

## cyborg on corners

Memory Wall had a mixed run. Collaboration were chased. Connections made, some helpful, some less so. Fragments were inserted, pasted into other “civic wall events”; example that Millennium / Methuselah party. Labor content was rebooted, reformatted in a street media arts lab. That was later, and the lab was part of larger remix. And the lens was different. But things were done. There was something to show. But mostly Memory Wall ended up as a cliché colonizing other walls, lame, hijacked. Never quite came off. Maybe it’s for the best. It is easy for a public history-art project to slip into a nostalgic set piece. We have enough of those. Don’t need a one-note shrine to “the great he-man cobbler or mistress-seamstress”. Time and talent can be put to a better use. A cornball sink hole is always nearby. And it’s hard to inoculate even when money is heaped, or maybe because of it.

But Memory Wall aimed to be more than a memorial to industrial flight and a shuttered place. Memory Wall wanted to turn the street into a media ecological dig. It was out “to out the layers”. Make them parade, flip, strut. Do it by retrofitting an empty stage.

Bring in some big lens. Park it. Truck in a posse of artists to check out “has been technologies”, techne that hooked and extended the garment workers. Use posse and lens to give back. And then flip the lens on ourselves. We need a recursive road show if we want to push a space of appearance.

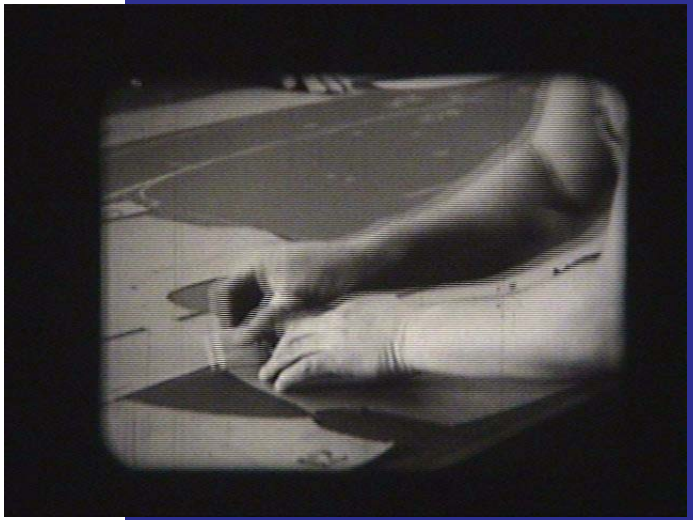
St. Louis was the place to do it. Two other street players made it singular. One was McLuhan, the other Monsanto. Both shadowed Memorial Wall. McLuhan and Monsanto are the local code, the garment back story. Memory Wall wanted to use the garment district rags, workers and old sewing kit to check out the coming wearable digital couture. All the new stuff that hooks, attaches, extends us. It wanted as Hannah Arendt said to “dare the extraordinary”. McLuhan and Monsanto pushed the brief past a formulaic public - art history project. Called for a stage for something more than a flat set piece on wearables shifted to Bangladesh. Because of what Messrs. McLuhan and Queeny unleashed there was the possibility that this stage, the empty wardrobe, and these dresser ghosts might be a window into existential road show.



McLuhan's first book was *The Mechanical Bride*. He started assembling scraps in St. Louis. And they were scraps, newspaper adverts, cut outs, scribbled notes. *The Mechanical Bride* is a dizzy Heuduck mosaic ride. But there's an anchor to the book. It's a dummy. It's Charlie McCarthy. Charlie is a puppet. He's known for snappy dialogue just like Mcluhan. Charlie is ever paired with Edgar Bergen. Puppeteer Bergen was an actor, a comic strip creator, and a so-so ventriloquist.

But Mcluhan wasn't writing a manual for puppeteers, not his audience. McLuhan just wanted to know who is in charge? Where do the voices comes from? Who wears who? McLuhan was interested in the interval between our technologies and ourselves, the skin between puppet and puppeteer. Who pulls those strings. Mcluhan was keen on how medias and other technologies hook, attach, extend us; just like that seamstress's needle and the shoe-man's scissors.

**He was after a pattern.**



*charlie on a wall* - Text and graphics from Marshall McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride* were projected on The Pulitzer Foundation of the Arts. It was part of an installation entitled "Marshall McLuhan Meets Josephine Baker". It was produced by Paul Guzzardo and Zlatko Cosic .

# Monsanto: Time Line

\* 1901 - Original Monsanto founded as a maker of saccharine by John F. Queeny and named after his wife, Olga Monsanto Queeny.

\* 1920s and 1930s - Manufacturers sulfuric acid and other chemicals, including polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), which are later implicated in reproductive, developmental and immune system disorders.

\* 1940s - Manufactures plastics and synthetic fabrics

\* 1960s - Establishes agricultural division with focus on herbicides.

\* 1962-1971 - Becomes one of principal companies supplying herbicide known as Agent Orange to U.S. military for use in Vietnam War. Agent Orange is later linked to various health problems, including cancer.

\* 1976 - Commercializes Roundup herbicide, which goes on to be a top seller around the world.

\* 1982 - Some 2,000 people are relocated from Times Beach, Missouri, after area is contaminated with PCB by-product dioxin. Critics say a St. Louis-area Monsanto chemical plant was a source but company denies any connection.

\* 1994 - Wins regulatory approval for its first biotech product, a dairy cow hormone called Posilac.

\* 1996 - Introduces first biotech crop, Roundup Ready soybeans, which tolerate spraying of Roundup herbicide, and biotech cotton engineered to resist insect damage.

\* 1997 - Spins off its industrial chemical and fibers business into Solutia Inc amid complaints and legal claims about pollution from its plants. Introduces new biotech canola, cotton and corn, and buys foundation seed companies.

1998 - Introduces Roundup Ready corn.

1999: Monsanto sold off NutraSweet Co. and two other companies.

2000 Monsanto merged with Pharmacia & Upjohn, and the agricultural division became a wholly owned subsidiary of the "new" Pharmacia;

2000 (October): Pharmacia spun off its Monsanto subsidiary into a new company, the "new Monsanto". As part of the deal, Monsanto agreed to indemnify Pharmacia against any liabilities that might be incurred from judgments against Solutia. As a result, the new Monsanto continues to be a party to numerous lawsuits that relate to operations of the old Monsanto.

2005: Monsanto acquired Emergent Genetics and its Stoneville and NexGen cotton brands. Emergent was the third largest U.S. cotton seed company, with about 12 percent of the U.S. market. Monsanto's goal was to obtain "a strategic cotton germ-plasm and traits platform."

2007: In June, Monsanto completed its purchase of Delta and Pine Land Company, a major cotton seed breeder, for \$1.5 billion. As a condition for approval of the purchase from the Department of Justice, Monsanto was obligated to divest its Stoneville cotton business, which it sold to Bayer, and to divest its NexGen cotton business, which it sold to Americot. Monsanto also exited the pig breeding business by selling Monsanto Choice Genetics to Newsham Genetics LC in November, divesting itself of "any and all swine-related patents, patent applications, and all other intellectual property".

2008: Monsanto purchased the Dutch seed company De Ruiter Seeds for €546 million, and sold its POSILAC bovine somatotropin brand and related business to Elanco Animal Health, a division of Eli Lilly in August for \$300 million plus "additional contingent consideration".

## in the ring with charlie



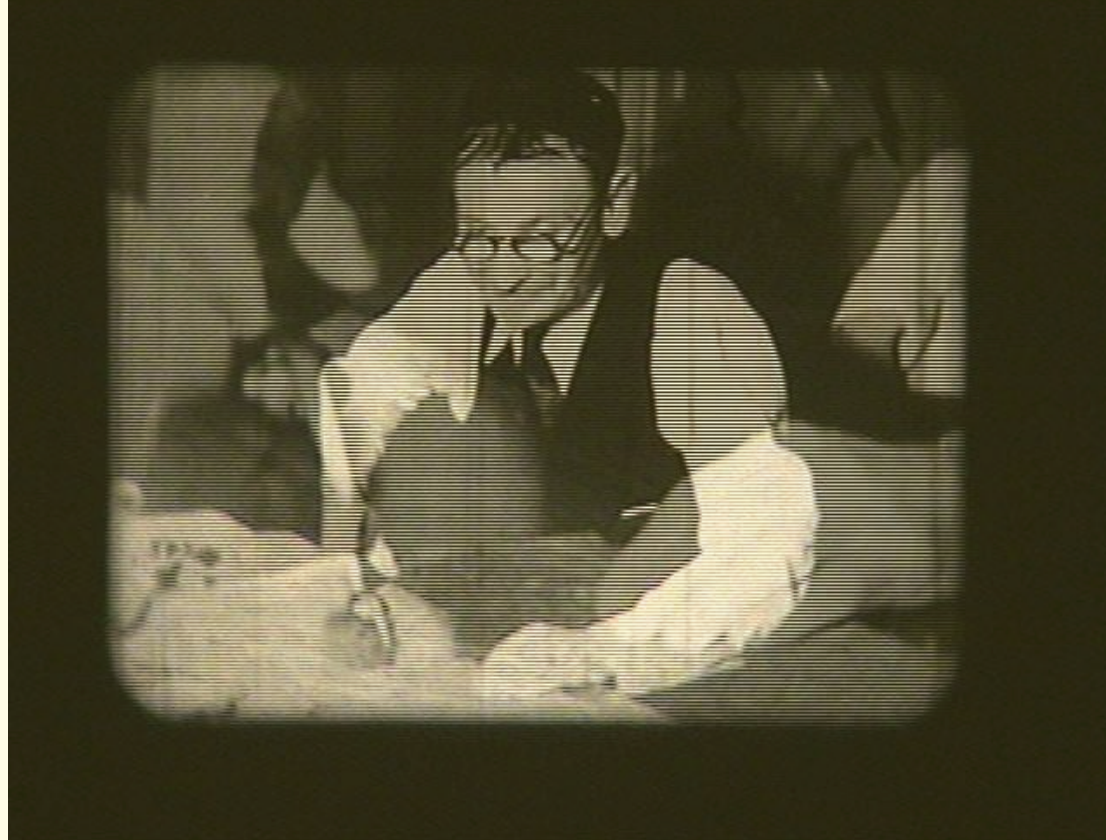
No society has ever known enough about its actions to have developed immunity to its new extensions or technologies. Today we have begun to sense that art may be able to provide such immunity.

In the history of human culture there is no example of a conscious adjustment of the various factors of personal and social life to new extensions except in the puny and peripheral efforts of artists. The artist picks up the message of cultural and technological challenge decades before its transforming impact occurs. He, then, builds models or Noah's arks for facing the change that is at hand. p70

It is a persistent theme of this book that all technologies are extensions of our physical and nervous systems to increase power and speed. Again unless there were such increases of power and speed, new extensions of ourselves would not occur or would be discarded. p91

When a community develops some extension of itself. it tends to allow all other functions to be altered to accommodate that form. 130

Understanding Media:  
The Extensions of Man  
by Marshall McLuhan  
1964



It was here; next door to those leave-taking vaudevillians that Mcluhan started his first book; A book about the sights, and the sounds of our razzle-dazzle popular culture, "the bride of razzle-dazzle". He called it The Mechanical Bride and published it in 1951, the same year Baker and Winchell had their run in at that Club. Mcluhan wrote about the Stork Club and the telegraphic rattle of Walter Winchell in The Mechanical Bride. But he wrote about something else first. He opened his book with a story about a barrel.

All his life Marshal Mcluhan was obsessed by Edgar Alan Poe's A Descent into the Maelstrom. For Mcluhan the maelstrom was a metaphor, a symbol for all the mechanical, technological forces that overpower us, sweep us away, the press, radio, movies, advertising, all around and everywhere, going, whirling faster, faster. Mcluhan saw these things, as the things that drown us. They empty us out. They leave us hollow. And this maelstrom is now the place where we find ourselves, it's home. We need the barrel as the way out, to stay whole, the barrel as a new platform.

Poe and the Barrel open Marshall Mcluhan's first book The Mechanical Bride. The book he started shortly after coming to St. Louis. That was almost seventy years ago, when he had an office ten miles from the Big Mud Mound, by that vaudeville district, when he sent Ong off to distant lands in search of things not quite remembered, nor understood. It started here. Both men are gone. Father Walter Ong recently died. It was after a long life of trying to understand how an old tool - print technology really changed us as human beings. And how we're being changed again by this swarm of electronic digital bits, the new maelstrom.

[Seclections From Buildbetterbarrel](#)

**Interview August 10, 1997 Fr. McNamee and Fr. Ong**  
**St. Louis Post-Dispatch Jeff Daniels**

**McLuhan's Two Messengers**  
**McLuhan Two Messengers**  
**Maurice McNamee and Walter Ong: World-Class Interpreters of His Ideas**

"He had come in hot with the New Criticism, which was very much in the air," McNamee said as he comfortably settled into an overstuffed chair. McNamee ended up taking all of McLuhan's classes. His approach to literature changed. He learned how to read.

Later on, after McNamee became chairman of the English department, he made practical criticism the heart of the curriculum.

"Modern criticism turned around the whole approach to literature in this country," McNamee explained.

"And McLuhan was certainly the source of that shift here in St. Louis. All I had to do was solidify it."

Ong, in his Roman collar as opposed to McNamee's Marcos-style casual wear, agrees that McLuhan had the innate ability to see into the whole context of a work of literature.

"He had precocious insights," Ong recalled, "but he didn't always know entirely what he was saying. A lot of the things he was saying back then are now only clear in the computer age."

And in this computer age McLuhan's theories and stratagems - mostly ignored throughout the '70s and '80s - have experienced quite a revival. Wired magazine, the bible of cyber surfers and techno heads in the '90s, has anointed McLuhan its virtual patron saint. Media saturation has led to a McLuhan resurrection, a circumstance that surprises neither McNamee nor Ong, who noted with a wry smile that,

"Marshall's exactly the kind of thing that pop culture seizes upon but doesn't understand."

According to McNamee, the insights into media and technology that McLuhan formulated could be seen in his early work.

"He passed along these little aphorisms, and they changed your view of literature," he noted. "But they also managed to change the way you viewed all your surroundings."

Ong leaned forward in his chair excitedly, using his hands to make a point as he added:

"Here's an example, and this just came to me in the past week," he said turning to McNamee. "Remember how Marshall used to insist that machines were extensions of human beings? That's not the way that most people look at them - they look at machines as little animals. "Mac (McLuhan) said that 's not the way it is - if you don't have human beings, then none of the machines run. That was an extremely profound insight, and I don't think he had an idea of how deep of one it was."

After McLuhan went North he continued rooting out helpers. Edmund Carpenter was one of them. Carpenter was an anthropologist. He lived with the Eskimos. Between Eskimos and after McLuhan he went to New Guinea to observe the effects of modern communications on tribal peoples. What made Carpenter so extraordinary was that he was the one McLuhan helper who understood fashion.

When Carpenter came back from New Guinea he wrote *Oh, What A Blow That Phantom Gave ME!*. The book was on technologies and tribes. There's a runway show in the book. It's a one of kind. It's in a *Highland Cage*. The 20th century's foremost fashion photographer Irving Penn set it up. Edmund Carpenter is in the audience. He's watching and taking notes. The notes follow:

Why brilliant fashion designers, a notoriously non - analytic breed, sometimes succeed in anticipating the show of things to come better than professional predictors, is one of the most obscure questions in history; and for the historian of culture, one of the most central.  
Eric Hobsbawm  
*The Age of Extremes - The History of the World From 1914 - 1991*



## MOMENTS PRESERVED

Irving Penn took a series of extraordinary photographs at the 1970 Goroka Agricultural Show, a great gathering of tribes held annually in the Highlands, attended by thousands of villagers, many elaborately plumed & painted.

As usual, Penn employed a collapsible, portable studio with one wall open & the camera outside, looking in. The secret of this studio is that it created its own space - space without background.

The moment subjects stepped across that threshold, they changed totally. All confusion & excitement ceased. Even those outside became still. A sudden intensity possessed everyone.

The same subjects who moments before posed comically for tourists, affecting exaggerated poses, now behaved with intense concentration. Their bodies became rigid, their muscles tense; their fingers tightly gripped whatever they touched. When Penn repositioned them, he found their bodies stiff in a way he never found subjects in our society.

The crowd outside, looking in, also became rigid. Chaos ceased & the scene became a tableau.

If this were merely my account, it might easily be dismissed as something contrived to fit the thesis of this book. But I have tried to record here, as best I remember them, Penn's own words. And the evidence is also in the photographs.

Edmund Carpenter  
*Oh, What A Blow That Phantom Gave ME!*  
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# the velocity of the fashion process\*



Irving Penn

\* Intellectual Property Law and the Sumptuary Code, Barton Beebe  
123 Harv. L. Rev. 809 (2010)

\* Studies of the fashion process in the United States, the developing world, and elsewhere show that new fashions emerge from and spread to diverse locations throughout global culture. In innovating or copying them, individuals seek a level of optimal distinctiveness that need not necessarily confer hierarchical status. Indeed, as the modern marketplace of kaleidoscopic distinctions, the “marketing of no marketing,” “indie brands,” and “mass customization” suggest, commodified forms of distinction often demonstrably reject the norms of hierarchical status competition in order to achieve their ultimate purpose, which is to produce in the fashion innovator or adopter a feeling of “significant difference,” of being something other than a mere copy in a mass world of equivalence — thus the emerging phenomenon in which consumers display obvious fakes of high-status luxury goods as especially recherché signs of distinction. As Thomas Frank has convincingly demonstrated, this commodification of counter-conformity was, for example, a defining characteristic of the “Peacock Revolution” in men’s apparel fashion in the 1960s and has fostered the “hip consumerism” (captured most effectively by Apple’s Steve Jobs) that has followed ever since.



Andrea Saltzman

