

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

**MCLUHAN STUDY QUESTIONS, PP. 68-93**

(REMEMBER, GOOGLE AND WIKIPEDIA ARE YOUR FRIENDS)

**Page 68-69**

- What has McLuhan already said about art?
- What might McLuhan mean by “arranging the entire human environment as a work of art, as a teaching machine designed to maximize perception” so that we might “make everyday learning a process of discovery”?
- In comparing the application of such knowledge learned from the above process to that of a thermostat, McLuhan is clearly making an analogy, imagining sensory perception as functioning as a thermostat controlling a room. So, the first thing you want to ask is: how does a thermostat work?
- Within the context of the paragraph before it and after it, what insight is McLuhan trying to provide through the joke, the “means of humor” (10) in the second paragraph?
- Keep in mind the discussion of figure/ground in the Old Messengers/New Media web site, why might McLuhan state that environments (the ground) are invisible active processes?
- Why does McLuhan state that artists are anti-environmental? Does he mean they like to pollute? Or does he mean something else?
- Might we say that the “habit of regarding all phenomena from a fixed point of view” is an unconscious process because it is part of the environment created by print?
- Why does McLuhan make the distinction between the public and the mass? How might the effects of print and electronic technologies create “the public” on the one hand a “the mass” on the other?
- According to McLuhan, what kind of environment is best suited to “multiple models of exploration”?
- How are the images on page 69 related the text on these two pages? What earlier parts of the book do they relate to?

**Page 70**

- Looking back at page 63, how might we regard the cartoon on page 70 as an anti-environmental statement?

**Page 71-73**

- What is Jeffersonian Democracy? (Hint: look it up in Wikipedia.)
- Based upon the Wikipedia article on “Jeffersonian Democracy,” how might the railroad be a technology to support those ends?
- In the second paragraph, McLuhan clearly states that one consequence of Jeffersonian Democracy and the railroad is the suburban household’s lawnmower. Can you connect the dots between the two as I have to explain how the car gave rise to Walmart? (See HistoryNet.com’s “How Railroads took the ‘Wild’ out of the West,” particularly page 4.)
- Why does McLuhan envision cities of the future as not consisting of “the huge hunk of concentrated real estate”? Is he right?
- What is Williamsburg? And why does he believe future societies will reconstruct railroad era cities like “so-many Williamsburgs”?
- Page 73 is a juxtaposition of two images. What do they represent individually and how is this juxtaposition a commentary on page 72?

**Page 74-75**

- What was the TV show Bonanza?
- Why is there a stage coach in the mirror and how does it comment upon the text?

**Pages 76-79**

- “When information is brushed against information” is a clear restatement of the idea of the method of inquiry McLuhan discusses on page 10. How might this be connected to the “perennial quest for involvement, fill-in”?

- How might the images on pages 77 and 78 reflect or symbolize this idea?
- To better understand the passage on page 79, scroll down to the notes section of <http://nickm.com/poems/> where Moffit discusses the poem “Poem.”

#### **Page 80-81**

- We’ve encountered this theme a number of times now. What, however, does the image remind you of? For me, it invokes ideas first encountered in pages 6-9.

#### **Page 82-87**

- How might these pages be an elaboration of pages 80-81?
- How does the design of pages 82-87 reinforce the ideas expressed in this passage?
- As explained on pages 86-87, the image is of Philadelphia’s Fairmount Water Works. What is significant about the design of the water works? And how is this an example of imposing the old upon the new?

#### **Pages 88-89**

- Keeping in mind that McLuhan has already stated that art is anti-environmental, it’s not surprising to see both poets and artists grouped together. Why, however, are sleuths included?
- Why does McLuhan say that all three are antisocial? How does being antisocial in this sense relate to being anti-environmental?
- What is the story of “The Emperor’s New Clothes”?
- Why is it significant that it is a child who sees that the emperor’s “new clothes” aren’t clothes at all?

#### **Page 90-91**

- What do we make of this image? How might it be related to the discussions of environments/anti-environments, visible/invisible, social/antisocial discussion on pages 82-89?

#### **Page 92-93**

- All these names in the first paragraph are characters played by W.C. Fields. (See <http://tinyurl.com/y6ewrw7> as well as Wikipedia.) How might McLuhan be using Fields as “humor as a system of communication,” as a “probe of our environment”?
- McLuhan equates the professional with the environmental and amateurism with the anti-environmental. Why? How does this relate to the story of “The Emperor’s New Clothes” on pages 88-89?
- Why does McLuhan discuss Michael Faraday in this passage? And why does he include the quote by J. Robert Oppenheimer?