

**ADVANCED COMPOSITION: REMIXING ACADEMIC WRITING
ENGLISH 251
SPRING 2011**

**MCLUHAN STUDY QUESTIONS, PP. 94-160
(REMEMBER, GOOGLE AND WIKIPEDIA ARE YOUR FRIENDS)**

Notes: Google and Wikipedia are your friends, and the handout “Mosaic Man” helps explain many of the concepts covered in this section of the book.

Page 94-99

- Here on pages 94-95, McLuhan returns to the clash of the old and the new, the transition from print to electronic media and the idea that we are trained to respond to the new (electronic world) through the conditioning of the old (print technology).
- The visual on pp. 94-95 is from Ingmar Bergman’s *The Seventh Seal*. The scene itself is a common medieval motif known as The Dance of the Dead or Danse Macabre. See the Wikipedia entry on The Seventh Seal, paying particular attention to the last paragraph in the “Portrait of the Middle Ages” section and its comment on the 14th century as a “distant mirror” to the 20th century. See also the Wikipedia entry on the Danse Macabre to learn about the relationship between the Danse Macabre and printing.
- McLuhan suggests that anxieties similar to that which print technology created for medieval Europe can be found in the 20th century’s Theater of the Absurd. What is the Theater of the Absurd and what clash of technologies would the Theater of the Absurd be a sign of?
- While pages 94-95 give us a clash of technologies resulting in expressions of fear and anxieties, the coming of print media did not result in the end of Western culture. Figures such as Montaigne became influential because of print technologies. How might we read the quote on page 96 as a response to pages 94-95?
- The woman on page 96 is Charlotte Moorman, a regular collaborator with Nam June Paik, both of whom were members of the Fluxus movement. Look up all three to better understand how the image and quote function together to comment on pages 94-95.

Page 100-101

- Why would McLuhan say that the youth of today are not able to “approach the traditional heritage of mankind through the door of technological awareness?”
- What does it mean to live mythically and in depth? (This is explained to some extent here, but also remember that McLuhan connects the mythic with the acoustic space of tribal society—see, for instance, p. 48.)
- Keeping in mind what McLuhan has said about the amateur and the professional and the organizing principles of acoustic and visual space, how might roles be different than goals?
- In the 1960s, Timothy Leary coined the phrase “Turn on, tune in, drop out.” Look up the phrase in Wikipedia to see what it means, especially Leary’s explanation of it in his 1983 autobiography.
- What are “teach-ins” and what is their relationship to the student counter-culture movement in the 1960s?

Page 104-107

- The Bob Dylan quote is from Dylan’s song “Ballad of a Thin Man.” How is this quote, regardless of the song’s overall meaning, a comment on pages 100-105? And how does the cartoon on page 107 continue this idea?

Page 108-109

- The quote is from James Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake* and the visual is of a 1960s folk rock band. Folk rock was part of the 1960s counter culture movement. In addition to reading the “Folk revival of the 1950s in Britain and America” section of the Folk Music entry in Wikipedia, you may want to rewatch the “McLuhan’s Wake” video, starting at 3:00 minutes.

Pages 110-115

- On pages 110-11, McLuhan reminds us of the characteristics of acoustic space before moving to his discussion of Homer and Plato on pages 113-14. See the section on Preface to Plato in the Wikipedia entry on Eric A. Havelock. See also my discussion of mythos and logos beginning in the 5th paragraph of the post “On the Unified Nature of English Studies”: <http://www.jpwalter.com/machina/?p=725>.

Page 116-118

- How might pages 116-119 be a discussion of the effects of the shift from acoustic to visual space, then the shift from alphabetic to print media within visual space; and then the shift from visual space back to acoustic space with electronic media?

Page 119

- John Cage, like Charlotte Moorman and Nam June Paik was a member of the Fluxus movement. See the Wikipedia entry on him, especially the introduction and sections 1.4, 1.5, and 2.2.

Pages 120-121

- Here we have a passage and discussion of Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*. Clearly, Joyce is playing with language, particularly the difference between aural and visual representation. For instance, the “book of kills” is actually the *Book of Kells*.

Page 122-123

- See the Wikipedia entry on copyright, section 4: History.

Page 132-37

- What has McLuhan already told us about art and artists?
- On page 68, McLuhan comments that we’ve learned to shape our entire environment as “a work of art, as a teaching machine designed to maximize perception and to make everyday a learning process of discovery.” How does the idea that “art is anything you can get away with” related to this?
- What do the three quotes on page 137 imply out our modern western notions of art?
- What does it mean for the “establishment” to embrace the “anti-environmental lads,” the Beatles? Why has the Cavern Club become a museum?

Page 138-39

- Keeping in mind McLuhan’s definition of hot and cold media, what is the difference between a cold war and a hot war? In 1967, the United States was involved in a war with the Soviet Union and with Vietnam. Which would McLuhan call a hot war and which a cold war?

Page 140-41

- What kind of war would you not see soldiers walking through the woods?

Page 142

- What is the difference between dialogue and propaganda?
- Why might McLuhan say that environments engage in propaganda?

Pages 143-45

- On page 119, we find John Cage, a member of the Fluxus movement, making reference to the I-Ching. On page 125, McLuhan suggests that the “inwardness” of television creates a “sort of reverse perspective which has much in common with Oriental art.” Now, here we have another quote from James Joyce, this time telling us that “The west shall shake the east awake...” a quote repeated at the end of page 145 while also telling us that “Electric circuitry is Orientalizing the West.” Who is shaking who awake?
- With this in mind, what do you make of the Variety Magazine claims about the power of Western movies on Asia? Is this an issue of either/or? Or are both cultures influencing each other? Is this part of what it means to be in a global village?
- How might the passage from Laotze be a representation of a “reverse perspective”?

Page 146-47

- How has quantum mechanics overthrown the Newtonian universe? (Hint: look up both “clockwork universe” and “uncertainty principle” in Wikipedia.)
- According to McLuhan (a devout Catholic), what does Nietzsche mean when he said, “God is dead.”
- According to McLuhan, why is it important for us to realize that the Newtonian universe is “dead”?
- What might the Meister Eckhardt quote have to do with the discussion on page 146?

Page 148-49

- What is the function of these pages?

Pages 150-51

- The quote McLuhan offers us on these pages is from Poe’s story “The Descent into the Maelstrom” and the rest of the text is commentary on it. Read the Wikipedia summary of “The Descent into the Maelstrom” and McLuhan’s Preface to *The Mechanical Bride* (available from the Handouts page of the course web site), and then discuss how the image of the surfing business man might be a representation of this “possible stratagem” McLuhan mentions.

Page 152-55

- What might be the point of the blank faces? Who might they represent? And what connection do they have to the passage from *Alice’s Adventures Underground*?
- Should we regard these pages as another transition? If so, what comes next?

Page 156-57

- What is the function of these pages? What are they doing?

Page 160

- Why might McLuhan end the book with this particular A.N. Whitehead quote? (Hint: Think about this quote in relationship with page 25.)