

SING-NAN FEN

University of Nebraska

Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media*

I

Understanding Media was published in 1964. Its content could be summarized in McLuhan's own words:

It explores the contours of our own extended beings in our technologies, seeking the principle of intelligibility in each of them. In the full confidence that it is possible to win an understanding of these forms that will bring them into orderly service, I have looked at them anew, accepting very little of the conventional wisdom concerning them. One can say of media as Robert Theobald has said of economic depressions: 'There is one additional factor that has helped to control depressions, and that is a better understanding of their development.' Examination of the origin and development of the individual extensions of man should be preceded by a look at some general aspects of the media, or extensions of man, beginning with the never-explained numbness that each extension brings about in the individual.¹

The book, according to the last sentence of the above quotation, is divided into two parts: Part I deals with the general aspects of the media or extensions of man; Part II examines the origin and development of the individual media, twenty-three in number. Part I is further divided into seven chapters. Except the seventh, the remaining six chapters discuss the six general aspects of the media. These six general aspects, in turn, find their illustrations in the twenty-three media treated in Part II. Thus, we can look at Part II as concrete illustrations of Part I and Part I as generalizations of Part II.

Mr. McLuhan's interest in the so-called media is not merely intellectual and historical. He has been particularly moved by the aspirations of our time for wholeness, empathy and depth of awareness² which he construes as a natural effect of electric technology.³ Thus, his interest in media is his interest in the cause of the contemporary change of psychological mood. His fundamental thesis is that change of the media is the cause of change of mood. And the present change of mood, aspiration for wholeness, etc., is caused by the change of media, from the mech-

¹Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, (New York: Signet Books, 1964), p. 21.

²*Ibid.*, p. 21.

³*Ibid.*, p. 21.

anical to the electric. The major thrust of the book is therefore to remind us of the on-going change in media and psychology which no one can afford to ignore as all of us are involved.

About the cause of the change of our psychological mood, McLuhan's foremost concern is to deemphasize the importance traditionally attached to the message. By message McLuhan means the 'content' for which the media serve as the vehicles to carry and deliver. In contrast to the traditional emphasis on content and message, McLuhan maintains the thesis that the medium is the message to which McLuhan devotes his first and the most important chapter of the book.

Of primary importance is the content or message which the media carries. So we generally believe. The content or message is important, as the logic goes, because it and it alone controls or shapes our psychological mood. Associated with this belief is the more general conviction, again commonly held, that the end is more important than the means. In this vein, General David Sarnoff makes the statement that the products of modern science are not in themselves good or bad; it is the way it is used that determines their value.⁴ Such a statement McLuhan writes off as 'the voice of the current somnambulism.'⁵ McLuhan himself maintains that the medium is the message in that 'it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action.'⁶ His own convincing example is electric light. In what way is electric light the message?

Disregarding the numerous ways the electric light is used for, electric light in virtue of itself changes our psychology of time, work, play, politics, social relations, etc.⁷ These changes are the messages of electric light in comparison with which the use we make of the electric light, whether for brain surgery or for night baseball, is a matter of indifference, according to McLuhan. Furthermore, the content of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium.⁸ McLuhan himself emphasizes the character of medium in so far as it shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action.

The traditional emphasis on message as separate from the medium is a moral and intellectual emphasis. McLuhan's emphasis on the character of medium, on the other hand, is basically an emphasis on physics and physiology. Intellectuals and moralists like to think that a message carried through a medium would effect the receivers becoming better persons. By the same token, messages are considered, screened, selected, evaluated and debated on this criterion of betterment. Under this consideration, the medium used to carry the message is a subordinate issue, the issue of mere efficiency. To McLuhan this type of thinking

⁴*Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 24.

is both conventional and shallow. It is conventional because the distinction between medium and message is not at all absolute:

The instance of the electric light may prove illuminating in this connection. The electric light is pure information. It is a medium without a message, as it were, unless it is used to spell out some verbal ad or name. This fact, characteristic of all media, means that the 'content' of any medium is always another medium. The content of writing is speech, just as the written word is the content of print, and print is the content of the telegraph. If it is asked, 'What is the content of speech?,' it is necessary to say, 'It is an actual process of thought which is in itself nonverbal.'⁹

Closely related to the non-distinction between message or content and medium is McLuhan's view of the effect or impact whether of message or of medium. Intellectuals and moralists cannot leave efficiency as a subordinate issue, for the process of becoming is ultimately a life progress which must be described in physical and physiological term. Superficially a man becomes a morally or intellectually better person due to certain influences. But the betterness or the change for betterness must be ultimately embodied in his physical or physiological change. In other words, the influence must be material. Hence efficiency is not a side issue unless lip service is paid to 'becoming.' If the material, physical or physiological change is emphasized, then the distinction between message and medium becomes inconsequential for it is at least possible that hard-ware medium affect our body much more than the soft-ware message.¹⁰

McLuhan's emphasis on the material impact of media on individual psychology and social institution despite our conscious awareness and intentional effort can be best summarized in his own words:

The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance.¹¹

To describe how technology alters sense ratio or patterns of perception is the content of the second chapter, "Media Hot And Cold." In his probe into the impact of technology, McLuhan looked for the impact on our organic bodies. To him it is inconsequential what intended message, pornography or sacred sayings for instance, does a particular medium, printing for instance, carries. It is consequential what particular sense or senses are stimulated or overstimulated by the medium. In the case of printing, it is the eye, the visual sense that is stimulated. Furthermore in so far as the printing as a medium has become pervasive and dominant in the Western culture, the sense life or the life of senses of the Western men have been exclusively visual, linear, and abstract to the extent that other senses — the sense of smell, taste, touch and hearing — remain inactive and non-participant. In this way, printing is a hot medium. 'A hot medium', in McLuhan's vocabulary, 'is one that extends one single sense in "high definition."¹² 'High definition' is the

⁹*Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 36.

state of being well filled with data. A photograph is visually, "high definition." A cartoon is "low definition," simply because very little visual information is provided.¹³ Thus, whether a medium is hot or cold depends on two variables, the number of senses participating and the degree of the completeness of data. A cold medium allows participation of many senses and the data calls for completion on the receivers' part. A hot medium, on the other hand, does not allow participation of many senses and the data is presented to the receivers in the finished form without the need for the receiver's active participation. Using the distinction of hot or cold medium in a grand manner, McLuhan characterizes cultural patterns, and history epochs as well as discerns cultural changes. For McLuhan, our culture and our style of life is determined by the dominant and prevailing medium, hot or cold. Since the invention of printing, which according to McLuhan's definition is a hot medium, the Western culture has had specialism, one sense speciality, individualism, linear type of abstract thinking as her distinct characteristic. But this culture is being given way to the aspiration for wholeness, empathy and depth of awareness. This change, following McLuhan's idea, is caused by the electric medium, such as TV which involves us with many senses, viewing, hearing, and touching and presents data in low definition as TV images wait for audiences' completion. In contrast to printing, the electric medium is a cold medium. Thus the second chapter, "Medium, Hot and Cold," complements the first chapter; medium is the message, as the message varies according to the medium hot or cold. Hot medium detribalizes as it isolates, specializes and rationalizes men. Cool medium tribalizes as it involves, generalizes and emotes men.

While the message or massage varies according to the medium, hot or cold, the variation does not take the simplistic linear form with medium as cause message as effect. The work of media is the work of and in a system. The work takes the form of reverberation within a system. Sometimes, such as our present time, the violent reverberation can turn the whole system loose. This is what McLuhan describes in his third chapter, "Reversal of the Overheated Medium." With reference to our own time, by the overheated medium, McLuhan could mean 'the stepping-up of speed from the mechanical to the instant electric form';¹⁴ by reversal, he could mean 'reverse explosion into implosion.'¹⁵ About this reversal, McLuhan elaborates in more details as follows:

In our present electric age the imploding or contracting energies of our world now clash with the old expansionist and traditional patterns of organization. Until recently our institutions and arrangements, social, political, and economic, had shared a one-way pattern. We still think of it as 'explosive,' or expansive; and though it no longer obtains, we still talk about the population explosion and explosion in learning. In fact, it is not the increase in numbers in the world that creates our concern with population. Rather, it is the fact that everybody in the world has to live in the utmost proximity created by

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 47.

our electric involvement in one another's lives. In education, likewise, it is not the increase in numbers of those seeking to learn that creates the crisis. Our new concern with education follows upon the changeover to an interrelation in knowledge, where before the separate subjects of the curriculum had stood apart from each other. Departmental sovereignties have melted away as rapidly as national sovereignties under conditions of electric speed.¹⁶

McLuhan's idea of the reversal of the overheated medium is very similar to the idea of dialectic movement, the movement of thesis towards its anti-thesis, propounded by Hegel and Marx. The theory purports to explain the origin of movement without the help of Aristotle's "unmoved mover." In McLuhan's case, the alternation between the hot and the cold medium is a natural dialectical process. Specifically, the mechanical medium, the hot medium, through its own moment of speeding up, inevitably brings forth the electrical medium, the speediest of all media, making simultaneous existence of cause and effect, East and West, present and future a reality. Thus from speed to simultaneity is the basic form of the reversal of the overheated mechanical medium of which we are the survivors. Together with this reversal of the overheated medium is the reversal of historical and psychological process specifically, the reversal of national state which is the consequence of the dominance of mechanical medium to *global village* which is the consequence of the dominance of the electrical medium. In this way, McLuhan seems to have adopted a cyclic view of history following Hegelian dialectics of a sort.

In this historical process, we play the role of "Gadget Lover," the title of Chapter 4. As a new medium becomes dominant, we are entranced by it to a state of numbness and become its servomechanisms. We become what we behold. We change as what we behold changes. But, change is not of one form. It takes the form of interchanges. This interchange McLuhan describes in the next chapter, "Hybrid Energy."

The hybrid or the meeting of two media is a moment of truth and revelation from which new form is born. For the parallel between two media holds us on the frontiers between forms that snap us out of the Narcissus-narcosis. The moment of the meeting of media is a moment of freedom and release from the ordinary trance and numbness imposed by them on our senses.¹⁷

But the hybrid is not limited to media. It includes human beings. It has been indicated above that McLuhan's use of the word message is not confined to its intellectual and moral connotation. His message is physical and physiological massage of media on our sensitive bodies. In so far as we participate with our senses we and the media are "hybridized." Media in the form of technology are nothing but extensions of our own sense organs or our alter-ego working on behalf of and with us. In this way human energy and non-human energies are acting out the physicists' drama, *The Transformation of Energies*. Again, this view need not be a crude and crass materialism. It is rather a

¹⁶*Ibid.*, p. 47.

¹⁷*Ibid.*, p. 63.

mystic view of cosmic energy, human energy included. In the concluding passage of the sixth chapter, "Media As Translator," McLuhan unashably makes explicit his version of mysticism:

Our very word 'grasp' or 'apprehension' points to the process of getting at one thing through another, of handling and sensing many facets at a time through more than one sense at a time. It begins to be evident that 'touch' is not skin but the interplay of the senses, and 'keeping in touch' or 'getting in touch' is a matter of a fruitful meeting of the senses, or sight translated into sound and sound into movement, and taste and smell. The 'common sense' was for many centuries held to be the peculiar human power of translating one kind of experience of one sense into all the senses, and presenting the result continuously as a unified image to the mind. In fact, this image of a unified ratio among the senses was long held to be the mark of our *rationality*, and may in the computer age easily become so again. For it is now possible to program ratios among the senses that approach the condition of consciousness. Yet such a condition would necessarily be an extension of our own consciousness as much as wheel is an extension of feet in rotation. Having extended or translated our central nervous system into the electromagnetic technology, it is but a further stage to transfer our consciousness to the computed world as well. Then, at least, we shall be able to program consciousness in such wise that it cannot be numbed not distracted by the Narcissus illusions of the entertainment world that beset mankind when he encounters himself extended in his own gimmickry.

If the work of the city is the remaking or translating of man into a more suitable form than his nomadic ancestors achieved, then might not our current translation of our entire lives into the spiritual form of information seem to make of the entire globe, and of the human family, a single consciousness?¹⁸

The electric media as an extension of our central nerve system externalize and extend our thinking process as do computers. There is no reason why the extension and externalization needs to stop at thinking. Once externalized, consciousness is no longer a private affair. There lies the hope for a 'single consciousness.' More imminent, of course, are messages delivered by an electric medium such as TV. What is the message of TV as a medium? In Part II of his book McLuhan himself observed how specific media, 23 in number, illustrate the general aspects of media in their respective way. TV is one of the specific media he chooses to emphasize.

According to McLuhan, the effects of TV lie not in its program or content. They can be discerned most by contrasting it with printing. Indeed, to McLuhan the effects of TV versus those of printing earmark two distinct cultures and civilizations which we ignore at our own peril. The way our children are educated is a case in point.

As former children, the present adults have been educated through the medium of print. First of all printing educates us exclusively through visual sense. Second, it educates us to be one thing at a time. Third, it compels us to proceed lineally, one after another. Fourth, it emphasizes uniformity without encouraging diversity. Yet finally it encourages individual selfish pursuit disregarding communal feeling and sensation. As a medium, printing educates us to be individualistic,

¹⁸*Ibid.*, p. 67.

mechanical, formally logical, visual and passive. According to McLuhan, this has been the Western culture since the 16th century which marked the beginning of the Gutenberg printing press and mass education.

In contrast, TV, contrary to popular thinking, educates us through the sense of touch, not through the visual sense. Unlike the sense of seeing, the sense of touch is more a 'common sense' than a 'special sense' as quotation 18 indicates. Second, TV impresses us with happenings, not one thing at a time. Third, TV does not proceed; it presents configurations and patterns, not isolated items. Fourth, due to its low definition, in contrast to high definition movie, its mosaic icon-like image is neither complete nor uniform. Much completion has to be done by the receivers with or without their knowing it. And finally TV involves us through kinetic sense, common viewing as well as simultaneous happenings.

In short as a hot medium, printing has educated the Western men into a culture of individualism, specialism, rationalism, and passivity long becoming familiar to us. As a cold medium TV may launch us, particularly our children, into a culture long forgotten, communalism, generalism, sensualism and involvement.

The young people who have experienced a decade of TV have naturally imbibed an urge toward involvement in depth that makes all the remote visualized goals of usual culture seem not only unreal but irrelevant, and not only irrelevant but anemic. It is the total involvement in all-inclusive nowness that occurs in young lives via TV's mosaic image. This change of attitude has nothing to do with programming in any way, and would be the same if the programs consisted entirely of the highest cultural content. The change in attitude by means of relating themselves to the mosaic TV image would occur in any event. It is, of course, our job not only to understand this change but to exploit it for its pedagogical richness. The TV child expects involvement and doesn't want a specialist *job* in the future. He does want a *role* and a deep commitment to his society. Unbridled and misunderstood, this richly human need can manifest itself in the distorted forms portrayed in *West Side Story*.

The TV child cannot see ahead because he wants involvement, and he cannot accept a fragmentary and merely visualized goal or destiny in learning or in life.¹⁹

It should be observed that McLuhan does not maintain that TV child is TV child; nothing more need to be said and done. The *West Side Story* is a reminder that as educators and adults we cannot afford to do nothing as the 16th Century schoolmen did in front of the torrent of the Gutenberg press. But the misfortune of these schoolmen lies not in their inaction but primarily in their blindness of the new tidings.²⁰ They collapsed in front of the challenge. This McLuhan does not want us to do. This is why the book *Understanding Media* is written.

II

To begin with, then, one must insist that McLuhan is no sort of specialist at all. Nothing he has to say is based on esoteric knowledge or technical

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 292.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 76.

competence. He is best approached as a sort of social critic or perhaps a dilettante conversationalist — and his ideas stand or fall on the basis of their internal consistency or whatever evidence McLuhan can present for them. It is the plight of the generalist that he cannot expect anyone to defer to this authority on the subject at hand.²¹

The above quotation from Theodore Roszak represents a rather common negative intellectual reaction towards McLuhan's book, *Understanding Media*. As the book is comprehensive in scope, its author cannot perform like a specialist scholar, supporting his important statements with evidences according to the strict canons of scholarship and sciences. Indeed, the nature of the book defies classification as science, fiction, history or philosophy, which entails a variety of sets of rules, to none of which McLuhan seems willing to conform. McLuhan himself is rather negative towards the book as a medium of communication in the first place. Nevertheless, he has written books including this one. Not a few critics notice this as his primary self-contradiction.²² As a book, its style and organization irritates the academic and disciplined mind, particularly its repetitious themes such as the medium is the message, its slick but meaningless sub-titles such as "Money, the Poor Man's Credit Card" and its overall sensationalism, profuse use of puns, wise-cracks and slangs unbecoming a scholar and gentleman.²³ It is his wide and wild generalizations without the support of solid evidence which incur severe and judicious criticism. As Anthony Quinton put it: "His procedure is to heap evidence up in tumultuous and disparate assemblages, with little critical appraisal of his sources — unless they deviate very grossly in some way from one of his main theses — and with only the most tenuous thread of topical relevance to connect them."²⁴ Other intellectuals and scholars present bills of particulars, to show up McLuhan's questionable procedure. First of all, he is simply ignorant of facts about films,²⁵ TV perceptions,²⁶ history,²⁷ yet uses his own imagined facts as evidences supporting his theory. Secondly, he distorts and even misquotes authorities such as Joyce,²⁸ Shakespeare,²⁹ Yeats and Blake³⁰ to reinforce his own theory. Thirdly, he makes use of vague terminology and ambiguous phraseology to build a conceptual system which can hardly stand close scrutiny. What does he refer to

²¹Theodore Roszak, "The summa Popologica of Mrashall McLuhan," in Raymond Rosenthal (ed.) *McLuhan: Pro and Con*, (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1968), p. 260.

²²Dwight MacDonald, "Running It Up The Totem Pole," in Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, pp. 32-33.

²³Anthony Quinton, "Cut Rate Salvation," in Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, pp. 186-187.

²⁴*Ibid.*, p. 191.

²⁵MacDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 33.

²⁶Ben Lieberman, "Paradise Regained or McLuhanacy," in Gerald Emmanuel Stearn (ed.). *McLuhan: Hot and Cool*, (New York: The Dial Press, 1967), p. 225.

²⁷Hugh Kenner, "Understanding McLuhan," in Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

²⁸Nathan Halper, "Marshall McLuhan and Joyce," in Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, pp. 68, 79, and 81.

²⁹George P. Elliott, "Marshall McLuhan: Double Agent," in Stearn, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

³⁰Milton Klonsky, "McLuhan's Message or: Which Way Did the Second Coming Went," in Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, p. 134.

by the term medium first of all?³¹ The same can be asked of terms like participation and involvement.³² When McLuhan talks of medium as the "extensions" of men, Burke is confounded.³³ Burke further maintains that McLuhan, following an intellectual fad, uses the words, information or communication in such a way that everything under the sun can be viewed as information or communication,³⁴ a blow on the head, a stumble on a stone, even a drop of rain. To Burke, McLuhan can get away with murder simply by his unscrupulous maneuvers with terms:

If, instead of saying that certain media are *analogous* to parts of the body, you say that they are "extensions" of such parts, and if you allow for great latitude in the use of analogy, anything will fit in somewhere. In fact, since the body is itself an aspect of nature, and thus embodies the same kinds of goings-on that we can observe in other parts of nature, even if an invention did happen to arise from observation of nature rather than by "extension" of the inventor's body, lax rules for the application of analogy here would allow you to find some analogical process in the body itself — whereupon, in keeping with the prime resources of the McLuhan nomenclature, you could call such an *analogy with* the body an "extension of" the body, that is to say a *derivation from* the body.³⁵

Even his sympathetic commentators like John M. Culkins S. J. can find four meanings of McLuhan's major thesis, the medium is the message.³⁶ Last, certainly not the least, is McLuhan's persuasive rhetoric which frequently is invalid reasoning.³⁷ Wagner specifically points out McLuhan's confusion between cause and effect as follows:

But what happens *chez* McLuhan is that the point of departure suddenly becomes, by bogus sleight of hand, the thesis proved ("With the arrival of electric technology man extended, or set outside himself, a live model of the central nervous system itself"). In this way we learn that it was really the fishes that discovered water.³⁸

Quinton points out his mistaking the necessary condition for the sole condition:

What he usually does is to argue that some change in media of communication is a necessary condition of a certain major social or cultural change, and then to represent his discovery as an account of what *created* the major change in question.³⁹

Again a sympathetic critic, Kostelanetz, cannot help pointing out the methodological and procedural inadequacy of McLuhan, particularly his "rampaging tendency to overexplain."⁴⁰

³¹Geoffrey Wagner, "Misunderstanding Media, Obscurity as Authority," in Rosenthal, *op cit.*, pp. 156-157.

³²Jack Behn, "Paradise Regained or McLuhancy," in Stearn, *op. cit.*, p. 220.

³³Kenneth Burke, "Medium as 'Message,' in Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, p. 167.

³⁴*Ibid.*, p. 170.

³⁵*Ibid.*, p. 168.

³⁶John M. S. J. Culkin, "A Schoolman's Guide to Marshall McLuhan," in Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, pp. 245-246.

Richard Kostelanetz, "A Hot Apostle in a Cool Culture," in Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, p. 219

³⁷C. J. Fox, "Revisal," Commonwealth, Vol. 81. Copy 16. 1964.

³⁸Wagner, *op. cit.*, p. 157.

³⁹Quinton, *op cit.*, p. 192.

⁴⁰Kostelanetz, *op. cit.*, p. 223.

By overexplain, Kostelanetz means what Quinton and many others call McLuhan's fallacy of single causation, using one cause, medium, to explain social and cultural changes in history. Particularly, McLuhan's slogan, the medium is the message suffers from ambiguity as well as the fallacy of single causation. Without clearly defining the terms, 'medium' and 'message,' McLuhan leads and misleads hypnotized readers to think the medium is indeed the message and the only message.⁴¹ Small wonder that his undisciplined procedure results in many unwarranted assertions which it is not hard for his critics to point out. His theory of human senses, for instance, needs a great deal of scientific reckoning, with psychology and physiology in particular. Yet McLuhan makes a bold statement about our senses, viewing, touching, smelling, etc., as if no scientific studies are needed. Quinton pointedly wonders why McLuhan never bothers to study blind men.⁴² While he belabors on TV as a contemporary medium, his technical knowledge about various aspects of TV is very weak. Consequently many of his assertions about TV are nonsensical.⁴³ Some critics maintain that if McLuhan pays some attention to American economic structure he would not slight the "content" of TV as if it makes little difference to both the producer and the consumers what kind of program is on or off.⁴⁴ Together with undisciplined procedure, McLuhan is also guilty of making many unwarranted assertions which reflects his lack of knowledge of academic disciplines, psychology and sociology in particular.⁴⁵

In addition to his procedural and substantial weaknesses, McLuhan's value commitments also incur severe criticism. He explicitly disclaims value commitment. Detachment and objectivity constitute his own claimed posture. But many readers find that he is not as value-free as he claims. First of all he certainly maintains a hierarchy of senses, making touch a *higher* sense than visual viewing. This hierarchy is hotly contended by Macdonald and Klonsky.⁴⁶ Second, he belittles conceptual thinking, linear logic or sequential reasoning which to many are precious human faculties.⁴⁷ Third, unwittingly, McLuhan apologizes for the status quo, following Hegelian dictum: what *is* rational. To

⁴¹Lieberman, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

Kenneth E. Boulding, "The Medium and The Message," in Stearn, *op. cit.*, p. 59.

⁴²Quinton, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

⁴³Klonsky, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

⁴⁴Thelma McCormack, "Innocent Eye on Mass Society," in Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, p. 205.

⁴⁵Neil Compton, "The Paradox of Marshall McLuhan," in Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

⁴⁶McDonald, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

Klonsky, *op. cit.*, p. 129.

⁴⁷Michael J. Arlen, "Marshall McLuhan and Technological Embrace," in Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, p. 85.

Roszak, *op. cit.*, p. 263.

Joseph Wood Krutch, "If You Don't Mind My Saying So," *American Scholar*, 36 (Ant. 1967), p. 535.

Compton, Ricks, DeMott,⁴⁸ McLuhan really offers a cut rate solution by explaining away problems of war, racial injustice, commercialism, militarism as if they are not problems but balance of nature of a sort. Krutch thinks McLuhan's education theory emphasizes adjustment.⁴⁹ Rockman and Meyer maintains that McLuhan simply legitimatizes or rationalizes profane objects, activities, attitudes and thought, in short, caters to current trends.⁵⁰ Basic to his value orientation, is his indifference to human achievement and conscious will. His interests in media focus on agency without fully realizing that the agent is in the picture too, as Burke put it.⁵¹

Different critics find different weaknesses in *Understanding Media*. Few take pains to criticize him systematically. Among these few is Sidney Finkelstein. Finkelstein's is also the rare systematic criticism. Finkelstein can be systematic for he finds McLuhan's faults not just in details but rooted in principle, particularly the principle, the medium is the message. According to Finkelstein, out of this principle, McLuhan weaves a panoramic view of history which is distorted, nonsensical and wrong. Logically if the medium is the message; changing medium is changing message which culminates in historical change. Particularly in Part II of his book McLuhan does use a variety of media to explain historical change. For instance printing, according to McLuhan is responsible for nationalism, individualism as well as reformation. The supply of paper has much to do with the rise and decline of the Roman Empire. Such an attribution of particular historical change to a specific medium Finkelstein finds outrageous. Finkelstein does not deny that technology in general, media in particular, is an important factor in historical change. What he objects to is that McLuhan makes media the primary agent of historical change.

According to Finkelstein, in making media the primary agent of historical change, McLuhan grossly ignores the creative and intentional contribution of human effort in cultural and historical change. "As important in change as technology was the human imagination projecting a world that could be differently shaped."⁵² Is technology itself not the result of human effort? There must be message other than medium. Thus "medium is the message" cannot be used as the principle to explain historical changes.

To Finkelstein, the most outrageous historical distortion McLuhan commits is in the area of art history. The following passage by McLuhan is typical:

⁴⁸Compton, *op cit.*, p. 122.

Christopher Ricks, "Electronic Man," *New Statesman*, Vol. 68, (D'11 '64), p. 925.
DeMott, Benjamin, "King of Pophink," in Stearn, *op cit.*, pp. 248-289.

⁴⁹Krutch, *op. cit.*, p. 534.

⁵⁰Arnold Rockman, "McLuhanism," *Encounter*, Vol. 31 (N' 68), p. 35.

⁵¹Burke, *op. cit.*, p. 166.

⁵²Sidney Finkelstein, *Sense and Non-Sense of McLuhan*, (New York: International Publishers, 1968), p. 25.

Even more notable were the effects of print in separating poetry from song, and prose from oratory, and popular from educated speech. In the matter of poetry it turned out that, as poetry could be read without being heard, musical instruments could also be played without accompanying any verses. Music veered from the spoken word, to converge again with Bartok and Schoenberg.⁵³

Finkelstein's criticisms of this view of musical history are: (1) it leaves out composers like Dowland, Monteverdi, Bach, Handel, Mozart, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Verdi, Wagner, Mussorgski all of whom used the 'spoken word' prolifically and they were composers after Gutenberg press; (2) there was instrumental music, distinct from song, for centuries before printing; (3) printing instead of causing a cleavage between music and poetry, brought about part-song and Madrigal; (4) after the appearance of printing, the 17th century saw the rise of a new, great, poetic-musical form, that of opera; (5) in successive centuries Handel and Mozart continued to write opera and in 19th century Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, and Wolf developed a new poetic-musical form, the art song; and (6) printing meant not only printed words, but printed music. How did the print affect music is a topic McLuhan simply ignored in his scheme of grandeur.⁵⁴

Finkelstein contrasts in detail the 'real history' of language, literature and painting to the 'McLuhanese history' which is built on the sandy foundation, the medium is the message. Particularly in the history of art, individual artists do not allow the medium to dictate the message to them. Rather they take advantage of the medium, old or new, to communicate messages worthy of communication.

The message, to Finkelstein, makes the difference and should make the difference independent of medium. No medium can make a deceptive message true, and truth vs. deception is what counts most in communication. Certainly, media are constantly used to deliver deceptive messages efficiently and successfully. From this fact it does not automatically follow that the medium is the message. In any form of communication or artistic expression what is consciously or purposefully 'said' is of great importance although it is also of importance for us to recognize the actual effect of the saying. To emphasize consequence needs not be accompanied by deemphasis on purpose, intention and human value which has made a difference in history.

The theory, the medium is the message, is used by McLuhan to weave a view of history. In turn, McLuhan tries to marshall and select historical data to vindicate his theory. In countermeasure, Finkelstein first contrasts real history with McLuhanese history. He then argues for the autonomy of message from the historical fact that human value, purpose and intention is a contributing factor in human history.

⁵³*Ibid.*, p. 34.

⁵⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 34-36.

To Finkelstein, the crucial difference between himself and McLuhan is that he values man's conscious effort to control his own destiny while McLuhan is an opportunistic determinist, having little regard for man's intelligence, reason and creativity. The same line is drawn in Finkelstein's criticism of McLuhan's distinction between hot and cold medium.

McLuhan's distinction between hot and cold medium is ultimately concerned with the receiver's involvement and participation. Hot medium stimulates less participation of less senses; cold medium stimulates more participation of more senses. To Finkelstein this mechanical S/R paradigm does not represent communication, particularly in art form in all its varieties. For the participation or involvement consists not merely in mechanical responses but a range from physical reaction, sensational excitement, sympathetic understanding towards thoughtful response. To achieve any of these responses, both the 'mind' of the artists and the 'mind' of the audience must be involved. In short, it is not simply the characteristic of the medium which determines whether it is hot or cold, participation or non-participation. More important is the artistry of the artists as well as the sensitivity of the audience. To say that TV as a cold medium involves us more while printing as a hot medium involves us less, does not make sense. Whether a Jack Paar or Johnny Carson show involves us more than James Reston's or even McLuhan's own writing is not a foregone conclusion. Basically Finkelstein maintains that:

One of the qualities that lifts human beings above the animal world is that their actions are no longer simply immediate responses to sensations and impulses. The more that people have replaced ignorance of the world about them with true knowledge of its make-up and laws, the more they have been able to plan their actions in terms not merely of immediate effect but of the wider repercussions of the forces they set in motion. McLuhan, turning not only to naturalism but to a kind of primitivism, attacks this rational mode of planning human actions. He uses the old chestnut that thought inhibits action and chills the responses to life.

It is true enough that rational thought and the knowledge brought by sharing others' experience help control and temper action. But far from stultifying action, their longer-term result is action more in accordance with human desires. This is seen as well in the impact of realist and humanist works of art, which throw light on reality and appeal not only to the sensations but to the conscious and thinking mind. The audience is not expected to respond by a single action. Instead the effect of the work is to alter or expand the mind and perceptions of the audience, so that all its responses to life, or human relations, will be different; educated, in a sense, by the art work.⁵⁵

In contrast McLuhan literally encourages "brainless involvement," such as the TV child whom he feels so helpless to help educationally.

Aside from his opportunistic catering to mass media and mass culture, McLuhan's psychology of sense ratio or sense participation is also dubious. In contrast, Finkelstein offers the humanistic view of human psychology:

⁵⁵*Ibid.*, p. 93.

For the human senses are complex and cooperative, not the pure individualists that McLuhan makes of them. They grow in connection with human activity: work, probing, exploring, reshaping nature, moving in society, forming human relationships. Hands, touch, eyes, ears, constantly collaborate. The rhythmic movement of a painter's or sculptor's hand turns into a "visual" rhythm in the art work, and the viewer feels this rhythm as a movement. This is but one small example of how painting and sculpture are primarily visual, but also tactile. Even written and printed language, despite what McLuhan says, is not purely "visual," in an exacerbating conflict with the "oral," or the world of sound. Written and printed language are also "oral." The writer, and also the reader, hear the sounds of speech in their "inner ear," so to speak; even muscular speech movements take place when people read "silently." In both poetry and prose of any artistic sensibility, the reader is aware of the speech rhythms and word sounds. That is one of the reasons that great writers are so moving to their readers.⁵⁶

In projection of future humanity, McLuhan belabors on the 'whole man' idea in contrast to the 'fragmented man' of the specialist type. But in psychological theory, he sees our sense of touch as the only common sense while the other senses work in isolation or separation. Finkelstein, according to the above quotation, holds that our life of senses or sense life must be viewed as a collaborated whole, not in separation.

'Fragmentation' and 'integration,' 'part' and 'whole' are terms employed at a writer's own convenience. The connotation of these terms usually put a writer on the side of the angels if he claims that he is for the whole and the integrated against the fragmented and the partial. In McLuhan's case he claims not only for the coming 'whole' and 'integrated' individual man but a cosmic wholeness which is also holiness of a sort. Such a mystic holistic grandeur is bought at the price of misuse and abuse of language which Finkelstein also takes pains to expose, the word medium in particular.

In expounding the medium is the message, McLuhan leads us to think that the medium is all there is in human history and that human history can be viewed as a whole, no longer miscellaneous details, in terms of medium change. But what does he exactly mean by the medium? To say the medium is the extension of man does not clarify the matter. It is like saying God is three in one, one in three. Finkelstein insisted that medium is not the message. Message is message; medium is medium. In distinguishing message from medium, we are not to destroy the wholeness or the integrity of an art form such as Beethoven's music or Rembrandt's painting. Rather we are enabled to discern how Beethoven and Rembrandt employ a particular medium to deliver a message. True, there are intimate relations between a medium and message about which Finkelstein gives numerous examples particularly in Chapter 5, "Art Extensions Vs. Media Amputations." This, however, does not eradicate the distinction between the medium and the message. To Finkelstein there are true messages and there are deceptive messages. Only true messages are extensions of man in Fin-

⁵⁶*Ibid.*, p. 38.

kelstein's usage. About media, there should be further distinctions. One important distinction is between technology and social institution. Without such a distinction, McLuhan in his Part II puts a conglomeration of items as speech, number, weapon, money, TV, wheel, etc., in one bag labelled media. To Finkelstein the word medium should only apply to technologies, communication technology in particular, not to social institutions.

In the case of TV, without carefully considering TV as a technology employed within a particular social institution, McLuhan falls flat on his face when he exacts TV as the path to a whole man:

Since he also calls the TV "medium" itself, with its multisense victimization, the path to a rounded man, replacing the 'fragmented' and 'specialized' man of the humanist and 'Gutenberg era,' it is worth examining how 'rounded' are the figures who create the TV commercials. In a one-minute commercial, a number of specialized talents are called on; one provides the idea, another the words, a third the music, a fourth the pictorial effects, and so on. These commercials have given a great number of jobs to actors, but the price the actors have to pay is the complete erasure of their personalities. They are strictly anonymous. Their names must never be known to the public. They must have a 'neutral personality,' so that the public have seen this same personage advertising a different product some previous time. And all of these specialists are subject to the whim and dictation of the advertiser. Even the programs surrounding these commercials are similarly produced by a galaxy of one-sided, one-faceted specialists.⁵⁷

In making the distinction between technology and social institution, Finkelstein does not deny that, like technology, social institutions are subject to change. Also the change of social institution like the change of technology taxes human intelligence, reason and creativity. Above all it is the message, the ends and the humanistic values which determines the change of technology as well as the social institution. Disregarding the true message, McLuhan's kind of writing can serve as a tranquilizer under a totalitarianism which also lauds the whole man, the integrated man and the tribal kinship, suppressing human reason, intelligence and creativity which Finkelstein insists as the fountain of human resilience and the ultimate aim of educational effort.

III

It must not be supposed that McLuhan's "press" is all "bad press." On the contrary Tom Wolfe tends to rank him with Newton, Darwin, Freud, Einstein and Pavlov.⁵⁸ Howard Luck Gossage compares *Understanding Media* with *Principia Mathematica*⁵⁹ and thinks that "He is the only author I know who writes a paragraph that one can read for two hours profitably."⁶⁰ After some criticism, Boulding, a respectable academician himself, yields that his is "perhaps typical of very creative minds that they hit very large nails not quite on the head."⁶¹

⁵⁷*Ibid.*, p. 73.

⁵⁸Tom Wolf, "The New Life Out There," in Stearn, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

⁵⁹Howard Luck Gossage, "Understanding McLuhan," in Stearn, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 7.

⁶¹Boulding, *op. cit.*, p. 64.

To Gilman and Walsh, McLuhan's contribution lies in his calling our attention to things happening in the contemporary world.⁶² To Schickel and Lueders, like C. P. Snow, McLuhan exemplified the rapprochement of the two cultures, the scientific and the humanistic.⁶³ Silberman approves McLuhan's healthy regards for technology.⁶⁴ George Steiner, a rising literary critic, credits McLuhan with opening a big door about sensibility in his non-academic approach to art, pop art and mass culture in particular.⁶⁵ About the matter of sensibility, Susan Sontag seems to endorse McLuhan's principle, the medium is the message:

The Matthew Arnold notion of culture defines art as the criticism of life — this being understood as the propounding of moral, social, and political ideas. The new sensibility understands art as the extension of life — this being understood as the representation of (new) modes of vivacity. There is no necessary denial of the role of moral evaluation here. Only the scale has changed; it has become less gross, and what it sacrifices in discursive explicitness it gains in accuracy and subliminal power. For we are what we are able to see (hear, taste, smell, feel) even more powerfully and profoundly than we are, what furniture of ideas we have stocked in our heads. Of course, the proponents of "the two cultures" crisis continue to observe a desperate contrast between unintelligible, morally neutral science and technology, on the one hand, and morally committed, human-scale art on the other. But matters are not that simple, and never were. A great work of art is never simply (or even mainly) a vehicle of ideas or of moral sentiments. It is, first of all, an object modifying our consciousness and sensibility, changing the composition, however slightly, of the humus that nourishes all specific ideas and sentiments. Outraged humanists, please note. There is no need for alarm. A work of art does not cease being a moment in the conscience of mankind when moral conscience is understood as only one of the functions of consciousness.

Sensations, feelings, the abstract forms and styles of sensibility count. It is to these that contemporary art addresses itself. The basic unit for contemporary art is not the idea, but the analysis of and extension of sensations. (Or if it is an "idea," it is about the form of sensibility.) Rilke described the artist as someone who works "toward an extension of the regions of the individual senses"; McLuhan calls artists "experts in sensory awareness." And the most interesting works of contemporary art (one can begin at least as far back as French symbolist poetry) are adventures in sensation, new "sensory mixes." Such art is, in principle, experimental — not out of an elitist disdain for what is accessible to the majority, but precisely in the sense that science is experimental. Such an art is also notably apolitical and undidactic, or, rather, infradidactic.⁶⁶

In Irving Weiss, McLuhan not only has a careful reader but an academic translator. For Weiss supplies what many critics ask for but never

⁶²Richard Gilman, "The Door McLuhan Opens," *New Republic*, Vol. 157 (N 18 '67), p. 34.

Moran Walsh, "McLuhanism," *America*, 114 (May 28 '66), p. 784.

⁶³Richard Schickel, "Marshal McLuhan: Canada's Intellectual Comet," *Harper*. Vol 232, (N '65), p. 67.

Edward Lueders, "The Medium has a Message," *English Journal*, Vol. 57, (Sept. '68), p. 566.

⁶⁴Charles E. Silberman, "Is Technology Taking Over," *Future*, Vol. 73, (Feb. '66), p. 114.

⁶⁵George Steiner, Jonathan Miller, and Andra Faye, "The World and Marshall McLuhan," in Stearn, *op. cit.*, p. 242.

⁶⁶Susan Sontag, "One Culture and the New Sensibility," in Stearn, *op. cit.*, pp. 258-259.

get from McLuhan himself, the academic credibility, as "these hidden dimensions of the human psyche have been revealingly discussed for a number of years now in other contexts, however, by such students of human behavior and conventions as Edward Hall, Konrad Lorenz, Jurgen Ruesch, Ernst Grombrich and George Kepes."⁶⁷

Given the opportunity, McLuhan himself answers at least some of the criticisms. Above value commitment McLuhan maintains that his concern is more religious than political. He is deeply compassionate because he believes in "human charity as a total responsibility of all, for all."⁶⁸ But charity needs not degenerate into sentimentality, hypocrisy and impotency which most of his moralistic critics are guilty of. Charity may motivate tough-minded detachment and objectivity. To understand all is to forgive all. How can we understand without scrupulous detachment and objectivity. It is understanding which McLuhan seeks foremost. If this is not the value commitment which critics themselves embrace, whether racial equality, social equality of cultural standards, it is transvaluation which perhaps is needed most. As a matter of fact, the principle, the medium is the message, is advanced to remind readers that commitment to message while disregarding the medium is moral blindness which is

a basic technique for endowing the idiot with dignity. Guilt and remorse are retrospective by definition and exempt the guilty party from any redeeming act of expiation or creative renewal. Guilt and remorse are forms of despair and sloth. Any charge of nonmoral fervor with regard to my work merely points to my own effort to protect reader and critic from the rage and indignation which they have richly earned. For many years I have observed that the moralist typically substitutes anger for perception. He hopes that many people will mistake his irritation for insight. Is this not one of the great attractions of Marxism? While lacking all insight into the processes with which it is concerned, it yet provides an intensely dramatic role for the corporate expression of dissatisfactions that elude the understanding.

Do I "approve of 'Peyton Place' or of Jack Paar?" No! But they're trying to classify Paar with a good or bad "thing," not attempting to find out *what* effect he's having or what's really going on.⁶⁹

The exclusive emphasis on message also implies an inability as well as unwillingness to go to the root of human affairs. In the last analysis value-conflict is sensory conflict.⁷⁰ Since sensory divergencies are caused by media divergencies, once more the medium is the message.

McLuhan also defends his own method or approach. He has not followed the conventional scholarship and academic discipline, for his task is to discover, not to justify. To discover is to probe like a poet, unlike an academic scholar and scientist.

⁶⁷Irving J. Weiss, "Sensual Reality in the Mass Media," in Rosenthal, *op. cit.*, p. 56.

⁶⁸"Marshall McLuhan and G. E. Stearn," in Stearn, *op. cit.*, p. 267.

⁶⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 287-288.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*, p. 276.

McLUHAN: All poets have to probe to discover anything. In our world, there is so much to discover.

STEARN: Can we excuse methodological lapses in the name of poetic and/or artistic license?

McLUHAN: Our sensory modes are constituents, not classifications. I am simply identifying modes of experience. We need new perceptions to cope. Our technologies are generations ahead of our thinking. If you even begin to think about these new technologies you appear as a poet because you are dealing with the present as the future. That is my technique.⁷¹

Specifically McLuhan defends his way of using language for purposes different from description and explanation. His is poetic use for probing.

The moment you see that the problem is to invent tools — probes — rather than to make continuous (I never saw the parody before today) connected statements, you alarm writers like Blissett. They really think that connected statements are a means of organizing energy and perceptions. They are actually a way of reporting things already seen. You take a statement and turn it around, using it as probe into the environment instead of using it descriptively — as a meant of packaging information, already picked up — the idea of using language and statement as probe in this sense just baffles them.⁷²

For the same reason, repetition is a necessity not a weakness as some of the critics think.

STEARN: Many readers have been shocked and confused by what they consider idiosyncratic methods in your work. For example: A number of critics suggest that your books are repetitious and, in Dwight Macdonald's words, "ultimately boring."

McLUHAN: 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.⁷³

Methodologically as well as substantially McLuhan stands his ground insisting that most of his critics mistake linear style of thinking as the only mode of rationality while he himself happens to see "rationality" differently.

STEARN: Blissett's parody-critique, written in 1957, seems to have anticipated some of the later criticism directed at the *Galaxy* and *Understanding*.

McLUHAN: The complaints about irregular, disconnected, irrational elements in *Explorations* show a complete unawareness. Connected sequential discourse, which is thought of as rational, is really visual. It has nothing to do with reason as such. Reasoning does not occur on single planes or in a continuous, connected fashion. The mind leapfrogs. It puts things together in all sorts of proportions and ratios instantly. To put down thoughts in coded, lineal ways was a discovery of the Greek world. It is not done this way, for example, in the Chinese world. But to deny that the Chinese have access to reason would be ridiculous. They do not have rational discourse at all

⁷¹*Ibid.*, p. 301.

⁷²*Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁷³*Ibid.*, p. 281.

by Western standards. They reason by the act of interval, not by the act of connection. In the electric age we are moving into a world where not the connection but the interval becomes the crucial event in organization. For people to waste their time lamenting the disappearance of logic and rational, connected discourse when they are really under the illusion that this is actually related to man's reasoning powers is simple non-fact. It is rather sad for people to waste a great deal of energy and moral indignation on things that don't exist, and never have.⁷⁴

McLuhan's view of rationality is crucial for it has bearing on both his way of thinking and writing and what he looks for and sees in the world. It also has bearing on what he proposes for the future, future education in particular.

The word 'rationality' represents a mode of thought which many intellectuals take to be the highest human distinction and consequently to be the ultimate aim of education. McLuhan, on the other hand, insists that this mode is not a universal mode in fact. It is a bare historical accident imbedded in our linguistic form and reinforced by printing technology. Without our own tradition, there is the artistic mode which is different from the rational, yet not without discipline. To accuse artists of unthinking is presumptuous, yet their mode is non- or a-rational in the conventional sense.

Ultimately it is not McLuhan's personal opinion that matters, to elevate the artistic, the creative or the organic or to perpetuate the rational, the logical or the mechanical. It is rather the historical ascendancy which McLuhan wants the readers to become aware of. As the mode of rational discourse is elevated by the printing press which is a mechanical media, the replacement of the mechanical by the electric media signifies the passing of the rational mode. What do electric media have in store for our sense life? What can conceivably replace linear reasoning? McLuhan's answer is: more sense participation resulted in pattern recognition instead of specialized and fragmented knowledge. As electric media speed up, synchronization or simultaneity replaces sequential development which is both the mode of production and the mode of thought during the era of mechanical media. In contrast, electric media is organic in that:

Today it is the instant speed of electric information that, for the first time, permits easy recognition of the patterns and the formal contours of change and development. The entire world, past and present, now reveals itself to us like a growing plant in an enormously accelerated movie. Electric speed is synonymous with light and with the understanding of causes. So, with the use of electricity in previously mechanized situations, men easily discover causal connections and patterns that were quite unobservable at the slower rates of mechanical change.

Mechanization depends on the breaking up of processes into homogenized but unrelated bits. Electricity unifies these fragments once more because its speed of operation requires a high degree of interdependence among all phases of any operation. It is this electric speed-up and interdependence that has ended the assembly line in industry.⁷⁵

⁷⁴*Ibid.*, p. 270.

⁷⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 305-306.

Thus it is the "speed up" which makes all the differences in contemporary scene. Due to this speed up, both the time lag and the spatial distance of the by-gone era are erased. We are living in a global village indeed and our mentality cannot help reverting to village mentality.

It can be misunderstood that McLuhan has high hopes for global village. But this is not the case.

The tribal-global village is far more divisive — full of fighting — than any nationalism ever was. Village is fission, not fusion, in depth. People leave small towns to *avoid* involvement. The big city *lined* them with its uniformity and impersonal milieu. They sought propriety and in the city, money is made by uniformity and repeatability. Where you have craftsmanlike diversity, you make art, not money. The village is not the place to find ideal peace and harmony. Exact opposite. Nationalism came out of print and provided an extraordinary relief from global village conditions. I don't *approve* of the global village. I say we live in it.⁷⁶

Indeed at the end of Part I of *Understanding Media*, McLuhan already warns that children living in global village "unbridled and misunderstood" can be problem children. Education must help them live in the new era properly. But education cannot help unless educators are willing to face up to the new situation, not to fight it, nor to join it but to control it. Spread throughout the book McLuhan proposes new ways of educating children, such as the study of a variety of media not just books, so that children become conscious of what hit and what missed them in their own environment. Fragmental departmentalism must give way to interdisciplinary approaches.⁷⁷ Pattern recognition as in art must be stressed instead of paced, sequential acquisition.⁷⁸ Above all, learning must take priority over teaching as learning is involvement, enlightened not blind involvement. In this way "education is ideally civil defense against media fall out."⁷⁹

After all, McLuhan is not really anti-rational. Only his is a rationality to be clearly distinguishable from rationalization. To McLuhan we cannot rationalize away the age of electric media. Nor can we rationalize away the consequent change of psychological mode, particularly of the younger generation. To be rational in this instance is to be able to understand the change without being overwhelmed by it. Amidst this understanding of change is also the understanding of the change of rationality itself. It is this understanding which is the most difficult to many. Probably this is also where McLuhan makes the greatest contribution. In making this contribution, McLuhan may be ranked as the contemporary Sir Francis Bacon who happened to be also erratic, unscientific and irrational!

⁷⁶Stearn, *op cit.*

⁷⁷McLuhan, *op cit.*, p. 175.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*, p. 175.