

McLuhan: The Musical
Book by Frank Moher
Music and Lyrics by Gerald Reid

Act One

Scene 1:

(A stage with just a podium on it.)

At the appointed hour, AN ABSENT-MINDED PROFESSOR arrives and moves to the podium. House lights remain on.)

ABSENT-MINDED PROF

Good evening, members of the Faculty Association.

In 1964, there appeared a book called "Understanding . . . uh . . . "Understanding . . . what? . . . Media, yes, thankyou. "Understanding Media", which reshaped our comprehension of the world around us, and in particular of the role which the, well, media play within it. It was written by a to-that-point largely unknown professor of English from the University of Toronto. But he did not remain unknown for long. In the years since, he has become celebrated around the world, appeared on the cover of countless magazines, and made us aware that, truly, we live in a "global village". You may even have seen his recent appearance in the very amusing film, "Annie . . . uhh . . . "Annie . . . Hall!, yes, that's right, "Annie Hall". Ladies and gentleman, I give you, a great Canadian, Dr. Marshall McLuhan.

(McLUHAN enters, to applause, moves to the podium.)

McLUHAN

Good evening. I wonder if you have heard the one about the teacher who asked his class: "What does this century owe to Thomas Edison?" To which a student replied: "If it weren't for Edison, we'd have to watch TV by candlelight."

(He waits for a laugh. There isn't one.)

My topic tonight is --

(Chord. McLUHAN reacts as if he's just heard something strange.)

Is --

(Chord. McLUHAN is transfixed.)

Oh my.

(Music, sound. Houselights fade. The podium becomes a hospital bed, in which McLUHAN lies almost lifeless. Silence. Is he dead? No. He begins to sing.)

Song: I See Something Small

McLUHAN: I see something small
A fly on the wall
A kid with a ball
I wish that I could get up and walk
down the hall.
(The head of a child peers over the edge of the bed. It is the very young MARSHALL.)

MARSHALL: Hey Mister McLuhan! Whatcha doin' in
here?
Aren't you sposed to write another
book for next year?
Something more about the information
age . . .
Something more about the global
village . . .

Hey Mister McLuhan you are famous BUT
Do you remember me? Remember me?
I am just the kid you were that wasn't
grown up
Back in nineteen fifteen.

McLUHAN: In nineteen fifteen!

MARSHALL: Do you remember standing in Winnipeg
And Dad got mad cause you refused to
watch the parade?
(We hear martial parade music, echoing the melody of the song. It grows louder.
MARSHALL, aged four, is standing now with his father, HERBERT, watching the parade. The bedridden McLUHAN has been wheeled off by NURSES. Music returns to main theme.)

Look up at my Dad
He's wearing his hat
But just beyond that

I see the most amazing thing I've ever

looked at
 (Projection of image behind: looking up at
 Dad, hat, and mostly sky and hundreds of
 overhead telephone lines.)

The sky -- I've never noticed it
 before -- is defined
 By what appears to be a lot of
 telephone lines
 Power lines, maybe a thousand wires
 Stretching right across the whole
 entire

World. Boy, it's really something I am
 truly amazed
 There's an issue here, that should be
 raised
 I don't know what to say, I better
 tell someone
 Excuse me, Dad?

HERBERT:
 MARSHALL:

Yes, Son?
 I see something above your head
 I'll bet you'll never guess: it's a
 spider web!
 I'll bet the spider that made that
 web
 Is the very same spider that's under
 my bed!

HERBERT:

Oh no, son, I'm sure that spider's dead
 And those are wires.

MARSHALL:
 HERBERT:

But what do they mean?
 They don't mean a thing
 Just watch the parade

MARSHALL:

But I don't wanna watch, it's a stupid
 parade

What I wanna know is why there's
 so many wires
 And how come there's so many roads
 and so many tires?

HERBERT:
 MARSHALL:

I don't know. It's just the way it is.
 But what I wanna know is what the
 reason is!
 (Music, tempo change. ELSIE enters, sweeps
 MARSHALL away.)

ELSIE

I'll tell you, Herbert Marshall!

MARSHALL

Mom!

ELSIE

Just come with me!

(Sings:)

If you want to know where wires go and
trains disappear
And you need to know what roads are for
and why it's all here
And you wonder why tomorrow's always
one day away
But you think that on the whole it may
be better that way . . .

Well, stick with me, my darling, the
future is a-borning
It's going to be a gay old time!
The world is in a hurry, but you don't
have to worry
Tomorrow is a friend of mine.
We'll be getting jollies riding round
on trollies
Faster than the speed of sound
And even though there's snow now, by
then we'll have the know-how
To make it summer all year round!

Oh, there's lots of things to celebrate
'bout nineteen-fifteen
We have photographic cameras and
washing machines
And the little war in Europe will be
over by Spring
But there is so much more that the
future will bring!

We'll be zipping round in cars that can
be found in
The reaches of the atmosphere!
We'll have telepathic books and there
won't be any crooks and
It isn't far from there to here.
Oh, stick with me, my darling, the

future is a-borning
 It's going to be a gay old time!
 The world is in a hurry, but you don't
 have to worry
 Tomorrow is a friend of -- !
 (Freeze.)

MARSHALL

Mom?

(Music returns to previous tune.
 ELSIE disappears. HERBERT reappears,
 looking skyward. Sings:)

HERBERT: I don't know why there's all these wires
 Telephones and roads, and goddamn tires!
 It's just the way the world wants to be ...

MARSHALL: WHY?

HERBERT: DON'T ASK ME!

(MARSHALL looks again to the sky.)

MARSHALL: I think it's a web
 Or maybe a net
 Or maybe it's art
 Or maybe a fence
 Or maybe a map!

Scene 2:

(An ACTOR appears.)

ACTOR

Master Herbert Marshall McLuhan has his first encounter
 with perspective.

(MARSHALL and his father, HERBERT, sit
 on a knoll overlooking a field. In the
 distance is a horse and carriage on a
 hill, trees, the setting sun, other
 items, all represented by little
 cardboard cutouts.)

MARSHALL

If you-really-could-dig-to-China-which-I-know-you-can't-
 but-if-you-could-what-would-keep-you-from-falling-up- into-
 the-sky-when-you-got-there-since-you'd-be-upside- down-
 wouldn't-you?-or-would-you-have-to-turn-around?

HERBERT

I'm . . . not really sure, son.

MARSHALL

You'd-probably-have-to-turn-around-of-course-you- wouldn't-
come-out-in-China-anyway-would-you?-not-from-
here-you'd-come-out-in-bottom-of-the-Indian-Ocean-
which-of-course-raises-the-question-would-that-cause-
a-flood-in-Winnipeg?

(Pause. HERBERT regards his son
quizzically.)

HERBERT

There are some things it just isn't given us to know,
Marshall.

MARSHALL

I don't think it would.

HERBERT

Which is why I sell life insurance, isn't it? Because for
all the things you can't count on . . . you can always
count on a good policy.

(Pause. They sit staring at the view.)

MARSHALL

Oh look, Papa. Look at that little horse over there.

HERBERT

What little horse?

MARSHALL

That little horse. Over there. It's about three inches
tall.

HERBERT

Oh-ho, no it's not, son. That's a full-grown horse.

MARSHALL

No it's not. It's about three inches tall. And so's that
carriage. And that tree, you could pick it up in your hand.

HERBERT

Oh no, y'see son, that's because those things are in the distance. They're far away. If they were right here, you'd see that they're big.

MARSHALL

No they're not.

HERBERT

Yes they are. Trust me.

(Pause. MARSHALL gets up, walks to the horse and picks it up. Shows it to his father, smiles. Picks up the carriage, the tree, the hill, the sun, any other items of scenery, until he has quite an armful. He walks back to his father and dumps the load at HERBERT's feet. HERBERT regards the items. Pause.)

HERBERT

You're different than other boys, son. I think that's a good thing.

(He pats MARSHALL on the head, goes. MARSHALL kneels and starts to play with his new toys.)

Interlude:

(MARSHALL isolated in light, playing with his toys. McLUHAN appears, 50ish, in Harris tweed suit, tie, natty hat.)

McLUHAN

Come on, hurry up, hurry up. I haven't got forever, you know.

MARSHALL

I have.

(He goes back to playing.)

Scene 3:

ACTOR

Master Herbert Marshall McLuhan, having read "Ivanhoe",
imagines himself in the leading role.

(Light, sound.)

MARSHALL

(Holding a toy sword.)

Rising, he mounts his steed as the first rays of dawn glint
off the cold steel of his armour. Erect, he rides out to
meet the enemy!

He rides, the hoofbeats of the massive beast thrumming
below him, higher, ever higher, o'er brook and dale,
trouncing brook, smashing dale, until --

ELSIE

Marshall! Herbert Marshall, it's time for me to go.

(ELSIE enters dressed for travel.

MARSHALL's reverie disappears.)

Now Marshall. This time on my tour I shall be reciting
excerpts from the work of Miss Dickinson and Mr. Donne. As
well as "Antony and Cleopatra" -- you remember "Antony and
Cleopatra", don't you?

MARSHALL

With the snake.

ELSIE

Asp.

MARSHALL

Asp.

ELSIE

That's right. But before I go, I want to make sure you
haven't forgotten what I've taught you. What is the first
rule of good elocution?

MARSHALL

(Straightening up.)

Straight carriage.

ELSIE

The second?

MARSHALL

Breathe.

ELSIE

Excellent. And the third?

MARSHALL

(Articulating.)

Nice round vowel sounds.

ELSIE

Good! Keep this up and you'll soon be able to go on my tours with me.

(She takes MARSHALL onto her knee.)

Ohhhhhhh Marshall. If it were not for these trips away, I do not think that I could survive in this -- place. But you know that I shall miss you. And you know I'll be back soon?

MARSHALL

How . . . soon?

ELSIE

Two short weeks. Two too short weeks.

(The MUSICIAN honks a horn.)

Oh! There's my car! Be a good boy for your father, Marshall, and help with Maurice. Goodbye!

Goodbye . . . !

(ELSIE goes. MARSHALL watches her go.)

MARSHALL

Goodbye, Mom.

ACTOR

Master McLuhan, having recently read "Ivanhoe", reimagines it now on the great plains of Canada.

Song: Ivanhoe

MARSHALL: While I was reading Ivanhoe
 I fell asleep and dreamed
 I dreamed my Mother came upon
 A place she'd never been
 A town that was so cold and grey
 The people had grown mean
 She came to bring them loveliness
 And show them worlds unseen.

Oh Mother do not set your foot
 Upon that town-hall stage
 These people will not hear your words
 So beautiful and sage
 But will in vengeance cast them off
 Like seeds on stony ground
 Beware the winds of righteousness
 Brewing all around.

(CHORUS:)

Oh how I wish that I was there and I was
 Ivanhoe
 Oh I would ride a valiant steed and on him
 go
 Thundering across the field with my jousting
 pole
 To save you
 From all the morons who have no taste
 From all the ignorant and two-faced
 All those who cannot appreciate
 What's beautiful and true.
 Oh in my dream my mother read
 From Milton and Shakespeare
 And when the asp was at her breast
 And she was acting there
 The crowd began to laugh and jeer
 And shout out awful names
 My Mother saw their faces then
 And they were all the same.

(CHORUS:)

Oh how I wish that I was there and I was
 Ivanhoe
 Oh I would ride a valiant steed and on him
 go
 Thundering across the field with my jousting
 pole
 To save you
 From all the morons who have no taste
 From all the ignorant and two-faced
 All those who cannot appreciate
 What's beautiful and true.

(MARSHALL finishes triumphantly, but a
 little melancholy, having vanquished

all his Mother's imaginary foes. But
still she is not there.)

Scene 4:

ACTOR

Master Marshall McLuhan encounters the media for the first
time.

(MARSHALL plays with a crystal radio
set. He tunes it -- we hear faint
voices, music, fade in and out.)

RADIO

In other news from Tinseltown . . . became the first woman
to swim the English Channel and . . . swanee, how I love ya
how I love ya . . . I'd like to send out a big kiss to all
my fans out there!

(When a signal is picked up, the
lights on stage dim -- when
MARSHALL tunes past it, they
brighten again.)

In half-light, A CITYSLICKER appears --
portrayed by a black light puppet. As
yet, we can still see the handlers.)

CITYSLICKER

Hey kid . . . stop right there.

Just a little more to the right . . .

(MARSHALL tunes the radio. The lights
brighten.)

No no . . . other way . . .

(MARSHALL tunes the radio. The lights
dim completely, so that now we see the
puppet in black-light only.)

Perfect! Leave it right there.

(MARSHALL reappears, now also
represented by a black light puppet.)

MARSHALL

Where -- are we?

CITYSLICKER

Everywhere! Anywhere you wanna be! Did you know the radio signals leaving the earth right now will reach the nearest galaxy --

(The CITYSLICKER rockets into the air and is surrounded by glittering silver stars.)

-- in 15,000 years?

Come onnnnnnn up.

MARSHALL

Can I?

CITYSLICKER

Yer pure energy now, bub. A droplet in the electronic sea.

(MARSHALL flies up to join the CITYSLICKER.)

You can go anywhere you want.

(The CITYSLICKER flies across the stage. A jungle tree appears. We hear native tom-toms. TARZAN swings by. A LION appears and roars at MARSHALL, startling him.)

See?

Or bring anyplace you want -- to you. Where do you live?

MARSHALL

Winn --

CITYSLICKER

Nowheresville! Right? That's what I thought. Not anymore.

(Famous landmarks dance by -- Empire State Building, Leaning Tower of Pisa, Eiffel Tower.)

New York, Italy, Paris, France! Just turn the dial -- crystal voodoo! -- yer there! Or who do you wanna meet? Will Rogers? Mackenzie King?

(These figures parade past.)

How 'bout Mary Pickford, she's from Nowheresville too.

(Mary Pickford sashays by.)

Just one little warning.

MARSHALL

(Dazzled by all he sees.)

What's that?

CITYSLICKER

Never trust technology.

(Stage lights snap back on. The CITYSLICKER disappears. The MARSHALL puppet is left suspended in the air. It plummets to the ground, hits the floor, limp, lifeless. McLUHAN approaches. Picks up the puppet, manipulates it for a moment. Regards it with a frown.)

McLUHAN

Pathetic.

(He dumps it in a trap in the stage floor.)

Scene 5:

ACTOR

Mister Marshall McLuhan, adolescent, observes the view.

(A tree rises out of the trap, with MARSHALL [the real one] atop it. He stares rapturously into the distance.

HERBERT enters.)

HERBERT

Whatcha doing, son?

MARSHALL

I'm trying to see Chicago, Father.

HERBERT

Oh-ho, no, ya can't do that son, y'see, because --

(Pause.)

Whaddaya see?

MARSHALL

I see streets rumbling with trucks as big as houses. I see a lake as wide as the Sargasso Sea. And Sinclair Lewis, downing a steak and whiskey in a tavern with mirrors on the wall.

(He turns.)

And in Hong Kong . . . they're just going to sleep. Or maybe they're just getting up. And the junks float like cherry blossoms in the harbour. And British colonels are sitting down to tea with their wives.

(He turns.)

And in London! . . . Virginia Woolf has just given Leonard a big kiss. Debate rages like sheet lightning at Speaker's Corner. And T.S. Eliot has written the first word in the first line of a new poem.

(Pause.)

HERBERT

You see all that, do you?

MARSHALL

And more.

HERBERT

Well, it's quite a world, Marshall. No doubt about it. But keep in mind, son. There's no place more beautiful than this.

I'll say goodnight to you now.

MARSHALL

Goodnight, Dad.

HERBERT

If you're going to stay up there much longer, let me know, and I'll send you up some clothes.

(HERBERT goes. MARSHALL stands for a moment more, pondering.)

ACTOR

Mister Marshall McLuhan comes to a decision.

MARSHALL

Daisyyyyyyy!

(The tree descends. DAISY, Marshall's girlfriend appears, sitting on a bench. He alights and hurries to her.)

Daisy. I've come to a conclusion.

DAISY

Scratch my back, would you Marshall? There's a spot I can't reach.

(MARSHALL sits and scratches that part of her back exposed by her sundress.)

MARSHALL

Now. I know you and I have been courting for some time. And I know you and I have discussed the prospect of marriage. However, I have realized we can't get married, Daisy, because -- I'm totally wrong for you and besides, I'm going to have to leave.

DAISY

That's good.

MARSHALL

You don't mind if I leave?

DAISY

No, the scratching, I mean. That's enough.

MARSHALL

The reasons that I'm totally wrong for you are, a) I'm committed to a life of the mind, Daisy, and you are -- not. B) I'll be devoting a lot of time to reading from here on in, which would condemn you to a lifetime of neglect. And C) --

DAISY

(Taking her hair down.)

Hold my bobby pins, would you Marshall? I don't have any pockets in this dress.

Well, I'm sorry you have to leave. Where are you going?

MARSHALL

I'm -- not sure yet.

DAISY

Well, bon voyage. Still, I can't believe it's what you really want, somehow. I mean, this is your home.

(She drapes herself across his lap.)

Traces her hands down one of her legs.)

The great, endless expanses of the Northern Shield . . .
the rich, yielding loam of the Red River -- valley . . .
the coulees and rolling landscape of the great northern
plains . . . all the way to the breathtaking -- thrust --
of the Rockies . . .

(This has had its intended effect on
MARSHALL.)

You wouldn't want to leave all that, would you?

MARSHALL

On second thought, no.

DAISY

(Sitting up briskly.)

You can give me my bobby pins back now. I told Mother I'd help her roll dough.

(She goes. MARSHALL sits for a moment, not sure what happened. Then he starts to go off after Daisy.)

T.S. ELIOT appears, in a tux.)

T.S. ELIOT

Excuse me.

(MARSHALL stops, turns.)

One moment of your time. I couldn't help overhearing. I thought perhaps I ought to . . . intervene.

Tom Eliot, how de do.

MARSHALL

Tom Eliot? As in --

T.S. ELIOT

T.S., yes. "I grow old, I grow old" and all that nonsense. "I shall wear the cuffs of my trousers rolled." Honestly. The things you become famous for in this silly old world.

You won't be staying here, of course.

MARSHALL

I have to. I just told Daisy I'd --

T.S. ELIOT

Yes, well I once wanted to be a steamboat captain in St. Louis, but that didn't happen either, did it? No no no. You're much too precious to waste on a place like this.

Song: Don't You Wanna Be Famous?

ELIOT: Don't you want to be famous
 Don't you want to be great
 Don't you wanna be an answer on a multiple
 choice exam in grade eight
 Don't you wanna be someone
 When you walk in
 That everyone stops and gawks and points and
 gasps "That's him!"

Don't you wanna be touched
 By clamouring hands
 Don't you wanna control the lives and minds
 of all your fans
 Or do you wanna be nothing
 Just an absolute zip
 Just a little nobody, no power, no money, no
 nothing
 That's it.

Well if you wanna be great
 And nothing less
 Then you better not stray or linger along
 The road to success
 You gotta use your friends
 In a really nice way
 And you gotta take credit if you thought it
 or you said it
 And you do it each day.
 (Vamp under.)

T.S. ELIOT

Now Marshall, I'd like to introduce you to Mr. Ezra Pound,
 fellow poet and refugee from the sticks.

POUND

Hiya kid.

T.S. ELIOT

And Mr. F. Scott Fitzgerald, a case study in why, once you
 leave, you must never go back.

FITZGERALD

(Drunk.)

Fucking Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.

Or Frank Moher?
 (They break into a charleston.)

Oh, up on your toes
 Down on your knees
 Let's all gain some notoriety
 Let's all join the Great Fraternity

FITZGERALD:
 Zelda says the Great Sorority

ALL:
 Let's all do the Notoriety Rag!

Interlude:

(MARSHALL spotlit. McLUHAN appears.)

McLUHAN
 I'm still waiting.

MARSHALL
 I know. I think I'm ready now.

Scene 6:

ACTOR
 Mister Marshall McLuhan prepares to leave for Cambridge.
 (MARSHALL and HERBERT. HERBERT, an
 amateur phrenologist, feels around on
 MARSHALL's skull.)

HERBERT
 You will meet a tall dark gentleman. No wait, maybe it's a
 woman. No, I think it's a dog.

MARSHALL
 I don't think phrenology can be used to predict the future,
 Dad.

HERBERT
 It's working for me so far.

MARSHALL

When did you start?

HERBERT

Just today.

(He feels around some more.)

You will live near a train station. Birds will come to roost on your window sills. You will begin to wear suspenders. Bread will retail for two quid a loaf.

That's amazing! I'm not even sure what a quid is!

MARSHALL

I'll let you know.

HERBERT

You're going to do just fine at Cambridge, Marshall.

MARSHALL

Thanks, Dad.

HERBERT

Son.

(They shake hands.)

Scene 7:

(MARSHALL performs "Marshall's March", a funny little hop-skip movement that will mark major progressions in his life; acoustic sound/music under. He arrives at Centre stage, waits expectantly.)

MARSHALL

I'm here!

(He is instantly surrounded by CAMBRIDGE BOYS, with posh accents.)

C.B. 1

Here?

C.B. 2

He's here!

C.B. 3
Oh my god, it's him!

C.B. 1
Is it really him?

C.B. 2
It's really him.

C.B. 3
Oh my god, he's here!

C.B. 1
He's really, really here.
(MARSHALL is quite pleased at this reception. It is not, however, entirely genuine.)

C.B. 2
McLuhan! We're awfully pleased to have you here! All the way from -- where is it? --
(C.B. 3 whispers in his ear.)
Canader, yes.
(The others snicker.)

MARSHALL
Well, gosh! They told me I'd fit in here and -- I guess I do!

C.B. 2
You do, McLuhan.

C.B. 3
You really, really do. And just to prove it, we'd like to challenge you to a small --
(He produces a rowing paddle. Dark musical chord. His demeanour suddenly becomes grim.)
-- race.

MARSHALL
Race?

C.B. 1
Yes. Race, McLuhan.

C.B. 2

Think of it as your -- first lesson.

(Music under. The C.B.s move to get into rowing position. McLUHAN appears. Perhaps he brings Marshall's scull with him, perhaps it just glides on.)

MARSHALL

Um. I seem to be entered in some sort of competition.

McLUHAN

You can say that again.

(He helps MARSHALL into his boat.)

Just remember, they're here because of their background. You're here despite it.

MARSHALL

(To the C.B.s)

Hold on a minute! Three men against one. Isn't that a little unfair?

C.B. 3

It's our empire, McLuhan! We make up the rules!

Song: Rower's Song

C.B.1: Hey McLuhan
 I know you're doing
 Your level best to simply keep up with us
 Physically
 But mentally
 It's obvious you need lots more practice.

Let us test your knowledge
 Do you belong in college?

MARSHALL: Talley-ho, my fine maties
 Roll out your questions boys
 You can fire 'em as you please
 It's nothing more than smoke and noise
 (He puts on an eyepatch.)
 On the academic seas.

C.B.1: Okay ask him
 C.B.2: Here's a good one
 Hey McLuhan, what's the definition
 Of Hapax Legomenon?

C.B.1: He won't know that it's something Latin.

MARSHALL: Let's see . . .

C.B.s Hapax Legomenon!
(Boom of cannon.)

MARSHALL: Is a reference only made once!
(Splash.)

MARSHALL: 'Twas a long haul off my beam, boys,
Half-tamped and poorly aimed
Better fire something mean
If you ever plan to sink or maim
Pirate McLuhan
At his roguish game.
(Sits down and hoists a skull and
crossbones.)

C.B.1: I don't believe it.

C.B.2: Let me see it.

C.B.3: Is that actually what it means?

C.B.1: It is.

Throw the book out.

C.B.2: Keep a look out
While I sink him with some history.

Who was William Random?
(Boom of cannon.)

MARSHALL: The fourth Lord Mayor of London.
(Splash.)

MARSHALL: Did you hear the question crack?
They tried to stove me in
But it's just a simple fact
And it's hankies to the wind
Now the gale's at my back
They'll never catch McLuhan.
(Puts up a tiny sail.)

C.B.3: Okay I've got one
Hey McLuhan . . .

MARSHALL: I suggest you make a small adjustment
Fairly soon now
Before your port bow
Is demolished by that bridge abutment!

C.B.s: Good god. Hard to starboard!

Oars up! Oh my good Lord!
 (McLUHAN begins jiggling a hornpipe on the
 f'ocsle. Sound of cannon. A bun barely
 misses his head. McLUHAN sits back down and
 resumes rowing.)

C.B.2: We barely missed it
 C.B.1: You bloody idiot!
 I can't believe the moron's got ahead
 By a whole length
 C.B.3: Let's put all our strength
 Into rowing try and concentrate.

MARSHALL: Well come on boys
 Where's the question?
 Have you used up all your ammunition?
 C.B.2: Who's the girl
 With the blonde hair
 At St. Michael's. Studies rhetoricians?

MARSHALL: She's asked me to dinner.
 (Boom. Pause.)
 C.B.s: That's it. You're the winner.
 (Crash. They begin to sink.)

MARSHALL: Tally-ho, my fine maties
 No one will gun me down
 On the academic seas
 I'll sail the Cap and Gown
 Right up the River Cam
 And plunder their degree.

And there's no one can catch me
 'Cause I'm a privateer
 On the academic sea
 And though they know I'm here
 (Runs up the Union Jack.)
 They can't find me
 'Cause I fly the Jack
 And eat my scones
 and tea!
 (When the song is done, the C.B.s
 evacuate the boat.)

C.B. 1

We won't forget this, McLuhan!

C.B. 2

You'll be hearing from us!

C.B. 3

Cambridge men have long memories!

(They are off.)

MARSHALL

I seem to have offended them.

McLUHAN

Not to worry. Wait till they meet Lord Beaverbrook.

So! You've done it!

MARSHALL

I have, haven't I?

McLUHAN

Congratulations, Marshall. You've nearly become -- me!

(Drum roll.)

ACTOR

And now! The amazing! Trans-for-mation!

(Magic show music. A CHARMING ASSISTANT rolls on a large crate. She/he proceeds to shackle McLUHAN'S hands and feet, while ANOTHER CHARMING ASSISTANT drapes a graduation robe over MARSHALL and plunks a mortar board on his head. They perform the classic "Transformation" illusion. McLUHAN, shackled, is placed in the crate, which is then bound around with chains. MARSHALL, not sure what's going on, but excited, climbs atop it. He waves goodbye as he draws a large curtain up in front of himself. Presto chango! When the curtain is lowered again, McLUHAN is in his place! He sings:)

Song: Check Me Out

McLUHAN: Oh I'm a brand new man!
She boppa digi-data
big name brand
super duper concentrated

new improved
 I got the formula
 to shine clean through
 I'm not your normal ya
 can count on me
 to not shrink or yellow
 oh I'm guaranteed
 won't scratch your mell-I mean

I'll chop or dice
 Throw out your mop
 oh I can slim your thighs
 Snap crackle pop
 you know I'm extra strength
 won't leak or frazzle
 Lemme clean your sink
 Bring out the dazzle
 I'll get out the worst
 Fresher and softer
 I can quench your thirst
 Free bonus offer!

(CHORUS:)

Oh check me out
 I am the product
 That you've heard about
 But never bought it
 Cause it sounds too good
 Good to be true
 Ya gotta check me out
 She boppa doo.

I'm everything they say
 All that and more
 So lemme make your day
 Go down to the store
 Ask 'em to demonstrate
 What I'm about
 You'll have to concentrate
 'Cause now I'm devout
 I've got the secret thing
 Now I've been filled up
 I am long lasting
 With no sticky build-up.

(CHORUS:)

Oh check me out
 I am the product
 That you've heard about
 But never bought it
 Cause it sounds too good
 Good to be true
 Ya gotta check me out
 She boppa doo.

Scene 8:

ACTOR

Professor Marshall McLuhan lectures to the English 202 class at the University of Wisconsin, Green Bay. A scene in a realistic mode.

ACTOR

It's about time.

(Houselights rise. McLUHAN arrives before a large portable blackboard, a large pile of books under his arm.)

McLUHAN

Good afternoon, class.

(When the audience doesn't reply, McLUHAN regards them sceptically.)

Ahh. A bunch of livewires, are we? American youth! Under the spell of mass culture, in a walking dream-state induced by the ministrations of editorialists and Madison Avenue pygmalions, emotional minestrone, but no matter! That's what we're here to deal with, to ameliorate, truth is mighty, and will prevail.

(He has started to diagram something on the blackboard. In the audience, AN UNDERGRADUATE rises.)

UNDERGRADUATE

Um . . . am I in the right class? I thought this was English 202.

McLUHAN

Indeed it is!

UNDERGRADUATE

Um . . . but . . . you're not even speaking English. Are you?

McLUHAN

Ah! Ahh! The immuration of language beneath the effluvial outfall of post-Luce semaphore. Good point, good point. We'll get to that in a moment.

(He has completed an incomprehensible diagram on the blackboard.)

Now! Melville-James-Whitman. Blood brothers, or just kissing cousins? Yes? What is your question?

(He has picked out a real member of the audience.)

Yes, you. Your question please.

(Presumably, the audience member will reply that s/he doesn't have a question.)

Exactly! You have no question! A man without a question is like a knight without his lance! Three thousand words please, on the subject "Walt Whitman: Harbinger or Windbag?" Lights please!

(Houselights blink out. A projector comes on.)

We reach our real point of departure, to wit:

(Slide: RCA ad, from "The Mechanical Bride.")

The Advertisement, also known as ad, as in ad absurdum, ad infinitum, ad nauseum and add-it-all-up-and-whaddaya get? The adnoise of the waking wounded!

(He regards the screen.)

Exhibit A: the Radio Corporation of America, RCA, Res Corporate Animus, cloaked in the garb of domestic enchantment. Note the inclination of the father toward the voice of distant authority. The passivity of the mother, seeing but unseen. The resort to icons of village and rural life to peddle a vision of centralized progress. Freedom to Speak for Who? Freedom for What to be Seen?

(Slide: "How to Develop Your Executive Ability".)

Exhibit B: Dr. Daniel Starch's formula for empowerment of the common joe. Note the happy accident of the surname, sure to stiffen the resolve of wet noodles everywhere. The call to arms, or rather to the army of executives whose success depends on the dimunition of independent thought and feeling. Here is the recipe not just to access robotic

modes of production, but to become the automaton itself. If I, Robot, then Who Me?

(Slide: "Too Late to Cry Out in Anguish" [ad promoting Lysol as a feminine hygiene product, also from "The Mechanical Bride"].)

Meanwhile, the UNDERGRADUATES in the audience have begun to snooze, or throw paper airplanes, or make out with one another, in blissful disregard of McLUHAN.)

Exhibit C: The cult of hygiene rendered in soap operatic warbles. Read with me please: "Too late, when love has gone, for a wife to plead that no one warned her of danger. Because a wise, considerate wife makes it her business to find out how to safeguard her daintiness in order to protect precious married love and happiness." Yes. Here we see the whole notion of humanity, of being human, presented as a liability; better to be scrubbed clean, sterilized, rendered fit for officially sanctioned contact. Lysol or Lies-All?

Finally --

(But when McLUHAN turns to the audience he discovers the UNDERGRADUATES have gone -- snuck out.)

McLUHAN

Hello? Hello? Is anybody here? Hello?

(McLUHAN stands there for a moment, then gathers up his books and goes. Leaving behind a lone UNDERGRADUATE, the only one who's been attentive throughout. The UNDERGRADUATE sits wide-eyed.)

UNDERGRADUATE

Wow.

Scene 9:

ACTOR

Professor Marshall McLuhan, having scrutinized contemporary culture, begins his first book.

McLUHAN

Now, in my first book, *The Mechanical Bride*, I intend to --

ELSIE (Off.)

Marshall!

McLUHAN

I recognize that voice.

(ELSIE enters, with CORINNE.
ELSIE kisses MCLUHAN.)

ELSIE

Herbert Marshall. How nice to see you.

McLUHAN

Mother. What a pleasant -- surprise.

ELSIE

Yes, well I've been rehearsing, "*East Lynne*", it's a silly old play, but a good part for me, I think.

(She turns to CORINNE.)

Marshall, I'd like you to meet a fellow actress of mine,
Miss --

(Musical chord. Lights change. McLUHAN
and CORINNE are isolated in spots.
ELSIE senses something odd.)

ELSIE

. . . Corinne Lewis, from Fort Worth Texas. I thought you
two . . . should meet.

McLUHAN

What's this? My Mother calls you actress but
It cannot be! If this be acting, then
Act I the fool and say that thou art witch!
Could actress act the part of rising sun,
That bathes benighted man in blessed warmth?
Can actress be, whose very glance is light
Upon the folded petals of my heart!
O Fate! Say not that this is artifice
And render all my faculties insane
Or leap I to the stage and, holding forth,
Pronounce my love for thee, O sweet Corinne,
And cast off wit, and tact, and commonsense
To join thee in thy revel, and revel
In thine eyes.

CORINNE

(Texas accent.)

It's a great pleasure to meet you too, Mr. McLuhan.

(She goes. ELSIE dusts off her hands.)

ELSIE

Well! That's all taken care of.

Goodbye, Marshall.

McLUHAN

But Mother, I --

ELSIE

I'll send you the reviews!

(She exits.)

McLUHAN

Thankyou, Mother. Please do.

(McLUHAN looks off after ELSIE, then off after CORINNE. Thinks a moment. Goes off, quickly, after CORINNE.)

Interlude:

(MARSHALL appears.)

MARSHALL

Wait!

(McLUHAN stops turns. Light change.)

Where are you going?

McLUHAN

Away.

MARSHALL

But you went away. I mean, you're coming back, aren't you? You went away, you got your education, you had a little -- fling in Wisconsin, and now you're coming back. Aren't you?

McLUHAN

It is impossible to have a "fling" in Wisconsin.

You think I'd come back? To that? To that -- place, that -- blip in God's consciousness? That welt in my memory, that little -- divot on the prairie! That crack, that nothingness, that vulgar little -- gopher hole! I'd have to be mad, I'd have to be -- wind-addled! I have a life to lead, thank you very much, and I don't intend to lead it there!

(McLUHAN storms off.)

MARSHALL

Actually . . . I always kinda liked it here . . .

Scene 10:

ACTOR

Mister Marshall McLuhan, having married, returns to Canada.

McLUHAN

But not to Winnipeg!

("Marshall's March". McLUHAN hop- skips -- but in a sober manner appropriate to his new station -- across the stage. Again, he waits expectantly.)

I'm here!

(Lights darken. Mood grows malevolent, sinister. Music to match. An ACTOR appears at a standing microphone. He is cloaked.)

ACTOR

The Case of the Murder of the New Professor.

(Sinister chords of music.)

ACTOR

The scene: Toronto. The year: 1946. A 35-year-old English professor with a few new ideas arrives on the campus of St. Michael's College, University of Toronto. Where they don't take kindly to new ideas.

Song: Campus Capers

(Enter the colleagues of Professor McLuhan. They wear black-rimmed glasses and carry nerdy briefcases. They operate like a dim-witted SWAT team.)

THEM: All around a genius
brilliant people lurk
You may not have seen us
We was doin' all the work.
doin all the work

Sure he's got ideas
Everybody does
But he'd never been as
Famous without us
famous without us

Where'd he come from?
How'd he get here?
Who'd he know and
Whud he study?
Ssssh.
Here he comes.
Hello, Marshall!
Howzit going?
How yaz doing?
Whuch yaz upto?
Hello Marshall
So nice to see you . . .

McLUHAN: Well I've been invited
To give another lecture
Down in the United
States this year
All about language
Used by advertising
How we swallow garb-age
Without realizing.

THEM: That's amazing.
Really. Truly.
Whuch yaz making?
Stop your drooling.
(Oh, come on
I wanna know)

Go ahead I'll
 Grab a tray we'll
 Make some room
 McLUHAN: Oh that's okay
 THEM: (Oh stay
 Don't go)
 Don't be silly
 Here's a deli
 Wanna coffee
 Have some jelly
 (It's
 on us)
 McLUHAN: Thanks a lot
 THEM: Oh it's no problem
 We don't get to
 talk too often . . .

Here's a little razor blade
 Hide it in his jelly
 Here's a little cyanide
 Drop it in his tea.
 Let's sit by the window
 Maybe you could sign
 This copy of yer latest book
 Just before you di-----ne!

Ha ha ha ha ha
 McLUHAN: Oh certainly
 THEM: We're not jealous
 That yer famous
 eat yez jelly
 ignoramous
 (Here
 You go)
 Can yez tell us
 How the hell yez
 Got yer own program
 On campus?
 (Cream?
 McLUHAN: Oh, thankyou)
 Well it seemed to me that
 In this century
 Of electronic media
 Especially TV.
 Maybe it was time we
 Understood these forces
 And maybe universities

Should try to do some courses . . .

THEM: So they gave yez
Yer own building
Yer own budget
You was willing.
Great! (Great)
Start a rumour!
Student lover
Get someone to
Run him over.
Wait (Wait . . .)

McLUHAN: Oh I can't believe it
I'm going to have to run
I have a class to teach, it's
(all about the syntax of television and the
manipulation of the psyche by non-print
media otherwise known as)
Lobotomy 101!

THEM: Ha ha ha ha ha
Ha ha ha ha ha
Well, Marshall . . .
It was such a pleasure
lemme get the door
Hope yez have a measure
Of success with what's in store!
Bye! Bye. Bye? Bye!
Doesn't it just go to show
How far a guy can get
By being Mister Popular?
He ain't immortal yet.
Northrop says he's stupid
Hasn't got a clue
His sloppy methodology
Is hippy-dippy too.
I heard he goes off campus!
Does his little lectures
Dishes up his theories
For the private sector.

Whadja find out?
Need a coffin
Three feet wide 'n
Six feet long 'n
Won't eat jelly
Don't drink tea

Hope he don't think
It was me . . .

ONE: Gotta do in ol' McLuhan
ANOTHER: Gotta be a way to screw him
ETC: Gotta think of something prudent
Use a kamikaze student!
Don't be stupid. Well, we gotta
Shut yer bloody yap. You gotta
B.Ed. and I gotta M.A.
an' you otta gotta M.Ed. if'n you weren't so
damn dim!
Well, what are we gonna do?
I dunno!
We'z gonna hang onta our tenure, yaz idiots!

Scene 11:

ACTOR

Dr. Marshall McLuhan enjoys a home life.

ACTOR

And casts about for his next great idea.
(Sound of children playing in
background. Sound of baby wailing.
Sound of children fighting. One CHILD
sits in front of a TV, watching. Sound
of TV.)

McLUHAN scribbles in a notebook.
(His IDEAS pop up beside him.)

IDEA

Masons are taking over the world.

McLUHAN

Mmmm . . . no. Too dangerous.
(He crosses out the idea.)

IDEA

Ezra Pound was right.

McLUHAN

Mmmm . . . better not.

IDEA
So was Mussolini.

McLUHAN
Definitely not.

CHILD
Can I have a cookie?

McLUHAN
No.

(Pause.)

IDEA
Homosexuals are ruining everything.

McLUHAN
Mmmm . . . might be a magazine piece.

IDEA
Women should --

CHILD
Can I have a cookie now?

McLUHAN
Oh, all right. But turn off the TV before you --
(The CHILD runs out.)

Turn off the TV!

(The CHILD is gone. McLUHAN sighs, rises, trudges to the TV. Bends to turn it off. A woman's hand snakes out and grabs him by the tie.)

VOICE
Marshall.

(A PUPPET MERMAID sticks her head out through the TV, still clutching McLUHAN by the tie.)

MERMAID
C'mon in, Marshall. The water's fine.
(She pulls McLUHAN by his tie into the TV.)

Light change. [Black light?]

The MERMAID and McLUHAN emerge out the back of the TV. They swim through the water.)

MERMAID

Let yourself go, Marshall! Stroke. Stroke.

McLUHAN

I really have to get back.

MERMAID

No you don't. Why would you want to go back to that?

McLUHAN

This happened to me once before.

MERMAID

Did it?

McLUHAN

When I was a child. I was listening to my crystal radio set when suddenly -- everything changed.

MERMAID

But this is different, isn't it?

McLUHAN

Yes, it -- is . . .

MERMAID

TV makes you work harder. All those little dots. Luring you into them. In, and down, down . . .

(She is pulling McLUHAN down with her. Lights are changing to an icy cold blue.)

. . . down . . . into the icy depths.

(They begin to hump. They grow passionate. Noisy. Just as they are about to climax, the CHILD calls from off.)

CHILD

DAAAAAAAA-AAAAAAD!

(Lights return to normal. The MERMAID disappears. McLUHAN [the real one] lies supine on the floor.)

CHILD

Dad? We're out of cookies.

(Dazed, McLUHAN digs in his pants for some change. He notices his pants are undone. He surreptitiously buckles them. Gives the CHILD the coin.)

McLUHAN

Go buy yourself some.

(The CHILD takes the coin, starts out. Stops, turns.)

CHILD

You were having another one of your ideas, weren't you?

(McLUHAN nods.)

Thought so.

(The CHILD goes. Lights narrow on McLUHAN. A high, piercing sound. Breaks.)

McLUHAN

My god.

Scene 12:

("Marshall's March". McLUHAN hop- skips in urgent fashion around the stage while the setting changes around him. He arrives back at Centre.)

McLUHAN

I've got it!

(McLUHAN is now surrounded by UNIVERSITY DONS sitting unmoving in chairs. The following is accompanied by little zings and explosions from the MUSICIAN, like bombs going off in McLUHAN's head, as indicated by asterisks.)

McLUHAN

Look, I've got it! Don't you see? * See. See? That's exactly it! The act of seeing . . . or hearing or touching

. . . actually changes you * . . . depending on the medium with which you're engaged! ***

(The DON he's talking to doesn't respond. He tries another.)

In fact, some media don't engage you at all, not really, they more -- engulf you, like radio, for example, or film! ** We might term these media which provide a great deal of sense data as -- what --

MUSICIAN

Hot.

McLUHAN

What?

MUSICIAN

Hot.

McLUHAN

What?

MUSICIAN

(Into a microphone:)

HOT!

(Beat.)

McLUHAN

-- Hot! **** -- whereas those which provide relatively little visual or oral definition would be -- well -- they'd be "cold" --

MUSICIAN

Cool.

McLUHAN

-- "Cool", wouldn't they? But the point is, the content of the medium makes no difference; what is important is the effect of the medium itself! *****

(A grand cacophony of bells, whistles, booms, zings and other strange sounds from the MUSICIAN. Pause. The DONS still haven't responded, or moved.)

McLUHAN looks one of the DONS in the eyes. Gives him a little push. The DON topples over, dead. McLUHAN moves to another DON. Taps her. She slumps over

in her chair. Moves to another. Blows
on him. He falls to the floor.

McLUHAN, surrounded by corpses, is
disoriented.)

This . . . means . . . that increasingly we live . . .
inside an electronic environment in which we might . . .
eventually . . . find ourselves

Trapped.

(Light change. Set change. McLUHAN is
left alone on a bare stage,
occasionally shot through with piercing
electronic sounds and blasts of light.
He is in the "sensorium" of his own
psyche.)

McLUHAN

I am alone

(Sound.)

Alone

After April comes May,
Crueler yet,
Then June, boggy with winds that blow off the lake
And down Front Street, up the University line,
Rising through manhole covers to encircle Queen's Park.
Le roi n'est pas ici.

Under a palomino sky
I float in a sea of icebergs, cheek-to-cheek
Their sloe-shaped hips dim beneath the water
I cry to the captain on his bridge: "You there!
I seem to have capsized. Throw me a line!"
He smiles a long smile of unfathomable intent
And turning, limps into his cabin.
Clip-clop, clip-clop.
The sky thickens like broth.

And on a stage a woman pirouettes.

(We see ELSIE, dimly.)

And on a hill a boy waits.

(We see MARSHALL, dimly.)

He does not see the city over the horizon
He does not sense the moon behind him
Knows only the breath and rush of grass
Exhaling its perfume into the night air . . .

MARSHALL

I'll be going now.

McLUHAN

What? Why?

MARSHALL

You won't be seeing me for a long while . . .
 (The light on MARSHALL and ELSIE
 fades.)

McLUHAN

O O O

What are we to do now? What are we to do?

I will go to the Fisher King

I will return the Grail

I will genuflect in his shadow

As commuters rush for trains around me.

(McLUHAN lies there. There is a
 clattering off.)

IRISH VOICE

Shite!

(McLUHAN looks.)

McLUHAN

Hello?

(JAMES JOYCE enters, carrying a bottle,
 drunk.)

JOYCE

What are you lookin' at, ya gobspatterin' ashwipe?!
 Christ's dirty underpants, I've bumped my shin because of
 you!

McLUHAN

I was just --

JOYCE

I know, you was just prevaricatin' in the highminded,
 rumpended tones of Mr. TitSucking Eliot, a pretender to
 immortality if ever I've clapped eyes on one! Well I've had
 enough of your modernist snivelling, McLuhan! Have a snort
 and get yer tail out from between yer gonads!

McLUHAN

(Regarding the bottle warily.)

Is this --? I won't -- ?

JOYCE

You'll curl up into a tiny ball and end up a mite in the dustheap of life, like me. Like everyone, McLuhan! Have a fucking drink!

(McLUHAN does. JOYCE whips out a book.)

Ya see this? "Ulysses". You think anyone rushed up and pulled my wanker to thank me for writin' it? The single greatest novel of the century? Do you think anybody gave a soul-purgatin' shit? I couldn't get it published! It had to be brought out on the backs a grocery bags by some froze-up sphincter I mean spinster in France! And you've published two of your atrocities, and got yerself a nice cushy spot on the academic bidet, and yer feelin' sorry for yourself?

McLUHAN

But -- nobody understands me.

JOYCE

WHO GIVES A CUP OF CHRIST'S SPIT IF THEY UNDERSTAND YA?
God Almighty, if ya haven't learned that after all these years, you've learned nothing at all!

Song: Non Carborundum Est

JOYCE: let me tell you something
 buddy, you should learn
 if you intend to survive
 without getting burned
 Columbus he was despised
 And Galileo spurned
 Darwin still gets revised
 'Cause he makes people squirm
 all of the people, all of the good folks
 all of them mean so well
 with their convictions, social restrictions,
 they'll see you burnt in hell

(listen to me)

if you have ideas
beautiful and true
you better learn to be as

sneaky as a shrew
 never put your trust in
 social common sense
 some night they will bust in
 to grab what they can get
 these little syphroids, moronic androids,
 little slimy lice
 with no ideas, wreck what they see as
 a threat to their little lives

(CHORUS:)

Never let the simpletons see you frown
 Never let them run you out of town
 Never let the buggers steal your crown
 And never let the bastards get you down.

There are three main subjects
 you should be aware
 that really put a twist in
 their righteous underwear
 One is sex, one is death,
 the other one is god
 If you try to suggest
 Something new or odd
 They'll go bananas, they'll do their
 damndest,
 to have you banned and barred
 They'll use reviews and simply refuse
 to choose to think too hard

(CHORUS:)

JOYCE and
 McLuhan:

Never let the simpletons see you frown
 Never let them run you out of town
 Never let the buggers steal your crown
 And never let the bastards get you down.
 (Music continues under as JOYCE grabs up a
 sequined microphone and is spotlighted, like the
 host of a beauty pageant.)

JOYCE

And now! The final friggin' assumption of Mister Marshall
 McLuhan!

(Upending his bottle.)

And it's about bloody time too, tell front of house to open the bar . . .

(McLUHAN starts to ascend a very high staircase.)

JOYCE

June, 1960!

ACTOR

McLuhan predicts that television would produce a generation of introverts.

JOYCE

(To audience member:)

He's talkin' about you ya bloody wastrel sit up an' pay attention!

1962!

ACTOR

Notes that it gets harder each year to find the dividing line between politics and show business.

JOYCE

And isn't Bill Clinton just ducky on the saxophone?

1964!

ACTOR

Predicts that the world could one day be run by Madison Avenue.

JOYCE

Ridiculous overstatement, of course (by the way, are those Guess Jeans you're wearing?)

Also 1964!

ACTOR

Publishes Understanding Media, in which he coins the phrase "the medium is the message", notes the decentralizing effect of technology, and heralds the electronic connectedness of humankind.

JOYCE

Not bad for the son of a Methodist.

(McLUHAN has by now reached the top of the stairs.)

ACTOR

Shortly after, Mister Marshall McLuhan goes through the roof.

(McLUHAN does. A trapeze descends, he grabs on, and it lifts him out of sight.)

ACTOR

Thus ends the first act.

ACTOR

Which is, of course, only the beginning.

JOYCE

In keeping with the traditions of the classical theatre, I shall shortly be accepting donations of liquor in the dressing room . . .

(The MUSICIAN continues to play as the houselights rise.)

End of Act One

Act Two

Prelude:

(When the audience returns, the aisles have been roped off, so that they can't return to their seats. They are urged/herded onto the stage, which has been turned into a maze with plastic sheets hung from above. At the appointed time, the lights go down and a long-haired figure, PONYTAIL, appears spotlit amongst them.)

PONYTAIL

Groovy.

Welcome, fellow specks of consciousness, to the world -- of Marshall McLuhan!

(Immediately, the maze lights up with slide images projected from every direction, and on every available surface. Colours, faces, news photos (circa 1968), etc. Strange electronic noises pierce the space. Somewhere, someone hammers erratically on a block of wood. A Warholian movie is projected, of the stage when it is empty. DANCERS in Day-Glo colours spin through the area, lit only by reflected light. A huge piece of fabric is stretched on a frame. A DANCER moves, pressing against it from behind, and AUDIENCE MEMBERS are encouraged to touch the DANCER's body through the fabric.

For detailed suggestions regarding this "Happening", see the Appendix.

Eventually, McLUHAN, in his usual tweed suit, tie and hat, wanders into the melee. He looks around with some puzzlement. He politely asks a few AUDIENCE MEMBERS if they've seen the

"gentleman with the long hair", but when he does finally find PONYTAIL, PONYTAIL's much too busy to deal with him. Eventually, McLUHAN grows frustrated and discombobulated, and stands centre and yells:)

McLUHAN

STOP!!!

(A spotlight captures McLUHAN where he stands. PONYTAIL spots him.)

PONYTAIL

Ladies and gentlemen, Mister Marshall McLuhan, let's give him a big hand!

(PONYTAIL encourages everyone to do so.)

McLUHAN

(Trying to stem the applause.)

Wait . . . thankyou very much, but . . . PLEASE WAIT!
(His anger brings them up short.)

PONYTAIL

Is something wrong?

McLUHAN

Look . . . I know you mean well and this is certainly all very --

(He looks around.)

fascinating. But it's not really what I had in mind.

PONYTAIL

But it's the sensorium, man!

McLUHAN

Well, yes, but -

PONYTAIL

Y'know, sensuousity, the total experience, all five senses rolled into one!

McLUHAN

That's not really what I --

PONYTAIL

Because that's what you said, man, you said the media should be used to, like, totally turn us on, man, like, expand our minds!

McLUHAN

I said no such thing! Have you read my books, or just reviews of them?

It's true that I've emphasized the tactile nature of media, and that eventually we will live in a, yes, sensorium created by the electronic projection of the senses. But I never said that it should happen, I simply said that it would! I mean these neural extensions such as film and television and binary code have great potential to bind mankind together into a single consciousness -- but they also have great potential to change us in ways we can't even perceive! And that's the whole point! The process is invisible, imperceptible, you can't see it happening! My god! If we could see and hear and feel it we could protect ourselves from it!

Do you see?

You don't see.

PONYTAIL

Bummer.

(PONYTAIL wanders off. Meantime, the DANCERS have urged the audience back to their seats and the "sensorium" has been struck. McLUHAN is left alone on the once again bare stage.)

McLUHAN

I can see this is going to get complicated.

Scene 13:

ACTOR

Mr. Marshall McLuhan, having recently appeared on the cover of Newsweek Magazine, is feted by the elite of New York. ("Marshall's March", now quite elaborate, rich. McLUHAN hop-skips to centre.)

McLUHAN

I'm here!

(Two tacky stage flats slide in place
in front of him, slamming in his face.
Music.)

Song: The Party Song

(New York penthouse. Enter FAMOUS PARTY
GUESTS as well as a HOSTESS [in a mu-mu?] a
la Lauren Bacall. The song is a big rat-a-
tat-tatty kind of march.)

HOSTESS: Everyone's waiting for the party to begin.
We've got the music on and the lights
turned down dim.
There's goose-bumps everywhere
You can feel the excitement in the
evening air
'Cause the word is that McLuhan just
drove in.

GUEST A: I saw a cab pull up and someone just
stepped out!
I'm pretty sure it's him. We better break
the champagne out.

HOSTESS: Fill your glass up everyone
And get ready 'cause you're all about to
meet someone
Who someday they'll be writing plays
about!
(Spoken:)
But possibly not musicals . . .
(Doorbell rings in time to music.)

GUEST B: Let's turn the lights out and pretend that
no one's here!

HOSTESS: Get outta sight, but be ready to cheer
Kill the music, not a sound
Let him think there's not a fan in town!
(She opens the door to reveal a silhouette
of McLUHAN, the enigma, backlit by hall
light. Music suspends.)
Hello? Oh I'm sorry, no one's here . . .
yet.
(Spoken. Beat builds under.)

HOSTESS

You're Mister McLuhan? Oh yes. Come in . . . You're that fellow who wrote that book "Understanding Medea"?

McLUHAN

Media. "Understanding Media."

HOSTESS

Well, come in. Welcome to the . . . Inner Sanctum.

McLUHAN

I can't believe I spent fifty years getting here and still managed to show up early . . .

ALL

You're not early. You're just a little ahead of your time!
(Everybody sings in full-blown Broadway style.)

CHORUS: Marshall McLuhan, you're our man
 A man with vision, a man with a plan.
 Our man of the hour, the man of the year
 The kind of guy who has an eye
 For spotting the trends before they're
 here.
 Give us a handshake. Give us a hug.
 Give him a glass of champagne. Join the
 club!
 Marshall McLuhan, is finally here!

HOSTESS: Welcome to New York! Lemme take your
 coat and hat
 Someone pop that cork. Welcome to
 Manhat!
 Lemme introduce you to
 The powers that be with the penthouse
 view
 Welcome to New York. This is where
 it's at!
 (Music and party continue as HOSTESS parades
 McLUHAN around to meet the GUESTS. FAMOUS
 GUESTS may be represented by caricature
 masks.)

HOSTESS

Mister McLuhan, I'd like you to meet Andy Warhol.

McLUHAN

Oh! Mister Warhol! I find your work fascinating!

WARHOL

You do?

McLUHAN

Yes. I think it's very interesting how, by mechanically reproducing mundane images, you manage to create a contemporary iconography.

WARHOL

I do? Wow. I'm gonna write that down.
(They cross.)

HOSTESS

Mister McLuhan, this is Hubert Humphrey.

McLUHAN

Oh! How do you do, Mr. Vice President.

HUMPH

Not so great.

McLUHAN

Oh?

HUMPH

It's this damn Vietnam War thing -- the public's pretty upset.

McLUHAN

Well that's to be expected I suppose. It's our first TV war.

HUMPH

What?

McLUHAN

Television, being a cool medium, allows the public to engage themselves in the war experience far more than radio or the print media could ever do in the past.

(Pause.)

HUMPH

Get Lyndon Johnson on the phone! And somebody get this man
a drink . . .

CHORUS: Marshall McLuhan, you're our man
 A man with vision, a man with a plan.
 Our man of the hour, the man of the year
 The kind of guy whose help might be
 Especially good for your career.
 Give us a handshake. Give us a hug.
 Give him a glass of champagne. Join the
 club!
 Marshall McLuhan, is finally here!
 (Suddenly McLUHAN spots someone he knows.)

McLUHAN

Oh! There's Robert Fulford!

HOSTESS

Who?

McLUHAN

Robert Fulford! He's a reporter for --

HOSTESS

Never heard of him. Come with me. I want you to meet
someone important.

McLUHAN

But --

HOSTESS

This is Tom Wolfe, the journalist.

WOLFE

I'm an outsider here. Just working on my next book.

McLUHAN

Well isn't that interesting? I'm an outsider too.

WOLFE

No you're not.

McLUHAN

Yes, I am.

WOLFE

I'm more of an outsider than you.

McLUHAN

Well I don't see how that's --

WOLFE

I'm from the South.

McLUHAN

I'm from Canada.

(Pause.)

WOLFE

You're right, McLuhan. It's hard to get more outside than that.

(WOLFE goes.)

McLUHAN

Excuse me, is that Arthur Erickson over there?

HOSTESS

Where? Who?

McLUHAN

The brilliant Canadian architect, Arthur --

HOSTESS

Never heard of him. But say, if you wanna meet an architect, here's Buckminster Fuller.

McLUHAN

I'd just like to say hello to --

HOSTESS

Wait a minute. You've got the opportunity to meet Bucky Fuller and you wanna waste time with some shmuck? Marshall! Famous is as famous does!

CHORUS:

Marshall McLuhan, you're our man
 A man with vision, a man with a plan.
 Our man of the hour, the man of the year
 The kind of guy who has an eye
 For spotting the trends before they're
 here.
 Give us a handshake. Give us a hug.
 Give him a glass of champagne. Join the

club!
 Marshall McLuhan, is finally here!
 (Big finish, leaving McLUHAN mauled and
 dishevelled on the floor.)

Scene 14:

(MARSHALL appears - just his face on a
 TV monitor.)

MARSHALL
 Getting pretty famous, aren't you?
 (McLUHAN looks up. He is startled to
 see him.)

McLUHAN
 What are you doing here?

MARSHALL
 Waiting.

McLUHAN
 For what?

MARSHALL
 Haven't you forgotten something?

McLUHAN
 I don't think so.

MARSHALL
 Something.

Scene 15:

ACTOR
 Mr. Marshall McLuhan goes to confession.
 (A confessional. A PRIEST. Steady drone
 of novenas being prayed.)

McLUHAN approaches, kneels on the other
 side of the divider from the PRIEST.
 Crosses self.)

McLUHAN

Bless me father for I have sinned. It has been one week since my last confession. These are my sins.

Well, actually, I'm not sure they are sins. But various people seem to regard them as transgressions, so I thought perhaps I should come discuss them with you. Perhaps you could regard this as pastoral counselling.

PRIEST

Go ahead, my child.

McLUHAN

I, um . . . questioned conventional wisdom . . . many times.

(Pause.)

PRIEST

Well, we all make mistakes my son. Say three Hail Marys and --

McLUHAN

Wait. That's not all.

I engaged in intellectual onanism. I generated ideas strictly for the sake of discussion and provocation. I enjoyed the results.

PRIEST

You did?

McLUHAN

Yes.

PRIEST

How many times?

McLUHAN

Many . . . many . . . times.
(Pause.)

PRIEST

Go on.

McLUHAN

I disrupted the corridors of Upper Canadian intellectual life. Leaving them a shambles, I became celebrated around

the world. I returned home a hero. And worse, a celebrity. I refused to become an eminence grise. I continued to say things I could not prove. I was a Rumpelstiltskin of the ephemeral. I referred to my countrymen as "mildewed with caution". I did not bow down before Northrop Frye. I consorted with Americans. I even enjoyed their company. I said things that were possibly wrong. Worse, I said things that were palpably true. I was a show off. I was a conservative in antiestablishment clothing. I dined with presidents and prime ministers, and declared the nation-state dead. I smoked cigars in polite company. I was not afraid of the future.

(Pause.)

PRIEST

How many times?

McLUHAN

Many . . . many . . . many times.

PRIEST

And all this in the last week, eh?

McLUHAN

I've been busy lately.

(Pause.)

PRIEST

Well there's only one thing to be done then. Crucifixion.

McLUHAN

I'm sorry?

PRIEST

Come on. Stand up. We'll make this as quick as possible.

(ALTAR BOYS appear to assist.)

McLUHAN

When you say "crucifixion", you mean metaphorically, of course. Public vilification, bad reviews, that sort of thing.

PRIEST

No no no. Crucifixion. Up on the cross, hanging out in the blistering sun.

(To the ALTAR BOYS.)

Bind his wrists.

(A cross has appeared. McLUHAN is roughly bound to it.)

McLUHAN

But wait -- !

PRIEST

No no. Let's get on with it.

McLUHAN

But --

PRIEST

We didn't "wait" when we made such a spectacle of ourselves, did we? We didn't "wait" before disturbing a lot of good, sensible people!

(McLUHAN is now being hoisted in the air aboard the cross.)

McLUHAN

HELLLLLLPPP!

PRIEST

We'll dispense with the nails, but I'm afraid you'll have to have the lance.

McLUHAN

You can't do this to me! I am Marshall McLuhan!

PRIEST

Exactly.

(He stabs McLUHAN in the side with a sword. McLUHAN screams. Silence.)

Well. That's that. Who's for a beer?

(The PRIEST and ALTAR BOYS exit. Lights focus on McLUHAN, eyes still wide with terror and realization.)

Scene 16:

ACTOR

Mister Marshall McLuhan, having achieved notoriety, becomes a fixture on the lecture circuit.

(McLUHAN at a podium.)

McLUHAN

Good evening. I wonder if you have heard the one about the teacher who asked his class: "What does this century owe to Thomas Edison?" To which a student replied: "If it weren't for Edison, we'd have to watch TV by candlelight."

My topic tonight is --

(Chord. McLUHAN reacts as if he's just heard something strange.)

Is --

(Chord. McLUHAN is transfixed.)

ACTOR

Mister Marshall McLuhan, having achieved eminence, suffers a slight stroke.

(Chord.)

ACTOR

Then another.

(Chord.)

ACTOR

And another.

ACTOR

The last of which leaves him without the ability to speak, read, or write.

(McLUHAN is in the hospital bed. A portable TV hangs overhead. A FRIEND reads to him.)

FRIEND

". . . As they walked, they at times stopped and walked again, continuing their tete-a-tete (which of course he was utterly out of), about sirens, enemies of man's reason, mingled with a number of other topics of the same category, usurpers, historical cases of the kind while the man in the sweeper car or you might as well call it in the sleeper car --

(McLUHAN laughs, delighted.)

-- who in any case couldn't possibly hear because they were too far simply sat in his seat near the end of lower Gardiner street and looked after their lowbacked car."

(McLUHAN stares off to one side now, a small smile still traced on his face. The FRIEND regards the book.)

FRIEND

James Joyce. Mad, but wonderful. Shall we stop there for tonight?

(McLUHAN looks, almost as if he'd forgotten someone shared the room with him, then nods, yes. The FRIEND rises.)

FRIEND

Bloom and Stephen's return next. I'll try to get around tomorrow evening to finish.

Goodnight, Marshall.

McLUHAN

Wuh. Wuh.

(The FRIEND goes. McLUHAN lies there.

MARSHALL appears on the TV screen.)

MARSHALL

I could read to you.

McLUHAN

Oh go away. What would you read to me? Ivanhoe. Tom Brown's Schooldays.

MARSHALL

You used to like Ivanhoe.

McLUHAN

I used to believe in phrenology, too.
(Pause.)

MARSHALL

You should never have left here, you know.

McLUHAN

Where?

MARSHALL

Here. Where I am.

McLUHAN

Oh don't be ridiculous. How could I have stayed?

MARSHALL

Endless views. Sunflowers waving in the wind.

McLUHAN

Bigots. Trolley collisions at Portage and Main.

MARSHALL

Big skies. Azure lakes.

McLUHAN

"Big skies". What exactly does that mean? As opposed to what, a "little sky?" What exactly is a "little sky"?

MARSHALL

Look out the window.

(McLUHAN does. Pause.)

But you went. You went. Cambridge. Toronto. New York. All the places that bright young men go.

McLUHAN

To become someone!

MARSHALL

To leave themselves behind.

Song: You and I

MARSHALL: hey old man
 remember when
 we sat together on the bank of the river
 when we were ten
 and I made you
 promise me
 that whatever happened you'd always be
 true to me
 Is your heart still pure?
 Have you stayed true?
 Is your mind still clear?
 Am I still you?

 Cause I'm still here
 and I miss you
 And you could be here
 if you wanted to.

McLUHAN: I recall
 That afternoon
 We sat together on the bank of the river
 And I told you

That anyone
 could stay the same
 if they never dared to go anywhere
 that was new or strange
 Did you find the courage
 To let yourself be changed?
 Did you live your own life
 Or was it all arranged?

Cause now I'm here
 And I miss you
 And you should be here
 'Cause you wanted to.

TOGETHER:

You and I
 Were so close
 But years go by
 You know how it goes
 The things we gain
 Are the things we choose
 And the more we stay the same
 The more we lose
 If we were together
 Once again
 If you were still who you were
 Way back then.
 We would sit
 And promise much
 But was there really ever
 any way to stay in touch?

McLUHAN:

'Cause now I'm here

MARSHALL:

'Cause I'm still here

McLUHAN:

And I miss you

MARSHALL:

And I miss you

McLUHAN:

And you should be here

MARSHALL:

And you could be here

MARSHALL and

McLUHAN: If/'Cause you wanted to.

Scene 17:

ACTOR

Mr. Marshall McLuhan has a strange encounter.

(Light, wierd sound; the stage grows dark. A MECHANICAL MAN appears. He wears Virtual Reality headgear, and is otherwise wired head to toe, large cables trailing behind him like mummy's rags. He is malevolently lit. THE MECHANICAL MAN approaches McLUHAN in his hospital bed. McLUHAN recoils, as if Mephistopheles himself has appeared.

Sound reaches a pitch. Stops. THE MECHANICAL MAN removes his headgear. He is an middle-aged man; it's PONYTAIL.)

PONYTAIL

Hi! Remember me?

McLUHAN

Of course I remember you! You are the Fallen, Beelzebub, Lord of the Dark Dominions! And this is Hades, isn't it? I AM IN HELL! AREN'T I?????

PONYTAIL

Um . . . no . . . not really.

You don't remember me, do you?

McLUHAN

Sorry.

PONYTAIL

Here, maybe this will help you.

(He lets his hair down. It is long.)

PONYTAIL

I . . . staged that little be-in number back in '68. You didn't like it too much. It was a little -- overdone, maybe.

McLUHAN

That was you?

PONYTAIL

'Fraid so.

McLUHAN

And you've found me here, all these years later?

PONYTAIL

Well, no, that's not exactly true either. Follow me now, this gets a little complicated. You see, we did meet in '68, but right now I'm actually visiting you from the future, see, I've been working on some new technologies lately and it's finally all paid off. It's kind of like a space-time/black-hole/Stephen Hawkings/Michael J. Fox sort of thing. But what does it matter how I got here? I'm here! It worked!

McLUHAN

Nurse!

PONYTAIL

No no, don't do that! She can't understand you anyway, remember? I just thought you should know -- it all happened! Just like you said it would! The Global Village. The Age of Information. Home Shopping Network, the whole thing!

McLUHAN

It did?

PONYTAIL

Yeah!

McLUHAN

And is it as wonderful as I thought it might be?

PONYTAIL

Better.

McLUHAN

Better?

PONYTAIL

Come on, my man. We're going surfing!

(PONYTAIL leaps atop the hospital bed, which becomes a surfboard. He leads McLUHAN on a musical tour of the future [they are wheeled about the stage]. He sings.)

Song: Surfin

PONYTAIL: Grab your board, buddy
Let's go surfin
It's a global village
Get on board, buddy
Let's go surfin through the
Information age.
All you need is a modem cable
Plugged into your board
When you're up and surfin you'll be able
To search the bulletin boards.

(CHORUS):

Every night we go surfin, surfin, surfin
Where it's never wet
Surfin through the moonlight, baby, baby,
On the Internet.
(They have arrived in the midst of three computer terminals at various points onstage. HACKERS sit at each, lit by the ghostly glow of their screens. Music continues under.)

PONYTAIL

Now. This is what I'm talkin' about. They're all talking by computer, see? He's in Portugal. She's in Calgary. He's in Tokyo. It's called a virtual community.

McLUHAN

Virtual.

PONYTAIL

Yeah!

McLUHAN

As in looks real, feels real, isn't real?

PONYTAIL

Well . . . yeah!

McLUHAN

Do they know each other?

PONYTAIL

Sort of.

McLUHAN

Do they ever meet?

PONYTAIL

Why would they want to do that? There are a lot of diseases around these days, man -- you don't wanna get too close to anybody if you don't have to.

(Music up.)

PONYTAIL: I know a little number
 From Down Under
 She's on Compuserve
 I wanna ask her
 How old she is
 But I haven't got the nerve
 So let's go surfin
 Records of Birth in
 The database in Sydney
 We'll enter her name:
 It's Evans, Jane
 And Wow! She's Sweet Sixteen!

(CHORUS:)

Every night we go surfin, surfin, surfin
 Where it's never wet
 Surfin through the moonlight, baby, baby,
 On the Internet.
 (They arrive at a large TV monitor. With a
 pizza displayed on it.)

PONYTAIL

Now. Watch this.

(PONYTAIL presses a box displayed on
 the screen.)

You make your choice.

(He inserts a credit card to the slot
on the front of the monitor.)

You pay with your card.

(A PIZZA DELIVERY PERSON arrives with a
pizza.)

Presto. It's delivered to your door.

(He offers the box to McLUHAN.)

Double cheese.

McLUHAN

I'd like to see the card.

(He takes it from the slot in the
monitor. Examines it.)

This number?

PONYTAIL

That's how they know it's you.

McLUHAN

This black strip?

PONYTAIL

Tells them -- everything they need to know.

McLUHAN

Who? Tells who everything they need to know?

PONYTAIL

The -- pizza guys.

McLUHAN

And who after that? And after that? They're watching you,
don't you see? -- they're keeping track!

PONYTAIL

So what? I got nothing to hide.

McLUHAN

Nothing?

PONYTAIL

Well, there was that one bust back in '69 . . .

McLUHAN

Ah-hah!

PONYTAIL

But this is ridiculous! You're fear-mongering! You! Of all people!

McLUHAN

You think you know me, do you?

PONYTAIL

I thought I did.

(Music up.)

PONYTAIL: Okay, buddy
 Let's make a little money
 I'll show you how it's done.
 We'll call Miguel
 He farms in Brazil
 Ask him how the coffee's done.

MIGUEL: No, amigos,
 My coffee froze
 Last night is a bitch

PONYTAIL: The futures are low
 Still in Tokyo
 And tomorrow we'll be rich!

(CHORUS):

Every night we go surfin, surfin, surfin
 Where it's never wet
 Surfin through the moonlight, baby, baby,
 On the Internet.
 (They arrive between a BUSINESSWOMAN at a
 desk and, elsewhere onstage, a BABY playing
 on the floor.)

PONYTAIL

All right. I have it. You can't object to this. The woman -
 - she's on a business trip, right? The baby. At home with
 Dad. Watch this.

(The BUSINESSWOMAN leans forward to a
 videophone; phones. Her image appears
 on a videophone by the BABY.)

BUSINESSWOMAN

Hello, baby.

BABY

Ga.

(The BABY crawls to the screen, extends a hand to it. Touches the screen. The BUSINESSWOMAN touches hers. Freeze.)

PONYTAIL

There. Mother and child. Connected by fibre optic cable. What's wrong with that?

McLUHAN

You call that connecting?

PONYTAIL

Electronically.

McLUHAN

Virtually, you mean.

(Lights fade on BUSINESSWOMAN and BABY. Focus on McLuhan.)

Song: McLuhan's Aria

McLUHAN: Are you telling me
 This vision of a mother
 Touching her baby
 Is as touching to the baby
 As it is to you and me?
 Excuse me, but I think you've lost your
 mind.
 You know I've spent my whole life
 Trying to explain
 How electric media
 Affect the human brain
 Hoping that perhaps it would
 Make people more aware
 Hoping it would do some good
 By making people care . . .

 And now the whole damned planet
 Is wired up for sound
 You're hooked up to the Internet
 And wandering around
 Peddling the virtues
 of the information age
 I guess it doesn't hurt you
 if you don't know it's a cage.

Does all this information and all this
stimulation
Do anything to lessen your sense of
isolation?
Does all this fascination with visual
sensation
Make you feel
The world's more real
Or more empty?

What's communication?
And what is information?
What you call exploration
I might call invasion.
Alexander Graham Bell
Refused to leave the dinner table
To answer the phone.
And now I see the windows flicker in the
night
Faces turning colors, green, and blue, and
white,
Watching their reflection in electronic
light
Bathing their eyes
And anaesthetizing
Their minds.

Do they know they're mortal?
There's only so much time.
What will they remember
At the end of the line?
An episode of Jeopardy?
Those great Nintendo moves?
All the great adventures they had
On CompuServe?

What about the human animal?
What about the mother's touch?
What about the cool earth we walk on?
Doesn't that mean much?
Let me drink fresh water
Feel the crystal splash
Of the ice cold water
On my face and hands
And if I spend another hour
In the information age
I won't waste that hour

Viewing an image
 I want to be connected
 To a world that is real
 Connected to a world
 that is mine
 And I can feel
 I can feel!

(McLUHAN sits quietly on the edge of his hospital bed, alone. PONYTAIL approaches tentatively, holding out the VR headgear.)

PONYTAIL

So. I guess you wouldn't be too interested in this then.

McLUHAN

What is it?

PONYTAIL

Virtual -- sorry -- Reality. VR. My own special brand. You just slip this on and anywhere you want to go, anyplace you wanna be, you're there.

McLUHAN

I take my reality straight up, thankyou.

(PONYTAIL regards the hospital bed, room.)

PONYTAIL

Yeah. I guess you do.

Well -- peace, man.

McLUHAN

Peace.

(PONYTAIL starts to go. He has left the VR headgear behind.)

Well wait, take your --

PONYTAIL

You keep it. Maybe you'll change your mind!

(PONYTAIL is gone. McLUHAN regards the headgear in his hands. Shudders. Buries it under the covers.)

ACTOR

Mr. Marshall McLuhan, having seen the future, opts for the past.

Scene 18:

(ELSIE appears, practising her elocutionary gestures in slightly slow motion. She is the same age as when we saw her at the play's beginning. McLUHAN spots her. Leaves his bed, moves to her. The bed remains in place, a bright light shining on it.

McLUHAN is now older than she.)

McLUHAN

Mother?

ELSIE

Hello, Herbert Marshall. Just a moment, I'm almost done.
(He mirrors her movements.)
You've been away.

McLUHAN

Yes.

ELSIE

Go far?

McLUHAN

Very.

ELSIE

Good! I'm going to Duluth next week myself. They're very keen on my Ozymandias there.

Why Herbert Marshall. You've got grey hair.

McLUHAN

Yes.

ELSIE

Well it's nothing a little henna won't fix. It happens to everyone, eventually. It might even happen to me.

Have you seen your father?

He's right over there.

(Lights rise on HERBERT, also moving in slow motion, gardening.)

McLUHAN

Dad?

HERBERT

Hm? Oh, Marshall! Come give me a hand.

(McLUHAN does, eagerly.)

Gotta get some beets in this year.

McLUHAN

I love beets!

HERBERT

Try to get some tomatoes in too.

(They dig together.)

McLUHAN

I'm old now, Dad.

HERBERT

I see that.

McLUHAN

Older than you. But I'd -- like to come back here, if I could. I'd like to come back to a place where -- things are real, and -- you can touch them, and -- the earth is like manna between your fingers!

HERBERT

Well son. I'm afraid you can't do that.

We're gone, y'see. We're gone. I'm gone. Winnipeg's gone. Well, it's not gone, but . . . they got one building there, turns its own lights off at night. And a planetarium. Imagine that.

(He starts to rise, go.)

The river's still there, but somehow it don't seem as big.
No, son, it's a nice idea. Too bad it's too late.

(He exits. McLUHAN turns. ELSIE is gone too.)

McLUHAN

Hello?

Hello?

Is anybody here?

HELLO?

(Silence. McLUHAN looks to the hospital bed. Haphazardly hop-skips over to it. "Marshall's March" -- but now the music is thin, wheezy, sad.)

McLUHAN looks about surreptitiously, digs into the covers, draws out the VR headgear. Puts it on.

As he does, the light on the hospital bed fades.)

ALL ACTORS

Mr. Marshall McLuhan enters eternity . . . virtually.

(Light change, sound. The bed rolls out. We almost lose sight of McLUHAN in the murk and change.)

Then, quiet. Everything has changed. MARSHALL appears, in the flesh. McLUHAN turns to him, astonished.)

MARSHALL

Hello, old man. Come with me.

Song: I See Something Small (Reprise)

McLUHAN: What's that on the wall?
 My mother's old shawl
 And way down the hall
 I see the linen closet where I used
 to crawl.

(MARSHALL removes McLUHAN's VR headgear, as ELSIE enters, catching McLUHAN by surprise.)

ELSIE: Hello, Herbert Marshall, what are you
doing here?
It's nearly time for breakfast; better
run along, dear
And afterwards we'll practise elocution
till noon
And later we'll go dancing 'neath a
red prairie moon.
(McLUHAN and ELSIE dance, as HERBERT and
DAISY approach.)

HERBERT and
DAISY: Hey there, Mister Big Shot, is it really
you?
You're quite a legend here, take your
coat off and stay
We may be nothing more than electronic goo
But what's it matter now, you're happy
anyway.

DAISY: Howdja like to go out on Friday night?
MARSHALL: I think that Friday night would be
all right!
(McLUHAN breaks off from dancing,
exultant now.)

McLUHAN: There's nothing like the feel of your
mother's hand,
Of your father's beard, of the noonday
sand
Standin' by the river where the waters
go
To and fro . . .
(McLUHAN, HERBERT, DAISY and ELSIE dance,
exuberantly, lithely. The dance builds and
builds until the music breaks into the
melody again.)

ALL: Isn't it amazing how a fantasy
Can come to seem more real than reality
And everything's susceptible to remedy
Digitally.
(Lights narrow down on MARSHALL and
McLUHAN.)

McLUHAN: The sun's going down

MARSHALL: The sky's growing black
 McLUHAN: It's just you and me
 MARSHALL: I'm glad that you're back
 MARSHALL and
 McLUHAN: We better head home!
 (Black.)

End

Performance rights must be secured before production. For contact information, please see the *McLuhan: The Musical* information page (click on your browser's "Back" button, or visit www.singlelane.com/proplay/mcluhan.html)

Appendix: "The Happening"

As the audience returns from Intermission, they are urged by front-of-house staff/ushers to go up onstage (seats in house have been roped off anyway -- someone may have to invite those who remain seated during intermission to leave their seats).

They pass through the curtain draped across the front-of-the stage to discover that the stage has been turned into a sort of maze. Worklights are on. We want to build up a critical mass of bodies onstage, so don't allow them to enter the maze until just about everyone's onstage. The Actors are there (except for McLuhan, but he could be backstage reading Lawrence Ferlinghetti's "Coney Island of the Mind" into his mike). The actors have little Woodstockian paintings on their faces -- flowers, doves, peace symbols, etc.

While the Audience is waiting:

-- An Actor lies on the floor (or somewhere conspicuous), staring at the ceiling, chanting: "Earth. Sky. Space. Infinity." over and over again.

-- An Actor goes about with a large bowl of popcorn, offering it to Audience members, saying: "Eat of the Popcorn of Consciousness."

-- An Actor prances about with an atomizer, spraying little puffs of perfume into the air (lightly-scented, please, for the allergenic.)

-- Ponytail goes about with a bell and a copy of the Ottawa White Pages. He reads listings loudly: "Clarke, Alan M., 525 Highcroft Avenue, 728-2126" (and so on, in alphabetical order). After each one he rings the bell. He should deliver each of the listings to a different audience member -- meaningfully. The Musician provides a constant background of wierd noise.

When most of the audience is up onstage, Ponytail rings the bell a number of times in succession to get their attention. Other Actors stop their activities, and move to positions in the maze. Ponytail says: "Groovy. . . Welcome, fellow specks of Beingness. The time has come for you to enter -- the world of Marshall McLuhan."

Immediately, the lights change to rich, multi-coloured stage-lighting; it should become dark, but not so dark it's dangerous -- still light enough for people to see each other and find their way through the maze. Lights pulse, as if to the rhythm of a heartbeat. Slides, videos begin to project on the various surfaces of the maze. The Musician plays acid-trippy music, punctuated by occasional squeals of electronic sound; the music should come from speakers all around the stage.

Ponytail guides people into maze, saying "Enter, Enter, This Way, Man. It'll Blow Your Mind", etc.

-- Inside the Maze, a stagehand moves about with yet another slide projector, projecting images onto the Audience members. Backstage, McLuhan can hammer rhythmically on a block of wood, while reciting from Allen Ginsburg's "Howl". As they progress through the maze, audience members come upon:

-- An Actor in a day-glo leotard, under a black-light, writhing sinuously, and continuing to spray fragrance into the air.

-- An Actor holding two boxes with holes cut in their tops: She offers one to various audience members to put their hand in, saying "Touch Nothingness". That box is empty.

Then she offers the other, saying "Touch Allness". That box is full of socks, or pieces of a fur coat, or something.

-- A video of the theatre when it's empty. That's all. Just going on and on and on.

-- They emerge from the other end of the maze to find a piece of fabric stretched on a frame, with an Actor dancing behind it; she/he presses against it, and someone encourages Audience members to touch the squirming body through the fabric. Once they have, Ponytail gets them to join the circle of Audience members now forming in the open area, holding hands. He tells them to chant "ommmm" or something, and hands someone the "Popcorn of Consciousness" to be passed around the circle. He encourages them as they falter, keeps adding new members to the circle, keeps joining peoples' hands whether they feel like joining hands or not.

Lights and sound should have picked up speed, rhythm by now.

As the final Audience members emerge from the maze, McLuhan is onstage, approaching various audience members, asking if they know who's in charge, who'd running this show, etc. He can approach Ponytail if someone directs him that way, but Ponytail is much too busy to deal with him. (He could, though, try to get McLuhan to touch the body behind the fabric; McLuhan doesn't.) McLuhan forlornly, pathetically tries to explain to various audience members that this wasn't his idea, not really what he had in mind, etc., until, totally frustrated, he commandeers a microphone and shouts "STOPPP!"

Lights snap back to worklights; all sound, activity stops.

Resume script.