

The Medium Is the Message Is the Metaphor: Cool Reason and the Young Intellectual Public of Marshall McLuhan

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ABSTRACT

Background *Following recent reappraisals of the work of media and communications theorist Marshall McLuhan, this article argues that an overlooked aspect of his appeal and celebrity is not only his famous use of metaphor, but also a countercultural stance suggested by this use of metaphor.*

Analysis *Applying Michael Warner's arguments about publics to McLuhan's rhetorical style, the article focuses partly on 1) the 1967 film This Is Marshall McLuhan: The Medium Is the Message and how it might have addressed an audience of countercultural youth; and 2) related texts that helped to construct McLuhan's celebrity.*

Conclusions and implications *Ultimately, the article historicizes McLuhan's celebrity to explain both its relatively short heyday in the 1960s and the comeback that can be attributed to the development of his young audience into teachers and reappraisers.*

Keywords *Marshall McLuhan; Youth; Celebrity; Intellectual; Metaphor; Rhetoric*

RÉSUMÉ

Contexte *À la suite de récentes réévaluations de l'œuvre du théoricien des médias et des communications Marshall McLuhan, cet article affirme qu'un aspect négligé de son attrait et de sa célébrité n'est pas seulement son fameux emploi de la métaphore, mais aussi son image contre-culturelle renforcée par cet emploi de la métaphore.*

Analyse *En appliquant au style rhétorique de McLuhan les arguments de Michael Warner sur les publics, l'article se focalise partiellement 1) sur le film de 1967 This Is Marshall McLuhan: The Medium Is the Message et comment il a pu interpeler un public de jeunes contre-culturels; et 2) sur des textes connexes qui ont aidé à fabriquer la célébrité de McLuhan.*

Conclusions et implications *Cet article, en fin de compte, situe la célébrité de McLuhan dans son contexte historique afin d'expliquer son apogée relativement courte dans les années 1960 et son retour en force à mesure que les jeunes amateurs du théoricien sont devenus enseignants et critiques.*

Mots clés *Marshall McLuhan; Jeunesse; Célébrité; Intellectuel; Métaphore; Rhétorique*

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Introduction

The media theorist Marshall McLuhan¹ somehow captured the imagination of young Americans and Canadians in the 1960s. How a middle-aged, donnish intellectual could ever accomplish such a feat is the question that preoccupies this essay. The main answer is that his rhetorical style was recognizably countercultural, partly because of how he often addressed young people: without condescension and yet with metaphor. An early example of this rhetorical style was McLuhan's response to the 1951 Massey Report, his Beat-poetic *Counterblast* (McLuhan, 1954), which was "a decidedly countercultural anticipation of the 1960s" (Palmer, 2009, p. 147).² Stodgier in appearance than most of the Beats, McLuhan was nevertheless making statements cryptic enough to be obviously coded with an alterity that separated him from the establishment that so many criticized. True, his tweedy clothing style evinced a "total nonchalance about appearing 'hip'" (Palmer, 2009, p. 140), and his teaching at universities and consulting for politicians and corporations proved him intimate with the establishment. In my view, his rhetorical style overcame these cultural liabilities. It offset the perception of McLuhan's complicity with a "suppression of critical, politicizing engagement" (Palmer, 2009, p. 148), a perception related to his being paid generously to speak to businesspeople (Marchand, 1998).³ He was, of course, a celebrity and sloganeer, but the title of McLuhan's Pop Art book *The Medium Is the Massage* (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967) and his more famous phrase, "The medium is the message," are so metaphorical that they are not as actionable as other slogans. Scholars have already shown that, to understand McLuhan, you must not only understand but also accept metaphor as one aspect of his cognitive and rhetorical style (e.g., Cavell, 2004; Dilworth, 2004; Gow, 2004).

Although McLuhan has been widely studied and recently re-appraised (e.g., Betts, Hjartarson, & Smitka, 2016; Fishman, 2006; Lamberti, 2012; Moss & Morra, 2004; and many examples from the 1990s), little work has been done to situate his style as a mode of address to a specifically young intellectual public. Because this public is now much older and was responsible for the first wave of re-appraisals of McLuhan, this essay is akin to a reception history, though its focus is less on history and more on the receptiveness of his public and what they saw in him and his work—and still see, through waves of re-appraisal. Michael Warner's (2002) chapter on intellectual publics in his book *Publics and Counterpublics* sharpens the focus by offering a common ground between the youth who struggle to articulate themselves and those who try to explain abstractions; he argued that the "burden" of creating any public "comes to be borne above all by style" (p. 129). McLuhan's often difficult ideas were received enthusiastically by his youth-inclusive popular audience partly because of metaphor, and partly because his rhetorical style was timely and mediated by the same star-making technologies, such as television and film, that he helped others to understand.

We might detect a paradox in McLuhan's attempt to convey understanding in a consciously arcane style or mode of address, such as metaphor, but for Jana Mangold (2014) his metaphors were not statements as much as they were translations (i.e., meant to "convey" understanding as in the original Greek meaning of metaphor, "to carry across"). Mangold tracked McLuhan's thinking about metaphor from the related etymologies of metaphor and translation in Greek and Latin, through his metaphor's

expansion from the basic “implicit comparison” (p. 16) to a very broad concept that included all writing and, it seems, any media, and finally to “a means of explaining a technology of transmission that changes entire situations of communication” (p. 17). Relatedly, Thomas W. Cooper (1981) considered McLuhan’s writing about the communications theorist Harold Innis to be “lively translations” (p. 154), even when both were writing in English. McLuhan himself wrote about metaphor explicitly in *From Cliché to Archetype* (McLuhan & Watson, 1970) in a chapter entitled “Centennial Metaphor,” in which this metaphor is an “inner trip” (p. 40) into the unconscious, notably using the language of drug use in the counterculture: an example of translating his more historical examples from that chapter into the parlance of his day. In our own day, we might describe McLuhan’s “translations” of insight into metaphor as “knowledge translation” or as “code-switching,” the latter being changes made to tone and example according to the intended audience. Insight is context dependent, and so translation is required.

Mangold (2014) furthermore suggested that the potential of media theory is not merely to explain communication, but also to transform our thinking (pp. 19–20; see also Cavell, 2004, p. 168), aligning with Northrop Frye’s (1971) definition of metaphor as a transformative conception leading to “a statement of identity: this is that, A is B” (p. 176)—not merely A:B associations. A classic example from McLuhan is the implied metaphor in his introduction of the idea of the global village (itself a metaphor and an oxymoron) in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962): “We can now live, not just amphibiously in divided and distinguished worlds, but pluralistically in many worlds and cultures simultaneously” (p. 31). “Amphibious,” we are transformed.⁴ Frye admitted that this conception in general was illogical and *radical*, and the latter of these adjectives was crucial to McLuhan’s use of metaphor, even if media theorists today would not normally align him with the radical politics of the left. With some of the wariness but never with the consistent pessimism associated with the Frankfurt School’s theories of media, culture, and related industries, McLuhan’s metaphors constituted media as a social dynamic and an agent of societal change.

Youth culture and McLuhan’s public intellectualism

Similarly but cynically (and far from Frankfurt), for Richard Posner (2001) public intellectuals such as McLuhan are not actually trying to teach; they are trying to *persuade*, and thereby to effect societal change—an end that almost any public will recognize, even if the means seem unfamiliar:

Almost by definition of academic expertise, and by the assumption that the public intellectual is addressing either a novel issue or an old one that continues to be contested, his audience will be unable to verify at first hand the truth of what he says. The logic and clarity of his exposition, or in a few cases the vatic or incantatory power of an obscurantist rather than limpid style, will provide some perceived warrant of the soundness of his views.

This is a function of style that is distinct from communication. (p. 46)

Posner’s description of “the vatic or incantatory power of an obscurantist ... style” could well have been a description of McLuhan’s style. Posner’s view was that public

intellectualism is more subjective than substantive. Other critics had other views of this subjectivity. Benjamin DeMott (1967), initially perplexed by McLuhan's "mass adulation" (p. 240), decided that his opaque style was reciprocally forgiven because he was "the constituted pardoner of this age—a purveyor of perfect absolution for every kind of modern guilt" (p. 244). DeMott seemed to believe that McLuhan's alleged technological determinism was appealing because it allowed irresponsibility, and in the context of youth and rebellion the political implications are fairly obvious. Rather than agree entirely that McLuhan's young audience was simply liking his apparent rebellion against the inevitable metaphor of communication, *clarity*, which has become a presumed criterion of literacy, I prefer Stuart Hall's (1980) insight about communication as a system of encoding and decoding that involves various negotiations and only presumptions of clarity. For Warner (2002) too, "public language addresses a public as a social entity, but that entity exists only by virtue of being addressed. It seems inevitable that the world to which one belongs, the scene of one's activity, will be determined at least in part by the way one addresses it" (p. 129). By not framing the dialogue in terms of the shortcomings of youth (though he did have his concerns), McLuhan created a receptive audience beyond his colleagues and other parental figures. Warner (2002) argued that "[w]hen people complain, as many do, that intellectuals are not writing clearly enough, their yardstick of good style often turns out to be not just grammatical or aesthetic but political" (p. 129). Following Theodor Adorno, Warner claimed that "the problem of style" (p. 134) in mass culture is "the phenomenon of normalization" (p. 135), but Warner implied that abnormal styles could solve the problem. Moral or immoral, McLuhan's politicized youth did not want the normality of their parents. They wanted alternative teachers—or had been given options by people such as McLuhan who influenced their desires and their development as an intellectual public.

McLuhan's message was aligned with, if not toward, young people, youth culture, and pop culture, specifically the pseudo-religious style of celebrity in the 1960s. Especially in the United States, but also in Canada, the 1960s were a decade when thousands of young people (in the tens of thousands, Camille Paglia estimates) fashioned themselves as anti-authoritarian but nevertheless sought "gurus—mentors or guides" (Paglia, 2003, p. 58) to replace their parents. Abbie Hoffman, co-founder of the Youth International Party, called McLuhan "more relevant than Marx ... For an old guy he does well" (quoted in Palmer, 2009, p. 153). He was "a guru of the young" (Marchand, 1998, p. 288). Elena Lamberti (2012) stated that, as "a media guru," "a popular guru," and "the *gurus' guru*" (pp. 78, 79, emphasis original), McLuhan was neither for nor against the counterculture; nor was he an "'enthusiast' of the new electric media" (p. 18); he often said that we should not judge but try to understand (Heer, 2014). For the anti-authoritarian youth, a judgmental attitude toward understanding would be a turn-off. When so-called student power was still provoking anxiety for Canadian politicians after the 1968 election, McLuhan advised Pierre Elliott Trudeau (who later became a friend) that he should meet students in a television studio, not an auditorium, and talk with them, unscripted, presumably not only to increase intimacy (Marchand, 1998), but also to limit the mob mentality and the tendency, in large

groups, to lecture rather than discuss. It was partly in this context of students at universities that McLuhan's "real power" was revealed: "his sensitivity to his social environment" (Theall, 2001, p. 26), which was primarily academic and rather elite.

Culminating in demonstrations on campuses throughout the Western world in 1968, the self-aware culture of youth in the 1960s involved an active critique of various institutions of oppression, including schools and universities—often for valid reasons. Warner (2002) in *Publics and Counterpublics* asked "how, by what rhetoric, one might bring a public into being when extant modes of address and intelligibility seem themselves to be a problem" (p. 130). One answer is to address the young public whose intelligence and intelligibility are both in question, and thereby validate their intelligence against the tendency to exclude them from discourse and marginalize them. Although McLuhan once implied that bitter protests at the end of the 1960s were "a basic technique for endowing the idiot with dignity" (quoted in Palmer, 2009, p. 153), he was not usually one to demonstrate a low opinion of students, at least until his later career, when his resentment about his failing reputation poisoned many of his social interactions (Marchand, 1998). Expressing a contrastingly low opinion that will probably always remain a type of professorial attitude, George H. Douglas (1971) suggested that, by the early 1970s, postsecondary teachers had "reached [or in his opinion more accurately *failed* to reach] a group of students that is somehow cut out of a different intellectual and spiritual cloth than the past several generations" (p. 236): "[W]e live in an age of information overload, where there is simply too much to learn by traditional analytical means, and students are accordingly anxious to be relieved of the burden of education, squirming to be released from it however possible" (p. 237). Douglas then focused on students as "mediocrities" (p. 238) and went on to characterize their generation as lazy, manipulative, and entitled. He called them "the McLuhan generation" (p. 240), not to imply that McLuhan was their ally but to suggest that McLuhan understood them (and their limitations) well. Douglas quoted only McLuhan's 1969 interview in *Playboy* magazine; I quote Douglas only to give an example of teachers who generalize that their students are the "problem": an undesirable change in the university and society. McLuhan tried to relate to this change. In the *Playboy* interview, McLuhan said, "I ceased being a moralist and became a student" (quoted in Palmer, 2009, p. 149).

Quite likely, in an era when youth culture was especially active, McLuhan's popularity among the youth was related to his appreciation for students and his attitude toward traditional pedagogy. (The narrator of the film *This Is Marshall McLuhan* [Pintoff & Fraumeni, 1967] declares that "the new youth have discovered him," as just about everyone else had too.) The McLuhan of the 1960s believed that classroom education was highly regimented and prescriptive, and that it fails so many students because its proponents have disparaging attitudes toward entertainment and related aspects of popular culture, such as electronic mass media. Hoffman said that McLuhan "understands how to communicate information" to young people (quoted in Palmer, 2009, p. 153). According to Lamberti (2012), "[c]onscious of the existing linguistic and cultural barrier between himself and his students, McLuhan started to learn the grammar of the new age and to approach the reality of new media as if it were a text" (p. 23).

Anticipating cultural studies as a discipline, he suggested that education move out of the classroom: “The METROPOLIS today is a classroom; the ads are its teachers. The classroom is an obsolete detention home, a feudal dungeon. [...] We must invent a NEW METAPHOR” (McLuhan, 1967c, p. 116).⁵ He argued that the advent of the printed book was a revolution in mass media that revolutionized education and that, to be fair, book-lovers had to admit that newer technology had its purposes (McLuhan, 1967b). In a 1960 report for the USA’s Office of Education, he wrote:

[W]hat the computer means in education is this. As information speeds up, information levels rise in all areas of mind and society, and the result is that any subject of knowledge becomes substitutable for any other subject. That is to say, any and all curricula are obsolete with regard to subject matter. All that remains to study are the media themselves, as *forms*, as modes ever creating new assumptions and hence new objectives. (McLuhan, 1967a, p. 159)

His claim that ads are teachers is not to approve of corporate messaging but to suggest that ads could be used to teach communication and critical thinking toward ideology. In opening up the role of teacher, whatever the extent, he also proposed that students become the teachers, especially teachers of media and technology: “They have very great experience of media, but no habits of observation or critical awareness. Yet they are the best teachers of media to teachers, who are otherwise unreachable” (McLuhan, 1967a, p. 153). Although he certainly considered young people unformed and naïve (alongside their “unreachable” teachers), McLuhan also respected their intelligence and their potential. He was not condescending; he did not talk down or oversimplify.⁶

His intellectual public beyond the Office of Education and among the youth responded well during the 1960s, and some of them were his re-appraisers in the 1990s and afterwards. CBC Television’s Heritage Minute about McLuhan in that era represented his students spilling out of the classroom talking excitedly about his ideas. B.W. Powe (2014), a student of McLuhan and Northrop Frye at the University of Toronto, claimed that “[b]y altering readers’ minds, and students’ minds, they [McLuhan’s ideas] entered their age and altered it” (p. 13). Students were definitive to the “age.” Tom Dilworth’s (2004) reflections on being a student of McLuhan in the late 1960s and early 1970s conveyed a heady enthusiasm for McLuhan’s unrepentantly encyclopedic style of teaching and his youthful sense of humour, which was based on puns and funny twists on well-known brain-teasers. McLuhan (1966) quipped that a chicken is “an egg’s idea for getting more eggs” (p. 27; see also Dilworth, 2004, p. 18). The comedian John McAndrew of SCTV wrote in wet cement on the university grounds: “When I grow up I want to be like Marshall McLuhan when he grows up” (quoted in Dilworth, 2004, p. 34), a joke that is both affectionate and infantilizing. It also reveals an appreciation of McLuhan’s youthfulness, an aspect perhaps of his public persona, or a trait projected onto him by young people who are now teachers themselves, always acquainted with newer young people, always needing to remember that lessons must be renewed with each generation. As young people, they were excited by a culture of ideas and were metaphorically opening the doors of perception. Other

1960s intellectuals, such as Timothy Leary and Aldous Huxley, were similarly engaged with, and sometimes quite hopeful about, young people.

One arising question, then, is about “the generation gap.” McLuhan (1911–1980) was hardly a young man when he gained international recognition. The 1960s were a time when television was not yet representing almost exclusively beautiful people, and so celebrity was not as young as it is today. McLuhan was one of the first “electronic natives,” a person who came of age with Hollywood, reached middle age with television, and could anticipate personal computing in old age. His middle age was also a time when high and low (or literary and popular) cultures were mingling. According to Lorraine York (2013), “as celebrity itself was transformed by the industrialization of entertainment culture in the early days of Hollywood, literary culture was anything but immune to its effects” (para. 4). The “literary culture” included McLuhan as a professor of literature and as a writer with a literary style whose own sense of fashion was conservative and squarely professorial. York also observed that celebrities who emerged in Canada in the 1960s and 1970s—as McLuhan did, in his fifties—had the benefit of being older than emerging celebrities in the twenty-first century tend to be; today, stars must cope with an “ever-greater pressure to succeed early in their careers” (para. 6) as a result of better-developed markets. McLuhan’s desire to be comfortable financially (Jeffrey, 1989) and his ambition to succeed (Fishman, 2006) required him to teach in and to the American market and reach out to young people and affirm their new significance to the cultures of the Western world. Although some critics “dismissed McLuhan as a marginal man from a marginal country” (Jeffrey, 1989, p. 1), he succeeded in impressing American academics as a forerunner of interdisciplinary research (Jeffrey, 1989; Lamberti, 2012). Furthermore, what he called his “nineteenth-century” Canadianness in the film *This Is Marshall McLuhan* was insignificant to his success as an export to American youth, because few of them could be expected to feel the nostalgia for an older Canada that accounts for some of the appeal of other older male Canadian stars, such as Don Cherry (Lee & York, 2016). To the youth, McLuhan was not a sign of the past but a time-traveller from the future—or at least a “futurologist and self-publicist” (Ferguson, 2005, p. 19). His related aura of mystery was enhanced by his reputation for being secretive, and so he was promotable as a celebrity regardless of his age and country of origin.

McLuhan’s celebrity: the mystic and the pragmatist

He was, for example, dubbed “the Pop Oracle” on the back cover of *McLuhan: Hot and Cool* (1967a–c), a book that deserves special attention because of its wide range of contents and the timing of its publication—close to 50 years ago (an anniversary being a convenient reason to re-acquaint oneself with a subject). The book appeared in 1967, coinciding with *The Medium Is the Massage* (a collaboration led in many ways by Quentin Fiore) and a related NBC Television broadcast of the aforementioned film, *This Is Marshall McLuhan: The Medium Is the Massage*, a McGraw-Hill educational project. McLuhan hated the film (Marchand, 1998), but he probably loved the publicity, contributing as it did to one of the few occasions in history when Canada seemed cool to its citizens. The year 1967 featured Canada’s centennial celebrations, when proponents of Canadian culture had an unusual confidence that helped them to promote

themselves and their culture beyond their own borders. McLuhan could joke in the film *This Is Marshall McLuhan* that he had a critical distance on twentieth-century technology such as television because he came from a nineteenth-century country—but it was his country, Canada, that had adopted TV more rapidly in the 1950s than any other in the world (McKay, 1976; see also “Canadian Broadcasting Corporation,” 2009). Seriously or not, he also said then that Canadians could see what to Americans was “invisible,” such as the effects of electronic technology on culture, America being one of the most plugged-in of all societies. He was therefore not only dubbed but also *self-professed* to be an “Oracle,” a seer and a speaker of undecyphered wisdom.

McLuhan: Hot and Cool and McLuhan’s other books from the 1960s demonstrate McLuhan’s own confidence and a desire (perhaps not only his) to expand the oracular dimensions of his celebrity. McLuhan published *The Gutenberg Galaxy* in 1962, and according to Tom Wolfe (1967), “with that one the McLuhan Cult really started” (p. 36). The narrator of *This Is Marshall McLuhan* quotes others who have called McLuhan “the high priest of pop culture” and “the ‘in’ intellectual celebrity,” among other things. The keywords here are *oracle*, *cult*, *priest*, and *medium*. One side of McLuhan’s public persona evident in these words is the pretense of religious significance often afforded to celebrities (Deshaye, 2013).⁷ His persona was mystical, visionary, and even supernatural, implying that he was channelling knowledge beyond his years and beyond his time and place.

Alongside these oracular dimensions, McLuhan was also simply pragmatic when promoting himself. Donald A. Fishman (2006) claimed that “McLuhan relished his role as a public intellectual, and he was a relentless seeker of publicity. His desire to be a celebrity made others feel uneasy about him and led academics to treat his work with suspicion” (p. 569). Today, academics might be less suspicious, or at least less surprised, because a constellation of the bigger star system is established in academia (Posner, 2001) and because, since McLuhan’s death in 1980, the discourse of public intellectualism has been imported to Canada through Conrad Black and his *National Post* (McLaughlin & Townsley, 2011). Another counterpoint to the “suspicion” is the credence attributed to celebrities: “We are more likely to give credence to the views of someone we know, or think we know, than to those of a complete stranger because we feel, perhaps mistakenly, that we can size up a person if we meet him [or her]. Television gives us the illusion of knowing celebrities” (Posner, 2001, p. 57). Thus, public intellectuals can gain credence by virtue of celebrity, however problematically. Whether McLuhan reached his students in the classroom or televisually, their opinions were probably influenced by the medium and by whatever awareness they might have had of his televisual contemporaneity.

As Black would do in the 1990s to gain credence, to raise the profile of conservative intellectuals, and to sustain their network, with *McLuhan: Hot and Cool* and other books in the 1960s, McLuhan inserted himself, and his editor Gerald Stearn inserted him, into the milieu of other well-known people. The book includes essays by American writers such as Wolfe (who, according to McLuhan’s biographer Philip Marchand [1998], was one of McLuhan’s most influential supporters and promoters), Susan Sontag, and his former student Walter Ong, and by others such as Frank

Kermode, Christopher Ricks, and George Steiner. Some of the essays are pro-McLuhan, some con, and some on related but non-McLuhan topics. DeMott (1967), one of the cons, was critical of McLuhan's name-dropping: "the right names ... the whole of the switched-on mob ... are fingered throughout like sacred medals," a tactic of "crowd-pleasing" (p. 242). The book also serves as an anthology of McLuhan's previous writings. Like many anthologies, it is highly teachable and portable (in a mass-market paperback format) and therefore helps to address students in—and out of—the classroom. In this case, it serves both a star-making and canonizing function, canonization being a sainthood metaphor that can help to remind academics of how piously we often treat the "luminaries" in our fields.

Literalizing the metaphor, the experimental lighting in the film *This Is Marshall McLuhan* (Pintoff & Fraumeni, 1967) contributes significantly to the image of McLuhan's celebrity.⁸ In the tradition of the construction of Glenn Gould's celebrity through close-ups of his face that imply genius (Carr, 2006), *This Is Marshall McLuhan* is full of medium to extreme close-ups, many of which reflect the high-contrast, constantly changing, psychedelically coloured illumination of his face; Marchand (1998) saw that McLuhan had "the protean face of an actor" (p. 191).⁹ The lighting calls to mind not only McLuhan's reflections on light in *Understanding Media* (1966; originally published in 1964), but also his statement in one of his final essays (1979) that "the poet [here both Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot] imposes upon himself, necessarily, the condition of continually changing his mask" in the process of "expressing oneself through historical masks" (p. 559). "This is a statement of a theory of communication" (p. 560), he wrote. It was certainly relevant to him not only in the context of modernist poetry but also film; McLuhan was intrigued by Sergei Eisenstein's ideas of montage, a film technique that depends on "continually changing" shots, and which influenced him and Innis (Cooper, 1981). In applying McLuhan's modernist "statement" about communicating through masks, or personas, to his own lightening, darkening, and multi-coloured face in *This Is Marshall McLuhan*, we can infer his historically specific and yet trans-historical perspective. Because the lighting in the film is psychedelic, McLuhan seems current to the 1960s and its drug culture and bright multicoloured fashion. Because it is constantly changing, there are two effects: first, he seems not only current but also timeless or independent of time (another religious sign), as if he were a time-lapse image of a sundial; second, our attention is drawn to the lighting and the many images of lights in the film, and, as a result, McLuhan is metonymically associated with light, that symbol of genius (e.g., the lightbulb, the ray of light from heaven). The connection remains today in the edited collection *At the Speed of Light There Is Only Illumination* (Moss & Morra, 2004). Because in *This Is Marshall McLuhan* the lighting is high contrast, McLuhan is dramatized; he becomes a character, a persona, a "mask," someone whose authenticity need not be questioned for a counterintuitive reason: he is so obviously a product.¹⁰

The lighting also generates an aura of mystery, but one that is not so serious that it cannot also be campy—reminiscent, in fact, of the first Batman movie (Martinson, 1966), which was released the year before *This Is Marshall McLuhan*. The sensationally mysterious aspects of *This Is Marshall McLuhan* appear to be deliberately exaggerated

and thus funny, perhaps in alignment with his rhetorical style, which is both entertaining and curiosity provoking. Stearn (1967) wrote in his introduction to *McLuhan: Hot and Cool*: “An engaging and comic folklore about McLuhan is emerging, and he has become his own most puzzling metaphor” (p. xv). Indeed, he is allegedly not only his own “metaphor” but also his own “medium,” as suggested by the title of Dilworth’s (2004) memoir about McLuhan’s classes at the University of Toronto: “McLuhan as Medium.” The exaggeration of his religious qualities, too, cannot be taken too seriously, and yet the claim that he had “become” a metaphor of himself is fascinating. It suggests that McLuhan personified the self-referentiality of stardom—the famous-for-being-famous aspects that Daniel Boorstin (1962) identified in *The Image*. By implying that McLuhan is “the medium is the message,” the statement also implies a series or chain of metaphors in which more than two terms combine.¹¹ How is McLuhan himself “the message”? Or, more accurately, how is his persona the message?

The unexpected popularity of metaphor

Rather than prompt too much of a digression,¹² these quotations about McLuhan as medium and as metaphor lead me to consider how metaphor—to my surprise—might have helped him to be popular. True, many academics have criticized McLuhan’s metaphors (Marchand, 1998). Umberto Eco alleged that McLuhan used metaphor too broadly, and Jonathan Miller complained he did so too literally (both cited in Gordon, 2010). In *McLuhan: Hot and Cool*, Christopher Ricks (1967) argued that McLuhan’s “style is a viscous fog, through which loom stumbling metaphors” (p. 211). One representative example comes only indirectly from McLuhan: “The consequence of the image will be the image of the consequences” (Heinrich Hertz, quoted in Murray, 2012, p. 123), an anastrophe that McLuhan cited as Hertz’s Law and that Stuart J. Murray (2012) called “a figurative extension that demonstrates the inherent reversibility of all media, here inverting the image and its consequences to trouble their causal relation” (p. 125). More directly from McLuhan himself, there is the disputed metaphor of hot and cool media from *Understanding Media*, certainly one of his least consistent and intuitive theories, though it offers insight on how a hot medium’s concentration on only one sensory perception (e.g., radio on hearing) makes it overbearing and less participatory. Alongside it is the Cubist or Gestaltist metaphor of figure and ground that underlies the medium-message: to see the “total field” (McLuhan, 1966, pp. 28, 56), we have to see the figure and ground together, just as we cannot separate a message from its medium. And of course there are the many explicit metaphors, for example, “the movie is a mighty limb of the industrial giant”; radio is a “tribal drum” and “a subliminal echo chamber” (McLuhan, 1966, pp. 257, 260, 264). Rarely are these metaphors self-evident as explanations of media.

In response to statements such as these, the re-appraisal of McLuhan by Fishman (2006) first noted that “McLuhan’s aphoristic way of speaking, his elliptical style of writing, and his heavy reliance on ‘probes’ hurts the ability to understand his ideas” (p. 567)—but later Fishman concluded:

McLuhan’s use of metaphors and literary allusions has allowed his prose to outlive the topicality of the day, giving it a visionary force. Thus, al-

though McLuhan offers no sustained vision of a society guided by computers, servers, and protocols, his work resonates with the evolving digital culture. His ideas, for instance, on the electronic media reversing producer-consumer relationships aptly apply to the multiple user and value-added effect of the computer revolution [...] [P]art of McLuhan's popularity comes from the very ambiguity of his statements—his conceptual elusiveness and his widespread use of metaphors—and the fact that later generations of commentators may interpret his comments in a variety of ways. (pp. 572, 573)

Warner (2002), too, but for different reasons, argues against the assumption “that a clear style results in a popular audience” (p. 137). If “popularity” can ever result from “ambiguity,” it is partly because “obscurity can be a form of engagement, a technique for probing the unknown” (Powe, 2014, p. 112). (“Probing” is one of McLuhan's favourite metaphors of intellectual work.) Obscurity and ambiguity can invite participation and interpretation; texts that are popularized through canonization at universities are popular partly for this reason (i.e., their teachability). Participation and interpretation are also required of metaphor. In fact, in a slightly earlier re-appraisal in the book *At the Speed of Light There Is Only Illumination*, metaphor is central. In her contribution to this re-appraisal, Lamberti (2004) reasoned that “[w]e should start to question not only *what* McLuhan said, but *how* he said it” (p. 64, emphasis original), following his own observations that the modernist style of poetry was as meaningful as the content delivered in such style. For Lamberti (2004), the “*how*” was not literal but metaphorical. McLuhan's metaphorical statement “The medium is the message” is parallel to the argument that style and content are inseparable. Write a modernist poem and then remove the line breaks; it will in some cases appear to be a paragraph. Play a pop song in a jazz style, and it will have a meaning very different from the same song in a death metal style. Both of the derivative songs will also be much less popular.

At times, however, McLuhan's metaphors are perfectly clear. His classroom-as-dungeon metaphor, which he modernized as classroom-as-prison in *City as Classroom* (McLuhan et al., 1977), would be immediately understood by most North American students. Similarly, when Robert Babe (2004) summarized McLuhan's theory, acknowledging at the same time the influence of Innis' theory of “the bias of communication,” he explained an analogy that is instantly recognizable and understood:

[McLuhan] defined media as any and all extensions of the human body, the human mind, or the human sensory apparatus. Wheels, for example, are media for McLuhan because they extend or amplify the feet; clothing and housing are media because they extend the skin and the body's heat-control mechanisms; radio and print extend or amplify, respectively, the ear and eye of message receivers; and computers, according to McLuhan, extend or amplify the human mind or central nervous system. Human extensions come between and link people, and hence *mediate* and help shape (or “bias”) their interactions. (p. 51, emphasis original)

The metaphors of radio-as-ear and computer-as-mind (regardless of the possibility that they are, more precisely, metonyms) are by now either cliché or archetype. Everyone familiar with the technology can quickly see the connections, and anyone unfamiliar could learn through the analogies because almost everyone has ears and minds for comparison. If computers “amplify the human mind,” then in today’s world of nearly ubiquitous computers—seemingly one in every pocket or purse—the potential for intelligence should be greater than ever. (People with their eyes on their phones while driving through traffic or tripping up staircases seem to belie this potential.) That Babe’s phrase “amplification of the human mind” is also dependent on the sonic radio-as-ear metaphor is no barrier to understanding, because McLuhan’s entire system of media is built from the ground up, like a pyramid: feet, clothes, ear, eye, mind. Of course, we benefit here from Babe’s *direct expression* of McLuhan’s conceptual metaphors. And of course McLuhan and his star image benefit from having so many others, including me, try to translate his conceptual clarity (which was by no means absolute) into verbal clarity, thereby sustaining his recirculation and involvement in the discourse.

But, admittedly, McLuhan and his ideas were not always clear, and we can speculate that his style of intellect had lost control to metaphor. This possibility arises in relation to the poetry of McLuhan’s time and place in *The Metaphor of Celebrity: Canadian Poetry and the Public, 1955–1980* (Deshaye, 2013), wherein I argue that celebrities lose control of metaphor partly because a conceptual metaphor, *privacy is publicity*, underlies and undermines their management of their relationship with the public. If fans can gain power over the star, the star can become more popular, maybe especially as the star loses confidence in the coherence of selfhood and the public anticipates a spectacle of breakdown (Deshaye, 2013). Lamberti (2004) argued that effects of mass media on McLuhan “turned the witty aphorisms (the ‘probes’) into easy quips that, in a short span of time, became a new ‘slang,’ the McLuhanesque or ‘nonsensical McLuhanese’” (p. 72). She attributed intention to this “slang” or “nonsense” by stating that McLuhan was “experiment[ing] with a new form of critical discourse” (p. 72). His occasionally wild language had the aforementioned purpose of addressing the youth and styling them as capable readers and interpreters, precisely because he was uttering “nonsense,” and thereby endearing himself to them. Being out of control—being a “perpetual outsider” (Jeffrey, 1989, pp. 8, 9)—also meant being beyond the authority of the establishment, whether it be the law, the corporation, or the university.

The cool as an intellectual attitude

How cool was McLuhan? Gordon Gow (2004) argued that “McLuhan’s method was characteristic of what he might have referred to as a *cool* technique that invokes metaphor to encourage participation, eschewing the idea of absolute truth and rewarding constructive, creative thought” (p. 186, emphasis original). His coolness invites participation through inference and interpretation (Fishman, 2006; McLuhan, 1966). It invites intellectual work that redefines reason. In George Lakoff and Mark Turner’s (1989) book, *More than Cool Reason*, “cool reason” refers to a style of rationality that William Shakespeare’s Theseus advocates in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1600). In the play, Theseus disapprovingly remarks on the presumably “hot” style of rationality

belonging to “[t]he lunatic, the lover, and the poet” (quoted in Lakoff & Turner, 1989, p. 216). Their “brains / ... apprehend / More than cool reason ever comprehends,” and what they “apprehend” is “[m]ore strange than true” (p. 216). Theseus’ “cool,” as in the online *Oxford English Dictionary*, means “not affected by passion or emotion, dispassionate; controlled, deliberate, not hasty; calm, composed” (Cool, n.d.). Hippolyta responds that it is “strange and admirable” instead of “true.” Although Lakoff and Turner (1989) preferred Hippolyta’s stance, they also posited that other styles of rationality can be “truthful” (p. 215). They would agree with McLuhan, who changed the meaning of Shakespeare’s temperature: cool reason should be expanded through creative truths. In other words, truth and by extension knowledge are not always *a priori* but often developed creatively, through metaphor and other processes not always accepted as rational or even as reasonable. Any teacher of young adults will know that these students are often relieved and inspired by such approval of creativity and (perhaps less often) the tolerance of some relativism. In the 1960s, McLuhan and his metaphors were “cool” not only in his sense of participation and association, but also in one sense of the youth argot (again, per the *OED*): “admirable, excellent,” “stylish,” “up to date” (Cool, n.d.), regardless of his self-proclaimed “nineteenth-century” Canadianness. Without suggesting the coolness of indifference, McLuhan was reaching out to impassioned, politically active thinkers—and thus without appealing to anti-intellectual disaffection.

Some would disagree, and in fact debates about McLuhan are often implicitly about conflicts between anti-intellectuals and intellectuals. Powe (2014) dramatized Frye’s criticism of McLuhan as a complaint that the latter had “sold out to the non-literate, or more precisely the anti-literary, audience” (p. 128).¹³ Powe also offered McLuhan’s criticism of Frye: McLuhan supposedly thought that Frye’s *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) “announces post-literacy” (2014, p. 114) and his own obsolescence as a critic and reader; Powe interprets McLuhan to mean that “the more we enter the mass-media fields of attraction and repulsion, the more the guardians of book culture [such as Frye] recede into moralistic nostalgia and rear-guard systematizing” (pp. 114–115). According to Powe, each side tended to allege that the other was somehow less than literate (i.e., reading the wrong things at the wrong time) and hence deficient intellectually. Wolfe (1967) too attributed a rather caustic intellectualism to McLuhan:

The idea that these things, TV and the rest, are just tools that men can use for better or worse depending on their talents and moral strength—that idea is idiotic to McLuhan. The new technologies, such as television [or the internet today], have become a new environment. They radically alter the entire way people use their five senses, the way they react to things, and therefore, their entire lives and the entire society. (p. 35, emphasis added)

When Wolfe wrote that “that idea is idiotic to McLuhan,” he asserted that he understood McLuhan and shared his intelligence—reminiscent of the tactic of self-promotion by association previously mentioned in the context of *McLuhan: Hot and Cool*. More significant, however, he demonstrated a stereotypically juvenile and even anti-intellectual tendency to insult, whereas McLuhan himself (except in some of the rare

moments that Powe, Palmer, and Marchand document) insisted on not judging. Wolfe understood McLuhan's *message* only insofar as he could separate it from McLuhan's style, which was engaging but not insulting, and he therefore partly misunderstood the *medium*.

Would not the difficulty of McLuhan's metaphors have made him a target of the anti-intellectualism so often associated with a popular audience outside of the university? Of the three types of anti-intellectualism that Richard Hofstadter identified and Daniel Rigney (1991) reconsidered, McLuhan seems invulnerable to all. Because he favoured metaphorical pronouncements, he could hardly be attacked by anti-rationalists; he was himself an intellectual anti-rationalist. As a professor at the prestigious University of Toronto who has been described as "pompous" (Dilworth, 2004, p. 22), he might have been attacked by anti-elitists, but his metaphors aligned him with countercultural icons such as Leary, whose own slogan in 1966 was to "turn on, tune in, and drop out" of school and society—a slogan with connotations of sexual tactility, radio, and metaphor that seems to be a McLuhanism itself. As for unreflective instrumentalism, McLuhan's insight about media as extensions of the body may be interpreted as instrumentalist simply because mass media are obviously and multifariously "instrumental" in the service of capitalism, but he is enormously reflective; in *This Is Marshall McLuhan* he is quoted as saying that "there is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is willingness to think." He evidently opposed the semblance of technological determinism in his media theories with critical reflection. He said, "Instead of explaining, I explore" (quoted in Pintoff & Fraumeni, 1967).

Conclusion

Today, McLuhan's ideas seem ever more relevant to people young and old. McLuhan is often said to be a prophet who could foretell the future, and one of his favourite aphorisms was that to understand the future you have to look in the rearview mirror. To understand the internet, the biggest library (of information, if not of books) in history, you have to look backwards to earlier media. Following his own advice in *This Is Marshall McLuhan*, he said:

[T]he electronic environment makes an information level outside the schoolroom that is far higher than the information level inside the schoolroom. In the nineteenth century, the knowledge inside the schoolroom was higher than the knowledge outside. Today it is reversed. The child knows that in going to school he is in a sense interrupting his education.

The compensating emphasis on media studies in primary and secondary education, and in my generation the tremendous change in literacy (e.g., toward digital and information literacies), is probably a direct result of similar observations by McLuhan and others. Stuart J. Murray (2012) proposed that McLuhan is highly relevant in "the age of social media and seemingly ubiquitous networks" and that "we must take account of cool networks, cool content, and the user's cool relations with them—relations that are highly participatory and that blur the distinction between active producer and passive consumer ... [C]ool media have an almost salutary power to threaten the high-tech biopolitical order of things" (p. 124). Although I agree in theory,

it is a theory familiar from the idealization of hypertext in the 1990s, and the internet and its derivative media have been widely colonized and highly stratified since then. They have also been radicalized by the trolls such that “participation” often appears to be only action-reaction, not reflective or constructive engagement. We might need to look farther back. Ironically, looking only so far back as the age of print (which for McLuhan ended in 1844 with the invention of the telegraph) might be far enough. A novel or a poem in print is absolutely cool: “highly participatory” and yet unclickable and therefore an easy solution to the problem of information overload. This solution works for my generation, but McLuhan would almost certainly think it retrograde and linear (i.e., a retreat). I am still learning about how to engage the abilities of my students without pandering to our technologically instilled and impatient desires for quick answers, gratifications, and seemingly ahistorical novelties. Murray’s (2012) contemporizing of McLuhan and Michel Foucault through his study of cartoons is a good example of applying (always already) “old” ideas for new students.

The acceptance of celebrity is one such engagement, because it affirms to our students that their immersion in popular culture and social media can be educational, in spite of disbelief from certain naysayers; the recognition of metaphor is another, because it can “talk back” across cultures of high and low. Metaphor is non-linear, instantaneously offering insights and a non-binary theory of communication, especially if the metaphor is serial or chained, as in the title of this essay. According to Derrick de Kerckhove, “McLuhan’s interpretation was that in communication there is no transportation of information (concepts or ‘content’) from a source to a target, but a transformation of the source and target simultaneously” (quoted in Cavell, 2004, p.168). This claim rejects linearity through simultaneity, and binaries through transformation. (Hall [1980], too, complicates the simple binary model.) Teaching metaphor to students can easily draw them toward poetry, the art most often associated with metaphor, and legitimize the art by inverse association with a conceptual framework that is surprisingly appropriate. Realizing that poets and professors have been celebrities can help, too.

It was partly the receptive youth of the 1960s who appreciated McLuhan’s metaphorical theories and became the first generation of his re-interpreters and re-appraisers, thereby rescuing his fortunes from a public that, after the 1960s, was increasingly dismissive—a result keyed to the increasing oddity of a man whose traumatic 1967 brain surgery and subsequent health problems changed his capacities forever (Marchand, 1998). He was only 56 when this surgery occurred, but he lived for 23 more years in decline. When he published *Understanding Media* in 1964 (again in 1966), he was scintillating, and the excitement of his ideas happened in a historical moment that included the Beatles and the Rolling Stones—and their great many fans. For those fans who knew of McLuhan, he was another star, one who guided them in his own way. As a young intellectual public, they were drawn to McLuhan’s oracular celebrity and the alterity suggested by the “slang” of his metaphors and his difficult style. Although these difficulties required years of explanation, they are memorable because of their continued ability to turn on proverbial lightbulbs—a metaphor that has new meaning in the context of McLuhan’s work on communication and culture.

Notes

1. Both Donald F. Theall (2001) and Andrew Chrystall (2015) believe that calling McLuhan a theorist is reductive, but as a professor of literature I cannot help but recognize his work—with its poetic imagination and game-changing applicability of specific, historical, confirmed facts to general and hypothetical situations—as “theory,” writ large.
2. Relevant in this context of the Beats, Donald F. Theall (2001)—McLuhan’s first doctoral student at the University of Toronto, a collaborator, and later re-appraiser—explains McLuhan partly as a poet and trickster (p. 38), not a dull and disinterested scholar but a funny and fun-loving creative writer (p. 21), therefore one for whom metaphor was always apt.
3. McLuhan claimed a neutral politics; he had also offered advice to both Conservatives and Liberals in Canada (Palmer, 2009). Although some Marxist views in the 1960s were in agreement with McLuhan’s, “[a] politics of the left would always be the blindspot in McLuhan’s vision” (Palmer, 2009, p. 142; see also p. 479n). According to Gary Genosko (1999), “McLuhanism remains compatible with capital’s new means of expansion in the deregulated, post-industrial cyberspace” (pp. 1–2). Nevertheless, Stuart J. Murray (2012) thinks of McLuhan’s rhetoric as “insurrectionary,” and Genosko also often cleverly and playfully points out the debates over the conformity or resistance of other post-modern thinkers (namely Jean Baudrillard) whose constant deconstruction results in slippery positions. For a survey of reasons why McLuhan should be put in the context of postmodernism, see Marjorie Ferguson (2005, originally published in 1991 with a subtitle referring to postmodernism). Consider too Donald F. Theall’s (2001) description of McLuhan as a “preposthumanist” (p. 37).
4. I would prefer the more radical “amphibian,” but I accept that “amphibious” is closer to the quotation. McLuhan returns to this metaphor in *From Cliché to Archetype* (McLuhan & Watson, 1970, p. 37), noting that he borrows it from Thomas Brown. Much more could be written about the ironies and media relationships implied in this metaphor, because amphibians are by definition acclimatized to both living in water and living on land, and their “extensions” into air are fascinating. On the topic of the global village specifically, Andrew Chrystall (2015) argued against using brief examples as I have just done: “[T]his emerging discourse replays many of the patterns and themes established during the McLuhan revival of the 1990s, including the tendency to avoid any real encounter with what McLuhan actually said about the ‘global village,’ the nature of his own work, and the context(s) for the image” (para. 4). Indeed, in trying for breadth I am sometimes preferring much of what McLuhan said (especially in the film *This Is Marshall McLuhan*, discussed later) to what he wrote, but the remainder of this essay does in fact examine “the nature of his ... work” as metaphor styled partly for specific 1960s “context.”
5. McLuhan later published the textbook *City as Classroom* (McLuhan, Hutchon, & McLuhan, 1977) to return to some of these ideas, but some of them also appear in *Counterblast*, including the stated desire for “a NEW METAPHOR,” all caps. *Counterblast* was first published in 1954, but my edition is from 1967, and I have not attempted to compare editions to date any of McLuhan’s ideas. Certainly the 1967 edition seems to be a sort of anthology of his terms and phrases.
6. McLuhan’s proposal in his report was to create new schools of electronic media. According to B.W. Powe (2014), the “immediate rejection by [his] intended audience—teachers—alarmed McLuhan; but the alarm inspired him to go public and to assemble and write *The Gutenberg Galaxy* and *Understanding Media*” (p. 99).
7. In terms of McLuhan’s actual religion, although Jeet Heer (2014) agrees with the view that McLuhan’s persona disguised a Catholic, conservative, patriarchal ideology (see also Theall, 2001), Heer also notes the opening up of McLuhan’s attitude throughout the 1960s so that, by 1967, he could tell an interviewer that “[t]he mere moralistic expression of approval or disapproval, preference or de-estation, is currently being used in our world as a substitute for observation and a substitute for study” (quoted in Heer, 2014, p. 122). McLuhan seemed willing to work against the “ism” toward a more disinterested “observation” and “study.”

8. Camille Paglia (2003) asserted that, in the 1960s, “[f]ew prophets or messiahs could survive the deglamorizing eye of the invasive TV camera” (p. 60), but McLuhan appeared to have been careful about how he was presented onscreen. Although he was superbly improvisatory, he was also well rehearsed and ready with rhetorical tactics that gave him time to think and remember his talking points, benefiting seemingly from scripts and definitely from controlled production values, such as those of the McGraw-Hill film and Woody Allen’s (1977) *Annie Hall*, in which he has a cameo.
9. Marchand (1998) also notes that “McLuhan had been suffering from blackouts since the late 1950s. His coloring in those years had taken on its characteristic pale, tense, apoplectic hue. As the sixties wore on, his coloring became worse” (p. 197). (His health problems had a penultimate culmination in brain surgery.) The lighting of *This Is Marshall McLuhan* disguises his pallor and gives him the clichéd “new lease on life” that photography, especially in film and TV, can simulate.
10. McLuhan recommended to his friend Pierre Elliott Trudeau that, on TV, he could rely on his public persona and had no need to appear authentic: “At a masquerade we are not private persons” (quoted in Palmer, 2009, p. 156). He also suggested that Trudeau—confident in his “natural, easy, flexible way” (quoted in Palmer, 2009, p. 157)—could improve democracy by videoconferencing with student leaders and thereby teach them about the world (Palmer, 2009). Presumably, children of the TV era would have little expectation of “natural” ease, except perhaps an ease with products.
11. In *From Cliché to Archetype* (McLuhan & Watson, 1970), McLuhan associates metaphor (specifically a clock metaphor) with “a chain of being” and “the missing link” (p. 39). See also Jeffery Donaldson (2015).
12. If the medium is communications technology such as television, which is the real message (the program on TV being mainly a distraction from the significance of the medium itself), how is McLuhan’s persona a communications technology? Certainly his persona suggests a relationship between technology and the iridescent mask described above: both change constantly now. It also suggests that such technology is related to a culture of celebrity and depends partly on individual celebrities (e.g., today, Steve Jobs of Apple, Mark Zuckerberg of Facebook). In other words, celebrities put their brands on technologies, sometimes as literally as in the process of putting their faces onscreen. Given that McLuhan was also stylistically recognizable as an older gentleman in a suit (not so often an iridescent mask), what is technological about this style? If an older gentleman in a suit seems an unlikely vessel for an epiphanic insight into modern mass media, the incongruence might be significant: it suggests a *separation*, rather than an equalization, of style and content—quite contrary to the lesson of “the medium is the message.” Why would McLuhan permit such an incongruence? One answer—one that calls attention to the personal materiality behind the public abstraction—is that he could not rid his persona of one of its functions, which was to be appropriate to his job at an eminent publicly funded university. Had he gone to work dressed like a hippie, he would have been even more alienating to colleagues who already tended to dismiss him. I do not know whether his clip-on tie and badly fitting toupé and fedora (Palmer, 2009) would ever have been interpreted as signs that he ridiculed his own position, or whether his suit was suitable to the part of the “everyman professor” (Ferguson, 2005, p. 19), with the emphasis on the approachability of “everyman.” McLuhan was not overly concerned about his contradictions, which were to him an inevitable result of non-linear thinking.
13. Lamberti (2012) argues throughout *Marshall McLuhan’s Mosaic* that McLuhan’s persistent literary examples (e.g., Edgar Allan Poe’s “Descent into the Maelstrom”) help to connect literary and media studies, if not books and readers.

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