

RECURSIONS

Remediating McLuhan



RICHARD CAVELL

Amsterdam
University
Press

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Richard Cavell

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Cover photograph: Yousuf Karsh, *Marshall McLuhan* 1974

Cover design: Suzan Beijer

Layout: Crius Group, Hulshout

Amsterdam University Press English-language titles are distributed in the US and Canada by the University of Chicago Press.

ISBN 978 90 8964 950 8

e-ISBN 978 90 4852 848 6 (pdf)

NUR 670

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Introduction

McLuhan is a medium and quite possibly a medium who is the message.

Donald Theall, *The Medium is the Rear-View Mirror* (1971)

The McLuhan remediated in the following pages is the one who had become a cliché when Donald Theall wrote these words that presaged what eventually became a twenty-year decline in McLuhan's reputation. Theall's McLuhan was defined by the parameters of literary modernism, communications biases, hot and cool media and technological determinism. The publication of McLuhan's *Letters* in 1987, and Philip Marchand's biography in 1989, heralded a renaissance of interest in McLuhan that has continued unabated to the centennial conferences and confabulations of 2011 and beyond. While this current scholarly interest has assured McLuhan's foundational status as media theorist—affirmed by Friedrich Kittler no less¹—it has by no means exhausted the import of his writings, in large part because his written body of work as a whole is rarely revisited, and because 'media' retains a largely communicational bias in much of what has been written on him.

The McLuhan I write about here is a McLuhan whose thought resonates with contemporary media theory. When McLuhan wrote about the 'digital computer' in *Understanding Media* (McLuhan, 1964, p. 80), he did so to highlight the translational quality of the digital—that it can code anything into anything else—which suggested to him the importance of the interface and the resonating gap as the spacetime of electronic mediation. His writing embodied these insights. McLuhan argued that a linear approach to understanding electronic media could only fail, since the exponential increase in informational data could be understood only in terms of pattern recognition—what today is called visual analytics (although McLuhan would call these analytics 'acoustic' because they did not derive from perspectival space). Thus, we find McLuhan constantly coding and recoding his work, the medium is the message becoming the medium is the message becoming the medium is the message becoming the medium is the message. His books were consistently montaged, cut and pasted, until he came to call them 'non-books'—mashups of disparate traditions and high and low cultural references. And McLuhan consistently de-authorised himself after *Understanding Media*, writing (and re-writing) his work performatively as dialogues. It is in this context that McLuhan is 'digital', not because he 'predicted' the digital moment.

McLuhan likewise rejected the theoretical orthodoxies of his day, from structuralism to Marxism, including the iteration of ‘communication studies’ that was then current, thus opening his work to the post-theoretical readings I propose here—‘post-theoretical’ in the sense that *media* are precisely what such theories failed to theorise. If ‘theory’ is associated with visual culture, as its etymology suggests (*theoros* = spectator), then McLuhan’s entire career can be understood as a critique of the visual culture that had emerged from print technologies. His focus was on the *invisibilia* of media effects (and their paradoxical materiality) and on the inescapable immersion in these media of those who sought to understand them. It was for this reason that McLuhan found himself at odds with the regnant theories of his time, especially the linguistic metaphor that informed structuralism, post-structuralism and deconstruction. Language, for McLuhan, was not a privileged medium, and media did not function linguistically. This position set him at odds with most of the major thinkers of his time. It was not that he was unaware of thinkers such as Foucault and Derrida, but he found their theories inadequate precisely because they did not consider the question of mediation. McLuhan—who was being *read* by Foucault and Derrida—had produced a much more radical notion of Foucault’s epistemic theory by linking episteme to mediation, and had anticipated Derrida’s deconstruction of speech-as-presence with the notion of utterance as *outerance*.²

The remediation of McLuhan can be made most productively along three major axes developed in his work:

- (a) *that all utterance is ‘outerance’*: utterance is McLuhan’s term for mediation generally. It contains *in nuce* his ‘extension’ thesis of mediation but also, and more radically, his notion of mediatic displacement (and thus ‘amputation’, the flipside of the extension theory). It is not only the subject that is displaced in this articulation, but also the human;
- (b) *that the content of one medium is another medium*: this is at once the basis for the historical, critical, and creative dimensions of McLuhan’s notion of remediation: *historic*, because it sets up a relationship between an epistemic medium and a previous one; *critical*, because it provides the basis for critiquing a medium that is environmental (and thus immersive) *from within*; and *creative*, because it opens up the possibility of counter-environmental production (at which point the critical and the creative coincide);
- (c) *that media are embodied*: this suggests that all mediation is bio-mediation. In this sense, the distinction between the mediatic and the human collapses and is replaced by a feedback loop, such that the two can only be understood relationally, the human and the mediatic merging.

McLuhan is radically humanistic in the contrarian sense that he re-positions the 'human' from essence to *tekhne*. This is a Nietzschean McLuhan, not an Aristotelian one, whose media theory is about the overcoming of 'man'—media as *Übermensch*. This is the McLuhan who at the beginning of his career stated that to understand electronic media one must immerse in the destructive element. That element is mediation and what it mediates is the human. This brings us to the heart of the great paradox in McLuhan: the sense that all media are embodied is coupled with the notion of discarnation. This strikes us as an odd idea, until we reflect that every time we utter a sound we extend ourselves environmentally and in doing so we dislocate our subjectivity, putting ourselves outside ourselves (even though we were never 'inside' ourselves; rather, we come into being through an utterance that *displaces* the self in the act of utterance).

McLuhan moved in his career from psyche to *bios*, from mind to brain. His concept of utterance is not the 'orality' about which his student Walter Ong wrote in the service of an argument for a fundamentally conservative oral culture. McLuhan's is a philosophical consideration of radical implication, sundering the world that Ong so painstakingly conjured. McLuhan's is the world of E.R. Dodds' Greeks, who were 'ear-rational'—subservient to a 'ratio-nality' based on the senses. For McLuhan, it is the masks of the Greek tragedians who *become* them, the *personae* through which they utter themselves. This is the self conceived of as an alienable object—an angel or a robot, as McLuhan was to put it at the end of his career. But these angels and these robots take on a life of their own in his theories. Media, like money (which is also a medium and has its own chapter in *Understanding Media*), know how to reproduce, and what this tells us is that media have become the new *bios*.

It is in the post-theoretical context that McLuhan takes on his full significance. If his ideas about mediation sound like a theory of alienation, they are, except they work in reverse—it is through this mediatic alienation that we *discover* ourselves as human, as fully one with our technologies, which have always been technologies of the self, a post-humanism which in McLuhan's thought is fully humanistic because, he argues, we are human *through* our technologies: they are the pre-condition of our being human.

Acknowledgements

Versions of some of the chapters that follow began life as lectures at Castle Thurnau, Bayreuth University; the Centre for Cross Faculty Initiatives, University of British Columbia; the Canadian Embassy, Berlin; Video Pool Artists' Centre, Winnipeg; Department of Media Studies, University of

Paderborn; the Hungarian Academy of the Sciences, Budapest; the Department of Media Studies, Potsdam University; the Moderna Museet, Stockholm; the University of Alberta (Edmonton); the McLuhan Program (Toronto); the Faculty of Education, University of British Columbia; the Christian-Albrechts Universität zu Kiel; Meiji-Gakuin University (Tokyo); the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Mount Scopus); the University of Belgrade; the Institute for Sonology (The Hague); and the J.W. von Goethe University (Frankfurt).

My thanks to Kirsten Schmidt (Eichstätt-Ingolstadt); Martine Leeker (Berlin); the late Mark Poster; Mary Bryson (Vancouver); His Excellency Ambassador Peter M. Boehm (Canadian Embassy, Berlin); Stephen Kovats (Berlin); Raviv Ganchrow and Kees Tazelaar (The Hague); Paul D. Miller, aka DJ Spooky (New York); Melentie Pandilovski (Winnipeg); Hartmut Winkler (Paderborn); Kristóf Nyíri (Budapest); Dieter Mersch (Zurich); Staffan Lundgren, Daniel Birnbaum, John Peter Nilsoon, and Sven-Olaf Wallenstein (Stockholm); Sanja Domazet (Belgrade); Douglas Coupland (Vancouver); Marco Adria (Edmonton); Dominique Scheffel-Dunand (Toronto); John Willinsky (Vancouver); Jutta Zimmerman (Kiel); Ayako Sato (Tokyo); and Menachem Blondheim (Jerusalem).

Special thanks to Geoffrey Winthrop-Young (Vancouver).

And thanks above all to Peter Dickinson.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Claude Bissell, who, one day at Massey College, said to a Junior Fellow waiting in the common room for the bell to be rung: ‘Richard, I’ve invited Marshall for lunch; would you like to join us?’

A version of *Beyond McLuhanism* was published as ‘McLuhans Gespenster: Elf Anmerkungen für ein neues Lesen’ in *McLuhan neu lesen: Kritische Analysen zu Medien und Kultur im 21. Jahrhundert*, ed. Kerstin Schmidt et al., trans. Michael Barchet (Bielefeld: Transcript P, 2008); an earlier version of *Re-Mediating the Medium* has been published in *Site* (Stockholm); a version of *On the 50th Anniversary of Understanding Media* has been published in the Spring of 2014 by the *Journal of Visual Culture*; a version of ‘McLuhan, Turing, and the Question of Determinism’ in Marion Näser-Lather and Christoph Neubert (eds.), *Traffic: Media as Infrastructures and Cultural Practices* (Leiden and Boston: Brill 2015); and an earlier version of ‘Mechanical Brides and Vampire Squids’ has been published in *Marshall McLuhan + Vilém Flusser’s Communication + Aesthetic Theories Revisited* (Winnipeg: Video Pool, 2015).

List of sigla

- BT* Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. and intro. Douglas Smith (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).
- CA* Marshall McLuhan and Wilfred Watson, *From Cliché to Archetype* (New York: Viking, 1970).
- DN* Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800 / 1900*, trans. Michael Metteer, with Chris Cullens, foreword by David E. Wellbery (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990).
- EFS* Harry Frances Mallgrave and Eleftherios Ikonomou, ed. and intro., *Empathy, Space and Form: Problems in German Aesthetics, 1873-1893* (Santa Monica: Getty Center, 1994).
- GFT* Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone Film Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (1986; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999).
- GG* Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1962).
- GV* Marshall McLuhan and Bruce Powers, *The Global Village: Transformations in World Life and Media in the 21st Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- LM* Marshall McLuhan and Eric McLuhan, *Laws of Media: The New Science* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1988).
- LWK* Michel Foucault, *Lectures on the Will to Know and Oedipal Knowledge*, ed. Daniel Defert, trans. Graham Burchell (London: Palgrave, 2013).
- MB* Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (New York: Vanguard Press, 1951).
- MM* Marshall McLuhan, Quentin Fiore, Jerome Agel, *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (New York: Random House, 1967).
- MS* Richard Cavell, *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 2002).
- TTED* Marshall McLuhan and Barrington Nevitt, *Take Today: The Executive as Dropout* (Toronto: Longman, 1972).
- TTW* Friedrich Kittler, *The Truth of the Technological World: Essays on the Genealogy of Presence*, ed. Hans Ulrich Gumbrecht, trans. Erik Butler (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2013).
- TVP* Marshall McLuhan and Harley Parker, *Through the Vanishing Point: Space in Poetry and Painting* (New York: Harper & Row, 1968).

- UM* Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964).
- VI* Vilém Flusser, *Vampyroteuthis Infernalis*, trans. Rodrigo Maltez Novaes (New York: Atropos Press, 2011).

1. Beyond McLuhanism

in memory of Mark Poster

The remediation of McLuhan—after a twenty year hiatus in which he was infrequently cited, often as ‘the infamous’—began in the wake of the publication of his *Letters* (1987) and Philip Marchand’s biography (1989). What these works suggested was that the ‘McLuhanism’ that had characterised critiques of the media theorist for the previous twenty years had failed to account for a thinker whose complexities extended beyond the remit of media triumphalism, utopian technologism, crypto-Catholic redemption, the ‘return’ to orality, naive globalism and, ultimately, techno-determinism. While these critiques reflected their moment, ‘McLuhanism’ also owed a great deal to McLuhan himself. Increasingly inspired by the urgency of his cause, he tended to overstate his case, to repeat himself endlessly,¹ to refuse accommodation for critical positions that did not accord with his own, to eschew the critical language of the day and favour sound bites over argumentation.

For all that these critical spasmodics damaged McLuhan’s reputation in the 1970s and 80s, they emerged from a theoretical position that can be described as *immersive*, a position that argued media could only be theorised from within the parameters that they proposed. This was especially true of electronic media, which exercised a pervasiveness that was total; thus, McLuhan rejected the notion that electronic media would be susceptible to a critical position that was external to them. This was the lesson he had learned from Poe’s ‘A Descent into the Maelström’: you had to go with the flow.² Ultimately, this led to McLuhan’s rift with Raymond Williams.³ McLuhan’s approach to media studies did not at all accord with that of Williams, who tended towards the ‘secure point of view’,⁴ as Patricia Yaeger has put it, even though it is now recognised that ‘[t]here is no longer a secure epistemological ground’ (‘Dreaming of Infrastructure’, p. 12) available to cultural critics. The notion of objectivity—of being able to take a position outside that which one was critiquing—was fostered by print culture, McLuhan argued, since print was an abstractive medium. Electronic phenomena were eroding this notion of objectivity because they were encompassing and pervasive—what McLuhan called ‘acoustic’—in that sound not only surrounds you but also breaches notions of inside and outside. Commenting on the 1960s phenomenon of the Happening,

a spontaneous, performative event, McLuhan stated that ‘the Happening does not so much address the audience as *include* the audience. It expects the audience to immerse itself in the “destructive element”.’⁵ It was likewise with the critic of electronic media.

The remediation of McLuhan allows us to re-encounter his work within a contemporary critical context. Deeply committed to the idea that print had had a profound epistemic effect not only on social, political, cultural and economic structures but on our thought processes themselves (or ‘mental processes’, as he calls them in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, p. 24), McLuhan sought to think his way through the effects that electronic mediation, in its turn, would produce. The advent of the internet has further encouraged the remediation of McLuhan, insofar as the internet cannot be identified with any one medium and so forces us to consider mediation more broadly. ‘Medium’ for McLuhan had the force of Foucault’s *episteme* (Cavell, ‘Vorwort’, p. 4) and of Friedrich Kittler’s discourse networks. The medium is *environmental*, to use a term that McLuhan employed constantly in the 1960s, and this notion has also come back to haunt us.

The remediation of McLuhan sounds the following notes:

- [1] McLuhan was among the first to remediate McLuhan. A scholar of the Renaissance, he was aware that cultural history was itself a form of remediation, which is a major theme of *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. He applied this notion in his own work at the macro level through the notion of remediation (as it has come to be known through the writings of Bolter and Grusin),⁶ and at the micro level through the processual, dynamic nature of his work, such that the notion ‘the medium is the message’ invites remediation as ‘the medium is the mess age’, which is then re-worked as ‘the medium is the massage’, which devolves further into ‘the medium is the mass age’. McLuhan similarly remediated his own books (such that remediation merges processually with re-reading and rewriting): *The Mechanical Bride* (1951) as *Culture is Our Business* (1970); *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) as *Take Today: The Executive as Dropout* (1971); and *Counterblast* (1954) as *Counterblast* (1969). Increasingly in his career, McLuhan sought to produce ‘non-books’,⁷ de-authorising and displacing himself such that these books cannot be read in the usual understanding of that word, either because they were written in a non-linear fashion or because their meanings are generated through juxtapositions of text and image or because they were written in sound bites, invoking acoustic modes of understanding rather than literate ones. As Raymond Williams remarked of *The*

Gutenberg Galaxy (configured as a series of asterisked footnotes to an absent text—the book itself as dominant medium), ‘if the book [i.e. *The Gutenberg Galaxy*] works it to some extent annihilates itself.’⁸ This deconstruction of the book was the first phase of McLuhan’s project to demonstrate that the new electric technologies were not in the service of print; the second phase, published as *Understanding Media* (1964), argued that these technologies were not representations of something else, but had an irreducible *materiality*. As early as 1954 McLuhan wrote that ‘The new media are not ways of relating us to the old ‘real’ world; they *are* the real world’ (*Counterblast* [1954], n.p.), which suggests that, as Mark Hansen has put it, these technologies have a ‘materiality outside the space governed by textuality’ (*Embodying Technesis*, p. 125).

- [2] McLuhan’s theories are theories of *displacement*: the displacement of time into space; of media into intermedia; of message into medium. But his displacements are not obliterations; they do not operate as binary oppositions, one term collapsing into the other. McLuhan theorised interfaces, gaps and resonances; he insisted that displacement be understood as a *process* of relations in tension: ‘It is hard,’ he wrote in 1972, ‘for the [...] uncritical mind to grasp the fact that “*the meaning of meaning*” is a *relationship: a figure-ground process of perpetual change*’ (McLuhan and Nevitt, *TTED*, p. 86). His *Laws of Media* (1988) are laws only to the extent that they can be broken; his modalities of enhancement, obsolescence and retrieval are dynamised by the principle of reversal, the universe to which these laws apply being a chaos of permeable borderlines constantly shifting ground in new tectonic alliances.⁹
- [3] In a 2004 editorial in *Critical Inquiry*, W.J.T. Mitchell calls for a ‘medium theory’ that would situate itself somewhere ‘between the general and the particular’ (‘Medium Theory’, p. 332), would not seek the de-oxygenated pinnacles of high theory, and would give due attention, finally, to mediation. This ‘medium theory’ would be the logical outcome of McLuhan’s notion that ‘the medium is the message’, which, whatever else it signified, pronounced the end of hermeneutics.¹⁰ *Pace* Mitchell, however, we do not need media theory because it can provide a *via media* between the excesses of high theory and the uncritical meanderings of ‘interpretation’; rather, media ‘are the end of theory because in practice they were already there to begin with,’ as Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz have put it (‘Translators’ Introduction’, p. xx). What McLuhan inaugurated with ‘the medium is the message’ was not an alternative to theory but an engagement with the reigning theories of his day and the social contexts of their production. As Friedrich Kittler

notes, 'What counts are not the messages or the content with which [people] equip so-called souls for the duration of a technological era, but rather (and in strict accordance with McLuhan) their circuits, the very schematism of perceptibility' (*GFT*, pp. xl-xli).

- [4] Rather than writing about an uninflected 'orality' to which electronic media were 'returning' us, McLuhan theorised the production of a space that was profoundly different from the visual space produced by print culture. This new space was embodied and deeply involving. McLuhan referred to this space as 'acoustic' because it was produced through the interaction of the senses in a way that visual space is not. Sound thus came to represent for McLuhan the senses 'in touch' with one another, and he would often refer to electronic media in terms of the audile-tactile,¹¹ as in the case of television, whose images cannot be perceived directly by the eye but must be produced deep within the brain. Of crucial significance in McLuhan's theorisation of the acoustic space of mediation was his insistence that it is *material*: 'Kant and Hegel simply flipped out of Hume's visual determinism into acoustic subjectivism. All of their followers are still under the illusion that the acoustic world is spiritual and unlike the outer visual world, whereas, in fact, *the acoustic is just as material as the visual*,' he wrote in 1974 (*Letters*, p. 489, emphasis added). For McLuhan, 'Media are staples' ('The Later Innis', p. 385); media have taken on the role in information culture that raw materials had had in mechanical culture. This was the argument put forward by Harold Adams Innis, who had extended his early studies of the fur trade routes and cod fisheries in Canada into a study of communication systems and their biases. Ironically, with his insistence that the *invisibilia* of media were nevertheless material, McLuhan found himself being rejected by the Left 'because his focus on bodies and media, extensions, narcosis and self-amputation was *more* materialist than Marxism had ever been' (Winthrop-Young and Wutz, 'Translators' Introduction', pp. 267-8, n. 9).
- [5] McLuhan was a theorist of what Peter Sloterdijk has called the 'media-ontological situation' (*Critique of Cynical Reason*, p. 512), in that McLuhan posited a relationship between media and what it means to be a (human) being. As a consequence of this relational ontology, McLuhan does not theorise a stable subject position. In his first book, *The Mechanical Bride* (1951), the 'bride' of consumerist culture is 'mechanical' and thus infinitely reproducible; in his second book, the 'man' of his 'Gutenberg Galaxy' is constituted through typography; and his 'understanding media' completely lacks a subject. As the progressive

form of the verb, 'understanding' anticipates Kittler's comment that media can never be understood: 'Understanding media—despite McLuhan's title—remains an impossibility precisely because the dominant information technologies of the day control all understanding and its illusions', writes Kittler (cited in Winthrop-Young and Wutz, 'Translators' Introduction', p. xl). What Kittler fails to notice is the form of the verb here, as well as the comic book pun of the book's initials—'Um ...'. Indeed, a Kittlerian re-reading of the mediatic *a priori* inherent in understanding as an adjective suggests that it is the *media*, here, that are *doing* the understanding, or even *being* understanding. As Christopher Horrocks has stated, 'For McLuhan, immersion in electronic media [...] has a psychological and sensory impact that profoundly affects the ontological security of the individual' (*McLuhan and Virtuality*, p. 66), an impact that McLuhan referred to as 'discarnation' ('A Last Look at the Tube', p. 197). Writing at the end of his career, McLuhan stated that 'in these [electronic] media, the sender is sent, and is instantaneously present everywhere. The disembodied user extends to all those who are recipients of electronic information. It is these people who constitute the *mass* audience, because mass is a factor of speed rather than quantity.'¹² Yet, for McLuhan, discarnation did not imply that technology was inhuman; in his understanding, 'all technologies are completely humanist in the sense of belonging entirely to the human organism' (Bornstein, 'Interview with McLuhan', p. 67). But this was a 'humanism in reverse' (McLuhan and Parker, *TVP*, p. 258), corporate rather than individual, leading us not towards the discovery of a human subjectivity, but towards an understanding of the 'human' as existing relationally—as always already technologised, as always already mediated.

- [6] As McLuhan had learned through his 1943 dissertation on Renaissance literature,¹³ rhetoric profoundly unmoors the speaking self from 'presence'; indeed, as he often put it, all *utterance* is at the same time *outrance*, at once private and public, at once an expression of the self and a displacement of the self.¹⁴ The breaching of private and public, inner and outer, is itself part of the much larger confluence of the biological and the technological: 'technology is part of our bodies,' he writes in *Understanding Media* (p. 68). To ignore this was a fatal flaw, in his view, because it encouraged a critique of technology as something separate from the social dimension of its cultural production. Indeed, he suggested that the bio-technological interface had become so extensive through electronic media that we had turned ourselves inside out—extended *and* amputated ourselves (the other part of the Faustian

bargain with the prosthetic gods)—and extruded ourselves into an environment⁵ that is at once ourselves and utterly ‘other’, a prosthetic environment that appears foreign to us—even though it *is* us—because it is now outside us. We have, in this sense, been *incorporated*.

- [7] McLuhan used the term ‘environment’ in a contrarian way at the origins of the environmentalist movement of the 1960s to argue that there was no longer a ‘natural’ environment, but only the one that we ourselves had created and which now encompassed us totally. What was once the ‘natural’ environment had become an artifact in the era that would come to be named the Anthropocene. It was the launching of Sputnik in 1957, according to McLuhan, that had turned nature into culture, earth becoming an artifact of technology, contained by technology rather than being its container. ‘Technological art takes the whole earth and its population as its *material*, not as its form’, he wrote in his 1954 pamphlet *Counterblast* (n.p.). This new environment proposes an ‘ecology’ of ‘echo recognition’ whereby we confront a ‘nature’ that is constituted by the bio-technologies of our extended selves: ‘Today’s ecological awareness is echo recognition’ (McLuhan and Nevitt, *TTED*, p. 3), because ‘[i]n today’s electric world, man becomes aware that [the] artificial “Nature” of the Greeks is an extension of himself’ (*TTED*, p. 6).
- [8] In McLuhan we encounter the political and the economic as modes of information technology. With the end of the Second World War, McLuhan argued, the era of Mars had given way to that of Venus, thus inaugurating a libidinal economy in which consumption was at once the product and the goal in a vast feedback loop of endless consumerism. ‘Technology eats itself alive,’ McLuhan and Nevitt wrote in 1972; it ‘loops the loop’ (*TTED*, p. 111). McLuhan’s study of this libidinal economy, *The Mechanical Bride* (1951), posits a wedding of the technological and the organic. McLuhan was among those who realised that, in the postwar period, commodification would be generalised within culture. The vehicle for this generalisation would be advertising, at once the new poetry⁶ of the culture-as-commodity era and a profound expression of the libidinal economy governing it. Thus, the frequent critique made of McLuhan—that he ignored the political and the economic—needs to take into account the way in which his theories blurred these distinctions. For McLuhan, economics and politics had collapsed into the cultural, a feedback loop in which we are at once the subject and object of our desires. Ironically, it was the assumed ‘immateriality’ of media technologies that tended to make McLuhan’s work seem irrelevant during the period when ‘critical’ most often meant ‘Marxist’—why

was he not dealing with economic practices? Did this not lead to his deterministic reading of the media? And where was politics in all of this? Now that the 'immaterial' has become invested with a 'materiality' it had not previously enjoyed—as in the notions of 'performativity', of the body as 'construct', of the 'death' of the subject, and above all of the 'effect' as meaningful in its own right—it is possible and even necessary to remediate McLuhan's media theories as political and economic analyses of the new cognitive capital.¹⁷

[9] In the 1960s, Tom Wolfe famously compared McLuhan to Newton, Darwin, Einstein, Freud and Pavlov, and while McLuhan's connections to Einstein and Freud have been explored over the years, the reference to Darwin deserves further pursuit as media theory increasingly encounters the *bios*.¹⁸ The environment as bio-technological extension represents for McLuhan the notion of an embodied mediation. If this bio-technological extension, this environment, is understood as technological, rather than natural, then its effect is to promote the notion of technology as a continuation of nature, rather than its overcoming. In this sense, we are 'becoming beside ourselves,'¹⁹ to use Brian Rotman's formulation; that is, becoming one with our prostheses.

[10] Jean-Luc Nancy states in his book *Corpus* that

Our world is the world of the 'technical', the world whose cosmos, nature, gods, whose system, complete in its intimate jointure, are exposed as 'technical': the world of an *ecotechnics*. Ecotechnics functions with technical apparatus, with which it connects us in all directions. But what it *makes* is our bodies, which it puts into the world and connects to its system, our bodies, which in this way it creates as more visible, more proliferating, more polymorphous, more pressed together, more in 'masses' and 'zones' than they have ever been.²⁰

McLuhan insisted, on the contrary, that the price of this connection was a concomitant disconnection without identity or self-presence, and he emphasised the increasing importance of the *in-visible*. Although he theorised electronic media as being tactile, touch, for him, measured separation. It is this resonating gap, this echoing effect, that is the site of McLuhan's 'ec[h]o-criticism'.

[11] While McLuhan sought to expand the role of the artist such that everyone engaging critically with the mediatic environment took on that role, he was lamenting as early as 1958 that 'the public [did] not rally with enthusiasm to the creator role', because 'we had been only

too successful in creating a consumer-oriented public that expected all articles presented to it to be fully processed for immediate use' (McLuhan, 'Media Alchemy', p. 66). The artist/critic, argued McLuhan, must wake us up, bring us to consciousness. Otherwise, as he put it, we dream awake, living in a vast phantasmagoria of our own invention which we take as natural, when, ironically, even nature has become a medium that we constantly seek to adjust. If, as Mark Taylor has suggested, modern philosophy is characterised by an encounter with the other ('Introduction', p. 8), then in McLuhan we find this insight taken beyond Hegel's meditations on the master/slave relationship to the discovery that the other we encounter at the heart of humanity is ourselves *as* technology. Hence, the double edge of McLuhan's 'humanist' take on technology, since it represents not simply a humanising of technology but the more disturbing—or perhaps transformative?—notion that technology is the *pre-condition* of our being human.