



THE PEBBLE

Official Occasional Newsletter

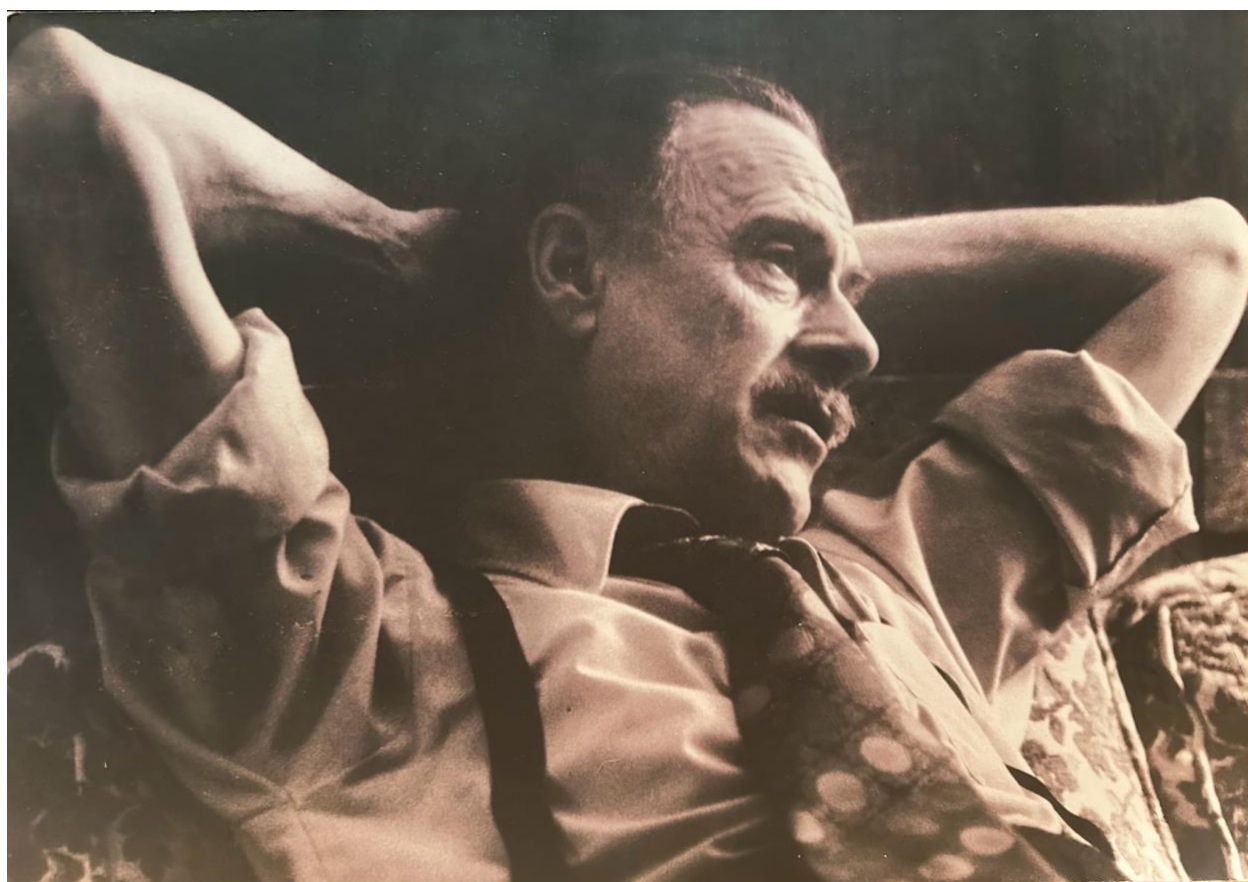
of

The Marshall McLuhan Initiative Inc.

Vol. II, No. 4, Oct. 2026, Whole No. 6

Esther G. Juce & Howard R. (J.) Engel, Editors

Welcome to McLuhan's Salon!



Marshall McLuhan would assume this posture of stretching out his tall frame and folding his hands behind his head just before reflecting on something profound. (This piece came from the collection of MM's daughter Teri McLuhan.)

This compelling photo of Marshall's gaze welcomes the somnambulant entering through the front door of the Marshall McLuhan Centre into his "Salon".

We began our inaugural season of conversation and conviviality at the budding Marshall McLuhan Centre (MMC), 507 Gertrude Avenue in the city of Marshall's early formation, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada on September 16, 2026! We have elected to call these gatherings

“Salons”, fashioned after the famous Monday evening seminars that McLuhan led at the U of T’s Centre for Culture and Technology, Marshall’s beloved Coach House. After the centenary of McLuhan’s birth, this sort of event was dubbed “McLuhan Salons”. This appellation for us is most appropriate, we feel, because as our founding director, Howard R. (J.) Engel, says, it is only at the MMC that we can claim to have “*McLuhan’s Salon*”!



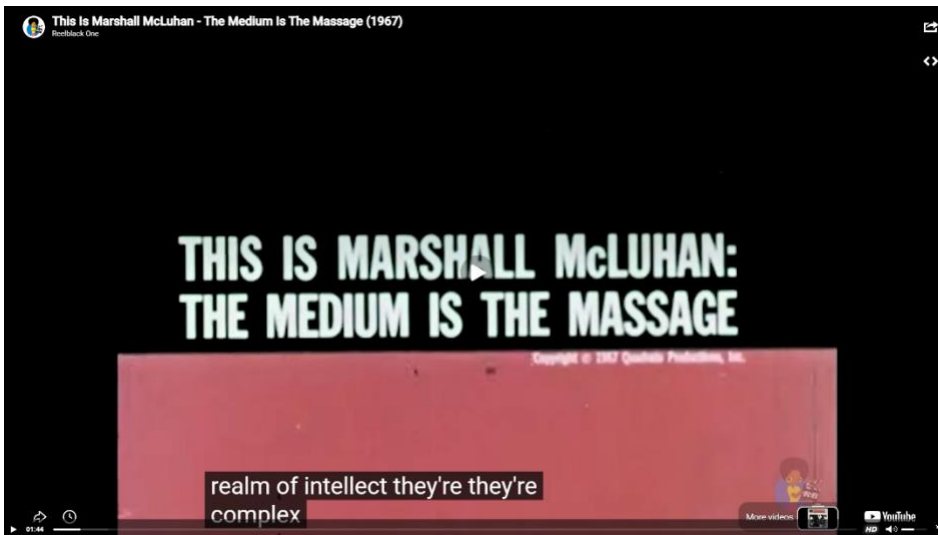
This photo of the Coach House was taken Dr. Jonathan Slater in 2019.

While the Monday Night Seminars were still operational, McLuhan played host at the Coach House to such celebrities as Pierre Trudeau, John Lennon and Yoko Ono, Margaret Atwood, Malcolm Muggeridge, Tom Wolfe, Woody Allen, and Northrup Frye. At the zenith of McLuhan’s fame, few, if any, of his contemporaries and colleagues could garner the attention of such world-renowned figures.

Our first Salon at the Centre began with a small but energetic group. Five people attended in person and four virtually, with one regret. After some cursory introductions, we settled down to watch the program!

Used with the permission of the Estate of Corinne and Marshall McLuhan, we showed the experimental documentary, *This is Marshall McLuhan: The Medium is the Massage* (1967), directed and produced by Ernest Pintoff and Guy Fraumeni. (This is the link for the documentary: <https://marshallmcluhan.com/films/>) The creators of this avant garde film

wanted to echo the book by the same name *The Medium is the Message* (1967), and they succeeded!



There is some overlapping of content between the book and the film, and the two forms are certainly in parallel. The book is a thorough-going pictorial treatise on the effect of various media on us human beings, with a description of the rapidity of change in technology. The film cleverly begins and ends with the lightbulb, the classic icon of

“the idea”. This is perfect for McLuhan, who said, “If you don’t like this idea, I have others.” Even more unique to McLuhan is that in his seminal work, *Understanding Media*, he uses the lightbulb as an example of a medium that illuminates and makes accessible a baseball diamond or the operatory where brain surgery is being done. The lightbulb is the quintessential medium, because it itself has no content, but makes the transmission of the message (and diverse messages) possible.



Both the book and the movie are a testimony of how rapidly technologies, and therefore the world we live in, are changing. These changing media are changing us without us realizing it; we are the somnambulant. However, the film, being a different medium, adds an unstoppable urgency to the message. In the middle of the book, the text reads, “The stars are so big, the Earth is so small. Stay as you are”. On the other hand, these same words are at the film’s

completion, along with the chilling question, “But can we afford to?” as the bulb is being turned off. The silence and darkness say it all.



Photo credit (p.4-6): Anastasiia Kochura, taken at the inaugural Sept. 16/26 session in McLuhan's Salon, 507 Gertrude Ave. On the left, are an original 1967 edition of The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects, and a 2001 reprint from Gingko Press. On the right is yet another massaging medium: a long-playing phonograph record that provides a variation on the theme, The Medium is the Massage. From The Marshall McLuhan Centre Collection, compliments of Michael McLuhan, Executor of the Estate of Corinne and Marshall McLuhan.

The urgency of the movie's message was not lost on the participants. Many crucial observations were made. The first issue that was discussed was a concern about one's privacy in the digital age, where recordings, algorithms, and constant surveillance threaten not only the possibility of having a true democracy, but also jeopardize our personhood and autonomy. For McLuhan, the “global village” was not a quaint and pleasant neighbourly encounter, but the threat of losing our very identities!

This discussion then led to the topic of censorship, how democracy can't exist when content is controlled. One antidote to the explosion of information in our era that was suggested is critical thinking, how one should not believe everything that one encounters. Rather, a person has the choice of discerning and searching for the truth. In fact, the suggestion was made was that we should stop using and endorsing technologies completely! This idea was near and dear to McLuhan's heart. He once stated that he was resolutely against every technology, and that his main objective in learning everything he could about any given technology was to find the “off button”! This quote is from Robert Fulford's interview with McLuhan on the 50th and final episode of *This Hour Has Seven Days* and originally broadcast on May 8, 1966. It may also be found on the MM Estate's web page of links to films.



The question was asked, how do the educators in our midst characterize the educational system today and the typical pupil? One person alluded to the paper written in 1967 by McLuhan and George B. Leonard entitled “The Future of Education: The Class of 1989”. (*Look*, February 21, 23-24. Online Source <http://learningspaces.org/files/mcluhanfs.html>. Here, with new technologies and the obsolescing the “factory” model of education, McLuhan stated that there would be more education happening outside of the classroom than inside. Of course, this is no longer a new idea, being the central thesis of *The City as Classroom: Understanding Language and Media* (1977) by Marshall & Eric McLuhan and Kathryn Hutcheon (now Kawasaki). Someone else responded that some students of today feel because of this phenomenon, students act like they think know more than their teachers! One educator commented that because of the brain-numbing effects of such technologies as social media, the students are not grasping the basics, while another responded that this depended on the teacher. A number of the participants said that in some ways, there is more inclusivity in education today. Now, different learning styles are addressed and accommodated, such as with the modern approach to home schooling. One idea was that perhaps in education, there could be the use of different methods, such as using story-telling and symbols to communicate concepts. Many present at the Salon felt that today’s approach to education has improved. There was certainly a consensus that the current technologies have completely changed the education system and all involved with it.

There was a comment made that technologies have changed so rapidly. The first computers took up entire buildings but could do only rudimentary arithmetic. Then, in the seventies, we had our own personal computer, the “calculator”, which could do square roots, but which could not be used during math exams! Now, there are more cell phones in the world than there are human beings, and we all live and die according to what is on our “personal” devices.

One person made the observation that according to McLuhan, politicians of today, being on the “cool” medium of television, rely more and more on casting agents, scripts, and make-up rather than substance and integrity, and that a certain head of state of today matches that profile perfectly. Likewise, McLuhan describes how the information explosion turns everything we

know, from art and education, to science and culture, into big business. Again, certain modern “tech giants”, who own million-dollar watches and solid gold toilets, came to mind.

One person, a retired designer, said that the style of this unique film genre was characteristic of the period of the 1960s, a time of celebration of discovery, but also a time of the quest for justice.

One of the younger members of the group noted that according to McLuhan, people do not live in the present but rather in the past, i.e. they are looking at the rearview mirror. In McLuhan’s words, “The future of the future is the present,” which is something that terrifies us.

It is a frightening world today, with the constant barrage of useless “information” and the enticements of sycophantic chatbots that draw us away from our physical realities and presence and create a false, “virtual” world, devoid of real human contact. Artificial “intelligence” threatens our livelihoods and falsified media are becoming the norm. What can be done to survive in such a world? Marshall McLuhan and the discipline of Media Ecology, which emerged from his work and that of others, offer a number of life-affirming antidotes. We must maintain the integrity of our communities and the involvement of the youth. We need to remain grounded in our physical reality, using all of our senses. With this discipline, we may be able to awake out of our somnambulance and become aware of our surroundings. Likewise, we have to be aware of our history so that we can learn to understand our personal and societal contexts. Finally, the most essential tool in our armamentarium for our survival is critical thinking, where we don’t accept the superficial message, but probe for meaning, understanding, and truth.

The evening ended with the note that the changes in are world more rapid then ever. If we needed McLuhan’s wisdom in the ‘60s and ‘70s, how much more do we need it in the 21st century!?!

~ *Esther G. Juce*



What's Goin' On Next at McLuhan's Salon, The Marshall McLuhan Centre, 507 Gertrude Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada R3M 0L7?

We are looking forward to our second Salon from 7:00 p.m. to 9:00 p.m. CDT this Wednesday, October 21. The Salon will be featuring the saga of how the bronze bust of Marshall McLuhan finally took its rightful place in the Winnipeg Citizens Hall of Fame in Winnipeg's largest greenspace, the Assiniboine Park. The evening will include the award-winning PowerPoint by The Initiative's Executive Director, Howard R. (J.) Engel, elaborated by him and Co-Treasurer, Esther Juce. Here is the link:

<https://us06web.zoom.us/j/89765532193?pwd=mAOuz1Gh0r1WG2275xCcg8a3rVwalQ.1> .

All are welcome to join virtually by Zoom or come in person. For the latter, there is free parking in the parking lot of Gladstone Elementary School right across from 507 Gertrude Avenue and will be marked by a sign. Refreshments will be available. Hope to see you there!



Photo Credit: Dan Gwozdz on the occasion of the Symposium, Winnipegon Homecoming: Marshall McLuhan in Winnipeg, May 30, 2024

(As a tease, we now have our speaker for the third Salon on November 18, The Initiative's own Dr. Jonathan Slater, Professor Emeritus of SUNY Plattsburgh. Stay tuned! ~eds.)