

The End of the Book and the Beginning of Television

The “cyclone,” ((Alongside prophecy and charlatanry, meteorological phenomena were often used to describe both McLuhan and the effects of his ideas. For cyclones see Pétillon, Pierre-Yves (1969) “Avant and après McLuhan” [review], *Critique* 265 (juin): 504-11.)) to use Pierre-Yves Pétillon’s (1969) term, that hit Paris in the mid-1960s was not referred to on a familiar first name basis, like most North American storms. This wind tore through the capital, rustling the pages of academic and popular publications, and ruffling the feathers of Parisian intellectuals and cultural *animateurs alike*. *Macluhanisme*, as the McLuhan cyclone came to be known, blew hot and cold or, rather, cool, to borrow McLuhan’s concept, depending on how much information one thought it transmitted and, consequently, the degree of participation required to complete its message. But as a lot of hot wind requiring minimal involvement, *macluhanisme* was deflected by those for whom it was fundamentally a loud, albeit beautifully formed, blast. For those who luxuriated in its coolness and the intensive participation it elicited, its dazzle was all the more fascinating and full for the openings it left by flitting from insight to insight. *macluhanisme* could be unfortunately full but empty, yet gloriously empty but full.

Foul wind or invigorating blast; revolutionary or impostor; ‘*genial Grock*’ ((This obscure reference is to Adrien Wettach Grock (1880-1959), the Swiss circus performer (acrobat and musician closely associated with

the violin and piano he used as props). Grock and his partner Brick were well-known in France. Grock performed across Europe, England and North Africa, for over 50 years. The phrase was used by Vernay, Alain (1969) “La galaxie gutenbergs ou le prophète McLuhan,” *Le Figaro* (25 jan.).)) or sinister exaggerator: M(a)cLuhan(isme) was all of these, and more. The cyclone collapsed these disjunctions into a bundle of paradoxes. The study of *macLuhanisme* concerns the effects of this phenomenon, its initial explosive impact in the 1960s, and its later lines of influence across French cultural production, particularly in sociological theory broadly conceived. McLuhan himself would not have been entirely pleased with my study of effects, despite the fact that he claimed to study nothing else. For McLuhan, effects were just as likely to precede causes as vice versa, or occur simultaneously. One first looks for effects and then finds the causes that will produce them; one starts with solutions and creates the problems that they solve (McLuhan 1969b). (“This artistic strategy is indispensable today: you start with the solution and then you create the problem that will lead to that solution. Or, you start with the effect and then you look for the situations that will produce that effect. The 19th century approach was the reverse of this. It is the approach of heavy industry and consumer-oriented minds today – start with the problem, then look for the solution. This is fine for a society enveloped by information moving at a slow rate. At high speeds, on the other hand, every solution creates more problems than it can resolve.” (“Media and the Structured Society,” *The McLuhan Dew-Line Newsletter* 2/1 (July 1969[b]):3). The reversal of cause and effect is part of a larger rhetoric of reversal or flip that takes place when a thing has reached a point of exhaustion or saturation. This reversal is tied to the implosive speed of new information technologies. This implosive speed, in turn, makes the item-by-item processing of information impossible or at least redundant, requiring a new kind of awareness adequate to the field of perception; hence, for McLuhan, what he called audile-tactile synesthesia.)) There is some truth in this so-called ‘artistic strategy’ as most marketers

know when faced with the situation of having to create needs for a product that satisfies them before they exist, but it should be taken *cum grano salis*, with a grain of salt. The effects of *macluhanisme* are just as paradoxical as its view of effects.

The effects I wish to study in this lecture are those concerning the place McLuhan's ideas were thought to occupy in French intellectual life. To take a pinch of salt from McLuhan would be to acknowledge that as French thinkers found their bearings in the wake of this cyclone, the effects of *macluhanisme* provided for the invention of a neologism that signified the phenomenon that had hit and continued to batter them. In addition, the place(s) already occupied by this phenomenon had to be found, as it were, in order to explain its sudden and widespread impact on French culture in the first place. These were clean-up operations and justifications rather than examples of non-linear and non-sequential causality. The time was, however, ripe for the arrival of McLuhan's ideas in France for two reasons: i) the question of *écriture* had already been posed in French philosophical circles, and McLuhan came to be placed in relation to this concept; ii) his emphasis on medium or form over content gave direction to research in the sociology of the media and policy formation in the area of broadcasting. The intellectual and administrative ambitions of French sociologist Jean Cazeneuve were carried forward on the prevailing winds of *macluhanisme*.

Writing Beyond the Book

Not everyone appreciates a cyclone, to say the least. Elaborate defenses against the cyclone were mounted as it blew through the human sciences at the Centre d'études des communications de masse of the Ecole pratique des hautes études in Paris. For one of its members, Olivier Burgelin (1969:

1107), ((Burgelin, Olivier (1969) "Un essayiste pop: Marshall McLuhan," *Esprit* 382 (juin): 1107-116. The Centre d'études des communications de masse (CECMAS) was founded by Georges Freidmann in 1960 at the Ecole pratique des Hautes Etudes, then under the direction of Fernand Braudel. Burgelin was an active member of the Centre. The semio-structural method favored by its early and most distinguished members such as Barthes, Metz, and Todorov in the 1960s, opened onto poststructural speculation with the arrival of Kristeva, the emergence of Baudrillard, and the confusion of methods in general that marked the 1970s. During 1972-73, CECMAS became CETAS, the Centre d'études transdisciplinaires. This is not to downplay the sociological perspective Freidmann, Paul Lazarsfeld, and Edgar Morin, among others, brought to the study of mass media. Burgelin's criticisms were in the air at the time and voiced by others such as Texier, Jean C. (1968) "Une nouvelle impuCOMBA (août).)) not even the abundance of humor found in McLuhan's work could "dispel the tiresome impression of tawdry showiness produced by the incessant handling of overpolished paradoxes." Disrespect for the principle of non-contradiction goes hand-in-hand with a delight in bad puns in McLuhan's imagination. McLuhan's way of being bad troubled Burgelin (1969: 1115) because his "prodigious taste for the new" was really "a greedy acceptance having nothing to do with intellectual progressivism." This "frantic modernist" seemed unaware that the most contemporary culture of the period was already "out of date, full of the past, of resistance to change, of all sorts of conservatisms," not to mention alienations and anguish (Burgelin 1969: 1116). McLuhan's celebration of modern life rested on a shaky foundation. He "jovially tramples on the flower beds" of ethnography, sociology, linguistics, and psychoanalysis, evoking these disciplines only through the names of thinkers from whom he quotes out of context. Burgelin charges that McLuhan doesn't enter into current debates and recent developments in the disciplines from which he borrows. Despite McLuhan's taste for the new, he is out of date and place in every discipline

save one: the history of anglo-saxon literature in which he was trained. The absence of a semiological reflection on media in McLuhan's work is a case in point for Burgelin; instead of turning toward the sign, McLuhan interests himself in the environments that media constitute, thus weakening, in Burgelin's estimation, the analysis of communication by operating with only two categories of medium/message and content; even here, the latter is understood as another, previously dominant, technological environment (the content of writing is speech; the content of the telephone is the telegraph).

Read today, Burgelin's objections are strikingly anti-postmodern in the sense that they associate McLuhan with staple postmodern phenomena such as the confusion of genres and disciplines, the depthlessness of his writing, the poverty of his categories and impoverishment of his thematics by his own incessant punning.

Burgelin advises that McLuhan cannot be "read to the letter." For example, while causality is the single explanatory principle expressing the relationship between media and galactic shifts in history, the use of this concept is largely metaphorical and signifies congruence, significantly reducing the power of the analysis. "McLuhan's system has no scientific value," Burgelin states (1969: 1110-11), and for this reason the empirical validity of research in the sociology of mass media makes as little sense to McLuhan as McLuhan's 'results' make for such a breed of sociologist. Indeed, Burgelin makes the important passing observation that McLuhan's response to the necessity of empirical validation is that this requirement "dissimulates the true problems, a little like rationalisation in the Freudian sense" (1969: 1112). This places McLuhan in the position of the analyst for whom the figurative analysand, an empirically-minded sociologist of media, subjects the media to an explanatory principle, including a strong appeal to 'reality', which conceals the unconscious motives and defenses of the

analysand's methodological claim. Rationalisation in this context is a form of resistance to McLuhan's efforts to understand the 'true' structure of the medium as message. This is the first intimation of the psychological profile of the paradoxes into which one was plunged by voicing criticisms of McLuhan. I take up this issue in more detail in Lecture 3 "Big Mac Attack."

The "idea that communication does not exhaust itself in the manifest content of the message" is for Burgelin (1969: 1114) McLuhan's most general and enduring insight. This did not, however, align McLuhan with a depth hermeneutics. If for many French thinkers McLuhan's focus on the medium put him into contact with structuralism – a matter I consider in some depth in Lecture 4 "Before the Letter" – it also enabled him to be placed in relation to the sorts of poststructuralism practiced by Barthes, Derrida and the group around the journal *Tel Quel*. This placement is from the outset extraordinarily awkward since, as Burgelin himself admits (1969: 1114), "McLuhan ignores and apparently contradicts them." Jean Texier (1968) had, in a similar spirit, suggested that McLuhan's "annihilation of *écriture*" should be the occasion to turn our attention to the "real research" of Barthes and Derrida. This placement which resists the very gesture, thereby working against itself, is made to work on the basis of the shared problematisation of the oppositional and metaphysical concepts of speech and writing. Burgelin's readers are left to recall that the double gesture of Derridean deconstruction ((I focus on a passing remark in Derrida (1982) "Signature Event Context," in *Margins of Philosophy*, Alan Bass (trans.), Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, and later briefly mention Derrida (1974) *Of Grammatology*, G. Spivak (trans.), Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press. McLuhan's explanations of orality are taken from *Understanding Media* (1964), although *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962: 3) begins with the bold statement that in the electronic age even non-verbal components of a given situation may be oral. This kind of generalization – whether of orality or *écriture* – requires closer attention.

See also the astute observations of Fekete, John (1982) "Massage in the Mass Age: Remembering Marshall McLuhan," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 6/3: 50-67. Both McLuhan and Derrida really seem to glory in the unfolding of the historically dominant, as Fekete remarks, categories (generalized orality and *écriture*) whose emergence they themselves anticipated and, of course, theorized. Fekete would be interested in the French debates: the examples I use are: Châtelet, François (1967) "Un nouveau faux prophète," *Le Nouvel observateur* 159 (du 29 nov. au 5 déc.): 36-7; Benoist, Jean-Marie (1968) "La nébuleuse McLuhan" (review), *La Quinzaine littéraire* 43 (du 15 au 31 jan.): 3-4; the manuscript evidence is slim when it comes to discovering McLuhan's knowledge of Derrida, see (MP. 193-29) marked manuscript by Roger Poole, "Embodiment and Text: A phenomenological inquiry into their relationship' and (MP. 193-30) marked manuscript by R. Poole, typescript draft of a review of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*.

I use the readings of Edgar Morin, a CECMAS member, as a welcome diversion contemporaneous with the *écriture* debate: (1968) *New Trends in the Study of Mass Communications*, Birmingham: Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, Occasional paper No. 7.; *idem* (1969) "Pour comprendre McLuhan" (review), *La Quinzaine littéraire* 69 (du 16 au 31 mars): 16-18.)) overturns and displaces the hierarchical arrangement of such metaphysical oppositions in order to analyze hitherto subordinated aspects of the inferior concept of writing, releasing, in order to graft them, onto a new, general concept of writing (Derrida 1982: 329-30). The speech/writing opposition is central to McLuhan's understanding of the transition from the scribal galaxy to the new oral society. But this transition or passage from one concept to the other is not, Derrida specifies, the way of deconstruction. Still, Burgelin (1969: 1114) insists:

However, it is the same value that is sought, despite the contradiction of the formulations, here under the denomination of écriture” there under that of medium, and, more clearly, it is a similar conception of signification that is rejected here as speech, and there as content. In both cases, what is foregrounded is that communication cannot be reduced to the single signified of the message.

The rhetorical promise by default of a *rapprochement* between Derrida and McLuhan in terms of the speech/writing opposition wanes as we read Derrida's (1982: 329) first concluding remark in “Signature Event Context”: “We are not witnessing an end of writing which, to follow McLuhan's ideological representation, would restore a transparency or immediacy of social relations” Instead, Derrida continues, emphasizing his own accomplishment: “but indeed a more and more powerful historical unfolding of a general writing of which the system of speech, consciousness, meaning, presence, truth, etc., would only be an effect, to be analyzed as such.” Derrida rejects McLuhan's vision of the psychological and social wholeness of pre- and post-literate cultures. His rejection is less interesting than for what it clears the way: the liberation and generalization of the hitherto subordinated predicates of writing. The movement toward the general is parallel to McLuhan's abandonment of specialism, separation, continuity, uniformity, homogeneity (all of the effects of the phonetic alphabet) towards the “web” (McLuhan 1964: 86) of orality, what Fekete (1982: 63), in his discussion of the passage from Derrida cited above, called “a general oral form.” Fekete leaves the task of working out the relationship between these two generalities (writing and orality) to future scholars. He does so, however, ahistorically, that is, without recognizing the history of the relationship between McLuhan and Derrida already worked through during McLuhan's French reception. This does not lessen the significance of the question Fekete posed nor lessen the degree of difficulty of the task he bequeathed us. The question I wish to pose concerns the

general oral form: is there anything that prevents it from being one of those 'effects' of which Derrida wrote above? To put it in slightly different terms: Is there anything that prevents the general oral form from being logocentric? My answer is no.

In the late 1960s in France Derrida's name was also regularly invoked in discussions of McLuhan's concept of writing for the sake of diminishing the seriousness of the latter's work. This is evident in François Châtelet's (1967: 37) claim that despite the "absurdity" and "deliberately fraudulent" nature of McLuhan's theories, they are "not without relation to the true questions." In this backhanded way, then, Châtelet (1967: 37) continues: "For it is correct that culture and its diffusion is currently undergoing a radical mutation and that the primacy of the book is being contested. This new situation requires a deep reflection on the fact of writing, reading, and the precarious imperialism of discourse." And for Châtelet it is Derrida who has reflected most deeply and seriously on these matters. McLuhan is a *faiseur* (a word meaning both a shark and a show-off, among other things) and the "pretentious foolishness" of *macluhanisme* threatens France. Châtelet does not specify the precise nature of the threat, but it is surely a question of resisting the schemes of a concept-shark. Perhaps Châtelet believed that he was protecting the youth of France against the seductions of a pseudo-theory. This move, incidentally, is precisely the one which convicted Socrates, and it is also the one used most commonly by conservative American critics with reference to Baudrillard.

Jean-Marie Benoist (1968: 4) pointed out that McLuhan thought "the electronic media restore a space of plenitude and presence"; that is, in McLuhan's writing the transition from writing to speech is logocentric and entails transparency, immediacy, nowness, and presence on a global scale. This is precisely what Derrida objects to as "ideological." McLuhan's oral society is, however, marked by an "acoustic orientation" that is also tactile

or, auditive-tactile. What this means is that orality is irreducible to speech as such because tactility is for McLuhan a sign of the interplay of the senses, itself irreducible to haptic sensation. This does not make McLuhan's oral culture any less metaphysical, it is just that care must be taken in the application of its predicates. My negative answer has, then, one qualification. McLuhan's knowledge of the writings of Derrida was extremely limited. His reading of Derrida was mediated by the writings of Roger Poole, Professor of English at the University of Nottingham. In the late 1970s, Poole was a Visiting Commonwealth Fellow at York University in Toronto and during his stay sent McLuhan several manuscripts (MP.193-29, 193-30), including his review of Derrida's *Of Grammatology*. From these articles McLuhan familiarised himself with the term deconstruction, the activities of the Yale Derridians, and could not resist a pun on Derrida's name, "Deride," which he scribbled in the margins of Poole's review. Poole left McLuhan with the incorrect impression that deconstruction was only a negative project, a single, derisive gesture, as it were.

Although the passage from the scribal to the oral is part of a "euphoric ideology," in Edgar Morin's (1969:18) terms, that holds little interest for deconstruction, this aspect is precisely what interests him. Morin had many regrets about *macLuhanisme*, including the reduction of a "gigantic historical period to a single and monotone factor ... a technological medium." Morin (1969: 16) writes: "If the paradigm of McLuhan is poor, his syntagm is rich, not only in terms of the flux of the proposed contiguities, but as much by a dialectical sense, sometimes light, sometimes subtle." McLuhan's galactic thought can be subtle and supple despite its "schematic dogmatism," since it alerts us to the interpenetration of galaxies and the neo-tribal or neo-archaic elements of neo-modernity. While Morin (1968: 16) valued the flexibility of McLuhan's "galactic way of thinking, ie., one which strives to establish large configurations where unexpected associations reveal a

flexible search after complex structuration,” the conceptual sensurround of *macluhanisme* just as easily produced a galactic giddiness.

Suffice to say that the place of *macluhanisme* was generally recognised as the philosophical milieu in which the deconstruction of the speech/writing opposition took place. It is the work of the grammatologist Derrida, however, that is said to be both real and true. To this depth McLuhan could only pretend and display the surface effects of serious thinking. The end of the book is not, for McLuhan, the beginning of writing, of Derridean *écriture*. The end of the book is the beginning of television. McLuhan thought that writing was a supplement to speech; in fact, it was sandwiched between two oralities, the first originary and the second neo-originary, whose unity it interrupted. For writing separates and specializes and undoes the “tribal web” by granting the individual emotional freedom (McLuhan 1964: 82-4); it is also civilising, intensifying, visual, and uniform. In short, writing is exterior to the speech whose place it takes and keeps, and this belief placed McLuhan firmly in the Western metaphysical tradition as Derrida represents it. Derrida (1974: 313 and 315) takes the “risk,” then, in *Of Grammatology*, of thinking of writing as an originary supplement that takes place *before* and *within* speech. What makes this thought risky is that it seems absurd and totally unacceptable within the tradition that separates the source from the supplement, a separation McLuhan does nothing to challenge.

The Empire of Cazeneuve

((I rely on Cazeneuve, Jean (1969) “Communications de masse et mutations culturelles,” *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie* XLVI: 17-25; (1969a) [avec collaboration de G. Namer] “Sociologie de la connaissance: Les théories de MacLuhan” (review), *L’Année sociologique* 20: 139-47;

(1969b) "MacLuhan est-il prophète?" *Les Nouvelles littéraires* (31 juillet): 1, 7; and (1976) "macluhanisme," in *Les Communications de masse: Guide alphabétique*, Paris: Denoël/Gonthier. My reference to McLuhan and pantheon building is from the translation of (1967) *La Galaxie Gutenberg: La genèse de l'homme typographique*, Jean Paré (trans.), Montrel: Hurtubise HMH; on the matter of video and tv aesthetics, see De Kerckhove, Derrick (1986) "Four Arguments for the Defence of Television," *Culture and Communications* [Budapest] 5: 43-65. I draw upon critical material bearing upon Cazeneuve and *macluhanisme* in general in Mattelart, Armand and Stourdzé, Yves (1985) *Technology, Culture and Communications: A Report to the French Minister of Research and Industry*, D. Buxton (trans.), Amsterdam: Elsevier Science Publishers and Mattelart, Michèle and Armand (1990) *The Carnival of Images: Brazilian Television Fiction*, David Buxton (trans.), New York: Bergin and Garvey. Mattelart and Stourdzé rely on Piemme, Jean-Marie (1978) *La télévision comme on la parle*, Bruxelles-Paris: Editions Labor/Fernand Nathan. I have not been able to locate this book from which they quote at length. Armand Mattelart later collaborated with Piemme (1980) *Télévision: enjeux sans frontières. Industries culturelles et politique de la communication*, Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble.

Gossip and factual material concerning the history of communications policy in France is found Thibau, Jacques (1970) *Une télévision pour tous les français*, Paris: Editions de Seuil; Missika, Jean-Louis and Wolton, Dominique (1983) *La folle du logis*, Paris: Gallimard. The Canadian material is from McLuhan's *Letters* (1987). While I am on the topic of gossip, file *MP*. 18-80 is full of long dead scandal of prurient interest to the Toronto-centric among us.))

In the midst of these debates, Cazeneuve was slowly building his own empire of communications. Cazeneuve's (1976) entry under the

neologism *macluhanisme* in the alphabetic guide to mass communications produced under his direction begins with the claim that McLuhan stands apart from all those who have written on the mass media. Not only does the neologism bear his name, but McLuhan's audience is the largest in the field and his writings are the most widely contested. It is the prophetic character of McLuhan's thought that makes it subject to criticisms based upon its lack of scientific rigor. Even if the directions in which McLuhan pushed discussions may be turned against his initial sign-posts, no matter, Cazeneuve suggests, since controversy is what makes McLuhan's ideas resonate even louder.

Of the three pillars of *macluhanisme* (the triumph of medium over content; the opposition of hot and cool media; the technological determination of civilisational transformation) the first "accomplished a kind of Copernican revolution" (Cazeneuve 1976: 260) in media studies. The study of content or the effects of messages gave way to the consideration of the effects of media as forms of communicational interaction of which there are two broad types (hot and cool). No matter how "artificial" this typology may be in practice, it does not detract from the sociological and prophetic significance of the third pillar. What fascinates Cazeneuve (1976: 265) is the sociological issue of cultural mutation that *macluhanisme* captures in terms of the interpenetration of *la galaxie Gutenberg* and our own *galaxie Marconi*. As far as Copernican revolutions are concerned, there have been several notable ones, namely those of Darwin with regard to anthropocentric consciousness and consciousness as such with Freud (McLuhan 1967: 363). The universe in question or, rather, the galactic sensibility attuned to content, was an influential one (albeit relatively small in planetary terms!) in the expanding universe of mass communications. If Gutenberg put the reader at the center of the universe of knowledge delivered by print culture, then McLuhan indicated the field created by electric-electronic networks in which the individual point of view of the

private reader would inhere, even if he taught this lesson through the products of alphabetic culture, namely, books.

For Cazeneuve (1976: 265), *macluhanisme* points toward a socially harmonious future in which the crises engendered by overlapping galaxies are surmounted by embracing new systems of media, while renouncing those born of the Gutenberg era. Much more than Morin, then, Cazeneuve was cooled – in its salutary sense – by *macluhanisme* : “One must not ask oneself if *macluhanisme* is serious; one must play its game and take note of what it reveals about the world of tomorrow” (Cazeneuve 1969b: 7). If baby boomers once straddled both galaxies and their tomorrow has already arrived, one wonders what happened to the idea of harmony as a so-called ‘gen x’ has grown into the same predicament. Inter-generational disharmony is congruent with the tensions of overlapping galaxies, even if they are defined generationally rather than technologically (still, demography and its mutant offspring such as psychography are tools of marketing).

Cazeneuve’s alphabetic guide was not written according to critical issues or problems. *macluhanisme* was given free rein, for example, in Hervé Fischer’s contribution on the esthetics of mass media (1976: 203-14). *Macluhanien* distinctions are employed in the dual service of the search for a definition of an aesthetics of electronic (primarily televisual) images, and in the exploration of the notion of an *écriture télévisuelle*, an electronic rhetoric of camerawork and editing that transcends the commonplace consumption of the semantic signs of realism found in reportage. De Kerckhove (1986: 49, 51) has developed this aesthetic approach by contrasting the effects of filmic editing to televisual modulation; in the case of films shown on television, the harsher images and intense motion of the former are softened by the gentle waves of colour and light of the latter. In order to appreciate the extent of

Cazeneuve's engagement with *macluhanisme*, it is necessary to turn to his earlier writings on cultural mutations and the mass media.

In "Communications de masse et mutations culturelles," Cazeneuve writes: "*macluhanisme* is a fashion, a craze that unmakes intellectual beds and reaches the general public" (1969: 17). Focusing on the third phase of the third pillar of *macluhanisme* (the return of an oral culture in the electronic civilisation), Cazeneuve accepts the analysis of the sensorial mutations (visual bias) of alphabetic man, but considers the claim for a new orality to be a debatable point. It seems that "the mass media are audio-visual means, and perhaps even more and more visual" (1969:22). Cazeneuve maintains that "although [McLuhan] sometimes clearly confirms that the mass media lead to the primacy of the oral and the auditory, at other moments he seems to indicate that we are leaning instead towards an equilibrium between vision and hearing" (1969: 22). The visual bias of electronic media and the not difficult task of finding ambiguous statements of position by McLuhan led Cazeneuve to suggest that current cultural mutations cannot be characterised by "the reflux of the visual and the return of the oral" (1969: 22). Later in the article Cazeneuve rephrases and hedges his position: "Thus, it is probably, contrary to what McLuhan understood, the reinforcement of the visual that is the most remarkable cultural effect of the mass media" (1969: 24).

Cazeneuve in addition argues that McLuhan did not pay sufficient attention to the ways in which the mass media transform culture into commodities that become more and more ephemeral. Broadcasts are, he thinks, less permanent than books. In the era before zapping and videorecorders, Cazeneuve reminds us, broadcasts received in the home could not be taped and replayed, stopped, and edited. Ultimately, Cazeneuve is prepared to let *macluhanisme* off the hook since its exaggerations in the

area of sensorial mutations are balanced by the attention it focuses on new media and the conceptual equipment it provides for their interpretation.

In his review of the French translations of McLuhan's work available in 1969 (*La galaxie gutenberg*, *Message et massage*, *Pour comprendre les media*, *Mutations 1990*, and *Pour or contre MacLuhan*, edited by G.E. Stearn), Cazeneuve (in collaboration with Gérard Namer) reflects on the "promotion of [McLuhan] to the rank of a big star" (1969a: 140). It may be the case that in North America "the only type of reaction that this oeuvre has not provoked is precisely indifference," in France reactions have been mixed: "the public was not staggered, and sociologists, by and large, did not let go of their defiant, and at times contemptible, attitude" (1969a: 140). This so-called mixed response is perhaps due to, Cazeneuve conjectures, the fact that the elements of surprise, shock, diversion, word play, and the rambling remarks of McLuhan "are not the sort that greatly move the latin character." This sort of posturing on the side of latinity snubs North American boosterism and special effects from which the 'latin character' is stereotypically and mythically immune. Cazeneuve throws up a rickety windscreen against the forces of *macluhanisme*.

McLuhan does not, Cazeneuve laments, pick up in *Pour comprendre les media* where he left off in *La galaxie gutenberg*. He develops neither his views on the primitive pre-gutenberg era nor of print culture but, instead, "they operate only as a means of reference or of comparison" (1969a: 141). Cazeneuve goes so far as to refer to developments in *Pour comprendre* regarding the analysis of the specific effects of communications technologies as work on *mass media* – a term, he comments disparagingly, that belongs to "the barbaric language of specialists" (1969a: 141). By this criterion alone, both McLuhan and Cazeneuve are barbarians! With the arrival of *Mutations 1990*, McLuhan is in full prophetic mode and abandons himself to "sociological fiction."

Cazeneuve mishandles McLuhan's typological distinction between cool and hot by first correctly including radio and cinema among hot media, and later incorrectly referring to them as cool (in contrast to television!) (1969a: 145). Unwittingly, then, Cazeneuve provides evidence for his claim that this typological distinction has not always been understood in the world of broadcasting, the very place where he distinguished himself in the 1960s and 1970s in a series of administrative roles including those of Administrateur de l'Office de Radio-Télévision française (O.R.T.F. 1964-70; 1972-74), Président du Comité des programmes de la télévision à l'ORTF (1971-74), and Président-directeur général et fondateur de la Société nationale de Télévision de la première chaîne (TF1) (1974-78).

What is Cazeneuve's legacy? His work is not widely read today. But his various explications and soft interrogations of McLuhan were perfectly adapted to the debates over form and content underway in France in the 1960s and 1970s, especially in relation to the critique of the media as vehicles of content. By appealing to McLuhan's so-called revolution of form against vaguely leftist notions of revolutionising the content of media, Cazeneuve was able to adopt a passively critical stance, even if his position aligned itself with technological determinism, and effectively released himself from the demands of the critiques of Marxism and *macluhanisme*. In short, Cazeneuve occupied the void that existed in the study of television in France in the 1960s and 1970s.

As Michèle and Armand Mattelart explain (1990: 112-13; 121, n. 12), two factors contributed to the rise of *macluhanisme* in France. First, the field of television remained undertheorised almost until the 1980s and, secondly, the antinomy of form and content produced a "theoretical vacuum" into which *macluhanisme* swept and subsequently "exercised its power of seduction." Armand Mattelart and Yves Stourdzé (1985: 80) have cited the work of McLuhan as the prime example of "trans-historic discourses which

cannot hide their occultation, not only of the real as it appears on television, but of the real, full stop.” On this view, the credibility afforded to McLuhan was one of the unfortunate political effects of the “intellectual underdevelopment” of the study of television. Moreover, without “serious scientific analysis of the material mode of functioning” to offset its emergence, *macluhanisme* could be “called to the rescue to paper over the cracks of a society which generally refused to think of television as the matrix of its system of modern communication, as the central mechanism for the production of consensus” (Mattelart and Stourdzé 1985: 80). This explanation of McLuhan’s influence in France relies on the description of the theoretical scene of writing on television as immature and empty, and figures McLuhan’s work as seductive in the sense that it draws attention away from the real into the unreal or a rhetorically devalued realm, and does so by papering over and thereby occluding substantive insights into the social influence of television.

It is worth citing at length Jean-Marie Piemme’s critique of the woolly “theoretical foundations of the dominant discourse on television” to which Mattelart and Stourdzé refer since Cazeneuve is one of the agents whose writings and administrative positions supposedly obstructed communications research in France:

In France, there exists a discourse on the subject of television, and more generally, on mass communications, whose very fame makes it impossible to ignore. It emanates from Jean Cazeneuve, long known for several books and even more articles on television and the mass media. His writings have a certain audience and his opinions on this subject are regularly solicited as much by journalists and newspapers as, more recently, by public authorities. His expert knowledge of the problems of television has led him not only to be the sociologist that he is, but also, at the request of the Giscardian regime, to take over the first television channel. This ultimate

promotion is not the least of the reasons for examining his central thesis more closely.

The books of Jean Cazeneuve have the particularity of taking on the appearance of being the sum total of all that has been said on the subject. References to work of all shades abound and analyses make imperturbable use of any empirical study with a few results to flaunt. Drawing mainly on American and Anglo-Saxon authors, Cazeneuve, according to the needs of his panorama, adds the results of often irreconcilable theories, corrects results of one study by the results of another, to which he generally adds the results of a third, and takes what he needs from psychology, empirical mass-media sociology, social psychology and the functionalist approach. He goes from Gurvitch to McLuhan by passing through the evolutionist thinkers of the nineteenth century, makes more references to Jung than to Freud and bases all his reflections on a certain idea of man and the human condition.

(Piemme, quoted in Mattelart and Stourd  1985: 82)

In short, Cazeneuve's eclecticism is a McLuhanist veneer. But for Mattelart and Stourd , Cazeneuve's eclecticism lacks McLuhan's originality, and he fails to consolidate the multiple positions from which he speaks.

Cazeneuve's construction of television by the arrangement of irreconcilable theories enabled his point of view to hide among the flecks of his imperfect mosaic method. His position was mobile, fluent and liberal enough to move over to the side of the object of his interest, especially in the era of Giscardian liberalism. Recall that McLuhan admired the liberal politics of Giscard d'Estaing in France, Jerry Brown in California, and Pierre Trudeau in Canada.

It was during Cazeneuve's tenure (but not directorship) in the ORTF that opposition to the introduction of advertising on television finally weakened sufficiently to allow it entry to the French screen. After the print media had staved off repeated attempts in the 1960s (1960, 1962, 1965) to institute De Gaulle's demand for television commercials on economic grounds, in 1968 the event occurred (Thibau 1970: 152-54), although limitations were placed on the duration of adverts, and an independent organ (Régie française de publicité [RFP]) was established to control private interests by ensuring that revenue from advertising did not exceed 25% of public resources. Created in 1969, the RFP was disbanded in 1992. Televisual publicity erupted during M. Biasini's directorship of the ORTF. The tumultuous year of 1968 may have brought students and workers into the streets, but it also brought commercials to television and colour to the French screen. According to Jean-Louis Missika and Dominique Wolton (1983: 52ff), the events of May '68 revealed the repressive and paternalistic dimensions of the "statist model" of television and the control over culture and information it exercised given the government's decision not to speak to the events on television and to suppress what were considered to be subversive reports. It was not until the election of Georges Pompidou in 1969 that, on this view, the liberalisation of French television began to occur. Missika and Wolton (1983: 179, 294) resist both McLuhan's and Cazeneuve's techno-prophecies of television in the planetary age on the grounds that the medium will not blur the distinction between totalitarian and liberal controls on the basis of its ability to be receptive to public opinion and to events; it has not operated without restrictions and is unlikely to achieve transparency, as the French case has, Missika and Wolton contend, demonstrated.

To refer to the professionalisation of McLuhan's slogan "the medium is the message" means: if the user of a medium is its content, as McLuhan came to believe, then there is no barrier to the introduction of commercials to

television (nor to the importation of programs), since no significant change occurs to the medium with their appearance. Wherever the blame is laid for the introduction of the good news of multinational capital to French television, it would not be the last time that *macluhanisme* would be used to influence and justify policy decisions. McLuhan's own interventions in this area are well-known in Canada. "We are the content of anything we use, if only because these things are extensions of ourselves," McLuhan (1987: 427) wrote in a letter to Jim Davey, Program Secretary in the Office of the Prime Minister in Trudeau's government. It followed for McLuhan that the C.R.T.C. (Canadian Radio and Telecommunications Commission) policy requiring a certain percentage of Canadian content in broadcasting is based on a misunderstanding of the media. The "user as content" supplement to the slogan the medium is the message means that Canadians are the content of the American media they use, and thus a policy aimed at limiting American (and, in general, transborder) access to the Canadian market and promoting Canadian cultural productions is ill-conceived and unnecessary – a residual effect of the Gutenberg galaxy and its misguided nationalism and protectionism. Throughout the 1970s McLuhan advanced this line of thinking on a variety of fronts, none of which proved to be particularly influential in the formation of broadcasting policy in Canada at the time, much to his chagrin (this is evident in his unpublished correspondence from 1971 with John Bassett, chairman and publisher of the defunct newspaper *The Toronto Telegram*; see MP. 18-80). Today, both French and Canadian struggles against American imports are simply being left behind by satellite technologies which effectively ignore national boundaries.

The cyclone of *macluhanisme* neither blew itself out in the awkward comparisons of Derrida and McLuhan that quickly took on contrastive tones, nor did the occasional xenophobic outbursts warning France of its dangers provide much shelter; neither was it exhausted in the opportunities

for (self-)promotion that it afforded those such as Cazeneuve in the sociology and administration of the mass media in France. By way of a conclusion, however, let's consider one of the positive contributions that *maculhanisme* was thought to have made to poststructuralist critique.

Electric Language

((On the question 'is language electric?' I read Deleuze and Guattari (1977) *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley, M. Seem, H. R. Lane, New York: Viking, despite themselves, against certain remarks by McLuhan on electric communication from (1964) *Understanding Media*.

The triumvirate of McLuhan-Hjelmslev-Lyotard constitutes, for Deleuze and Guattari, a critique of point of view. For McLuhan, as he explained in *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), the orality of the electronic age undermines closed systems of alphabetic and typographic culture (specifically, a fixed point of view) and creates an interplay between modes of perception. Lyotard would call this the libidinal-aesthetic force of the figural which disrupts closed discursive systems, and displaces any fixed 'point of view' or identity. The fluidity of the figural also makes it irreducible to the visual, which in McLuhan's terms is consonant with the critique of vision in terms of acoustic space. But the discursive, in Lyotard's deconstruction of the discourse/figure opposition, also inhabits the space of the figural, just as in McLuhan, the Gutenberg legacy lingers in today's acoustic space. The result is "trauma and tension."

In a milieu characterized by a variety of critical engagements with and creative departures from structuralism and semiology, Deleuze and Guattari's *Anti-Oedipus* found a place in the widespread critique of the

signifier and the prevailing anti-Saussureanism of the period but with one important exception. Unlike Baudrillard, for instance, who saw in the linguistic theories of Hjelmslev and Barthes further examples of the ideology of signification, Deleuze and Guattari (1977: 242) combined a critique of a linguistics of the signifier with praise for Hjelmslev: "We believe that, from all points of view and despite certain appearances, Hjelmslev's linguistics stands in profound opposition to the Saussurean and post-Saussurean undertaking." Neither Deleuze nor Guattari followed Barthes's translinguistic approach to semiology. To do so would have brought them into step with the practices of specialists who exercise control over diverse signifying phenomena by making them dependent upon language. What is most disturbing in the tag of 'linguistic imperialism' is that Hjelmslev has long been recognized as one of its agents, even though his sense of language is not, strictly speaking, reducible to actual languages. While linguistics ordinarily concerns particular languages, Hjelmslev's algebra aims to calculate the general system of language in relation to which particular languages would reveal their characteristics. But the calculation of theoretically possible formal relations at the level of the general system includes non-materialized elements, that is, elements not realized in any existing languages. The glossematist is not, then, a linguist proper.

Deleuze and Guattari do not complain that Hjelmslev's theory is too abstract. For its high level of abstraction is precisely one of its virtues, and they rejoice in the irreducibility of the planes of expression and content to signifier and signified. Hjelmslev was not a "signifier enthusiast." Deleuze and Guattari (1977: 243) think that Hjelmslev's theory "is the only linguistics adapted to the nature of both the capitalist and the schizophrenic flows: until now, the only modern (and not archaic) theory of language." This kind of linguistics theorizes language as an inclusive and intensive continuum, whose variations conform neither to linguistic constants nor variables, but are open to continuous and hitherto unrealised conjunctions.

Glossematics may be brought into the schizoanalytic fold because it offers a rarely permitted (grammatically, that is) freedom to connect and combine phonemes into possible morphemes; to pursue, in other words, unusual if not unnatural connective syntheses, generalizable in structural terms as unrestricted and unpoliced passages, meetings and alliances at all levels and places. This is precisely what they praised in McLuhan's sense of electric flow. Glossematics starts to 'schizz' at the moment when Hjelmslev, reflecting on the fact that a sign is a sign of something, maintains that this entity can no longer be conceived of as only a sign of content-substance (a content-substance or the conception of a thing is ordered to and arranged under a content-form by the sign). A sign is equally a sign of an expression-substance (the sounds subsumed by an expression-form of phonemes). Expression and content and form and substance are the double dichotomies of Hjelmslevian signification. Hjelmslev attempts to destroy the hierarchy and directionality of signification which was hitherto based upon the definition of the sign as that of an expression-substance for a content-substance by carrying to its radical end the mutual solidarity and equality of linguistic expression and content.

What I am suggesting in these too brief comments is that it is possible to read the 'triumvirate' in a more detailed fashion.))

In *Anti-Oedipus*, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari (1977: 240) ask: "What exactly is meant when someone announces the collapse of the 'Gutenberg galaxy'?" There is no need to name McLuhan or the thought in his name since it goes without saying to whom Deleuze and Guattari refer. Perhaps it is for the better that he is not named since this is a way to take another position in a playing field already divided by fierce loyalties and oppositions. The answer to this question cannot be found in McLuhan's books in any straightforward manner. The issue at stake concerns the role of *maculuanisme* in the schizophrenic process and anarchic anoedipalism.

McLuhan's announcement at first seems puzzling since capitalism, despite what Deleuze and Guattari think about its "profound illiteracy," still uses writing and communicates through it as printed money, for example. What happens to writing in the age of 'electric language'? Does the electric revolution come to language in a way that is irreducible to the orality that takes one back to the source?

Deleuze and Guattari continue: "This seems to us to be the significance of McLuhan's analysis: to have shown what a language of decoded flows is, as opposed to a signifier that strangles and overcodes the flows" (1977: 240). Without a despotic signifier that holds the signified in the straight-jacket of an asymmetrical dichotomy and codes it relationally in a closed system of oppositions, no single flow (libidinal energy or electric transmissions) can control the fluxes and constellations of desire.

Signification is structured, coded, controlled. Hence, Deleuze and Guattari appeal to television signals (ironically, the code of *multiplexage analogique de composantes* [MAC], unlike SECAM [Séquentiel couleur à memoire] or PAL [Phase Alternative Line], raises the question of how we are to understand the French spelling of McLuhan's name as *Mac* Luhan, a matter to which I turn in Lecture 3) and the pure information of the electric light as examples of decoded flows. The decoded flow of the electric light, Deleuze and Guattari suggest, forms a substance "by entering into a relationship with another flow, such that the first defines a content and the second, an expression" (1977: 241). Deleuze and Guattari graft the categories of Hjelmslevian glossematics onto McLuhan's concept of the electric light, understood as a contentless and messageless medium of communication that can enter into a relationship that is neither predetermined nor determinable, forming a substance (a decoded flow is unformed matter that is given form, thereby becoming a substance). The meeting of flows create, in other words, meaning. But the relation between content and expression is relative and reversible, which explains why there

is no dominant signifier and no predeterminable hierarchy. Remember that this is the part of the *Anti-Oedipus* in which a strange trio appears: McLuhan, Louis Hjelmslev and Jean-François Lyotard. Certain concepts from each thinker (electric light as pure information; content-expression-form-substance; the figural) are favorably evaluated on the basis of their contributions to the critique of the signifier. McLuhan specifies (1964: 9) that the content may 'blind' one to the medium, but it need not do so, since "content or uses of such media are as diverse as they are ineffectual in shaping the form of human association." Electric light is pure information, a plane of immanence in which no one knows what sorts of relationships will be established, set in motion by the capitalist production of power and the sale of electricity. Electric light is, after all, salable, and it is this feature that allows the capitalist code to determine its flow through the circuits it builds and owns, and rents. For Deleuze and Guattari capitalism at the same time decodes and limits by encoding the flows it releases.

What is electric language? "Electric language does not go by way of the voice or writing," Deleuze and Guattari write (1977: 241), echoing McLuhan's dream of a generalised decoding without verbalisation: beyond language is the decoding machine, the computer, and beyond its promise of a "Pentecostal condition of universal understanding and unity" achieved by means of instantaneous translation, there is the "general cosmic consciousness": a condition of "speechlessness [and signlessness] that could confer a perpetuity of collective harmony and peace" (McLuhan 1964: 84). The sempiternal glance of angels is an asemiotic state of perfect and instant communication. How important, then, can McLuhan's thinking be for the critique of the signifier and schizoanalysis if it actually relies upon a transcendental ground, whose despotic influence, Deleuze and Guattari hoped, they would escape, by establishing a field of immanence? And what about the metaphysical speech/writing opposition that McLuhan reinforces? It alone should suffice to dampen Deleuze and Guattari's spirited support

for this aspect of McLuhan's thought since only the destruction of this old binarism wins their praise. Deleuze and Guattari exercise the interpretive freedom to pick and choose and transform the ideas they borrow without respecting the contexts from whence they came. They make McLuhan radical for their own ends regardless of what in his thought, as I have suggested, may militate against their creative borrowings. It takes a lot of imagination to make *macluhanisme* radical.