

Broadcasting House Proceedings

The most important argument of all derives from information obtained from a variety of writers who have had occasion to study the medium. We should remember, as well, that television is illusion and that it works best, if it works at all, as entertainment. The French philosopher-sociologist Jacques Ellul put it best in his book "The Political Illusion" in which he said:

Finally, TV's effect on politics is being much discussed. The televised transmissions of parliamentary sessions, the direct exposure of politicians, the possibility a statesman has to show his face to everybody when making a speech—all this, it is argued, provides some sort of direct democracy.

As we have noted, however, this entirely passive role of the citizen has nothing to do with a working democracy. Such TV transmissions illuminate precisely the division discussed above: on the one hand there is the political spectacle, on the other, the reality of power. TV accentuates the spectacle, on the other, the reality of power. TV accentuates the spectacle and makes it all the more special because it gives the individual the impression of life itself, or reality directly seized. He will say: "Political Affairs? Of course, I've seen this important debate in the Assembly, where everybody played his role so seriously. The State? Of course. General de Gaulle or Mendès-France talked to me yesterday over the TV."

The examples given are French, of course, because the author is French.

All that is just a spectacle, appearance without root, such a game. And precisely because all this is only a game, such a telecast is possible. The real political mechanism—the state structure—remains completely hidden, outside all control, all the more so as the flickering little screen fixes the individual's attention on the spectacle and prevents him from searching deeper and asking himself questions as to the true nature of power.

This shows the folly of pretending that the televising of the proceedings of this Chamber will accomplish any part of the crusade which the hon. member for Peace River (Mr. Baldwin) has carried on so long, as a result of which the pressure generated by his efforts is being felt by the government over there. Again, we get a trade-off which will really satisfy no one. Just as the trade-off of the abolition of capital punishment for gun control did not fool the people of Canada, so this trade-off will not fool them either. In fact I can think of nothing more detrimental to the successful conclusion of the effort to obtain open government than the televising of this Chamber, thus creating the illusion to which reference was made over and over again by the Minister of Communications when she said it would open this place up, while being unaware of the other point which is so crucial to anything like the free workings of a democratic government.

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There have been other warnings that have been pertinent. Malcolm Muggeridge, a long time television personality, has this to say:

The media enormously distort life. People are given a surface picture which they come to believe—the legend made visible, the word become television. It promotes complete conformism. A phrase like "population explosion" is banded about as if it meant something!

Or Blaik Kirby, writing in the *Globe and Mail* and speaking of Muggeridge's series "A Third Testament", says something that applies precisely to what is planned for the House when he writes:

... but nothing can be done really well on TV that is not properly adapted to the visual medium,—

[Mr. Johnston.]

This is one of the problems with this place; it is not adapted to the visual medium. It is not adapted to television now, but it would be because the demand would come and we would be forced to conform.

It is a pity, in a way, that the leader of the NDP is leaving because it was from that corner of the House that so much utterly unquestioned faith in regard to televising the proceedings of this Chamber comes.

We get back to the idea of myth that Fotheringham used:

In any case, it is quite certain that myths in our western civilization are connected with action, and incite to action. In that sense the definition of myth as "a motivating global image" is certainly the most exact. This myth is indeed a vigorous, highly coloured, irrational representation, charged with the entire believing capacity of the individual. It is, for the most part, a subconscious image, because the religious charge which it carries gives it an appearance of obviousness and certitude so fundamental that to become conscious of it is dangerous. Conscious awareness would run the risk of weakening the certitude. The person with a confused sense of it escapes the clarity of seeing the myth as myth. He can continue to take refuge in certitude.

I know this most important point is also the most misunderstood, Mr. Speaker, because it moves into the realm of the new sacred and the new mythological. It is one of my personal disappointments that some of the reverend gentlemen who are also members of parliament, and whom, one would assume, would know much about the former sacred and the old mythology, have themselves joined in demythologizing the old sacred, and seem to be unaware they are taking upon themselves a new sacred and have accepted a new mythology. So they will not be aware of the loss of objectivity in discussing this measure. In conforming to this world, spokesmen have raised modern technology to a level beyond criticism—irony of ironies!

I heard the hon. member for Winnipeg North Centre (Mr. Knowles) speak of the right to know, that televising this Chamber somehow will provide the right to know. The most ancient of temptations, Mr. Speaker, is the right to know. It is the original one. That is the new myth, the myth that has been exposed, and first exposed by a Canadian prophet, Marshall McLuhan. He has spoken in his own country, and although perhaps unhonoured he has been generally unheard and almost completely misunderstood. Again I would go back to Ellul's writing; he has appreciated what we have heard but to which we have paid so little attention. He says:

Anonymity can no longer be assured by ancestral tradition in a society geared to the future and rejecting continuity with the past.

That is an excellent description of North America.

The anonymity is now assured by the mass media. The someone who carries the story to all, the someone who is completely known and completely anonymous and is assimilated to the "no one" speaking in the myth, is, par excellence, the television announcer.

That is where we find, not the birth of modern myth, but its guarantee of mythical authenticity. The transformations produced in the modern psyche by the mass media, the disconnected order of the discourse, the reappearance of global mythical thinking, the rejection of rational logic, the instant seizure of the real, etc., that has all been thoroughly shown, demonstrated and explained by Marshall McLuhan.

Yet it is as if he never wrote, Mr. Speaker. He has been a true prophet who has said these things 20 years ago. One listens in vain for any indication that he has been heard and