BOOK REVIEWS

THE GLOBAL VILLAGE: TRANSFORMATIONS IN WORLD LIFE AND MEDIA IN THE 21ST CENTURY
Marshall McLuhan and Bruce R. Powers

New York: Oxford University Press, 1989, 220 pp., $29.95 (cloth)

This book, written between 1976 and 1984, is the last cooperative effort by Marshall McLuhan. The central hypothesis of the work is that Western society is shifting emphasis from linear rational (left-hemispherical) thinking to a more "holistic," qualitative (right-hemispherical) mode of awareness. This shift is manifest in the artifacts of the electronics industry and is characterized as a struggle between data processing and information transmission. It is difficult to tell how much of this book is McLuhan's work, since his last stroke was in 1979. This may explain why the book does not seem to flow with total coherence. In it McLuhan and Bruce R. Powers present what Powers calls in the Preface "a triad of new terms: visual space, acoustic space, and the tetrad" (p. ix). We are also enlightened by Powers as to McLuhan's concept of scholarship as "replay," and his intellectual modus operandi being a "constant refinement through the minds of others" (p. xi). As a consequence, it should probably not be a surprise that much of this book is a rehash of ideas already available in earlier works by McLuhan. Furthermore, notions, problems, and the terminology to express them (such as a clash between Occidental and Oriental modes of thinking, global transformation of consciousness, integral consciousness, spherical awareness, linguistic priority, and perspectivism) are much more elegantly and powerfully articulated in the works of Jean Gebser, who began publishing in German during the late 1930s. Gebser's works *Ursprung und Gegenwart* (1949; translated as *The Ever-Present Origin*, 1985) and *Wandlung des Westens* (1943; translated as *Transformation of the West*, in press) contain virtually all of McLuhan's claims about shifts in Occidental and Oriental thought, including much of the evidence he cites.

The great differences revolve around intellectual rigor and their respective attitudes toward social order. McLuhan tends to extend Skinnerean behaviorism as expressed in *Walden Two*, just as Parsons extended Wiener's cybernetics, to an astonishing magnitude. For instance,

McLuhan, a religious reader of such conservative and ethnocentric tabloids as *Forbes* and *Money*, tells us that "AT&T cooperating with the Bell Systems will be instrumental in producing the new man precisely because they are on the cutting edge of the future, due to the hybrid power being released by the merger of the digital computer and high-speed transmission equipment" (p. 124). AT&T is described in mystical terminology as a "miracle" happening and a "well-intentioned business monopoly." This book has an unmistakable corporate spin which reminds one of reading public relations material for the Canadian government (Chapter 10, *Epilogue: Canada as Counter-Environment*) and AT&T (Chapter 8 about "Global Robotism").

Chapter 1 is entitled "The Resonating Interval," a familiar concept borrowed from Eric Havelock and used by McLuhan in earlier works to describe tribal social order (what Gebser called the "harmoniks" of the "tribal we"). Essentially, the authors make a simplistic argument in this chapter that Western man is currently dominated by left-hemispherical thinking, and that he is shifting, because of his electronic inventions, to a right-hemispherical "artistic" mode of consciousness. In 1943, we find Gebser discussing the, " . . . abandonment of materialistic determinism, of a one-sided mechanistic–causal mode of thought; and second, a manifest urgency of attempts to discover a universal way of observing things [what McLuhan and Powers call 360-degree acoustic/electric resonance], and to overcome the inner division of contemporary man who, as a result of his one-sided, rational orientation, thinks only in dualisms" (Gebser, 1985, p. xviii).

Clearly McLuhan and Powers have not yet reached a state of abandoning material determinism. On the contrary, throughout the book, they attribute changes in consciousness to changes in material media — technological determinism, "The alphabet created a lineal and visual environment of services and experiences (everything from architecture and highways to representational art), which contributed to the ascendancy or dominance of the left, or lineal, hemisphere" (p. 58). They are inconsistent on this point, since they stated earlier in the book that all artifacts are language (which is not exactly Gebser's argument, for he simply calls all manifestations of consciousness "civilizational expressions," inclusive of architecture and the phonetic alphabet). McLuhan and Powers write that their "methodology" led them " . . . to an awareness that all our artifacts are in fact words. All of these things are the outerings and utterings of man" (p. 7). Not unlike Roland Barthes' "universal semantics," these authors expand the realm of semiotics until it simply means all things experienced/interpreted by humans, the simulacrum of Baudrillard. The authors repeatedly argue that technological determinism is absolute in that the people involved are largely unaware of the nature or magnitude of the influence of their own "utterings."

Additionally, the premise of the book is based on a plethora of dualistic thinking, including left- versus right-brain hemispheres, synchronics versus diachronics, retrieval versus obsolescence, enhancement versus reversal, figure versus ground, acoustic versus visual "space," "flipping" between opposites (the "chiasmus"), and data processing versus high-speed information transmission. The notion of chiasmus on the surface seems close to Gebser's carefully articulated concept of "plus-mutation" and hypertrophic states, except that the flipping of a given technology's social consequence leads nowhere but back and forth. Nor does chiasmus explain from where innovation originates. There is definite ambivalence on this crucial issue, for at times the authors insist that "visual thinking" (what Gebser also calls "perspectival mental–rational consciousness") is the effect of the phonetic alphabet (an artifact). At other times, the authors are in total agreement with Gebser when they write that, "The tetrad not only reveals the configurational character of time, but also that the artifact (or founding idea) is always the product of the user's mentality" (p. 10).

This brings us to the "tetrad," which this book claims to introduce. The concept has a complex history and is used in other acceptations, as in botany (the tetrahedron), chemistry (quadrivalent bonding), biology (chromosomal grouping), and mathematical statistics where the tetrad difference is that which exists between the products of correlation coefficients of four variables taken in pairs. According to the authors, and despite its mathematical origin, the tetrad is a right-hemisphere visualization which acts as a metaphoric amplifier to ask and answer four questions about any technology: 1) What does any artifact enlarge or enhance; 2) What does it erode or obsolesce; 3) What does it retrieve that had been earlier obsolesced; 4) What does it reverse or flip into when pushed to the limits of its potential (chiasmus). The mythic representation of the tetrad itself reminds one of an extended Mobius strip. It is supposed to describe the "action" of any artifact in a "scientific," empirically testable way. The consequence of their right-hemisphere visualization, according to the authors, is to generate a ratio of two pairs of balanced figure/ground couplets. However, the very notion of a "ratio," as demonstrated by Gebser, is a construct of the perspectival mental-rational consciousness structure—what the authors call left-hemispherical thinking.

Unlike Gebser's work, this book manifests a metaphysical confusion as well as a misunderstanding of Edmund Husserl's response to metaphysical thinking (concerning the priority of material determinism and constructivism). In the first chapter there appears to be a very heavy borrowing of figure/ground lifeworld analyses from Husserl and Alfred Schutz. This is a curious situation, given that this chapter also inaccurately lumps together Hegel with 20th-century writers, saying, "From

Hegel to Heidegger, phenomenologists have engaged in an attempt to get at the hidden properties, or concealed effects, of language and technology" (p. 6). Yet the entire aim of Husserl's project was to debunk all forms of metaphysical speculation, including hypothetical procedures, consistently arguing against any form of reductionism to some hidden Real reality, the appearance versus ground bias of the Cartesian dualism.

Similarly, McLuhan and Powers mix the Saussurean dualism between the synchronic and diachronic (concerns about temporality in scientism, explained by Gebser) with popularized and simplified left-brain/right-brain notions in order to arrive at conclusions already well drawn by such theorists as Maurice Merleau–Ponty and Martin Heidegger. For instance, the authors argue that, "Simultaneous interplay cannot be reduced to linear (sequential) representation in much the same way that a synchronic chord of music cannot be experienced as a diachronic tune" (p. 8). This is a clumsy way of saying what Merleau–Ponty analyzes in *Phénomènologie de la Perception* (1962) and *Signs* (1960).

Probably most troubling here is the authors' attempt to forge a causal relationship between general left-brain/right-brain theory and Saussure's structural linguistics. Contradictorily, the authors evoke Pribram's holographic theory in order to explain hemispherical differences. The problem here is that it is precisely Pribram's holographic/holonomic clinical research that demonstrates that the cognitive specialization based on hemispherical location has been overstated in the popular literature. In his forthcoming work *Brain and Perception: Holonomy and Structure in Figural Processing*, Pribram offers a theory of nonlocal cortical processing, as well as a much more advanced theory of harmonic model based on fourier transforms performed by dendridic processing. Already in his *Languages of the Brain* (1971), Pribram clearly argues that the linguistic act is holographic, despite the apparent "inhibitory suppressive" function evidenced by cortico-cortical associations via the corpus callosum. Furthermore, Pribam repeatedly argues that linguistic competence (*la langua*) and activity (*la parole*) are not separable, except in artificial terms, and are closely related to, if not dependent upon, logic. Hence, when the authors claim that " . . . the diachronic is visual (left hemisphere) in structure, and that the synchronic is acoustic (right hemisphere) in structure," they are drawing a gross generalization that is not supported by the sources they cite (p. 24).

Of course, this entire field of issues revolves around the phenomenon of time. In the terminology of Gebser, who offers to this day one of the most complete analyses of the "irruption" of time into our consciousness, McLuhan and Powers are examples of "deficient perspectival" thinking, which manifests dualism and an unbalanced notion of "holism." In 1943, Gebser wrote about time that:

As we approach the decline of the perspectival age, it is our anxiety about time that stands out as the dominant characteristic alongside our ever more absurd obsession with space . . . 'temporic' artists [are] those painters of the two major artistic generations since 1880 (i.e., following the classicistic, romantic, and naturalistic movements) who were engaged — doubtless unintentionally — in concretizing time. From this point of view, all of the attempts by the various 'movements' — expressionism, cubism, surrealism, and even tachism — show as their common trait this struggle to concretize and realize time. Understandably, such experimentation resulted in numerous faulty solutions; but as we noted earlier, such faults were equally unavoidable during the search for perspective and spatial realization (Gebser, 1985, pp. 22, 26).

McLuhan and Powers also discuss angelism (discarnatism) and electrical telepathy, concepts treated in great depth by Gebser as "machine magic." While these authors valorize global robotism, they promote an ideology of the panoptican. The authors' dream would seem to be a nightmare for others like Michel Foucault, Jean–Francois Lyotard, and Gebser. Throughout the book the authors seem mesmerized by the power of technology and its ability to conquer space and time. Others, such as Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari with their metaphor of the "rhizome" (in *On the Line*, 1983) and Will McWhinney's (1990) metaphorical application of fractals to express a social order that has no center, seem far more cognizant of political implications and less naive about monopoly power. After all, it is well known that already by 1926, AT&T had proven its voracious appetite for power by refusing to lease its long lines to rivals for radio networking and by attempting to exploit its monopoly control over essential broadcast transmitter patents, refusing to sell a transmitter to anyone who would use it for commercial profit without paying a license fee to AT&T for that right.

Having been a scholar of Gebser's work since before it was translated, I am struck when reading McLuhan by the incredible coincidence, not only in theoretical constructs but in the very words used to articulate ideas. Anyone interested in McLuhan must investigate Gebser for themselves. Gebser brings a prodigious knowledge of linguistics and multidisciplinary evidence to bear on the issue of consciousness mutation and the consequences of the technological battle with time and space. I find Gebser's writing far more coherent, with greater analytic elegance. Gebser's conclusions follow logically and consistently from the data, while McLuhan's work generally, and this work in particular, seems to have a forced, conservative "flip," given the light of evidence cited. As for the authors' treatment of visual and acoustic "space" (the word space is in quotation marks because the authors inappropriately apply a visual construct to tactile harmonics) Gebser, as well as Elizabeth Stroker (1987), offer far more scholarly analyses.

Eric Mark Kramer
University of Oklahoma
Norman, Oklahoma

REFERENCES

DELEUZE, G., & GUATTARI, F. (1983). *On the line* (John Johnston, Trans.). New York: Semiotex.

GEBSER, J. (1985). *The ever-present origin* (A. Mickunas & N. Barstad, Trans.). Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press. (Original work published 1949–1953)

GEBSER, J. (in press). *Transformation of the west* (A. Mickunas & N. Barstad, Trans.). Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press. (Original work published 1943)

MCWHINNEY, W. (1990). Fractals cast no shadows. *IS Journal 9*, 9–20.

MERLEAU–PONTY, M. (1962). *Phenomenology of perception* (C. Smith, Trans.). New York: Routledge & Kegan Paul. (Original work published 1962)

MERLEAU–PONTY, M. (1964). *Signs* (R. C. McLeary, Trans.). Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press. (Original work published 1960)

PRIBRAM, K. (in press). *Brain and perception: holonomy and structure in figural processing*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

PRIBRAM, K. (1971). *Languages of the brain: Experimental paradoxes and principles in neuropsychology*. New York: Brandon House, Inc.

SKINNER, B. F. (1976). *Walden two*. New York: Macmillan.

STROKER, E. (1987). *Investigations in philosophy of space* (A. Mickunas, Trans.). Athens, Ohio: Ohio University Press. (Original work published 1965)

HUMAN BEHAVIOR IN GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE:
AN INTRODUCTION TO CROSS-CULTURAL PSYCHOLOGY
Marshall H. Segall, Pierre R. Dasen,
John W. Berry, and Ype Poortinga

New York: Pergamon Press, 1990, 424 pp., $48.50 (cloth), $24.50
(paper)

Human Behavior in Global Perspective is part of the multivolume General Psychology Series. This book makes a valuable contribution to the growing field of cross-cultural psychology with its conceptual framework underscoring the sociocultural context of human behavior.

The book is divided into four parts. Part 1, "A Prolegomenon," includes four chapters that advance the case that human behavior must be examined in its sociocultural context if it is to be truly understood. Chapter 1, "The Sociocultural Nature of Human Beings," advances the premise that humans are both a biological and sociocultural species. It also provides the conceptual framework to be used throughout the text. Chapter 2, "The Global Perspective in Psychology: A Brief History," provides a historical review of the development of cross-cultural psychology. The authors also present their case for using a global perspective