A Hopkins Reader*: "The function of new art is to reorganize perception and impulse so that an art that does not disturb or annoy, at first, is meaningless."[68] And he may also be taken here as reiterating the earlier charge of Eliot made in the "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921):

> We can only say that it appears likely that poets in our civilization, as it exists at present, must be *difficult*. Our civilization comprehends great variety and complexity, and this variety and complexity, playing upon a refined sensibility, must produce various and complex results. The poet must become more and

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[66] "One of the reasons for Eliot's power over the mind of his time was that he never explained his cryptic and seemingly paradoxical statements. His readers had ample opportunity for participation and involvement," (McLuhan, "James Joyce, Playboy of the West-end World," MS., 2).

[67] McLuhan, "Education in the Electronic Age," *Interchange* 1, no. 4 (1970): 5. The role appears to have been particularly well suited to the "private" McLuhan's temperament. In one of his letters to his Mother in 1932, he recounts the proceedings at a recent Monday night debate where the question arose, "was Jesus a Jew?" McLuhan says to his mother that he found the question absurd, but in order that the religious point was not lost he proposed an alternative question for the group to consider: "Could Jesus have led a successful military operation?" He goes on to note how the question fuelled debate long into the night, and how "they," the figures with whom McLuhan was dialoguing, maintained old orthodox views while he sought to deal with philosophy, science, metaphysics etc. McLuhan to Elsie McLuhan, 1932.

[68] McLuhan, review of *A Hopkins Reader*, ed. By John Pick, MS., 9.

more comprehensive, more allusive, more indirect, in order to force, to dislocate if necessary, language into his meaning.[69]

One of the effects of the sum of McLuhan's public postures and/or impostures, in both print and performance, and apparent "ambivalence" (captured by Sorel Etrog's portrait of McLuhan below), was that it served to puzzle nearly everyone, including a number of his fellow Catholics. For example, we can hear echoes of Edward Wakin's confusion in his remarks regarding the apparent incongruity between McLuhan's "steadfast statements of faith" and the "statements and observations that are not at all tranquilizing and certainly not comforting to the conservative Catholicism with which McLuhan seems to identify himself."[70]

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[69] T. S. Eliot, "The Metaphysical Poets" (1921) cited in McLuhan, "Eliot, and the Rhetoric of The Waste Land," *New Literary History* 10, no. 3 (Spring, 1979): 560.

[70] McLuhan, "Our Only Hope is Apocalypse," in *The Medium and The Light*, 58.

Figure xxi. (Sorel Etrog, "Marshall McLuhan," 1976)
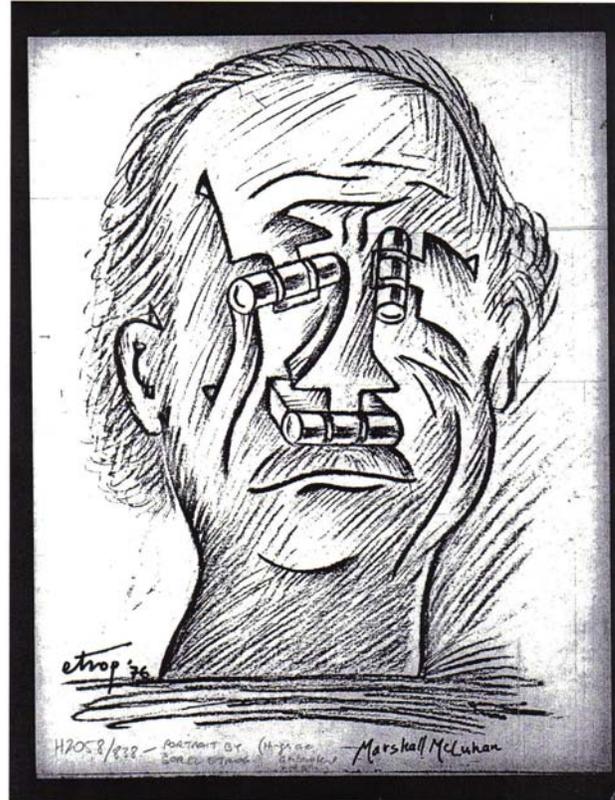
The cloud of confusion that surrounded McLuhan gave rise to a situation
where several of his critics and commentators, particularly those who
valued "sincerity"[71] over "intelligibility," felt that something "odd" was
going on. For some, the surplus of "meaning" his work generated served
to promote wild hallucination and judgement — McLuhan was seen as
hiding something and this was construed as "problematic."[72]

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[71] See McLuhan, "Masks, Roles and the Corporate Image," MS., 63. Cited in Chapter
Three.

[72] E.g. Milton Klonsky gets "a feeling" that behind McLuhan's dichotomies a "weird
allegory" is being produced in which the five senses are personified as actors engaged
in a struggle for the human psyche, and sight is finally exposed as an agent of Lucifer,
racked up, and made to confess. Milton Klonsky, "Mc2Luhan's Message Or: Which Way
Did the Second Coming Went?" 137.

For a period, the energy and confusion his strategy and tactics generated appears to have served a number of ends.[73] It made him great "content," and aided in elongating his staying power. But "opposition" was growing quickly. A number of his critics and commentators began to add to an already growing hostile barrage of criticism, using the confusion as an alibi to attack and/or critique McLuhan's outputs on explicitly "religious" and "theological" grounds; e.g. Anthony Burgess, Arthur Cohen, Theodore Roszak, and the Cambridge Apostle, Jonathan Miller.[74] In turn, the "abuse value" of what was taken by some as "Catholic bashing" won McLuhan several additional allies at a time when he was already "suffering" celebrated acclaim.[75] Increasingly it began to appear that McLuhan's strategy of declining to offer any overt judgments, "theological statements," and not mounting "a vehement moralistic campaign against electronic technology," so as to avoid becoming involved "in countless absurdities of misunderstanding,"[76] was

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[73] Leveraging off "abuse value" was always a feature of McLuhan's praxis. Writing to Lewis, McLuhan recounts the reception to his article "Dagwood's America" in which he documents how America has swung towards the feminine pole of the axis in recent years: "…wow! What an outburst of feminine rage, what clawing and screaming over my phrases … Of course the author is a male. He identifies himself with Dagwood." He continues, noting that the response to his article represents that of the average guy, and registers that he "…will now write a book feeling sure that his article will ensure it being published," (McLuhan to Wyndham Lewis, 27 January 1944). The "book" eventually appeared as *The Mechanical Bride*.

[74] Anthony Burgess, "The Modicum is the Message," in *McLuhan: Pro and Con*; Arthur Cohen, "Doomsday in Dogpatch: The McLuhan Thesis," in *McLuhan: Pro and Con*; Theodore Roszak, "The Summa Popologica of Marshall McLuhan," in *McLuhan: Pro and Con*; Jonathan Miller, *McLuhan*. Also see Richard Deacon, *The Cambridge Apostles: A History of Cambridge University's Elite Intellectual Secret Society* (London: Robert Royce, 1985).

[75] "To reward and to make celebrities of artists can, also, be a way of ignoring their prophetic work, and preventing its timely use for survival," (*Understanding Media*, 65).

[76] McLuhan to Robert Manning, 21 July 1971.

merely an alternative means of earning a slightly different set of equally absurd misunderstandings.[77] The net effect of this energized, over-heated, and volatile situation saw the McLuhan "explosion" flip and implode even faster than it had exploded:

> To introduce understanding into a somnambulistic society is perhaps a kind of explosive and satirical activity. But the public has its revenge. In the kingdom of the blind, the one-eyed man is regarded as a hallucinated idiot.[78]

In many respects, the above mentioned comments made by McLuhan in a letter to *The Listener* in 1970 might also be read as an account of the fate of his own corporate or iconic image. By 1971, seemingly overnight, the iconic image of McLuhan was vilified and he became something of a scapegoat and figure to be ridiculed.[79]

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[77] Theall documents how McLuhan's work also rapidly fell into disrepute on account of his public relations driven techniques. Donald F. Theall, *Beyond the Word: Reconstructing Sense in the Joyce Era of Technology, Culture, and Communication* (Toronto and Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 1995), xvi.

[78] McLuhan, "Reply to 'Northrop Frye on Communications,'" *The Listener* (London), 8 October 1970, 6. It is relevant that here we see McLuhan playing with Erasmus' well known remarks regarding the one-eyed man being *king* in the kingdom of the blind.

[79] Which, in many respects, persists to the present day. See Jeffrey.

Figure xxii. (Anthony Jenkins, "Marshall McLuhan.")

Magnetic City

At this point we need to pause and turn to consider how McLuhan saw
the situation of his day. Perhaps the best introduction to the matter is to
begin by noting that, in the 1970s, McLuhan updates his earlier images of
the "global village"[80] and "global theatre."[81] The new image he offers is of
the planet as a "single household with many monitors and conflicting

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[80] "The more you create village conditions, the more discontinuity and division and diversity. The
global village absolutely insures maximal disagreement on all points. It never occurred to me
that uniformity and tranquillity were the properties of the global village. It has more spite and
envy. The spaces and times are pulled out from between people. A world in which people
encounter each other in depth all the time. The tribal-global village is far more divisive – full of
fighting – than any nationalism ever was. Village is fission, not fusion, in depth all the time,"
McLuhan, "Even Hercules Had to Clean the Augean Stables But Once!" in *McLuhan Hot and
Cool*, ed. Gerald E. Stearn (New York, The Dial Press, 1967), 279–280.

[81] *From Cliché to Archetype*, 12.

programs."[82] The household image is an ideal starting point as it brings us to the heart of the problem of recounting McLuhan's diagnosis. Any attempt to discuss what amounts to a single, uninterrupted action will be problematic — and any attempt to recount that vision even more so. Technically speaking, it is not possible to look at one situation through the lens of another if there is no "other," no outside of the singular action. Communicating any understanding of the situation, therefore, might only be done in and through the multiplication of provisional images, and cancellation or negation of those images in a fashion not dissimilar to the apophatic mode and theology that proceeds *via negativa:*[83]

> Technologies begin as anti-environments, as controls, and then become environmental, needing the endless spawning of new anti-environments as controls. Dreams are anti-environment for physiological sleep. Private consciousness is anti-environment for collective unconscious as environment.
>   All technologies are collective unconscious. All arts, science and philosophy are anti-environmental controls that are ever merging into environmental and loosing their power to create awareness of environment. *When arts fail to cope with the environment by being anti-environment then there can be a shift to a rapid succession of innovations as ersatz anti-environments.*[84]

With this in mind I will now offer six of McLuhan's more striking images of the 1970s (which I have not attempted to put in any "pattern" — logical or analogical — on the grounds that, while tempting, this kind of speculative enterprise would involve us in countless

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[82] *Take Today*, 45.

[83] Including the single household: "History need never be orientated towards the past. But today, as we make new media do old jobs, we have an orientation to the past that ensures the destruction of all achieved values. *When the globe becomes a single electronic computer*, all languages and cultures recorded on the single drum, the fixed point of view becomes irrelevant," (McLuhan to David Riesman, 18 February 1960). Emphasis mine.

[84] McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Counterblast*, 30–31. Emphasis mine.

misunderstandings). To some readers McLuhan's diagnosis in the following may appear to be science fiction.[85] It is not irrelevant that McLuhan had claimed that "we live science fiction" in both his review of *The Naked Lunch* and *Nova Express*,[86] and also in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*:

> People of literary and critical bias find the shrill vehemence of de Chardin as disconcerting as his uncritical enthusiasm for the cosmic membrane that has been snapped around the globe by the electric dilation of our various senses. This externalization of our senses creates what de Chardin calls the "noosphere" or technological brain for the world. Instead of tending towards a vast Alexandrian library the world has become a computer, an electronic brain, *exactly as in an infantile piece of science fiction.* And as our senses have gone outside us, Big Brother goes inside. So, unless aware of this dynamic, we shall at once move into a phase of panic terrors, exactly befitting a small world of tribal drums, total interdependence, and superimposed co-existence.[87]

1. Emergence of New Figures

We can get a sense for how McLuhan saw what was to be the last decade of his life by examining his predictions for the 1980s. They emerge from his observation of patterns already present in his day, extrapolated via figure-ground analysis:

> The figure is what appears and the ground is always subliminal. Changes occur in the ground before they occur in the figure. We can project both figure and ground as images of the future using the ground as subplot of subliminal patterns and pressures and effects which actually come before the more or less final figures to which we normally direct our interest.[88]

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[85] As we have already seen, McLuhan readily acknowledges that "the abyss and horror" are dependent on the scrutineer. McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 3 May 1949.

[86] McLuhan, "Notes on Burroughs," in *Media Research*, 90.

[87] *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 32.

[88] McLuhan to Tom Stepp, 26 March 1973. McLuhan adds that it is easy for him to do because he has "devoted nearly all his study to ground." This, McLuhan notes, marks him out from other students of the media.

The 1980s, McLuhan predicted, will see a host of new *figures*:[89] (1) a society of contented non-achievers, (2) the end of Chinese culture,[90] (3) the end of identity, (4) the emergence of a new multi-sub-cultural mosaic, (4) literacy for an elite only, (5) education in an age of amnesia, (6) cubism in sports,[91] (7) the imminent arrival of the computer for home shopping and voting, and (8) the collapse of representative government.[92]

2. "Media" as Unmoved Mover

In "Living at the Speed of Light," in which McLuhan predicted the figures of the 1980s we have just mentioned, McLuhan also predicts the invention of "anti-gravity" as a possible new energy source. Arguably, his ability to make such a claim is that he saw that, during the software

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[89] It is appropriate to start with "figures" insofar as McLuhan and Powers indicate that: "When the ground moves too fast, a condition endemic to the electronic society, only figure is left," (*The Global Village*, 99).

[90] In the article McLuhan meditates on the effects of the Chinese bid to apply the phonetic alphabet to their culture. He concludes that it dooms them to an ever greater explosion, via industrial aggression and enterprise, than anything the Western world has ever experienced. What has taken centuries in the West, McLuhan notes, under electric conditions, could happen in China in a generation. McLuhan, "Living at the Speed of Light – the 80's, version V," MS., 3.

[91] Ibid., 1.

[92] With the disappearance of private identity, representative government (previously based on majority rule and nose counting) will yield to the figures McLuhan referred to as the "polstergeist," the cultural mind readers. Ibid., 10.

      It is relevant to note here that during the late 1960s McLuhan used the same procedure to "predict" the situation of the 1970s. His vision included: (a) a rampage of lawsuits for disservice environments created by old services, (b) the biggest depression ever, (c) with the birth of the computer, the end of childhood and sex as a special interest, (d) role-playing instead of work, (e) the end of the megalopolis on account of the disservices it creates, (f) the end of the east/west dichotomy, (g) the full emergence of the global theatre, and (h) the end of the bureaucratic structure of the Roman Church as "Electric technology ensures universal liturgical lay participation and dissipation of centralist clerical bureaucracy," (McLuhan, "The End of Jobs, The Return of Roles," *Administrative Management* 13, no. 1 (1970): 40).

age, the "principles" of anti-gravity were already operative. As the only "machine" that consumes and produces the same "material" (information), computers were creating more information than they were being "fed." In short, the computer-satellite matrix, the 'software' environment, was exhibiting characteristics that are analogous to the proposed "hardware" "free-energy" generators. In view of these and other similar observations, McLuhan begins to stress that the "media" themselves are becoming autonomous.[93] Perhaps the crux of the matter is expressed in a letter to Jim Davey where McLuhan suggests that the "media" were assuming a character analogous to deity:

> I have only just discovered that St. Thomas Aquinas' idea of instrumentality is that of the "unmoved mover." All media change us and their surround without in any way being changed themselves. In other words, Aquinas also said "the medium is the message," just as he said the user or the cognitive agent is the content…[94]

3. Shrinking, Blurring, and Pulsing

In addition to presenting an image of the planet "shrinking," becoming a "single household" (a condition of "no boundaries and no monopolies of knowledge"),[95] McLuhan tries to show how change itself has become the

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[93] For example, in *Understanding Media* McLuhan notes: "If the formative power in the media are the media themselves, that raises a host of large matters that can only be mentioned here, although they deserve volumes…," (*Understanding Media*, 19–20). He also broaches the matter in the materials associated with the "Project in Understanding New Media." Here McLuhan registers how, as our technology enables us to externalise each of our senses, they constitute a collected sensorium of mankind and are free to enter into new transactions outside us. McLuhan, "Media Log III," MS., 2. Also see *War and Peace in the Global Village*, 36–37.

[94] McLuhan to J. M. Davey, 7 May 1971. Jim Davey was on the staff for the Office of the Canadian Prime Minister, Pierre E. Trudeau as a policy advisor. The theme has since been developed by one of McLuhan's associates and friends. See Tony Schwartz, *Media: The Second God* (Garden City, NY.: Anchor, 1983).

[95] *Take Today*, 232.

main staple and "…change alone has any semblance of reality."[96] One of the best images McLuhan offers as a means of apprehending the character of the new situation can be seen in "A Media Approach to Inflation":

> Perhaps there is no better way of indicating the discontinuous simultaneous pattern of the new situation in economics and society than to point to the nature of the TV image, which is structured by innumerable pulsations which move toward the viewer through the monitor. The TV image is literally constituted by a mesh or mosaic of live intervals which provide an overwhelming inducement to involvement on the part of the TV audience. The entire world of electric information now presents pulsating intervals for the intervention and involvement of the world population.[97]

Naturally, under these conditions, old categories and figures tend to blur and disappear. New figures spring up only to submerge again in a blur, and formerly identifiable categories, e.g. artist, frontiersman, and enemy, push towards invisibility:[98]

> Today the end of steel is no mere metaphor, since the 'hardware' now disappears inside the computer by design; but the new frontier is as invisible as a radio wave. There are no tracks to identify or locate the new frontiersman, even nostalgically. He has neither retrospect nor prospect in his instant space-time field. It is all pasts and all futures in an eternal present.[99]

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[96] Ibid., 154.

[97] McLuhan, "A Media Approach to Inflation," *The New York Times* (Saturday, 21 September 1974).

[98] This theme has since been developed at length by Paul Virilio who has made great use of McLuhan's diagnosis of the effects of speed-up: "With acceleration there is no more here and there, only the mental confusion of near and far, present and future, real and unreal — a mix of history, stories, and the hallucinatory utopia of communication technologies," Paul Virilio, *The Art of the Motor*, trans. Julie Rose (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 35.

[99] *Take Today*, 90.

Older media "forms" too, that were formerly invisible environments, become visible as *figures* and are caught up in this shrinking, blurring, and pulsing action. Under the proscenium arch of the satellite, older forms are shown as enacting something of a drama of pseudo-Ovidian metamorphosis.[100] Again, it is a theme mentioned, albeit briefly, in *Understanding Media*.[101] It is, however, most visible in his proposed musical-cum-neo-beast epic, "Every Man in His Media or Medium," where a multiplicity of old *forms* take the place of the obsolesced East-West dichotomy.

This shrinking, blurring, and pulsing action, McLuhan shows, also serves to inform the very "tone" of the decade. From the 1970s he documents how the age of boredom, which had earlier supplanted the age of anxiety, was in turn giving way to an age of rapid oscillation or phase shifting (pulsating intervals) between ecstasy (and the thrills of widespread festive celebration),[102] and paranoia (or a state of "…panic terrors, exactly befitting a small world of tribal drums, total interdependence, and superimposed coexistence").[103] McLuhan saw that paranoia was evoked when: (a) there is a pervasive feeling that every kind of change affects everything else,[104] (b) there is a general awareness

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[100] See *War and Peace*, 190.

[101] "Today not only clock-time, but the wheel itself, is obsolescent and is retracting into animal form under the impulse of greater and greater speeds," (*Understanding Media*, 152).

[102] See McLuhan, "The Medieval Environment: Yesterday or Today," MS., 3.

[103] *Gutenberg Galaxy*, 32.

[104] McLuhan, "Violence Of The Media," MS., 3. "It seems to me that with ecology we have rediscovered causation, recognising that everything effects [sic] everything," (McLuhan to Lynn White, 28 January 1971).

that the technological game is out of control,[105] and (c) "war" becomes the "environment" of our time.[106]

4. The End of Invisible Environments

One of the most striking differences between McLuhan's diagnosis of the 1970s and his earlier reports is that he registers the end of hidden environments. Having reached something of a threshold, McLuhan apprehended that something of a "flip" or reversal had occurred, pushing all former hidden environments into full visibility:[107]

> The patterns of formerly hidden processes now begin to obtrude on every hand. Prescience, prophetic vision, and artistic awareness are no longer needed to establish an understanding of the most secret causes of personal and social processes. Mere electric speed-up makes X-ray awareness natural.[108]

Arguably, one of the contributing factors appears to have been that the rapidly maturing computer-satellite matrix served to consolidate the retrieval of "human scale" that had emerged with the Bomb:

> From the moment of Hiroshima and The Bomb we had positive proof that information as such had become the new sinews of war. By complementarity, the same pervasive use of information had created an environment of learning for war, business, and education alike. Paradoxically, the overkill via sheer knowledge *returned men to sudden recognition of the precious significance of the*

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[105] McLuhan, "Living at the Speed of Light – the 80's, version V," MS., 2. McLuhan adds, actually, "western technology has been out of control for 2,500 years."

[106] McLuhan, "Identity, Technology and War," *U.S. Catholic Jubilee* 35, no. 1 (1970): 37.

[107] That said, McLuhan will continue to refer to the hidden ground when addressing an audience less familiar with his work.

[108] *Take Today*, 193. "At the speed of light the unconscious tends to surface and to move up into consciousness, so that what Freud set out to do in 1900 in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, has now been pretty well accomplished. In the 1970's the unconscious has surfaced, and we are now confronting it as our new consciousness of group responsibility," (McLuhan, "address at Alliance for Life Festival, Ottawa, 6 May 1977.").

> *human scale*. The classic wisdom of nothing in excess was
> resurrected by this instant of hideous strength when everything
> was in excess. The human scale that had been submerged during a
> century of industrial gigantism was instantly and unforgettably
> retrieved.[109]

As a consequence of formerly hidden environments becoming visible, McLuhan was moved to suggest that Lewis Mumford might "be quite correct in seeing the wedding of the old mechanical hardware and the new electric software as creating a megamachine of the Aztec or Pyramid type."[110] The complex North American megamachines, e.g. the US\$ 53 billion per year advertising industry for the manipulation of the public psyche or the equally vast security systems,[111] McLuhan shows, begin to stand out, stark, and everywhere visible.[112] So too does the mystery of the human heart:

> After centuries of confronting the hidden and twisted motives of
> social men, it came as a mighty deliverance through
> mechanization to slough off humanity altogether. The alibi for
> their gesture was absolute equality, albeit in nonentity. As we
> return to role playing under the impulse of electric circuitry, *we*

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[109] *Take Today*, 150. Writing in 1943, McLuhan had noted that the technological landscape introduced conditions of sub-human chaos by abolishing "human scale," desolating of human community, and reducing man to his lowest common denominator as consuming animal. McLuhan, "Education of Freemen in Democracy: The Liberal Arts," *St Louis University Studies in Thomas Aquinas*, 1 (1943): 49.

[110] McLuhan, "The Case of the Unhappy Medium," MS., 17.

[111] McLuhan, "A Last Look at the Tube," MS., 5.

[112] McLuhan is otherwise fairly critical of Lewis Mumford's methodology and visa versa. Mumford asserts that McLuhan is not only hostile to the printed word, but gives his support for the "purely physical assault on books," and would bestow human kind with "the gift of total illiteracy," reinstating the "compulsions of the pyramid age as a desirable feature of the totalitarian electronic complex," (Lewis Mumford, *The Myth of the Machine: The Pentagon of Power* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1970), 294–5, 339.

also confront once more the mysteries of both malignancy and magnanimity in the human heart.[113]

5. Organs Without Bodies

McLuhan's charge that we are confronted once again with the mystery of the human heart takes on new significance when we consider what stands as his most striking image of the condition of man in the new decade. From the 1970s McLuhan turns to stress that technologically speaking, we now seem to have gone beyond T. S. Eliot's "Hollow Men."[114] When man has extended his central nervous system, McLuhan appears to have seen that he becomes a collection of organs without a body — endowed with super-angelic qualities. Not even the angels of Aquinas had this power to be everywhere at once:[115]

> On the telephone, or on the air, man is in every sense discarnate, existing as an abstract image, a *figure* without a body. The Cheshire cat in *Alice in Wonderland* is a kind of parallel to our state. When discarnate, man has no identity, and is not subject to natural law. In fact he has no basis for morals of any sort. As electric information moved at the speed of light, man is a nobody. When deprived of his identity, man becomes violent in diverse ways. Violence is the quest for identity.[116]

Under late-electric conditions, as McLuhan notes in a letter to Father Shook, we entered the age of discarnate man:

> My concern is with the fact that the psychic and social structure of the Western world has been profoundly shaped by its technologies of communication. It is the view of Eric Havelock in *Preface to Plato*, and of others, that the individual private psyche, the human "self" is itself an artefact. This private, separate self is as little known to the Hebrew as to the Hindu of yesterday, or the hippie of today. *Electric man is discarnate man,* sharing a

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[113] *Take Today*, 276.

[114] McLuhan, "Article on Death," MS., 6.

[115] Ibid., 1.

[116] McLuhan to Clare Booth Luce, 5 April 1979.

consciousness or at least a *sciousness*, as fully as any native tribe. Information moved at electric speeds also sends the sender instantly. Not just the broadcaster but his public go to Peking and return, and everybody becomes totally involved in everybody.[117]

For McLuhan, the condition of discarnate man, where the *ground*

for existence is disembodied and discarnate experience,[118] was one if not

the "major sickness"[119] of this last decade of his life, and he attributed it

to the action of the "media" themselves.[120] In "Violence of the Media"

McLuhan argues that it is the media themselves that inflict (rather than

depict) violence by way of an instant invasion and deprivation of their

users physical bodies as they are merged into a network of extensions of

their nervous system. The elimination of the physical body of the user, he

notes, deprives them (the user) of the means of relating the program

experience to their private individual selves, even as instant involvement

suppresses private identity:[121]

> What may emerge as the most important insight of the twenty-first century is that man was not designed to live at the speed of light. Without the countervailing balance of natural and physical laws, the new video-related media will make man implode upon himself. As he sits in the informational control room, whether at home or at work, receiving data at enormous speeds — imagistic, sound, or tactile — from all areas of the world, the results could be dangerously inflating and schizophrenic. His body will remain in one place but his mind will float out into the electronic void, being everywhere at once in the data bank. Discarnate man is as weightless as an astronaut but can move much faster. He loses his

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[117] McLuhan to Father Shook, 20 June 1972. Emphasis mine.

[118] McLuhan, "Article on Death," MS., 6.

[119] McLuhan to Pierre Babin, 13 March 1978.

[120] As part of a public relations exercise, representatives from Western Union asked McLuhan (and other famous people) for an equivalent statement to Morse's "What Hath God Wrought" on the occasion of the launch of the first U.S. domestic communications satellite, WESTAR I (launched on April 13, 1974). McLuhan replied: "Today we are there and you are here instantly as disembodied software via Western Union."

[121] McLuhan, "Violence of the Media," MS., 2.

sense of private identity because electronic perceptions are not related to place. Caught up in the hybrid energy released by video technologies, he will be presented with a chimerical "reality" that involves all his senses at a distended pitch, a condition as addictive as any known drug. The mind, as figure, sinks back into ground and drifts somewhere between dream and fantasy. Dreams have some connection to the real world because they have a frame of actual time and place (usually in real time); fantasy has no such commitment.[122]

6. A New Religious Age

When the *ground* for existence is a disembodied and discarnate experience, McLuhan also saw that we had entered a great new religious age[123] — one that had in fact been in the offing for some time, since man began living "not by bread alone but by slogans also,"[124] since television,[125] and since the abolition of nature with Sputnik. As McLuhan notes in "The Future of Morality: The Inner Versus the Outer Quest":

> *Mirabiliter condidisti, et mirabilius reformasti* … This statement has always seemed to indicate that both the Incarnation and the Mass are a profound and total remaking of man and the world. Now in the electronic age, when so much of our world is man made, it

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[122] *The Global Village*, 97.

[123] McLuhan, "Electric Consciousness and the Church," in *The Medium and the Light*, 88. "Since the basis for natural law is unavailable to the TV generation, their only recourse is to supernatural law as a means of cohesion, coherence and meaning. For these reasons we seem to be on the threshold of a great new religious age," (McLuhan to Edward Wakin, 27 July 1978).

[124] *Culture is Our Business*, 42. Later in the same work McLuhan adds: "In the sixteenth century religion went inward and private with Gutenberg hardware. Liturgy collapsed. Bureaucracy boomed. Today liturgy returns. Bureaucracy fades …. The present electric ESP age of multiple interfaces finds no problem in metamorphosis or transubstantiation such as baffled abcede–minded culture of the sixteenth century and after," (Ibid., 82).

[125]" TV is a spiritual medium. It is a light medium and it charges right inside the human being like a yogi exercise. It transforms the body image and the whole relation of humans to their fellows," (McLuhan, "Marshall McLuhan and Mike Wallace: A Dialogue," 13).

becomes easier to understand some of the wonders of this
doctrine.[126]

While McLuhan can be seen here developing on the observations
of both Joyce and Alexander Pope,[127] as with the weight of McLuhan's
claims, they are not as far-fetched as it might sound to some. He was
merely acting as the "antenna of his race," the "serious" artist,"[128]
observing and reporting, in both an empirical and artistic manner, the

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[126] McLuhan, "The Future of Morality: The Inner Versus the Outer Quest," MS., 10–11.
The phrase, "*mirabiliter condidisti…*," is taken from the section of the Mass where
preparation is made for the offering: Deus, qui humanae substantiae dignitatem
mirabiliter condidisti, et mirabilius reformasti: da nobis per hujus aquae et vini
mysterium, ejus divinitatis esse consortes, qui humanitatis nostrae fieri dignatus est
particeps, Jesus Christus, Filius tuus, Dominus noster: Qui tecum vivit et regnat in
unitate Spiritus Sancti, Deus; per omnia saecula saeculorum. Amen. [O God, You who
miraculously created the dignity of human substance and even more miraculously
reformed it, allow us, through the mystery of this water and wine, to become sharers in
the divinity of him who deigned to become a partner in our humanity, Jesus Christ, Your
Son, Our Lord, who lives and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit, God,
through all the ages of ages. Amen].

The section "Deus qui humanae substantiae dignitatem mirabiliter condidisti et
mirabilius reformasti" is a reference to man's former condition of innocence and to his
present one of being ransomed by the Blood of Christ. In other words it is a
recapitulation of the whole economy of the Sacrifice, from Adam to the present moment.

[127] In a letter to Felix Giovanelli McLuhan registers that he has been working on Joyce
only to find the last pages of *Finnegans Wake* "is a rendering of the last page of the
Mass." He adds, "the opening of *Ulysses* also uses words of the mass," leading
McLuhan to conclude that "the whole thing is an intellectual Black Mass … revealing the
Church of the Anti-Christ and other things," (McLuhan to Felix Giovanelli, 10 May 1946).
In a similar vein, he notes in the *Gutenberg Galaxy* that: "The last book of *The Dunciad*
proclaims the metamorphic power of mechanically applied knowledge as a stupendous
parody of the Eucharist," (*The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 261).

It may not be irrelevant that McLuhan had noted to Staines: "By the way,
'antichrist' in Nietzsche seems to mean when the bureaucratic mode of the Catholic
Church is pushed to its limit, it flips into antichrist. This seems to have been the view of
James Joyce in *Dubliners*," (McLuhan to David Staines, 2 June 1977).

[128] C.f. Ezra Pound, "The Serious Artist."

experiences of his age. In many respects he had to look no further than the horoscopes in the newspaper or the collaboration between Arthur C. Clarke (the "second best" science fiction writer of his day who "predicted" the satellite), and Stanley Kubrick (a pioneer of American cinema).[129] Just prior to the launch of *Intelsat* 1, the first commercial communications satellite in geosynchronous orbit, Clarke and Kubrick began work on *2001: A Space Odyssey*.[130] Reflecting back on the film that is now famous for its development of the themes of metamorphosis, from pre-historic Ape-man to *übermensch*,[131] and technologies coming "alive" and spinning out of human control, Clarke noted that he and Kubrick had set out with the deliberate intention of creating a myth with an Odyssean parallel:

[129] See McLuhan, "Conspicuous Co-existence and How it Affects Markets," MS., 3. Here McLuhan discusses how, under electric conditions, it is the audience that is the formal cause of the Hollywood product.

[130] During the Second World War, Arthur C. Clarke served in the Royal Air Force working with the early warning radar defence system. In 1945, as the war was nearing completion, Clarke wrote a short letter to the editor of *Wireless World* suggesting that the invention of geostationary satellites for instant global communications might serve as an ideal peace time use of the Nazi's V2 rocket technology: "An "artificial satellite" at the correct distance from the earth would make one revolution every 24 hours; i.e., it would remain stationary above the same spot and would be within optical range of nearly half the earth's surface. Three repeater stations, 120 degrees apart in the correct orbit, could give television and microwave coverage to the entire planet. I'm afraid this isn't going to be of the slightest use to our post-war planners, but I think it is the *ultimate* solution to the problem," (Arthur C. Clarke, "V2 For Ionosphere Research?," *Wireless World* (February 1945): 58). Clarke followed his letter with the now famous article, "Extra-Terrestrial Relays," originally titled "The Future of World Communications." In the article Clarke explains how satellites, maintaining a geosynchronous orbit (approximately 22,300 miles above the equator) could be used to transmit radio, TV, and telephone signals around the world. Arthur C. Clarke, "Extra-Terrestrial Relays," *Wireless World* (October 1945): 305–308.

[131] As found in Fredrick Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* — which Kubrick references in and through his use of Richard Strauss' *Also Sprach Zarathustra* in the main title sequence.

> Quite early in the game I went around saying, not very loudly, "M-G-M [Metro–Goldwyn–Mayer] doesn't know this yet, but they're paying for the first $10,000,000 religious movie." Nevertheless, it is still quite a surprise to see how many people realized this, and it has been amusing to see how many faiths have tried to stake claims in the finished work.[132]

Having been invited to an advanced, private screening of *2001* by Kubrick,[133] it is little surprise then that we find that McLuhan states in one of his interviews of the period: "[Electric man] … is a very religious man in that he lives in a physical universe that is now spiritual."[134] Further rationale for his claim is visible in light of his conversations with Pierre Babin. Here McLuhan concludes that while having "no relation to private identity and no relation to natural law," discarnate man "retains and perhaps intensifies his relation to 'supernatural law.'"[135] Ergo, discarnate man is not only inclined towards "totalitarian regimes and to

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[132] Arthur C. Clarke, *Report on Planet Three and Other Speculations* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1972), 249.

[133] W. Terrence Gordon documents how McLuhan fell asleep during the screening after just ten minutes. W. Terrence Gordon, *Marshall McLuhan,* 231. Writing to Joe Keogh after the screening McLuhan notes how he left *2001* halfway through because: "All science fiction bores me stiff – barren sensibility and no acquaintance with the arts," (McLuhan to Joe Keogh, n.d.).

[134] McLuhan, "Interview with Marshall McLuhan," *The Review of Books and Religion* 3, no. 9 (June 1974): n.pag.

[135] McLuhan to Pierre Babin, 13 March 1978. Elsewhere McLuhan notes that "some glorious heresies" will "emerge from the age of discarnate man … if they haven't come already (they may already be here and we haven't noticed). McLuhan, "Interview with Marshall McLuhan," *The Review of Books and Religion* 3, no. 9 (June 1974): n.pag. McLuhan adds that the theology of discarnate man is going to be extremely transcendental and Gnostic. It's not going to have much place for the human being as incarnate spirit.

acceptance of the state as God,"[136] but in desperate need of religion to hold himself in community:

> Since the basis for natural law is unavailable to the TV generation, their only recourse is to supernatural law as a means of cohesion, coherence and meaning. For these reasons we seem to be on the threshold of a great new religious age.[137]

As something of a further side-effect, McLuhan saw that a new state of "civil war," between the Catholic Church and the forces of the electric media, was in prospect (if it did not exist already) given that he saw no grounds for the coexistence of these two tribal forces:[138]

> Discarnate man is not compatible with an incarnate Church … I cannot see that the physical existence of man is compatible with the speed of light. There is no lack of evidence of both physical and metaphysical violence as a response to this situation…[139]

The Hallucinated Idiot

We now come to the third and final section of this chapter where we encounter what McLuhan did after the "implosion," and how he transformed his inheritance in view of the situation of his day. Our starting point is to consider just how little the "implosion" appears to have affected his operations.

While gaining celebrity status appears to have been an integral part of McLuhan's strategy, given that it enabled him to grab attention (the first base of any artistic activity), it was not an end in itself:

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[136] Ibid. In an article written the same year, McLuhan notes that when loyalty to natural law declines the supernatural becomes the new "anchor," and this might readily take the form of the sort of megamachines (or state) that Mumford talks about as existing in Mesopotamia and Egypt some 5000 years ago. McLuhan, "A Last Look at the Tube," MS., 5.

[137] McLuhan to Edward Wakin, 27 July 1978.

[138] McLuhan, "Handwritten Note," MS., n.pag.

[139] McLuhan to Clare Booth Luce, 5 April 1979.

> The desire to stand on the stage, the desire of plaudits has nothing to do with serious art. The serious artist may like to stand on the stage, he may, apart from his art, be any kind of imbecile you like, but the two things are not connected, at least they are not concentric. Lot's of people who don't even pretend to be artists have the same desire to be slobbered over, by people with less brains than they have.[140]

Rather, it was necessary for communicating his effects (which were, at root, disruptive and disturbing), to a "general" audience. It appears, however, that he was well aware that in "going against the grain,"[141] performing the role of professional controversialist and "enemy of society," he was walking a tightrope. We have, in the West, a long standing tradition of "crucifying" our artists who disturb and annoy. Consequently, McLuhan was well prepared to contend with what he must have understood as inevitable. It is little surprise then that, when the dunces were in confederacy against him, after the "implosion," he responded swiftly.

McLuhan's immediate response was to embark on a programme of correspondence oriented to pushing key readers to reconsider his earlier work as satire — the great "argumentative language of the human race":[142]

> You have not studied Joyce or Baudelaire yet, or you would have no problems in understanding my procedure. I have no theories whatever about anything. I make observations by way of discovering contours, lines of force, and pressures. *I satirize at all times*, and my hyperboles are as nothing compared to the events to which they refer .... My canvasses are surrealist, and to call them

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[140] Ezra Pound, "The Serious Artist," 47.

[141] C.f. McLuhan, interviewed by anon., "Genius or Whimsy? Some McLuhanisms." *The Sunday Post of Canada*, 13 May 1979. Cited in the Introduction.

[142] Carter Kaplan, *Critical Synoptics: Menippean Satire and the Analysis of Intellectual Mythology* (Carnbury, London, and Mississauga: Associated University Press, 2000), 120.

> "theories" is to miss my satirical intent altogether. As you will find in my literary essays, I can write the ordinary kind of rationalistic prose any time I choose to do so. You are in great need of some intense training in perception in the arts.[143]

Concomitant with this claim, he adopted the traditional "innocent" stance of the satirist and, through his "pacific protestations," claimed that the victims of his satires were in fact the aggressors.[144] For example, in a letter to Robert Manning, McLuhan notes: "I have spent my life teaching people to read and enjoy books, it always seemed to me that in describing in detail the enemies of the book I was performing the highest service in the defence of literacy." What appears to be the case, however, is that "I turn on the fire alarm and am charged with arson."[145]

By the mid-1970s McLuhan refined his earlier claim, indicating that he has been working in the Menippean tradition:

> Those people who think that I am enemy of the book have simply not read my work, nor thought about the problem. Most of my writing is Menippean satire, presenting the actual surface of the world we live in as a ludicrous image.[146]

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[143] McLuhan to William Kuhns, 6 December 1971. Emphasis mine. One of McLuhan's earliest published works for the *Manitoban* was an imaginary, satirical interview with Dr. Johnson that looks at an evil and pagan city that celebrated "a century of progress" — a 20th century religious ceremony. McLuhan, "An Interview with Dr. Johnson," *Manitoban*, 16 March 1934.

[144] Timms, 106.

[145] McLuhan to Robert Manning, 21 July 1971. It is interesting to note how McLuhan describes himself using the same terms as he uses for William Burroughs: "It is amusing to read reviews of Burroughs that try to classify his books as nonbooks or as failed science fiction. It is a little like trying to criticize the sartorial and verbal manifestations of a man who is knocking on the door to explain that flames are leaping from the roof of our home. Burroughs is not asking merit marks as a writer; he is trying to point to the shut-on button of an active and lethal environmental process," (McLuhan, "Notes on Burroughs," in *Media* Research, 91).

[146] McLuhan to Michael Hornyansky, 3 February 1976. McLuhan adds that he has been "paying relatively little interest to media, but studying the political and corporate world."

That said, however, McLuhan has very little else to say directly about this genre of satire. He briefly mentions Menippus the satirist in his doctoral work.[147] He also refers to Menippean satire in a letter to Hugh Kenner where he identifies Jonathan Swift as writing, like Thomas More, in the Menippean tradition:

> Swift is Xian [Christian] Socratist. In the tradition of Thos [Thomas] More – Lucianic – Menippean Satirists. More is Swift's hero (along with Socrates) because More represented a *way*. Great Learning and piety sharply focused at the level of practical wisdom and goodness. More anti-scholastic. In favour of the old theology like Erasmus and Colet. More's irony basic mode of Xian awareness. Conflict of City of God and Man within him. Xian irony or paradox inescapable modality of secular life.[148]

In a much later letter to Sister St. John he identifies the Menippean tradition as falling under the aegis of Byzantium and the Greek Orthodox Church, and asserts that the Menippean mode is impersonal:

> Unlike the Roman satire, it [Menippean satire] is not individual but corporate. Since it concerns the entire audience as festive there are no onlookers! Individual satire can be moralistic. You cannot write a satire on the human race, as it were. The audience is the area of formal causality and ergo is beyond the reach of moral judgment.[149]

And writing to Sheila Watson, McLuhan appears to offer his assent to Kernan's distinction between Menippean and formal satire:

> Perhaps you know Alvin Kernan's *The Cankered Muse: Satire of the English Renaissance*. He makes a nice comparison between formal

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[147] *The Classical Trivium*, 239. As a further aside, in "George Meredith as Poet and Dramatic Novelist" McLuhan documents how Meredith combines both prose and verse, a characteristic that is often used as definition of this form. See Clarence Mendell, *Latin Poetry: The Age of Rhetoric and Satire* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon, 1967), 18.

[148] McLuhan to Hugh Kenner, 4 March 1949. It is not irrelevant to mention that McLuhan regarded Wyndham Lewis as something of the Thomas More of the 20th century. See McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis: Lemuel in Lilliput," in *The Medium and the Light*, 179.

[149] McLuhan to Sister St. John, 3 November 1978.

satire and the Menippean. In the latter "the scene is stressed and absorbs the satirist. Whereas in formal satire the satirist himself is important." I think this is very useful for Lewis who satires somewhere between these two modes. I realize that my own work is extremely Menippean. *The satirist does not appear in person.*[150]

At the time of making his claim to Hornyansky, however, none of these above mentioned comments were publicly available.

Menippean Thunder

What appears to be the case is that McLuhan's claim that his work is Menippean satire is intended, primarily, as an additional way of offering yet another invitation for exploration (albeit geared for an elite and highly literate rather than general audience). This is clearly the case if we also consider the state of the scholarship of his day on the "genre." Going by what more contemporary scholars have to say, it appears safe to conclude that the state of scholarship on Menippean satire in the 1970s was little better than it is today.[151] In brief, while satire has been acknowledged as a social force since antiquity, its origins are clouded and, as a result, it is often regarded as something of an amorphous genre.[152] Menippean satire is even more amorphous, and as a consequence, there is a near universal admission by critics of the genre that while Menippean satire is a common form of antiquity, it is largely

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[150] McLuhan to Sheila Watson, 6 August 1974. Emphasis mine. McLuhan is referring to Alvin Kernan, *The Cankered Muse*, 15. C.f. *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects*, 10 cited in Chapter Four.

[151] See Max Nanny, "The Wasteland: A Menippean Satire," *English Studies* 66, no. 6 (1985). While Northrop Frye can be said to have made a valuable contribution in his *Anatomy of Criticism*, as we have already seen, McLuhan was certainly not enamoured by Frye's scholarship.

[152] Leonard Feinberg, *Introduction to Satire* (Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1967), 18.

ignored by literary criticism.[153] Further, insofar as McLuhan is a Catholic and Christian operating in the Menippean tradition we are taken, potentially, even further into trackless terrain. As Timms has noted, even the topic of the *Christian* satirist remains relatively unexplored.[154]

Perhaps the only work of the period that comes close to approximating how McLuhan himself understood Menippean satire is Eric McLuhan's "Menippean Thunder at *Finnegans Wake*" (1982),[155] and even this was only completed two years after McLuhan's death. The thrust of Eric McLuhan's doctoral work is his bid to present *Finnegans Wake* as a Menippean satire. To achieve this end his work is also dedicated to offering not only a new understanding of the Menippean genre, but also a new definition. The latter, Eric McLuhan argues, is necessary on the grounds that the current practise of determining whether a work is Menippean or not is problematic. The prevailing descriptive method of measure is one of "matching" — a work's characteristics are checked or matched against some pre-existent list e.g. as offered by Bahktin. The problem, Eric McLuhan finds, is that current procedures are fixated on stasis and continuity, and are largely unable to contend with the fact that Menippean satire is always changing. The Menippists, however, Eric McLuhan argues, "always tended to aim their shafts directly at the audience of the moment, so they are not confined to

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[153] Payne, 3.

[154] Edward Timms, "The Christian Satirist: A Contradiction in Terms?," in *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 31, no. 2 (1995): 101. Keeping in mind that Timms has overlooked the work of Gilbert Highest. See Gilbert Highest, *The Anatomy of Satire* (Princeton, NJ., and London: Princeton University Press, 1962).

[155] Particularly given that he appears to have written the work following an extended period of collaboration with his father and in full view of the materials that emerged from McLuhan and Theall's collaborative exploration of the *epyllion* and other matters during the early 1950s.

any ideal of form."[156] As readers and their sensibilities change, as language and literary styles and devices change, so too do the tactics of the Menippist.[157] Hence, according to Eric McLuhan, while every Menippist might employ a tactic of the tradition (thereby including in his or her work a "Menippean signature"), they are free to innovate and employ new tactics "to engage and retune the sensibilities of a reader by deliberately violating his sense of decorum in one way or another."[158] Faced with such innovations, Eric McLuhan shows, advocates of a descriptive approach are largely resigned to simply adding additional items and characteristics to an ever growing list. In contrast, Eric McLuhan argues that a way forward can be had by defining Menippean satire in terms of the author's rhetorical purpose (the "effects" intended).[159] Ergo, Menippean satire can include any work that an author deliberately fashions to produce Menippean effects. This alone, he holds, provides a way of contending with innovation within the tradition without recourse to an ever-growing list of characteristics and tactics.

Having, then, cleared a path, Eric McLuhan sets about representing Menippean satire as concordant with the praxis of the grammarians, and he suggests that it might well be regarded as the satirical arm of grammar.[160] At root, he finds that Menippean satire proceeds by playfully attacking the sensibility or perceptions (rather than the concepts) of the audience with a view to therapeutic readjustment

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[156] Eric McLuhan, "Menippean Thunder at Finnegans Wake: The Critical Problems," 30.

[157] Ibid., ii–iii.

[158] Ibid., 446.

[159] Eric McLuhan's work is not devoid of such lists. In what appears to be a deliberately Rabelaisian gesture (see Highest, 176–177) he includes 65 "Menippean topics" (or characteristics) in an appendix. It is very instructive for a closer examination of the techniques and themes McLuhan employed.

[160] Eric McLuhan, "Menippean Thunder at *Finnegans Wake*," 111–12.

and enabling them to see themselves and the world clearly.[161] He also goes on to locate the wellspring of Menippean satire in certain traits of Cynic philosophy. Menippean effects, he argues, are the same effects sought by Cynic philosophy, but achieved through the medium of writing.[162] Building from I. G. Kidd's entry in the *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Eric McLuhan asserts that the Cynics, or "dog philosophers" (said to include Menippus himself), saw themselves as playing a dual role. On one hand they saw themselves as the watchdogs of mankind, the scouts and heralds of God that barked at illusion, dedicating their labours as a reconnaissance for others to follow. And on the other hand, they understood themselves to be surgeons that cut the cancer from the minds of their fellows, constantly reiterating the charge:

> To the great, remember you're human; to the proud, remember you're mortal; to the powerful, remember you're limited; to the learned, examine your ignorance; and to the rest, discard all your illusions and pretences. It is a kind of fundamentalist humanism. Can a constantly reiterated "wake up you idiots?" be called a philosophy?[163]

After the Revolution

While McLuhan's comments on the satirical nature of his work offer little in the way of immediate explanatory value, they do help us see what he did next. In "Literature as Material for British History," McLuhan presents the case that environmental conditions are not always conducive to satire: "After the revolution, political satire suddenly

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[161] Ibid., 92–3.

[162] The emphasis Eric McLuhan places on the author's rhetorical intent and his location of the wellspring of Menippean satire in Cynic philosophy are, arguably, misplaced. This is, however, a matter that cannot be taken up here.

[163] Ibid., 78.

dwindles and the satiric muse seeks more personal objects."[164] Arguably, his comments here can be read as anticipating the course of his own career. During the first half of the 1970s McLuhan renewed his programme, shifting his emphasis away from providing a detailed history of the future and social navigation charts, to a programme of "direct" engagement in a fight against the forces hampering the arrival of that future. Despite his comments on the pending "civil war," his diagnosis of the 1970s reveals that the "revolution" was, in fact, over. As the computer-satellite matrix matured, passing from anti-environment to environment, it appears that McLuhan saw that techno-cultural evolution had entered a new phase that would remain relatively constant and stable (albeit chaotically so), even with the advent of new technologies like instant replay.[165] When everything is in flux and there is nothing but revolution, there is "no difference that makes a difference," nothing but stasis and zero-gradient culture. In the face of a situation that either could not be satirized, or had made satire mostly useless, McLuhan registers that a new program is needed.[166] In the late 1960s he registers that he is no longer interested in writing books:

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[164] McLuhan, "Literature as Material for British History," MS., 15–16.

[165] Which McLuhan regarded as humanity's most metaphysical of technologies because it enables us to have the meaning without the experience. McLuhan, "La Révolution de l'Information," (address, *Biennale Internationale de l'Information*, le Toquet, 20 June 1973), 21. This matter can however only receive mention here.

[166] "In a business civilization we have long considered liberal study as providing necessary means of orientation and perception. When the arts and sciences themselves become environment under conditions of electric circuitry, conventional liberal studies, whether in the arts or the sciences, will no longer serve as antienvironment. When we live in a museum without walls, or have music as a structural part of our sensory environment, new strategies of attention and perception and attention have to be created. When the highest scientific knowledge creates the environment of the atom bomb, new controls for the scientific environment have to be discovered, if only in the interests of survival," (*Through the Vanishing Point*, 242–43).

> **McLuhan**: My film projects are slightly embryonic. I am making one on the city. That's the only film I'm actually making. I certainly plan to do some, but first I'm going to get rid of a lot of books. Books that I've already half written or three-quarters written. I've got at least half a dozen to finish off. Then I'm through with books.
> **Joe Medjuck**: Forever?
> **McLuhan**: At least I hope so. But anyway, I'm not going to specify the program I have in mind. It's a bit early.[167]

Further, in *Take Today* McLuhan and Nevitt indicate that working in and through the press, radio, and TV had also become similarly unserviceable or no longer appropriate (even had it been possible):

> If the "diehard" fails to understand the *processes of power*, the "revolutionary," in seizing the *positions of power*, mistakes "the state apparatus" for the actual controls of power. The *effect* is the setting up of a "police state" regardless of ideology or intent. Power is always a relationship, the putting on of the vortex of the living community by becoming an acceptable service environment. The components that go into this *mask of power*, therefore, vary according to the character of the communities. A wearable or bearable "mask of power" must comprise all the principal features and postures inherent in the life of the community. Today, on the other hand, it is a natural mistake of revolutionaries to take over the new environments of press, radio, and TV. *These cannot possibly wear the recognizable visage of deep currents of experience or feeling*.[168]

We also see in his outputs between 1970 and 1973 numerous items of inventory indicating that his earlier programme had, for all intents and purposes, broken down.[169] He registers that he is less able to capture the

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[167] McLuhan, "Marshall McLuhan Makes a Movie," *Take One* 2, no. 5 (May-June 1969): 15. One of the contributing reasons appears to have been that he saw that when TV was pushed to extreme it will produce a reversion to civilized book values by sheer reversal of itself.

[168] *Take Today*, 5. Emphasis mine.

[169] McLuhan's "Project Notes" of the period are replete with his meditations on what shape his project would take from this point. For example, in a fragment (dated 2 April

attention of the "iconoclastic" youth.[170] And he implies that he was losing touch with the new psychedelic crowd.[171] Ultimately, during the early 1970s he is led again to confront the "malignancy and magnanimity in the human heart," and he publicly entertains the possibility that most people simply do not want to know what they are doing. As McLuhan states in "Education in the Electronic Age":

> I was on the David Frost show and had occasion to mention the antithetic and polar-opposite character of movie and TV forms. This observation always causes dismay in people who have never thought about media. Incidental to this observation I pointed out why the TV medium was itself an inner psychedelic trip and why "drug addiction" was a mere minor aspect of the TV experience. No discussion of this observation occurred on the program and no inquires or comments ensued then, or later. It would seem quite impossible that even the most bizarre suggestion that offered any

1972) we see McLuhan lay out a series of questions for himself: (a) How to mount a program of media studies in Africa, India, UK, USA, Germany, (b) How to relate ad agencies to the arts, (c) How to relate social science to the arts, (d) How to set up an interdisciplinary program in a university via media study, (e) How to relate industry to society via media, (f) How to advise UNESCO, Nixon, USA, Trudeau via media study, (g) How to discover the role of the arts in society via media study. McLuhan, "Project Notes, 2 April 1972," MS., n.pag.

[170] Something of the transition is evident if we compare McLuhan's comments made to Mike Wallace with his later correspondence with Fishwick. During the interview with Mike Wallace, Wallace asks, "why do you imagine that we are so fascinated with what you say?" McLuhan replies that his book helps give small children the feeling of having superior knowledge over their teachers, but I don't endorse such a reason at all. He adds: "it gives a sense of power over experts … it's a bit disreputable, I think," ("Marshall McLuhan and Mike Wallace: A Dialogue," *7*). By the early 1970s, however, McLuhan registers a shift. Writing to Fishwick, McLuhan notes how the 1960s, dropout, "TV generation were happy to discover the rage that my stuff produced in the academic bosom and associate with me on that account. Now they are squaring up they no longer feel the same satisfaction zapping the establishment via McLuhan," (McLuhan to Marshall Fishwick, 1 August 1974).

[171] "The older drama seems to be exhausted and LSD seems to fill the vacuum," (McLuhan, "Understanding Canada and Sundry Other Matters," *Mademoiselle* 64, no. 3 (1976): 126).

kind of approach to understanding drug addiction in our time should pass unheeded. Such, however, was and is the case. *People do not want to know the cause of anything. They do not want to know why radio caused Hitler and Gandhi alike. They do not want to know that print caused anything whatsoever*. As users of these media, they wish merely to get inside…[172]

In an untitled fragment that appears to have been intended as a letter to the editor of Toronto's *Globe and Mail* (10 September 1973), McLuhan notes that the "McLuhan fallacy has been to work on the supposition that people want to know what they are doing in the present." He continues: "it should be called the Oedipal fallacy" on the grounds that it is assumed that "Oedipus would have liked to have known the identity of his mother."[173] Subsequently, from the early 1970s, while he continued to write articles and finish the half dozen books that were in various states of production (including *Culture is Our Business*, *From Cliché to Archetype*, and *Take Today*),[174] he turned his attention towards a more "direct" mode of action and more "personal" objects in a manner not dissimilar to his early operations at the start of the 1950s.[175]

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[172] McLuhan, "Education in the Electronic Age," *Interchange* 1, no. 4 (1970): 12. Emphasis mine.

[173] McLuhan, "Letter Fragment," MS., n. pag.

[174] Three additional works remained incomplete, including: (a) a revision to *Understanding* Media to be called, Understanding Media Revised, (b) the revision and preparation for publication of McLuhan's dissertation on Nashe, and (c) a project McLuhan referred to as a Twentieth Century Baedeker.

[175] I use the phrase "direct" loosely, merely in contrast with what appears to have been McLuhan's description of satire as operating in an "indirect" mode: "So far as I have had anything to say to educators directly the gist of my approach is satirical … insofar as the satirical wrenching of the dormant perceptual life is educational, I might be squeezed into that category," (McLuhan to Gerry Stern, 18 October 1973). C.f. McLuhan, "The Hidden Information Environment," (Address to the American Assembly of Collegiate Schools of Business, Toronto, 15 April 1977), 7. Cited in Chapter Two.

One of McLuhan's first efforts at a more "direct" mode of action was to try and instigate a symposium on causation. Returning to his comments in "Education in the Electronic Age," we see that he identified the absence of thinking about causation to be a major weakness — if not illness — of his day:

> The total non-response of hundreds of thousands of people to the suggestion that there was an actual physical, environmental, man-made cause of drug addiction in our time startled me into study of the attitude of the scientific community to causation. It does not take long to discover that all of the sciences, physical and social, are interested only in describing and measuring effects while ignoring causation entirely. [176]

He also proposed to initiate a "World Communication Series." [177] Unlike his efforts of the 1950s, however, when communication was a new and emerging discipline, the later McLuhan's concern for communication was on the grounds that the field had: "…emerged as a necessary object of attention in the 20th century, not because it's new, but because it's that portion of the social organism now undergoing elephantiasis. To reduce

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[176] McLuhan, "Education in the Electronic Age," *Interchange* 1, no. 4 (1970): 12. Similarly, McLuhan writes to Gilson: "In my own attempts at understanding media I have discovered a uniform distaste in even my friendly readers and critics for the attempt to discover causality of any kind in the environmental action of media on man or society. I have found that scientists and students regard causes as mere concepts or categories to be described and classified. I would much welcome light on the causes for the non-interest in causes," (McLuhan to Etienne Gilson, 19 January 1971).

[177] The details of which are outlined at some length in his letter to Judith Greissman, 14 July 1971. As something of an aside, McLuhan's letter also indicates something of a turn-around on his earlier orientation towards intellectual property. Where McLuhan had earlier lobbied for copyright reform, in this letter he is at pains to ensure that the project be protected: "I am sure you will keep in mind that until we actually have produced a book in this series, any advance publicity for it would permit it to be snatched from under us. I feel it is so obvious, that it is also very vulnerable to the idea-snatcher," (Ibid.).

this unwieldy growth is going to require great surgical attention and skill."[178]

A Place to Stand

Neither McLuhan's proposed symposium nor his "World Communication Series" ever got underway.[179] In view of his "failures" he turned instead to two local projects: lobbying for the halt of the Spadina Expressway, and becoming involved in the activities of a local pro-life/anti-abortion group.

During the 1960s, the governing bodies of Metropolitan Toronto proposed the development of a network of freeways in the inner city. The proposed freeway network included the Spadina expressway, which was intended to run from north of Highway 401 into downtown Toronto via the Cedarvale Ravine and Spadina Road. McLuhan became involved in lobbying for its cessation because he saw the proposed expressway as a symbol for environmental change and corporate objectives in conflict with human needs:

> The technocrats persist in their strategy of homogenization, which fosters a filling in of all the older "spaces" of the city with massive structures, obliterating all intervals of human scale and their Victorian vestiges. It kills community.[180]

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[178] McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Counterblast*, 64.

[179] When McLuhan's bid failed he moved to support the efforts of Melvin Kransberg, editor of *Technology and Culture*, who was also looking to put on a similar symposium. See McLuhan to Fredrick Wilhelmsen, 10 March 1971. Similarly, when his proposed Symposium on Causation also failed to get underway he merely sought to interface with, support, and influence similar projects. See McLuhan to Ralph Cohen, 13 July 1973.

[180] *Take Today*, 31.

As McLuhan notes to Jim Davey, the "really devastating program is the destruction of perception and sensitivity by the creation of vast environments far exceeding human scale."[181] Similarly, McLuhan came to see the "abortion mills" as a potential battle ground on which to test the opposing forces of 19th century "blue-printing" and the new organic and ecological forces of wholeness: "To take a stand on abortion is therefore to take a stand against the principle currents and trends which we have inherited from 19th century industry."[182] In short, both projects were new beachheads. Firstly, they were a site where he could take a stand against human ignorance of the effects of innovation:

> These artificial man-made environments such as Sputnik not only transform the image we have of ourselves but also the image we have of other people. Although they transform the nature of the human situation, nobody takes responsibility for this, because nobody is especially aware that it has happened.[183]

> The abortion mill closely resembles Buchenwald. The people engaged in it would risk their lives to save a 2 year old child from a car or truck. What has happened is a complete collapse of community awareness via specialism of function. As long as an operation or process is divided into sufficiently small segments, no one feels any responsibility.[184]

Secondly, these local projects were also a platform from which to "directly" contest the age old conflict between the individual and collective or mass man. In this respect, both these local projects may also readily be understood as a fight for a Christian (read Catholic)

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[181] McLuhan to J. M. Davey, 29 September 1971.

[182] McLuhan, "Private Individual Vs. Global Village," in *Abortion and Social Justice*, eds. Thomas W. Hilgers and Deniss J. Hilgers (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1972), *247*.

[183] McLuhan, "address at Alliance for Life Festival, Ottawa, 6 May 1977."

[184] McLuhan to J. M. Davey, 29 September 1971.

interpretation of "human rights."[185] As a Catholic and Christian, McLuhan held that human rights are grounded in a divine source which overcomes any mere quantitative difference. By contrast, he saw that most current discussions of "human rights," which were underpinning the arguments *for* the expressway and abortion, were largely informed by some variant of existential philosophy.[186] Here, "the good" is measured quantitatively, "value" is frequently found in terms of "convenience," and pushed to extreme, the logical terminus of existential philosophy McLuhan read as dictating that the individual must go.[187] Thirdly, it appears that McLuhan held that through his involvement in these local projects he might be able to beget global change by way of resonant echo.[188] Both projects, particularly his anti-abortion lobbying, bring us to

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[185] While not necessarily so, it is relatively obvious that in fighting for the individual, McLuhan was also fighting for the Church. While McLuhan deemed that the Church was a "tribal" group, he also held that: "Christianity definitely supports the idea of a private, independent metaphysical substance of the self. Where the technologies supply no cultural basis for this individual, then Christianity is in for trouble. When you have a new tribal culture confronting an individualist religion, there is trouble," (McLuhan, "Electric Consciousness and the Church," in *The Medium and The Light*, 85).

[186] In "The New American Vortex" McLuhan had argued that, post-WWII, the "hallucinations" of Marxist and Fascists have dissipated. However, he asserts, if the "mirage disappears" then the mind is confronted with naked reality of its wilfully debased function. Existentialism, he continues, serves as a temporary release of angst for all camps. But, ultimately, it is a temporary measure and cannot hold up because there is no scapegoat — no face-saving mechanism which can prove self torment and self deceit are caused by an external foe. McLuhan, "Catharsis and Hallucination From Machiavelli to Marx," MS., 20–21 in "The New American Vortex." What appears to be the case, particularly in light of his comments here, is that Existentialism and its many varieties was proving to be more enduring than he had anticipated.

[187] Ibid.

[188] "The ground has changed drastically at present. The computer is a portent of the return to Carlyle's medieval idea of the cottage economy, when large enterprises can be run from a kitchen, as it were," (*Take Today*, 49). In some respects McLuhan's understanding of the process of "begetting" by way of resonant echo can be seen in his

a nexus of what the Westerners think about man — and this nexus is also, potentially, an Archimedean lever. As McLuhan notes in terms of abortion:

> It would be a mistake to think of abortion as exceptional or unconventional behaviour in our time. Abortion is simple social planning and the mechanization of death. If meat packing and death camps can resonate in a way that makes abortion centres a familiar and acceptable pattern, then abortion centres constitutes a precedent for the repetition of further violence to human dignity and compassion.[189]

There was, for McLuhan, no question that either pro-abortion or pro-expressway arguments apply with equal validity to the status of all other human beings and communities:

> The same assumptions, for more or less convenience, or inconvenience, must apply to the decision about the continuing or suppressing the existence of many new members or groups of all human or non-human populations …. According to the currents of existential philosophy, entire sections of the population, insofar as they are somnambulist and exhibit a very low level of consciousness would be subject to the same argument.[190]

Turning now to the specifics, at the heart of both projects was his bid to transform by revealing what he understood as "the actual process,"[191] rather than to persuade or convince by way of rational and

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meditations on proposed strategies for marketing Prohtex. As McLuhan notes to Bill: "When such a thing as REPLAY came on to the market, everybody whoever would have to have one whether secretly or overtly. For the positive side of REPLAY could be displayed like a lapel ornament or a corsage, or identity symbol," (McLuhan to Bill (no surname available), 17 March 1973).

[189] McLuhan, "Private Individuals Vs Global Village," 247. Arguably, we can also see here the extent of McLuhan's "debt" to Siegfried Giedion who had revealed how the effects of mechanisation had leaked into spiritual values.

[190] Ibid., 246–247. It is worth keeping in mind that McLuhan's comments here are made for a general audience during a pro-life rally. Naturally, his diagnosis of Existential philosophy is found at least partially wanting.

[191] McLuhan to J. M. Davey, 29 September 1971.

logical argument — a task he saw as largely impossible if not undesirable and inconsistent with the essence of the projects themselves:[192]

> I don't think I need stress that when people become group-oriented and have lost their private identities, it is not easy to convince them about the right to individual or private life. People without identity are not easily convinced that private identity means anything. Mass, or electronic, man is not concerned about the private right to life. That indifference is the new hidden ground that we're all up against, suddenly flipping over into a tribal society which has much concern with the group and very little concern with the private individual. In the world of the data-bank and social services, the individual becomes a statistic. He is part of a computerized program, and his private identity is meaningless. He is a replaceable bit in a computer programme. That is the world we have created. I'm not talking about *Star Trek*, or some fantasy, but a world we have actually created, and with whose subliminal, hidden consequences, we are now faced.[193]

This entailed using his figure/ground approach, and the primary vehicle he chose for the task was film.[194] For his anti-Spadina expressway

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[192] C.f. McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 23 July 1969. Something of the spirit of McLuhan's enterprise can be apprehended in Eric McLuhan's essay, "The Logos and Formal Causality." Here Eric McLuhan argues that the question of transformation, or more precisely, "conversion," lies at the very heart of orthodoxy. The issue at stake is whether conversion is achieved by way of persuasion from the speakers *logos* or from within the convert him or herself. The orthodox Christian rhetor, Eric McLuhan argues, was committed to the latter, and consequently sought to operate as an artist–educator, revealing the audience to themselves as a necessary prelude to repentance and conversion. He goes on to note that in this respect they, the Patristics, were more like Menippean satirists in that they revealed what lay hidden. Eric McLuhan, "The Logos and Formal Causality," MS., 89–90.

[193] McLuhan, "address at Alliance for Life Festival, Ottawa, 6 May 1977."

[194] McLuhan was also involved in creating another film, *Picnic in Space* (1973). Richard Cavell is the only critic that has, to date, afforded the film any scholarly attention. By contrast, Marjorie Ferguson, who has also commented on the film, treats it merely as evidence of McLuhan's "decline" into self-parody (following a period of "critical originality" stemming from 1951 to 1962). *Picnic in Space*, Ferguson argues, ought only be regarded as a "bizarre period-piece," (Marjorie Ferguson, "Marshall McLuhan

lobbying McLuhan worked with Jane Jacobs to produce "The Burning Would."[195] Through juxtaposition, sound montage, fast motion photography, and voice-over, "The Burning Would" seeks to show the sensory impact and subjective completion of the proposed expressway. One of the most striking examples of the film at work can be seen and heard in the scene where the soundscape of "expressway" (traffic noise) is juxtaposed with images of the existing environment, children playing in a lush green park.[196] From this scene alone the proposed expressway is revealed as utterly dissonant with "human scale" and operations of the existing community in action. It worked. While the degree to which McLuhan and Jacob's film contributed to the eventual cessation of the Spadina expressway can be debated at some length, his lobbying must in many respects be considered a success. By contrast, his anti-abortion campaigning appears to have had negligible impact, and has to date not even received much in the way of scholarly attention.

Rousing the Theologians

During the first half of the 1970s McLuhan also began a more "direct" dialogue with members of the Church given that he saw it (the Church) as having a profound role to play in the new religious age — to shake up

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Revisited: 1960's Zeitgeist Victim or Pioneer Postmodernist," *Media Culture and Society* 13, no. 1. (1991): 78).

In view of McLuhan's forays into the use of film, a more comprehensive survey of his intellectual "debts" would include a survey of the work of Sergei Eisenstein. C.f. McLuhan to John Dunaway, 1 September 1976. Cited in Chapter One.

[195] McLuhan also sought to make a film for his anti-abortion lobbying along similar lines — revealing the actually processes. It was never made.

[196] Here the interplay between figure and ground is shown as "creating" communication (and by extension, revealing how most communication is nonverbal or subliminal).

our present population.[197] As McLuhan notes in "The Meaning of Television to Children," the TV environment has been usurped by the "bomb" as representing "the highest learning of our time, the most advanced technology, knowledge and learning in our world."[198] This new environment, as with all preceding environments, McLuhan asserts, needs an "anti-environment to act as its control," and "we have not provided one except for our Churches." The Church, he claims, can act as an anti-environment insofar as it serves to raise awareness of the world and its quaint ways and limitations.[199] The problem, however, was that the Church too was being buffeted by the electric storm. As McLuhan notes in "The Hardware/Software Merger," the Roman Catholic Church is in a state of total collapse thanks to electric speed up. Speed up of information, he says, has destroyed the whole image of the Church in the eyes of the ordinary Catholic.[200]

McLuhan also appears to have seen that the "resolute mediocrity of the ecclesiastical mind,"[201] and the general unawareness of Churchmen of the effects of new communication(s) technologies was hampering the

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[197] McLuhan, "Our Only Hope is Apocalypse," in *The Medium and the Light*, 62. McLuhan appears to have begun preparing for this new turn in and around the middle 1960s. We see, for example, McLuhan note to Wm. J. Wilson that he intends to a quite a lot of work on the changing relation of the world to the church in the following year while at Fordham. McLuhan to William Wilson, 29 March 1967.

[198] McLuhan, "The Meaning of Television to Children," *Report on Children and Television: A Consultation*, (Toronto: National Council of Churches, 11–15 January 1965), 33.

[199] Ibid.

[200] McLuhan, "The Hardware/Software Merger: How Successful Have They Been?," in *Reappraisal of the Educational Technology Industry*, conference proceedings (Chicago: Urban Research Corporations, 16–18 November 1969), 24.

[201] And "…its refusal to acquire the contemporary disciplines in any field … these factors probably excluded the possibility of any serious dialogue about liturgy as a contemporary fact," (McLuhan to Fredrick Wilhelmsen, 29 February 1972).

ability of the Church to perform its role of "shaking up" in the new situation:

> I have long thought about the word in relation to communication. The Church is so entirely a matter of communication that *like fish that knew nothing of water*, Christians have no adequate awareness of communication.[202]

On one hand, as McLuhan notes to John Mole, the Basilians within St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto,[203] as with the Pope of the day,[204] were being driven, unconsciously, into the clutches of the acoustic:

> "Process" theology and the speculative theology of the descendants of Kant and Hegel *is unconsciously in the grip of the merely acoustic dimension.* This is the world of involvement par excellence. It is the anti-Graeco-Roman form of the pre-Socratic world of *hoi barbaroi*.[205]

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[202] McLuhan to Kristin M. Popik, 28 May 1971. Emphasis mine. In regards to the "water": "The whole of Genesis is concerned with the attempt of man to build new technologies. When Cain, a "tiller of the ground," wanted to become more than a simple farmer, he slew Abel, the "keeper of sheep." When men began to built cities or towers, a technology of bricks — as in Babel — fragmented mankind. When man worshipped pagan idols, it meant the worshipping of tools. Enoch and Methusaleh were not so much persons as long-lived cultures, tribal kinship groups, or totalities — all of them fallen and fragmented. Men lost human respect, living as somnambulists hypnotized by their own technologies," (McLuhan, "The De-Romanization of the American Catholic Church," in *The Medium and the Light*, 55).

[203] The Basilian Fathers were established as a religious congregation in France in 1822. In the middle of the nineteenth century the French Basilians came to Canada on invitation of Bishop de Charbonnel of Toronto. They opened St. Michael's College in 1852. See http://www.basilian.org/.

[204] "**Question**: Would not religious leaders tend to welcome the electronic age since much of religion pertains to the so called 'spirituality?' **McLuhan**: I think they have. I think John XXIII was taken in by it. He thought they had come to a great new age of Christianity but it was also an age of anti-Christianity," (McLuhan, "Interview with Marshall McLuhan," *The Review of Books and Religion* 3, no. 9 (1974): n.pag.).

[205] McLuhan to John Mole, 29 January 1974. Similarly, McLuhan notes to Campbell: "Whereas some of the clergy had mistaken the printed book for the inner life of the spirit, many of the Catholic clergy now mistake the new software environment for the mystical body. They feel compelled to abandon a bureaucratic Rome for a miasmatic

On the other, as McLuhan notes to the Archbishop of Toronto, the likes of Kung and Kavanaugh were acting just as unconsciously "in their medium" in the clutches of their visual bias. Since this letter remains unpublished I will cite it at length:

> Having just read James Kavanaugh's *A Modern Priest Looks at His Outdated Church*. I was amazed to recognize that men of his age have felt the full electronic impact unwittingly and naively … Kavanaugh's world has crumbled with the return of the acoustic forms of electric discontinuity. After five centuries of visual hierarchy and Juridic connectedness in all areas of the Western establishment, suddenly all of the visual connections have been pulled out. The mere attempt to suggest that there is any relevance whatever in visually connected rational order appears as an insult since TV. It is the sender who is sent today. Electrically, whole populations move instantly, everywhere. This new angelism began with the telegraph and telephone a century ago. Hans Kung's *Infallible* is, like Kavanaugh, a testimony to the sudden loss of connections in the age of Rock and auditory space. Kung pays as little heed to the changing ground of the papal figure as did Trent, or Vatican II …. It is the total decentralism of the instantaneous and electric that makes all the extant forms of the old Gutenberg centralism and hierarchy seem so bizarre and incongruous to the present generation. Yet, the same people who complain the loudest, understand the least. Kung and Kavanaugh are totally unaware of what hit them. There is however, little indication that anybody in or out of the church, ever heeded the properties that inhere in the vast service environments which we create by extending our own sensory lives. Even with Gutenberg there came the loss of all human scale.[206]

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involvement in mankind at large. The Gutenberg revolution was visual hardware. The electric revolution is acoustics. Hardware congealed and legalized Catholic doctrine. Software blurs it into a kind of echo chamber of all religions at once," (McLuhan to Robert Campbell, 19 August 1968).

[206] McLuhan to Philip Pocock, 25 June 1971. Hans Kung appears to have particularly irked McLuhan: "Am partly through *Infallible* by Hans Kung …. Kung is the victim of an unconscious visual orientation of an extreme kind. His utter lack of contemporary artistic culture (i.e. from Baudelaire onwards) is fatal, in his case, so far as perception is concerned. This state applies to the entire hierarchy as well as the Establishment in all

One of the few Churchmen that McLuhan credits with having any awareness of media effects was Pierre Teilhard de Chardin whom he credits with having "correctly defined the major change of our age":[207]

> It has been stated over and over again. Through the discovery yesterday of the railway, the motor car and the airplane, the physical influence of each man, formerly restricted to a few miles, now extends to hundreds of leagues or more. Better still, thanks to *the prodigious biological event represented by the discovery of electro-magnetic waves*, each individual finds himself henceforth (actively and passively) simultaneously present, over land and sea, in every corner of the earth.[208]

That said, however, if McLuhan expressed some kind of enthusiasm towards Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's work during the mid-1950s, it had evaporated by the 1970s. Writing to his close friends, Tom and Dorothy Easterbrook, McLuhan flatly states: "I am not a fan of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. The idea that anything is better because it comes later is surely borrowed from pre-electronic technologies."[209] Similarly, McLuhan notes to Wilhelmsen: "The idea of a Cosmic thrust in one direction … is surely one of the lamest semantic fallacies ever bred by the word 'evolution' …. That development should have any direction at all is inconceivable except to the highly literate community."[210] In short, while seeing that he

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areas of the Western world. Joseph Needham's studies of Oriental Science make clear how desperately the West needs the acoustic awareness for survival. Am planning to do a piece on Kung," (McLuhan to Kristin M. Popik, 28 May 1971).

[207] McLuhan, "The Humanities in the Electronic Age," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 7, 12; McLuhan, "The Electric Age – The Age of Implosion," MS., 3.

[208] Teilhard de Chardin, *The Phenomenon of Man*, cited in McLuhan, "The Humanities in the Electronic Age," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* 7, 12. Emphasis mine.

[209] McLuhan to Tom and Dorothy Easterbrook, 3 March 1972.

[210] McLuhan to Fredrick Wilhemsen, 28 January 1972. Publicly, however, McLuhan artful avoided making any claims, pro or con. For example, see McLuhan, "Electric Consciousness and the Church," in *The Medium and the Light*, 87–88.

diagnosed one aspect of the new electric situation correctly, McLuhan appears to have regarded Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, at best, as an exemplar of highly literate man (or "print orientated bastard"), and, at worst, a Manichean.[211]

In their lack of any awareness of media effects, McLuhan appears to have held that the Churchmen had missed the fact in the age of "cybernation" all we have been accustomed to is "obsolete":[212]

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[211] "[I] would be grateful if you would suggest to me a bit of reading that might point up the 'Manichean deviation' as it manifests itself today. Is it to be found in Teilhard de Chardin with his 'trust man and trust the world?" (McLuhan to Donald Pikell, 25 October 1971).

The relationship between McLuhan and Teilhard de Chardin features extensively in criticism and commentary of McLuhan's oeuvre. The first studies into the relationship were conducted by Daniel Leary, and Richard McCafferty. Both concluded that McLuhan was not directly influenced by de Chardin. See Daniel J. Leary, "Voices of Convergence: Teilhard, McLuhan, and Brown," in *The Continuous Flame: Teilhard in the Great Traditions*, ed. Harry J. Cargas (Jefferson, St. Louis: B. Herder, 1969); Richard B. McCafferty "The Influence of Teilhard De Chardin on Marshall McLuhan," (Northwestern University, Ph.D. diss., 1969). Despite their findings, Miller has sought to "bracket" McLuhan with his "co-religious" de Chardin, while also noting that a comparison between the two is "unjust," (Miller, 20–21). During the mid-1990s the question of the relationship between the pair resurfaced. In this context Hickey asserts that McLuhan "flirted" with the ideas of de Chardin. Neil Hickey, "McLuhan in the Digital Age: Where Are You Now That We Need You?" in *The Legacy of McLuhan*, 64. Tom Wolfe has sought to stress the influence of de Chardin on McLuhan. See Tom Wolfe, foreword to *Understanding Me*, xiii–xviii. And finally, Uwe Jochum finds McLuhan's work to be to be a form "political media Gnosticism," heavily influence by de Chardin. Uwe Jochum, "The Gnosis of Media," *Library Quarterly* 74, no. 1 (2004): 31–32.

[212] "Today, the satellite environment has scrapped the entire nature process of the planet. This was not the result of an inadvertent blooper but of a restless pressure for more speed of information. The resulting increase of environmental information has in effect scrapped everything known as human organizations while at the same time retrieving innumerable forgotten forms of human organization from the most remote and prehistoric past. The things we assumed as the ground for human existence have simply been cancelled," (*Take Today*, 224).

Today the Catholic hierarchy has no awareness of the peculiar and unique properties of spatial and human organization inherent in electric technology. The invisible and total environment of information, electrically established, presents an ethereal world that is a "reasonable facsimile" of the mystical body. This ethereal-mundane form demands a total submission and involvement that challenges the claims of the church itself. The interface between the ethereal world of the information environment (created by electric circuitry and satellites) and the mystical body *opens a new frontier in church history which is as trackless and opaque* as that which confronted the traveller who got off at the end of steel in the "Wild West" of 1870.[213]

Ergo, the clergy were simply neither in a "very good position to prescribe or to act," [214] nor to capitalise on the opportunities latent in the present for reform.[215] When they did act, it was usually an ad hoc or an involuntary response.[216] As McLuhan and Nevitt state in the "Taking the Veil in Vain: The Religious Dropout" section of *Take Today*:

When the ground itself becomes Protean or bewildering in its multiplicity of changes, then the ordinary psyche abandons all hope of relating thereto and retreats to the ivory tower of integrity .… If the early Christian felt isolated by the size of the adversary—the world —the modern Christian feels outdistanced by the speed. Today, it is inconceivable to the organizer of traditional teaching and instruction how any arrangement could be made for relating the young or the faithful to the ancient church except by arbitrary

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[213] McLuhan, "The Papal Interval," MS., 5. Emphasis mine.

[214] McLuhan, "address at Alliance for Life Festival, Ottawa, 6 May 1977."

[215] An echo of the kind of reforms McLuhan saw as being possible can be heard in his correspondence with Barbara Ward: "At present, when the power to create diverse forms of Space and work and residence are almost unlimited, it would seem to be a very good time to up-date our vision of a Christian culture or city," (McLuhan to Barbara Ward, 9 February 1973).

[216] "Moreover, since the Basilians do not have a clue about what I'm talking about, they clammed up quickly when I began to point out the relation between renewal and ecumenism and the media, i.e. *most of the ad hoc strategies employed in Liturgy*, etc. are based on a complete misunderstanding of media effects," (McLuhan to Fritz Wilhelmsen, 29 February 1972). Emphasis mine.

"authority" and paternalism. Failing to relate old figure and new ground, he sees no recourse but to join the new ground. This is the fatal formula for loss of identity: "Here lies community R.I.P.," as James Hitchcock observes.[217]

In addition to providing what may yet stand as the most precise diagnosis of the state of the Roman Catholic Church in North America, McLuhan appears to have intensified his programme of correspondence and writing journal articles designed to agitate, probe, challenge, and better the ability of Church leaders to respond to the present day "crisis" by relating the "old figure" to the "new ground.[218] For the most part his approach is not to present answers,[219] but rather the right questions (at least for inaugurating a new dialogue). He also went about "putting on" the Church hierarchy by pointing out what had been ignored:

> The Catholic Church has manifested that confusion on a massive scale since Vatican II. The Catholic Church is itself a right-hemisphere institution that is completely tribal; the body of Christ is a tribal, simultaneous institution or thing that includes everybody; but the Catholic Church opted for literacy and left hemisphere Graeco/Roman culture from the very first century right up to the present time. Now that left hemisphere church finds itself in a right hemisphere world without any guidelines. This issue was not broached at Vatican II. *At the Council of Trent, nobody noticed that it was Gutenberg who made all the problems, and at*

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[217] *Take Today*, 286.

[218] It is, of course, something that he had been doing over his entire career. For example see McLuhan, "Wyndham Lewis: Lemuel in Lilliput," in *The Medium and the Light*.

[219] McLuhan, "Address at Alliance for Life Festival, Ottawa, 6 May 1977."

Vatican II, nobody mentioned the hidden ground of electric information which has created all the moral and theological problems of our time.[220]

McLuhan also sought to cleanse and reinvigorate the language of the Churchmen so that they might be in a better position to dialogue, among themselves, with their age, and more importantly, with their congregations.[221] One of the tactics he employed for the task was to reformulate several of his old themes using terms that bear some relation to medieval terminology.[222] For example, in the 1970s "the medium is the message" becomes "the user is the content,"[223] thus bringing his "media

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[220] Ibid. Emphasis mine. Writing to the Associate Editor of *Playboy* McLuhan notes: "The Roman Church was once a massive visual monument to the bureaucratic organization chart of specialist and inter-connected functions. That was after Gutenberg. Before Gutenberg, the Roman Church had been more oral and auditory and musically ordered. Print and the council of Trent scrapped the old music in favour of firm connections. Electric technology suddenly ended connections in the Roman Church, rendering its systematic patterns quaint and arbitrary," (McLuhan to David Standish, 7 July 1971).

[221] As McLuhan notes to Wilhelmsen: "I am going to do some further work on translating myself into Thomistic terms. It is a commentary on the Thomists that I should have to tell them how to relate themselves to the contemporary world," (McLuhan to Fredrick Wilhelmsen, 10 March 1971). That said, however, as he notes to Atkin, McLuhan was "…a bit peeved at the local Thomists for leaving it to me to discover the meaning of their own thoughts instead of helping me – they held me up for years," (McLuhan to John Atkin, 16 March 1971).

[222] E.g. "Formal Causality," which McLuhan had been working on for some time. McLuhan had noted to Drucker in 1959 that he was "reinventing formal causality," (McLuhan to Peter Drucker, 15 December 1959).

[223] "In the four years since making the above observations, I have discovered very many things about media and education. It is now perfectly plain to me that all media are environments. As environments, all media have all the effects that geographers and biologists have associated with environments in the past. Environments shape their occupants. One person, complaining about my observation that "the medium is the message," simply said: "McLuhan means that the medium has no content." This remark was extremely useful to me because it revealed the obvious, namely, *the content of any medium is the user*. This applies equally to electric lights, any language … It is obvious that the user or content of any medium is completely conformed to the character of this

studies," that had captured the world's ear, into the orbit of the terminology of Aquinas and work of the neo-Thomists. It also provided McLuhan with a fresh and much more direct way of admonishing his critics, including both Miller and Fishwick:

> You are obviously suffering from some extreme delusions about the motivation behind my work. You are the perfect embodiment of my own observation that "the user is the content". You use my work in any way that makes you feel fit. If you have any knowledge of Aristotelian causality you will know that *formal* causality is concerned with effects. My work is concerned with *effects* not with inputs or efficient causality.[224]

Secular Theory of Communication

In 1973 McLuhan's programme of needling the somnambulistic Churchmen hit something of an obstacle — he received a Vatican appointment to the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications.[225] In the face of his new appointment he appears to have been unsure of the appropriate decorum and how to proceed.[226] Something of his hesitation and concerns are apparent in his correspondence with John Mole. Here McLuhan notes: "I have looked at *Communio et Progressio* and found it futile. Does this mean that I should say so in public? Or write to the

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man-made environment. His entire sensory life arranges its hierarchies and dominance in accordance with the environments in which he operates," (McLuhan, "Education in the Electronic Age," *Interchange* 1, no. 4 (1970): 11). C.f. Scott Eastham, *The Media Matrix: Deepening the Context of Communication Studies* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1990), 39.

[224] McLuhan to Marshall Fishwick, 17 December 1975.

[225] "Your reverence, the announcement of my appointment to the PCSC will have confirmed the charge of an English writer that "McLuhan is a secret Agent of Rome." However, it can no longer be a secret and I am very pleased with the honour, and hope that I can be of some service," (McLuhan to Guido Del Mostri, June 4, 1973).

[226] While this is speculation, I suspect that McLuhan's hesitation is on the grounds that he knew that anything he might say would be wildly misinterpreted.

members of the [Pontifical] Communication Commission about it?"[227] Ecclesiological considerations and McLuhan's understanding of the place and function of the layperson within the Church aside, McLuhan concluded that no major change in his operation was necessary. Despite the council's repeated requests for comment from a "media standpoint," McLuhan replied that he had nothing in the way of a "package" to offer. Comment, opinion, and "private" point of view, McLuhan appears to have regarded as largely irrelevant if not downright unhelpful: "I only realised today that we cannot transcend our 'flat earth' view of media so long as we rely on private impressions at a particular time and place."[228]

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[227] McLuhan to John W. Mole, 29 January 1974. In an earlier letter to John Kelly, he raised a similar question, asking whether he should voice his, presumably, "private" and "personal" concerns and criticisms of the Church publicly:…After all, I teach undergraduates here, and the teaching of poetry requires a very wide range of theological reference. Up until now I have refrained from exercising any "right" of private interpretation. I would like to know from you whether you think I should withhold my reflections on the kinds of teaching which these undergraduates seems to have imbibed hereabouts?" (McLuhan to John Kelly, 12 November 1973). McLuhan adds: "…As I have explained in *Take Today*, all structures in the world, including the church in these human aspects, are being torn apart by the decentralising power of instant information. The Toronto School of Theology knows no more about this than Rockefeller. Why should I sit by and watch it happen here? Why should I respect the somnambulistic maundering of University committee and councils who are totally unaware of being robotised by new technology? Must we use our rational faculties merely to implement the dictates of the stock response? In a word, why should I sit by any longer as if unaware of the foolishness and incompetence of Bill Davis and John Evans and many of those under them who take them seriously?" (Ibid.) "Bill Davis" who McLuhan refers to here appears to be the former Canadian Minister of Education, William G. Davis, who also established the TVOntario educational network in 1970. John Evans was the president of the University of Toronto from 1972 to 1978.

[228] McLuhan to Harry Skornia, 6 July 1964. Another dimension to McLuhan's pattern of response is that he largely resisted the "exchange of prose." As McLuhan notes to Will: "…my immediate feeling and impression is one of total futility as regarding the kind of participation possible between here and Rome. I am sure that telephone conference

> **Hoskins**: You yourself believe in the divine revelation. It cannot be ephemeral? It is indestructible?
> **McLuhan**: It doesn't matter at all what people think about it.
> **Hoskins**: Well, it matters in the sense that it is for people.
> **McLuhan**: It matters to them; it certainly would affect their future, or their future existence. But as far as the society of men is concerned the private opinion about any of these matters is quite insignificant. The revealed and divinely constituted fact of religion has nothing to do with human opinion or human adherence.[229]

Rather, as McLuhan notes to the secretary of the commission, Monsignor Panciroli, his programme is one of training in perception:[230]

> It has been my experience over many years of teaching the perception of the media that it requires a considerable period of time to foster reception of these things. A few days, or even a few weeks at the Vatican would serve very little purpose. My student and friend, Walter J. Ong, S.J. has some studies which simplify my approach somewhat. I recommend his *The Presence of the Word*… and his *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* … as complementary to my own work.[231]

McLuhan's "way" — his programme in training perception he offered to the commission — entailed stressing that the Church was in desperate need of a "secular" theory of communication:[232]

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calls would be an enormous improvement on the type of bureaucratic prose and comment that are currently in use," (McLuhan to Rev. R. Drake Will, 1974).

[229] McLuhan, "Electric Consciousness and the Church," 85.

[230] Writing to the Hammonds McLuhan indicates that he has been getting repeated invitations from the Vatican Communications Committee, however: "I haven't yielded so far," (McLuhan to Marion and Opal Hammond, 22 January 1975). It is relevant to mention that McLuhan saw "training in perception" as more valuable that concern with questions of ownership. See McLuhan, "It Will Probably End the Motor Car," *Cinema Canada*, 30 (August 1976): 3–5, 29.

[231] McLuhan to Monsignor Panciroli, 19 February 1975.

[232] Norman O. Brown also appears to have come to a similar conclusion around the same time. See his comments regarding a "vulgar metaphysics" in Norman O. Brown. *Closing Time* (New York: Random House, 1973), 108.

> Christian theologians and philosophers have avoided the entire
> question of secular communication even when it concerns the very
> life of the Church …. The step needed to corrupt the knowledge of
> God is to specialize a fragment of His being by imaging his
> creatures as extensions of himself. Then it is very easy to assume
> that man and extensions of man are also extensions of God.[233]

His rationale appears to have been that he saw the Churchmen were
confused about the "status" of technological innovation.[234] In short, one
of the "problems" of the age that plagued the Church as much as those
outside of it stemmed from confusion regarding questions of providence
as they pertain to new communication(s) technologies:

> James Joyce put the matter very simply in *Finnegans Wake*: "…As
> for the viability of vicinals, when invisible they are invincible." By
> "vicinals" Joyce alludes to Vico whose *scienza nouva* asserts the
> principle of the sensory and perceptual change resulting from new
> technologies throughout human history. Hence the ancients
> attributed god-like status to all inventors since they alter human
> perception and self awareness.[235]

In the absence of a secular theory of communication, McLuhan observed
that those inside the Church were inclined to shirk the reality and
significance of human choice and responsibility. Writing to Jacques
Maritain, he makes clear that we are in fact doing "these things" to
ourselves:

> May I suggest that just as the Roman clergy defected in the
> Gutenberg era on the illusion of the inner light, even greater
> numbers may be expected to defect under the mystical attractions
> of the electric light. *Since our reason has been given us to understand
> natural processes, why have men never considered the consequences of*

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[233] McLuhan, "The Case of the Unhappy Medium," MS., 29.

[234] "Many people seem to assume that massive technological developments are the
"hand of God" or the "voice" of evolution …. The human environment is now man made.
Nature has been supplanted. This puts the moralist in an entirely new position for which
there is no precedent," (McLuhan to L. A. Morse, 9 December 1970).

[235] McLuhan to Jacques Maritain, 6 May 1969.

their own artefacts upon their modes of self awareness? I have devoted several books to this subject …. The nineteenth century bureaucrats in charge of implementing Vatican II are quite helpless in the face of a world of instantaneous information. Since *we are doing these things to ourselves*, there is no earthly reason for submitting to them unconsciously or irrationally. [236]

Writing to John Mole, McLuhan makes it equally clear that what we are doing to ourselves is unnecessary, and might, albeit with gigantic effort, be brought to an end: [237]

These kinds of psychic oscillation resulting from large environmental change are no longer necessary, any more than the plague. *Psychic diseases can now be treated for what they are, namely manifestations of the response to man-made technologies.* Environmental noise and disturbance can be controlled as readily as the unhygienic conditions that prevailed until recent times. The psychic effects of TV are no more necessary than the physical effects of polluted drinking water. As long as people persist in ignoring the subliminal and hidden effects of media on psyche and society, they will attribute these things to the "will of God."[238]

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[236] Ibid. Emphasis is mine. In a later letter to Maritain McLuhan mentions that he is aware that no one has sought to understand metamorphosis and causality in social institutions through a study of the sensory and perceptual changes resulting from new environments. He adds: "Surely history or philosophy cannot be written without a complete awareness of these matters, " (McLuhan to Jacques Maritain, 28 May 1969).

[237] One of the side effects, McLuhan implies, is that there might be a way of reconciling the Eastern and Roman Churches: "The mysteries of conflict between the Eastern and Roman churches, for example, are a merely obvious instance of the type of opposition between oral and the visual cultures, having nothing to do with faith," (*The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 68). What is important to stress here is that "reconciliation" does not entail the imposition of one culture on another. As McLuhan notes in "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters": "…in the modern world we have through the very perfection and instantaneity of our means of communication made it impossible to resolve the conflicting claims of numerous societies and cultures which are now in close association. Neither can we hope to impose any one culture on all the others and reduce them to a single form…," (McLuhan, "Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters," in *The Medium and the Light*, 174).

[238] McLuhan to John W. Mole, 29 January 1974.

To facilitate the development of a secular theory of communication, McLuhan embarked on a programme of correspondence as well as authoring magazine and journal articles. He also appears to have been headed towards creating a "Book of Probes into Catholicism" with Edward Wakin. As McLuhan and Wakin note in a memorandum (1977), their book of probes:

> Will attempt to clarify and track the new frontier in Church history brought on by the electric revolution. It will not be a systematic re-ordering of Catholicism, but a sequence of observations and comments. It will discuss the various insights to be found in the McLuhan approach to modern media and modern society by relating then to Catholics, Catholicism and the Catholic Church.[239]

The crux of McLuhan's approach, however, is to present the value of figure-ground analysis:

> I think that Gestalt's figure/ground dichotomy presents us with a useful way of speaking and understanding. The cognitive agent — to speak like Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas — is on the level of

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[239] McLuhan, and Edward Wakin, "Memorandum on a Book of Probes into Catholicism," MS., n.pag. The shape of the book, Wakin adds, is still undetermined: "But two general approaches come to mind, one of which will probably become dominant: (1) A discussion of Catholicism under various categories or headings. The five models of the Church used by the Jesuit theologian Avery Dulles look promising at this stage: The Church as Institution, Mystical Communion, Sacrament, Herald, fervent. The discussion would include such matters as personal worship, infallibility, liturgical change, doctrinal pronouncements, ordination of women, the role of bishops, the changing parish and diocese. (2) A discussion of various key observations and how they apply to Catholicism such as de-centralization, the prevalence of software, role-playing rather than goal chasing, electric simultaneity, interval as touch, dropping out in order to drop in. These probes would be applied across the board to every category or phase of Catholicism — wherever appropriate?," (Ibid.). The book was never written. Nor was the small book on St. Thomas Theory of Communication in relation to media — the angelic doctor for electric or discarnate man — that McLuhan sought to co-write with Jack Wilson. McLuhan, Diary, 19 January 1973. Also see Eric McLuhan, "The Christian in the Electronic Age," in *The Medium and the Light*, 175–177.

the efficient cause, not on that of formal cause. He concerns himself with the "content" of Christianity, not with its true message which consists of being plugged into a person. Generally, when you teach the content of the faith, you seldom go beyond its efficient cause. The formal cause is your manner of being, and all the baggage that accompanies your message.[240]

In his correspondence we see that he regarded figure-ground analysis to be integral to a Christian Theory of Communication: "This morning, for example, I was looking at Galatians 6:6 and it seems to me that a basic Theory of Christian Communication could be attained by simply selecting key texts to indicate the figure-ground concerns."[241] He also wrote to the PCSC and figures associated with the body stressing the need for the Commission to look, first, at media *effects* in terms of formal rather than efficient causality. "The effects of the media on man and society," McLuhan states, "must be sought, not in the efficient cause or in the visible *figure*, but in the formal cause of enveloping 'services' which are the inseparable *ground* of the figure."[242]

In addition to providing a method or tools, McLuhan sought to direct the attention of the Church towards the consideration of what he regarded as the most pressing issues or "problems" requiring attention. The first of these was the question of the relationship of the Church to the

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[240] McLuhan, "Religion and Youth: Second Conversation with Pierre Babin," in *The Medium and the Light*, 102–103.

[241] McLuhan to Opal and Marion Hammond, 8 May 1973. "Have a look at Luke 8-18: "Heed how you hear". Note the importance of the how in the figure-ground relationship of the seed and ground in the verses above it. Those who conceptualise the seed without perceptualsing are those who are not with it and therefore cannot keep it. After all, the church is a thing, and not a theory. That is why the poor and the children of the world can grasp it, whereas the wise and the learned have serious conceptual problems blocking their perceptual lives. The Jews had many concepts about the Messiah which defeated their confrontation with Him," (McLuhan to William Glenesk, 5 January 1970).

[242] McLuhan to the Pontifical Commission for Social Communications, 23 January 1976.

Graeco-Roman world. The matter underpins much of McLuhan's

conversation with Pierre Babin:

> That's how, paradoxically, the Church found itself embodied from
> its very beginnings in the only culture that preferred fixed and
> solid positions. The Church, which offers to man and demands of
> him a constant change of heart, wrapped itself in visual culture
> that placed static permanence above all other values. This Graeco-
> Roman culture, which seems to have imposed on the Church like
> a shell on a turtle, doesn't allow for any possibility for a supple
> theory of change and of communication. It is this hard shell that
> stands between the Church and other cultures of the world, all of
> which have accommodating, flexible, evolving forms.[243]

> Electrically, we not only scrap Renaissance forms but retrieve
> occult patterns of order that have been in abeyance for thousands
> of years. Whether the retrieval of these ancient patterns as
> environmental to twentieth century man, whether this new
> ambience is compatible with Western man's image of himself as
> private and separate, seems to me doubtful at least. If Western
> "nature" has gone, and private individuality has gone, the church
> has at least to confront the actualities of a non-Graeco-Roman
> world. *Whether its task is to adapt to this new situation or to struggle to
> revive and perpetuate the old Graeco-Roman canons, is an immediate
> prospect.*[244]

The second, which is not unrelated to the first, is the "status" of the

metaphysical substance of the self. While the matter is broached at

several points throughout McLuhan's oeuvre, his formulation of the

"issues" is perhaps stated most clearly in an unpublished letter to

Madame Alexis De Beauregard. Since this letter remains unpublished I

shall cite it at length:

> Basically, it seems to me an inescapable fact that the incarnation
> and the passion occurred in the Graeco—Roman context. Since
> God does nothing in vain and nothing idly, or insignificantly, His

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[243] McLuhan, "Keys to the Electronic Revolution: First Conversation with Pierre Babin,"
in *The Medium and the Light*, 49.

[244] McLuhan to Barbara Ward, 31 July 1972. Emphasis mine.

providence in setting the church centrally in the Graeco-Roman context has an enormous significance which has merely been taken for granted up until now. At the present time when the entire Western establishment is dissolving very rapidly under the impact of electric technology and when tribal man is resuming his dominance over the world, the question of the relevance of the Graeco-Roman thing becomes a central concern.

I have always known about the central fact of the spirit and rational metaphysical substance as indebted to the Graeco-Roman culture, but it was not until I discovered that it was this very private ego that resisted the study of theological effects on the human psyche that I began to ask what was the theological studies of the metaphysical individual substance. I know of no theologian or philosopher who has bothered to raise this issue. Aquinas merely takes it for granted. He seems not to have raised the question of whether tribal and corporate man is the natural condition and that private, individual man is an artificial state.[245]

Finally, he also sought to direct the attention of Church leaders to the pressing issue of Church authority under electric conditions. As McLuhan states to John W. Mole:

What I am coming to is the question of the magisterium. The Eastern church, being iconic and audile-tactile, could not tolerate the visual hierarchy of Rome with external, materialistic aspects, and today, as the Western church also is invaded by the simultaneous electric thing with its multi-locational boundlessness, *the whole question of Roman authority becomes crucial*.[246]

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[245] McLuhan to Alexis de Beauregard, 11 May 1972. "Buckminster Fuller, for example, points out that the space capsule was the first completely designed, man-made environment. With the space capsule you have to design all aspects of the environment simultaneously because you have to take the planet with you. Up until now we never even knew what the planet consisted of because we never had to take it away with us. In the same way *we have only begun to think of the function or meaning of selfhood*," (McLuhan, and Eli Bornstein, "An Interview With Marshall McLuhan," *The Structurist* 6 (June 1966): 67). Emphasis mine.

[246] McLuhan to John W. Mole, 29 January 1974.

What is important to stress at this juncture is that, for the most part, McLuhan presented his work as diagnostic. Diagnosis, however, also entailed the occasional "controversial" probe, particularly when his work was not being "dealt with" by the theologians.[247] For example, during an interview with Pierre Babin, McLuhan makes a rare claim:

> *Church authority has to take on entirely new forms*. Young people accept the authority of disk jockeys because they tune them in to what is in the wind or in the air, where they can vibrate in unison. The new ways of thinking and speaking, the new styles to which everyone conforms, are acoustic. The new way does not consist of seeing then doing, but of tuning oneself to the proper frequency, the right wavelength. It's our whole idea of communication that has changed …. We have discovered in our time that touch consist of tuning the sense organ to the frequency of the object itself, maintaining a constant interval between the organ and the object. If we want to grasp the object and squeeze it, we are no longer dealing with contact (and interval) but with connection.[248]

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[247] For example, in a later section of a letter to Beauregard I have just cited McLuhan adds: "…this is a matter that has affected and afflicted the mission of the church in the world for two thousand years. *The Church has never made an adequate gesture toward the tribal societies of India and China and Africa*, for these peoples are beyond the limits of the Graeco-Roman private individual. They have no idea of the private person. This fact alone pushes the matter of the effects of literacy into top prominence, and here the work of Eric Havelock in Preface to Plato is indispensable. For, if the private person is an artefact, then it becomes criminal to perpetuate him technologically in the electric age," (McLuhan to Alexis de Beauregard, 11 May 1972). Emphasis mine.

[248] McLuhan, "Religion and Youth: Second Conversation with Pierre Babin," in *The Medium and the Light*, 98–99. Emphasis mine. Writing to Cavelery McLuhan briefly indicates that a step in this direction, a means towards pushing Church authority to take on an entirely new form, might be had by way of the foundation of a new religious order: "The Jesuits, as first order founded under Gutenberg auspices, now interface with an antithetic age which is obviously crying out for a new religious order to embody these problems of electronic or discarnate man," (McLuhan to Rodger Calverley, 7 November 1973). For the researcher who directs his or her attention specifically at the implications McLuhan's work has for the Church this, as with the question as to whether McLuhan's own praxis might be taken as a "pilot model" of the function of that new religious order, would be a fruitful avenue of inquiry.

Thingness

McLuhan's dialogue with the Church was not restricted to a top-down engagement with the hierarchy. During his tenure as hallucinated idiot McLuhan also tried to save his fellow Christians from ruination by "conventional theology"[249] on the grounds that: "…all those having trouble with their faith today tend to be victims of post-renaissance conceptualized theology and catechism."[250] His efforts in this regard bring us, in many respects, to the single most "personal object" he sought to address throughout his entire career.[251]

The crux of McLuhan's praxis here was to try and provide some propaedeutic for an "encounter"[252] with the uncharted and un-chartable "thingness" and what he considered the "ever present fact":[253]

> Isn't the real message of the Church in the secondary or side-effects of the Incarnation, that is to say, in Christ's penetration into all of human existence? Then the question is, where are you in relation to this reality? Most people prefer to avoid the question by side-stepping it. The message is there but they want no part of it. So they eliminate it by plugging into another channel. They hypnotize themselves with the figure so as to better ignore the

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[249] See McLuhan, "Milton, Montaigne, and the *Philosophi Christi*," MS., 5.

[250] McLuhan to William Kuhns, 5 January 1970.

[251] McLuhan says to Wakin, only 1 in 6 of his kids raised in the Church stayed in the Church. "There is a great disparity between what the kids learned in Church and what they experienced and what their needs are," (McLuhan, "Our Only Hope is Apocalypse," in *The Medium and the Light*, 63).

[252] "It is clear to me that a study of the effects sought by any writer or artist or scientist whatever would naturally stress the experience of encountering this person. The word "encounter" is universally employed today, just as the words "perception" and "involvement" are. I think that the series I have in mind would be very much on the side of "encounter" and direct experience," (McLuhan to Judith Greissman, 14 July 1971).

[253] "… I can say that I do not think of God as a concept, but as an immediate and ever present fact, an occasion for continuous dialogue," (McLuhan to James Taylor, 15 January 1969).

ground. They prefer to study the words rather than the questions that Christ asks everywhere, and of every human being.[254]

Central to his procedure was his bid to recast what "theology" means. Here McLuhan's conversation with Hubert Hoskins brings us to the heart of McLuhan's *way*, and works to further illuminate the relationship of his work to the "negative way" of T. S. Eliot with which we began this chapter:

> **McLuhan**: The revelation is of *thing*, not theory. And where revelation reveals actual thing-ness you are not dealing with concept. The thing-ness revealed in Christianity has always been a scandal to the conceptualist: it has always been incredible. This issue is raised in the Book of Job, where faith and understanding were put at totally opposite poles. Job was not working on a theory but on a direct percept. All understanding was against him; all concept was against him. He was directly perceiving a reality, one revealed to him.
>
> **Hoskins**: If what you are saying is right, I still don't see how such an activity as theology is possible even in theory.
>
> **McLuhan**: I should think that it is very much a pastime, in the sense of a rehearsal of past times. It is not personal and direct confrontation. Theology is one of the "games people play," in the sense of its theorizing. But using direct percept and direct involvement with the actuality of a revealed thing — there need be no theology in the ordinary sense of the word ….
>
> **Hoskins**: You regard this as a game?
>
> **McLuhan**: Pure game.
>
> **Hoskins**: A useless game?
>
> **McLuhan**: Not necessarily more useless than any other game. Most games are a tremendous *katharsis* for pent-up emotions and frustrations. There has always been a great clash between works and concepts in religion. I think that theology can become a work, perhaps a part of the *opus dei*, part of the prayerful contemplation of God. Insofar as theology is contemplation and prayer it is part of the contemplation of the *thing*ness and the mysteries.

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[254] McLuhan, "Religion and Youth: Second Conversation with Pierre Babin," in *The Medium and the Light*, 102–03.

> **Hoskins**: This is using the term "theology" in a rather unusual way.
>
> **McLuhan**: Theology should ideally be a study of the *thing*ness, the nature of God, since it is a form of contemplation. But insofar as it is a theoretical or intellectual construct, it is purely a game, though perhaps a very attractive game. It can be played equally with any oriental theology: it has no more relevance to Christian theology than to Hindu theology.[255]

A Dialogue

In the closing years of his life McLuhan began working with another set of collaborators including: Kathryn Hutchins (*City as Classroom: Understanding Language and Media*), Robert K. Logan ("Library, Old Figure in a New Ground"), Bruce R. Powers (*The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century*), and Eric McLuhan (*Laws of Media: The New Science*).[256] And he set about recasting his work in terms of what conventionally passed for "science."[257] From his correspondence we see that he began calculating his strategy one

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[255] McLuhan, "Electric Consciousness and the Church," in *The Medium and the Light*, 81–82.

[256] McLuhan also continued to collaborate with Barrington Nevitt on developing the "laws." See Barrington Nevitt, *ABC of Prophecy: Understanding the Environment* (Toronto: Canadian Futures, 1980).

[257] Satire might be construed as a kind of science insofar as it is concerned with the nature of reality, emphasising what seems to be real, but is not. Leonard Feinberg, *Introduction to Satire* (Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1967), 3). Similarly, Elliot argues that satire is the truth of natural science — objective, non-emotional truth, that sometimes takes on the character of creative art. Robert C. Elliott, *The Power of Satire: Magic, Ritual, Art* (Princeton, NJ.: Princeton University Press, 1960), 226–228. McLuhan, at least, appears to have concurred. As Eric McLuhan writes in *Laws of Media*: "The style of *UM* [*Understanding Media*] had been deliberately chosen for its abrasive and discontinuous character ... It was designed deliberately to provoke the reader, to jar the sensibilities into a form of awareness that better complemented the subject-matter. This is a poetic technique (science, if you will) of a high sort – satirizing the reader directly as a means of training him," (*Laws of Media,* viii).

decade prior (which as we have seen, is a relatively conventional pattern). As McLuhan notes to Sheila Watson, when "I asked Harley Parker what happens when the arts became environmental, what controls are available for human perception, he said science would have to substitute for the arts."[258]

McLuhan's bid to renew his programme and represent his work as "science" took two directions. Firstly, he sought to formulate what he calls the laws of the media: "When I came across Karl Popper's principle that a scientific hypothesis is one capable of falsification, I decided to hypothesize the 'Laws of the Media.'"[259] Secondly, from 1976, McLuhan sought to storm a new beachhead and bring his project under the aegis of split brain/hemispheric research. His rationale for the latter was that the state of research into the brain's hemispheres in the mid-1970s was analogous to what Communication was in the 1950s and Media Studies

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[258] McLuhan to Sheila Watson, 15 February 1965.

[259] McLuhan, "The Laws of the Media," in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound*, 5. McLuhan's laws are the "tetrads" as discussed briefly in Chapter Three. Since McLuhan's laws are treated by nearly every commentator on his work, I will here take the less trodden path and consider the latter.

was in the 1960s.[260] It was new and emerging field,[261] and it appears
McLuhan deemed it particularly well suited to his approach:[262]

> What is called the left hemisphere in this two-hemisphere study, is
> the world of logic and dialectic, and the right hemisphere is the
> world of analogy and group awareness. *These hemispheres are not
> theoretical, but based entirely on empirical study of brain damage.* You
> may note that the left hemisphere is lineal and connected and
> goal-oriented ... The right hemisphere, on the other hand, is the
> world of the simultaneous and the analogical and the
> discontinuous.[263]

Subsequently, McLuhan set about "putting on" a new audience by
recasting his oeuvre in the idiom of split-brain studies — using the left
and right hemisphere of the brain as his new "obsolete dichotomy" in a
similar fashion to his use of acoustic and visual space during the 1950s.[264]

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[260] In his correspondence, McLuhan indicates that his first inclination was to dismiss the
two hemisphere studies: "Keep in mind that I had not followed it up sooner because I
could see that the whole approach was very evidently from men of the left hemisphere.
What finally made me look closer was the idea of dominance of hemispheres. The left
is dominant in a literate, lineal environment and the right goes dominant in a
simultaneous electronic environment." (McLuhan to Jim Striegel, 14 September 1976).

[261] The work of several other figures in the field, e.g. Julian Jaynes' *The Origin of
Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind*, McLuhan regarded as "science
fiction." "Harold Innis: The Philosophical Historian. An Exchange of Ideas Between Prof.
Marshall McLuhan and Prof. Eric Havelock," videocassette. (Toronto: University of
Toronto, 14 October 1978).

[262] Particularly in the wake of the collapse of the East/West dichotomy. C.f. McLuhan,
"The End of Jobs, The Return of Roles," *Administrative Management* 13, no. 1 (1970):
40 and McLuhan, "Living at the Speed of Light – the 80's, version V."

[263] McLuhan to Edwin C. Garvey, 10 November 1976. Emphasise mine.

[264] C.f. *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 183 cited in the Audience as Formal Cause section of
Chapter Two, and McLuhan, and Harley Parker, *Counterblast*, 142 as cited in Chapter
Four. The relevant question at this juncture, from McLuhan's "perspective," is what are
the conditions (the *ground*, e.g. "disembodied and discarnate experience," and the
condition of organs-without-bodies), that are conspiring to make the hemispheres of the
brain "visible" and a matter of interest across several domains?

Apparently, it was a task that required little in the way of labour. As McLuhan notes to Hall:

> For thirty years at least, I have been using the two hemispheres approach under the names of the *written* and the *oral*, the *visual* and the *acoustic*, the *hot* and the *cool*, the *medium* and the *message*, *figure* and *ground*, and so on .… *My work has been a dialogue between the two hemispheres* in which the characteristics of the right hemisphere are given so much recognition that I have been unintelligible to the left hemisphere people. It happens that the left hemisphere people are completely out of touch with the results and formal characteristics of their own new electric technologies.[265]

He then set about putting his "new" discoveries to work, addressing the audience of the moment.[266] It appeared to work, at least insofar as his new work attracted attention. As he notes to Jim Striegel:

> The advantage of the hemisphere thing is that it is pragmatic and empirical rather than conceptual. I had no trouble getting it accepted in Paris at UNESCO recently. The French were quite unable to resist the empirical evidence. Naturally, the Third world is right hemisphere, and the First world is left hemisphere. From the moment of the phonetic alphabet a lineal environment formed and left hemisphere went into dominance. With the formation of the instantaneous electric environment, the right took over .… For

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The "price" McLuhan paid for operating in this fashion is that his contribution to studies on brain "hemispheres" came to be seen as deficient as the "field" matured. Ornstein, for example, has since stressed that earlier patterns of research (which McLuhan was "putting on") over-emphasised the "split" between the two sides of the brain when, in fact, it is massively "connected" via the corpus callosum. See Ornstein, *The Right Mind.*

[265] McLuhan to Edward T. Hall, 3 September 1976. Emphasise is mine. McLuhan states the matter more accurately in an interview with Bruce Powers wherein he states that he is engaged in the "Herculean task" of processing right hemisphere perceptions of the world through the left hemisphere. McLuhan, and Bruce Powers, *The Global Village*, 133.

[266] C.f. Eric McLuhan, "Menippean Thunder at Finnegans Wake: The Critical Problems," 30. E.g. advising Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau. See McLuhan to Pierre Trudeau, 1 February 1979.

thirty years I have been working out of the right hemisphere and attacking the left. The world of the symbolist poets and of James Joyce, is a right hemisphere world. *The hemispheres gives a beachhead into the territories I have covered in my work*. In the light of this, I think you can considerably simplify the project you outlined. All media content is left hemisphere, and media effects are right hemisphere. The r/h [right hemisphere] is perception, and the l/h [left hemisphere] is the concept world. My own insistence that I have been r/h, perceptual rather than conceptual, is amply borne out.[267]

McLuhan also brought his "new" discoveries back into the orbit of his dialogue with the Church — and it is here that we are brought the crux of McLuhan's campaign — to facilitate dialogue:

Indeed, the solution lies in the complementary nature of the two cerebral hemispheres. For, anatomically, these two hemispheres are complementary, and not exclusive. Neither mode is more important except in transitional forms of awareness. It is culture that makes one or the other dominant and exclusive. A culture builds itself on a preference for one or the other hemisphere instead of basing itself on both. Our school system, like our Catholic hierarchy, is completely dominated by the left side of the brain. Vatican II was a very poor attempt to pass over to the right side. The result was mostly confusion. Ecumenism, too, I suppose, attempts to play both hemispheres equally, but it leaves me perplexed.[268]

McLuhan's foray into new terrain was, however, short lived. In 1979 he suffered a massive stroke that rendered him speechless. The following year he died. In his wake, his corpus has continued to grow. The *Laws of Media*, which brings his "laws" back into the orbit of his doctoral work, was unfinished during his lifetime, was completed by Eric McLuhan. Similarly, *The Global Village*, that combines McLuhan's "laws" with his latest research into brain hemispheres, was completed by Bruce

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[267] McLuhan to Jim Striegel, 14 September 1976.

[268] McLuhan, "Keys to the Electronic Revolution: First Conversation with Pierre Babin," in *The Medium and the Light*, 53.

R. Powers. While both books deserve considerable attention, however, they must await a latter work. "And so, I interrupt what I hope to be able to conclude another day. It is impossible not to be conscious of the many defects of this study; but it is, likewise, impossible to have surveyed the terrain in question without acquiring a vivid sense of its largely unexplored character."[269]

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[269] *The Classical Trivium*, 252.

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