

(2025 February 21) The Mystical Side of Marshall McLuhan - Feuerherd (JSTOR)

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By the end of the 60s Marshall McLuhan was one of the best-known names among futurist thinkers both in and dropped-out from academia. His "the medium is the message" slogan had swept through ivory towers, media networks and hippie communes and his mutually invigorating friendship with Bucky Fuller made him a kind of hero among the young, even some who preferred heroes of a more traditional or overtly political cast (like Marcuse, for instance). McLuhan, whose fame was in what was becoming known as communications theory and cybernetics, was an important precursor to the imminent laptop revolution that promised (falsely, as it turned out) a new world of individualist freedom).

For a smaller set of academics and drop-outs, those inclined toward what was still considered avant garde literature, McLuhan was an important link to Joyce, Pound, Beckett and other pioneers of literary modernism in the English-speaking world. Among his other later-renowned students (Walter J. Ong, one of my favorites) was Hugh Kenner, whose 1971 book, *The Pound Era*, is widely considered to be one of the most important go-to texts on modernism. McLuhan introduced Kenner to Pound (while Pound was still incarcerated at the St Elizabeths hospital for the criminally insane) and Kenner dedicated his second book, *The Poetry of Ezra Pound* (1951) to McLuhan.

McLuhan, influenced by the writings of G.K. Chesterton (who was, along with Hilaire Belloc arguably the most influential Catholic author among the early modernists, taken seriously by T.S.Eliot, among others) converted to Roman Catholicism in 1937 and passed some of that inclination on to Kenner, whose first book was *Paradox in G.K. Chesterton* (1947), which McLuhan wrote the preface to. Kenner's later writings, though comprehending a wide range of explicit and implicit cosmological, psychological, aesthetic and otherwise speculative ideas among modernist and premodernist artists and thinkers, do not seem to embody McLuhan's or Chesterton's doctrines.

McLuhan, however, as noted by Wolfe in the article linked here, though he did not bring it up in his public life, until his early death entertained something of a mystical perspective, aligned in particular with the spiritualist evolution philosophy of Teilhard de Chardin (who, had significant cachet among mid- to late 20thC futurists, including, for instance, Paolo Soleri, whose visionary architectural complex, Arcosanti is a favorite tourist stop-off between Tucson and Phoenix).