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This publiaction was funded by MSD/Münster School of Design.

FH MÜNSTER
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MSD FB Design
Münster School of Design

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Welt | Gestalten, Volume 10
Edited by Lars C. Grabbe and Oliver Ruf
ISSN (Print) 2698-3036
ISSN (Online) 2698-3109

ISBN (Print) 978-3-96317-368-4
ISBN (ePDF) 978-3-96317-933-4

Bahnhofstr. 5, 35037 Marburg/Germany,
contact: info@buechner-verlag.de

Layout and cover image: Tobias Held

Printing and binding: Totem.com.pl, Inowrocław, Polen
The printing materials used are certified as FSC Mix.
Printed in EU

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek
The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at https://dnb.de.

www.buechner-verlag.de

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Introduction

Lars C. Grabbe,
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Marshall McLuhan: Then and Now

When Marshall McLuhan coined his famous aphorisms – "the medium is the message," "the global village," "the extensions of man"– he was not merely describing the effects of media. He was staging what he called probes: intellectual provocations, riddles designed to jolt perception out of habit, to render the invisible infrastructures of culture suddenly palpable. McLuhan's style was never that of the conventional theorist; but closer to a mosaic, a collage, a sequence of probing fragments. His thought moved in patterns rather than in straight lines, and precisely in this stylistic eccentricity lay the enduring vitality of his work. To read McLuhan is to be invited to participate in a process of thinking that resists closure, that oscillates between insight and paradox, and reveals the uncanniness of media as environments.

What has made McLuhan's works so resilient is not only their capacity to explain the transformations of his own time – the shift from print to television, the sudden expansion of electronic communication – but their ability to serve as prisms for shedding light on our present. The twenty-first century has produced realities that he could not have foreseen in detail, yet his sensibility seems uncannily attuned to them: a sensibility that privilegs form over content, medium over message, the sensory architectures that underlie cognition and culture.

Today, we are deeply immersed in complex media landscapes. The smartphone has become a permanent prosthesis, reshaping gesture, attention, and memory. The internet has expanded into a planetary nervous system, spanning intimate chats and vast data infrastructures. Artificial intelligence systems, once speculative, increasingly appear as companions, collaborators, or competitors in creative, cognitive, and economic domains. The "extensions of man" now include extensions of thought, agency, and imagination. McLuhan described the electric age as a return to simultaneity and multi-sensory

perception, we may now ask whether AI inaugurates an age of recursive mediation – media that not only extend the human but anticipate, simulate, and transform it in return.

This book explores McLuhan's relevance under these conditions – not as an exercise in commemoration, but as a living dialogue between "then and now." This is entirely in keeping with McLuhan's own habit of offering ideas a probes, as tests, and discarding them if they are unhelpful. "You don't like that idea? I've got others." Reading McLuhan today means moving between times: situating his observations within their historical horizon, while testing how they resonate or distort when refracted through the contemporary. This oscillation between past and present is not merely comparative. It suggests that McLuhan's concepts function less as doctrines and more as heuristics, as tools for navigating the shifting topographies of media and culture.

The essays collected here draw on diverse disciplines and approaches – media ecology, philosophy, phenomenology, image and game studies, art and design research, cultural studies and semiotics. Some read McLuhan against the grain, probing the blind spots of his theories. Others expand his categories into new terrains, asking how they might illuminate the dynamics of digital platforms, algorithmic governance, or networked aesthetics. Still others experiment with McLuhan's fragmentary style itself, creating mosaics that echo his method of pattern recognition.

In this sense, *Marshall McLuhan: Then and Now* is less a closed anthology than an open field of encounters. Uniting these contributions is a shared conviction that McLuhan's legacy should not be reduced to quotations or clichés but reactivated as a mode of inquiry. If the global village has become a reality of connected isolation, if the medium-as-message has been absorbed into opaque platforms logics, if the extensions of man now include processes of automation and artificial cognition – then McLuhan's provocations may still serve us, not as answers, but as questions.

To think with McLuhan today is to recognize that media are never neutral instruments. They are environments that configure experience, shape the horizon of the thinkable, and inscribe themselves into the very fabric of subjectivity. They are, as McLuhan insisted, not what we "use," but what "we live in". This book stages a collective effort to make such environments visible, to interrogate their dynamics, and to imagine how they might yet be reshaped.

This book is in McLuhan's tradition of applying inquiry and investigation as a counter to determination, that "there is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is a willingness to contemplate the situation." He put it remarkably simply in his 1960 report to the National Association of Educational Broadcasters: "All of my recommendations, therefore, can be reduced to this one: study the modes of the media, in order to hoick all assumptions out of the subliminal, non-verbal realm for scrutiny and for prediction and control of human purpose."

In *McGilchrist and McLuhan: The New Hemisphere Hypothesis and the Future of Media* the author Jamie Stantonian explores the intersections between Marshall McLuhan's media theory and Iain McGilchrist's hemisphere hypothesis to illuminate the cognitive and cultural foundations of media environments. It traces McLuhan's engagement with the trivium and hemispheric lateralization, linking print culture and dialectic to left-hemisphere dominance, and rhetoric and grammar to right-hemisphere perception. By contrasting McLuhan's optimism about electronic media with McGilchrist's warnings of left-hemisphere triumph in computational society, the article interrogates the implications of AI, algorithmic governance, and digital infrastructures. It concludes by asking how metaphor, imagination, and right-hemisphere modes of attention might counterbalance an increasingly mechanized world.

Sven Gramp is revisiting Marshall McLuhan's reflections on tactility in *Touched by Touching. McLuhan and the Contemporary Digital Condition*. McLuhan's explorations of haptic perception, often overshadowed by his treatment of the acoustic and the visual, reveals the multisensory entanglement of media as extensions of the body. By examining historical shifts from print to electronic media and their tactile dimensions, the article explores how digital interfaces, mobile devices, and immersive technologies reshape bodily presence and affective engagement. It argues that touch, as both metaphor and sensory modality, remains central for understanding media ecologies and their profound impact on human perception and social experience.

In *The Creative Volume and the Dynamic Temperature of AI in Games: A McLuhanian Perspective* Jörg Burbach discusses how AI dynamically shapes digital games by balancing structured engagement with open-ended exploration. By integrating McLuhan's media theory with the Creative Volume model, AI-driven

games are interpreted as flexible, knowledge-generating environments where players acquire skills and insights through interactive immersion. The focus is on AI's role in mediating player experiences and its cognitive, cultural, and ethical implications in game design.

The paper *Ares and the Algorithm: A Tetradic Analysis of the Social Mediatization of 21st Century Conflicts* by Courtney Jade de Villiers analyzes the impact of social media and its algorithms on 21st century conflicts, using McLuhan's Media Ecology and Tetrad of Media Effects. It explores how social mediatization creates a third investigative space, amplifying identity struggles and contributing to political aggression and violence. The study highlights digital tribes, echo chambers, and filter bubbles as byproducts of algorithms, promoting homogeneity and mimetic violence through mechanisms like scapegoating. Ultimately, the paper links the transformation of communication in the digital age with the intensification of global political and social unrest.

Joseph Reid examines in *Applied McLuhan in the Great Perfection: Anti-Environments, Conciousness, and the Ground of Being* the intersection of media, technology, and consciousness through McLuhan's media theories, Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, Gebser's structures of consciousness, and Longchenpa's Dzogchen teachings. Reid argues that technological crises are rooted in perception, not tools, advocating for awareness to transcend digital distraction. McLuhan's "the medium is the message" aligns with Dzogchen's non-dual "Great Perfection," while Patanjali's sensory withdrawal (pratyahara) offers a remedy for distraction. By viewing AI and technology as extensions of consciousness rather than threats, the article proposes synairesis: an integrative embrace of tools. Solutions lie in Anti-Environments, contemplative practice, and recognizing all media as arising from a luminous ground of being.

With *Weaving the Future: Revolutions in Fashion and McLuhan's Media Theory* Kalina Kukiełko examines the evolution of fashion through three technological revolutions: the Jacquard loom's mechanization of textile production, the internet and social media's globalization of fashion, and AI's transformative role in design and manufacturing. Anchored in McLuhan's theory of media as bodily extensions, it explores how technology reshapes communication, identity, and society. The Jacquard loom is highlighted as a precursor to modern programming, electronic

media as a catalyst for sustainability and inclusivity (e.g., the Fashion Revolution), and AI as a driver of personalization and eco-conscious practices. Ultimately, fashion is presented as a dynamic medium for cultural, social, and technological innovation.

Yamile Haber Guerra looks in *Reassessing McLuhan* on his approach to language, technology, and writing as evolving myths shaped by technological and discursive innovation. It reaffirms McLuhan's ideas from "Myth and Mass Media," emphasizing media as myths, sources of subordinate myths, and macro-myths in new connective contexts. The study highlights how new technologies and media redefine myths, showcasing the enduring relevance of McLuhan's principles in understanding communication's evolution. The 1959 text, where McLuhan discussed "the medium is the message," is discussed as a foundational and prophetic work that explains media evolution and the reinterpretation of communication as an empirical and adaptive phenomenon.

In *Art Biennales and the Challenges of the Global Village: The Case of Ruangrupa*, Meital Raz discusses the challenges and dynamics of art biennales as global exhibition platforms, using McLuhan's concepts of 'global village' and 'global theatre' as its theoretical foundation. It examines how biennales balance local, national, and cosmopolitan agendas, with a focus on the historical complexity of these institutions. Documenta 15 acts as a key case study, highlighting controversies that have defined the event since its 1955 inception, particularly those amplified during its 2022 edition. The article intertwines this analysis with McLuhan's theories, offering insights into the evolving role of biennales within the interconnected cultural and political frameworks of globalization.

John G. McDaid examines in *Toward a Unified Sensorium: McLuhan's Media Ecology and the Posthuman Turn* McLuhan's concept of the unified sensorium to explore shifts in perception, subjectivity, and cognition across media paradigms. Integrating Ferrando's posthumanism and Hayles' distributed cognition, it proposes a "ramified sensorium" – a branching network of human and non-human sense-making agents – as essential in digital environments. By tracing media evolution from orality to literacy to digitality, the chapter highlights how each reorganizes perception and challenges liberal humanist assumptions. Contemporary tools like large language models and algorithmic

systems are framed as cognitive environments creating new agency and complexity. The chapter advocates for intentional media design, ecological sensitivity, and multispecies inclusion to navigate the posthuman, embracing ambiguity and multiplicity on a planetary scale.

Finally, in *Technological Mediation of the Body: The Power Dynamics of Embodied Interaction in Digital and Immersive Media* Aysel Merve Baron and Leman Figen Gul discuss the body as a dynamic medium within digital and immersive technologies, using McLuhan's media theory and post-phenomenological perspectives. McLuhan's view of media as extensions of human perception is expanded by scholars like Ihde and Verbeek, who explore how technologies shape human-world relations and impose normative interaction scripts. However, contemporary systems often limit bodily expression with predefined gestures focused on efficiency, restricting creativity and cultural diversity. The chapter argues for the importance of expressiveness in interaction design as a political and aesthetic dimension, influencing agency and cultural participation. It advocates for alternative, adaptive design strategies that promote diverse and inclusive embodied interactions.

McGilchrist and McLuhan

Jamie Stantonian

The New Hemisphere Hypothesis and the Future of Media, or, Computational Society and Its Future

Abstract

This essay compares Marshall McLuhan's media theory with Iain McGilchrist's hemisphere hypothesis to argue that while in the past half century electric media have led to a revival of right-hemisphere orality, via the computer it has also amplified the vices of the quantifying and controlling left hemisphere. Situating McLuhan's early account of the Classical Trivium (grammar, rhetoric, dialectic) alongside his later interest in hemispheric asymmetry, it provides an overview of 'dialectical' or left-hemisphere methods of knowledge production and how they manifest in the electric age as big data, bureaucratic proliferation, and now Large Language Models.

It details how McGilchrist reframes hemisphere differences as contrasting modes of attention: left as grasping, decontextualizing, and control-seeking; right as relational, embodied, and open to ambiguity, myth, and awe, warning that contemporary technologies exteriorize left-hemisphere cognition and enthrone administration over life. It critiques LLMs and

"agentic" architectures as technological dialectics, and explores how their danger lies not in some hypothetical ascent to super-intelligence, but in entrenching left-hemisphere numbness to the living world into humanity's collective sensemaking systems. However it concludes by identifying countercurrents such as a gradual retreat from the web know as "the great logging off", and trends towards religious and ecological re-enchantment. Conditions for a revival of mythopoetic imagination, rebalancing media ecologies toward a humane, right-hemisphere-led poiesis rather than machinic enclosure.

Keywords
Classical Trivium, Hemisphere Hypothesis, Iain McGilchrist, Artificial Intelligence, Large Language Models, Apollo & Dionysus, Romantic Revival

In her fair works did Nature link
The human soul that through me ran;
And much it grieved my heart to think
What Man has made of Man.

William Wordsworth, 1798
Palgrave's Golden Treasury

In the winter of 1978, in the twilight of his public fame and just a year before the stroke that rendered him unable to speak, Marshall McLuhan published a short essay in the *Journal Of Communications* featuring a trademark pun; "*The Brain and the Media, the 'Western' hemisphere*". Drawing on recent revelations in cognitive science about hemisphere lateralization, he described the left hemisphere's visual mode of perception as analytical, lineal and detached, conceptualizing the world as a Euclidean space which was continuous, homogeneous and static; precisely the characteristics of a print-based culture and the West's cognitive style. Popular culture, on the other hand, superpowered by electric media, was amplifying the right hemisphere, which perceives a world that is simultaneous, symbolic and synthetic — a domain of myth, metaphor and motion. Taken together, he saw this as a potentially volatile dynamic.

These ideas would reach full maturation in the posthumously published Laws of Media, where the lineal, visual

nature of print media was explicitly associated with the left hemisphere's abilities and disabilities, notably its blindness to change in anything other than algorithms, and a reduction of emergent formal cause to ossified abstraction. To the general reader this may have been viewed as a peculiar late addition to Marshall's thought, but the incorporation of the hemisphere hypothesis was in fact the culmination of a long intuition about the relationship between media and sensemaking which can be traced to the very beginning of his intellectual journey, when he studied at Cambridge in the 1930s.

1. An Ancient Quarrel

To readers familiar with McLuhan through his bestsellers, his 1943 doctoral thesis may seem like an obscure work—indeed, it only became publicly available more than a quarter-century after his death—yet within it, we see the embryonic outlines of his entire worldview. The dissertation, *The Place of Thomas Nashe in the Learning of His Time*, was ostensibly about the swashbuckling 16th-century poet, playwright, and satirist Thomas Nashe and his lively public beef with intellectual Gabriel Harvey. However, discussion of this dispute occupies only the final quarter of the publication; the majority of the thesis forms a sweeping two-thousand-year history of the Western intellectual tradition from antiquity onwards, outlining a meta-quarrel between three major schools of thought as to which was the superior means of determining truth within the Classical Trivium.

"Trivium" means "the place where three roads meet", and refers to three intellectual disciplines; grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic which had been taught in one form or another since the time of Plato. The modern meaning of *grammar* is semantic pedantry, but it originally referred to the extensive storehouse of Western literary tradition, the art of interpreting it in a literal and moral sense, but also allegoric (comparing the past to the present) and anagogical (comparing the past to the future). It is about the interpretation not just of texts, but the living world and the cosmos in its totality, reading "the book of nature"; "Grammar is the art of gathering and interpreting congruous instances, whether phenomenal or textual" (McLuhan, 2006, 57 n. 45). It was the allegorical exegesis of creation.

Complimenting this was *rhetoric*, the oral art of communicating thoughts from one mind to another persuasively and eloquently. Marshall viewed grammar and rhetoric as a mutually reinforcing package, as grammar provides the interpretive foundation which rhetoric builds upon to achieve effective communication; a realm of encyclopedic memorization of aphorisms and parables, and inventive referencing. Part of this complementarity is that he viewed both as grounded in the concrete realities of language and lived experience. In the Laws of Media, (McLuhan et al, 1988, 9) they outline that:

> *The natural affinity between rhetoric and grammar springs in part from each having both figure and ground elements, and in part from both concerning words as presented to the exterior senses in writing and speech Grammatical commentary on and interpretation of texts.*

Dialectic, finally, was the art of thinking and assembling arguments, and forms the basis of logic and philosophy. It is a wholly abstract place, a workspace of conceptual reflection where ideas are rigorously tested, dissected, and reconstructed. Here, the mind engages in a kind of mental modeling, breaking down complex concepts into their constituent parts, and reassembling them in the hope of uncovering deeper truths or to resolve contradictions. While *grammar* connects and spots patterns in order to unveil new layers of meaning, *dialectic* fragments and disassembles for ease of conceptual computation; "the grammarian is concerned with connections; the dialectician with divisions" (McLuhan, 2006, 93).

Over the course of four lengthy chapters, Marshall charts how various historic intellectual traditions prioritize particular elements of the trivium over others, and how this emphasis shapes how these traditions define, apply, and share knowledge. For instance, he characterized the Carolingian renaissance in the eighth and ninth centuries as emphasizing grammar while scholastic renaissance of the twelfth "is the renaissance of dialectics and is a period of strife between dialectics and grammar, with dialectics achieving complete ascendancy" (McLuhan, 2006, 6). In Laws of Media (McLuhan et al, 1988, 10) gave the following characterization of this polarity;

> *Because of their conservative attachment to tradition, grammarians and rhetoricians were ever styled 'Ancients', while dialecticians, who in each age propose marvellous new systems and methods for organizing knowledge and thought and endeavour, were styled 'Moderns'.*

Just as the intimidating complexity of logographic writing undermined the mass adoption literacy before the alphabet, and just as the potential of mathematics was hampered by the clumsy Roman numbering system preceding the adoption of indo-arabic numerals, so the lack of specialist symbols for variables in scholastic logic hindered the latent computational potential of the *quantification of thought* (Ong 1958, 53). In the 16th century, the logician and educational reformer Peter Ramus sought to change all this, introducing a set of techniques using cutting edge technology which would radically simplify logic, and disrupt Aristotelian convention. Thanks to the repeatability and conformity of the printing press, not just words but *diagrams and tables* could now be replicated at scale. Ramus took advantage of this to spatially arrange, organize and communicate logical and rhetorical relationships between words and concepts, and to isolate and classify these "corpuscular units". This visualization of logic led to treating words as tokens which one could manipulate to run operations, and led to a diagrammatic fad during the late 16th century. Marshall saw it as a pivotal shift in educational paradigms and a new era of dialectical dominance. It also marked a cultural and cognitive transition, as logic became something to be *seen and arranged on the page* rather than debated aloud and formed in the mind. This was the context through which Marshall viewed the feud between Nashe and Harvey.

The origins of this quarrel was criticism exchanged in the early 1590s between Nashe and Harvey's brother, Richard Harvey, who dismissed Nashe as an arrogant upstart, leading to an escalation of increasingly vitriolic pamphlets

and personal attacks that would be familiar to any user of social media. Nashe was a famous wit and master of the *Ancient* art of rhetoric and grammar, while Harvey was the advocate of the *Modern* dialectical techniques of Ramus. While Harvey used his intellectual weight to lay out systematic, point-by-point refutations, Nashe used inventive insults and creative use of media. For example, sometimes when quoting Harvey, he would employ a font commonly used in street signs to comment on how lifeless his prose was and elsewhere left ornamented spaces in his pamphlet so the reader could write their own insults.

Harvey's insistence on modern dialectical techniques made him an easy target for Nashe, as he attempted to impose logical rules on the work of art, such as forcing the classical hexameter format into English poetry. This led to the creation of cringe verse which was easily lampooned as "twitching and hopping in our language like a man running upon quagmires" (Nashe, 1592). Another tonal difference was that Harvey's writing was pompous and moralising, full of references to obscure ancient texts to show off his breadth of learning to his well-read peers. Nashe on the other hand wrote in an accessible colloquial style full of pop culture references blending the oral traditions of the English with the new and emerging book culture in a streetwise and avant-garde way. Nashe's final pamphlet, *Have With You To Saffron-Walden* (1596), is recognized as the culminating blow in the quarrel, ridiculing Harvey's scholarship, background, and supporters in a manner that Harvey never effectively answered.

In the long term though, the educational reforms pioneered by Ramus, with its emphasis on visualizations and print technology, would triumph for the next five centuries. They led to a new cognitive paradigm which would "translate every kind of problem and experience into the new visual kind of lineal order" (McLuhan, 1962, 146) which would expand to new techniques of instrumental knowledge, such as the Mercator projection and Cartesian coordinate system, and open the mind to "uniform time and uniform continuous space" (McLuhan, 1962, 19), a way to "process experience homogeneously" (McLuhan, 1962, 165) to enable greater control over natural forces. The visual space unveiled by the printing press revealed an infinitely expanding world of possibility for manipulation, and of control. And indeed, he (McLuhan, 1969, 53-74), saw print as the prototype of industrialism itself;

> *Printing ... was the first mechanization of a complex handicraft; by creating an analytic sequence of step-by-step processes, it became the blue-print of all mechanization to follow. The most important quality of print is its repeatability; it is a visual statement that can be reproduced indefinitely, and repeatability is the root of the mechanical principle that has transformed the world since Gutenberg ...*

Having achieved almost total dominance in the era of print, dialectic's disciples blocked the other two roads to truth, and began to analyze both grammar and rhetoric by deconstructing them and viewing them through a utilitarian lens. Art and poetry was to be viewed as a deviation from the crystalline and Apollonian world of abstraction, at best a delusional mirage which would lead man astray in her search for truth.

To correct this dialectical bias, Marshall's entire telos was to champion grammar on its own terms, crafting his probes and parables to view problems from multiple perspectives using metaphor rather than through the disassembling monocle of dialectic. Observing that *Modern* communication theories, such as the Shannon-Weaver model, deliberately excluded meaning from their calculations, he proposed "a theory of transformation, not transportation." Just as Nashe made use of the modern technology of print, Marshall, with his grammarian tendencies towards quoting Joyce and Shakespeare, also referenced cybernetics, gestalt theory, general systems theory, and, eventually, cognitive science.

In the 1960s, pioneering neurological experiments revealed that the two hemispheres of the brain process information in very different ways and, indeed, perceive the world in wholly different manners. Cleverly designed tests, conducted on patients whose connecting tissue between the brain hemispheres had been severed to treat severe epilepsy, enabled scientists to *communicate with each hemisphere independently*. This led to radical insights into the specializations of each half of the brain. For example, the left hemisphere appeared to specialize in speech and language, while the right hemisphere seemed to specialize in facial recognition. These groundbreaking procedures, led by cognitive neuroscientist Roger Sperry, sparked widespread discussion in scientific, psychological, and philosophical circles, and resulted in Sperry receiving the Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine in 1981.

In September 1976, Marshall wrote to friend and collaborator Walter Ong (Farrell, 2016) with some excitement at the revelations; seeing in it a neurobiological basis to what he'd been writing about since the 1940s.

> *For thirty years at least, I have [in effect] been using the two hemispheres approach under the names of the written and the oral, the visual and the acoustic, the hot and the cool, the medium and the message, figure and ground, and so on. Now it turns out that medicine has been building a great beach-head for this approach with its new understanding of the two hemispheres of the brain... During the past century, while the knowledge of the two hemispheres has been growing, there has also been a new electronic milieu or environment which automatically pushes the right hemisphere into a more dominant position than it has held in the Western world since the invention of the phonetic alphabet.*

Outside of his 1978 paper in Journal Of Communications, much of his writing on the topic would come out posthumously, taking its most complete form in Laws of Media (McLuhan et al, 1988, 72):

> *The lineality of the left hemisphere is supported by an alphabet-based service environment of roads and transportation, and by logical or rational activities in social and legal administration. Dominance of the right hemisphere, however, depends upon a cultural milieu or environment of a simultaneous resonating character. Such dominance is normal in oral societies, and today our universal environment of simultaneous electric information has entirely subverted the dominance of the left hemisphere.*

In another posthumously published work, *The Global Village* (McLuhan et al, 1989, ch.1) he and Bruce Powers explicitly

identify the pattern-spotting abilities of the right hemisphere with grammar-allied-with-rhetoric, and details how the left hemisphere petrifies figures from the ground. Technology itself, as a product of the left hemisphere, moves as a "dumb force" which is oblivious to its effects as it is oblivious to the ground. They write that the left hemisphere / dialectic sees cause-and-effect as linear and sequential, as opposed to sensing the emergent totality of the environment. They write that *"For use in the electric age, a right-brain model of communication is necessary to demonstrate the 'all-at-onceness' character of information moving at the speed of light."* (Marshall McLuhan & Bruce Powers 1989)

Yet the hemisphere hypothesis's time in the sun would be short. A few years before, in 1976, saw the publication of Julian Jaynes's *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* which helped popularize the notion of hemispheres differences in dramatic form by hypothesizing that in antiquity, people experienced thoughts as auditory hallucinations from external gods rather than as self-generated reflections. Such speculation had caused a great degree of controversy in the academic world, and with it brought a defensive and dismissing stance about speculations about the implications of Sperry and co's work on brain lateralisation. After Marshall's death on New Years Eve 1980, the idea of the logical, rational left hemisphere and the bohemian, artistic right hemisphere bled fully into popular culture, to find fertile ground in the New Age movement. Slowly, the hemisphere hypothesis developed a reputation for being the basis for quackery, to the extent that many neurologists believed it career suicide to pursue further study in the field. Yet, what Marshall saw in the early science was far from illusory.

2. The New Hemisphere Hypothesis

For decades the hemisphere hypothesis languished in academic obscurity, to become the clichéd content of self-help seminars and creative writing workshops, until the 2010s, when the field was rehabilitated by the English philosopher and psychiatrist Iain McGilchrist. In a series of forensically researched books, he surveys the scientific literature in exhaustive detail, before exploring the historic, and philosophical implications over the course of two thousand pages. The first thing McGilchrist does is distance himself from the follies and false claims of this earlier hemisphere hypothesis, for example the idea that the engineering-leaning left hemisphere is "male" while the empathetic right is "female". Instead, McGilchrist writes that the "most fundamental difference between the hemispheres lies in the type of attention they give the world" (McGilchrist 2009, Intro).

While Marshall looked back to antiquity to trace the relationship between these polarities of perception, McGilchrist looks back to the evolutionary origins of animal life, tracing brain asymmetry half a billion years, to the emergence of the predator-prey ecology of Cambrian Explosion, and a rapid leap in the complexity of the eye. During that time the left hemisphere would specialize as a targeting system with the functions of "getting and feeding" while the right hemisphere would come to specialize