

McLuhan's Unconscious

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I dedicate this thesis to my grandparents
– Alma, Dick (in memoriam); Jim (in memoriam), Doris (in memoriam) –
and to Paul Nursey-Bray.

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Abstract

The proof set forward in this thesis is that the method of Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980), which he came in the 1970's to describe as 'structuralist', 'phenomenological' and even 'metaphysical', owes a heretofore unacknowledged debt to Sigmund Freud (1856-1939). Critics have thus far neglected the influence of nineteenth and twentieth century psychology in McLuhan's work, although a wealth of biographical material supports the argument that McLuhan's 'metaphysical' method is derived as much from psychoanalysis and analytical psychology (C.G. Jung) as from any of McLuhan's acknowledged predecessors. Returning to the texts from which McLuhan gained his knowledge of psychology, I trace the influence of Freud, Jung and their disciples upon McLuhan, establishing McLuhan's use of Freudian concepts and terminology in his first book *The Mechanical Bride* (1951), and his use of the psychoanalytic concepts of the 'unconscious', 'trauma' and 'repression' in the books that came after it. What McLuhan calls the 'unconscious' is more often named by him as *Logos*, 'acoustic space' or the 'media environment', and I trace the debts that these concepts owe not only to Freud and Jung but to Aristotle, St. Thomas Aquinas, gestalt theory, art theory, Henri Bergson, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Wyndham Lewis, Siegfried Giedion, Harold Innis, the French symbolist poets of the late nineteenth century and the British modernists of the early twentieth. Despite his rejection of the Freudian argument, McLuhan, like Freud, conceptualizes pain or trauma as the 'cause' of transformations (i.e. processes) in the unconscious; but while for McLuhan, invoking St. Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle, technologies are 'formal causes' simultaneous with (or 'preceded' by) their effects, for Freud and his modern interpreter Jacques Lacan, trauma is 'paradoxical' in structure, presenting as both its own 'cause' and 'effect'. Situating McLuhan in relation to French structuralism, I contrast McLuhan's concepts of 'figure' (as cause) and 'ground' (as effects), elaborated in his last book *Laws of Media* (1988), to the concepts of the 'signifier' and the 'signified' in Ferdinand de Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1916), and critique McLuhan's 'tetrad', the ideograph with which he illustrates media 'effects', in relation to the psychoanalytic concept of the signifier elaborated by Lacan. In reply to McLuhan's maxim that 'the medium is the message', I conclude that technologies, insofar as they function as 'formal causes', are doubly 'hidden': firstly, because, as McLuhan says, they can only be grasped through their effects; and secondly because, as Lacan says, their effects can only be articulated when they manifest as 'disturbances' in the *symbolic* order, i.e., as fantasies of the Other's *jouissance* (enjoyment). There are numerous stories about how McLuhan would frustrate his critics by refusing to take a 'point-of-view', and in fact his (psychoanalytic) technique of 'putting on' the audience as a mask, and his (deconstructivist) manner of changing perspectives as often as necessary, sit oddly with his championing of *Logos*. A comparison with Freud and Lacan finds McLuhan at a 'paradoxical' moment in the history of Western thought, poised between modernism and postmodernism, between structuralism and deconstructivism, and between metaphysics and psychoanalysis.

Declaration

This work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text.

I give consent to this copy of my thesis, when deposited in the University Library, being available for loan and photocopying.

ALICE RAE

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Key to References

Works by McLuhan

- BP *The Book of Probes*
- CA *From Cliché to Archetype* (with Wilfred Watson)
- CB *Counterblast* (with Harley Parker)
- CT *The Classical Trivium: The Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of His Time*
- EM *Essential McLuhan* (ed. Frank Zingrone)
- GG *The Gutenberg Galaxy*
- GV *The Global Village* (with Bruce Powers)
- HC *McLuhan Hot and Cool*, ed. Gerard Emanuel Stearn
- IL *The Interior Landscape*
- L *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*
- LM *Laws of Media* (with Eric McLuhan)
- MB *The Mechanical Bride*
- ML *The Medium and the Light*, ed. Eric McLuhan
- MM *The Medium is the Massage*
- PC *McLuhan Pro and Con*, ed. Raymond Rosenthal
- TT *Take Today* (with Barrington Nevitt)
- UB *McLuhan Unbound*, volumes 1-20, ed. W. Terrence Gordon
- UM *Understanding Media* (first edition)
- VP *Through the Vanishing Point* (with Harley Parker)
- VVV *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations*
- WP *War and Peace in the Global Village*

Works by Freud

- GPT *General Psychological Theory* (1963), ed. Philip Rieff
- Moses *Moses and Monotheism*, tr. Katherine Jones
- SE *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, ed. James Strachey

Note that Katherine Jones' translation of *Moses and Monotheism*, and a number of articles from the collection of Freud's papers published in 1963 as *General Psychological Theory*, edited by Philip Rieff, are used throughout in preference to the Standard Edition, however Standard Edition references are also given.

Introduction

Marshall McLuhan has a reputation for baffling his audience, and there has been no agreement by critics as to the nature of his achievement. Extolled in 1965 as a thinker on par with 'Newton, Darwin, Freud, Einstein, and Pavlov', McLuhan's star has since fallen, and he is remembered, if at all, as a brilliant academic celebrity who never quite fulfilled his promise as the prophet of the TV age. After gaining international attention with *Understanding Media* in 1964, McLuhan became a target for critics, especially from the new left, who read him as a 'technological determinist' or mystic and, thus, apolitical. He responded by aligning himself with the Western philosophical tradition, calling himself a 'phenomenologist', 'structuralist' and even a 'metaphysician', but by then his books were falling out of fashion and in fact his last book *Laws of Media*, which justifies his stance as a philosopher, did not appear until many years after his death. Philosophy, in any case, had long since moved on from these concerns, led by the French school of critics who were engaged in a confrontation with the Western notion of the *Logos* in a movement that came to be known as 'post-structuralism'. McLuhan, born in the prairie town of Edmonton, Alberta, and a product of the English Department at Trinity Hall, Cambridge University, was educated in a different tradition, that of the poets: Shakespeare, the Renaissance playwrights and pamphleteers, the eighteenth century romantics, nineteenth century symbolists and twentieth century modernists. As well as this, he was a Roman Catholic. If his French contemporaries owed their dues to German idealism, phenomenology, Marxism, existentialism and psychoanalysis, McLuhan owed his to Catholic theology and the Italian and English Renaissance; where the French school invokes Kant and Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, McLuhan appeals instead to Renaissance philosophers Francis Bacon and Giambattista Vico, and thirteenth century theologian St. Thomas Aquinas. All of these thinkers share common roots in the Western philosophical tradition, however, and the method developed by McLuhan over a number of decades, which he came to identify in the early 1970's as 'metaphysical', has certain affinities with the methods of Kant and Hegel, as well as Kant's disciple, Arthur Schopenhauer. Most of all, McLuhan's method resembles the multi-aspected 'metapsychological' method of Sigmund Freud,

one of Schopenhauer's disciples, more famous as the founder of psychoanalysis. How and why McLuhan's method came so closely to resemble Freud's, despite McLuhan's not inconsiderable efforts to distance himself from the 'Freudians', is the subject of my inquiry.

To appreciate the connections between McLuhan's and Freud's methods, I have found it necessary to move between discourses. McLuhan, for his part, interprets the Western tradition in light of the 'trivium', i.e. the ancient arts of grammar (*Grammatica*), the art of interpretation; rhetoric (*Rhetorica*), the art of eloquence or persuasion; and dialectic (*Dialectica*), the art of philosophy or logic. The trivium, as taught in the medieval university, was roughly equivalent to an undergraduate degree, and served as the foundation for study of the 'quadrivium' of arithmetic, astronomy, geometry, and music. McLuhan and Freud are both grammarians, but Freud, more than McLuhan, tends towards the use of dialectic (or more precisely what he calls 'speculation'). McLuhan stresses the connection, since ancient times, between grammar and science, i.e. the notion of 'Nature' as a 'book' to be read. Grammar, as McLuhan shows, was the established mode of science from Plato through until the twelfth century (alchemy, for example, was grammatical in method); in the thirteenth century the dialectical method of Aristotle won new adherents through the work of St. Thomas Aquinas (*CT 7, 17*). McLuhan says that science since the Renaissance (in fact since Descartes, a dialectician *par excellence*) tends to be dialectical or 'mathematical' (*Ibid.*; see also *LM 22-31*); however the grammatical tradition has not been eliminated entirely, persisting in the work of Charles Darwin, for example, and, though McLuhan does not acknowledge this, in Freud. McLuhan's last book *Laws of Media: The New Science* (1988), completed after his death by his son Eric McLuhan, takes its subtitle from Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum (New Instrument [for the interpretation of nature])*, first published in 1620, and Giambattista Vico's *Scienza Nuova (The New Science)*, first published in 1725 (*LM xi*). Eric McLuhan comments in the introduction: 'I have subtitled ours *The New Science*. On reflection, I am tempted to make that the title and *Laws of Media* the subtitle, for it should stand as volume three of a work begun by Sir Francis Bacon and carried forward a century later by Giambattista Vico.'

(*Ibid.*) The McLuhans (*op.cit.* 4) cite from Bacon's *Novum Organum* (Aphorism XIX):

There are and can only be two ways of searching into and discovering truth. The one flies from the senses and particulars to the most general axioms, and from these principles, the truth of which it takes for settled and immovable, proceeds to judgement ... And this way is now in fashion. The other derives axioms from the senses and from particulars, rising by a gradual and unbroken ascent, so that it arrives at the most general axioms last of all. This is the true way, but as yet untried.

The first method is dialectical, the second grammatical, and it is Bacon's (and Vico's) grammatical method that McLuhan himself applies. In *Laws of Media*, McLuhan depicts grammar and rhetoric, 'the twin sciences of writing and speech', as the most ancient of the three arts of the trivium, and says that 'Where dialectic is inevitably theoretical, grammar and rhetoric are always empirical first.' (LM 9-10) McLuhan says that dialectic was considered a branch of rhetoric until dialecticians, such as Aristotle, argued for a distinction between the two and thereafter sought to subjugate rhetoric to dialectic (LM 9; CT 42). Freud, meanwhile, quite apart from this tradition, says in his 'metapsychological' papers of 1915 and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* in 1920 that his analysis of the psyche rests upon three different categories: the *topographical*, the *dynamic*, and the *economic*; and 'when we succeed in describing a mental process in all its aspects, dynamic, topographic and economic,' Freud says, 'we shall call this a *meta-psychological* presentation.' (GPT 130; SE XVIII: 7, emphasis in original). I suggest that McLuhan's 'tetrad', the graph depicting 'media effects' introduced by McLuhan in the mid 1970's and elaborated in *Laws of Media*, is revolutionary precisely because, like Freud's 'meta-psychology', it describes at once the topographical, dynamic and economic aspects of a process. The same three elements are identified in Jean Piaget's *Structuralism* (1970), referenced in *Laws of Media*; however, all the elements of a meta-psychological presentation are present in McLuhan's work from the 1950's, in his concept of 'space' (derived from his study of the symbolist poets, as well as from Siegfried Giedion and Harold Innis), and his description of the dynamic 'senses' ruled by a principle of 'reversal', concepts taken from St. Thomas Aquinas. Describing his method in a letter of 1973, McLuhan says:

My writings baffle most people simply because I begin with *ground*, and they begin with *figure*. I begin with *effects* and work round to the *causes*, whereas the conventional pattern is to start with a somewhat arbitrary selection of "causes" and then try to match these with some of the effects. It is this haphazard matching process that leads to fragmentary superficiality. (L 478)

In fact there is a profound affinity between McLuhan's method and Freud's, only that the technique Freud applies, as analyst, to an individual patient, McLuhan applies to the 'environment' *per se*. Commenting on his discovery of infantile sexuality, Freud (SE XIV: 19) says:

I can understand that one would arrive at different results [regarding infantile sexuality] if, as C. G. Jung has recently done, one first forms a theoretical conception of the nature of the sexual instinct and then seeks to explain the life of children on that basis. A conception of this kind is bound to be selected arbitrarily or in accordance with irrelevant considerations, and runs the risk of proving inadequate for the field to which one is seeking to apply it. It is true that the analytic method, too, leads to certain ultimate difficulties and obscurities in regard to sexuality and its relation to the total life of the individual. But these problems cannot be got rid of by speculation; they must await solution through other observations or through observations in other fields.

In short, Freud, the grammarian, is criticizing Jung for his dialectical method, i.e., for presenting 'theoretical' causes and relying upon 'speculation' rather than 'observation'. Freud's method as analyst was to encourage his patients in 'free association', that is (as he explains in his case history on the Rat Man), 'to say everything that came into his head, even if it was *unpleasant* to him, or seemed *unimportant* or *irrelevant* or *senseless*' and 'to start his communications with any subject he pleased' (SE X: 159, emphasis in original). McLuhan, likewise, says that 'The only method for perceiving process and pattern is by *inventory of effects* obtained by the comparison and contrast of developing situations.' (TT 8, emphasis in original) When we compare these techniques, we can see that both enable the analyst to seek *patterns* in effects, and thereby to seek *causes* through 'observation' (and interpretation), rather than by logic alone.

While some of the connections between McLuhan and Freud may be attributed to the influence of Freud upon McLuhan, they in fact share common roots in the Western tradition. Freud was greatly influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer (1788-1860) and Charles Darwin (1809-1882), also a disciple of Schopenhauer; Schopenhauer, in turn, aligned himself with Plato (c. 428/427 BC – 348/347 BC) and Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), setting himself against the dialectical phenomenology of Kant's critic G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831). McLuhan's lineage from Plato is on the one hand through Renaissance philosophers Francis Bacon (1561-1626) and Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), and on the other through Plato's student Aristotle (384 BC – 322 BC); thirteenth century theologian St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274), whose philosophy is founded upon the works of Aristotle; and Irish novelist James Joyce (1882-1941), who bases his aesthetics upon the teachings of Aquinas. McLuhan's concept of media as 'forms' or 'figures' in the environment, founded as it is upon the ancient doctrine of the *Logos*, has certain affinities with the work of the German phenomenologists, especially Schopenhauer, who refined Kant's thesis to argue for the necessity of three phenomenological categories: space, time, and causality. (Freud's 'metapsychological' categories, i.e. the *topographical*, *dynamic*, and *economic*, echo Schopenhauer's categories; McLuhan himself, however, never read Schopenhauer.) McLuhan's lineage from Hegel, meanwhile, is on the one hand through I.A. Richards and the school of 'New Criticism', which held the purpose of art to be the resolution of tension or conflict (Theall, 1971: 39); and on the other through Hegel's critic Karl Marx (1818-1883) via the work of Harold Innis (1894-1952), who built upon Marx's thesis to argue that societies are structured not primarily, in fact, by economic relationships but by 'communications' media (see Quinton in *PC* 188-189 and 191-192; Carey, 1975: 28, 51-52). In fact, as Judith Stamps (1995) and Paul Grosswiler (1998) have shown, despite McLuhan's rejection of Hegel's dialectical method (and likewise that of Marx), McLuhan's 'phenomenology', so to speak, is clearly dialectical, insofar as it assumes a process of negation and 'reversal' in the evolution of forms. While Grosswiler sets McLuhan next to Marx, Stamps argues that McLuhan's method is one of 'negative dialectics' (i.e. the deliberate use of a dialogic or 'negative' stance, in which 'non-conceptuality', or what McLuhan calls 'acoustic space', is set against the hegemonic

Western tradition) and rather belongs alongside the 'negative dialectics' of his German contemporary Theodor Adorno (1903-1969).¹ The concept of 'acoustic space', in fact, may be aligned with the Kantian concept of the 'sublime', known to McLuhan through the work of art critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) on the 'grotesque' character; this, in turn, enables a comparison between McLuhan and his French contemporary Jacques Lacan: for McLuhan, the sublime is the acoustic; for Lacan, the sublime is the 'Real'. McLuhan did not engage with the work of Kant and Hegel until the 1970's, however; his phenomenology of the 'senses' or *sensus communis* ('common sense') is derived instead from the much earlier St. Thomas Aquinas, refracted through Joyce's concept of the city as a body with organs and Vico's concept of history as 'contrapuntal', rather than linear. McLuhan's Darwinism, meanwhile, comes not directly from Darwin, nor from Freud, but rather from French philosophers Henri Bergson (1859-1941) and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955).²

If McLuhan is yet to be recognized as a 'metaphysician', this is due to his rhetorical style. As he says, 'I don't explain – I explore' (*HC* xiii). Ted Carpenter (2001: 8) says he was in awe of McLuhan's 'astonishing capacity to summarize, then christen ideas with unforgettable headlines'. However, says Carpenter, 'All his later books were collaborations. All were edited. All were hash. Marshall was at his best in conversation. Next best: informal letters.' (*Ibid.* 16; see also Marchand, 1989b) Numerous critics have complained about McLuhan's style: 'out of control ... going round in circles' (Rosenberg, *HC* 201); 'vague, repetitious, formless' (Macdonald, *HC* 207); 'a viscous fog, through which loom stumbling metaphors' (Ricks, *HC* 217). Yet McLuhan himself saw his 'drilling' style, in which 'the scenery doesn't change, only the texture', as integral to his argument (letter to Harold Rosenberg, *L* 318; see also *HC* 281). He wrote to a reviewer of *Understanding Media*: 'One fact which you may misjudge about

¹ See Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialektik* (1966). Judith Stamps's study compares Innis and McLuhan to the 'Frankfurt school' – Adorno, Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) and Max Horkheimer (1895-1973). Another of the Frankfurt school was Herbert Marcuse (1898-1979), whose books, especially *Eros and Civilization* (1955) and *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), share McLuhan's preoccupations with technology and civilization.

² Darwinian visions of society are similarly to be found in the work of a number of McLuhan's contemporaries, including Wyndham Lewis, Lewis Mumford, Siegfried Giedion, and Harold Innis.

my style is this, I do not have a point of view. My seemingly stark statements are flat and iconic forms that I learned from symbolist writing. An insight is not a point of view.' (L 301) To a colleague he wrote: 'One major misunderstanding [of critics] concerns my "style" which happens to be a very *good* style for getting attention. As for getting *understanding*, that depends entirely upon the reader. The reader is always the content ...' (L 505) Tom Wolfe praised McLuhan as a thinker on par with 'Newton, Darwin, Freud, Einstein, and Pavlov' (HC 15); others have framed him as a 'crisis philosopher' or 'pop philosopher' (H. Rosenberg, HC 196; *The New Yorker*, PC 107); as an artist (Rosenberg, HC 201; Theall, 1971; Kroker, 1996 [1984]: 17; Theall, 2001); as a satirist (Jeffrey, 1989; Theall, 2001); as a joker or clown (Theall, 1971: 32-33) as a poet (Theall, 1971: 16; Theall, 2001); as a technological determinist (Williams, HC 186-189; Kostelanetz, PC 210; Carey, PC 272; Theall, 1971: 6; Fekete, 1977: 141); as a cognitive psychologist (Wolfe [1969] in Genosko, ed., 2005: 163) as a sociologist (Morris, HC 80); as a social scientist (Stamps, 1995: xi); as a Thomist (Theall, 1971: xviii) as a Catholic humanist (Miller, 1971; Theall, 1971: 10; Kroker, 1996 [1984]); as a teacher (Ong, 1981); as a cultural critic (Fekete, 1977; Theall, 2001); as a technology theorist (Kuhns, 1971; Kroker, 1996 [1984]); as a technology fetishist (Fekete, 1977); as founding member of a 'communications school' including fellow Canadians Harold Innis, Eric Havelock and Walter Ong (Berg, 1985; de Kerckhove, 1989; Jeffrey, 1989); as a modernist or proto-postmodernist (Curtis, 1972, 1978; Willmott, 1996; Stamps, 1995; Marchessault, 2005; Theall, 2001: 35, 90); as a structuralist (Curtis, 1972; Kroker, 1996 [1984]); as a linguist (Gordon, 1997; 2003); as a spatial theorist (Cavell, 2002); and as an art theorist (Cavell, 2002). A few critics have rejected part or all of McLuhan's argument, calling him a 'false prophet', 'one-idea man' and 'mad scientist' (or variations on this theme), and his work 'pretentious (sic) nonsense' or at the very least 'slightly dotty' (see e.g. Châtelet, 2005 [1967]; Finkelstein, 1968; Halper, PC 81; Rosenthal, PC 9; Roszak, PC 258; Alvarez, HC 180; Spivak, 1999: 365). A number of critics have, meanwhile, sought to frame McLuhan on his own terms, that is, as a grammarian and rhetorician with a somewhat ambiguous relationship to the dialectical tradition of Western philosophy (Theall, 1971: see e.g. 39, 95-99; Kroker, 1996 [1984]; Berg, 1985; E. McLuhan, 1989; Stamps, 2005 [1990]: 341 and 1995: especially p.xii;

Grosswiler, 1996, 1998; Compton, *PC* 106-124; Kuhns, n.d., in *McLuhan Studies* 1:1; Czitrom, 1982: 168-169; Theall, 2001). There have been, if you like, two 'waves' of McLuhan criticism, the first from McLuhan's contemporaries, the second from the 'postmodern' school of critical and cultural theory. The first wave of criticism (e.g. Châtelet, 2005 [1967]; Stearn (ed.), 1967; Finkelstein, 1968; Rosenthal (ed.), 1969 [1968]; Miller, 1971; Theall, 1971; Kuhns, 1971; Fekete, 1977) recognizes McLuhan's value as a stimulant, but reads him as apolitical or even 'counterrevolutionary', condemning his irreverence for the conventions of academic discourse. The second wave of criticism, enhanced by access to the biographies by Philip Marchand (1989) and Terrence W. Gordon (1997), as well as by access to McLuhan's published *Letters* (1987), his unpublished documents (archived in the National Archives of Canada), his video interviews (collected in 1996 as *The Video McLuhan*, subsequently published in 2003 as *Understanding Me*), and posthumous books including *Laws of Media*, has been far kinder, finding significant connections between McLuhan's thought and the philosophy and artistic practice of the twentieth century (e.g. Czitrom, 1982: 146-182; Kroker, 1996 [1984]; Stamps, 1995; Willmott, 1996; Grosswiler, 1998; Genosko, 1999; Theall, 2001; Cavell, 2002; Marchessault, 2005). These reassessments notwithstanding, McLuhan's relationship to nineteenth and twentieth century psychology has been little studied, with none but the most superficial analysis of McLuhan's use of psychological terms and concepts and from where these have been derived, nor any appreciation of the connections between McLuhan's method and the methods of Freud and Jung. A comparison with Freud enables us to validate McLuhan's place in the Western tradition not just as a grammarian (scientist), dialectician (philosopher) or rhetorician (artist), but as 'a metaphysician, interested in the life of the forms and their surprising modalities' (L 413).

McLuhan's reading of Freud was haphazard, and the Freudian concepts that he uses often come to him second- or third-hand. There is evidence that McLuhan read Freud in the mid to late 1940's, probably starting with *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930); yet there has been no study of McLuhan's remark in a letter of 1949 to his friend Felix Giovanelli that he (McLuhan) has 'Reviewed Freud's last two books for [Frederick]

Morgan [at the *Hudson Review*] recently' (L 213). (There is a note by the editors of *Letters, Ibid.*, note 9, that 'There is no record – in the Hudson Review or elsewhere – of this review.') McLuhan's interest in the 'unconscious' was stimulated by his study of advertising as a form of popular culture; as early as 1930, after attending a lecture on 'modern advertising', McLuhan mused in his diary that 'the appeal is always to some powerful feeling in man: fear, pride, sex, wealth, ambition etc'; at Cambridge from 1934-1936, his mentor F. R. Leavis was describing advertising as 'a branch of applied psychology'; and in an early article of 1947 on 'American Advertising' McLuhan says that 'To exploit the irrational and, at all times, to avoid the pitfalls of rational "sales resistance" aroused by the inept ad is the first law of advertising dynamics.' (L 3; Leavis, 1934 [1933]: 12; *UB* 9, p.13) By 1949, McLuhan had been introduced to some of the literary applications of psychoanalytic theory through the journal *Neurotica*, and had read Alfred Adler and Karen Horney, as well as a little of Freud; at this time the term 'irrational' starts to be replaced by the term 'unconscious'. McLuhan seems to have revisited the Freudian argument in 1963, for he introduces a variety of Freudian concepts in his third book *Understanding Media*, in particular that of the 'Freudian censor' (i.e. super-ego) for which he substitutes his own concept of 'Narcissus-narcosis' – the 'numbing' effect of technology. However it is evident from McLuhan's letters of the 1960's and 70's that his preoccupation was not so much with Freudian *concepts* as with the socio-historical significance of Freud's argument. McLuhan wrote in 1964 (the same year that *Understanding Media* was published): 'Much of the significant work of our time, whether it be that of Freud or I.A. Richards in criticism, or countless social and political analysts, has indicated a very wide breakdown of communication between individuals and between societies.' (L 302) In fact, from as early as 1948, McLuhan planned to write a book he dubbed a 'twentieth-century Baedeker', which he envisaged as 'A list of books with specific indications of their *kind* of relevance ... for the kind of people who remain illiterate through the misfortunes of current educational misguidance.' (L 205) The project was still on his mind in 1972, when he wrote to Ted Carpenter: 'Apropos the Baedeker ... What is needed is your kind of structural awareness that goes across times, places, cultures.' (L 450) 1973 was spent working mainly on the 'Baedeker', however, the project was put aside

while McLuhan and his son Eric worked on what would later be published as *Laws of Media* (Marchand, 1998 [1989]: 250). McLuhan wrote to Rollo May³ in 1974:

Have been working lately on an inventory of "breakthroughs" in the arts and sciences since 1900. These breakthroughs depend on changes in "models" of perception and can usually be spotted by the vortex of commotion and distress which they occasion. The primary advantages which we enjoy in this project is our awareness that there are several varieties of "space", whereas the sciences, at least, adhere to only one kind of space, namely visual space. (L 504)

McLuhan saw Freud's achievement as pivotal:

The big breakthrough that came with Planck in quantum mechanics and Freud in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (both in 1900) was the recognition of discontinuity in matter, and between the conscious and the unconscious. The physicists identified this interval as the "resonant interval" of interface, i.e. the chemical bond. This is a complete break with visual space which came with cubism or "multi-locational space" at the same time. (*Ibid.*)

McLuhan's concept of 'changes in "models" of perception' owes much to Swiss historian Siegfried Giedion (1888-1968), who says that 'a common trait of the scientific and artistic groups around the turn of the century was to employ an unprecedented sharpness of analysis in revealing the inside of processes' (Giedion, 1955 [1948]: 100). Giedion too uses Freud as an example, who 'by the exceeding penetration of his diagnostic and therapeutic methods, opened new access to the structure of the psyche' (*Ibid.*). Echoing André Malraux's description in *Les Voix de silence* (1950) of photographic reproduction as a 'museum without walls', McLuhan suggests that X-ray photography may be interpreted as a kind of 'biology without walls', the printed Bible a 'religion without walls', the telephone 'speech without walls', advertising 'the boudoir without walls', and psychoanalysis a 'psychology without walls' (Cavell, 2002: 171; *CB* 123, 126). In fact most of McLuhan's comments on Freud (and they are very few) concern psychoanalysis as a method of *structural* analysis, while the 'Freudian'

³ Rollo May (1909-1994), a psychotherapist, was the author of *Love and Will* (1969) and *Power and Innocence: A Search for the Sources of Violence* (1972), a book similar in theme to McLuhan's book with Barrington Nevitt, *Take Today: The Executive as Dropout* (1972).

concepts that McLuhan critiques are often distorted beyond recognition, having been taken from critics who themselves have misread Freud.

McLuhan had no special knowledge of the work of C.G. Jung, but seems to have been more open to Jung's argument. He says in a letter of December 1944: 'Increasingly, I feel that Catholics must master C. G. Jung.... Modern anthropology and psychology are more important for the Church than St. Thomas to-day.' (L 166) In his literary criticism of the early 1950's, McLuhan brackets Jung and Freud together, echoing G.K. Chesterton, Wyndham Lewis and James Joyce in denigrating both men for their 'psychological gropings' (see e.g. 'Joyce, Aquinas, and The Poetic Process' in *Renascence* 4:1, Fall 1951, p.5). He was intrigued, however, by Jung's term 'collective unconscious', and – directed by the literary criticism of Northrop Frye, a colleague, though not a close friend, at the University of Toronto – McLuhan invokes the Jungian concept of the 'archetype' in *From Cliché to Archetype* (1970) and *Laws of Media*. Citations from Jung's 1958 book *Psyche and Symbol* (a compendium of articles edited by Violet S. de Laszlo) appear in a number of McLuhan's later books (*CA*, *LM*, *GV*); and it may have been Jung, along with John Cage, who stimulated McLuhan's interest in the *I Ching*, an essay on which appears in *Psyche and Symbol*, being the foreword to the celebrated German translation by Richard Wilhelm, published in 1923 (Jung, 1958: 225-244). A reference to the translator's introduction by B. M. Hinkle to Jung's seminal work *Psychology of the Unconscious* (1912) also appears in *From Cliché To Archetype*, but there is nothing to suggest that McLuhan had read the book. (In *Psychology of the Unconscious* Jung broke from Freud's psychoanalytic model to establish his own concept of the unconscious.) Most of what McLuhan knew of Jung probably came from conversation with colleagues; at the University of Toronto, for example, McLuhan in the early 1960's enlisted a friend, psychiatrist Daniel Cappon to develop 'tests' for media bias, the results for which would come, it was proposed, through Jungian dream analysis among other things (Marchand, *op.cit.* 151, 171-172, 175). Evidence suggests, however, that despite his use of the key Jungian terms 'archetype' and 'collective unconscious', McLuhan's understanding of Jung was no more than superficial.

McLuhan's uneasy relationship with Freud has been barely hinted at by critics. Richard Kostelanetz suggests that McLuhan achieves a 'complete emancipation from Sigmund Freud' in that he 'hardly mentions sexual desire, except to say at one point that it represents the ultimate form of tactile activity' (*PC* 225). William Kuhns (1971: 199) characterizes McLuhan as 'weak' in the area of psychology; while Donald Theall (1971: 205) notes that McLuhan 'dabbles in Freud and Jung, but he rarely goes deeply into psychoanalysis' or other fields of psychology, and contends that 'his deepest psychological insight comes from Thomas Aquinas' doctrine of the *sensus communis* with no attempt to justify it in light of today's discoveries'. John Fekete (1982: 59), in a later assessment, notes that 'Like Freud or [Herbert] Marcuse, McLuhan reads history with pointed reference to psychic organization.' However, as Arnold Rockman (2005 [1968]: 150) notes, '[f]rom Freud [McLuhan] strips away the super-ego and its role in social control as a censor of socially undesirable wishes and activities, and leaves only the relation between the body and its senses and the "patterns of information" perceived and "processed" by that body.' Tom Wolfe (2005 [1969]: 163) says that McLuhan is 'almost wholly concerned with the effect of the means of communication (the medium) on the central nervous system' and that his theory properly belongs to the discipline of 'cognitive psychology'. Richard Cavell meanwhile provides the most extended treatment of Freud's influence upon McLuhan in chapters 2 and 4 of his recent book *McLuhan in Space* (2002). Cavell notes the similarity between McLuhan's concept of the technology as an 'extension' of the body and Freud's concept of the 'prosthetic' in *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), where the human being is characterized as 'a kind of prosthetic God' (*SE XXI*: 91-92). Cavell (2002: 44, 47) says that 'McLuhan cast himself as a Freudian from the beginning of his career', writing an article on 'Culture and Neurosis' subtitled 'A Study in the Psychology of Culture' (unpublished), and after *The Mechanical Bride* retained 'a residue of ideas from his encounter with Freud'. He suggests that the 'use of the Narcissus myth' in *Understanding Media* was McLuhan's answer to the 'Oedipus complex' in Freud, and emphasizes 'the appropriateness of the myth of Narcissus and Echo, which embodies the *interface* of literacy (associated with print) and orality (associated with electronic media).' (*Ibid.* 85-86; see also McCormack in *PC* 1969: 201; Czitrom, 1982: 178)

Cavell (*op.cit.* 45) emphasizes the difference between McLuhan's and Freud's concepts of 'civilization': Freud presents civilization as '[growing] out of certain basic desires', while for McLuhan civilization is 'the product of a specific set of technologies'. Cavell does not, however, explore the similarity between McLuhan's concept of the 'senses' and Freud's concept of the 'drives', nor the similarity between the dialectical methods by which McLuhan and Freud conceptualize the process of evolution. Elsewhere the linkage of Freud and McLuhan is more tenuous. Tom Wolfe (2005 [1969]: 166-173) provides an extended comparison between the two men on the basis of their celebrity. ⁴ Milton Klonsky finds a reversal of 'Freud's Olympian pronouncement: "Where id was, there ego shall be," ["*Woll es war, soll Ich werden*"]' in McLuhan's concept of 'cosmic consciousness', a concept inspired in fact by philosopher Henri Bergson, and satirized by McLuhan as an 'electric logic' that 'plays *Oedipus* backward' (*PC* 137; McLuhan and Nevitt, cited in Cavell, 2002: 86; see also Cavell 2002: 45). Glenn Willmott (1996: 20-21) notes that McLuhan's concept of the 'unconscious' is that of a 'public' unconscious or an '*external*' unconscious rather than that of a 'private' unconscious; and says in a note on McLuhan's concept of 'Narcissus narcissis' that while McLuhan in his 'psychological discourse' drew from the social psychology of Alfred Adler and Karen Horney, the analytical psychology of C. G. Jung and the gestalt psychology of Wolfgang Köhler, he found Freud 'too focused upon individual narratives and experiences circumscribed by the Oedipus complex and its libidinal economy.' (*Ibid.* p.230 note 37) Theall (1967: 25) and Daniel J. Czitrom (1983: 178) briefly connect McLuhan's concept of 'Narcissus-narcosis' to the Freudian concept of repression (as does McLuhan himself), but neither pursues this point. James M. Curtis, in his memorial essay 'McLuhan: The Aesthete as Historian', comments incisively that 'Like Freud, McLuhan was interested in latent, not manifest,

⁴ Tom Wolfe (2005 [1969]: 166) says, for example, of McLuhan and Freud:

In any historical perspective the two men are contemporaries (Freud died in 1939). Both have come forth with dazzling insights in a period (1850 to the present) of tremendous intellectual confusion and even convulsion following what Nietzsche called "the death of God"; and Max Weber, "the demystification of the world." Both men explain *all* in terms of - ...[something] *so obvious we never stepped back to see it for what it was!* Freud: sex. McLuhan: TV. Both men electrified – outraged! – the intellectuals of their time by explaining the most vital, complex, cosmic phases of human experience in terms of such lowlife stuff: e.g., the anus; the damnable TV set.... Freud was the subject of as much derision in his day as McLuhan in his

content.' (*Journal of Communication* 31:3, Summer 1981, p.149) Theall (2001: 61), likewise, stresses the fact that 'McLuhan ... is reading the collective unconscious of the drama of society'. However, this again is merely to repeat what McLuhan himself noted on a number of occasions (see e.g. *Understanding Me* 202).⁵ Geoffrey Sykes (2005 [2000]: 89), in a recent assessment, suggests that 'acoustic space' insofar as it precludes the semiotic 'appears an increasingly psychoanalytic phenomenon'. There is little else of note.

Freud's influence upon the French school of critical and cultural theory has been great, and a number of critics have sought to align McLuhan with this group, which had its own celebrities in thinkers such as Roland Barthes (1915-1980) and Jacques Lacan (1901-1981). Interestingly, despite their parallel interest in the 'unconscious', and their markedly similar conceptions of it (in structural terms, at least), McLuhan never read Lacan. It would be naïve to think that Lacan had no knowledge of McLuhan, given the influence of '*Macluhanism*' upon the French school of theory (see Gary Genosko's *McLuhan and Baudrillard*, 1999); however, *Laws of Media*, the book in which McLuhan proves himself a 'structuralist', was not published until 1988, almost a decade after McLuhan's death. Lacan, born in 1901 (ten years before McLuhan), died less than a year after McLuhan in 1981. The first English translations of his work were not published in book form until 1977, with *Écrits*, a selection of Lacan's papers, published by Tavistock in London, and *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis*, Lacan's seminar of 1964 (first published in French in 1973), published by the Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis. The late introduction of Lacan's work to the English-speaking world, coupled with the difficulty of his argument, are the likely reasons why his work remained unknown to McLuhan.⁶ There has been some study,

⁵ McLuhan says in an address of 1972: 'It was Freud who began the immersion approach to the human psyche and the reporting of the subliminal or inside story of human motivations. Personally speaking, my own approach to media study has always been to report the subliminal effects of our own technologies upon our psyches, to report not the program, but the impact of the medium upon the human user.' (*Understanding Me*, 202)

⁶ Lacan's name cannot have been wholly unfamiliar to McLuhan, for a comparison between Jacques Derrida and Lacan is drawn by Gayatri Spivak in her introduction to the translation of Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (1974), which McLuhan read, however briefly, in the late 1970's and cites in *Laws of Media*. See Spivak, 'Translator's Preface' in Derrida, 1974: lxii-lxvii; *LM* 122

though not much, of the connections between McLuhan and the French school of 'structuralism'; Genosko (1999: 22) reflects on the 'disjointed efforts' of critics to align McLuhan with the structuralist movement. Donald Theall (1971: 80, 83, 96, 115, 117) notes McLuhan's neglect of Roland Barthes, in particular his *Elements of Semiology*, as well as thinkers such as Noam Chomsky, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and Ferdinand de Saussure, in McLuhan's Renaissance-Humanist conception of speech and language, while Jonathan Miller (1971: 100-102) likewise criticizes McLuhan for neglecting the contributions of Chomsky and Saussure (among others); *Laws of Media*, in which McLuhan historicizes the contributions of Chomsky, Barthes, Lévi-Strauss, Saussure, and Jacques Derrida, may be seen to address these early critics. Paul Riesman in 'De l'homme "typographique" à l'homme "électronique"' (2005 [1966]: 193-202) explicitly links McLuhan with Lévi-Strauss, stating that the two thinkers 'have recognised independently of one another that the structure of communication also contains a message and it is often the message [i.e. this message at the level of structure] which is the most important' (*Ibid.* 199; translated by Genosko in Genosko, 1999: 19). James M. Curtis (1970) also links McLuhan with Lévi-Strauss in a book review of *The Languages of Criticism and the Sciences of Man: The Structuralist Controversy* (eds. Richard Macksey and Eugenio Donato, Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore and London, 1970), being the proceedings of an international symposium hosted by the Johns Hopkins University, Baltimore, in 1966, at which Barthes, Derrida, Lacan, Lucien Goldmann and Jean Hyppolite addressed American audiences for the first time (see also Genosko, *op.cit.* 22). Curtis later links McLuhan and Barthes in 'Marshall McLuhan and French Structuralism' (*Boundary 2*, 1:1, Autumn 1972, pp.134-146); however Genosko (*op.cit.* 23) criticizes Curtis for aligning them 'by means of external criteria', namely, in relation to the 'virulent attacks' by critics that each of them provoked. In *Culture as Polyphony* (1978), meanwhile, Curtis (1978: 98) likens McLuhan's analysis of the 'structural' effects of media-technologies to that of Barthes in *The Fashion System* (*Système de la Mode*, 1967) and Lévi-Strauss in *The Raw and the Cooked* (*Le Cru et le cuit*, 1964). An interest in the French school led McLuhan to Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* (1916, posthumous), which he embraced in his last years, incorporating a critique of Saussure into *Laws of Media*. There has been

little study of the connections between McLuhan and Saussure, although Terrence W. Gordon, author of the biography *Marshall McLuhan: Escape into Understanding* (1997), speculates about the value of Saussure for McLuhan, and contributes a short essay on 'McLuhan and Saussure' to the posthumous collection of aphorisms, *The Book of Probes* (2003). Gordon says that the appeal of Saussure for McLuhan was his 'similar' objective 'to set linguistics in the larger context of semiotics', and sets both against Derridean deconstructivism, which he says serves to 'grotesquely misrepresent' Saussure (BP 442, 448). Gordon does not, however, acknowledge Barthes's (1967a: 11) response to Saussure in *Éléments de Sémiologie* (1964, tr. *Elements of Semiology*, 1967), namely, 'the possibility of inverting Saussure's declaration: linguistics is not a part of the general science of signs, even a privileged part, it is semiology which is a part of linguistics'. McLuhan's argument in *Laws of Media* that all technologies are 'verbal in structure' (or 'in the plenary sense linguistic' as he says in an earlier essay) is in fact closer to Barthes's stance than to Saussure's (LM ix, 3; UB 19, p.7).⁷ Genosko's study *McLuhan and Baudrillard: The Masters of Implosion*, which traces the influence of McLuhan on Jean Baudrillard and the French school of critical theory, notes the use of Saussure by Baudrillard (see Genosko, 1999: 80, 90), but does not explicitly connect Saussure with McLuhan. McLuhan started identifying his method as 'structuralist' from 1974, arguing that 'the *diachronic* is visual ... in structure, and the *synchronic* is acoustic ... in structure' (LM 112, emphasis in original; see also 'McLuhan's Laws of the Media' in *Technology and Culture* 16:1, January 1975, p.74). He extends his criticism of Saussure to thinkers such as Paul Ricoeur, Roman Jakobson, and Noam Chomsky, arguing that all show 'confusion ... with regard to the visual and acoustic' (LM 111, 113, 121-123). French critics such as Châtelet (2005 [1967]: 205-206) contrasted McLuhan's 'gauche' analysis of speech and writing with the 'rigorous' analysis of Jacques Derrida in *De la grammatologie* (1967). Fekete (1982: 61-63), Carey (2005 [1986]: 279), McCallum (2005 [1989]: 325), Genosko (*op.cit.* 7, 38-41) and Theall (2001: 56-57; 131-132) each comment briefly upon McLuhan's relationship to Jacques Derrida and Derridean 'deconstruction', while

⁷ McLuhan met Barthes in 1973. See Genosko 1999: 30-31. In fact McLuhan references Barthes' later book, *Writing Degree Zero*, 1967, in *Laws of Media*.

Stamps (1995: xiii) suggests an affinity with Michel Foucault's postmodern sensibility and Willmott (1996: 148-149) compares McLuhan with Lacan. However, there has been, in general, a dearth of analysis of the 'tetrad' ideogram that appears in *Laws of Media*, and, as far as I am aware, I am the first to situate McLuhan's 'new science' (founded upon the 'trivium' of grammar, dialectic and rhetoric) in relation to the intertwined disciplines of metaphysics and psychoanalysis.

Throughout, McLuhan's argument is unfolded chronologically, and Chapter 1 explores McLuhan's use of Freudian concepts and terminology in his first book *The Mechanical Bride* (1951). As this chapter is meant to contextualize McLuhan's rejection of Freud in later books, some biographical detail is provided. McLuhan's reading of Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, the lay psychoanalytic journal *Neurotica* and several books by Freud in the 1940's saw him decorating *The Mechanical Bride* with his own descriptions of the unconscious, sex drives, phallic symbols, 'anal-erotic obsession' and the 'twin desires' for power and 'womb-like' comfort; the stated themes of the book, which McLuhan reiterates throughout, are 'technology, sex and death'. As far as possible, I appeal to the texts by Freud with which McLuhan seems to have then been most familiar: *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930), which McLuhan seems to have read around 1947; *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901), which I suggest that McLuhan read around 1949; *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1940), which we can be sure that McLuhan first read in 1949; and *Moses and Monotheism* (1937/1939), which I suggest he also read at this time. I also revisit any texts which may have had a bearing on McLuhan's understanding of Freud, including those that apply psychoanalytic theory to other subjects.

Chapter 2, 'The Unconscious as Acoustic Space', details the origins of McLuhan's 'structural' method, beginning with his work on the structure of the *Logos* in his doctoral thesis of 1943 and ending with his structural analysis of consciousness in *From Cliché to Archetype* (1970). The concept of 'acoustic space' may be read as a reply to the 'unconscious' of Freud and Jung, though it has precursors in the work of James Joyce and in the structural methods of Siegfried Giedion and Harold Innis.

There has been little commentary on McLuhan's relationship to Jung, but McLuhan's use of the Jungian concept of the 'archetype' may be read, I show, as an attempt to explain the phenomenon of *repression*, meanwhile circumventing the answer to this problem to be found in Freud's controversial theories of the 'Oedipus complex' and 'castration complex'. There is no clear break between the development of McLuhan's 'structural' and 'phenomenological' methods, and in fact from the mid 1950's the two exist side-by-side, much like Freud's structural analysis of the psyche in early work such as *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), and his theory of the 'drives', developed several years later. Chapter 3, 'Dynamics of the (Collective) Unconscious', details the origins of the 'phenomenological' method developed by McLuhan in the commissioned 'Report on Project in Understanding New Media' (1960), reworked as *Understanding Media* (1964), and in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) – works which saw McLuhan shifting from a structural concept of the psyche, in which psychical elements are depicted as either 'conscious' or 'unconscious', to a concept of dynamic psychical *processes*. McLuhan's study of 'media' intensified from 1963 when he was granted funding to establish a 'Centre for Culture and Technology' at the University of Toronto, a cross-disciplinary program situated within McLuhan's own department at St. Michael's College, but specializing in the research and analysis of media and communications technologies.⁸ It was not until the 1970's that McLuhan started to think of his method as 'phenomenological', but throughout the 1960's he surveyed a vast number of theories of perception from psychology, cognitive science and art theory, all of which consolidated his 'phenomenological' approach.

Chapter 4, 'The Economic Principle in the *Logos*', explores McLuhan's contributions as a dialectician, using his work on the subject of war. Like Freud (who died in 1939), McLuhan was witness to both the 'world' wars against Germany, and for both, war presented a philosophical problem not easily ignored. *The Mechanical Bride* was written in the aftermath of World War II, while *War and Peace in the Global Village*

⁸ Dismantled after McLuhan's death, the 'McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology' was reestablished in 1994 and is now based within the Faculty of Information Studies at the University of Toronto. See 'The McLuhan Program in Culture and Technology: History and Mandate' at University of Toronto website, www.utoronto.ca/mcluhan/about_history.htm

(1968), a response to the war in Vietnam, canvasses all sorts of wars: tribal warfare, Imperial warfare, the Napoleonic wars, the two 'world' wars, the 'cold' war, the Vietnam war, nuclear war, and even 'education as war'. War (aggression, violence, competition, etc.) is also the theme of two later books: the 'management' guide *Take Today: The Executive as Dropout* (1972) with Barrington Nevitt, and *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century* (1989) with Bruce R. Powers. McLuhan quips in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*: 'It has been said that the inevitable war is one whose causes have not been discovered.' (GG 68) Freud proposed a death-drive;⁹ McLuhan blamed technologies for their 'subliminal' effects. Read as a dialectician/philosopher, McLuhan in effect addresses the same problem as Freud, namely: how do we conceptualize the economic principle at work in the *Logos*, i.e., in the 'reason and speech' (and technologies) of humankind? That is to say, how do we conceptualize the tension between 'forms', or matter, and the dynamic force, or 'energy', that motivates their evolution? In short, how do we conceptualize *process*?

Chapter 5, 'McLuhan and Lacan', is a critique of McLuhan's 'tetrad' in *Laws of Media*, and echoes Slavoj Žižek in finding the point of difference between metaphysics and psychoanalysis in the concept of *causality*. The effect of the technology/word upon the 'ratio' of the 'senses', McLuhan attributes to 'formal cause', i.e. the (unconscious) pressure of the technology as a form. The concept of formal cause has a rich tradition in Western philosophy, and in *Laws of Media* McLuhan traces this tradition from Plato and Aristotle through the Renaissance to modern scientific concepts of causality. The effects of the technology as (formal) cause must, however, be distinguished from the use of the technology as a *signifier*. In fact the basic fault of McLuhan's theory is that he fails to articulate the difference between the technology/word as signifier and as (formal) cause. In *Laws of Media* 'figure' is a term applied to both. Like Freud, McLuhan invokes the concept of *trauma* to conceptualize the process of evolution, but while for McLuhan *technologies* are the causes of trauma (i.e., 'the medium is the

⁹ It has been suggested that Freud's concept of the 'death-drive' was inspired by grief at the unexpected death of his daughter Sophie (1893-1920) from influenza, shortly after the war had ended. This was disputed by Freud, who claimed that *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, which introduces the concept, was written in 1919. See Peter Gay, *Freud: A Life for Our Time*, pp.394-395

message'); for Lacan, rewriting Freud, trauma in essence is 'cause', and its manifestations – the 'Real', *jouissance* – are sublime (in the Kantian sense of the term), instituted retrospectively in the symbolic order by *the signifier of the phallus*.¹⁰ McLuhan comes close to a Lacanian concept of the signifier with his concept of the audience as a 'mask' that the speaker must 'put on', but stops short of a concept of *fantasy*, interpreting the audience-as-mask quite unequivocally as a variety of 'formal cause'. In Lacanian theory, trauma accompanies the subject's failure to synthesize an act within the symbolic order, so the signifier is produced not by the unconscious pressure of technological forms but by the 'absent' cause of the Real. Slavoj Žižek (born 1949), of the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia, has provided a brilliant exposition of Lacan on causality, and I turn to Žižek to provide clarity on this point. As Žižek (2001: 58) describes the 'Real':

there is something, some hard kernel, which resists symbolization, this kernel is ... the Real of an indigestible traumatic encounter, of an enigma that resists symbolization. And not only is this Real opposed to freedom – it is its very condition. The shocking impact of being affected/'seduced' by the enigmatic message of the Other derails the subject's *automaton*, opens up a gap which the subject is free to fill in with his (ultimately failed) endeavours to symbolize it. Freedom is ultimately *nothing but* the space opened up by the traumatic encounter, the space to be filled in by its contingent/inadequate symbolizations/translations.¹¹

The psychoanalytic concept of causality, of the Real as the 'retroactive' cause of the symbolic (or *jouissance* that of fantasy), is exactly what is missing from McLuhan's deterministic universe.

¹⁰ Lacan, in his later work, says that all *jouissance* is phallic *jouissance*; the signifier 'woman', i.e., the signifier of the (Platonic, as it were) 'idea' of woman, signifies that which is not-whole (*pas toute*) (Lacan, 1999: 7, see also note 28). Echoing Freud, Lacan says that 'woman's *jouissance* is based on a supplementation of this not-whole ... in the *a* [i.e. *objet petit a*, *autre*, other] constituted by her child.' (*Ibid.* 36) It is imperative to note that Lacan's work has been subjected to a feminist critique by Lacan's students Julia Kristeva and Luce Irigaray, in whose work Lacanian concepts are transmuted in relation to feminine sexuality and feminine *jouissance*; these critiques are, however, here left aside.

¹¹ For Žižek on the concept of 'freedom', see also the section on 'The Forced Choice of Freedom' in *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, 1989, pp.165-169

McLuhan had a cameo part in the 1977 film *Annie Hall*, where he is dragged in by the film's protagonist to utter to a would-be disciple: 'You know nothing of my work.' He harangued Woody Allen, the director and star of the film, to let him use his own line: 'You think my fallacy is all wrong?' Allen was not enthusiastic.¹² The term 'fallacy' comes from the Latin *fallacia* (deceit); *fallax* (deception); *fallare* (to deceive). What is of interest in the dialogue between McLuhan and Freud is the signifier, or rather, the 'primordial emergence' of the signifier, that is, the *phallus* as signifier. All signifiers are 'phalluses' (fallacies). The term *phallus* comes from the Greek. 'You think my fallacy is all wrong?' is a play on the term *phallus*, the 'fallacy' (Freud says) upon which the symbolic order is founded. If this seems disrespectful, let it be minded that McLuhan loved puns (usually terrible ones, such as 'Should old Aquinas be forgot') and studied in both Greek and Latin. Considering McLuhan was so eager to use the line, 'You think my fallacy is all wrong?' it is unlikely that he himself was not appreciative of the joke.¹³

¹² See Marchand, 1998 [1989]: 270. The scene was shot over a dozen times; McLuhan's lines in the final cut are: 'I heard, I heard what you were saying. You know nothing of my work. You mean my whole fallacy is wrong. How you got to teach a course in anything is totally amazing.'

¹³ It is likely this quip was inspired by the notions of 'intentional fallacy' and 'affective fallacy' developed by William Wimsatt and Monroe Beardsley in *The Verbal Icon: Studies in the Meaning of Poetry* (1954). McLuhan would have been familiar with Wimsatt and Beardsley's earlier (1946) essay on 'The Intentional Fallacy' published in the *Sewanee Review*, 54, 468-488. The 'intentional fallacy' is the proposition that it is necessary to know an author's 'intention' in creating a work to appreciate it. The 'affective fallacy' is the proposition that appreciation of a work must be based upon the affective response it elicits. There is also what William James (1842-1910) calls the 'Psychologist's Fallacy', discussed by Anton Ehrenzweig in *The Psychoanalysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing* (1953), one of McLuhan's sources for *Understanding Media*. The 'Psychologist's Fallacy', as Ehrenzweig reads it, is the rationalizing of what are in fact 'inarticulate' or 'gestalt free' perceptions. See Chapter 1, 'The 'Psychologist's Fallacy' in the Observation of Inarticulate Perceptions', pp.3-21.

1 McLuhan and Freud

If McLuhan's method owes something to Sigmund Freud, it is useful to start with the question of what, exactly, McLuhan knew of psychoanalysis. To answer this question requires some detective work. While a number of critics have noted Freud's influence upon McLuhan, none have gone so far as to connect McLuhan's 'Freudian' concepts with the sources from which they have been derived, leaving no clear impression of which books by Freud were known to McLuhan, or when he might have read them. McLuhan himself is of little help, for his remarks about Freud are few, and tend to be general in intent. With a little close reading, however, it is possible to chart Freud's influence upon McLuhan, from McLuhan's first encounters with Freud in the 1940's to his use of psychoanalytic concepts and terms in his first book *The Mechanical Bride* (1951) and his rejection of Freud thereafter. While Freud's influence is evident across McLuhan's oeuvre, McLuhan's study of Freud seems to have been concentrated around the years 1947 to 1950, prior to the publication of *The Mechanical Bride*. There is evidence that McLuhan first read Freud in the 1940's, and *The Mechanical Bride* has previously been read as, among other things, a reply to Freud's thesis on technological progress, *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). The psychoanalytic terms and concepts in *The Mechanical Bride* have not heretofore been catalogued, however, and in fact owe little to Freud directly.

To appreciate the reasons for McLuhan's silence when it comes to Freud, some biographical detail is necessary. Born in Edmonton in 1911, Herbert Marshall McLuhan (called Marshall or 'Mac' by his friends) spent most of his young life in Winnipeg, Manitoba, where his family settled during the First World War. Entering the University of Manitoba in 1928, McLuhan earned a B.A. in 1933 and an M.A. in English literature in 1934, with a dissertation on English writer George Meredith (1828-1909); upon winning an IODE postgraduate scholarship to study in Britain, McLuhan enrolled at Trinity Hall, Cambridge University, where he earned a second B.A. in 1936, and a PhD in 1943 for a thesis on English pamphleteer Thomas Nashe (1567-1601). Returning to America in 1936, McLuhan was employed to teach first at the University of Wisconsin

(1936-1937); at St. Louis University (1937-1944; a year's leave was granted in 1939-1940 to undertake doctoral research at Cambridge); at Assumption College, Windsor, Ontario (1944-1946); and, from 1946 until 1979 (notwithstanding a year holding the Schweitzer Chair at Fordham University, New York, in 1967-1968), at St. Michael's College at the University of Toronto. McLuhan's career was beginning, in fact, just as Freud's was ending. Freud was in his fifties when the first English translations of his work were published, with the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* in 1910 and *The Interpretation of Dreams* in 1913, translated by A. A. Brill; his standing in the English-speaking world was fortified with the publication of his *Collected Papers* in four volumes in 1924 and 1925, translated by James and Alix Strachey and Joan Riviere, which included the five famous case histories on Dora, the Wolf Man, the Rat Man, the psychotic doctor Schreber, and Little Hans, written in the first decade of the twentieth century, as well as his papers on metapsychology and analytic technique (see Gay, 1988: 465-466). Riviere and the Stracheys went on to translate the rest of Freud's oeuvre, and the *Standard Edition* (in English) of Freud's *Complete Psychological Works*, edited by James Strachey, was first published in 24 volumes between 1943 and 1974 by the Hogarth Press in London.

At the time McLuhan attended Cambridge University in the years 1934-1936, a student of Mansfield Forbes (1889-1936), I.A. Richards (1893-1979) and F.R. Leavis (1895-1978), Freud was receiving immense attention among critics of English literature both in Britain and America. McLuhan, however, maintained a vigorous disdain for the 'Freudians', writing of Forbes, for example: 'Now Forbes is ... a "broadminded" modern sceptic who has put his shirt on psychoanalysis. Personally I would prefer the hickory bush.' (L 52) The reference to 'the hickory bush' invokes the nursery rhyme 'Mother may I go out to swim? / Yes, my darling daughter / Hang your clothes on a hickory limb / But don't go near the water.' Peter and Iona Opie (1997: 371) say that the poem seems to have been better known in America than in England, and note that the phrase 'hickory limb' has sometimes been substituted with 'gooseberry bush'. McLuhan must have known a version referring to the 'hickory bush', and his comment, 'Personally I would prefer the hickory bush', intimates that he would rather not 'go near

the water' (i.e. psychoanalysis). In fact, until 1943, the year that he completed his doctoral research, McLuhan's attention to Freud and the psychoanalytic movement is virtually nil (although in 1935 he attended a special lecture by the architect Ernst Freud, son of Sigmund Freud, reporting back to his family that he 'told some good stories': see *L* 62-63). A letter to his brother Maurice ('Red'), written in 1934 during McLuhan's first year at Cambridge, helps illustrate McLuhan's early attitude to psychology. Commenting on *Son of Woman* (1931), John Middleton Murry's book on D. H. Lawrence, McLuhan describes Lawrence's '[seeking] "fulfillment" in sex' as the result of his 'having no religious education (like all the English poor, from whom he came) and becoming the unconscious victim of modern psychological quackery'. He says that Lawrence 'was one of [those] rare men who are born "eunuchs for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake" but that he 'denied and frustrated his great spiritual capacity for [Christian] dedication and leadership'. (*L* 44) McLuhan goes on to say, summarizing from a weekly column by G.K. Chesterton in the *Illustrated London News* (1934, December 8):

in psych[ology] the confusion arises from the fact that the thing which is being studied is also the thing studied. The psych[ologist] forgets that a man does know some things about a man long before he is cloven in 2 and one 1/2 becomes a psych[ologist] and the other a psyc[h]ol[ogic]al problem. When he plunges into the dark sea of the subconscious he forgets that there is such a thing as the broad daylight of human nature. (*L* 44-45)

Quoting from Chesterton (a little inaccurately), McLuhan says:

It [psychology] attributes an irrational talismanic power to single words and memories and wallows in the idea of wild things that appear in action without ever sans ever having passed through thought . . . I can suggest that G[eorge] B[ernard] S[haw] became a socialist economist because he nearly swallowed a penny when he was a child. (*L* 45)

McLuhan first encountered Chesterton's books as an undergraduate at the University of Manitoba, and it was Chesterton (1874-1936), a convert to Roman Catholicism in 1922, who introduced McLuhan to Catholic Humanism, to the art of paradox, and to St.

Thomas Aquinas.¹⁴ McLuhan's own interests at this time were fixed upon ancient, medieval and Renaissance literature, and Catholic theology. As a Cambridge undergraduate in 1935, McLuhan wrote of his 'privative sense of incompleteness due to not having Greek and Latin', and, after achieving a knowledge of French, set about learning to read the Greek and Latin texts he was studying (L 51). Later, while based at the University of Wisconsin (1936-1937), he enrolled in a German course, and Eric McLuhan recalls that his father 'was quite able to read' in Greek, Latin, French and German (see Editor's note, L 92; ML xii). McLuhan completed his doctoral research and was awarded a PhD from Cambridge University in 1943, teaching, meanwhile, a variety of courses in criticism and Renaissance literature, first at the University of Wisconsin (1936-1937) and then at St. Louis University from 1937-1944 (L 93). McLuhan's thesis, titled 'The Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of His Time', and greatly directed by the work of medieval scholar Étienne Gilson, surveys a vast number of ancient and medieval texts, from Homer and Virgil, Plato and Aristotle, the Stoics, the Pythagoreans, and the Bible, to St. Augustine (354-430) and St. Thomas Aquinas (c. 1225-1274), so as to position the 'war of words' between Renaissance writers Thomas Nashe (1567-1601) and Gabriel Harvey (1545-1630) in terms of the ancient quarrel between rhetoricians, grammarians and dialecticians. It is against these early intellectual interests and McLuhan's religious beliefs that we must set his resistance to Freud. Raised a Baptist, and attending various Protestant churches throughout his youth, McLuhan was inspired by the Catholic Humanism of Chesterton, Jacques Maritain, and T. S. Eliot, and liked to point out the connections that other writers had with Catholicism; for example, in a letter to Corinne Lewis (whom he wed in 1939), McLuhan notes a book called *Shakespeare Rediscovered* in which the author, Clara Longworth, comtesse de Chambrun,

show[s] how all Shakespeare's friends were Catholics, from Richard

¹⁴ G.K. Chesterton's *St. Thomas Aquinas – "The Dumb Ox"* (1933) seems to have been McLuhan's introduction to Aquinas. He says in a letter to his brother in November 1934: 'Now I can heartily recommend GK's book on St. Thomas as being of use to you in your philosophy ...' (L 39) See also McLuhan's article on Chesterton 'G. K. Chesterton: A Practical Mystic' in the *Dalhousie Review* 15:4 (January 1936), 455-464, republished in *Marshall McLuhan Unbound*, where he says that 'Mr Chesterton has written on the power of Aquinas to fix even passing things as they pass...' (UB 11, p.14)

Field, his printer to the Earls of Southhampton and Essex, his patrons. Even his friend Whitgift, the Archbishop of Canterbury, was a profound Catholic sympathizer. Of course it has long been known that his [Shakespeare's] father and mother were staunch Catholics ... (L 101; see also 73)

When in 1935 McLuhan's brother Maurice shared his intention to become a minister in the Church of Christ, McLuhan urged him to consider converting to Roman Catholicism, writing to their mother: 'As soon as he [Maurice] can discover what Protestantism is and in what points it cannot possibly agree with Rome, let him lay these points before a Churchman (i.e. a priest) and let him discuss them with him....' (L 75) McLuhan converted to Roman Catholicism in 1937, two years before his marriage (Corinne, his wife, converted in 1946). As a thinker, McLuhan defined himself as a 'Thomist', in which he was influenced as much by Maritain, Gilson and James Joyce as by Aquinas himself. Publicly, McLuhan was careful not to let the fact that he was a Catholic prejudice his critics, yet, as Philip Marchand reports, and as Corinne McLuhan concurs, for McLuhan, first came God, then his work, then his family (see Marchand, 1998 [1989]: 51, 70; *ML* xvii-xviii; Corinne McLuhan in *McLuhan's Wake*, dir. K. McMahan, 2002).

McLuhan left Cambridge University in 1936 with a small appreciation of modern psychology, in particular the gestalt theory of Wolfgang Köhler, which he learned from I.A. Richards. He had no sympathy for Richards's atheism, however, writing to his brother Maurice: 'Richards is a humanist There are [for him] no permanent, ultimate, qualities such as Good, Love, Hope, etc. and yet he wishes to discover objective, ultimate[ly] permanent standards of criticism... in order to establish intellectualist culture as the only religion worthy [of] a rational being ...' (L 50; Marchand *op.cit.* 37) In late 1939, after Britain's declaration of war against Germany, and back at Cambridge to undertake research for his doctoral thesis, McLuhan read and enjoyed the work of Alfred Adler (1870-1937), recommending *The Neurotic Constitution* (1921), *Understanding Human Nature* (1928) and *Social Interest* (1939) to his brother: 'you would find these of great interest', he says in a letter of January 1940 (L 125). Like Freud, Adler was Austrian, Jewish, and had trained in Medicine, and he

was one of the first to join Freud's circle in 1902; his break with Freud occurred in 1911, two years before Freud's break with Jung, and Adler went on to found the school of 'individual psychology' that became popular in America. It is possible that Adler's stress on the 'individual' lent to McLuhan's bias against Freud, despite the fact that Freud's system is founded upon the dialectic of 'Eros' (libido) and 'Thanatos' (the death-drive), while Adler's system is based, instead, upon the argument that 'every one processes an 'idea' about himself and the problems of life – a life-pattern ... that keeps fast hold of him without his understanding it, without his being able to give any account of it' (Adler, 1938: 26-27). In Adler, the activity of the individual is depicted as a repetition of patterns established in the parents' treatment of the child, and Adler says that '*The character of a human being is never the basis of a moral judgement, but is an index of the attitude of this human being toward his environment, and of his relationship to the society in which he lives.*' (Adler, 1927: 189, emphasis in original) While Adler's system remains closer to Freud's than does Jung's 'analytical psychology', it does not retain the sense of conflict that Freud's system presents. In Freud each individual is a site of conflict between the id (i.e. the 'drives'), the ego which struggles for control of the id, and the super-ego which dictates to the ego; in Adler it seems that with proper parental attention any person can be well-adjusted to their environment. (Freud maintained in his pamphlet *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement*, 1914, that both individual psychology and analytic psychology, as they rejected the theory of the libido, found the truths of psycho-analysis 'too uncomfortable for their taste'. SE XIV: 66) McLuhan clearly found in Adler a productive approach to reading 'patterns' in social activity, although he wrote in the preface to an early draft of *The Mechanical Bride*, 'Adler has no idea of *grammatica* or *rhetorica* as means of analyzing either social or poetic products ...' (Gordon, 1997: 101)¹⁵ Adler, in other words, was a dialectician, the kind of thinker to whom McLuhan was rarely sympathetic.

Around the end of 1943 or start of 1944, after finishing his doctorate, and at about the same time that the first of his articles on the Dagwood and Blondie comics was

¹⁵ No mention of Adler is to be found in the published version of *The Mechanical Bride*.

published in *Columbia* (see 'Dagwood's America' in *Columbia* 3: 22), McLuhan read *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time* (1937) by German analyst Karen Horney (1885-1952) (Marchand, *op.cit.* 78). Horney, who had been based in the United States since 1930, emphasizes the influence of 'cultural' factors in neuroses, arguing that

a neurosis is a psychic disturbance brought about by fears and defenses against these fears, and by attempts to find compromise solutions for conflicting tendencies. For practical reasons it is advisable to call this disturbance a neurosis only if it deviates from the pattern common to the particular culture. (Horney, 1964 [1937]: 29)

Horney criticizes Freud's theory of 'the Oedipus complex as the very kernel of neuroses' (*Ibid.* 83). McLuhan endorses this criticism, quipping in *The Mechanical Bride*, 'in the past five years mothers have been taught to ask themselves anxiously not "Did I give my baby the right capsules?" but "Did I give my baby an Oedipus complex?"' (*MB* 76) The unique aspect of Horney's argument, however, which McLuhan adopted, is the emphasis of 'cultural conditions' over 'biological and physiological conditions' in causing neurosis (Horney *op.cit.* viii). McLuhan soon started his own paper on the subject, for which three alternative titles have been recorded. The working title, which McLuhan mentions in a letter, was 'Culture and Neurosis: From Machiavelli to Marx' (L 157); Marchand (*op.cit.* 78) records the work in progress as *From Machiavelli to Marx: A Study in the Psychology of Culture*; and the unpublished paper is archived as 'Catharsis and Hallucination from Machiavelli to Marx' (L 157, footnote 3). McLuhan describes the paper in a letter of March 1944:¹⁶

One important paper I'm working on at the moment is "Culture and Neurosis: From Machiavelli to Marx." An analysis of the entirely emotional and "neurotic" character of the political and literary cycles of development of "Renaissance Man." Upshot of paper is that to-day our "nervous breakdown" is a blessed opportunity to escape from the cycle back to reason. (L 157)

¹⁶ Part of McLuhan's argument in his unpublished article on 'Culture and Neurosis' is that 'the importance of a Machiavelli, a Hobbes, or a Marx is not primarily intellectual but cathartic. They don't offer conceptual systems so much as emotional strategies' (cited in L 157, footnote 3). This argument, which invokes (from the *Poetics*) the Aristotelian concept of 'catharsis', is at the heart of McLuhan's later concept that a writer's work is best grasped by means of a 'theory of communication' which positions the writer in relation to his or her reading public (q.v. Chapter 5).

McLuhan's interest in the work of Karen Horney led him to investigate modern psychology in greater depth. He swung first towards analytical psychology, writing in a letter of December 1944 to Walter Ong, S.J. (a former student at St. Louis University): 'Increasingly, I feel that Catholics must master C. G. Jung.... Modern anthropology and psychology are more important for the Church than St. Thomas to-day.' (L 166) McLuhan reiterates his preference for Jung in a letter of December 1947: 'it is plain enough to me that the abiding achievement of the past century has been in analytical psychology and as such the Catholic mind has yet to ingest let alone digest that achievement.' (letter to Walter Ong, L 191) Meanwhile, McLuhan had started to read a little of Freud, probably starting with *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1930). In an article published in the *Sewanee Review* in October 1947, McLuhan brackets Freud first with Giambattista Vico, for his awareness of 'the simultaneity of all history seen at the psychological and intellectual level', then with William Blake, as both 'mistook a psychology for metaphysics and theology' (UB 10, p.6, p.9). The use of Freud's name suggests a familiarity with Freudian texts not evident anywhere earlier; in particular, the reference to Vico's and Freud's awareness of 'the simultaneity of all history' evokes the passage in *Civilization and its Discontents* where Freud likens the structure of the psyche to the metropolis of Rome, in which the ruins of the ancient buildings are 'still buried in the soil of the city' (SE XXI: 70).

What spurred McLuhan's interest in Freud once more was an article by Gershon Legman, 'The Psychopathology of the Comics', published in the journal *Neurotica* in late 1948. A self-styled 'psychoanalytic' forum beloved of the 'beats', *Neurotica* was published nine times in total between Spring 1948 and Winter 1952; contributors included Leonard Bernstein, Lawrence Durrell, beat poets Allen Ginsberg and Richard Rubenstein, and illustrator William Steig. Edited chiefly by Jay Irving Landesman, Legman, a regular contributor from *Neurotica* 3, is named 'Associate Editor' of *Neurotica* 5, and sole editor of *Neurotica* 9. The mandate of the journal, as stated at the outset, was to analyse a 'neurotic' culture and society 'in as non-technical language as possible' (*Neurotica* 1, Spring 1948, p. 3). *Neurotica* 3 includes a citation

of Ernest Jones (the Welsh psychoanalyst and biographer of Freud) that by Freud's own definition, 'Psychoanalysis is the study of mental processes of which we are unaware, of what for the sake of brevity we call the unconscious' and that 'anyone following this path is practicing psychoanalysis even if he comes to conclusions different from Freud's'. (cited by Rosenblum, *Neurotica* 3, p.56)¹⁷ One effect of McLuhan's encounter with *Neurotica* (in which he published two articles, one in *Neurotica* 5, Autumn 1949, and another in *Neurotica* 8, Spring 1951) was that McLuhan, for the time being at least, saw fit to align his purpose with that of the 'Freudians'.

McLuhan was introduced to *Neurotica*, and to Legman's work, by his friend Felix Giovanelli (a colleague from St Louis University), who had met Legman in New York (see L 209, footnote 1). 'The Psychopathology of the Comics', which McLuhan read around the very end of 1948 or in early January 1949, had obvious resonances with McLuhan's 'folklore' book (published in 1951 as *The Mechanical Bride*) as well as an article on 'American Advertising' McLuhan had written in 1947, in which, like Legman, McLuhan criticizes the 'armchair sadism' perpetuated by 'thrillers' and detective fiction (*UB* 9, p.7). The opening paragraph of Legman's article reads:

The American generation born since 1930 cannot read. It has not learned, it will not learn, and it does not need to. Reading ability just sufficient to spell out the advertisements is all that is demanded in our culture. With only token recourse to the printed word, for more than a decade the radio, the talking movie, the picture-magazine and comic-book have served all the cultural and recreational needs of the generation of adults now upon us. For them, the printed word is on its way out. (*Neurotica* 3, Autumn 1948, p.3)

McLuhan wrote to Giovanelli in January 1949:

¹⁷ Freud says in 'On the History of the Psychoanalytic Movement': '... the theory of psychoanalysis is an attempt to account for two striking and unexpected facts of observation which emerge whenever an attempt is made to trace the symptoms of a neurotic back to their sources in his past life: the facts of transference and of resistance. Any line of investigation which recognizes these two facts and takes them as the starting-point of its work has a right to call itself psycho-analysis, even though it arrives at results other than my own.' (*SE* XIV:16) Jones's summary of psychoanalysis as the study of 'mental processes of which we are unaware, of what for the sake of brevity we call the unconscious' is thus a little misleading.

Legman would surely be worth an evening's chat. His piece on the Comics in *Neurotica* 3 was dandy. Written, however, in *Typhon* tone. Tell him how to let up on moral earnestness without loss of intellectual point. Change of tone required only to get his stuff printed. I haven't told him about Vanguard doing my folklore because [Seon] Givens [at the Vanguard Press] turned down his book. Perhaps you could break the news tactfully without loss of an ally. He sounds like a good sort of gent. (L 209)

Legman sent McLuhan a copy of his monograph *Love and Death: A Study in Censorship* (1949). The book – an attack on the agencies of censorship which allow descriptions of sadistic violence to pervade the movies, comics, and fiction books, while regarding any depiction of sex as 'obscene' – takes the argument that 'There is no mundane substitute for sex except sadism.' (Legman, 1949: 9, emphasis in original) Legman writes:

you will find no other human activity that can replace sex completely – *spurlos versenkt*. Narcissism, homosexuality, zoöphily: these are clearly misdirections of ordinary sexual acts toward biologically unsuitable recipients. Fetichisms in all their number seldom supersede sexuality, generally do no more than to excite to it by a deviant concentration upon one attractive feature – breast, hair, foot, buttock, or whatever – an interest usually spread over all. But sadism does substitute. It is complete in itself. (*Ibid.*)

McLuhan wrote to Giovanelli at the start of March: 'Legman sent me his piece on Love and Death. It's queerly static. He doesn't seem to grasp the dialectic of the sado-masochistic relations.' (L 212) At the end of April McLuhan wrote to Giovanelli: 'Tell me has our *Neurotica* friend [Legman] read W[yndham] Lewis on the Homo[sexual] as child of the Suffragette? That section remains for me a high-point.' (L 213)¹⁸ McLuhan's letter to Giovanelli continues: 'But there's not even a hint of such awareness in Freud or Horney. Freud on the causes of homosexuality is just a bloody

¹⁸ A footnote in McLuhan's essay 'Wyndham Lewis: Lemuel in Lilliput', 1944, mentions Lewis's argument from *The Art of Being Ruled* (1926), also documented in Lewis's later book *The Doom of Youth* (1932), that homosexuality is the product of feminism (see L 213, footnote 6). Lewis says in *The Art of Being Ruled* (1989 [1926]: 218): 'in the contemporary world [homosexuality] is a part of the feminist revolution. It is as an integral part of feminism proper that it should be considered a gigantic phrase of the sex war. The 'homo' is the legitimate child of the 'suffragette'.'

comic – Penis envy for girls, castration terror for men.' (*Ibid.*)¹⁹ At this point he adds: 'Reviewed Freud's last two books for [Frederick] Morgan recently.' (*Ibid.*)

From his letter of April 30, 1949 to Felix Giovanelli, we know that McLuhan had then recently read 'Freud's last two books' (L 213). While there is no record of his 'review', one of the 'last two books' must undoubtedly have been the English translation of *Abriß der Psychoanalyse (An Outline of Psychoanalysis)*, a book first published in 1949 by the Hogarth Press and Institute of Psycho-Analysis in London, and by Norton in New York. (The translation, by James Strachey, had previously been published in 1940 in the *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, the same year as the first German edition in *Imago*, the psychoanalytic journal founded in 1912 by two of Freud's circle, Otto Rank and Hans Sachs.) Written in late 1938, the year before Freud's death (he had left Vienna in June 1938 due to the Nazi occupation of Austria, and was in voluntary exile in England) the *Outline* is highly technical, and assumes a knowledge of Freud's oeuvre. Like the fragment 'Elementary Lessons in Psycho-Analysis' (started after the *Outline*, but soon abandoned), the *Outline* was Freud's attempt to record, before his death, a succinct version of the concepts he had introduced. Regarding the other of the 'two books' there are fewer clues to go by. It is possible that McLuhan had access to a copy of *The International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, in which part of the fragment 'Elementary Lessons in Psycho-Analysis' is appended to *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*; this, however, does not explain how the *Outline* captured McLuhan's attention in 1949. If we accept as accurate McLuhan's description of 'Freud's last two books', it must have been *Moses and Monotheism* that McLuhan had 'reviewed', of which the first two essays were published in *Imago* in 1937; the third essay was added in the German edition and the English edition (translated by Katherine Jones) that were published in 1939. Reprinted by Alfred A. Knopf in New York in 1940, 1947, and 1949, this particular book of Freud's, which analyses in psychoanalytic terms the

¹⁹ McLuhan presents Freud's concepts of 'castration anxiety' and 'penis envy' as if they were specific to homosexuality, whereas in fact for Freud, the 'castration complex' is part of every individual's sexual development, regardless of whether the person's 'object choice' is hetero- or homo-sexual.

origins of Judaism and Christianity, would have been of unique interest to McLuhan.²⁰ Begun in 1934, rewritten in 1936, and considered somewhat of a peculiarity in Freud's oeuvre, *Moses and Monotheism* finds Freud attempting 'to translate the concepts of individual psychology into mass psychology' (a feat which Freud notes 'is not easy'), so as to describe the evolution of a religion by applying to a whole culture psychological concepts such as the castration complex, trauma, repetition-compulsion and the 'return of the repressed' (SE XXIII: 132). Herbert S. Benjamin mentions *Moses and Monotheism* in 'Psychiatrist: God or Demitasse?' in *Neurotica* 4 (Spring 1949) pp.31-38, suggesting that Freud plays the role of 'messianic' father in relation to the previous 'religions' of 'Moses, Christ, the Catholic Church, and other religions and father images' (p.33). Near the end of the book, Freud describes the evolution from reverence of the 'totem animal', to deification of the 'hero', to the worship of gods with human form, to worship of the one, 'nameless' god of whom no representation is permitted (SE XXIII: 133). One clue that McLuhan had read *Moses and Monotheism* may be McLuhan's use of the concept of the 'totem animal' in *The Mechanical Bride* (MB 84, 141). McLuhan worked quickly; writing to Felix Giovanelli in January 1949 that he planned to write an article on Ford Madox Ford (also for the *Hudson Review*), he says: 'Shall do the Ford piece for Hudson. Just 2 days work. But shall read more of the novels [first].' (L 209) McLuhan may not have been meticulous in his 'review' of Freud; however, in setting out to review 'Freud's last two books', he probably troubled himself to read at least some of Freud's earlier texts. (I suggest that in addition to *Civilization and Its Discontents*, McLuhan probably looked at *The Interpretation of Dreams* and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*.) Like McLuhan's own work, however, Freud's texts defy easy analysis. McLuhan's 'review' of Freud, no doubt written in haste, is likely to have lacked credibility.

1949 saw the publication of an article by McLuhan on 'The Psychopathology of *Time and Life*' (*Neurotica* 5, Autumn 1949, pp.5-16), fashioned from material he had been collecting for his book on industrial 'folklore', the title a nod to Legman's *Neurotica*

²⁰ In Britain, the translation of *Moses and Monotheism* by Katherine Jones was published by the Hogarth Press in 1939, and reprinted in 1940 and 1951; the translation by James Strachey, which formed part of Volume XXIII of the Standard Edition, was not published until 1964.

article and Freud's *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*. In fact, save for the title, there is nothing notably 'Freudian' about McLuhan's analysis. As in *The Mechanical Bride*, McLuhan charges the producers of popular culture (in this case, the magazines *Time*, *Life*, and *Fortune*) for 'manipulat[ing] the standardized reflexes of a semi-hypnotized and mentally helpless audience' (*Ibid.* p.6). His analysis of the *Life* magazine formula, which is pursued in *The Mechanical Bride*, is the winning combination of 'technology', 'sex', and 'death':

The *Life* stereotype ... is technology and sex. Stress on eroticism, nudism, and primitivism being only too obviously the futile efforts of the mechanized slave to get the machine out of his guts. The child of these twain, in thriller and comic-strip as well, is death. (*Ibid.* p.13)

The lack of Freudian terminology in McLuhan's 'Psychopathology' article, compared to his relatively free use of such terms in *The Mechanical Bride*, suggests that this article was written prior to his 'review' of Freud in early 1949.

The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man (1951) was assembled from a collection of press clippings and lecture notes that McLuhan had prepared throughout the 1940s. Publication of the book was delayed by the sheer volume of McLuhan's material: 'a terrifying thing', recalls the former editor of Vanguard Press, then Seon Givens (Marchand, *op.cit.* 117). The five hundred page manuscript was eventually reduced to a fraction of that size, with substantial rewriting by McLuhan in 1950 – shortly after his reading of Freud (*Ibid.* 117-118). *The Mechanical Bride* surveys the 'imagery' of the 'press, radio, movies, and advertising', 'of whose rich human symbolism [man] is mainly unconscious' (*MB* v, 4). Comprising a collection of advertisements with commentary presented alongside in two-column newspaper layout, the book had its genesis in McLuhan's early teaching experiences at the University of Wisconsin in 1936-1937. During an interview thirty years later, he recalled:

In 1936, 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, games, movies.... To meet them on their grounds was my strategy in pedagogy: the world of pop culture. Advertising was a very convenient form of approach. (HC 268)

Many of McLuhan's 'Freudian' references in *The Mechanical Bride* are traceable to *Neurotica*, for example, the concept of 'fetichism' (see Goldston, *Neurotica* 3, pp.46-51), and 'sado-masochistic' pleasure (a pervasive theme throughout the nine volumes of the journal). Other Freudian concepts are taken from Margaret Mead's *Male and Female* (1949), an anthropological study of the Pacific islanders; from Joseph Campbell's *Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949), which discusses the 'archetypal hero' in a cross-cultural context; from Wilhelm Reich's *The Mass Psychology of Fascism* (1933), which links Nazism to sexual repression; and from Legman's book *Love and Death* (1949). Presenting analyses of 50 or so advertisements, McLuhan (building on Legman's argument in *Neurotica* 3, Autumn 1948, pp.3-4, that '[l]ike all other forms of dreaming, literature operates under a censorship') says that the ads 'express for the collective society that which dreams and uncensored behavior do in individuals' (MB 97). While there are no specific references to Freud, McLuhan justifies his method by appeal to psychoanalysis, explaining that 'the psychoanalytic insight that the most valuable data are yielded by individuals or groups involuntarily, in moments of inattention ... [is that] which makes popular culture so valuable as an index of the guiding impulses and the dominant drives in a society' (50). Here McLuhan may have been influenced by Herbert S. Benjamin's article in *Neurotica* 4 (Spring 1949), which says: 'The genuine artist is not the man who "is afraid to lose his neuroses lest his art go with them," but, as Freud made patently clear, is one who functions primarily in a fashion comparable to the analyst, clarifying and objectifying man's neuroses in a therapeutic way.' (p.34) Such a role is necessary due to the exploitative, manipulative character of the 'commercial education' provided by advertising, McLuhan says:

Ours is the first age in which many thousands of the best-trained individual minds have made it a full-time business to get inside the collective public mind. To get inside in order to manipulate, exploit, control it seem[s] fitting to devise a method for reversing this process. Why not use the new commercial education as a means to

enlightening its intended prey? Why not assist the public to observe the drama which is intended to operate upon it unconsciously? (*MB* v)

There are two chapters in *The Mechanical Bride* that especially recall the Freudian argument: in 'Love Goddess Assembly Line', McLuhan expounds upon the concept of unconscious (or 'subrational') societal 'impulse[s] and appetites'; while the title piece 'The Mechanical Bride' speculates about the sado-masochistic nature of these desires, as they relate to both 'sex and technology' (*MB* 93-97; 98-101). McLuhan makes free use of psychoanalytic terminology throughout the book, however, writing about the 'ego' (33, 144), the 'sex-drive' (113), sexual 'desires' (84), 'identification' (143, quoting William Reich), the Oedipus complex (76), 'narcissism' (143-144), 'phallic symbols' (80, 84), penis-envy (84, quoting Margaret Mead's *Male and Female*) and 'anal-erotic obsession' (62); he also in one place describes an ad as being 'like a slip of the tongue that reveals a hidden attitude' (137).

There are clues in *The Mechanical Bride* that suggest that along with *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*, *Moses and Monotheism* and *Civilization and Its Discontents*, McLuhan had read, however briefly, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) and *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901). In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud distinguishes between what he calls 'manifest' content and 'latent' content (*SE* IV: 277). Freud says that 'a dream is the fulfillment of a wish'; however, it requires an analysis to raise the 'latent' dream-thoughts to attention (*Ibid.* 122, 144) The dream, he says, is 'given [its] shape' by two 'psychical forces': 'one of these forces constructs the wish which is expressed by the dream, while the other exercises a censorship upon this dream-wish and, by the use of that censorship, forcibly brings about a distortion in the expression of the wish.' (*Ibid.*) As such, Freud modifies his formula to read: 'a dream is a (disguised) fulfillment of a (suppressed or repressed) wish.' (*Ibid.* 160) Reiterating this thesis (of which we must note that Freud provides an exposition in chapter IV of the *Outline*), but applying it to 'the collective society', McLuhan says:

[T]he ad agencies ... express for the collective society that which dreams and uncensored behavior do in individuals. They give spatial form to hidden impulse and, when analyzed, make possible bringing

into reasonable order a great deal that could not otherwise be observed or discussed. Gouging away at the surface of public sales resistance, the ad men are constantly breaking through into the *Alice in Wonderland* territory behind the looking glass which is the world of subrational impulse and appetites. Moreover, the ad agencies are so set on the business of administering major wallops to the buyer's unconscious, and have their attention so concentrated on the sensational effect of their activities, that they unconsciously reveal the primary motivations of large areas of our contemporary existence. (MB 97)

McLuhan suggests that Hollywood movies serve the same purpose in entertainment as the ads do in advertising. He cites from film critic Parker Tyler's *The Hollywood Hallucination* (1944), which suggests that 'The movie theater is the psychoanalytic clinic of the average worker's daylight dream.' (MB 97)²¹ McLuhan summarizes Tyler thus: 'the [movie-goer] dreams the dreams that money can buy but which he can neither afford nor earn in the daylight world. In the dark theater he dreams the dreams which tend to keep even his frustrations within a dream world.' (MB 97) McLuhan is in fact reprising two articles from 1947, 'American Advertising' and 'Inside Blake and Hollywood', where he describes Hollywood as 'Exuberance of semi-conscious and uncontrolled symbols on the one hand, and shrewd technical and commercial control on the other' and says that in America, 'The hyperaesthesia of the ad-man's rhetoric has knocked the public into a kind of groggy, slap-happy condition ... this orgy of irrationalism may not be without its cathartic function' (UB 10, p.12; UB 9, p.6). Comparing the Hollywood industry with the advertising industry, McLuhan says that both operate by appealing to our 'unconscious minds':

Hollywood is like the ad agencies in constantly striving to enter and control the unconscious minds of a vast public ... in order to exploit them for profit.... The ad agencies and Hollywood, in their different ways, are always trying to get inside the public mind in order to

²¹ McLuhan does not quote Tyler exactly. Tyler (1970 [1944]: 243-244) in fact says: The black daylight of the office and the bright nightlight of the movie theater balance too easily the daydream of the office and night dream of the theater; the effect is one of canceling, and hence of a perpetual suspension of the true conflict of forces.... The movie theater is the psychoanalytical clinic for the average worker and his *day-*, not his *night*, dreams! He emerges from the theater cured of the illusion that his effort to alienate himself from the night or mechanical work in lighted office or factory is morbid, a monstrous kind of wish.

impose their collective dreams on that inner stage... One dream opens into another until reality and fantasy are made interchangeable. (MB 97)

Meanwhile, the insight 'that the most valuable data [for the analyst] are yielded by individuals or groups involuntarily, in moments of inattention' is part of Freud's thesis in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*; note, however, that here too McLuhan extends Freud's argument to 'groups' as well as to individuals (50).²² Further hints that McLuhan had read *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* are the references to "'slips" of the tongue and pen' that appear in an article of 1953 on Joyce (see *IL* 37, 45).

A clue to McLuhan's familiarity with *Civilization and Its Discontents* is McLuhan's reference to the psychoanalytic concept of anal erotism in his analysis of the modern obsession with 'hygiene'. He says that

in a world accustomed to the dominant imagery of mechanical production and consumption, what could be more natural than our coming to submit our bodies and fantasies to the same processes? The anal-erotic obsession of such a world is inevitable. And it is our cloacal obsession which produces the hysterical hygiene ads, the paradox here being much like our death and mayhem obsession in the pulps on one hand, and, on the other, our refusal to face death at all in the mortician parlor. (MB 62)

From where McLuhan derived this concept of 'anal-erotic obsession' is not made clear. There is a brief paragraph on the 'sadistic-anal' phase in chapter III of the *Outline* (*SE* XXIII: 154), but McLuhan's use of the concept in the context of 'hygiene' recalls *Civilization and its Discontents*, where Freud, describing the process by which a character-trait is formed, says that the 'anal erotism' of young children, that is, their 'interest in the excretory function, its organs and products', can later develop into

²² Donald Theall (2001: 224, 268 note 17) reports lending McLuhan a copy of Jurgen Ruesch and Gregory Bateson's *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry* (1951), and says that he and McLuhan 'discussed Bateson's work frequently during the period from 1950 to 1953'. It is uncertain whether Ruesch and Bateson influenced the writing of *The Mechanical Bride*, however they anticipate McLuhan's critique of Freud, arguing that while 'Freud's model of the soul is still the most comprehensive system available' for 'the understanding of intrapersonal processes', '[w]hat we need today is systems which would embrace both events confined to the individual and events encompassing several people and larger groups'. Ruesch *et. al.* (1951: 62)

'parsimony, a sense of order and cleanliness', which, if 'intensified', 'produce what is called the anal character' (*SE XXI*: 96-97). A further note by Freud reads:

A social factor is also unmistakably present in the cultural trend towards cleanliness, which has received *ex post facto* justification in hygienic considerations but which manifested itself before their discovery. The incitement to cleanliness originates in an urge to get rid of the excreta, which have become disagreeable to the sense perceptions. (*Ibid.* 100, footnote 1)

McLuhan returns to the concept of the 'anal' character in at least two other places, in a short piece titled 'Oral-anal' in *Explorations 8* (1957),²³ and in a brief passage in *Understanding Media* (p.131).²⁴

There is both a Freudian and a Jungian aspect to McLuhan's concept of the 'unconscious' in *The Mechanical Bride*. To start with, McLuhan applies the concept to society at large, rather than just to the individual: he variously describes 'the trance world' (*MB* 28), the 'collective dream' (v), the 'collective public mind' (v), 'subrational collectivism' (143), 'mass hysteria', 'mass delirium' and 'collective irrationalism' (144), 'the dim dreams of collective consciousness' (vi) and 'the collective consciousness of the race' (31), in a way that recalls C.G. Jung's 'collective unconscious'. The concept of 'collective consciousness' put forward in *The Mechanical Bride* actually owes more to the work of Wyndham Lewis, and to Swiss historian Siegfried Giedion, however,

²³ In 'Oral-anal' in *Explorations 8* (1957), McLuhan attempts to align the 'oral' phase in Freud with 'oral', i.e. pre-literate, culture, and the 'anal' phase with 'civilized' culture. He cites from Otto Fenichel's *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neuroses* that 'All positive or negative emphasis on taking and receiving indicates an oral origin', repeating Fenichel's descriptions of some of these 'oral' attitudes. Here McLuhan says that 'What Freud calls "oral" is noted as typical of pre-literate societies' and goes on to explain these characteristics in relation to the 'auditory' (*VVV* Item 9; *EM* 191).

²⁴ McLuhan comments briefly on the topic of 'anal erotism' in *Understanding Media* (p.131), arguing that 'Central to modern psychoanalytical theory is the relation between the money complex and the human body'. He invokes the argument of Hungarian analyst Sándor Ferenczi that money is 'nothing other than odorless dehydrated filth that has been made to shine'. This is from Ferenczi's essay 'The Ontogenesis of the Interest in Money', first published in English in the volume *Contributions to Psycho-Analysis* (1916), reprinted as *Sex in Psycho-Analysis: Contributions to Psycho-Analysis* (first edition 1916, second edition 1950). It is doubtful, however, that McLuhan's quote was taken from this source; more likely he found it quoted elsewhere. See Ferenczi, 1950: 327; also Fenichel, 1945: 281, 487-488, on money and the 'anal' character.

than it does to Jung. In *Time and Western Man*, Lewis (1927: 29) describes the 'submissive, hypnotized public' confronted by the ads; Giedion (1967: vi), meanwhile, in the Foreword to the First Edition of *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941), says: 'in spite of the seeming confusion there is nevertheless a true, if hidden, unity, a secret synthesis, in our present civilization. To point out *why* this synthesis has *not* become a *conscious and active reality* has been one of my chief aims' (emphasis in original; see also *L* 131). McLuhan echoes Giedion when he says: 'There is a kind of trancelike dream logic in extending the methods and attitudes of one sphere of action to another.' (*MB* 15) While Giedion applies this insight to architectural forms, McLuhan applies it to the artifacts of popular culture:

When the same patterns recur, [analysts of popular culture] are alerted to the possibilities of similar underlying dynamics. No culture will give popular nourishment and support to images or patterns which are alien to its dominant impulses and aspirations. And among the multifarious forms and images sustained by any society it is reasonable to expect to find some sort of melodic curve. There will be many variations, but they will tend to be variations on certain recognizable themes. And these themes will be the "laws" of that society, laws which will mould its songs and art and social expression. (96)

Arguing that society is shaped by 'social myths or forms ... [whose] consistency is not conscious in origin or effect', McLuhan says that the fantasies perpetuated by newspaper, radio, film and advertising are 'bringing about [a] condition of public helplessness' (v). Letting the ads inform our taste in consumer products is akin to wearing a 'strait jacket', McLuhan says: we may feel 'safe and strong', but we 'can exercise very little of [our] human character or dignity' (33, 148).

The Freudian aspect to McLuhan's concept of the 'unconscious' in *The Mechanical Bride* is found in his use of the concept of the 'drives'. Unlike in the later books, where the 'unconscious' is depicted as structured by the pressure of technological forms, here McLuhan depicts the human being as *internally* motivated by (unconscious) 'desires' and by what he idiosyncratically terms 'sex drives', 'sales drives' and 'success

drives'.²⁵ McLuhan hypothesizes that the human being is motivated by 'twin desires' for 'power' (which he relates to technology) and 'comfort' (which he relates to sex). Comfort is depicted as feminine (McLuhan calls it 'womb-like comfort') and power as masculine or 'phallic' (14, 80, 84). McLuhan says that 'these conflicting wishes are incorporated unconsciously in a wide range of popular objects', e.g. fast cars, fashion clothing, gadgets, and 'assembly-line' women (84). Ads, McLuhan says, offer a set of 'promises and commands, blended ... in such a way as to release the unconscious pressures and desires of the mind' (90). He depicts advertising as 'a kind of social ritual or magic that flatter[s] and enhance[s] us in our own eyes' (113). With advertising,

The eye is anxiously turned on the neighbor or friend with a "How do I measure up?" "Do I rate?" This, in turn, brings about a tendency to live not only in terms of present commodities but of future ones. Unrest is present no matter what may be the present house, car, job. Living is done in terms of a future... (112)

Through an 'endless stress on exclusiveness and fashion', people are 'made extremely conscious of the shabby character of the article [they] bought last year or five years ago' and are conditioned to want ever new articles (*Ibid.*). Market research is defined as a kind of 'social engineering', where all ads and consumer polls are designed for 'adjusting products to consumers and consumers to products, whether the article is corn flakes or legislation' (47). As McLuhan says: 'Most people are terribly ill at ease until they are "in line" with their fellow men. The polls are a graphic means of showing people where that line is.' (46) 'By keeping everyone in a panic', McLuhan says, 'through daily invitations to "See how you stack up with your fellow man on the following issues," the individual can be torn between the fear of being a misfit and the passion for the distinction conferred by purchasing a mass-produced item.' (48)

A persistent theme of *The Mechanical Bride* is 'the interfusion of sex and technology',

²⁵ McLuhan likewise employs the concept of the 'drives' or 'appetites' in 'American Advertising' (1947), arguing that 'Carried out as an educational programme directed towards self-knowledge and self-criticism, the study of these sprightly fantasies of unrestricted appetitive life would constitute precisely that step toward moral and intellectual regeneration which we have always known must precede any act of genuine improvement.' (*UB* 9, pp.9-10)

and here too McLuhan is greatly influenced by Giedion (*MB* 84, 94). Says Giedion (1955 [1948]: 44), commenting in *Mechanization Takes Command* on the insidious effects of mechanical technology:

In the time of full mechanization It is no longer replacement of the human hand by the machine, but of intervention into the substance of organic as well as of inorganic nature.... Death, generation, birth, habitat undergo rationalization, as in the later phases of the assembly line. The host of unknowns that these processes involve makes uneasiness hard to dispel. Organic substance or inorganic, it is experimentation with the very roots of being.

McLuhan, likewise, says that sex, like death, has been transformed through the 'totemistic worship' of mechanical technology, so that people now approach sex with a 'mechanical' attitude (*MB* 141). McLuhan says 'It is not a feature created by the ad men, but it seems rather to be born of a hungry curiosity to explore and enlarge the domain of sex by mechanical technique, on one hand, and, on the other, to *possess* machines in a sexually gratifying way.' (94) However, McLuhan states clearly that the cult of technology, while it is intensely sexualized, does not intensify the pleasure of sex itself at all:

It would be a mistake ... to equate the intensity of the current glamour campaigns and techniques with any corresponding new heights of a man-woman madness. Sex weariness and sex sluggishness are, in measure at least, both the cause and increasingly the outcome of these campaigns. No sensitivity of response could long survive such a barrage. What does survive is the view of the human body as a sort of love-machine capable merely of specific thrills. (99)

McLuhan applies a Freudian interpretation here as well, describing this relation of the self to machines as a form of 'identification', 'parallel to the situation in which "primitive" men once got collectively and psychologically inside the totem animal' (84). McLuhan says 'It is precisely the same annihilation of the human ego that we are witnessing today. Only, whereas men in those ages of terror got into animal strait jackets, we are unconsciously doing the same *vis a vis* the machine.' (33) He cites from Joseph Campbell's *Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949), where Campbell describes the act of 'primitive' totemic identification: 'An unconscious identification took place, and this was

finally rendered conscious in the half-human, half-animal, figures of the totem-ancestors ... through acts of literal imagination ... an effective annihilation of the human ego was accomplished and society achieved a cohesive organization.' (Campbell, 1949: 390; *MB* 33) As the human being, from fear or 'terror' of 'wild beasts', once assumed the characteristics of the 'totem animal', so do we today assume the characteristics of the 'totem machine' (*MB* 141). One effect of this, McLuhan says, is the cult of 'personal hygiene' in which the human being is 'encouraged to become psychologically hard, brittle, and smoothly metallic' (*Ibid.*). 'Totemistic worship of mechanism is recorded not only in a dozen popular hygienic and social rituals for avoiding human contact,' McLuhan notes, 'but the very word "contact" has come to mean getting a business prospect inside the network of one's private success mechanism.' (*Ibid.*) McLuhan connects some of these effects with capitalism. He cites from an editorial in *Fortune* magazine (November 1947):

The American citizen lives in a state of siege from dawn till bedtime. Nearly everything he sees, hears, tastes, touches, and smells is an attempt to sell him something. Luckily for his sanity he becomes calloused shortly after diaperhood; now, to break through his protective shell, the advertisers must continuously shock, tease, tickle, or irritate him, or wear him down by the drip-drip-drip or Chinese water-torture method of endless repetition. (*MB* 88)

Paradoxically, however, the production-line paradigm of mechanical technology is not in essence *capitalist* but *communist*, for, McLuhan says:

By far the majority of the rich are daily drudges in the same mills as the go-getters who are still on the make, and they work tirelessly at tasks which render the operation of their wealth and power as uncontrollable as that of any other marketeer. Thus, it may very well be that the effect of mass production and consumption is really to bring about a practical rather than theoretic communism. When men and women have been transformed into replaceable parts by competitive success drives, and have become accustomed to the consumption of uniform products, it is hard to see where any individualism remains. (55)

This is an argument taken from *Time and Western Man*, where Lewis (1927: 96) says that 'Everywhere the peoples become more and more alike', so that 'the contemporary

magnate, in appearance, culture, manners and general tastes, is hardly to be distinguished from the average workman on his estate or in his factory'. Meanwhile, McLuhan says that the production-line and its paradigm of 'replaceable parts' (another concept from Giedion) tends to erode the male and female roles. 'Mechanization means dissecting work into its component operations', and the 'standardization' in production is 'closely connected [with] the interchangeability of parts' says Giedion (1955 [1948]: 31, 49). As 'Technology needs not people or minds but "hands."', McLuhan says, 'Education in a technological world of expendable parts is neuter.' (MB 53) Our acceptance of the assumptions of 'applied science' means that today 'the same curriculum and the same room serve to prepare boys and girls alike for the neuter and impersonal routines of production and distribution' (*Ibid.*). McLuhan interprets fast cars, glamorous women ('hot numbers'), babies, and gadgets as 'phallic' objects, an idea he seems to have taken from Margaret Mead's *Male and Female*. McLuhan's interest, however, is less in the meaning of the 'phallic' symbol than in the fact that such symbols are now, like all other items, 'mass-produced'. In a paragraph interwoven with quotations from *Male and Female* (see Mead, 1967 [1949]: 273), McLuhan considers the car as phallic object:

"The beginning of an egoistic valuation of the male organ . . . sets the stage for the little girl's envy . . . that is like her envy of another child's bicycle or roller-skates, an active seeking envy for something you can do something with . . ." Dr. Mead is not considering the car as a "dream date" offered to men, but [as an object of envy] as it is valued by women. She adds that this envy of the male organ, which in the United States is not a deep psychic wound (as in Europe) but merely desire for an instrument of power, is "expressed most vividly in one form in women's insistence on driving their own motor cars, and in another form in the cult of high breasts and legs." (MB 84)

McLuhan notes that 'sex has been exaggerated by getting hooked to the mechanisms of the market and the impersonal techniques of industrial production' (MB 99). However, McLuhan says: 'It is a common mistake to regard this brand of advertising as a mere "vulgar" effort to hitch sales curves to sex curves.' (84) He explains that it is a *mechanical* attitude (rather than a capitalist attitude) that pervades these ads, where, for example, 'girdles and related equipment are sold on an engineering and

technological basis: "an all-way stretch and resilient control. Girdle and garters act in harmony to give you a slim hip and thigh line. . . . It lives and breathes with you." (*Ibid.*) McLuhan comments: 'The body as a living machine is now correlative with cars as vibrant and attractive organisms.' (*Ibid.*) One effect of the 'identification' of the body with machines, McLuhan says, is that it 'reduces sex experience to a problem in mechanics and hygiene' (99). McLuhan says that 'the ordinary glamour girl ... accepts from a technological world the command to transform her organic structure into a machine. A love machine? It would seem so.' (154)

The influence of Gershon Legman and the journal *Neurotica* is evident in McLuhan's use of the concept of sado-masochistic pleasure.²⁶ McLuhan articulates again and again a connection between sex, death, and the public's sado-masochistic enjoyment of bad news and violent imagery. In fact *The Mechanical Bride* is unique among McLuhan's books in that here McLuhan conceptualizes human activities (e.g. the use of objects; the desire for objects; advertising; entertainment) as essentially *sexual* activities, i.e. activities by which some kind of sexual gratification is achieved. McLuhan says, for example:

Perhaps that is what the public wants when it reaches out for the *inside* story smoking hot from the entrails of vice or innocence. That may well be what draws people to the death shows of the speedways and fills the press and magazines with close-ups of executions,

²⁶ Freud first addresses the subject of sado-masochism in the *Drei Abhandlungen zur Sexualtheorie* (*Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*) (1905), which comprise Freud's early work on perversion (of the sexual aim and sexual object), infantile sexuality, and the transformation of sexuality in puberty. In the first essay on 'The Sexual Aberrations', he credits Richard von Krafft-Ebing in his use of the terms 'sadism' and 'masochism' (*SE VII*: 157). The text of the first edition in 1905 was altered and added to by Freud in the later editions of 1910, 1915, 1920 and 1924, indicating the evolution of Freud's concepts over this time. While 'sadism' is the perversion of an 'aggressive instinct', resulting in 'the desire to inflict pain upon the sexual object', 'masochism', Freud says (in a paragraph added in 1915), 'is further removed from the normal sexual aim than its counterpart; it may be doubted at first whether it can ever occur as a primary phenomenon or whether, on the contrary, it may not arise from a transformation of sadism. It can often be shown that masochism is nothing more than an extension of sadism turned round upon the subject's own self, which thus, to begin with, takes the place of the sexual object' (157-158). This view is coherent with Freud's 1915 essay 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes' (see *SE XIV*: 127). Freud says in the *Three Essays* (in a comment also added 1915) that: 'Sadism and masochism occupy a special position among the perversions, since the contrast between activity and passivity which lies behind them is among the universal characteristics of sexual life.' (*SE VII*: 159)

suicides, and smashed bodies. A metaphysical hunger to experience everything sexually, to pluck out the heart of the mystery for a super-thrill. (101)

He remarks that 'sex weariness may be a factor in the cult of violence, although Wilhelm Reich, the psychologist, argues that it is a mere substitute for sex in those who have acquired the rigidities of a mechanized environment.' (99) Thus, in the ads, amongst the images of sex and technology 'will usually be found images of hectic speed, mayhem, violence, and sudden death.' (98) Writing back to Legman, who says that 'There is no mundane substitute for sex except sadism', McLuhan wonders whether 'sadistic violence, real or fictional, in some situations ... is an effort to pass the frontiers of sex, to achieve a more intense thrill than sex affords'. (99-100)

The Mechanical Bride marks McLuhan's first encounter with Freud, and has particular resonance with *Civilization and Its Discontents*. In fact, while there is no reason to think that McLuhan understood the technicalities of the Freudian concepts he references (narcissism, identification, the theory of the drives, etc.), his thesis about the effects of mechanical technology upon society may be read as an answer to Freud's thesis on technological progress, McLuhan arguing that the use of mechanical technology takes us *back* to a 'primitive' form of (un)awareness, i.e. an 'unconscious' awareness, in which the typical state of the human being is 'sunk in a subrational trance' (*MB* 10; see also Cavell, 2002: 43, 45; Klonsky, *PC* 137). One aspect of Freud's thesis in *Civilization and Its Discontents* is that 'it is impossible to overlook the extent to which civilization is built upon a renunciation of instinct, how much it presupposes precisely the non-satisfaction (by suppression, repression, or some other means?) of powerful instincts' (*SE XXI*: 97). Freud's thesis, in other words, posits a progression from 'primitive' to 'civilized' society, where 'civilization' is founded upon the repression of 'instincts'. McLuhan, however, constructs a history whereby Western 'civilized' society *returns* to a 'primitive' state of awareness through the advent of mechanical technology. McLuhan is later to argue that 'retribalization' is an effect of electronic technology, rather than mechanical technology, stating in 'Myth and Mass

Media' (1959): 'I failed at that time [i.e. in *The Mechanical Bride*] to see that we had already passed out of the mechanistic age into the electronic, and that it was this fact that made mechanism both obtrusive and repugnant.' (UB 18, pp.16-17)

I have detailed McLuhan's use of Freudian terminology in *The Mechanical Bride* not only to contextualize his rejection of Freud in the books that came after it, but also to emphasize the fact that McLuhan's knowledge of Freud was not as limited as his later books suggest. At the same time, it should be recognized that McLuhan's knowledge of psychoanalysis is based upon a small and somewhat random sample of 'Freudian' texts, and he had but a layman's understanding, at best, of the concepts upon which psychoanalysis is founded, i.e., the drive; infantile sexuality; narcissism; the Oedipus complex; the id, ego, and super-ego; the pleasure principle and the reality principle; and – most crucially – the castration complex. As throughout his oeuvre, McLuhan's method in *The Mechanical Bride* is grammatical and rhetorical; however, there are nods towards a psychoanalytic method, as well as the structural method of analysis employed by Siegfried Giedion. McLuhan's interest in the themes of sado-masochism, 'sex and death' meanwhile proves short-lived, and nowhere after *The Mechanical Bride* does he embrace the vocabulary of psychoanalytic theory with anything like the zest shown in this book. It was McLuhan's interest in the methods of Freud and Jung, nevertheless, along with the 'structural' method of many of his contemporaries which led McLuhan, after 1951, to a 'structural' analysis of the psyche.

2 The Unconscious as Acoustic Space

McLuhan interpreted the 'structuralism' of the modern age as an effect of the 'field' awareness imposed by electronic communications technology. Though schooled in gestalt theory by I.A. Richards, his mentor at Cambridge University, McLuhan in fact did not embrace the gestalt method until much later. His 'structural' analysis of consciousness, inspired by Siegfried Giedion and in part by Harold Innis, is built around the concepts of 'visual' and 'acoustic' space, where 'visual space' corresponds roughly to what Freud calls 'consciousness' and 'acoustic space' to the 'unconscious'. Where Innis is concerned with the structural effects of technologies on communication over space and time, McLuhan shows himself to be more interested in the structural effects of media upon the *psyche*, though he nods to Innis, and to Giedion (author of *Space, Time and Architecture*), by conceptualizing the psyche in terms of 'space'. McLuhan later sought, somewhat unsuccessfully, to align the concept of 'acoustic space' with the Jungian concept of the 'archetype', meanwhile avoiding entanglement in some of the more controversial aspects of psychoanalytic theory, namely, Freud's conception of the 'unconscious' as a product of the Oedipus complex and castration complex.

Logos

McLuhan's 'structural' method is founded upon the doctrine of the *Logos* ('reason and speech') inherited from ancient Greek cosmology and philosophy. *Logos* presents the universe as a divine utterance with an order, or pattern, analogized in the 'reason and speech' of humankind. As McLuhan explains, for the ancient Greek philosophers, 'Society is a mirror or speculum of the Logos, as, indeed, are the external world, the mind of man and, above all, human speech.' (*IL* 227) The doctrine is sketched out in McLuhan's doctoral thesis of 1943, while McLuhan and Eric McLuhan historicize the concept of *Logos* in *Laws of Media* (1988). They say that 'Among others, Heraclitus [c. 535-475 BC] discussed logos as the informing principle of cosmology, of the kosmos.

For Heraclitus, god's chief name is Highest Reason, Logos; and, in a different aspect, 'the Wise Being' or even 'the Only Wise Being.' (Fr. 32). Quoting from *The Giants of Pre-Sophistic Greek Philosophy* (1965) by F. M. Cleve, McLuhan notes the development of the concept from Heraclitus's theodicy to Stoic philosophy:

[for Heraclitus] the divine body that encircles the world is that part of the resonant logos which never 'changes.' This part is not contained by the world (Fr. 108), but keeps outside, as an environment: 'The Logos does not dwell within the world, penetrating it, but around the world. Beyond the continent, the ocean, the air cover, the fire of the stars, there is still the *pyr aeizoon*, the lasting body of the Logos... The Logos, then, is not in the world. This was changed later on by the Stoics. They imagined the world as penetrated by the Logos, thus deviating from the genuine dogma of Heraclitus ...' (LM 36)

In fact the doctrine of the *Logos* was a part of Greek cosmology centuries before it was recorded in written form. As McLuhan explains,

Plato's *Timaeus* should be seen as a statement of a cosmology already many centuries old, and one which had, long after Plato's own day, exponents as different as the Pythagoreans and the Stoics.... For example, Plato gives an elaborate allegorical interpretation of the parts and functions of the human body. Thus, "the creative powers were aware of our tendency to excess. And so when they made the belly to be a receptacle for food, in order that men might not perish by disease, they formed the convolutions of the intestines, in this way retarding the passage of food through the body, lest mankind should be absorbed in eating and drinking, and the whole race become impervious to the divine philosophy." Similarly, "sight is the source of the greatest benefits to us; for if our eyes had never seen the sun, stars, and heavens, the very words which we are using would not have been uttered." But "God gave us the faculty of sight that we might behold the order of the heavens, and create a corresponding order in our own erring minds. To the like end the gifts of speech and hearing were bestowed upon us; ..." Nothing could make more clear than this the relationship which was held to exist between the order of speech and language and the order of nature. (CT 21)

Here is how McLuhan introduces the *Logos* in his doctoral thesis (the quote is from E. Vernon Arnold's *Roman Stoicism*, 1911):

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'" (CT 22)

McLuhan emphasizes the connection between *Logos* and 'analogy': 'Inseparable from the doctrine of the Logos is the cosmological view of the *rerum natura*, the whole, as a continuum, at once a network of natural causes and an *ordo naturae* whose least pattern expresses analogically a divine message....' (CT 21) The Stoic concept of *Logos* (i.e. of a world 'penetrated by the Logos') had a great influence upon Christian theology, such as that of St. Thomas Aquinas. In fact McLuhan himself relates *Logos* to the Incarnation of God in Christ, stating that 'We [Catholics] can see how all things have literally been fulfilled in Christ, especially our powers of perception.' (ML 169) He says 'The Catholic ... knows created Being has been marvelously preserved and recreated by the Incarnation, and that the human race in particular has been assumed into the life of the Divine Logos, which is Christ.' (ML 158) That the speech and artifacts of humankind exist as forms proportionate to the *Logos* ('which is Christ') McLuhan accepts as a matter of (Catholic) faith.

Landscape

In his literary criticism of the late 1940's and early 1950's, McLuhan is concerned with tracing lines of influence from Aristotle, through St. Thomas Aquinas, to the symbolists in France and the modernists in Britain and America. It is in studying the work of James Joyce that McLuhan finds the 'extremely conscious' use of 'scores of inter-related analogies', which he attributes to the influence of the symbolists and Aquinas (UB 10, p.11). Joyce's knowledge of the symbolists was enriched by the work of Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882-1973); Maritain, in turn, was greatly influenced by Aquinas. McLuhan says that the technique of the symbolists, which Joyce imitated, 'was to treat words not merely as signs but as things with a mysterious life of their own which could be controlled and released by establishing exact relationships, rhythmic and harmonic, with other words' (book review, *Renascence* 3:1,

Fall 1950, p.45). For Joyce, McLuhan says, 'every word is an avatar, a revelation, an epiphany.... alive with a physical and mental life which is both individual and collective' (*IL* 37). McLuhan notes the influence of Joyce on Ezra Pound, and finds the influence of Pound and Joyce in T.S. Eliot; and he especially emphasizes the influence of the French symbolist poets (i.e. Arthur Rimbaud, Stephane Mallarmé, Jules Laforgue, etc.) upon Joyce, an influence that is transmuted through Joyce to Pound and Eliot (see *IL* 143-144; *L* 195; 197, footnote 3). McLuhan says that the 'sense of the analogy of Being' found in the symbolists and those they influenced marks 'a return to the pre-Christian doctrine of the Logos which included *ratio et oratio* [reason and speech] and was the element in which all men were thought to move and have their being'. (book review, *Renascence* 4:2, Spring 1952, p.216; *Renascence* 3:1, p.45)

McLuhan situates the techniques of symbolism and modernism in relation to Romantic impressionism (*Renascence* 4:2, p.216; *ML* 160-161). He postulates 'the indispensability of landscape as a technique for managing the aesthetic moment in poetry'. (*IL* 157) McLuhan says that the Romantic poets used 'natural' landscape to fix an 'aesthetic moment'; the symbolists, however, use 'psychological landscape' or *paysage intérieur* – 'interior landscape' (*Ibid.*). McLuhan says that 'the heritage of the romantics [Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Tennyson, Hopkins, Shelley, Landor, etc.] was developed not in England but in France, by the symbolists' (Rimbaud, Mallarmé, Laforgue, etc.); and the modernists, 'Joyce, Pound, Yeats, Lewis, Eliot', are 'the true heirs of the symbolists' (*Renascence* 4:2, p.216) He says that

the impressionism of Romantic art had taught the artist to pay minute attention to his perceptions, to their mode and inner effect.... Romantic impressionism unexpectedly opened the door to the creative process by developing new resources of introspection. Impressionism was the parent of symbolism. And impressionism and symbolism alike insisted on attention to process in preference to personal self-expression. (*ML* 160-161)

McLuhan credits Gustave Flaubert (1821-1880) for being 'the first to see in his [last novel] *Sentimental Education*' (*L'Éducation sentimentale*, 1869) that the new technique calls for 'the abandonment of the continuity of unilateral narrative in favor of

the more profound effects to be achieved by analogical juxtaposition of characters, scenes, and situations without copula' ('Joyce, Aquinas, and The Poetic Process', *Renascence* 4:1, Fall 1951, p.9). McLuhan says that '[Flaubert's] ... episodes are not causally linked so much as set side by side or at such distances from one another as will cause the maximal excitement of analogical intelligibility.' ('Mr Eliot's Historical Decorum', *Renascence* 2:1, Fall 1949, p.9) In 'The Aesthetic Moment in Landscape Poetry' (1952) McLuhan traces the development of this technique of 'analogical juxtaposition' from Flaubert through Charles Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Mallarmé to Joyce, although he says that 'Mallarmé had been led to this technique by an aesthetic analysis of the modern newspaper, with its static inclusiveness of the entire community of men.' (*IL* 158)²⁷ McLuhan quotes Mallarmé: 'The poetic act consists in seeing suddenly that an idea fractions itself into a number of motifs equal in value, and in grouping them; they rhyme.' McLuhan comments: 'In other words, Mallarmé discovered that the aesthetic moment of arrested cognition can be split up into numerous fractions which can be orchestrated in many discontinuous ways.' (*IL* 164) The utility of 'discontinuous' orchestration, which is the technique of the symbolists, 'is its power of rendering an inclusive consciousness in a single instant of perception.' (*Renascence* 4:1, 9; *IL* 158)

In his first article devoted to Joyce, McLuhan analyses Joyce's use of Aquinas's four 'rational notes' ('beauty, integrity, consonance, and *claritas*') in Joyce's unfinished first novel *Stephen Hero*,²⁸ which was first published in 1944 ('Joyce, Aquinas, and The Poetic Process', *op.cit.* pp.3-11). McLuhan especially emphasizes Joyce's application of the Thomist concept of 'beauty' as 'things duly proportioned'. He cites from the novel:

I have only pushed to its logical conclusion the definition Aquinas has

²⁷ Raymond Rosenthal uses McLuhan's interpretation of Mallarmé as an example of McLuhan's 'bulldozing' approach, writing that 'If one reads Mallarmé, one gets the distinct impression of an ironic distaste for newspapers; if one reads McLuhan on Mallarmé, the irony has been expunged for the purposes of a thesis, the expectable thesis.' (*PC* 9)

²⁸ *Stephen Hero*, written 1904-1905, was not published until 1944, however it was upon this manuscript that Joyce based *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, serialized in *The Egoist* in 1914-1915.

given of the beautiful.

Aquinas?

Pulchra sent quae visa placent. He seems to regard the beautiful as that which satisfies the esthetic appetite and nothing more – that the mere apprehension of which pleases . . . (Joyce, 1961 [1944]: 83)

The notion that beauty, or that which is 'pleasant', is that which is proportional to the senses is to be found in Aristotle's *Περὶ Ψυχῆς* (*De Anima* or *On the Soul*), Book III, Chapter 2, where Aristotle says:

the objects of sense are (1) pleasant when the sensible extremes such as acid or sweet or salt being pure and unmixed are brought into the proper ratio; then they are pleasant: and in general what is blended is more pleasant than the sharp or the flat alone; or, to touch, that which is capable of being either warmed or chilled: the sense and the ratio are identical: while (2) in excess the sensible extremes are painful and destructive. (Aristotle, 1941: 584)

McLuhan (*op.cit.* p.5) cites Aquinas's definition of beauty in the *Summa Theologica*, Part 1, Question 5, Article 4, being that

beauty relates to a cognitive power, for those things are said to be beautiful which pleases when seen. Hence beauty consists in due proportion, for the senses delight in things duly proportioned, as in what is like them – because the sense too is a sort of reason, as is every cognitive power. Now, since knowledge is by assimilation, and likeness relates to form, beauty properly belongs to the nature of a formal cause.

McLuhan (*op.cit.*, p.5) says that this definition 'has wide but precise bearings for everything Joyce did as an artist.' He comments: 'That the senses themselves are *properly analogous*, as are the other cognitive powers, was not a fact lost on Joyce, who knew that the creative process itself was a retracing of the stages of apprehension' (i.e. beauty, integrity, consonance and *claritas*) through which 'the object achieves its epiphany' (*Ibid.*, p.4, emphasis in original). McLuhan uses the phrases 'poetic process' and 'creative process' interchangeably, later defining this process as 'the experience of ordinary cognition ... reversed, retraced, and hence epiphanized. The moment of arrested cognition achieves at once its stasis and

epiphany as a result of the reconstruction of the stages of ordinary apprehension.’ (*IL* 165) McLuhan suggests that Joyce’s use of the ‘labyrinth’ motif recognizes ‘the learning process as a labyrinth of the senses and faculties whose retracing provided the key to all arts and sciences’ (letter to Harold Innis, March 1951, *L* 221) McLuhan says that ‘Joyce ... seems to have been the first to make explicit the relation in Aquinas between the stages of apprehension and the creative process.’ (*R* 4:1, 3; see also *ML* 170) In ‘Mr Eliot’s Historical Decorum’ (*Renascence* 2:1, Fall 1949, pp.9-15), McLuhan says that ‘a story or poem to produce a *single effect*, to have the utmost esthetic unity, must ... be written backwards. Anything not conducing to that effect can by this procedure be eliminated and maximum intensity can be achieved.’ (p.12) This is a development that McLuhan traces in Flaubert, newspaper journalism, and Edgar Allen Poe. In ‘Media Alchemy in Art and Society’ (*Journal of Communication*, 8:2, Summer 1958, pp.63-67) McLuhan says that ‘As a newspaper man Poe had long been aware that the serialization of a novel in paper or magazine compelled the writer to work backwards, since it was necessary to know the end at the beginning.’ (p.65) Commenting on Poe’s essay ‘Philosophy of Composition’ (1846), which was very influential in France, McLuhan says: ‘Poe saw that ... One must begin with the effect that is to be achieved and then seek out the means for obtaining that effect and no other effect.’ (*ML* 157) McLuhan summarises this technique in *The Mechanical Bride* (1951): ‘Having in mind the precise effect *first*, the author has then to find the situations, the persons, and images, and the order which will produce that effect and no other....’ (*MB* 106; see also *GG* 45) McLuhan says that Mallarmé, building upon this foundation, ‘saw that a poetry of *effects* was impersonal. The author effaced himself above all in not assigning causes or explanations as transitional devices of a novelistic or pseudo-rationalistic type between the parts of the poem.’ (*Renascence* 2:1, pp. 12-13, emphasis in original)

McLuhan finds the same awareness of ‘analogical ratios’ that he finds in Joyce in Ezra Pound’s use of the Chinese ‘ideogram’.²⁹ McLuhan wrote to Felix Giovanelli in 1948:

²⁹ McLuhan pursued his study of the ‘ideogram’ through Sergei Eisenstein’s *Film Form* (1949) and V. I. Pudovkin’s *Film Technique* (1929) of which he wrote in 1951: ‘Eisenstein’s *Film Form* and [Pudovkin’s] *Film Technique* explore the relations between modern developments

'[Pound's] method in prose and verse is the ideogram. That is the sculp[t]ed item, whether historical, excerpted or invented. These he sets side by side in analogical ratios in accord. with Aristotelian principle of metaphor.' (L 202) McLuhan cites from *ABC of Reading* (1934) Pound's summary of an essay by Ernest Fenollosa, who says 'In Europe, if you ask a man to define anything, his definition always moves away from the simple things that he knows perfectly well, it recedes into an unknown region of remoter and progressively remoter abstraction.' (Pound, 1934: 3; *UB* 3, p.21) Whereas, Fenollosa says, when a Chinese man wants to define anything – to define, for example, 'red' – he would 'put together the abbreviated pictures of

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As Pound (*op.cit.* 6-7) says, '... the Chinese "word" or ideogram for red is based on something everyone *knows*.' Pound invokes Aristotle directly in his essays in *ABC of Reading* and *Guide to Kulchur* (1938), and McLuhan follows Pound in interpreting the 'ideogram' in Aristotelian terms, as a four-part analogy or metaphor.³⁰ In the work of T.S. Eliot, McLuhan says that the technique of 'verbal landscape' used by Laforgue and Rimbaud is transmuted to become 'a major technique for juxtaposing states of mind and for putting erudition and popular songs and speech in startling apposition' (*Renascence* 3:1, p.44). McLuhan relates the techniques of Pound and Joyce to Eliot's concept of the 'objective correlative', described in an essay on Hamlet (Eliot, 1932: 124; see *IL* 138; *GG* 277):

The only way of expressing emotion in the form of art is by finding an 'objective correlative'; in other words, a set of objects, a situation, a

in the arts and Chinese ideogram, pointing to the common basis of ideogram in modern art[,] science and technology.' (L 221) He says later in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, pp.34-35: 'The ideogram affords none of the separation and specialization of sense, none of the breaking apart of sight and sound and meaning which is the key to the phonetic alphabet.'

³⁰ Ezra Pound, commenting on the concept of 'analogy', says in *ABC of Reading*, 'You can **prove** nothing by analogy. The analogy is either range-finding or fumble. Written down as a lurch toward proof, or at worst elaborated in that aim, it leads mainly to useless argument, **BUT** a man whose wit teems with analogies will often "twig" that something is wrong long before he knows why. Aristotle had something of this sort in mind when he wrote "apt use of metaphor indicating a swift perception of relations".' (Pound, 1934: 68, emphasis in original)

chain of events which shall be the formula of that *particular* emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked.

McLuhan says that while the Romantics sought to represent 'Nature' in all its forms, and the symbolists the psyche (using *paysage intérieur* or 'interior landscape'), what the modernists seek to reproduce is the process of 'ordinary cognition' itself. McLuhan says: 'In *Stephen Hero* Joyce wrote: "For Stephen art was neither a copy nor an imitation of nature. The artistic process was a natural process . . . a veritably sublime process of one's own nature which had a right to examination and open discussion."' (ML 171-172) McLuhan comments: 'That this sublime process is that of ordinary apprehension is made plain a little further on:'

What we symbolise in black the Chinaman may symbolise in yellow: each has his own tradition. Greek beauty laughs at Coptic beauty and the American Indian derides them both. It is almost impossible to reconcile all tradition whereas it is by no means impossible to find the justification for every form of beauty which has been adored on the earth by an examination of the mechanism of esthetic apprehension whether it be dressed in red, white, yellow or black. We have no reason for thinking that the Chinaman has a different system of digestion from that which we have though our diets are quite dissimilar. The apprehensive faculty must be scrutinised in action. (Joyce, 1961 [1944]: 187)³¹

McLuhan comments:

It is impossible to exaggerate the importance of this last phrase for an understanding of Joyce's art, because he never ceased to evolve technique for scrutinizing sensations and impressions "at the very instant of their apparition." And this meant for Joyce neither

³¹ The passage from *Stephen Hero* (1961 [1944]: 187) is cited by McLuhan in 'Joyce, Aquinas, and The Poetic Process' in *Renascence* 4:1, Fall 1951, p.7; as well as in a lecture on 'Catholic Humanism and Modern Letters', 1954, reprinted in *ML* 172, each time with minor errors – e.g. 'symbolize' instead of 'symbolise', a forgotten or an added word, different punctuation, etc. Joyce is reformulating Vico (1948: 60; Book 1, Section II: XXII, Axiom 161), who says that 'There must in the nature of human things be a mental language common to all nations, which uniformly groups the substance of things feasible in human social life and expresses it with as many diverse modifications as these same things may have diverse aspects. A proof of this is afforded by proverbs or maxims of vulgar wisdom, in which substantially the same meanings find as many diverse expressions as there are nations ancient and modern.'

impressionism nor expressionism but the revelation of the profoundly analogical drama of existence as it is mirrored in the cognitive powers in act ... (*Renascence* 4:1, p.7)

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), McLuhan connects the modernist and symbolist technique with the concept of the 'grotesque' in Gothic architecture described by English critic John Ruskin (1819-1900) in *Modern Painters*, Volume 3 (1856). Ruskin describes three kinds of 'grotesque', but it is the third kind, which he describes as 'Art arising from the confusion of the imagination by the presence of truths which it cannot wholly grasp', to which McLuhan refers (Ruskin, 1897: 100). Ruskin says: 'A fine grotesque is the expression, in a moment, by a series of symbols thrown together in bold and fearless connection, of truths which it would have taken a long time to express in any verbal way, and of which the connection is left for the beholder to work out for himself; the gaps, left or overleaped by the haste of the imagination, forming the grotesque character.' (*Ibid.* 101-102; *GG* 266; *IL* 17-18) McLuhan finds the influence of Ruskin's 'grotesque' in Joyce, stating that 'Joyce ... accepted the grotesque as a mode of broken or syncopated manipulation to permit *inclusive* or simultaneous perception of a total and diversified field.' (*GG* 267) McLuhan comments: 'Such, indeed, is symbolism by definition – a collocation, a *parataxis* of components representing insight by carefully established ratios, but without a point of view or lineal connection or sequential order.' (*Ibid.*)

The dissolution of linear perspective and unilateral narrative was preempted, McLuhan says, by Giambattista Vico (1668-1744). McLuhan was led to Vico through his study of Joyce, who in writing his last novel *Finnegans Wake* (1939) was greatly influenced by Vico's *Scienza Nuova* (1725). McLuhan says that 'Vico was the first to point out that a total history of human culture and sensibility is embedded in the changing structural forms of language' (letter to Robert J. Leuver, July 1969, *L* 385). He says that linear perspective 'yields in Vico to a complex genetic metaphor that becomes the intellectual means of being simultaneously present in all periods of the past and all mental climates of the modern world as well' (*UB* 10, p.8). In contrast to linear perspective, this new technique represents 'a multi-locutional mode of perception ... sometimes

referred to as a “circulating point of view” in which a view from above may suddenly become a view from everywhere at once’ (*Ibid.*, p.5). McLuhan noted in an essay of 1951 that in Vico, ‘the growing interest in the anatomy of states of mind [from Michel de Montaigne (1533-1592) onward] ... reached the point of stress on the importance of reconstructing by vivisection the inner history of one’s own mind.... Vico generalized the process as a means of reconstructing the stages of human culture by the vivisection and contemplation of language itself.’ (*IL* 161) McLuhan expands upon this point in an essay of 1953:

At the beginning of the eighteenth century Vico’s *Scienza Nuova* had proposed language as the basis for anthropology and a new science of history. Extant languages, he argued, could be regarded as working models of all past culture, because language affords an unbroken line of communication with the totality of the human past. The modalities of grammar, etymology, and word-formation could be made to yield a complete account of the economic, social, and spiritual adventures of mankind. If geology could reconstruct the story of the earth from the inert strata of rock and clay, the *scienza nuova* could do much better with the living languages of men. Previously, historians had attempted to create working models of some segment of the human past in their narratives. These were necessarily hypothetical structures eked out by scraps of recorded data. The new historian need never attempt again to revivify the past by imaginative art, because it is all present in language. (*IL* 24)

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, quoting from A. Robert Caponigri’s book *Time and Idea* (1953), McLuhan says that ‘Vico conceives the time-structure of history as “not linear, but contrapuntal. It must be traced along a number of lines of development . . .” For Vico all history is contemporary or simultaneous, a fact given, Joyce would add, by virtue of language itself, the simultaneous storehouse of all experience.’ (*GG* 249-250; Caponigri 1968 [1953]: 119) McLuhan says that the influence of Vico in *Finnegans Wake* is evident in Joyce’s use of puns to effect ‘a simultaneous presence of all modes of human consciousness, primitive and sophisticated.’ (*IL* 143) For example, ‘One world burrowing on another’, McLuhan says, ‘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.’ (*IL* 46) Or, to express the sense that in sleep ‘the people is one and they have

all one language' (in the 'Anna Livia' section of *Finnegans Wake*), Joyce says 'it is dormition'; McLuhan comments that this term 'in a single gesture' links 'Domitian, damnation, and all the senses of "subliminal," or doormission, with its links with dormitory, dormeuse, doormouse (Lewis Carroll), door-muse and the daughters of memory' (*IL* 46-47). Says McLuhan: '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'. (*IL* 46)³²

McLuhan finds the 'sense of the analogy of Being' in Joyce superior to the concepts of the psyche elaborated by Freud and Jung. He says that:

associated with this notion of speech [as *Logos*] is the sense of a collective human consciousness which is not merely psychological (Joyce and Eliot have always been sharply critical of Freud and Jung for this reason among others) but in the nature of a common drama of the race. (*Renascence* 3:1, p.45)

McLuhan relates Joyce's puns with their many levels of meaning to the Freudian 'slip' (or 'parapraxis') detailed by Freud in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life* (1901). Says McLuhan: 'His [Joyce's] puns in the *Wake* are a technique for revealing the submerged drama of language, and Joyce relied on the quirks, "slips," and freaks of ordinary discourse to evoke the fullness of existence in speech.' (*IL* 37-38) Again: 'The timeless or simultaneous aspect of words leaps out at us (the literal sense of "object") when they are used not as conventional signs but as metaphysical existents.... One of the many techniques for freeing words from their conventional contexts is the pun and the "slip" of the tongue or pen.' (*IL* 45) Unlike Freud, who interprets the 'slip' or parapraxis as the symptom of a 'repressed' wish or desire that is inaccessible to 'consciousness', McLuhan says that it is possible for a person to be aware of all levels of meaning in a text. He says of Joyce, 'It is obvious that he [Joyce] had no subliminal

³² Notably, McLuhan relates the Joycean technique of multi-leveled meaning to his own work, writing of his axiom 'the medium is the message': 'When we hear that "the medium is the message in the long run," we think it is jabberwocky or Finneganesse. And so it is. That is, such a formula speaks not of one plane of fact at a time, but is multi-leveled. And in facing the new electronic forms we have to learn how to talk and perceive on many planes at once. Analogical knowledge cannot be visualized.' (book review, *Renascence* 12:4, Summer 1960, p.205)

side to him. He was terribly aware.' (book review, *Renascence* 12:4, Summer 1960, p.202)

By the mid to late 1950's, McLuhan had started to extend the Thomist concept of the 'formal cause' as 'things duly proportioned' to technologies. 'A formal cause ... has a profound proportion to our senses', he says in an address of 1959, going on to suggest that 'It is impossible for man to create any form of technology which is not proportional to the senses whether it is a telephone or radio or print, or any other language.' (*ML* 38-39). Later, he says that 'Language is a technology which extends all of the human senses simultaneously. All the other human artifacts are, by comparison, specialist extensions of our physical and mental faculties.' (*CA* 20) As speech is 'a medium which employs all the senses at once in harmonic ratios' and is 'the *only* medium that uses all the senses at once', McLuhan suggests that 'therefore in the multi-media electric age the structure of speech probably holds the orchestral clues for cultural control and equilibrium' (*NAEB* III: 29, 9, emphasis added).

Acoustic Space

The 'structural' method of analysis developed by McLuhan in the 1950's clearly has precedents in the work of I.A. Richards, James Joyce, Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Freud, Jung, and (from 1951) Harold Innis, but was greatly directed by Siegfried Giedion (1883-1968), author of *Space, Time and Architecture* (1941) and *Mechanization Takes Command* (1948).³³ In these books (both referenced by McLuhan in *The Mechanical Bride*) Giedion historicizes the conception of 'space' in art, architecture and science, interpreting the transformations in perception of space/environment as manifestations of a 'dynamic equilibrium' at work. McLuhan reflected in an interview of 1967:

Giedion influenced me profoundly. *Space, Time and Architecture* was one of the great events of my lifetime. Giedion gave us a language for tackling the structural world of architecture and artifacts of many kinds

³³ McLuhan contacted Giedion in 1943 after reading *Space, Time and Architecture*, and Giedion later contributed to *Explorations* (see *L* 132). On the influence of Giedion, see also Cavell, 2002: 12-13.

in the ordinary environment. He learned this language from his preceptor, [Heinrich] Wölfflin [who] approached [art criticism] not descriptively ... but structurally. Giedion began to study the environment as a structural, artistic work – he saw language in streets, buildings, the very texture of form. (HC 269-270; see also L 131-132)

McLuhan suggests in the same interview that 'When you make a structural analysis, you follow lines of force and follow not just one but many, at various levels of the culture, observing patterns.' (HC 275) By taking Giedion's concept of 'space' (or the 'environment') as a concept for 'consciousness' *per se*, and applying his method of structural analysis, McLuhan had the basis of a method for conceptualizing the psyche in structural terms.

The concept of 'acoustic space', which has proved one of the most enduring of all McLuhan's concepts, owes its genesis to a cross-disciplinary research group at the University of Toronto established in the early 1950's by McLuhan and his friend Ted Carpenter. The 'communications group', as it came to be known informally, included Ted Carpenter (Anthropology); McLuhan (English); McLuhan's long-time friend Tom Easterbrook (Economics); Jacqueline Tyrwhitt (Town Planning); and D. Carlton (Carl) Williams (Psychology); it also, at various times, welcomed Siegfried Giedion, Ashley Montagu, and anthropologist Dorothy Lee, among many others.³⁴ The grant that the group received from the Ford Foundation in 1952 partly subsidized the publication of the cross-disciplinary journal *Explorations: Studies in Culture and Communication*, founded by Ted Carpenter, the first issue of which was published in December 1953 (Marchand, 1998 [1989]: 129). Nine issues of *Explorations* were published between 1953 and 1959; a collection of articles from the journal was later published by Beacon Press in Boston as *Explorations in Communication* (1960); and issue 8 (October 1957) was reissued ten years later by the Something Else Press as *Verbi-Voco-Visual*

³⁴ Ted Carpenter's memoir 'That Not-So-Silent-Sea' (2001) traces the evolution of the 'communications group'. McLuhan liked to quote from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Rime of the Ancient Mariner': 'We were the first that ever burst / Into that silent sea.' (PC 22)

Explorations (1967).³⁵ The interest shared by the communications group, and the theme of *Explorations*, was 'media biases' (Carpenter, 2001: 2).

The group took its name and direction from Harold Innis's recently published book *The Bias of Communication* (1951). One of McLuhan's former students, Donald Theall (1989: 52; 2001: 224, 268 note 17), reports that Jurgen Ruesch and Gregory Bateson's influential book *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry* (1951) also garnered McLuhan's interest around this time, but it was Innis who directed McLuhan's interest to communications media. In fact McLuhan (GG 216; UB 8, p.8) describes his own book *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) – or, to be more precise, the first two-thirds of it – as a 'gloss' or 'footnote' to *The Bias of Communication* (1951). A thinker in the Hegelian-Marxist tradition of dialectical materialism, Innis's interest was in the effects of technologies upon the organization of systems of production, and in *The Bias of Communication* he sought to show 'that sudden extensions of communication are reflected in cultural disturbances.' (Innis, 1991 [1951]: 31) As he explains,

A medium of communication has an important influence on the dissemination of knowledge over space and over time and it becomes necessary to study its characteristics in order to appraise its influence in its cultural setting. According to its characteristics it may be better suited to the dissemination of knowledge over time than over space, particularly if the medium is heavy and durable and not suited to transportation, or to dissemination of knowledge over space than over time, particularly if the medium is light and easily transported. The relative emphasis on time or space will imply a bias of significance to the culture in which it is embedded. (*Ibid.* 33)

Developing this thesis, McLuhan interprets *all* media as 'communications media'. He says in 'Notes on the Media as Art Forms' (originally published in *Explorations Two*, April 1954, and described by *Marshall McLuhan Unbound* editor Terrence W. Gordon as an 'embryonic version' of *Understanding Media*, see UB 15, p.2), that

the gratuitous assumption that communication is a matter of

³⁵ Gary Genosko (1999: 16, note 1) says that between 1964 and 1972 *Explorations* continued to be published as an insert in the University of Toronto *Varsity Graduate* magazine, 'edited by McLuhan alone'. Genosko notes that this fact is 'not well known'.

transmission of information, message or idea ... blinds people to the aspect of communication as participation in a common situation. And it leads to ignoring the *form* of communication ... which is more significant than the information or idea 'transmitted'. (*UB* 15, p.6)

The electric light, for example, McLuhan says in *Understanding Media* (p.9), 'escapes attention as a communications medium just because it has no "content".... it is not till the electric light is used to spell out some brand name that it is noticed as a medium.' As well as conceptualizing all technologies as 'communications media', McLuhan borrows from Innis the concept of technologies as 'staples'. Innis's early books, including *The Fur Trade in Canada* (1930) and *The Cod Fisheries* (1942), investigate the effects of trade and industry upon patterns of social organization. McLuhan says in *Understanding Media*:

technological media are staples or natural resources, exactly as are coal and cotton and oil. Anybody will concede that society whose economy is dependent upon one or two major staples like cotton, or grain, or lumber, or fish, or cattle is going to have some obvious social patterns of organization as a result.... (*UM* 21)

McLuhan employs Innis's thesis to argue that 'the "message" of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs' (*UM* 8). He says, for example, that '[t]he railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure.' (*Ibid.*) These changes, he adds, are 'quite independent of the freight or content of the railway medium' (*Ibid.*). In contrast to Innis's distinction between 'time-biased' and 'space-biased' media, however, McLuhan's framework (as he states in the Prologue to *The Gutenberg Galaxy*) is one of 'the *forms* of thought' associated with the use of certain technologies, and 'the divergent nature of oral and written social organization' (*GG* 1, emphasis in original).³⁶

³⁶ McLuhan also found in Innis a template for his 'mosaic' method, writing that: Innis in his later work tackled configurations rather than sequences of events in their interplay.... As he began to understand the structuring powers of media to impose their assumptions subliminally, he strove to record the interaction of media and cultures He [Innis] is setting up a mosaic

In his memoir of McLuhan, Ted Carpenter (2001: 4) names the concept of 'acoustic space' the 'first breakthrough' for the Toronto communications group, and he attributes it to Carl Williams: 'Carl ... used the phrase 'auditory space' in describing an experiment by E. A. Bott [then recently retired from the University of Toronto]... the phrase was electrifying. Marshall changed it to 'acoustic space' and quoted 'inner landscape' poetry. Jackie mentioned the Indian city of Fatehpur Sikri. Tom saw parallels in medieval Europe. I talked about Eskimos.' Richard Cavell (2002: 21), meanwhile, reports on McLuhan's memory of the event. Recalls McLuhan,

Professor Jacqueline Tyrwhitt ... had been explaining some of Siegfried Giedion's recent findings in which he discriminated between enclosed and unenclosed spaces. Since that time his study of *The Beginnings of Architecture* has brought these matters into a luminous focus. As Professor Tyrwhitt followed his exploration of Egyptian as contrasted with Roman space, she stressed the point that a pyramid did not enclose any space since darkness is to space what silence is to sound. In the same way, an Egyptian temple does not enclose space since it, too, is dark. Even the Greeks never achieved true closure of space. At this point psychologist Carl Williams ... intervened. He observed that unenclosed space could best be considered as acoustic or auditory space. Williams had long been associated with E.A. Bott, who has spent his life studying auditory space. Bott's formula for auditory space is simply that it has no centre and no margins since we hear from all directions simultaneously.³⁷

McLuhan finds in Tyrwhitt's analogy that 'darkness is to space what silence is to sound' the suggestion of an analogy between architecture and speech, writing in *Counterblast* (1969): 'SPEECH ... is a cosmic, invisible architecture of the human

configuration or galaxy for insight.... Innis makes no effort to "spell out" the interrelations between the components in his galaxy. He offers no consumer packages in his later work, but only do-it-yourself kits, like a symbolist poet or an abstract painter. (GG 216-217)

Ted Carpenter (2001: 11), in his memoir of McLuhan, says that he is 'unconvinced of his [McLuhan's] allegiance to Innis', stating that they were divided by personality and by politics; Innis 'was firmly committed to an open society', McLuhan, a Conservative, 'was just as firmly committed to a closed society. He thought Blacks, Jews[,] Protestants, would all be happier elsewhere'. Carpenter (*op.cit.* 12-13) attributes the condensed quality of Innis's writing to the fact that Innis wanted to complete the books before his death (Innis was dying of cancer); he also says that Innis, an 'icon' of 'integrity', '[would never] have become Marshall's defender'.

³⁷ Richard Cavell (*op.cit.* 234, note 60) comments that 'To say that Edward Bott devoted his career to studying auditory space is not accurate'.

dark.' (CB 13) Influenced by Edmund T. Hall's *The Silent Language* (1959), McLuhan elaborates that 'What silence is to acoustic space, darkness is to visual space. Speech structures interpersonal distances' (CB 117). McLuhan wrote to Wyndham Lewis in December 1954:

Acoustic Space is spherical. It is without bounds or vanishing points. It is structured by pitch separation and kinesthesia. It is not a container. It is not hollowed out. It is the space in which men live before the invention of writing – that translation of the acoustic into the visual. (L 245)

Carl Williams wrote an essay on 'Acoustic Space' for *Explorations Four* (February 1955, pp.15-20), in which some of the group's discussions on 'space' surface between Williams's scientific paragraphs on audition. The product is notably obscure (Carpenter, *op.cit.* 5, Marchand, *op.cit.* 132-133).³⁸ In 1956, over differences with Ted Carpenter, Williams 'insisted that his name be removed from the masthead of *Explorations*' (Carpenter, *op.cit.* 6). McLuhan and Carpenter later revised the essay on 'Acoustic Space' and republished it under their names in the anthology *Explorations in Communication* (1960). As described in the revised paper,

Auditory space has no point of favored 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. (EC 67)

In fact the concept of 'auditory space', though suggested by Williams, must have had resonance for McLuhan with what T.S. Eliot named the 'auditory imagination' – a concept McLuhan had been quoting since the late 1940's (see *ML* 107, 122, 143; *VVV*

³⁸ Robert Fulford (2005 [1991]: 313) recounts Carl Williams's memory of events: "What happened", Williams said, "was that I wrote the original article for *Explorations*. Carpenter, who was doing the editing, undertook to alter and add to it without consulting me." Williams did not see proofs and knew of Carpenter's changes only when he held the printed magazine in his hands. "I didn't take too kindly to that. I don't think he twisted it hopelessly out of shape, but it was the arrogance that got me. I never did get along very well with Carpenter." Then, when the book was being put together, Williams was asked for permission to reprint his piece. He said he would allow reprinting only if they went back to his original text. "So", he says, "they just went ahead and plagiarized it. Put it under their name. That was typical of Carpenter. I don't think it was Marshall so much."

Item 14; CA 63; CIOB 164). Says Eliot (1933: 118-119):

What I call the "auditory imagination" is the feeling for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word; sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the beginning and the end. It works through meanings, certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense, and fuses the old and obliterated and the trite, the current, and the new and the surprising, the most ancient and the most civilized mentality.

McLuhan's prior study of the symbolists and modernists, as well as the gestalt theory he had learned from I.A. Richards at Cambridge University, enabled him to conceptualize 'acoustic space' in terms of a field of 'discontinuous' components. He says in an article of 1957: 'Factors making for simultaneous or instantaneous presentations of facts or forces tend to set up fields of relations which have an auditory character.' (UB 2, p.5) From Georg von Békésy's *Experiments in Hearing* (1960), McLuhan adopts the concept of the 'mosaic', replacing earlier formulations of 'landscape' technique (GG 41-42). 'The paradox presented by Professor von Bekesy', says McLuhan, 'is that the two-dimensional mosaic is, in fact, a multidimensional world of interstructural resonance.' (*Ibid.* 43) McLuhan contrasts this to 'the three-dimensional world of pictorial space that is, indeed, an abstract illusion built on the intense separation of the visual from the other senses.' (*Ibid.*) McLuhan emphasizes the fact that the 'visual' and the 'acoustic' each represent a *form* or *structure*, rather than implying that something is 'seen' or 'heard'. In his essay 'The Medium is the Message' (1960), he says: '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.' (UB 17, p.9) He expands on this in *Understanding Media*, writing about the 'mosaic' form: 'The mosaic can be *seen* as dancing can, but it is not *structured* visually; nor it is an extension of the visual power. For the mosaic is not uniform, continuous, or repetitive. It is discontinuous, skew, and nonlinear ...' (UM 334) Acoustic space, likewise, has 'a kind of orchestral, resonating unity, not a logical unity of discourse [as in visual space]' (UB 17, p.9). The newspaper, for example, 'is "auditory" in basic structure ... 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.' (*Ibid.*) The TV, likewise, is 'auditory' or 'mosaic' in form (*UM* 334). The TV image, McLuhan says, 'is a mosaic mesh not only of horizontal lines but of millions of tiny dots, of which the viewer is physiologically able to pick up only 50 or 60 from which he shapes the image; thus he is constantly filling in vague and blurry images ...' (*EM* 246) In fact McLuhan finds the acoustic form (i.e. the mosaic, the discontinuous) to be the basic structure of all electronic technology, modern art and modern physics (*UM* 334). McLuhan contrasts this 'simultaneous' and 'discontinuous' field of interpenetrating forms to 'visual' structures which he conceives as inescapably 'sequential', 'linear' and 'connected', due to the ability of the eye to focus on objects *in sequence*. He says: 'The visual power enables us to isolate the single incident in time and space, as in representational art. In visual representation of a person or an object, a single phase or moment or aspect is separated from the multitude of known and felt phases, moments and aspects of the person or object.' (*Ibid.*) This line of argument is reprised in *Through the Vanishing Point* (1968), where 'acoustic space' and 'visual space' are presented in terms of the different capabilities of the ear and the eye. The eye, McLuhan says, is the only one of our senses that is able 'to separate or capture *single aspects*' (*VP* 10, emphasis added). Unlike the ear, which hears 'simultaneously' sounds from all directions, we can *focus* our eyes upon an object; and the eye must consider things in sequence, one-thing-at-a-time; the concept of 'efficient causality' (i.e. the singular 'cause' that produces the 'effect') only makes sense to the eye. Meanwhile, 'The man who lives in an aural world lives at the center of a communications sphere, and he is bombarded with sensory data from all sides simultaneously.' (*VP* 6) That, for McLuhan, is the essence of acoustic space, and this is why the symbolist 'landscape', the 'mosaic' newspaper and the 'tactile' TV image are acoustic in structure, not visual. Any form that 'bombards' the perceiver with a mass of (discontinuous) sensory data *simultaneously* does not and cannot yield meaning through the (visual) illusion of one-to-one correspondence of 'word' (or symbol) and 'thing'.

Influenced by friends in the communications group, anthropologists Ted Carpenter and Dorothy Lee, McLuhan contrasts the Western concept of the 'word' (i.e. the one-to-one correspondence of 'word' and 'thing') to the pre-literate concept. As McLuhan explains, 'A phonetically written language will inevitably develop the habit of making words refer to things. A pre-literate language, on the other hand, has no such habit. Word is thing.' (NAEB III: 33) In oral cultures, he says, 'words are not signs or symbols. They don't refer to something. They are the thing itself.... The word "tree" is tree, because it has the power to evoke tree.' (CB 112) McLuhan invites an analogy with music:³⁹ 'We know that music need not refer to something. A phrase or melody defines itself and evokes an attitude or a state of mind instantly. But the phrase or melody does not refer to such attitude or state. It's the state and we're the music.' (*Ibid.*) 'Acoustically', McLuhan says, elaborating on this point, 'a word is a complex set of harmonic relations as beautiful as a seashell. These relations are dynamic. They are simultaneous, set off by silence. The set of harmonic relations constitutes a field entity ...' (*Ibid.*) He does, in fact, try to visualize acoustic space, writing, for example: 'acoustic space is spherical because we hear simultaneously from all directions. It has no lines or directions. It contains nothing; it's contained in nothing. It has no horizons or boundary lines.' (*Ibid.*) This is an acoustic space we are invited to 'picture', a difficult task as so much of the description is in the negative: 'no lines or directions. It contains nothing ...' In *The Mechanical Bride*, McLuhan relates the concept of 'discontinuity' to that of harmony, writing that

discontinuity, whether in cultures or physics, unavoidably invokes the

³⁹ Here, too, McLuhan may have been influenced by the gestalt theory of I. A. Richards, who says in *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1926: 172-173):

Any musical sound, for example, is plainly complex, though how complex it is from the point of view of its musical effects is still very uncertain. It has pitch, it has *timbre*, the characters which change as it is played upon one kind of instrument or another, the characters which are sometimes called its colour. Its effects also vary with its loudness and with its volume. It may be far more complex still. Its relations again to other musical sounds may be of at least three kinds: pitch relations, harmonic relations and temporal relations, complicated, all of them, in the utmost degree by Rhythm.... The one point of importance for our present purpose is the immense scope for the resolution, interanimation, conflict and equilibrium of impulses opened up by this extraordinary complexity of musical sounds and of their possible arrangement. It is not in the least surprising that so few invariable correspondences between stimuli and total responses have as yet been discovered.

ancient notion of harmony. And it is out of the extreme discontinuity of modern existence, with its mingling of many cultures and periods, that there is being born today the vision of a rich and complex harmony. We do not have a single, coherent present to live in, and so we need a multiple vision in order to see at all. (MB 97)

Here we have 'the *vision* of a rich and complex *harmony*' that 'we need a *multiple vision* ... to see'. McLuhan later appeals to musical terminology, writing in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* of 'all the senses in concert' (GG 247); while in *Counterblast*, words 'are a kind of symphony of the sensorium'; 'Words are an orchestral harmony of touch, taste, sight, sound'; and 'THE ARTIST HAS ABSOLUTE PITCH FOR HIS TIME.' (CB 114; 117; 63) In *The Medium is the Massage*, he quotes John Cage: 'Everything we do is music.' (MM 119) Capsulating Cage's *Silence: Lectures and Writings* (1961), McLuhan says:

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 ... (MM 111, emphasis in original)

James M. Curtis, in *Culture as Polyphony* (1978), insists upon the musicality of 'acoustic space' and the musical concept of 'polyphony' as the best means to theorize it. Quoting from *The Oxford Companion to Music* by Percy A. Scholes (10th edition, 1970), Curtis (1978: vii) notes that the terms *polyphony* and *polyphonic* 'are applied to "many-sound" or "many-voiced" music, i.e. to music in which instead of the parts marching in step with one another, and without particular interest in their individual melodic curves, they move in apparent independence and freedom though fitting together harmonically.' It must be noted, however, as McLuhan himself explains in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, that polyphony is necessarily a *visual* (i.e. notated) form of music, so the term does not really do justice to the concept of acoustic space (GG 200-201). In his self-published pamphlet *Counterblast* (1954), a response to Wyndham Lewis's *Blast* pamphlets (1914-1915), McLuhan invokes a concept of the 'interval', prefacing his comments with a quote from Ezra Pound's *Antheil and the Treatise on Harmony*

(1924): 'A sound of any pitch, or any combination of such sounds, may be followed by a sound of any other pitch, or any combination of such sounds, providing the time interval between them is properly gauged; and this is true for any series of sounds, chords or arpeggios.' (Pound, 1968 [1927]: 10, see *EM* 208; McLuhan has removed the capitalization from Pound's text) McLuhan comments: 'The interval is the means of epiphany or revelation.... It is the instrument of analogical intuition of Being. It is the dynamic symmetry of tensions among proportions which yields the Golden Section in space or time.' (*EM* 208-209) The interval describes not a thing in space or time but a *relationship* between components; it is, McLuhan says throughout *Take Today* (1972), *Laws of Media* (1988) and *The Global Village* (1989), a 'gap' or an 'interface' yielding meaning through 'resonance'. The acoustic structure of the 'resonant interval' has an equivalent in the visual realm which McLuhan dubs 'light *through*'. He contrasts 'light *through*' the field of components with 'light *on*' the object. The concepts come from modern art, as he explains:

The French painter André Girard who has worked with CBS and NBC for years told me that it was his admiration for the technique of [Georges] Rouault [1871-1958] that interested him in television. For, he pointed out, television is like Rouault in providing an image by light through, not by light on. Rouault painted his canvasses as if they were stained glass windows. (NAEB III: 25, emphasis in original; see also 11, 83)

McLuhan contrasts the film image, in which 'the viewer is the camera', to the TV image, in which 'the viewer is the screen'. 'Psychologically', McLuhan says, 'there would seem to be a great gulf between these two roles', the eye-as-camera 'superficial' in its experience and the eye-as-screen 'a thing of profundity and depth' (NAEB III: 83; see also *UM* 313). Unlike 'light on' the object, which establishes the 'point-of-view', the 'light through' structure encourages 'participation' and 'involvement' (see *EM* 246). McLuhan suggests in the *Counterblast* pamphlet of 1954 that 'the Eastern integrity of the interval' (i.e. the resonance of discontinuous components in acoustic space) may be contrasted to 'the Western integrity of the object' (i.e. the concept of the singular abstract thing in visual space) (*EM* 208). In fact McLuhan connects these two different attitudes with two different cognitive processes, which he

dubs 'matching' and 'making'. (He connects both of these to the concept of 'mimesis', noting in *Laws of Media*, p.4, that the Western philosophical tradition recognizes 'at least two ... versions of mimesis', i.e., the visual and the acoustic.⁴⁰) McLuhan draws attention to Aristotle's *Poetics*, where Aristotle says that 'Imitation [*mimesis*] is natural to man from childhood, one of his advantages over the lower animals being this, that he is the most imitative creature in the world, and learns at first by imitation.' (Aristotle, 1941: 1457; *Poetics* Chapter IV, 1448b; see *Renascence* 4:1, p.3; *UB* 20, p.11) Mimesis as 'matching' (i.e. *representing* the object) is a concept to be found in E. H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* (1960), where Gombrich describes how the process of representation in painting depends in fact upon a specialist technique of visual perception which is foreign to most cultures, but which flourished in the Renaissance prior to its dissolution in impressionism, expressionism, cubism, futurism, vorticism, etc. 'Archaic art starts from the schema, the symmetrical frontal figure conceived for one aspect only,' Gombrich (1960: 118) explains, 'and the conquest of naturalism may be described as the gradual accumulation of corrections due to the observation of reality.' Gombrich (*op.cit.* 141) says that Greek art was unique in the history of art for its 'continued and systematic modifications of the schemata of conceptual art, till making was replaced by the matching of reality through the new skill of mimesis.' He adds, 'We mistake the character of this skill if we speak of the imitation of nature. Nature cannot be imitated or "transcribed" without first being taken apart and put together again.' (*Ibid.*) The concept of 'making', meanwhile, while also found in

⁴⁰ McLuhan notes that 'Most studies of mimesis ... proceed on the assumption of [mimesis as the] matching [of] inner and outer. Notable exceptions are found in E. H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* and Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato*.' (CA 147) He quotes from Havelock's book:

Plato's choice of the word *mimesis* to describe the poetic experience.... focuses initially not on the artist's creative act but on his power to make the audience identify almost pathologically and certainly sympathetically with the content of what he is saying the poetic state of mind is for Plato the arch-enemy and it is easy to see why he considered this enemy so formidable. He is entering the lists against centuries of habituation in rhythmic memorised experience. He asks of men that instead they should examine this experience and rearrange it, that they should think about what they say, instead of just saying it. (Havelock, 1963: 45, 47; see CA 147-148; LM 16-17)

'Aristotelian mimesis', by contrast, says McLuhan, quoting from the *Physics*, Book II, Chapter VIII, and *De Anima*, Book III, Chapter VII, 'is a kind of recap of natural processes, whether of making sense via cognition or of making a house by following the lines of Nature'; McLuhan connects this with the Vichian concept of *ricorso* and James Joyce's 'millions of repetitions of the cognitive labyrinth' (CA 149-150)

Gombrich's book, is derived from Book X of Plato's *Republic*, where Plato contrasts 'making' – the 'making' of objects by our senses, which he compares to the 'making' of a piece of furniture – to *mimesis* (imitation). Gombrich (*op.cit.* 116; GG 51) presents 'a brief formula' that 'making comes before matching': 'Before the artist [or child] ever wanted to match the sights of the visible world he wanted to create things in their own right.' McLuhan elaborates these concepts – 'making' and 'matching' – to argue that they represent 'a polarity that is inherent in consciousness as such' (CA 148). While 'matching' presents the illusion of one-to-one correspondence between representation and thing, 'making' processes the current *situation* through *all* the senses, as a re-enactment of the situation or what Vico calls a '*ricorso*', i.e., a repetition through which a person or culture ritualizes, 'purges' or 'makes sense' of an experience (see CA 119, 148-149).

Working from the distinction between 'making' and 'matching', McLuhan constructs an anthropological argument. He says in *Take Today*: 'There are only two basic extreme forms of human organization. They have innumerable variants or "parti-colored" forms. The extreme forms are the civilized and the tribal (eye and ear).' (TT 22) The civilized society is an 'open society' (in Henri Bergson's sense of the term, later reformulated by Karl Popper⁴¹), individualist, liberal, secular ('profane' in Mircea Eliade's sense of the term⁴²), nationalist, industrial, and capitalist. The tribal society is a 'closed society' (in Bergson's sense of the term), corporate, conservative, religious ('sacred' in Eliade's sense of the term), pre- or post-industrial, and communist. McLuhan links the shift from 'tribal' to 'civilized' society with the technology of the phonetic alphabet. He says that 'the incessant translation of sound into sight and sight into sound' enacted in phonetic reading and writing fosters that 'sense of individual identity' praised by Plato in the *Republic* and 'that inner dialogue or conscience within, which we rightly associate with the very citadel of civilized awareness' (UB 1, p.8). Any nation based upon the use of the phonetic alphabet (the Roman Empire, Britain, Germany, France, America, etc.), McLuhan calls 'civilized', stating in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* that the term

⁴¹ See Henri Bergson, *Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion* (1932, tr. *The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*); also Karl Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945)

⁴² See Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane* (1959)

“Civilization” must now be used technically to mean detribalized man for whom the visual values have priority in the organization of thought and action. Nor is this to give any new meaning or value to “civilization” but rather to specify its character. It is quite obvious that most civilized people are crude and numb in their perceptions, compared with the hyperesthesia of oral and auditory cultures. (GG 27)⁴³

The technology of print, says McLuhan, ‘is the extreme phase of alphabet culture that detribalizes or decollectivises man in the first instance.’ (GG 158) He says that ‘With print, via Gutenberg, the visual stress of the alphabet gained new ascendancy.’ (LM 125) As the mechanism for ‘the first uniformly repeatable commodity’, the printing press was the model for ‘the first assembly-line, and the first mass production’, leading to the fixed-price market of ‘uniform commodities’ with ‘uniform pricing’ (GG 124; NAEB III: 49). McLuhan says that the principle of mechanization ‘is always the same. Segmental analysis of the total action involved, and the laying out of this action as a series of static repeatable segments in what we have since called the assembly line.’ (NAEB III: 47) Since the invention of the alphabet, he says that ‘there has been a continuous drive in the Western world toward the separation of the senses, of functions, of operations, of states emotional and political, as well as of tasks ...’ (GG 42-43) By establishing a paradigm of ‘uniformity, repeatability, lineality, individualism and “point of view”’, the phonetic alphabet created ‘what we call Renaissance individualism and nationalism’, promoting ‘self-set objectives’, ‘initiative and self-reliance ... inner self definition and inner goals’ (NAEB III: 48; 55-56). In a tribal culture, by contrast, ‘There is no individualism’ (NAEB VII: xxx). Quoting from Mircea Eliade’s *The Myth of the Eternal Return* (1954 [*Le Mythe de l’éternel retour*, 1949]), McLuhan says that a person in a tribal society ‘acknowledges no act which has not been previously posited and lived by someone else, some other being who was not a man. What he does has been done before. His life is the ceaseless repetition of gestures initiated by others’ (Eliade, 1954: 5; CA 119). McLuhan elaborates:

⁴³ McLuhan changes the emphasis of his definition of ‘civilization’ in the ‘management’ guide *Take Today*, stating that ‘Civilization is a management pattern of delegated jobs and specialized tasks.’ (TT 192)

He is impersonal, he has no feelings or attitudes that he considers his very own. It never occurs to him to hold opinions that are not those of everybody in the tribe. His face is a mask, a stolid mask...for he is not concerned with showing his emotions. He is a creature of habit, of ritual. There is no individualism...it's togetherness at all costs. In a tribe everything happens to everybody at the same time...and, nothing happens to anybody without it happening to everybody. Tribalism is the extension of the family group, and so, like the family, its codes and rules are un-written. (NAEB IV: xxx)

Several critics have problematized McLuhan's use of the term 'tribal', which belongs to an Imperialism since deconstructed in the name of 'post-colonial' studies.⁴⁴ McLuhan, for his part, invokes a number of anthropological studies to illustrate what he means by 'tribal' (see *GG* 18, 33-34, 36-39, 76; *WP* 71-72; *CA* 92-93). He cites the fact that a person's activity in a tribal society is governed by 'the fundamentally influential sphere of kin relationships' (David J. Riesman, *GG* 29); and also notes that in such a society, '[one] comes to regard [one]self as a rather insignificant part of a much larger organism – the family and the clan – and not as an independent, self-reliant unit' (J.C. Carothers, *GG* 18). 'The oral man's inner world', McLuhan suggests, 'is a tangle of complex emotions and feelings that the Western practical man has long ago eroded or suppressed within himself in the interest of efficiency and practicality'; in fact, through 'mimesis of the alphabet', Western peoples have 'acquired ... the power to act without reacting', performing social obligations 'with complete detachment' (*UM* 50; *LM* 17; *UM* 4).⁴⁵ The 'visual' values of civilization have been undermined, however, by the

⁴⁴ See e.g. Ivan Kalmar (2005 [1984]), 'The Future of "Tribal Man" in the Electronic Age'. Both Andrew Ross in *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (Routledge: New York, 1989, see 113-134) and Gayatri Spivak in *A Critique of Post-Colonial Reason* (Harvard University Press: Cambridge Massachusetts, 1999, see especially 365-366), problematize McLuhan's imperialist assumptions; Janine Marchessault, acknowledging these studies, charges McLuhan with 'Orientalism', i.e. the projection of 'oriental' or exotic qualities upon a foreign culture (see Marchessault, 2005: 129; also Edward Said, *Orientalism*, 1987). Marchessault (*op.cit.*), despite finding McLuhan guilty of 'Orientalism', reads McLuhan as a supporter of multiculturalism; Ted Carpenter (2001: 11), however, in his memoir, indicates that McLuhan was not personally supportive of multiculturalism.

⁴⁵ Like McLuhan and Eric Havelock, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1930-2002) has linked the shift from 'tribal' to 'civilized' with the shift from an oral to a literate culture. Bourdieu distinguishes between the 'logic' of literate thinking and the 'pre-logical logic of practice', a logic that he says is 'learned by body' and 'can only survive in the incorporated state'. As he says in *The Logic of Practice* (1980):

The body ... does not represent what it performs, it does not memorize the past, it enacts the past, bringing it back to life. What is 'learned by body' is not something

acoustic values of electronic communications technology, heralding a return to tribal forms of communication. McLuhan dubs this process 'retribalization'.

In a retribalized society, McLuhan says, people want 'roles' not 'jobs'. He suggests that the 'simultaneous sharing of experiences as in a village or tribe' facilitated by electronic communications technology

creates a village or tribal outlook, and puts a premium on togetherness. In this new tribal juxtaposition of people, nobody strives for individual excellence, which would be socially suicidal and is therefore taboo. Teenagers deliberately seek mediocrity as a means of achieving togetherness.... they cannot stay "together" if they are exceptional; therefore they boycott the exceptional. (*EC xi*)

He says that the 'confusions and indecisions' of the electronic age are an effect of 'living simultaneously in two contrasted forms of society and experience' (*GG 1*). Contemporary art and entertainment are 'tribal' and inclusive, while the fragmentation of functions characteristic of 'civilization' persists in politics, law, education and commerce (*GV 68*). McLuhan calls this 'a formula for complete chaos', for we 'live mythically and integrally, as it were, but we continue to think in the old, fragmented space and time patterns of the pre-electric age' (*Ibid.*; *UM 4*). As he says in a TV clip of 1960:

these new media of ours ... have made our world into a single unit....the world is now like a continually sounding tribal drum, where everybody gets the message.... all the time. A princess gets married in England and boom boom boom go the drums and we all hear about it; an earthquake in North Africa, a Hollywood star gets drunk...away go the drums again. I use the word tribal....it is probably the key word ... (see documentary footage, 'World is a Global Village' in the CBC archives; *NAEB VII: xxiii*)

While the phonetic alphabet and the printing press led the 'explosion' of mechanical

that one has, like knowledge that can be brandished, but something that one is. This is particularly clear in non-literate societies, where inherited knowledge can only survive in the incorporated state. (Bourdieu, 1992 [1990]: 73)

Such knowledge, Bourdieu says, 'is never detached from the body that bears it and can be reconstituted only by means of a kind of gymnastics designed to evoke it, a *mimesis* which, as Plato observed, implies total investment and deep emotional identification' (*Ibid.*).

technologies in the Renaissance, today we face the 'implosion' of cultures through electronic media.⁴⁶ McLuhan wrote in 1962:

We are today as far into the electric age as the Elizabethans had advanced into the typographical and mechanical age. And we are experiencing the same confusions and indecisions which they had felt when living simultaneously in two contrasted forms of society and experience. Whereas the Elizabethans were poised between medieval corporate experience and modern individualism, we reverse their pattern by confronting an electric technology which would seem to render individualism obsolete and the corporate interdependence mandatory. (GG 1)

McLuhan detected the 'retribalizing' effects of electronic media in communism, existentialism, psychoanalysis, modernist literature, atonality in music, jazz, rock music, beat poetry, recreational drug use, hippie culture, cubism, and the popularity of Eastern mysticism, all of which he saw as examples of the way that teenagers and artists were developing tribal forms of social ritual in response to the electric environment (see e.g. *UB* #3, 26-27, *MB* 87, *UM* 47, *WP* 77-80, *LM* 52, 55, 59-63, *GV* 72). He says: 'Ours is a brand-new world of allatonce. "Time" has ceased, "space" has vanished. We now live in a global village...a simultaneous happening. We are back in acoustic space.' (*MM* 63, emphasis in original) He dates this process from the invention of the telegraph.⁴⁷ 'Once linked to the telegraph,' he says, 'the press achieved the speed of light, as radio and TV have done since then. Total global coverage in space, instantaneity in time.' (*UB* 6, p.17). By 'juxtapos[ing] news items from Tokio, London, New York, Chile, Africa and New Zealand', 'Everywhere and every age have become here and now.' (*Ibid.* p.7, emphasis in original) Reformulating Innis's distinctions between 'time-biased' and 'space-biased' media, McLuhan says

⁴⁶ The concepts of 'explosion' and 'implosion' seem to have been derived from Lewis Mumford's *The City in History* (1961), who describing the evolution of the city says that 'We live [today] in fact in an exploding universe of mechanical and electronic invention, whose parts are moving at a rapid pace ever further and further away from their human center, and from any rational, autonomous human purposes. This technological explosion has produced a similar explosion of the city itself: the city has burst open and scattered its complex organs and organizations over the entire landscape.' See Chapter 2, 'The Crystallization of the City', especially p.34.

⁴⁷ The telegraph was patented in the United States in 1837 by Samuel Morse. For McLuhan on the invention of the telegraph, see *NAEB* III: 88

'when information can move instantaneously over considerable distances, space and time alike disappear into a new structure which has been called space-time perhaps because it contains neither' (NAEB III: 88; see also *UM* 3). He says that the telegraph, newspaper, radio, telephone and TV 'eliminate time and space factors in human association ... [re-]creating involvement in depth' so that '[w]e begin to realize the depth of our involvement in one another as a total human community.' (*MM* 9; *CB* 37) McLuhan calls the acoustic space of electronic culture 'post-literate'.

McLuhan's thesis on the effects of the phonetic alphabet in structuring the 'visual space' of Western culture took some time to elaborate. In 'Culture Without Literacy' in *Explorations One* (December 1953), an early piece scoping the themes of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan suggests that writing enables some 'control of space' (*UB* 6, p.9). In 'The Effect of the Printed Book on Language in the 16th Century', published in *Explorations 7* (March 1957), he says that 'Writing was a huge technological advance ... It expressed, it made explicit, many relations which were implicit, suggested in inflectional language structures. And what writing couldn't make explicit, quickly got lost.' (*UB* 2, pp.14-15) The effects of phonetic reading and writing, McLuhan says in 'Printing and Social Change' (1959), include 'psychic withdrawal, a weakening of sensuous life and a considerable lessening of the power of recall' (*UB* 1, p.8). In the essay on 'Acoustic Space' with Ted Carpenter, the authors comment on the nature of Western 'objectivity', stating that:

In our society ... to be real, a thing must be visible, and preferably constant. We trust the eye, not the ear. Not since Aristotle assured his readers that the sense of sight was "above all others" the one to be trusted, have we accorded to sound a primary role. "Seeing is believing." "Believe half of what you see and nothing of what you hear." "The eyes of the Lord preserve knowledge, and he overthroweth the words of the transgressor." [Proverbs 2:12]. Truth, we think, must be observed by the "eye," then judged by the "I." (*EC* 66)

In contrast to the discontinuous 'acoustic space' of pre-literate cultures, with the phonetic alphabet, 'men discovered how to translate the multi-sensuous thing that is spoken, language into one sense only.... abstract[ing] one sense [i.e. the visual sense]

from the cluster of the human senses.' (NAEB III: 43) The phonetic alphabet, moreover, says McLuhan, is the only writing system by means of which such dissociation is possible, reducing speech 'to a merely visual code' (GG 45). In Chinese for example, McLuhan says, 'The characters are not the thing but the *effect* of the thing.' (L 419) He cites from translator James Legge's introduction to the *I Ching*, where Legge postulates that 'the written characters of the Chinese are not representations of words, but symbols of ideas' and 'the combination of them in composition is not a representation of what the writer would say, but of what he thinks.' (see *Ibid.*)⁴⁸ Says McLuhan, 'Only the phonetic alphabet makes a break between eye and ear, between semantic meaning and visual code; and thus only the phonetic alphabet has the power to translate man from the tribal to the civilized sphere, to give him an eye for an ear.' (GG 27) In *Laws of Media* McLuhan and Eric McLuhan provide three justifications for this argument. Firstly, they say, the invention of the 'consonant' as 'a meaningless abstraction' enabled the visual sense 'to detach itself from the other senses' in the first place (LM 14). Quoting Eric Havelock, they note that while the vowel 'could exist by itself in language, as in exclamations like "Ah.", the consonant could not; 'It was therefore an abstraction, a non-sound, an idea in the mind.' (Havelock, 1976: 43; LM 14)⁴⁹ The phonetic alphabet was 'the first system in which in all cases one and only one acoustic value was theoretically attachable to one given shape' (Havelock, 1973: 341; LM 14). The signs of the alphabet are thus rendered 'free of ambiguity', a feat that the McLuhans say 'was accomplished both by one-to-one matching of sign and sound, and by rendering the signs themselves inherently meaningless' (LM 14). The second effect of the alphabet, the McLuhans say, is that it stresses the aspect of visual *linearity*, enabling us 'to transcribe any language into a *series* of abstract, meaningless sounds' (*Ibid.* 15). Thirdly, in its use, the phonetic alphabet promotes the 'suppression' or 'interiorization' of all the other senses except the visual sense 'as a guarantee of abstract, static uniformity', thereby producing a

⁴⁸ McLuhan takes his argument on the character of non-phonetic writing from Harold Innis, who says in *The Bias of Communication* (1991 [1951]: 62), summarizing an argument by Marcel Granet, 'the Chinese are not equipped to note concepts or to present doctrines discursively. The word does not fix a notion with a definite degree of abstraction or generality but evokes an indefinite complex of particular images.... Neither time nor space is abstractly conceived; time proceeds by cycles and is round; space is square.'

⁴⁹ See Aristotle's exposition on the letter in the *Poetics*, Chapter 20.

'split between conscious and unconscious' (15-16).

McLuhan says that writing 'exists by creating a dichotomy of sight and sound, and sets up a vast series of splits in human awareness, such as are unknown in pre-literate or archaic societies.' (NAEB III: 45) He thus historicizes the Freudian concept of the 'unconscious' in relation to the development of print technology.⁵⁰ He says that 'The denuding of conscious life and its reduction to a single level [due to print technology] created the new world of the *unconscious* in the seventeenth century.' (GG 244, emphasis in original) McLuhan cites from *The Unconscious Before Freud: A history of the evolution of human awareness* (1960) by Lancelot Law Whyte, asserting that 'Whyte ... gives some idea of the rise of the "discovery" of the unconscious as a result of the restriction of conscious life within the extreme limits of print technology.' (GG 245) Whyte (1960: 60) says that Descartes and the Cartesian scholars were the first to hypothesize 'two independent realms [i.e. *res extensa* and *res cogitans*] which are none the less so intimately interdependent'. He says that: 'No thinker ever imagined that "body" and "mind" – insofar as the terms are valid – are without apparent interactions.... The lesson is that the more brilliant the light cast on two neighboring realms, the more profound the obscurity into which their interactions are thrown.' (*Ibid.*) McLuhan cites a further passage from Whyte's book, in which Whyte situates the Cartesian rejection of the 'unconscious' in relation to the Materialist and Idealist schools of thought, for whom the concept presented no problem. For the Cartesian school, says Whyte (1960: 61; GG 247), 'the admission of the existence of unconscious mental processes presented an acute philosophical challenge,'

for it demanded the discarding of the original conception of the dualism, as one of two independent realms, matter in motion [*res extensa*] and mind necessarily aware [*res cogitans*]. For those who were loyal to Descartes, all that was not conscious in man was material and physiological, and therefore not mental.

McLuhan comments, 'It is thus that the seventeenth century, having emerged into a

⁵⁰ Donald Theall (1971: 46) suggests that McLuhan's argument distorts the fact that 'the phenomenon of the unconscious seems to be discoverable in Greek art and ancient myth'.

merely visual science in its conscious life, is reduced to recourse to the world of dreams [to commune with the 'unconscious']. (GG 244) McLuhan interprets the Freudian and Jungian versions of the 'unconscious' as inferior to the 'viviseptive' concept of consciousness depicted by Giambattista Vico in the *Scienza Nuova* and introduced to the modernists by James Joyce. For McLuhan, 'The unconscious [of Freud and Jung] is a direct creation of print technology, the ever-mounting slag-heap of rejected awareness.' (*Ibid.* 245) He says in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* that

Any phonetic alphabet culture can easily slip into the habit of putting one thing under or in another; since there is constant pressure from the subliminal fact that the written code carries for the reader the experience of the "content" which is speech. But there is nothing subliminal in non-literate cultures.... Thus natives, when asked Freudian questions about the symbolism of their thoughts or dreams, insist that all the meanings are right there in the verbal statement. The work of Jung and Freud is a laborious translation of non-literate awareness into literary terms, and like any translation distorts and omits. (*Ibid.* 72)

When McLuhan says 'there is nothing subliminal' for non-literate peoples, he means that there is no demarcation between the 'visual' and the 'acoustic'. 'To the oral man the literal is inclusive, contains all possible meanings and levels', says McLuhan, whereas 'the visual man of the sixteenth century is impelled to separate level from level, and function from function, in a process of specialist exclusion.' (*Ibid.* 111)⁵¹ McLuhan says that this notion 'is memorably expressed by George Orwell in *1984*' with the notion of 'Newspeak'. He quotes from the novel:

'Don't you see that the whole aim of Newspeak is to narrow the range of thought? In the end we shall make thoughtcrime literally impossible, because there will be no words in which to express it. Every concept that can ever be needed, will be expressed by exactly *one* word, with its meaning rigidly defined and all its subsidiary meanings rubbed out and forgotten. Already [...] we're not far from that point [...] Every year fewer and fewer words, and the range of consciousness always a little smaller [...]' (Orwell, 1954: 45; CA 57)

⁵¹ McLuhan's argument that 'tribal' consciousness operates on many levels owes something to William Empson's *Seven Types of Ambiguity* (1930; revised edition 1953), in which Empson shows how the 'ambiguity' of words and phrases in poetry, i.e., the inability to reduce their meaning to a single level, contributes to their effect.

McLuhan presents Orwell's 'Newspeak' as necessarily a *visual* conception of speech, and he charges Freud with the same mistake as Orwell. 'The appeal of Freud to the literati can be understood via his visual bias' McLuhan says (*CIOB* 156). 'Freud's notion of ever-increasing repression [in *Civilization and Its Discontents*] is simply a remark on the ever-increasing visuality, blueprinting of society.' (*HC* 279). In fact there are *two* distinct concepts of 'splitting' to be found in Freud's work: firstly, the 'splitting' between conscious and unconscious (as in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where the dream has a structure that must qualify as 'acoustic' – 'dreams take into account in a general way the connection which undeniably exists between all the portions of the dream-thoughts by combining the whole material into a single situation or event. They replace *logical connection* by *simultaneity in time*', *SE* IV: 314); and secondly, the initial 'splitting' between the 'ego' and the (unconscious) drives or 'id' (as in *The Ego and the Id*, 1923), where the ego must be interpreted, after Jacques Lacan, as a *signifier* of the subject in the place of the Other. The 'split' between ego and id is not commensurate with the split between 'consciousness' and the 'unconscious': while the id is by definition unconscious, so too, Freud says, are parts of the ego and super-ego. Freud warns against picturing the id, ego, and super-ego in terms of 'sharp frontiers like the artificial ones drawn in political geography. We cannot do justice to the characteristics of the mind by linear outlines like those in a drawing... but rather by areas of colour melting into one another as they are presented by modern artists' (*SE* XXII: 79).

McLuhan's notion of unconscious components lost in 'translation' to consciousness is largely inspired by that of Anton Ehrenzweig (1908-1966) in *The Psycho-Analysis of Artistic Hearing and Vision: An Introduction to a Theory of Unconscious Perception* (first edition 1953). Interestingly, this text (which E.H. Gombrich mentions in passing in *Art and Illusion, op.cit.* 27) is listed in a section titled 'Further Readings for Media Study' in some – but not all – editions of *Understanding Media* (it is found, for example, in the 1994 edition published by the MIT Press, but is missing from the first edition as well as the 'Critical Edition' edited by W. Terrence Gordon, published 2003);

meanwhile, it is not referenced in any way in the body of the book.⁵² Ehrenzweig (1953: 5), who is astute in Freudian theory as well as gestalt theory and the earlier psychology of William James (1842-1910), asserts that 'current art psychologies pay too much attention to the obvious surface order of art and to its aesthetic appeal, and are thus prevented from appreciating the many inarticulate form phenomena falling outside art's aesthetic superstructure'. He distinguishes between the 'articulated' form (i.e. *gestalt*) and the 'inarticulate form elements' in perception, calling the 'inarticulate' forms 'gestalt-free' forms (*Ibid.* 7). Ehrenzweig says that the 'surface' perception (or 'surface mind') has an 'articulating tendency', i.e. that 'We tend for the most part to notice simple, compact, precise forms, at the same time eliminating vague, incoherent, inarticulate forms from our perception.' (*Ibid.* 3) Ehrenzweig submits that 'we have to distinguish between the structural repression inherent in unconscious form processes and the superego's repression directed against the archaic or infantile contents symbolized in them' (*Ibid.* 16). He explains:

What the psycho-analytical literature commonly calls repression is the superego's censorship directed against specific *contents* hidden in the unconscious mind. If these rise to the surface they are 'censored'; they have to submit to certain distortions which makes sure that their true meaning is not recognized; they are then merely 'symbolized'. The *structural* repression, however, is inherent in the stratification of mental contents and forms; it means that without due 'translation' of their primitive structure the mental contents remain altogether inaccessible to the surface mind. (*Ibid.* 17)

Ehrenzweig finds this distinction in a letter of 1896 from Freud to Wilhelm Fliess, but notes that Freud 'did not, however, follow up this idea' (*Ibid.* 16). Says Ehrenzweig (p.17):

Freud approaches the problem genetically. Both mental contents and the structures in which they are expressed belong to a definite genetic level of development and are preserved as such in the adult's

⁵² The title of Ehrenzweig's book is erroneously cited in the MIT Press edition of *Understanding Media* as '*Psychoanalysis of Artistic Vision and Hearing: The Dissociation of Sensibility since the Renaissance* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1953)', suggesting that the editors have compiled this list from an original manuscript in which McLuhan has subtitled the book with his own words. The term 'dissociation of sensibility' comes from T. S. Eliot's essay 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921). See Eliot, 1932: 247

unconscious mind. Every perception, or memory of a perception, has to rise through the earlier (lower) genetic levels to the mature (highest) levels. As the perception passes to a higher level it has to be 'translated' so as to assume the structure appropriate to that level. 'Every later translation inhibits the earlier one and attracts its cathexis.' Without the 'translation' the perception is dealt with according to the psychological laws valid for the earlier level and by the means then available. 'This failure of translation is what is called clinically "repression".' (citations from Freud, *Aus der Anfängen der Psychoanalyse, Briefe an Wilhelm Fliess, etc.* p.187; see SE I: 235)

Ehrenzweig's influence is evident in Chapter 7 of *Understanding Media*, 'Media as Translators', where McLuhan says that 'All media are active metaphors in their power to translate experience into new forms.' (UM 57) In fact McLuhan himself relates the concept of the medium as 'translator' to the Freudian concept of repression, stating that 'Perhaps there is a key to some of these problems [regarding media as translators] in the Freudian idea that when we fail to translate some natural event into conscious art we "repress" it.' (59)

McLuhan meanwhile fails to engage with Freud's concept of the 'castration complex' as the means by which the ego becomes subject to a law external to itself. In fact the revolutionary quality of the phonetic alphabet may be precisely that it serves to *liberate* the 'individual' from the tyranny of the group, exchanging, to a large degree, one kind of repression (i.e. the super-ego) for another (i.e. 'structural' repression). As McLuhan says, 'In archaic societies ... the conscious life is flooded with images of what civilized man thrusts back into the unconscious. Individual consciousness is achieved by strategic ignorance and suppression [i.e. 'structural repression']. Man's right to his own ignorance might be said to be his principal means of private identity.' (CA 63) A similar argument is made by Lacan (1977a: 26, 27) in 'Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis' (1948), where he says that what we face today 'is the increasing absence of all those saturations of the superego and ego ideal that are realized in all kinds of organic forms in traditional societies', although he attributes this to 'the promotion of the ego' and 'the utilitarian conception of man that reinforces it'. A paradox then emerges, for if acoustic forms imply the dominance of the super-ego, and visual forms the liberation of the individual, then, contrary to what McLuhan says, the process of 'retribalization' must

mean a return to the authority of the group, not a utopia where there is 'no subliminal factor in experience' and where 'mythic forms of explanation explicat[e] all levels of any situation at the same time' (*EC* xi). The paradox may be solved by appealing to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's concept of the 'schizo' ego in *L'Anti-Oedipe* (1972, tr. *Anti-Oedipus*), where electronic culture is shown to 'free' the subject from any one authority as well as from the fixed identity of the 'individual'.

Environment

The concept of a subliminal technological 'environment' shared by all of humankind is McLuhan's answer to the Freudian 'unconscious'. The dialectic between (unconscious) 'environment' and (conscious) 'anti-environment', employed by McLuhan from 1964, is founded upon an earlier dialectic of 'form' and content', and the maxim that 'the medium is the message'.⁵³ As McLuhan elaborates:

"the medium is the message" because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. The content or uses of such media are as diverse as they are ineffectual in shaping the form of human association. Indeed, it is only too typical that the "content" of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium. (*UM* 9)

By September 1964, McLuhan had reformulated his idea that 'the medium is the message' in terms of a media-*environment*, writing to Buckminster Fuller: 'If one says that any new technology creates a new environment, that is better than saying the medium is the message.' (*L* 308-309) There are many possible sources for McLuhan's use of the term 'environment' in this context. It appears in an evolutionary context in the work of Henri Bergson, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Siegfried Giedion, and Lewis Mumford, and in a psychoanalytic context in the *Neurotica* 5 editorial of which the first sentence reads: 'We define neurosis as the defensive activities of normal individuals against abnormal environments.' (*Neurotica* 5, Autumn 1949, p.3) Richard Cavell connects McLuhan's use of the term 'environment' to the work of artist and architect

⁵³ Ted Carpenter (2001: 8) says that the phrase 'the medium is the message' was inspired by a lecture given by Ashley Montagu, under the title 'The Method is the Message'.

Frederick Kiesler (1890-1965), author of *From Architecture to Life* (1930), who was affiliated with Buckminster Fuller's Structural Studies Associates (see Cavell, 173-174, also 284, footnote 18). McLuhan, punning on his own phrase, sometimes describes the media-environment as a 'massage', writing in *The Medium is the Massage* (1967):

All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. *The medium is the massage*. Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments. (*MM* 26, emphasis added)

In fact it is clear from McLuhan's essay 'The Relation of Environment to Anti-Environment' (1966 and 1967) that what he is really concerned with is the dynamics between the 'unconscious' (environment) and 'consciousness'. Here he reiterates the earlier insight that 'Any new technology, any extension or amplification of human faculties given material embodiment, tends to create a new environment.' (*UB* 4, p.6; McLuhan in Matson and Montagu, Eds., 1967: 41) However, 'The ground rules, the pervasive structure, the overall pattern [of the environment] eludes perception except in so far as there is an anti-environment or a counter-situation constructed to provide a means of direct attention.' (*Ibid.*) He relates this to the concept of the 'unconscious':

Joyce directed our perceptions to the environmental aspects of technology, whether ancient or modern. His perceptions had revealed to him that today, as in the past, the obvious is usually invisible and that the incidental content of any new environmental process can be counted on to exhaust human attention, blanking out awareness of the radically effective factors. This matter has had much consideration in our time under the heading of the "unconscious". (Matson *et. al.*, *op.cit.*)

McLuhan's use of the terms 'anti-environment' and 'environment' distinguishes the concepts from the psychoanalytic terms 'consciousness' and the 'unconscious', and in fact, McLuhan's understanding of these concepts is significantly different from Freud's. Freud, as per the enlightenment tradition, positions the 'unconscious' in relation to 'consciousness'; McLuhan, however, takes the (unconscious) *environment* to be the

primary state of awareness, and the (conscious) 'anti-environment' to be a privileged state of awareness. He says:

An environment is naturally of low intensity or low definition, which is why it escapes observation. Anything that raises the environment to high intensity, whether it be a storm in nature or violent change resulting from a new technology, 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. (44)

McLuhan adds that 'It is useful to view all the arts and sciences as acting in the role of anti-environments that enable us to perceive the environment... we have long considered liberal study as providing necessary means of orientation and perception.' (42)

Archetypes

McLuhan's rejection of the Freudian schemata of id, ego and super-ego is evident in *From Cliché to Archetype* (1970) with Wilfred Watson, which invokes instead the Jungian concept of the 'archetypes' to describe the structure of the unconscious. The authors betray the superficiality of their knowledge of both Jung and Freud, however, when they say that 'whenever we "quote" one consciousness, we also "quote" the archetypes we exclude; and this quotation of excluded archetypes has been called by Freud, Jung, and others "the archetypal unconscious".' (CA 21-22) It is in fact the originality of Jung's concept of the 'archetype', and Freud's rejection of it, that distinguishes analytical psychology from psychoanalysis (founded upon the concept of the drives); Freud certainly never conceptualizes the unconscious as 'archetypal'. In *From Cliché to Archetype* McLuhan conceptualizes the activated archetype as a 'cliché'; this is an equivalent term for what he has thus far termed the 'medium' or 'technology', but specifically refers to the *function* of a technology *in use*.

While McLuhan's interest in Jung may be noted from as early as 1944 (see L 166), it is almost certain that the Jungian concept of the 'archetype' was brought to his attention by Northrop Frye, a colleague at the University of Toronto and author of *Anatomy of*

Criticism (1957); and by William Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks, the authors of *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957). Frye's commentary on the archetype in *Anatomy of Criticism* reworks a number of previous articles including 'Levels of Meaning in Literature' and 'The Archetypes of Literature', published in the *Kenyon Review* (Spring 1950 and Winter 1951 respectively), and 'The Language of Poetry', published in *Explorations* 4 (February 1955), with which McLuhan would have been familiar. In Jung the concept of the 'archetype' is inseparable from the concept of the 'collective unconscious'; Frye (1966 [1957]: 112), however, says that the concept of the 'collective unconscious' is 'an unnecessary hypothesis in literary criticism, so far as I can judge'. See Wimsatt and Brooks (1957: 709, note 6): "'Archetype," borrowed from Jung, means a primordial image, a part of the collective unconscious, the psychic residue of numberless experiences of the same kind, and thus part of the inherited response-pattern of the race.' In the last chapter of *Literary Criticism*, titled 'Myth and Archetype', Wimsatt and Brooks evaluate the contributions of Vico, Ernst Cassirer, Susanne K. Langer, Frye, Richard Chase and Leslie Fiedler, placing them in relation to the theories of dream analysis proposed by Jung and Freud. Commenting on Frye's essay 'My Credo' (1951), Wimsatt and Brooks (1957: 709) say:

For Northrop Frye the discovery [of archetypes] points to the possibility of turning literary criticism for the first time into a true science. No true science, he argues, can be content to rest in the structural analysis of the object with which it deals. The poet is only the efficient cause of the poem, but the poem, having form, has a formal cause that is to be sought. On examination, Frye finds this formal cause to be the archetype.

Questioning whether psychoanalysis and Jungian psychology may be interpreted as forms of literary criticism, the authors decide that "'mythic" and "archetypal" criticism, whatever other contribution it may make, provides no way of circumventing the basic problems of traditional criticism.' (*Ibid.* 714) They note, but do not find any reason for, the shift from traditional criticism to 'mythic' and 'archetypal' criticism. McLuhan's reply to Frye, Wimsatt and Brooks is 'Myth and Mass Media' (1959), in which he reminds us that 'Today we come to the oral condition again via the electronic media, which abridge space and time and single-plane relationships, returning us to the

confrontation of multiple relationships at the same moment.' (UB 18, p.6) McLuhan's concept of 'myth' is based upon that of Ernst Cassirer, whose *Language and Myth* (*Sprache und Mythos*, 1925, upon which Cassirer based his three-volume work *Die Philosophie der Symbolischen Formen*, 1923-1929) is invoked in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Cassirer (1946: 37) suggests that 'the primary function of linguistic concepts does not consist in the comparison of experiences and the selection of certain common attributes, but in the concentration of such experiences, so to speak, in distilling them down to one point.' McLuhan is replying to Cassirer when he says that 'myth is the mode of simultaneous awareness of a complex group of causes and effects' (GG 166; see also TT 8). Or, as he expresses it in *Take Today*, 'What has been called "mythic" in the past merely means an instant vision of a complex process or a capsulated statement of such processes.' (TT 84). In the electronic media environment, McLuhan says, we 'cannot avoid being mythic in our every gesture ... *the now* contains all pasts whatever, including the most primal and primitive modes' (*Ibid.*). He also suggests that the ads are our new form of myth, because they are involved in 'fusion and telescoping of phases of process' (UB 18, p.8). McLuhan started to use Jung's term 'collective unconscious' from around 1964 to describe the effects of technologies, writing in September of that year: 'Technologies would seem to be the pushing of the archetypal forms of the unconscious out into social consciousness. May this not help to explain why technology as environment is typically unconscious?' (L 310) He repeats this verbatim in *Counterblast* (1970), where the connection with Jung is even more clear: 'Technologies begin as anti-environments, as controls, and then become environmental, needing the endless spawning of new anti-environments as controls.... Private consciousness is anti-environmental for collective unconscious as environment.... All technologies are collective unconscious.' (CB 30-31)

The concept of the 'collective unconscious' is discussed in two of Jung's articles from the mid 1930's, 'Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious', first published in 1934, later revised and republished in 1954; and 'The Concept of the Collective Unconscious', originally published in English in 1936/1937. Both of these articles were

reprinted (the first in English translation) in Volume 9, Part 1 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* in 1959; this book, however, popularly known as *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, did not appear in paperback until 1980. The book that McLuhan consulted, *Psyche and Symbol* (1958), a compendium of Jung's work edited by Violet de Laszlo, does not include either of these seminal articles on the 'collective unconscious', but instead presents the first five chapters from Jung's contemporary work *Aion: Contributions to the Symbolism of the Self* (republished as Volume 9, Part 2 of the *Collected Works*), which addresses the role of the ego in the relation between 'conscious' and 'unconscious'. (*Psyche and Symbol* also includes a number of later articles not directly addressing the subject of the 'collective unconscious'.) McLuhan's use of Jung in *From Cliché to Archetype* seems to be limited to what he read from *Aion* in *Psyche and Symbol*, although he also quotes from the translator's preface (by B. M. Hinkle) to *Psychology of the Unconscious* (the English translation of *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido*, 1913, in which Jung broke from Freud to develop his own concept of the 'unconscious'), and from an article by Lauriat Lane, Jr. ('The Literary Archetype: Some Reconsiderations' in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 13:2, December 1954, pp.226-232), which discusses Jung's article 'On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetic Art', published in the second collection of Jung's essays in English, *Contributions to Analytical Psychology* (1928) (see CA 15, 19).⁵⁴ The concept of the archetype inherited from Jung is of a psychic content that may be 'projected' upon objects in the environment. Archetypal projection, says Jung (1990 [1959]: 6), is the way in which the individual 'assimilate[s] all outer sense experiences to inner, psychic events'. He says:

All the mythologized processes of nature, such as summer and winter, the phases of the moon, the rainy seasons, and so forth, are in no sense allegories of these objective occurrences; rather they are

⁵⁴ References for *Laws of Media* (1988) and *The Global Village* (1989) also include *Psyche and Symbol* (1958), while in *Understanding Media*, p.21, McLuhan cites briefly from Jung's *Contributions to Analytical Psychology* (1928). McLuhan argues in *Understanding Media*, pp.193-194, that 'written and printed language is biased toward the private and individual posture. Thus, the traditional figures of rhetoric were individual postures of mind of the private speaker in relation to an audience, whereas myth and Jungian archetypes are collective postures of the mind with which the written form could not cope, any more than it could command mime and gesture.'

symbolic expressions of the inner, unconscious drama of the psyche which becomes accessible to man's consciousness by way of projection – that is, mirrored in the events of nature. (*Ibid.*)

Jung interprets the human being's actions as largely unconscious, 'activated' by a 'situation' corresponding to a certain archetype. He says:

There are as many archetypes as there are typical situations in life. Endless repetition has engraved these experiences into our psychic constitution, not in the form of images filled with content, but at first only as forms without content, representing merely the possibility of a certain type of perception and action. When a situation occurs which corresponds to a given archetype, that archetype becomes activated ... (*Ibid.* 48)

Jung studied the cross-cultural symbols that appear in dreams, folktales, religious imagery, alchemy, tarot cards, and myth, attributing the universality of archetypes to a phenomenon that he called 'the collective unconscious'. The concept is one that Jung struggled much to defend, and he was never able to settle the question of whether the archetype can be said to be 'inborn'. As Jung defines it, the archetype is 'essentially an unconscious content that is altered by becoming conscious'; and he says that the term 'designates only those psychic contents which have not yet been submitted to conscious elaboration' (*Ibid.* 5).

While the concept of the archetype in *From Cliché to Archetype* may seem 'a highly simplified interpretation of the Jungian view' (Zingrone, 2005 [2001]: 266), it must in fact be read as a retort to that put forward by Northrop Frye. Philip Marchand (1998 [1989]: 125) reports that McLuhan was no fan of Frye, and that during a University debate between Frye and Ted Carpenter 'over the nature of archetypes', 'Carpenter attacked Jung and [Sir James George] Frazer's understanding of the term, while Frye defended their use of it from a literary point of view'; McLuhan, Carpenter recalled, 'stood by', 'egging me on'. A chapter of *From Cliché To Archetype* is devoted to Jung's concept of the archetype, where McLuhan says that

Jung and his disciples have been careful to insist that the archetype is to be distinguished from its expression. Strictly speaking, a Jungian

archetype is a power or capacity of the psyche. Nevertheless even in Jung's writings the term is used with interchangeable senses. In *Psyche and Symbol* Jung declares that "the archetype is an element of our psychic structure and thus a vital and necessary component in our psychic economy. It represents or personifies certain instinctive data of the dark primitive psyche; the real, the invisible *roots of consciousness*." (CA 22)⁵⁵

In the 'Introduction' to *From Cliché to Archetype*, however, which (as the chapters are arranged alphabetically) appears about halfway through the book, McLuhan critiques Frye's interpretation of the 'archetype' by saying:

As we meditate upon the ancient clichés or sacro-breakthroughs, the literal man is inclined to consider them as "archetypes." For example, Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* defines archetype as "a symbol, usually an image, which recurs often enough in literature to be recognizable as an element of one's literary experience as a whole." Of course this particular definition is most un-Jungian in suggesting that archetypes are human artifacts produced by much repetition – in other words, a form of cliché. (118)

In McLuhan's theory of cliché and archetype, '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 is a unit extension of man, an archetype is a quoted extension, medium, technology, or environment.' (21) A cliché becomes an archetype '[by] way of resonance and repetition'. (150) Only if we think of the cliché as a *function* and the archetype as a *repeated* function ('engraved ... into our psychic constitution', as Jung says) can we appreciate the statement that 'The archetype is ... a retrieved cliché – an old cliché retrieved by a new cliché.' (21) McLuhan extends his definition of 'cliché' and 'archetype' to 'the nonlinguistic world', suggesting that any function, specifically any 'stock response', is a form of 'cliché'. He says:

It might be asked why the word "archetype" should seem to relate so exclusively to literature. The same question can be asked of "cliche": why is it almost exclusively verbal in its association? ... We are taking it for granted that there is at all times interplay between these worlds

⁵⁵ The citation is from Jung's essay 'The Psychology of the Child Archetype', in the section 'The Archetype as a Link with the Past', which reads precisely: '... certain instinctive data of the dark, primitive psyche; the real but invisible *roots of consciousness*.' (Jung, 1958: 123)

of percept and concept, verbal and nonverbal. Anything that can be observed about the behavior of linguistic cliché or archetype can be found plentifully in the nonlinguistic world. (19-20)

There is some ambiguity, however, in the way that the 'archetype' is conceptualized, for McLuhan says:

the archetype is extremely cohesive; other archetypes' residues adhere to it. When we consciously set out to retrieve one archetype, we unconsciously retrieve others; and this retrieval recurs in infinite regress. In fact, whenever we "quote" one consciousness, we also "quote" the archetypes we exclude... (21-22)

In other words, we can read McLuhan's 'archetype' as an 'unconscious' form corresponding to a 'conscious' cliché. But if we acknowledge that 'whenever we "quote" one consciousness, we also "quote" the archetypes we exclude', then we must also acknowledge that the 'archetype', in fact, by 'quoting' what it includes as well as what it excludes, is but another name for the structure of what McLuhan has, until this time, called 'interior landscape', 'acoustic space', or the 'media-environment'.

McLuhan suggests that through the use of the phonetic alphabet, print and mechanical technology, Western society has come to value the conscious (cliché) over the unconscious (archetype), so that the unconscious manifests as 'the environment of consciousness'. (200) However, 'A century of earnest probing of the unconscious [by Freud, Jung, et. al.] has revealed much of its structure and content, pushing them up into consciousness.' (*Ibid.*) Consequently, 'Consciousness has increasingly become the environment of the unconscious until we begin to "dream awake," as it were, losing the boundaries between private and corporate.' (*Ibid.*) In fact, McLuhan says that the 'ego' described by Freud and Jung is but an 'artefact' of Western culture, so that

Consciousness itself appears more and more a response to largely unconscious components in what we have long assumed to be the intransigent and "natural" configuration of our "private consciousness." Inevitably, as our electronic technology has extended not simply our bodies but also our nervous systems, we have become more deeply involved in other lives as portions of our own "unconscious." Greater awareness of our actual relation to the corporate life of mankind has

bred the utmost doubts concerning the "private" character of our own consciousness. (McLuhan in Matson *et.al.*, Eds., *op.cit.* 41)

McLuhan's targets here include not only Jung but Henri Bergson and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and his argument is indebted to Wyndham Lewis in *Time and Western Man* (1927). Jung (1990 [1959]: 3-4), describing the unconscious, says that

A more or less superficial layer of the unconscious is undoubtedly personal. I call it the personal unconscious. But this personal unconscious rests upon a deeper layer, which does not derive from personal experience and is not a personal acquisition but is inborn. This deeper layer I call the collective unconscious. I have chosen the term 'collective' because this part of the unconscious is not individual but universal; in contrast to the personal psyche, it has contents and modes of behaviour that are more or less the same everywhere and in all individuals. It is, in other words, identical in all men and thus constitutes a common psychic substrate of a suprapersonal nature which is present in every one of us.

In contrast to the 'collective unconscious' described by Jung, there is no suggestion that what McLuhan calls the 'collective unconscious' is 'inborn'; McLuhan's 'collective unconscious' is rather an *environment* for consciousness *per se*. In fact McLuhan's concept of the 'unconscious' as 'the corporate life of mankind' corresponds roughly with what Freud calls *Massenpsychologie* (see 'Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego', 1921, *SE XVIII*: pp.65-143). It corresponds less exactly with Jung's 'collective unconscious' (despite McLuhan's somewhat erroneous use of Jung's term). Freud in *Moses and Monotheism* (1939), drawing on his earlier study *Totem and Taboo* (1913), suggests that 'It is not easy to translate the concepts of individual psychology into mass psychology, and I do not think that much is to be gained by introducing the concept of a "collective" unconscious – the content of the unconscious is collective anyhow, a general possession of mankind.' (*Moses* 170) McLuhan, however, is not willing to grant to Freud the concept of a 'collective' unconscious. He says in a letter of 1969: 'The merely individualist psychology of Freud has flunked out in the new age of tribal and corporate identities.' (*L* 393)

If consciousness represents a certain configuration of components, muses McLuhan, then 'A cliché is an act of consciousness: total consciousness is the sum of all the clichés of the media or technologies we probe with.' (CA 150) Building on his work on 'repression' in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*, McLuhan says that the 'real significance [of the cliché] lies in the fact that all access to consciousness is tentative and uncertain' (CA 55). For the raising of one function to consciousness 'depends upon the suppression of huge quantities of unconscious archetypal materials' (39-40). 'A mind has many rationales; a cliché probe stresses only one of these at a time', McLuhan says; it works by 'select[ing] for use one item or one feature out of a vast middenheap of mythological materials. It may be that the cue for selection occurs when, from the rationale of a dominant cliché complex, we make a deprecatory adjustment toward the unconscious or the irrational ...' (39-40) In short, the 'irrational' is 'suppressed'. On the other hand, McLuhan says, "Superstitions' can be regarded as absurdist recognitions of alternative rationales' (40). In fact what is interesting about *From Cliche to Archetype*, when compared with McLuhan's earlier books, is that it shows McLuhan shifting from consideration of the technology/word as a *form* to consideration of the technology/word as a *signifier*. This is clear in McLuhan's new formulation of repression as a function of 'suppressing' the 'irrational'. It seems he was aware, however, that he had yet to master the subject. While initially picturing the book as 'a bit of a block-buster', McLuhan was dissatisfied with its final form, writing to his son Eric in December 1970: 'The *Cliche 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[liche]/A[rchetype].' (L 375, 418) In particular, he was troubled by the Joycean 'moment of arrest', writing to Eric: 'We really will have to get down to text and creases in order to cinch the full implications of frustration and hang-up and arrest as the metamorphic moment of epiphany.' (L 418-419)

Despite the plurality of concepts by which McLuhan describes 'consciousness', there is in fact utmost consistency from the concept of language as *Logos* in his doctoral thesis of 1943 through to the 'tetrad' ideograph in *Laws of Media*, where technologies are presented as fourfold analogies or 'metaphors', manifesting the four 'simultaneous

processes' of Extension, Obsolescence, Retrieval, and Reversal, in relation to the *Logos*. At all times, McLuhan is concerned with the *process* by which the *form* manifests (phenomenologically) in relation to the multi-sensory, 'unconscious' environment. The concept of 'repression' poses a problem, however, to that of *Logos*, and McLuhan's use of the Jungian concept of the 'archetype' may be read as an attempt to habilitate the concept of repression outside the context of the 'Oedipus complex' and 'castration complex' in which it is set by Freud. In his work after *From Cliché To Archetype*, McLuhan turns to gestalt theory as a means of synthesizing his 'structural' and 'phenomenological' methods, meanwhile abandoning the concept of 'repression' (as shall be shown in Chapter 5) for a 'metaphysical' concept of causality. From the mid 1950's, however, as I show in the next chapter, McLuhan invokes St. Thomas Aquinas to describe (phenomenologically) the dynamics of the *Logos*.

3 Dynamics of the (Collective) Unconscious

The inability of structural analysis to reveal the dynamism of consciousness leads McLuhan in his second book *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) to describe the unconscious as a *sensus communis*, i.e. the meeting place of the 'senses', a concept taken from St Thomas Aquinas and Aristotle. Work on *The Gutenberg Galaxy* was interrupted, however, by a project undertaken by McLuhan for the National Association of Education Broadcasters (NAEB) in 1959-1960, to develop a syllabus for senior high school students for the study of media. Research for this project spanned psychology, cognitive science and art theory, inspiring McLuhan to rewrite the concept of the *sensus communis* in terms of 'subjective completion' (i.e. the 'filling in' of perceptions by the viewer) or 'sensory closure' (as in gestalt psychology). The report on the project was published in late 1960 by the NAEB as 'Report on Project in Understanding New Media', and was subsequently reworked by McLuhan as *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964). Both *Understanding Media* and the Report upon which it is based are built on the insight that there is an economic principle at work in the *Logos*, an insight also developed by Freud (in relation to the psyche) in his early studies of hysteria, his 'metapsychological' papers and *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920). In fact if *The Mechanical Bride* is an answer to *Civilization and Its Discontents*, *Understanding Media* must be read as an answer to *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, for both invoke the concepts of 'pleasure', 'pain' and 'trauma' to describe the economic principle at work in consciousness (i.e. 'repression'). As there is nothing to suggest that McLuhan ever read this book of Freud's, his use of Freudian concepts in *Understanding Media* must be explained by other influences, either earlier than or secondary to Freud.

Sensus Communis

McLuhan attributes to St. Thomas Aquinas the concept of 'consciousness' as the

meeting place of the senses.⁵⁶ As he explains in *Take Today* (1972):

Aquinas reminds us that “all sensible qualities are related” by a power which had long been called [by Aristotle] “common sense.” This intellectual power is that by which every sense experience is simultaneously translated into all the other senses, presenting us with a unified sensory experience, which is consciousness. Consciousness is thus the act of *making sense* ... (TT 96)

Aristotle (1941: 584-585) presents his argument for a ‘common sensorium’ or ‘common sense’ in Book III, Chapter 2 of *Περὶ Ψυχῆς* (*De Anima* or *On the soul*, c. 350 BC) where he says that each sense ‘is relative to its particular group of sensible qualities: it is found in a sense-organ as such and discriminates the differences which exist within that group; e.g. sight discriminates white and black, taste sweet and bitter, and so in all cases’. He then asks: ‘Since we also discriminate white from sweet, and indeed each sensible quality from every other, with what do we perceive that they are different? It must be by sense; for what is before us is sensible objects...’ (*Ibid.* 585) Aristotle concludes that ‘Both the discriminating power and the time of its exercise must be one and undivided.’ (*Ibid.*) In his commentary on *De Anima*, St Thomas Aquinas says that the perceptions must be unified by means of a *sensus communis* (Aquinas’s Latin translation of Aristotle’s term) or ‘common sense’, which he (and McLuhan after him) suggests is that of ‘touch’. Aristotle (*op.cit.* 577) raises the problem of whether touch is ‘a single sense or a group of senses’ in *De Anima* Book II, Chapter 11. He says that ‘flesh is not the organ but the *medium* of touch’ (*Ibid.* 578-579). The organ of touch, he suggests, must be located where the object of touch is *perceived*, i.e., the place where

⁵⁶ McLuhan studied the work of St. Thomas Aquinas throughout his teaching life. A friend and colleague at St Louis University, where McLuhan taught from 1937 to 1944, was Bernard J. Muller-Thym, who had completed his M.A. in Latin at St. Louis University, and went on to complete a Ph.D. at the Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies in Toronto, on the writings of Meister Eckhart; in his biography of McLuhan, Philip Marchand says that the Philosophy Department at St. Louis University at that time ‘began and ended with St. Thomas Aquinas’, and he credits McLuhan’s knowledge in this field to Muller-Thym (Marchand, 1998 [1989]: 54; L 111, note 2). St. Michael’s College at the University of Toronto, where McLuhan taught from 1946, also boasted a ‘stronghold’ of Thomist scholars (Marchand, *op.cit.* 89). The famed medieval scholar Étienne Gilson (whose books McLuhan cites extensively in his doctoral thesis) was based exclusively from 1951 at the St. Michael’s College Pontifical Institute of Medieval Studies (a centre established by Gilson in 1929; from 1929 to 1951 he had divided his time between Toronto and the Collège de France in Paris), but to McLuhan’s disappointment Gilson was one who found McLuhan’s methods unpalatable (see *Ibid.* 90).

the senses meet together. In Chapter 13, Aristotle (*ibid.* 602) says, 'without touch it is impossible to have any other sense Touch takes place by direct contact with its objects All the other organs of sense, no doubt, perceive by contact, only the contact is mediate: touch alone perceives by immediate contact.' Accords Aquinas: 'the sense of touch is generically one, but is divided into several specific senses, and for this reason it extends to various contrarities We might also say that all those contrarities agree, each in some proximate genus, and all in a common genus, which is the common and formal object of touch.' (*Summa Theologica* Part I, Q. 78, Article 3)

In his books of the 1960's, McLuhan formulates the interplay of the senses in terms of 'tactility', which he says 'is not a sense but an interplay of all senses'; and from 1963, he relates 'tactility' or the sense of 'touch' to the function of the central nervous system (*CB* 23; see also *GG* 265; *UM* 107). Echoing Aquinas, and writing back to Aristotle, McLuhan suggests that while we are used to thinking of 'touch' as a function of the *skin*, it rather represents the 'contact', 'interplay' or communication of senses. He says: 'It may very well be that in our conscious inner lives the interplay among our senses is what constitutes the sense of touch. Perhaps *touch* is not just skin contact with *things*, but the very life of things in the *mind*? (*UM* 108, emphasis in original)⁵⁷

Sense-Ratio

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* McLuhan reformulates the *sensus communis* in terms of a 'sense-ratio', a concept ostensibly adopted from William Blake.⁵⁸ (The concept appears briefly in the NAEB report, III: 9.) Says McLuhan: 'It would seem that the extension of one or another of our senses by mechanical means ... can act as a sort of twist for the kaleidoscope of the entire sensorium. A new combination or ratio of the

⁵⁷ McLuhan extends his argument that 'touch' is the 'life of things in the mind' in *The Global Village* (1989) with Bruce Powers, drawing upon studies of the human brain:

The fact that neurons never actually connect, or touch, should be of immense interest to neurophysiologists. When an electrical impulse reaches the tip of a neuron's tail, or axon, it discharges a chemical called a neurotransmitter. This chemical message diffuses across a gap called a synapse to receptors located in the next cell, triggering yet another electrical charge that courses through another axon until the message reaches millions of other neurons. The brain, it would appear, is a mosaic that resonates in its "discrete" parts. (*GV* 50; see also *UM* 247-248)

⁵⁸ Northrop Frye's study of Blake, *Fearful Symmetry*, was published in 1947.

existing components occurs ...' (GG 55) Quoting from Blake's poem *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (written 1804-1820), McLuhan (GG 265) asserts that '*Jerusalem*, like so much of [Blake's] other poetry, is concerned with the changing patterns of human perception' and says that Blake's theme is captured in these lines from Book II, Chapter 34 of the poem:

If Perceptive organs vary, Objects of Perception seem to vary;
If the Perceptive Organs close, their Objects seem to close also.

McLuhan links the idea of the 'perceptive organs' *varying* and *closing* with the concept of 'ratio', which appears later in the poem (Book III, Chapter 74):

The Spectre is the Reasoning Power in Man, & when separated
From Imagination and closing itself as in steel in a Ratio
Of the Things of Memory, It thence frames Laws & Moralities
To destroy Imagination, the Divine Body, by Martyrdoms & Wars.

He explicates Blake's concept of 'Imagination' (a concept that appears in Aristotle, but that was popularized by Romantic poets such as Blake, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and John Keats) using the concept of 'synesthesia' to be found in E. H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion: A Study of the Psychology of Pictorial Representation* (1960), taken in turn from Heinrich Wölfflin's *Principles of Art History (Kunstgeschichtliche Grundbegriffe*, 1915) and Adolf von Hildebrand's *The Problem of Form in the Figurative Arts (Das Problem der Form in der bildenden Kunst*, 1893) (see GG 41, 81). Here is Gombrich's (1960: 366-368) description of 'synesthesia', which McLuhan cites in several places (UB 3, pp.22-23; GV 5):

What is called "synesthesia," the splashing over of impressions from one sense modality to another, is a fact to which all languages testify. They work both ways – from sight to sound and from sound to sight. We speak of loud colors or of bright sounds, and everyone knows what we mean. Nor are the ear and the eye the only senses that are thus converging to a common center. There is touch in such terms as "velvety voice" and "a cold light," taste with "sweet harmonies" of colors or sounds, and so on through countless permutations Synesthesia concerns relationships.

Relating this to Blake, McLuhan says:

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 ... (GG 265)

Against the concept of the 'sense-ratio', McLuhan presents the technology as a 'closed system' (prefigured by the technological 'strait jacket' in *The Mechanical Bride*). A 'closed system' is the technological 'extension' of a 'sense' that is 'incapable of interplay' with the other senses (GG 5). In fact the concept of the 'closed system', while McLuhan attributes it to Blake, has clearly been derived from systems theory, and specifically from Kenneth Boulding's *The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society* (1956), where Boulding suggests that the 'open system', which is characteristic of all 'life', is 'a structure ... which is continually taking in something from its environment and giving out something to its environment, all the while maintaining its structure in the middle of this flow', while the 'closed system', 'a system of a given number of variables constrained by some mutual functional relationships which move to some position of minimum potential and remain in this equilibrium', designates inorganic matter (32-33). As McLuhan puts it,

the price we pay for special technological tools, whether the wheel or the alphabet or radio, is that these massive *extensions* of ourselves constitute *closed* systems. Our private senses are not closed systems but are endlessly translated into each other in that experience which we call con-sciousness. Our extended senses, tools, technologies, through the ages, have been closed systems incapable of interplay or collective awareness. (GG 5)

McLuhan says that 'Blake makes quite explicit that when sense ratios change, men change. Sense ratios change when any one sense or bodily or mental function is externalized in technological form'. (*Ibid.* 265) Man 'is then compelled to behold the fragment of himself "closing itself as in steel."' (*Ibid.*)

Subjective Completion (Sensory Closure)

Like the concept of synesthesia, the concept of 'Subjective Completion' (later renamed 'Sensory Closure' and in *Understanding Media* merely called 'closure', in the manner of the gestalt psychologists) is taken from Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*, and from one of the books that influenced Gombrich, Adolf von Hildebrand's *The Problem of Form in the Figurative Arts*. McLuhan (NAEB III: 25) connects the concept of 'closure' with that of 'projection' in analytical psychology; Richard Cavell (2002: 122-123; see also GG 2) connects it also with the concept of 'empathy' (*Einfühlung*), to be found in Heinrich Wölfflin's *Principles of Art History*. Subjective Completion, or 'closure', in McLuhan's formulation, means that the sensorium is apt to 'fill in' perceptions where they are not directly stimulated by the environment.

In the 'Report on Project in Understanding New Media', McLuhan produces a number of 'charts' intended to show 'the dynamic symmetries and contours of the media' (NAEB III: 27). The charts introduce four categories: 'SI' (Structural Impact, later renamed 'Sensory Impact'); 'SC' (Subjective Completion, later renamed 'Sensory Closure'); 'LD' (Low Definition, which McLuhan later calls 'cool') and 'HD' (High Definition, which McLuhan later calls 'hot'). With the concepts of 'SI' and 'SC' McLuhan seeks to express the idea that: 'The media as extensions of the sense organs alter sensibility and mental process at once.' (letter to Walter Ong, 18 November 1961, L 280) He expands:

SI, or Structural Impact, refers to sensory impressions as they affect the beholder or audience. SC, or Subjective Completion, concerns the effect of this impression as it is processed by the audience. In psychology the SC is referred to as projection. In systems development SI becomes input and SC is output.... Our SC depends much on previous SI ... Perhaps the most useful formulation is that of Adelbert Ames: "perceptions are not disclosures." SI is not SC. The impression is not the experience. The beholder must collaborate in creating the illusions of space, as of time. The receiver of a structured impression, such as any medium offers, must be attuned to that structure. (NAEB III: 25-26)

McLuhan says that a medium that is auditory in High Definition, such as the radio, prompts a Subjective Completion (or SC) which is visual and tactile in High Definition. Conversely, a film, which is visual in High Definition, prompts a Subjective Completion which is auditory and tactile in High Definition. A Low Definition medium, meanwhile, such as the telephone, which McLuhan says is auditory, prompts a Low Definition Subjective Completion in the other senses. Envisaging a 'scientific' test to predict these effects, McLuhan wrote Bernard Muller-Thym (a friend and colleague from his years at St. Louis University): 'I am trying to get the systems-development people to work out flow charts which would enable us to chart and predict the effects of input through any one sense, as it affects the ratio of intensities in the other senses.' (L 271) The charts presented in the NAEB Report depict the SI and SC for the media of speech, writing, print, prints (i.e. visual art), press, photography, telegraph, telephone, phonograph, film (movies), radio, and television. McLuhan says that a Low Definition medium evokes the greatest degree of involvement or participation, while High Definition media have a 'hypnotic' effect. Describing 'speech' as 'technologically a very poor medium', McLuhan says that 'Speech fosters highest levels of awareness, precisely because it does such a poor job of communication. When a medium is doing a poor job, it commands the highest degree of participation between speaker and speaker, between speaker and audience.' (NAEB III: 123) He attributes the pervasive 'tactility' of TV to the fact that it, too, is 'low in information', explaining that

The S-I 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. The television image is low in information (LD). It is high in contour, sculptural and tactile values. These elicit the highest degree of participation response of any medium we have. (*Ibid.* p.136)

McLuhan says that the movie (along with the photograph) is a high-definition 'reversal' of print technology, and 'utterly unlike telegraph, radio, and TV' (UB 1, p.30). 'The TV image', in contrast, 'is a mosaic mesh not only of horizontal lines but of millions of tiny dots The contours of the resultant cartoonlike image are fleshed out within the imagination of the viewer, which necessitates great personal involvement and participation' (EM 246). McLuhan describes the difference between TV and film as that

between High Definition Sensory Impact for film (with the corresponding High Definition Sensory Closure) and Low Definition Sensory Impact for TV (with the corresponding Low Definition Sensory Closure). Both, he says, are tactile in their Sensory Closure, but TV is more tactile than film because with TV 'it is the SI itself which bombards us with tactile values' (NAEB III: 117).⁵⁹ Despite the fact that film is 'technically superior' to TV, McLuhan says that TV, like speech, is more agreeable to 'dialogue'. He explains: 'Radio and film are technically superior to television in terms of information flow achieved. In the same way, writing is superior to speech, and print to writing. But the interchange which is dialogue reaches a higher intensity as information is withheld.' (*Ibid.*, p.123) Speech, like TV, is Low Definition in both Sensory Impact and Subjective Completion; in fact, McLuhan depicts speech as a medium of 'maximal stability', and the medium with the 'richest' Subjective Completion, writing that

As the only medium using all the senses at once, speech also uses all of the senses in LD. Since the SI is in LD, the SC or response is one of deep participation, in all the senses also. That is, if any one sense were given HD in speaking, we would not tend so much to respond with all senses, as with those complementary to the one in HD.... When SI is in Low Definition, the SC response tends to involve all of our senses more than when the SI is in High Definition. Since speech has all senses in SI (and all of these in LD) the SC effect is the richest possible to any medium. Since the SI-SC are similar, this makes for maximal stability of the medium. (*Ibid.*, p.35)

Speech, McLuhan says, is unique among technologies in that it preserves the divine harmonic ratios of *Logos*. Technologies, meanwhile, which extend certain senses in High Definition, tend to upset the 'harmony' of the senses. Every technology has this effect, as he explains in *Understanding Media*: 'To behold, use or perceive any extension of ourselves in technological form is necessarily to embrace it to undergo

⁵⁹ On the development of the talking picture from the silent picture, McLuhan says: When the movies became the "talkies," HD sound intensified an already HD visual medium. Silent pictures had a strong auditory SC. When sound was added technologically as part of the SI, fantasy mounted at the expense of creative participation. But silent or talking movie SC always had a large tactile component. Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World* was wide of the mark in imagining that the "feelies" lay ahead in a world of nightmare Utopia. The movies were already the feelies in SC. With television, it is the SI itself which bombards us with tactile values. (NAEB III: 117, emphasis in original)

the "closure" or displacement of perception that follows automatically.' (UM 46)

Reformulating the concepts of 'HD' and 'LD' in *Understanding Media*, McLuhan describes media as either 'hot' or 'cool'. The cool medium is 'low-definition', where 'much has to be filled in' by the user (UM 23). Hot media, on the other hand, activate 'one single sense' in 'high-definition' (*Ibid.* 22). McLuhan defines speech, telephone and TV as 'cool', and the alphabet, book and film as 'hot'. However, he says that some media, such as radio, might be 'hot' in a cool culture, but 'cool' in a hot culture. He hypothesizes that 'the hotting-up of one sense tends to effect hypnosis, and the cooling of all senses tends to result in hallucination.' (32) Hypnosis is brought about through the repetitive use of one of the senses, such as happens with the use of a mechanical technology. Hallucination, meanwhile, manifests as 'a furious fill-in or completion of sense' when 'all outer sensation is withdrawn'. (*Ibid.*) McLuhan says that 'low definition' media (speech, telephone, TV, etc.) are 'high participation', inviting hallucination, while 'high-definition' media (books and films, for example) are 'low participation', inducing a state of hypnosis. He also relates the concept of 'cooling off' to the Freudian super-ego, saying that:

any intense experience must be "forgotten," "censored," and reduced to a very cool state before it can be "learned" or assimilated. The Freudian "censor" is less of a moral function than an indispensable condition of learning. Were we to accept fully and directly every shock to our various structures of awareness, we would soon be nervous wrecks, doing double-takes and pressing panic buttons every minute. The "censor" protects our central system of values, as it does our physical nervous system by simply cooling off the onset of experience a great deal. (24)

Here McLuhan echoes Wyndham Lewis (1927: 414), who says that 'The sensa-world is a world of the unconscious or automatic It is the world of things that, in the usual way, we do not explicitly notice, which we *repress* and push down and away, out of sight, and yet which throng our sense-field.' In fact there is no suggestion here that 'repression' is an effect of the castration complex, as it is in Freud; Lewis, like McLuhan after him, presents 'repression' (or 'cooling off') as the function by which we cope with the barrage of sensory perceptions confronting us.

Ablation

In several places, McLuhan connects the concept of 'closure' with that of 'ablation'. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, he cites from *The Study of Experimental Medicine* (1957) by Claude Bernard:

Experiment ... implies ... the idea of a variation or disturbance that the investigator brings into the conditions of natural phenomena.... To do this, we suppress an organ in the living subject, by a section or ablation; and from the disturbance produced in the whole organism or in a special function, we deduce the function of the missing organ. (GG 3)

McLuhan applies Bernard's concept not to the human body and its organs, but to the functions of humankind as a whole. Writing to Walter Ong in 1962, McLuhan says:

Did you get the point of "closure" from my charts? SI-SC. Chair for example is ablation of squat posture. Chair itself is an ablative absolute, that is. But its existence effects a "closure" or rearrangement of other gestures. Closure of chair is table, of wheel is road, of radio is intense visualisation etc. (L 286)

After 1963, McLuhan integrates the concept of 'closure' with Adolphe D. Jonas's thesis in *Irritation and Counterirritation* (1962), arguing that any 'extension' of ourselves in technology effects a 'generalized numbness' in response to a 'specialized irritation' (see 'Central Nervous System' below). Describing the 'numbing' effects of new technology in relation to ablation/closure, McLuhan says in *Counterblast* (1970):

The **one area** which is **numb and unconscious** is the area which receives the **impact**. Thus there is an **exact parallel** with **ablation** in **experimental medicine**, but in **medical ablation observation** is properly **directed, not** to the **numb** area, but to all the **other organs** as they are **affected** by the **numbing** or **ablation** of the **single organ**. (CB 42, emphasis in original)

Note that here McLuhan has shifted from the language of the NAEB report, which

describes the psyche or perception/consciousness (i.e. in terms of 'Structural Impact' and 'Subjective Completion'), to describing the effects of technologies upon 'all the other organs' in the *environment*.

Energy

Behind McLuhan's concept of the dynamic 'senses', but rarely explicit, is a concept of 'energy'. Although McLuhan's use of the term may be attributed to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, it is in fact an ancient concept with which he would have been familiar from his doctoral study. Heraclitus named 'fire' the source of energy in the universe; Thales, 'water'; Anaximander, the Indeterminate; Anaximedes, 'air'; Aristotle, says Étienne Gilson in *God and Philosophy*, one of the books McLuhan studied for his doctoral thesis, is the first to identify the first principle as that of 'God' (Gilson, 1941: 1-4; 32). Aquinas follows Aristotle, arguing that 'whatever is in motion is put in motion by another It is ... impossible that in the same respect and in the same way a thing should be both mover and moved, i.e. that it should move itself.... it is necessary to arrive at a first mover, put in motion by no other; and this everyone understands to be God' (*Summa Theologica* Part 1, Q.2, Article 3.) Arthur Schopenhauer uses the term 'will' (*Wille*), explaining in *Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung* (1819, tr. *The World as Will and Representation*):

Phenomenon means representation and nothing more. All representation, be it of whatever kind it may, all *object*, is *phenomenon*. But only the *will* is *thing-in-itself*; as such it is not representation at all, but *toto genere* different therefrom. It is that of which all representation, all object, is the phenomenon, the visibility, the *objectivity*. It is the innermost essence, the kernel, of every particular thing and also of the whole. It appears in every blindly acting force of nature, and also in the deliberate conduct of man, and the great difference between the two concerns only the degree of the manifestation, not the inner nature of what is manifested. (Schopenhauer, 1966, volume 1: 110)

Freud, writing after Schopenhauer, conceptualizes the unit of 'will' or 'energy' (*Energie*) as a 'drive' (*Trieb*); Teilhard (1959: 64-65), meanwhile, employs a *dialectic* between

'radial energy' and 'tangential energy' to argue that evolution must inevitably occur at the level of a plurality, not at the level of the individual organism. Thus, just as new inventions (e.g. the telegraph) are invented at the same time in different parts of the world, so too do species evolve across the Earth as a *plurality* (or 'conglomerate'), due to the 'radial' energy that they share (Teilhard, 1964: 160, 165). McLuhan, while he does not stress the concept of 'energy', echoes Teilhard in a number of places, writing in *Understanding Media* of 'hybrid energy', and later describing the 'environment' as 'a special organization of available energies' (see *UM* chapter 5; *UB* 20, p. 3). McLuhan must have been familiar with the Freudian concept of 'energy' from Ruesch and Bateson's *Communication: The Social Matrix of Psychiatry* (1951), which he read around 1951, annotating and discussing the book with graduate student Donald Theall (see Ruesch and Bateson, 1951: 246-253; Theall, 2001: 8, 224, 268 note 17). Bateson explains how for Freud, 'Psychic energy is protean in its transformations, so that a wish or hatred not acted upon in one way will predictably find phenomenal expression in some other way.' (Ruesch *et. al.*, *op.cit.* 1951: 248) As well as Ruesch and Bateson's book, and not forgetting *Civilization and Its Discontents*, which McLuhan read in the late 1940's, there is another book which must have brought the concept of the 'drive' to McLuhan's attention: Otto Fenichel's classic *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (1945), which McLuhan read in 1957. *Explorations* 8 (October 1957), subsequently reissued as *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations* (1967), includes 24 short 'items' by McLuhan including one named 'Oral-Anal' (Item 9) in which McLuhan, using Fenichel's descriptions of 'oral' attitudes to objects, tries to align 'oral' cultures with the 'oral' character, and 'visual' cultures with the 'anal' character (see *VVV* Item 9; *EM* 191; Fenichel, 1945: 487-492). It is possible that McLuhan's interest in Fenichel's book was restricted to the sections on 'Anal Character Traits' and 'Oral Character Traits' in Chapter XX from which he takes his examples; as Ted Carpenter (2001: 9) reports, McLuhan 'skimmed several books a day'. It is likewise possible, however, that Chapter II of Fenichel's book, 'The Dynamic, The Economic, and the Structural Points of View', which includes sections on 'Mental Dynamics', 'Mental Economics' and 'Mental Structure', introduced McLuhan to Freud's 'metapsychological' method.⁶⁰ The 'Oral-

⁶⁰ Ruesch and Bateson (1951: 254) only once refer to Freud's 'metapsychological' method,

Anal' item concludes: 'The psychodynamics of sight, sound and language take easy precedence over social biology as concepts and instruments of explanation of these phenomena [of 'oral' and 'anal' characters]'. (VVV Item 9; *EM* 191) The term 'psychodynamics' likewise appears in a letter of 21 September 1957 to Walter Ong, where McLuhan says: 'More and more I am baffled at my inability to get serious attention for psychodynamics of media I have yet to discover one sentence in any student or author since 1500 that hinted at any awareness of the inherent psycho and social dynamics of any medium.' (*L* 251) ⁶¹ In fact McLuhan's concept of 'energy', while applied to the 'environment' *per se* and including the 'psychodynamics' of media, recalls Freud's 'metapsychological' system as much as Teilhard's evolutionary biology, and there is great similarity between McLuhan's concept of the 'senses', as the units of this hybridizing 'energy', and Freud's concept of the libido or 'drives' (*Triebe*).

The drive, Freud says in one of his papers on metapsychology, 'is so to say our mythology [in psychoanalysis]' (*SE* XXII: 95). He describes the drive as '*an urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things* which the living entity has been obliged to abandon under the pressure of external disturbing forces; that is, it is a kind of organic elasticity, or to put it another way, the expression of the inertia inherent in organic life.' (*SE* XVIII: 36, emphasis in original) The German word *Trieb* is often translated as 'instinct' and still appears as such in the Standard Edition of the English translation of Freud. However modern critics such as Otto Fenichel (1945: 12) and Jacques Lacan (1977: 49) have questioned the rendering of *Trieb* as 'instinct', and today the term 'drive' has come to be accepted as a better translation for *Trieb*. Freud himself distinguishes between '*Instinkt*', which is a term he applies to animal biology, and *Trieb* (i.e. the drive), which he applies strictly to the human being. Initially, Freud distinguished between two classes of drives, 'ego-libido' and 'object-libido'; however,

writing 'Metapsychology (is) the coordination of the various points of view (dynamic, historical, and economic).'

⁶¹ The collection of McLuhan's letters published in 1987 includes only one letter from 1956, two from 1957, and none at all from 1958. The editors report that McLuhan's letters were dictated and typed from 1959; in 1957 he was still handwriting his letters. While there is little detail of this period provided in Philip Marchand's biography, by 1957 McLuhan was father to six children, and was becoming increasingly in demand as a speaker and consultant (see Marchand, 1989 [1998]: 144-147). It is likely that his attention to Fenichel's book was fleeting.

his study of the narcissistic phase in infantile sexual development, in which the ego is also the 'object' of the libido, led him to conclude that such a distinction may not hold ("On Narcissism: An Introduction", 1914, *SE XIV*: 67-102; see also Gay, 1988: 341). In his 1915 paper *Trieb und Triebchicksale* (1915, 'Instincts and their Vicissitudes'), Freud reformulates the function of the drive in terms of four elements: *Drang* (pressure); *Quelle* (the source); *Objekt* (the object); and *Ziel* (the aim) (*SE XIV*: 122-123; Lacan, 1977b: 162). The source is an eroticized function of the body (e.g. the mouth, in the oral drive; the anus, in the anal drive; the penis, in the phallic drive; etc.). *Drang* (pressure) is an internal 'excitation' (*Reiz*); and the *Ziel* (aim) of the drive is its trajectory towards 'satisfaction' (*Befriedigung*), achieved by eliminating the 'stimulation' (i.e. *Reiz*) at the source of the drive (*SE XIV*: 119). The object, meanwhile, is that 'in regard to which or through which [the drive] is able to achieve its aim', e.g. the breast, in the case of breast-feeding (*Ibid.* 122). However, Freud tells us that the object of drive is itself 'of no importance. It is a matter of total indifference', as Lacan says (see *Ibid.* 122-123; Lacan, 1977b: 168) As Lacan (*op.cit.* 180) explains, the object of drive is 'a hollow, a void, which can be occupied, Freud tells us, by any object'. Freud says that objects are eroticized when they become 'cathected' with libido, and that '[t]o begin with, sexual activity attaches itself to functions serving the purpose of self-preservation and does not become independent of them until later' (*SE VII*: 182). He explains how, in the act of breast-feeding, the baby's mouth comes to function as an erotogenic zone, so that other objects (such as the thumb, in thumb-sucking) may come to be substituted for the breast. (Freud calls this 'the oral drive'.) As Freud says in the *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*: 'it is clear that the behaviour of a child who indulges in thumb-sucking is determined by a search for some pleasure which has already been experienced and is now remembered.... It was the child's first and most vital activity, his sucking at his mother's breast, or at substitutes for it, that must have familiarized him with this pleasure.' (*SE VII*: 181) This is expressed more clearly in the *Outline*: 'The baby's obstinate persistence in sucking gives evidence at an early stage of a need for satisfaction which, though it originates from and is instigated by the taking of nourishment, nevertheless strives to obtain pleasure independently of nourishment and for that reason may and should be termed *sexual*.' (*SE XXIII*: 154)

Freud hypothesizes in the *Three Essays* that 'sexual excitation arises (a) as a reproduction of a satisfaction experienced in connection with other organic processes [e.g. sucking at the breast, defecation, urination, etc.] (b) through appropriate peripheral stimulation of erotogenic zones and (c) as an expression of certain 'instincts' ...' (SE VII: 200)

Notwithstanding the fact that Freud, unlike McLuhan, is concerned with the problem of sexuality, McLuhan's concept of the 'senses' serves the same function in McLuhan's 'phenomenology' as the concept of the 'drives' in Freud, a fact best explained by the influence of Teilhard upon McLuhan. (Tom Wolfe, who first met McLuhan in 1965, says in *The Video McLuhan*, a collection of McLuhan's video interviews later transcribed as *Understanding Me*, that Teilhard 'influenced McLuhan every bit as much as Harold Innis', and that McLuhan's silence on this matter is due to the fact that Teilhard was held as both too much of a 'Darwinist' for the Catholic church, and yet too much of a 'Catholic mystic' in academic circles: see *Understanding Me*, p.xvi). In the *Introductory Lectures* (from lectures given by Freud in 1915-1916 and 1916-1917), Freud explains that the sexual drives

are extraordinarily *plastic*, if I may so express it. One of them can take the place of another, one of them can take over another's intensity; if the satisfaction of one of them is frustrated by reality, the satisfaction of another can afford complete compensation. They are related to one another like a network ... (SE XVI: 345; see also XXII: 97; Lacan, 1997: 91)

Compare this to McLuhan's description of the 'senses' in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*:

the principle of exchange and translation, or metaphor, is in our rational power to translate all our senses into one another. This we do every instant of our lives.... Our private senses ... are endlessly translated into each other in that experience which we call consciousness. (GG 5)

McLuhan recalls Teilhard's evolutionary biology when he says that media, 'being extensions of ourselves [i.e. of our 'private senses'], also depend on us for their interplay and their evolution ... they do interact and spawn new progeny ...' (UM 49) In

forming 'hybrids', McLuhan says, media 'release ... energy and change' (*Ibid.*). He says, for example, that

of all the great hybrid unions that breed furious release of energy and change, there is none to surpass the meeting of literate and oral cultures. The giving to man of an eye for an ear by phonetic literacy is, socially and politically, probably the most radical explosion [of energy] that can occur in any social structure. (*Ibid.*)

McLuhan relates the 'detrribalization' of oral cultures to the process of 'fission', i.e. the splitting of an atom, and the 'retribalization' of literate cultures by electronic communications technology to the process of 'fusion', i.e. the fusing together of atomic nuclei to create a single atom. McLuhan says,

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. (50)

It is clear that McLuhan and Freud share an emphasis on 'energy' as the driving force of evolution, but while for Freud the constructive manifestations of this energy are essentially *sexual* in nature, for McLuhan, influenced by Teilhard and Henri Bergson, this energy predates the evolution of sexuality. Freud's achievement, says McLuhan, was to reveal 'the pervasiveness of sex as structure in experience and environment and in situations that seem to have just nothing at all to do with sex' (L 318). However, where Freud is interested in how the psyche is structured by the libido or sexual 'drives', McLuhan's interest is in how aspects of human activity, *including sex*, are structured by the technological 'senses' in the 'environment'.

Extension

The source of McLuhan's concept of the technology as the 'extension' of a sense has been widely debated. McLuhan says in the NEAB Report, reformulating Harold Innis, that 'Any medium whatever is an extension, a projection in space or in time, of our

various senses.' (NAEB III: 13; see also Innis, 1991 [1951]: 31) Richard Cavell (2002: 82) connects McLuhan's concept of the technology as an 'extension' to the Freudian concept of the technology as an 'auxiliary organ' or 'prosthetic' which appears in *Civilization and its Discontents*. Freud says that:

With every tool man is perfecting his own organs, whether motor or sensory, or is removing the limits to their functioning.... Man has, as it were, become a kind of prosthetic God. When he puts on all his auxiliary organs he is truly magnificent; but those organs have not grown on to him and they still give him much trouble at times. (SE XXI: 90-92)

We can be certain that McLuhan read *Civilization and Its Discontents* in the years prior to the publication of *The Mechanical Bride* (q.v. Chapter 1). However, it is Edmund T. Hall's book *The Silent Language* (1959) from which McLuhan cites in the Prologue to *The Gutenberg Galaxy*: 'Today man has developed extensions for practically everything he used to do with his body.... all man-made material things can be treated as extensions of what man once did with his body or some specialized part of his body.' (Hall, 1959: 79; GG 4) Ted Carpenter (2001: 19) attributes McLuhan's concept of the technology as 'extension' to Hall. That Hall had read *Civilization and its Discontents* is highly likely, for he had an interest in psychology in general, and specifically in the connections between 'culture' and 'biology' (arguing in *The Silent Language*, p.60, that culture is 'rooted in biological activities ... laid down at different times in the history of evolution'). His sources for *The Silent Language* include Freud's *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis* (1923), and he explicitly criticizes Freud's concept of the 'unconscious' as well as Freud's preoccupation with language (i.e. words and symbols) over other forms of 'communication' (Hall, *op.cit.* 83-85). McLuhan, who references *The Silent Language* in the NAEB report, indicates his respect for Hall in a number of letters to Walter Ong in late 1961 and early 1962 (see L 280, 285, 287);⁶² and in one of these letters McLuhan attributes to Hall the concept of 'media as extensions of the sense organs':

⁶² References to *The Silent Language* resurface in McLuhan's later books *Through the Vanishing Point*, *Take Today* and *Laws of Media*.

You know Ed Hall's *The Silent Language*? Do get same if not. He provides not my kind of thing, but a helpful approach to same. The media as extensions of the sense organs alter sensibility and mental process at once. All the *other* senses are altered in themselves, and in their ratios among themselves, by any technology that extends or externalizes any *one* of them. (L 280)

McLuhan met Hall, then Professor of Political Theory and Cultural Relations at John Hopkins University, Washington, in 1963, when McLuhan visited the University to speak at the Institute for International Development (see L 383, footnote 1). The two corresponded over the years, and in 1975, Hall sent McLuhan the proofs for his book *Beyond Culture*, which included the note:

Marshall McLuhan used to talk about innering and outering (processes he could see at work in man), and few people knew what he meant until he began speaking in terms of extensions – a term he borrowed from the author – in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962). (Hall, 1981 [1976]: 245, note 4; L 515, footnote 1)

McLuhan wrote to Hall in December 1975, after reading the proofs: 'Of course I am unhappy about ... where you accuse me of unacknowledged borrowing. How happy I would have been to give you full credit had I recognized the source at the time of writing!' (L 515) Replying to this letter, Hall reassured McLuhan that 'We all get things from each other'. (*Ibid.*, footnote 1) In fact, the concept of 'extension' was not originally Hall's. Writing to Walter Ong in February 1962, McLuhan notes: 'Ed T Hall ... says he got the idea of our technologies as outerings of sense and function from Buckminster Fuller. I got it from nobody. But now I find it the core of W[illia]m Blake.' (L 287; see also PC 19) Buckminster Fuller (1895-1983), whom McLuhan met at the Delos symposium of 1962, noted in a letter of November 1966 to John Ragsdale (editor of *Biophilist*):

Regarding McLuhan, I have known him for five years. He acknowledges use of my concept and phrasing of the "Mechanical" and other "Extensions of Man" which was first published in the "predictions" in my preface to *Nine Chains to the Moon*, Lippincott – 1939, and also in my charts in 1938 and republished in my book *The Epic of Industrialization*, written in 1940. I speak about such phenomena as a scientist, McLuhan speaks as a Professor of

Literature. (L 308, footnote 1)

Fuller, of course, was writing in the pre-war era when Freud's work was generating much interest in America; and we may reasonably assume that Fuller had read *Civilization and its Discontents*.

It is likely that the concept of 'extension' in McLuhan was partly inspired by his study of James Joyce. McLuhan first read *Ulysses* in 1936-1937, while working as a Graduate Assistant at Wisconsin University (see L 92). Joyce presents the chapters of *Ulysses* (serialized in *The Little Review* from 1918) each as an analogy of an organ of the human body: one chapter represents the heart, another the brain, another the lungs, another the genitals, the ear, the eye, the nerves, and so on, as revealed in Joyce's chart of the book in Stuart Gilbert's book *James Joyce's Ulysses* (1930) (see Gilbert, 1930: 40). McLuhan wrote in 1952: 'The shape of *Ulysses* is that of the city presented as the organic landscape of the human body. The shape of the *Wake* is the same, save that the landscape of the human mind and body is presented more intimately and under a much greater diversity of forms ...' (IL 158) Refracted through Joyce, the city functions as an organizing body (or *sensus communis*) for the manifold 'extensions' of man, a concept further pursued by McLuhan from the early 1950's in discussions with Jacqueline Tyrwhitt. McLuhan acknowledges the influence of Joyce in his concept of 'extension' in a 1967 version of his essay 'The Relation of Environment to Anti-Environment', writing that 'Joyce ... calls the extensions of man, whether in weaponry or clothing, the "extinctions of man". For every extension not only colors and enlarges our lives but also extinguishes a part of us.' (McLuhan in Matson and Montagu, eds., 1967: 39)

In *Take Today* (with Barrington Nevitt) and at www.marshallmcluhan.com, the concept of 'extension' is credited to American writer Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882), and dated 1870. To Emerson, 'The human body is the magazine of inventions, the patent-office, where are the models from which every hint was taken. All the tools and engines on earth are only extensions of its limbs and senses' (TT 86; see also www.marshallmcluhan.com/faqs.html). James M. Curtis (1978: 34-35, 61-79; 1981:

147-148) attributes the concept of the technology as 'extension' to German writer Ernst Kapp in *Grundlinien einer Philosophie der Technik* (1877, tr. *Outlines of a Philosophy of Technology*), prefigured by Hegel's *Naturphilosophie* or *Philosophy of Nature* in his *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences* (1816, revised 1827 and 1830); and Curtis finds the same concept in Henri Bergson's *L'Evolution créatrice* (1907, tr. *Creative Evolution*) and *Les Deux Sources de la morale et de la religion* (1932, tr. *The Two Sources of Religion and Morality*); in Part Two of Ernst Cassirer's *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen* (1925), translated as *Mystical Thought*; in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's *Le Phénomène Humain* (1955, written 1938-1940, tr. *The Phenomenon of Man*), influenced by Bergson; and in Jean Gebser's *Ursprung und Gegenwart* (1949/1953, literally '*Origin and Present*', tr. *The Ever-Present Origin*), influenced by both Cassirer and Bergson. Bergson's work was familiar to McLuhan from the late 1930's (see *L* 77), and Teilhard's from the late 1940's; in a letter of August 1963 McLuhan notes 'That electro-magnetism as such is an extension of the central nervous system is a persistent theme of Teilhard de Chardin in his *Phenomenon of Man*' (*L* 292). While there is no evidence that McLuhan had read Cassirer's *Philosophy of Symbolic Forms*, his *Language and Myth* (1946), a translation by Susanne K. Langer of Cassirer's short essay *Sprache und Mythos* (upon which his three-volume work is based), is referenced by McLuhan in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (pp. 25-26). Here, Cassirer (1946: 59) says that the evolution of humankind and its environment is characterized by 'increasing mediation', reflected in 'the invention and use of *tools*'; moreover, 'as soon as man employs a tool, he views it not as a mere artifact of which he is the recognized maker, but as a Being in its own right, endowed with powers of its own. Instead of being governed by his will, it becomes a god or daemon on whose will he depends – to which he feels himself subjected ...' Richard Cavell (2002: 256-257, footnote 52) first finds McLuhan using the term 'extension' in an article of 1955, 'A Historical Approach to the Media', and notes still other incidences of the concept that may have influenced McLuhan: e.g. Nobel laureate Georg Von Békésy's *Sensory Inhibition* (1967) and Le Corbusier's concept of decorative art as 'an extension of our limbs – in fact *artificial limbs*.'

Curtis (1978: 74-75) also traces the concept of 'extension' to Lewis Mumford's *Technics and Civilization* (1934), which McLuhan read in the 1940's (Marchand, 1998 [1989]: 77). In fact characteristic of the concept of 'extension' put forward by Freud and McLuhan, as well as by Bergson (whose *Creative Evolution* predates *Civilization and Its Discontents* by more than twenty years), Teilhard, Mumford, and Edmund T. Hall, is that all characterize 'extensions' in technology in terms of the evolutionary process (see e.g. Freud, *SE XXI*: 90-91; Mumford, 1934: 10; Hall, 1959: 78-79). Siegfried Giedion, likewise, in *Mechanization Takes Command*, proposes a principle of 'dynamic equilibrium' to describe the evolution of 'man and his environment' (Giedion, 1955 [1948]: 719-720). He says 'the relations between man and his environment are subject to continual and restless change There is no static equilibrium between man and his environment, between inner and outer reality.' (*Ibid.* 720) McLuhan invokes the concept of 'equilibrium' in *Understanding Media*, arguing that

The Greek word *ponos*, or "toil," was a term used by Hippocrates, the father of medicine, to describe the fight of the body in disease. Today this idea is called *homeostasis*, or equilibrium as a strategy of the staying power of any body. All organizations, but especially biological ones, struggle to remain constant in their inner condition amidst the variations of outer shock and change. The man-made social environment as an extension of man's physical body is no exception. The city, as a form of the body politic, responds to new pressures and irritations by resourceful new extensions – always in the effort to exert staying power, constancy, equilibrium, and *homeostasis*. (*UM* 98)

McLuhan had been blurring the distinction between the 'mechanical' and the 'organic' since *The Mechanical Bride*, repeating Norbert Wiener's argument that 'since all organic characteristics can now be mechanically produced, the old rivalry between mechanism and vitalism is finished. After all, the Greek word "organic" meant "machine" to them.' (*MB* 34) If the technology is no more than an evolutionary adaptation, just like every other organ of the human body, then there is no distinction to be found between an organ such as the eye and a technology such as the telescope. Invoking Samuel Butler's dystopic novel *Erewhon* (1872), McLuhan quips that 'Consequently we have now arrived near the day of the automatic factory, when we shall find it as natural for an unaided factory to produce cars as for the liver to

secrete bile or the plant to put forth leaves.' (MB 34) Technology becomes the organs of the environment itself, leading McLuhan to suggest that

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. (UM 46)

As he puts it in *War and Peace in the Global Village*, 'The extensions of man with their ensuing environments, it's now fairly clear, are the principal area of manifestation of the evolutionary process.' (WP 19) Again, in *Counterblast*: 'The new media are not bridges between man and nature: they are nature.' (CB 14)

As well as an 'extension', McLuhan dubs the technology an 'enhancement', 'amplification', 'outering' or 'uttering', 'translation' or 'metaphor' of an organ, sense or function; from 1962, he invokes experimental medicine to describe the technology as an 'ablation' (see above); while from 1963, he borrows from the work of Adolphe D. Jonas to characterize the technology as a 'counter-irritant' or 'auto-amputation' (see 'Central Nervous System' below). Note, however, that from 1973 or so, McLuhan ceases to conceptualize the technology primarily as an 'extension', instead conceptualizing it as a 'word' – 'with a linguistic structure'. Thus, a technology is an extension but not a *logical* or *metonymical* extension (i.e. 'X is Y'); it is rather an *analogical* or *metaphorical* extension (i.e., 'A is to B as C is to D'), manifesting the four 'simultaneous processes' of 'Enhancement', 'Obsolescence', 'Retrieval' and 'Reversal' (q.v. Chapter 5).

Reversal

The law of reversal, as McLuhan calls it in *Laws of Media*, describes an economic principle in the *Logos*, i.e. in the 'reason and speech' of humankind. That this principle operates at the level of signification is recognized in language ('light' as differentiated

from 'dark', 'good' as differentiated from 'evil', 'pleasure' as differentiated from 'pain', etc.), however McLuhan is concerned with 'reversal' at the level of form. In a letter of 1969 to Jacques Maritain, McLuhan says: 'It was Aquinas who alerted me ... to the principle of complementarity inherent in all created forms. (In the *Summa*, 1-11, Q.113, a.7, ad quantum).' (L 370) He cites from the *Summa*: 'Et ido in toto tempore praecedenti, quo aliquid movetur ad unam formam, subset formae oppositae; et in ultimo instanti illius temporis, quod est primum instans . . .' – 'And therefore in the preceding time, by which anything is moved towards a form, it is supported by its opposite form; and in the final instant of its time, which is the first instant . . .' (L 371) McLuhan asserts that: 'The same principle is stated in the *I Ching* that when any form reaches the end of its potential, it reverses its characteristics.' (L 370) He also relates the phenomenon of reversal to the rhetorical technique of *chiasmus*, stating that:

It [reversal] is known in rhetorical theory as the figure of *chiasmus*, as when we say *time wounds all heels*. Two statements of opposite intent are made at the same time. "When we were Jung and easily Freudended" as Joyce puts it in *Finnegans Wake*. Chiasmus is indispensable to understanding media since all information flow by feed-back – that is, by effects – operates simultaneously in opposite modes. (NAEB III: 23)

McLuhan elaborates in relation to the senses (*Ibid.*; see also *UM* 30):

It is an absolute principle that to the degree that any situation is put in H[igh] D[efinition] by a flow of much information, that situation is at the point of drastic change and of the manifestation of opposite characteristics.... The principle involved in this reversal of characteristics which accompanies all HD situations ... appears in all my charts in the crossing of the SI-SC [Structural Impact – Subjective Completion] diagonal over the HD-LD [High Definition – Low Definition] diagonal.

Later, in *Understanding Media*, McLuhan connects the phenomenon of 'reversal' or 'chiasmus' with Kenneth Boulding's concept of the 'break-boundary' in *The Image*, stating that 'in any medium or structure there is what Kenneth Boulding calls a "break boundary at which the system suddenly changes into another or passes some point of no return in its dynamic processes."' (*UM* 38)

The concept of 'reversal' is also to be found in Teilhard's *Phenomenon of Man*. For Teilhard, the Earth, and all its matter, is in a perpetual state of evolution, of 'genesis' (i.e. 'becoming'), so that, for example, there is no (static) 'human being' as such; rather, a process of 'hominisation' (i.e. the becoming-human of the human being) is manifest in the 'layer' of the species *Homo Sapiens*.⁶³ Teilhard (1959: 151) says that 'No size in the world can go on increasing without sooner or later reaching a critical point involving some change of state.' A change of state, however, such as that of the birth of a consciousness that is aware of itself as such, 'does not represent merely a critical point that the individual or even the species must pass through. Vaster than that, it affects life itself in its organic totality, and consequently it marks a transformation affecting the state of the entire planet.' (*Ibid.* 180) He explains:

A continuous adjustment co-adapts them [i.e. the forms of living matter] from without. A profound equilibrium gives them balance within. Taken in its totality, the living substance spread over the earth – from the very first stages of its evolution – traces the lineaments of one single and gigantic organism. (*Ibid.* 112)

Teilhard conceptualizes the evolution of the various 'layers' or 'spheres' of the Earth thus: barysphere (core), lithosphere (earth), hydrosphere (water), atmosphere (air), biosphere (organic matter), and 'noosphere' (thinking matter); later, he introduces the concept of the 'Christosphere', i.e. divine matter (*Ibid.* 68, 181). Teilhard says that the phenomenon of 'consciousness', whether of the most rudimentary forms of interior perception or that of the human being, tells us that as well as a determinate exterior, or a 'without' to things, there must be also a 'free within'; and that 'the mind, seen from our side, is essentially the power of synthesis and organisation' (*Ibid.* 56-57; 259). The evolution of a consciousness that is conscious of its role in the evolutionary process (i.e. that consciousness that is manifest in the becoming-human process of Hominisation), Teilhard interprets theologically, as a process towards an 'Omega Point' of collective consciousness, i.e. divinity (*Ibid.* Book Four, Chapter 2).

⁶³ McLuhan declares in *Counterblast* (1969, p.34) 'Extensions of man are the hominization of the world. It is a 2nd phase of the original creation.'

Teilhard's argument, in turn, owes much to Bergson's theories on the evolution of consciousness. Commenting on Bergson's *Creative Evolution* (1910), McLuhan says that for Bergson, 'even consciousness is an extension of man that dims the bliss of union in the collective unconscious' (UM 80). Bergson (1911: 167) suggests that language is the means by which 'intelligence' (i.e. 'consciousness') is liberated:

Without language, intelligence would probably have remained riveted to the material objects which it was interested in considering. It would have lived in a state of somnambulism, outside itself, hypnotized on its own work. Language has greatly contributed to its liberation.

For Bergson, the 'unconscious', far from belonging to any individual, belongs to 'consciousness' *per se*. As McLuhan elaborates, language

has impaired and diminished the values of the collective unconscious. It is the extension of man in speech that enables the intellect to detach itself from the vastly wider reality. Without language, Bergson suggests, human intelligence would have remained totally involved in the objects of its attention. Language does for intelligence what the wheel does for the feet and the body. It enables them to move from thing to thing with greater ease and speed and ever less involvement. (UM 79)

McLuhan summarizes: 'Speech acts to separate man from man, and mankind from the cosmic unconscious.' (UM 80; see also Lewis, 1927: 320-321) Meanwhile, McLuhan echoes Teilhard in interpreting the advent of electronic communications technology as a 'prodigious biological event' (Teilhard, 1959: 240; UB 7, p.12). In 'The Formation of the Noosphere' ('*La formation de la Noosphère*', originally published in 1947), Teilhard (1964: 179), whose argument recalls the Hegelian dialectic towards 'absolute spirit', says that by means of electronic communications technology humanity is tending towards becoming 'psychically centred upon itself'. He suggests that:

the whole of human history appears as a progress between two critical points: from the lowest point of elementary consciousness to the ultimate, noospherical point of Reflection. In biological terms, humanity will have completed itself and fully achieved its internal equilibrium only when it is psychically centred upon itself ... (*Ibid.*)

McLuhan introduces Teilhard's concept of the 'Noosphere' in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, writing of 'the cosmic membrane that has been snapped round the globe by the electric dilation of our various senses', and explaining that

This externalization of our senses [by means of electronic communications technology] creates what [Teilhard] de Chardin calls the "noosphere" or a 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. (GG 32)

Developing Teilhard's argument, McLuhan explains that electronic communications technology form a 'central nervous system' for the Noosphere, communicating information between all points of consciousness at the speed of light. He says that 'Our extended faculties and senses now constitute a single field of experience which demands that they become collectively conscious, like the central nervous system itself [has become extended outside our bodies].' (MR 122) He says in an article of 1966:

In his *Poetics* (Chapter IV, 1448b), Aristotle reminded us that mimesis is the process by which all men learn. He alluded to the process of making by which our perceptions simulate within us the environment that we encounter outside ourselves. It is this learning and making process that, by electric circuitry, is being extended beyond our central nervous system. The next phase of this extension will naturally concern the action of making consciousness technologically. (UB 20, p.111)

McLuhan saw the computer as the means for realizing this 'collective consciousness' (UM 351). The subject does not cease to be 'conscious', i.e. to exercise his or her own senses and 'organizing' capacities; however, this role is subordinated to that of organ of the greater body (i.e. 'Noosphere'), so that we witness a 'reversal' in role, from camera (i.e. conscious agent) to screen (i.e. agent *for* consciousness). McLuhan comments upon the 'utter human docility' and 'servo-mechanistic fidelity' that such a role will require from its subjects (*Ibid.* 57). Yet he never says that the computer will *replace* consciousness; rather, 'a conscious computer would still be one that was an

extension of our consciousness, as a telescope is an extension of our eyes, or as a ventriloquist's dummy is an extension of the ventriloquist.' (*Ibid.* 351)

Consensus

It is Teilhard's concept of the 'Noosphere', along with the evolutionary theories of technological extension suggested by Freud, Bergson, Mumford, and Hall, that enables McLuhan to conceive first of a *sensus communis* or 'consensus', and later of a 'collective unconscious' (using Jung's term) that is 'external' and environmental rather than individual (see e.g. *UB* 7, p.13; *UM* 108, L 336). As McLuhan elaborates in the NAEB report:

Just as all media, including speech, are technological extensions of our various senses, so the communal processing of these extensions of our senses is that which drives the various media through their numerous phases of transformation. The technology of speech or writing or railway depends on a large degree of communal agreement and cooperation. And just as our individual experiences of our individual senses get processed by some sort of inner common sense which gives unity to the diversity of our sensations, so with the media as extensions of our senses. These cooperative technological extensions of ourselves undergo a social or communal processing which gives them unity, and which ensures also that they will always be changing their forms as they continue to inter-penetrate and to "translate" into one another. (NAEB III: 18, emphasis in original)⁶⁴

McLuhan suggests that there is even greater urgency for such 'communal processing' under electronic conditions, for 'the electronic dimension forces upon our attention the need to harmonize the various media in the way in which the many forms of human speech harmonize our various senses' (29). He says that the phonetic alphabet has proved so *fragmentary* to human interaction and experience that

Our technologies, like our private senses, now demand an interplay and ratio that makes *rational* co-existence possible. As long as our technologies were as slow as the wheel or the alphabet or money, the fact that they were separate, closed systems was socially and

⁶⁴ Due to error the text in the NAEB report reads 'some sort or [*sic*] inner common sense'.

psychically supportable. This is not true now when sight and sound and movement are simultaneous and global in extent. A ratio or interplay among these extensions of our human functions is now as necessary collectively as it has always been for our private and personal rationality in terms of our private senses or "wits," as they were once called. (GG 5; see also *UM* 108; *UB* 7, p.13)

He wrote to Walter Ong in 1962:

its [sic] about time we did something for philosophy in regards to "touch," that "interface" transforming moment when the *sensus communis* translates one mode into another. Our media now do this *outside* us and thus calls urgently for an outer consensus of media proportioned to the proportional ratios of consciousness. (L 287)

In fact McLuhan's letters of the early 1960's refer continually to the external *sensus communis* and McLuhan's vision of a global 'con-sensus' of the senses, which he saw as achievable by means of electronic technology. He suggests that the 'city' used to be the place of this consensus.⁶⁵ 'So long as the externalizations of sense were rudimentary in the form of writing and architecture, the pressures for consensus could be met by *urban* order', he says; however, 'Now that our technologies are no longer positional but interplanetary, an urban consensus will not serve.' (L 279-280) Today, says McLuhan, 'the city no longer exists except as a cultural ghost for tourists.... the city is obsolete ... The INSTANTANEOUS global coverage of radio-TV make the city form meaningless, functionless. Cities were once related to the realities of production and intercommunication. Not now.' (CB 12-13) He wrote to Jacqueline Tyrwitt in December 1960:

From Aristotle onward, the traditional function of the *sensus communis* is to translate each sense into the other senses, so that a unified, integral image is offered at all times to the mind. The city performs that function for the scattered and distracted senses, and spaces and times, of agrarian cultures. Today with electronics we have discovered that we live in a global village, and the job is to create a global *city*, as center for the village margins. The parameters of this task are by no means positional. With electronics any marginal

⁶⁵ It is likely that McLuhan's concept of the 'city' was influenced by Lewis Mumford's *The City in History* (1961) as well as by James Joyce's depiction of the city in *Ulysses*.

area can become center, and marginal experiences can be had at any center. Perhaps the city needed to coordinate and concert the distracted sense programs of our global village will have to be built by computers in the way in which a big airport has to coordinate multiple flights. (L 277-278, emphasis in original)

McLuhan proposed the 'University' as 'the only possible model of such consensus', writing in 1961:

The *university itself* would seem to become the only possible model of such consensus, inviting the concept of a university of being and experience, rather than of subjects. Such a concept of university could supercede the concept of urban center in an age of electronic information movement, and need not be locational, or geographic. (L 280, emphasis in original)

It is clear that the 'city' or 'University' that McLuhan envisioned has already begun to evolve in the form of 'cyberspace' or the World Wide Web. While Teilhard saw technology as gradually freeing more and more of the population to spend its 'surplus of free energy' in the occupation of 'research', McLuhan rather says that electronic communications technology impel us to 'translate' everything into its currency, i.e. 'information' (Teilhard, 1965: 172-173; 'Media as Translators' in *UM* 56-61). He says in *Understanding Media*: 'The poet Stephane Mallarmé thought "the world exists to end in a book." We are now in a position to go beyond that and to transfer the entire show to the memory of a computer.' (*UM* 59) Sounding like Teilhard (1965: 179), McLuhan muses that the evolution of the electronic 'Noosphere' implies the transformation of human beings as speaking agents to a situation where technologies speak *outside* us (i.e., the transformation from 'camera' to 'screen'). McLuhan ponders:

The problem of urban planning today in the field of nuclei that *is* the global village is assuming more and more the character of language itself, in which all words at all times comprise *all* the senses, but in evershifting ratios which permit ever new light to come through them. Is not this the problem that we have now to face in the management of inner and outer space, not fixed but ever new-made ratios, shifting always to maintain a maximal focal point of consciousness. Thus the human community would assume the same integral freedom and awareness as the private person? (L 278, emphasis in original)

McLuhan also, like Teilhard, invokes Bergson's argument for a 'cosmic' consciousness *post* speech. He says in *Understanding Media*,

Language as the technology of human extension, whose powers of division and separation we know so well, may have been the "Tower of Babel" by which men sought to scale the highest heavens. Today computers hold out the promise of a means of instant translation of any code or language into any other code or language. The computer, in short, promises by technology a Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity. The next logical step would seem to be, not to translate, but to by-pass languages in favor of a general cosmic consciousness which might be very like the collective unconscious dreamt of by Bergson. (*UM* 80)

McLuhan cautions, however, regarding the transformation from 'detrribalized' to 'retribalized' culture, that 'that which is normal and desirable in a print culture with regard to the titillation of the senses may become quite nonviable under electronic conditions, even for the welfare of the private individual', for 'the divisions between inner and outer, private and communal, whatever they may have been for a literate culture, are simply *not there* for an electric one.' (*Ibid.*, emphasis in original)

Central Nervous System, or, Pleasure and Pain

McLuhan's system is transformed by the introduction of the concept of the 'central nervous system' from 1963, and the closely allied concepts of 'irritation', 'pain', and 'trauma'. McLuhan notes the concept of the 'nervous system' as early as 1953, where, quoting Teilhard (anonymously, however) he says that 'In 1844 the American press greeted the telegraph as "the first definite pulsation of the real nervous system of the world."' (*JL* 16) It is not until 1963, however, that McLuhan starts to explore the concepts of 'pleasure' and 'pain', substituting for the Thomist concept of the *sensus communis* a concept of the 'central nervous system' as that which unites the senses. These concepts feature in I. A. Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1926), which McLuhan studied at Cambridge University in 1935-1936; in a chapter titled 'A Sketch for a Psychology', Richards, influenced both by Freud and by the gestalt psychology of Wolfgang Köhler, relates the human being's conscious and unconscious responses to

stimuli (e.g. the responses generated by a poem) to the function of the nervous system in responding to 'pleasure' and 'unpleasure'. Richards (1926: 85) says that 'The nervous system is the means by which stimuli from the environment, or from within the body, result in appropriate behaviour.' The function of the poem, in Richards's view, is the 'organisation of [the reader's] impulses for freedom and fullness of life' (*Ibid.* 132) Ezra Pound (1934: 16) suggests in *ABC of Reading* that language functions as a kind of 'nervous system' for society, writing: 'Language is the main means of human communication. If an animal's nervous system does not transmit sensations and stimulae, the animal atrophies. If a nation's literature declines, the nation atrophies and decays.' Giedion, too, discusses the 'nervous system' in the conclusion to *Mechanization Takes Command*, relating the concept to that of 'equilibrium' (Giedion, 1955 [1948]: 719-722). While it is necessary to note these influences, McLuhan's use of the term 'central nervous system' from 1963 must finally be attributed to Adolphe D. Jonas's *Irritation and Counter-Irritation: A Hypothesis about the Autoamputative Property of the Nervous System* (1962), a book that greatly influenced McLuhan's argument in *Understanding Media*.

With the exception of Richard Cavell (2002: 87), who briefly assesses Jonas's influence on McLuhan, there has been no analysis of the influence of Jonas's book in *Understanding Media*, though the influence of Hans Selye, author of *The Stress of Life* (1956), and Jonas, his disciple, is sometimes noted in passing (see e.g. Fekete, 1982: 165; Kroker, 1996 [1984]: 73, 75).⁶⁶ There is no doubt that Selye is the better writer of the two; however, it was Jonas's less scholarly book that inspired three of McLuhan's most famous concepts in *Understanding Media*, namely, the 'numbing' effects of technology (a phenomenon that McLuhan dubs 'Narcissus-narcosis'); the technology as 'counter-irritant'; and the technology as 'auto-amputation'. Both Selye (1956: 213), influenced by gestalt theory, and Jonas (1962: 9), influenced by Selye, aim at a 'unified theory' of disease, conceptualising the organism (or, in Jonas, the central nervous system) as functioning to preserve 'homeostasis' in the face of 'stress' (Selye) or 'irritants' (Jonas). McLuhan says in *Understanding Media*:

⁶⁶ Hans Selye in fact contributed to *Explorations I* in 1953.

In the 1920's [Hans Selye] had been baffled at why physicians always seemed to concentrate on the recognition of individual diseases and specific remedies for such isolated causes, while never paying any attention to the "syndrome of just being sick." Hans Selye, in tackling a total, inclusive approach to the field of sickness, began what Adolphe Jonas has continued in *Irritation and Counter-Irritation*; namely, a quest for the response to injury as such, or to novel impact of any kind. (UM 64)

Selye (1956: 253) defines 'stress' thus: 'Stress is usually the outcome of a struggle for the self-preservation (the homeostasis) of parts within a whole. This is true of individual cells within man, of man within society, and of individual species within the whole animate world.' He says that: 'stress has its own characteristic form and composition but no particular cause. The elements of its form ... are additive indicators which can express the sum of all the different adjustments that are going on in the body at any time.' (54) McLuhan wrote later in *Explorations* that 'Dr. Hans Selye has come up with the first non-visual disease theory since the Greeks introduced the image of the skin as an envelope enclosing organs. His *stress* theory is entirely a *field* view of disease. The body is part of a total field.' (*Counterblast* 1954; EM 189, emphasis in original) Jonas, influenced by Selye, also invokes the concept of homeostasis; however, Jonas attributes this property to the central nervous system, and clearly positions his 'counterirritation' thesis in relation to Freud's 'pleasure principle'.

Jonas depicts the central nervous system as a homeostatic system whose function it is to preserve the 'equilibrium' of the human organism. However, Jonas (*op.cit.* 12) says that a 'hierarchy' of organs subsists, so that in the case of severe trauma to any individual organ, we witness 'a successive shutting down of the higher activities until at last only the most primitive core of the C[entral] N[ervous] S[ystem] carries on its vital task'. One strategy of the central nervous system is thus to induce a 'generalized numbness' in the human organism as a response to any localized 'irritation' (210; see also UM 44). Jonas describes the reactions of a person who falls down an elevator shaft, and who, while sustaining no apparent injury, manifests these symptoms:

At first there will be a shocklike effect which has as its consequence an increased threshold to all types of perception or, as it is commonly referred to, a generalized numbness. The victim is unaware of pain or sensory stimuli. The suddenness and overwhelming nature of the accident would flood the C[entral] N[ervous] S[ystem] with an intolerable amount of sensations were it not for the postulated protective mechanism which, at least in the beginning, successfully insulates the cognitive centers. Outwardly this person appears somewhat dazed; his motions, although purposeful, are awkward; his perception, accurate enough to judge and appreciate obstacles in his way, is dulled sufficiently so that he is not able to recognize familiar objects.... It is only [later] that all body activities come into play, though in an abortive fashion, that would have been adopted if the C[entral] N[ervous] S[ystem] had been properly prepared. At this turn of events, he may break out into profuse perspiration, begin to tremble, become nauseous and feel dizzy or faint outright. (210)

Repeating this description almost verbatim, McLuhan comments that the phenomenon of 'generalized numbness' is familiar to us in all instances of 'shock' or 'trauma' (*UM* 44). McLuhan says that the technique of inducing 'numbness' is employed medically in hypnosis, and in dentistry with 'the device known as *audiac*', where '[t]he patient puts on headphones and turns a dial raising the noise level to the point that he feels no pain from the drill.' (*GG* 24, 272; *UM* 44) Arguing that technologies tend to emphasize the use of a 'single sense', McLuhan comments: 'The selection of a *single* sense for intense stimulus ... is in part the reason for the numbing effect that technology as such has on its makers and users. For the central nervous system rallies a response of general numbness to the challenge of specialized irritation.' (*Ibid.*)

McLuhan dubs this phenomenon 'Narcissus-Narcosis'. In the use of technology, he says, we are like Narcissus, who was hypnotized by the reflection or 'extension' of himself in the water. McLuhan elaborates:

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. (UM 41)

Jonas (*op.cit.* 168) once uses the term 'narcosis', but in fact the concept of 'Narcissus-narcosis' may be traced to a number of sources.⁶⁷ It appears, though in different terms, in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, where McLuhan says:

The formula for hypnosis is "one sense at a time." And new technology possesses the power to hypnotize because it isolates the senses. Then, as Blake's formula has it: "They became what they beheld." Every new technology thus diminishes sense interplay and consciousness, precisely in the new area of novelty where a kind of identification of viewer and object occurs. (GG 272)

Richard Cavell (2002: 84-85) notes that McLuhan connects Blake's line with a line from Psalm 113 – 'They that make them shall be like unto them' (see UM 45). The connection with narcissism may have come from a short article 'On Acting' in *Neurotica* 5 (Autumn 1949, pp.31-32, republished in 1963 in *The Compleat Neurotica*), excerpted by Clellon Holmes from a *Psychoanalytic Quarterly* article of 1946 by Otto Fenichel. The author hypothesizes that 'the unconscious aim of all acting [is] to make the audience feel the same emotions that the actor displays', and says:

The actor desires to exert power to allay his castration anxieties. The movie-actor, though robbed of this feeling of power (because he is robbed of his audience in an indirect manner), gets the consolation prize of being able to watch his own performance. He can become his own audience, thus making the narcissistic circle complete. (*Ibid.* p.32)

In fact Cavell (2002: 86) interprets McLuhan's use of the 'Narcissus myth' as part of a

⁶⁷ McLuhan first wrote on the subject of 'narcissism' in a chapter called 'The Tough as Narcissus' in *The Mechanical Bride* (see MB 141-144), where the ad in question presents a scene where a young boy mimics the posture of the man on a poster of the wall of his room, depicting 'The MASSIVE MASSIMO'. The ad, for the National Dairy Products Corporation, is headlined 'How to make a muscle'. McLuhan comments that the boy seems 'a little sceptical both about "The Massive Massimo" and himself', and attributes this to the fact that the boy 'is committed only superficially and temporarily' to the 'mechanistic assumptions' of the ad (144). James M. Curtis (1978: 77) connects McLuhan's use of the Narcissus myth to Lewis Mumford's *The City in History* (1961), which details the 'narcissism' of the Athenian city-state, pp.146-147.

project to 'rewrite' Freud. Cavell says (quoting McLuhan and Barrington Nevitt) that for McLuhan,

The Oedipal model, as elaborated by Freud, was flawed heuristically through its linear and sequential nature, and thus through its dependency on the culture of the visual, as confirmed by its dramatization of the triangulated gaze.... In substituting Narcissus (and Echo; the orality/literacy interface) for Oedipus, McLuhan substituted a relational myth for a sequential and progressivist one, the flatness of mosaic interaction (which was also the space of the television screen) for the false depths of three-dimensional 'introspection.' This reversal of the Oedipus myth was achieved through a form of 'electric logic' that 'plays *Oedipus* backward, as does the entire new sense environment of electric technologies,' which take us into a 'corporate past'. (*Ibid.*)

While Cavell reads the concept of 'Narcissus-narcosis' as a critique of Freud's 'Oedipal model', the concept may equally well be read as a critique of the psychoanalytic concept of *narcissism*. In psychoanalytic theory, narcissism describes a very early stage in the development of the ego in which the 'the ego's instincts are directed to itself and it is to some extent capable of deriving satisfaction for them on itself'; Freud calls this 'potentiality for satisfaction' 'auto-erotic' (*GPT* 98; *SE* XIV: 134). Surely McLuhan must have been thinking of Freud when he says:

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 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! (*UM* 41-42)

As well as the function of 'numbness', Jonas hypothesises that the central nervous system functions to introduce 'counter-irritants' so as to displace awareness of other 'irritants' in the environment. Typical examples, says Jonas (*op.cit.* 299), include 'gritting one's teeth when enduring pains that are inflicted upon any part of the body, gripping the edge of the chair when the dentist drills a tooth and digging the nails into one's own flesh when a particularly unpleasant thought strikes the mind.' He also

describes 'counterirritations' of 'a psychological nature', e.g. 'Worries, anxieties, obsessive-compulsive ruminations and the like' (300). Of these he says: 'The counterirritation permits the sufferer, within limitations, to maintain a sense of inner integration, sanity and logic and a capacity to adhere to conventional rules. Although he will complain that he is tired of all his preoccupations, he would feel threatened if his worries were removed.' (300) Jonas wonders:

[D]o the new comforts and protections usher in a new series of irritations which then set into action a new cycle? Is the history of civilization nothing but an attempt to combat discomfort; and in doing so, do men only create new ones? ... Will we ever be able to catch up in this endless spiral, or are we making conditions progressively more intolerable for our C[entral] N[ervous] S[ystem]? (366)

Jonas says that 'in the area of its evolution, it appears that the C[entral] N[ervous] S[ystem] has successively surrounded itself with more and more complex organ systems to maintain for itself an optimum state' (12) McLuhan develops this argument, stating that all technologies function as 'counter-irritant' to the existing environment and its 'irritants'. A chair, for example, is an 'extension' or 'outering' of the human bottom; with the chair, says McLuhan, 'The squat posture is "translated" into a new matter, namely wood or stone or steel.' (*CB* 39) The chair eases the discomfort of squatting, and is thus 'a great saver of toil and tension'. (*Ibid.*) Yet, in its use, the chair engenders new irritations, necessitating a new technology as 'counter-irritant', so that

A table is born. Table is a further outering or extension of body resulting from chair. The new fixed posture of chair calls forth a new inclination of body and new needs for the placing of implements and stirring of food. But table also calls forth new arrangements of people at table. The fixing of a posture of the body in a chair has a whole series of consequences. (*Ibid.*)

Another example is the antiseptic, which McLuhan says came about 'in the late nineteenth century when anesthesia and the greater prevalence of surgery had created a mounting death rate' (*CIOB* 28). Echoing Jonas, McLuhan says that 'the counter-irritant usually proves a greater plague than the initial irritant' (*UM* 66). Technological invention is thus a self-perpetuating process whereby 'New means

create new ends as new services create new discomforts.' (CA 46)

Finally, Jonas (*op.cit.* 10) introduces the concept of 'auto-amputation'. He says that '[a]s long as the intensity [of intrinsic and extrinsic stimuli] remains within a given limit, the homeostatic mechanisms [of the central nervous system] will function smoothly' (*Ibid.*). However, 'The autoamputative property is called into action when the peripheral organs are unsuccessful in localizing the toxic agent. The ultimate goal of such a process is the total removal of the offending organ even if it means biological death.' (10-11) Here is how McLuhan presents it in *Understanding Media*:

Medical researchers like Hans Selye and Adolphe Jonas hold that all extensions of ourselves, in sickness and in health, are attempts to maintain equilibrium. Any extension of ourselves they regard as "autoamputation," and they find that the autoamputative power or strategy is resorted to by the body when the perceptual power cannot locate or avoid the cause of irritation.... While it was no part of the intention of Jonas and Selye to provide an explanation of human invention and technology, they have given us a theory of disease (discomfort) that goes far to explain why man is impelled to extend various parts of his body by a kind of autoamputation. In the physical stress of superstimulation of various kinds, the central nervous system acts to protect itself by a strategy of autoamputation or isolation of the offending organ, sense, or function. (UM 42)

McLuhan, copying Jonas, defines the central nervous system thus: 'Physiologically, the central nervous system, that electric network that coordinates the various media of our senses, plays the chief role. Whatever threatens its function must be contained, localized, or cut off, even to the total removal of the offending organ.' (*Ibid.* 43) Jonas applies the irritation-counterirritation hypothesis to explain social functions (including 'violence') in society at large; McLuhan, too, applies the concept of 'counterirritation' to society at large, asserting that 'Socially, it is the accumulation of group pressures and irritants that prompt invention and innovation as counter-irritants. War and the fear of war have always been considered the main incentives to technological extension of our bodies.' (UM 46-47; see also Jonas, *op.cit.* 13, 325)

The theory of 'counter-irritation' leads Jonas, as well as McLuhan, to comment on the

phenomena of 'pleasure' and 'pain'.⁶⁸ Pain, says Jonas (*op.cit.* 67) 'is not in the service of life preservation; rather it is the indication or the direct manifestation of the nervous system's protecting itself'; and he places 'in the same category [as physical pains,] mental pains like anxiety, shame and guilt'. McLuhan, again copying Jonas, says that 'Sudden social failure or shame is a shock that some may "take to heart" or that may cause muscular disturbance in general, signaling for the person to withdraw from the threatening situation.' (*UM* 43) Invoking Freud, Jonas (*op.cit.* 67) says 'Freud came to the conclusion that the manifestation of pain constituted basically the danger of losing a vital object (originally the mother).' In fact Freud distinguishes between 'pain', which belongs to the function of the central nervous system and the pleasure-pain series of stimuli, and 'anxiety' (*Angst*), which signals a fear of the loss of love, or, more specifically, what Freud calls the fear of the repetition of a traumatic moment. Such a distinction between anxiety and pain is missing in Jonas. Jonas also introduces the concept of 'comfort' in distinction from pleasure, asserting that 'comfort ... does not possess the qualities of crescendos seen in pleasure and it is relatively free from irritation. The characteristic here is a maximum reduction of muscular tension and a diminution of external stimuli' (335). McLuhan summarizes: 'Whereas pleasure is a counter-irritant (e.g. sports, entertainment, and alcohol), comfort is the removal of irritants. Both pleasure and comfort are strategies of equilibrium for the central nervous system.' (*UM* 43) In fact McLuhan's summary here is not entirely true to Jonas's argument. While Jonas (*op.cit.* 13) does say that 'comfort' may mean 'removal of irritation', he says that characteristic of 'comfort' is 'a maximum reduction of muscular tension and a diminution of external stimuli', so that the use of alcohol and other drugs are strategies of 'comfort' (not, as McLuhan says, of 'pleasure'). Sports, says Jonas, are 'counter-irritants' or 'diversions' where '[a] good deal of frustrating or potentially frustrating situations have to be added to make [the] game interesting' and the 'pleasure' experienced is related to the feeling of triumph over these frustrations (see 15-16, 332).

⁶⁸ See also I. A. Richards, *Principles of Literary Criticism*, pp. 95-96, where Richards comments on the Freudian concepts of 'pleasure' and 'unpleasure'.

Pleasure, in fact, Jonas (*ibid.* 328) characterizes as a 'motivational factor', quoting from the opening lines of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (SE XVIII: 7; Jonas, *op.cit.* 329):

In the theory of psychoanalysis we have no hesitation in assuming that the course taken by mental events is automatically regulated by the pleasure principle. We believe, that is to say, that the course of those events is invariably set into motion by an unpleasurable tension and that it takes a direction such that its final outcome coincides with a lowering of that tension – that is, with an avoidance of unpleasure or a production of pleasure.

While by no means a Freudian, Jonas (*op.cit.* 67, 300, 329, 330) in *Irritation and Counterirritation* references four of Freud's books, then recently republished in the Standard Edition: *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920); *Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety* (1926); *Civilization and Its Discontents*; and *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* (1940); he also cites from Otto Fenichel's *Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (1945). Jonas presents the 'counterirritation' thesis as an alternative to the dialectic Freud establishes between the 'pleasure principle' and the 'reality principle', arguing (somewhat incoherently) that the pleasure principle does not apply 'whenever socially meaningful pleasures invite participation or whenever there is an interplay between an individual and an element outside of him for the purpose of enjoyment' and that then 'the principle of irritation-counterirritation becomes prominent' (329). Jonas says at the outset:

The ability ... to master, at least in part, a hyperirritation with a counterirritative procedure offers human beings a powerful or even an irresistible motivation. Living in a sea of subliminal and supraliminal insults, the self or the C[entral] N[ervous] S[ystem] will seek out surcease in the form of pleasure and comfort. There is a distinction between the two activities; the former utilizes counterirritation, the latter removal of irritation to achieve relief from tension. Many of the actual pursuits to obtain a temporary easing of the nearly constant irritation violate the essence of the A[uto] A[mputative] P[roperty] hypothesis, resulting only in a continuation of the superirritated state. A rigorous application of its basic principles creates a sounder foundation for the entire pleasure principle. (13)

Rejecting the Freudian argument, Jonas says that the 'counter-irritation' hypothesis

'provides a more rational explanation of the principle of self-destruction, unpleasure, death instinct and other negative drives in that it views such phenomena as counterirritants to stem or to nullify otherwise overwhelming irritation... Counterirritation has such a universal application that nearly every aspect of human activity can be selected as the brush fire started artificially to stop the forest fire.' (301)
Jonas reads Freud thus:

Freud became aware of a contradiction to the pleasure principle when encountering patients who appeared unwilling not only to forego their sufferings but also directly sought out ways and means to have pains inflicted upon them either actively or passively. There was a paradox in the direction of such a drive toward unpleasurable experiences, for drives and instincts were thought to be in the service of self-preservation and pleasure. To make allowance for this phenomenon which was at variance with basic theories of human behavior Freud postulated in his book, *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* [*Beyond the Pleasure Principle*], the existence of a death instinct. It was thought to be based upon the biological will to suffer and inflict self-destruction opposing the will to love and live. In his publication, *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* [*Civilization and Its Discontents*], Freud stated that human suffering was inevitable because the self-destructive tendencies could not be mastered. (300)

The problem with this reading of Freud is that it ignores the dialectical method used by Freud to explain the economic principle he saw at work in the psyche. Unlike Jonas, who attempts a 'unified theory' of the functioning of the human organism, Freud presents a number of systems functioning in conflict with one another: 'individual' and 'germ-plasm' of the race; sex-instincts (Eros) and death-instincts (Thanatos); pleasure principle (primary process) and reality principle (secondary process), and so on. It is through the tensions captured in the use of dialectic that Freud is able to explain how a number of pathological states (i.e. hysteria, obsessional neurosis, psychosis, etc.) manifest in the struggle between *different* economies – i.e. the economy of the drive, the economy of the central nervous system, and the economy of the ego.

The 'pleasure principle' is often misunderstood to mean that the human being strives after pleasure. Freud in fact defines it thus: 'The pleasure principle ... is a tendency operating in the service of a function whose business it is to free the mental apparatus

entirely from excitation or to keep the amount of excitation in it constant or to keep it as low as possible.' (SE XVIII: 62) Freud initially interprets the functioning of the psychical apparatus in terms of a 'principle of constancy' or 'law of constancy' (see SE I: 147, 221), arguing that the human being is motivated by a 'tendency to keep intracerebral excitation constant' (SE II: 197); however Freud later says that the 'principle of constancy' and the 'pleasure principle' are in essence the same: 'for if the work of the mental apparatus is directed towards keeping the quantity of excitation low, then anything that is calculated to increase that quantity is bound to be felt as adverse to the functioning of that apparatus, that is as unpleasurable' (SE XVIII: 9). From the first, Freud conceptualizes the 'pleasure principle' – or, as he calls it in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900), the 'unpleasure principle' – in dialectical terms (see SE V, Chapter VII, E, 'The Primary and Secondary Processes – Repression'). He describes two processes he calls the 'primary' process and the 'secondary' process, while recognizing this distinction as a necessary 'fiction' (SE V: 603). It is a useful fiction, however, insofar as it emphasizes the 'chronology' of the processes, for Freud says 'the primary processes are present in the mental apparatus from the first, while it is only during the course of life that the secondary processes unfold, and come to inhibit and overlay the primary ones' (*Ibid.*). He clarifies these concepts in a later paper, 'Formulations On the Two Principles in Mental Functioning' (1911):

the unconscious mental processes ... we consider to be the older, primary processes, the residues of a phase of development in which they were the only kind of mental processes. The sovereign tendency obeyed by these primary processes is easy of recognition; it is called the pleasure-pain (*Lust-Unlust*) principle, or more shortly the pleasure-principle. These processes strive towards gaining pleasure; from any operation which might arouse unpleasantness ("pain") mental activity draws back (repression). (*GPT* 21-22; SE XII: 219)

Further describing the two processes, Freud depicts the pleasure-principle as satisfying 'need' through the hallucinated 'repetition' of an earlier satisfaction (variously conceptualized as acts of 'hallucination', 'wish-fulfillment', and 'dreaming'); Freud says however that this function of hallucination ultimately fails to satisfy, due to the realization of 'the absence of the expected gratification' (*GPT* 22; SE XII: 219).

Consequently, a new principle (i.e. the secondary process) evolves, whereby 'what [is] conceived of [is] no longer that which [is] pleasant, but that which [is] real, even if it should be unpleasant'. (*Ibid.*) Freud renames this secondary process the '*reality-principle*', describing how the psychical apparatus, in order to avoid unpleasure, must 'form a conception of the real circumstances in the outer world and to exert itself to alter them' (*Ibid.*). Lacan (1997: 28) assures us that Freud 'find[s] no trace' of a 'distinction between the two apparatuses ... in the anatomical structures sustaining them.' Rather, the 'pleasure principle' and the 'reality principle' form a dialectic by which Freud depicts the human being as the site of a 'conflict'. On the one hand, the human organism is 'designed not to satisfy need, but to hallucinate such satisfaction', 'a system which naturally tends toward deception and error' (the pleasure principle) (*Ibid.*). At the same time, operating against this system is 'a principle of correction, of a call to order ... [that] operates in the mode of detour, precaution, touching up, restraint. It corrects and compensates for [the pleasure principle]' (*Ibid.*).

The dialectic between 'pleasure principle' and 'reality principle' in fact replaces Freud's earlier dialectic between 'pleasure' and 'unpleasure' (pain). In the last, famous chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams*, where Freud first presents a structural analysis of the 'Unconscious', he says that

consciousness, which we look upon in the light of a sense organ for the apprehension of psychical qualities, is capable in waking life of receiving excitations from two directions. In the first place, it can receive excitations from the periphery of the whole apparatus, the perceptual system; and in addition to this, it can receive excitations of pleasure and unpleasure, which prove to be almost the only psychical quality attaching to transpositions of energy in the inside of the apparatus. (*SE V: 574*)

In 'Instincts and Their Vicissitudes', first published in 1915, Freud ascribes to the 'nervous system' 'the function of abolishing stimuli which reach it, or of reducing excitation to the lowest possible level: [it is] an apparatus which would even, if this were feasible, maintain itself in an altogether unstimulated condition' (*GPT 86; SE XIV: 120*). He says here: 'let us grant that the purpose of the nervous system is – broadly

speaking – *to master stimuli.*' (*Ibid.*). Freud finds the concepts 'pleasure' and 'unpleasure' to be problematic, however, cautioning that

the activity of even the most highly developed mental apparatus is subject to the pleasure-principle, *i.e.* is automatically regulated by feelings belonging to the "pleasure-pain" series ... these feelings reflect the manner in which the process of mastering stimuli takes place.... "painful" feelings are connected with an increase and pleasurable feelings with a decrease in stimulation.... Let us, however, be careful to preserve this assumption in its present highly indefinite form, until we succeed, if that is possible, in discovering what sort of relation exists between pleasure and "pain," on the one hand, and fluctuations in the quantities of stimuli affecting mental life, on the other. It is certain that many kinds of these relations are possible, some of them by no means simple. (*GPT* 86-87; *SE* XIV 120-121)

In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud depicts 'pleasure' (*Lust*) and 'unpleasure' (*Unlust*) in terms of 'tensions' in the human being, 'tensions' which may arise from internal or external stimuli. He locates the perception of these 'tensions' in the 'perceptual-consciousness system' ('*Pcpt.-Cs.*'), which he says is to be located 'on the borderline between outside and inside', *i.e.* between 'the external world' and 'the other psychical systems' that the *Pcpt.-Cs.* encompasses (*SE* XVIII: 24). Freud describes the *Pcpt.-Cs.* as 'the medium for the perceptions' and 'the sense-organ of the entire apparatus'; however, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, where he draws extensively from biology, Freud characterizes the function of the various 'sense organs' not primarily in terms of the '*reception of stimuli*', but rather the '*[p]rotection [of the *Pcpt.-Cs.*] against stimuli*' (*SE* XXII: 75; XVIII: 27, emphasis in original). In the *Introductory Lectures*, Freud hypothesizes 'that pleasure is *in some way* connected with the diminution, reduction or extinction of the amounts of stimulus prevailing in the mental apparatus, and that similarly unpleasure is connected with their increase' (*SE* XVI: 356, emphasis in original). Two phenomena exist that trouble this theory: one is the phenomenon of 'sexual tension' or 'sexual excitation', in which an increase in excitations corresponds to an increase in pleasure (not unpleasure); and the other is the phenomenon of masochism, in which the subject feels 'pleasure' in the experience of 'pain' or unpleasure (see *SE* VII: 209; also 'The Economic Problem of Masochism', *SE* XIX: 159-170). Freud thus tends to prefer to define the function of the psychical

apparatus as that of 'mastering and disposing of the amounts of stimulus and sums of excitation that impinge on it from outside and inside', regardless of how these excitations are experienced (i.e. whether as 'pleasure' or 'unpleasure'). (SE XVI: 356-357; see also SE XIV: 120)

McLuhan's method in the NAEB Project, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media* is to describe the dynamic transformations (i.e. processes) in the structure of the unconscious in terms of units of energy (i.e., 'senses', or 'extensions' of senses). Like Freud in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, McLuhan works from the assumption that there is an economic principle at work in these processes, and he repeats Freud's concept of the 'pleasure principle' (as the function of the 'central nervous system' in protecting the organism from an excess of stimulation, i.e. trauma) in his concept of 'Narcissus-narcosis' as the 'numbing' of the organism in response to the trauma of technology. McLuhan, however, never engages with the concept of the 'reality principle' proposed by Freud as the dialectical counterpart to the 'pleasure principle', and as such McLuhan's concepts of 'pleasure' and 'pain' bear only a superficial resemblance to Freud's, which are essentially dialectically conceived rather than phenomenological (i.e. descriptive of a process). Freud, in fact, all but abandons the problematic concepts of 'pleasure' and 'pain' to pursue a number of other dialectics: the primary process and the secondary process; the pleasure principle and the reality principle; and, most famously, *Eros*, the libido or sexual drives, and *Thanatos*, the 'death-drive'. It is in pushing past the concepts of 'pleasure' and 'pain' that McLuhan, likewise, emerges as a reluctant dialectician.

4 The Economic Principle in the *Logos*

McLuhan's use of a dialectical method, or rather his use of dialectics, has been noted by a number of critics who set him within the tradition of dialectical phenomenology established by G.W.F. Hegel. McLuhan himself resists the role of dialectician, however, rather calling himself a 'metaphysician'. While Freud's dialectics are indebted to the German philosophical tradition – specifically, Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche – McLuhan owes more to Renaissance philosopher Giambattista Vico (1668-1744), whose dialectics between the '*certum*' and the '*verum*' of law, 'philology' and 'philosophy', 'myth' and 'idea' blend Platonic idealism with a notion of human progress that anticipates the evolutionism of Schopenhauer and his disciples. The search for a first, transcendental *cause* (which Jacques Lacan finally names the 'Real' and Jacques Derrida the 'trace') leads McLuhan, like Freud, to the fact of *trauma*, not truly a concept nor a (Kantian) transcendental category, but a phenomenon which (as Slavoj Žižek has shown) possesses the structure of a paradox, functioning as both its own 'cause' and 'effect'. Rejecting the Freudian concept of trauma as 'castration' anxiety, McLuhan, writing back to Vico, presents technology as the cause of trauma, and art as an 'anti-environment' enabling readjustment to new technologies.

Technologies as Causes of Trauma

The notion that technologies have disturbing or traumatic effects upon societies comes from Harold Innis, though McLuhan, developing Innis's thesis, shows himself to be more interested in the impact of technologies upon the *psyche*. In McLuhan's work, technologies have a traumatic impact upon the subject/society, who/which forms an unconscious (imaginary) 'identification' with technology as an extension of the self/society, and experiences new technologies as an assault to this identity; technologies also have a *structural* effect upon the psyche (i.e. a bias towards the 'audile-tactile' or 'visual'), which in turn has an effect upon the 'organization' of the society as a whole (i.e. 'tribal' or 'civilized'). Rewriting Innis, who says that cultures

using 'new media of communication' are 'characterized by profound disturbances', McLuhan says that: 'new technology disturbs the image, both private and corporate, in any society, so much so that fear and anxiety ensue and a new quest for identity has to begin.' (Innis, 1991 [1951]: 188; *WP* 126) McLuhan's concept of the 'image'⁶⁹ comes from Kenneth Boulding's *The Image* (1956: 64) where Boulding says that

The basic bond of any society, culture, subculture, or organization is a "public image," that is, an image the essential characteristics of which are shared by the individuals participating in the group.... An enormous part of the activity of each society is concerned with the transmission and protection of its public image ...

The concept of the 'image' presented by Kenneth Boulding belongs to what Boulding calls an 'organic theory of knowledge', i.e. a theory of knowledge in which new knowledge must be built upon and integrated with previous knowledge. Technologies are traumatic insofar as they outstrip the individual's/society's skills of integration; all war, McLuhan says, can be attributed to 'accelerated technological change' (*UM* 102). McLuhan suggests that 'militarism', or war, 'is itself the main route of technological education and acceleration for lagging areas' (*Ibid.*). Past wars have meant 'the speedy dumping of industrial products on an enemy market to the point of saturation. War, in fact, can be seen as a process of achieving equilibrium among unequal technologies' McLuhan says (*UM* 102, 344). He conflates war and education, depicting education as an act of 'aggression', and war as 'a form of compulsory education for the other guy' (*WP* 149, 153).⁷⁰ (*The Mechanical Bride* attributed that function to

⁶⁹ McLuhan's concept of the 'image' may also have been influenced by Jacques Maritain, whose concept of the 'image' from *The Range of Reason* (1952) McLuhan cites in an address of 1954 (Maritain, 1953: 185; *ML* 154):

Every great period of civilization is dominated by a certain peculiar idea that man fashions of man. Our behaviour depends as much on this image as on our very nature – an image which appears with striking brilliance in the minds of some particularly representative thinkers, and which, more or less unconscious in the human Mass, is none the less strong enough to mold after its own pattern the social and political formations that are characteristic of a given cultural epoch.

Another likely influence is Daniel J. Boorstin's *The Image, or What Happened to the American Dream* (1962), mentioned in *UM* 52 and *CIOB* 132.

⁷⁰ McLuhan was in fact linking 'war' with 'education' as early as *The Mechanical Bride*, where, in a chapter titled 'Education', he suggests that war is an intrinsic part of the modern, mechanized industrial society, and that Western wealth is founded upon the 'logistics of the war machine' (*MB* 126) He says:

advertising.) 'Nobody has ever studied what degree of innovation is required to shatter the self-image of a man or a society', McLuhan comments. (WP 126)

The concept of the 'image' may be compared to Jacques Lacan's concept of the 'imaginary' and the Jungian concept of the 'archetype', and in fact Boulding (1956: 152-153) says:

It is, indeed, almost the whole business of the psychoanalyst to explore the image, both conscious and unconscious.... By so doing he helps to modify the image by permitting its suppressed parts to develop according to its own internal laws in a way that will restore the patient to mental health.... In the work of some later heretics, such as [C. G.] Jung, the psychoanalytic school seems to be going too far in the direction of awarding images a status which is almost independent of the organism that supports them and that creates them.

Jung (1990 [1959]: 5) defines the 'archetypes' as 'psychic contents which have not yet been submitted to conscious elaboration', but that may be 'projected' upon an object. In fact McLuhan's concept of the 'image' is less like Jung's 'archetype' than it is like Lacan's concept of the *imago*. The object in the 'imaginary' phase in Lacan is neither an object with symbolic function (on the technology as a signifier with symbolic function, q.v. Chapter 5), nor 'projected' upon an object like a Jungian 'archetype', but is rather an object with which the 'I' (*das Ich*, the ego) identifies. In Lacan's 1949 (revised) paper 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience', Lacan describes the imaginary phase of the child as that in which the ego is formed through identification with its own image. He notes the start of this phase around the age of six months, at which time the baby starts to be able to recognize itself in a mirror. The formation of the ego, as Lacan describes it, is characterized by an 'identification, in the full sense that analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation that takes place in the subject when he assumes an image' (Lacan, 1977a: 2). In 'The Agenbite of Outwit' (1963), McLuhan similarly says that

[M]echanized or total war fosters prosperity and an economic well-being which is itself an immediate exposure of a situation in which we tend to have lost control and view of our own purposes. As the creator of wealth and opportunity for all, war has put peace to shame in our time. War has provided higher education and higher consumer standards for more people than peace ever did. (128)

'Every new technology diminishes sense interplay and awareness for precisely the area ministered to by that technology: a kind of identification of viewer and object occurs.' (MR 122) McLuhan, however, has no concept of the 'imaginary', nor, at this point, of the archetype; in *War and Peace in the Global Village* he assimilates the function of the 'image', as he does with the function of 'social pain' in *Understanding Media*, to the function of the central nervous system. He draws from biologist Otto Lowenstein's book *The Senses* (1966), which McLuhan says 'describ[es] the structure of nervous reaction incidentally and by implication' (WP 54). He cites (Lowenstein, 1966: 196; WP 75):

Many valuable data are collected by surgeons in their often desperate attempts to stop overpowering pain by sectioning off this or that nervous pathway connected with diseased organs. This is a slow and haphazard process, and our relative lack of information is due to the fact that a suffering man is the only reliable source of information on pain. Alas, the information can be very misleading. A patient suffering from severe phantom pain can only point in the direction of a long-lost limb to indicate its origin, and the intriguing phenomena of referred pain can add to the confusion. Referred pain often arises from impulses in one deep-seated organ, but is localized by the sufferer somewhere at the surface of the body.

Elaborating on this theme, McLuhan says that: 'When one has been hurt by new technology, when the private person or the corporate body finds its entire identity endangered by physical or psychic change, it lashes back in a fury of self-defense.' (WP 97) However, as with referred pain, 'the symptom against which we lash out may quite likely be caused by something about which we know nothing'. (*Ibid.*) McLuhan draws attention to Lowenstein's claim that pain 'can even survive the disappearance of the initial source', to argue that the central nervous system is 'a key factor in pain' (*Ibid.* 75). Applying Lowenstein's argument to the corporate body, McLuhan says:

Pain is a sense quite in addition to the usual five, and, as Lowenstein puts it, "we must assume that the central nervous system plays an overridingly important part in the elaboration of pain and suffering." Most of the pain felt by the occupants of the new technological environments corresponds to what is medically called "phantom pain." The pain caused by new media and new technologies tends very much to fall into the category of "referred pain," All new

technologies bring on the cultural blues, just as the old ones evoke phantom pain after they have disappeared. (*Ibid.* 15-16)

The concepts of 'phantom pain' (as the effect of old technologies) and 'referred pain' (as the effect of new technologies) apply especially to electronic media in relation to the older mechanical environment. In fact McLuhan suggests that the inability of mechanical technology to provide 'feedback' to the central nervous system (where electronic communications technology is interpreted as the 'central nervous system' of the environment) induces a 'spastic' state. Quoting Lowenstein, McLuhan explains that the 'smooth' movements of the body rely upon the 'coordination between ... antagonistic pairs of flexor and extensor muscles': 'for each muscle moving a limb one way, there is at least one other moving it in the opposite direction' (*Ibid.* 55). In a spastic patient, however, '[t]he feedback of information from the muscles is defective', so that movements are uncoordinated and jerky (*Ibid.* 55-56). McLuhan uses this notion of the 'spastic' condition of the central nervous system to explain 'the spastic condition of society during the centuries of mechanical organization' (*Ibid.* 54).

McLuhan has been criticized and branded a 'counterrevolutionary' for neglecting to incorporate a concept of 'power' in his work (see e.g. Richard Kostelanetz in *PC* 226; Theall, 1971: 6; Kuhns, 1971: 197; Fekete, 1977: xvii; Kroker, 1984: 79). In fact, while never clearly articulated, McLuhan, like Freud, finds *aggression* a more useful concept than that of power, reflecting the notion, inherited from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, of the Earth as an 'organization' of 'energy'. Freud says in *Civilization and Its Discontents* that 'aggression ... constitutes the greatest impediment to civilization'⁷¹ and that, due to the existence of the aggressive instincts, and the 'primary mutual hostility of human beings, civilized society is perpetually threatened with disintegration' (*SE XXI*: 122,

⁷¹ As Freud memorably says,

men are not gentle creatures who want to be loved, and who at the most can defend themselves if they are attacked; they are, on the contrary, creatures among whose instinctual endowments is to be reckoned a powerful share of aggressiveness. As a result, their neighbour is for them not only a potential helper or sexual object, but also someone who tempts them to satisfy their aggressiveness on him, to exploit his capacity for work without compensation, to use him sexually without his consent, to seize his possessions, to humiliate him, to cause him pain, to torture and to kill him. (*SE XXI*: 111)

112). It is in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920) that Freud first conceptualizes the drive in terms of two opposing forces: one, Freud variously calls 'libido', the sexual drive, the erotic drive, or 'Eros' (after Plato's concept of 'love'); the other 'Thanatos', which is characterized by aggressive or self-destructive impulses, and this Freud finally names the 'death drive' (*Todestrieb*). Freud says that the psychical apparatus in general obeys a 'pleasure principle' (*Lustprinzip*); however, the detection of a range of biological and social phenomena which are seemingly at odds with the pleasure principle leads Freud to argue that the drive reveals itself as 'a *compulsion to repeat* which over-rides the pleasure principle' – 'something that seems more primitive, more elementary, more instinctual than the pleasure principle which it over-rides' (*SE XVIII*: 22, 23, emphasis added). Freud tells us that it is only to the death-drives, and not to the sex-drives, 'that we can predicate a conservative, or rather retrograde, character corresponding to a compulsion to repeat' (*SE XVIII*: 44). In Freud's last book *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, which McLuhan read in 1949, Freud says that Eros and Thanatos cannot really be separated: they 'operate against each other or combine with each other' in all human acts (*SE XXIII*: 149). In the act of sex, for example, the human being aims for 'the most intimate union' through an 'act of aggression'; in eating, likewise, the human being '[destroys] the object with the aim of incorporating it'. (*Ibid.*) Freud says: 'This concurrent and mutually opposing action of the two basic instincts gives rise to the whole variegation of the phenomena of life.' (*Ibid.*).⁷²

⁷² Lacan clarifies this point, drawing upon another dialectic to be found in Freud. Just as Pierre Teilhard de Chardin deploys a dialectic of 'tangential' and 'radial' energies to explain evolution, Freud describes the phenomenon of the sexual drive in terms of a dialectic between the 'individual' and the 'quasi immortal germ-plasm' of the race, stating:

Biology ... shows ... that the relation existing between the ego and sexuality may be conceived of in two ways, apparently equally well justified: in the one, the individual is regarded as of prime importance, sexuality as one of his activities and sexual satisfaction as one of his needs; while in the other the individual organism is looked upon as a transitory and perishable appendage to the quasi-immortal germ-plasm bequeathed to him by the race. (*GPT* 90; *SE XIV*: 125)

Lacan (1977b: 196) says that this force described (dialectically) by Freud 'is an organ, in the sense of an instrument, of the drive', and dubs 'the organ of the drive' – 'this ungraspable organ, this object that we can only circumvent, in short, this false organ' – the 'lamella'. Says Lacan: 'It is the libido, *qua* pure life instinct, that is to say, immortal life, or irrepressible life, life that has need of no organ, simplified, indestructible life. It is precisely what is subtracted from the living being by virtue of the fact that it is subject to the cycle of sexed reproduction.' (198) Lacan says, 'what is represented by the lamella ... [is] the relation between the living subject and that which he loses by having to pass, for his reproduction, through the sexual

In *Civilization and Its Discontents* Freud criticizes the communists for depicting 'private property' as the impediment to freedom and peace, arguing that 'Aggressiveness ... already shows itself in the nursery almost before property has given up its primal, anal form; it forms the basis of every relation of affection and love among people' (SE XXI: 113). He notes the variety of methods employed by civilization to limit aggressiveness, e.g., by encouraging 'identifications and aim-inhibited relationships of love'; 'the restriction upon sexual life'; and the commandment 'to love one's neighbour as oneself' (112). While Freud stresses the function of the super-ego in redirecting aggression back towards the self, Lacan (1977a: 42) interprets the aggressivity of the subject to be directed by an existential 'frustration' that one's identity is inextricably tied up with an image (i.e. a signifier) that has no 'objective' meaning, only a meaning that can and must be sought in the response of others (or, as Lacan calls symbolic order, 'the big Other'). The ego 'is frustration in its essence', says Lacan; he likens the aggressivity of the subject to 'the aggressivity of the slave whose response to the frustration of his labour is a desire for death.' (*Ibid.*, 42, 43) Absent from McLuhan's early work, the notion of aggression started to engage McLuhan more and more after *Understanding Media*, as the skirmishes in Vietnam escalated into a bloody and protracted war. Defining 'war' in an article of 1967, McLuhan says that

When the social environment is stirred up to exceptional intensity by technological change and becomes a focus of much attention, we apply the terms "war" and "revolution." All the components of "war" are present in any environment whatever. The recognition of war depends upon their being stepped up to high definition. (McLuhan in Matson and Montagu, Eds., 1967: 44)

Sources for *Understanding Media* include *War and Human Progress* (1950) by J. U. Nef (see *UM* 21); while in *War and Peace in the Global Village* McLuhan samples an eclectic range of books on human relationships, games, and war, from *Homo Ludens* (1938), Johan Huizinga's seminal study of human 'play', to studies of Napoleon's

cycle'. (199) 'In this way', Lacan says, 'I explain the essential affinity of every drive with the zone of death, and reconcile the two sides of the drive [i.e. libido and death-drive] – which, at one and the same time, makes present sexuality in the unconscious and represents, in its essence, death.' (*Ibid.*)

battle tactics and the Chinese 'Book of Changes', the *I Ching*. *Take Today* surveys a greater range of political theory, from Marx's *Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* (*Zur Kritik der Politischen Ökonomie*, 1859) and *Capital* (*Das Kapital*, in three volumes, 1867/1885/1894) to Albert Speer's memoirs of the Third Reich and transcripts of the Nuremberg war trials (also in *UM* 247); sources for *Laws of Media* (1988) and *The Global Village* (1989), meanwhile, include Konrad Lorenz's *On Aggression* (1966 [*Das sogenannte Böse*, 1963]), and Erich Fromm's *The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness* (1973), which includes a critique of Freud's concept of the 'death-drive' (see Fromm, 1973: 438-478). Notably, McLuhan in *War and Peace in the Global Village* also cites from *Report from Iron Mountain on the Possibility and Desirability of Peace* (1967), a book exposed as a hoax in 1972. Purported to have been written by a 'Special Study Group' for the United States government (the author was in fact a New York writer, Leonard C. Lewin), the *Report from Iron Mountain* presents a number of arguments against the desirability of 'peace', as well as strategies for preserving a state of war. McLuhan cites:

War is not, as is widely assumed, primarily an instrument of policy utilized by nations to extend or defend their expressed political values or their economic interests. On the contrary, it is itself the principal basis of organization on which all modern societies are constructed. The common proximate cause of war is the apparent interference of one nation with another. But at the root of all ostensible differences of national interest lie the dynamic requirements of the war system itself for periodic armed conflict. Readiness for war characterizes contemporary social systems more broadly than their economic and political structures, which it subsumes. (*WP* 113, 166)

McLuhan, connecting this argument with that of José Ortega y Gasset in *Man and People* (1957), where the handshake is described as 'as ancient ritual of war', comments that: 'To say that "readiness for war characterises contemporary social systems" is saying no more than that the customary handshake is a ritual form of tribal hostility used to maintain a diplomatic or armed truce between entities.' (*WP* 116) In short, McLuhan, along with Freud, suggests that aggression or 'readiness for war' is the primary basis for human relationships.

That forms of exchange, such as the handshake, function to preserve peace (or an 'armed truce'), is an argument that has been explored by a number of anthropologists. Claude Lévi-Strauss in *Les Structures Elementaire de la Parente* (1949, revised edition 1967, tr. *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*) says that: 'Exchanges are peacefully resolved wars, and wars are the result of unsuccessful transactions.' (Lévi-Strauss, 1969: 67) Writing back to Freud's *Totem and Taboo* (1913), an analysis of the incest prohibition in 'primitive' societies (in which Freud posits the horde's killing of the 'primal father' as the origin of culture, guilt, and religion), Lévi-Strauss says that society rather originates in the *exchange of women*: 'It is the fundamental step because of which, by which, but above all in which, the transition from nature to culture is accomplished.' (24) Lévi-Strauss asserts that this custom or ritual inheres in all societies in the form of the incest prohibition, which universally prohibits one's sexual union with certain relatives named as 'mother', 'father', 'brother', 'sister', 'mother's sister', 'father's brother', etc. Lévi-Strauss stresses that 'It is the social relationship more than the biological tie implied by the terms 'father', 'mother', 'son', 'daughter', 'brother', and 'sister', that acts as the determinant [in the taboo against incest].' (30) In fact, as Lévi-Strauss explains, many societies 'place identical forms of marriage, from the point of view of proximity, at the two extreme poles of social regulation': 'parallel cousins' (i.e. one's mother's sister's children and one's father's brother's children) are named as one's own 'brothers' and 'sisters'; while 'cross-cousin marriage' between 'the respective descendants of a brother and a sister', 'despite the very close degree of consanguinity between the spouses, is regarded as an ideal'. (14) It is '[t]he *fact of being a rule*', says Lévi-Strauss, that is 'the very essence of the incest prohibition' (32). He says that in any marriage system, 'the result of the incest prohibition is fundamentally the same, viz., that as soon as I am forbidden a woman, she thereby becomes available to another man, and somewhere else a man renounces a woman who thereby becomes available to me.' (51) In other words, 'the fact that I can obtain a wife is, in the final analysis, the consequence of the fact that a brother or father has given her up' (62). Lévi-Strauss says that such rules are not restricted to the matter of sexual unions, but are evident 'every time the group is faced with the insufficiency or the risky distribution of a valuable of fundamental importance' (32). Lévi-Strauss

relates the necessity of 'collective intervention' to the condition of scarcity (of women, food, property, valuables, etc.) and says that 'collective intervention ... [is] a state of affairs regarded as virtually normal in primitive society... and necessary to the group if its coherence is not to be continually compromised.' (*Ibid.*). To Lévi-Strauss, it is through the exchange of valuables (women, food, etc.) that a person or group places another under an obligation to reciprocate in kind. Lévi-Strauss says that: 'These gifts are either exchanged immediately for equivalent gifts or are received by the beneficiaries on condition that at a later date they will give counter-gifts often exceeding the original goods in value, but which in their turn bring about a subsequent right to receive new gifts surpassing the original ones in sumptuousness (52). Thus, as Lévi-Strauss says,

Goods are not only economic commodities, but vehicles and instruments for realities of another order, such as power, influence, sympathy, status and emotion; and the skilful game of exchange ... consists in a complex totality of conscious or unconscious manoeuvres in order to gain security and to guard oneself against risks brought about by alliances and by rivalries. (54)

In the phenomenon of 'potlatch', found in the Indian societies of Alaska and the Vancouver region, huge quantities of valuables are transferred between groups, with the aim being 'to surpass a rival in generosity, to crush him if possible with future obligations which it is hoped he cannot meet, so as to take from him his prerogatives, titles, rank, authority and prestige'. (53) The same aim is evident, says Lévi-Strauss, in the Western exchange of 'certain non-essential goods, such as flowers, sweets and 'luxury articles', to which is attached a great psychological, aesthetic or sensual value': he notes that 'these gifts, like invitations (which, though not exclusively, are also free distributions of food and drink), are [intended to be] 'returned'.' (55-56) Christmastime, for example, is 'nothing other than a gigantic potlatch'. (56)

While Lévi-Strauss connects war with the condition of scarcity, McLuhan hypothesizes that all wars are fought 'by the latest technology available in any culture' and that 'Every technology necessitates a new war' (*UM* 339; *WP* 98). He says that 'Any form of continued and accelerated innovation is, in effect, a declaration of war on one's own

civilian population.... An act of war directed against another civilian population involves the population in revolutionary adjustments, such as we now take for granted on the home front in an age of rapid scientific advance' (TT 173). Writing on Vietnam, he says that 'As a crash program of Westernization and education, the war consists of initiating the East in the mechanical technology of the industrial age' (Finkelstein, 1968: 117).⁷³ At the same time, he says that 'Since violence is the inevitable 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.' (L 348) Reading the 'symptoms' of war to identify the 'causes', McLuhan wrote to the then Vice President of the United States of America, Hubert Humphrey in December 1967:

it is plain that [Vietnam] is our first TV war, just as World War II was a radio war and World War I a railway war. We are now in the midst of World War III, and it no more resembles World War II than World War II did World War I. (L 349)

That the Vietnam war was a 'TV war' was a point that had great currency in the 1960's. McLuhan elaborates: 'TV means that the Vietnam war is the first to be fought on American soil. Parents can now see their sons killed in living color. All sons become ours on TV.' (CIOB 52) The first war against Germany, he says, was a war of 'centralism and encirclement', i.e. of mechanical technology (railway); the second was a war of 'decentralism', i.e. of electronic technology (radio); since then, McLuhan says, all wars have been 'information' wars (*ibid.* 66). 'Economists have pointed out that as information levels rise in a culture or economy, not only does one product tend to be easily substitutable for another, but information itself tends to substitute for the previous movement of commodities', he says, and 'since the movement of information constitutes by far the largest human activity today, war itself tends more and more to assume the informational character.' (NAEB III: 130) Thus, 'World War III is a guerilla

⁷³ Finkelstein wrongly attributes this quote to *Authors Take Sides on Vietnam: Two Questions on the War in Vietnam answered by the authors of several nations* (1967), eds. Cecil Woolf and John Bagguley, which publishes the responses of 259 famous writers to two questions, 'Are you for, or against, the intervention of the United States in Vietnam?' and 'How, in your opinion, should the conflict in Vietnam be resolved?' In fact no mention of McLuhan is to be found in this book, although contributors include contemporaries such as Lewis Mumford, William Empson, Leslie Fiedler, George Steiner, and Tom Wolfe. The true source is unknown.

information war with no division between military and civilian.' (*CIOB* 66) That radio was to blame for the atrocities of World War II is an argument derived from Innis (1972 [1950]: 165), repeated by McLuhan in a number of places (see e.g. *TT* 25, 192; *ML* 43; *CA* 82-83; *CB* 141; see also Roszak in *PC* 265-266; Ricks in *HC* 214-215). McLuhan says in the NAEB report (III: 14) that 'radio created Fascism', arguing that

The immediate effect of radio on a tribal society is to intensify whatever elements of tribalism are present.... When radio was new in Europe, it awakened the old tribal energies and patterns of various European peoples giving us the form which we call fascism. (NAEB III: 127; see also *UM* 215)

By contrast, 'The effect of radio upon the sensibilities of completely detribalized men, such as the British and the American, has been to stir up a deep sense of responsibility for the human family in the forms which we associate with socialism and communism.' (NAEB III: 127) In 'The Medium is the Message' (1960) McLuhan cites from a speech by former German Armaments Minister Albert Speer at the Nuremberg Trials. Speer (one of Hitler's most trusted cohorts during the war) suggests that the telephone, teleprinter and radio 'made it possible for orders from the highest levels to be given direct to the lowest levels, where, on account of the absolute authority behind them, they were carried out uncritically' and suggests that '[t]he means of communication alone permit it to mechanize the work of subordinate leadership. As a consequence a new type develops: the uncritical recipient of orders' (*UB* 17, pp.18-19). McLuhan comments: 'What seems to have occurred in Germany and Japan under electronic impact was the brainwashing of a recently assumed literacy and reversion to tribal cohesion and pre-individualist patterns of thought.' (*Ibid.* 19) He attributes the violence of the Holocaust to a 'confusion of images and goals' which he says is characteristic of all cultures confronted by new technologies (*CB* 141). 'When images or identity, private or corporate, are confused, the natural response is blind violence. Such violence is never a quest for a goal but for an image.' (*Ibid.*) He says 'This was the horror of Hitler.... the Germans violently sought a new identity to match their new [tribal] psychic dimension They used the mechanical technology of the nineteenth century in the delusion of meeting a twentieth-century destiny.' (*Ibid.*) Since the

invention of the atom bomb, however, McLuhan says that 'It is no longer convenient, or suitable, to use the latest technologies for fighting our wars, because the latest technologies have rendered war meaningless. The hydrogen bomb is history's exclamation point. It ends an age-long sentence of manifest violence!' (*MM* 138) He says that 'The nuclear bomb is not hardware', but rather a form of software, i.e. information, and so 'It ends war as a means of international power play.' (*CIOB* 66) 'Whenever hot wars are necessary these days,' he says, 'we conduct them in the backyards of the world with the old technologies. These wars are happenings, tragic games.' (*MM* 138) The cold war, meanwhile, is conducted with 'informational technology' which 'renders all of our institutions obsolete' (*UM* 339; *L* 352). McLuhan explains: 'Real, total war has become information war. It is being fought by subtle electric informational media – under cold conditions, and constantly. The cold war is the real war front – a surround – involving everybody – all the time – everywhere.' (*MM* 138) In *Understanding Media*, in a chapter on 'Weapons', McLuhan distinguishes between 'hot' and 'cold' wars. He says that

The "hot" wars of the past used weapons that knocked off the enemy, one by one. Even ideological warfare in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries proceeded by persuading individuals to adopt new points of view, one at a time. Electric persuasion by photo and movie and TV works, instead, by dunking entire populations in new imagery. (*UM* 339)

The cold war, he says, is 'an electric battle of information and of images that goes far deeper and is more obsessional than the old hot wars of industrial hardware' (*UM* 339) Like previous wars, the cold war or 'information' war is a matter of 'the processing of difficult and resistant materials by the latest technology' (*UM* 344). Forms of information, like all other technology, 'constitute the emergence of new staples, and new natural resources in a society' (*NAEB III*: 130). As he says,

In the past, war had consisted in the movement of commodities back and forth across frontiers. Today, when the largest commodity of all is information itself war means no longer the movement of hardware, but of information. What had previously been a "peace-time" activity within our own boundaries now becomes the major "cold-war" activity across frontiers. Instead of competing for the franchise and dollars of our own

citizens, we are now engaged in trying to win the favorable attention of Asian and African millions for the star turn or top show. (NAEB V: 2)

If we reinterpret McLuhan's concept of war in the context of *scarcity*, we can better understand his argument that today, 'cold' wars, i.e. 'information' wars, as McLuhan calls them, are at least as effective than the 'hot' war (if not more so) in controlling the opposition's access to technologies/information – i.e. as resources, as 'staples'.

The term 'global village' predates by at least two decades the term 'globalisation' that started to be used in the political-economic arena in the 1980's. Ted Carpenter notes that McLuhan in his later work preferred the term 'global theatre' to 'global village', arguing that 'in the global theater the audience and the crew become actors, producers rather than consumers' (*UB* 5, p.19); however, Carpenter (2001: 8) says that this term 'proved unappealing to journalists, who considered themselves neutral reporters, not theatrical producers'. The concept has been credited to Wyndham Lewis, who wrote in *America and Cosmic Man* (1948) that 'the earth has become one big village, with telephones laid on from one end to the other, and air transport, both speedy and safe'; and to Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, who wrote that technology was creating 'a single organised membrane over the earth', and that 'the age of *civilisations* has ended, and that of *one civilisation* is beginning' (Lewis, 1948: 16; Teilhard, 1959: 241, 1965: 158; *L* 253, footnote 3; Carpenter, *op.cit.* 7; Wolfe in *Understanding Me*, p.xvii). The concept appears in various forms in McLuhan's work after 1951 (see e.g. *UB* 6 p.6; *L* 253), but is pervasive by the 'Report on Project in Understanding New Media' (1960) where McLuhan tells us confidently that 'The world is now a global village.' (NAEB VII: xxi). While critics of *Understanding Media* read this as utopic, McLuhan went on to describe the global village as 'a whispering gallery, with a large portion of mankind engaged in making its living by keeping the rest of mankind under surveillance', a 'theatre', in other words, 'with every human being more or less aware of being on-stage and in role' (*UB* 5, p.12; *TT* 275; see also *UM* 344; *TT* 93). McLuhan describes the dynamics of the 'global village' in terms of a dialectical engagement between Western 'nationalism' and Eastern 'communism'. Under the impact of electronic communications technology, he says that 'The entire Western world is going

East (tribal) and inward. The East is detribalizing – going West and outward. No such macroscopic revolution ever occurred before. All identity images, private and corporate, dissolve. Violent struggle to regain these images ensues.’ (*CIOB* 66) McLuhan’s alignment of ‘communism’ with tribalism may have been inspired by Jung, who says in the Preface to *Psyche and Symbol* that ‘Communism is an archaic, primitive and therefore highly insidious pattern which characterizes primitive social groups’ (Jung, 1958: xvi; *CA* 22). In fact McLuhan eventually attributes all war to the ‘threat of communism’ as it is perceived by the West, where the ‘West’ includes all nations founded on the phonetic alphabet (Britain, Germany, France, the United States, etc.) and ‘communist’ cultures include all those that have not been exposed to the phonetic alphabet (Russia, China, India, Japan, the Middle East, tribal Africa, etc.). McLuhan often comments on the ‘stability’ of the tribal society compared with the fragmented ‘civilization’ of the West, which is characterized by technological disturbances (see e.g. *UB* 6, p.8). He says that in a tribal society ‘all technology is part of a ritual that is desperately sought to be kept stabilized and permanent’, and that tribal peoples ‘simply cannot comprehend the concept of the individual or of the separate and independent citizen’ (*EM* 240; *WP* 22-23). The effect of the phonetic alphabet, McLuhan says, is to *fragment* or compartmentalize all aspects of human interaction and experience, so that the Westerner possesses a ‘highly specialized and precarious individual ego (or private psyche)’, with corresponding nationalist pride, ‘that visual kind of unity that springs men out of local and tribal patterns’ (*TT* 258; *UM* 339). McLuhan describes how the advent of electronic media in the West has had a dual impact on the perception of ‘communism’: on the one hand, it produced communism as a Western ‘ideal’; on the other hand, by collapsing the walls of time and space between nations, it produced the perception that ‘all backward countries are “threats” to all developed countries’, for they ‘have never known social or political individualism’ (*L* 349-350). McLuhan says that ‘To be surrounded by rapidly developing countries whose patterns of culture are widely divergent from our own has certainly upset the American image ... Our confused efforts to re-establish goals, habits, attitudes, and the sense of security they bring have become the main order of business.’ (*WP* 128-129) In the East, meanwhile, ‘All the non-industrial areas like

China, India, and Africa are speeding ahead by means of electric technology ... they have never had a nineteenth century; they have entered the twentieth century with their family kinship structures and their closely integral patterns of association still intact.' (*WP* 128) The war against 'communism' is futile, as far as McLuhan is concerned, for as he says in *The Mechanical Bride*, with men and women 'transformed into replaceable parts accustomed to the consumption of uniform products', then 'the effect of mass production and consumption is really to bring about a practical rather than theoretic communism' (*MB* 55). While in *The Mechanical Bride* McLuhan attributes this 'practical' communism to the effects of mechanical technology, he later interprets 'communism' as the adjunct of electronic technology and its 'retribalizing' effects, so that 'communism' now threatens the West from within (i.e. the communist party, rock'n'roll music, Woodstock, hippie culture, the beats, etc.). McLuhan mocks Karl Marx (1818-1883) for looking through a 'rear-view mirror' in his analysis of a class system already rendered obsolete through the industrial revolution (*WP* 4-5; *TT* 58-67, 68-78). 'Bless the Marxists', McLuhan says in *Counterblast*, 'for their devotion to the revolution that took place in our service environments over a century ago.' (*CB* 128) McLuhan says (reiterating the argument developed by Wyndham Lewis in *Time and Western Man*, 1927):

When travel and information and education services are available to the ordinary person, that is Communism. It happened long before Karl Marx.... Today, with the multi-billion dollar service environments available to everybody, almost for free, (these include the massive educational and information world of advertising) it means that we have plunged very deep into tribal Communism on a scale unknown in human history. (*L* 373)

He challenged an international forum in Denmark in 1969 at the height of the Vietnam war: 'What are we fighting Communism for? We are the most Communist people in world history.' (*Ibid.*; see also *UM* 222) For McLuhan, the 'threat of communism' is paranoia on the part of the West. 'To regard the global encirclement of the USA by backward tribal communities presenting a "communist" threat to the USA is a very confusing affair. It represents a state of mind at least as confused as the Kaiser in 1914', he says (*L* 350). As he explains, 'The Kaiser in 1914 protested that Germany

had been encircled. He saw the Slav countries and Russia as terrible threats to German security. They were backward countries just beginning to industrialize.' (L 349) McLuhan wonders if '[s]ince the United States is the only country in history to begin with print technology as its guideline and pattern for all its establishments, it is, of all countries, the least able to confront the advent of electric technology, which contradicts every facet of specialist rational order.' (TT 271-272)

There is some evidence that McLuhan connected the effects of electronic communications technology with terrorism. He says that

The mechanical techniques, with their limited powers, we have long used as weapons. The electric techniques cannot be used aggressively except to end all life at once, like the turning off of a light. To live with both of these technologies at the same time is the peculiar drama of the twentieth century. (UM 342)

He elaborates this 'drama' in *Take Today* in relation to the global village/theatre:

Half the world today is engaged in keeping the other half "under surveillance." This, in fact, is the hang-up of the age of "software" and information. In the preceding "hardware" age the "haves" of the world had kept the "have-nots" under surveillance.... *The police state is now a work of art, a bureaucratic ballet of undulating sirens.* That is a way of saying that the espionage activities of our multitudinous man hunters [i.e. police, etc.] and "crediting" agencies are not only archaic, but redundant and irrelevant. (TT 25, emphasis in original)

McLuhan says that 'The "enemy" in modern warfare is necessarily part of a single body politic, namely, the global community.' (*Ibid.* 172) He elaborates:

The enemy within is far harder to oppose than the old-fashioned variety.... The arms race at home is at least as destructive of social peace as the exploding of the product in "enemy" territory. In the Global Theater of the Absurd we can no longer identify our enemies ... (*Ibid.* 173)

In a formulation that has relevance both for Vietnam and the recent war in Iraq, McLuhan says 'In a word, the outer enemy reflects a fear that in fact originates at

home. In seeking to stabilize the existing setup by an external war, there is the recognition of the danger of a social breakthrough at home.' (*Ibid.* 172) He comments in a letter of 1965, after reviewing Jacques Ellul's *Propaganda* (1965 [*Propagandes*, 1962]),

[Ellul's] theme is that propaganda is never the content, is never the ideology. It is rather the pattern of all the media themselves. What he is really saying is that under electronic conditions all cultures whatever become propaganda. (L 324; see also CA 77, 82)

Terrorist warfare, as a form of information warfare, is perhaps the only form of warfare possible when the planet has become a 'global theatre'; it represents not a struggle between states, but between militant subcultures and states. The 'decentralized' Internet enables subcultures of all kinds, including terrorist cells, to mobilize resources (i.e. information) across borders. Borders in fact are 'obsolete'. The act of terrorism, which is outside the law, functions both as 'bad news' and as an 'anti-environment'. In fact Freud in *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego* (1921), as well as in *Civilization and its Discontents*, describes 'the narcissism of minor differences' by which 'communities with adjoining territories ... are engaged in constant feuds and in ridiculing each other ... it is a convenient and relatively harmless satisfaction of the inclination to aggression, by means of which the cohesion between the members of the community is made easier.' (SE XXI: 114; XVIII: 101-102) When all the world is electronically 'connected', there is no 'Other' upon whom one can vent one's aggression; young men (and women) who may have bonded through going to war against the Other now bond by going to war with civilization itself. Writing about the Twin Towers attacks on September 11, 2001, Slavoj Žižek (2002: 9) questions whether the goal of 'today's fundamentalist terror' is 'to awaken us, Western citizens, from our numbness, from immersion in our everyday ideological universe?' Žižek comments: 'It does seem as if the split between First World and Third World runs more and more along the lines of the opposition between leading a long and satisfying life full of material and cultural wealth, and dedicating one's life to some transcendent Cause.' (*Ibid.* 40) McLuhan, by contrast, attributes the 'split between First World and Third World' to the clash between the 'communist' or 'tribal' values of non-alphabetic

cultures and the individualist, visual values of the West. 'What is characteristic of tribal man,' says McLuhan, 'whether he be a Mountbatten, a "Limey," a Vietnamese, a Japanese, or a member of the *kibbutzim*, is instant readiness to serve the whole community and to die for it without a qualm.' (TT 266)

McLuhan contrasts the structure of 'civilized' society to that of 'tribal' society. He suggests that the tribal society is characterized by a 'horizontal structure' of 'decentralized' power, where ongoing learning of one's role within the society is integral to the way of life (TT 183). In times of war, however, a 'vertical structure' materializes, and the society is headed by a 'war chief' who 'designate[s] various jobs to various people' (Wilfred Pelletier, cited in *Ibid.*). The 'vertical structure' and 'delegation of jobs' characteristic of tribal warfare are the rule in Western industrial societies, however, which McLuhan says exist in 'a perpetual state of wartime energy organization' (*Ibid.*). In *War and Peace in the Global Village*, pp.23-24, McLuhan criticizes Ashley Montagu's argument in *The Human Revolution* (1965) that

The fact is that as man has advanced in civilization he has become increasingly, not less, violent and warlike. The violences that have been attributed to his original nature have, in fact, been acquired predominantly within the relatively recent period of man's cultural evolution. In our own time most of us has grown so accustomed to the life of each for himself that it is difficult for us to understand that for the greater part of man's history every man of necessity lived a life of involvement in the welfare of his fellows. (Montagu, 1965: 24)

McLuhan says: 'It helps to know that civilization is entirely the product of phonetic literacy, and as it dissolves with the electronic revolution, we rediscover a tribal, integral awareness that manifests itself in a complete shift in our sensory lives.' (WP 24-25) However, he warns, 'for the Western world, whose legal and educational institutions are based on the detribalized citizen and on visual training of perception and judgement, such shift to the auditory is violent and traumatic' (book review, *Renascance* 12:4, Summer 1960, p.208). He also warns that 'With literacy about to hybridize the cultures of the Chinese, the Indians, and the Africans, we are about to experience such a release of human power and aggressive violence as makes the

previous history of phonetic alphabet technology seem quite tame.' (UM 50) Writing in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* of the clash between East and West, McLuhan cautions against aggravated violence, warning that 'there is enough inner trauma in such a change without the auditory cultures and the optical cultures flinging themselves at each other in outer manifestations of sadistic self-righteousness.' (GG 68)

If war is but an effect of 'technological trauma', then there is scope for prevention of war (UM 66). McLuhan says in *Understanding Media*, '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.' (*Ibid.* 64) One method is by controlling access to technologies. McLuhan suggests in the NAEB Report (III: 9) that if we could understand the dynamics of technologies, we might then, 'in the interests of human equilibrium ... suppress various media [such] as radio or movies for long periods of time, or until the social organism is in a state to sustain such violent lopsided stimulus'. As he elaborates in *Understanding Media*:

We are certainly coming within conceivable range of a world automatically controlled to the point where we could say, "Six hours less radio in Indonesia next week or there will be a great falling off of literary attention." Or, "We can program twenty more hours of TV in South Africa next week to cool down the tribal temperature raised by radio last week.["] Whole cultures could now be programmed to keep their emotional climate stable in the same way that we have begun to know something about maintaining equilibrium in the commercial economies of the world. (UM 28)

Such programming, McLuhan says, would be 'the equivalent of a thermostatic control' for whole societies (UB 4, p.19). There is also scope for the prevention of war through art, which McLuhan says functions to 'immunize' audiences against trauma. '[Gustave] Flaubert ... [said] that if people had read and understood his *Sentimental Education* there would have been no war of 1870', notes McLuhan; similarly, 'Wyndham Lewis observes that if people had understood his analysis of popular culture in *The Art of Being Ruled*, there would have been no World War II.' (*Understanding Me*, 13-14; see also UM 65) In June 1968 McLuhan suggested to Prime Minister Pierre Elliott Trudeau that in order to prevent war, what was required was 'to set up social therapies and

immunizing programs exactly comparable to medical action in the fact of an endemic disease' (L 353; see also 490). 'To have a disease without its symptoms is to be immune', says McLuhan; 'Today we have begun to sense that art may be able to provide such immunity.' (UM 64)

If McLuhan's thinking on the subject of war is somewhat incoherent, it is because he never manages to reconcile the different dialectics upon which his argument is founded. While McLuhan stresses the traumatic impact of the technology at the level of the 'image' (or the 'imaginary', if we align McLuhan's argument with that of Lacan), other factors are clearly at work in McLuhan's analyses of war, namely, that of 'aggression' (ascribed by Freud to the 'death-drive', *Thanatos*, conceptualized in opposition to the libido, *Eros*); that of the 'central nervous system', whether 'private' or 'corporate', conceptualized in *Understanding Media* in terms of a dialectic of 'pleasure' and 'pain'; that of the 'divergent nature of oral and written social organization', described in terms of a dialectic of 'tribal' and 'civilized', or 'East' and 'West'; and, though mentioned only very briefly, that of symbolic exchange (which, in the context of scarcity, presents a dialectic between 'war' and 'peace' as a 'temporarily resolved' war). Clearly, any theory of war that embraces all these dialectics is going to be complex; however, it must be emphasized that all these dialectics imply a principle of 'homeostasis' or 'equilibrium' at work in the dynamics of the environment, from the cellular level (i.e. *Eros/Thanatos* as the '*urge inherent in organic life to restore an earlier state of things*', SE XXII: 95), to the global village (i.e. the war of East and West as a war of 'unequal technologies'). If we accept that a principle of 'homeostasis' governs McLuhan's thinking on the subject of war, then we are in the best place to understand the vital function that McLuhan accords to art.

Art as the dialectical counterpart to Technology

McLuhan's concept of art as 'anti-environment' forms the dialectical counterpart to his concept of technology as environment, and represents McLuhan's ethical position in respect to the disturbing and disruptive effects of technology. Writing back to Harold

Innis, McLuhan says in the NAEB Report (III: 22): 'The task of art is to correct the bias of technological media.' While the inventor of technology 'creates products and processes that transform environments', 'The artist makes new perception' (TT 94). McLuhan says:

Art as an anti-environment is an indispensable means of perception, for environments, as such, are imperceptible. Their power to impose their ground rules on our perceptual life is so complete that there is no scope for dialogue or interface. Hence the need for art or anti-environments. (UB 20, pp.3-4)

The relationship between technology and art, environment and anti-environment, is conceptualized dialectically; every technology is in the first place a work of art, while every work of art, in its repeated use, becomes a technology (see CA). McLuhan does not distinguish between art and science as such; the artist is a person 'in any field, scientific or humanistic, who grasps the implications of his actions and of new knowledge in his own time' (UM 65). Later, McLuhan and Eric McLuhan suggest that the 'laws' of media (i.e. Extension, Obsolescence, Retrieval and Reversal) apply to the arts as well as the sciences and in fact 'erase the distinction between them' (LM x).

The Artist

McLuhan's concept of the 'artist' was greatly influenced by the modernists, for whom the function of art and the role of the artist were matters of the highest concern. The function of art, as the modernists saw it, is that of 'adjusting the reader to the contemporary world' (IL xiv). As McLuhan notes, T.S. Eliot wrote a number of 'patient' essays, and Ezra Pound a number of 'impatient' ones, designed to educate their readers in modern poetic technique. Their efforts, McLuhan declared in 1950, have 'thus far been ineffectual', while James Joyce, whose first book was *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1916, serialized 1914-1915), McLuhan says 'wrote no essays yet is no worse off in his readers' (book review, *Renascence* 3:1, Fall 1950, p.45). Initially conceptualizing the role of the artist in the terms provided by I.A. Richards, Wyndham Lewis, Eliot, Pound, and Joyce, McLuhan by the mid 1950's started to

delineate differences between the role of the artist in (pre-literate) 'tribal' society, in (literate) Western society, and in so-called 'post-literate' or electronic society. The concept of the 'artist' provides the parameters for the application of McLuhan's 'anti-social', 'anti-environmental' method of 'probing' the (unconscious) environment, and, McLuhan tells us, has utility across all fields of the arts and sciences.

Artist and Critic

In *The Mechanical Bride* and McLuhan's early pieces of literary criticism, McLuhan's concept of the artist is to some extent intertwined with that of the critic.⁷⁴ We may attribute this to the influence of I.A. Richards and F.R. Leavis, McLuhan's mentors at Cambridge University, as well as the influence of Eliot, Pound, and Lewis, all of whom fulfilled both roles. Lewis's 'strategy', for example, as both artist and critic, McLuhan says, is 'the training of perception' (book review, *Renascence* 12:2, Winter 1960, p.94). I.A. Richards (1929: 285-286) meanwhile describes the function of art as that of 're-ordering' the 'impulses' of the nervous system, so as to adjust the reader to the current environment. Richards says:

Let us suppose that ... there exists *a tendency towards increased order* This tendency would be a need ... deriving in fact from *the* fundamental imbalance to which biological development may be supposed to be due. This development with man (and his animal neighbours) seems to be predominately in the direction of greater complexity and finer differentiation of responses. And it is easy to conceive the organism as relieving, through this differentiation, the strain put upon it by life in a particularly uncongenial environment. It is but a step further to conceive it as also tending to relieve internal strains due to these developments imposed from without. And a re-ordering of its impulses so as to reduce their interferences with one another to a minimum would be the most successful – and the 'natural' – direction which this tendency would take. (*Ibid.*, 285-287, emphasis in original)

⁷⁴ McLuhan distinguishes between artist and critic in *From Cliché to Archetype* (1970), where he says that: 'The poet, or creator, more than the critic, tries to exploit new technology in order to establish new plateaus for perception. The critic tends rather to look at the values of the preceding age which have been eroded by the new developments.' (CA 175)

Art, Richards suggests, is part of the process of evolution, 'relieving ... the strain put upon [the organism] by life in a particularly uncongenial environment'. Lewis turns this around: 'The artist,' Lewis says, 'is engaged in writing a detailed history of the future because he is aware of the unused possibilities of the present.' (NAEB VII: i) Similarly, for Ezra Pound (1934: 65), 'Artists are the antennae of the race.' T.S. Eliot, meanwhile, addresses the function of art in relation to the art that has come before:

[W]hat happens when a new work of art is created is something that happens simultaneously to all the works of art which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal order among themselves, which is modified by the introduction of the new (the really new) work of art among them. The existing order is complete before the new work arrives; for order to persist after the supervention of novelty, the *whole* existing order must be, if ever so slightly, altered; and so the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted; and this is conformity between the old and the new. Whoever has approved this idea of order, of the form of European, of English literature will not find it preposterous that the past should be altered by the present as much as the present is directed by the past. (Eliot, 1932: 5, emphasis in original; LM 47-48)

Reformulating these concepts of the artist in *The Mechanical Bride*, McLuhan defines 'art' as both a 'storehouse of achieved values' and 'the antennae of new awareness and discovery', enabling 'a unified and an inclusive consciousness in which there is easy commerce between old and new' (MB 87). The best art thus makes no distinction between 'high-brow' and 'low-brow'. McLuhan says of James Joyce:

One of the "high-brow" products of this century is James Joyce's *Ulysses*.... The hero of *Ulysses* is a "middle-brow" Dubliner with a very "low-brow" wife. There is also the ironically presented Stephen Dedalus, the esthete-artist who corresponds to *Life's* resentfully romantic image of the high-brow. But Joyce was a real high-brow, a man of real distinction; that is to say, he was a man who took an intelligent interest in everybody and everything.... He was very high-brow, very middle-brow, and especially very low-brow. (*Ibid.* 59)

McLuhan says that 'The great artist necessarily has his roots very deep in his own time – roots which embrace the most vulgar and commonplace fantasies and aspirations.' (*Ibid.* 152) He repeats this in *From Cliche To Archetype*, arguing that artists tend to

draw upon the most 'banal', 'vulgar' materials of collective consciousness (CA 178-179; 152); a technique described, McLuhan (CA 181) suggests, in W.B. Yeats's poem 'The Circus Animals' Desertion' (completed just before Yeats' death in 1939):

Those masterful images because complete
Grew in pure mind, but out of what began?
A mound of refuse or the sweeping of a street,
Old kettles, old bottles, and a broken can,
Old iron, old bones, old rags, that raving slut
Who keeps the till. Now that my ladder's gone,
I must lie down where all the ladders start,
In the foul rag-and-bone shop of the heart.

McLuhan says in *The Mechanical Bride* that 'The basic criterion for any kind of human excellence is simply how heavy a demand it makes on the intelligence. How inclusive a consciousness does it focus?' (MB 152) He expands upon this in *Understanding Media*, stating that: '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.' (UM 65) There are two (complementary) interpretations for the phrase 'integral awareness'. On the one hand, 'integral awareness' seems to imply that the artist is one for whom 'consciousness' is not 'fragmented' (i.e. by the effects of technologies), so that McLuhan can say of Joyce, for example, that 'he had no subliminal side to him. He was terribly aware' (book review, *Renascence* 12:4, Summer 1960, p.202). On the other hand, 'integral awareness', like the term 'inclusive consciousness', seems to imply the encyclopedism of Cicero's *doctus orator*, i.e. a consciousness that includes all (or as much as possible) of the culture that has come before it.

Anti-Social as Anti-Environmental

Art is not the only province of the anti-environment, however. To McLuhan, all 'anti-social' activities are anti-environmental, because they raise the unconscious environment to conscious attention. This argument owes much to Wyndham Lewis,

who says in *Blast* (No. 1, 20 June 1914, p.33):⁷⁵

The artist of the modern movement is a savage (in no sense an "advanced," perfected, democratic, Futuristic individual of Mr. Marinetti's limited imagination [in 'The Futurist Manifesto, 1909]): this enormous, jangling, journalistic, fairy desert of modern life serves him as Nature did more technically primitive man.

McLuhan invokes the tale of 'The Emperor's New Clothes' to illustrate the way that only someone *outside* of a certain environment is able to 'see' it for what it actually is.

He elaborates:

"Well-adjusted" courtiers, having vested interests, saw the emperor as beautifully appointed. The "antisocial" brat, unaccustomed to the old environment, clearly saw that the Emperor "ain't got nothin' on." The new environment was clearly visible to him. (*MM* 88, emphasis in original)

To McLuhan, the 'artist' (like the antisocial brat) is one who is 'rarely "well-adjusted," he cannot go along with currents and trends' (*Ibid.*). While technologies inspire somnambulism, the artist 'sharpens our perception' (*Ibid.*). McLuhan says: 'Poets and artists live on frontiers. They have no feedback, only feedforward. They have no identities. They are probes.' (*CIOB* 44) He finds 'aesthetic bonds between the poet, the sleuth, and even the criminal', likening Arthur Rimbaud and Ernest Hemingway to action film hero James Bond and the rogues played by Humphrey Bogart so as to argue that

James Bond, Humphrey Bogart, Rimbaud, and Hemingway are all figures who explore the shifting frontiers of morals and society. They are engaged in detecting the social environment by probing and transgression. For to probe is to cross boundaries of many kinds ... (*UB* 20, p.5)

McLuhan says that 'The child, by delinquent behavior, is aping the exploratory artist. Dostoevski was aware of this in *Crime and Punishment*. He saw the criminal as a sort

⁷⁵ McLuhan misquotes this passage in *Culture Is Our Business*, writing of 'this enormous, jangling, journalistic, *fiery* desert' (*CIOB* 172, emphasis added)

of cross between the saint and the artist.’ (EM 226) As anti-social activities are those that reveal the hidden environment, McLuhan says that ‘Professionalism is environmental. Amateurism is anti-environmental.’ (MM 93) Amateurs, like ‘small children’, are less apt to conform to the established mores of the environment (*Ibid.*; UB 20, p.4).

Jokes (Probe of Environment)

Jokes, too, are anti-environmental.⁷⁶ McLuhan says that ‘Humor ... as a probe of our environment – of what’s really going on – affords us our most appealing anti-environmental tool.’ (MM 92) Describing the function of the ‘clown’ (i.e. comedian, joker) in society, McLuhan says that

the clown is a probe.... the clown attacks power. He tests the tolerances for us all. He tells us where 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. (CIOB 288)

McLuhan says that jokes ‘are stabs or probes into the cultural matrix that plagues [us]’ and that it is ‘inevitable that the funny man be “a man with a grievance”’ (CA 132).⁷⁷ Conversely, ‘anyone can determine an area of social irritation and disturbance by

⁷⁶ Theall (1971: 157; 2001: 155) and Cavell (2002: 47) have connected McLuhan’s analysis of the joke to Freud’s analysis in *Der Witz und Seine Beziehung zum Unbewussten* (1905). McLuhan, however, makes direct reference to this book only once, in *From Cliché to Archetype* (1970), where the authors say, ‘Sigmund Freud uses Jewish marriage-broker jokes to illustrate the interplay of different areas of experience in his title *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*.’ (CA 133) It is likely that McLuhan was led to this book by Anton Ehrenzweig’s *Psychoanalysis of Artistic Hearing and Vision* (1953), in chapter VIII of which, ‘The Inarticulate (‘Baffling’) Structure of the Joke’, Ehrenzweig critiques Freud’s concept of the joke by emphasizing its ‘original inarticulate and nonsensical character’ (p.126). This would date McLuhan’s introduction to Freud’s concept of the joke at around 1963, during the writing of *Understanding Media*, although he would have known of Freud’s book from Gershon Legman’s article ‘Rationale of the Dirty Joke’, published in *Neurotica* 9 (Winter 1952) pp.49-64. Note that McLuhan refers to the English translation by A. A. Brill, *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* (1916, also appearing in *The Basic Writings of Sigmund Freud*, 1938); Legman shortens the title to *Wit and the Unconscious*; the Standard Edition, translated by James Strachey, was first published in 1960 as *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*.

⁷⁷ McLuhan credits to comedian Steve Allen the line ‘The funny man is a man with a grievance.’ (CIOB 288)

simply checking the areas from which jokes are currently emerging' (*Ibid.* 133) However, 'When grievances or irritations become too severe, the joke ceases to function as a catharsis.' (*Ibid.*) The Vietnam war, for example, produced few jokes, but there are countless jokes about the minor irritations that flourish in immigrant populations and between neighbouring nations (*Ibid.*).

Games (Capsule of Environment)

McLuhan says that games, too, 'as a sort of capsule or live paradigm of any society', are anti-environmental (*WP* 169). He says: 'Games ... involve the sensory life of a society in a mocking and fictitious way. To simulate one situation by means of another one, to turn the whole working environment into a small model, is a means of perception and control by means of public ritual.' (*Ibid.* 168-169) He says that the audience participates in the game 'as the environmental cliché', while 'the players enact the metaphorical archetype of the wider situation'. (*Ibid.* 169) In fact he argues that the audience is 'indispensable' to the game, for '[t]he greatest contest in the world in which only the players are present would have no game character whatever.' (*Ibid.*)

News (Rules of Environment)

News, meanwhile (which for McLuhan means 'bad news' – 'Good news is simply not news', he says) enables people to perceive the 'ground rules' of the environment. In 'The Emperor's Old Clothes' (1966), McLuhan cites from a British legal case cited, in turn, in a book called *Uncommon Law* by Alan P. Herbert. 'Evidence was brought that "what is called 'news' is always an anti-social and disturbing act; that 'news' consists, as to ninety percent, of the records of human misfortunes, unhappiness and wrongdoing, as to nine per cent of personal advertisement ..."' (*UB* 20, pp.4-5)

McLuhan interprets:

It has often mystified readers of the press that real news is bad news. Good news is simply not news. The ads are full of good news. Good news is a repeat of the old environment, while bad news is a probe

into the new environment. Bad news reveals the lines of force in an environment ... (*Ibid.* p.5)

By the 'ground rules' or 'lines of force' McLuhan seems to mean the law, i.e., law in all its forms – moral law, written law, unwritten law, 'the laws of nature', etc. News of disasters and wrongdoing 'enables us to perceive our world'; 'without crime as content we would not be able to perceive the environment' McLuhan says (*UB* 4, p.11; *EM* 226). The ads meanwhile balance the 'bad news' with 'good news': 'Since ads are all good news,' McLuhan quips, 'it takes a lot of bad news to sell good news.' (*CIOB* 268)

Rear-View Mirror

'When faced with a totally new situation,' McLuhan famously says, 'we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past. We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future.' (*MM* 74-75) He uses the example of Marx and Engels' tirade against capitalism in the *Communist Manifesto* (1848), arguing that 'By Karl Marx's time, a "communism" resulting from [the new service environments – the press, the highway, the postal routes ... steam and mail] so far surpassed the older private wealth and services contained within the new communal environment that it was quite natural for Marx to use it as a rear-view mirror for his Utopian hopes.' (*WP* 4-5) McLuhan says 'The Marxists spent their lives trying to promote a theory after the reality had been achieved. What they called the class struggle was a spectre of the old feudalism in the rear-view mirror.' (*CB* 140) It is only the artist who 'has the power to discern the current environment created by the latest technology', McLuhan says; 'the artist can show us how to "ride with the punch," instead of "taking it on the chin."' (*VP* xxiii; *UM* 66) He says: '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.' (*UM* 65) Again, in *Through the Vanishing Point* (1968):

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

ricorso of the preceding environment, thus insuring total disorientation at all times. It is not that there is anything wrong with the old environment, but it simply will not serve as navigational guide to the new one. (*VP* xxiii)

McLuhan asserts that 'The same rear-view pattern appears in connection with every innovation whatever.' (*WP* 127) However, 'media determinism', he assures us, 'is only possible when the users are well-adjusted, i.e., sound asleep' (*GV* 11). '[H]ow do we become aware of the effects of alphabet or print or telegraph in shaping behaviour?' he asks in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*; '[f]or it is absurd and ignoble to be shaped by such means.... And the influence of un-examined assumptions derived from technology leads quite unnecessarily to maximal determinism in human life.' (*GG* 247) The answer, McLuhan says, is the 'anti-environment' or 'probe'.

Tribal Art vs. Art as Anti-Environment or Probe

The function of art, McLuhan says, in a formulation influenced by I.A. Richards, is to 'orient', 'adjust' or 'attune' the populace to fluctuations or changes in the multi-sensory environment (see *IL* xiii-xiv). While art in tribal cultures serves to 'merge' the populace with the current environment, art in a rapidly transforming culture is a matter of constructing 'anti-environments', that is, deliberately disturbing or disrupting the current environment by raising it to (conscious) attention. McLuhan was aware of this distinction as early as 1951. He wrote to Harold Innis:

the business of art is no longer the communication of thoughts or feelings which are to be conceptually ordered, but a direct participation in an experience. The whole tendency of modern communication whether in the press, in advertizing or in the high arts is towards participation in a process, rather than the 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. (*L* 221)

In his study of pre-literate cultures (assisted by friends Dorothy Lee and Ted Carpenter in the 'Toronto communications group' in the 1950's), McLuhan became aware that the role of the artist in pre-literate ('tribal') culture was different to that of the artist in

Western society. He says in *Counterblast*:

What we [in Western society] call **art** would seem to be **specialist artefacts** for enhancing human **perception**. **Since the Renaissance**, the **arts** have become privileged means of **perception for the few**, rather than means of **participation** in a common life, or **environment**. This phase now seems to be ending [with electronic culture] ... (CB 32, emphasis in original)

He explains that 'From the beginnings of literacy until now, art has mostly been thought of as representation, a kind of matching of inner and outer environments. Primitive man and post-literate man agree that art is making and that it affects the universe.' (WP 92) 'Archaic or primitive art looks to us [in the West] like a magical control built into the environment' (UB 4, pp.7-8), he says, explaining that:

The artist of the preliterate society is a bridge between the visible and the invisible [i.e. unconscious] worlds. He is a "pontiff." His work may be in dance, music, or varied materials. His art is to create designs, masks, or vortices of power and energy, which "put on" the public. (TT 10)

The modernist works of art, like tribal art, 'have no content and no subject matter' McLuhan says, a development which he aligns with 'the so-called new criticism' (NAEB IV: 4). He suggests that 'After Poe, and since Cézanne, poets and painters devised ever new modes of speaking not to their readers and viewers, but through them.' (NAEB VII: viii, emphasis in original) He notes:

One of the most obvious areas of change in the arts of our time has not only been the dropping of representation, but the dropping of the story line. In poetry, in the novel, in the movie, narrative continuity has yielded to thematic variation. Such variation in place of story line or melodic line has always been the norm in native societies. It is now becoming the norm in our own society and for the same reason, namely that we are becoming a non-visual society. (UB 4, pp.15-16)

As McLuhan also explains it, 'The unconscious that had long been the environment of consciousness has become the content of modern artistic awareness.' (UB 20, p.9)

Reformulating this argument in *From Cliché to Archetype*, McLuhan says that the form of modernist art, like tribal art, is that of 'archetype-into-cliché', while art from the medieval period, the Renaissance, the industrial age and the present-day Western literati takes the form of 'cliché-as-probe' (CA 121). McLuhan says that 'The artist in the Middle Ages, Renaissance, or the era up to the nineteenth century was regarded as a unique, exceptional person because he used a unique, exceptional process [i.e. the 'cliché-probe']. In primordial times, as today, the artist uses a familiar, ordinary technique [i.e. the 'archetype-into-cliché] and so he is looked upon as a familiar, ordinary person.' (118) Unlike Western art, which exists for the 'training of perception', McLuhan says that 'The function of art in a tribal society is not to orient the population to novelty but to merge it with the cosmos.... The primitive role of art [is that] of serving as consolidator and as liaison with the hidden cosmic powers ...' (177) An example of the 'archetype-into-cliché' process is to be found in Joyce's 'use of an archetypal Ulysses ... to explore contemporary consciousness in the city of Dublin' (118). Joyce sets up a parallel between the journey of Odysseus as archetype and 20th-century Dublin as the invisible environment. In other words, as he 'retrieves' Homer's *Odyssey*, Joyce reveals the hidden environment in the form of a new cliché, i.e., the novel *Ulysses*. The technique of cliché-as-probe, meanwhile, 'is always at the "interface" of discourse': 'feed[ing]-forward ... but always engaged in retrieving old clichés from every sphere of human activity' (164). The cliché-probe 'junks present environments' in a cyclic process of creation and destruction (184). McLuhan says, however, that 'there is a paradox in cliché itself, since at the moment of truth it is tossed onto the scrap heap of the obvious and the useless. In retrospect, all great discoveries are obvious' (164).

McLuhan suggests that 'art ceases to be a form of self-expression in the electric age. Indeed, it becomes a necessary kind of research and probing.' (VP xxiv) One example of modern art is the 'Happening', which raises the entire environment to attention in order to 'archetypalize' it. McLuhan says that

The Happening ... is the repetition of an environment as a means of offering some control to the perceiver, for whom it is expected to be a

familiar environment. An environment is far too unwieldy a thing to be usable as a probe. The art materials shaped by a single artist can serve as a probe to direct and order perception. With the Happening the exploratory and probe functions have to be assumed by the audience directly. The environment as familiar cliché is archetypalized, at least to the extent of being repeated. (CA 198)

We can contrast the 'Happening' to 'Pop Art', which McLuhan says is the product of drawing attention to 'some object in our own daily environment as if it were anti-environmental' (UB 4, p.8). (Think, for example, of Andy Warhol's Marilyns or Heinz soup cans.) McLuhan cautions that

Pop Art serves to remind us ... that we have fashioned for ourselves a world of artefacts and images that are intended not to train perception or awareness but to insist that we merge with them as the primitive man merges with his environment. The world of modern advertising [by this interpretation,] is a magical environment constructed to produce effects for the total economy but not designed to increase human awareness. (UB 4, pp.7-8)

Pop Art, in short, is a 'tribal' form of art, 'merging' the audience with the environment, whereas the Happening, despite its apparent similarity to Pop Art, is an 'anti-environment' or 'probe' of the environment designed for the 'training of perception'. Modern art is also the domain of the 'icon' and the 'pun', which preserve a playful interplay between environment and anti-environment. McLuhan says in a letter of 1964: 'The icon combines the environmental and the anti-environmental much in the manner of the pun. The pun by means of low-definition [sic] permits interplay between itself as environment and itself as anti-environment.' (L 297) McLuhan suggests that 'any high definition image can be made environmental and involving by repetition', as is the case with Andy Warhol, who 'uses the technique of redundancy and repetition to transform the pictorial into the iconic' (*Ibid.*). On the other hand, McLuhan says, presenting 'part of the environment' in 'high definition' can be 'a means of dismissing it from attention. As soon as one has paid special attention to any part of one's environment it tends to be ignored or dismissed.' (*Ibid.*)

McLuhan distinguishes, too, between art in pre-literate society and art in 'post-literate'

(electronic) society. To start with, McLuhan says that the effect of electronic technology is to transform *all* extant environments into anti-environments (i.e. objects of attention, art objects), because electronic technology 'is totally environmental', putting all other environments into the position of 'content' (e.g. TV and Internet). He explains:

Electric technology is totally environmental for all human communities today. Hence the great confusion arising from the transformation of environments into anti-environments, as it were. 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.... 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. (*UB 4*, p.14)

At the same time as this is happening, electronic technology transforms the 'public as environment' into a 'mass audience' (*Ibid.* p.12). McLuhan says: 'The printed word created the Public. The Public consists of separate individuals, each with his own point of view.... The Mass does not consist of separate individuals, but of individuals profoundly involved in one another.' (*Ibid.* pp.16-17) A notable effect of this is that people now tend to participate as 'co-creators rather than as consumers', both in art and education (*Ibid.*, p.12). McLuhan says:

Art and education become new forms of experience, new environments, rather than new anti-environments. Pre-electric art and education were anti-environments in the sense that they were the content of various environments. Under electric conditions the content itself tends however towards becoming environmental itself. (*Ibid.*)

Both modern and postmodern art, McLuhan suggests, present form (environment) as content (anti-environment). However, postmodern art differs from modern art in that it also features 'producers as consumers'. Says McLuhan, 'in the global theater the audience and the crew become actors, producers rather than consumers. They seek

to program events rather than to watch them.' (UB 5, p.19)⁷⁸ In 'New Media as Political Forms', published in *Explorations 3* (August 1954), McLuhan says that whereas authors in the past, as members of society, could enlighten the rest of society by 'introspection', today 'it is no longer possible to be sure of what being a member of society may involve' and 'no single writer ... can encompass more than a fragment of the available attention of the public', so that the author therefore 'has to bestir himself as much as any pollster' (UB 14, p.13). He pushes this argument further in the NAEB report (III: 107), where he says that

As the electronic creates a total field situation by providing more and more information of all kinds, the audience is naturally involved more and more as producer and creator. The art forms which result from this new situation are increasingly do-it-yourself forms.

Meanwhile, McLuhan suggests that 'Experimentation has passed from the control of the private artist to the groups in charge of the new technologies'; as he says, 'The new media need the best artist talent and can pay for it.' (NAEB VII: i) He explains:

It would seem to be paradoxical that in the new auditory and electronic age the role of the artist should move steadily away from the ivory tower towards the control tower in society. But whether in industrial design or town planning and marketing, the highest artistic powers are in ever greater demand. As we become ever more alert to the personal and social consequences of non-verbal forms in patterning our lives, the artist becomes the key figure in providing models of larger situations which will give us power of control over change. ('Around the World, Around the Clock', book review, *Renascence* 12:4, Summer 1960, pp.204-205)

Thus, '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 expensive public technology, and artist and public merge in a single experience' (NAEB VII: i) McLuhan's argument is best illustrated by the new Internet technologies (i.e. Google, Facebook, Myspace, Youtube, Wikipedia, Ebay,

⁷⁸ McLuhan is reformulating Joyce's comment in *Finnegans Wake* (1939), 'My producers are they not my consumers?' See *CIOB* 134. See also 'Producers and Consumers' (book review) in *Renascence* 13:4 (1961: Summer) pp.217-219

etc.). However, McLuhan warns, with the current 'speed' of development, 'the artist can no longer provide years of advance developments in the patterns of human experience which will inevitably emerge from new technological development' (*Ibid.*).

State as a Work of Art

McLuhan says that Niccolò Machiavelli (1469-1527), author of *Il Principe* (1532, written 1513, tr. *The Prince*), was the first 'to turn the state into a work of art', an argument that McLuhan credits to Jacob Buckhardt (1818-1897) (*MB*, vi). McLuhan says that what is new in Machiavelli is the recognition and manipulation of 'the laws of power for the sake of power'. (*Ibid.* 87). With the advent of electronic technology, however, which puts the state (along with all other institutions) into the place of anti-environment, McLuhan says that '[t]oday we are in a position to criticize the state as a work of art ...' (*Ibid.*; see also *TT* 20)

Environment as a Work of Art

McLuhan says that the transformation of all environments into anti-environments or 'content' by means of electronic communications technology – in other words, our consciousness of the 'unconscious' environment – enables us to deal with the environment *itself* as a work of art (see e.g. *MM* 68). He wrote to Jacqueline Tyrwhitt in 1964:

The [town] planner's job is to program the entire environment by an artistic modulation of sensory usages. Art is a CARE package dispatched to undernourished areas of the human sensorium. What the artist has formerly done on a private entrepreneurial basis the planner now must do on a corporate or group basis. This is equally true of education and government. Instead of worrying about program content, the job is now to program the total sensorium. (*L* 299)

McLuhan saw that the programming of the environment would obsolesce the classroom in education. He wrote in 1956:

Before print the community at large was the centre of education. Today, information-flow and educational impact outside the classroom is so far in excess of anything occurring inside the classroom that we must reconsider the educational process itself. The classroom is now a place of detention, not attention. Attention is elsewhere. (*UB 16*, p.14)

He warns in the NAEB report: 'I am not optimistic about saving any of the traditional qualities in education from the electronic bombardment.' (NAEB VII: x) However, the advantage of electronic communications media is that, by careful programming, 'we can include the learning process in the environment itself' (*UB 20*, pp.10-11). The computer, McLuhan says, is 'admirably suited to the artistic programming of such an environment, of taking over the task of programming the environment itself as a work of art, instead of programming the content as a work of art' (*EM 224*). With a dig at the 'art' scene, he proposes that: '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.' (*VP 7*)

Planet as a Work of Art (Ecology)

A turning-point in our consciousness of the (unconscious) 'environment' was the launch of Sputnik, McLuhan says, at which point in time we started to deal with the Earth itself as a work of art (see *UB 20*, p.10; *EM 224*, 268; *WP 177-178*; *CA 9-10*; *UB 12*, p.22; *TT 216*, 294; *UB 5*, p.4). As McLuhan explains:

The planet is now the content of the new spaces created by the new technology. Instead of being an environment in time, the earth itself has become a probe in space. That is, the planet has become an anti-environment, an art form, an extension of consciousness, yielding new perception of the new man-made environment. (*UB 20*, p.10)

McLuhan extends this analysis in 'Roles, Masks and Performances (1971), where he introduces the concept of the 'global theatre' as an alternative to the 'global village':

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 of the planet became actors in a new sort of theatre.... 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. (UB 12, p.22)

McLuhan connects this shift in consciousness with the 'ecology' movement. In his essay 'At the Moment of Sputnik the Planet Became a Global Theater in which there are no Spectators but only Actors' (1974), he says that with Sputnik,

For the first time the natural world was completely enclosed in a man-made container. At the moment that the earth went inside this new artifact, Nature ended and Ecology was born. "Ecological" thinking became inevitable as soon as the planet moved up into the status of a work of art. (UB 5, p.4)

McLuhan says in *Take Today* that 'Ecology is the simultaneous awareness of the interplay of the total field of processes.' (TT 233) Ecology, McLuhan suggests, is a matter of maintaining 'equilibrium among the components of [the] environment in order to ensure survival' (UB 5, p.4). As he says, with our instantaneous and simultaneous perception of all 'processes', it becomes 'obvious that "everything causes *everything*."' (TT 145)

Artist as Rhetorician

McLuhan's method as an artist, it must not be forgotten, is inspired by the ancient art of rhetoric. His doctoral thesis of 1943, 'The Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of His Time', is a study of rhetoric and its application from ancient times through to the English Renaissance, leading McLuhan to appreciate that '[t]he rhetorical handbooks of the sixteenth century were nearly all derived from the medieval favorites [i.e. the ancient writers and texts celebrated during the medieval period]: Hermogenes, *Ad Herennium*, Cicero, and Quintilian' and that '[t]he rhetorical treatises [from Cicero to Nashe] make very little sense apart from the whole tradition of ancient and medieval education', in which rhetoric was taught alongside the arts of grammar and dialectics

(CT 5). Rhetoric since Cicero (106 BC – 43 BC) and Quintilian (c. 35 – 100 AD) is held to have five 'divisions': *inventio* (discovery), *dispositio* (arrangement), *eleutio* (style), *memoria* (memory), and *pronuntiatio* or *actio* (delivery), together believed to capture 'every aspect of speech, from the whole down to the last detail' (E. McLuhan, n.d., 'St. Thomas Aquinas's Theory of Communication'). The elder McLuhan applies these techniques not only to verbal presentation, but to communication more broadly. One of the best examples of this is the 'Marshall McLuhan DEW-LINE newsletter', published from 1968-1970 by Eugene M. Schwartz in New York.⁷⁹ The DEW-LINE, the title a reference to Canada's 'Distant Early Warning' communications system of the Cold War years, was available to subscribers only and was published in various formats, including papers clipped in folders, a tabloid newspaper and printed booklets, often accompanied by 'posters, vinyl recordings, and slides of advertisements', and in one case, a copy of McLuhan's *War and Peace in the Global Village* (Marchand *op.cit.* 227; Cavell, 2002: 132). This in turn led to a spin-off, a series of records titled 'The Marshall McLuhan Dew-Line Platter-tudes' (*EM* 235). In 1969, 'for an extra five dollars' readers could purchase a 'DEW-LINE' deck of cards (now a collector's item), each printed with an aphorism by McLuhan or those he admired, e.g. 'Is there a life before death?' (5 of Hearts), 'Fulton's steamboat anticipated the mini-skirt: we don't have to wait for the wind anymore' (3 of Spades) and 'Thanks for the mammaries' (7 of Diamonds); like the *I Ching*, these were intended to provide 'breakthroughs' in the face of a difficult problem (Marchand *op.cit.* 227; Cavell *op.cit.* 132; Kuskis, n.d.). What is revealed by McLuhan's DEW-LINE, along with numerous other texts (the glossed advertisements of *The Mechanical Bride*; the typographical poems of *Explorations*; the tetrad of *Laws of Media*) is a rhetorician's concern with *form*.

Trauma as Cause

To locate McLuhan within the Western philosophical tradition it is necessary first to explain the term 'dialectic' and its derivatives. Plato, McLuhan says, generally 'extends

⁷⁹ The partnership between Eugene M. Schwartz and McLuhan was forged during McLuhan's sabbatical year at Fordham University in 1967-1968.

the term [dialectic] till it is almost identical with philosophy and especially with metaphysics'; however 'Aristotle was to clarify the situation by showing how logic and dialectics are concerned with the truth of enunciations, and not, as metaphysics, with the essence or nature of things' (CT 46). The Stoics championed dialectics as a method for distinguishing the false from the true; Cicero however depicts dialectic as 'ancillary to rhetoric, since its function is always to organize empirical knowledge, whether grammatical or medical or legal' (*Ibid.* 52, 56). Hegel, centuries later, uses the term 'dialectical' to describe the *process* by which new ideas unfold from previous ideas in a pattern which McLuhan, like many before him, crudely describes as that of 'thesis – antithesis – synthesis' (LM 225). Karl Marx adopts Hegel's understanding of 'dialectical' process but applies it to material and social forms, earning his work the moniker of 'dialectical materialism'. McLuhan's use of the term is somewhat different, for he relates it to the medieval trivium of grammar, rhetoric and dialectic. Echoing Francis Bacon, McLuhan champions the 'grammatical' method of observing effects over the 'dialectical' method which uses logic to name causes. A third use of the term 'dialectical' is also found. Two terms which co-exist in opposition and which depict the tension inherent in a process may be said to be 'dialectically' opposed: e.g. Nietzsche's dialectic between 'nihilism' and 'the eternal return of the same'; Freud's dialectic between *Eros* and *Thanatos*; and McLuhan's dialectic between technology and art. To avoid confusion, I refer where possible to dialectical *method*, dialectical *process* and dialectical *terms*. These need not be differentiated, however; Francis Bacon's *pro et contra* style of argument, to take one example, is 'dialectical' in all three senses of the term.

McLuhan and Vico

The dialectic between technology as environment and art as anti-environment (or, as McLuhan reformulates it from the early 1970's, between anti-environment as *figure* and environment as *ground*) is inspired by Giambattista Vico's 'new science' in the *Scienza Nuova* (first edition 1725; second edition 1730). Donald Theall (1971: 20, 100-101) connects McLuhan's use of dialectic with Francis Bacon's *pro et contra* style,

describing Bacon's method as a 'precursor of Hegelianism'; primary among Vico's influences were Plato (c. 428/427-348/347 BC), Tacitus (circa 56-117 AD), Bacon (1561-1626) and Hugo Grotius (1583-1645), and it is to Bacon that we may attribute Vico's notion of human progress. Like G.W.F. Hegel (1770-1831) – and many thinkers after him including Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Freud, Innis and McLuhan – Vico presents the progress of humanity in terms of the striving between two conflicting yet intimately connected forces (*certum* and *verum*; philology and philosophy; myth and idea). Writing, for example, of the relationship between 'philosophy' as a form of logic, and 'philology' as a form of grammar, Vico (1948: 56-57; Section II: X, Axiom 138-140) says:

Philosophy contemplates reason, whence comes knowledge of the true; philology observes the authority of human choice, whence comes consciousness of the certain.

This axiom by its second part defines as philologists all the grammarians, historians, critics, who have occupied themselves with the study of the languages and deeds of peoples: both their domestic affairs, such as customs and laws, and their external affairs, such as wars, peaces, travels and commerce.

The same axiom shows how the philosophers failed by half in not giving certainty to their reasonings by appeal to the authority of the philologists, and likewise how the latter failed by half in not taking care to give their authority the sanction of truth by appeal to the reasoning of the philosophers. If they had both done this they would have been more useful to their commonwealths and they would have anticipated us in conceiving this science [i.e. the 'new science'].

Prior to *Laws of Media: The New Science* (1988), a book subtitled after Francis Bacon's *Novum Organum* and Vico's *Scienza Nuova*, there is little acknowledgement by McLuhan of Vico's influence in his own work. However, in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* he draws from A. Robert Caponigri's *Time and Idea: The Theory of History in Giambattista Vico* (1953) to briefly elaborate Vico's concept of '*ricorso*', a concept to which he returns in *From Cliché to Archetype* (GG 250; CA 119, 126, 148-149). Caponigri describes how Vico replies to the natural law theory of his age by proposing a dialectic between the *certum*, i.e., the concrete manifestations of law, and the *verum*,

i.e. the ideal law – a dialectic that over time (and with the force of ‘providence’ – Vico, too, was a Catholic) motivates the processes of law. As Caponigri (1968 [1953]: 38) explains, ‘The ‘certum’ and the ‘verum’, which natural law seeks to mediate, are dimensions, not of single laws, but of the total process of law, and represent the alternate dynamisms of that process, the one toward the immediacy, the concreteness, the multiplicity of the law in its historical structures, the other toward its unity in idea.’ The *certum* and the *verum* are further shown ‘to be, not the abstract elements of an analytical situation, but dialectical moments of one continuous and dynamic process. Their opposition is not abstract, but immanent to the concreteness of this process.’ (*Ibid.* 51) The dialectic between the *certum* and the *verum* is transmuted in revisions of the *Scienza Nuova* to become that of the processes of the consciousness of humanity, between the ‘idea’ and the ‘myth’. Explains Caponigri,

The universality of the myth and the universality of the idea, in Vico’s thought, stand in a complex and counterpointal [sic] relation. The key to this relationship is again to be sought in the essential structure of human consciousness according to Vico: its finitude, its orientation to the infinite, and the contradiction which attends this character. The distance which separates myth from idea is the same that separates finite and infinite; they are incommensurate and exhibit a radical contradiction. Therefore, under this aspect, myth and idea are essentially autonomous; neither may be reductively equated with the other. Myth is not mere rudimentary idea; idea is not merely explicated, ‘rationalized’ myth. They are two distinct attitudes of the human consciousness toward truth, toward the idea.... Ideas are not born full grown from a spontaneous, transcendent insight; they are hammered out, to change the metaphor, between the anvil of the implicit universality of all truth and the sledge of criticism and reflection, far from destroying the myth, actually releases its innermost reality, the universal idea, which is, in a sense, imprisoned within it. As it contradicts and destroys the myth in its limits and restrictions, criticism releases and realizes myth in its human essence. Myth and idea stand in a relationship of tension and dialectic, which is the most intimate and self-generative process of the human subject. (170-171)

Caponigri suggests that the process by which myth and idea counterpoint one another is captured in Vico’s concept of ‘ricorso’ (pl. *ricorsi*). As Caponigri interprets it,

‘Ricorso’ ... is the act by which the human spirit renders present and

contemporaneous to itself the life of all the individual nations in their eternal and ideal principles. This act of 'ricorso' is the supreme and constitutive act of humanity in its own ideas and presence. By this act, the human spirit reaches, so to say, back through all time, that is the time and the life of the individual nations, and down into the depths of consciousness to bring the entire content of history before itself in a single and total act of presence. It is a supreme act of reflection, moreover, for it achieves this 'ricorso' not by advertence to the infinite and tedious detail of life of the nations, but by advertence to the eternal and ideal history. This act of 'ricorso', it is almost needless to indicate, is the best possible definition of the historiographic act and is clearly identical with Vico's conception of the actual method of the 'New Science'. (141-142)

Like the work of art in McLuhan's theory of art as 'anti-environment', the act of *ricorso* is that by which consciousness is renewed for relevance in the present time. Notably, Caponigri names 'trauma' as a first cause of *ricorsi*. He says that 'Progress, in Vico's theory, is part of that wider conception of providence in which the radical trauma of human history is healed.' (123)

McLuhan and Kant

McLuhan had long been derisive of the German tradition of philosophy, but his interest in causality led him to reconsider the contributions of the German phenomenologists. He had studied Immanuel Kant in the 1930's, writing to his brother in 1934 that 'I never understood the importance or meaning of Plato and Aristotle until I read Kant a year later'; it is likely he was familiar with the *Critique of Judgement*, for in an unpublished paper of 1948, 'The Difficulties of Ivor Winters or Rymer Redivus', McLuhan describes Winters as 'a naive, unconscious Kantian', suggesting in a letter of the same period that 'Kantian esthetics ... are unconsciously behind all American critical activity.' (L 39; 204, see also note 5).⁸⁰ In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan cites from the *Critique of Practical Reason* to argue that Kant does not know 'that number is audile-tactile' and that 'the visual, in abstraction from the audile-tactile, sets up a world of antinomies and

⁸⁰ It is interesting to note that in February 1949, McLuhan attended a series of seminars on 'values' at the University of Toronto (for which funding had been sought by Harold Innis), at which David Savan, a colleague in the Department of Philosophy, presented a paper on Kantian ethics (Buxton, 2004).

dichotomies of insoluble but irrelevant kind' (GG 251). Philip Marchand (1989b: 69), who in researching McLuhan's life accessed a great deal of unpublished archival material, finds a dismissive attitude to Kant (as well as to other thinkers including Hegel, Marx, and Jacques Derrida) to be characteristic of McLuhan's letters. A lineage from Kant may be observed, however, in McLuhan's use of John Ruskin's concept of the 'grotesque' (invoked in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* to describe the 'discontinuous' character of the mosaic), for Ruskin's three categories of 'grotesque' in *Modern Painters*, Volume 3 (1856) imitate Kant's three categories of the 'sublime' in the *Critique of Judgement*.⁸¹ While the concept of the 'sublime' appears in Kant's *Observations on the Feeling of the Beautiful and Sublime* (*Beobachtungen über das Gefühl des Schönen und Erhabenen*, 1764), reprised in the *Critique of Judgement* (*Kritik der Urteilskraft*, 1790), it is best set in relation to the *Critique of Pure Reason* (*Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1781, revised edition 1787) in which Kant provides a critique of the tradition of metaphysics which assumes a certain relationship between knowledge, or truth, and the objects of our experience. In presenting his critique, Kant (1966: xxxiii) distinguishes between the prior or *a priori* (transcendental) categories (or forms, if you like) of our understanding, and concepts which are formed *a posteriori*. Kant differentiates between 'synthetic' judgments, which synthesize the *a posteriori* with the *a priori* forms, and 'analytic' judgments, which are derived from *a posteriori* concepts alone (the analytic judgment, in other words, is logical). Logic has had success, says Kant (*op.cit.* xxix), 'due entirely to its limitation, whereby it has not only the right, but the duty, to make abstraction of all the objects of knowledge and their differences, so that the understanding has to deal with nothing beyond itself and its own forms'. Kant, however, sets himself against logic, that is, 'to the presumption that it is possible to make any progress with pure (philosophical) knowledge, consisting of concepts, and guided by principles, such as reason has long been in the habit of

⁸¹ McLuhan cites essayist Edmund Burke (1729-1797) in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (pp.170-171) and may have been familiar with Burke's essay 'A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful' (1757), which was known to Kant. McLuhan may also have been familiar with the ancient treatise Περὶ Ὑψους (*On the Sublime*), attributed to 'Longinus' in the first century AD. Longinus is mentioned in a footnote of McLuhan's doctoral thesis (see CT 244, note 19), and the bibliography for *Laws of Media* (1988) includes the Loeb Classical Library edition of Aristotle's *Poetics*, tr. W. H. Fyfe (William Heinemann: London; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, Massachusetts; 1960 [1927]), bound with *On the Sublime* and Demetrius' *On Style*. See LM 241

employing, without first enquiring in what way, and by what right, it has come possessed of them' (*Ibid.* xlii). Any experience which overwhelms judgment, Kant calls 'sublime'. Žižek cites Kant:

The sublime may be described in this way: It is an object (of nature) the *representation [Vorstellung] of which determines the mind to regard the elevation of nature beyond our reach as equivalent to a presentation [Darstellung] of ideas.* (Kant, 1952: 119)

In Žižek's interpretation,

The Sublime is therefore the paradox of an object which, in the very field of representation, provides a view, in a negative way, of the dimension of what is unrepresentable. It is a unique point in Kant's system, a point at which the fissure, the gap between the phenomenon and Thing-in-itself, is abolished in a negative way, because in it the phenomenon's very inability to represent the Thing adequately *is inscribed in the phenomenon itself* – or, as Kant puts it, 'even if the Ideas of reason can be in no way adequately represented [in the sensuous-phenomenal world], they can be revived and evoked in the mind by means of this very inadequacy which can be presented in a sensuous way.' (Žižek, 1989: 203)

If we read McLuhan's concept of the 'grotesque' character of acoustic space as a variety of the (Kantian) 'sublime', then it transpires that the concept of 'acoustic space' serves the same purpose in McLuhan's work as the concept of *trauma* in Freud, and the 'Real' in Lacan. It is the recognition of a 'gap' or 'split' between sublime object and the *concept* or *signifier*, and it is this which sets McLuhan in oblique relationship to the Western tradition of metaphysics and its critics.

McLuhan and Hegel

A number of critics, misled by McLuhan, have attributed McLuhan's use of dialectics not to Vico but to the Hegelian tradition (see e.g. Stamps, 1995; Grosswiler, 1996, 1998; also Theall, 1971: 39; Carey, 1975), and it is true that the dialectical process recognized in McLuhan's 'tetrad' owes something to Hegel's phenomenology. Hegel, who inspired the dialectical materialism of Karl Marx, and who may be read as both a

disciple of Kant and his critic, proposed a phenomenology of Kant's (transcendental) categories, showing that these were not *a priori*, as Kant argued, but rather developed through a process of negation and revision, the first serving as preconditions upon which the later are formed. This process Hegel dubbed the 'phenomenology of spirit' (*Phänomenologie des Geistes*).⁸² Unlike modern phenomenology such as that of Edmund Husserl, Hegel's phenomenology, suggests Martin Heidegger (1994: 30), 'is the *absolute self-presentation of reason* (ratio – λόγος), whose essence and actuality Hegel finds in *absolute spirit*. This self-presentation of reason *is called for by the basic guiding question of philosophy* [i.e. that of 'being'] and is forced into a definitive direction – not at all arbitrarily – by German Idealism [i.e. the Platonic idealism of contemporaries such as Fichte and Schelling]' (emphasis in original). Hegel, in short, insists that the 'being' of forms be thought as a *process*. Husserl (1859-1938), whose *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (*Ideen zu einer reinen Phänomenologie und phänomenologischen Philosophie – Erstes Buch: Allgemeine Einführung in die reine Phänomenologie*, 1913) is referenced in *Laws of Media*, asserts that phenomenology must ground all other sciences; it cannot be used to prove a hypothesis, but is rather a method of 'access' to the process of knowing. 'Have been paying a lot of attention to Kant, Hegel and phenomenology of late' McLuhan says in a letter of January 1974, while in a letter of 1978, he says that 'It was while reading [Isaac] Newton's *Optics* [*Opticks*, 1704] . . . that I came across his observation about the occult qualities which underlay [sic] any phenomenon. Somehow this enabled me to recognize phenomenology as that which I have been presenting for many years in non-technical terms.' (L 489; Gordon, 1997: 312).⁸³ In *Laws of Media*, 'phenomenology' is presented as a form of grammar, i.e. the oldest of the arts of the trivium, for the authors say that

In the beginning was the word. The primitive is a phenomenologist who equates reading aloud the Book of Nature with the making [as opposed to 'matching'] process. As a man speaks, his language is in

⁸² This is sometimes translated as 'phenomenology of mind'.

⁸³ Elsewhere McLuhan attributes his interest in phenomenology to the French school. In 1977, he wrote that 'I only became aware of phenomenology recently when some French people like [Roland] Barthes took an interest in my work – the study of effects. This puzzled me and led me to look into their position, which I should have done long ago.' (L 529)

a state of birth, as is also the thing about which he is talking. (LM 86)

In a letter of 1977, however, recasting his argument in the terms of (visual) *figure* and (acoustic) *ground*, McLuhan interprets all phenomenology since the enlightenment as a form of logic, writing to Cleanth Brooks:

The pattern used by all phenomenology began with Descartes [1596-1650] in selecting *figures* without *ground*, the Norrie [Northrop] Frye style of classification without insight. Of course, the whole thing has happened over and over again, beginning with the Schoolmen in the 12th century Descartes eliminated all the parts of rhetoric except method or *disposition*, and ... this continues in unbroken line to Hegel, and then onward. (L 528-529)

McLuhan finds the problem with phenomenology in the 'visual stress' given to forms in conceptualizing causality. In *Laws of Media*, McLuhan suggests that '[t]he triadic form' of the Hegelian dialectic is 'a connected form that depends on a ground stress of visual space to give it salience and validity. As a visual form, it has blinded the West to the metaphysical and verbal properties of human artefacts as metaphors and as extensions of ourselves.' (LM 225) McLuhan complains in a letter to Ezra Pound in 1948 of the 'incorrigibly dialectical' mentality of American thought, blaming this on the fact that 'America is 100% 18th century. The 18th century had chucked out the principle of metaphor and analogy – the basic fact that as A is to B so is C to D. AB:CD. It can see AB relations. But relations in four terms are still verboten.' (L 207) Describing 'analogical awareness' in *Through the Vanishing Point*, McLuhan says that it depends upon '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 components as well.' (VP 240) This 'play of ratios', says McLuhan, is 'the key to all metaphysical insight and perhaps the very condition of consciousness itself' (*Ibid.*) Comparing the Hegelian dialectic to the four-part 'tetrad' in *Laws of Media*, the authors say that 'for some mysterious inherent reason the triad form [of the Hegelian dialectic] eliminates ground. But when a fourth term is added to a triad, making a tetrad, the form flips into a new one – resonant and appositional and metamorphic.' (LM 127) Moreover, 'When tetrads are made for each

of the parts of a tetrad [i.e., A, B, C and D] – each one a dimension of formal cause – the metaphysical results serve to indicate the proper bridge between grammatical humanism and dialectic.’ (LM 227) The McLuhans say that the tetrad thus ‘render[s] obsolete all groundless dialectical and systematic Marxist approaches to interpretation of social processes and technological transformations of culture by flipping the discussion into a kind of linguistic of real words’ (*Ibid.* 5). Slavoj Žižek (2006 [2005]: 28) suggests that Hegel’s phenomenology may be read as a ‘logic of the *signifier*’, and Heidegger (1994: 12) concurs that for Hegel

a being as such, the actual in its genuine and whole reality, is the idea, or the concept. The concept, however, is the power of time, i.e. the pure concept annuls time. In other words, the problem of being [for Hegel] is properly conceived only when time is made to disappear.

To Hegel, that is, a ‘being’ is purely figurative, a timeless structure; it is necessary, in fact, to make the processes of *ground* ‘disappear’ in order to conceptualize the *figure* (signifier). McLuhan, however, does not read Hegel so kindly, writing in 1978: ‘It does not seem to matter whether it is Hegel, or Husserl, or Heidegger, phenomenology is the light coming through a *figure* from a hidden *ground* and this leads to all the techniques and doubts and ‘bracketing.’ (Gordon, 1997: 312-313) He then adds: ‘I think that the obfuscation via jargon which has been going on under the name of philosophy during these centuries is a professional racket.’ (*Ibid.* 313)

McLuhan and Heidegger

McLuhan was aware of the work of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) from the late 1950’s or early 1960’s, for there are references to Heidegger in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, where McLuhan says that ‘Heidegger seems to be quite unaware of the role of electronic technology in promoting his own non-literate bias in language and philosophy’ (GG 248). References for *Laws of Media*, meanwhile, include Heidegger’s book of essays, *The Question Concerning Technology* (1977), and McLuhan comments briefly on

Heidegger's essay of the same name (*LM* 62-65).⁸⁴ Heidegger, not unlike McLuhan, criticizes the Western tradition of metaphysics for its stress on the object; however, in exploring the problematic of *Dasein* as one of *process*, Heidegger stresses the difference between the 'being-t/here' (*Dasein*) of the human being and the 'being' (*sein*) of beings.⁸⁵ In *Beitrage zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, tr. *Contributions to Philosophy* (Heidegger's 'other' masterpiece, written in the late 1930's but not published until 1989; *Sein und Zeit*, 1927, tr. *Being and Time*, is much better known), Heidegger says that 'In the entire history of metaphysics, i.e., in all of thinking up to now, "being" is always grasped as beingness of beings and thus as these beings themselves. As the result of philosophy's asthenia in differentiation, still today all "thinkers" begin, as it were, by equating being with beings.'" (*Ibid.* 187)⁸⁶ In *Einführung*

⁸⁴ It has been suggested that McLuhan was influenced by Heidegger (Marchessault, 2005: xi). I suggest that McLuhan, rather than influenced by Heidegger, took care to differentiate his project from Heidegger's. See also Willmott (1996: 185-194) for a comparison of McLuhan and Heidegger.

⁸⁵ The German word *Dasein* means 'existence' or 'essence'; however Heidegger draws attention to the roots of the word – *da* meaning 'here' or 'there' and *sein* meaning 'being' – to emphasize the fact that *Dasein* is 'thrown' or grounded *somewhere*: i.e. *Da-sein*, there-being, being-t/here.

⁸⁶ In *Sein und Zeit* (1927, tr. *Being and Time*) Heidegger suggests that 'temporality' (i.e. *time* in its phenomenological aspect) is the 'horizon' from which *Dasein* knows Being, and describes the 'comportment' of *Dasein*, whose being-t/here is necessarily finite – i.e., in existential terms, limited by its knowledge of the necessity of its own death – as one of 'care' (*Sorge*). In *Beitrage zur Philosophie (Vom Ereignis)*, tr. *Contributions to Philosophy*, meanwhile, Heidegger reveals the force between *Sein* (the 'being' of beings) and *Da-sein* (the 'be-ing-t/here' of the human being) to be that of '*Ereignis*' ('enowning'). (The difference between *Dasein* in *Being and Time* and the hyphenated *Da-sein* in *Contributions to Philosophy* is related to 'authenticity' – *eigentlichkeit* – etymologically 'ownmostness'. In *Being and Time* Heidegger distinguishes between 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' *Dasein*; *Dasein* is grasped in its 'average everydayness', which Heidegger describes in its inauthentic form as a 'being in the they'. *Contributions to Philosophy*, by contrast, uses *Da-sein* to refer exclusively to 'authentic' – *eigentlich* – being-t/here, so that '*Da-sein* is the grounding of the truth of being.' Heidegger 1999: 120) *Ereignis*, Heidegger, says, is a 'sway' or 'swaying' (*Wesen*, literally 'essence') between *Sein* and *Da-sein* that exhibits the dynamics of 'the owning over of *Sein* to *Da-sein*' and 'the owning over of *Da-sein* to *Sein*'. Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly coin the term 'enowning' to translate *Ereignis* (and to aid rendering many related terms 'such as *Ereignung*, *Eignung*, *Zueignung*, *Ubereignung*, *Eigentum*, *ereignen*, *zueignen*, *ubereignen*, *eignen*'). Previously, *Ereignis* has been translated as 'event', 'befitting' or 'appropriation' (with *eignis* – 'owning' – appearing as 'propriation'). Of these translations, Emad and Maly say, 'None begins with the prefix *en-*, with its specific indication of "enabling" and "thorough moving unto". None approximates the *er*, *eignen*, and *eignis* the way *en*, *own*, and *owning do*.' They claim that 'Above all it is the prefix *en-* in this word ['enowning'] that opens the possibility for approximating *Ereignis*, insofar as this prefix conveys the sense of "enabling," "bringing into condition of," or "welling up of". Thus, in conjunction with *owning*, this prefix is capable of getting across a sense of an "owning" that is not an "owning of something.'" (see Emad and Maly in Heidegger, 1999: xx)

in *die Metaphysik* (1953, tr. *An Introduction to Metaphysics*), seeking a 'first cause', Heidegger says:

Why are there beings . . . ? Why, that is to say, on what ground? From what source does the being derive? On what ground does it stand? The question is not concerned with particulars, with what beings are and of what nature at any time, here and there, with how they can be changed, what they can be used for, and so on. The question aims at the ground of what is insofar as it is. To seek the ground is to try to get to the bottom; what is put in question is thus related to the ground. However, since the question is a question, it remains to be seen whether the ground arrived at is really a ground, that is, whether it provides a foundation; whether it is a primal ground [*Ur-grund*]; or whether it fails to provide a foundation and is an abyss [*Ab-grund*]; or whether the ground is neither one nor the other but presents only a perhaps necessary appearance of foundation – in other words, it is a non-ground [*Un-grund*]. Be that as it may, the ground in question must account for the being of beings as such. (Heidegger, 1959: 3)⁸⁷

The problem with this kind of phenomenology, McLuhan says, is that 'it is an all-out attempt by dialectic to invent – or turn itself into – grammar, to force some sort of *ground* to surface' (*LM* 10-11). The McLuhans say in *Laws of Media*: '[Heidegger's] discussions pay close attention to the play of etymologies in his terms, in an evident attempt to retrieve grammatical stress as a new mode of dialectic' (*Ibid.* 63). However, Heidegger 'has not noted that the ground is formed as mosaic, structured acoustically, nor that its structure is entirely due to its interface with figures' (*Ibid.*). The McLuhans say,

There is in Heidegger still no sense of interplay between figure and ground; the attention has just been shifted from one to the other without trying to take the new thing on its own terms. That is, *ground* cannot be dealt with conceptually or abstractly: it is ceaselessly changing, dynamic, discontinuous and heterogeneous, a mosaic of intervals and contours. (*Ibid.*)

⁸⁷ The translator, Ralph Manheim, in fact coins the term 'essent' to render Heidegger's neologism '*Seiend*' (see 'Translator's Note' in Heidegger 1959: vii-ix). Manheim comments: "Existent" has often been used [for "seiend"]. There are two objections: 1) it does not derive from the verb 'to be' [*sein*]; 2) it means something different in Heidegger. Another solution has been to render "Das Seiende" as "What is" and "ein Seiendes" and "die Seienden" respectively as "a being" and "beings." (p.vii) For the sake of clarity, I have substituted the terms 'being' and 'beings'.

To conceptualize *ground*, in other words, one must appeal to particulars; 'the *ground* of the motor car', for example, as Eric McLuhan (1998: 50) says,

is principally the road, plus oil and gas supplies (and all the politics that go along with them). It also includes all manufacture, design, retail, and reselling, parkings lots, service facilities, shopping malls, adjustments to urban design and the creation of suburbs, and rearrangements in lives, leisure and recreation, and business.

McLuhan's criticism of Heidegger, along with thinkers such as Paul Ricoeur, Roman Jakobson, Lévi-Strauss, Noam Chomsky, Derrida and Ferdinand de Saussure is that all 'are unwittingly committed to the structures of visual space' (LM 113).⁸⁸

McLuhan and Derrida

McLuhan seems to have been unattuned to the 'deconstructivist' movement gaining momentum in critical theory in France just at the time that McLuhan himself was discovering 'structuralism'. As Gary Genosko (1999: 40-41) reports, McLuhan was disparaging of Jacques Derrida's method of 'deconstruction', writing 'Deride' (a play on Derrida's name) in the margin of a colleague's review of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*, first published in English translation in 1974. In fact in many ways Derrida's critique of the 'metaphysics of presence' extends McLuhan's critique of the 'visual bias' of the West, and while McLuhan's critique of the Western tradition as 'visual' in bias does not strictly apply to deconstructivist thinkers such as Derrida, Derrida's critique of the Western tradition as 'logocentric' would seem to apply to McLuhan (see Carey, 2005 [1986]: 279; Genosko, *op.cit.* 40). In 'Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences', delivered at the international symposium on structuralism hosted by Johns Hopkins University in 1966, Derrida (1978: 279-280), setting himself against the 'structuralist' movement with which he had then been aligned, argues that

⁸⁸ McLuhan's critique of Heidegger must be set next to that of Theodor Adorno in *Negative Dialektik* (1966), who like McLuhan finds the dialectical method insufficient for the project of phenomenology (see Adorno, 1973; also Stamps, 1995, especially p.4).

the entire history of the concept of structure ... must be thought of as a series of substitutions of centre for centre, as a linked chain of determinations of the centre. Successively, and in a regulated fashion, the centre receives different forms or names. The history of metaphysics, like the history of the West, is the history of these metaphors and metonymies. Its matrix [...] is the determination of Being as *presence* in all senses of this word. It could be shown that all the names related to fundamentals, to principles, or to the centre have always designated an invariable presence – *eidōs, archē, telos, energeia, ousia* (essence, existence, substance, subject), *alētheia*, transcendentality, consciousness, God, man, and so forth.

Derrida names Western metaphysics with its emphasis on Being a 'metaphysics of presence', elaborating in *Of Grammatology* that:

within this epoch, reading and writing, the production or interpretation of signs, the text in general as fabric of signs, allow themselves to be confined within secondariness. They are preceded by a truth, or a meaning already constituted by and within the element of the logos. Even when the thing, the "referent," is not immediately related to the logos of a creator God where it began by being the spoken/thought sense, the signified has at any rate an immediate relationship with the logos in general (finite or infinite), and a mediated one with the signifier ... (Derrida, 1976: 14-15)

Against this 'logocentric' view, Derrida suggests that all meaning (discourse, signifier, identity, etc.) is constituted in a 'play' of opposites. He says in *Of Grammatology* that 'no real element of the language has an absolute situation, only a differential one' and that any element is meaningful merely by virtue of its difference and delayed presence or deferred-ness (Derrida coins the term '*differance*') from other signs (*Ibid.* 217). In place of a 'transcendental signified', Derrida proposes a 'trace', about which he says,

Where and how does it begin . . . ? A question of origin. But a meditation upon the trace should undoubtedly teach us that there is no origin, that is to say simple origin; that the questions of origin carry with them a metaphysics of presence.... What the thought of the trace has already taught us is that it could not be simply submitted to the onto-phenomenological question of essence. The trace *is nothing*, it is not an entity, it exceeds the question *What is?* and contingently makes it possible. (Derrida, 1976: 74-75)

In contrast to the metaphysician's concern with presence, Derrida describes the approach of the deconstructivist as one of 'play'. 'One could call *play* the absence of the transcendental signified as limitlessness of play,' says Derrida (1976: 50), 'that is to say [limitlessness of play] as the destruction of onto-theology and the metaphysics of presence.' Derrida uses the term 'destruction' or 'deconstruction' to describe his critical method, and in the lecture of 1966, he finds a deconstructivist ethic present in

the Nietzschean critique of metaphysics, the critique of the concepts of Being and truth, for which were substituted the concepts of play, interpretation, and sign (sign without present truth); the Freudian critique of self-presence, that is, the critique of consciousness, of the subject, of self-identity and of self-proximity or self-possession; and, more radically, the Heideggerean destruction of metaphysics, of onto-theology, of the determination of Being as presence. (Derrida, 1978: 280)

Derrida's reading of Freud as a deconstructivist begs the question whether a similar interpretation may be applied to McLuhan. Like McLuhan, Freud is not merely a grammarian (scientist), but increasingly casts himself as a dialectician (philosopher), a role for which he apologizes, as he finds himself renouncing 'observation' for what he calls 'speculation'. In 'To Speculate – On Freud' (*The Post Card*, 1987, pp.257-409), Derrida questions whether Freud's 'speculative' method in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* may in fact be read as deconstructivist. Derrida notes Freud's recognition that 'in the works of his later years (among them *Beyond* . . .), he has "given free rein to the inclination, which I kept down for so long, to speculation" ([SE] XX, 57):' (*Ibid.* 272) Derrida intimates that Freud deliberately employs a 'play' of oppositions (life/death, sex-instincts/death-instincts, pleasure principle/reality principle, etc.), serving to undermine the authority of the signifier as one of presence. Freud's technique in 'speculative' work such as *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* is thus to construct and deconstruct his own system endlessly,⁸⁹ and Derrida suggests that this is in Freud's mind when he writes of the two processes driving evolution:

⁸⁹ In 'To Speculate – On Freud', for example, Derrida traces the 'undecidability' of Freud's dialectical system in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, i.e. the oppositions between Eros and Thanatos, pleasure and pain, the pleasure principle and the reality principle, reading Freud's text in light of the biographical details carefully provided, and those equally carefully omitted,

Freud invokes [Ewald] Hering's theory, the two groups of processes in "contrary directions" (*entgegengesetzter Richtung*) which continuously unfold in all living substance: the assimilatory (*assimilatorisch*) process and the dis-similatory (*dissimilatorisch*) process; the first is constructive (*aufbauend*), the second de-constructive (*abbauend*). *Abbauen*: the word that certain French Heideggarians recently have translated as "to deconstruct," Freud then asks himself if we may venture to recognize "our two instinctual impulses," the "life instincts" and the "death instincts," in these two processes.... (*Ibid.* 267-268)⁹⁰

Something like this is achieved by McLuhan in 'The Relation of Environment to Anti-Environment' and *Counterblast*, where the technology-as-environment is presented as imperceptible 'except in so far as there is an anti-environment or a counter-situation constructed to provide a means of direct attention', while the 'arts and sciences' are 'anti-environments that enable us to perceive the environment'; however '[s]uch anti-environmental means of perception must constantly be renewed in order to be efficacious.' (*UB* 4, p.6, p.7, p.18) Furthermore, as new environments use older environments as 'content', 'society is always one phase back, is never environmental. Paradoxically, it is the antecedent environment that is always being upgraded for our attention.' (*Ibid.* p.11) The definition between 'environment' and 'anti-environment' here is blurred; technology, insofar as it is 'new', is a work of art; while art and science, through repetition of use, become technologies effecting somnambulism upon the

by Freud, i.e. the concealed relationships between the child playing 'fort/da', namely, Freud's grandson, Ernst Halberstadt (later Ernst Freud); Freud, 'the grandfather'; Sophie, the child's mother, and Freud's daughter; and Sophie's husband, Max Halberstadt, the child's father, and Freud's son-in-law. See *The Post Card*, 1987, pp.257-409. As Gayatri Spivak comments, relating Derrida's technique to Nietzsche's, 'If one is always bound by one's perspective, one can at least deliberately reverse perspectives as often as possible, in the process undoing opposed perspectives, showing that the two terms of an opposition are merely accomplices of each other.' (Spivak, 'Translator's Preface' in Derrida, 1976: xxvii) Spivak suggests that 'a further deconstruction deconstructs deconstruction, both as the search for a foundation (the critic behaving as if she means what she says in her text), and as the pleasure of the bottomless. The tool for this, as indeed for any deconstruction, is our desire, itself a deconstructive and grammatological structure that forever differs from (we only desire what is not ourselves) and defers (desire is never fulfilled) the text of our selves. Deconstruction can therefore never be a positive science.... We *must* do a thing, *and* its opposite, and indeed we desire to do both, and so in indefinitely.' (*Ibid.* lxxvii-lxxviii)

⁹⁰ Freud says in *An Outline of Psychoanalysis* 'The aim of the first of these basic instincts is to establish ever greater connections unities and to preserve them thus – in short, to bind together; the aim of the second is, on the contrary, to undo connections and so to destroy things.' (*SE* XXIII: 148)

user. The germ of a deconstructivist ethic may also be found in McLuhan's use of paradox. *From Cliché to Archetype* devotes a chapter to paradox, drawing from *Paradoxia Epidemica* (1966) by Rosalie L. Colie, who says that '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 ...' (Colie, 1966: 6; CA 162) 'Paradoxes earn their right to question technique and method by their demonstration (in the very act of questioning) of their control over the techniques they question', says Colie, and furthermore, 'paradoxes [themselves] turn out to be paradoxical, to do two things at once, two things which contradict or cancel one another.' (Colie, *op.cit.* 8; CA 164) In *The Global Village*, McLuhan says that 'either/or' thinking is a product of the phonetic alphabet, while 'tribal' and 'Oriental' peoples are able to think in 'both/and' (i.e. paradoxical) terms (GV 39). An example of both/and thinking, says McLuhan, is the way that physicists conceptualize light *both* in terms of waves *and* in terms of particles. (*Ibid.*) Unlike Westerners, who believe that everything must be *either* one thing *or* another, McLuhan says that 'People who have not been exposed to the phonetic alphabet ... can easily entertain two diametric possibilities at once.' (*Ibid.*) While these concepts suggest an awareness of deconstructivist 'play' in the making of meaning, McLuhan's emphasis on the concept of 'simultaneity' in fact disqualifies him as a deconstructivist. As Derrida (1976: 85) argues, 'Simultaneity coordinates two absolute presents, two points or instants of presence, and it remains a linearist concept.'

McLuhan's 'New Science'

Metaphysics, according to Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas, is the study of 'first causes' or 'first principles', and it is through his concern with causality that McLuhan earns his status as a 'metaphysician'. He asserts in a letter of 1970 that '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'; he suggests here that his method is 'metaphysical rather than sociological or dialectical' (L 413, 412). McLuhan's identification as a 'metaphysician' was probably inspired by the 'Playboy' interview of 1969, 'Marshall McLuhan: A Candid Conversation with the

High Priest of Popcult and Metaphysician of Media', for the moniker 'metaphysician of media' seems to have clung to him thereafter. In fact the title is something of a misnomer, for the term 'metaphysics' already denotes its object – 'being' in general; it is specious to speak of a 'metaphysics of ...' McLuhan's understanding of the term was without doubt directed by T.S. Eliot's commentary on 'The Metaphysical Poets' (1921), in which Eliot (1932: 241) starts with the caveat that it is 'extremely difficult to define metaphysical poetry [and] to decide what poets practise it and in which of their verses', going on to suggest that the 'metaphysical' character attributed to the poetry of John Donne (1572-1631) and his disciples, later classed as the 'metaphysicals', is the product of a richly associative sensibility, in contradistinction to later poets such as John Milton (1608-1674) and John Dryden (1631-1700). Eliot suggests that 'In the seventeenth century a dissociation of sensibility set in, from which we have never recovered; and this dissociation, as is natural, was aggravated by the influence of the two most powerful poets of the century, Milton and Dryden.' (*Ibid.* 247). Says Eliot (*ibid.* 249-250),

Those who object to the "artificiality" of Milton or Dryden sometimes tell us to "look into our hearts and write." But that is not looking deep enough; Racine or Donne looked into a good deal more than the heart. One must look into the cerebral cortex, the nervous system, and the digestive tracts.

McLuhan attributes the 'dissociation of sensibility' evident in the work of seventeenth century poets to the effects of the printing press;⁹¹ he meanwhile finds a 'metaphysical' sensibility restored to artists in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the 'field' structure of electronic communications technology.⁹²

McLuhan ponders in a letter of 1972: 'There seems to be a universal inhibition in the

⁹¹ That the printing press was to blame for the 'dissociation of sensibility' in the Renaissance is an argument McLuhan finds in Alexander Pope's *Dunciad* (1728, revised a number of times between 1729 and 1743), which satirizes Pope's contemporaries as 'dunces' of history. McLuhan cites from the *The Dunciad in Four Books* (1743) in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (p.263): '*Philosophy*, that lean'd on Heav'n before, / Shrinks to her second cause, and is no more. / *Physic of Metaphysic* begs defence, / And *Metaphysic* calls for aid on *Sense!*' (Pope 1999: 357-358) In Aristotle's *Physics* and *Metaphysics*, the 'second cause' is the formal cause.

⁹² In his Introduction to Hugh Kenner's *Paradox in Chesterton* (1948), for example, McLuhan promotes G.K. Chesterton as a 'metaphysical moralist' (p. xxi).

Western world to study the *ground* of events, or structures. I have been asking myself for the past two years whether this inhibition, or subliminal reluctance, relates to the peculiar character of private identity in the West?' (L 458) McLuhan posits that since 'private identity' is an 'artefact' of Western culture, any attempt to 'probe' this artefact leads invariably to 'insecurity and panic' (*Ibid.*). As he explains, crediting his argument to Eric Havelock's *Preface to Plato* (1963):

the private identity of Western man appears to be grounded in the peculiar effects of the phonetic alphabet in abstracting private from corporate identity. If private identity, in this sense, is an artefact, then it is easier to understand why any probing of the nature of psychic change as shaped by outer environments might breed insecurity and panic. In the Orient, and in non-phonetically literate countries where private identity hardly exists, there is no uneasiness about probing the causes of psychic change resulting from man-made or technological environments. (*Ibid.*)

McLuhan related the reaction he received from critics to the rejection experienced by Freud (see also L 513):

many people resent me because I have made so many discoveries and from the point of view of subliminal life this may well be a clue. People feel angry when something they had 'known' all along surfaces. It happened with Freud. The point is, we create our subconscious ourselves and resent anybody fooling around with it. When I study media *effects*, I am really studying the subliminal life of a whole population, since they go to great pains to hide these effects from themselves. (cited in Gordon, 1997: 315-16)

McLuhan finds the remedy for the visual bias of Western culture in the 'metaphysical' attitude of philosophers such as Francis Bacon. While Bacon's 'system' is dialectical, he champions a grammatical method of exegesis and rhetorical (aphoristic) style of presentation (see e.g. CT 49, GG 103, 189).⁹³ 'Personally,' McLuhan says, 'having

⁹³ McLuhan cites from *The Advancement of Learning*, Book II, on (scientific) 'method' versus the use of the 'aphorism' (see CT 201; GG 102-103):

Another diversity of Method, whereof the consequence is great, is the delivery of knowledge in Aphorisms, or in Methods; wherein we may observe that it hath been too much taken into custom, out of a few axioms or observations upon any subject, to make a solemn and formal art, filling it with some discourses, and illustrating it with examples, and digesting it into

found the utmost ambiguity in all human technologies, and having never discovered a fixed position from which to view or measure them [i.e. dialectic], I have settled for studying their on-going effects on the users [i.e. grammar].’ (York University, CSWS Archive, file 287; Gordon, 1997: 314) The difference between grammar and dialectic, as McLuhan uses the terms, is reprised in *Take Today*, where the authors say:

It is difficult to make a mistake in logic, once the premises are granted. Psychologists report that madmen are rigorously logical, but their premises are irrelevant. The method of exploration seeks to discover adequate premises.... The *expository method* of system presentation [i.e. dialectic] serves very well to package preconceptions. The *exploratory method* [i.e. grammar] encounters surprise and discovery at every turn. (TT 8)

McLuhan opposes the dialectician’s ‘point-of-view’ with a call for ‘relevance’, to be achieved through ‘dialogue’. He says, ‘In the dialogue there is no maintaining of a point of view, but only the common participation in creating perpetually new insight and understanding in a total field of unified awareness. For dialogue is not light on, but light through ...’ (NAEB VII: ix). Dialogue, McLuhan says, must replace the old hierarchy, for ‘the entire new technology of our age demands the greatest of all humanist forms of instruction, not as an ideal, but as a daily necessity of action in every area of our communities.’ (UB 7: p.16) He elaborates that

As dialogue comes back, relevance acquires primacy. Dialogue is the only means of achieving it at all, however briefly. Dialogue ends the regime of the consumer and the producer. In dialogue the consumer is a producer, and the producer a consumer. (NAEB III: 122)

a sensible Method.

But the writing in aphorisms hath many excellent virtues, whereto the writing in Method doth not approach. For first, it trieth the writer, whether he be superficial or solid: for Aphorism, except they should be ridiculous, cannot be made but of the pith and heart of sciences; for discourse of illustration is cut off; recital of examples are cut off; discourse of connection and order is cut off; descriptions of practice are cut off.... Secondly, methods are more fit to win consent or belief, but less fit to point to action; for they carry a kind of demonstration in orb or circle, one part illuminating another, and therefore satisfy; but particulars, being dispersed, do best agree with dispersed directions. And lastly, Aphorisms, representing a knowledge broken, do invite men to inquire farther; whereas Methods, carrying the show of a total, do secure men, as if they were at farthest.

The role of the artist is essentially that of the rhetorician in 'transforming' his or her audience (through dialogue), however, both grammarian (scientist) and dialectician (philosopher) tend to make use of rhetorical techniques, and thus may also qualify as artists. In fact the role of the rhetorician (artist) is inherent to the role of the grammarian (scientist), for, as McLuhan says, to study the environment 'on its own terms is virtually impossible, as by definition it is at any moment ... subliminal. The only possible strategy is to construct an anti-environment, which is the normal activity of the artist ...' (GV5)

Freud's 'metapsychological' method, meanwhile, is derived from the German tradition of metaphysics. Kant's transcendental categories, twelve of which have been taken from Aristotle's categories in the *Organon*,⁹⁴ are reduced by Arthur Schopenhauer to three – space, time and causality – echoed in Freud's 'metapsychological' categories, i.e. the *topographical* (spatial), the *dynamic* (temporal) and the *economic* (causal). All three of these categories prove to be necessary, Freud finds, to conceptualize the phenomenon of 'repression': as he says in the *Introductory Lectures*, 'repression is a topographico-dynamic concept', while 'the term 'traumatic' has no other sense than an economic one.' (SE XVI: 342; 275) As Freud explains it, the term 'trauma' applies to

an experience which within a short period of time presents the mind with an increase of stimulus too powerful to be dealt with or worked off in the normal way, and this must result in permanent disturbances of the manner in which the energy operates. (*Ibid.* 275)

In his letter to Wilhelm Fliess on repression as a failure of 'translation', Freud says: 'The motive for [repression] is always a release of unpleasure which would be generated by a translation; it is as though this unpleasure provokes a disturbance of thought which does not permit the work of translation' (SE I: 235). In his later paper 'Repression' (1915), Freud likewise says that '*the essence of repression lies simply in the function of rejecting and keeping something out of consciousness*', and that 'the motive and purpose of repression [is] simply the avoidance of "pain."' (GPT 105, 111;

⁹⁴ *Organon* was the title given by Aristotle's disciples to six of his works on logic.

SE XIV: 147, 153; emphasis in original). Such a definition is not incompatible with McLuhan's concept of 'trauma' as a matter of 'numbing', 'counter-irritation' and 'autoamputation'. For Freud, however, a traumatic moment is registered in the *repetition* of a previous traumatic moment. An early formulation of this idea may be found in the footnotes to Freud's translation of Jean-Martin Charcot's *Tuesday Lectures*, where Freud conceptualizes trauma as 'an *accretion of excitation* in the nervous system, *which the latter has been unable to dispose of adequately by motor reaction*. A hysterical attack is *perhaps* to be regarded as an attempt to complete the reaction to the trauma' (SE I: 137, emphasis in original). Freud says that the central nervous system generally obeys a 'pleasure principle', but like McLuhan (with the concept of 'Narcissus-narcosis' as 'generalized numbness' in response to a 'specialized irritation'), Freud says that the 'pleasure principle' can be 'put out of action' by a 'traumatic' event. He says:

We describe as 'traumatic' any excitations from outside which are powerful enough to break through the protective shield. It seems to me that the concept of trauma necessarily implies a connection of this kind with a breach in an otherwise efficacious barrier against stimuli. Such an event as an external trauma is bound to provoke a disturbance on a large scale in the functioning of the organism's energy and to set in motion every possible defensive measure. At the same time, the pleasure principle is for a moment put out of action. (SE XVIII: 29)

Later, using birth as the 'model for an anxiety state' (an idea taken from Otto Rank, one of the members of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society), Freud suggests that '[t]he essential thing about birth, as about every situation of danger' is that it creates 'a state of highly tense excitation ... which one is not able to master by discharging it' and 'before which the efforts of the pleasure principle break down'. (SE XXII: 93) Freud, however, questions further. He notes that while 'pleasure' and 'pain' are responses to stimuli, whether external or internal, the object of anxiety is something *absent*. Freud says that in anxiety, 'what is feared, what is the object of the anxiety, is invariably the emergence of a traumatic moment, which cannot be dealt with by the normal rules of the pleasure principle.' (*Ibid.* 94) He therefore finds it necessary to conceptualize 'a two-fold origin of anxiety – one as a direct consequence of the traumatic moment and

the other as a signal threatening a repetition of such a moment.' (*Ibid.* 94-95)

While originally imagining a 'primal scene' or fantasy of seduction as the first cause of trauma, Freud later conceptualized the compound symptoms of neurosis in terms of a complex of effects. (The term 'complex' is borrowed from Jung, as Freud acknowledges.) In his analysis of his own and his patients' dreams and parapraxes (slips), which he believed revealed a person's desires in a disguised form, Freud proposed two developmental events. The Oedipus complex, associated with the pleasure principle, is that by which the young child takes as a love-object one of its parents, and displays aggression towards the other parent, who is seen as a rival. (The name comes from the tale of King Oedipus, who killed his father and married his mother, albeit unwittingly. In fact Freud came to argue that 'ambivalence', i.e. an admixture of love and hate, characterizes the child's relationship with both the mother and father.) The castration complex, meanwhile, is built around the traumatic event through which the child's incestuous love for one parent (that of the opposite sex) and aggression towards the rival parent (that of the same sex) are repressed, due to a 'fear of castration' for boys, or 'fear of loss of love' for girls. Freud says that for the boy, this traumatic event is the realization that his mother does not have a penis (i.e. that part of his body that is most associated with pleasure) and is therefore 'castrated'. The little boy, identifying with his father (who has a penis), and experiencing anxiety at the fantasy of his own 'castration', represses his incestuous love for his mother and aggression towards his father, turning this aggression back upon his own ego (thereby producing a 'super-ego') and in the process strengthening his identification with the male role.⁹⁵ The pleasure principle thus comes to be opposed by the 'reality principle', from which the child learns to tolerate 'unpleasure' and to postpone gratification (i.e. pleasure).

⁹⁵ Freud came to argue, controversially, that the developmental process is different for the two sexes, so that whereas for boys the castration complex is preceded by the Oedipus complex, for girls the order is reversed. The little girl first recognises her own 'castration', i.e., the fact that she has no penis, in jealousy of the father. The castration complex is then subsumed by the Oedipus complex, with an incestuous love of the mother and 'penis-envy' (*Penisneid*). As the little girl becomes resigned to her female role, identifying with her mother, Freud says that this penis-envy is transformed into the wish for a child, which functions for the girl as a 'penis substitute'. See the *Three Essays*, SE VII: 195; see also *New Introductory Lectures in Psycho-Analysis* lecture XXXIII on 'Femininity', SE XXII: 112-135, especially 128-129)

McLuhan, for his part, assimilates the 'Freudian censor' (i.e. super-ego) to the function of the central nervous system in 'numb[ing] us from the blow' of technology. He says:

It is interesting to note that success in keeping up a respectable front of customary kind can only be done by a frantic scramble back of the façade [sic]. After the crime, after the blow has fallen, the façade of custom can only be held up by swift rearrangement of the props. So it is in our social lives when a new technology strikes, or in our private life when some intense and, therefore, indigestible experience occurs, and the censor acts at once to numb us from the blow and to ready the faculties to assimilate the intruder. (UM 67)

As McLuhan describes it:

the central nervous system appears to institute a self-protective *numbing* of the affected area, insulating and anesthetizing it from conscious awareness of what's happening to it. It's a process rather like that which occurs to the body under shock or stress conditions, or to the mind in line with the Freudian concept of repression. I call this peculiar form of self-hypnosis Narcissus narcosis, a syndrome whereby man remains as unaware of the psychic and social effects of his new technology as a fish of the water it swims in. (EM 237)

McLuhan's rejection of the Freudian schema of id, ego and super-ego in fact repeats that of many of his contemporaries. Lancelot Law Whyte, in *The Unconscious Before Freud* (1960), referenced by McLuhan in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, says that:

It may ... be wrong to think of two *realms* which interact, called the conscious and the unconscious, or even of two contrasted kinds of mental *process*, conscious and unconscious, each causally self-contained until it hands over to the other. There may exist, as I believe, a single realm of mental processes, continuous and mainly unconscious, of which only certain transitory aspects or phases are accessible to immediate conscious attention. (Whyte, 1960: 17-18)

Whyte defines 'conscious' to mean '*directly present in awareness*' and 'unconscious' to mean '*all mental processes except those discrete aspects or brief phases which enter awareness as they occur*' (20-21). Whyte says that what is 'unconscious' thus includes 'not only the "subconscious" and "preconscious," but all mental factors and processes

of which we are not immediately aware, whatever they be' (21). Freud, however, insists upon a distinction between the 'unconscious' and the 'preconscious', writing in the last chapter of *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1900) that

there are *two kinds of unconscious*, which have not yet been distinguished by psychologists. Both of them are unconscious in the sense used by psychology; but in our sense one of them, which we term the *Ucs.*, is also *inadmissible to consciousness*, while we term the other [the preconscious] the *Pcs.* because its excitations – after observing certain rules, it is true, and perhaps only after passing a fresh censorship, though nonetheless without regard to the *Ucs.* – are able to reach consciousness. (*SE V*: 614-615, emphasis in original)

The Freudian 'unconscious', in other words, does not mean all that is not 'conscious', but rather refers specifically to repressed (i.e. censored) wishes 'inadmissible to consciousness'. Edward T. Hall (1959: 84-85), whose work McLuhan also references in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, attacks Freud's concept of 'the unconscious [as] inaccessible to direct examination', arguing after Harry Stack Sullivan that

the unconscious is not hidden to anyone except the individual who hides from himself those parts which persons significant to him in his early life have disapproved. While they are dissociated or hidden from himself, they are there for trained observers to see and they can therefore be analyzed ...

Hall adopts Sullivan's concepts of 'in-awareness' and 'out-of-awareness' to replace Freud's categories of the 'conscious' and the 'unconscious', but says that these concepts do not apply to 'neuroses', being 'deviations from the norm' (97). Hall is probably quoting Karen Horney (1964 [1937]: 21), who says that 'a neurosis involves deviation from the normal'; she does, however, qualify this statement, writing that: 'The neurotic has fears which in quantity or quality deviate from those of the cultural pattern' (*Ibid.* 25). Freud himself finds no difference between 'neurotic' and 'normal' persons regarding the structure of the unconscious.

Despite their disagreement over the 'cause' of repression, both McLuhan and Freud envisage a specialist role as the necessary counter to trauma. For Freud, it is the

analyst who invites the patient to 'traverse the fantasy' of the lost object (Lacan's *objet petit a*) by re-interpreting the 'causes' of the patient's trauma. To McLuhan, the 'artist' is a rhetorician who constructs 'anti-environments' so as to counteract trauma in the audience, thereby bridging 'between biological inheritance and the environments created by technological innovation' (LM 98). By this reasoning, 'consciousness' itself appears as a work of art to adjust us to the 'unconscious' effects of technologies, and in fact McLuhan says:

It is human consciousness itself that is the great artifact of man. The making and shaping of consciousness from moment to moment is the supreme artistic task of all individuals. To qualify and to perfect this process on a world environmental scale is the inherent potential of each new technology. (UB 20, p.14)

McLuhan and Freud each have a concept of 'energy' as the force behind evolution; however, the unit of energy in McLuhan is variously described as a 'sense', a 'technology', a form, a function, or a *figure*, while in Freud's oeuvre a unit of energy has the name of a 'drive' (*Trieb*). As Freud describes in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*,

It is as though the life of the organism moved with a vacillating rhythm. One group of instincts rushes forward so as to reach the final aim of life as swiftly as possible; but when a particular stage in the advance has been reached, the other group jerks back to a certain point to make a fresh start and so prolong the journey. And even though it is certain that sexuality and the distinction between the sexes did not exist when life began, the possibility remains that the instincts which were later to be described as sexual may have been in operation from the very first ... (SE XVIII: 40-41)

The congruity between McLuhan's and Freud's methods is probably best explained by the debt owed by both to Darwin's analysis of 'forms' in evolution in *The Origin of Species* (1859), and, before Darwin, to Schopenhauer's thesis in *The World as Will and Representation* (1819), which echoes in Freud's concept of the dynamic, plastic 'drives' and McLuhan's concept of the 'senses' which 'translate' into one another, releasing 'hybrid energy'. Quietly, McLuhan recognizes this debt. He may have read *The Origin of Species* around the end of 1970, for in a letter of January 1971 he connects Darwin's method with that of the symbolist poets, writing that

Symbolism initiated the technique of separating effects from causes, studying the effects in order to learn the causes.... Inevitably, Darwin, in starting with species, was dealing with effects. The causes were infinitely remote and only to be guessed at from the effects. (NAC, letter to Fritz Wilhelmson, 18 January 1971; Gordon, 1997: 429-430, note 67)

Darwin's achievement, in McLuhan's analysis, was to abolish the mechanized view of 'Nature' promoted by the visual bias of Western culture and the Western identification of the body as 'machine'. Darwin, in other words, refined Schopenhauer's thesis to make explicit the concept of trauma as *cause*. Linking Darwin's theory of evolution with the rhetorical paradox, McLuhan suggests that

Paradox is the posture of the mind when, like a boxer balanced on two feet, it is feinting for an opening. Scientific discovery is always attended by paradox.... Darwinian theory supposes that species can evolve but still persist in a world where all is change – it is a theory at once radically revolutionary and radically conservative. (CA 166)

In *Take Today* (1972), quoting from *Finnegans Wake*, 'Charlie, you're my darwing', McLuhan comments that

The single word "darwing" indicates the end of the ironclad system of clanging mechanisms that had satisfied the ideas of order in the classical "age of reason." "Charlie" Darwin's evolutionary approach opened the closed, self-regulating systems to a cosmic process of innovation that was totally environmental [i.e. *trauma*].... His "gap in Nature" began a new interface of rapid change and breakthroughs that still resonates. (TT 60)

Freud, developing Darwin's thesis in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* to describe the origin of the 'instincts' (*Triebe*), likewise suggests that

[t]he attributes of life were at some time evoked in inanimate matter by the action of a force of whose nature we can form no conception [i.e. *trauma*] The tension which then arose in what had hitherto been an inanimate substance endeavoured to cancel itself out. In this way the first instinct came into being: the instinct to return to the inanimate state. (SE XVIII: 38)

Freud's mistake, in McLuhan's analysis, is that while he recognizes the 'energy' in 'Nature', he (like Aristotle, the phenomenologists and Karl Marx before him) neglects the 'formal' effects of *technologies* upon the patterns of that energy (the study of which McLuhan calls 'entelechy', after Aristotle).⁹⁶ McLuhan explains in a letter of 1971:

Entelechy or *energeia* is the recognition of the new actuation of power brought about by any arrangement of components whether in the atom or the plant or the intellect.... [Technologies] which actuate human potential, creating specific new patterns of energy and form of action ... have for 2500 years been excluded from philosophical study. They were *written off*. (L 429)

He expands in *Take Today*:

Since Plato, philosophers and scientists have attributed constant forms and patterns of action only to the world of "Nature." Both Plato and Aristotle, and their followers, as well as all the other schools of philosophy, have refused to recognize any patterns of energy arising from man-made technologies. Having invented "Nature" as a world of rigorous order and repetition, they studied and observed only "natural" forms as having power to shape and influence psyche and society. The world of man's artifacts was considered neutral until the electric age. As the electric environment increasingly engulfed the old Greek "Nature," it became apparent that "Nature" was a figure abstracted from a ground of existence that was far from "natural." Greek "Nature," which sufficed until Einstein, excluded most of the chaotic resonance of the great Sound-Light Show of existence itself. (TT 7)

In fact, concludes McLuhan, 'from Plato to the present, in the Western world, there has been no theory whatever of psychic change resulting from technological change. The exception is the work of Harold Innis (*The Bias of Communication*) and his disciples, Eric Havelock and [Marshall] McLuhan.' (L 458) Contrasting Innis to Hegel, McLuhan says that 'If Hegel projected a historical pattern of *figures* minus an existential *ground*,

⁹⁶ The meaning of *entelechia*, a neologism emphasizing the 'end' (*telos*) of a process of being or 'being-at-work', has been debated for thousands of years, notably in St. Thomas Aquinas's commentary on the *Metaphysics*. Says Aristotle, 'For the action is the end, and the actuality is the action. And so even the word 'actuality' [*energeia*] is derived from 'action' [*ergon*], and points to the complete reality [*entelecheia*]' (Aristotle, 1941: 830; *Metaphysics* Book IX Chapter 8, 1050a). It is enough to recognize here that McLuhan's interpretation of *entelecheia* reflects his 'metaphysical' conception of *process*, so that for him 'Entelechy ... is the recognition of the new actuation of power brought about by any arrangement of components whether in the atom or the plant or the intellect ...' (L 429)

Harold Innis, in the spirit of the new age of information, sought for patterns in the very ground of history and existence. He saw media, old and new, [...] as living vortices of power creating hidden environments that act abrasively and destructively on older forms of culture. [...] Innis, in fact, is himself presenting a total field-theory of 'cause' and effect. (McLuhan in Innis, 1972: v, ix)

In a rare comment on Freud, McLuhan says that

Even Freud paid no attention to the *ground* of psychic conditioning, except tangentially, in *Civilization and Its Discontents* [1930]. His Oedipus complex would be meaningless except in a highly literate environment. Historically, Oedipus himself was the product of technological change. When the oral and tribal Greek was submitted to the detribalizing action of the visually oriented alphabet, his new private identity was suddenly in violent interface with the old corporate, or incestuous, identity. Today we have an instant replay, as it were, of the Greek historical shift from oral to visual culture as we move from visual to acoustic culture, electrically. (L 458)

McLuhan's critique of the Western philosophical tradition is taken directly from Bacon: in thinkers such as Kant, Hegel, Heidegger and Derrida, McLuhan (rightly or wrongly) finds all the problems Bacon associates with dialectical method. The 'tetrad' in *Laws of Media* overcomes these problems, McLuhan says, through 'metaphysical' analysis, bridging 'between grammatical humanism and dialectic' (LM 227). It may be argued that the roles of grammarian and dialectician form a dialectic resolved in the role of the (Derridean) deconstructivist; in the interplay between text (as environment) and the deconstructed text, the deconstructivist mimics the *dialogue* between rhetorician/artist and audience. Though McLuhan casts Freud as a dialectician who pays 'no attention to the *ground*', psychoanalysis is actually a variety of grammar, but more precisely (remembering that rhetoric belongs to grammar) it is a kind of rhetoric *in reverse*, the analyst positioning him- or herself as Other, i.e. as audience, in relation to the patient, so as to promote a 'transference' relationship, that is to say the projection of the role of 'Other' upon the analyst. While he rejects the tenets of psychoanalysis, McLuhan suggests in a letter of 1975 that

“formal causality”, i.e. structural form ... is inseparable from “putting on” one’s public. The writer’s or performer’s public is the formal cause of his art or entertainment or his philosophy. The *figure/ground* relation between writer and public or between the artist and his making is an interplay, a kind of intercourse. This interplay is at its peak in all performance before the public and is characteristic of role-playing in general. There is, as it were, a sexual relation between performer and public ... Perhaps there has been insufficient thought given to the nature of role-playing in its metaphysical or formal causality. (L 511)

Here McLuhan seems to want to equate the ‘metaphysical’ with ‘formal’ causality, only that this, he says, is ‘inseparable from “putting on” one’s public’ – inseparable, in short, from the art of rhetoric.

It transpires that McLuhan’s ‘metaphysical’ method, renamed ‘new science’ in *Laws of Media*, is nothing but an integration of the arts of grammar, dialectic and rhetoric. As he developed his structural analysis of formal causality, McLuhan meanwhile sought a method to explain the transformative effects of the *dialogue* between speaker/subject and audience/Other which is essential to the art of rhetoric. Hinted at in *Take Today*, this notion of transformative dialogue is absent from the posthumous *Laws of Media*, where the technology is analyzed as a ‘word’ with a ‘*Logos*-structure’ based upon the four-part Aristotelian ‘metaphor’ and depicted in a diagram that McLuhan calls a ‘tetrad’. What we are left with, then, is a paradox, for McLuhan’s (psychoanalytic) interpretation of rhetoric as the act of “putting on” one’s public’ is incompatible both with the notion of the subject as an incarnation of *Logos* and with the ‘*Logos*-structure’ of the tetrad in *Laws of Media*. At the end of his career, possibly reluctant to open a Pandora’s Box whose contents he had for so long avoided, McLuhan is to be found contemplating the chasm between metaphysics and psychoanalysis.

5 McLuhan and Lacan

In placing McLuhan in the Western philosophical tradition it is valuable to compare him with one of his contemporaries, French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan (1901-1989), for to explore the relationship between McLuhan and Lacan is to explore the relationship between metaphysics and psychoanalysis, a field that has been brilliantly mined by Slavoj Žižek. If we follow Žižek in distinguishing between Lacan's early work on the 'Real', 'imaginary' and 'symbolic' orders and his later work on fantasy, it becomes clear why the Lacanian critique of metaphysics is properly to be situated both pre- and post-Derridean 'deconstruction'. On the one hand, Lacan's recognition of the 'split' between symbolic and Real provides a basis for Derrida's critique of Western metaphysics as a 'metaphysics of presence', and his concept of '*differance*' as a logic of the signifier. However the formula for subjectivity devised by Lacan, $\$ \diamond a$, recognizes something new articulated by Lacan as 'the lack in the Other'. In *Laws of Media* (1988), written between 1973 and 1979 and completed by Eric McLuhan after his father's death, the authors champion the notion of the technology-signifier as an 'incarnation' of *Logos*, preserving its divine ratios; meanwhile, McLuhan's essays and letters of the same period reveal just how close he came to a psychoanalytic interpretation of subjectivity, with his notion of the audience (Other) as a 'mask' that the speaker (subject) must 'put on'.

McLuhan's method in *Laws of Media*, while resembling his 'phenomenological' and 'structural' methods, is in fact derived from gestalt theory, which, like structuralism, is concerned with the problem of 'form'. As Wolfgang Köhler (1929: 191) notes, 'In German the word "gestalt" may be used as a synonym for "form," or perhaps "shape."' Gestalt theory, and specifically that of Köhler, was familiar to McLuhan from his early years of study under I.A. Richards at Cambridge University. Köhler's argument is that 'sensory units may have acquired names and may have become richly symbolic in the context of our knowledge, while existing, nevertheless, as segregated units in the sensory field prior to such accretions.' (*Ibid.* 151) That is, objects (even prior to our recognition of them as such) do not present themselves as sensory data, but emerge

from the sensory 'field' as organized 'gestalts'.⁹⁷ Richards invokes gestalt psychology to critique the crude 'stimulus-response' concept of human behaviour as the one-to-one correspondence of cause and effect. Says Richards (1926: 86),

The process in the course of which a mental event may occur, a process apparently beginning in a stimulus and ending in an act, is what we have called an impulse. In actual experience single impulses of course never occur. Even the simplest human reflexes are very intricate bundles of mutually dependent impulses, and in any actual human behaviour the number of simultaneous and connected impulses occurring is beyond estimation. The simple impulse in fact is a limit, and the only impulses psychology is concerned with are complex. It is often convenient to speak as though simple impulses were in question, as when we speak of an impulse of hunger, or an impulse to laugh, but we must not forget how intricate all our activities are.

While McLuhan did not initially adopt Richards' method, the notion of stimuli forming a complex arrangement of components found a reply in McLuhan's concept of acoustic space. Research for *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and the NAEB report led McLuhan to E. H. Gombrich's *Art and Illusion* (1960), which makes explicit the gestalt theory of art criticism such as that of Adolf von Hildebrand in the late nineteenth century; gestalt theory likewise forms the basis of Anton Ehrenzweig's *The Psychoanalysis of Hearing and Vision* (1953) and Hans Selye's *The Stress of Life* (1956), referenced by McLuhan in *Understanding Media*, as well as Köhler's *Gestalt Psychology* (1929) and Jean Piaget's *Structuralism* (1970, *Le structuralisme*, 1968), referenced in *Laws of Media* and *The Global Village* (1989). McLuhan's notion of technologies as 'organs' causing 'pain' to society owes much to Selye (1956: 219-220), who conceptualizes disease in the human being in terms of a 'field' response to stress, explaining that '[t]he shape of each disease functions as a single unit, although it is made up of innumerable simple

⁹⁷ A similar concept is found in Henri Bergson's *L'évolution créatrice* (1907, tr. *Creative Evolution*, 1911) which McLuhan also read in the mid 1930's. Bergson (1911: 318-319) says: Now, life is an evolution. We concentrate a period of this evolution in a stable view which we call a form, and, when the change has become considerable enough to overcome the fortunate inertia of our perception, we say that the body has changed its form. But in reality the body is changing form at every moment; or rather, there is no form, since form is immobile and the reality is movement. What is real is the continual *change of form: form is only a snapshot view of a transition.* (emphasis in original)

reacton-responses'. In *Structuralism* (1970), Piaget (1970: 57; LM 105) stresses the concept of 'equilibration' in the apprehension of forms; he says that 'it is equilibration which makes Gestalten reenter the domain of structure ... for whether physical or physiological, equilibration involves the idea of transformation within a system and the idea of self-regulation'. Piaget suggests that 'Gestalt psychology is ... a structuralist theory more on account of its use of equilibration principles than because of the laws of wholeness it proposes.' (*Ibid.*) Gestalt theory, in short, is concerned with *process* as much as form.⁹⁸

By the time McLuhan started to call himself a 'structuralist', he had reformulated the dialectic between technology as 'environment' and art as 'anti-environment' in the figure/ground terms of gestalt theory. The use of these terms, from a tradition that emphasizes process as much as structure, enabled McLuhan to conceptualize the relationship between the singular aspect (figure) and the environment (ground) not as one of one-to-one correspondence, but rather as one of 'interface' or 'interplay'. Say the McLuhans in *Laws of Media*: "Figure' and 'ground' entered Gestalt psychology from the work of Edgar Rubin, who about 1915 used those terms to discuss aspects of visual perception'; the authors declare that they have 'broadened' the terms, however, so as 'to embrace the whole structure of perception and consciousness' (LM 5). They describe the figure/ground relationship thus:

All situations comprise of an area of attention (figure) and a very much larger area of inattention (ground). The two continually coerce and play with each other across a common outline or boundary or interval that serves to define both simultaneously. The shape of one conforms exactly to the shape of the other. (LM 5)

⁹⁸ In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), McLuhan historicizes the concern with process in relation to the nineteenth century 'method of invention', reiterating A.N. Whitehead: 'The greatest invention of the nineteenth century was the invention of the method of invention.' (GG 45). McLuhan says that such a method was described in Edgar Allen Poe's *Philosophy of Composition* (1846), i.e., 'to begin with the solution of the problem or with the effect intended. Then one backtracks, step by step, to the point from which one must begin in order to reach the solution or effect.' (*Ibid.*) McLuhan then identifies 'the twentieth century step beyond the method of invention' as 'not the backtracking from *product* to starting point, but the following of *process* in isolation from product'; for, he says, 'To follow the contours of process as in psychoanalysis provides the only means of avoiding the product of process, namely neurosis or psychosis' (*Ibid.*). McLuhan may have been inspired by Ruesch and Bateson (1951: 62), who attribute '[the] introduction of the notion of process' in psychiatry to Freud.

McLuhan and Powers in *The Global Village* say that 'The common sensorium, which is Goethe's proper use of the word *Weltinneraum*, contains all potential figures in sensuous latency at once. In this respect, ground provides the structure of or style of awareness, the way of seeing or the terms in which a figure is perceived.' (GV 5) However, they also say that

[figure and ground] are in a constant state of abrasive interplay, with an outline or boundary or interval between them that serves to define both simultaneously. As in the paintings of Van Gogh or cloissoné art, figures rise out of and recede back into ground, which is configurational and comprises all other (available) figures at once. (*Ibid.*)

We can see that in fact McLuhan's formulation of the relationship between 'figure' and 'ground' is not merely in terms of 'structure' (i.e. 'the structure or style of awareness', or a dialectic of 'attention' and 'inattention') but incorporates a theory of *process*, i.e. dynamic interplay or 'abrasive interplay'. The figure/ground relationship, in short, depicts the *interface* between 'consciousness' and the (collective) 'unconscious', and as we have seen in McLuhan's previous formulations of this dialectic, this interface is one of 'dynamic equilibrium' or 'homeostasis', not merely of form.

The terms 'figure' and 'ground' replace earlier dialectics between the 'visual' and the 'acoustic', 'cliché' and 'archetype', and 'message' and 'medium'. Initially, McLuhan had proposed a dichotomy between 'form' and 'content', but he finds such a distinction to be artificial, i.e., 'native to the abstract, written, and printed forms of codification' (*UB* 18, p.16). He explains that

The "content" approach to media ... is, I am reasonably satisfied, derivative from the habit of literacy itself. We would not talk about the "content" of a tune or a melody. But as soon as man learned how to encode the audible in visible terms (writing) he easily began to make divisions between "form" and "content," and between thought and feeling, individual and state, and so on. (*UB* 17, p.15)

The form/content distinction is developed in *Understanding Media*, where McLuhan

says that 'the "content" of any medium is always another medium', so that 'media come in pairs, with one acting as the "content" of the other, obscuring the operation of both.' (UM 8, 52) For example:

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." (UM 8)

The exception to this rule, McLuhan says, is 'electric light'. Light (or electricity) 'is a medium without a message, as it were, unless it is used to spell out some verbal ad or name' (UM 8). Except for the electric light, therefore, every technology is two-fold. It consists of a *medium*, a form that extends a sense or senses; and additional to this is the visible 'content' or *message*. Echoing Harold Innis, McLuhan says that it is the technology or form itself, regardless of its content or message, which has the power to transform society. Thus his maxim: 'The medium is the message':

"the medium is the message" because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. The content or uses of such media are as diverse as they are ineffectual in shaping the form of human association. Indeed, it is only too typical that the "content" of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium. (UM 9)

While 'the medium is the message' is clearly intended as a paradox (later satirized by McLuhan as 'the medium is the *massage*', 'mess age' or 'mass age'), the maxim also repeats the notion that the effects of media are 'subliminal' or 'unconscious' – and that it is these effects that constitute McLuhan's 'message'.

McLuhan conceptualizes the unconscious effects of the technology in terms of what Aristotle and St. Thomas Aquinas call 'formal cause'. Describing the formal cause in an address of 1959, McLuhan says:

a formal cause exerts its pressure non-verbally and non-conservatively. Any substantial form impresses itself upon you without benefit of awareness or conscious attention on your part. You can be conscious about it if you like, but a tree, grass, stones, the world of

forms in which we live impresses us steadily and constantly without intermission, without benefit of words or thoughts. They are total in their action upon us. It doesn't matter what theory we may have about them: their effect upon us is quite independent of any thought we may have about them. (*ML* 37-38)

Likewise, 'The meaning of a work of art ... has nothing to do with what you think about it. It has to do with its action upon you. It is a form: it acts upon you. It invades your senses. It re-structures your outlook. It completely changes your attitudes ...' (*Ibid.* 38) The 'media of communication', too, are 'complex forms.... And their effect upon us is that of forms, not of ideas or of concepts.' (*Ibid.*) McLuhan says (in a familiar refrain): 'Just why people should be so obsessed by what they suppose to be the content of these forms, and so completely unaware of the formal structure and the formal causes of such forms, I do not understand.' (*Ibid.*) In *The Gutenberg Galaxy* McLuhan blames the modern inability to understand formal cause on the effects of print technology (*GG* 126). Conversely, he says that: 'The electronic age finds it both natural and necessary to be aware of every kind of situation from many points of view simultaneously.' (*UB* 1, p.21). Quoting from Edmund Whittaker's *Space and Spirit* (1946), McLuhan contrasts the concept of linear causality developed by Isaac Newton in the late seventeenth century with the 'relativity' theory of Albert Einstein (1879-1955), in which 'space is no longer the stage on which the drama of physics is performed: it is itself one of the performers' (Whittaker in *GG* 253). McLuhan says that 'it has been the consensus of modern science and philosophy that we have now shifted from "cause" to "configuration" in all fields of study and analysis.' (*GG* 251-252) Or, as he puts it elsewhere: 'We are now concerned with causes not on a single plane or in mere sequence, but as a total field of interaction and interpenetration.' (*UB* 17, p.7)

When McLuhan started to integrate his argument about the shift 'from "cause" to "configuration"' with the evolutionary theories of Henri Bergson and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, he adduced the formula (another paradox) that 'effects precede causes' (see e.g. *UB* 5, p.17). He wrote in a letter of 1971, reworking Poe's thesis on composition:

The study of effects has lately driven me to the study of causality, where I have been forced to observe that most of the effects of any

innovation occur before the actual innovation itself. In a word, a vortex of effects tends, in time, to become the innovation. It is because human affairs have been pushed into pure process by electronic technology that effects can precede causes. (*ML* xxii)

In *Take Today*, McLuhan and Barrington Nevitt say that 'While dealing with the old Greek and Newtonian Nature, men found concepts and points of view useful for the framing of theories of causes that could be tested by measurement' (*TT* 7). In the electronic age, however, 'Point of view is failure to achieve structural awareness.' (*Ibid.* 13) McLuhan and Nevitt say that in the electronic media environment,

points of view disappear automatically and concepts have to yield to percepts, for concepts arise from endlessly repeated percepts – ossifications of percepts, as it were Percepts are not hypotheses that can be tested quantitatively, but percepts and observations do yield patterns which can be regarded as "causes" although, in fact, they are *processes*. (*Ibid.* 7)

McLuhan elaborates in 'The Argument: Causality in the Electric World' (1973) also with Barrington Nevitt: 'all grounds are a totality of cumulative effects that continually gell into figures as causes. "When the time is ripe" in any process, the effects as ground have preceded the cause as figures. "*Causality*" is a process pattern ...' (*UB* 3, pp.17-18)

In *Laws of Media*, tracing concepts of causality in the history of science, McLuhan says that 'Aristotle provides the earliest systematic treatment of causes, by drawing together Plato's observations. Aristotelian causality is fourfold, and is applicable both to nature and to artefacts.' (*LM* 87) The four Aristotelian causes are: the material cause (e.g. 'the bronze of the statue, the silver of the bowl', upon which the other causes are effected); the formal cause; the efficient cause, i.e. the dynamic agent; and the final cause, 'in the sense of end or 'that for the sake of which' a thing is done' (Aristotle, 1941: 240-241; *Physics* Book II Chapter 3; 194b, 195a; see also Bunge, 1959: 31-32). Arguing that Plato was acoustic in his sensory bias, while Aristotle was

visual (an argument taken from Harold Innis),⁹⁹ McLuhan says that Aristotle ‘confuses’ the acoustic quality of formal cause, trying to interpret it visually and abstractly, and thus ‘frequently confuses formal and final cause’ (*LM* 113, 88). The visual bias of Western culture has meant that ‘Final cause, inherent in the thing from the outset, [has come] to be misinterpreted ... as the end-point of a series of efficient causes.’ (88) In the Renaissance, ‘modern Scientific method was born’ when print technology effected the ‘complete ascendancy’ of the visual sense over all the other senses; the ‘doctrine of simultaneous causes’ inherited from Plato and Aristotle was then reduced to the *causa efficiens* or ‘efficient cause’ which was, unlike the other three causes, mathematically representable (*Ibid.*; Bunge, *op.cit.* 32). The ‘efficient cause’ therefore came to be accepted as ‘the necessary and sufficient condition for the appearance of something’ (*LM* 88). McLuhan cites Galileo (1564-1642): ‘that and no other is to be called cause, at the presence of which the effect always follows, and at whose removal the effect disappears.’ (*Ibid.*; Bunge, *op.cit.* 33) With this interpretation of causality, ‘Figure/ground resonance and the interplay of levels and causes were eliminated’ (*LM* 90). As such there was a transformation in ‘the mode of understanding of formal causality ... from dynamic to abstract and ideal’ (88). McLuhan says: ‘Prior to visual space, formal cause coincided with logos as a figure/ground concern with the thing, structurally inclusive of its whole pattern of side-effects on the ground of users.’ (89) However, ‘[w]hen visual space transformed cosmology and the logos alike from resonant ground to rational figure’, formal cause came instead to be regarded as the ‘definition of a thing’s essence (its *form* or the ‘whatness’ whereby we know a thing)’ (*Ibid.*). This confusion ‘from Aristotle onwards’, perpetuated ‘by persons, to one or another degree visually biased, who assumed visual space to be the common-sense norm’, has spawned ‘at least two ... versions of mimesis and of logos and of formal cause’, one visual and one acoustic, with the authors of the ‘visual’ concepts regarding

⁹⁹ In *Explorations* 8 (reissued as *Verbi-Voco-Visual Explorations*) McLuhan presents a paradox in relation to the ‘visual bias’ of Aristotle and ‘acoustic bias’ of Plato. He says, ALL MEN ARE BORN EITHER PLATONISTS OR ARISTOTELIANS, said Coleridge. The aristocratic Plato had a low opinion of scribes and stenographers, yet his world of ideas is almost entirely visual. Whereas Aristotle, the man of method and scribal order, appeals in his philosophy entirely to the ear. His philosophy has no visual effects at all. Plato is paradoxically the darling of literary men, Aristotle of oral, intuitive men. The man of the written dialogue finally assumes a literary role. (VVV Item 20)

the original 'acoustic' concepts as 'a confused or tentative attempt to explain' the thing in visual terms (4).

The problem of how to define and depict formal causality 'scientifically', without neglecting its 'acoustic' properties, is the subject of *Laws of Media*, and McLuhan's answer to this problem is the 'tetrad'. The tetrad unites what McLuhan calls the four 'laws' of media, which McLuhan says apply to every human artifact; and his later insight that every technology has a four-part 'verbal' or 'metaphorical' structure, like a word. McLuhan's inspiration for the 'laws' – which he formulated with his son Eric in 1974 – was Karl Popper's notion in *Objective Knowledge* (1972) that a 'scientific hypothesis is one that can be disproved' (see 'McLuhan's Laws of the Media', *Technology and Culture*, 16:1, January 1975, p.74; *LM* viii). Eric McLuhan says that his father, after reading this definition, immediately started asking: 'What statements can we make about media that anyone can test – prove or disprove – for himself? What do all media have in common? What do they *do*?' (*LM* viii) He reports:

We had expected to find a dozen or so such statements. By the first afternoon we had located three ... all present in [*Understanding Media*]. First, extension: as an 'extension of man' (the subtitle), every technology extends or amplifies some organ or faculty of the user. Then, the attendant 'closure': because there is equilibrium in sensibility, when one area of experience is heightened or intensified, another is diminished a third, with a chapter to itself in [*Understanding Media*] ('Reversal of the Overheated Medium'): every form, pushed to the limit of its potential, reverses its characteristics.... then the fourth appeared – retrieval.... this too had been the subject of a book, *From Cliché to Archetype*. At first we thought retrieval entailed only the recasting of whatever formed the content of the new form. That is does (the content of any medium is an older medium), and considerably more. We found these four [laws] ... and no more. (*Ibid.*)

It was not until later that McLuhan started to recognize 'an inner harmony among the four laws – that there are pairs of ratios among them – and ... the relation between that and metaphor' (ix). This concept may be dated by its use in a letter of December 1976 (see *L* 525); and is articulated in 'Laws of the Media', published in the journal *Etcetera: A Review of General Semantics* in July 1977. Eric McLuhan says: 'the link to metaphor

led to one of the farthest-reaching realizations Utterings are outerings (extensions), so media are not *as* words, they actually *are* words ... [with a] verbal structure.' (LM ix)

McLuhan's interest in French structuralism, a movement brought to his attention in the early 1970's, led him to the work of Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). McLuhan studied Saussure's *Course in General Linguistics* over a six month period in 1974 (Gordon, 1997: 330); and in *Laws of Media*, he is careful to distinguish his use of the terms *figure* and *ground* from Saussure's terms 'signifier' and 'signified'. Saussure (1966: 15, 66) conceptualizes the 'sign', which he calls the 'tangible' element of a language, as a 'two-sided psychological entity' that unites, through a process of association, a *concept* and a *sound-image*. He says that the sound-image 'is not the material sound ... but the psychological imprint of the sound, the impression that it makes on our senses'. (*Ibid.* 66) To emphasize the relation between the concept and the sound-image, Saussure renames the 'concept' the *signifiant* ('signified') and the 'sound-image' the *signifié* ('signifier'). After reading Saussure, McLuhan started identifying his own method as 'structuralist'; he attributed this method not to Saussure, however, but to I.A. Richards, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot, and the symbolist poets whose work he had been studying since the 1930's (see e.g. L 506-507; UB 17, p.11). Widely criticizing French structuralism, McLuhan says that 'To date, linguistics, philosophy, and semiotics have all stopped short of etymology (relation between figure and ground) ... at the level of description or of matching signifier and signified ...' (LM 118) It is an error to conceptualize signification in terms of the 'matching' of signifier and signified, McLuhan says, for the relationship between figure and ground is not one of correspondence but 'abrasion', where grounds are structured acoustically and there are simultaneous effects of *grounds* upon *figures* and *figures* upon *grounds*. McLuhan wrote to James M. Curtis after reading his essay on 'Marshall McLuhan and French Structuralism' (*Boundary* 21:1, Autumn 1972, 134-46): 'The most controversial area of my structural approach concerns the factor known only to James Joyce, the greatest of all structuralists, namely the conflict and complementarity of audible and visible space.' (Gordon, 1997: 321). A few months later, he muses: 'Paradoxically, what is called 'structuralism' in linguistics and in the arts is characterized by the disappearance

of merely visual lay-out in favour of iconic and multi-sensuous structures.’ (*Ibid.*) Over the next few years, McLuhan finds the concern with ‘structure’ to be characteristic of phenomenology, gestalt psychology, psychoanalysis, structural anthropology, and existentialism,¹⁰⁰ all of which, he says, deal with figure/ground interplay or ‘simultaneous’ causes and effects.

Applying this understanding of causality to a critique of the Western philosophical tradition, McLuhan says in *Laws of Media* that ‘The new philosophies, logics, and linguistics of our time’ are ‘born of the shift from visual to acoustic space’ (55). McLuhan suggests in a letter of June 1974 that in the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and G. W. F. Hegel (1770-1831), the ‘visual determinism’ found in the philosophy of John Locke (1632-1704) and David Hume (1711-1776) has ‘flipped ... into acoustic subjectivism’ (*L* 489). ‘The logical, rational world is visual, continuous, and connected, but when pushed to its limit,’ he explains, ‘flips into the [simultaneous] acoustic form’ (*Ibid.*).¹⁰¹ McLuhan suggests that the ‘spiritualism’ of Kant’s and Hegel’s disciples, i.e. the emphasis upon *process* rather than object, comes from ‘the illusion that the acoustic world is spiritual and unlike the outer visual world, whereas, in fact, the acoustic is just as material as the visual.’ (*Ibid.*) “‘Process” theology and the speculative theology of the descendents of Kant and Hegel’, McLuhan says, implying thinkers such as Henri Bergson and possibly Martin Heidegger, ‘is unconsciously in the grip of the merely acoustic dimension.’ (*Ibid.* 490) Likewise, ‘The “structuralism” of the European phenomenologists’, he suggests, implying Edmund Husserl, Heidegger

¹⁰⁰ McLuhan describes existentialism as a philosophy of ‘structures, rather than categories, and of total social involvement instead of the bourgeois spirit of individual separateness or points of view.’ (*UM* 47) He wrote in a letter of 1974:

The reason that I am admired in Paris and in some of the Latin countries is that my approach is rightly regarded as “structuralist”. I have acquired that approach through Joyce and Eliot and the Symbolists, and used it in *The Mechanical Bride*. Nobody except myself in the media field has ventured to use the structuralist or “existential” approach. (*L* 506)

¹⁰¹ McLuhan’s letter, as published in *Letters*, reads ‘Have been paying a lot of attention to Kant, Hegel and phenomenology of late, with full realization that Kant and Hegel simply flipped out of Hume’s visual determinism into acoustic subjectivism....The logical, rational world is visual, continuous, and connected, but when pushed to its limit, flips into the acoustic form, as with Hume and Kant.’ (*L* 489) He almost certainly here meant ‘Hegel and Kant’ rather than ‘Hume and Kant’. In the same letter he says ‘I have yet to meet a philosopher who understood what had happened to Kant and Hegel [sic] in their flight into the acoustic during their revulsion from the visual determinism of Locke and Hume.’ (490)

and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 'is [that of] the audible tactile world which', he says, 'I know very well, since I use it at all times myself.' (L 489; see also 540) In an article of 1975 on 'McLuhan's Laws of the Media' (*Technology and Culture* 16:1, p.74), McLuhan relates the distinction between 'acoustic' and 'visual' to Saussure's distinction between the 'synchronic' and 'diachronic':

The structuralists, beginning with Ferdinand de Saussure and now [Claude] Levi-Strauss, divide the approaches to the problem of form into two categories: *diachrony* and *synchrony*. Diachrony is simply the developmental, chronological study of any cultural matter; but synchrony works on the assumption that all aspects of any form are simultaneously present in any part of it.

McLuhan later criticizes Saussure for his 'confusion ... with regard to the visual and the acoustic' in his use of the terms 'diachronic' and 'synchronic' (LM 111). Saussure (*op.cit.* 17-20) says that it is necessary to ignore *parole* (i.e. the temporal processes of speech) in order to conceptualize *langue* (i.e., in McLuhan's words, language as 'a total and inclusive world of simultaneous structures', LM 111). Saussure (*op.cit.* 81), however, says that:

to indicate more clearly the opposition and crossing of two orders of phenomena that relate to the same object, I prefer to speak of *synchronic* and *diachronic* linguistics. Everything that relates to the static side of our science is *synchronic*; everything that has to do with evolution is *diachronic*.

For McLuhan, the distinction between the 'synchronic' and the 'diachronic' is merely that between the object (that is to say, language/speech) conceptualized in acoustic terms, i.e. in terms of 'simultaneous' relations – *langue*; and the object conceptualized in visual terms, i.e. in terms of 'sequential' relations – *parole*. In fact, McLuhan says that conceptualizing an object in both 'synchronic' and 'diachronic' terms is an ability deriving from the 'clash' between visual and acoustic spaces (LM 112). As he elaborates, visual *figure* and acoustic *ground* 'form an iconic or tactile relationship, defined by the resonant interval between them. That is, there is no continuity or connection in the figure-ground relationship. Instead, there is an interface of a transforming kind.' (GV 22-23)

The structure of McLuhan's tetrad, which the McLuhans say shows the 'structure of perception and of consciousness', is based upon the Aristotelian concept of 'metaphor' (LM 5, 127). In 'Laws of the Media', McLuhan says that

A "metaphor" means literally "carrying across" from Greek *metaferrein* and was translated into Latin as "translatio." In a word, metaphor is a kind of bridging process, a way of getting from one kind of experience to another. This reaching out always involves a resonating interval rather than a mere connection. (UB 19, p.7)

McLuhan seems to use the terms 'analogy' and 'metaphor' interchangeably, blurring the distinction between them. However, in *Laws of Media* McLuhan finds confusion in the concept of metaphor elaborated by Aristotle in his *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*, arguing that 'metaphor is a means of *perceiving* one thing in terms of another. The concepts come after, often long after, the percepts'; and that '[o]n closer examination, we find that Aristotle's celebrated anatomy of metaphor has nothing to do with metaphor itself: it is instead an anatomy of synecdoche.' (LM 230) Aristotle (1941: 1476) says that 'Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on grounds of analogy.' McLuhan comments:

Synecdoche is exactly this kind of name-swapping and sort-crossing: it consists of using (naming) the part for the whole or the whole for the part – genus and species. It is exactly metaphor minus its ground-elements. Only one of the four kinds of metaphor mentioned by Aristotle is actually metaphor: the one 'on grounds of analogy.' (LM 230)

Aristotle's confusion may be attributed to his bias as a dialectician, McLuhan says, for 'Dialectic functions by converting everything it touches into figure [i.e. signifiers]' (*Ibid.*). In the *Poetics*, 'analogy' is depicted as *one* kind of metaphor, namely, that manifesting the four-part structure 'A is to B as C is to D'. Aristotle explains: 'That [kind of metaphor] from analogy is possible whenever there are four terms so related that the second (B) is to the first (A), as the fourth (D) to the third (C); for one may then metaphorically put D in lieu of B, and B in lieu of D.' (*Ibid.* 1477) McLuhan connects

this with the celebrated passage in *De Anima* or *On the Soul* on the intrinsically four-part (analogical) structure of cognition:

With what part of itself the soul discriminates sweet from hot I have explained before and must now describe again as follows: That with which it does so is a sort of unity, but in the way just mentioned, i.e., as a connecting term. And the two faculties it connects, being one by analogy and numerically, are each to each as the qualities discerned are to one another (for what difference does it make whether we raise the problem of discrimination between disparates or between contraries, e.g., white and black?). Let then C be to D as A is to B; it follows *alternando* that C:A::D:B. If then C and D belong to one subject, the case will be the same with them as with A and B; A and B form a single identity with different modes of being; so too will the former pair. The same reasoning holds if A be sweet and B white. (*Ibid.* 594; *UB* 19, pp.8-9)

Aristotle's point is that the 'analogy' functions not just in regards to 'contraries', e.g. 'white' and 'black', both objects of the eye; but functions also in regards to 'disparates', i.e., objects perceived by different senses. In McLuhan's formulation, the analogy comprises two figure/ground sets (A/B and C/D). All situations have the structure of 'metaphor', of recognizing 'one situation in terms of another situation', where each situation is composed of an 'explicit' figure and its 'implicit' ground; 'As two situations are involved, there are two sets of figure-ground relations in apposition,' says McLuhan, 'though the grounds may or may not be stated.' (*LM* 120; *GV* 28) In the 'interface' of situations, a 'resonant interval' is created, and it is this that the tetrad diagram reveals. The tetrad presents 'two grounds and two figures in ratio to each other', representing 'not a sequential process, but rather four simultaneous ones'; it 'is exegesis on four levels, showing ... the logos-structure of each artefact, and giving its four 'parts' as metaphor, or word.' (*GV* 9; *LM* 99, 128) In presenting both diachronic and synchronic aspects of a technology, the tetrad reveals 'the borderline between visual and acoustic space as an arena of spiraling repetition and replay, both of input and feedback, interlace and interface in the area of an imploded circle of rebirth and metamorphosis' (*GV* 9). It is designed 'to draw attention to situations *that are still in process*, situations that are structuring new perception and shaping new environments, even while they are restructuring old ones' (*GV* 29, emphasis added). McLuhan

comments: 'Apropos the four-part structure which relates to all human artifacts (verbal and non-verbal), their existence is certainly not deliberate or intentional. Rather, they are a testimony to the fact that the mind of man is structurally inherent in all human artifacts and hypotheses whatever.' (*UB* 19, pp.7-8) In short, McLuhan repeats his earlier insight that cognition as such is inherently 'analogical'.

An outline of the 'laws' appears in a letter of July 1974 to Hans Selye (see *L* 502). However, the first text on the 'laws' to surface was a letter in the January 1975 edition of *Technology and Culture*, 16:1, pp. 74-78, titled 'McLuhan's Laws of the Media'. Here, after he comments briefly on scientific method, McLuhan introduces the concepts of 'diachrony' and 'synchrony' (which he attributes to Saussure and Lévi-Strauss, identifying his method, like theirs, as 'structuralist'), going on to assert that synchrony is 'as it were, acoustic', while diachrony is visual. He then abruptly presents a list of technologies and the attributes that they A) 'amplify', 'enhance' or 'speed up'; B) 'obsolesce'; C) 'retrieve'; and D) 'reverse' or 'flip' into. Housing, for example,

- A) [amplifies] Private enclosed visual space (three little pigs).
- B) [obsolesces] Cave, tent, wigwam, dome.
- C) [retrieves] Wagon trains, covered wagon (pioneers), mobile home clusters.
- D) [reverses into] High-rise corporate. (76)

Money, meanwhile,

- A) [amplifies] Transactions.
- B) [obsolesces] Barter.
- C) [retrieves] Potlatch (conspicuous consumption).
- D) [reverses into] Credit. (77)

Another article, 'Laws of the Media', was published in June 1977 in the journal *Etcetera: A Review of General Semantics* (republished as *UB* 19). Here, in a short but pithy exposition, McLuhan relates the tetrad with its 'four features ... in analogical proportion to each other' to the Aristotelian concept of 'analogy' (*UB* 19, p.6); he then presents as examples ten tetrads on 'The Laws of Equilibrium'; 'Metaphor'; 'Tetrad'; 'Verbum (utterance)'; 'Spoken Word'; 'Slang'; 'Talking Drum'; 'Mirror'; 'Printed Word';

and 'Radio'. The tetrad itself, for example,

- (A) Intensifies awareness of inclusive structural process;
 - (B) Obsolesces logical analysis and "efficient causality";
 - (C) Retrieval mode: metaphor;
 - (D) Reversal: technology (hardware) becomes word (software).
- (*Ibid.* 10)

In *Laws of Media* each of the tetrads is presented like a symbolist poem: glosses spread out from the centre of the page, with a small cross in the corner to remind the reader what each of the four sections represent, namely, enhancement ('ENH') in the top left; obsolescence ('OBS') in the bottom right; retrieval ('RET') in the bottom left; and reversal ('REV') in the top right. *The Global Village* tetrads, however (save for those in the last chapter, which simply list A, B, C and D one after the other, as in McLuhan's articles of 1975 and 1977), are presented around a diagram of a looping Möbius strip in an X shape, running from A (enhancement) to B (obsolescence) to D (reversal) to C (retrieval) and back to A. Together, these 'four simultaneous processes' present the metaphorical or 'double figure-ground' structure of the artifact, where 'Retrieval is to obsolescence as enhancement is to reversal [i.e. A is to B as C is to D] – and – Retrieval is to enhancement as obsolescence is to reversal [i.e. A is to C as B is to D].' (GV8) McLuhan says:

The action of any artifact (or its corresponding idea) is diachronic as it undergoes a progressive history and development from enhancement – which should be regarded as a form of amplification – to obsolescence (A to B to D to C). It is synchronic if one were to view the artifact mythically as a configuration ($A/D = C/B$ and $B/D = C/A$).

(*Ibid.* 9)

Eric McLuhan says: 'I don't consider it any exaggeration to say that confirming and detailing this tie, between speech and artefacts, constitutes the single biggest intellectual discovery not only of our time, but of at least the last couple of centuries.' (LM ix-x) He notes that a number of other philosophers have found patterns of 'fours' – Bacon's four 'idols' in the *Novum Organum* and the four Aristotelian 'causes', for example – but says that 'our four seemed to be new' (*Ibid.* x). In fact the revolutionary quality of the tetrad, in relation to the Aristotelian concept of analogy, is best grasped

through a comparison of McLuhan with Freud and Lacan.

In a paper of 1955, Lacan (1977a: 126), who is also writing back to Saussure, depicts the structure of the psyche in terms of 'two non-overlapping networks': the 'synchronic' network is 'that of the signifier', in which 'each element assumes its precise function by being different from the others'; while the 'diachronic' network, 'that of the signified', 'reacts historically' upon the synchronic network, 'just as the structure of the [synchronic network] governs the pathways of the [diachronic network]'. Says Lacan:

The dominant factor here is the unity of signification, which proves never to be resolved into a pure indication of the real, but always refers back to another signification. That is to say, the signification is realized only on the basis of a grasp of things in their totality. (*Ibid.*)

Leaving aside for the moment the matter of the 'real', we can draw a comparison between McLuhan's and Lacan's 'structural' analyses of the signifier-signified or figure-ground relationship. As 'signification is realized only on the basis of a grasp of things in their totality', we can say that Lacan's 'signified' is equivalent to McLuhan's archetype that 'quotes' all other archetypes, including those that it excludes. In structural terms only, the 'signified' is another way of conceptualizing what McLuhan calls 'acoustic space', the 'sense-ratio', 'media-environment', 'archetype' or *ground*. In fact two of McLuhan's 'laws' correspond to Lacan's structural analysis (or Freud's topographical analysis) of the psyche. McLuhan says that '*Enhancement* consists in intensifying some aspect of a situation, of extending a sense or configuration of senses, of turning an element of ground into figure or of further intensifying something already figure.' (*LM 227*) Meanwhile, '*Obsolescence* refers to rendering a former situation impotent by displacement: figure returns to ground.' (*Ibid.*) As the McLuhans say, Enhancement and Obsolescence are 'complementary actions'. (*Ibid.* 99) As a new *figure* presents itself, so does the old *figure* or configuration return to *ground*. To put it in Lacanian terms, each new signifier displaces the previous signifier(s) into the synchronic network in which 'each element assumes its precise function by being different from the others'. By including in the tetrad the 'laws' of 'retrieval' and 'reversal', however, McLuhan's analysis qualifies as what Freud would call 'meta-psychological'; for

McLuhan recognizes not just the *structural* aspects of consciousness, but also its *dynamic* aspects (i.e. its processes) and its *economic* principle (i.e., repression). Regarding the third law, McLuhan says: '*Retrieval* is the process by which something long obsolete is pressed back into service, revived, a dead disease now made safe; ground becomes figure *through* the new situation.' (LM 228) The reference to 'a dead disease made safe' is the best clue to the meaning of 'Retrieval': something 'retrieved' is something previously rejected, something that previously disrupted or disturbed equilibrium. On the other hand, '*Reversal* involves dual action simultaneously, as figure and ground reverse position and take on a complementary configuration. It is the peak of form, as it were, by overload.' (*Ibid.*) Say the McLuhans: 'Both the retrieval and reversal aspects of the tetrad involve metamorphosis.' (LM 105-106) That is, the laws of retrieval and reversal, when set against the laws of extension and obsolescence in a four-part structure ('duly proportioned' to the Logos), represent structurally the *dynamic* aspects of the interface between consciousness and the technology as a form, as well as the *economic* principle at work in consciousness, in short, the 'evolutionary' process of the media-environment.

Before we become too comfortable in the comparison of McLuhan with Freud and Lacan, it must be emphasized that the tetrad depicts not the structure of 'signification' (a concept that McLuhan finds problematic, as it implies a one-to-one correspondence of word and thing), but that of 'formal cause' as it relates to *Logos*. Let us consider this in relation to the law of reversal. Reversal, McLuhan says, is an ancient concept found in both the East, e.g. in the Chinese 'book of changes', the *I Ching*; and in the West, in the concept of '*hubris*' and the *Περίπτεια* of Greek drama (see e.g. UM 38, TT 22, L 370). As it appears in the *Poetics* (Aristotle, 1987: 14, tr. Richard Janko):

A reversal is a change of the actions to their opposite, as we said, and that, as we are arguing, in accordance with probability or necessity. E.g. in the *Oedipus*, the man who comes to bring delight to Oedipus, and to rid him of his terror about his mother, does the opposite by revealing who Oedipus is; and in the *Lynceus*, Lynceus is being led to his death, and Danaus follows to kill him, but it comes about as a result of the preceding actions that Danaus is killed and Lynceus is rescued.

McLuhan finds the same principle in the *I Ching*: 'By the law of change, whatever has reached its extreme must turn back.' (TT 22) In *Laws of Media*, 'reversal' is described as the principle by which 'Any word or process or form, pushed to the limits of its potential, reverses its characteristics and becomes a complementary form' (LM 107). The authors say, for example, that 'Money (hardware), pushed to its limit, reverses into the lack of money, that is, credit (software or information), and the credit card.' (*Ibid.*) Eric McLuhan in *Electric Language* (1998) provides these examples: 'Too much of a good thing = an ill: overdo anything and it turns: a little wine is a delight; too much, it turns poisonous'. 'One reader = a correspondent; a hundred thousand = a public.' 'A little joking = fun and games; too much = an attack' (EL 30). Aristotle (1987: 14) connects 'reversal' (*Περὶπέτεια*) with 'recognition', stating that 'A recognition is finest when it happens at the same time as a reversal, as does the one in the *Oedipus*.' In fact it is very easy to interpret the law of reversal as the point at which a term is differentiated in opposition to other terms. We must reject this definition, however. In *Laws of Media*, the authors say: 'The logos of creation explicitly presents us with the created order as a speech in which the words are things and things are words, an awareness central to the present work.' (LM 217) McLuhan is concerned with the effects of the technology in acoustic space, i.e. the 'collective unconscious', where (as he says at the outset) word is thing, thing is word. There is no detachment between the 'thing' and its presencing; so that as far as McLuhan is concerned, 'reversal' does not refer to the point at which a term is differentiated, but rather, the point at which a thing is *different*.

McLuhan in fact has a concept of the 'signifier' as distinct from the 'figure', founded, interestingly, upon an argument put forward by Wolfgang Köhler, reformulated by I. A. Richards in *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1926), and illustrated by Köhler in *Gestalt Psychology* (1929), where Köhler invokes for his example Ivan Pavlov's experiments with dogs. Discussing the 'conditioned reflex', Köhler (1929: 298) says that 'what we call a conditioned reflex now is just one special case of a certain type of association, because it is evident that the "stimulus," which is to be artificially connected with a

reflex, cannot be made to produce that reflex except by first becoming "connected" with an *adequate* "stimulus" which naturally produces that reflex'. Köhler comments:

As yet no-one seems to have examined the question whether a change in the presentation of the "artificial stimulus," in its relation to the natural one, exerts an influence upon the building up of the conditioned reflex. A bell rings and food is shown or given, but no attention is paid to those experimental conditions upon which organization would depend. That is not at all astonishing since the old concept of "connecting two separate processes by learning" still prevails. (298-299)

Köhler goes on to suggest 'that conditioning is practically the same thing as associating two sensory processes, and that associating depends upon organization' (299). McLuhan invokes Köhler's argument in a number of places to describe what he calls the 'conditioned environment'. In 'Address at Vision 65', for example, crediting his argument to Erwin Straus, author of *Phenomenology: Pure and Applied* (1964), McLuhan says:

[Pavlov] didn't get his conditioning effects by means of stimuli or signals to his experimental subjects. Rather he did it by environmental controls. He put them in environments in which there was no sound, in which the heat and other sensory controls were very carefully adjusted and maintained steadily. Pavlov discovered that if you tried to condition animals in an ordinary environment, it did not work. The environment is the real conditioner, not the stimulus or the content. (EM 226)

The crucial aspect of Pavlov's discovery, says McLuhan, is that 'the stimulus cannot be a conditioner. Only a totally controlled environment effects conditioning.' (UB 20, p.4) He underscores the fact that

Pavlov had been unable to condition his dogs in his experiments until he had completely conditioned the laboratory environments in which they lived. Until precise thermal and auditory controls were introduced into the laboratories the conditioning did not occur. The bell did not elicit salivation. (WP 66)

Pavlov's discovery, says McLuhan, was 'that any controlled environment, any man-

made environment, is a conditioner that creates non-perceptive somnambulists.' (*Ibid.* 71) McLuhan applies this insight to Western culture, arguing that '[t]he Westerner lives in a man-made environment, mechanically conditioned' by the phonetic alphabet, print and mechanical technology, and that 'all Western men have experienced this [conditioning] for centuries' (66-67).

McLuhan's concept of the 'stimulus-response' relationship as the product of a 'conditioned environment' is consistent with earlier formulations of the 'sign' or 'symbol' as objects foreign to 'acoustic space'. He says in an article of 1956: 'The complex harmonic structure of the word can never be a sign or reference before writing.... Only after this acoustic magic has been enclosed in the fixed written form can it become a sign.' (*UB* 16, p.8) Rejecting Northrop Frye's definition of the 'symbol' as 'Any unit of any work of literature which can be isolated for critical attention.... such as words, phrases, images, etc.', McLuhan comments:

Many people confuse single objects with symbols. It helps to note the original meaning and structure of the term "symbol" as a juxtaposition of two things. Originally, parties to a contract broke a stick and each took a half. Upon completion of the relationship, the parties juxtaposed the two sticks, creating the *symbol*.... Things in isolation are not symbols. (*CA* 36)

'Symbolism', McLuhan says, comes from the Greek *symballein* – 'to throw together' – and is a technique of 'juxtaposing' disparate elements 'without connectives' (*UB* 8, p.7) Considering the beginnings of 'symbolism', McLuhan invokes Ludwig Bertalanffy's *Robots, Men and Minds: Psychology in the Modern World* (1967), where Bertalanffy (1967: 36-37; *WP* 56, 58) says:

The evolution of symbolism, we have said, is the fundamental problem of anthropogenesis. *All* other human achievements are minor or derived from it.... The *decisive* step seems to be that man, in one way or the other, made an *image* of things apt to be their representative. It is probably not so important whether this was a *graven* image – such as the paleolithic carvings of animals – or an *acoustic* image – the first word of representative language. But it was decisive that man, in some way, *dissociated* something from himself which was to stand in for something else.

Here we see McLuhan considering the 'symbol' as something 'dissociated ... from [the subject] which was *to stand in for something else*', bringing him closer to a Lacanian concept of the signifier. However, Bertalanffy's argument, as McLuhan reads it, merely repeats McLuhan's, being that 'for evolution of cognitive symbols, apparently some glorified gestalt perception is prerequisite: Insight or seeing things together which were previously unconnected.' (Bertalanffy, *op.cit.* 36; *WP* 58)

The sign or symbol, if we accept McLuhan's argument, is merely a form in which 'resonance' is lost in the translation from the acoustic to the visual. He says that '[i]f you study symbolism you will discover that it is a technique of rip-off by which *figures* are deliberately deprived of their *ground*.' (L 448) The *signifier*, however, if we listen to Lacan, is not merely a form, but one in which symbolic function is invested – *not by the subject, but by what Lacan calls the 'Other'* (i.e., 'the big Other', the fantasized Other). McLuhan's concept of speech tends to emphasize the relationship of speaker to speech, rather than the relationship between speaker and audience/Other: he conceptualizes speech as 'a medium which employs all the senses at once in harmonic ratios'; as the extension of 'an actual process of thought, which is in itself nonverbal'; and as 'the arrest of the flowing of thought', a concept he credits to Aristotle (NAEB III: 29; *UM* 8; *CB* 117). Alongside this deterministic concept of speech, however, McLuhan invokes the concept of 'dialogue', arguing that

The basic requirement of any system of communication is that it be circular, with, of course, the possibility of self-correction. That is why presumably the human dialogue is and must ever be the basic form of all civilization. For the dialogue compels each participant to see and recreate his own vision through another sensibility. (*UB* 6, p.20)

Similarly, McLuhan depicts technologies as 'collective', evolving through some kind of 'communal processing' (NAEB III: 18). Here McLuhan echoes Vico (1948: 57; §144): 'Uniform ideas originating among entire peoples unknown to each other must have a common ground of truth.' An example of this, McLuhan says, is the 'popular phrase', for 'Whatever the public will accept and verbally repeat ... already possesses a valid

base in human experience.... That is why a popular phrase of wide acceptance is high-level psychological evidence of collective experience.' (NAEB III: 126) From the early 1970's McLuhan introduces a new maxim to complement 'the medium is the message', arguing that

If the medium is the message, the user is the content. That is the sense of Baudelaire's "Hypocrite lecteur." The reader puts on the mask of the poem, the book, the language, the medium, and imbues them with the "sobsconscious inklings" [(Joyce)] of his own inadequacies. (L 436)

As McLuhan formulates it: 'the viewer, the hearer, the reader, only accepts those parts of any experience that seem meaningful to him. What he cannot relate to, he throws aside or ignores.' (L 449) Here again McLuhan echoes Vico (*op.cit.* 54; §122): 'whenever men can form no idea of distant and unknown things, they judge them by what is familiar, and at hand'. A Freudian interpretation of this statement would suggest that traumatic experiences are 'repressed'; however, the Jungian interpretation is probably closer to McLuhan's intention, i.e. that all experience is correlated to an 'archetype' extant in the unconscious. As he explains in an address of 1966, 'the moment you encounter the known you translate it back into the known. This means that we never encounter the unknown. We encounter only convenient self-deceptions.' (*Understanding Me*, 87) The concept of the 'mask' may have been inspired by Leslie Fiedler's article 'Archetype and Signature' in *The Sewanee Review* (Spring 1952), which is cited in Wimsatt and Brooks's *Literary Criticism: A Short History* (1957). Fiedler suggests that 'In deed as in word, the poet composes himself as maker and mask, in accordance with some contemporaneous *mythos* of the artist.' (Wimsatt and Brooks, 1957: 713). He says (as cited by Wimsatt and Brooks): 'In the Mask of [the poet's] life and the manifold masks of his work, the poet expresses for a whole society the ritual meaning of its inarticulate selves; the artist goes forth not to "recreate the conscience of his race," but to redeem its unconscious.' (*Ibid.*). At times, McLuhan uses the maxim that 'the user is the content' as a variant of the 'medium is the message', writing to William Kuhns, for example, in December 1971, that: 'The person who turns on an electric light is the content of the electric light, just as the

reader of the book is the content of the book.' (L 448) McLuhan later notes that 'the fact that in all communication the user of whatever medium is the content ... turns out to be merely an ancient Aristotelian observation that the cognitive agent itself becomes and is the thing known.' (letter to John Wain, April 1971, L 431) The concept of the audience or text as 'mask' surfaces in a number of essays of the early 1970's, notably in 'Roles, Masks and Performances' (1971) and 'At the Moment of Sputnik the Planet became a Global Theater in which there are no Spectators but only Actors' (1974). (The concept also appears in *Take Today*, p.274, where McLuhan submits the paradox that 'The stripper puts on her audience by taking off her clothes.') Arguing that 'Every environment that we make and assume is a mask ...', McLuhan says that a person 'puts on' a book, film, play, etc., as a 'mask', just as the creator of the book, film, play, must 'put on' his or her audience (*UB* 12, p. 11). He says:

a magazine [or any other art form, e.g. book, film, play] 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. (*Ibid.* p.3)

As McLuhan reminds us in *Take Today*: 'No actor is an actor without his audience.' (*TT* 274) Or, as he says in a letter of 1971: 'It is the public that largely determines the style of discourse that is going to be presented to it.' (L 449) This argument owes much to *Fiction and the Reading Public* (1932) by Q.D. (Queenie) Leavis, the wife of McLuhan's former professor F.R. Leavis at Cambridge; McLuhan read the book while studying at Cambridge in the mid 1930's, and recalled it in a letter of 1973:

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. (L 467)

McLuhan proposes that 'the audience is, in all matters of art and expression, the formal cause [of the artwork], e.g. fallen man is the formal cause of the Incarnation,

and Plato's public is the formal cause of his philosophy....' (ML 74) McLuhan suggests in a letter of 1976 that to appreciate any thinker's 'theory of communication' requires studying 'the public they wish to transform', i.e., 'the people [the writer] wants to influence and alter' (L 525; ML 74).¹⁰² So, for example, 'Aquinas puts his public in the front window. It is the list of objections which he has to other people's views on any particular subject.' (L 525) McLuhan then asserts that: 'The study of publics is really the study of formal causality, since nobody can write without imagining a group of people who need his help.' (*Ibid.*)¹⁰³

McLuhan's statement that '[t]he study of publics is really the study of formal causality' invites a psychoanalytic critique. For, in psychoanalytic theory, it is not that a person cannot write or speak 'without imagining a group of people who need his help'; but, rather, that the relation of the individual to the (fantasized) 'group of people' that possess the authority of bestowing symbolic function upon the subject is founded upon an initial (mis)recognition, namely, of the self as an organized whole (i.e. *das Ich*, the ego, the 'I'), so that the meaningfulness of what 'I' speak or write is sustained by the fantasy of oneself in relation to this (fantasized) 'Other'. The id 'speaks in the Other', says Lacan (1977a: 285):

It [das Es, the id] speaks in the Other, I say, designating by the Other the very locus evoked by the recourse to speech in any relation in which the Other intervenes. If it speaks in the Other, whether or not the subject hears it with his ear, it is because it is there that the subject, by means of a logic anterior to any awakening of the signified, finds its signifying place.

¹⁰² The term 'theory of communication' is taken from I.A. Richards' *Principles of Literary Criticism* (1926), Chapter 21 of which is titled 'A Theory of Communication'. Eric McLuhan, explaining his father's concept of the 'theory of communication', says in an essay on 'St. Thomas Aquinas's Theory of Communication' that 'To identify someone's theory of communication it is necessary to locate two things: one is that writer's audience; the other, the effect that the writer proposes to produce in that audience and the manner of doing it.' (Eric McLuhan, 'St. Thomas Aquinas's Theory of Communication' in *McLuhan Studies* volume 1 issue 6, online at www.chass.toronto.edu/mcluhan_studies/v1_iss6/1_6art2.htm)

¹⁰³ McLuhan's essay 'Pound, Eliot, and the Rhetoric of *The Waste Land*' (1979), for example, purports to study Eliot's 'theory of communication', analyzing the audience as formal cause of the text. Eric McLuhan has since contributed analyses of the rhetorical techniques used by Francis Bacon and St. Thomas Aquinas. See E. McLuhan, n.d., Francis Bacon's Theory of Communication and Media; n.d., St. Thomas Aquinas's Theory of Communication.

Lacan invokes Saussure's concept of the sign as 'the signifier over the signified', representing this by the algorithm 'S/s'. The introduction of a 'bar' between signifier and signified, says Lacan, means that 'The thematics of this science [i.e. Saussure's *Cours de linguistique générale*] is suspended, in effect, at the primordial position of the signifier and the signified as being distinct orders separated initially by a barrier resisting signification' (*Ibid.* 149). He suggests that:

If we try to grasp in language the constitution of the object, we cannot fail to notice that this constitution is to be found only at the level of the concept ... and that the *thing*, when reduced to the noun, breaks up into the double, divergent beam of the 'cause' (*causa*) in which it has taken shelter in the French word *chose* ['thing'], and the nothing (*rien*) to which it has abandoned its Latin dress (*rem*). (*Ibid.* 150)

The relationship between signifier and signified, that is to say, is irreconcilable: on one side of the bar, the 'thing'; on the other side, a 'nothing'.

Replying to Freud's analysis of the penis/phallus as the cause of (castration) anxiety, Lacan introduces a concept of 'phallic *jouissance*', i.e. phallic enjoyment, phallic pleasure so to speak, to articulate the economic principle at work in the castration complex. (The French term *jouir* is slang for 'to come', so the term *jouissance* has a greater meaning than the English word 'enjoyment' suggests.¹⁰⁴) The traumatic event that initiates the castration complex, Lacan suggests, is the realization that this mysterious 'enjoyment' (*jouissance*) is somehow related to the fact of *copulation*. For the fact of copulation locates the subject for the first time as *outside* the 'other place' where 'pleasure' (or, to be more precise, fantasized pleasure, i.e., *jouissance*) is located (Lacan, 1977b: 64). Žižek (1997: 15) elucidates this most clearly:

[W]hat, precisely, *is* symbolic castration? It is the prohibition of incest in the precise sense of the loss of something which the subject never possessed in the first place. Let us imagine a situation in which the subject aims at X (say, a series of pleasurable experiences); the operation of castration does not consist in depriving him of any of these experiences, but adds to the series a purely potential,

¹⁰⁴ On the translation of *jouissance* and related terms, see e.g. 'Translator's Note' in Lacan 1977a: x

nonexistent X, with respect to which the actually accessible experiences appear all of a sudden as lacking, not wholly satisfying.

In 'The Signification of the Phallus' (1958), Lacan re-interprets the castration complex by arguing that it turns upon the function of the phallus as a *signifier*. He says:

In Freudian doctrine, the phallus is not a phantasy, if by that we mean an imaginary effect. Nor is it as such an object (part-, internal, good, bad, etc.) in the sense that this term tends to accentuate the reality pertaining in a relation. It is even less the organ, penis or clitoris, that it symbolizes.... the phallus is a signifier ... (Lacan, 1977a: 285)

In Lacanian theory, 'The phallus is the privileged signifier of that mark in which the role of the logos is joined with the advent of desire'; 'it is the signifier intended to designate as a whole the effects of the signified, in that the signifier conditions them by its presence as signifier' (*Ibid.* 287, 285). Lacan says that 'the erectile organ comes to symbolize the place of *jouissance* [enjoyment], not in itself ... but as a part lacking in the desired image'. (*Ibid.* 320) Lacan says that: 'this signifier is chosen because it is the most tangible element in the real of sexual copulation, and also the most symbolic in the literal (typographical) sense of the term, since it is equivalent there to the (logical) copula.' (*Ibid.* 287) Regardless of whether the subject is male or female, Lacan says that 'The fact that the phallus is a signifier means that it is in the place of the Other that the subject has access to it.' (*Ibid.* 288) Freud's schema of id, ego and super-ego is transmuted by Lacan to become one of need, demand of the (m)other and 'desire of the Other'. In his seminal paper on 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the I as revealed in psychoanalytic experience' (1949), Lacan (*Ibid.* 1-7) interprets the baby's recognition of its mirror image as indicative of the initial 'split' between ego and id. It is this initial 'misrecognition' (*méconnaissance*) of the self as a whole – whereby, as Freud says, '*Woll es war, soll ich werden*' – 'Where it (id) was, so I (ego) shall be' – that both institutes the use of the signifier, and establishes forever a 'bar' between signifier ('I') and signified. In identifying with its *imago*, the baby recognizes its mother as an 'other' and, more profoundly, that it itself is an 'other'. The relationship between 'I' and the (m)other is not indifferent by any means, however, for it has as its kernel the horrifying fact that the breast (i.e. that which satisfies the 'I'),

belongs to the (m)other. With this realization, the relationship of the baby to the mother, originally founded upon need, becomes one of 'demand'. Lacan says that demand 'bears on something other than the satisfactions it calls for' and cannot be satisfied by any object; in fact, 'demand annuls the particularity of everything that can be granted by transmuting it into a proof of love, and the very satisfactions that it obtains for need are reduced to the level of being no more than the crushing of the demand for love ...' (*Ibid.* 286). Demand, Lacan says, recognizes the other as possessing 'that alone by which [needs] are satisfied', and thus as having 'the power of *depriving* [the subject] of that alone by which [needs] are satisfied' (*Ibid.*, emphasis added). The demand of the baby is not a demand for the breast; *rather, it is demand for a proof that the mother will not 'deprive' it of this (imaginary) thing.* By means of the castration complex, Lacan suggests, the object-of-demand (i.e. the object that would satisfy, but the object that the m/other has the power to withhold) undergoes a displacement to become the fantasized object of the Other's desire. Lacan calls this fantasized object of the Other's desire the '*objet petit a*', where '*a*' stands for *autre*, i.e. 'other'. Lacan explains in his lecture (in English) 'Of Structure as an Immixing of an Otherness Prerequisite to Any Subject Whatever' (1966), delivered at the international symposium on structuralism at Johns Hopkins University, and incorporating an implicit critique of McLuhan:

Many people talk nowadays about messages everywhere, inside the organism a hormone is a message, a beam of light to obtain teleguidance to a plane or from a satellite is a message, and so on; but the message in language is absolutely different. The message, our message, in all cases comes from the Other by which I understand "from the place of the Other." It certainly is not the common other, the other with a lower-case *o*, and this is why I have given a capital *O* as the initial letter to the Other of whom I am now speaking. (Lacan, 1967: 186)

Where Freud describes the castration complex in terms of the triangular relationship between the child, mother and father, Lacan describes a relationship between subject, other and the Other (*l'Autre*, sometimes called *grand Autre*, i.e. 'big other'). Initially Lacan proposes the term 'Name-of-the-Father' for the (structural) role played by the father because, as he says in a seminar on psychosis (1955-1956), 'the attribution of

procreation to the father can only be the effect of a pure signifier, of a recognition, not of a real father, but of what religion has taught us to refer to as the Name-of-the-Father.' (*Ibid.* 199) It takes but 'a little severity' for the child to recognize the Name-of-the-Father as an impediment to the mother's attention, i.e., the proof of her love (*Ibid.* 219). The Name-of-the-Father is the impediment to the child's demand for love from the mother: it is, precisely, the signifier of a Law to which the mother herself is subject. We can illustrate this concept with an example from McLuhan (Lacan, in fact, makes use of the same example in Seminar VII, 1959-1960, on *The Ethics of Psychoanalysis*, see Lacan, 1997: 13-14; Žižek, 1989: 29, 198). McLuhan invokes the tale of 'The Emperor's New Clothes' to illustrate the way that only someone *outside* the familiar media-environment can see it for what it actually is. He says:

"Well-adjusted" courtiers, having vested interests, saw the emperor as beautifully appointed. The "antisocial" brat, unaccustomed to the old environment, clearly saw that the Emperor "ain't got nothin' on." The new environment was clearly visible to him. (*MM* 88, emphasis in original; see also *CB* 33)

We can read this story thus. To the courtiers, the Emperor is a signifier sustaining the fantasy of the 'Other', i.e., the (fantasized) agent in whom is invested the authority of the symbolic order. The Emperor's Law decrees that the courtiers see the Emperor as 'beautifully appointed'. The crucial factor here is the triangular relationship between subject, other, and big Other; that is to say, it is each courtier's desire not of the Emperor, but of the *other* courtiers, sustained by the 'Emperor' as Name-of-the-Father or signifier of the Law (the Emperor's 'clothes' signifying the phallus), that enables each of the courtiers to see the Emperor as 'beautifully appointed'.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Žižek transmutes Lacan's formulation of the analyst/Other as the 'subject supposed to know' to propose the Other as a 'subject supposed to believe', illustrating the necessity of 'decentrement' in the triangular relationship between subject, other, and big Other. Žižek (1997: 106) says,

From the very outset, the speaking subject displaces his belief on the big Other *qua* the order of pure semblance, so that the subject never 'really believed in it'; from the very beginning, the subject refers to some decentred other to whom he imputes this belief. All concrete versions of this 'subject supposed to believe' (from small children for whose sake parents pretend to believe in Santa Claus, to the 'ordinary working people' for whose sake Communist intellectuals pretend to believe in Socialism) are stand-ins for the big Other. So – the way one should answer the conservative platitude according to which every honest man has a profound need to

To the elusive and irreconcilable relationship between the *objet petit a* (as fantasized object of the Other's desire) and that which represents it, i.e. the phallus, Lacan gives the name of the 'Real'. (The concept has its origin in Freud's 'reality principle'.) Žižek (1989: 201-207) emphasizes the congruity between the Lacanian concept of the 'Real' and the Kantian concept of the 'sublime'. Just as the sublime in Kant 'provides a view, in a negative way, of the dimension of what is unrepresentable', for Lacan, likewise, 'The Real is an entity which must be constructed afterwards so that we can account for the distortions of the symbolic structure.' (*Ibid.* 203, 162) The Real is a 'gap' or 'split' between the *symbolic* form (i.e. word, gesture, image, etc.) and that which it signifies, i.e. *objet petit a*; belonging to the domain of the Other, it is not simply the inability to synthesize a phenomenon (as is Kant's 'sublime'), but rather exists as the fantasy or symptom of the Other's *jouissance*. Žižek (*op.cit.* 164) explains that

If we define the Real as such a paradoxical, chimerical entity which, although it does not exist, has a series of properties and can produce a series of effects, it becomes clear that the Real *par excellence* is *jouissance*: *jouissance* does not exist, it is impossible, but it produces a number of traumatic effects.

The Real as cause, in short, functions not at the level of physiological stimuli, i.e., 'pleasure' and 'pain', but rather at the fissure between the Real and the symbolic, conceived as the sublime, obscene fantasized pleasure (*jouissance*) of the Other. Lacan invents the formula $\$ \diamond a$ to describe the function of fantasy, whereby the barred subject (\$) posits itself as equivalent to the *objet petit a*, that is, as the object fantasized to fulfil the lack in the Other. '[A]s the object of fantasy,' says Žižek (1997: 8), '*objet petit a* ... is that 'something in me more than myself' on account of which I perceive myself as 'worthy of the Other's desire'.' In the place of the Other, i.e. the symbolic order, the subject functions as what Lacan calls 'the signified of a signifier', i.e. a signifier the symbolic function of which the subject must seek from other subjects in the place of the Other. Žižek (1997: 9) calls the Lacanian argument one of 'radical

believe in something is to say that every honest man has a profound need to find another subject who will believe in his place.
See also Žižek 1989: 34-35

intersubjectivity': the subject is literally 'decentred' from within. As Žižek (*op.cit.* 9-10) explains,

for late Lacan, the object is precisely that which is 'in the subject more than the subject itself', that which I fantasize that the Other (fascinated by me) sees in me. So it is no longer the object which serves as the mediator between my desire and the Other's desire [as, for example, in Lacan's 1949 paper on 'The mirror stage ...']; rather, it is the Other's desire itself which serves as a mediator between the 'barred' subject (\$) and the lost object that the subject 'is', – that provides the minimum of phantasmic identity to the subject.

The formula $\$ \diamond a$ depends, says Žižek (2006 [2005]: 31), upon the recognition of 'a barred Other, incomplete, 'not-all', an Other articulated against a void, an Other which carries within it an ex-timate, non-symbolizable kernel'. Žižek explains that

if the Other is not fractured, if it is a complete array, the only possible relationship of the subject to the structure is that of total alienation, of a subjection without remainder; but the lack in the Other means that there is a remainder, a non-integratable residuum in the Other, *objet a*, and the subject is able to avoid total alienation only insofar as it posits itself as the correlative of this remainder: $\$ \diamond a$. (*Ibid.* 31)

In fact the Lacanian concept of the *objet petit a* is of the greatest interest for a critique of McLuhan, for as Žižek interprets it, the *objet petit a* functions as both the 'absent' cause of the signifier and *the formal cause of desire*; it 'mediates between the incompatible domains of desire and *jouissance*' (Žižek, 1997: 39). Says Žižek:

In what precise sense is *objet petit a* the object-cause of desire? The *objet petit a* is not what we desire, what we are after, but, rather, that which sets our desire in motion, in the sense of the formal frame which confers consistency on our desire: desire is, of course, metonymical; it shifts from one object to another; through all these displacements, however, desire none the less retains a minimum of formal consistency, a set of phantasmic features which, when they are encountered in a positive object, make us desire this object – *objet petit a* as the cause of desire is nothing other than this formal frame of consistency. (*Ibid.*)

Žižek (1994: 30) describes how Lacan proceeds from structuralism to hermeneutics,

conceiving of signification as 'the imaginary experience-of-meaning whose inherent constituent is the misrecognition of its determining *cause*' (emphasis in original). As Žižek explicates,

The symbolic order is 'barred', the signifying chain is inherently inconsistent, 'non-all', structured around a hole. This inherent non-symbolizable reef maintains the gap between the Symbolic and the Real – that is, it prevents the Symbolic from 'falling into' the Real – and, again, what is ultimately at stake in this decentrement of the Real with regard to the Symbolic is the Cause: the Real is the absent Cause of the Symbolic. The Freudian and Lacanian name for this cause is, of course, *trauma*. (*Ibid.*)

As Lacan (1977b: 22) describes it: '*Cause* is to be distinguished from that which is determinate in a chain, in other words the *law*... Whenever we speak of cause ... there is always something anticonceptual, something indefinite.... there is cause only in something that doesn't work.' Žižek expands upon this:

The Cause *qua* the Real intervenes where symbolic determination stumbles, misfires – that is, where a signifier falls out. For that reason, the Cause *qua* the Real can never effectuate its causal power in a direct way, as such, but must always operate intermediately, under the guise of disturbances within the symbolic order. Suffice it to recall slips of the tongue when the *automaton* of the signifying chain is, for a brief moment, disrupted by the intervention of some traumatic memory. However, the fact that the Real operates and is accessible only through the Symbolic does not authorize us to conceive of it as a factor immanent to the Symbolic: the Real is precisely that which resists and eludes the grasp of the Symbolic and, consequently, that which is detectable within the Symbolic only under the guise of its disturbances. (Žižek, *op.cit.* 30)

As Žižek explains, 'the traumatic event is nowhere given in its positivity; only afterwards can it be *logically constructed* as a point which escapes symbolization.' (Žižek, 1989: 171) He says,

This paradox of trauma *qua* cause that does not pre-exist its effects but is itself retroactively 'posited' by them involves a kind of temporal loop: *it is through its 'repetition', through its echoes within the signifying structure, that the cause retroactively becomes what it always-already was.* In other words, a direct approach necessarily

fails: if we try to grasp the trauma directly, irrespective of later efforts, we are left with a meaningless *factum brutum* ... It is only through its echoes within the signifying structure that the *factum brutum* ... retroactively acquires its traumatic character and becomes the Cause. (Žižek, 1994: 32)

The paradoxical structure of trauma elaborated by Freud, Lacan and Žižek can be set against McLuhan's concept of 'Narcissus-narcosis'. For McLuhan, technology invites 'somnambulism', i.e., servomechanistic servitude; it 'numbs' the user through the inane repetition of a function. For Lacan, however, the traumatic Real *transforms* the function of the technology into a signifier, i.e., an act addressed to the Other. McLuhan, by neglecting to account for the structure of the 'castration complex', or the investment of authority in another subject which sustains the structure of the Other's desire (and thus the symbolic function of the subject, i.e. the *meaningfulness* of what 'I' do or say), is at a loss to explain how technologies function as symbolic entities, even as they function at the 'unconscious'/subliminal level of 'formal cause'. In fact the technology as a *form*, in this light, is doubly inarticulate: firstly because, as McLuhan says, it can only be grasped through its effects; and secondly because these effects tend to manifest as disturbances in the *symbolic* order, i.e., as proof of the Other's (fantasized) *jouissance*.

In the late 1970's McLuhan became fascinated by scientific studies of the 'left' and 'right' hemispheres of the brain, which he argued were 'in constant dialogue through the *corpus callosum*' at the base of the skull (LM 70). The left brain (corresponding to the right side of the body) is associated with the recognition of names, written words, and sequential order; while the right (which corresponds to the left side of the body) is associated with spatial, musical, emotional, 'gestalt' or 'simultaneous' recognition, for example, recognizing faces (see diagram, LM 68). 'Because the dominant feature of the left hemisphere is linearity and sequentiality,' McLuhan argued in an article of 1978, 'there are good reasons for calling it the "visual" (quantitative) side of the brain; and because the dominant features of the right hemisphere are the simultaneous, holistic and synthetic, there are good reasons for indicating it as the "acoustic" (qualitative) side of the brain.' (McLuhan, 1978, The Brain and the Media: The "Western" Hemisphere, *Journal of Communication*, 28(4), 54) In *Laws of Media* and

The Global Village with Bruce Powers, published posthumously in 1989,¹⁰⁶ McLuhan argues that Westerners have an extreme left-hemisphere bias, with highly developed verbal and sequential ordering skills; tribal peoples, meanwhile, such as the Inuit, have a right-hemisphere bias and are expert at 'gestalt' recognition (see e.g. *LM* 67-70; *GV* 48, 54). It is possible, but 'rare', for the hemispheres to be in 'true balance'; McLuhan accords that skill to 'Orientals' (*LM* 77-78; *GV* 48). Unlike Westerners, who conceptualize things in terms of 'either/or', Orientals are able to accept 'both/and'; conversely, Westerners see identity as *fixed* in a way that 'Orientals' do not. Orientals, aware of the fact that all opposites are intimately related ('Yin and Yang') see life as an art of 'attuning' themselves to the environment. The Japanese, for example, says McLuhan, quoting from Ruth Benedict's *The Crysanthemum and the Sword: Patterns of Japanese Culture* (1967), 'do not see human life as a stage on which forces of good content with forces of evil. They see existence as a drama which calls for careful balancing of the claims of one "circle" against another and of one course of procedure against another ...' (*Ibid.* 69) McLuhan says that 'Orientals have a capacity for instant readjustment to all ... social conditions, which is related to seeing life as a multi-sensory equilibrium with no ordering priorities.' (*Ibid.* 57) He quotes from *The Book of Tea* by Japanese writer Okakura Kakuzo, who writes: 'The present is the moving infinity, the legitimate sphere of the relative. Relativity seeks adjustment: adjustment is art. The art of life lies in a constant readjustment to our surroundings.' (Kakuzo, cited in *GV* 65; *LM* 78) McLuhan says that 'It is this sensitivity ... plus a strong sense of decorum (propriety) and a lack of private identity that enables an Oriental to change behavior instantly from one pattern to another.' (*GV* 69) The analysis of Oriental 'attunement' is offered in the way of a prescription for Westerners, who McLuhan says are struggling to develop a 'right-hemisphere model of communication ... that yet is congenial to our culture and its residua of left-hemisphere orientation' (*Ibid.* 80). Ostensibly, McLuhan invokes the hemisphere model to critique the linear 'Shannon-Weaver model of communication' developed by Claude E. Shannon and Warren

¹⁰⁶ *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century*, by McLuhan and Bruce R. Powers, was first published in 1989, a year after *Laws of Media*, and in fact repeats much of the material of *Laws of Media*. I refer to *Laws of Media* as McLuhan's 'last book' as it is the book in which McLuhan invested his time in the years prior to his death, and was clearly written to justify McLuhan's stance as a philosopher.

Weaver in *The Mathematical Theory of Communication* (1964) (LM 86). Yet it is possible that McLuhan's enthusiasm for the hemisphere model was that it provided a platform from which to analyze, independently from Freudian theory, communication in its interpersonal aspects.

Laws of Media may be read as McLuhan's attempt to record, for posterity, a guide to his thought and its place in the Western philosophical tradition. It is a metaphysical treatise that in scoping the history of Western thought from Plato onwards quietly rejects the psychoanalytic notion of the (phallic) signifier as the organizing principle in the unconscious. Instead, McLuhan describes the unconscious as an 'acoustic space' structured by the effects of technologies/words as *forms*. Since McLuhan's death in 1980, his eldest son Eric McLuhan has upheld his father's mission with the online journal *McLuhan Studies* (1996 onwards) at the University of Toronto, and a sequel to *Laws of Media* titled *Electric Language: Understanding the Message* (1998); like *Laws of Media*, however, these posthumous studies simply ignore McLuhan's gestures in the direction of psychoanalysis. A psychoanalytic critique of McLuhan's 'new science' serves to bridge not just between McLuhan and Freud, but more importantly between McLuhan and the French school of critical and cultural theory, so that he can be read with, and against, his contemporaries. At the same time, we must preserve a Thomist/Joycean appreciation of McLuhan's '*plures sensus*' – many meanings; for his texts, like *Finnegans Wake*, are meant to contain 'everything at once'.¹⁰⁷ That is why one can frame McLuhan from so many different perspectives: Thomist, Marxist, Darwinist, phenomenological, existential, structuralist, psychoanalytic, modern, postmodern, post-structuralist. All of these are there, in 'discontinuous' juxtaposition, in 'interplay'.

¹⁰⁷ See St Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* Part 1, Question 1, Article 10. McLuhan describes *Finnegans Wake* (1939) as 'a great short-cut to the encyclopedic arts and sciences of our century'. *UB* 14, p.6.

Conclusion

Given the variety of McLuhan's influences, and his commitment to Catholic and Renaissance thinkers, why is it so crucial to appreciate his engagement with Freud? Their lives coincided but barely; McLuhan was born in 1911, while Freud died in 1939; McLuhan made his home in Toronto, Freud in Vienna; although for a little less than a month, while Britain went to war against Germany, the two cohabited in England: Freud settling in London where he died on 23 September 1939; McLuhan arriving in Cambridge on 2 September 1939, newlywed, to undertake a year of doctoral research. Freud was Austrian, Jewish, atheist, a student of medical science; McLuhan was Canadian, a student of literature, and a Roman Catholic. What, then, is the nature of their connection? How exactly is McLuhan indebted to Freud?

McLuhan's uncharacteristic silence on Freud may be our best clue to his influence. While *The Mechanical Bride* has been read as an answer to *Civilization and Its Discontents*, neither here nor elsewhere does McLuhan cite from Freud directly; in fact, aside from a few scattered remarks during the late 1960's and early 1970's, there is little to indicate which of Freud's books were known to McLuhan, or what opinion he held of them (HC 279; L 504, 458; CA 133). Forensic analysis of *The Mechanical Bride* and McLuhan's letters of the same period reveal that McLuhan was familiar, by 1951, with at least five of Freud's books: *The Interpretation of Dreams*, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, *Moses and Monotheism* and *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*. *Understanding Media* (1964) introduces Freudian concepts including trauma and censorship/repression which do not appear in the NAEB Report of 1960 upon which the book is based, nor in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* in 1962; in large part, McLuhan's use of these concepts may be attributed to the influence of Adolphe D. Jonas, whose book *Irritation and Counterirritation* (1962) introduced McLuhan to some of the ideas, although none of the subtleties, of Freud's *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Between 1963 and the publication of *From Cliché to Archetype* (1970), McLuhan read or perhaps revisited *Wit and its Relation to the Unconscious* (otherwise known as *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious*); 1963 also marks McLuhan's

renewed interest in Jung, hailed by the subject matter of *From Cliché to Archetype*. Primary sources aside, McLuhan engaged with Freudian concepts in the work of I.A. Richards, Mansfield Forbes, Alfred Adler, Karen Horney, Gershon Legman, the *Neurotica* volumes, Margaret Mead, Joseph Campbell, Wilhelm Reich, Jurgen Ruesch and Gregory Bateson, Otto Fenichel, Anton Ehrenzweig, Hans Selye and Adolphe D. Jonas, Rollo May and Erich Fromm, not to mention James Joyce; the cumulative effect of these influences cannot be underestimated. 'Freud's greatest service to psychiatry', writes Jurgen Ruesch, 'was probably his introduction of the notion of process and the consideration of the individual as a whole.... today psychiatry has finally adopted these notions of process which physicists and chemists had accepted a long time before.' (Ruesch *et. al.*, 1951: 62). 'When the dynamic and the economic points of view are applied,' writes Otto Fenichel, whose *Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* McLuhan encountered in 1957, 'the problem of conscious or unconscious should be put in the following way: Under what circumstances and through what energies does the condition of consciousness arise?' (Fenichel, 1945: 14) 'It is well established that the mere fact of *knowing what hurts you has an inherent curative value*', writes Hans Selye in *The Stress of Life*, a book from which McLuhan cites in *Understanding Media*; 'Psychoanalysis cures because it helps us to adapt ourselves to what has happened.' (Selye, 206-261) 'Both the superego's repression and the structural repression', writes Anton Ehrenzweig, another influence in *Understanding Media*, 'may be manifestations of a general principle of repression inherent in the evolution of the organism.' (Ehrenzweig, 1953: 18) "I propose that when we have succeeded in describing a psychical process in its dynamic, topographical and economic aspects," Spivak cites from Freud in her Preface to Derrida's *Of Grammatology* (invoked in *Laws of Media*), "we should speak of it as a *metapsychological* presentation." (Spivak in Derrida, 1976: xlii; *SE XIV*: 181) Recall that *The Interpretation of Dreams* was to have taken pride of place in McLuhan's encyclopedic 'Baedeker' as an example of one of the 'breakthroughs' of the century, 'the recognition of discontinuity ... between the conscious and the unconscious', as McLuhan described it in 1974 (*L* 504). McLuhan signed a contract with Doubleday in 1971 for the 'Baedeker' that he had envisioned in the late 1940's; completing the book proved impossible, however, and in 1975 or 1976

he suggested in its place what was to be published posthumously in 1988 as *Laws of Media*. (Marchand 251-252; L 525). It would be naive to think that McLuhan, who was so adept at recognizing 'patterns', was ignorant of the connections between his own method and Freud's; yet *Laws of Media*, a study of the methods of Western philosophy and science from the ancients to the structuralists, ignores Freud and psychoanalysis entirely (C. G. Jung, Jean Piaget and Wolfgang Köhler meanwhile rate a mention, as do G.W.F. Hegel, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger, Ferdinand de Saussure, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida). Asked in an interview of 1967 if Freud had influenced him at all, McLuhan replied: 'I've read Freud and Jung and used them to make discoveries of my own – just as any literary person has been influenced by them.' (HC 279) Yet it is telling that just as the 'review' of Freud mentioned by McLuhan in 1949 is missing (destroyed or lost), so is the psychoanalytic movement absent from the history of Western thought presented in *Laws of Media*. Freud, so to speak, assumes the status of a sublime (traumatic) object for McLuhan, serving as the 'repressed' point of reference in McLuhan's oeuvre.

It is worthwhile, in this context, to note the fragility of McLuhan's health in the last two decades of his life. McLuhan started to experience episodic 'blackouts' in the late 1950's, which by 1966 had become frequent; a brain tumour was diagnosed in 1967, and the required surgery left McLuhan 'nervous, fragile, tense', with permanent disturbances of memory, McLuhan reporting that much of what he had read in the years immediately prior to the surgery seemed to have been 'rubbed out' (Marchand, 1998 [1989]: 197; 213-214). The confused discussions of Freud in *From Cliché to Archetype*, and its erroneous reference to '[what] has been called by Freud, Jung, and others "the archetypal unconscious"' may be due less to McLuhan's ignorance than to a crisis of health at this time (CA 21-22).¹⁰⁸

It is tempting to 'psychoanalyze' McLuhan to explain his resistance to Freud. Philip Marchand, author of *Marshall McLuhan: The Medium and the Messenger* (1989),

¹⁰⁸ McLuhan's career ended after a debilitating stroke in 1979, and he died in Toronto on December 31, 1980.

depicts McLuhan as a resilient child who would not accede to the demands of an unpredictable mother and who gradually developed a sense of superiority over his weaker father and younger brother. Charged with his mother's ambitions, who herself had achieved some fame as a dramatic actress, McLuhan saw himself destined for greatness, and so imposed upon himself a rigorous discipline both in life and work, evident in his early and intense concern with Humanist ethics, his conversion to Catholicism, and his piety. At age 19, as a student at the University of Manitoba, McLuhan commented derisively of his male friends: 'To them the most absorbing topic . . . is sex and women . . . Personally I wish that my sex instinct was nil if such were possible.' (McLuhan's diary, 8 April 1930, L 3) His opinions on feminism, homosexuality and abortion were staunchly conservative, even censorious (Marchand *op.cit.* 45, 74; L 441, 502-503). Donald Theall (1971: 108; see also 2001: 123), contrasting McLuhan to James Joyce, notes that unlike Joyce, McLuhan 'does not make the erotic central except through his rather interesting insistence on "tactility" as the mark of the more integral, that is, the more sensual.'¹⁰⁹ It would be too much to suggest that McLuhan avoided the subject of sex; in fact, as he states in *Culture is Our Business*, p.124, 'My own book The Mechanical Bride records the effect of the hardware service environment on sex' (emphasis in original); sex is the subject of a later essay, 'The Future of Sex' in *Look* magazine (July 25, 1967) with George B. Leonard; and sex is a central theme in a number of essays, speeches and interviews, including the *Playboy* interview of 1969. However, McLuhan was a Catholic, for whom the body is understood as a site of struggle between sin and redemption through Union with God; and to the Church's standards of humility McLuhan strictly adhered (Marchand, *op.cit.* 51). Remembering the writers to whom McLuhan pledged his allegiance – first among them St. Thomas Aquinas – it is likely that McLuhan's chief

¹⁰⁹ 'It was in the company of that old magician, Sigmund Freud, that Joyce learnt the way into the Aladdin's cave where he manufactured his *Ulysses* ...' wrote Wyndham Lewis (1927: 120). As Donald Theall (1971: 108) says, Joyce's writing, in contrast to McLuhan's, embraces 'the sexual, the cloacal, and the erotic'. Theall says

The whole of *Finnegans Wake* ... is about what happens in one night in one bedroom in and out of one man's dream. For that matter *Ulysses* also ends in a bedroom. Joyce's work is intimately personal; in McLuhan the person qua person never appears. (*Ibid.*)

See also pp.131-132.

problem with Freud was his atheism.¹¹⁰

McLuhan's early interest in psychology never waned, as is clear from the persistent references in his letters to psychological concepts and texts. As an undergraduate at the University of Manitoba, McLuhan studied social psychology under Henry Wright, along with English, history, Latin, geology, astronomy and economics;¹¹¹ the value McLuhan placed in this subject cannot have been small, for at age 19 he wrote in his diary:

When I have a bit more philosophy and psychology... I am going to work out some of the great "laws" that govern the affairs of men ... [I would] take this field of the "laws" and show that in spheres of science, literature, history, tho[ugh]t, action, human and superhuman, everything is a mass of timeless truth and consistent order. I would take a number of concrete examples and work them out in detail...
(cited in Guardiani, n.d. [1996])

Here is the germ of McLuhan's 'laws' of media. He was encouraged in the 1930's by I.A. Richards, his mentor at Cambridge University, who promoted the application of psychology in the field of literary criticism, while the 1940's saw McLuhan deliberating between Freud and Jung; Freud appealed as a scientist, but McLuhan could only scoff at his theories of castration anxiety (*L* 213). In 1948 he found McLuhan describing the various Western cosmologies from the centuries before Christ to St. Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century as 'not philosophies but psychologies'; 'They were strategies of a moral kind evolved as a practical means of bearing up against the universal confusion', he explains (McLuhan in Kenner, 1948: xii). During his career, McLuhan sampled the work of Adler, Horney, Freud, Reich, Jung, Henri Bergson, Ruesch, Bateson, Carl Williams, Fenichel, E.H. Gombrich, Selye, Jonas, Georg Békésy, Edmund T. Hall, Anton Ehrenzweig, Otto Lowenstein, Rollo May, Konrad Lorenz, Johan Huizinga, Jean Piaget and Wolfgang Köhler; anthropology likewise earned his attention, as he read the works of Mircea Eliade, Edmund Carpenter and Dorothy Lee. By the mid 1960's McLuhan could declare a respect for Freud who he said 'revealed

¹¹⁰ Freud locates the origins of religion in the 'feeling of infantile helplessness' (*SE* XXI: 72).

¹¹¹ See *L* 2; Marchand *op.cit.* 21. Henry Wright's work draws from William McDougall's treatise *An Introduction to Social Psychology* (1908).

the pervasiveness of sex as structure in experience and environment and in situations that seem to have just nothing at all to do with sex' (L 318). However, he insisted that psychoanalysis with its stress on the individual 'ego' had become redundant in the electronic age: 'The TV age has ended the condition of personal isolation that evoked the attentions of Sigmund Freud.... The classifications of psychoanalysis are irrelevant to the TV generation.' (CA 86) Interviewed by Gerard E. Stearn in 1967, McLuhan rhapsodized briefly about *The Interpretation of Dreams*, stating that Freud 'reveals the amazing power that all people have in their dream life of invention and poetic discovery, that the most ordinary person in his dream life is a tremendous poet' (HC 279). Yet even as he availed himself of Freudian concepts of the unconscious, the 'censor' (super-ego), the central nervous system, pleasure, pain, trauma and repression, McLuhan publicly swore his allegiance not to Freud, but to Harold Innis, Siegfried Giedion, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, James Joyce, Aquinas, Francis Bacon and Giambattista Vico. According to McLuhan, it was Giedion and Innis who inspired the notion of unconscious processes found in *The Mechanical Bride*: his spatial model (developed in *Explorations*) based upon that of Giedion; his dynamic model (developed in the NAEB report and *The Gutenberg Galaxy*) derived from that of St Thomas Aquinas. The economic model described in *Understanding Media*, founded upon the concepts of Narcissus-narcosis (numbing), counter-irritation and auto-amputation, is manifestly derived from Adolphe D. Jonas's critique of the Freudian pleasure principle in *Irritation and Counterirritation*; yet after *Understanding Media* McLuhan relinquishes these concepts for the notion of 'reversal' found in ancient metaphysics, specifically in Aristotle. That McLuhan aligned himself with the Catholic and Humanist thinkers he esteemed is no surprise. Yet what he took from Freud, whether deliberately or not, was a frame of reference from which to interpret the *spatial, dynamic* and *economic* analyses of processes that he found, perhaps on occasion retrospectively, in the work of the thinkers to whom he attributed his 'metaphysical' method. What McLuhan faced through his engagement with Western metaphysics, just as Freud had found in conceptualizing the 'unconscious', was the necessity of a multi-aspected analysis to conceptualize *process* in the fact of a sublime *cause* (i.e. *trauma* or McLuhan's 'acoustic space'). It is as a *metaphysician*, therefore,

i.e. one who is deliberately engaged in the analysis of processes and their (unconscious) causes, that McLuhan owes a debt to Freud.

The 'trivium' of grammar, rhetoric and dialectic provides the key to McLuhan's legacy, and his place in the history of Western thought. McLuhan's grammatical study of the history of the trivium in his thesis on Nashe was the first of its kind; F.P. Wilson, McLuhan's thesis examiner, declared he had learned more from McLuhan's thesis than from any other doctoral thesis he had read (Marchand *op.cit.* 72; Gordon 1997: 114). Here McLuhan reminds us of the integrity of the trivium; its arts are but three 'branches' of the *Logos*; they share a common root and reflect a common purpose, namely, the pursuit of wisdom (see e.g. *CT* 63-64). The 'metaphysical' method, as McLuhan calls it, integrates the arts of the trivium, and thus Aquinas, Bacon and Vico are read as grammarians and rhetoricians *as well as* dialecticians; they are, in short, metaphysicians whose primary concern is causality, and the sublime 'first cause' which cannot be conceptualized by dialectics alone (see *LM*; E. McLuhan, n.d., Thomas Aquinas's Theory of Communication; n.d., Francis Bacon's Theory of Communication and Media). By setting McLuhan in relation to Freud, McLuhan's method is revealed as a rhetorical technique of 'probing' the *Logos* (i.e. the 'reason and speech' of humankind) to reveal its metaphysical properties, that is to say its 'unconscious' *topography, dynamics, and economic principle*. In this light, we must question McLuhan's critique of Freud, for contrary to what McLuhan tells us, Freud was not merely a dialectician whose revolutionary 'breakthrough' was the recognition of the 'discontinuity' between conscious and unconscious (or as McLuhan would say, between visual and acoustic space). In fact what was revolutionary in Freud was his recognition of the complex of effects instituted by the phallic signifier (i.e. the 'castration complex'); and it is *this* that establishes a break between Freud's metaphysical or 'meta-psychological' method, derived from Arthur Schopenhauer's categories (space, time and causality), and the method of 'psychoanalysis'. It is likewise the concept of (symbolic) castration which distinguishes the 'individual' unconscious of Freud from the mythic, 'collective' unconscious of Vico, Joyce and McLuhan. Contrarily, it is McLuhan's unwillingness to acknowledge the effects of the

phallic signifier in the symbolic realm which prevents him from moving beyond metaphysics to the kind of critique provided by his French contemporaries, even as he champions the rhetorical method as a 'reciprocal' action of 'putting on' the audience (Other) as a 'mask'. Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, to name but a few of the thinkers who have engaged with the notions of cause and effects within the symbolic order, offer critiques of certain value in framing McLuhan's insights within postmodern psychoanalytic discourse.

McLuhan is rightly celebrated as a rhetorician, and it is in his valuing of rhetoric over grammar and dialectic that we find his ethics. Two of his oft-told stories illustrate this. At the start of *The Mechanical Bride* McLuhan invokes Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'A Descent Into the Maelström', describing how 'when locked in by the whirling walls and the numerous objects which floated in that environment', the protagonist says: "I *must* have been delirious, for I even sought *amusement* in speculating upon the relative velocities of their several descents toward the foam below." McLuhan says, 'Poe's sailor saved himself by studying the action of the whirlpool and by co-operating with it.' The same point is encapsulated in a joke McLuhan sent to the Prime Minister: 'As Zeus said to Narcissus: "Watch yourself!"' What he is telling us is that we have a *choice* between technological somnambulism (*not* determinism, note) and (ethical) action; that it is ethically necessary, in fact, to engage with the world not just as a maker and user of technology, hypnotized by one's own constructions, but as an observer (grammarians), as a joker or clown (rhetorician), preserving one's sense of the ridiculous sublime. McLuhan was an artist-rhetorician first of all, and only contingently, as it were, a 'structuralist', 'phenomenologist' and 'metaphysician'; had he been born in another place, or educated in another tradition – had he lived another decade, even – he may have gone on to counter Western metaphysics with an attack similar to that of his French contemporaries. The relationship between psychoanalysis and metaphysics is symbolized by the figure of Narcissus, who is central not just to McLuhan's oeuvre but also to Freud's. When Narcissus stares at himself in the water, he is hypnotized by the image of himself as a *form*; at the same time, he *desires* the desire of himself as signifier of Otherness. The Zeus/Narcissus joke, 'Watch yourself!' is shorthand for the

method of psychoanalysis: 'Watch your [unconscious] self!', where Zeus is the Name-of-the-Father, that is to say the signifier serving as retroactive 'cause' of the castration complex, while Narcissus embodies the 'paradox' of the Lacanian *objet petit a*, the fantasized object that is both 'absent' cause of the signifier and formal cause of the Other's desire. The water, of course, in both of these stories, is an archetype for the unconscious, the subliminal surround in which we may drown like Narcissus, or in which, like Poe's sailor, we may 'dream awake'.

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