A McLuhan Sourcebook

Key Quotations from the Writings of Marshall McLuhan, Assembled by William Kuhns

McLuhan was the most epigrammatic of writers. His talent for the gemlike insight — in which various facets, from unrelated worlds, flared with brilliant, wholly shared light — was unrivalled. To this day, the French term McLuhanisme describes the junction of discrepant worlds that can mingle and intersect, bringing illumination to one another.

His genius for compression was allied to a discursive, non-consecutive, and frequently confounding style. In Understanding Media, there are paragraphs more dizzying and gravity-defying than Montreal’s fabled roller coaster, Le Monstre. If McLuhan flashed constantly with brilliance, each flash could lurch and twist in a new unexpected direction from the flash that came before. His writings offer remarkable riches, and very little continuity.

Yet one marvel of his aphorisms is that they lend themselves to a continuity and a context all their own. This is the idea behind the Sourcebook. His most provocative and compelling comments on any subject can be assembled in a few pages. Each remark remains discretely its own, a world of insight unto itself, with no formal continuity between what comes before or after. Yet the combined effect is to converge different sources of luminosity. The quotations interact with one another, becoming a kind of nonlinear essay.

McLuhan’s best thought speaks to us in the language of metaphor. In a scientific and logical universe, this makes him suspect: not only do many of his tenets lie beyond present scientific scrutiny; like any voice that speaks primarily in metaphor, McLuhan lends himself to subjective, rather than “objective,” understanding.

This may appear a difficulty: it is a remarkable strength. McLuhan’s best aphorisms can be described as arcs of thought strikingly like subatomic trajectories: they’re startling, constantly transformative, and influenced by the subtle participation of the observer. Understandably, McLuhan’s critics shy from this volatility: his final meaning seems pitched for them in ever-changing shades of ambiguity. Yet there can be a fine creative edge in that ambiguity. For example, in 1962 he wrote: “The new reality is in the image and not behind it.” This has no predetermined meaning. A fashion designer whose faith rides on label and logo would make one sense of it; a programmer who creates computerized models of aerodynamic flow would make another sense of it. Both are apt. It is the breadth of aptness which we find so unfamiliar.

McLuhan was trained as a literary scholar. Within the realms of poetry, drama, fiction, variable interpretations
of the same work are not only allowable: they are a measure of the writer’s reach. The world of technology has fostered other rules. Any engineer will tell you that the scanning raster lines of a TV are no more and no less than its scanning raster lines. McLuhan looked at those lines and asked, “Why should the broken lines of the television mosaic emphasize the sculptural contours of objects?” Or, why should the scanning raster lines of the TV behave so much like a human finger?

A question like this brings the gifts of a major poet to the terra incognita of our technological environment. In doing that, McLuhan offered what no one before him had dreamt possible, and what no one since has adequately begun to achieve: a perception of our man-made world which can tap into the richest resources of the imagination.

McLuhan not only speaks through one’s intuition, he expands it, and enables it to return to the world with awakened capabilities. What is there to learn from McLuhan? Perception and perception and perception.
I. ABOUT MEDIA

MEDIA AS "THE NEW NATURE"

The new media are not bridges between man and nature; they are nature.

The new media are not ways of relating us to the old "real" world; they are the real world and they reshape what remains of the old world at will. — 1969

It is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action. — 1964

The word "medium" was Latin for "public." There not being any reading public before printing, men perhaps tended to think of readers at large as a kind of scattering of currency — a "medium" in that sense. — 1973

The reader of the newspaper accepts the newspaper not so much as a highly artificial image having some correspondence to reality as he tends to accept it as reality itself. Perhaps the effect is for the media to substitute for reality just in the degree to which they become virtuosos of realistic detail.

The news automatically becomes the real world for the TV user and is not a substitute for reality, but is itself an immediate reality. — 1978

We must substitute an interest in the media for the previous interest in subjects. This is the logical answer to the fact that the media have substituted themselves for the older world. Even if we should wish to recover that older world we can do so only by an intensive study of the ways in which the media have swallowed it. — 1956

AS NEW LANGUAGES...

Today we are beginning to realize that the new media are not just mechanical gimmicks for creating worlds of illusion, but new languages with new and unique powers of expression. — 1957

If a language contrived and used by many people is a mass medium, any one of our new media is in a sense a new language, a new codification of experience collectively achieved by new work habits and inclusive collective awareness. — 1960

New media may at first appear as mere codes of transmission for older achievement and established patterns of thought. But nobody could make the mistake of supposing that phonetic writing merely made it possible for the Greeks to set down in visual order what they had thought and known before writing. In the same way printing made literature possible. It did not merely encode literature. — 1960

Ads, comics, and movies are not codes in North America but basic languages. That we have not yet begun to teach their grammars is as natural as it is for pre-literate man to ignore the written or visual mode of his language. Grammar comes from the Greek
“written.” And education would seem to involve the translation of experience into a new mode. — 1960

It is the framework that changes with each new technology and not just the picture within the frame.

The spoken word was the first technology by which man was able to let go of his environment in order to grasp it in a new way.

We must maximize rather than minimize the various features of our new media. It is easy now to see that they are not mere vehicles for already-achieved experience and insight.

Gramophone and movies were merely the mechanization of speech and gesture. But the radio and TV were not just the electronification of speech and gesture but the electronification of the entire range of human personal expressiveness. With electronification the flow is taken out of the wire and into the vacuum tube circuit, which confers freedom and flexibility such as are in metaphor and in words themselves. — 1955

Each new technology creates an environment that is itself regarded as corrupt and degrading yet the new one turns its predecessor into an art form. — 1964

The bias of each medium of communication is far more distorting than the deliberate lie. The form and tone of some press styles may make the very concept of truth irrelevant. The most urgent and reliable facts presented in this way are a travesty of any reality. — 1955

All media exist to invest our lives with artificial perception and arbitrary values. — 1964

The effects of new media on our sensory lives are similar to the effects of new poetry. They change not our thoughts but the structure of our world. — 1969

(To Mike Wallace) If I turn off this mike my relationship to you is changed instantly. — 1966

**BURSTING BOUNDARIES**

Today the boundaries between inner and outer forces of the media are confused. And our four-century preoccupation with print has fixed our attention on so limited an aspect of the media that we find it very hard to release our attention to the whole range of media influence. What I wish to show is that today we experience, in reverse, what pre-literate men faced with the advent of writing. — 1955

Personally, I think that the effect of the telegraph has been . . . to break down the division between our inner and outer worlds. — 1956

There is no inside or outside under electronic conditions. That is the meaning of our glass buildings, the new banking services. — 1970
The dichotomy between information and entertainment has ended. — 1962

What we call entertainment at the present time is really, basically, a form of politics. There is really far more politics in Hollywood in the consumer attitudes and personal preferences and goals as set by casting bureaus and so on, far more political reality in the Hollywood scene than there ever has been in the so-called political scene. — 1966

The media themselves are the avant-garde of our society. Avant-garde no longer exists in painting and music and poetry, it's the media themselves. — 1973

With the telegraph and after, we enter the world of interdependence and inter-action, in which no medium has its meaning alone and no product or advertisement has its meaning or use by itself. — 1961

DEVELOPING THE POTENTIAL OF NEW MEDIA

[F.D.R.] was at great pains to use an unfavourable press to enhance his radio image. The art of politics today requires an orchestral use of the varied instruments of public communication. These instruments do not exist or function in isolation from one another any more than do our senses function in isolation. — 1965

Circuitry means that every situation must fold back into itself much in the pattern of cognition and its playback, which is “recognition” in the action of human perceiving and knowing. The new technology mimes the prime procedure of human learning and knowing. — 1968

For rational beings to see or re-cognize their experience in a new material form is an unbought grace of life. Experience translated into a new medium literally bestows a delightful playback of earlier awareness.

It is possible that our new technologies can bypass verbalizing. There is nothing inherently impossible in the computer, or that type of technology, extending consciousness itself — as a universal environment. There is a sense in which the surround of information that we now experience electrically is an extension of consciousness itself. — 1970

New media are new archetypes, at first disguised as degradations of older media. These degradations happen when new media inevitably use older ones as content. Using the older ones as content hastens the tidying-up process by which a medium becomes an art form. — 1964

Except for light, all other media come in pairs, with one acting as the “content” of the other, obscuring the operation of both. — 1964

The art of politics today requires an orchestral use of the varied instruments of public communication. The
most ardent Beatlemaniac is quite unable to verbalize the meaning of the Beatles. In the same way a flag cannot involve if its symbols can be spelt out or verbalized. A flag issue that is raised and maintained on the level of editorial debate has no relevance to the function of flag. — 1964

**ENVIRONMENTS**

[Environment, from the Greek, perivello: to hit from all sides at once]

Environments are not just containers, but are processes that change the content totally. — 1967

Cab Calloway: “When I walk down Eighth Avenue, man, I see rhythms, I don’t see downtown.”

A prime feature of the environmental is its invisibility and unawareness. This seems to be involved in the very process of phylogeny. Each new stage of growth becomes the environment for all preceding stages. But we are aware only of the preceding stages, or, as it were, the content of the environment. — 1964

The new environment reprocesses the old one as radically as TV is reprocessing film. — 1964

The unconscious is a store of everything at once. When you begin to move information electrically, you begin to create a subconscious outside. — 1967

We actually live in a world environment that now has the structure of our own subconscious lives . . . — 1967

The sudden discovery of nature was made possible by the railway.

At electric speeds of data processing, we become aware of environments for the first time. We call them “parameters.” It all began in electronic research when it was discovered that the instruments of observation distorted the data. Now we know that any environment acts like the instrument of observation. — 1964

The simultaneous insists upon the harmonious. — 1957

The present is always invisible because it’s environmental. No environment is perceptible, simply because it saturates the whole field of attention. — 1967

We can always see the Emperor’s old clothes, but not his new ones. — 1965

Electric technology offers, perhaps for the first time, a means of dealing with the environment itself as a direct instrument of vision and knowing.

All human technology begins as an immediate service or aid to some existing function and this aid quickly develops its own field of associated services and activities which, in turn, create new services and satisfactions. — 1973

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While environments as such have a strange power to elude perception, the preceding ones acquire an almost nostalgic fascination when surrounded by the new. This is nowhere more evident than in the art of photography with its power to invest all human artifacts with the quality of art. — 1967

One of the features of service environments is that two create less total service than one, or, in other words, the addition of service environments creates not increased service but a decrease of service. — 1970

Apropos “the medium is the message” I now point out that the medium is not the figure but the ground, not the motor car but the highways and the factories. Also, I point out that in all media the user is the content, and the effects come before the invention. — 1973

It may even be that the loss of one’s power to recognize new patterns of power in the environment is in direct ratio to the impact of such new powers. We are most nearly numb where impact is most severe . . . A. J. Toynbee has few if any instances of societies meeting the challenge of major change successfully. — 1964

Whether it be recognized as radio or television or Telstar or the bomb, the new environment of mankind is scarcely “hardware” or physical so much as it is information and the configurations of codified data. — 1966

HOW NEW ENVIRONMENTS RESHAPE OLDER ENVIRONMENTS

You have to perceive the consequences of the new environment on the old environment before you know what the new environment is.

When a new environment forms, we see the old one as if we lived in a world of the déjá vu. This was, of course, Plato’s theory of knowledge, that it was a form of recognition of that which we had known in another existence. — 1967

The history of the arts and sciences could be written in terms of the continuing process by which new technologies create new environments for old technologies. — 1964

Each technological extension involves an act of collective cannibalism. The previous environment is swallowed by the new environment and reprocessed for whatever values are digestible. Thus, Nature was succeeded by the mechanical environment and became what we call the “content” of the new industrial environment. — 1964

. . . we now live in a technologically prepared environment that blankets the earth itself. The humanly contrived environment of electric information and power has begun to take precedence over the old environment of “nature.” Nature, as it were, begins to be the content of our technology.

— 1965
And this strange processing of old forms by new forms tends, in some cases, to strengthen the old forms considerably. For example, one of the effects of automation on libraries and catalogs is to enormously increase the whole cataloging activity. Unexpectedly, instead of supplanting it, it has increased it enormously. — 1965

Xerox makes it possible to present instant recaps of ongoing events — a sort of “story so far” that used to sit above serial publications. As in football instant replays, the recap or recorso draws attention to processes rather than product or even goal. The audience is involved in the game in a totally new way — a way that changes the game itself. — 1964

Xerox has completely changed the nature of conferences and has led to a much higher frequency of meetings. Xerox feeds and speeds the entire environment into the dialogue process of the conference table. — 1971

**HOW TO STUDY MEDIA**

You must be literate in umpteen media to be really “literate” nowadays. — 1966

If you want to understand the nature of TV, you make a complete inventory of all the things that have changed in the past 12 years, in dress, in social behavior, in program tastes. — 1966

Understanding several media simultaneously is the best way of approaching any one of them.

Any study of one medium helps us to understand all others. — 1964

A primary method for studying the effects of anything is simply to imagine ourselves as suddenly deprived of them. If students were to interview physically deprived people about the effects on them of living in a world which has no place for a paraplegic, or a blind man, they would quickly apprehend the menace of our man-made service environment. — 1974

Bad news reveals the character of change; good news does not. — 1966

[Joyce showed how to] make an inventory of all the effects of the new thing as it encounters all the older forms of the society. — 1967

The understanding of media as art forms is achieved by translation of one medium into another. — 1960

Today we can test the contrast between radio and TV in a variety of ways. We have only to imagine what might be the effects of video-phone on the telephone to perceive the utter diversity of these media. — 1971

If you wanted to study radio as a medium in its impact on society, you would do well to look at what happens to radio in a movie. What use is there made of radio in the movie? What happens to a telephone in a Broadway play? — 1959

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The best way to study the nature of any medium is to study its effect on other media because you can see them spelled out there. So when you study the effect of TV on sports, then you begin to understand the nature of TV. And when you see its effects on politics, in advertising, and in movies, then you begin to understand it. — 1977

HYBRID MEDIA

The hypertrophy of written messages, which has been dubbed “Parkinson’s law” by its author, would appear to be caused not by paper-shuffling and the typewriter, but by the effort of the typewriter to keep pace with the acceleration of information movement created by the telephone and electronic media. — 1960

The hybrid or meeting of two media is a moment of truth and revelation from which new form is born. — 1964

The electric typewriter is a contradiction in terms. It is a hybrid of the fragmentary and the integral. Our world is filled with such hybrids. The internal combustion engine is such a hybrid. — 1964

The telegraph is an electric form that, when crossed with print and rotary presses, yields the modern newspaper. — 1964

And the photograph is not a machine, but a chemical and light process that, crossed with the machine, yields the movie. — 1964

One of the most common causes of breaks in any system is the cross-fertilization with another system, such as happened to print with the steam press, or with radio and movies (which yielded the talkies).

Artists in various fields are always the first to discover how to enable one medium to use or to release the power of another. — 1964

Dickens, by using the newspaper as the content of the older novel form, created a new hybrid of great power. As usual, when the new medium swallowed an older one, conventional taste protested that vulgarization had occurred. Paradoxically, Dickens, by pushing the camera eye to a point of high fidelity, broke out of the domain of perspective and moved back into the highly actual and iconic world of surrealism and modern art. — 1964

MEDIA AS THEY AFFECT MEDIA

A new medium is never an addition to an old one, nor does it leave the old one in peace. It never ceases to oppress the older media until it finds new shapes and positions for them. — 1964

One of the many effects of television on radio has been to shift radio from an entertainment medium into a kind of nervous information system. News bulletins, times signals, traffic data, above all weather reports, now serve to enhance the native power of radio to involve people in one another. — 1964
The alphabet was one thing when applied to clay or stone, and quite another when set down on light papyrus. — 1964

In the age of the photograph, language takes on a graphic or iconic character whose "meaning" belongs very little to the semantic universe, and not at all to the republic of letters. — 1964

It was the telephone, paradoxically, that sped the commercial adoption of the typewriter. The phrase "send me a memo on that," repeated into millions of phones daily, helped to create the huge expansion of the typist function. — 1964

It seems useful to consider the impact of Xerox if only because it illustrates how profoundly one technology can alter traditional patterns of relation between writing and speaking. — 1973

Xerox extends the function of the typewriter almost to the point where the secret, personal memo is moved into the public domain, as with the Pentagon Papers. When notes for briefing individuals or groups are first typed and then Xeroxed, it is as if a private manuscript were put in the hands of the general reader. The typewriter plus photocopying thus, unexpectedly, restores many of the features of confidential handwritten records. — 1973

Today the decentralizing of such institutions [as department stores] into a multiplicity of small shops in shopping plazas is partly the creation of the car, partly the result of TV. — 1964

The BBC was set up to some extent, according to Innis, under the pressure of newspapers, post office, and various political pressures which felt that this form would be altogether too radical or mutational if it go out of hand. — 1959

The newspaper that could advertise every sort of product on one page quickly gave rise to department stores that provided every kind of product under one roof. — 1964

Yet does General Motors, for example, know, or ever suspect, anything about the effect of the TV image on the users of their motor cars? — 1964

With the rise of statistics as a means of persuasion in 1830s, parliamentary oratory took a nose dive. Gladstone appears to have been the first to master statistics as a form of oratory. The advent of radio in the same way was fatal to political oratory, for one cannot orate into microphone. — 1957

**MEDIA FUSING FUNCTIONS**

The typewriter fuses composition and publication, causing an entirely new attitude to the written and printed word. Composing on the typewriter has altered the forms of the language and literature. — 1974

Like the typewriter, the telephone fuses functions, enabling the call-girl, for example, to be her own
procuer and madame. — 1964

The very nature of the telephone, as of all electric media, is to compress and unify that which had previously been divided and specialized. Only the authority of knowledge works by telephone because of the speed that creates a total and inclusive field of relations. — 1964

The poet or novelist now composes on the typewriter. The typewriter now fuses composition and publication, causing an entirely new attitude to the written and printed word. — 1964

MEDIA REPROCESSING MEDIA

When television becomes an old technology, we will really understand and appreciate its glorious properties.

— 1967

The history of the arts and sciences could be written in terms of the continuing process by which new technologies create new environments for old technologies. — 1964

Swift's *A Tale of a Tub* used the new world of print to enclose the preceding world of the sermon and theological exegesis. Swift is aware of the conflict of forms somewhat in the manner of *Mad Magazine* today.

— 1964

It is not surprising that these new [electrical] forms have beaten the book into the pulps, just as the book destroyed the manuscript and the great culture linked to it. In 1831 the French poet Lamartine foresaw that the newspaper was the book and the poetry of the future.

THE USER AS CONTENT OF A MEDIUM

When one medium uses another, it is the user that is the “content.” When motor cars ride on freight cars, the car is using the railway, and the car is the “content” of the railway, and also of the highway. So it is when print uses the manuscript, or when TV uses the movie, or when movie uses the theatre or when writing uses the voice. Hybridising or piggy-backing creates new chemical compounds like talking pictures or horseless carriages.

— 1971

In the case of any medium whatever, whether of language or clothing or radio or TV, it is the user himself who is the content, and it is the user alone who constitutes the experience of that service. No matter what is on TV, if the user is a Chinese, it is going to be a Chinese program, just as surely as a movie on TV is experienced as a TV show. — 1974

You are the content of any extension of yourself, whether it be pen or pen, pencil or sword, be it palace or page, song or dance or speech . . . The meaning of all these is the experience of using these extensions of yourself. Meaning is not “content” but an active relationship. — 1971
The user is always the content, at least in the traditional Aristotelean view that the “cognitive agent itself becomes and is the thing known.”

—I 1975

I. A. Richards's . . . Practical Criticism was a series of revelations about what people do when they actually read [a poem]. They turn it into whatever happens to suit them.

— 1978

The reader “puts on” the poem as a mask. He becomes its “content” by adjusting himself to use the poem as a means of perceiving the world.

— 1974
II. MEDIA EVOLUTION, MEDIA FORMS

PATTERNS IN MEDIA EVOLUTION

In short, any new technology is an evolutionary and biological mutation opening new doors of perception and new spheres of action to mankind. — 1964

Every mode of technology is a reflex of our most intimate psychological experience. — 1947

The new technology mimes the prime procedure of human learning and knowing. — 1968

Physiologically, man in his normal use of technology, or his variously extended body, is perpetually modified by it and in turn finds ever new ways of modifying his technology. — 1964

Until 1700 more than 50 percent of all printed books were ancient or medieval. Not only antiquity but also the Middle Ages were given to the first reading public of the printed word. And the medieval texts were by far the most popular. — 1964

At the very beginning, in 1450, the printed word already had all the essential characteristics of modern movies. The movie today is at once a fulfillment and a kind of reversal of the nature of print invented five hundred years ago. — 1959

The "flickers," as the movies were once called, are really built into the printed form. The printed form is itself a flicker in which you are constantly transferring from this shot to that shot. This shot, the image lingers while you look at that one, and while you look at the next one, there's a fingering, wavering, doubtful no-man's land. — 1959

Edwin Schrödinger has explained how he and his fellow physicists had agreed that they would report their new discoveries and experiments in quantum physics in the language of the old Newtonian physics. That is, they agreed to discuss and to report the nonvisual, electronic world in the language of the visual world of Newton. — 1974

TV is a new start, like the invention of writing itself. But the movie is in a sense the final stage of the Gutenberg revolution; for the movie is a mechanical, not an electronic, form. And print was the first mechanization of a handicraft, the first form of mass production by exact repetition. — 1958

Television may be as decisively the successor to writing as oral speech was the predecessor of writing. — 1955

The television environment has steadily upgraded the old movie forms into sentimentally valued art forms. The medieval world got the same treatment from the Gutenberg technology. — 1966
We have here today, the electronic equipment (TV) that is translating us into software instantaneously and enables us to be played back as software instantaneously. — 1978

The new environment of mankind is scarcely “hardware” or physical so much as it is information and the configurations of codified data. — 1966

But whereas the age of photo, radio, and movie was the period of fission in media and marketing, with TV we now move into the age of fusion and, even psychically, the hydrogen bomb. The message of TV is of interfusion, implosion, and integral effort. — 1961

As technology advances, it reverses the characteristics of every situation again and again. The age of automation is going to be the age of “do it yourself.” — 1957

LANGUAGE AND SPEECH

The great and abiding mass medium is not literature but speech. Language is at once the most vulgar of all media and the greatest work of art that ever can be devised by man.

Language does for intelligence what the wheel does for the feet and the body. It enables them to move from thing to thing with greater ease and speed and ever less involvement. — 1964

Our own mother tongues are things in which we participate totally. They change our perception. So that if we spoke Chinese we would have a different sense of hearing, smell, and touch. — 1970

The mother tongue is propaganda. — 1965

Speech is our principal means of structuring interpersonal distances. And these distances are not just physical, but emotional and cultural. We involuntarily raise our voices when speaking to those who do not understand our language. — 1955

When does a mechanical code of transmission of information itself become a language? Under what conditions does a language revert to a code of transmission? With our new coding devices today [such as movies] we are setting about to establish whether these means of transmission have themselves so deeply altered human sensibilities and reshaped human institutions and attitudes as to have acquired the status of new languages. — 1960

For to an infant, English is not a language but a mechanical code. To an adult beginning Russian, it, too, is first a mechanical code. It becomes a language only when it has become subliminal. — 1960

Traditional vernaculars are themselves the great mass media; that is, specialized frames and vehicles of experience.

Language is metaphor in the sense that it not only stores but translates experi-
ence from one mode to another. — 1962

Eliot's discovery that our whole English language was shifting from iambic rising stress to trochaic falling stress goes along with an amazing set of revolutions in English language and literature and a change of human outlook and human association. — 1965

For language, itself, is the collective mask of a culture, even as its resources and powers for channelling perception are the prime concern of the poet. With language, the poet assumes the corporate mask and manipulates it like a puppet. — 1963

The English or any other language is itself a massive organization of traditional experience providing a complex view of the world. — 1954

Human languages are the greatest of all works of art beside which the works of Homer, Virgil, Dante, and Shakespeare are minor variations. — 1954

Language is really a storage system for the corporate and collective experience of all mankind . . . Every time you play back some of that language, you release a whole charge of these ancient perceptions and memories. — 1966

Although we think of speech [in mother tongues] as near and private, there is nothing about us that is so corporate and public. Speech in its subliminal resonance unites us with the most distant ages as well as with the present multitudes. — 1972

ALPHABET

The phonetic alphabet is unique in being formed by phonemes, or meaningless bits. All other alphabets consist mainly of morphemes, or meaningful bits. The extreme abstraction of meaning from the formal sign . . . releases the visual faculty from its embodiment in the other senses. In separation from sound and touch and semantics, both Euclid and logic become simultaneously possible. — 1973

The translating of auditory into visual terms set up an inner life in man which separated himself from the exterior world and, in part, from his own senses, as we know from the study of pre-literate societies. — 1953

The unique power [of the alphabet] is its power to separate sound, sight and meaning. The letters of our alphabet are semantically neutral . . . This divorce . . . has permeated and shaped all the perceptions of Western literate man. — 1964

The Japanese are about to launch a multi-billion dollar program to impose Western phonetic literacy on the whole of Japan. This program will scrub off the entire face of Japan, eroding its oral culture . . . The ripping-off of the entire Japanese identity will release a fantastic flood of violence and a corporate quest for new identity on a competitive scale unhithened in
The phonetic alphabet is the only one in which the letters are semantically neutral, lacking verbal structure or force. Since the visual image presented in these letters is acoustically and semantically neutral, they have had the extraordinary effect . . . of supporting the visual faculty independently. — 1973

The translation of auditory into visual terms set up an inner life in man which separated him from the external world and, in part, from his own senses, as we know from the study of pre-literate societies. — 1953

Phonetically literate man, from the Greeks to the present, has been consistently aggressive with his environment. His need to translate his environment into phonetic, literate terms turns him into a conqueror and a cultural bulldozer, or leveller. — 1974

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato argued that the new arrival of writing would revolutionize culture for the worst. He suggested that it would substitute reminiscence for thought and mechanical learning for the true dialect of the living quest for truth by discourse and conversation. — 1954

The written word no longer relates people to the key jobs and functions of our society. The airplane pilot doesn't depend upon written messages. And the same goes for just about everybody. — 1967

**PRINT**

A place for everything and everything in its place is a feature not only of the compositors arrangement of his type fonts, but of the entire range of human organization of knowledge and action from the sixteenth century onward.

. . . the space of the modern classroom is based on the printed book. The kind of uniform, repeatable enclosure of data from the press made it possible for the first time in history to have the same book in front of teacher and student alike . . . . Modern classroom seating plans persist in the spatial layout of the movable types which gave us the printed page. — 1961

Print provided a vast new memory for past writings that made a personal memory inadequate. — 1964

In five centuries explicit comment and
awareness of the effects of print on human sensibility are very scarce.

--- 1964

The fact that print fosters the consumer habit of mind, the readiness to accept completely processed and packaged goods, is a side of print that has been little considered. --- 1958

Print created the mental habit of communing with another mind. The illusion that you are in close and sympathetic contact with another mind is a natural illusion resulting from quickly following the images on the printed page. It is pure illusion. Nobody had such an illusion before printing, at least, nothing resembling it. --- 1959

We are perhaps too much a part of the civilization which followed the printing industry to be able to detect its characteristics. Education in the words of Laski became the art of teaching men to be deceived by the printed word. --- 1964

Not only does print vividly discover national boundaries, but the print market was itself defined by such boundaries, at least for early printers and publishers. Perhaps also the ability to see one's mother tongue in uniform and repeatable technological dress creates in the individual reader a feeling of unity and power that he shares with all other readers of that tongue. Quite different sentiments are felt by preliterate or semiliterate people. --- 1960

In fact, the discovery of movable type was the ancestor of all assembly lines and it would be foolish to overlook the impact of the technological form involved in print on the psychological life of readers. To overlook this would be as unrealistic as to ignore rhythm and tempo in music. --- 1964

School and classroom as we know them were the direct extension of the technology of the printed book. And the printed book was the first teaching-machine, whereas the manuscript had been merely a teaching tool. --- 1960

Gutenberg made all history simultaneous: the transportable book brought the world of the dead into the space of the gentleman's library. --- 1951

Mechanization of any process is achieved by fragmentation, beginning with the mechanization of writing by movable type. --- 1964

The ability to see one's mother tongue in uniform . . . dress creates in the individual reader a feeling of unity and power that he shares with all other readers of that tongue. --- 1960

The literate liberal is convinced all real values are private, personal, individual. --- 1962

Perhaps the most potent of all as an expression of literacy is our system of uniform pricing that penetrates distant markets and speeds the turn-over of commodities. --- 1964
THE PHOTOGRAPH

While environments as such have a strange power to elude perception, the preceding ones acquire an almost nostalgic fascination when surrounded by the new. This is nowhere more evident than in the art of photography with its power to invest all human artifacts with the quality of art. This is no mere power of reproduction but a making-new. — 1967

The photograph revolutionized the human image as much as it changed the patterns and spaces of our cities. Indeed, the photograph gave us a push in the direction of the programmed environment. — 1966

In the photographic age, fashions have come to be like the collage style in painting. — 1964

The first blow against nationalism is struck by the photograph, because it ignores all boundaries. It just annihilates the usual space-pockets created by newsprint. But even though it's printed in the newspaper, it's still totally antithetic to the news-story form, because what you see in a photograph is very different from what you read about a given situation in Korea or Cairo or anywhere else. What you see are people. What you read about are Egyptians, Koreans, and so on. — 1959

The first market effect of the photo was to give new intensity of presence and conspicuousness to products. The new effect was to relate the consumer directly to the product . . . So that whereas the public had once been spectators of the rich consuming conspicuously, the public now became aware of the ordinary man in the act of consuming. — 1957

The photograph has reversed the purpose of travel, which until now had been to encounter the strange and unfamiliar. — 1964

A picture of a group of persons of any hue whatever is a picture of people, not of "coloured people." — 1964

The photograph as an extension of the visual power has the strange property of being a form of statement without syntax. The woodcuts and engravings that preceded the photo were highly syntactical. So is the movie that succeeded the photograph. The syntax of the engraving was from the hand. The syntax of the movie is from the foot. The movie, physiologically, is the union of the eye and the foot. — 1964

Photography has been one of the major means that compelled men to examine their environments critically. — 1967

Nobody can commit photography alone. It is possible to have at least the illusion of reading and writing in isolation, but photography does not foster such attitudes. — 1964

It was the photograph that revealed the secret of bird-flight and enabled man to take off. The photo, in arresting
bird-flight, showed that it was based on a principle of wing fixity. Wing movement was seen to be for propulsion, not for flight. — 1964

Just as the painter Samuel Morse had unintentionally projected himself into the nonvisual world of the telegraph, so the photograph really transcends the pictorial by capturing the inner gestures and postures of both body and mind, yielding the new worlds of endocrinology and psychopathology. — 1964

**THE TELEGRAPH**

The telegraph . . . is not the mechanization of writing but the electrification of writing. — 1960

The telegraph made possible a daily, hourly snap or cross-section of the globe. It killed the 19th-century editorial and the feature writer, who used to shake governments and mount diplomats.

The original telegraph line between Baltimore and Washington promoted chess games between experts in the two cities. Other lines were used for lotteries and play in general, just as early radio existed in isolation from any commercial commitments and was, in fact, fostered by the amateur hams for years before it was seized by big interests. — 1964

The telegraph had already created new forms of the printed word, in the newspaper and in poetry alike. By making it possible for information to be gathered simultaneously from every quarter of the globe, the telegraph press took on a mosaic and essentially acoustic character of simultaneity that occurred in symbolist poetry as well. — 1974

**THE TELEPHONE**

The very nature of the telephone, as all electric media, is to compress and unify that which had previously been divided and specialized. Only the "authority of knowledge" works by telephone because of the speed that creates a total and inclusive field of relations. — 1964

The absence of image on the telephone is a great big positive potential of that medium that has never been tapped. It could be used for teaching mathematics to disadvantaged children and so on, to people who have no mathematical aptitude and so on. — 1966

The auditory image of the telephone is of low definition. It elicits maximum attention and cannot be used as background. All the senses rally to strengthen the weak sound of the phone. We even feel the need to be kinetically involved via doodling or pacing. And whereas we complete the strong auditory image of radio by visualizing, we only slightly visualize on the phone. — 1964

Whereas we accept the phone as an invader of our homes, we are by no means ready to leap outside our homes for socializing in the way which the videophone demands. — 1976
Why does a phone ringing on the stage create instant tension? Why is that tension so very much less for an unanswered phone in a movie scene? The answer to all of these questions is simply that the phone is a participant form that demands a partner, with all the intensity of electric polarity. — 1964

The English dislike the telephone so much that they substitute numerous mail deliveries for it. The Russians use the telephone for a status symbol, like the alarm clock worn by tribal chiefs as an article of attire in Africa. — 1964

We ... hijack the [Inuit] group with Anik, with the satellites, and we put them on the air. You heard the story about having telephones put in there, but the people didn't want any private phones. Everybody wanted a party line so they could listen in to everybody else. They refused to have any private phones up in the Eskimo country. They insisted that everybody's conversation be available to everybody simultaneously. — 1973

Telephone in hand, the decision maker can exercise only the authority of knowledge, not delegated authority. — 1960

"Real" is an idea borrowed from the visual world. The word "phony" — which means "unreal" in English slang — originally meant "as unreal as a telephone conversation." In the 1920 dictionary, that's what "phony" meant. — 1978

Electric media transport us instantly wherever we choose. When we are on the phone we don't just disappear down a hole, Alice in Wonderland style — we are there and they are here. — 1971

French is the "language of love" just because it unites voice and ear in an especially close way, as does the telephone. So it is quite natural to kiss via phone, but not easy to visualize while phoning. — 1964

The child and the teenager understand the telephone, embracing the cord and the ear-mike as if they were beloved pets. — 1964

THE TYPEWRITER

The rhythms of typing favour short, concise sentences, sentences with oral form. — 1974

The typewriter is part of our oral revolution. — 1974

A typewriter is a means of transcribing thought, not expressing it. — 1974

At the typewriter, the poet commands the resources of the printing press. The machine is like a public address system immediately in hand. — 1964

The typewriter fuses composition and publication, causing an entirely new attitude to the written and printed word. Composing on the typewriter has altered the forms of the language and literature. — 1974
MOVIES

The movie, by sheer speeding up of the mechanical, carried us from the world of sequence and connections into the world of creative configuration and structure. — 1964

The basic fact to keep in mind about the movie camera and projector is their resemblance to the process of human cognition. — 1954

Film is still in its Manuscript phase. — 1964

When an inexpensive play-back for video tape is available, the film will become as portable as a book after Gutenberg. — 1966

Every literary form, from the stream of consciousnessness to James Joyce and Virginia Woolf, to the private eye in the whodunit, is a direct import of film technique. One of the principal effects of new art forms is to awaken older forms to new life and manifestation. — 1964

I can only regard the movie as the mechanization and distortion of this cognitive miracle by which we recreate the exterior world. But whereas cognition provides that dance of the intellect which is the analogical sense of Being, the mechanical medium has tended to provide merely a dream world which is a substitute for reality rather than a means of proving reality. — 1954

The movie camera is a means of rolling up the daylight world on a spool. It does this by rapid still shots. The movie projector unrolls the spool and recreates the daylight world as a dark dream world. In reversing the process of perception even the mechanical camera and projector bring about a mysterious change in everyday experience. The movie reconstructs the external daylight world and in so doing provides an interior dream world. — 1954

You see, the camera extends your feet and your eyes; a movie camera carries your eyes out on your feet into the world — it’s mobile. And TV doesn’t do that; it doesn’t extend your eyes and your feet, it extends your eyes and your hands: it feels, it handles, it scans the environment, by scanning, by handling. — 1966

TV has processed the old movie into a widely heralded avant-garde form. The movie is no longer an environmental form. It is the “content” of TV. Thus it has become a harmless consumer commodity that is no longer regarded as corrupt and degrading. That designation is always reserved for whatever is actively environmental. — 1965

In [David Copperfield], [Dickens] experimented with the eyes of a child as if they were a camera turned on the adult world. To see the adult world as a live process unfolding mysteriously to the child’s awareness was a notable degree of anticipation of film form and camera eye. D. W. Griffiths recognized
this and habitually carried a volume of Dickens with him on location. He would sit down and open his Dickens in the midst of shooting a film in order to discover new ways of solving his problems. — 1964

NEWSPAPER

The modern newspaper is a magical institution like the rainmaker. It is written to release feelings and to keep us in a state of perpetual emotion. It is not intended to provide rational schemes or patterns for digesting the news. It never provides insights into events, but merely the thrill of the event.

People don't actually read newspapers, they step into them like a warm bath.

Take the date line off a newspaper and it becomes an exotic and fascinating surrealist poem.

[On bad polling predictions] It's noticed in Britain too; the pollsters had a bad time. In the last two elections, they came off very badly. I think they are asking newspaper questions — high-definition questions about your point of view on this candidate, that candidate. — 1960

Man uses the press for privacy in public conveyances. — 1967

Most trivial matters are given considerable additional intensity by being translated into prose at all. That is why no account of anything can be "truthful" in a newspaper. — 1970

The unformulated message of an assembly of news items from every quarter of the globe is that the world today is one city. All war is civil war. All suffering is our own. — 1954

It is a paradoxical situation, but the press in literate America has an intensely oral character, while in oral Russia and Europe the press has a strongly literary character and function. — 1964

It was Poe who invented both the detective story and the symbolist poem as his response to the electric challenge... Poe saw that the principle [of working backward for serialization] extended all the way to the daily news report. For, if news came in so fast that no single editorial eye could process the entire contents of the paper, then it was necessary to package the news in a style that made the reader the editor. — 1958

In pictorial papers and magazines even words take on the character of landscape. — 1952

What has happened since the old muck-raking days of the 1920s is that espionage, whether political or commercial, has become the largest business in the world, and we take it for granted that the modern newspaper depends on "bugging" the whole community. In fact, we expect the press to "bug" the world and to challenge and penetrate all privacy and identity, whether private or corporate. — 1974
Quite independently of good or bad editorial policies, the ordinary man is now accustomed to human-interest stories from every part of the globe. The sheer technique of world-wide news gathering has created a new state of mind which has little to do with local or national political opinion. So that even the frequent sensational absurdity and unreliability of the news cannot annul the total effect, which is to enforce a deep sense of human solidarity. — 1951

It is the daily communal exposure of multiple items in juxtaposition that gives the press its complex dimension of human interest. — 1964

The classified ads (and stock-marketed quotations) are the bedrock of the press. Should an alternative source of easy access to such diverse daily information be found, the press would fold. — 1964

News, far more than art, is artifact. — 1969

The proud motto “All the news that’s fit to print” advertises the fact that news is actually a fiction. From the initial selection of experiences to be written up, to the arbitrary selection of items to be read by the reader as scanner, there is a large factor of choice in looking at the world itself as something to fit print. — 1971

“He made the news” is a strangely ambiguous phrase, since to be in the newspaper is both to be news and to make news. Thus “making the news,” like “making good,” implies a world of actions and fictions alike. — 1964

**RADIO**

Radio was inseparable from the rise of jazz culture as TV has been inseparable from the rise of rock culture. — 1972

The subliminal depths of radio are charged with the resonating echoes of tribal horns and antique drums . . . this medium has the power to turn the psyche and society into a single echo chamber. — 1964

Radio provides a speed-up of information that also causes acceleration in other media. It certainly contracts the world to village size, and creates insatiable village tastes for gossip, rumor, and personal malice. — 1964

Radio will serve as background-sound or as a noise-level control, as when the ingenious teenager employs it as a means of privacy. — 1964

Radio . . . transforms the relation of everybody to everybody, regardless of programming. — 1974

The power of radio to involve people in-depth is manifested in its use during homework by youngsters and by many other people who carry transistor sets in order to provide a private world for themselves amidst crowds. — 1964

Radio provided the first massive expe-
rience of electronic implosion, that reversal of the entire direction and meaning of literate Western civilization. — 1964

Both Hitler and Gandhi, and many others in this century, were made possible by the electric P.A. system and by radio. Anybody who wants to moralize about radio has to dump Gandhi and Hitler into the same pot. — 1970

[F.D.R.] was at great pains to use an unfavourable press to enhance his radio image. The art of politics today requires an orchestral use of the varied instruments of public communication. These instruments do not exist or function in isolation from one another any more than do our senses function in isolation. — 1965

It is not easy to explain to a Westerner why oral cultures should be so rabid in their response to radio. The oral man cannot tolerate radio any more than he can tolerate alcohol . . . His very culture is already profoundly involving, and radio and alcohol excite the tribal membrane of the oral cultures to a morbid degree. — 1972

I live right inside radio when I listen. — 1964

Radio, in contrast to the telephone, permits the listener to fill in a good deal of visual imagery. The radio-announcer or disc-jockey stands out loud and clear, while the voice on the telephone resonates in isolation from the visual sense. Nobody ever wrote a lament about “All Alone by the Radio” but “All Alone by the Telephone” is a classic of the twenties that was a resounding prophecy of high-rise living in the present time. — 1971

**XEROGRAPHY**

Any notable figure has only to empty his Xeroxed memos into the publisher’s office to have a biography available in a few hours. — 1971

The Pentagon Papers were position papers that probably were never read by anyone. Xerox is responsible for the proliferation of large committees and their position papers. — 1973

Xerography makes the reader both author and publisher: in tendency. The highly centralized activity of publishing naturally breaks down into extreme decentralism when anybody can, by means of xerography, assemble printed, or written, or photographic materials which can be supplied with sound tracks.

But xerography is electricity invading the world of typography, and it means a total revolution in this old sphere, or this old technology, a revolution that is being felt in the classroom itself. — 1965

**TV**

TV is an integral medium, forcing an interaction among components of experience which have long been separate and scattered. — 1961
The TV screen just pours that energy into you which paralyzes the eye; you are not looking at it; it is looking at you. — 1977

Most people were struck by the TV coverage of the Kennedy assassination. We were all conscious of great depth of involvement, but there was no excitement, no sensationalism. When involvement is maximal, we are nearly numb. — 1964

TV, then, is not part of the 19th-century art-program for the reconquest of synesthesia. TV is rather the overwhelming and technological success of that program after its artistic exponents have retired. — 1961

The man with a very private face makes a very bad TV image, whereas somebody that looks like an old peasant, or a very broken-down character, makes good TV. — 1972

If television is going to strip us of our civilized individuality, of our separate selves, then we should close down TV. Because, as far as I know, television is incompatible with the continuance of Western man. — 1972

For centuries Americans had gone outside to be alone and had gone inside to be warm and sociable. The basic pattern had reversed the custom of the rest of mankind. Suddenly, TV had brought Americans into line with Europe and Asia. Since TV, the young, at least, tend to go outside to be with people and inside to be alone. — 1973

Why should the broken line of the television mosaic emphasize the sculptural contours of objects? — 1960

The TV image is the first technology to project or externalize our tactile sense. — 1961

In the movie you sit and look at the screen. You are the camera eye. In television you are the screen. You are the vanishing point as in an oriental picture. The picture goes inside you. In the movie, you go outside into the world. In television you go inside yourself. — 1967

Television . . . is profoundly and subliminally introverting, [creating] an inward depth, meditative, oriental. The television child is a profoundly orientalized being. And he will not accept goals as objects in the world to pursue. — 1967

[People] don’t see movies on TV; they see TV. — 1966

The ideal show on pay TV would be a great composer rehearsing a symphony, not playing his symphony. — 1967

TV is a service medium only during a crisis. — 1970

TV as a today show is a continuous present. There are really no dates. — 1971

People will not accept war on TV.
They will accept war in movies. They will accept it in newspapers. Nobody will accept war on TV. It is too close.  
--- 1973

The Beatle hairdos are another fringe benefit of TV. --- 1966

When the news team seeks to become the news source by means of direct dialogue rather than by remote report of the event, they are being true to the immediacy of the TV medium in which comments outrank the event itself. --- 1971

COMPUTER

It is one of the mysteries of cybernation that it is forever challenged by the need to simulate consciousness.  
--- 1966

The real job of the computer in the future is not going to have anything to do with retrieval. It's going to have to do with pure discovery, because we use our memories for many purposes, mostly unconscious . . . When you can recall things at a very high speed, they take on a new mythic and structural meaning that is quite alien to ordinary perception. So the computer . . . has, in spite of itself . . . revealed the knowledge of the mythic, pattern, structures, and profiles, all of which are quite excitedly loaded with discovery. --- 1966

At computer speeds, effect is so closely related to the input that the arranger of computer systems can scarcely avoid artistic involvement in whatever he is doing. --- 1971

It is a world in which the creative imagination of the artist is now needed by the men who handle the computers.  
--- 1958

Circuitry means that every situation must fold back into itself much in the pattern of cognition and its playback, which is "recognition" in the action of human perceiving and knowing. The new technology mimics the prime procedure of human learning and knowing. --- 1968

The programming of computers calls for levels of human awareness about media and ourselves such as we do not yet possess. --- 1961

Computers are still serving mainly as agents to sustain precomputer effects.  
--- 1973

The computer is able to take over the whole mechanical age. Everything that was done under mechanical conditions can be computerized with relative ease, and that includes our educational system. --- 1966

In terms of, say, a computer technology we are headed for cottage economics, where the most important industrial activities can be carried on in any individual little shack anywhere on the globe. --- 1970

A computer as a research and communication instrument could enhance
information retrieval, obsolesce mass library organization, retrieve the individual's encyclopedic function and flip into a private line to speedily tailored data of a saleable kind. — 1979

“Come into my parlor,” said the computer to the specialist. — 1968

With electric circuitry, all the mechanical enterprises of mankind tend to acquire reverse characteristics. Just as the educational establishment tends to shift its stress from instruction to discovery with the audience directly involved in the learning process, so all mechanical industry tends to abandon packaging in favor of the tailor-made or custom-built for the individual. This pattern begins to emerge in computer design procedures in architecture. — 1966

...AND FUTURE MEDIA

The book is about to cease being a vehicle of self-expression, and is about to become a corporate probe of society. — 1966

The tendency is for the book to cease to be a package and to become a custom-made information service tailored to the individual needs of the reader. The public was a creation of print technology and largely ceases to exist under electric circuitry. — 1966

The video cassette is even now awaiting programs and themes to bring to the mass audience. The makers of video cassettes have been baffled by the question of programming. The natural impulse is to repeat, in this new form, the existing shows from older media. That is called “the law of implementation”: we use the new to do the old, even if it doesn't need doing at all. — 1975

The next medium, whatever it is — it may be the extension of consciousness — will include television as its content, not as its environment, and will transform television into an art form. — 1967

Survival now would seem to depend upon the extension of consciousness itself as environment. This extension has already begun with the computer and has been anticipated in our obsession with ESP and occult awareness. — 1972

It may be worth mentioning the structural features of analogy since with the computer there has risen the possibility of extending consciousness itself as a technological environment. If this is to be done, it cannot be done on the basis of any existing notion of rationality. — 1971

Having extended or translated our central nervous system into the electromagnetic technology, it is but a further stage to transfer our consciousness to the computer world as well. — 1964

An external consensus or conscience is now as necessary as private consciousness. — 1964
[A future medium like a kind of computerized ESP would process] consciousness as the corporate content of the environment — and eventually maybe even [lead to] a small portable computer, about the size of a hearing aid, that would process of private experience through the corporate experience, the way dreams do now.

— 1965

The technological tendency to do more and more with less and less could now be exceeded only by putting the information directly into the human nervous system. If an age of “brain transplants” lies ahead, it may become possible to supply each new generation with “brain prints” taken live and directly from the intellects of the age. Instead of buying the works of Shakespeare or Erasmus, one might well become electroencephalographically imprinted with the actual brain perception and erudition of Shakespeare or Erasmus. The book... could then be bypassed. — 1970