theories and methodologies

Elsie McLuhan's Vocal Science

PAULA McDOWELL

Pull out the plug in order to get back to the physical body.
—Marshall McLuhan, 19 December 1978[1]

FOUR YEARS BEFORE A MASSIVE STROKE TOOK AWAY HIS ABILITY TO SPEAK, MARSHALL McLUHAN ADVISED HIS SON ERIC TO "DEVELOP THE power and habit of listening. It is not a power that I have, and nobody ever told me how to go about getting it."[2] A notorious talker who would "lecture and discourse nonstop if anyone else was present" (Marchand 273), and who frequently telephoned his friends and colleagues in the wee hours of the morning to discuss his latest idea,[3] this English professor turned media theorist was also one of the first academics to recognize and seize the opportunities offered by the new media of popular culture to reach audiences wider than the readerships of scholarly journals. From the 1960s onward, McLuhan made dozens of appearances on radio and television and even made a cameo film appearance: in Woody Allen's *Annie Hall*, he silences an arrogant Columbia University professor by declaring, "You know nothing of my work." At once a raconteur and an aphorist, he was most alive when processing his thoughts aloud to a live audience, whether in a Canadian Broadcasting Corporation recording studio, at his family dinner table, or in his office at the University of Toronto, where he dictated many of his later writings (books, articles, and correspondence) to his secretary, Margaret Stewart ("Marge"). "Telephone conversations with Marshall would turn into miniature symposia," recalled the University of Toronto president Claude Bissell (qtd. in Nevitt 284). Ironically, given his own wee-hours use of the telephone, McLuhan theorized this medium of secondary (or electronic) orality as "an intensely personal form that ignores all the claims of visual privacy prized by literate man" and as "an irresistible intruder in time or place" (*Understanding Media* 296).

McLuhan's debts to his professors at Cambridge University are now well known, especially his debts to I. A. Richards, in whose classroom experiments in New Critical interpretation he took part

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in 1935. But I wish to consider his debt to perhaps the most influential person in his life, his mother, Elsie Naomi Hall McLuhan (1889–1961), who preceded him in her study of literature and the "vocal arts" (in her case, elocution; in his case, rhetoric) and in her publicly recognized skills of oral performance. Best remembered today for his dictum "the medium is the message"[4] and his contribution to the "orality-literacy heuristic"[5] (forged in dialogue with his student and friend Walter J. Ong), McLuhan studied classical rhetoric and wrote his PhD thesis on Thomas Nashe and the classical trivium. But both before and during his college years, I argue, his most valued interlocutor, audience, and correspondent was his mother, and his greatest secular influence was what I call here Elsie McLuhan's vocal science. His mother's professional career as a dramatic speaker meant that Marshall McLuhan *heard* literature long before he read it, and his early exchanges with his mother about the oral delivery of literature and the corporeality of oral and aural communication profoundly shaped his later media theory.

Elsie Naomi Hall was born on a farm in Nova Scotia. At sixteen she graduated from Acadia University, where she had received elocutionary training from Josephine Goodspeed, a graduate of Emerson College of Oratory in Boston. According to the Acadia University calendar for 1907–08, Goodspeed taught students "to express 'by means of the body, the face, and the voice, the various emotions of the soul'" (qtd. in Gordon 7–8).[6] In eighteenth-century Britain, proponents of the "elocution movement" offered to teach the ancient arts of rhetoric to new social groups. Elocutionists such as John "Orator" Henley and Thomas Sheridan offered to help speakers shed the linguistic provincialisms believed to hamper social advancement in the newly consolidated "Great Britain." By the nineteenth century, instruction in public speaking was standard in public classrooms throughout Britain and North America, and literary works formed the bulk of the classroom-recitation canon.[7] In 1908 Elsie Hall moved to Alberta to teach school. She boarded with the McLuhans, married Herbert McLuhan, and gave birth to two sons, Marshall (b. 1911) and Maurice (b. 1913). When Herbert enlisted in the army to fight in the First World War in 1915, she moved with her boys to Winnipeg to live with her mother, and when Herbert was discharged the family settled there. Elsie Hall McLuhan sought further vocal training from Alice Leone Mitchell, another graduate of Emerson College who had opened a voice school in Winnipeg, and she eventually began giving local recitals. Beginning in 1922, she organized and undertook performance tours across Canada (leaving her sons with their father), and by the 1930s she had become a well-known one-woman show.

Equipped with nothing but her voice and a few props, Elsie McLuhan entertained audiences for two hours in theaters, churches, community halls, and schools. Modeling her career as a monologist or diseuse after those of predecessors such as Ruth Draper (an American speaker who dominated the solo-performance field in the United States and Europe for forty years) and E. Pauline Johnson, or Tekahionwake (a Canadian indigenous poet and performer who also earned international acclaim), she delivered character sketches and dramatic readings of highbrow, middlebrow, and popular verse and performed roles from plays. Her repertoire contained verse by male poets such as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Joyce Kilmer, Edward Guest, and Walter de la Mare, including poems in dialect by the French Canadian poet William Henry Drummond and by Paul Lawrence Dunbar, one of the first African American authors to earn international fame. But she also performed a striking number of works by women writers, including Johnson, May Isabel Fisk, Mary Carolyn Davies, Winifred Hawkridge, Althea Thurston, Constance D'Arcy Mackay, Isabel Ecclestone Mackay, Emma Speed Samson,

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Florence Guertin Tuttle, Frances Hodgson Burnett, and fellow Novia Scotian Marguerite Odgen Wilkinson, whose edited anthologies *New Voices* (1919) and *Contemporary Poetry* (1923) are now recognized as leading examples of popular modernism (as contrasted with the "high" modernism of poets such as T. S. Eliot and Ezra Pound).

Elsie McLuhan also performed works by Ella Wheeler Wilcox, the popular poet of whom Richards wrote in *Practical Criticism* (1929), "[T]here cannot be much doubt that when we know we are reading Milton or Shelley, a great deal of our approval and admiration is being accorded not to the poetry but to an idol. Conversely, if we did not know that we are reading Ella Wheeler Wilcox, much of our amusement or patronizing condescension might easily be absent" (297). Marshall McLuhan grew up listening to his mother recite both Wilcox and William Shakespeare as she did the housework, and by the time he left for college he had already memorized vast swaths of poetry. These factors no doubt contributed to his success in Richards's pedagogical experiments, wherein he (Richards) distributed anonymous poems and prose samples in the classroom and asked his students to write critiques of them. In 1935 McLuhan reported home that "Richards read aloud my (annonymous) comments on one of his 'prose passages for practical criticism' to-day, with approval. He reads many and much fun we have at the expense of various unknowns."[8]

Perhaps most revealing of Elsie McLuhan's character, though, was her willingness to perform preemptive self-satire. Well aware of how some contemporaries felt about "lady elocutionists" (let alone "lady scribblers" like Wilcox), she performed the scene in Richard Brinsley Sheridan's *The Rivals* where the ridiculous would-be elocutionist Mrs. Malaprop prides herself on her vocabulary and pronunciation yet misstates almost everything that she says. A newspaper clipping from *The Calgary Herald* reports that McLuhan performed this role with great success to "over 800 Calgarians" who (at the height of the Great Depression) paid thirty-five cents each and left "delighted" by her "art" (Review).

McLuhan's reviewers repeatedly distinguish her oral arts from those of a "mere elocutionist." One reviewer, for instance, observes that her art form requires "more than the fine voice of a mere elocutionist. . . . [H]er impersonations demand that this same voice be flexible and clear" ("Recital"). Another reviewer exults, "[I]t seems that the old school of 'elocutionists' who rolled their eyes, pounded their breasts and waved their arms . . . is passing away. Certainly nothing could be farther from it than the work of Miss Elsie McLuhan" ("Elsie McLuhan"). A third reviewer, drawing on the root word of *text*, the Latin *texere*, to weave, writes that "an art like this is like a spell that weaves for its hearers images from song and story" ("Miss Elsie McLuhan"). McLuhan studied her profession with every means at her disposal: voice coaching, drama lessons, home exercises, and extensive reading. An undated manuscript note to herself reads, "Boleslavsky on acting—get book," suggesting that she studied works such as *Acting: The First Six Lessons* (1933) and *New Features in Acting* (1935), by the actor, acting teacher, and theater and film director Richard Boleslavsky.[9]

One text we know Elsie McLuhan especially valued was Edward A. Hayes's *Principles of Vocal Science* (1897), for a note on the back endpaper of her copy suggests she passed it on to one or both of her sons: "this was mamma's when she was singing you will finds some very valuable information in it." Both Maurice and Marshall McLuhan were greatly influenced by their mother's vocal science; the former became a United Church minister, while the latter's speaking and debating skills are well known.

An obscure figure today, Hayes described himself as a "teacher of the voice and . . . investigator of vocal laws" and as "Director of the New York School of Vocal Science." Al-

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though very few copies of *Principles of Vocal Science* appear to have survived, this eighty-plus-page tract is important to us here, not only for its value to Elsie McLuhan but also because its emphases on "cause and effect," the human sensorium, and the physical constitution of sound startlingly anticipate many of Marshall McLuhan's key concerns. Filled with lively anatomical illustrations, its chapters are titled "The Singer's Tongue," "The Singer's Tongue and Palate," "The Singer's Cheeks," "The Singer's Neck," "The Singer's Breath—Inspiration," and "The Singer's Breath—Expiration." Hayes discusses dozens of body parts in detail: not only expected ones, such as the lips, tongue, mouth, and diaphragm, but also unexpected ones, such as the "abdomen" (68, 69, 82) and "viscera (contents of the abdomen)" (78, 82), "clavicle" (57), "cranium" (23, 31, 32, 33), "finger nail[s]" (56), and "arm pits" (70). He seems to have specialized in the study of muscles and muscle control, and he delighted in recounting the Latin names of muscles. One can imagine this vocal instructor enumerating to his bewildered students the names and unique virtues of muscles such as the "*latissimus dorsi*" (68), "*depressor labii inferioris*" (44), "*erector spinae*" (80), and "*obliquus externus abdominis*" (77), as well as "the enormously important *bucinator* muscles" (44–45).

For Hayes the study of the vocal mechanism of the body was a scientific matter of "cause and effect": "in the musical world, as in every world, cause and effect is king" (15). The corporeal medium of sound could be analyzed like any other "means," or medium: "let us apply cause and effect to the voice. What is voice? Sound. What is sound? Air vibration. What causes air vibration? Muscular vibration. What causes muscular vibration. Why, breath pressure" (and so on [14]). In working to establish scientific principles of causation for the "vocal arts," Hayes analyzes different body parts as the "means" (16, 18), "instrument[s]" (15, 21, 22), "organ[s]" (29), and "agents" of sound (57). He does not describe sound as a medium or the body as a medium of sound, but he uses virtually all the other historical antecedents of our modern "media concept" (to borrow John Guillory's phrase), especially "means."[10] Hayes's chief concern was with the medium and its "effects" rather than with any particular message. In this way, he anticipates Marshall McLuhan, whose *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962) and *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964) and other works are centrally concerned with cause and effect. As McLuhan's biographer, W. Terrence Gordon, observes, "the study of effects is the thread running through all of [his] media analysis—if not its entire rationale" (313).

Hayes cared little about the particular content of his vocal students' performances, only that they deliver it effectively and "invisibly" by means of the medium of their bodies. As Lisa Gitelman has suggested, "the success of all media depends at some level on inattention or 'blindness' to the media technologies themselves (and all of their supporting protocols) in favor of attention to the phenomena, 'the content,' that they represent for users' edification or enjoyment" (*Always Already New* 6). Despite his intense interest in cause and effect, Hayes emphasized that "the '*aesthetic* ideal' is a losing sight of the *means* by which the perfection of voice is realized" (16; my emphasis). Paradoxically, the ultimate goal for his vocal students was to forget their lessons: "Pure, bald voice is not the ideal, but singing. . . . [T]he muscles must be so trained that their action will be voluntary, and when this is achieved the singer can confidently forget the means by which the end was attained and center all his faculties on the interpretation of his music." When it comes to the vocal arts, only our *in*attention to the medium—the speaker's body—allows us to truly hear and "interpret" the message (18).

In 1929 Marshall McLuhan began, as he put it, "laboring up the peaks of English literature" at college.[11] After obtaining a BA and an MA at the University of Manitoba and

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a second BA and a PhD at Cambridge (all of these degrees in English literature), he taught in an English department for the rest of his life. Throughout his years in college, he wrote to his mother almost weekly, and his letters clearly demonstrate his interest and involvement in her career. McLuhan seems genuinely to have felt that he never encountered anyone who read literature aloud as well as his mother, and he vowed to imitate her study of oral "interpretation":

> [A]ll of [the lecturers here] try to read poetry . . . and do it only respectably. That is firmly (doggedly determined to weigh scrupulously each syllable) and without any transitions of manner to suit the poem. I'm not quite sure if this standard way is justifiable or not. In any case it lags miles behind your interpretation Mother, and I simply must get a background of technique.[12]

Despite this harsh judgment of his Cambridge professors' oral reading skills, McLuhan described Mansfield Forbes's lecture on "metre rhyme, rhythm, and the reading (aloud) of poetry with spec. ref. to the ages of Pope and Wordsworth" as "the biggest intellectual treat of my life."[13] The founder of the Cambridge English faculty, Forbes was known for his engaging lecture style, and McLuhan discovered that Forbes shared his mother's admiration for Draper. He reported home, "I spoke about Ruth Draper to Forbes. He said [that] she jammed her houses in London Oxf[ord] and Camb[ridge] [and] [t]hat . . . . her ability to hold an audience for 2 hours . . . [was] very remarkable. . . . Forbes was impressed by Ruth D's capacity to present 'two or three different people' (consecutively). I must find out some more."[14]

McLuhan also discussed with Forbes "faults in the reading [aloud] of poetry," and he relayed these conversations to his mother, with instructions for her upcoming "talk":

> Do not hesitate, Mother, to be forthright and authoritative in your talk to the English-speaking union. . . . I would elaborate the theme that elocution has suffered, more than singing, from its seeming proximity to common parlance. Point out that excellence therein [i.e., in elocution] is as far removed from the flowers and intonations of rhetorical oratory (with its narrow compass of tones and showy emphasis) as is excellence of poetry (with its organic relation or interdependence *between content and tone and material patterns*.) from the easy swing of doggerel.[15]

Effective elocution depended on the speaker's use of voice *and* gesture: not only aspects of voice such as tone, pitch, cadence, and so on but also careful manipulation of many parts of one's body (eyes, eyebrows, lips, mouth, hands, arms, shoulders, stance, and so on). "Content" and medium were "organic[ally] . . . interdepend[ent]," but Marshall McLuhan's focus here on delivery rather than on content suggests that he already distinguished between the medium and the message.

An avid theatergoer in his younger years, McLuhan reported seeing John Gielgud perform in *Romeo and Juliet* in London. He praised Gielgud's adept use of voice and gesture in tandem: "he paused on a word now and then where some shade of meaning demanded slowness or where the latent meaning required some gesture, some steps, some 'impromptu' and 'spontaneous' physical expression or flick at some other person on the stage." He also praised Shakespeare's recognition of the centrality of his actors' bodies as the material means of transmitting his words: "Shak[espeare] knew the men he was writing for and he expected ('all art is collaboration') a great deal from them in order to carry across to the audience the deal of stuff he packed into his lines."[16] But with the possible exception of Gielgud, and perhaps a few others, McLuhan found no performers in England whose elocutionary talents he deemed equal to his mother's. For this reason, he urged her to bring her show to London: "you could take the élite London by storm. There is a persistent and re-

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ally irresistible drive, here, for the right reading aloud of poetry, and there is no one to do it." He suggested she should supplement her repertoire with works by the new modernist poets that he was reading, and he exclaimed, "How I wish I could read you some of these Mother!" He especially recommended T. S. Eliot's "Triumphal March" from "Coriolan," Eliot's unfinished poem sequence responding to political developments at a time when fascism was taking hold in Europe: "I do not say that the above poem on mod[ern] civilization would thrill an Ontario audience but I am not sure that it wouldnt. . . . [T]here is really an amazing opportunity for you Mother to break with the outworn idea of an elocutionist as a pre-movie entertainer and to use your art to focus attention on really great modern art."[17] McLuhan assumed that the oral performance of literature would hold its own against the much newer art form that was all the rage: the "talking pictures." The first full-length feature film with sound appeared in 1927, and McLuhan was an enthusiastic filmgoer for many years. But in the 1930s it never occurred to him that movies would displace live platform performances. In fact, he regretted that there were no "talking-movies" in Shakespeare and Milton's day, when there was better material for actors to speak: "I cannot but regret that such means of perpetuation as the talking-movies represent were non-existent when there were greater purposes to which to turn them. Think of hearing Shak[espeare] recite To be or not to be, the Blind Milton dictating his great poem and so on." Having made this assertion, though, he then went on to express gratitude that the "talkies" *hadn't* existed in Shakespeare's and Milton's day: "if 'talkies' had existed in those times it is unlikely that the men who made them interesting would ever have existed."[18] Exhibiting a precocious interest in the cognitive and social effects of new media, he speculated that if modern recording technologies had existed in the Renaissance, the particular nature of Shakespearian and Miltonian poetic creativity wouldn't have existed, for Shakespeare's and Milton's poetry was orally indebted in ways that movie scripts aren't. In the Renaissance, he suggested, orality had not yet been "displaced" by literacy, and accordingly these poets' awareness of the sound of poetry profoundly shaped their literary works.

For the McLuhans poetry was always about the aural. In 1938 Elsie McLuhan introduced her eldest son to Corinne Lewis, a student at the Pasadena Playhouse School of Theatre, and they were married within a year. Even before they married, Marshall introduced his fiancée to another of his lifelong loves (besides herself), the poetry of Gerald Manley Hopkins. "Have you tackled Hopkins?" he queried in one letter. "Read him aloud. He *insists* on it!"[19] Shortly after their whirlwind wedding, Marshall reported his new domestic reading program to his mother: "Corinne and I have . . . read Jane Austen's Sense and Sensibility and L H Myers [The] Root and the Flower and are now beginning Trollope's '[The] Warden'. We read these aloud. When I read Corinne knits, when she reads I smoke."[20] Corinne and Marshall would "read [literature] aloud" to each other for forty years, and Marshall continued to study Hopkins for the rest of his life. In 1935 he reported from college that he had "read about 50 pages of the life of the wonderful (poet) Gerald Manley Hopkins (1844–89),"[21] and thirty years later he wrote to a friend, "[T]he weakness of literacy as such is its tendency to play up the visual aspects of language at the expense of all the other senses. Hopkins would seem to have begun the strategy of playing down the visual in order to play up the other senses in speech."[22]

Hopkins's experiments with the aurality of poetry were also a topic of conversation between McLuhan and Ong. While teaching at St. Louis University in 1938–41, McLuhan directed Ong's master's thesis, "Hopkins' Sprung Rhythm and the Life of English Poetry"[23]—an extraordinary work showing that

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Ong, too, already believed that the content of a message is distinct yet inseparable from its medium, or "vehicle." "Hopkins' poetry," Ong observes, "is not separable from the vehicle of its rhythm," and poetic rhythms are felt in the body when verse is read aloud: "man's ear is being constantly fed with a complex wave of sound. . . . The texture of this wave, when its source is speech, can be exceedingly rich and variable" but is "not easily . . . described" (119–20). Ong followed McLuhan in stressing "Hopkins' persistent plea for oral, interpretive reading of his poems." He quoted Hopkins advising the future editor of his verse: "you must not slovenly read it with the eyes but with your ears, as if the paper were declaiming at you. . . . Stress is the life of it."[24] Like McLuhan distinguishing between his mother's elocutionary "excellence" (which necessitated the skilled interpretation of literary texts) and the "showy emphasis" of mere "rhetorical oratory," Ong emphasized that Hopkins's poetry required "more than 'rhetorical' reading." "The pitch of feeling to which his poetry rises," Ong wrote, going on to quote Hopkins again, "makes its performance demand 'not reading with the eye but loud, leisurely, poetical (not rhetorical) recitation, with long rests, long dwells on the rhyme and other marked syllables, and so on'" (129). (McLuhan later quoted this statement and others like it by Hopkins in his own media theory.)

As I've shown here, Marshall McLuhan heard literature long before he read it. His early understanding of the aurality of literature, I'll suggest briefly now, was fundamental to his later arguments about the effects of once-new media forms such as print, radio, and television. As Peter de Bolla suggests, complex concepts can "be thought of as small scale theories." They enable thinking across a variety of domains, and in some cases they "enable the production and discovery of new knowledge" ("New Knowledge"; see also de Bolla, *Architecture*). The concept of orality, as elaborated by Ong, McLuhan, Eric Havelock, Jack Goody, and others, has withstood more than half a century of critiques now, and it has emerged battered but still useful (within limits). The potential usefulness of the newer coordinating concept of aurality (and its companion heuristic, aurality and literacy) is suggested by the essays in this *PMLA* cluster. As McLuhan observed, "concepts are provisional affairs for apprehending reality; their value is in the grip they provide" (*Mechanical Bride* vi).

McLuhan's early debts to Elsie's "vocal science" influenced his later statements on mechanical and electromechanical media as "extensions" of the human sensorium. In his phenomenal bestseller *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, he emphasized the effects of increasingly widespread "writing machines"[25] such as typewriters and dictaphones. These machines enable the production of texts, but what made them most interesting to McLuhan was their capacity to remediate *voice*. The typewriter was an "expediter . . . [that] brought writing and speech and publication into close association." This effect had significant implications for his most admired modern poets: "Eliot and Pound used the typewriter for a great variety of central effects in their poems. . . . [T]he typewriter was an oral and mimetic instrument that gave them the colloquial freedom of the world of jazz and ragtime." (McLuhan frequently compared jazz to conversation.) The typewriter "carried Gutenberg technology into every nook and cranny of our culture," yet it also triggered "opposite oral effects" (285). "Poets like Charles Olson are eloquent in proclaiming the power of the typewriter to help the poet to indicate exactly the breath, the pauses, the suspension, even, of syllables, the juxtaposition, even, of parts of phrases which he intends" (282). McLuhan idealized "the world of sound . . . [as] a unified field of instant relationships" (300), and the typewriter (not supplanted by the personal computer until after his death, in 1980) allowed poets to capture "the breath, the pauses, the suspension, even, of syllables" of speech. In so doing, this new tool of writing

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and "extension of man" arguably brought readers and hearers of literature into closer communion with the artists themselves (282).

On the one hand, McLuhan theorized the acoustic principle as inclusive and participant. He loved the theater[26] and all kinds of spoken-word performance,[27] and he excelled at public speaking himself. On the other hand, as his aforementioned advice to his son Eric to develop the habit of listening suggests, there are certain ironies in McLuhan's lifelong commentary on sound, hearing, and the acoustic world. McLuhan was notoriously hypersensitive to sound, often stuffing cotton batting in his ears to moderate auditory vibrations, and his hypersensitivity became almost unbearable after a series of strokes. In 1970 he advised a former student who had become a minister to "have a look at Luke 8:8: 'Heed *how* you hear.'"[28] In the biblical parable of the seeds (or the sower), the seeds represent the word of God, which sometimes falls on rich soil and bears "fruit an hundredfold" and sometimes falls by the wayside or on rock (*King James Bible*, Luke 8.8). To fail to cultivate the skill of listening, McLuhan suggests in this letter, is to let potentially fruitful seeds go to waste. But in this case the only person doing the "hearing" was McLuhan's secretary, Margaret Stewart, to whom he dictated this letter and most of his later works. By 1970 McLuhan was in bad health and overwhelmed with daily mail from across the globe, and Stewart worked tirelessly to protect his time and health. Sometimes taking dictation over the telephone, she organized his thoughts into coherent sentences, and (to her dismay) he often trusted her to revise, proof, sign, and send out "his" letters without his having ever seen them. After he was rendered aphasic by stroke, his daughters Teri and Stephanie "launched a full-scale program to teach him English word by word, sound by sound" (Gordon 290). According to Gordon, this stroke paradoxically opened a new door of communication between McLuhan and his daughters, for he "was compelled to listen for the first time in his life" (424n47).

If "listening is the new reading," as the Web site for Audible announces, we too may need to follow McLuhan's advice to "develop the power and habit of listening." Audiobook sales are rising exponentially, and most users access this form of electronic orality on their smartphones, that "extension of man" most of us now carry on our persons. Audiobooks are accessible only by machines, yet, ironically, they return us with fresh ears to a renewed focus on the "acoustic world" and the body as its coordinating medium. As Marshall McLuhan—informed by Elsie McLuhan's vocal science—reflected a half century ago, it may also be time now to "pull out the plug in order to get back to the physical body."

Notes

1. This remark appears in a journal entry dated 19 December 1978 (National Archives of Canada, MG31, D156, vol. 6, file 2).

2. Letter to Eric McLuhan; 24 Sept. 1975 (National Archives of Canada, MG31, D 156, vol. 2, file 19).

3. Teresa McLuhan, one of Marshall McLuhan's daughters, suggests he couldn't resist waking up his children as well, turning them into his a.m. amanuenses: "Dad always wanted to share everything with us. When we were younger . . . he'd wake us up at three or four in the morning and have us take down his breakthroughs" ("Teri McLuhan").

4. This dictum is the theme of McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964), but in a later manuscript note McLuhan recalled that he "1st used this phrase in June (?) 1958 at Radio broadcasters conference in Vancouver" (A. McLuhan).

5. I coin this phrase and discuss the history of this heuristic in *The Invention of the Oral*.

6. On Elsie's education and career, see also Anderson.

7. On the classroom recitation of literature in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Great Britain and the United States, see Robson.

8. Letter to Elsie McLuhan, Herbert McLuhan, and Maurice McLuhan; 7 Feb. 1935 (McLuhan, *Letters* 58–59).

9. National Archives of Canada, MG31, D156, vol. 2, file 9.

10. I borrow the term "media concept" from Guillory, who builds an erudite argument concerning a "linked series of evolving terms" that anticipate our modern concept of the medium (326).

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11. Diary entry, 3 Apr. 1930 (National Archives of Canada, MG31, D156, vol. 3, file 1).

12. Letter to Elsie McLuhan, Herbert McLuhan, and Maurice McLuhan; 16 Oct. 1934 (McLuhan, *Letters* 25).

13. Letter to Elsie McLuhan, Herbert McLuhan, and Maurice McLuhan; 16 Oct. 1934 (McLuhan, *Letters* 24).

14. Letter to Elsie McLuhan, Herbert McLuhan, and Maurice McLuhan; 8 Feb. 1935 (McLuhan, *Letters* 58).

15. Letter to Elsie McLuhan, Herbert McLuhan, and Maurice McLuhan; 3 Nov. 1934 (McLuhan, *Letters* 34).

16. Letter to Elsie McLuhan; 13 Jan. 1936 (McLuhan, *Letters* 81).

17. Letter to Elsie McLuhan, Herbert McLuhan, and Maurice McLuhan; 6 Dec. 1934 (McLuhan, *Letters* 42–43).

18. This diary entry appears separately at the bottom of the preprinted diary pages dated 14–15 November 1930 (National Archives of Canada, MG31, D156, vol. 3, file 1).

19. Letter to Corinne Lewis; 1 Feb. 1939 (McLuhan, *Letters* 108).

20. Letter to Elsie McLuhan; 19 Oct. 1939 (McLuhan, *Letters* 119).

21. Letter to Elsie McLuhan, Herbert McLuhan, and Maurice McLuhan; 16 Jan. 1935 (McLuhan, *Letters* 48).

22. Letter to Michael Wolff; 3 July 1964 (McLuhan, *Letters* 304).

23. Ong's MA thesis was submitted in 1941 and published in 1949.

24. Ong is quoting Hopkins's letter of 21 May 1878 to Robert Bridges.

25. I borrow this term from Gitelman, *Scripts*.

26. However, in later life the increasing demands of career and family often left him too exhausted to attend the theater (or to stay awake when he did go [Michael McLuhan]).

27. According to Michael McLuhan, Marshall owned and "play[ed] a large collection of spoken word LP's."

28. Letter to William Glenesk, 5 Jan. 1970 (National Archives of Canada, MG31, D156, vol. 225, file 9).

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