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



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...the massage?



# 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 reevaluate 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.



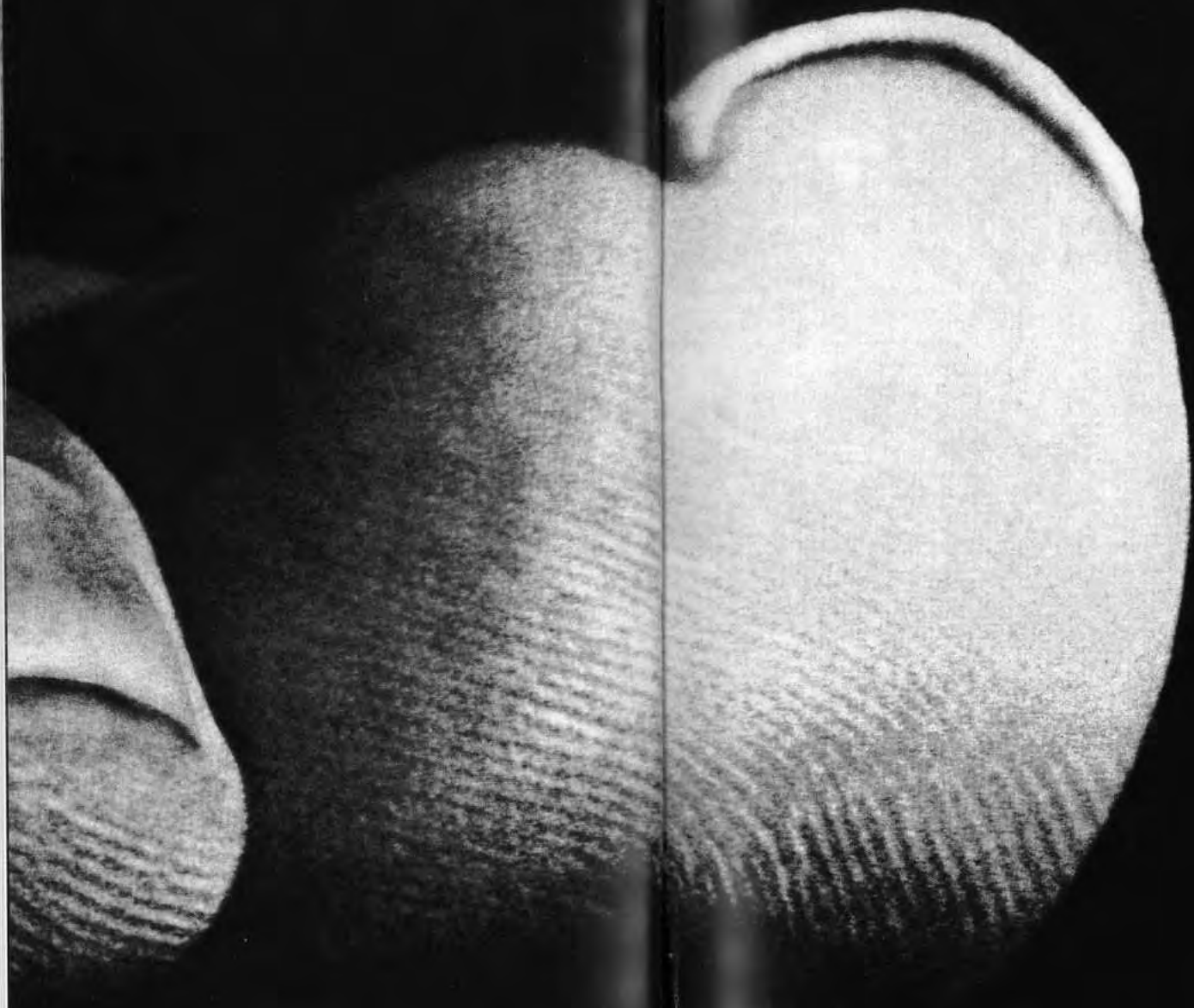


All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. The medium is the message. Any understanding of social and cultural change 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...**

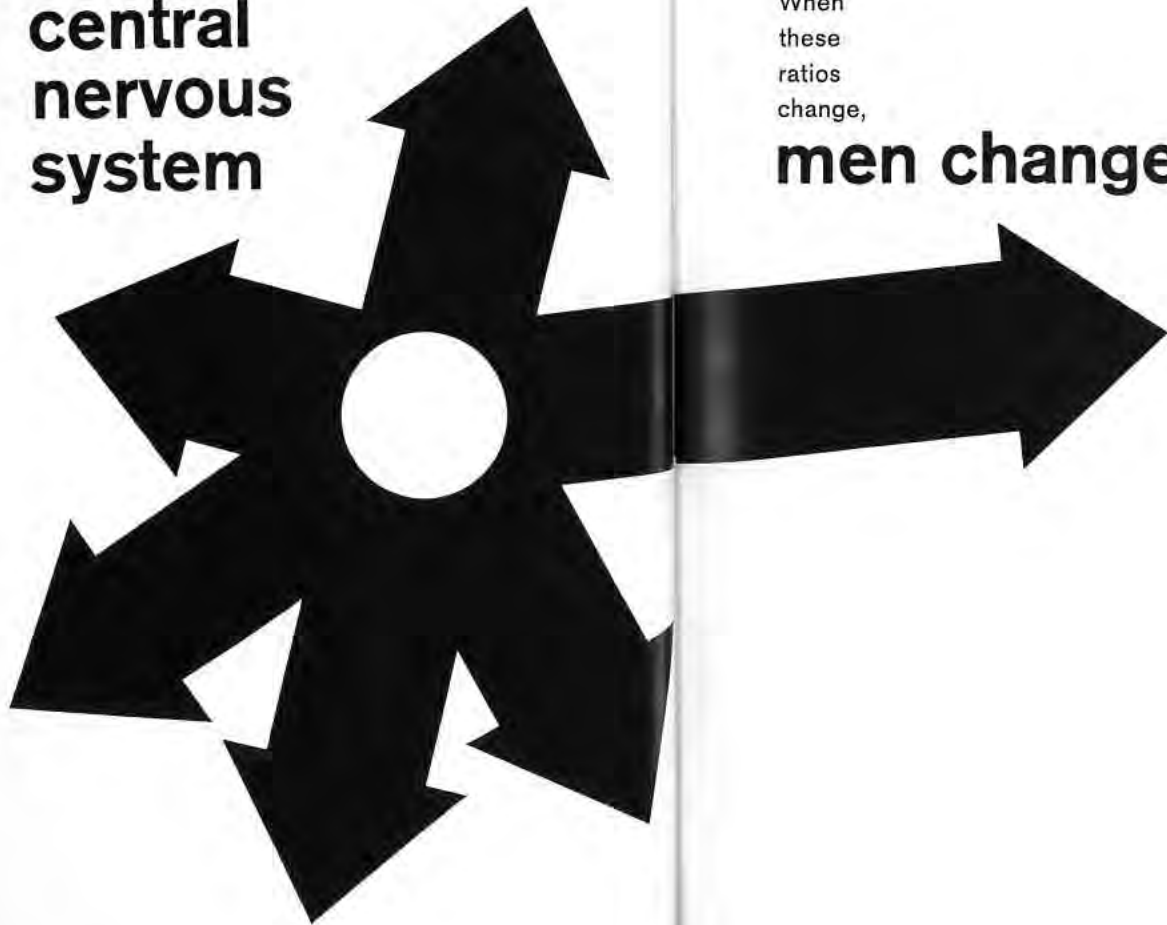


**clothing, an extension of the skin...**



**electric circuitry,**

**an extension of  
the  
central  
nervous  
system**



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.**



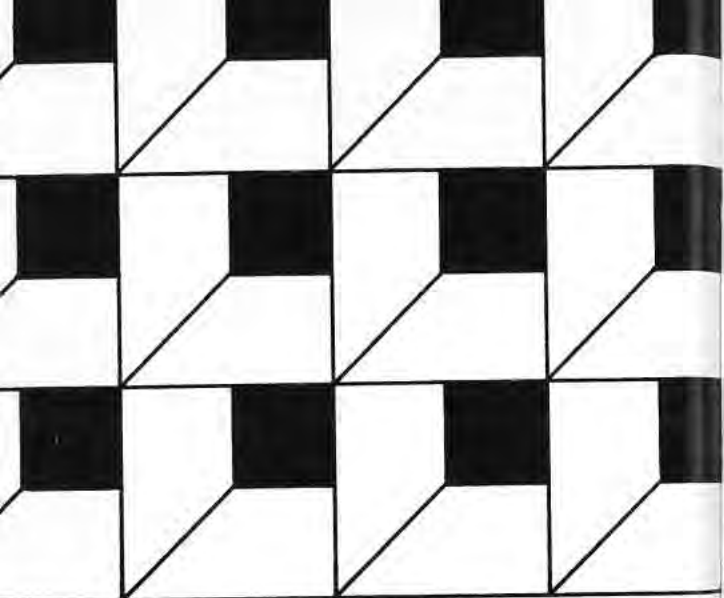
"Now for the evidence," said the King, "and then the sentence."

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

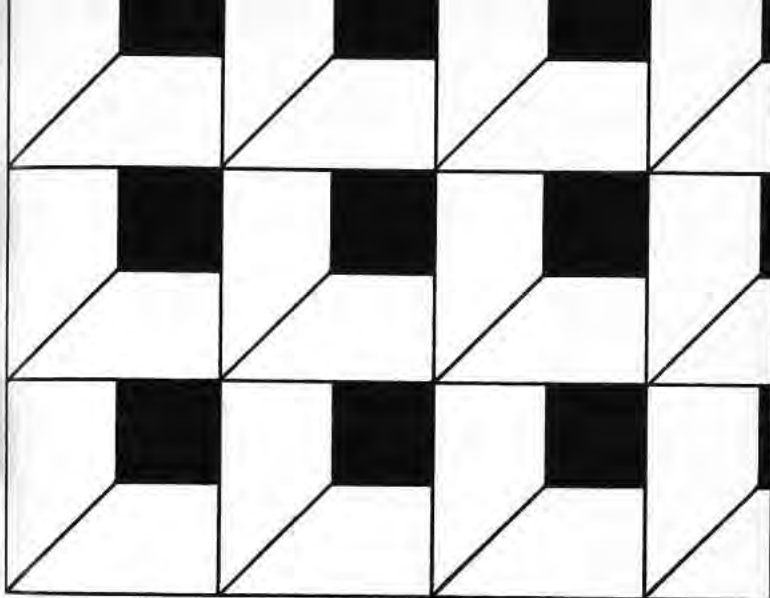
"Nonsense!" cried Alice, so loudly that everybody jumped, "the idea of having the sentence first!"







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



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

Ours is a brand-new world of allatonceness. "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.

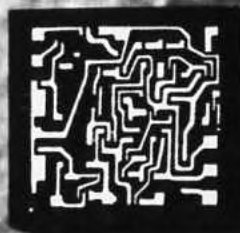
We have had to shift our stress of attention from action to reaction. We must now know in advance the consequences of any policy or action, since the results are experienced without delay. Because of electric speed, we can no longer wait and see. George Washington once remarked, "We haven't heard from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



We have now become aware of the possibility of arranging the entire human environment as a work of art, as a teaching machine designed to maximize perception and to make everyday learning a process of discovery. Application of this knowledge would be the equivalent of a thermostat controlling room temperature. It would seem only reasonable to extend such controls to all the sensory thresholds of our being. We have no reason to be grateful to those who juggle these thresholds in the name of haphazard innovation.

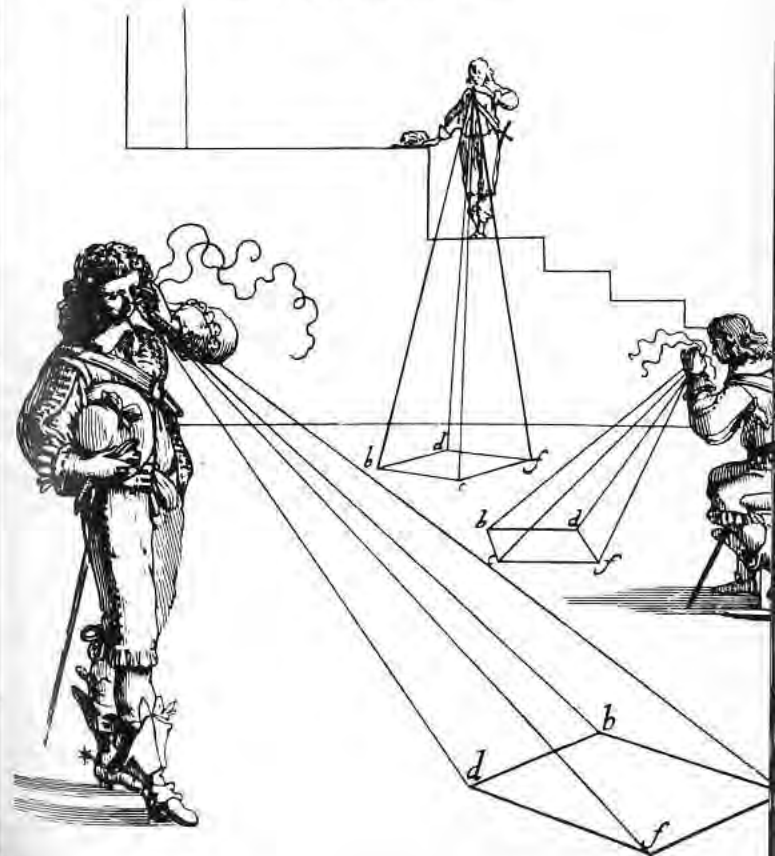
An astronomer looking through a 200-inch telescope exclaimed that it was going to rain. His assistant asked, "How can you tell?" "Because my corns hurt."

Environments are not passive wrappings, but are, rather, active processes which are invisible. The groundrules, pervasive structure, and over-all patterns of environments elude easy perception. Anti-environments, or countersituations made by artists, provide means of direct attention and enable us to see and understand more clearly. The interplay between the old and the new environments creates many problems and confusions. The main obstacle to a clear understanding of the effects of the new media is our deeply embedded habit of regarding all phenomena from a fixed point of view. We speak, for instance, of "gaining perspective." This psychological process derives unconsciously from print technology.

Print technology created the public. Electric technology created the mass. The public consists of separate individuals walking around with separate, fixed points of view. The new technology demands

that we abandon the luxury of this posture, this fragmentary outlook.

The method of our time is to use not a single but multiple models for exploration—the technique of the suspended judgment is the discovery of the twentieth century as the technique of invention was the discovery of the nineteenth.





*"It isn't that I don't like current events.  
There have just been so many of them lately."*





### The end of the line.

The railway radically altered the personal outlooks and patterns of social interdependence. It bred and nurtured the American Dream. It created totally new urban, social, and family worlds. New ways of work. New ways of management. New legislation.

The technology of the railway created the myth of a green pasture world of innocence. It satisfied man's desire to withdraw from society, symbolized by the city, to a rural setting where he could recover his animal and natural self. It was the pastoral ideal, a Jeffersonian world, an agrarian democracy which was intended to serve as a guide to social policy. It gave us darkest suburbia and its lasting symbol: the lawnmower.

The circuited city of the future will not be the huge hunk of concentrated real estate created by the railway. It will take on a totally new meaning under conditions of very rapid movement. It will be an information megalopolis. What remains of the configuration of former "cities" will be very much like World's Fairs—places in which to show off new technology, not places of work or residence. They will be preserved, museumlike, as living monuments to the railway era. If we were to dispose of the city now, future societies would reconstruct them, like so-many Williamsburgs.

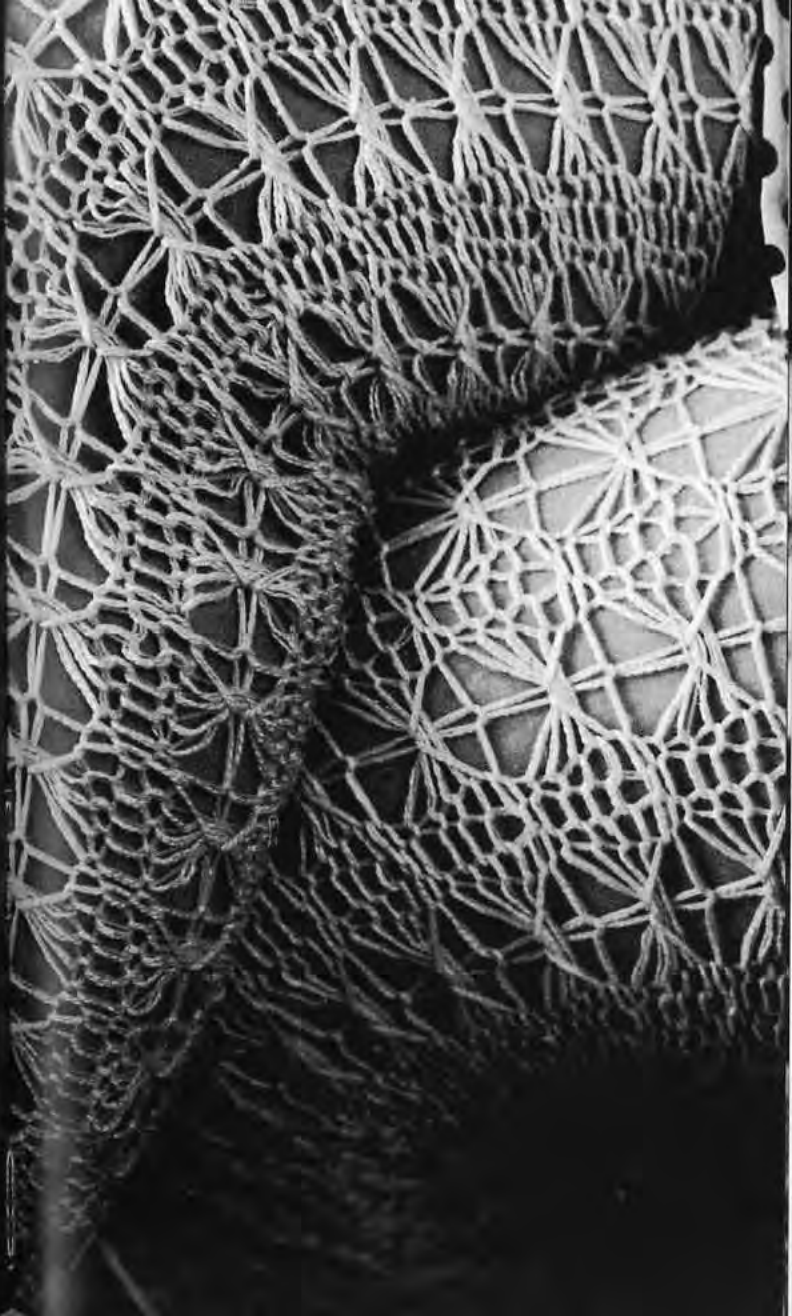




The past went that-a-way. When faced with a totally new situation, we tend always to attach ourselves to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past.

We look at the present through a rear-view mirror. We march backwards into the future. Suburbia lives imaginatively in Bonanza-land.

**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.

"The thing of it is, we must live with the living."

— Montaigne







The youth of today are not permitted to approach the traditional heritage of mankind through the door of technological awareness. This only possible door for them is slammed in their faces by a rear-view-mirror society.

The young today live mythically and in depth. But they encounter instruction in situations organized by means of classified information—subjects are unrelated, they are visually conceived in terms of a blueprint. Many of our institutions suppress all the natural direct experience of youth, who respond with untaught delight to the poetry and the beauty of the new technological environment, the environment of popular culture. It could be their door to all past achievement if studied as an active (and not necessarily benign) force.

The student finds no means of involvement for himself and cannot discover how the educational scheme relates to his mythic world of electronically processed data and experience that his clear and direct responses report.

It is a matter of the greatest urgency that our educational institutions realize that we now have civil war among these environments created by media other than the printed word. The classroom is now in a vital struggle for survival with the immensely persuasive "outside" world created by new informational media. Education must shift from instruction, from imposing of stencils, to discovery—to probing and exploration and to the recognition of the language of forms.

The young today reject goals. They want roles—R-O-L-E-S. That is, total involvement. They do not want fragmented, specialized goals or jobs.



We now experience simultaneously the dropout and the teach-in. The two forms are correlative. They belong together. The teach-in represents an attempt to shift education from instruction to discovery, from brainwashing students to brainwashing instructors. It is a big, dramatic reversal. Vietnam, as the content of the teach-in, is a very small and perhaps misleading Red Herring. It really has little to do with the teach-in, as such, anymore than with the dropout.

The dropout represents a rejection of nineteenth-century technology as manifested in our educational establishments. The teach-in represents a creative effort, switching the educational process from package to discovery. As the audience becomes a participant in the total electric drama, the classroom can become a scene in which the audience performs an enormous amount of work.



Amherst seniors walk out on graduation address by Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara. June, 1966.

# ED UCATION



**“Because something is happening  
But you don’t know what it is  
Do you, Mister Jones?”**

**—Bob Dylan**



*"The hell of it is those punks pump over fifteen billion dollars into the economy every year."*