

**MEDIA
AS
MESSAGE**



Marshall McLuhan
(1911-1980)

*The Mechanical Bride: Folklore
and Industrial Man*
(1951)

*The Gutenberg Galaxy: The
Making of Typographic Man*
(1962)

*Understanding Media: The
Extensions of Man*
(1964)

*The Medium is the Massage:
An Inventory of Effects*
(1967)

*War and Peace in the Global
Village*
(1968)

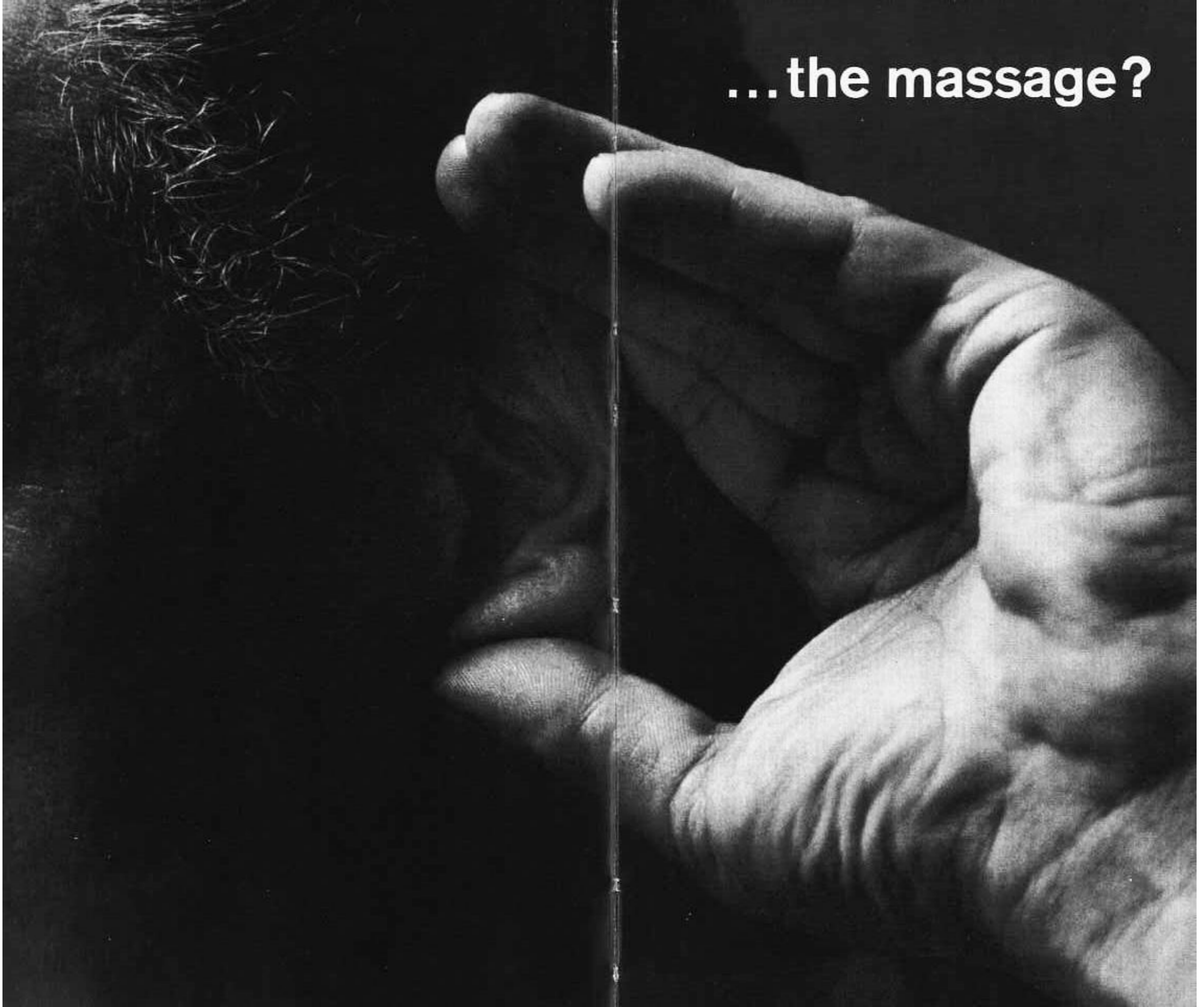
Marshall McLuhan
Author of UNDERSTANDING MEDIA

Quentin Fiore

**The Medium
is the Message**
An Inventory of Effects

 R3348 * \$1.45 * A BANTAM BOOK

...the message?



and how

**“The major advances in civil
that all but wreck the socie**

**ization are processes
ties in which they occur.”**

—A. N. Whitehead

The medium, or process, of our time—electric technology—is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life. It is forcing us to reconsider and re-evaluate practically every thought, every action, and every institution formerly taken for granted. Everything is changing—you, your family, your neighborhood, your education, your job, your government, your relation to “the others.” And they’re changing dramatically.

Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication. The alphabet, for instance, is a technology that is absorbed by the very young child in a completely unconscious manner, by osmosis so to speak. Words and the meaning of words predispose the child to think and act automatically in certain ways. The alphabet and print technology fostered and encouraged a fragmenting process, a process of specialism and of detachment. Electric technology fosters and encourages unification and involvement. It is impossible to understand social and cultural changes without a knowledge of the workings of media.

The older training of observation has become quite irrelevant in this new time, because it is based on psychological responses and concepts conditioned by the former technology—mechanization.

Innumerable confusions and a profound feeling of despair invariably emerge in periods of great technological and cultural transitions. Our “Age of



30-million toy trucks were bought in the U.S. in 1966.

Anxiety" is, in great part, the result of trying to do today's job with yesterday's tools—with yesterday's concepts.

Youth instinctively understands the present environment—the electric drama. It lives mythically and in depth. This is the reason for the great alienation between generations. Wars, revolutions, civil uprisings are interfaces within the new environments created by electric informational media.

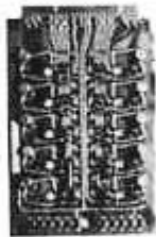
your family



The family circle has widened. The worldpool of information fathered by electric media—movies, Telstar, flight—far surpasses any possible influence mom and dad can now bring to bear. Character no longer is shaped by only two earnest, fumbling experts. Now all the world's a sage.



your job



"When this circuit learns your job, what are you going to do?"

"Jobs" represent a relatively recent pattern of work. From the fifteenth century to the twentieth century, there is a steady progress of fragmentation of the stages of work that constitute "mechanization" and "specialism." These procedures cannot serve for survival or sanity in this new time.

Under conditions of electric circuitry, all the fragmented job patterns tend to blend once more into involving and demanding roles or forms of work that more and more resemble teaching, learning, and "human" service, in the older sense of dedicated loyalty.

Unhappily, many well-intentioned political reform programs that aim at the alleviation of suffering caused by unemployment betray an ignorance of the true nature of media-influence.

"Come into my parlor," said the computer to the specialist.

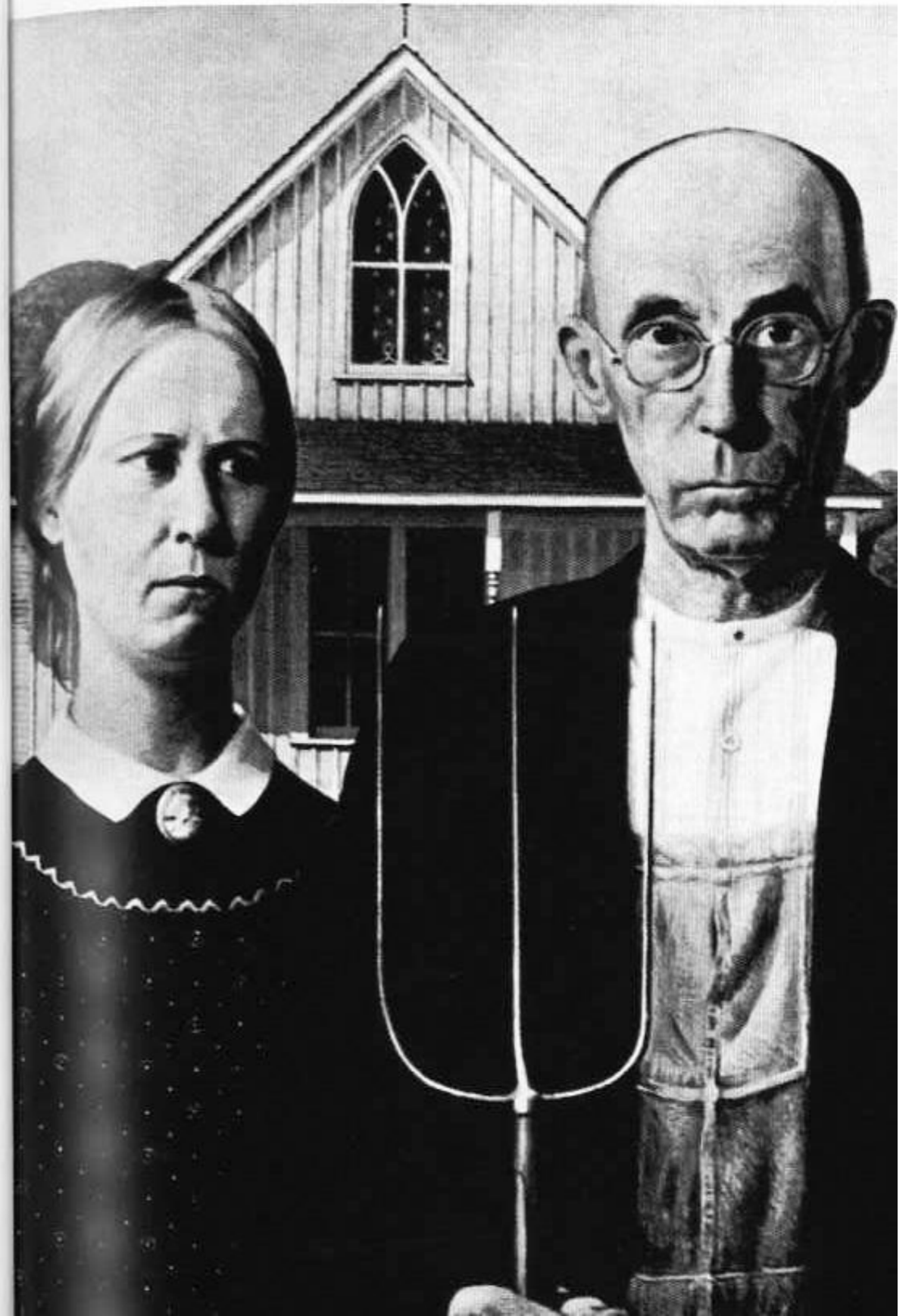


your government



Nose-counting, a cherished part of the eighteenth-century fragmentation process, has rapidly become a cumbersome and ineffectual form of social assessment in an environment of instant electric speeds. The public, in the sense of a great consensus of separate and distinct viewpoints, is finished. Today, the mass audience (the successor to the "public") can be used as a creative, participating force. It is, instead, merely given packages of passive entertainment. Politics offers yesterday's answers to today's questions.

A new form of "politics" is emerging, and in ways we haven't yet noticed. The living room has become a voting booth. Participation via television in Freedom Marches, in war, revolution, pollution, and other events is changing everything.

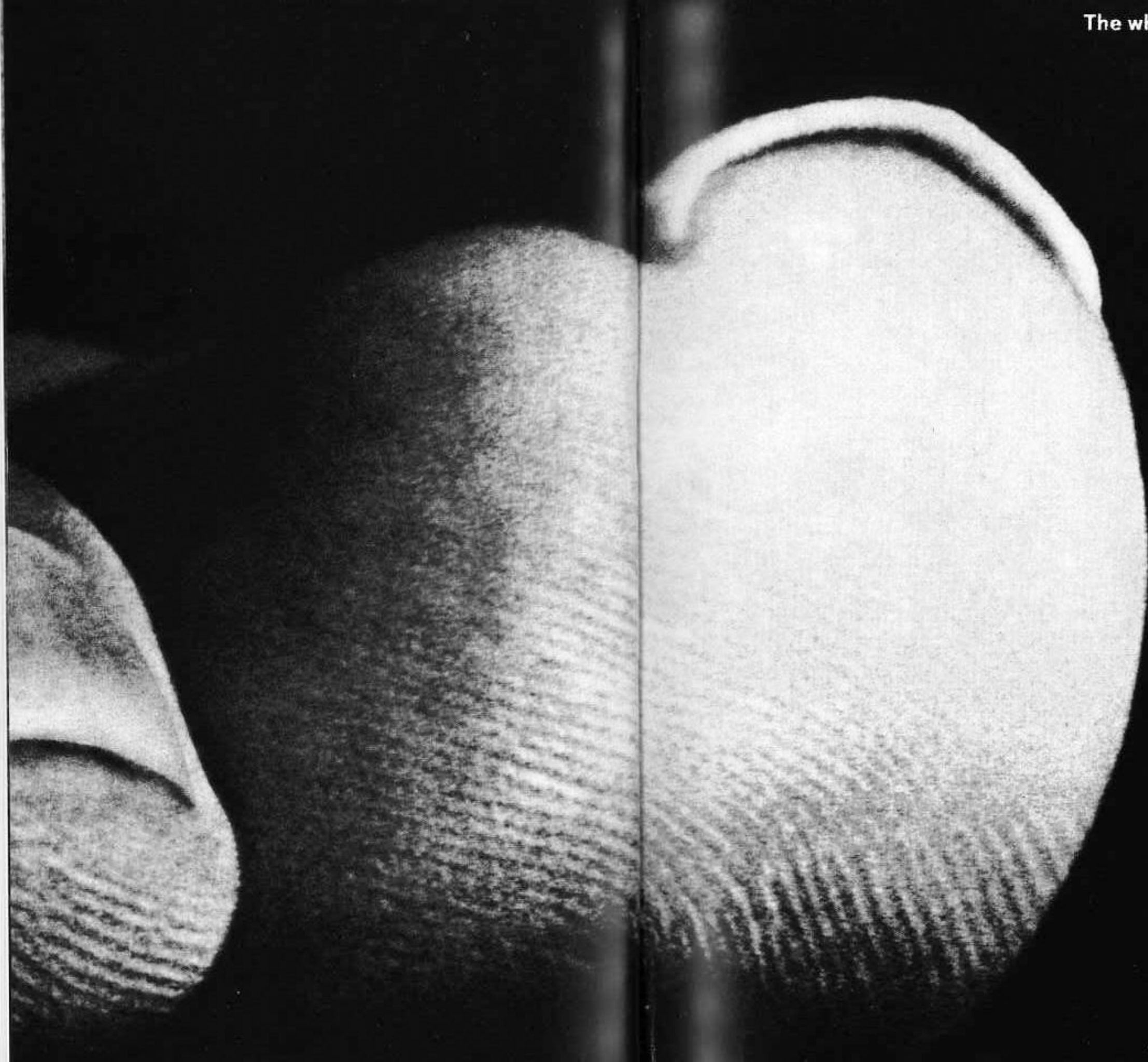


All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. The medium is the message. Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments.

**All
media
are
extensions
of
some
human
faculty—
psychic
or
physical.**







... is an extension of the foot



the book



is an extension of the eye...

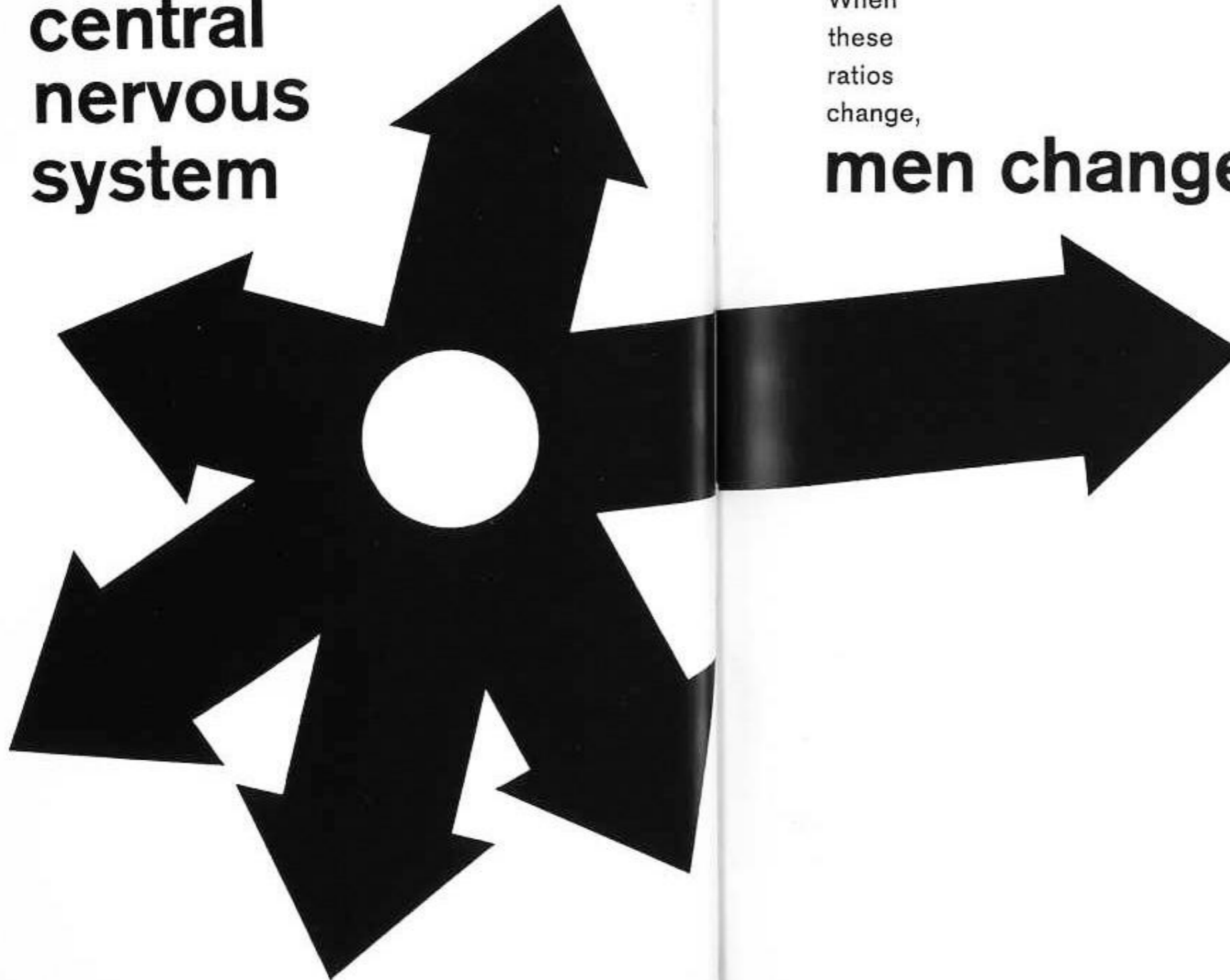


clothing, an extension of the skin...



electric circuitry,

**an extension of
the
central
nervous
system**



41

Media, by altering the environment, evoke in us unique ratios of sense perceptions. The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act—the way we perceive the world.

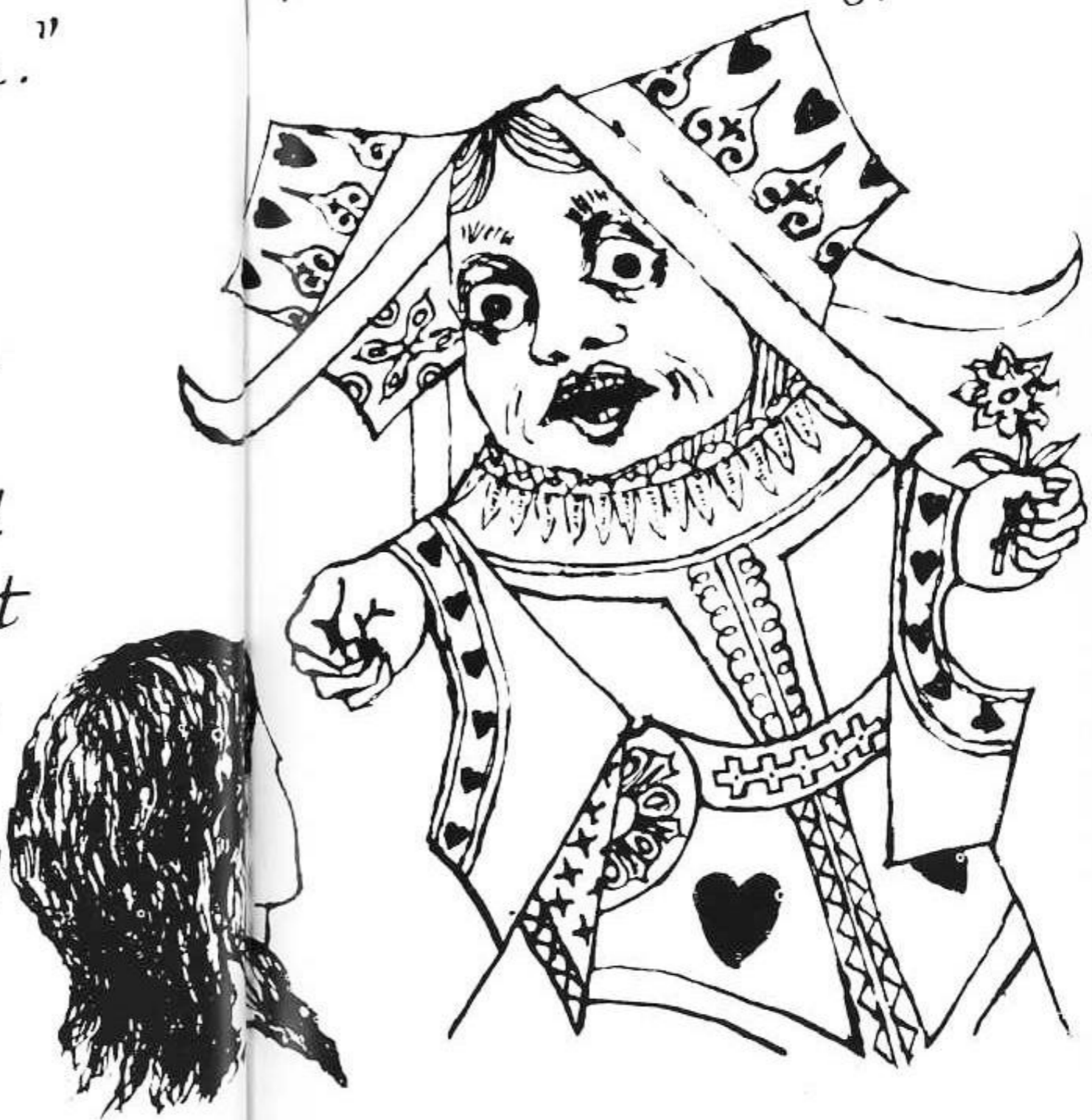
When
these
ratios
change,

men change.

"Now for the evidence," said the King, "and then the sentence."

"No!" said the Queen, "first the sentence, and then the evidence!"

"Nonsense!" cried Alice, so loudly that everybody jumped, "the idea of having the sentence first!"



Printing, a ditto device

Printing, a ditto device

Printing, a ditto device confirmed and extended the new visual stress. It provided the first uniformly repeatable "commodity," the first assembly line—mass production.

It created the portable book, which men could read in privacy and in isolation from others. Man could now inspire—and conspire.

Like easel painting, the printed book added much to the new cult of individualism. The private, fixed point of view became possible and literacy conferred the power of detachment, non-involvement.

Printing, a ditto device

Printing, a ditto device

Printing, a ditto device

Printing, a ditto device

Printing, a ditto device

Printing, a ditto device

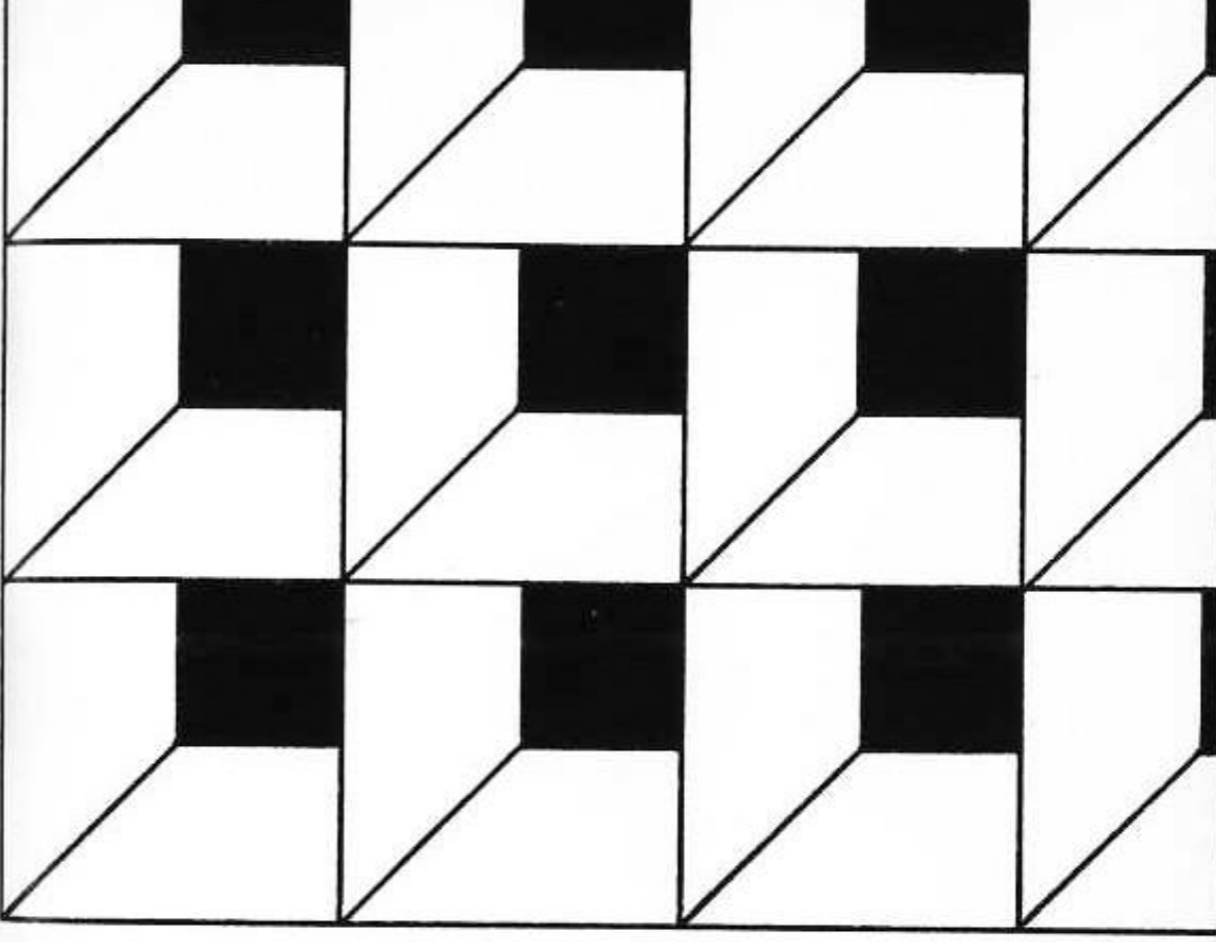
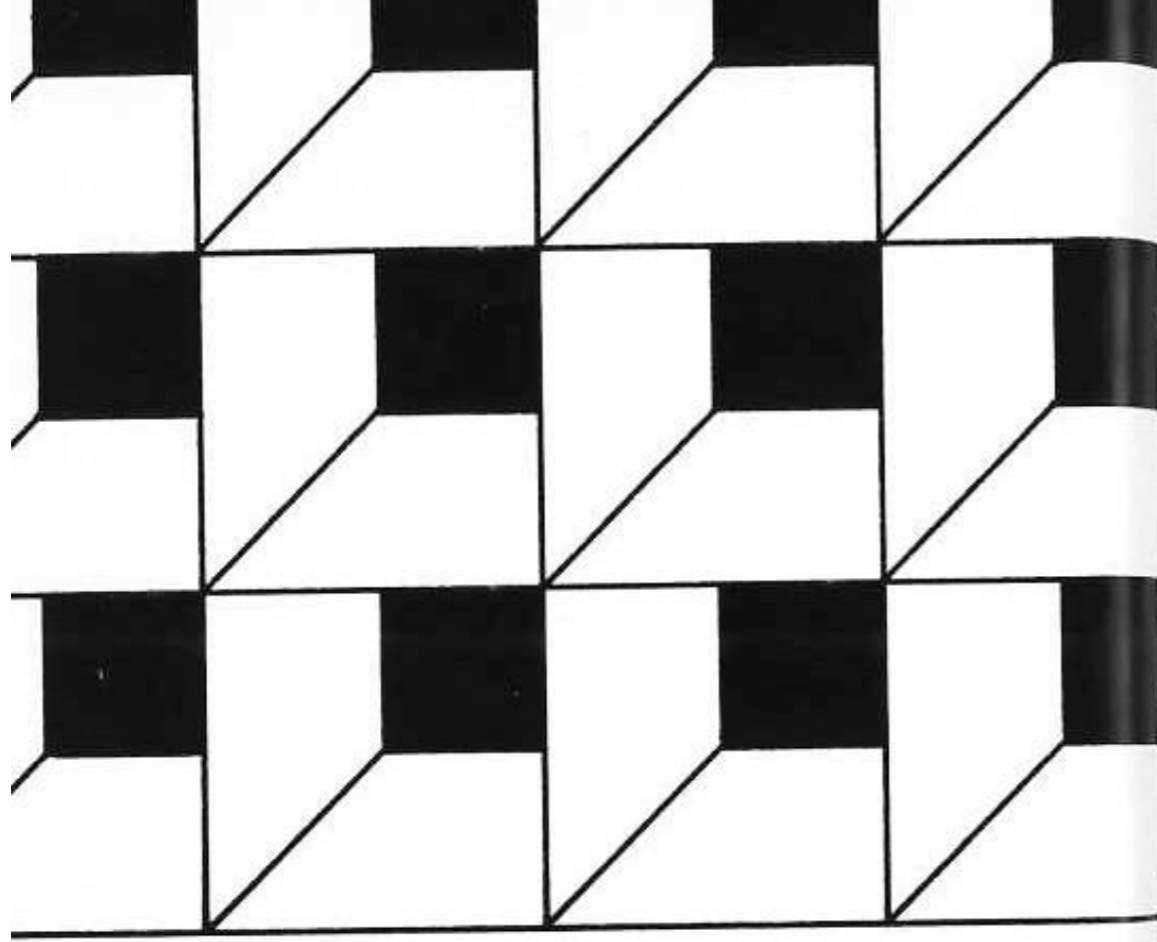
Printing, a ditto device

Printing, a ditto device

... suo. Et vidit deus quod esset bonum
 it. Faciamus hominem ad imaginem
 tudinem nostram. et posuit piscibus mari
 volatilibus celi. et bestiis omnibusque terrarum
 reptantibus quod movetur in terra. Et creavit
 deus hominem ad imaginem et similitudinem
 suam: ad imaginem dei creavit eum
 masculinum et feminam creavit eos
 et benedixitque illis deus. et ait. Crescite
 multiplicamini et replete terram. et
 dominamini piscibus
 maris. et volatilibus celi: et universis
 animalibus que moventur super terram
 aitque deus. Ecce dedi vobis omnem
 terram afferentem sementem super terram
 omnia ligna que habent in semetipsis
 fructum suum: ut sint vobis in escam
 et in cibum animalibus terre. omniaque volu-

—John Dewey
in the very constitution
ence then suppose that
abide. Those who write
is then assigned its own
ion from executive' doing.
called 'practice,' from
a separation of that mode
tion of occupations and

of human nature."
these divisions inhere
the anatomy of experi
place in which it must
Each of these activities
insight, of imagination
of activity commonly
interests bring about
"...compartmentaliza
of human nature."



Ours is a brand-new world of allatonce-ness. "Time" has ceased, "space" has vanished. We now live in a global village... a simultaneous happening. We are back in acoustic space. We have begun again to structure the primordial feeling, the tribal emotions from which a few centuries of literacy divorced us.

We have had to shift our stress of attention from action to reaction. We must now know in advance the consequences of any policy or action, since the results are experienced without delay. Because of electric speed, we can no longer wait and see. George Washington once remarked, "We haven't heard from Benj. Franklin in Paris this year. We should write him a letter."

At the high speeds of electric communication, purely visual means of apprehending the world are no longer possible; they are just too slow to be relevant or effective.

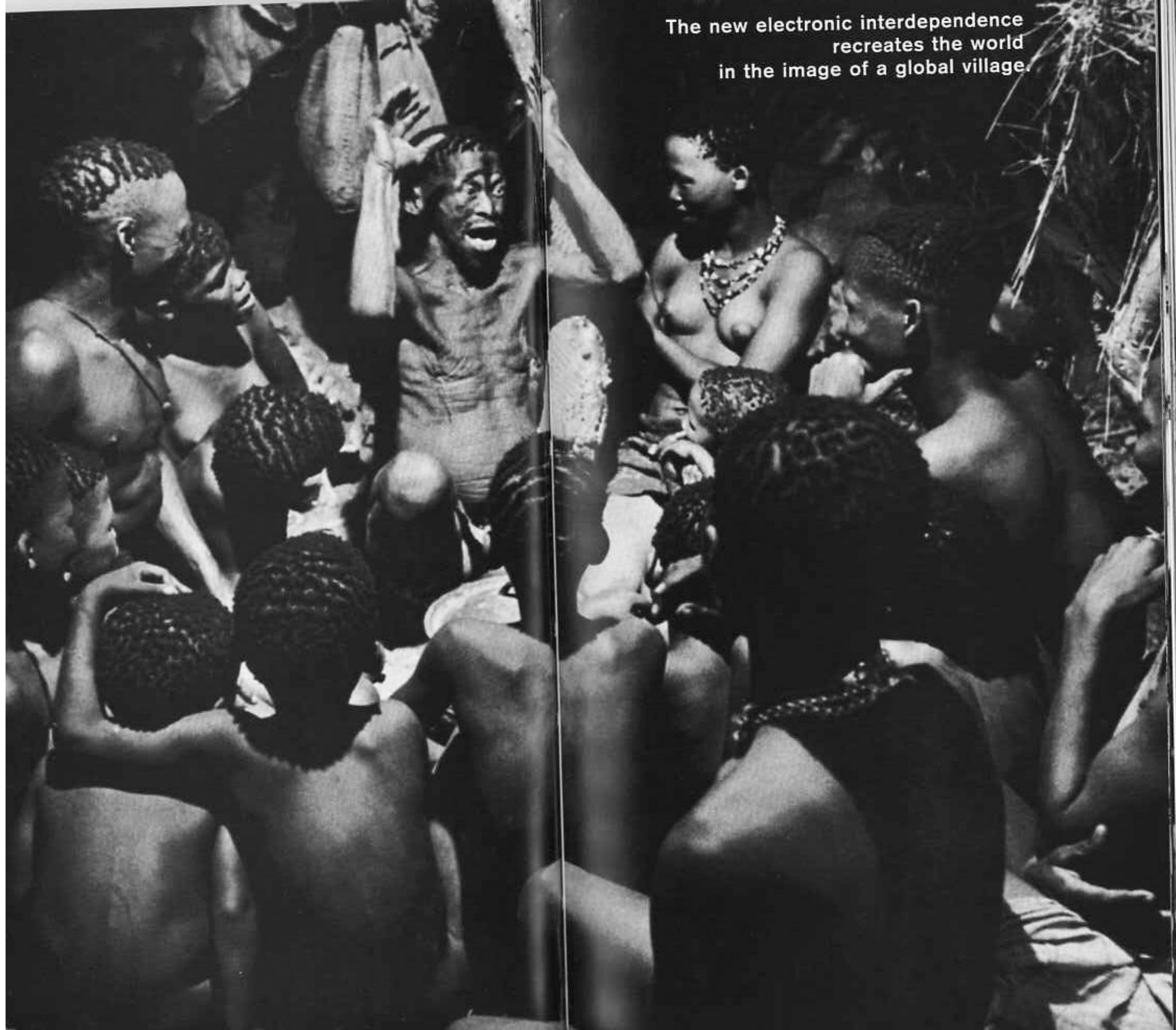
Unhappily, we confront this new situation with an enormous backlog of outdated mental and psychological responses. We have been left d-a-n-g-l-i-n-g. Our most impressive words and thoughts betray us—they refer us only to the past, not to the present.

Electric circuitry profoundly involves men with one another. Information pours upon us, instantaneously and continuously. As soon as information is acquired, it is very rapidly replaced by still newer information. Our electrically-configured world has forced us to move from the habit of data classification to the mode of pattern recognition. We can no longer build serially, block-by-block, step-by-step, because instant communication insures that all factors of the environment and of experience co-exist in a state of active interplay.

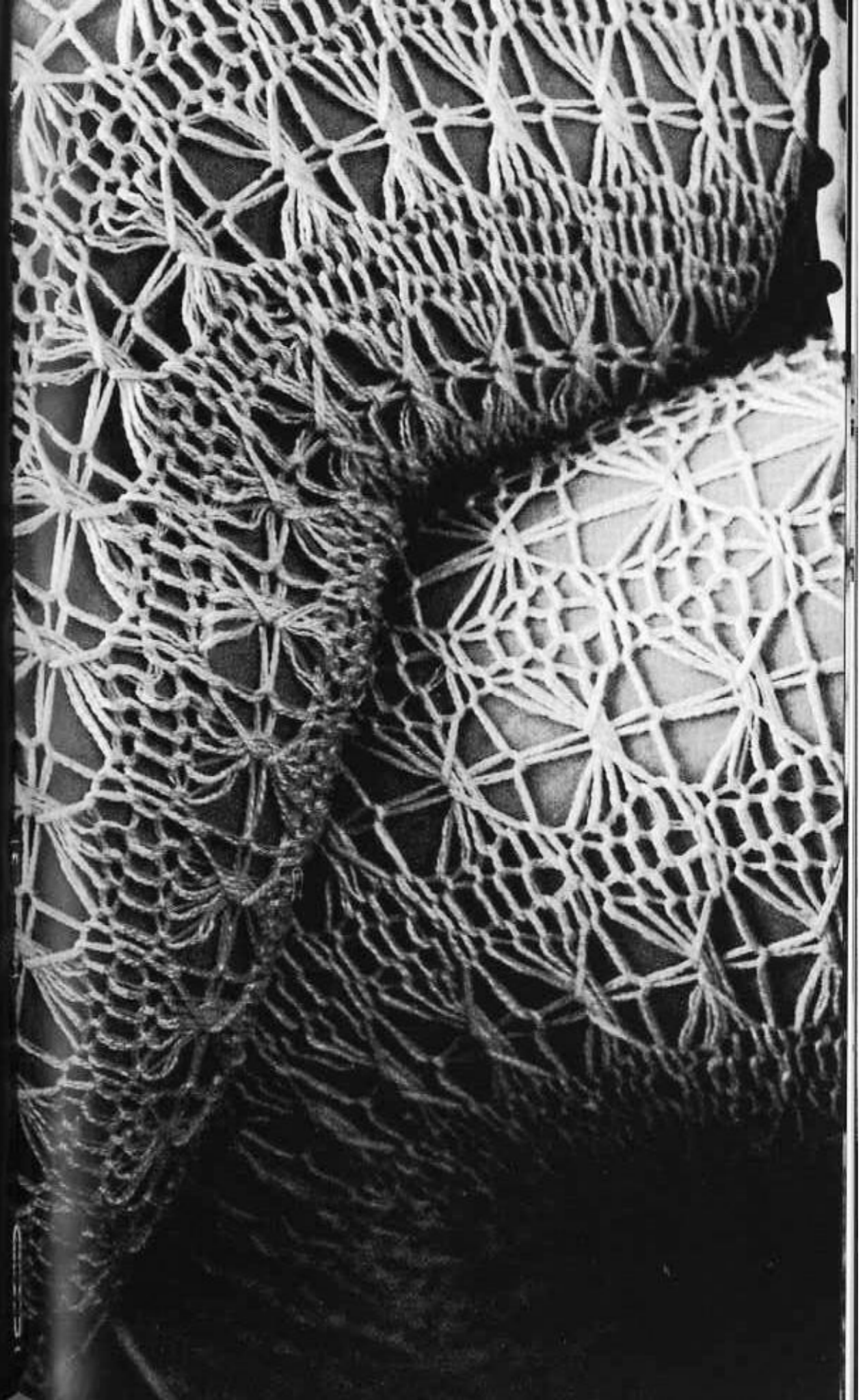
**Solid integrated circuit
enlarged several hundred times.**



The new electronic interdependence
recreates the world
in the image of a global village.



**When
information
is
brushed
against
information...**






the results are startling and effective. The perennial quest for involvement, fill-in, takes many forms.

**The stars are so big,
The Earth is so small,**

Stay as you are.





In the name of "progress,"
our official culture is striving
to force the new media to do
the work of the old.



Our official culture is striving to force the new media to do the work of the old.

These are difficult times because we are witnessing a clash of cataclysmic proportions between two great technologies. We approach the new with the psychological conditioning and sensory responses of the old. This clash naturally occurs in

transitional periods. In late medieval art, for instance, we saw the fear of the new print technology expressed in the theme *The Dance of Death*. Today, similar fears are expressed in the *Theater of the Absurd*. Both represent a common failure: the attempt to do a job demanded by the new environment with the tools of the old.