

Massaging Ourselves to Sleep
McLuhan and the Difficulties of Praxis

Leif Penzendorfer

A Thesis
in
The Department
of
Communication Studies

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts at

Concordia University

Montreal, Quebec, Canada

April 2015

© Leif Penzendorfer, 2015

CONCORDIA UNIVERSITY
School of Graduate Studies

This is to certify that the thesis prepared

By: Leif Penzendorfer

Entitled: Massaging Ourselves to Sleep: McLuhan and the Difficulties of Praxis

and submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

MA in Media Studies

complies with the regulations of the University and meets the accepted standards with respect to originality and quality.

Signed by the final examining committee:

Andra McCartney Chair

Charles Acland Examiner

Fenwick McKelvey Examiner

William J. Buxton Supervisor

Approved by _____
Chair of Department or Graduate Program Director

Dean of Faculty

Date _____

Abstract

Massaging Ourselves to Sleep: McLuhan and the Difficulties of Praxis

Leif Penzendorfer

The purpose of this thesis is to determine the extent to which Marshall McLuhan's performance of his media texts influenced their form and the ways in which he disseminated his message. From *The Gutenberg Galaxy* to *Understanding Media* to *the medium is the MESSAGE* his style changed significantly. Throughout much of his career he was driven both by his foundational aphorism that the medium is the message, and also by his desire to create a discipline, that of communication/media studies, from the tools he had crafted in order to probe his ideas. By looking at the ways in which his ideas came together, through agency and praxis, and how he put them into play by crafting his texts to resemble his theories, I aim to both understand his concepts better and also show how he became a performer targeted at the media that were presenting his ideas, from print to radio to television. A driving question of this thesis is why were McLuhan, and his theories, dismissed for so long?

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to

Dr. Bill Buxton, for getting me to the finish line
and
Dr. Peter van Wyck, for getting me off the starting line

Adam van Sertima, whose whips kept me cracking
and without whom this could never have come to be
and
Joshua Davidson, for asking the interesting questions

To my parents, whose unconditional support went above
and beyond: you had no idea why I needed to do this
but you didn't let that stop me

To Céline: for not burying me in the long grass

and to all the rest of you,
whether you know it or not,
you helped!

Table of Contents

Introduction		1
One	An Agent Through the Epochs	9
1.1	<i>Moved to Act: Nietzsche and agency</i>	10
1.1.1	<i>A Complexity of Action: agency and determinism</i>	12
1.2	<i>Probing Our Words: an allusion of meaning</i>	23
1.3	<i>Building McLuhan: the tools of an epoch</i>	28
Two	Feeling Our Actions	33
2.1	<i>Understanding Media: a toolset</i>	34
2.2	<i>McLuhan Comes to his Senses</i>	40
2.3	<i>A Limb Too Far: extension and amputation</i>	45
2.4	<i>A Poiesis of Thought: agent media</i>	56
Three	Ricorso - a McLuhan Heuristic	61
3.1	<i>Performer and Performance</i>	67
3.1.1	<i>A Heuristic Loses its Marker</i>	72
3.2	<i>Ricorso: the spiral nature of tool formation</i>	75
Four	Take Two Tetrads and Call Me in the Morning	78
4.1	<i>Four Sides to Every Story</i>	79
4.2	<i>The Mosaic of Massage</i>	83
4.3	<i>Concluding Remarks</i>	88
Bibliography		91
Appendix		90
	Figure 1: Barthes' second order semiology	
	Figure 2: ricorso spiral, first without then with overlaps	

Introduction

Marshall McLuhan was a puzzling figure, and his prognostications and claims were often outrageous and enigmatic as well. When Marshall McLuhan made his most famous proclamation “the medium is the message” in 1964s *Understanding Media*, he was well ahead of society’s ability to understand what he was getting at. With our present computing and internet technologies, many of his proclamations can be analyzed more easily than would have been possible in his own time. These proclamations include those that he, and others, attempted to perform as actors, such as *the medium is the MESSAGE*¹ and *Counterblast*, as well as his various television and radio appearances. In this thesis, I aim to translate some of his ideas into more standard rhetorical and argumentative form. McLuhan was a prognosticator, a performer, a scholar, and a confounder of wisdoms, among other things. But what would happen if one applied McLuhan’s ideas to McLuhan’s own works? How does *the medium is the MESSAGE* hold up under the scrutiny of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*? By working through some of his main theories, I will show how they apply, or at least how McLuhan believed they applied, in crafting his non-academic works.

In this thesis I will look at Marshall McLuhan, his ideas, and his performance of them through how agency shapes, and becomes blocked by, the media we engage with in our daily lives. These notions are analyzed from a position of reflexivity, a tautological relationship between cause and effect. It will be an exploration of the shape of the content of the message, that is an attempt to feel out the containers that shape our perceptions of our media. I will engage with the underpinning structures of much of McLuhan’s approach to analyzing media. This will

¹ This book has several editions, each one with a different formatting and subtitling. The edition of *The Medium is the Message* that I have is written entirely in lower case except for the upper case *MESSAGE*, and is missing the subtitle, hence I have written it out in accordance with my edition.

Introduction

be a mix of a literature review while also attempting to probe McLuhan's theoretical foundations. I will attempt to forge a new path, re-interpreting McLuhan through my own background much as he did interpreting mythology, such as his take on the Narcissus myth and many other aspects of his learning and heuristics; McLuhan used familiar objects in unfamiliar ways in order to make the reader aware that their interpretation had been pre-formed for them and that there was more than one perspective analysis available. He tended to blend implicit and explicit references throughout his work, making it difficult to know from where he was gleaning his ideas. Often the works of Harold Innis, Pierre de Chardin, and Walter Ong are explicit in studies of McLuhan. However, while these theorists might frame his motivation, much of the work of Heidegger and Nietzsche help more in coming to terms with his approach. In particular, their work through agency and tool use are important markers in viewing McLuhan's heuristic attempts with *the medium is the MESSAGE* and *Counterblast*.

It is the man himself, however, who shaped a media theory and started a discipline, and he did so by being unorthodox in his approach and pragmatic in his performances. As he progressed from *The Gutenberg Galaxy* to *Understanding Media* and to *the medium is the MESSAGE*, one can take note of his changing style, as he came to rely more and more on his discoveries to drive his presentation of those insights. McLuhan attempted to put his theories into practice, he preached what he practiced. This caused consternation in his native academic environment as his rhetoric was not targeted at them. To teach his principles he became a performer in order to be an example of his ideas. This was something he was both born to be, thanks to the performance aspirations of his mother, and something he developed into. He had a goal and a driving need to achieve it; he also had several tools at his disposal: he was an

Introduction

academic, a student of literature, and the son of an elocutionist. He was an actor, not a reactor, and it guided his words and deeds. And depending on the context of the analysis, his success or failure change completely. In both academe and the public sphere of North America during the 1960s he was a prophet, in the 1970s he was a charlatan, and by the 1990s he was hailed as the patron saint of *Wired* magazine.

Since this thesis focuses so heavily not only on poesis and agency, but on specific exemplary texts (in particular the book and audio recording of *the medium is the MESSAGE*), the readers' understanding of this material would be enhanced if they engaged with both versions of *MESSAGE* while reading this thesis. Another note is that McLuhan was a very hit-and-miss prognosticator. However there was both method to his madness and a discernible trend in his skills, which weakened whenever he became precise in terms of a medium (e.g. the car) or closer to his own time and into the future (e.g. TV and computers). McLuhan was aware of this, emphasizing that he was "probing" rather than seeking answers or crafting theories. "The various ideas and concepts introduced in the commentaries are intended to provide positions from which to examine the exhibits. They are not conclusions in which anybody is expected to rest but are intended merely as points of departure." [McLuhan, 2008: vii] Regardless, he attempted to work in his own primary medium, print, and the results give an intriguing insight into his ideas. More importantly, it was his performance, both of his public self and the manner in which his work became more performative, that defined what his ideas meant, to academe and the public at large.

Introduction

CHAPTER 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

In chapter 1, I explore the relationship between McLuhan's media theory and the concept of agency. Seen through the theoretical frameworks supplied by Nietzsche, particularly agency and the will, McLuhan's own approach to the effectiveness of media impacts becomes more evident. It is also important to see whether or not McLuhan is a technological determinist as he has been accused of and why that is or is not the case. If we have no agency, there is little value in studying the effects of media, since their impact is a *fait accompli*.

I also discuss the impact of language on McLuhan and the ways in which he attempted to communicate his lessons. Language is made up of building blocks that are metaphors, and the semiotics/semiology of Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles Saunders Peirce help to explain how McLuhan used language to play with itself and reveal patterns in the effects of the media we use. Nietzsche understood language as flexible and arbitrary, believing its role to be that of creative outlet and object of study for media influence. With his concept of the *will* as a site of resistance and an opportunity for agency, Nietzsche offered us the opportunity to choose the manner in which particular phenomena, in McLuhan's case media, affect our lives, and McLuhan showed us how to be agents in the face of our media.

It is in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* that McLuhan comes up with his concept of the epochs, eras in which certain media have held sway on the actions and perceptions of societies. The Gutenberg epoch, named after the inventor of the printing press, was notable for its mechanical and linear understanding of reality and our perceptions of it. It was an "eye" culture, and one that birthed modernism, a belief in progress, and a knowable universe.

CHAPTER 2: Feeling Our Actions

In chapter 2, I begin to discuss how McLuhan viewed the role of the senses in forming our perceptions and thus the impact that media have on those senses that directly impact the ways in which we see. They are a core element of McLuhan's concept of sense extension, and from sense extension to amputation to sense ratios. If the senses are the intermediaries between our central nervous system and the signals of the material world, then anything that changes how we perceive elements that they pass on to us will change how we respond. It is not just what we respond to but how we respond to it that is shaped by the media we use.

In *Understanding Media (UM)*, McLuhan begins to provide us with tools for use in dealing with media. From the probe to Gestalt psychology, the role of language becomes clearer in his use of aphorism. *UM* is the first of his writings that hadn't been written purely as an academic piece; it is the source of many of his well known aphorisms such as "the medium is the message," and "the global village," as well as his discussion about sense ratios. Slowly McLuhan's performance starts to unfold, and to change its target audience.

Building on Nietzsche's theories of agency, Heidegger's concept of poiesis is useful in coming to terms with McLuhan's "building" of probes. The relationship between agency and poiesis is that poiesis requires agency in order to perform its role. Without agency, it is reactionary and falls into a more techne-like state of making, where the technology is its own *raison d'être*. This distinction between two modes of making plays well with a psychological concept that McLuhan likes, the aforementioned Gestalt psychology, a concept further developed

Introduction

in chapter 4. Poiesis offers a way of seeing McLuhan's work as he himself saw it: as an engagement with our world instead of merely reacting to it.

CHAPTER 3: Ricorso - a McLuhan Heuristic

In chapter 3, I examine the ways in which McLuhan's performance of his concepts blossomed under the cooperative publishing efforts of two print designers Quentin Fiore and Jerome Agel, as well as the marketing team of Gerald Feigen and Howard Gossage. Fiore and Agel helped McLuhan craft his ideas and probes into tautological wholes. It wasn't circular logic that was being used, rather it was that the argument of media effects used the given medium as the medium of analysis in order to demonstrate directly the ways in which the given medium impacts the consumer if the reader/listener/viewer took the time to figure it out.

Because McLuhan was also attempting to build an academic discipline out of his research and because much of what he was learning and teaching involved various different audiences, he began incorporating teaching methods into his work and his performance of it. I look at how McLuhan used heuristics to attempt to get his ideas across by subtly manipulating the media he was presenting his material through to more accurately reflect the changes that these media wrought on their users. This was McLuhan the performer and it had not sprung from nowhere. His mother, Elsie, was influential in forming him as a performer. Her elocutionary passions had infected Marshall as well.

The mosaic method of reading that McLuhan first introduced in *The Mechanical Bride*, though didn't codify as the mosaic until *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, is an attempt to access a

Introduction

printing-press technology with the tools of the electric epoch. By skimming across connections, like following the nodes in a spiderweb, the mosaic method mimicked the impacts of our present electric epoch, much like the way we surf across websites on hyperlinks. This is in direct contrast to accessing the book “cover to cover” in linear fashion from beginning to end. And like other media, such as the train and the clock, it changes our relationship with time.

McLuhan was fascinated with our changing relationship with time. In particular, he was fascinated with the recursive nature of time as proposed by Giambattista Vico, a late 17th- and early 18th-century philosopher. Vico's ricorso was a spiral conception of time that repeated itself endlessly. Yet it never remained exactly the same; at no overlapping point, where “what’s old is new again” are things the way they were. They are subtly changed, and those changes can be gleaned. Gestalt psychology is the tool that McLuhan uses to reveal these subtle changes.

Chapter 4: Take Two Tetrads and Call Me in the Morning

In chapter 4, I examine McLuhan’s main tool, the tetrad, and his way of understanding it, Gestalt psychology. Gestalt psychology is made up of figure and ground. Figure is the area of interest, and the much larger ground, is liminal background. Gestalt psychology is thus a context-based method for looking at objects and their relations. McLuhan finds that media require a teasing out to place them in the visible and analyzable area of figure and uses the tool of the tetrad to do just that.

After a lot of ground work, McLuhan’s tetrads come front and centre. This tool, or in McLuhan’s terms *probe*, would have been the culmination of his life’s work and was finished

Introduction

nearly a decade after his death by his son Eric in *The Laws of Media*. The tetrad focuses on the elements that become foregrounded and backgrounded by different media. Its four elements are to enhance, obsolesce, retrieve, and to reverse into, and should be viewed as simultaneous. Its presentation was relegated to the printed page. Thus it is a media tool based on the electric epoch and acoustic space and the mosaic method displayed in a medium of the Gutenberg epoch.

With *the medium is the MESSAGE*, seen holistically as a single entity made up of the book and the record album, McLuhan not only achieved his ultimate tautological work but also became it. His public persona had, by this time, become completely intertwined with his attempt to craft a discipline and his method of teaching his media theory. But was he successful? Viewing him from within his own time and from a North American perspective gives us a different answer than one derived from looking at his global impact today. In 1970s North American academe and general public, he was a failure. Today, globally, in art and academe, he is a great success.

CHAPTER ONE: An Agent Through the Epochs

Marshall McLuhan was a study in contrasts, as was his work. In order to come to grips with what he was attempting to say and how he was attempting to say it, I will look at several of his key concepts, using the work of other theorists to clear up the hermeneutics of his intellectual origins, comparing his ideas with the ways in which he presented them. In this chapter, that means a look at agency, language, and *The Gutenberg Galaxy*.

I begin with the concept of agency. Nietzsche and McLuhan were closer in approach and understanding than with what McLuhan would likely have been comfortable. Both considered humans capable of free will, but also realized that the vast majority of us could not exercise this free will due to a lack of awareness. Nietzsche, as a philologist, was aware of the ways in which languages function. With his concept of the *will* he provided a site of resistance and opportunity for agency that allows for a more generous reading of McLuhan as not being a technological determinist.

After Nietzsche's contributions, I will be looking at the aphorism and its sign system of language. McLuhan uses language, in particular through the medium of print, to impart his message. His tool of choice? The aphorism. The aphorism can be seen as a container of sorts, one that simultaneously conceals the contents while allowing for a fuzzy view of the frame. However, it is couched in language, and that brings its own issues that need to be understood before attempting to unpack what any given aphorism might represent. Semiology and semiotics are used to look closer at how language already functions as metaphor and Roland Barthes provides an example of how a medium's frame might disappear from view, leaving only the

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

message visible. The visibility of the medium fades from sight when we concentrate on the message, receding from figure to ground, an aspect of Gestalt psychology that is explored in chapter 3.

In *The Gutenberg Galaxy (GG)* McLuhan crafted a work that bridged several technologies, or media, in its creation. The presentation of the *GG* was, as a book, an object of the printing press that was also its subject matter. However, the format of the text was that of a manuscript, a link to his Catholicism. According to McLuhan, all three of these technologies were of different “epochs” or media ages; each has a different impact on those who engaged with them, or in McLuhan’s terms, are immersed in their environment and anti-environment.

1.1 *Moved to Act: Nietzsche and agency*

McLuhan never really mentioned Nietzsche other than disparagingly. It is appropriate, then, that I find much in McLuhan harking back to Nietzsche’s understanding of agency and the individual’s ability to act and absorb their environs. Realizing the impact of our sensory hierarchy matters little if we cannot act on our knowledge. And without a reason to be agents, we are unlikely to become them. Particularly interesting are Nietzsche’s concepts about the will,² and the difference between *being* and *becoming*. Whereas Descartes claimed that the will was the one thing of which we had a good grasp, Nietzsche claimed it was something about which we understood nothing. For Nietzsche, the will is mysterious. With respect to *becoming*, he was also concerned that people treated themselves a bit like spreadsheets: they took snapshots of their

² Nietzschean *will* and the *will to power* are often conflated, and share much in common. Both are addressed in this thesis.

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

lives and then defined their states as unchanging evidence of their *being*. This, according to Nietzsche, is nonsense. At no point are we ever a given thing, such as “just” or “foolish” but rather we are an amalgam of constantly shifting actions and reactions, from *willing*, and that we are more accurately continually in a changing state of *becoming*. Thus, for Nietzsche, *being* is a dangerous illusion. In a letter between Nietzsche and the writer/composer Köselitz, the latter remarking on Nietzsche’s switch to a typewriter on which he composed his work, Köselitz noted that “my ‘thoughts’ in music and language often depend on the quality of pen and paper.” To which Nietzsche responded, “Our writing equipment takes part in the forming of our thoughts.” [Kittler, 1999: iii] This is a sort of poiesis of tools, that is, the creative ability of the things we use, which can best be understood through the concept of agency or free will.

Agency tends to be discussed as action or intentionality in most Arts disciplines outside of philosophy, and the way agency is discussed in philosophy often has little to offer media studies. It is, however, fundamental for understanding McLuhan. Specifically, it not only relates to accusations of his being a technological determinist — a claim he refuted directly in *Understanding Media* — but also to his use of aphorisms. Yet agency is a slippery thing and is hard to pin down. We have the possibility, but not the probability, of being an agent at any given time; we *may* be agents, but we rarely *are* agents. I have named this “layered agency” in order to provide an idea of its complexity and contextual dynamism and to lend shades of grey to a concept that is often seen to be black and white but which is rather different, and not unlike quantum superposition: your state and your agency cannot both be pinpointed simultaneously. This is similar to Nietzschean *becoming* in that snapshots of time do not incorporate all one was

nor all one may become. Thus, using poiesis and layered agency, we can begin to discuss the practice of theory.

1.1.1 A Complexity of Action: agency and determinism

McLuhan's claim that we can resist the impacts of media only if we are aware of them is more than his attempt to refute claims of technological determinism that had been levelled against him. For McLuhan, understanding meant the opportunity of overcoming, core to both the *will* and agency. Any discussion of agency — and by extension a medium's relation to it — that does not include the work of Nietzsche is automatically hobbled; much of his vast body of work delves into the manners in which we control and orient our energies to perform tasks. In particular, his writings that were collected into the *Will to Power*,³ focus on it. For Nietzsche, the will to power was the desire and implementation, that is actioned desire, to overcome oneself in sublimating active power into creative power. For action may only come about through power and willing. This is also the case with his expression of nihilism. Nihilism exists in two general forms; that of the Russian nihilists which descends into depression from emptiness and at a lack of foundational reality, and that of Nietzsche, who approached the lack of framework that nihilism championed in order to construct a reality in accordance with individual wants. This is a blending of his concepts of agency and the will to power, and is, as such, foundational to both

³ *The Will to Power* is not actually a book of Nietzsche's, but rather a collection of his unpublished writings put together posthumously. There is much debate as to whether this work should be counted as his. For myself, I side with its use, with caveats: it's unedited, unreviewed, and not a published book by Friedrich Nietzsche. Yet it is, clearly, his work in sound-bite and raw form and no less valuable in creating dialogue. This is in line with much of McLuhan's work as well.

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

McLuhan's proposal that our media shape us and that we have the capability of overcoming their effects.

Nietzsche was a nihilist in the sense that he did not discount everything that exists, such as the "Total rejection of current religious beliefs or moral principles" with "An extreme form of scepticism, involving the denial of all existence" [OED], instead he held that that which we perceive to be real is merely a perception and not that which actually exists. "Nietzsche believed that only by honestly facing the stark truth that there is no truth, no goal, no value or meaning in itself, could one pave the way for a real intellectual liberation and a revaluation of all values." [Golomb and Wistrich, 2002: 4] His nihilism was not a strangling of the purpose of man, but instead a creation of purpose, a liberation, for as he said, "... a *will to nothingness*, an aversion to life, a rebellion against the most fundamental pre-requisites of life, but it is and remains a *will!*... man still prefers to will *nothingness*, than *not* will..." [Pearson and Large, 2006: 435] so that the will, and not the absence of everything, is simultaneously the goal and the means to achieve it.

There is a motive force outside of the simple mechanical aspect seen by science and that agency (currently discounted in North American philosophy) is of defining moment to Nietzsche. He has a bi-perspectivist take that can be applied to the majority of his ideas, namely that there is a causal or mechanistic view and an equal and as-important *Aktivität*⁴ perspective that is more in line with an agency, as of a purpose or function. In this he was an advocate of the "big

⁴ "Nietzsche is arguing that it is insufficient to account for life solely in terms of an exogenous mechanism such as adaptation to external circumstances. Such a conception deprives life of its most important dimension, which he names *Aktivität* (activity). It does this, he contends, by overlooking the primacy of the "spontaneous, expansive, aggressive [...] formative forces" that provide life with new directions and new interpretations, and from which adaptation takes place only once these forces have had their effect." [Pearson and Large, 2006: 308]

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

picture,” not focusing on the relevance of one perspective at the expense of another, much as McLuhan kept a distinction between content and form. That is, for Nietzsche, there was a clear distinction between the mechanical cause-and-effect structures of reality and the motive forces that engaged those structures.

Power is an important element in understanding Nietzsche’s work. The German language allows for many kinds of power, often closely but never completely faithfully translated into English. Although I am speaking of power versus force/might versus violence, more precise translations of *Macht* v *Kraft* will be of benefit and so I will give as accurate a translation for each as I can and then use the original German words to denote and link with Nietzsche's concepts of power. *Macht*, from the verb *Machen*, i.e., to make, urges us to see power as a creative force and therefore inherently connotes a guiding intellect or formative influence. It is also, however used with respect to that power seen with respect to a force of arms, such as the *Wehrmacht* (the Army) or as influence such as in politics. *Kraft*, or force, also has the not inconsequential aspect of the word might, and so can be seen from at least two aspects/ perspectives, namely that of a simple motive force such as exists within any engine (in fact the German word for truck is *Leichtkraftwagen* (*LKW*) – literally Light Power Vehicle) and that of simple physical strength.

The distinction between *Kraft* and *Macht* is crucial to any understanding of Nietzsche's mature doctrine of power: it represents his philosophical emphasis on the transition from physical force to mental and spiritual power. Nietzsche's notion of *Kraft* refers to a primitive energy, to a latent and indefinite state that functions only when activated within a concrete situation. The transition from *Kraft* to *Macht* is thus a transition from the potentiality of force to its actualization. [Golomb, 2002: 20-21]

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

To which, I think, Nietzsche would disagree; what is missing from this work is the idea that *Kraft* and *Macht* are two sides of the same coin and that one requires both to be truly human. *Macht* is as primitive, and latent, and indefinite as *Kraft*. It is in the state of constant becoming that *Macht* gains its distinction from *Kraft*, “The authentic selfhood of the *Übermensch*, like that of the “exceptional Greeks”...is achieved by one's ability to bring about a “transfiguration of nature,” a purification of the primitive, coarse element of force into refined, creative power.” [Golomb, 2002: 21]

Power is not desired but *willed*, and ““Willing” is not “desiring,” striving, demanding: it is distinguished from these by the affect of *commanding* [emphasis mine].” [Nietzsche, 1968: 347] And although it corresponds to Nietzsche's perspective that a *desire* for power drives those without it, the will to/for power drives all of us from our first moments – and these two “powers” are very different. Nietzsche claims that *Macht* is very susceptible to *Kraft* and it is not that a “constant resource manifests itself” but rather that we find *being* at every stage at which we choose, arbitrarily, to pause our constant state of *becoming*.

Although Nietzsche claims that we are constantly in a state of becoming, we do see ourselves, at any given point in time, as being. And he has no problem with this, except if we believe that we have become something, instead of just seeing ourselves during a slice of time. “The world with which we are concerned is false, ... it is “in flux,” as something in a state of becoming, as a falsehood always changing but never getting near the truth: for – there is no “truth.” To impose upon becoming the character of being – that is the supreme will to power.” [Nietzsche, 1968: 324] This shows Nietzsche's constant duality, his belief in metaphors as useful constructs that are simply *useful constructs* and nothing more, and should not be seen

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

or worshipped as greater than they are. *Macht* is a willing to overcome an opposing force or thing. At any point in time we can say that this has generated us “as we are,” as beings, but it is false to say that this snippet in time is real, since we can never *be*, we are always in a process of *becoming*. “Power and weakness do not signify different quanta but a different direction of the operation of power and distinct modes of derivation and intensification.” [Golomb, 2002: 30] In other words we can see power and weakness as being aspects of (cap-)ability, namely that power and weakness do not exist except as levels of success in willing at any given point in time. When we identify the impacts of media, we can change our “willing,” our agency, from weak to strong, allowing us to resist the desired state of the media.

But he describes how *Macht* is at the whim of *Kraft*, “Compared with him who has tradition on his side and requires no reasons for his actions, the free spirit is always weak, especially in actions; for he is aware of too many motives and points of view and therefore possesses an uncertain and unpracticed hand.” [Golomb, 2002: 32] Again showing that while *Macht* is the goal (or willing towards power, at any rate) there is more than just the difficulty of achieving any individual willing, there is also the issue of *Macht* not being able to stand against *Kraft*, when push comes to shove. Looked at through the lens of the medium being the message, “They are deeply immersed in illusions and dream images; their eye glides only over the surface of things and sees “forms”; their feeling nowhere leads into truth, but contents itself with the reception of stimuli, playing, as it were, a game of blindman's bluff on the backs of things.” [Pearson and Large, 2006: 115] We receive stimuli and treat it as the thing itself, blind to the source of the stimuli.

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

The will to power is something that we should *will* towards, not *strive* towards. Coming from the man that brought us *Beyond Good and Evil*, it would certainly seem strange if there were not positive and negative aspects to each thing of which he speaks. Moreover, there is a way outside the traditional bounds that we, as a people, conceive of, outside of normal morality, a sort of meta-morality if you will, from which nihilists can become agents and construct new moralities.

The transmitted “morality of tradition,” which mechanically and arbitrarily conditions us, is, in fact, anti-individualistic, repressing the genuine personality, making it into a “*dividuum*.” Nietzsche proposes instead an egoistic morality that springs out of positive power and self-expression. [Golomb, 2002: 34]

Nietzschean individuality has less to do with seeing ourselves as a single being, separate from the herd, and runs along his concept of the *Übermensch*, a striving to fulfill ourselves to the utmost.⁵

“Nietzsche constantly rejects “[t]he delusion of a moral world order” and claims that in morality there is “*absolutely no eternal necessity*.” [Golomb, 2002: 39] For if there is no thing that guides us, then we are free to create our own guidance – and that is the core of what nihilism was for Nietzsche; the ability to create/craft out of the viscera around us all manner of social living that was in the best interest of those living in it and not set to some pattern or vague idea of what an external and uncommunicative god-being wished for us. Nihilism was an opportunity *par excellence* to engage agency. *Deus ex machina*, not as diviner of providence but rather as

⁵ “The central ideal of Nietzsche's philosophy was the individual and his freedom to shape his own character and destiny.” [Golomb and Wistrich, 2002: 1] So what, then, would Nietzsche qualify as the individual? “The concepts “individual” and “species” equally false and merely apparent.” [Nietzsche, 1968: 282] He would say that each of us is responsible for ourselves, and that it is this that equates to the individual.

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

both guide *and* giver of free will. Yet Nietzsche realized that man is prone to simply toss aside that which does not work even if it includes that which does work.

So let us take care not to exchange the state of morality to which we are accustomed for a new evaluation of things head over heels and amid acts of violence (*Gewalt*) – no, let us continue to live in it for a long time yet – until... we become aware that *the new evaluation* has acquired predominance within us and the little doses of it to *which we must from now on accustom ourselves* have laid down a new nature in us. [Golomb, 2002: 40]

To don a new morality is no trivial task, neither in the dismissal of the old nor in the mantling of the new. For McLuhan, this new morality has been given to us by our media. That is, unless we are careful and aware.

For Nietzsche, biology is a determinant. This should be distinguished from his concept of agency in that it shapes but does not define action. In particular, the difference is discrete; our agency lies within a band constrained by certain things, the main element of which is biological. The form of the organ, and the change of that form determine the function and also the efficacy and efficiency of the organ to fulfill its role in the body. And this does not simply mean that adding to the organ improves and changes it, but that taking away may have the same result and more-so that the positive and negative features of biological change have nothing to do with whether something is added or taken away but with how the function becomes changed through these additions and deletions. In biological terms, then, the medium is the message.

“The form is fluid, the 'meaning' [Sinn] even more so... It is no different inside any individual organism: every time the whole grows appreciably, the 'meaning' [Sinn] of the individual organs shifts, - sometimes the partial destruction of organs, the reduction in their number... can be a sign of increasing vigour and perfection.” [Pearson and Large, 2006: 417]

Further, “Our most sacred convictions, the unchanging elements in our supreme values, are judgments of our muscles.” [Nietzsche, 1968: 173] He refines this further by delimiting the difference between our bodies and our souls; “Belief in the body is more fundamental than belief

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

in the soul: the latter arose from unscientific reflection on [the agonies of] the body...”, [Nietzsche, 1968: 271] and “Essential: to start from the *body* and employ it as guide. It is the much richer phenomenon, which allows of clearer observation. Belief in the body is better established than belief in the spirit.” [Nietzsche, 1968: 289], and finally, that the spirit can be seen “Along the guiding thread of the body.” [Bittner, 2003: 27] Nietzsche was perfectly clear that the body was a necessary starting point for any analysis of humanity. Likewise, our access to agency, and the body is the point from which McLuhan starts in his own analyses.

The body as starting-point links back to McLuhan’s discussion of the impact of different media influencing how we understand what our sciences tell us. “Any extension, whether of skin, hand, or foot, affects the whole psychic and social complex.” [McLuhan, 1994: 4] Our biologies are a part of us and cannot easily be removed from studies on things that impact human psyches and being. This is further touched on in chapter 2 when discussing the senses.

As per Nietzsche’s bi-perspectivist viewpoint, we can regard biology from a historical and from a use/functional perspective. This difference, between the history, origin, external perspective of a thing and the use, purpose, internal perspective of a thing can be seen when he writes that,

The origin of the emergence of a thing and its ultimate usefulness, its practical application and incorporation into a system of ends, are *toto coelo* separate; that anything in existence, having somehow come about, is continually interpreted anew, requisitioned anew, transformed and redirected to a new purpose by a power superior to it; that everything that occurs in the organic world consists of *overpowering, dominating,...* [Pearson and Large, 2006: 416]

Some exercises of power contribute to self-overcoming, some to self-preservation and some to enhancement, and these include good and bad uses, or more accurately, without value

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

judgement, they simply imply change. More to the point, they define Nietzsche's understanding of agency.

The standpoint of "value" is the standpoint of conditions of preservation and enhancement for complex forms of relative life-duration within the flux of becoming. ... "Forms of domination"; the sphere of that which is dominated continually growing or periodically increasing and decreasing according to the favorability or unfavorability of circumstances (nourishment). [Nietzsche, 1968: 380]

This sense of domination, an overcoming of that which sits in opposition, is critical to Nietzsche's ideas of the will to power. It is a form of agency. And where does a world without agency exist for Nietzsche? Nowhere. For it is as a process of activity that adaptation occurs and there is no place for adaptation outside of agency. Yet it is no guarantee that we are agents, only that we have the power, that is the *will*, to be such. As McLuhan notes, "We can, if we choose, think things out before we put them out." [McLuhan, 1994: 49]

The will, according to Nietzsche, was a complex thing well beyond the understanding of man, something that was hard-wired as a tool of overcoming. It is more than just an action within a psychological system, but a biological constraint as much as a psychological one. Again, the constraint is of kind, not of degree; a shaper and not definer of action. Nietzsche considered the will to be both emotive and cognitive; it is active, feeling, and intelligent.

Third, the will is not merely a complex of feelings and thoughts, it is above all an emotion, and in fact the emotion of command. ... In any given case, we both command and obey, and when we obey we know the feelings of coercion, pressure, oppression, resistance, and agitation that begin immediately after the act of will. [Pearson and Large, 2006: 320]

There is a biological basis to willing. "...assuming that one could derive all organic functions from this will to power... The world as it is seen from the inside, the world defined and described by its 'intelligible character' – would be simply 'will to power' and that alone." [Pearson and Large, 2006: 330] But the will to power is more than this, it is more than

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

just an emotion and just a function of our biology. It is a constant need to increase that power which we perceive to control and can be seen from the perspective of both a function and a cause.

The will to power as *life*... what man wants, what every smallest part of a living organism wants, is an increment of power. Striving for this gives rise to both pleasure and displeasure; out of that will man seeks resistance, needs something to oppose him. Un-pleasure, as an inhibition of his will to power, is thus a normal fact, the normal ingredient of everything that happens in the organic world, and man does not avoid it but instead has constant need of it: every conquest, every pleasurable feeling, everything that happens presupposes a resistance overcome. [Nietzsche, 1968: 367]

For every being, every structure within them fights towards a freedom that only power affords – for it is specifically powerlessness that constricts the perception of freedom. The feeling of power, however, can mask times when we have no agency. Since it is a system with a sole aim, overcoming, it is blind to meaning and thus can be a victim of its own success, hiding the reasonableness of the attempt to overcome. In this resides a corollary of capitalism: there is no ethics when the bottom line is the sole qualifier of success.

Nietzsche speaks of two perspectives, the causal and the Aktivität. But he does not subscribe to a simple bi-perspectival viewpoint, just as he never subscribes to even his own views as being more than what he is capable of demonstrating *at a given time about a given thing*, much like McLuhan claims with respect to his probes. He mentions elsewhere in his works that “There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* a perspective 'knowing'; the *more* affects we allow to speak about a thing, the *more* eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our 'concept' of the thing, our 'objectivity'.” [Pearson and Large, 2006: 427] In this he is simply saying 'there are at least two sides to every story – find as many as you can!' Nietzsche's *On Truth and Lies in an extra-moral sense* is a work that speaks to much of this: truth, deception, and the lure of illusion; Nietzsche is blaming language and metaphor for

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

our belief in singular truths. He is seeking context, to find the ground that we have hidden in our submission to the figure.

Overcoming, the goal of willing, the achievement of a given power. To what end do we pursue or engage in these actions?

“What is the purpose of self-overcoming?” he could have succinctly answered, “To achieve maturity and power.” In this respect the will to power is similar to the will to selfhood – namely to become an autonomous person capable of devising and effectuating values. [Golomb, 2002: 20]

That’s a start, but I think it ends well short of where Nietzsche saw self-overcoming, and that would be an eternally increasing, however incrementally, power *over ourselves*.

Self-overcoming is the overcoming of inertia that is inherent in physics and in personal and professional growth, throughout society. It is this self-overcoming that coincides with agency, and is that which allows us to perform actions outside of the bindings that media attempt to exert. Inertia is the state of rest to which an object desires and the amount of force required to get things moving again. Self-overcoming is a time-point analysis of an ongoing process, a moment in time labeled as *being* that is really a process of *becoming*, but not ever ending at whatever was originally destined as worth willing towards. This is how media may affect us, by setting us onto paths against which we do not *will*, or where the *will* bends mindlessly to the signals of media, overcoming us.

Being and willing are more than they first appear, due to the manner in which I’ve explained them. By defining them I have perhaps changed how the reader understands these concepts, at least in the context of this thesis. This is due, in no small part, to the arbitrary nature of language. Nietzsche, student of language, understood well both the arbitrary nature of language, and its usefulness.

1.2 *Probing Our Words: an illusion of meaning*

Language is a fundamental form of communicating with our reality. This is not to say that it has the shaping power attributed to it by some theorists, along the lines of the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis. However, it does affect how we structure our arguments and communicate them. The arbitrary nature of language that allows us to free-form patterns, i.e. pattern recognition, is also causing a sort of monoglossia. We can freely improvise language, but tend to produce and consume language based on habitual or common patterns, which have a generally repetitive structure. One cannot have limitless language in a human frame, even discounting the impact on communication; we are finite beings. Literal language is an illusion born of repetition. And it is an illusion on which we base and share our lived realities.

We create and share our worlds with words, and these words have not only a history but also a hidden structure, much as McLuhan claimed that media do. It is impossible to separate our language from the signs that make up its parts. The signs of language frame our realities creating a near tautology. While objects and methods of representation between media can and do differ, seeing the approach of a tool used on one medium can lend itself to approaches for using that tool on another. The aphorism, “any pithily expressed precept or observation; a maxim” [OED] allows for latitude in understanding; instead of attempting to ground an unchanging, monoglossic definition, it opens the world of interpretation. An aphorism is a metaphor, metaphors are crafted from language, and language is a series of signs. For McLuhan, the probe was built from

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

language and metaphor, primarily the aphorism. The work of Saussure and Peirce elucidate that link.

Using semiology, according to Saussure, we can study the ways in which systems of signs are created and used. For him, the sign is broken into the signifier and the signified. The signified represents the source of the sign, and the signifier represents the thing created to stand for the signified. Together they make a sign, for the one without the other has no meaning. The example he spends most of his time on is that of language and linguistics; “Everything in language is basically psychological, including its material and mechanical manifestations,” [Saussure, 1966: 6] Thus, not only is language metaphorical, but it is more than that. It is, as McLuhan notes “the encoded form of the collective perceptions and wisdom of many people.” [Bolter and Grusin, 2000: 175]

Saussure states that “language is a convention, and the nature of the sign that is agreed upon does not matter.” [Saussure, 1966: 10] This specifies the arbitrary nature of the sign in language. This arbitrariness does not hold completely true, but it does not need to. For it is groups that define the cultural language and validity of the medium: “For language is not complete in any speaker; it exists perfectly only within a collectivity.” [Saussure, 1966: 14] A sort of figure and ground of language itself, for as Gestalt psychology shows, context determines the elements that we take note of and those we ignore or forget.

When Saussure states, almost paradoxically, that “Signs that are wholly arbitrary realize better than the others the ideal of the semiological process... although language is only one particular semiological system... One characteristic of the symbol is that it is never wholly arbitrary;” [Saussure, 1966: 68] it should be seen that he makes a distinction between the pure

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

realm of the sign, much as Plato did, and that which is a sign engaged for a purpose. Stated otherwise, the sign is engaged as a communicative medium. This echoes McLuhan's concern that we are often unaware of the technologies we use, including language. Use obfuscates. Saussure requires that signs also differentiate - two signs cannot stand for the same thing, and it is only in their differences from each other that signs gain meaning. "*Arbitrary* and *differential* are two correlative qualities... Signs function, then, not through their intrinsic value but through their relative position." [Saussure, 1966: 118] Context frames meaning. This variability, or flexibility, of language and the sign is evident in the aphorism, and objects of study are only relevant against other objects in order to glean their "shape."

Peirce offers a distinction, a further sophistication into the language of signs, in his standard tripartite separation of signs into three categories: the icon, the index, and the symbol.

An Icon is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own, and which it possesses, just the same, whether any such Object actually exists or not...*An Index* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object...*A Symbol* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the Symbol to be interpreted as referring to that Object. [Peirce, 1955: 102]

These distinctions allow for a separation that Saussure's system did not allow for, breaking down the signifier into definable aspects. A photograph, for example stands as an indexical relation to the Object, since it has been affected by the Object. The videogame, however constructs a nuanced relationship with the Object, one that would be within Peirce's definition of the Symbol. In fact, videogames straddle all three categories, although they mainly reside in the icon and the symbol. The use of these distinctions become clear when comparing photographic, print, and videogame semiotics, as can be seen in chapter 4, on tetrads. However, neither Saussure nor Peirce accounted for the media in which language was being used; it took until McLuhan for that

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

to occur. “While studying the warring elements of the trivium, McLuhan also realized how, as an “outering” of our subconscious, language demonstrates the relationships between things.” [Edan, 2003: 73] In McLuhan’s world, even black boxes create relationships. All relationships, however change over time.

Time is “of the essence” in language. This applies whether the link to the object is iconic, indexical, or symbolic and applies to photographs as well as to videogames. “Once a photograph ages, the immediate reference to the original is no longer possible.” [Kracauer, 1993: 429] This is because the reading of what it represents changes with time. He expands on this temporality by comparing photography to fashion, whereby “Photography is bound to time in precisely the same way as *fashion*. Since the latter has no significance other than as current human garb, it is translucent when modern and abandoned when old.” [Kracauer, 1993: 430] McLuhan would argue that space is “of the essence” as well, for changing sense ratios affect perceptions of time and space. When our understanding of realities changes, our past actions become more visible to us. Much as McLuhan argues, it is our present period that is invisible to us and our pasts that we ignore - at our peril.

We can also see McLuhan echoing through the words of others dealing with language and signs, such as when Barthes posits that “... deprived of a principle of marking, photographs are signs which don’t *take*, which *turn*, as milk does. Whatever it grants to vision and whatever its manner, a photograph is always invisible: it is not it that we see.” [Barthes, 1980: 6] This sentiment coincides heavily with McLuhan’s own supposition as to the hidden nature of the effects of media and the messages of those media. *Ceci n’est pas une pipe*. McLuhan’s “the medium is the message,” rings through Sontag’s statement that “The camera is a kind of passport

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

that annihilates moral boundaries and social inhibitions, freeing the photographer from any responsibility toward the people photographed.” [Sontag, 1973: 41] It is a tool, which simultaneously hides the photographer from action and from imparting a message to the images created, pushing the image as figure and consigning the process and tools to ground. According to Barthes,

It is rather as if I had to read the Photographer's myths in the Photograph, fraternizing with them but not quite believing in them. These myths obviously aim (this is what myth is for) at reconciling the Photograph with society (is this necessary? -Yes, indeed: the Photograph is *dangerous*) by endowing it with *functions*, which are, for the Photographer, so many alibis. These functions are: to inform, to represent, to surprise, to cause to signify, to provoke desire. And I, the *Spectator*, I recognize them with more or less pleasure: I invest them with my *studium* (which is never my delight or my pain.) [Barthes, 1980: 28]

Barthes, then, is working from his position of the death of the author while simultaneously investing the photographer with the role he has stripped from the author. This seems to be a paradox until one realizes that his intent is to note that these functions are not there, they merely *appear* to be there; the medium vanishes into the message. But the photograph, as beguiling a subject as it is, hides its frame in more than one way, for it is not just visual nor is visuality everything, much as we may feel that it is so. How does it hide itself so well in plain sight?

It hides in plain sight in the same way that all media do: by presenting the content as the object of study. Analyzing the content of media will never give you more than a glimpse into the impact that a given medium has. It is not the content but the container that shapes us, metaphysically. “By emphasizing form over content [McLuhan] was able to recognize patterns” [Edan, 2003: 73] These patterns can give us a glimpse into the shape a given medium has on our lives.

Videogames, for example, trade our language for myth. With language, through its metaphorical relation to both real and arbitrary associations, we have created a structure with

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

which to engage not only with our environs, and a method to share that with others, but also a way to create thoughts not inherently grounded in earthly phenomena, much as hermeneutics purportedly offers. With its use, however we have reified it, and made it seem to be more than it is. And we have turned it into both a tool for action and a reason for inaction, due to the hidden nature of its impact. We are, to paraphrase the proverb, a fish without a word for water. The invisibility of our surroundings impacts our understanding and ability to discuss it.

1.3 *Building McLuhan: the tools of an epoch*

Marshall McLuhan refers to four main epochs of media impact. These are 1. Oral Tribe Culture, 2. Manuscript Culture, 3. Gutenberg Galaxy, and 4. Electronic Age. Although arrayed as if they represented a linear progression in human evolution, McLuhan works through his mosaic method to show that the dominant epoch for a given “present” obsolesced but did not obliterate the existence nor the impact from prior epochs. It is merely that technologies, that is *media*, formed in this progression and that they influence us differently. The first epoch came about with the formation of language; this allowed a more nuanced communicative structure, changing the nature of shared space. This epoch was characterized by senses in balance, a simultaneous intake by all of the senses, yet with an auditory focus.

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, and thus no man knew appreciably more or less than any other — which meant that there was little individualism and specialization, the hallmarks of “civilized” Western man. [The Playboy interview]

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

In the second epoch, the phonetic alphabet was the distinct aspect of manuscript culture that allowed for fundamental changes in sense perception. Although less guilty than the printing press for creating the primacy of sight, manuscript culture did begin the separation of the senses and the raising of sight as first among them. It was not reading that was the fundamental gift of the phonetic alphabet, but

...the separation of both sights and sounds from their semantic and dramatic meanings in order to render visible the actual sound of speech, thus placing a barrier between men and objects... The balance of the sensorium — or Gestalt interplay of all the senses — and the psychic and social harmony it engendered was disrupted, and the visual function was overdeveloped. This was true of no other writing system. [The Playboy interview]

It is the third epoch, however, that is the focus of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, the mechanical age ushered in with the printing press. In his analysis and comparison of the effects of this epoch, McLuhan gives us the tools with which to analyze the impact of other epochs, particularly our own. This mechanical age separated life — and the manner in which reality was understood — into a sum of its parts, a construction that was logical, methodical, and primarily visual. “The notion of moving steadily along on single planes of narrative awareness is totally alien to the nature of language and of consciousness. But it is highly consistent with the nature of the printed word.” [McLuhan, 1962: 244] In Western print our eyes move on a plane, from left to right and from line to line, following deductive logical principles, presenting a step-by-step argument folded into a conclusion that follows “naturally” from the principles given in a chronologically consistent manner. Much of the impact of the Gutenberg-induced aspect is from the scale that it

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

introduced.⁶ Suddenly things could be done massively. The printing press ushered in the very possibility, let alone the actuality, of the industrial revolution. “The invention of typography confirmed and extended the new visual stress of applied knowledge, providing the first uniformly repeatable commodity, the first assembly-line, and the first mass-production.” [McLuhan, 1962: 124] People began to use language as a thing, as a Heideggerian “standing reserve.” That is they saw language as something to use instead of something to perceive or explore. [McLuhan, 1962: 161] This mass production was not confined to material objects; the idea of nation and the rise of nationalism were also connected to the influence of the printing press. Perhaps a way to envision how these concepts are linked, that of mass production and nationalism, is to picture the following causal tree, a mode of thinking supported by the Gutenberg technology: mass=closed, closed=uniform, uniform=nation. Uniformity centralizes. What comprises a nation? Uniformity. Of thought, of action, of language, of ideals... Truly? Only thanks to Gutenberg. “Nationalism didn’t exist in Europe until the Renaissance, when typography enabled every literate man to *see* his mother tongue analytically as a uniform entity.” [McLuhan and Zingrone, 1995: 243] The loss of the idea of nation, the creation of people of no nation, people “of the world” is the result of electric media, or a time before the printing press; it pre- or post-dates it. “Closely interrelated, then, by the operation and effects of

⁶ What about the Chinese printing press, invented in 1040? Why did it not incite revolutions in China? The pictogram does not allow for the same scale-inducing flexibility as a phonetic-based alphabet. “Unlike the phonetic alphabet, which separates sight and sound and meaning in a purely abstract form of notation, the ideograph, like the hieroglyph, is a complex *gestalt* which involves all the senses at once.” [Marchessault, 2005: 127] Pinyin, the formal phonetic system of the Chinese character, on the other hand is likely a different story. However its arrival is during the upheaval of the present electronic age, and is thus harder to ascertain. “The writings of Egyptian, Babylonian, Mayan, and Chinese cultures were an extension of the senses in that they gave pictorial expression to reality, and they demanded many signs to cover the wide range of data in their societies — unlike phonetic writing, which uses semantically meaningless letters to correspond to semantically meaningless sounds and is able, with only a handful of letters, to encompass all meanings and all languages.” [McLuhan and Zingrone, 1995: 241]

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

typography are the outerring or uttering of private inner experience and the massing of collective national awareness, as the vernacular is rendered visible, central, and unified by the new technology.” [McLuhan, 1962: 199]

A hugely important idea that McLuhan introduces in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* is that a thing creates its inverse. There are two sides to a coin: you cannot have heads without tails. McLuhan places it visibly into his work by having *GG* be a printed text modelled on the manuscript, an immediate visual juxtaposition available to the reader, if the reader looks for it. “Print created national uniformity and government centralism, but also individualism and opposition to government as such.” [McLuhan, 1962: 235] The creation of anything can only exist in contrast to something else, which possibly did not exist before. Although this is a false dichotomy, what is evident is that a dominant mode of being/seeing/whatever creates lesser modes that are in opposition to it. The position that a medium creates a situation and its inverse became one of the four points of his tetrad, discussed in chapter 4, towards the end of his life. More important are the tones of Gestalt psychology, which modify or sophisticate the analysis, discussed in chapter 3. For Gestalt psychology concerns itself with where our attentions are and thus how we interpret our reality.

This brings us to the fourth epoch, our own. Although *The Gutenberg Galaxy* is focused on the third epoch, and *Understanding Media* is ostensibly based around the fourth, McLuhan does give us a few concepts that extend from *Understanding Media* through to *Laws of Media*. One such instance is the changing role of language within a media system; instead of being static from its inception, its impact changed first with the phonetic alphabet, was suppressed by the visual focus of mechanical media and regained its power in the fourth epoch. “For the world of

Chapter 1: An Agent Through the Epochs

visual perspective is one of unified and homogeneous space. Such a world is alien to the resonating diversity of spoken words. So language was the last art to accept the visual logic of Gutenberg technology, and the first to rebound in the electric age.” [McLuhan, 1962: 136] Some examples of this rebound to the spoken can be seen in cell phone shorthand and emoticons, LOL. This fourth epoch has a myriad of effects. However, because McLuhan is concerned with senses, their ratios and extensions, he keeps coming back to the sensory impact of the epochs. In the world of print, “The reduction of tactile quality in life and language is ever the mark of refinement.” [McLuhan, 1962: 240] And that is one impact of print. With electronic media, particularly videogame consoles, we are seeing a struggle to reverse that impetus - touch is regaining, if not prominence, then at least a rebalanced role to the other senses, where it is no longer ignored. But, within an epoch, is there a difference between media of the same era? I believe so, otherwise McLuhan would not have shown the importance of individual media within epochs, citing dozens of examples in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*.

Although his approach was still rudimentary in *GG*, McLuhan was beginning to sculpt his texts to reinforce his concepts. By combining the mosaic of “read any section by itself” and the manuscript form in a product of the printing press, he was starting to walk the talk. But he was not yet a performer of his work. In the next chapter, I will look more closely at the impact of electronic media on our present society and the impact that McLuhan had with the release of *Understanding Media* and the impact it had on him.

CHAPTER TWO: Feeling Our Actions

McLuhan is building a complex world without answers, crafting tools with which to comprehend one's lived environment through metaphysical⁷ analysis. But these tools did not come from nothing: he crafts tools from tools. Thus it becomes necessary to look at the tools he uses to craft his own tools, a sort of hermeneutic heuristic. McLuhan saw the world as metaphor. This becomes obvious when one views McLuhan's other texts, such as *MASSAGE*, or the works and authors he cites, including *Finnegans Wake* by Joyce and *A Descent into the Maelström* by Poe. He states that the media themselves are metaphors, and expands traditional understandings of media to include such artefacts as the electric light and vehicles. These media metaphors thus stand for other things, in particular sense extension, core to "the medium is the message." Sense extension, however takes for granted that we know what the senses are and how they perform their tasks, as well as some assumptions about "extension." McLuhan claims that senses are extended through the use of media, much as a car is an extension of the feet. "A theory of cultural change is impossible without knowledge of the changing sense ratios effected by various externalizations of our senses." [McLuhan, 1962: 42] Amputation occurs in the central nervous system when our senses become extended. Extension is confusing; amputation perhaps more so. Nonetheless, they are important for understanding his discussion of changing sense ratios. Our senses vie with each other for sharing information with the central nervous system (CNS); the

⁷ McLuhan considered himself to be a metaphysical researcher, probing underlying structures rather than more material concerns. His analysis of the *forms* of media instead of the *content* confirms this, "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." [Molinario, McLuhan C, and Toye, 1987: 412]

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

senses are thus affecting our system at different ratios based on which sense is given dominance by the CNS. These ratios change depending on context, much like the core elements of figure and ground do in Gestalt psychology. An example of McLuhan's tools would be the *probe*, which requires *aphorism*. Probes attempt to find the impact, or effects, of a given medium by inciting us to think not only critically but creatively.

After discussing the tools that McLuhan makes available to explore media in *Understanding Media (UM)*, built on the foundations of chapter 1, I move into exploring the senses, both of themselves and with respect to McLuhan's use of them when discussing sense extension. I then discuss Heidegger and poiesis — the way in which we see ourselves in our technologies — and will look at the manner in which our agency impacts our tool use, and vice versa. This is followed by how McLuhan may have viewed *UM*.

2.1 *Understanding Media: a toolset*

Written aphoristically and in a seemingly rambling fashion, *Understanding Media* can be a minefield for those unwilling or incapable of taking the time to muse on the meaning of McLuhan's words. There is no hand-holding. He is building a tower and showing you the floor plans, without teaching you how to read architectural drawings. When he states that “The passive consumer wants packages, but those... who are concerned in pursuing knowledge and in seeking causes will resort to aphorisms, just because they are incomplete and require participation in depth,” [McLuhan, 1994: 31] he is preparing us for the manner in which we are to work through his ideas. There is no shortage of irony in the fact that I am attempting to approach and make

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

plain the position of Marshall McLuhan in a format that he believes is incapable of explaining his propositions. "...the untrained intellectual deals only with concepts and theories, and has little skill in the study of effects and consequences... Personally, I prefer to study the pattern minus the theory." [Molinaro et al, 1987: 540] Thus he would claim that in transforming his aphorisms into arguments I am likely to miss the point of his work, attempting to make meaning where he was probing, or at least presenting it in a manner that will not aid in understanding said propositions. The cardinal sin herein lies in locking in the meaning in a material stronger than stone: the written word. I aim to overcome this constraint by the use of a tool that McLuhan understood well, even if he did not use the term himself. That term is poiesis, which I borrow from Heidegger.

In his Introduction, McLuhan introduces us to a fundamental underpinning for his controversial aphorism that "the medium is the message," based on the concept of sense extension. When he claims that, "Any extension, whether of skin, hand, or foot, affects the whole psychic and social complex." [McLuhan, 1994: 4] he sets the stage for proposing that media extend the senses, defining the word media as that which exists between ourselves and our reality; this is a theme he will return to many times throughout *Understanding Media*. He then spends the remainder of the introduction contrasting two ages: that of the mechanical past from that of the electrical present/future. The mechanical age, which is ceding primacy, was one in which actions had little consequence, particularly those actions which needed to bridge time and space. The communicative networks available in the mechanical age generally required physical movement of couriers in order to relay information, ensuring that it took not only a long time for a message to get somewhere but also that any response to that message was at least as distant in

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

time as it was in space. In the present electrical age, made even more prevalent since the advent of email and cell phones, action and reaction occur almost simultaneously. [McLuhan, 1994: 4] It has become difficult to tell them apart.

Ascendancy of one ideal does not mean the death of another; it is a demotion, not a destruction. When things change in focus, when some things retreat while others are (re)vitalized, it is simply that: a change of focus. McLuhan addresses this in several ways, using Gestalt psychology, the tetrad, and his definition of myth. McLuhan makes the claim that “Myth is contraction or implosion of any process, and the instant speed of electricity confers the mythic dimension on ordinary industrial and social action today. We live mythically but continue to think fragmentarily and on single planes.” [McLuhan, 1994: 25] With this definition of myth, he seems to be saying that the very move from the sequential to the simultaneous, from the mechanical to the electrical, creates this mode of being. Thus, while our age is already electrical we approach it from a mindset that was crafted in the mechanical age. Specifically, McLuhan states that “We actually 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.” [McLuhan, 1994: 4] Therein he shows the juxtaposition and paradoxical nature extant when major social and psychological paradigms change. Part of the problem in seeing, let alone understanding, is that the tools which were useful in a prior age don’t work in the new age being formed, or, at best, give inaccurate and unexpected results. Thus, there is much turmoil and misunderstanding until the modes of the new age are completely internalized. But our tools change; the dominant become ancillary and the new mode of being becomes more common than the old. McLuhan gives one example, “The partial and specialized character of the viewpoint, however noble, will not serve at all in the

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

electric age.” [McLuhan, 1994: 5]⁸ This is the reversal of the “eye” into the “ear,” the move from a visual into an acoustic space, a claim he makes many times throughout *Understanding Media*, and a concept he borrowed from Harold Innis and changed liberally to fit his needs. This is not to say that the dominant mode replaces all other modes of being. It does not — it displaces them from their hegemonic roles. However, it is not as if media are in a zero-sum game; “The mere obsolescence of the wheel does not mean its disappearance.” [McLuhan, 1994: 220] TV did not kill radio any more than the internet has killed print. It does, however influence the manner in which we engage with new and old technologies, in an ever-changing milieu.

What this boils down to is a discussion of how the body is formed, and thus how the mind exists. This is an interesting new cardinal point on the dichotomy of Descartes’ original mind-body problem.

(O)n the one hand I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, non-extended thing (that is, a mind), and on the other hand I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. And accordingly, it is certain that I am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it. [Descartes, 1984-1991: 54]

McLuhan is fundamentally taking a position that situates itself clear of standard definitions of dualism and monism: the dichotomy between, on the one hand, that there either is a mind-body split, and on the other, that the mind and the body are one. Taking the position that dualism is insufficient, McLuhan parses the body into further splits, the nature of which are cogent to the senses and their role in mediating to the mind. This is split even further as he proposes to follow

⁸ It is our relationship to space and time that are regulated by our sense perceptions. How these change and are changed by media is a fundamental aspect of this thesis.

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

the lead of the ideas of cognitive science in his time⁹ in making the mind a distinct structure from the body, although housed within it. As such, the senses are intermedial, and fundamental to any discussion of McLuhan.

In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan attempts to get one idea across in a myriad of ways. Specifically, the idea is that our media are sense extensions. This idea is so extreme that he needs to couch it in another idea: a medium is a vessel, and a vessel shapes what it carries. Said in McLuhanese, “the medium is the message.” Media extend our senses and it is in how we incorporate the changes that the “message” is received. This was a notable change from his earlier work, *The Mechanical Bride*, and as McLuhan himself noted, “*Mechanical Bride* is a good example of [a] book that was completely negated by TV. All the mechanical assumptions of American life have been shifted since TV; it's become an organic culture... I happened to observe it when it was reaching the end of its term, just before TV.” [McLuhan and Zingrone, 1995: 267] To understand why this is so he notes that our senses are extended by the tools or media that we use, and this puts a burden on the central nervous system. Although he occasionally states otherwise, “... the greatest aid to this end is simply in knowing that the spell can occur immediately upon contact, as in the first bars of a melody.” [McLuhan, 1994: 15] it is intrinsic to his ideas to understand that the mere use of a medium will not necessarily change a person, anymore than drinking one beer makes one an alcoholic — but that first sip!—; if it were so, then there would be no possibility to escape the label of technological determinist that hounded McLuhan. It is the regular, systematic preference for and use of a medium that shapes, and this parses directly onto larger groups, as it can only shape a society *over time* and in relation

⁹ Things have changed a fair bit from McLuhan's time. Cognitive science today shies away from the word mind, at least from its link with consciousness.

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

to other dominant media. The predisposition any society has to being shaped by a given medium depends on many factors, including which media dominate and the effects those media have had already. His concept of *hot and cool* media attempts to contextualize the impact of media. How much time it takes for media effects to impact a society can be roughly worked out according to McLuhan, although he rarely does so himself. When he does prognosticate, it becomes obvious that predicting a timeline of change is not one of his stronger suits - the more precise he gets the less accurate his timeline has proven to be. For example, he claims that “The car, in a word, has quite refashioned all of the spaces that unite and separate men, and it will continue to do so for a decade more, by which time the electronic successors to the car will be manifest.” [McLuhan, 1994: 225] If he is referring to communicative telepresence such as that which the internet has afforded, we can see, from a position nearly 50 years after this statement was written, that this change is not manifest. If he is referring to social-living patterns, it becomes less clear. But the decline of the car is happening now, as our discarnate presence is expanding.¹⁰ It is unlikely that many society-changing paradigmatic shifts become evident at a pace of less than a generation. However, when he is more general, he is more insightful (such as his contention that print took hundreds of years to manifest the dominance of sight), yet television has reversed this process in a much shorter time frame, on the scale of decades. Why? Because it took a long time to disseminate the works of the printing press and to teach people how to read. Television, however, became pervasive in a remarkably short period of time, and we have never understood that we need to be educated on how to read it in order to access it. This distinction is vital; we must learn

¹⁰ “Only 44 percent get a license within a year, and just over half of teenagers are licensed by the time they reach 18, an age at which two-thirds of teenagers were licensed 20 years ago.” [Washington Post, 31 July, 2013. Web.]

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

to read in order to access the work of the printing press, requiring active learning over many years. Television allows access to its content without needing to learn a system of access, a method of reading, as it were. This is akin to learning how to fly by jumping out of an airplane. McLuhan takes umbrage with using a system *even though it is not, or at best poorly, understood* as this leads people to analyze the content instead of the medium itself. To extrapolate from McLuhan's claim that "In fact, they need more training in graphics, because the art of casting and arranging actors in ads is both complex and forcefully insidious." [McLuhan, 1994: 230] seems of exceeding appropriateness - if photographs require training in order to read, then certainly 24 photographs per second do.¹¹ Whenever time and space ratios change, so too change the sense ratios with which they interplay. But the senses themselves and how they are influenced by media are important to understand. What is a sense that it can be extended or change in ratio?

2.2 *McLuhan Comes to his Senses*

Marshall McLuhan makes much ado about the senses. It is important to understand why that is, and the ways in which he thinks about the senses as well as uses them to further his discussion about media. His use of the senses grew progressively as his research wore on. This could be seen as a sort of "coming to his senses" in that he became more aware of the influential

¹¹ Ostensibly, movies are simply photographs shown several times per second. Film is traditionally shown at 23.98 frames per second (fps). Newer technologies allow for higher frame rates, such as 2012s *The Hobbit*, shown at 48 fps. TV typically ranges from 25 (PAL) to 29.97 (NTSC) fps [Apple website, cinema tools], and videogames can exceed that, posting well into the hundreds of fps. This should not be confused with refresh rate, although the two may well impact each other. Further analysis exceeds the scope of this thesis.

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

nature of the senses just as he began to understand our epoch and the role of media in shaping it, through our senses. It was a reflexive notion of the senses and his sensibility as they shaped each other and shaped his notion of media impact.

The time period in which McLuhan was most active was the 1950s and 1960s, a time of turmoil and upheaval, particularly in the West. 1968 comes to mind, from the French riots and student uprisings, with slogans such as “il est interdit d’interdire” (it is forbidden to forbid) and “je suis Marxiste - tendance Groucho” (I am a Marxist - of the Groucho variety), anti-Vietnam demonstrations in the United States, the Troubles in Northern Ireland, the Prague Spring, and the founding of such institutions as the Club of Rome and Friends of the Earth. According to McLuhan, this was part of the shock of dealing with a new epoch of media: the electrical. As a Catholic and a scholar of literature and rhetoric, McLuhan saw new forms being created from old containers; the message was shifting. For McLuhan, then the senses were in transition, and a study of how our senses are formed and the visual notion of causality were of intense interest.

It is both a necessary action and an ironic inevitability that visuality, or at least phenomenological aspects of it (and in fact the entire sensory system and its roles) are often overlooked in analyses of media — or at least relegated to niche status. It is necessarily ignored because it is a field of study all on its own, with little language overlap. This is ironic because the senses are the guardians of perception, and media studies are often confronted with analyses of perception and reality, in other words meaning-making, due to its focus on the impacts of the technologies we use. We take for granted that our media represent visual elements the way they do because our vision, the sense of sight, seems to determine the most natural forms for us. This is not so, and further, negatively influences any attempts to understand sense extension. The very

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

idea of a concrete set of sense hierarchy shows that we have internalized media impacts throughout written history. The senses are more than sight and sound, and more than merely dedicated “sense organs.”

The concept of the senses as a discrete group of five is counterproductive to understanding the ways in which they can be influenced and how that impacts us, through our central nervous system. By limiting them to five, and assigning them arbitrarily to more-or-less visible sense organs: sight from eyes, sound from ears, smell from nose, taste from tongue, touch from *everything else*, we make it difficult to parse the impact of changing sense ratios. Further, we occlude and elide elements that would ostensibly come from different senses into those we already identify. This becomes particularly troublesome when we deal with sensory overlap, as much of McLuhan’s sense-extension does.

One type of sensory overlap is termed synesthesia. Synesthesia is when one sense is triggered by stimuli that usually trigger a different sense. Synesthesia and cross-modality are two terms often confused, ironically, with each other. They refer to the mingling of the senses. Synesthesia is the medical condition whereby one consistently mixes sensory signals. e.g. when one sees the number three yet the mind conjures the colour blue. Cross-modality, however is the simulated effect of synesthesia whereby certain elements are found to stimulate other senses in most people engaging with them, such as a granular photo of a stone causing the viewer to feel the roughness of the texture or the bass sounds of a stereo causing the sense of touch to engage. Typically, cross-modality defines when the senses have been fooled, overwhelmed or confused. Often synesthesia is used when an author means to use cross-modality. McLuhan is one such author, and I will therefore use his convention here so as to not confuse common use of the term.

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

This term is very important, particularly with respect to haptics and McLuhan's use of media as sense extensions. "For, in practice, tactility is less a separate sense than it is the interplay among the senses." [McLuhan, 2005: 46] Steven Feld, mentioning how sound, vision, and touch are important in senses of self and place, notes that "Because motion can draw upon the kinesthetic interplay of tactile, sonic, and visual senses, emplacement always implicates the intertwined nature of sensual body presence and perceptual engagement." [Feld, 2005: 181] This shows the interrelatedness of the senses and makes no note of a value hierarchy, contrary to how vision is given primacy in our societies.

The senses have found themselves subject to constantly-shifting paradigm with regards to their importance: both real and perceived. Throughout recorded history we have noted a shift towards the ocular-centric which, as noted, accelerated around the time of the printing press. As David Howes, an academic with a focus on the senses, puts it,

Tastes and sounds and touches are imbued with meaning and carefully hierarchized and regulated so as to express and enforce the social and cosmic order.... The sensory order, in fact, is not just something one sees or hears about; it is something one *lives*. [Howes, 2005b: 3]

This hierarchy is not arbitrary in the sense that it exists for a reason, but it is arbitrary in the manner in which it plays out. The senses do not have clear signals and our perception of their value and meaning has changed over time. In no small part this is due to our arbitrarily assigning five senses within which to contain all human experience. Further, this is due to a perception of noise interfering with how we interpret the signals our senses receive.

Noise is a distraction from the message. In Gestalt psychology we could see noise being equivalent to the ground, or the content of media. It's not really the same, however. Where it is useful is in covering up the frames of media that the media themselves cover up; it is a further

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

distraction from the form. The reason that noise is as important as it is — in a conceptual way—, according to Lev Manovich, whose research bridges the gap between the humanities, the sciences, and art, is that “communication is always accompanied by noise, and therefore a received signal always has some noise mixed in.... the signals we receive are accompanied by noise recognizable to us.” [Manovich, 2006: 224] This determination that noise is always present aims to muddy the simple metaphors we generally apply when dealing with the senses and communication; it opens up the standard dichotomies which govern the senses - that there are dominant senses (sound is more important than touch, sight is more important than sound, etc.) and that, in fact these senses are always ordered and even perceived in the same manner. David Howes offers a different take, in that

the senses are constructed and lived differently in different societies and periods. The perceptual is cultural and political, and not simply (as psychologists and neuroscientists would have it) a matter of cognitive processes or neurological mechanisms located in the individual subject. [Howes, 2005a: 1]

McLuhan’s epochs are, in fact, statements of the manner in which media change which senses are ‘dominant.’ As Marx noted, “The forming of the five senses is a labour of the entire history of the world down to the present.” [Howes, 2005b: 55]

The sensorium should be seen at any historical moment as shifting, contingent, dynamic, and *alive*. It lives only in us and through us, enhanced by our technologies and extended prosthetically, but always subject to our consciousness (itself dependent on sensory formations). ... we should begin to reckon with the auditory, the olfactory, and the tactile as similarly crucial sites with regulatory potential in the sensorium’s infinite body. [Jones, 2006: 82]

The sensorium changes and is perceived differently depending on which McLuhanian epoch one is in. This brings up another issue, that of delimiting the senses. Andra McCartney, who specializes in sound walks and the nature of sound in our lived experience, feels that “...sound is the language of vibration... Hearing is done not only with our ears, but also with every fibre of

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

our beings as vibrations of sound move into our bodies.” [McCartney, 2004: 179] This overlap is synesthetic, and is an example that this overlap is an integral part of how we absorb the medium of television.

Perhaps it is just because of the low definition of the retinal image that there is such high participation and interplay of all the senses in television. In this respect the television viewer is a sort of skin diver, for all the senses are in play, but some of them in rather diminished intensity. This would seem to be a condition of synesthesia, that no one sense be allowed high intensity. [McLuhan, 2005: 44]

Once again McLuhan does not provide concrete answers. He merely attempts to point out fallacies or errors and to direct attention towards those things that ought to be reflected on. In this case we should reflect on the way in which we are perceiving television. As noted earlier, tactility is a blending or overlap of the senses, and thus tactility is synesthetic. Although the senses are culturally mediated as to their importance, I would argue that this is falsely delimited and that we should attempt to understand cross-modality in greater depth. “One person’s signal is another’s noise.” [Bogost, 2006. p. 29] In particular, this is because hanging onto the faulty idea of five senses in a hierarchy, from sight on down, impedes our ability to engage with understanding our media. Further, the senses merely inform our central nervous system. We can only react to how it is fed, filtered, extended, and amputated through our senses.

2.3 *A Limb Too Far: extension and amputation*

Explicit and central to McLuhan’s underpinning of the medium is the message is the role of the central nervous system as object and subject of the changing sense ratios that define the impact that media have on our perceptions. Because his metaphor is organic, or biological,

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

McLuhan sticks with that theme in expressing the central nervous system, sense extension, and media. He notes that it is when we are in this final phase, when we no longer acknowledge the medium, that it has the greatest impact. It has been internalized. “The effect of electric technology had at first been anxiety. Now it appears to create boredom. We have been through the three stages of alarm, resistance, and exhaustion that occur in every disease or stress of life, whether individual or collective.” [McLuhan, 1994: 26] This affects our senses. Since the central nervous system is a gathering place for our senses, a place from which to make sense of the senses, as it were, any extension is likely to place limits on the senses extended. “Any invention or technology is an extension or self-amputation of our physical bodies, and such extension also demands new ratios or new equilibriums among the other organs and extensions of the body.” [McLuhan, 1994: 44-45]

McLuhan notes that extensions are amputations, and that amputations cause irritations, particularly when the location of those irritations can't be determined. When overstimulated, “the central nervous system acts to protect itself by a strategy of amputation or isolation of the offending organ, sense, or function. Thus, the stimulus to new invention is the stress of acceleration of pace and increase of load.” [McLuhan, 1994: 42] Although we have tactics to deal with irritants, through pleasure and comfort, this is more of a settling or calming of the symptom than an understanding of the disease. [McLuhan, 1994: 43] This can, and often does, lead to conflating or confusing symptom for disease. “The area of impact and incision is numb. It is the entire system that is changed.” [McLuhan, 1994: 64] Because it is the entire system, localizing change is impossible and thus it is very difficult to notice how media impact us directly. However, when McLuhan states that

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

This power of technology to create its own world of demand is not independent of technology being first an extension of our own bodies and senses... The urge to continuous use is quite independent of the content of public programs or of the private sense life, being testimony to the fact that technology is part of our bodies. Electric technology is directly related to our central nervous systems, so it is ridiculous to talk of "what the public wants" played over its own nerves. [McLuhan, 1994: 67-68]

it is not difficult to see why he has been labeled a technological determinist by those who read only these words.

But why does content not matter? McLuhan notes that,

For the "content" of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind. The effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as "content." The content of a movie is a novel or a play or an opera. The effect of the movie form is not related to its program content. The "content" of writing or print is speech, but the reader is almost entirely unaware either of print or of speech. [McLuhan, 1994: 18]

Thus, he is saying that since the vessel shapes the content, with respect to our very physiognomies through our central nervous systems, the effect of the vessel is greater than the contents inside it. Although a water-skin and a clay vase are both vessels for hydration, they impact our lives quite differently; the water-skin promotes a freedom to travel, creating a more nomadic lifestyle whereas the clay vase, due to its brittle nature and inflexible shape, promotes living close to a source of water.

In stating that the medium is the message, McLuhan supposes that,

In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message. This is merely to say that the personal and social consequences of any medium - that is, of any extension of ourselves - result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology. [McLuhan, 1994: 7]

When he says "extension" here, he is referring to sense extension. He then begins the process of defining what he means by sense extension, although he presupposes that the reader will be able to follow his logic. Although he wrote texts for academics and those for the general public, it is

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

often difficult to parse whether he was aware of the difference of his audiences. “What we are considering here, however, are the psychic and social consequences of the designs or patterns as they amplify or accelerate existing processes. For the "message" of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs.” [McLuhan, 1994: 8]

Our perceptions of space-time change to conform to the morphology of the media being consumed and engaged with — more-so if we create and therefore *use* the tools of these media. As Nietzsche said, “Our writing tools are also working on our thoughts.” [Kittler, 1999: 200]

These changes in a world of mechanization form a paradox wherein the sense extension of new technologies cause growth and change while simultaneously retarding further growth and obviating an understanding of said change. This is a process hidden from our attentions like the proverbial water is hidden from a fish, because mechanization breaks processes down into attendant parts which are then assembled into a series. [McLuhan, 1994: 11-12] This series, these “steps in a process,” seem to contain meaning, however “That one thing follows another accounts for nothing. Nothing follows from following, except change.” [McLuhan, 1994: 11-12]

As Nietzsche seems to concur, “But every purpose and use... just follow and replace one another at random.” [Pearson and Large, 2006: 416] Thus we are blinded to how a medium forms us, since we only see the series and not the final product, or put more colloquially, we cannot see the forest for the trees. Or perhaps, the paper for the papyrus.

At first his rhetorical question that, “Is it not evident that the moment that sequence yields to the simultaneous, one is in the world of the structure and of configuration?” [McLuhan, 1994: 13] puzzled me. It became clearer when I attempted to liken it to a construction project and the building that is created from it. From the architect’s design to the construction elements creating

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

its foundation, structural-support elements, creature comforts such as plumbing, HVAC, and electricity, to the final result - an ivory tower, there is no link between the series that created it and the structure which then exists. At least not in structure and function. Like a building is no longer merely the processes involved in its construction, no meaning of its use can be gleaned from the processes of how it is made. “How” and “why” are not the same question. This is hidden behind the façade of the chosen object at which the question has been aimed.

In the film *Annie Hall*, Woody Allen directly introduces Marshall McLuhan into an argument he wishes to have with the braggart standing in line behind him. The braggart is about to pontificate on hot media as highly participatory, when McLuhan steps in and tells the braggart that he understands nothing of McLuhan’s work. As a segue into what McLuhan was actually referring to with respect to his definition of hot and cold media, this presents an interesting anecdote. Cinema, according to McLuhan, is a hot medium because audiences are fully immersed in the medium and cannot interact with it; ironically, by breaking the fourth wall, the separation of the film from the audience, Allen introduces a break which could engage the audience if the medium were *not* the message. “A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in "high definition." High definition is the state of being well filled with data... Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience.” [McLuhan, 1994: 22-23] To sum up this idea we could say that the more engaged a single sense is by the medium which is engaging it, the less agency one has to respond to it. McLuhan cites radios, movies, and photographs as hot media, whereas telephone, television, and cartoon are cool. This raises a few questions in particular with regards to my own research, piquing my interest. Does it matter which sense is targeted? Can multiple senses be heavily

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

engaged and if so, how do the changing sense ratios affect each other? Is immersion cause, effect, or ancillary? i.e. how does immersion impact the changes wrought by media? One question that may have been raised before McLuhan himself quashes it is in regard to the universality of the effects he claims for any given media. By contextualizing both the cultures in contact with a medium and the medium itself he has created a flexible method to interpret effects of the media he analyses. “Nevertheless, it makes all the difference whether a hot medium is used in a hot or a cool culture.” [McLuhan, 1994: 30] Context determines outcome. Unfortunately, McLuhan’s hot and cold aspect of media were the among his most perplexing. As Janine Marchessault notes “...as concepts they remain among his least developed and confusing.” [Marchessault, 2005: 177]

That media cannot be analyzed either *in absentia* nor out of their context in constant relation and interplay with other media should be obvious from their contextual nature of affects vis a vis hot and cold. McLuhan offers, as an approach to media studies, that “... the concentric with its endless intersection of planes is necessary for insight. In fact, it is the technique of insight, and as such is necessary for media study, since no medium has its meaning or existence alone, but only in constant interplay with other media.” [McLuhan, 1994: 26] Therefore, in order to study a medium, one must study other media. In isolation, media do nothing: hegemony through monopoly. Another take is that of Ferdinand de Saussure who stated that, “In language, as in any semiological system, whatever distinguishes one sign from the others constitutes it.” [Saussure, 1966. 121]

By delving directly into “the medium is the message,” McLuhan starts to broaden our understanding of what that statement actually means. The content, that which we traditionally see

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

as the point, or meaning, of a medium is little more than a distraction from the sense ratio manipulation in which the medium is actually engaging. We regard media as blank carriers of content, when this is effectively the opposite of how a medium functions. We don't see that the content of a medium is simply another medium because we are distracted by the manner in which it is presented to us. We are generally oblivious to the effects of a medium because media affect us so subtly. "The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance." [McLuhan, 1994: 18] His example, of media being functionally similar to any other staple or resource we organize ourselves around [McLuhan, 1994: 18]¹² shows in a very straight-forward manner the ways in which our environs shape us and backs up his claim that "We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us."¹³

In part 2 of *Understanding Media*, McLuhan cites example after example of how our media have shaped us. Although it would seem that overwhelming us with examples is of little merit in and of itself, the examples he does use allow for both a broader and a deeper understanding of how media shape us. The Global Village metaphor that McLuhan has structured from his medium analysis of electricity in the West is perhaps his most well-known. Our modern, electrical, media are non-specialist media and as such, they bring about the "global village," McLuhan's metaphor for the retribalizing aspect of electric technology. "Specialist technologies detribalize. The nonspecialist electric technology retribalizes." [McLuhan, 1994: 24] Thus, through our abilities to change time and space by bridging them electrically, we are able to

¹² This idea of organization around staples was proposed by Harold Innis and is one that McLuhan was particularly fond of and adapted to his own ends.

¹³ This quote appears many times on the studio album of *the medium is the MESSAGE*.

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

contact and influence people and events immediately and from great distances, making it seem as though we are all present in the same location, the proverbial village. A posted letter and an email have little in common in how they straddle space and time.

Marshall McLuhan is often accused of being a technological determinist. Much of what he says can certainly smack of that viewpoint. However, he does not discount human agency - he merely claims that as long as we are not aware of how media function we cannot be active in constructing a use for that medium. "For any medium has the power of imposing its own assumption on the unwary." [McLuhan, 1994: 15] Further, using the example of the press, he notes that "Anybody who could think that the press has the same function in America and Russia, or in France and China, is not really in touch with the medium." [McLuhan, 1994: 208] This is where his concept of hot and cold media might help to explain that any medium will change a culture in ways consistent with itself and with the extant cultural modes and mores, had he developed it more. "We can, if we choose, think things out before we put them out." [McLuhan, 1994: 49] In other words, we must be active if we do not wish to be reactive. A simple enough configuration, yet difficult enough to achieve. The layered agency concept I discussed in chapter 1 applies: can is not must, and action is not agency.

Nonetheless, McLuhan is not without his inconsistencies: for all of his vaunted ability to see through the symptom of content to the disease of medium he is human and makes mistakes, not least by omission.

The ultimate conflict between sight and sound, between written and oral kinds of perception and organization of existence is upon us. Since understanding stops action, as Nietzsche observed, we can moderate the fierceness of this conflict by understanding the media that extend us and raise these wars within and without us. [McLuhan, 1994: 15]

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

Where in that sentiment is the all-important haptic element, or any of the other senses? Yet McLuhan himself addresses the myriad senses and their extensions throughout his work. A case in point, according to McLuhan, is that television is a tactile medium and a vanguard of the change that electrical technology heralds. How does this work into his analysis, borrowed from Harold Innis, of eye and ear cultures? All that notwithstanding, our senses are extended by media, and we do not control their effects - we do, however control whether we wish to use the media and can only make such decisions if we understand the effects that any given medium exhibits. A further example: the humble oil painting is an excellent expression of the medium being the message, for it is not what the painting is of but rather the techniques employed in its creation and the manner in which it is displayed that influence its message. A stamp of the Mona Lisa on the back of a postcard will not have the same impact as viewing the original hanging in the Louvre, with particular architectural highlights, and lighting created just to show off the painting, its texture, and its frame.

In *Laws of Media*,¹⁴ Marshall McLuhan attempts to give us tools with which to probe media. With the use of tetrads, probes, aphorism, translation, and ground/figure some of the more complex and esoteric methods and tools of understanding media are brought forth. As discussed earlier, McLuhan used probes to feel for the shape of reality, to craft a metaphor. In order to discuss it, he resorted to aphorism. McLuhan does not find the aphorism to be superior to rhetoric, he finds it indispensable for certain teaching tasks, of which his approach to media is one. "First, then, the matter of the proverb, the maxim, the aphorism, as an indispensable mode

¹⁴ *Laws of Media* was published nearly a decade after his death, with the help of his son, Eric and originally conceived as a second edition of *Understanding Media*. It introduces the tetrad as a poetical tool.

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

of oral society.” [McLuhan, 1962: 104] To understand why this might be, it is fundamental to understand that for McLuhan, everything was metaphor.

Language is metaphor in the sense that it not only stores but translates experience from one mode into another... But the principle of exchange and translation, or metaphor, is in our rational power to translate each of our senses into the others: this we do every instant of our lives. [McLuhan and McLuhan, 1988: 225-6]

Every part of language was meant to stand for something that it was not, and in its use, metaphor buries itself, reifies itself, and we become anesthetized to the working of a representation.

That language is representation, and that it can be boiled down to an essence of metaphor was not a new concept proposed by McLuhan. Charles Saunders Peirce and Ferdinand de Saussure with their systems of semiotics and semiology respectively, analyzed language in just this way, as noted in chapter 1. Peirce had created a system of sign analysis that was incredibly in-depth, creating trichotomies of the sign, and trichotomies for each of those trichotomies, along with classes of signs the essence of which was this: it's all relative and we can trace connections and contexts to determine the type of sign (metaphor) that a given word is.¹⁵ Saussure had a simpler, though no less sophisticated approach: “The bond between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary.” [Saussure, 1966: 67] Although not all are equally so. Signs do not point to things but to concepts, “The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image.” [Saussure, 1966: 66] It is their relative positions and not through an intrinsic value that time is linked to language, “*Arbitrary and differential* are two correlative qualities... Signs function, then, not through their intrinsic value but through their relative position.” [Saussure,

¹⁵ Peirce was a great fan of things existing in threes. “Signs are divisible by three trichotomies; first, according as the sign in itself is a mere quality, is an actual existent, or is a general law; secondly, according as the relation of the sign to its object consists in the sign's having some character in itself, or in some existential relation to that object, or in its relation to an interpretant; thirdly, according as its Interpretant represents it as a sign of possibility or as a sign of fact or a sign of reason.” [Peirce, 1955: 101]

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

1966: 118] But it is what Roland Barthes did with Saussure's semiology when crafting his conceptions of myth that relates most closely to McLuhan's conception of metaphor. For when the original sign becomes the signifier for a new sign *divorcing the new sign of what the previous one had signified*, metaphor is all that can remain. A quick look at Barthes' semiologically-based creation of myth will show the recursive nature of metaphor, "As this lateral shift is essential for the analysis of myth, I shall represent it in the following way, it being understood, of course, that spatialization of the pattern is here only a metaphor: {see figure 1, appendix}" [Barthes, 1972: 115] It could be argued that postmodernism is the crushing of the original signifiers in myth creation. Television programming of the 1990s and 2000s, such as "The Simpsons," "The Venture Bros," and "The Family Guy" would be prime examples. These cartoon television shows are almost unwatchable if one does not have a storehouse of American cultural values built in; "The Family Guy" in particular spends most of its time decontextualizing and satirizing fictional elements. One such scene situates the coyote from Warner Bros Looney Tunes in his cliché position awaiting the arrival of the roadrunner in one more hare-brained and doomed-to-fail attempt at killing it. Through an accident the coyote actually manages to kill the roadrunner and we are treated to a dinner scene where two coyotes are seated at a dinner table eating the cooked remains of the bird. The conversation quickly drifts between absurdities as the coyote loses his sole *raison d'être* - killing the roadrunner - and starts a downward skid in his life before finding the Lord Jesus Christ. This video is found easily online. It requires one to be familiar with the original series or its artefacts, as well as other American cinema and television clichés, all directly divorced of their original signifiers and thus becoming Barthesian myth. McLuhan

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

expands on this concept by noting that it is not just language that is metaphorical, but our very senses and their perception of the world.

The power of metaphor becomes more evident when one takes McLuhan at his word, that translation is the role of media and of language. "...technology is explicitness." Translation is thus a "spelling-out" of forms of knowing. What we call "mechanization" is a translation of nature, and of our own natures, into amplified and specialized forms." [McLuhan, 1994: 56] Without this role of translation, without the tool of metaphor, we would never have been able to change our perceptions, that is our sense ratios.

"A man's reach must exceed his grasp or what's a metaphor." All media are active metaphors in their power to translate experience into new forms. The spoken word was the first technology by which man was able to let go of his environment in order to grasp it in a new way. Words are a kind of information retrieval that can range over the total environment and experience at high speed. Words are complex systems of metaphors and symbols that translate experience into our uttered or outered senses. They are a technology of explicitness. By means of translation of immediate sense experience into vocal symbols the entire world can be evoked and retrieved at any instant. [McLuhan, 1994: 57]

2.4 *A Poiesis of Thought: agent media*

On the surface of things, poiesis, "to make" in ancient Greek, seems self-evident. Digging a little deeper, however reveals it to be both a sizeable undertaking and hugely impactful to McLuhan's ideas, although he never discusses the idea itself, *per se*. To grapple with Heidegger's concept of poiesis, a "bringing-forth into the world" I will enlist the help of a handful of Nietzsche's ideas on which I expounded in chapter 1.

The poetics of agency; what does it mean to relate to media? Heidegger believes that there are two ways of looking at the world, that of *techne* and that of *poiesis*, and that we have

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

fallen, through technology, from a world-view where we see the world as it is to a condition where we see the world merely as raw material, as a standing reserve, where *things* do not exist, only *objects* do. It is, of course, important to understand what Heidegger means when he uses terms like object and thing, and even more-so the Greek words *techne* and *poiesis*, and to bring in a few other concepts he makes use of, namely Gestell/Enframing, and the standing reserve.

“Enframing means that way of revealing which holds sway in the essence of modern technology and which is itself nothing technological.” [Heidegger, 1977: 20] Although he uses many other ideas and concepts, these are the most important in understanding where he is coming from and what it is that he claims, namely that technology is unchanging in essence (Essentialism) and that we have no way of controlling it (Determinism.) Once enframed, that is, seen the 'way it is', our world-view is stuck in that paradigm, which in the case of technology is one wherein things have a use-value and nothing else, where we come to see things from the perspective of the *techne*, the mechanical arts, and lose track of *poiesis*, the making as revealing, the changing from an object to a thing. As McLuhan notes, understanding builds resistance. Yet determinism is due to lack of agency, since we have given up *poiesis* for *techne*.

This change is vital, Heidegger maintains, because without it we lose the essence of ourselves, not just of the potential thing. What is an object then but simply something observable or sensible, something that is, and no more than that, again? Through our enframing of things to a standing reserve, an object is simply one more thing that has a use, fulfills a need, and nothing more. It is just waiting to be used. This is dangerous, because it places us into a position whereby we do not realize and take no notice of objects, specifically the fact that we do not identify the danger, because we cannot see it, makes the danger greater, because it occludes rational thought

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

on the impact of our actions, followed by (appropriate, one hopes) reasoned action. But according to certain translations, Heidegger claims that this is not something that we can choose to do, removing agency from any action to address his Essentialist concerns. Although I can make no claim to the contrary, as I have not read his work in German, I do not believe that to be his position, for even in the English translation of 'The Turning', he states that “So long as we do not, through thinking, experience what is, we can never belong to what will be.” [Heidegger, 1977: 49], which I read to mean, metaphorically (my metaphor, not that of Heidegger), that we are slaves to sensation instead of users of the tools represented by our senses the moment we treat things as objects.

What, then, is a thing? A thing is *not* an object, it is a 'coming to presence', a revealing, a *poiesis*, a 'making as revealing'. Presence is a verb and a noun in his work, and it relates to being. It is important to stress that Heideggerean *being* (Dasein) is not the same as Nietzschean *being* (sein) in the being versus becoming argument from chapter 1; it is the human *being*, not the *I am*. “Every occasion for whatever passes over and goes forward into presencing from that which is not presencing is *poiēsis*, is bringing-forth [*Her-vor-bringen*].” [Heidegger, 1977: 10] Heidegger uses a jug as an example, that outside of its creation reveals itself by being used in a ceremony, along with the notion of giving [of itself, sense of meaning] such as a portion shared with the gods. Technology as enframing is agency, however humans [being] enframed removes us from having agency. In other words, devices are objects that take us out of touch with what is important whereas things bring us in contact with that very importance. It touches on the problematic subject of authenticity and can be seen as the subject idea in Barthe’s *From Work to Text*.

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

Heidegger's work, in particular on poiesis, techne, enframing, and presence are a microcosm of language, agency, and the impacts of technology. His words ring of Nietzschean agency when he states that "The will to mastery becomes all the more urgent the more technology threatens to slip from human control." [Heidegger, 1977: 5] A link to Gestalt psychology can be gleaned from his discussion bearing on causes; all causes are related and slip in the cover of the thing/object they create. "What we call cause [*Ursache*] and the Romans call *causa* is called *aition* by the Greeks, that to which something else is indebted [*das, was ein anderes verschuldet*]. The four causes are the ways, all belonging at once to each other, of being responsible for something else." [Heidegger, 1977: 7] This details the manner in which media slip through being revealed by seeming to be their content. But even more so, he makes a case for being right in line with the *medium is the message* when he states that

It is technology itself that makes the demand on us to think in another way what is usually understood by "essence." But in what way? If we speak of the "essence of a house" and the "essence of a state," we do not mean a generic type; rather we mean the ways in which house and state hold sway, administer themselves, develop and decay - the way in which they "essence" [*Wesen*]. [Heidegger, 1977: 30]

He uses essence in order to perform his own probes of technology; for he seeks questions. "We would be advised, therefore, above all to pay heed to the way, and not to fix our attention on isolated sentences and topics. The way is a way of thinking." [Heidegger, 1977: 3] Thus Nietzsche, Heidegger, and McLuhan agree: agency is possible, however it requires thought to go along with action; poiesis is the correct action for an agent to make. And action can take many forms; for McLuhan it was slowly heading towards a performance of his ideas.

With *Understanding Media*, McLuhan took his combination of theory and praxis the next step, although some would argue that it was a step backward. Where *GG* was mired in the freshly

Chapter 2: Feeling Our Actions

minted mosaic approach, *UM*, ostensibly making the case that the modern, electric epoch was one of the mosaic, seemed to abandon it, using the standard chapter approach of most academic texts. And yet, *UM* is filled to the brim with aphorisms and non-standard interpretations of events and objects that allow for McLuhan's probes to function simultaneously as a tool that he presents within the work and as a tool with which to engage that work. *UM* is almost a theoretical tautology, built on itself. As McLuhan was wont to joke, "You don't like those ideas? I got others."

Now that we have some background, a fleshing out, of important elements of McLuhan's thought, I will attempt to show how he used this understanding to attempt to craft heuristic elements into his work in chapter 3.

CHAPTER THREE: Ricorso - a McLuhan Heuristic

In this chapter, my focus is on the ways in which we interact and engage with our tools, negotiating the spiral and integral nature of tool/us formation. This follows along the lines of “first we shape our tools, thereafter our tools shape us” [*MASSAGE* audio] and uses McLuhan’s concept of the electrical epoch being one of the mosaic, similar to Poe’s allegory of the maelström,¹⁶ which is why McLuhan refers to it so often. Poe’s allegory deals with understanding the nature of a medium through observation. Most people trapped in the whirlpool don’t take the time to observe what is occurring and are moved about at the whim of the current rather than of their own volition. By looking at *MASSAGE* I will analyze how McLuhan attempted to realize his own ideas in material form. The medium is the example. *Counterblast* was McLuhan’s first attempt at duplicating the forms he saw changing due to shifting epochs. He crafted it alone, in homage to Wyndham Lewis’ *Blast*. For *the medium is the MASSAGE*, in both print and album form, he had the help of design professionals Quentin Fiore and Jerome Agel. Fiore was the graphic designer, tasked with imagining McLuhan’s words and concepts in audio/formats that broke from print’s linear nature, whereas Agel’s role involved a more metaphysical overview. This is likely why Agel credited himself as a producer on his projects, whereas McLuhan and Fiore were the “authors.” The tetrad will allow for exploring *MASSAGE* as a

¹⁶ In the story, a mariner clings to life while awaiting his inevitable demise from being swallowed by the maelström, As he bides his final minutes, he keeps himself entertained by guessing which objects will be swallowed by the maelström first. “At length, after making several guesses of this nature, and being deceived in all --this fact --the fact of my invariable miscalculation, set me upon a train of reflection that made my limbs again tremble, and my heart beat heavily once more.” [Poe, 2011: ebook] This testing of theories by failure in order to find a method of success through shared characteristics (all failures have X in common) is much the same as that which McLuhan applies throughout his probes. That which he seeks determines what he looks at.

Chapter 3: Ricorso - a McLuhan Heuristic

media object, expanded on in chapter 4, while poiesis will be explored through the choices that are or appear to be available through the navigation of the text and audio. Thus *MASSAGE* itself functions as a metaphor, a sort of tautology, both incorporating and informing the ways in which media are formative and the impact of agency in and on McLuhan's approach.

As McLuhan progressed from *The Gutenberg Galaxy (GG)* to *Understanding Media (UM)* and to *the medium is the MESSAGE*, he was changing the form of his message. Gone were the near-linear attempts at the mosaic that were embodied in *GG* and the highly aphoristic but purely lettered *UM*, superseded by attempts to have the media be the messengers of their own probes. He began to act out in each medium in which his work was being presented, attempting to show the manner in which each medium functioned. While *MASSAGE* the book remained a printed text, the record album that accompanied it and shared its title was a mishmash of soundbites, remixes, juxtapositions, and sound effects that made linear listening a near impossibility.

McLuhan's radio presentations, television interviews, and graphic texts explored the media in which he was presenting. All became literal metaphors, literal tautologies. Metaphors exist in many forms, and McLuhan used the image as aphorism. Since the nature of metaphor extends beyond the written word, McLuhan articulated images and sounds through his aphorisms in *MASSAGE*, with the help of media-design experts. The aphorism is a mode of expression, a suggestive discourse, and McLuhan uses it to evoke the impact of media that he, in other texts, describes in words, particularly the linear logic of the printing press. And yet, images are not the only medium with malleable meaning, as Roland Barthes describes in *Death of the Author*. "To give a text an Author is to impose a limit on that text, to furnish it with a final significance, to

close the writing.” [Barthes, 1978: 147] However, metaphors are incredibly powerful in shaping: a vessel containing a thing shapes that thing. It doesn’t matter whether the vessel is aware of its influence, nor whether the thing contained is aware of how it is shaped, nor even whether the person using the vessel is aware of how the changed shape has impacted their lives; consciousness is not a requirement for media access. And as McLuhan becomes shaped by his media so his approach conforms more to the vessel, and his message becomes a massage, intentionally, and with an awareness for the potential irony.

Metaphors are themselves inherently poetic. They engage the reader in meaning-making without the constraints of literal language, which hides its metaphorical roots by claiming incontrovertible definitions. The poetic nature of metaphor is thus poiesis, where theory and praxis meet. Theorists and poiesis are an uneasy blend. Theorists can identify and codify what is happening, but are generally ill-suited to doing their own poetics in order to show the meaning of their work. This work is often stuck in a hermeneutic environment antagonistic to proofs that do not reside in philosophically-mandated forms of language. That is, theorists are often not the talented designers required to link, or correspond with, their metaphysical understanding and to communicate it through their actions. McLuhan himself provides us with ample examples of his attempts at poiesis, and I focus on *MASSAGE*, with further examples from *Counterblast* to round out the ideas I’m attempting to explain. The very title of *the medium is the MASSAGE* is a telling one, as McLuhan alludes to the surreptitious nature in which media affect us. He hits us up front with the phrase that gained him fame, and changes it subtly to imply a degree of immediacy¹⁷

¹⁷ I am using Bolter and Grusin’s term immediacy to mean the transparency of the medium in the process. [Bolter and Grusin, 2000] The medium gains traction as it loses visibility; you cannot fight what you do not realize exists.

that his original lacked. By invoking the image of a massage, McLuhan is telling us that we will like it, it will have a soporific effect and it will change us in ways not immediately obvious.

This brings McLuhan's theories and praxis into juxtaposition: the linearity of print culture versus the mosaic approach of the electrical. Examples of this would be pages 50-1 and 108-9 in *MASSAGE*: the words and the image juxtapose to both work together and distract from each other. Neither the words nor the image is clear or simple; without study there is little that can be gained from it. Thus the book is no longer governed by the logic of the printing press, yet digital technology mimics its organizing principles. A reversion to type, if you'll pardon the pun.

Whereas *Understanding Media* is linear,¹⁸ *MASSAGE* (both the book and the album seen as a single, holistic object) may be accessed from any page or point in time from which it becomes a "choose your own adventure," and can be seen as the "evolution" of tool-use wherein McLuhan and his helpers honed their craft. This led to changing notions and perceptions of print, although not entirely consciously. It's not the technology/technique but our changed perceptions that allow for changed relationships with media. The printing press is linear until it becomes an electrical device, at which point it changes how we interact with it.

¹⁸ As McLuhan noted in his preface to *The Mechanical Bride*, "because of the circulating point of view in this book, there is no need for it to be read in any special order. Any part of the book provides one or more views of the same social landscape." This does not apply to *UM*; although part II, being examples of his probes into various media, can be read in any order, as long as one sticks to reading any given chapter in its entirety, part I is an entirety of itself and requires the reader to progress in relatively linear, printing press-inspired, fashion.

“How do you like it so far?”¹⁹ asks *MASSAGE*, the album, immediately. As beginnings go, quite conclusive. A book still looks and feels, despite the impact of the 1960s, like a book but its logic no longer *has* to be words marching into oblivion, in reverse. The mosaic approach to reading or listening to *MASSAGE*, with its inclusion of multiple fonts, text sizes, viewing angles, and images (including photographs, drawings, whether in black and white or colour, etc.) or sound bites, quotes, sound effects or other ephemera is not dependent on the technologies producing it. Gutenberg’s press and the tinfoil phonograph could have accommodated much of these seemingly technology-mediated elements. However, it was our changed perceptions to “what is possible” in design that impacted the manner in which these media objects were created and used. This is not necessarily the case in the consumption of media. In fact, we did “Today’s job with yesterday’s tools;” we attempted to analyze the electronic epoch through the lens of the printing press. This is a repeated theme on the *MASSAGE* album and throughout many of McLuhan’s academic texts as well.

McLuhan had several goals in mind when he became involved in the electric information age books²⁰ and even beforehand.²¹ He wanted to create a new discipline, Media Studies, and he

¹⁹ As of writing, the studio album can be found online on YouTube, NPR Sound, or for purchase on the iTunes store. A cursory search should be all that is required to experience the audio of the album, if not its material elements, such as the vinyl, the sleeve art, inserts, and effect of repetitive listening. I encourage the reader to give it a listen; at under 42 minutes in length it is both a short investment and very important in grappling with this subject matter. As Douglas Adams noted, 42 is the answer. Perhaps he had recently listened to the *MASSAGE* album.

²⁰ “Electric information age book” is a name given by Jeffrey Schnapp and Adam Michaels to the works published from 1966 to 1975 that blended artistic design with text and creative license; *The medium is the MESSAGE* is considered the first of its kind, and many books (several from McLuhan) would follow its lead, culminating with *Other Worlds* by Jerome Agel and Carl Sagan.

²¹ *The Mechanical Bride* in 1951 launched McLuhan’s “mosaic” approach, even though he had yet to come up with his metaphysical analyses of media, let alone the term mosaic to describe it.

Chapter 3: Ricorso - a McLuhan Heuristic

was attempting to craft a curriculum, but he had a problem: how to sell the idea that Media Studies was a viable and interesting field. As he wrote to Harold Innis in 1951, “I think there are lines appearing in *Empire and Communications* [1950], for example, which suggest the possibility of organizing an entire school of studies.” [McLuhan and Zingrone, 1995: 72] He went so far as to propose a place to house it and several elements of the discipline. “It seems obvious to me that Bloor St. is the one point in this University where one might establish a focus of the arts and sciences. And the organizing concept would naturally be “Communication Theory and practice.” [McLuhan and Zingrone, 1995: 75] Viewing an opportunity to craft a new discipline changed the way he engaged with his material and how he attempted to show others the value in its study; he became a salesman of his discoveries, a seller of the Santa María.

To discuss his work, without including his public persona, is to ignore a core element of what he was attempting to accomplish. For in his public persona he embodied the very probes he claimed to use for media analysis, and he wove them together with his heuristics to craft not only a potential curriculum, but also the reasons for its existence. This curriculum was intrinsically based around Vico’s concept of ricorso, or recurrence, and led to McLuhan’s creation of the tetrad, a system wherein the old is new again, the visible hidden, and vice versa. In order to show this to those generations which were bridging epochs, he applied his understanding of the mosaic nature of the electronic epoch to his heuristics. And then he took them “on stage” massaging audiences with his ideas in order to jolt them out of their own preconceptions, freeing them to explore.

3.1 *Performer and Performance*²²

McLuhan has been accused of being many things, from the unsavoury to the unkind and the inverse, from being a new thinker right up to hero worship. Charlatan, soothsayer, con, but also prophet, showman, and harbinger. Tom Nairn, in the *New Statesman*, best summed up the overarching totality of critical views in his review of *MESSAGE*:

Capable of the most brilliant and stimulating insight into relationships other historians and social theorists have ignored, he systematically fails to develop this insight critically. Consequently, his view of the connection between media and society is an unbelievable shambles: his dream-logic turns necessary conditions into sufficient conditions, half-truths into sure things, the possible into a *fait accompli*. [Schnapp, 2012: 89]

All that is missing is the used-car salesman epithet. And, perhaps, on many levels the claims can be viewed as accurate. From a literal standpoint, his metaphorical approach would do little other than make people scratch their heads in wonder or consternation. *Why won't he just say what he means?!* But this is where the very point he was attempting to make rears its ironic head; with media couching its impact behind content, the student is required to look obliquely in order to catch the character of it. Thus it is relevant to note the importance of the difference between literal and figurative language, that “truth” is abstract and that we can sometimes come to better terms with an object through abstracting distractions, which corresponds perfectly with Gestalt psychology. This dichotomy of literal versus figurative transcribes onto figure and ground, although a bit awkwardly, as in this example figurative is opposed to figure. We take the focal point to be literal even though we are granted no more than a figurative view of it. But Nairn

²² I am discussing performance as critical theory, that is as “performativity.” This is about a thing coming into being as it is being performed, and as such, has direct correlations with McLuhan’s performance of his role(s) as well as his valuing the poiesis of action. As such it is in line with Nietzschean *becoming* and Heideggerean *poiesis*. This distinguishes it from the ideas of Searle and Butler who focus on illocution and repetition.

Chapter 3: Ricorso - a McLuhan Heuristic

misses the point entirely; McLuhan isn't offering insights into the media themselves, he is offering the tools for anybody to gain insights if they're willing to reflect and apply the probes he offers. He is, however, a performer and his work became a performance. This becomes evident when one looks at how his technique and approach changed from the *Gutenberg Galaxy* to *Understanding Media* to *MESSAGE*. A critical element of that approach is the figure and ground of Gestalt psychology.

It is interesting to look at Gestalt psychology through the senses that filter our perceptions and its link with performance. Gestalt psychology, which McLuhan relied on heavily, is a tool that can be juxtaposed with media as sense extensions, since our senses themselves function as *intermediaries*. When figure and ground constantly meld into each other and distract from just what the focus of any activity is we may notice that our senses are being engaged differently and once aware of this, we can pay attention to the ways in which media engage us and change us. Implicit in Gestalt psychology's shifting between figure and ground is that we are not necessarily conscious of this occurring, and even if we are, our ability to sift or parse its impact is limited. Action, doing, the senses, and metaphor are inextricably linked for Nietzsche, for Heidegger, and for McLuhan. Looking at agency and bringing in the distinction between *techne* and *poiesis* rounds out how McLuhan attempted to approach the ways in which our media influence us; *techne* foregrounds content. Performers, like other artists, attempt to change the area of focus. They hide what should be obvious and bring forth hidden elements in accordance with the desires of the director. In McLuhan's case he often had both roles, on top of being the author.

In *GG* McLuhan approached his subject matter from the more sterile confines of the academic approach. It was deeply researched, its work was presented in the mosaic format in

which any element is accessible without constitutive necessity of the rest. As Marchessault notes, “*The Gutenberg Galaxy* is a very scholarly presentation of ideas within an historical framework... it is dense and exciting in its gathering together of a huge, almost encyclopedic, array of studies, which in the humanist tradition draws on a vast number of disciplines...” [Marchessault, 2005: 116] But while it seemed traditional in some ways, its mosaic nature and general adherence to the form of a medieval manuscript were hardly *de rigueur* in academe. From this, he moves on to a more traditional-seeming text with *UM* but this was an illusion. In *UM*, McLuhan addressed a changing perception of space and time. “It is not until *Understanding Media* that McLuhan shifts his metaphors to focus on space as immediate environment, stressing surround and disorientation - environ - rather than distant spheres of symbolically mediated spaces and hence, temporalities.” [Marchessault, 2005: 157] But it is with the late 1960s *MASSAGE* that he breaks free from the ironic constraints he imposed on himself by, as Raymond Williams notes, “using books to condemn book culture.” [Marchessault, 2005: 118] He was not able to do so alone.

As his career, both academic and popular, progressed, and as he became a celebrity thanks to the efforts of Feigen and Gossage, his work became more allegorical, more probing, and more metaphorical. “Marshall reached his global tier of fame with the help of two San Francisco men connected in media circles, Gerald Feigen and Howard Gossage. In 1965 they held a McLuhan Festival in the offices of Gossage’s San Francisco ad agency... Feigen and Gossage also brought Marshall to New York and introduced him to magazine and newspaper heavyweights through a series of cocktail parties and meetings. He was in all the magazines.” [Coupland, 2009: 166] While causality of one over the other is outside the scope of

this thesis, correspondence is not. He became a probe, attempting to show the impact of events by allowing people to complete their own pictures of what media were doing; he walked the talk. Metaphorically. And it was important to his concept of the probe that people were actively engaged with their environments. “For McLuhan, participation defines art’s capacity to stimulate and unite the psyche-soma. It is both physically involving and intellectually creative, and it invites performativity rather than passive readership.” [Marchessault, 2005: 125] If we are not engaged, we are not much different than the Sufi parable of the donkey laden with books; a donkey with a load of holy books is still a donkey. It is by doing that we learn. And artists are an important element in making sure the learning is not too scripted and stilted. As Nietzsche notes, “A painter without hands who wished to express in song the picture before his mind would, by means of this substitution of spheres, still reveal more about the essence of things than does the empirical world.” [Pearson and Large, 2006: 119]

Beyond engagement is the step to poiesis, and McLuhan took this step very seriously, indeed. So much so that he enlisted help in the areas in which he was unfamiliar or unskilled.

He begins numerous collaborations with artists and designers and his books (many of them photo-collages) are far more aphoristic and rhetorical than works of rigorous scholarship. His media studies become more performative, and his research is increasingly concerned with curriculum for the new discipline of Communication Studies, as well as for popular consumption. [Marchessault, 2005: 157]

In tandem, the marketing work of Feigen and Gossage, and the design work of Agel and Fiore worked to propel McLuhan’s method and his insights beyond the academic circles to which he was accustomed. “McLuhan moved well beyond publishing for English specialists, directing his work to humanities scholars in general, as well as to those working in fields such as education and audiovisual studies as well as the corporate world.” [Buxton, 2012: 581] And although

initially he was treated with great respect, he was an academic treading intellectual ground and by the mid 1970s the very marketing apparatus that had elevated him to prophet in the greater milieu gave him the unshakeable aspect of being a snake-oil salesman in the academic world. Nonetheless, his performance work was integral to his theories, and he engaged it whenever possible. His performances were not scripted. However, he had mannerisms that he used in relation to his theories depending on with which medium he was engaging. For television, the “cool” medium, it was important that he remain aloof. “TV is a medium that rejects the sharp personality and favours the presentation of processes rather than of products.” [McLuhan, 1994: 309] And he would use his knowledge of the medium to engage the audience. Unfortunately for McLuhan, this could be seen as ego.

By “putting on” audiences and trying to outmaneuver opponents in debate, McLuhan projected a protean face of an actor, capable of assuming different expressions without being committed to any one of them. Aside from tucking in his chin before speaking, he avoided any kind of pose or set of mannerisms that would leave an audience with a well-defined impression of him. [Marchand, 1998: 191]

McLuhan often engaged with his audiences, whether they were private, academic, or professional, by using puns. Puns are, at their base, a play on the very meaning that literalists apply to words. They are an oral artefact. More importantly, as Marchessault notes, “We need to read McLuhan’s puns as creative engagements with the life world.” [Marchessault, 2005: 159] By using puns as probes to see what stuck and what did not, mentally, he was getting the puns to perform double duty. Justly, we should also read his puns as a heuristic, probing his own ideas and poking exploratory holes where others might have preferred he left well-enough alone.

3.1.1 A Heuristic Loses its Marker

Heuristics, in other words teaching aids, tend to involve methods wherein the student discovers what is attempting to be taught “all by themselves.” That is, the method is often invisible in the learning that the student does and the student is unaware of having been taught anything. These methods are often hands-on in that the student performs a task in order to learn the lesson. A standard academic example would be the essay. The concept of heuristics is an old one; Plato’s academy already used them to teach lessons. And, in a warning not heeded, Plato admonished against those using his written texts without knowing the academy’s heuristics. He was worried that his work would be viewed without the benefit of knowing the way in which it was to be used as a heuristic, and how that might play into understanding the works of his school. This was prescient, particularly since his culture was an oral one; his students would have interacted in ways of which we are no longer aware, as we approach his work thousands of years later and from our own viewpoints instilled by our present hybrid electronic/Gutenberg epochs. Plato’s was an oral culture, yet we have some of his written works; how would students have been asked to respond? The essay was an invention credited to the 16th-century philosopher Montaigne, and is thus a more modern heuristic than would have been available to Plato’s students. Barthes notes that meaning-making is the domain of the receiver of communication and not the sender. The intention of the message sender does not guarantee receipt of the same message that was sent. As such, if one wishes to transmit meaning, literal language reduces in usefulness the more abstract or metaphysical the concepts one is attempting to impart become.

‘Jenny is cleaning her room’ allows for much less interpretive breadth than “Enframing means the gathering together of that setting-upon which sets upon man...” [Heidegger, 1977: 20]

For McLuhan then, his performances and allegories were heuristics from which to engage with the media and not with McLuhan himself. His tools, however, were the classical Gutenberg technology of print and the electronic technologies of audio (radio and record albums) and television. These tools were grounded in metaphors, and McLuhan used metaphor *a lot*. He saw print as metaphor, as mentioned throughout earlier chapters, and shows that McLuhan was attempting to use the tools, i.e. media, at his disposal to show the manner in which they impact the user. He found it insightful that metaphor was the Greek word for transportation. “The word “metaphor” is from the Greek *meta* plus *pherein*, to carry across or transport.” [McLuhan, 1994: 89] It was, for McLuhan, almost a self-referential heuristic that contained its own instruction manual. “First, then, the matter of the proverb, the maxim, the aphorism, as an indispensable mode of oral society.” [McLuhan, 1962: 104] And, as the oral was being reborn in the electrical epoch, metaphor became a tool for our time.

Poetry, a word with its etymological roots in poiesis, can take many forms, in particular spoken word, print, and image/sound/text. In many ways, McLuhan’s approach was more poetic than prosaic; he was, however learned in the creation of prose, particularly academic writing, and thus enlisted aid for his non-prosaic work from people he considered skilled in those arts.

...the artists that McLuhan will come to collaborate with throughout the rest of his career are the multi-disciplinary artists and graphic designers like Harley Parker and Quentin Fiore. In fact, he could be said to have recognized that designers (being artists who merge culture and commerce) would be the central artistic players of the twenty-first century as Hal Foster’s *Design and Crime* (2002) well testifies. McLuhan did realize that someone would have to design the new information environments that were coming into existence. As he would write in his later collage collaboration, *Culture is Our Business*, artists create the ‘anti-environments’ to make visible the invisible environment and as a means of ‘adjustment and perception.’ [Marchessault, 2005: 165-166]

Chapter 3: Ricorso - a McLuhan Heuristic

And, like poetry, his work allowed for interpretation to a greater degree than more literal prose allows for. “McLuhan’s litany of examples do not substantiate or illustrate a theory of the media, rather, these function as singularities that enable the researcher/student to ‘probe’ the media in terms of a larger field of patterns, relationalities and structural homologies.” [Marchessault, 2005: 203] These probes, as mentioned, were as varied in their forms as the media they were intended to probe. Yet McLuhan doesn’t consider *MASSAGE* his work, and it’s not. It’s *Understanding Media* as poiesis. How does that compare with *Counterblast* and his later EIA books? It was a publication that marked a change from McLuhan the academic to McLuhan the heuristic performer. “Continuing on the path defined for him by Gossage and Feigen, McLuhan no longer merely described the emergent electric age, he performed it; his identity as a celebrity was bound up with that performance and inseparable from it.” [Buxton, 2012: 589]

For McLuhan, his attempts at performance did not come from nowhere. They will have come from his mother, Elsie as well as the performative role of many rituals in the Catholic church. His mother was an elocutionist by training and her skill instilled a love for performance in young Marshall. She would often practice her art at home and Marshall learned much from her.

“Although she never formally taught them, Elsie’s sons were also the beneficiaries of her elocutionary training: they developed habits of speech that remained with them for the rest of their days. The effects were more immediately noticeable in Maurice, who spoke often at church groups as he grew older and eventually became a minister, but they were more profound in Marshall. He memorized immense quantities of poetry and was familiar with the works of the greatest English poets before he entered university.” [Marchand, 1989: 13]

McLuhan often mentioned the impact of Catholic rituals on his ability to focus on the forms of media instead of getting caught up in its contents; he felt that only artists were granted the same insights that Catholicism allowed him. Giambattista Vico was someone that McLuhan felt had

similar attributes. Although Vico was not an artist, with unknown religious affiliations, he was a humanist, rhetorician, jurist, and political philosopher and influential on McLuhan's perceptions of time.

3.2 *Ricorso: the spiral nature of tool formation*

McLuhan valued the work of Vico highly, in particular Vico's concept of ricorso. This concept was one in which time did not move in a straight line nor did it repeat exactly. It was multivariate and a new return to the past. But we have tended to view time as linear. This notion is not based on evidence but rather on the interpretive force of a given epoch. "The linear concept of time was made effective as a result of humanistic studies in the Renaissance." [Innis, 2008: 62] Thus linear time was conceptual in the epoch of the printing press. It no longer held true in the electronic, where recursion is a regular theme. According to a shared proverb, from China to India to Heraclitus, you can never enter the same river twice.

Vico, like Heidegger, is a philologist among philosophers. His time theory of '*ricorsi*' has been interpreted by lineal minds to imply 'recurrence' ... 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. And in Vico, the concept of recurrence cannot 'be admitted at the level of the course of the nations through time': 'the establishment of providence establishes universal history, the total presence of the human spirit to itself in idea, it possesses itself, past, present, and future, in an act which is wholly consonant with its own historicity. [McLuhan, 1962: 249-250]

Nietzsche was also a philologist, as noted in chapter 1, and there is much that he has to offer McLuhan's theories, not least of which is another aspect from which to come to terms with them for the student of media. Nietzsche also found that time is recursive and repetitive; his concept of the Übermensch relied on the ability to both notice the nature of time/reality and to accept it

internally into decision-making processes, as he repeats in several works, including *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*. Nietzsche viewed the “eternal recurrence” as a circle. However, it allowed for an infinite repetition of finite elements; thus, the impact would be similar in that the repetition of similar things would potentially play out differently. “The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it” [Nietzsche, 2001: 341] This may be an example of how not even Nietzsche was able to escape the dominant media logics of his epoch. As a child of the printing press and the industrial revolution, he accepted time as linear. Although he did so in an atypical manner, he proposed that it repeated forever. It was an infinite loop of finite possibilities that proposed a beginning and an end, where the end was attached to the beginning: a circle, or perhaps a Möbius strip.

Of most interest to this thesis, however is that Vico’s concept of ricorso was spiral in nature. The return was not a circle, as Nietzsche proposed, not the alluded-to “snake eating its own tail,” the ouroboros. It spiralled back on itself and into new permutations.

...Vico’s concept of ‘ricorso’ which is not simply a return but always a new return, a new retelling... There is no sense of a return to an origin, nor of the circle but of the spiral of time where there is no beginning or end.

Vico’s periodization is cyclical rather than linear, moving through three main stages in theocracy, aristocracy, and democracy. At the end of the third stage after a period of destruction there is a ‘ricorso’ to the first in a never-ending cycle of change. [Marchessault, 2005: 179]

This spiral nature overlaps with McLuhan’s statement that “first we shape our tools, thereafter our tools shape us,” [*MASSAGE* audio] and illuminates how we shape our media and how they change the ways in which we use them in a global/metaphysical sense. This is even more so in the case of the tetrads, where elements never disappear: they are either obsolesced or retrieved. As so often with McLuhan, and as noted by the critic Tom Nairn, it’s the micro elements — that is the details — that are missing.

Chapter 3: Ricorso - a McLuhan Heuristic

McLuhan seeks to understand media as both an effect of and an influence upon the western human sensorium. This awareness must take on the paradox that technologies function both as physical extension of human bodies and as invisible environments. He attempts to think of media not as continuous and progressive developments but as contiguous and, importantly, as belonging to a living changing environment, to a space-time framework and inter-national context. [Marchessault, 2005: 202-3]

And he attempts to think of media as permanently linked into the ricorso *shaping* that defines media impact upon us.

Whether the spiral nature of ricorso is to be viewed as an overlapping spiral or as a non-overlapping spiral as this visual representation of ricorso attempts to illustrate, as seen in Figure 2 in the appendix, makes for an interesting argument. My interpretation is that the spiral is overlapping; that is, while any given medium is changing how we engage with its past, present, and future iterations, it is simultaneously engaging with other media. For McLuhan, this would be most easily visualized as the time periods in which media epochs are changing. For example, as bridging technologies: books can be seen as electronic creations, long before the ebook, as they are no longer locked into the logic of the printing press' mechanical approach. Seen from Gestalt psychology, this would be analogous to the liminal moments when figure and ground change composition, such that what was figure becomes a part of ground again, and a new figure emerges.

But where do the limits between figure and ground lie? A study of the boundary area between figure and ground, and notions of "visible" boundaries, e.g. written haiku versus spoken Beat, and how the electric epoch has wiped out that distinction/notion will shine some light on it in the next chapter. This brings me to the mosaic nature of the electrical epoch and how that relates to what has gone before and how McLuhan attempted to use it as a heuristic.

CHAPTER FOUR: Take Two Tetrads and Call Me in the Morning

This chapter will explore the role and function of the tetrads, and McLuhan's performance of *MASSAGE*. It will include a discussion of the tetrads, what they are and how they function before exploring and contrasting several of McLuhan's tetrads (written word, spoken word, and acoustic space), while keeping in mind McLuhan's rules and the poetic role of agency. Finally, I will delve into the mosaic method and what McLuhan, through collaboration and performance, was able to craft with *MASSAGE*.

Gestalt psychology, the senses, and the link to metaphor are integral to the tetrad. The nature of figure and ground, as well as the psychological links between touch and perception, underlie Gestalt psychology. Noting elements that switch into the foreground (figure), and which elements thus get relegated to the background (ground) is a distinct part of the tetrad. The tetrad deals with sense extension and as such, my earlier discussion of the senses is beneficial in understanding why McLuhan found the tetrad such a useful tool. Since sense ratios can be theoretically mapped to figure and ground they can also be mapped to the tetrad. As one or more senses increase their focus, they determine what rises from the ground to be figure, just as the corresponding sensory decreases relegate the former figure to a subsidiary role in ground. The tetrad is, in many ways, a culmination for both McLuhan, as he worked on them just prior to his death, and for myself, as it concludes this thesis and is built on all of the ideas preceding it.

4.1 *Four Sides to Every Story*

We have arrived at the poetic moment of this thesis; building on all of the concepts covered until here, I will delve into McLuhan's practical tool of probing, the tetrad. This tool, as its name implies, is made up of four parts, with two general functions: to show which elements a given media prefers or raises up in our esteem and to hide those elements that do not coincide with its *modus operandi*. The tetrads of Marshall and Eric McLuhan are grouped "poetically" and are to be understood simultaneously. The written word moves from left to right and top to bottom, in time and space (certainly not the only convention, however it is one in English) whereas the tetrads are meant to be understood as simultaneous. They are neither linear nor progressive; in particular, we are not supposed to understand the four parts as occurring one after another because they are continuous and not contiguous. Tetrads are mosaics, which are unfortunately confined to a space/time ratio in written form for which they are ill-suited. McLuhan seems to have remained confined to the tools of print even while attempting to escape them. This concern is relevant to research/creation scholars as well, since they need to find a way to archive and retrieve their work within the academic community, which has long favoured — to the exclusion of nearly everything else — the printed word.

A tetrad is no aphorism, although that is what McLuhan attempts to make it into. Nonetheless, the tetrad is neither a difficult nor a pointless device. The four parts of the tetrad are, simply: what does a medium enhance or intensify (Enhance), what does it render obsolete or displace (Obsolesce), what does it retrieve that was previously obsolesced (Retrieve), and what

does it produce or become when pressed to an extreme (Reverse)?²³ [McLuhan and McLuhan, 1988: 7] The medium subjected to a tetrad must be constructed by humans, either materially or via language, for it is the metaphoric aspect that is being analyzed. “In tetrad form, the artefact is seen to be not neutral or passive, but an active logos or utterance of the human mind or body that transforms the user and his ground.” [McLuhan and McLuhan, 1988: 99] Further, “Language always preserves a play or figure/ground relation between experience, and perception and its replay in expression.” [McLuhan and McLuhan, 1988: 121] Thus, to paraphrase and adapt McLuhan, our world shapes us and then we shape our world. It is thus a question of the perception of time and of our access to agency.

What should be evident in reading and contrasting the two tetrads, is that their use “as is” is restricted, whereas what cannot be evident is the usefulness of constructing a tetrad. This one needs to do for oneself. That is not to say that the tetrads of others aren’t useful, but the greater use by far comes from poiesis. Although the greatest value comes from doing, the explanation of discoveries are completely valid. Recall, however that any medium should be viewed in juxtaposition with another. In the case of the tetrads, McLuhan’s poetic creations do not stand on their own; media can only be analyzed comparatively. The more precise one is in delimiting the concept or metaphor being analyzed, the more accurate and useful the results of crafting the tetrad become. McLuhan’s tetrads in particular are poetically complete. The playfulness and flexibility of media poetics allows for more contemplation, although the written word tetrad

²³ 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. Obsolescence refers to rendering a former situation impotent by displacement: figure returns to ground. 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. 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. [McLuhan and McLuhan, 1988: 227-8]

seems more Print than Manuscript, since a reversal into “with the corporate reading public and ‘historical sense’” [McLuhan and McLuhan, 1988: 155] seems unlikely to occur with hand-written documents due to the size of that readership. This could hardly be called a public. For the purposes of this chapter this comparative tetrad juxtaposition will suffice.

Since the tetrad can basically be reduced to a set of two Gestalt probes (*enhance* and *retrieve* can be seen as figure, *revert into* and *obsolesce* can be seen as ground), a closer look at the correlation is warranted. This is, however vastly oversimplified, as *revert into* can easily be shown to be figure. Nonetheless, we can see much similarity between enhancing and retrieving, even if the objects they impact upon are different.

In the tetrad, the culmination of McLuhan’s efforts to teach us how to understand media are, if not laid bare, at least presented methodically and with a blend of aphorism and the more staid academic stylings of a traditional scholarly work. The tetrads are meant to be tools in order to help us probe media; as such, there are several significant subtleties that should be understood when dealing with them. The most important are the role of ground/figure in the constitution and understanding of what the tetrad has discerned, as well as the importance of poiesis, Ancient Greek for the act of creation and much talked about by Heidegger, in his ideas about poiesis, crafting, time, and the standing reserve. These two aspects are important because the value of the tetrad is in the crafting more-so than in the finished product and aspects of the tetrad reveal the background (ground) and foreground (figure) of the object being studied.

All situations comprise 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. Figures rise out of, and recede back into, ground, which is con-figurational and comprises all other available figures at once. [McLuhan and McLuhan, 1988: 5]

Chapter 4: Take Two Tetrads and Call Me in the Morning

In poiesis, the importance of the flexibility of meaning is inherent in words, thus best expressed poetically, since "...Bacon, like Vico, abandoned prevailing scientific methodology for having exhausted its potential usefulness and ruined the language as a tool of investigation...

Interpretation and thought are thus reduced to algebra." [McLuhan and McLuhan, 1988: 219] For if language is stripped of its metaphorical construction, if that retreats into a formal, rigid, unyielding monoglossia then it also yields any ability to conform to the ideas it is attempting to reveal. Ossified language cannot communicate complexity. Of course it can never be completely stripped of metaphor as its very existence is metaphorical. However, it can increase the illusion of literalness and completeness. This is the issue of the tetrad: it is a tool for individual probing not for sharing a result crafted from the methodology. It can, of course, still be shared. In particular, this occurs when a discussion of its "findings" are included. It is, as so often with McLuhan, itself an aphoristic device, batteries not included. A tetrad is often shown as if the generated tetrads are of interest/use to those who did not themselves craft the particular tetrads in evidence when the import of the tetrad is the exercise of its creation. The role and power of making/doing/poiesis is such that since the power of poiesis comes from the doing, the knowledge/whatever gained from it is of less use to others. The tetrad, thus, is useful in practice, and not in theory, at least not directly because its use in theory is more as a heuristic. This makes it extremely useful for any discussion about bridging theory and praxis.

4.2 *The Mosaic of Massage*

We are caught in webs of meaning; everywhere we look, listen, or otherwise sense our surroundings we make judgements and decide on courses of action. On the surface, we come across as remarkably action-oriented, and thus as agents. Our likes, dislikes, interests, and disgusts seem hardwired and often genetic. In Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, foetuses are subjected to blasts of cold to make them seek shelter as human adults. At first glance they seem to be attempting to influence genetics, but this is more akin to the hidden ways that media affect us: an unknown past event shapes our future, subconscious reactions. Were we aware of the process and the way in which it shapes us, we would be capable of overcoming its impulses. If we are not, we are doomed to follow the allegorical piper.

The mosaic nature of the electrical epoch has spun a web. As the observer in Poe's *The Maelström* notes, we are deceived about the motions of events that surround us. By looking at events, and their effects, we begin to be able to piece together elements of the media that influence us, but only if we notice the artificially-locked modes of our perception. McLuhan's tetrad was one such probe to aid in this endeavour. In an attempt to educate, he engaged learning through action, that is the poiesis of media agency as a heuristic. Agency, the ability to act instead of merely reacting to events, impacts impact, which is to say that how much of an agent one is, with respect to media use, determines the nature and severity of a medium's impact. Agency and poiesis, a form of action, can be seen in present university discourses about the value of research/creation, a branch of academe that values the object as well as its study. In the form of the tetrad, both agency and poiesis show their value as creative and hermeneutic

Chapter 4: Take Two Tetrads and Call Me in the Morning

potential for new knowledge through a reevaluation of the knowledge systems we already have in place. This leads from theory to praxis. McLuhan's written and spoken tetrads come together in one element in *MASSAGE*, and blend indistinguishably into the tetrad for acoustic space. In *MASSAGE*, the designer, Fiore, gives graphic examples of McLuhan's position that changing media change the sense ratio of those who come in contact with it, because "...Fiore provides an overall mapping of how the human sensorium is stretched, stressed, and shaped by the new age." [Schnapp, 2012: 86] He attempts to visually instill the ambiguity of metaphor into the 'coequal' page. Although McLuhan attempted something similar in *Counterblast*, the rudimentary, and words-only approach loses much of its impact.

So, where does that leave us? Perhaps we should look at the tetrad anew, from a place of poiesis. As McLuhan notes, if one is not aware of what is happening, one cannot exercise control over it. "For any medium has the power of imposing its own assumption on the unwary. Prediction and control consist in avoiding the subliminal state of Narcissus trance." [McLuhan, 1994: 15] In unpacking McLuhan's "Written Word" and "Spoken Word" tetrads, one can immediately see the differences between different media forms of human communication. Of note is that while McLuhan made tetrads for both written and spoken words, he did not do so for print *per se*; due to its impact and formal placement as default medium for McLuhan, he dedicated an entire book to it, *the Gutenberg Galaxy*. As he notes, "... no medium has its meaning or existence alone, but only in constant interplay with other media." [McLuhan, 1994:26] Thus in looking at the word we may juxtapose the written with the spoken to glimpse what they mean with respect to each other. In order to analyze a medium, it must be contrasted against another medium. As we head towards present-day media, an issue arises wherein we may

Chapter 4: Take Two Tetrads and Call Me in the Morning

only look “backwards” as to how prior media have affected the present medium; where we may guess incorrectly is possibly where the next, not-yet-extant medium/epoch starts to influence hegemony.

Whether in a linear, printing press-ordained methodology or in the electric mosaic, *doing* promotes *understanding*. Marchessault describes the many elements of McLuhan’s thought and tools that inform his approach to presenting his metaphors.

As we have seen, especially obvious in McLuhan’s best work *Gutenberg Galaxy*, the mosaic is an iconic and historically grounded form that is discontinuous, abrupt and multi-levelled. It must be seen as an heuristic device gathering a variety of surfaces together - the hypertext in its multidimensional form is a construction that neatly encapsulates the spatiality McLuhan was calling for and that von Békésy was describing. [Marchessault, 2005: 204]

The mosaic, a web where we may “choose our own adventure” which tends to favour scanning many subjects superficially, impedes in-depth reading. Yet hypertext has its immediacy confronting us; the electric information age (*EIA*) books were attempts to show this impact using the tools of previous epochs. The change from the Gutenberg to the electrical epoch is a mosaic, but it is deceptive to think of it as such, since the word contains elements of the visual, and the mosaic approach is much more than that. It is, most of all, a change into the values of acoustic space. “Acoustic space, according to Cavell, ‘encapsulates time as a dynamic of constant flux’ and is inherently dialogical.” [Marchessault, 2005: 206] This ricorso of the lived experience can be experienced by listening to *MASSAGE*; tempo and time are not the same as when one attempts to read the book. Access to meaning changes the ways in which meaning is made and thus changes the thinker.

To contrast the written from the spoken word, McLuhan notes that portability, and in fact an increasing monoglossia, are the consequences of typography. “Typography makes language

Chapter 4: Take Two Tetrads and Call Me in the Morning

into a ‘portable commodity’ rather than a tool for perception and exploration.” [Marchessault, 2005: 143] In contrasting poiesis and *techne*, he feels that typography narrows our focus to coincide with a more technical embrace. However, the mosaic of our electrical epoch allows for a more creative mode of being. “McLuhan shares this modernist project to rekindle the imaginative contours of experience extinguished by the *techne* of literacy.” [Marchessault, 2005: 147] Pages 50-1 and 108-9 in *MASSAGE* show some attempts at breaking the linear flow of print, the juxtaposition of words and images. On the album, when speech is backgrounded by music and interspersed with soundbites, *MASSAGE* is attempting to duplicate its effects between disparate media, with the commonality that their epoch lends them. “... on the activation of the reader that operates at the perceptual/organizational level in the INVENTORY BOOKS.” [Schnapp, 2012: 184] That is, that the reader actively fills in the blanks themselves, by accessing the book helter-skelter or in fact, self-organized; in a manner of the mosaic. Any page or audio portion of *MASSAGE* are worlds of meaning in and of themselves; they control their contexts separately in a manner that text alone does not.

The tetrads for the Written Word, Spoken Word, and Acoustic Space [McLuhan, 1988: 154, 186, 180] bring to light some simple elements, generalities, that these media promote. With the Written Word, ego and elitism rise as glossary falls; the “I” becomes important, and a single reference work stands as authority, for example a dictionary. With the Spoken Word, the word as deed, valuing perception and experience over elements that become cliché (impossible without the repetitive nature and monoglossia of print) and gain solidity through repetition. In the Acoustic Space, thought gives rise to simultaneity, focuses on resonance, has no focal space (as things are multi-locational), but instead has a rhythm. It exists as the space between figure and

ground in Gestalt psychology at the cost of touch, and the lineal rationality of print. “Heidegger is using Husserl’s rubric that ‘the possible precedes the actual,’ which is to observe abstractly that ground comes before figure. He has not noted that the ground is formed as a mosaic, structured acoustically, nor that its structure is entirely due to its interface with figures.” [McLuhan and McLuhan, 1988: 63] Here we have McLuhan mentioning the mosaic, Gestalt psychology, and acoustic space as co-constitutive. By looking at the Acoustic Space tetrad, we can see how acoustic space might impact human agency: goalless, as McLuhan notes. Not unlike the accusations levelled at Generation X.

In the EIA books, photos don’t illustrate: they have their own, equal roles to the text. They are symbiotic and feed information into the interpretation of each that a mere photograph with a caption, for example in a newspaper, does not. They are as metaphorical as the texts embedded in, surrounding, or engaged with them are. At least that is the position the authors of *The Electric Information Age Book* take. “All are works that, rather than fuse the photographic and the textual/typographical, treat them as separate realms, each with its distinctive dignity. “The photographs are not illustrative,” writes Evans. “They, and the text, are coequal, mutually independent, and fully collaborative.”” [Schnapp, 2012: 36] Does defining them as such grant them that power, or is it the result of the new aesthetic? Neither; they function differently because the thought processes that crafted them were different by an epoch.

With his elocutionary abilities and his freeing himself of the constraints that academe was attempting to place around him, McLuhan was finally able to engage his poetic sensibilities, unleashed by the talents of Agel and Fiore. The EIA books allowed McLuhan to create multi-sensory metaphors, and from the feel to the look to the sound of *MASSAGE*, he abandoned

academic pretense. In *MASSAGE* he reached the pinnacle of his ability to engage the mosaic nature, which he had pioneered in earlier works, in print and audio form.

4.3 *Concluding Remarks*

Marshall McLuhan attempted to control every element of his communication, from his persona and portrayals in the mass media, in academe, and throughout his presentations, crafting a performance to coincide with his message: we are what we eat. But he seems to have forgotten one of the primary lessons of rhetoric: know your target audience. “But speakers and writers need to do the digging to find the ends and proofs pertinent to their situations.” [Olmsted, 2006: 2] And I would argue that he had none; because his audience was everybody, he could focus on nobody. And even poetics require a target. In other words, although McLuhan used every approach he could think of to make people understand the value of his proposed discipline and the tools he had developed for it, he was unable to target his audience in the manners in which they required to be convinced. For the academic, he was too scattered. For the lay, he was too elite. For the professional, he was too abstract.

This condition was one bred from overstaying his welcome; although his methods and performance coincided with the Zeitgeist of the 60s, by the time the 70s rolled around, mass-media audience rhetorical tropes had changed. McLuhan had not. In fact, he dug in his heels and dove deeper into metaphor and aphorism.

A few caveats that need to be kept in mind: my focus is on McLuhan in his time, and locked into a North American milieu. By the time the 1990s came around, McLuhan was back in

Chapter 4: Take Two Tetrads and Call Me in the Morning

vogue, even if only peripherally. *Wired* magazine had proclaimed him their patron saint, and his popularity began to surge in university courses and academic publishing. By the time of his centennial in 2011, he was celebrated across the world, from within and outside of academe. *The Globe and Mail* made him front page news. The University of Toronto (*U of T*) held a large, multi-day conference on his ideas and their present impact. As did universities in Australia, Chile, Germany, Italy, Japan, Poland, Slovakia, Spain, and elsewhere. Embassies, publishing gatherings, and more were also involved.

Even so, by the end of his life he had to watch the dismantling of his precious *U of T* coach house, his reputation was in tatters, and he was unable to speak a word in his defence. I have attempted to show why that might have been the case, and where his ideas came from as well as using the tools of other disciplines in order to understand McLuhan. This has involved the examination of his rise through academe to international media darling, his aphorism of *the medium is the message* as seen through Nietzschean agency and Heideggerean poiesis, and his performance of his work in print, on radio and television. All this was done with the end goal of setting up a discipline of study, one which still bears his hallmark ideas and strives to help us in *Understanding Media: Communication Studies*.

Appendix

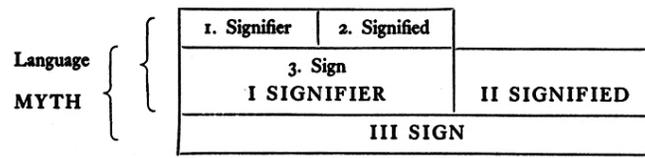


Figure 1: Barthes' second order semiology [Barthes, 1972:]

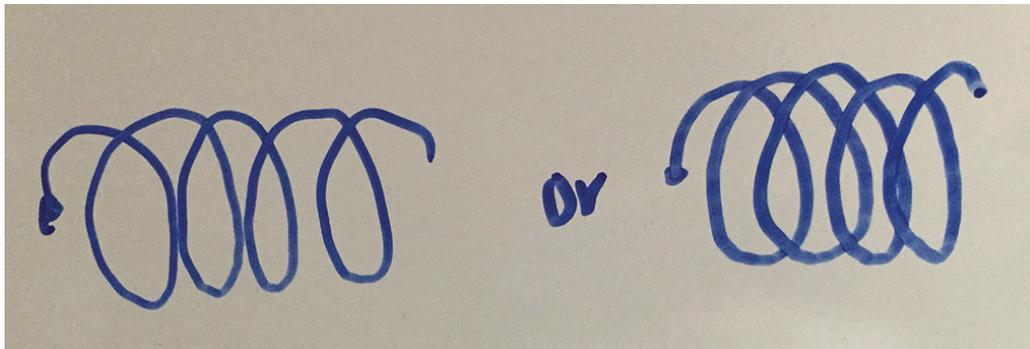


Figure 2: ricorso spiral, first without then with overlaps

Bibliography

Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*. Trans. Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, 1980. Print.

---. *Image, Music, Text*. Trans. Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, 1978. Print.

---. *Mythologies*. Trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang, 1972. Print.

Bittner, Rüdiger. *Nietzsche: Writings from the Late Notebooks*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2003. Print.

Bogost, Ian. *Persuasive Games: The Expressive Power of Videogames*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2006. Print.

Bolter, Jay David, and Richard Grusin. *Remediation: Understanding New Media*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2000. Print.

Buxton, William J. "The Rise of McLuhanism, The Loss of Innis-sense: Rethinking the Origins of the Toronto School of Communication." *Canadian Journal of Communication* 37 (2012): 577-93. Web. 8 Aug. 2014.

Coupland, Douglas. *Marshall McLuhan*. Toronto: Penguin Canada, 2009. Print.

Bibliography

- Descartes, Rene. *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes*. Trans. John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch, and Anthony Kenny. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1984-1991. Web. 11 Apr. 2015.
- Edan, Tina. "St. Marshall, Mass and the Media: Catholicism, Media Theory and Marshall McLuhan." MA thesis. Concordia University, 2003. Web. 5 Feb. 2015.
- Edgerton, Samuel Y. "Brunelleschi's Mirror, Alberti's Window, and Galileo's 'Perspective Tube'." *História, Ciências, Saúde-Manguinhos-Manguinhos* 13.0 (2006): 151-79. Web. 12 Oct. 2011.
- Feld, Steven. "Places Sensed, Senses Placed: Towards a Sensuous Epistemology of Space." *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. Ed. David Howes. Oxford: Berg, 2005. 179-91. Print.
- Friedberg, Anne. *The Virtual Window: from Alberti to Microsoft*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006. Print.
- Galace, Alberto and Charles Spence. "The Science of Interpersonal Touch: an Overview." *Neuroscience and Biobehavioral Reviews* 34.2 (2010): 246–59. Web. 21 Sept. 2014.

Bibliography

Golomb, Jacob. "How to De-Nazify Nietzsche's Philosophical Anthropology?" *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism? On the Uses and Abuses of a Philosophy*. Eds. Jacob Golomb and Robert S Wistrich. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. 19-46. Print.

Golomb, Jacob and Robert S Wistrich, eds. *Nietzsche, Godfather of Fascism? On the Uses and Abuses of a Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002. Print.

Heidegger, Martin. *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*. Trans. William Lovitt. New York: Harper and Row, 1977. Print.

Howes, David. "Architecture of the Senses." *Sense of the City: An Alternate Approach to Urbanism*. Ed. Mirko Zardini. Montreal and Baden: Canadian Centre for Architecture and Lars Müller Publishers, 2005a. Print.

Howes, David, ed. *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. Oxford: Berg, 2005b. Print.

Innis, Harold A. *The Bias of Communication*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2008. Print.

Bibliography

Jones, Caroline A. "Sensorium: New Media Complexities for Embodied Experience."

Parachute 121 (2006): 80-97. Print.

Kittler, Friedrich A. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and

Michael Wutz. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999. Print.

Kracauer, Siegfried. "Photography." *Critical Inquiry* 19 (1993): 421-36. Print.

Manovich, Lev. "The Poetics of Augmented Space." *Visual Communication* 5.2 (2006):

219-40. Print.

Marchand, Philip. *Marshall McLuhan: the Medium and the Messenger*. Cambridge, MA:

MIT Press edition, 1998. Print.

Marchessault, Janine. *Marshall McLuhan: Cosmic Media*. London: SAGE publications,

2005. Print.

Mazzio, Carla. "The Senses Divided: Organs, Objects, and Media in Early Modern

England." *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. Ed. David Howes.

New York: Berg Publishers, 2005. 85-105. Print.

McCartney, Andra. "Soundscape Works, Listening, and the Touch of Sound." *Aural*

Cultures. Ed. Jim Drobnick. Toronto: YYZ Books, 2004. 179-85. Print.

Bibliography

McLuhan, Eric, and Frank Zingrone, eds. *Essential McLuhan*. Toronto: House of Anansi Press Ltd, 1995. Print.

McLuhan, Marshall. "Inside the Five Sense Sensorium." *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. Ed. David Howes. Oxford: Berg, 2005. Print.

---. *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962. Print.

---. *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*. Berkeley, CA: Gingko Press, 2008. Print.

---. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge: MIT, 1994. Print.

McLuhan, Marshall, and Eric McLuhan. *Laws of Media: The New Science*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988. Print.

McLuhan, Marshall, Quentin Fiore, and Jerome Agel. *the medium is the MASSAGE: an Inventory of Effects*. Berkeley, CA: Gingko Press, 2001. Print.

Molinaro, Matie, Corinne McLuhan, and William Toye, eds. *Letters of Marshall McLuhan*. Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1987. Print.

Bibliography

Nietzsche, Friedrich. *The Gay Science*. Trans. Josefine Nauckhoff. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2001. Print.

---. *The Will to Power*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 1968. Print.

“The Playboy Interview: Marshall McLuhan.” *Playboy Magazine*, March 1969: 26-27, 45, 55-56, 61, 63. Web. 12 April 2012.

Olmsted, Wendy. *Rhetoric: an Historical Introduction*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. Print.

Pearson, Keith Ansell, and Duncan Large, eds. *The Nietzsche Reader*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006. Print.

Peirce, Charles Saunders. “Logic as Semiotic: The Theory of Signs.” *Philosophical Writings of Peirce*. Ed. Justus Buchler. New York: Dover Publications, 1955. Print.

Poe, Edgar Allen. *Complete Works*. Delphi Classics, 2011. ebook.

Schnapp, Jeffrey T., and Adam Michaels. *The Electric Information Age Book: McLuhan / Agel / Fiore and the Experimental Paperback*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2012. Print.

Bibliography

Saussure, Ferdinand de. *Course in General Linguistics*. Trans. Wade Baskin. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966. Print.

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York: Picador, 1973. Print.