



Technology and Culture : Ruminations on Marshall Mc Luhan’s ‘The Mechanical Bride’

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Abstract: In his observation of North American culture industry Marshall Mc Luhan finds that how the trained human minds affect the collective public minds and influence them in their own way . The controlled popular culture offers various meanings to different stakeholders . Marshall Mc Luhan’s ‘The Mechanical Bride’ appears as a chapter in the his book *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* , and offers significant inferences on the influence of technology in the life of common individual , and subsequently makes the indicators of the popular culture. The present papers offers the key indicators and findings in Marshall Mc Luhan’s ‘The Mechanical Bride’.

Keywords: popular culture, technology, public life, advertisement, media

INTRODUCTION

Marshall McLuhan has been one of the pioneering thinkers of culture and technology. His views on popular culture and media have sparked significant ripples worldwide. After close analyses of various forms of media, he has provided insights into how media technologies affect human behavior (Mullen, 373). By profession, Marshall McLuhan worked as a Professor of English at St. Michael's College, University of Toronto, and gained popularity akin to stardom through his explicit observations on media and his social appearances. At his Centre for the Study of Culture and Technology, Marshall McLuhan "set groundbreaking precedents in the humanistic study of technology" (Mullen, 373). In his exploration of culture, he proposed examining media forms as one would analyze the pages of books. His concepts of "the medium is the message," "global village," and "world wide web" hold enduring value.

In his observation of the North American culture industry, McLuhan explored how trained human minds influence collective public opinion in

diverse ways. The age of technological revolution also brings news from the press and media, emphasizing the urgent need to prioritize human issues. Among the myriad threats to life and the environment on this planet, threats to emotional balance also hold significant importance. There is a critical need to contemplate emotional health and its related manifestations in today's world.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Marshall McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* offers significant insights into human behavior amidst the growing influence of technology in daily life. Despite its groundbreaking nature, there is comparatively little secondary material available on this work. During the data collection process for the current study, I consulted several texts. Among these, Donald F. Theall's *The Virtual Marshall McLuhan* (2001) discusses the contemporary impact of technology on human life. Philip B. Meggs's introduction to the fiftieth anniversary edition of *The Mechanical Bride* (2001) examines the book's relevance in the context of the twenty-first century. Bhaskar Charya's PhD dissertation, *Media Culture and Representation: A Study of the Works of Marshall McLuhan* (2016), completed at the Department of English and Media Studies, University of Lucknow, explores current trends in media culture through the lens of McLuhan's ideas.

METHOD

The author employed qualitative research methods in the present paper, conducting an analytical study of the text *The Mechanical Bride*. The research utilizes associations and correlations to develop its ideas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Marshall McLuhan's 'The Mechanical Bride' appears as a chapter in his book *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man*, and offers significant inferences on the influence of technology in the life of common individual, and subsequently makes the indicators of the popular culture. Offering an analysis of the major advertisements in 1950' and 1960' Marshall McLuhan ruminates over the influences of technology on our psyche. "McLuhan's fearless symmetry now suggests a world returning to a retribalized global society based on electronics. This eerie cosmos of rock and roll and Telstar is "the early part of an age for which the meaning of print culture is becoming as alien as the meaning of manuscript culture was to the eighteenth" (*The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* p. 135)

'The Mechanical Bride' is a signature chapter appearing in *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* that offers the gist of the whole

arguments. It shows a close reading of advertisements to articulate the traces and trajectories of popular culture. It may rather be appropriately understood as the study of contemporary psyche so much affected with technology as life becoming the bride of machines. The text offers an apocalyptic association of technology, human species, sex tools and life in a cultural dynamo, that exists in a very association. The arguments in the text create a space in the broader sense of the term, where human being is put as a 'thinking machine', that seeks privilege, comfort, sexual desires and wontedness in extremities with realization or without realization surprisingly as cause of the devastation, destruction and even death without any fear of expected human emotions, and displays that stealthily slides to knock and create noise that loudly speaks of a dominant pattern composed of "sex and technology".

Marshall Mc Luhan states that looking at the visuals in media, we can easily infer how sexual desires are marketed, and technology becomes an alliance in this mode of business. The panorama of technology is usurping the seamless flow of easy emotions, and the audience gets entangled in the quagmire of technological simulacra. The popular culture is appearing as an amalgam of technology, desires and emotions. It offers a pastiche of understanding where technology dominates and yokes our emotions.

Mc Luhan says that "to the mind of the modern girl, legs like busts, are power points which she has been taught to tailor, but as parts of the success kit rather than erotically or sensuously." (Mechanical Bride, 24). The canons of feminism, and adoration to body is being taken in unwanted form by the publicist. The statement of Meenakshi Thapan, although presented quite late, in Indian context, holds value to understand the ideas of Marshall Mc Luhan in this regard. She observes:

The female body is a matter of speculation as of contention in urban social life as well as in academic much discourse. A woman's body is viewed as being sensuous, mysterious, exotic, always a 'desirable other' represented in advertisements, in women's magazines, on the catwalk, in popular cinema, and so on. The public 'gaze', whether male or female, is always speculating how next the woman will clothe her body, or adorn it, or maintain it, or manipulate it, or shape it to perfection. (Thapan, 32)

The body is not considered in sync with human self. It is noticed in media as a commodity or an object. Various means, form and portrayal of media compelled with strategic human thoughts to propagate romantic adventures, and could possibly be brought to camera, lights and action treat every segment of male and female anatomy as a play of gridded works uniquely designed to lure the audience and readers in order to stimulate their desires that demand pleasure, and perhaps something more than the sexual desires appropriately

put up by *Lil Abner* as the “ pictorial scrap” of futuristic wanton desire. The text itself is a test of intelligentsia that requires discoveries and an examination and evaluation of thinking machines to understand all such machines and mechanical structures offering bribe towards death and destruction . Many such advertisements can be seen on commercial websites , that show erotic displays of commodities. Many such advertisements of nylons can be seen on the websites like “<https://www.etsy.com/ca/market/nylons>”

The conscious part of the human cerebral structure understands the consequences and finality of the utility, and the uses offered by the technology towards comforting glories and glamour of life through deteriorating health of heart and mind. Yet it seeks pleasure of specialist degrees and treatment of human heart and mind as bribe at ease that strangely dissociate even sexual desires from the human persons and even from the unity of the body. “This visual and not particularly voluptuous character of commercially sponsored glamour is perhaps what gives it so heavy a narcissistic quality .The brittle self conscious pose of the mannequin suggests the activities of competitive display rather than spontaneous sensuality . (‘The Mechanical Bride’,99) . Mc Luhan offers a deep understanding of the psyche of dating and relationship , and their contexts in men and women counterparts . The following expression is self explanatory :

The switch over from the competitive display to personal affection is not easy for the girl. Her mannequin post is in the way . On the male, this display of power to which he is expected to respond with cars and dates has various effects. The display of current feminism sex power seems to many males to demand impossible virility of assertion. (‘The Mechanical Bride’, 99) It would be appropriate to mention Samuel Butler’s curious understanding , “in which machines were coming to resemble organisms that only in the way they obtained power by digestion of fuel but in their capacity to evolve ever new types of themselves with the help of the machine tenders. This organic character of the machines , he saw , was more than matched by the speed with which people , who minded them were taking on the rigidity and thoughtless behaviorism of the machine. (‘The Mechanical Bride’,99)

An Indian cinematic portrayal of this kind of replica may be well applauded through S. Shankar’s *Enthiran* (transl. Robot) (2010) , an exemplary visual text that educates as reader of this text regarding the intimate relationship that these texts establish between humans and machine or sex and technology or the behavioral aspects of human body and technology . Feminine empowerment as gender understanding through technology and glamorizing the word of biological understanding of the term sex is almost possible exchanges and bribing oneself through technology, is an easily comparably study with the car in a body shop that allures and manages huge

audience to choose for the best part similarly to “The walk”, “the legs”, “the body”, “the hips”, “the looks”, “the lips”. Did she fall off a wall? Call all the king’s horses and men” (The Mechanical Bride, 1951: 98) towards a happening bride. The text does not fight or protest womb but somewhere goes beyond “womb” to showcase a realization of gorilla competition to create imagery and pleasure taking the entire entrepreneur towards “tomb”. As Fritz Leiber’s girl with the hungry eyes says:

“She’s the horror behind the billboard She’s the eyes that lead you on and on and then show you death.” She says to him: “I want your high spots. I want everything that made you happy and everything that hurt you bad. I want your first girl ... I want that licking ... I want Betty’s legs ... I want your mother’s death ... I want your wanting me. I want your life. Feed me. baby, feed me.” (Fritz Leiber, cit. in The Mechanical Bride, 101)

In the initial stages, the enjoyment that is stimulated through technology regarding the feminine anatomy, at a later stage is a cautious fusion of “sex, technology and death that (emph. added) persists amid the most likely circumstances (p101), and, therefore, Mc Luhan offers us a wide range of visual texts for instance “Ten Years of Look”, Parker Tylor’s *Chaplin Last of the Clowns* and *Monsieur Verdoux, Ten Seconds before Death*, *Moby Dick Studies in Classical American Literature*. To pilot and fly high to give us a feel that these readings and approaches are not merely symbolic expressions of the fact that many people in our environment have become so mechanical that they do not mind and resent at being deprived of full human status (p100). The text is an illustrious representation of various form of art and culture and its portrayal that subsists in the text that thinking machine creates through technology where sex curiosity and metaphysical play is pivotal role towards death and destruction.

The discourse on body further takes Mc Luhan to show the dissociation of physical pleasure and reproduction. Human being appears as thinking machine. Referring to Edmund Wilson’s *Memoires of Hecate Country*, he states that “woman appears as a disagreeable but challenging sex machine.” (The Mechanical Bride, 1951: 99). The chapter further offers the references of the patterns of violence in comic books and literature, sensation and sadism, fusion of sex, technology and death, and many other behaviorist facts of day to day life. He infers that the machine has so much influenced our psyche that “many people have become so mechanized that they feel a dim resentment at being deprived of full human status.” (The Mechanical Bride, 100).

CONCLUSION

The excessive influence of technology in our lives is alarming.

Technology is increasingly shaping our emotions, posing a serious concern for traditional cultural norms in human society. In the words of the author, "this trance seems to perpetuate the widely occurring cluster image of sex, technology, and death which constitutes the mystery of the mechanical bride" (McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride*, 1951: 101). This insightful observation of modern realities provides numerous insights into contemporary world culture. It is crucial now to view human culture through the lens of traditional values and raw emotions. Human behavior should be guided by the capacities of the human mind, not solely by technological tools.

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