



NR 1:2006 | VOLUME 1

HEAD OF M3

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PRINT

Printon Trükikoda AS
Tallinn, Estonia, 2006
Paper: Munken Print &
Munken Lynx
Typeface: Georgia &
Helvetica Rounded

ISSN 1653-5677

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Daddy's Little Helper

A reading of Marshall McLuhan's "The Gadget Lover. Narcissus as Narcosis"

Rolf Sindøe

"Men just aren't the same today"
I hear ev'ry mother say
They just don't appreciate that you get tired
They're so hard to satisfy, You can tranquilize your mind
So go running for the shelter of a mother's little helper¹

Let's assume the following is true.

It is the Indian summer of 1965. Mick Jagger is sobering up, following the initial rush of tremendous commercial success with his band, Rolling Stones. At this point he wants to be taken seriously as a performing artist. He's tired of recording US rhythm and blues covers and wants to start writing his own material.

In the USA, albums like "Mr. Tambourine Man" by The Byrds and "Highway 61 revisited" by Bob Dylan are drastically changing the sound of contemporary pop music.^{2, 3} At the same time in the UK The Beatles are recording a new album which is said to be completely groundbreaking, both stylistically and musically.⁴ Mick Jagger knows from rumours in the music circuit that this album is supposed to be entitled "Plastic Soul", He is well aware of the annoying fact that black musicians long ago nicknamed Rolling Stones "Plastic Soul". For a while, Mick Jagger ponders Paul McCartney's humiliating pun and the general intellectualism of contemporary music. Finally, he resolves that it's high time he himself said something meaningful—maybe even critical—about society in a rock song. So he jots down some rhyming words about middle-aged women who abuse tranquilizers. His sidekick, Keith Richards, approves very much of the idea of singing about women and drugs and, instantly, knocks off a nice riff and a strong hook line.—Cheers!

Well, the true story behind the making of the song, "Mother's little helper" may of course be completely different. However, the song is a twisted critique of the middle class's hypocrisy, its doubtful moral and fragile social values. The lyrical motif is the yoke of middle class women spending their time at home. Deeply frustrated from being neglected by their families they seek the comfort of tranquilising drugs.

The Rolling Stones were notorious dopers but there's no fascination with drug use to be found in Mick Jagger's lyrics. On the contrary, once you notice the ironised sentimentality that marks the song's 'mothers' you recognise its double perspective. Most people would probably agree that there's nothing in rock'n roll that isn't already present in society, and once you take a closer look at it the song is a blatant critique of 'society', 'normality' and 'mediocrity'. What Mick Jagger is actually sneering between the lines is something like: "Yeah, yeah, we're wasted on drugs, but so is society!" So, quite obviously, the song's embedded message is a critique of the hypocrisy that surrounds the use of drugs.

As overly simplified as the lyric's sarcasm may seem, "Mother's Little Helper" is about a part of reality that continues to exist, namely the drug enhanced normality.⁵ The song takes its title from the well-known nickname for Valium which was introduced in the US and UK in 1963. Valium was the first commercially successful tranquilizer and already at the time of the recording of *Aftermath* (December 1965) the frequent use of Valium amongst suburban housewives was a cliché.⁶ Valium belongs to the class of drugs that are called 'Benzodiazepines' which at that time, long before the Net, were available only on prescription. The drug was predominantly used for anything associated with anxiety, or for sleeping problems. Metaphorically speaking Valium (and benzodiazepines) works on the mind as chemical body armour and this is where Mick Jagger, Valium and Marshall McLuhan finally come together.

The lonely housewives drug themselves into oblivion, just as McLuhan's tells us that Narcissus did, both drugs and mirror watching serving as instances of technological mediation.

Today, within media research the status of *Understanding Media* is comparable to "Mother's little helper". It is no longer revolutionary in any way. It is a classic that everyone knows. Today, some even consider it as an old and corny book that has spawned a million quotes due to its high browed pretentiousness and analytical quirkiness. Sentences like "The media is the message" and "Hot and cold media" have been used as sound bites for more than forty years. Many within academia have had great difficulties with using Marshall McLuhan's work. In the beginning of the sixties he was largely unknown outside Canada. He was an unorthodox thinker, coming from what some saw as the fringes of Western civilisation.

Within the context of western culture the book combines cultural analyses with readings of examples taken from history and popular culture and from medical, philosophical, cognitive and psychological sciences. It is interesting that McLuhan, the (pre-digital) media researcher, is cited whenever the

need arises to accentuate any analysis of digital media in the 21st. century. Although Marshall McLuhan left the arena in the global village a quarter of a century ago, his legacy is part of an important heritage of thinking, writing and dreaming about mediated social interactions. One possible explanation why McLuhan's theories persists to be discussed is that time has been on his side: The 21st century is as complex as his writings, maybe even more chaotic and paradoxical. Still, there's more to it than historical accident. It is the interdisciplinary scope of *Understanding Media* that is its most valuable asset. McLuhan grasps different contemporary international trends and utilises them in a string of extremely creative analyses of media related phenomena, taken from within the western civilisation. Looking at his books today, he seems to have been in a constant process of self evaluation and self re-inventing, but the analytical eloquence, the linguistic equilibrium and the rhetorical artistry shows us that this is an academic trailblazer, working at the height of his powers during the sixties.

Now, let's radicalise this pseudo historical re-framing and play 'retro' with the granddad of radical media research. When I say "Beam me up, Scottie!" I will try to take *Understanding Media* back into the first part of the sixties.

Beam me up, Scottie! The focus in quite a lot of contemporary media research is the 'newness' and 'now ness' of different media related phenomena. But—and this is only one of the many paradoxes connected to his writings—McLuhan wasn't only about the instant, actually, for the most part he was about the past. Few theoreticians have analysed media with the manifold of radical historical implications that Marshall McLuhan did. It wasn't media as a purely technological phenomenon he was analysing. Being a humanist he was preoccupied with the social and cultural evolution of the western society, his essays illustrates the aforementioned drug-society-analogy from a different perspective: There's nothing in media that isn't already in society.

In the first decades of the 20th century Edmund Husserl saw the blind man's stick as a lucid example of 'prosthetics'. The stick was both a cognitive and physical extension of the human body, helping a disabled person to move around. In Marshall McLuhan's understanding media is an 'extension of man's body', helping to establish an individual equilibrium.

Born in 1911, Marshall McLuhan was a critical observer of the rise of late industrial society, much in the vein of French peers like Jean Baudrillard, Roland Barthes and Jacques Derrida. Confronted with the explosive growth of commercial news media and electronic technologies in the post WWII period he was deeply affected by observing the written word being threatened by the wide emergence of moving pictures and simultaneously witnessing how literature was about to be obsolesced by movies as the centre pillar of the

arts. He dubbed the period spanning from the 1440s to the period following World War II "the Gutenberg Galaxy". He firmly believed that printing technology was the single most important invention in the western world. In the years after WWII, however, McLuhan foresaw how the book was about to be obsolesced by a new medium (or a new 'technology'). He dubbed this new epoch—which he acknowledged to be deeply embedded in himself as a researcher—"the Electrical Age".

Of course, media is not only the message. Media (in McLuhan's use of the word) are fundamentally about control because they go between us and our environment as 'buffer zones' and 'body armours'. Media are in many ways exactly like mother's little helper, the tranquilizer. When we broadcast footage of the world we take possession of it, we are in control of it. Media are prosthetics, just like the blind man's stick. Media are extensions, which treat physical and psychological disabilities and at the same time expand the efficiency of the body with the objective to re-establish equilibrium.

TV was a well known technology at the time McLuhan was writing Understanding Media. Commercial TV networks, though, wasn't and the fact that network corporations were dominating the broadcasting system in the beginning of the sixties, thus gaining a significant social and cultural importance, is part of the book's historical background.

The book's central essay is about television, seen as a technology. "Television. The Timid Giant" is a title that seems deeply ironical compared to the text's analytical content and critical perspective. This essay is almost three times as long as the rest of the book's 25 essays, more so, the general occurrence of the notion of 'television' in *Understanding Media* is significantly higher than any other technical phenomena (media) McLuhan write about.

In "Television. The Timid Giant" McLuhan makes a great effort to explain how the televised picture—seen as a media and a technology—is an extension of the body with a very dubious quality. He defines TV as a 'cool' medium because of its low information bandwidth and the much, much lower pictorial quality, compared to movies and photography. In contrast, radio is seen as a 'hot' medium because of its more complex informational processes. In McLuhan's reading the viewer compensates for this flaw by hyper-activating the imagination.

At this point, though, a certain idea comes to mind. There might be yet another underlying point with this critical stance. It could be argued that McLuhan's analysis of the rough and blurred, black and white TV picture—perhaps by choice, perhaps by coincidence—in fact illustrates that TV works on the mind (and the human body) exactly like phenomenologist Roman Ingarden's notion of *leerstellen* in fictional prose.⁷ Modernist prose consists of nar-

ratives with empty spots, blanks to be filled out by the reader. To be able to make the story coherent the reader is forced to fill out these 'holes'. One could argue that there are also 'holes' in TV broadcasting which the viewer needs to fill out, thus he or she is stimulated as a media consumer in a completely different way than by listening to for instance the radio.

A cool medium, whether the spoken word or the manuscript or TV, leaves much more for the listener or user to do than a hot medium. If the medium is of high definition, participation is low. If the medium is of low intensity, the participation is high.⁸

Part of the explanation may be that McLuhan was genuinely hopeful with regards to the future of television, especially if its 'literary' potential—the coolness factor—was fulfilled.—Through the technical evolution, maybe television could become just as exiting as the book?

Of course, McLuhan wasn't naive. *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) is both a warning against techno-dystopia and at the same time an attempt to embrace the coming of the new. This attempt was continued the following year in *Understanding Media*, and, finally, in *The Laws of Media. The New Science*, a work based on notes left from the work of *Understanding Media*.⁹

Coming from the beginning of the 20th century McLuhan had a limited understanding of digital technologies. Naturally, the world had only recently learned about Alan Turing's concept of 'artificial intelligence' and the concept of digitised information technology was yet to be developed.¹⁰ Also, the world was only about to be led into the cultural and scientific paradigm shift from atoms to bits at the time when McLuhan developed his analytical position with regards to media.¹¹

In McLuhan's essays—or 'probes' as he sometimes called them to explain their tentative character—a computer should be seen as part of a general technological trend towards automation. In 1963–64, when McLuhan was working on the idea of 'The global village'¹², he wasn't thinking about computer networks. To him, the telegraph and telephone cables signified the basic idea of connectivity.¹³

McLuhan's main observation and critique was that western culture paradoxically seemed to be headed towards a social closure with the coming of the televised 'global village'. Ovid's Narcissus is McLuhan's metaphor of the modern westerner. Narcissus is not a narcissist; he just can't stand the coming of the new. Narcissus is not self-absorbed; he is in a state of devastating distress.

"Be that as it may," McLuhan writes. "... the wisdom of the Narcissus myth does not convey any idea that Narcissus fell in love with anything he regarded as himself. Obviously he would have had very different feelings about the im-

age had he known it was an extension or repetition of himself."¹⁴ McLuhan's disturbing psychological portrait of the modern (North American) media consumer, dubbed 'Narcissus', illustrates the fundamental idea that the mechanisms of the industrial technicalities applies on the mind as well as on the body.

The basic problem with 'hot' media—media with a high bandwidth of information—is that the individual becomes both sensorally and informationally over-stimulated by using them. In McLuhan's view this causes an intense feeling of stress that leads into self absorption, or what he calls 'self-amputation' with an expression taken from Hans Selye (1907–1982).

In 1956 Selye—a native Hungarian, born in Vienna and working in Montreal as a biochemist and neurologist for the last part of his life—published a popular book about his research in specific conditions in the human psyche. The book was called *The Stress of Life*, and in it Selye differentiates between 'stress' and 'distress'. Stress isn't in itself a negative experience; it is the individual's response to stress that determines the outcome of this specific experience. Selye uses the expression "self amputation", as a metaphor to explain what happens to the individual when it is exposed to stress traumas, or 'distress'.¹⁵

Selye coined the idea of G.A.S., the General Adaptation System. In the G.A.S., Selye explained, the body passes through three universal stages of coping. First there is an "alarm reaction," in which the body prepares itself for "fight or flight." No organism can sustain this condition of excitement and so a second stage of adaptation ensues (provided the organism survives the first stage). In the second stage, a resistance to stress is built. Finally, if the duration of the stress is sufficiently long, the body eventually enters a stage of exhaustion, a sort of aging "due to wear and tear."

McLuhan readily adapted these mechanistic principles in *Understanding Media*. He used Selye's ideas, combined with the Greek Narcissus myth, as a basic layer in his own writings. Like Selye's 'modern man', Narcissus is fundamentally exhausted, not from being chased by the nymph Echo, but from the sensoric, emotional overload, that is an existential condition in the industrial age.

This extension of himself by mirror numbed perceptions until he became the servomechanism of his own extended or repeated image. The nymph Echo tried to win his love with fragments of his own speech, but in vain. He was numb. He had adapted to his extension of himself and had become a closed system.¹⁶

No doubt, McLuhan draws on a fascination of robots and maybe also of

fragments of cybernetic theory, but there is more to the (mirror) image than meets the interested technical eye:

Medical researchers like Hans Selye and Adolphe Jonas hold that all extensions of ourselves, in sickness or in health, are attempts to maintain equilibrium. Any extension of ourselves they regard as “autoamputation”, and they find that the autoamputative power or strategy is resorted to by the body (Turner’s “liminality”) when the perceptual power cannot locate or avoid the cause of irritation.¹⁷

On the following page McLuhan continues: “The principle of self-amputation as an immediate relief of strain on the central nervous system applies very readily to the origin of the media of communication from speech to computer”.¹⁸

Interestingly, this is McLuhan’s only direct reference to Hans Selye in *Understanding Media*. Of course, no one can accuse McLuhan of hiding a major source of inspiration. This is part of his writing style. In his unmistakable slapdash style he writes “... researchers like Selye ...” using the *simile* in a place where a precise reference might be expected. Let us take this observation a little further.

The title of the essay, “The Gadget Lover. Narcissus as Narcosis”, is a typical McLuhan pun. The first part of it points towards psychological and socio-economical aspects of lifestyle products which are used as social icons. Furthermore, the main title points out a sign of the times: the fetishism, the emotional loading that relates directly to many electrical aids and appliances. The subtitle of the essay is both a *simile* and a word pun in that the title blurs the border between on one hand a concrete literary meaning and a mythical figure (Narcissus) and on the other hand the medical technology, anaesthetics. What is being communicated in the title is actually both the conclusion of the essay’s analysis and a perlocutionary speech act *a la* J.L. Austin. Contrary to the illocutionary speech act that does what it says McLuhan’s title doesn’t enact the logical but the psychological effect of what he’s analysing. Psychologically, McLuhan claims, the media consumer is numbed like Narcissus (the psychological, cognitive level of McLuhan’s analysis) and the effect of the technical action he is exposed to is similar to anaesthetisation (the medical level of the analysis).

The principle of numbness comes into play with electric technology, as with any other. We have to numb our central nervous system when it is extended and exposed, or we will die. Thus the age of anxiety and of electric media is also the age of the unconscious and of apathy. But it is strikingly the age

of consciousness of the unconscious, in addition. With our central nervous system strategically numbed, the tasks of conscious awareness and order are transferred to the physical life of man, so that for the first time he has become aware of technology as an extension of his physical body. Apparently this could not have happened before the electric age gave us the means of instant, total field-awareness.¹⁹

Note how this passage seems to hold traces of Selye’s ‘G.A.S’-theory (“we have to numb our central nervous system ... or we will die ...”). Another thing worth further interest is McLuhan’s implied ambiguity with regards to the well known theory of psychological philosopher, Sigmund Freud, about the Id and the Unconscious is really interesting. Does he refute Freud in this passage, claiming that the central nervous system is just an important and autonomous part of the human body as the cerebellum? Or does he utilise ideas by Hans Selye for his own intellectual purpose? Either way, it seems that this would be un-thinkable without his simultaneous use of elements of psychological behaviourism and Aaron T. Beck’s cognitive therapy.²⁰ Furthermore, ethical and moral questions, connected to the relationship between the individual and society is generated by McLuhan. Quote: “... the age of anxiety and of electric media is also the age of the unconscious and of apathy”. According to McLuhan ‘Narcissus’ is morally committed to act to get out of the distress. He has do something about the informational overload in the era of “... instant, total field-awareness”. He is bound to consciously fight the social closure with the use of prosthetics of any kind.

What is it with drugs and TV? Well, drugs can help us do what we could not otherwise perform. Looking at ‘lifestyle medicine’, the main objective isn’t to combat a trauma, heal an infection or cure a disease, but to enhance life quality. It is possible to accentuate this observation and suggest drugs to be considered as ‘prosthetics’. Drugs are a medical technology and a psychological aid and in this function they should be considered as prosthetics. In his brilliant introduction to McLuhan, Lance Strate writes: “[To Marshall McLuhan] All technologies are media because they go between ourselves and our environment. As buffer zones, they become our environment, and in using them, we are at the same time used by them.”²¹

The prime quality of TV was and is entertainment, but in McLuhan’s understanding, we should expect more from it. TV as a medium should facilitate a new, enhanced learning and experience framework. But contrary to it’s positive potential, TV is used exactly like drugs. The reason for this is that TV facilitates what could not otherwise be facilitated in a world that is becoming more complex, i.e., the maintenance of the individual’s mental equilibrium.

Instead of criticising the television broadcasting technology for affecting the individual like a cognitive, consumerist band aid and a sedative, McLuhan radicalises his analysis in an attempt to explain what actually happens—both in technical terms and psychologically—when an individual indulges in television and in any other media form.

McLuhan connected different areas like contemporary media, scholarly history, literature, technological history and medicine with each other. He sought to describe media in a both historical, philosophical and (medico)technical perspective. His main observation was that television works as a sedative in the Western world and that society is based on semi-religious belief in technologies. In fact, he himself proves the point in his own constant scientific interest in printing culture. In the eyes of McLuhan ‘The Gutenberg Galaxy’—the culture based upon printing technologies—is the beginning of the world as we know it.

McLuhan himself, though, isn’t logical. On the contrary, he is extremely emotional (I would argue that he is nostalgic) in his choice of his analyses ‘contrast material’ the canonical classics. McLuhan’s use of the Western literary canon is not in itself unorthodox, but the specific use of selected classics in readings of modern culture certainly is strange, mainly because he is so ambivalent and seems to be driven by private idiosyncrasies. In *Understanding Media*’s introductory essays he seems to be impressed by the new technologies, the book’s last part, though, consists of analyses that are both critical and inconclusive in a most disturbing manner. And, more problematic, McLuhan is blurring and even reversing his own terms.

We know how McLuhan understands media as ‘extensions’ and ‘repetitions’ of the self in the first part of *Understanding Media*. We also know about his distinction between ‘hot’ and ‘cool’ media. “A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in “high definition”. High definition is a state of being well filled with data”.²² The hotter the medium, the less participation of the media consumer, he claims. A quote from the essay “Media Hot and Cold”: “Hot media are ... low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completion by the audience”.²³ Now, in the final part of *Understanding Media* McLuhan utilises these terms in a completely contradicting way:

... Tad Szulc is under the illusion that TV is a hot medium, and suggests that in the Congo “television might have helped Lumumba to incite the masses to even greater turmoil and bloodshed.” But he is quite wrong. Radio is the medium for frenzy, and it has been the major means of hotting up the tribal blood of Africa, India and China, alike. TV has cooled Cuba down, as it has

cooled down America. What the Cubans are getting by TV is the experience of being directly engaged in the making of political decisions.²⁴

To recapitulate, in the books initiatory essay, “Media Hot and Cold”, TV is explained as a ‘cool’ media which by its nature activates the media consumer. But in “Television”, an essay taken from the books second, analytical part, McLuhan now paradoxically claims that it is radio that excites public rebellions and that TV actually “cooled Cuba down”.

The differences in the two essays might very well be caused by simple omissions. Another, more likely, explanation is that McLuhan actually believes that it goes both ways. In other words: That television sometimes works as a cool medium and sometimes works as a hot medium, depending of the specific situation.

The problem is of course that implementing ambiguity, paradoxicality and inverse logics in one’s scientific work is a ‘problematic’ proposition, to say the least. As it is, McLuhan utilises paradoxicality in his own writing and thereby blurs his own twin-headed opinions in rhetorics and semantic twists.

Physiologically, man in the 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. Man becomes, as it were, the sex organs of the machine world, as the bee of the plant world, enabling it to fecundate and to evolve ever new forms. The machine world reciprocates man’s love by expending his wishes and desires, namely, in providing him with wealth. One of the merits of motivation research has been the revelation of man’s sex relation to the motorcar.²⁵

*Do cybernetic organisms symbolise mankind’s extension or its closure?*²⁶ Marshall McLuhan certainly understood the cultural and emblematic value of gadgets and gizmos; he was no techno fiend, though. Seen as a post modern, post structuralistic construction the cyborg certainly cannot be considered to be a theme in McLuhan’s work, but maybe we can look at it in different perspective. Perhaps we should think about the aesthetics of early modernity and 20th century robot icons. Though robots wasn’t a theme in McLuhan’s writings something in the abovementioned quote points in the direction of pre-war German ‘man-machine’ ideals as demonstrated in for instance Fritz Lang’s *Metropolis* (1927). Another possible explanation is that McLuhan also relates to the sixties’ popular interest in anything that connected with the notion of space and robots, following the Russian launch of Sputnik in 1957. To me, it seems likely that he was extremely challenged by the idea of artificial intelligence, as it was staged in *Metropolis* and seen at

the time of his own writing in the Russian and North American space programmes.²⁷

In the 50s and 60s Cold War culture the western world was about command and control, or, you might say 'cultural equilibrium'. Equilibrium is a key concept in McLuhan's writing. Why is that? Let's try a biographical angle on this question. McLuhan was Catholic, a strong believer. In *McLuhan Studies* Lance Strate characterises Marshall McLuhan as "a practical mysticist. Strate continues:

He was practical because his work was grounded in the materialities of communication and the pragmatics of technology. And he was a mystic because his work was building towards a concept of media transcendence.²⁸

In McLuhan's understanding media as a cultural phenomena was pervasive, much in the same way that computer marketers nowadays talk about 'pervasive computing'. The new message was that media exists on every level in the electric era, be it linguistic, cognitive or technical. An important side aspect, though, was that McLuhan was looking at the electrical age as a pre-World War man.

Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man—the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and corporately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves be the various media. Whether the extension of consciousness, so long sought by advertisers (my emphasis, RS) for specific products, will be "a good thing" is a question that admits of a wide solution. There is little possibility of answering such questions about the extensions of man without considering all of them together. Any extension, whether of skin, hand, or foot, affects the whole psychic and social complex.²⁹

Talking about television—the mirror, the altar, the tranquilizer—let me make some bold claims on McLuhan's behalf.

Network broadcasting was booming in the first part of the sixties, thus creating what McLuhan saw as a giant electrical network, and described metaphorically as a 'global village'. At this final point of my 'retro crossword puzzle' I'd like to suggest that the title of the essay "The Gadget Lover. Narcissus as Narcosis" is changed. It could be called "The TV Lover. Information Overload as Overdose". This paraphrase of the original title intentionally

seeks to communicate what I think is McLuhan's embedded critique of certain mechanisms directly connected to broadcasting media. Far from being propagandistic, he impregnates his analysis of what he might have imagined was the near future of commercial network broadcasting with a deep ethical concern. On the one hand he seems to be warning against the threat of a media induced social closure. On the other hand he illustrates how network corporations grasp the sedated media consumer by the throat and how in this process the actual positive potential of TV broadcasting *leerstellen* is wasted on the altar of consumerism.

For the last time: Why are TV screens with their leerstellen 'cool'? The mind is ruled by emotions. Emotions are stimulated, amongst many other things, by fantasy. Fantasy is evoked by hints and suspense. Hints and suspense are an extremely strong creative force that makes TV—with its lousy picture and narrow bandwidth—the single most significant cultural phenomenon. Therefore television, shooting *leerstellen* in the eyes of the viewer, have the potential to radically change not only the media consumer, but also society. This is what seems to be demonstrated in the essay "Television. The Timid Giant".

McLuhan's analytical logics are intentionally reversed. I assume the reason for this is that he—and this is where he becomes a true sixties philosopher wants us to question authority. I think he wants us to hesitate to conclude anything after having read his essays.

Let us recap the mirror lake scene, then, assuming the lake's mirror picture is similar to 'reality'. The mirror is a technology or a 'media' in which man is subsumed. Now, what happens to Narcissus at the mirror lake is that 'media' reflects his anaesthetised body. What does the image mediate, apart from Narcissus's countenance? It shows the result of an individual's auto amputation, the glazed stare of a distressed media consumer. It shows the individualised symptom of a future dystopia and points towards a worst case scenario: The social closure of the Western World. Utilised in this fashion television transforms into 'Daddy's little helper' and McLuhan's abused phrase becomes a mere platitude: "the medium is the massage".

Notes

1. "Mother's little helper" (Jagger / Richards). Recorded December 3—8, 1965. Released in the UK on the album *Aftermath* in April, 1966. Released in the US as a single on July 2, 1966.
2. "Highway 61 revisited". Release date: August 30 1965.
3. "Mr. Tambourine Man". Release date: June 21, 1965.
4. The album was renamed "Rubber Soul". Release date: December 3, 1965.
5. The development of Valium made it possible to treat psychologically based lifestyle symptoms. Historically, Valium is part of the 2. revolution of drugs. It represents a change from nature medicine to chemistry, whereas for instance Viagra is the symbol of the shift from chemical to biological and genetic manipulations of the human body, the so called 3. revolution of drugs. Source: Møldrup, 1999.
6. Working at Hoffmann-La Roche, Leo Sternbach was the inventor of "mother's little helper." He developed the prescription drug Valium in 1963 and caused an overnight sensation. Valium became the most-prescribed drug in the US between 1969–1982. Valium is the most profitable drug in history—it is registered in the Guinness Book of Records as the most widely prescribed drug in the world.
7. Ingarden, 1931.
8. 1997, p. 319.
9. The work was initiated by Marshall McLuhan himself, but, following McLuhan's death in 1980, *The Laws of Media* was finalised, edited and published by McLuhan's son, Eric, in 1988.
10. Alan Turing coined a test for computer intelligence in the 1950 paper "Computing machinery and intelligence". Briefly, the test is twist of a social game where a judge must decide from a two-sided conversation whether or not one of his two, hidden, opponents is a computer. If he fails to tell which one is a computer, then the computer can be said to represent 'artificial intelligence'.
11. The phrase "from bits to atoms" is taken from Nicholas Negroponte's book, "Being Digital", 1995.
12. "The Global Village" is a phrase Eric McLuhan explains his father had borrowed from either James Joyce or P. Wyndham Lewis. In: McLuhan Studies, issue 2 (url: http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/mcluhan-studies/v1_iss2/1_2index.htm, last accessed Oct. 11, 2005).
13. Eric McLuhan, "The source of the term 'Global Village'", McLuhan Studies, #2.
14. 1997, p. 41–42.
15. Selye served as professor and director at the Institute of Experimental Medicine and Surgery at the University of Montreal from 1945 until retiring in the mid-1970s.
16. 1997, p. 41.
17. 1997, p. 42.
18. 1997, p. 43.
19. 1997, p. 47.
20. John B. Watson developed *behaviorism* as a trend within American psychology in the forties and fifties, followed by Aaron Beck who founded the Center for Cognitive Therapy at the University of Pennsylvania during the fifties.
21. Strate, "Media Transcendence".
22. 1997, p. 22.
23. 1997, p. 23.
24. 1997, p. 310.
25. 1997, p. 46.
26. My understanding of 'cyborg' comes from Donna Haraway whose analysis of cyborgs has stood the test of time and proves to be influential. In the western world, we live within the grid of a in a masculine heteronormativity, that is both racist and xenophobic. Being a Ph.D. biologist and socialist, Haraway understands the cyborg not only as a metaphor for femininity as such, but as a metaphor for black women, historically, the most oppressed (and self-oppressive) racial group. Therefore, following the logics of heteronormativity, it was obvious that the commercialization of the cyborg would take place. Capitalism takes the sting out of any critical bite with a bandage of consumerism, if you can't beat them, buy them!.
27. The cyborgian creature comes from both art and sciences: In computer science the notion of artificial intelligence leads to cyborgs and in literature science fiction makes use of the concept of a creature which is partly machine, partly human. From a relative literary obscurity the cyborg rose into fame during the eighties—alongside with an intensified dissemination of gadgets and gizmos—and, finally, Hollywood appropriated the cyborg and made big bucks out of it in films like *Robocop* (1987) and *Terminator* (1984).
28. "Media Transcendence", McLuhan Studies issue 3, (url: http://www.chass.utoronto.ca/mcluhan-studies/v1_iss3/1_3art8.htm, last accessed Oct. 12 2005).
29. McLuhan, 1963, p. 3–4.

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