

# THE MEDIUM

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**BASED ON THE LIFE AND PREDICTIONS OF  
Marshall McLuhan**

**Conceived and Directed by**

Anne Bogart

**Costume Design by**

Gabriel Berry

**Lighting Design by**

Mimi Jordan Sherin

**Scenic Design by**

Neil Patel

**Soundscape by**

Darron L. West

**Company Stage Manager**

Megan Wanlass

**Created by**

James "Will" Bond  
Mark Corkins  
Ellen Lauren  
Kelly Maurer  
Tom Nelis

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## INTRODUCTION

**MM** Hello, I'm Marshall McLuhan. I haven't seen you before.

Are you new here?

Hello, I'm Marshall McLuhan. I haven't seen you before.

Are you new here?

I am not, by temperament or conviction, a revolutionary. I would prefer a stable, changeless environment of modest services and human scale. But the medium or process, of our time's - electric technology - is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life. It is forcing us to reconsider and re-evaluate practically every thought, every action, and every institution formerly taken for granted.

Everything is changing - you, your family, your neighborhood, your education, your job, your government, your relation to "the others." And they're changing dramatically. Only by understanding change can you ease the burden of experiencing it. You can't go home again.

The only "extension of man" should be awareness. Gadgets like television are all the more dangerous because they often turn users into dependents. Such gadgets become idols. I wish none of these technologies ever happened. They impress me as nothing but a disaster. They are for dissatisfied people. Why is man so unhappy he wants to change his world? I would never attempt an improvement - my personal preference, I suppose, would be preliterate milieu; but I want to study change to gain power over it. You don't like those ideas? I got others.

Recognition of the psychic and social consequences of technological change will allow us to neutralize the effects of innovation. If we maintain lively

dialogue with, and among the technologies, we can enlist them on the side of traditional values instead of watching those values disappear while we play the helpless bystanders.

My own studies of the effects of technology on human psyche and society have inclined people to regard me as the enemy of the things I describe. I feel a bit like the man who turns on a fire alarm only to be charged with arson. I have tried to avoid making personal value judgments about these processes since they seem far too important and too large in scope to deserve a merely private opinion.

There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening.

It's vital to adopt a posture of arrogant superiority. Instead of scurrying into a corner and wailing about what media are doing to us, one should charge straight ahead and kick them in the electrodes. They respond beautifully to such resolute treatment and soon become servants rather than masters.

What's that buzzzzzzzzzzzzing?

Before the invention of the phonetic alphabet, man lived in a world where all the senses were balanced and simultaneous, a closed world of tribal depth and resonance, an oral culture structured by a dominant auditory sense of life. The ear, as opposed to the cool and neutral eye; is sensitive, hyperaesthetic and all-inclusive, and contributes to the seamless web of tribal kinship and interdependence in which all members of the group existed in harmony. The primary medium of communication was speech,

## ENTRANCE INTO THE BELLY OF THE WHALE

## FIRING LINE

**MM** Tribal cultures

**JA** At present, the problem of identity has become a major hang-up in the cultures of the world as a result of technological and environmental changes.

**MM** or?

**JB** Electronic man is the first since Neolithic times to live in a man-made environment.

**MM** If a few details here and there are wacky, it doesn't matter a hoot.

**KM** TV children are aimless, undisciplined, and illiterate.

**MM** Oral Cultures!

**JA** The ear favors no particular "point of view." We are enveloped by sound. We can't shut out sound automatically. We simply are not equipped with earlids.

**MM** The tribal echoland.

**JB** The point now is to trigger the release of visual memories.

**JA** Unless people understand the nature of media, they are in danger of losing all the traditional values of literacy and Western civilization.

**MM** Unlike strictly visual space.

**EL** We are living in media saturation, where simulations of the real have utterly replaced the real.

**JA** As the load of information stresses your mental capacity, you sense that you've come down with infomania.

**MM** The man of the tribal world.

**JA** Infomania erodes our capacity for significance.

- EL** The world is splintering into a trillion subcultures and designer cults with their own languages, codes and lifestyles.
- MM** Kaleidoscopic life.
- JB** Like a small child fascinated by a kaleidoscope.
- MM** Spontaneous emotions: anger, joy, sorrow, fear.
- KM** In order to reach people you've got to hurt them. You really have to cut very close to the bone. It's like surgery.
- JA** When deprived of his identity, man becomes violent in diverse ways.  
Violence is the quest for identity.
- JB** There are thus two kinds of violence relating to the same situation: first, the kind that comes from the unimportance of everybody; and second, the kind that comes from the impulse to restore one's private meaning by acts of violence.
- EL** Technology stifles the blood of life by dehumanizing the spirit and cutting existence off from nature.
- KM** Nature is a mess.
- JA** Every new medium creates its own environment, which acts on human sensibilities in a total and ruthless fashion.
- MM** Most people are still blissfully ignorant of what the media do to them.
- KM** All media work us over completely. They are so persuasive 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 message.
- JA** This genie can never be put back in the bottle.

**MM** We no longer partake in the drama of alienation, but are in the ecstasy of communication.



## DIONNE WARWICK

**MM** Hello, I'm Marshall McLuhan. I haven't seen you before. Are you new here?

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I am not, by temperament or conviction, a revolutionary. I would prefer a stable, changeless environment of modest services and human scale. But the medium, or process, of our time - electric technology - is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life. It is forcing us to reconsider and re-evaluate practically every thought, every action, and every institution formerly taken for granted.<sup>/1</sup>

<sup>/2</sup>Everything is changing - you, your family, your neighborhood, your education, your job, your government, your relation to "the others." <sup>/3</sup>And they're changing dramatically. Only by understanding <sup>/4</sup>change can you ease the burden of experiencing it.

You can't go home again.<sup>/5</sup>

The only "extension of man" should be awareness. Gadgets like television are all the more dangerous because they often turn users into dependents. Such gadgets become idols. I wish none of these technologies ever happened.

<sup>/6</sup>They impress me as nothing but a disaster. They are for dissatisfied people.

Why is man so unhappy he wants to change his world? I would never attempt an improvement - my personal preference, I suppose, would <sup>/6</sup>be a preliterate milieu;<sup>/7</sup> but I want to study change to gain power over it.<sup>/7</sup>

You don't like those ideas? I got others. <sup>/8</sup>Recognition of the psychic and social consequences of technological change makes it possible to neutralize the effects of innovation. If we maintain lively dialogue with, and among the

technologies, <sup>19</sup> we can enlist them on the side of traditional values instead of watching those values disappear while we play the helpless bystanders.

My own studies of the effects of technology on human psyche and society have inclined people to regard me as the enemy<sup>/10</sup> of the things I describe. I feel a bit like the man who turns on a fire alarm only to be charged with arson. I have tried to avoid making personal value judgments about these processes since they seem far too important and too large in scope to deserve a merely private opinion.

There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>/12</sup>It's vital to adopt a posture of arrogant superiority. Instead of scurrying into a corner and wailing about what media are doing to us<sup>/13</sup>, one should charge straight ahead and kick them in the electrodes. They respond beautifully to such resolute treatment and soon become servants rather than masters.

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## THEME FROM VALLEY OF THE DOLLS

1. Gotta get off, gonna get, gotta get, hafta get off of this ride.
2. Gotta get hold, gonna get, need to get hold of my pride.
3. When did I get, where did I, how was I caught in this game?
4. When will I know, where will I, how will I think of my name?
5. When did I stop feeling sure, feeling safe, and start wondering  
wondering why?
6. Is this a dream, am I here, where are you?
7. What's in back of the sky? Why do we cry?
8. Gotta get off, gonna get, outta this, merry go round,
9. Gotta get on, gonna get, need to get on where I'm bound
10. When did I get, where did I, why am I lost as a lamb?
11. When will I know, where will I, how will I learn who I am?
12. Is this a dream, am I here, where are you?
13. Tell me, when will I know, how will I know, when will I know why?

## THE CYBERSPACE LOUNGE

JA Hello, I just flew in from cyberspace and boy are my electrodes tired. I haven't seen you before. Are you new here? You know, people are learning to expect more and more from television. The future is clear...picture it: Visit far away places or even different eras without leaving your living room. You can visit a Prehistoric World, a Western World, a Future World. You are instantly transported to that time and place. You also get to choose the life-form you wish to be when you visit these Virtual Worlds. Come back in prehistoric times as a dinosaur, if you like. Your movements will be dinosaur-like. A friend visiting the same world will see you as a dinosaur. Or, want to go back to the Old West looking just like John Wayne? It can be done.

Virtual reality won't merely replace T.V., it will eat it alive.

Virtual reality

Virtual

Virtual reality won't merely replace T.V., it will eat it alive.

alive,

it will eat it alive.

We can link brains with computers, we can expand consciousness so much that a human being can take in all the information in the fuckin' universe and see relationships.

They made LSD illegal. I wonder what they're going to do about this stuff.

See, this is the situation. We're living in extremely fast and extremely dense times.

The way to keep up is to be ahead.

It's vital to adopt a posture of arrogant superiority.

We are going to find the power to realize our deepest cultural aspirations.

This is why we must find out what our deepest cultural

I don't explain,

**MM** I explore.

**JA** My entire concern is to overcome the determinism that results from the determination of people to ignore what is going on

Did you hear the one about the frog?

Frog is taken to a laboratory and placed in a pot of hot water. Frog jumps out of the pot because it's way to hot. Smart frog.

Later this same frog was put into a pot of cool water which is then slowly heated so that the rising temperature is barely perceptible to the frog.

It is just me or is it getting warm in here? Punchline? COOKED FROG.

Moral? WAKE UP!

## DETECTIVE DRAMA

**MM (V.O.)** A hot medium excludes and a cool medium includes. In a cool medium, the audience is an active constituent of the viewing or listening experience. A girl wearing open-mesh silk stockings or glasses is inherently cool and sensual because the eye acts as a surrogate hand in filling in the low-definition image thus engendered. Which is why boys makes passes at girls who wear glasses.

**EL** Searching through the digital jungle, alters the relationship of logic to intuition. An artificial information jungle already spreads out over the world, duplicating with its virtual vastness the scattered geography of the actual world.

**MM** Hello, I'm Marshall McLuhan. I haven't seen you before. Are you new here?

**EL** The next logical step would be to bypass languages in favor of a general cosmic consciousness which might be very like the collective unconscious dreamt of by Bergson.

**MM** The basic thing to remember about the electric media is that they inexorably transform every sense ratio and thus recondition and restructure all our values and institutions.

**EL** Because of electric speed, we can no longer wait and see.

**MM** You don't like those ideas, I've got others...this is a highly traumatic process. Electronic culture creates a crisis of identity, a tremendous violence - violence that is simply an identity quest. All our alienation and atomization are reflected in the crumbling of such time-honored social values as the right of privacy and the sanctity of the individual. I don't explain I explore.

**JB** Congratulations! Mr. McLuhan.

- MM** What's that buzzing?
- JB** You have just purchased a genuine Hatsubatsu TM French Fry!
- EL** A medicine that can shut down a migraine attack in just thirty seconds.
- JB** Migraine Headache!
- EL** If you're good looking and got the dough, you're going to have sex with beautiful women for real. If you're lonely and introverted and have no dough and a crummy apartment, you're going to have virtual sex with fake beautiful girls.
- JB** The weirdness has already begun: authors are disappearing, personalities are going multiple, and worlds are popping up like mushrooms. I would like to begin by recalling that, throughout his career, Freud defined "reality" as a bound set of perceptions that can be verified through activities of transformation and signified in bound sets of words, i.e. verbalized.
- MM** I feel a bit like the man who turns on a fire alarm only to be charged with arson.
- E** Cyberspace is so big and so indefinite that it's impossible to get a grip on without getting into some really heavy shit: identity, community, perception.
- MM** The content or message of any particular medium has about as much importance as the stenciling on the casing of an atomic bomb.
- KM** To avoid drowning, you wise up. Simple as that. To make you a little more aware than you were the day before of how beautiful the world is. We'll be linked together fiber-optically. The bulk of the human population will be moved off planet.
- MM** It's not an easy period in which to live.....  
Didn't know it was loaded.

## DETECTIVE INTO COFFEE TALK

**MM** Most people are still blissfully ignorant of what the media do to them; unaware that because of their pervasive effects on man, it is the medium itself that is the message, not the content, and unaware that the medium is also the message - that, all puns aside, it literally works over and saturates and molds and transforms every sense ratio. The content or message of any particular medium has about as much importance as the stenciling on the casing of an atomic bomb. For thirty years, at least, I have been using the two hemisphere approach under the names of the *written* and the *oral*, the *visual* and the *acoustic*, the *hot* and the *cool*, the *medium* and the *message*, *figure* and *ground*, and so on. Now it turns out that medicine has created a great beach head for this approach with its understanding of the two hemispheres of the brain. If you look at the traits of the left hemisphere, you will discover the lineaments of the First World - the literate and the industrial world - and, on the other hand - in the right hemisphere you will perceive the characteristics of the Thirds World - the world without the phonetic alphabet. The new electronic milieu or environment automatically pushes the right hemisphere into a more dominant position than it has held in the Western world since the invention of the phonetic alphabet.



## TALK SHOW

**EL** Hello

**KM** Hello

**EL** Hello

**KM** Hello

**EL** Try to remember the world before computers.

**KM** Remember fluidity that we experienced before computers.

**EL** You'll be able to grasp virtual reality, V R. How can we use VR to regain our souls?

**KM** See, this is the situation. We're living in extremely fast and extremely dense times. Today every damned things comes with a user's manual. Tomorrow, shirts - rubber bands - hamburgers - each individual french fry...  
"Congratulations! You have just purchased a genuine Hatsubatsu TM French Fry! Read all instructions carefully before consuming your new Hatsubatsu TM French Fry! First, set the digital clock-timer on your new Fry! Find the small white 'time set' button and push five times while dialing the "feature function" knob to seventeen! Now press..."

**EL** The human ego is undergoing a shock.

**KM** You pause for a moment and wonder at your identity.

**EL** Are we having fun yet? Well, the question is: What is interactive?

**K&E** I think...I think...

**EL** I think interactive means creating something out of our own minds.

**KM** I think we'll go from couch potatoes to couches where you'll see the potatoes in the dirt. We'll get buried even more.

- EL** Time seems to be speeding up. Call from your home, your office, any where there's a phone, just press a few buttons and relax.
- KM** If you don't chose to jump in, what exactly do you chose?
- MM** The primary medium of communication was speech.
- V.O.** As television seeps ever more deeply into the root system of our consciousness, it attacks our capacity to differentiate between reality and the representation of reality. Represented experience is rapidly replacing direct experience as the defining sensibility in American life.
- KM** Like a roarin fire sucking up oxygen.
- EL** With digital technology, how do you know if an image is real or fabricated?
- KM** It's not science fiction anymore. It's real. Though is may sound like science fiction today, tomorrow it will be as commonplace as talking on the telephone.
- V.O.** Hello, I'm Marshall McLuhan. Today, electronics and automation make mandatory that everybody adjust to the vast global environment as if it were his little home town.
- EL** What are you to say to people when they put their heads in the teeth of technology's buzzsaw and call it freedom?
- KM** It's like billions of tiny little Bac-O bits of valuable information strewn across that great salad bar in cyberspace.
- EL** Call anyone, any time in real time. With the Smart phone  
AT & T has come up with the ultimate weapon to get even the most computer phobic homemakers into the twenty-first century.
- V.O.** Pop Art really consists in noticing the current environment as art form instead of the usual procedure of noticing the preceding environment as art

form. This is really an interesting procedure and might have some large consequences.

**K&E** Are we fun yet?

**V.O.** Hello, I'm...

**KM** Who gave you that numb!

**EL** That's enough road and traffic information to get the car on to the next beacon. Cruising the electronic frontier at hyper-speed clutching a copy of Nietzsche's Will to Power in your virtual hands. So say good bye,

**KM** Good bye

**EL** and so long.

## MCLUHAN'S TEXT DURING THE TALK SHOW

**\*MM** The primary medium of communication was speech, and thus no man knew appreciably more or less than another - which meant that there was little individualism and specialization, the hallmark of "civilized" Western man. Tribal cultures even today, simply cannot comprehend the concept of the individual or of the separate and independent citizen. Oral cultures act and react simultaneously, whereas the capacity to act without reacting, without involvement, is the special gift of "detached" literate man. Another basic characteristic distinguishing tribal man from his literate successors is that he lived in a world of *acoustic* space, which gave him radically different concept of time-space relationships. If a few details here and there are wacky, it doesn't matter a hoot. acoustic space has no center, and no margin, unlike strictly visual space, which is an extension and intensification of the eye. Acoustic space is organic and integral, perceived through the simultaneous interplay of all the senses; whereas "rational" or pictorial space is uniform, sequential and continuous and creates a closed world with none of the rich resonance of the tribal echoland. Our own Western time-space concepts, derive from the environment created by the discovery of phonetic writing, as does our entire concept of Western civilization. The man of the tribal world led a complex, kaleidoscopic life precisely because unlike the eye, cannot be focused and is synaesthetic rather than analytical and linear. Speech is an utterance, or more precisely, an outerring, of all our senses at once; the auditory field is simultaneous, the visual successive. The modes of life of nonliterate people were implicit, simultaneous and discontinuous, and also far richer than those literate man. By their dependence on the spoken word

for information, people were drawn together into a tribal mesh; and since the spoken word is more emotionally laden than the written - conveying by intonation such rich emotions as anger, joy, sorrow, fear - tribal man is spontaneous and passionately volatile. Audile-tactile tribal man partook of the collective unconscious, lived in a magical integral world patterned by myth and ritual, its values divine and unchallenged, whereas literate, or visual man creates an environment that is strongly fragmented, individualistic, explicit, logical; specialized and detached. By knowing how technology shapes our environment, we can transcend its absolutely determining power.

## TELEVANGELIST

**JA** It is not an easy period in which to live. The future has imploded onto the present. There was no nuclear Armageddon. There's too much real estate to lose. The new battlefield is people's minds. There is no new world order, only new world chaos. The large cities of the world are so obsolete and irrelevant that they will all suffer the fate of London Bridge which has not fallen down but has been transferred to the private property of a Texan.

Modern man worries whether he exists as nothing more than an entry in a data bank somewhere. His self is no longer his physical body so much as it is an image or pattern of information, inhabiting a world of other images and other patterns of information.

How will we negotiate such a mass of images, facts and figures and still find time to sleep?

These sudden changes amount to a kind of transvaluation of values and a resulting feeling of the meaninglessness of life and human endeavor because of the disappearance of all the previous goals and objectives. You cannot go home again.

Even points of view must go because it's no longer possible to take a fixed position for more than a single moment.

We are certainly in a state of transition; we have arrived at nothing less than the end of history. However, it is not something to be alarmed about. I imagine it's simply the normal situation that prevails when a species is preparing to depart for the stars, which is unavoidable. The span of time in geological terms is hardly the wink of an eye. In fact, from that perspective,

all of human history appears as a preparation for human transcendence of planetary existence. I think you have to take the point of view that certainly the planet is the cradle of mankind, but, inevitably, one cannot remain in the cradle forever. The human imagination, in conjunction with technology, has become a force so potent that it really can no longer be unleashed on the surface of the planet with safety. The human imagination has gained such an immense power that the only environment that is friendly to it is the vacuum of deep space.

It's our own ingenuity and inventiveness that guarantee that this environment must now be superseded.

The world rendered as pure information not only fascinates our eyes and minds, but also captures our hearts. We feel augmented and empowered.. Our hearts beat in the machines. This is Eros.

## K N E E P L A Y 1

**JB** I grew up in a small town in Texas and as I was growing up my father never allowed us to watch TV. I went away to a university and then when I came back I was surprised to see my father was watching TV constantly. He would sit with a remote control and watch all the channels at once. He would watch a bit of this, a bit of that, and this fascinated me.

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## F A M I L Y   S H O W

- MM** Most people are still blissfully ignorant of what the media do to them; unaware that because of their pervasive effects on man, it is the medium itself that is the message, *not* the content, and unaware that the medium is also the *massage*
- JB** Communication between human beings is almost a miracle.
- JA** In a world where physical contact is impossible.
- JB** Getting a life is really about choosing your memory. You know.
- JA** Technology's great appeal is, in fact, that it allows you to get rid of your memories.
- EL** Everyone lives schizophrenically today.
- KM** You lose the ability to separate real from fake.
- EL** The barrier between you and the machine goes away.
- JB** If you don't choose to jump in, what exactly do you choose.
- KM** The limits of technological domination are reached when a human being says "No."
- JB** The experts are playing gotcha with your soul.
- MM** (Ha Ha Ha)
- KM** Art can be abstract.

- JA** Human nature is an evolving identity, secured in the process of adaptation to "nature."
- EL** Voice activated typewriters
- JB** Controlled-Release Birth Control Pills.
- KM** Fat prevention drink
- JA** One of the most telling effects of the electronic media, has been the creation of an external present, a NOW. So powerful is the hold of the image and the rapid shift sequence\*, so mesmerizing the juxtaposition of contents, that the watcher is gradually seduced away from causal/historical habits of mind. The structure of programming allows absolutely no time for absorption or reflection. Hour upon hour the world's montage is rushed past our eyes...
- EL** Hyperspace has all the charm of a starry sky in August\* . . .
- KM** Our is a brand-new world of\* allatonceness.
- JB** Wireheading is a new branch of computer technology where designers envision creating hardware that wires the computer directly to the brain.
- KM** Are we having fun yet?
- EL** The weather's comfortable, the twinkle's alluring, but the vista's intimidating and there are no reliable star charts. It is pretty empty out there, too.
- KM** You can't go home again.
- JA** Virtual Reality is a technology that will dissolve the boundaries between us and allow us to see the contents of each other's minds.

**KM** I keep thinking about a room that would create an experience of a loss of memory.

**EL** The human ego is undergoing a shock.

**KM** There was once a form of Mongolian torture. A man was buried up to his neck in the desert sand. His hair was completely shaved and his head tightly covered with an animal hide. In the intense heat of the desert with his head covered, the hair would not grow out but inward into the brain. The result for the man was a loss

**MM** Identity loss.

**KM** of memory

**MM** You must be alive in our own time.

## M C L U H A N ' S   T E X T   D U R I N G   T H E F A M I L Y   S H O W

**MM** That, all puns aside, it literally works over and saturates and molds and transforms every sense ratio. The content or message of any particular medium has about as much importance as the casing of an atomic bomb. In the tribal world the senses of touch, taste, hearing and smell were developed for very practical reasons, to a much higher level than the strictly visual. Into this world, the phonetic alphabet fell like a bombshell, installing sight at the head of the heirarchy of senses: Literacy propelled man from the tribe, gave him an eye for an ear and replaced his integral in-depth, communal interplay with visual linear values and fragmented consciousness. As an intensification and amplification of the visual function, the phonetic alphabet diminished the role of the senses of hearing and touch and taste and smell, permeating the discontinuous culture of tribal man and translating its

organic harmony and complex synesthesia into the uniform, connected and visual mode that we still consider the norm of "rational" existence. The whole man became fragmented man; the alphabet shattered the charmed circle and resonating magic of the tribal world, exploding man into an agglomeration of specialized and psychically impoverished individuals," or units, functioning in a world of linear time and Euclidean space.

I believe that our survival, and at the very lease our comfort and happiness, is predicated on understanding the nature of our new environment. The electric media constitute a total and near-instantaneous transformation of culture, values and attitudes. This upheaval generates great pain and

## NEWS BRIEF

**MM** They bring the world to you. In a compelling way. More real than real. If you don't like what's happening, you can just pull the fricking plug.

**JA** New technology will change the way you shop, play and learn. The International Space University (ISU) will teach college courses and confer degrees to a group of multinational students while orbiting the Earth. I'm tired of the war in Bosnia. Let's see a different story. A new generation of electronic narcotics, their uses and content determined by mega-corporations pushing mindless consumption of things we don't need and aren't good for us. The environment that man creates becomes his medium for defining his role in it. GENIE!

**KM** The satellite environment of the planet has put a new spin on the earth, transforming our vision of it. Rice and corn that resist cold; plants that produce their own natural pesticide; inserting cactus genes into wheat or soybeans to create plants which need less water. Self watering plants. Cybernated greenhouses, plug in greenhouses, to avoid drowning you wise up, simple as that. Effective and great news. Atom . . .

**JA** This genie can never be put back in the bottle. Sublime attention?

**JB** Use your remote-control buttons to order instant replays during sports events, pick which segments to watch on the evening news, and answer questions while watching quiz shows or documentaries. Check sports scores. Anybody at a ball game, for example, is a nobody. In the electronic world everybody is at the same ball game from morning 'till night. They've

discovered they've got a collective identity, but personally they're nothing. Bring your own beer.

**JA** Who gave you that numb?

**JB** I go my way with the assurance of a sleep walker.

**JA** The way to keep up is to be ahead. The point is to expand the viewers capacity for complexity, to make you a little more aware than you were the day before of how beautiful the world is.

## K N E E P L A Y 2

**JB** \*I grew up in a small town in Texas and as I was growing up my father never allowed us to watch TV. I went away to a university and then when I came back I was surprised to see my father was watching TV constantly. He would sit with a remote control and watch all the channels at once. He would watch a bit of this, a bit of that, and this fascinated me.

**\*EL** There is a willow that grows aslant a brook  
  
that shows his four leaves in the glassy stream.  
  
There with fantastic garlands did she make  
  
Of crow flowers, nettles, daisies, and long purples,  
  
That liberal shepards give a grosser name,  
  
But our cold maids do dead men's fingers call them.  
  
There on the pendant boughs her coronet weeds  
  
clambering to hand, an envious sliver broke,  
  
When down her weedy trophies and herself  
  
Fell in the weeping brook. Her clothes spread wide  
  
And, mermaid like, a while they bore her up;  
  
Which time she chanted snatches of old logs,



As one incapable of her own distress,  
Or like a creature native and indued  
Unto that element; but long it could not be  
Til that her garments, heavy with their drink,  
Pulled the poor wretch from her melodius lay  
To muddy death. Drowned, drowned.

**\*2**MMA hot medium excludes and a cool medium includes. In a cool medium, the audience is an active constituent of the viewing or listening experience. A girl wearing open-mesh silk stockings or glasses is inherently cool and sensual because the eye acts as a surrogate hand in filling in the low-definition image thus engendered. Which is why boys make passes at girls who wear glasses.

## THE COOKING SHOW

**KM** See, this is the situation. We're living in extremely fast and extremely dense times. One day you're lucky to have a FEDEX account, the next day everybody who calls you asks, "What's your FAX number?" "Huh?" As you go to the phone to get a FAX line installed, the Berlin Wall comes down and your globe-trotting friends are calling you from the Wall rave: They're dancing on the detritus. With a really good portable MIDI sound system. And you're thinking you'd like to get a drink to celebrate, but now your non-globe-trotting friends won't drink alcohol, even for world peace - dumb drug - and anyway they gotta talk to that doctor down in Stanford who's working on the bio-chip, the first digital implant that talks to nerve cells. "Huh?" So the Evil Empire fragments, and the Western economic system teeters, and as the losers of World War #2.0 win control of the new economic order, and media-hip, surgically-enhanced neo-nazis run for president; as IBM announces a chip the size of a few atoms that can flip and flop with the best of them, and the Human Genome Project maps the genetic structure of the species... you pause for a moment and wonder at your identity. "HUH?" Technology escalates on your very block: Knives turn to pistols, pistols turn to Uzis. Cocaine turns to crack, crack to nuke. Charles Atlas turns to Arnold Schwarzenegger, 38DD turns to 64 GG, Mick Jagger sings "Sympathy for the Devil" on the easy-listening station, and after an evening of techno hard-core sounds, the first Sex Pistols album sounds mellow and quaint. You can't go home again. I go my way with the assurance of a sleepwalker.

## COOKING SHOW TO WESTERN

**MM** What is happening?

What is happening...

There...what is happening?

There...there...what is happening...

There is...what is...

There is no...what is...

There is...happening...

What is happening...

## THE WESTERN

- MM** Look a bit closer at both nationalism and industrialism and you'll see\* that both derived directly from the explosion of print technology in the 16th Century. Nationalism didn't exist in Europe until the Renaissance, when typography enabled every literate man to see his mother tongue. The printing press, by spreading mass produced books and printed matter across Europe, turned the vernacular regional languages of the day into uniform closed systems of national languages - just another variant of what we call mass media - and gave birth to the entire concept of nationalism.
- \*JB** I grew up in a small town in Texas and as I was growing up my father never allowed us to watch TV. I went away to a university and then when I came back I was surprised to see my father was watching TV constantly. He would sit with a remote control and watch all the channels at once. He would watch a bit of this, a bit of that, and this fascinated me.
- KM** scream
- JA** Without direct human presence, participation becomes optional.
- EL** You'll be able to watch any show you want at any time you want.
- MM** It's vital to adopt a posture of arrogant superiority.
- JB** All people tend to misunderstand each other almost totally all the time.

- JA** We can link brains with computers, we can expand consciousness so much that a human being can take in all the information in the fuckin universe and see relationships.
- KM** scream
- EL** Psychologically considered, violence is an attempt to restore order to achieve identity.
- MM** One should charge straight ahead and kick them in the electrodes.
- KM** On the frontier everybody is a nobody and violence is the order of the day.
- JB** On the other hand, the loss of private identity which has come rather suddenly upon Western man has produced a deep anger at this rip-off of his private self.
- JA** Perhaps this is why so many people feel that their identity has been threatened
- MM** Now we're dealing with the principle of the absolute absence of reality.
- EL** When people become too intense, too serious, they will have trouble in relating to any sort of social game or norm. Perhaps this is why jokes are so important.
- JB** There are extremely few people who are serious enough in their mental endeavors to train their perceptions to confront new situations.
- JA** You are the screen. The images wrap around you. You are the vanishing point.

**MM** We all become Chicken Littles, scurrying around frantically in search of our former identities and in the process unleashing tremendous violence.

**JB** If you don't like it, you can just pull the friggin plug.

**JA** Have you ever paid a toll without slowing down?

**JB** Have you ever tucked your kid in from a phone booth?

**EL** Our hearts beat in the machines. This is Eros.

**JB** It's like eating a good meal in five minutes.

## WESTERN TO VENTRILQUIST

EL    Obscenity begins when there is no more spectacle, no more stage, no more theater, no more illusions, when everything becomes immediately transparent, visible, exposed in the raw and inexorable light of information and communication. We no longer partake in the drama of alienation, but are in the ecstasy of communication, and this ecstasy is obscene.

## T H E V E N T R I L O Q U I S T

**JB** Hello

**KM** Hello

**JB** Hello

**KM** Hello

**JB** I haven't seen you here before. Are you new here?

**KM** You must be alive in our own time.(to audience) A girl wearing open mesh silk stockings . . .

**JB** . . .or glasses is inherently cool . . .

**KM** . . .and sensual . . .

**JB** . . .because the eye acts as a surrogate . . .

**KM** . . .hand . . .

**JB** . . .filling in the low definition image thus engendered.

**KM** Which is why boys make passes at girls who wear glasses.

**JB** My concern is to overcome the determinism that results from the determination of people to ignore what is going on.

**KM** It is vital to adopt a posture of arrogant superiority.

**JB** . . .hot media are low in participation by the audience, and cool media are high in participation.



**KM** I think they are sinking into a kind of world where satisfactions are pathetically crude and feeble. Their kicks are on a seven or eight year old level.

**JB** . . . a cartoon is low in definition or cool because the rough outline drawing provides very little visual data and requires the viewer to fill in or complete the images himself . . . A book is hot . . .

**KM** Television is cool . . . .

**JB** A photograph is hot . . .

**KM** A cartoon is cool . . .

**JB** A lecture is hot . . .

**KM** a bull session is cool . . .

**JB** You don't like those ideas?

**KM** I got others . . .

**JB** After all my stuff is very difficult.

**KM** If a few details here and there are wacky, it doesn't matter a hoot.

**JB** Most people are still blissfully unaware of what the media do to them...

**KM** Most people are still blissfully unaware of what the media do to them...

**JB** There once was this frog, and he was taken to a laboratory and placed into a pot of boiling water.

**KM** You don't have to tell a story.

**JB** It is the medium itself that is the message, not the content . . .

**KM** . . .What do we need all this stuff for anyway?

**JB** I don't pretend to understand my theories . . .

**KM** Who gave you that numb?

**JB** . . .I believe that our survival, and at the very least our comfort and happiness . . .

**KM** You don't like what's happening, you can just pull the friggin' plug.

**JB** ...is predicated on understanding the nature of our new environment..

**KM** Now we're dealing with the principle of the absolute absence of reality.

**JB** The first right of every man in civilized society is to be protected...

**KM** . . .against the consequences of his own stupidity.

**JB** Have you ever paid a toll with out slowing down?

**KM** Have you ever tucked your kid in from a phone booth?

**JB** The electric media . . .

**KM** (hums)

**JB** What's that buzzing?

**KM** What's that buzzing? Well, I don't know.

**JB**     Constitute a total and near instantaneous transformation . . .

**KM**     (hums)

**JB**     What's that buzzing?

**KM**     A self protective numbing?

**JB**     . . .of the culture . . .

**KM**     . . .(hums)

**JB**     What is that buzzing?

**KM**     peculiar form of self hypnosis?

**JB**     Too many people know too much about each other

**KM**     The Cheshire cat in Alice In Wonderland is a kind of parallel to our state. When discarnate, man has no identity, and is not subject to natural law. In fact he has no basis for morals of any sort. It is . . . 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.

          You can't go home again.

## THE DATING GAME

**JA** The point now is to trigger the release of visual memories that TV watchers have stored up- by saturating the viewers with more visual images.

**MM** Hello I'm Marshall McLuhan. Why is man so unhappy he wants to change his world?

**EL** It is possible -

**KM** Because people are learning to expect more and more from television.

**EL** This effect has made human life appear very cheap indeed.

**JA** There are no links - it's all ebb and flow.

**MM** You must be alive in our own time. Are you new here?

**EL** Cyberspace is a consensual hallucination that these people have created. It's not really a place, it's not really space. It's notional space.

**JA** Cyberspace is where you are when you are talking on the telephone.

**MM** How far can we enter cyberspace and still remain human?

**KM** Cyberspace can cast a spell of passivity on our lives. We talk to the system, telling it what to do, but the system's language and processes come to govern our psychology.

**MM** You can't go home again.

**JA** We have no art. We do everything as well as possible.

**MM** How will we negotiate such a mass of images, facts and figures and still find time to sleep?

**JB** The art of life lies in a constant readjustment to our surroundings.

**MM** In the age of information, man the food-gatherer returns as man the fact-finder. Our ecological approach is Paleolithic, is it not?

**ALL** HUH?

**MM** You don't like those ideas, I got others.

Ever tuck your kid in from a phone booth?

**KM** In a matter of moments, and it can't be stopped, short of dismantling the entire telephone system.

**MM** Why?

**EL** Without direct human presence, participation becomes optional.

**MM** Virtual Reality is a technology that will dissolve the boundaries between us and allow us to see the contents of each other's minds. Why we can say when anything happens that "the situation was ripe."

**JB** The consequence of the images will be the image of the consequences.

Ours is a brand new world of allatonceness.

**MM** A mind and personality, this is Eros.

**JA** Time has ceased, space has vanished.

- MM** There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening.
- JA** We expect access to everything NOW, instantly and simultaneously.
- MM** I grope, I listen, I test, I accept and discard.
- JB** Everything must be at our disposal.
- MM** We *can* say some things about the territory. It involves the Frankenstein Myth and Prometheus and Faustus: (hu)man at play with the creation of life\*, at war with the limitations of biology and time. And it involves *much more*.
- \*JA** Television demands participation and involvement in depth of the whole being. It will not work as a background. It engages you.
- MM** Under electric conditions, there can be no privacy.
- JA** Huh?

## T H E R A P S O N G

( T H E R E V O L U T I O N H A S B E E N T E L E V I S E D )

**MM** Hello I'm Marshall McLuhan, Hello I'm Marshall McLuhan, Hello I'm  
Marshall McLuhan, Are you NEW here?

The CITY no longer exists, except as a cultural ghost for tourists.

The PEASANT was always a suburban parasite. The farmer no longer  
exists.

The METROPOLIS today is a classroom. The classroom an obsolete  
detention home.

The metropolis is OBSOLETE. Ask the Army.

Until WRITING was invented, we lived in acoustic space, where the

Eskimo now lives: boundless, directionless, horizonless, the

dark of the mind, the world of emotion, primordial intuition,

terror. SPEECH is a social chart of this dark bog.

SPEECH structures the abyss of mental and acoustic space,

shrouding the race; it is a cosmic, invisible architecture of the

human dark. Speak -that -I may -see -you.

THESE FIVE KINGS DID A KING TO DEATH

WRITING turned a spotlight on the high, dim Sierras of speech;

writing was the visualization of acoustic space. It lit up the dark.

A goose's quill put an end to talk, abolished mystery, gave architecture and towns, brought roads and armies, bureaucracies. It was the basic metaphor with which the cycle of CIVILIZATION began, the step from the dark into the light of the mind.

The hand that filled a paper built a city.

The handwriting is on the celluloid walls of Hollywood; the Age of Writing has passed.

Gutenberg made all history SIMULTANEOUS: the transportable book brought the world of the dead into the space of the gentleman's library; the telegraph brought the world of the living to the workman's breakfast table.

The MECHANIZATION of writing mechanized the visual-acoustic metaphor on which all civilization rests; Telephone, gramophone, and RADIO returns us to the dark of the mind, to the invasions from Mars and Orson Welles; it mechanizes the well of loneliness that is acoustic space: the human heart-throb put on a PA system provides a well of loneliness in which anyone can drown. Movies and TV complete the cycle of mechanization of the human sensorium. The new media are not bridges between man and nature: they are nature.

Break, Break, Breakdowns of varying degrees



By surpassing writing, we have regained our WHOLENESS, not on a national or or cultural, but cosmic, plane. We have evoked a super-civilized sub-primitive man.

NOBODY yet knows the language inherent in the new technological culture; we are all deaf-blind mutes in terms of the new situation.

We are back in acoustic space. We begin again to structure the primordial feelings and emotions from which 3000 years of literacy divorced us.

*Hands have no tears to flow.*

## T H E D R A M A

**MM** What's that buzzing? This upheaval generates great pain and identity loss. The whole man became fragmented man. It literally works over and saturates and molds and transforms every sense ratio, diminishing the role of the senses of hearing and touch and taste and smell. The sky is falling in. A mind and a personality, might be freed from the limitations and risks of a particular physical body. Mental breakdowns of varying degrees . What's that buzzing?

**JA** All new technologies bring on the cultural blues, just as the old ones evoke phantom pain after they have disappeared

**MM** I haven't seen you before, are you new here.

**JA** The only way you can reach people is to hurt them. You really have to cut very close to the bone. It's like surgery

**MM** What's that buzzing?

**JA** The artist has been an alien and an outcast in the Western world until recently. No so in the Orient, where the exact reverse has been the case for many centuries. But the Oriental world is a world that was never dedicated to fragmented or specialist stress on the visual sense. Art has been considered the primary mode of adjustment to the environment.

**MM** What's that buzzing?

**JA** It is in us that God meets with nature and yesterday parts with tomorrow.  
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.

**MM** What is happening

**JA** A headache is a million dollar idea waiting to get born.

**MM** Can't go home again.

**KM** What is that buzzing?

**JA** I don't know what's inside; maybe it's nothing. I just start to work. I  
grope, I listen, I test, I accept and discard. I try out different sequences  
until the tumblers fall and the doors swing open.

**KM** You don't have to tell a story.

**JA** The first right of every man in civilized society is the right to be protected  
against the consequences of his own stupidity. 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 is  
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.

**KM** There is no new world order, only new world chaos. We may consider the  
life of every human being as an unrelenting movement from childhood on,  
through the phases of youth, maturity, and old age. The past of every  
individual undergoes constant transformations in his or her memory and

more often than not it acquires the features of an irretrievable land made more and more strange by the flow of time. Thus the difference between a displacement in space and in time is somewhat blurred. We can well imagine an old expatriate who, meditating on the country of his youth, realizes that he is separated from it not only by expanse, but also by the wrinkles on his face and gray hair, marks left by a severe border guard, time. What then is exile

if, in this sense, everybody shares that condition. Mental breakdowns of varying degrees. What's that buzzing? WHAT'S THAT BUZZING?

## WHAT'S THAT BUZZING?

**JB** Numb, numb, numb, numb, numb, numb, numb, numb, numb, numb, numb,  
numb, numb, numb, numb, numb, numb, numb, numb, numb, numb

**EL** Nothing is closer to us. We can miss it as easily as we overlook a pair of eyeglasses on the bridge of the nose or a contact lens on the cornea. Say good-bye and! A simple operation performed under local anesthesia will do away with both of them forever. We do not even realize when we are trapped in our minds and -

**MM** Hello, I'm. . . I haven't seen you before. Are you new here?

**EL** Suppose you want to visit a tropical island

**MM** In the tribal world the senses of touch, taste hearing and smell were developed for very practical reasons, to a much higher level than the strictly visual

**EL** When the real is no longer what it used to be, nostalgia assumes its full meaning.

**MM** Everything is changing - you, your family, your neighborhood, your education, your government, your relation to "the others."

**EL** Today there is no past.

**MM** The eye - it cannot choose but see; we cannot bid the ear be still; our bodies feel, where'er they be, against or with our will.

**EL** This is no cynical observation, but a simple fact that artists are the only people who take the trouble to understand our environments. The Symbolists taught me, starting with Poe, that in all situations the *effects* come before the *causes*..

**MM** Why is man so unhappy he wants to change his world?

**EL** Where are we when software architects shape the datascape into endless mazes of light attracting us like moths to a flame.

**MM** This problem is doubly acute today because man must, as a simple survival strategy, become aware of what is happening to him despite the attendant pain of such comprehension. The fact that he has not done so in this age of electronics is what has made this also the age of anxiety. But despite our self-protective escape mechanisms, the total-field awareness engendered by electronic media is enabling us - indeed, compelling us - to grope toward a consciousness of the unconscious, toward a realization that technology is an extension of our own bodies.

**EL** What's that buzzing?

## M C L U H A N ' S   A R I A

**MM** What is happening?

What is happening...

There...what is happening?

There...there...what is happening...

There is...what is...

There is no...what is...

There is...happening...

What is happening...

There is no...is no...is happening...is no...is no...

There is no...there is no...

There is no in...there is no in...no in...

There is no in..happening...

In happening...

Is no in...

Is no in...in...inev...inevita...inevita...table...happening...

There is...there is...what is happening?

There is no inev...there is no inev...

There is no inevitable..is happening...

Happening...ing...ing is...ing is...

There is no inevitability as...

No inevitability as...no inevitability as...

Inevitability as...as..as...as long...

As long as..as as long as...as as as long as...

Long as there...long as there...

There is no inevitability as long as there...

As long as there is...

Is...is...is....is...is...is...

What is happening...is...is..is...

Hap...is hap...is hap...hap...hap...hap...hap...hap...

There is no...inev...itab...il...it...y...a...z...

Long...asz...there...isza...will..a...

Will...a will...a...a...a...wi...wi...wi...wi...will..

Ing...ling...ling...ingne...ingne...

Ingness...ingnest...ingnest....ingnest...

T...t...t...to...to...to...to...to...CON...TEM...PLA...TE..

What is ha...ha...ha...ha...pening...

What is...

What...

Wha...wha...wha...wha...wha...wha...wha...wha...



# TECHNO - BREAKDOWN

## T H E F U T U R E

- JB** Imagine the world turning a little faster.
- KM** It won't be necessary to be computer literate. The computer is learning to understand natural language.
- JA** You can control everything by telephone from anywhere in the world.
- KM** You can pay any bill to anyone, any time, at any banking center.
- JA** Computers will become so small, specialized, disposable, and commonplace that they will fade into the background of our daily lives, just like pencils.
- KM** Computers will cook our food and perfect our recipes.
- EL** Operate a computer simply by looking at it.
- JA** Send a fax from the beach.
- KM** You will look into a computer screen and see reality.
- JB** People will stop looking at their computer screens and start gazing into them.
- JA** You can search through thousands of periodicals in minutes.
- KM** You will be able to watch any show at any time you want.
- EL** With 500 channels, you'll have fifteen thousand half hour TV shows a day to choose from.

- JA** Kids will be able to control the characters in cartoons with a joy stick.
- JB** Use remote control pads to play along with Jeopardy and choose which camera angles to watch during baseball games.
- KM** The next time you watch “Cheers” pull up a barstool next to Norm and Cliffy. Bring your own beer.
- EL** A tiny TV hooks onto your eyeglasses, or is worn with a headset.
- JA** Multisensory, multi-media entertainment.
- JB** You might call up a flight-simulator game and have a dog fight in 3-D with your friend across town - In real time.
- EL** Visit faraway places, or even different eras, without leaving your living room.
- KM** Visit a prehistoric world, a western world, a future world. You are instantly transported to that time and place.
- JA** You also get to choose the life form you wish to be when you visit these virtual worlds.
- KM** Create your individualized version of “Terminator 12.”
- JB** You may choose to see events from another perspective.
- EL** Two way television.
- JA** Voice activated typewriters.

- KM** Telebrain sets.
- EL** Global video celebrations.
- KM** Global tele-seminars.
- JB** Global tele-democracy.
- EL** Global tele-economies.
- JA** Deodorant underwear.
- EL** Mood suits.
- KM** Toilets that weigh you, take your blood pressure, and analyze your urine and stool.
- EL** Head cooling pillows
- KM** Non fattening fat.
- EL** No calorie sugar.
- JA** Indefinite life expectancy.
- KM** Renewable body organs.
- JA** Non flesh implants.
- JB** Modular alterable bodies.
- EL** Limitless time.

- KM** Self cleaning houses.
- JA** Solar powered air conditioners.
- EL** Self checkout at supermarkets.
- JB** Electronic money.
- EL** Flying cars.
- JA** Asexual reproduction.
- KM** Round refrigerators
- JB** Microwave clothes dryers.
- JA** Hand scanning locks.
- JB** Plug in homes.
- EL** Instant homes.
- JA** Computers that can read lips.
- EL** Electronic communities.
- KM** Museum cities.
- JA** Temporary jobs, fluid careers, nonspecialization, multiprofessions, automatic universal living expense, leisure.
- KM** Post-humans, trans-humans, tele-humans, cyborgs, bionics, transexuals.
- EL** Genetic redesigns of body and mind.

**JA** Feeders implanted in the brain to provide continuous automatic nourishment.

**KM** Better self-styled human genes.

**JB** Cybernated production.

**JA** Speech compression mechanisms.

**EL** Instant mobile campuses.

**JA** Computer regulated seasons.

**JB** Inforetrievals.

**JA** Telefactories.

**EL** Teleshopping

**KM** Telebanking

**JB** Instant playlands

**JA** The bulk of the human population . . .

**EL** will be moved off planet.

**JB** The Earth will be . . .

**KM** a tourist attraction.