



**Finding McLuhan: The Mind/The Man/The Message.** Edited by Jacqueline McLeod Rogers, Tracy Whalen, & Catherine G. Taylor. Regina, SK: University of Regina Press, 2015, 304 pp. ISBN: 9780889773745.

The complexity and range of contemporary media culture was simply beyond the imaginative capabilities of any mid-twentieth century thinker. The seeming prescience of Jules Verne or George Orwell is notable because of the myriad writers and thinkers who missed the mark entirely when trying to predict what the world would look like in the future. Today there are avenues of communication that go beyond the wildest dreams of science-fiction writers from the last century and the ways in which these new technologies alter the way we interact were simply unforeseeable when Marshall McLuhan was writing his seminal works on media. The challenge of making McLuhan relevant to new generations is, as a result, not a small one. The seeming prescience of arguments like the extension of the central nervous system via electronic media or the emergence of the global village are interesting enough on their own, but the original writings may now feel like they are ruminations of a media landscape we have long since left behind. Jaqueline McLeod Rogers, Tracy Whalen, and Catherine G. Taylor certainly deserve a great deal of credit for producing *Finding McLuhan: The Mind/The Man/The Message*. The volume provides a sizable variety of investigations into different aspects of McLuhan's life and work and different perspectives on each avenue of inquiry.

*Finding McLuhan* is the result of the "Marshall McLuhan in a Post Modern World: Is the Medium the Message?" conference conducted at the University of Winnipeg in 2010. A variety of authors contribute perspectives on McLuhan's work and on McLuhan himself. There are overtures to a broad scope of connected subjects, but the unifying thread of the text is McLuhan's personal history and his thinking. The way his theories relate to the contemporary media landscape is given a great deal of focus, but there is a notable amount of attention paid to the man's personal history and to how he related to the professional and personal worlds around him. The book contains reviews, criticisms, and evaluations of McLuhan's work and his legacy from a variety of perspectives. Presented are strategies for teaching McLuhan's theories (Doug Brent), analyses of his style of writing and framing his arguments (Yoni Van Den Eede), his awareness of space as an element in his theory (James F. Scott), and an evaluation of his seemingly apolitical perspective (Allen Mills).

Adam Lauder's chapter on mapping McLuhan's theory and its domestic influences is particularly compelling. The domestic sources McLuhan used in sourcing his thinking is an area that deserves a significant amount of attention if for no other reason than raising the profile of other seminal Canadian theorists. The ability to draw a map between the origins of Canadian media theory, arguably the most notable media theorist in Canadian history, and the contemporary work being done on the subject is significant for course design and research perspective in Canada.

There are a few chapters where the authors appear to use McLuhan as a means of proving their own theses or settling their own scores. Elizabeth Birmingham and Kevin Brooks make a case for the use of the term "antimodernism" in describing McLuhan's

overall approach. Kathleen Buddle's critique of his assessment of First Nations in Canada should be compulsory reading for anyone researching the Aboriginal Canadian media landscape (and recommended reading for anyone else). There are points at which McLuhan's Catholicism or, rather, his conversion from Protestantism to Catholicism and continued devotion to the Roman church until his death played a role in his thinking (David Charles Gore & David Beard). The arguments are well made, but their value will depend on the sensibilities of the individual reader.

The book concludes with three interviews conducted shortly after the publication of Douglas Coupland's biographical examination of McLuhan for Penguin Canada. *Marshall McLuhan* (Penguin, 2009) contained an allegation that McLuhan may have been an undiagnosed autistic. Both Eric and Michael McLuhan are interviewed (the former being much more forgiving to the allegation than the latter) and the section concludes with a short interview with Coupland. The interviews allow for exposure to three perspectives on the suggestion that McLuhan might have been on the spectrum, but it is difficult to find the continuity of the interviews with the rest of the text. In the end, it feels like it was dropped in as an appendix rather than a continuation of the other arguments made in previous chapters. In short, it pulls focus from the other conversations about McLuhan in the rest of the book and draws that focus toward justifying Coupland's biography. It just seems out of place.

As a whole, this text will be a welcome source for enthusiasts of McLuhan's work. The scope of perspectives in each of the chapters also provides for the possibility that someone unfamiliar with McLuhan's work might come across this text and develop an interest in his thinking. The introduction to the text states, "We want to make McLuhan a salient figure – both as polymath and as intellectual architect – to those encountering him for the first time or re-encountering and re-evaluating him" (p. xii). It is safe to say that the editors have accomplished this. The breadth of subjects covered alone makes this a useful source of McLuhanite perspective for a variety of possible studies. More importantly, a number of the chapters in this text will re-invigorate McLuhan for those who might have moved on from his theories. There is a great deal in McLuhan's work that is contradictory, exciting, difficult and, at times, problematic. Still, somewhere in all of that is a thread of prescience. Though the world has changed significantly since the original publication of *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*, many of the core arguments contained in those volumes still ring true and in *Finding McLuhan* there is a roadmap for confronting, appreciating, and utilizing those revelations.

## References

- McLuhan, Marshall. (2003). *Understanding media: The extensions of man*. London, UK: Routledge Classics. (Originally published in 1964)
- McLuhan, Marshall. (2010). *The Gutenberg galaxy: The making of typographic man*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press. (Originally published in 1962)