

# Reading McLuhan

In a section of *Understanding Media* called “The Medium Is the Message,” McLuhan takes issue with David Sarnoff’s statement that “We are too prone to make technological instruments the scapegoats for the sins of those who wield them. The products of modern science are not in themselves good or bad; it is the way it is used that determines its value.” McLuhan uses the following rhetorical statements to point out what he perceives as blindness on the part of Sarnoff to the nature of media: “The smallpox virus is in itself neither good nor bad; it is the way it is used that determines its value”; “Firearms are in themselves neither good nor bad; it is the way they are used that determines their value.” McLuhan then says “It has never occurred to General Sarnoff that any technology could do anything but add itself on to what we already are.” McLuhan is very good at pointing out that “...the personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result in a new scale that is introduced into our affairs by each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.”

Apparently, then, McLuhan believes that some media are by their very nature harmful in their personal and social consequences, for he believes that it is the medium, rather than the content or uses of the medium “...that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action”:

The electric light is pure information. It is a medium without a message, as it were, unless it is used to spell out some verbal ad or name.... Whether the light is being used for brain surgery or night baseball is a matter of indifference. It could be argued that these activities are in some way the “content” of the electric light, since they could not exist without the electric light. This fact merely underlines the point that “the medium is the message” because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. The content or uses of such media are as diverse as they are ineffectual in shaping the form of human association.

Or, again:

Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot. For the “content” of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind. The effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as “content”. The content of a movie is a novel or a play or an opera. The effect of the movie form is not related to its program content.

McLuhan is not arguing for the abolition of various media. For instance, electric technology, he says, “totally threatens” an America which has a high “stake in literacy as a technology or uniformity applied to every level of government, education, industry, and social life.” All the same, “It is,

however, no time to suggest strategies when the threat has not even been acknowledged to exist.” He is simply arguing that it is the case that a given media will impose its possibilities on “the cultural matrix within which the particular medium operates.” If we remain blind or deaf to the nature of the medium (as opposed to its possible uses or contents.)

The groundwork for being able to begin to even assess the social and personal consequences of any medium involves being aware, McLuhan says, that “any medium has the power of imposing its own assumption on the unwary. Prediction and control consist in avoiding this subliminal state of Narcissus trance. But the greatest aid to this end is simply in knowing that the spell can occur immediately upon contact, as in the first bars of a melody.”

And it’s a subliminal, unquestioned influence if not considered with care and an attempt toward understanding.

I begin to understand my friend Jay McLaughlin’s remarks about learning Japanese. In her novel, she’s writing about her stay in Tokyo, and, in this part, of a conversation between “Jasan” and another Westerner in Tokyo:

no no I don’t think you can ever be fluent cuz it’s a culture and a mind set, not just words and syntax. you know? before I came to Japan I really wanted to be able to speak and be totally fluent, you know. now I’m not so sure. Oh, no, Jay, you can’t give up now, you’ve just peaked for a while, I know that feeling, totally frustrating, man, but you wait you all of a sudden get this great surge of comprehension. I mean I’ve been speaking Japanese for eight years and that still happens. It’s always the most frustrating just before a breakthrough you’ll see and he’s so excited that I can’t tell him it’s not the difficulty of the language, its my new discovery that learning a language means to a certain extent and for a certain time you have to accept the social structures that the language is built on and I’m starting to have doubts if I want to live in Japanese structures, even to improve even for a while, even to improve my syntax or my vocabulary. The less Japanese a gaijin seems to speak, the happier they seem to be and the more they like the Japanese. I’m tired of living on the edge of translation all the time.

Augustine said “Seek not to understand that you may believe; believe, that ye may understand.” Ooooooo... say that again? Wash my mind out with soap! Cleanse me!

Of course, it probably is the case that the word of love in the bones of the bod on the way to the world in the wine of our dying is good to believe. That we arrive at our faith by other than the mind, entirely. Undoubtedly. That we are persuaded to be who we are and do what we do, choose what we do, by other means than Augustine’s discourse. That the invisible environment, which in a certain way is what we are—and includes media—is a medium—is an embodiment of much of what we assume is. We are unknowing and perhaps the means by which we come to know (and perhaps, then, *later* to question) necessarily involves a loving application of mind soap.

“Environments are invisible. Their ground rules, pervasive structures, and overall patterns elude easy perception.”

McLuhan

“Good taste is the first resort of the witless.”

Harley Parker

Toynbee considers that although all of the oriental societies have in our time accepted the industrial technology and its political consequences: “On the cultural plane, however, there is no uniform corresponding tendency.” This is like the voice of the literate man, floundering in a milieu of ads, who boasts, “Personally, I pay no attention to ads.” The spiritual and cultural reservations that the oriental peoples may have toward our technology will avail them not at all. The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance. The serious artist is the only person able to encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception.

McLuhan



Consider the University as a medium. Why not?: water is a medium, there are fish in water, there are schools of students. (I think of a medium as a channel for communication, whether it’s one way, two-way, or whatever.) Well, I guess one-way is hardly communication, but TV is a medium all the same. One of the assumptions built into many of the University’s personnel, policies, and programs is that the end, the goal of a university education is that the student be enabled to fit in to a largely corporate society. This message, this metamaterial, informs and modifies much ‘education.’

Professionalism is environmental. Amateurism is anti-environmental. Professionalism merges the individual into patterns of total environment. Amateurism seeks the development of the total awareness of the individual and the critical awareness of the ground rules of society. The amateur can afford to lose. The professional tends to classify and to specialize, to accept uncritically the ground rules of the environment. The ground rules provided by the mass response of his colleagues serve as a pervasive environment of which he is contentedly unaware. The “expert” is the man who stays put.

McLuhan in *The Medium is the Massage*

So the “serious artist” is an amateur according to McLuhan. I get a chuckle out of the amateurish way McLuhan wrote the last quote. It’s not very quotable, is it? It’s so ismatic it’s parodic of isms.

“The serious artist... is an expert...” he said. I doubt very much that the “serious artist” encounters anything with “impunity.” We don’t seem to know until we need to, until it hurts. Perhaps there are only times in our lives when we are “serious artists.” We’re all implicated in the washing of brains, if only because we do it so well to ourselves.

Much of what we are deeply trained to feel is beautiful is in fact ugly. The icon of the ‘beautiful woman’ enslaves both men and women to an expensive, remote idolatry of the commodity of glamour. Our images of the beautiful should direct us to the true and loving and free, not to the neurotic, power-hungry, and aloof. The icon of the desirable man enslaves both women and men to an idolatry of empty urbanity and acquisitive disregard for each other. This is good for nobody and nothing but the economy.



It may be that a given medium acquires power to the degree that it is capable of multi-form content and use, wide-spread dissemination, and intense perpetuation of commodity exchange.

On the other hand, it may be that a medium bestows power upon us insofar as we are able to infer from its suggestions something of the invisible, unheard, and unfelt that begins to form in an act of the imagination. If it is so that a medium is an extension of our body, then it is empowering insofar as it goes some way toward fulfilling “The aspiration of our time for wholeness, empathy, and depth of awareness.”

“I gave my heart to know wisdom, and folly, and madness,” or so saith the preacher, though he went on to call it vanity also.



Been thinking about the Math department, other departments, indoctrination into the institutional mind.

Generally speaking, Math students do not do ‘original’ work until they’re well into postgraduate studies. This is simply because the amount of learning it takes to reach the height of mainstream Math takes that long to acquire. And by then, they are so high up on the already massive structure of knowledge and assumptions that they will build something quite beyond the sight of anybody wandering around near the base of the tower.

There’s nothing wrong with such work. Some of it is astonishingly elegant, to judge from my minute acquaintance with it. All the same, that’s where the students are directed.

At U.Vic., the Philosophy department offers courses in logic. The Math department doesn’t. Good Math students don’t need courses in logic. They acquire it subliminally by reading between the lines of many proofs. They are successful students to the degree that they completely internalize all the assumptions underlying classical logic to the point where these unexamined assumptions take on the unquestioned reality of the informing spirit that moves the hand to write. They begin to soar, to delight in the exercise of their developing mathematical intuition which leads them, in a flash of brilliance, to the same conclusion generations of students have come to before.

Their intuitions become swift and trained to the mark like the huntsman’s arrow. The economy of their writing develops. They would prove things directly and only bring out the dragon-slayer of *reductio* when indirection is apparently necessary.

If they are particularly talented, they may one day become academics and teach others what proofs are, develop in others the intuition of their Platonic love.

The system is entirely geared to this sort of transmission of knowledge. What would happen if, from day one, students were instructed to question the assumptions of classical logic, to develop their

mathematical intuition along other lines? It would throw a wrench into undergraduate studies. ‘We were supposed to be maximizing the volume of pig-troughs by now!’ And the students would be outsiders with few career options. They would have to learn classical Math to begin to appreciate the radical nature of their own work and to defend it.

Davis and Hersh, in *The Mathematical Experience*, do not limit their discussion to Math or metamathematics, which deals with logics, axiom systems, proof, and so on: they consider also other aspects of the environment of the mathematician, including the politics of publishing and the status quo that says mathematicians do mathematics, first and foremost. The authors recognize the ways in which the institution has an interest in perpetuating the status quo of classical Math, and are concerned that this inhibits the development of valid, radical departures from the known.



A quote from THE MATHEMATICAL EXPERIENCE. A conversation between an “Ideal Mathematician” and a student who comes to him (him, always him) with a strange question. The authors’ Ideal Mathematician is not the perfect one, the one “...without defect or limitation. Rather, we mean to describe the most mathematician-like mathematician.... We want to display clearly the discrepancy between the actual work and activity of the mathematician and his own perception of his work and activity”:

**Student:** Sir, what is a mathematical proof?

**I.M.:** You don’t know that? What year are you in?

**Student:** Third-year graduate.

**I.M.:** Incredible! A proof is what you’ve been watching me do at the board for three years! That’s what a proof is.

**Student:** Sorry, sir, I should have explained. I’m in philosophy, not Math. I’ve never taken your course.

**I.M.** Oh! Well, in that case—you have taken some Math haven’t you? You know the proof of the fundamental theorem of calculus—or the fundamental theorem of algebra?

**Student:** I’ve seen arguments in geometry and algebra and calculus that were called proofs. What I’m asking you for isn’t examples of proof, it’s a definition of proof. Otherwise, how can I tell what examples are correct?

**I.M.:** Well, this whole thing was cleared up by the logician Tarski, I guess, and some others, maybe Russell or Peano. Anyhow, what you do is, you write down the axioms of your theory in a formal language with a given list of symbols or alphabet. Then you write down the hypothesis of your theorem in the same symbolism. Then you show that you can transform the hypothesis step by step, using the rules of logic, till you get the conclusion. That’s a proof.

**Student:** Really? That’s amazing! I’ve taken elementary and advanced calculus, basic algebra, and topology, and I’ve never seen that done.

**I.M.** Oh, of course, no one ever really does it. It would take forever! You just show that you could do it, that’s sufficient.

**Student:** But even that doesn’t sound like what was done in my courses and textbooks. So Mathematicians don’t really do proofs, after all.

**I.M.** Of course we do! If a theorem isn’t proved, it’s nothing.

**Student:** Then what is a proof? If it’s this thing with a formal language and transforming

formulas, nobody ever proves anything. Do you have to know all about formal languages and formal logic before you can do a mathematical proof? **I.M.** Of course not! The less you know, the better. That stuff is all abstract nonsense anyway.

**Student:** Then really what is a proof?

**I.M. :** Well it's an argument that convinces someone who knows the subject. **Student:** Someone who knows the subject? Then the definition of proof is subjective; it depends on particular persons? Before I can decide if something is a proof, I have to decide who the experts are. What does that have to do with proving things?

**I.M.** No, no. There's nothing subjective about it! Everybody knows what a proof is. Just read some books, take some courses from a competent mathematician, and you'll catch on.

**Student:** Are you sure?

**I.M.** Well—it is possible that you won't, if you don't have any aptitude for it. That can happen too.

**Student:** Then you decide what a proof is, and if I don't learn to decide in the same way, you decide I don't have any aptitude.

**I.M.** If not me, then who?

Regardless of whether the mathematician is justified in his surety concerning the unquestionable validity of his notions of proof, he is clearly institutionalized to the point where he will continue to unquestioningly and contentedly perpetuate the “pervasive environment,” the “ground rules provided by the mass response of his colleagues.” In turn, students will receive and absorb his wisdom—uncritically, if they are particularly in love with Math, talented, ambitious, and desiring of a place in the academy. The ‘best’ students become what they behold.

I doubt that the indoctrination Hersh and Davis describe is unique to Math departments. I know at least one Creative Writing professor who dislikes students writing stories set within the Creative Writing department. It is undoubtedly unreasonable to expect teachers to encourage insurrection. That must be the students' job?

The rawness of now, however, and the occasional need for us to deal intensely with the now in which we are mired often gives our art a blazing reality splendid to the touch. It often issues from the pain and commitment we can feel to be alive—*now*. A fusion of life and art. In McLuhan's language, it's “anti-environmental,” and is sometimes dangerous to the environment it describes, transcends, moves out from. To re-quote McLuhan:

Our conventional response to all media, namely that it is how they are used that counts, is the numb stance of the technological idiot. For the “content” of a medium is like the juicy piece of meat carried by the burglar to distract the watchdog of the mind. The effect of the medium is made strong and intense just because it is given another medium as “content.” The content of a movie is a novel or a play or an opera. The effect of the movie form is not related to its program content.

Similarly, many of the effects of a university education are not related to its program content. However, as Gregory Whitehead points out in “If a voice like, then what?”, “For years little or nothing could be done for many of these people. Doctors often resorted to surgery, whose results were difficult to predict. Today, however, there's been a new medical breakthrough in diagnosing and

testing voice problems. With the ability to view vocal chords in action, through the use of fibre-optics, it is now possible for doctors to correct voice problems in nine out of ten cases.”



Though many people in positions of power are not university educated, it's probably true, on the whole, that graduates fare 'better' materially than non-graduates. Thinkers such as Noam Chomsky and Foucault see the universities as the primary places entrusted with the perpetuation of the status quo. The academy's graduates assume the administrative, technical, mediating, theorizing, and educative positions without which the techno-structures would fall.

Most everyone hates their work and they work for someone else. Who is this good for? We talk about how bad things are in China, so bad that the students rose up as a body in the name of freedom and justice. Who is more free: those students (among the living) or our own who are so busy studying their lessons they don't have the inclination to speak out as a body at all? Who is enslaved? We don't often know it's outside the law to be alive in any country.

We are under a massive illusion that we are free. Many of my fellow poets—particularly Creative Writing graduates—are in a hurry to publish as prestigiously as they can, rather than with magazines that do not cater to the prestige market and speak out strongly against the witless, waspish, self-protective refuge of good taste. I agree with Seattle's Joseph Keppler that getting a poem published in the local newspapers would be a kind of poetry in itself. They don't publish serious poetry. It's considered to be hopelessly out of touch. Unfortunately, the editors are right.



The nearly instantaneous capacity of electronic media to disseminate now's noise, the present, makes the moment global. The global moment, like the moon, is always present if unseen, sometimes. There was a student in China and his sister. Imagine a bond between them and in their turnings, also like the moon and the earth and the sun and the stars, that bond, like gravitation was of the moment always, however unfelt by either of them. And in their turnings also was the global moment. She turned him in. He was turned in. He turned in, and felt the global moment on his skin. It was all over. And then he felt it in him, like radio waves. He began to resonate, and wondered where he began and where he ended, as though who and what he was had imploded, turned in, and then exploded out into the global moment which is ongoing. So that rather than a body turning, anymore, he was as an improbable event which you could locate anywhere in the universe at different times. As he is here now, within the global moment.

Elsewhere, lovers in this moment wonder now what has come between them. What has come between them? For it's in the nature of love to create a universe uniting two bodies turning as though the global moment is not of the moment in their turnings together. They long for that bond between them that will turn them in to each other, though separate. They are already there, the lovers, though they do not feel it, bodies extended, intermingled in the numb air.

Zhou Feng Sou is in his cell, or somewhere else, or he is dead. We do not know. His sister is in despair or shining in the glow of the global moment, all she is inside shining outside in harmony with the

invisible light of the global moment that is all around.

Here? Not here. The students here are far too busy learning their lessons to have time for such things. There is so much work for them to do they don't even have time to read the papers. They are excited by what they're learning and increasingly have no moments for anything else. They are learning. Besides, here we are free, like them, to think what we please and do what we like. Here we speak out for what we believe (when we have the time) and when we do not quake in doing so as we do when in opposition to the global moment. When you would speak out, know that it is not just shyness that makes you quake. Our country is silence 2000 miles wide. We are reserved of mind, as we would have the Indians be, in space.

We would observe the rule of the global moment and let the glib speak for US.



In *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong discusses at some length some of the noetic characteristics of oral cultures and of the individuals within such cultures. If there is no writing, everything of importance must be remembered. To be remembered, it must be memorably expressed. 'Memorably expressed' can mean that it's said powerfully, or it can mean that the information is encoded in well-known formulas such as lists, metered language, song, rhyme, and so on. Everything of importance must be remembered by at least one of the members of society.

In our society, as is the case with all societies which possess writing and print prominently, no individual has to permanently retain what we need to know. We can look it up, use it to whatever purpose we desire, and forget it. It is written down. We can remember it again by picking up the writing once more. Consequently, the language no longer needs to be structured in ways which continually employ rhyme, metered language, standard, predictable syntax, and so on. The language becomes extremely unmemorable in these ways. The rhythms of a sort of crazy jazz, but moreso. It's even freer than jazz. Which can be wonderfully liberating. To talk as we do, I mean.

Long and involved arguments that are divided into many parts and that are original, that cannot be stitched together from highly formulaic components, are difficult for oral cultures to develop. The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, which are long and involved, and which are from an oral culture, are not arguments but stories stitched together in very memorable ways. Mathematics and logic begin in sand-drawings, not in stories.

The shift from the word as event and living, as uttered and heard, to the word as seen, as thing, as having an existence apart from a person uttering it, as having a life independent of whatever anyone may say about it, brings into the world a distance, an objectivity to thought and language that is unheard of in oral cultures.

McLuhan would say that this shift "gives us an eye for an ear," that we conduct our knowing thereafter slightly more with the eye than we did before, slightly less with the ear. Or, if that's an inaccurate way of putting it, let's try another: if not 'more' with the eye, then in a different way with the eye; if not 'less' with the ear, then in a different way with the ear.

“I see”: I understand. “I hear that...”: it could be hearsay, untrustworthy.

McLuhan, maintains that the social and personal consequences of media are independent of the content and uses of the medium because he feels that these adjustments in the way we sense the world, these adjustments in the “sense ratios” accompany changes in consciousness.

Our personal capacity for memory is diminished in certain ways, though in others, we have access to the increasing mind-bank of memory encoded and recorded in the collective memory of books.

McLuhan saw, or heard, say, radio and television as introducing a very strong element of orality back into North America and the west. He saw the danger not so much as being that these mediums could and would and are being used as propaganda, but rather, saw the danger as our individual inability to deal with it.



A bizarre example in America of the general inability to deal with propaganda: the flag burning imbroglio. Some poor bastard burned an American flag in public and the country went nuts. President Bush is proposing an amendment to the First Amendment to make burning the flag an offence. Front page news in the July 2/89 Seattle Post-Intelligencer—which is as revealing a name as our own Times Colonist. Here’s a clip from the Seattle paper. This is actually an astute commentary by David Schaefer from the Times Washington bureau:

When Bush unveiled his proposed amendment Friday, he chose to do it in front of one of the most American of symbols: the statue at Arlington National Cemetery of marines erecting a flag atop Mount Suribachi on the small Western Pacific island of Iwo Jima after one of the final, most grisly battles of World War II.

It was a page from Bush’s successful campaign for the presidency last year, a campaign that critics said substituted symbolism for substance and in which Bush was forever in front of the flag. He staged one campaign event at a flag factory, and led off virtually every meeting with the Pledge of Allegiance. That image was a repeated thrust at his Democratic foe, Massachusetts Gov. Michael Dukakis, who had vetoed a state statute that would have required teachers to lead the pledge at the beginning of each school day.

Now, some say, Bush is trying the same tactic on congressional Democrats and specifically Foley, the top elected Democrat in the country and the person responsible for scheduling legislation in the House.

Bush “is clearly speaking to his audience that he has to keep happy. This is a way that he keeps those groups in place,” Doug Bailey, a Republican pollster, told The Boston Globe. “He’s letting people know that he remembers how he got elected.”

Polls taken since the court’s June 21 ruling show overwhelming support for Bush’s position, and Foley is fully aware of the potential for political fallout.

The flag has probably always been a strong symbol for Americans of their freedom and their country, their collectivity. Individual freedom together with intense collectivity. Already a confusing symbol. William Randolph Hearst Jr., that bastion of the free press, in his column in the July 2 Post-Intelligencer, a column called "Let's Salute, Not Burn, American Flag," says:

Let us remember the poem by John Greenleaf Whittier dedicated to Barbara Frietchie, who held the Stars and Stripes out her Frederick, Md. home window as Confederate troops were marching by. "Shoot if you must, this old grey head, but spare your country's flag," she said.

Billy also quotes "Pop," who said:

American independence means the independence of the citizens in religious, political, industrial and ethical matters. It means freedom from undue sympathy for those hostile to and destructive of our democracy. It means America shall be first in our thoughts, and first in our hearts.

It seems to me that there is in this incident a great confusion of the symbol with what the symbol stands for. As though in burning the flag, one burns freedom and the country. The consequence of this confusion is a negation of what the symbol stands for, insofar as the flag stands for personal freedom in both thought and action from the collective mind (or was it just from England?). To burn the flag is not to burn freedom or the country. To impose a law forbidding the flag's burning is to forget this. If they are not free to burn the flag and acknowledge that none of the reality of their convictions reside in the symbol itself, are they not less free to know what freedom is? And yet in the outspoken, iconoclastic artists of America, the strength of conviction in the otherwise empty American aspiration toward personal freedom speaks truly. Much moreso than in our own artists who don't usually embrace the risk of failure that inevitably arises when you don't do things by the book. So the American concern with personal freedom is not entirely empty.

Print encourages the objectivity in thought and language that discourages (at least in print) identifying the symbol with the thing, or the idea, or the emotion. You could get away with burning a flag-size piece of paper that only had on it the words 'the American flag,' probably. Or if not, you could undoubtedly get away with burning an identical piece of paper that had on it 'that thing ->' while it pointed to the other piece of paper. The magic is somewhat removed.

The overwhelming public support for Bush's position points to an inability in the American public (and we're no better) to deal with the magical transformation of symbol to seeming substance on TV and on radio, for radio can seem as 'real' as television.

The print mentality, which helps us in so many ways, and which even was the necessary condition for the development of logic, and mathematics, science, and, in general, Western rationality, does not tend to confuse symbol with substance so easily, and really does not understand anymore that it can be done. Magic and superstition are widely considered to be foolish anachronisms, or at least primitive confusions. It's a mode of thinking relegated to oral cultures. North America may be becoming that sort of tribal culture, through its electronic media. And is seldom aware of it.



One of McLuhan's great metaphors—he was very much a poet, an artist—is media as extensions of our bodies, even of our nervous system. This is a more specific form of the more comprehensive metaphor of technologies as extensions of ourselves.

Transplants, artificial organs, cloning, the car, with all its odd power to move us, these are just a few examples of a symbiosis of man and machine. These examples are very much extensions of the body, most obviously, rather than extensions of the mind or the nervous system. Media technologies are primarily extensions of the mind and the nervous system, according to McLuhan.

For instance, print is an extension of the memory. Our memory is extended outside of ourselves. We don't need to remember what is recorded. We can pick it up and re-member it. It was a dismember of us until we re membered it to us. Jacki Apple, an American radio producer, has said that radio provides people with the soundtrack for the movie of their day to day lives, particularly the young. Radio can fill acoustic space in a way that television or even movies cannot fill visual space. A guy with his shades, in his car, with the radio turned up loud, is transforming acoustic space in a way that would require acid for visual space, or sleep and dream. Speed radio's D.J.s play a role that must be slick and of the moment. *Now* and *now* and *now*. The time is now and you are of the moment, driving powerfully into the future along the razor edge of now. You are in the time and space of the speeding moment. Speed radio is the pulsing beat of the collective, tribal drum. It extends us into the auditory space along the edge of a now that is always moving and almost ahead of its time.

The fibres of the communications systems, those miles of threads, the pulsing of the satellite beams, the light-speed of its now, all these beams and threads are as so many nerve fibres hot-wired into our bodies, extending our senses, in various ratios, out into the immediacy of all.

Our moment, the nerves firing, the sensorium aflash and abuzz with now's thingamagogs is brought to you, in part, by these extensions of our senses. Even when they're not turned on. What turns us on, for instance is, in part, in response to what we have learned is desirable. Through media.

Anorexia Nervosa is in the electric air, a disorder of society's nervous system, and is therefore difficult to actually locate, like any virus that operates from the nervous system. As we are attached to this electrical nervous system, we are not immune, though, of course, it tends to afflict young women with the free-flowing guilt of our affluence combined with our hyper-mediated mania for thinness. They are particularly prone, it seems. The guilt of affluence is pronounced in the young, male or female, who have in adolescence developed the mind to see it for what it is in their own city and around the world, without yet being able to convince themselves that it has nothing to do with themselves. At the same time, the desirable woman must be thin.

We are beyond ourselves, intertwined in the pleasure and pain, fears, and musings of our nervous system. There is much fear involved: who and what are men and women now? You and me? The great collectivity introduced into our nervous system is reminiscent of an earlier, tribal collectivity. Standardized education, standardized language, standardized newspapers, art, network television and radio, all these standardized, collective forms of knowing and sensing the world make individuality as difficult for us, perhaps, as it was—and is, still, in some places where it's still allowed—within the tribe.

Yet the struggle for individuality is still our ideal for men and women. To be in touch, to hear, to see the world is to be open to the Anorexia Nervosas in our minds, to the wounds, the pain and the pleasure streaming in through the extensions of us, our senses. Luddites have nowhere to run. It's in them already. There is no escaping our collectivity. The artist may be a scabrous, open wound resonant with the global moment, not immune, not detached from us all. Where is individuality then? Louis Hammer has said "Whoever spits the pain/from their throat/ is beginning to love/the flame in their hands."

Perhaps we come into our own personal power, the flame in our hands, our individuality, power not over others but within ourselves, insofar as we may speak out of the pain of our becoming as we are rent asunder, extended out as we are into others, to say what we are become. And perhaps if this is done with compassion, which only befits we who are already so much of others, in our being torn and extended, if our reach is far enough, we may say what it is to be one and the many.