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Vol. XLI

May 1970

No. 5

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# Mass Media and the Future of Preaching

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EDITORIAL NOTE: This is a corrected copy of page 206 of the April issue of this journal. We apologize for the inversion of two lines which obscured the significance of the author's introductory remarks.

Contemporary electronic media threaten the stability of words, the ability of words to stay put in our culture. Since society depends on a common organization of words and word symbols for orderly function and for the transmission of tradition from generation to generation, the new media profoundly affect the very nature of our culture.

Electronic media provide information all at once in multiple sensory dimensions and consequently seem to alter our perception of reality, particularly of order within that which we perceive as reality. Even the mechanical movie projector, by moving a series of still photos at an appropriate speed, managed before the advent of electronic media to kill both the orderly short story and the novel. The literary disciplines admit with candor that the novel in written form is open to further experimentation only insofar as the written style and even the configuration of pagination mimic the film, the radio program, or the relaxed and cluttered environment of the television medium.

For instance, the New York artist and journalist Tom Wolfe writes in the "style" of the disk jockey, the magazine advertisement, the dance choreographer, and even the plain tactile experience of the street.

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If he writes about a marching band, the sentences are likely to march across and down the page, thus offering a more rounded or total experience of communication to the viewer-reader.

So-called nonbooks such as McLuhan's *The Medium Is the Massage*,<sup>1</sup> Abingdon's new *Rock 2000*,<sup>2</sup> Firnhaber's *Say Yes*,<sup>3</sup> and Habel's *Interrobang*<sup>4</sup> are hybrid media forms with visual, synthetic-auditory, and even tactile stimuli woven together between two covers. Inevitably such experiments will be paperback and disposable, revealing their close relationship with electronic media, the content of which is by essence disposable—though it may be republished, rerun, or one might say, re-disposed a myriad times over.

To say that electronic media subvert man's attempts at order and system, qualities inherent in the orderly printed word, may by now seem a truism even among those of us who resist the truth. McLuhan's oracles, the writings of Boulding and Barnouw or of Wittgenstein and the linguistic analysts, or even the writings of many earlier literary critics and artists, such as T. S. Eliot—so startling a generation ago—have almost a tedium about them now.

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<sup>1</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium Is the Massage* (New York: Bantam Books, 1967).

<sup>2</sup> *Rock 2000*, ed. H. H. Ward (New York: Abingdon Press, 1969).

<sup>3</sup> R. Paul Firnhaber, *Say Yes*, No. 6 in "The Perspective Series" (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1968).

<sup>4</sup> Norman Habel, *Interrobang* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969).