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

Act One  

Scene 1:  

(A stage with just a podium on it.  

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

ABSENT-MINDED PROF  

Good evening, members of the Faculty Association.  

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

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

McLUHAN  

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

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

My topic tonight is --  

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

Is --  

(Chord. McLUHAN is transfixed.)
Oh my.

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

Song: I See Something Small

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

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

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

McLuhan: In nineteen fifteen!

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

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

I see the most amazing thing I've ever
looked at
(Projection of image behind: looking up at Dad, hat, and mostly sky and hundreds of overhead telephone lines.)

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

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

HERBERT:  Yes, Son?
MARSHALL:  I see something above your head
I'll bet you'll never guess: it's a spider web!
I'll bet the spider that made that web
Is the very same spider that's under my bed!
HERBERT:  Oh no, son, I'm sure that spider's dead And those are wires.

MARSHALL:  But what do they mean?
HERBERT:  They don't mean a thing
Just watch the parade
MARSHALL:  But I don't wanna watch, it's a stupid parade

What I wanna know is why there's so many wires
And how come there's so many roads and so many tires?
HERBERT:  I don't know. It's just the way it is.
MARSHALL:  But what I wanna know is what the reason is!
(Music, tempo change. ELSIE enters, sweeps MARSHALL away.)
ELSIE
I'll tell you, Herbert Marshall!

MARSHALL
Mom!

ELSIE
Just come with me!

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

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

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

We'll be zipping round in cars that can be found in
The reaches of the atmosphere!
We'll have telepathic books and there won't be any crooks and
It isn't far from there to here.
Oh, stick with me, my darling, the
future is a-borning
It's going to be a gay old time!
The world is in a hurry, but you don't
have to worry
Tomorrow is a friend of --!
(Freeze.)

MARSHALL

Mom?

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

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

MARSHALL: WHY?
HERBERT: DON'T ASK ME!

(MARSHALL looks again to the sky.)

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

Scene 2:

(An ACTOR appears.)

ACTOR
Master Herbert Marshall McLuhan has his first encounter
with perspective.

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

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

MARSHALL

(Pause. HERBERT regards his son quizzically.)

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

MARSHALL
I don't think it would.

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

(Pause. They sit staring at the view.)

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

HERBERT
What little horse?

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

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

MARSHALL
No it's not. It's about three inches tall. And so's that carriage. And that tree, you could pick it up in your hand.
HERBERT
Oh no, y'see son, that's because those things are in the distance. They're far away. If they were right here, you'd see that they're big.

MARSHALL
No they're not.

HERBERT
Yes they are. Trust me.

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

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

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

Interlude:

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

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

MARSHALL
I have.

(He goes back to playing.)
Scene 3:

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

(Light, sound.)

MARSHALL
(Holding a toy sword.)
Rising, he mounts his steed as the first rays of dawn glint off the cold steel of his armour. Erect, he rides out to meet the enemy!

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

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

(ELSIE enters dressed for travel. MARSHALL's reverie disappears.)
Now Marshall. This time on my tour I shall be reciting excerpts from the work of Miss Dickinson and Mr. Donne. As well as "Antony and Cleopatra" -- you remember "Antony and Cleopatra", don't you?

MARSHALL
With the snake.

ELSIE
Asp.

MARSHALL
Asp.

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

MARSHALL
(Straightening up.)
Straight carriage.

ELSIE
The second?
MARSHALL
Breathe.

ELSIE
Excellent. And the third?

MARSHALL
(Articulating.)
Nice round vowel sounds.

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

(She takes MARSHALL onto her knee.)
Ohhhhhh Marshall. If it were not for these trips away, I do not think that I could survive in this -- place. But you know that I shall miss you. And you know I'll be back soon?

MARSHALL
How . . . soon?

ELSIE
Two short weeks. Two too short weeks.

(The MUSICIAN honks a horn.)
Oh! There's my car! Be a good boy for your father, Marshall, and help with Maurice. Goodbye!
Goodbye . . !

(ELSIE goes. MARSHALL watches her go.)

MARSHALL
Goodbye, Mom.

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

Song: Ivanhoe

MARSHALL: While I was reading Ivanhoe
I fell asleep and dreamed
I dreamed my Mother came upon
A place she'd never been
A town that was so cold and grey
The people had grown mean
She came to bring them loveliness
And show them worlds unseen.
Oh Mother do not set your foot
Upon that town-hall stage
These people will not hear your words
So beautiful and sage
But will in vengeance cast them off
Like seeds on stony ground
Beware the winds of righteousness
Brewing all around.

(CHORUS:)

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

(CHORUS:)

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

(MARSHALL finishes triumphantly, but a little melancholy, having vanquished
all his Mother's imaginary foes. But still she is not there.)

Scene 4:

ACTOR
Master Marshall McLuhan encounters the media for the first time.

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

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

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

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

CITYSLICKER
Hey kid . . . stop right there.

Just a little more to the right . . .
(MARSHALL tunes the radio. The lights brighten.)

No no . . . other way . . .
(MARSHALL tunes the radio. The lights dim completely, so that now we see the puppet in black-light only.)

Perfect! Leave it right there.
(MARSHALL reappears, now also represented by a black light puppet.)

MARSHALL
Where -- are we?
CITYSLICKER

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

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

-- in 15,000 years?

Come onnnnnnn up.

MARSHALL

Can I?

CITYSLICKER

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

(MARSHALL flies up to join the CITYSLICKER.)

You can go anywhere you want.

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

See?

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

MARSHALL

Winn --

CITYSLICKER


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

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

(These figures parade past.)

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

(Mary Pickford sashays by.)

Just one little warning.


MARSHALL
(Dazzled by all he sees.)

What's that?

CITYSLICKER

Never trust technology.

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

McLUHAN

Pathetic.

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

Scene 5:

ACTOR

Mister Marshall McLuhan, adolescent, observes the view.

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

HERBERT enters.)

HERBERT

Whatcha doing, son?

MARSHALL

I'm trying to see Chicago, Father.

HERBERT

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

(Pause.)

Whaddaya see?

MARSHALL

I see streets rumbling with trucks as big as houses. I see a lake as wide as the Sargasso Sea. And Sinclair Lewis, downing a steak and whiskey in a tavern with mirrors on the wall.
(He turns.)
And in Hong Kong . . . they're just going to sleep. Or maybe they're just getting up. And the junks float like cherry blossoms in the harbour. And British colonels are sitting down to tea with their wives.
(He turns.)
And in London! . . . Virginia Woolf has just given Leonard a big kiss. Debate rages like sheet lightning at Speaker's Corner. And T.S. Eliot has written the first word in the first line of a new poem.
(Pause.)

HERBERT
You see all that, do you?

And more.

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

I'll say goodnight to you now.

MARSHALL
Goodnight, Dad.

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

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

ACTOR
Mister Marshall McLuhan comes to a decision.

MARSHALL
Daisyyyyyy!

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

Daisy. I've come to a conclusion.

DAISY
Scratch my back, would you Marshall? There's a spot I can't reach.
(MARSHALL sits and scratches that part of her back exposed by her sundress.)

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

DAISY
That's good.

MARSHALL
You don't mind if I leave?

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

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

DAISY
(Taking her hair down.) Hold my bobby pins, would you Marshall? I don't have any pockets in this dress.

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

MARSHALL
I'm -- not sure yet.

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

(She drapes herself across his lap. Traces her hands down one of her legs.)
The great, endless expanses of the Northern Shield . . . the rich, yielding loam of the Red River -- valley . . . the coulees and rolling landscape of the great northern plains . . . all the way to the breathtaking -- thrust -- of the Rockies . . .
(This has had its intended effect on MARSHALL.)
You wouldn't want to leave all that, would you?

MARSHALL
On second thought, no.

DAISY
(Sitting up briskly.)
You can give me my bobby pins back now. I told Mother I'd help her roll dough.

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

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

T.S. ELIOT
Excuse me.

(MARSHALL stops, turns.)
One moment of your time. I couldn't help overhearing. I thought perhaps I ought to . . . intervene.

Tom Eliot, how do do.

MARSHALL
Tom Eliot? As in --

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

You won't be staying here, of course.

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

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

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

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

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

T.S. ELIOT
Now Marshall, I'd like to introduce you to Mr. Ezra Pound,
fellow poet and refugee from the sticks.

POUND
Hiya kid.

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

FITZGERALD
(Drunk.)
Fucking Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer.
POUND
I'm from Idaho, you know.

MARSHALL
I know!

POUND

ELIOT
Where?

EZRA

ELIOT
Oh my goodness. No wonder he's drunk.

POUND
But we got out. Y'see kid? That's the thing! We got out.

FITZGERALD
Fucking Joan Crawford!

ELIOT
Keep your personal life out of this, Scott, and quit touching my tux.

ALL: You gotta understand
What greatness is
It's not the same as being famous but then
what the hell is?
The masses just stand there
With their thumb out and grin
But if greatness stops and opens the door
We jump in.

There's only so much room
In the library
On the shelf of M's like Milton, Mead and Marconi
On the end of the shelf
Down on the floor
Is it gonna be me or him or her or you
Or Frank Moher?
(They break into a charleston.)

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

FITZGERALD:
Zelda says the Great Sorority

ALL:
Let's all do the Notoriety Rag!

Interlude:

(MARSHALL spotlit. McLuhan appears.)

McLUHAN
I'm still waiting.

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

Scene 6:

ACTOR
Mister Marshall McLuhan prepares to leave for Cambridge.

(MARSHALL and HERBERT. HERBERT, an amateur phrenologist, feels around on MARSHALL's skull.)

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

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

HERBERT
It's working for me so far.
MARSHALL

When did you start?

HERBERT

Just today.

(He feels around some more.)

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

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

MARSHALL

I'll let you know.

HERBERT

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

Thanks, Dad.

MARSHALL

Son.

(They shake hands.)

Scene 7:

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

MARSHALL

I'm here!

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

C.B. 1

Here?

C.B. 2

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

C.B. 1
Is it really him?

C.B. 2
It's really him.

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

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

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

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

C.B. 2
You do, McLuhan.

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

MARSHALL
Race?

C.B. 1
Yes. Race, McLuhan.
C.B. 2
Think of it as your -- first lesson.
(Music under. The C.B.s move to get into rowing position. McLuhan appears. Perhaps he brings Marshall's scull with him, perhaps it just glides on.)

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

McLUHAN
You can say that again.
(He helps MARSHALL into his boat.)
Just remember, they're here because of their background. You're here despite it.

MARSHALL
(To the C.B.s)
Hold on a minute! Three men against one. Isn't that a little unfair?

C.B. 3
It's our empire, McLuhan! We make up the rules!

Song: Rower's Song

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

Let us test your knowledge
Do you belong in college?

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

C.B.1: Okay ask him
C.B.2: Here's a good one
Hey McLuhan, what's the definition
Of Hapax Legomenon?
C.B.1: He won't know that it's something Latin.

MARSHALL: Let's see . . .
C.B.s Hapax Legomenon!
(Boom of cannon.)
MARSHALL: Is a reference only made once!
(Splash.)

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

C.B.1: I don't believe it.
C.B.2: Let me see it.
C.B.3: Is that actually what it means?
C.B.1: It is.
Throw the book out.
C.B.2: Keep a look out
While I sink him with some history.

Who was William Random?
(Boom of cannon.)

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

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

C.B.3: Okay I've got one
Hey McLuhan . . .
MARSHALL: I suggest you make a small adjustment
Fairly soon now
Before your port bow
Is demolished by that bridge abutment!

C.B.s: Good god. Hard to starboard!
Oars up! Oh my good Lord!
(McLUHAN begins jigging a hornpipe on the f'ocslle. Sound of cannon. A bun barely misses his head. McLUHAN sits back down and resumes rowing.)

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

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

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

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

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

C.B. 1
We won't forget this, McLuhan!
C.B. 2
You'll be hearing from us!

C.B. 3
Cambridge men have long memories!
(They are off.)

MARSHALL
I seem to have offended them.

McLUHAN
Not to worry. Wait till they meet Lord Beaverbrook.

So! You've done it!

MARSHALL
I have, haven't I?

McLUHAN
Congratulations, Marshall. You've nearly become -- me!
(Drum roll.)

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

Song: Check Me Out

McLUHAN: Oh I'm a brand new man!
She boppa digi-data
big name brand
super duper concentrated
new improved  
I got the formula  
to shine clean through  
I'm not your normal ya  
can count on me  
to not shrink or yellow  
oh I'm guaranteed  
won't scratch your mell—I mean

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

(CHORUS:)

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

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

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

Scene 8:

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

ACTOR
It's about time.

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

McLuhan
Good afternoon, class.

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

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

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

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

McLuhan
Indeed it is!
UNDERGRADUATE
Um . . . but . . . you're not even speaking English. Are you?

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

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

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

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

Yes, you. Your question please.

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

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

(Houselights blink out. A projector comes on.)

We reach our real point of departure, to wit:

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

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

(He regards the screen.)

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

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

Exhibit B: Dr. Daniel Starch's formula for empowerment of the common joe. Note the happy accident of the surname, sure to stiffen the resolve of wet noodles everywhere. The call to arms, or rather to the army of executives whose success depends on the diminution of independent thought and feeling. Here is the recipe not just to access robotic
modes of production, but to become the automaton itself. If I, Robot, then Who Me?

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

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

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

Finally --

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

McLUHAN

Hello? Hello? Is anybody here? Hello?

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

UNDERGRADUATE

Wow.

Scene 9:

ACCTOR

Professor Marshall McLuhan, having scrutinized contemporary culture, begins his first book.
McLUHAN
Now, in my first book, The Mechanical Bride, I intend to --

ELSIE (Off.)
Marshall!

McLUHAN
I recognize that voice.
(ELSIE enters, with CORINNE. ELSIE kisses MCLUHAN.)

ELSIE
Herbert Marshall. How nice to see you.

McLUHAN
Mother. What a pleasant -- surprise.

ELSIE
Yes, well I've been rehearsing, "East Lynne", it's a silly old play, but a good part for me, I think.
(She turns to CORINNE.)
Marshall, I'd like you to meet a fellow actress of mine, Miss --

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

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

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

ELSIE
Well! That's all taken care of.

Goodbye, Marshall.

McLUHAN
But Mother, I --

ELSIE
I'll send you the reviews!
    (She exits.)

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

Interlude:

    (MARSHALL appears.)

MARSHALL
Wait!
    (McLUHAN stops turns. Light change.)
Where are you going?

McLUHAN
Away.

MARSHALL
But you went away. I mean, you're coming back, aren't you? You went away, you got your education, you had a little --
fling in Wisconsin, and now you're coming back. Aren't you?
McLUHAN
It is impossible to have a "fling" in Wisconsin.

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

(McLUHAN storms off.)

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

Scene 10:

ACTOR
Mister Marshall McLuhan, having married, returns to Canada.

McLUHAN
But not to Winnipeg!

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

I'm here!

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

ACTOR
The Case of the Murder of the New Professor.

(Sinister chords of music.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

THEM: That's amazing.
Really. Truly.
Whuch yaz making?
Stop your drooling.
(Oh, come on
I wanna know)
Go ahead I'll
Grab a tray we'll
Make some room
McLUHAN: Oh that's okay
THEM: (Oh stay
Don't go)
Don't be silly
Here's a deli
Wanna coffee
Have some jelly
(It's
on us)
McLUHAN: Thanks a lot
THEM: Oh it's no problem
We don't get to
talk too often . . .

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

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

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

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

Ha ha ha ha ha

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

Whadja find out?
Need a coffin
Three feet wide 'n
Six feet long 'n
Won't eat jelly
Don't drink tea
Hope he don't think
It was me . . .

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

Scene 11:

ACTOR
Dr. Marshall McLuhan enjoys a home life.

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

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

IDEA
Masons are taking over the world.

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

IDEA
Ezra Pound was right.

McLUHAN
Mmmm . . . better not.
IDEA
So was Mussolini.

McLUHAN
Definitely not.

CHILD
Can I have a cookie?

McLUHAN
No.
(Pause.)

IDEA
Homosexuals are ruining everything.

McLUHAN
Mmmm . . . might be a magazine piece.

IDEA
Women should --

CHILD
Can I have a cookie now?

McLUHAN
Oh, all right. But turn off the TV before you --
(The CHILD runs out.)
Turn off the TV!
(The CHILD is gone. McLUHAN sighs, rises, trudges to the TV. Bends to turn it off. A woman's hand snakes out and grabs him by the tie.)

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

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

Light change. [Black light?]
The MERMAID and McLuhan emerge out the back of the TV. They swim through the water.)

MERMAID

McLUHAN
I really have to get back.

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

McLUHAN
This happened to me once before.

MERMAID
Did it?

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

MERMAID
But this is different, isn't it?

McLUHAN
Yes, it — is . . .

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

杷 she is pulling McLuhan down with her. Lights are changing to an icy cold blue.)

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

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

CHILD
DAAAAAAA—AAAAAAAD!

杷 lights return to normal. The MERMAID disappears. McLuhan [the real one] lies supine on the floor.)
CHILD
Dad? We're out of cookies.
(Dazed, McLuhan digs in his pants for some change. He notices his pants are undone. He surreptitiously buckles them. Gives the CHILD the coin.)

McLUHAN
Go buy yourself some.
(The CHILD takes the coin, starts out. Stops, turns.)

CHILD
You were having another one of your ideas, weren't you?
(McLUHAN nods.)
Thought so.
(The CHILD goes. Lights narrow on McLuhan. A high, piercing sound. Breaks.)

McLUHAN
My god.

Scene 12:

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

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

McLUHAN
Look, I've got it! Don't you see? * See. See? That's exactly it! The act of seeing . . . or hearing or touching
. . . actually changes you * . . . depending on the medium with which you're engaged! ***

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

In fact, some media don't engage you at all, not really, they more -- engulf you, like radio, for example, or film!

** We might term these media which provide a great deal of sense data as -- what --

MUSICIAN

Hot.

McLUHAN

What?

MUSICIAN

Hot.

McLUHAN

What?

MUSICIAN

(Into a microphone:)

HOT!

(Beat.)

McLUHAN

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

MUSICIAN

Cool.

McLUHAN

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

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

McLUHAN looks one of the DONS in the eyes. Gives him a little push. The DON topples over, dead. McLUHAN moves to another DON. Taps her. She slumps over
in her chair. Moves to another. Blows on him. He falls to the floor.

McLUHAN, surrounded by corpses, is disoriented.)

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

Trapped.

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

McLUHAN

I am alone

Alone

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

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

And on a stage a woman pirouettes.
(We see ELSIE, dimly.)
And on a hill a boy waits.
(We see MARSHALL, dimly.)

He does not see the city over the horizon
He does not sense the moon behind him
Knows only the breath and rush of grass
Exhaling its perfume into the night air . . .
MARSHALL
I'll be going now.

McLUHAN
What? Why?

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

McLUHAN
O O O
What are we to do now? What are we to do?
I will go to the Fisher King
I will return the Grail
I will genuflect in his shadow
As commuters rush for trains around me.
(McLUHAN lies there. There is a clattering off.)

IRISH VOICE
Shite!
(McLUHAN looks.)

McLUHAN
Hello?
(JAMES JOYCE enters, carrying a bottle, drunk.)

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

McLUHAN
I was just --

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

(Regarding the bottle warily.)

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

JOYCE

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

(McLUHAN does. JOYCE whips out a book.)

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

McLUHAN

But -- nobody understands me.

JOYCE

WHO GIVES A CUP OF CHRIST'S SPIT IF THEY UNDERSTAND YA?

God Almighty, if ya haven't learned that after all these years, you've learned nothing at all!

Song: Non Carborundum Est

JOYCE:

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

(listen to me)

if you have ideas
beautiful and true
you better learn to be as
sneaky as a shrew
never put your trust in
social common sense
some night they will bust in
to grab what they can get
these little syphtoids, moronic androids,
little slimy lice
with no ideas, wreck what they see as
a threat to their little lives

(CHORUS:)

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

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

(CHORUS:)

JOYCE and McLuhan:

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

(Music continues under as JOYCE grabs up a
sequined microphone and is spotlit, like the
host of a beauty pageant.)

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

(Upending his bottle.)
And it's about bloody time too, tell front of house to open the bar . . .

(MCLUHAN starts to ascend a very high staircase.)

JOYCE

June, 1960!

ACTOR

McLuhan predicts that television would produce a generation of introverts.

JOYCE

(To audience member:)

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

1962!

ACTOR

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

JOYCE

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

1964!

ACTOR

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

JOYCE

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

Also 1964!

ACTOR

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

JOYCE

Not bad for the son of a Methodist.
(McLUHAN has by now reached the top of the stairs.)

ACTOR
Shortly after, Mister Marshall McLuhan goes through the roof.

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

ACTOR
Thus ends the first act.

ACTOR
Which is, of course, only the beginning.

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

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

End of Act One
Act Two

Prelude:

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

PONYTAIL

Groovy.

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

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

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

Eventually, McLuhan, in his usual tweed suit, tie and hat, wanders into the melee. He looks around with some puzzlement. He politely asks a few AUDIENCE MEMBERS if they've seen the
"gentleman with the long hair", but when he does finally find PONYTAIL, PONYTAIL's much too busy to deal with him. Eventually, McLuhan grows frustrated and discombobulated, and stands centre and yells:)

McLuhan

STOP!!!(A spotlight captures McLuhan where he stands. PONYTAIL spots him.)

PONYTAIL

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

(PONYTAIL encourages everyone to do so.)

McLuhan

(Trying to stem the applause.)

Wait . . . thankyou very much, but . . . PLEASE WAIT!

(His anger brings them up short.)

PONYTAIL

Is something wrong?

McLuhan

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

(He looks around.)

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

PONYTAIL

But it's the sensorium, man!

McLuhan

Well, yes, but -

PONYTAIL

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

McLuhan

That's not really what I --
PONYTAIL
Because that's what you said, man, you said the media should be used to, like, totally turn us on, man, like, expand our minds!

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

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

Do you see?

You don't see.

PONYTAIL
Bummer.

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

McLUHAN
I can see this is going to get complicated.

Scene 13:

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

I'm here!
(Two tacky stage flats slide in place in front of him, slamming in his face. Music.)

Song: The Party Song

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

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

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

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

GUEST B: Let's turn the lights out and pretend that no one's here! Get outta sight, but be ready to cheer

HOSTESS: Kill the music, not a sound Let him think there's not a fan in town! (She opens the door to reveal a silhouette of McLUHAN, the enigma, backlit by hall light. Music suspends.) Hello? Oh I'm sorry, no one's here . . . yet. (Spoken. Beat builds under.)
HOSTESS
You're Mister McLuhan? Oh yes. Come in . . . You're that fellow who wrote that book "Understanding Medea"?

McLUHAN
Media. "Understanding Media."

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

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

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

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

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

HOSTESS
Mister McLuhan, I'd like you to meet Andy Warhol.
Oh! Mister Warhol! I find your work fascinating!

You do?

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

I do? Wow. I'm gonna write that down.

(They cross.)

Mister McLuhan, this is Hubert Humphrey.

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

Not so great.

Oh?

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

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

What?

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

(Pause.)
HUMPH
Get Lyndon Johnson on the phone! And somebody get this man a drink . . .

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

McLUHAN
Oh! There's Robert Fulford!

HOSTESS
Who?

McLUHAN
Robert Fulford! He's a reporter for --

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

McLUHAN
But --

HOSTESS
This is Tom Wolfe, the journalist.

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

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

WOLFE
No you're not.

McLUHAN
Yes, I am.
WOLFE
I'm more of an outsider than you.

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

WOLFE
I'm from the South.

McLUHAN
I'm from Canada.

(Pause.)

(WOLFE goes.)

McLUHAN
Excuse me, is that Arthur Erickson over there?

HOSTESS
Where? Who?

McLUHAN
The brilliant Canadian architect, Arthur --

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

McLUHAN
I'd just like to say hello to --

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

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

Scene 14:

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

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

McLUHAN
What are you doing here?

MARSHALL
Waiting.

McLUHAN
For what?

MARSHALL
Haven't you forgotten something?

McLUHAN
I don't think so.

MARSHALL
Something.

Scene 15:

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

McLUHAN approaches, kneels on the other side of the divider from the PRIEST. Crosses self.)
McLUHAN
Bless me father for I have sinned. It has been one week since my last confession. These are my sins.

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

PRIEST
Go ahead, my child.

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

(Pause.)

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

McLUHAN
Wait. That's not all.

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

PRIEST
You did?

McLUHAN
Yes.

PRIEST
How many times?

McLUHAN
Many . . . many . . . times.

(Pause.)

PRIEST
Go on.

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

(Pause.)

PRIEST
How many times?

McLUHAN
Many . . . many . . . many times.

PRIEST
And all this in the last week, eh?

McLUHAN
I've been busy lately.

(Pause.)

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

McLUHAN
I'm sorry?

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

(ALTAR BOYS appear to assist.)

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

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

(To the ALTAR BOYS.)

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

McLUHAN

But wait -- !

PRIEST

No no. Let's get on with it.

McLUHAN

But --

PRIEST

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

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

McLUHAN

HELLLLLLPPP!

PRIEST

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

McLUHAN

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

PRIEST

Exactly.

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

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

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

Scene 16:

ACTOR

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

(McLUHAN at a podium.)
McLUHAN

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

My topic tonight is --

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

Is --

(Chord. McLUHAN is transfixed.)

ACTOR

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

(Chord.)

ACTOR

Then another.

(Chord.)

ACTOR

And another.

ACTOR

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

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

FRIEND

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

(McLUHAN laughs, delighted.)

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

(McLUHAN stares off to one side now, a
small smile still traced on his face.
The FRIEND regards the book.)
FRIEND
James Joyce. Mad, but wonderful. Shall we stop there for tonight?

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

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

Goodnight, Marshall.

McLUHAN
Wuh. Wuh.

(The FRIEND goes. McLUHAN lies there.

MARSHALL appears on the TV screen.)

MARSHALL
I could read to you.

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

MARSHALL
You used to like Ivanhoe.

McLUHAN
I used to believe in phrenology, too.

(Pause.)

MARSHALL
You should never have left here, you know.

McLUHAN
Where?

MARSHALL
Here. Where I am.

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

MARSHALL
Endless views. Sunflowers waving in the wind.
McLUHAN
Bigots. Trolley collisions at Portage and Main.

MARSHALL
Big skies. Azure lakes.

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

MARSHALL
Look out the window.
(McLUHAN does. Pause.)

McLUHAN
To become someone!

MARSHALL
To leave themselves behind.

Song: You and I

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

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

McLUHAN: I recall
That afternoon
We sat together on the bank of the river
And I told you
That anyone
could stay the same
if they never dared to go anywhere
that was new or strange
Did you find the courage
To let yourself be changed?
Did you live your own life
Or was it all arranged?

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

TOGETHER:

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

McLUHAN:
'Cause now I'm here

MARSHALL:
'Cause I'm still here

McLUHAN:
And I miss you

MARSHALL:
And I miss you

McLUHAN:
And you should be here
MARSHALL: And you could be here
MARSHALL and McLuhan: If/'Cause you wanted to.

Scene 17:

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

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

PONYTAIL
Hi! Remember me?

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

PONYTAIL
Um . . . no . . . not really.

You don't remember me, do you?

McLUHAN
Sorry.

PONYTAIL
Here, maybe this will help you.
(He lets his hair down. It is long.)
PONYTAIL
I . . . staged that little be-in number back in '68. You didn't like it too much. It was a little -- overdone, maybe.

McLUHAN
That was you?

PONYTAIL
'Fraid so.

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

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

McLUHAN
Nurse!

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

McLUHAN
It did?

PONYTAIL
Yeah!

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

PONYTAIL
Better.
McLUHAN

Better?

PONYTAIL

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

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

Song: Surfin

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

(CHORUS):

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

PONYTAIL

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

McLUHAN

Virtual.

PONYTAIL

Yeah!
McLUHAN
As in looks real, feels real, isn't real?

PONYTAIL
Well . . . yeah!

McLUHAN
Do they know each other?

PONYTAIL
Sort of.

McLUHAN
Do they ever meet?

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

(Music up.)

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

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

PONYTAIL
Now. Watch this.

(PONYTAIL presses a box displayed on the screen.)
You make your choice.  
(He inserts a credit card to the slot on the front of the monitor.)

You pay with your card.  
(A PIZZA DELIVERY PERSON arrives with a pizza.)

Presto. It's delivered to your door.  
(He offers the box to McLuhan.)

Double cheese.

McLUHAN
I'd like to see the card.  
(He takes it from the slot in the monitor. Examines it.)

This number?

PONYTAIL
That's how they know it's you.

McLUHAN
This black strip?

PONYTAIL
Tells them -- everything they need to know.

McLUHAN
Who? Tells who everything they need to know?

PONYTAIL
The -- pizza guys.

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

PONYTAIL
So what? I got nothing to hide.

McLUHAN
Nothing?

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

McLUHAN
Ah-hah!
PONYTAIL
But this is ridiculous! You're fear-mongering! You! Of all people!

McLUHAN
You think you know me, do you?

PONYTAIL
I thought I did.

(Music up.)

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

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

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

(CHORUS):

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

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

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

BUSINESSWOMAN
Hello, baby.
BABY

Ga.

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

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

McLUHAN
You call that connecting?

PONYTAIL
Electronically.

McLUHAN
Virtually, you mean.

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

Song: McLuhan's Aria

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

   And now the whole damned planet
   Is wired up for sound
   You're hooked up to the Internet
   And wandering around
   Peddling the virtues
   of the information age
   I guess it doesn't hurt you
   if you don't know it's a cage.
Does all this information and all this stimulation
Do anything to lessen your sense of isolation?
Does all this fascination with visual sensation
Make you feel
The world's more real
Or more empty?

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

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

What about the human animal?
What about the mother's touch?
What about the cool earth we walk on?
Doesn't that mean much?
Let me drink fresh water
Feel the crystal splash
Of the ice cold water
On my face and hands
And if I spend another hour
In the information age
I won't waste that hour
Viewing an image
I want to be connected
To a world that is real
Connected to a world
that is mine
And I can feel
I can feel!

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

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

McLUHAN
What is it?

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

McLUHAN
I take my reality straight up, thankyou.

(PONYTAIL regards the hospital bed,
room.)

PONYTAIL
Yeah. I guess you do.

Well -- peace, man.

McLUHAN
Peace.

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

Well wait, take your --

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

(PONYTAIL is gone. McLUHAN regards the
headgear in his hands. Shudders. Buries
it under the covers.)
ACTOR
Mr. Marshall McLuhan, having seen the future, opts for the past.

Scene 18:

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

McLUHAN
Mother?

ELSIE
Hello, Herbert Marshall. Just a moment, I'm almost done. (He mirrors her movements.)

You've been away.

McLUHAN
Yes.

ELSIE
Go far?

McLUHAN
Very.

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


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

Have you seen your father?

He's right over there.
(Lights rise on HERBERT, also moving in slow motion, gardening.)

McLUHAN
Dad?

HERBERT
Hm? Oh, Marshall! Come give me a hand.
(McLUHAN does, eagerly.)
Gotta get some beets in this year.

McLUHAN
I love beets!

HERBERT
Try to get some tomatoes in too.
(They dig together.)

McLUHAN
I'm old now, Dad.

HERBERT
I see that.

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

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

We're gone, y'see. We're gone. I'm gone. Winnipeg's gone. Well, it's not gone, but . . . they got one building there, turns its own lights off at night. And a planetarium. Imagine that.
(He starts to rise, go.)
The river's still there, but somehow it don't seem as big. No, son, it's a nice idea. Too bad it's too late.

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

McLUHAN

Hello?

Hello?

Is anybody here?

HELLO?

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

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

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

ALL ACTORS

Mr. Marshall McLuhan enters eternity . . . virtually.

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

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

MARSHALL

Hello, old man. Come with me.

Song: I See Something Small (Reprise)

McLUHAN: What's that on the wall?
My mother's old shawl
And way down the hall
I see the linen closet where I used to crawl.
(MARSHALL removes McLUHAN's VR headgear, as ELSIE enters, catching McLUHAN by surprise.)
ELSIE: Hello, Herbert Marshall, what are you doing here? It's nearly time for breakfast; better run along, dear And afterwards we'll practise elocution till noon And later we'll go dancing 'neath a red prairie moon. (McLUHAN and ELSIE dance, as HERBERT and DAISY approach.)

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

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

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

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

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

End

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

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Appendix: "The Happening"

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

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

While the Audience is waiting:

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

-- An Actor goes about with a large bowl of popcorn, offering it to Audience members, saying: "Eat of the Popcorn of Consciousness."
-- An Actor prances about with an atomizer, spraying little puffs of perfume into the air (lightly-scented, please, for the allergenic.)

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

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

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

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

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

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

-- An Actor holding two boxes with holes cut in their tops: She offers one to various audience members to put their hand in, saying "Touch Nothingness". That box is empty.
Then she offers the other, saying "Touch Allness". That box is full of socks, or pieces of a fur coat, or something.

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

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

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

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

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

Resume script.