

## John McHale, Marshall McLuhan, and the Collage “Ikon”

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## Spratt’s Flaps: Midwifery, Creativity, and Sexuality in Early Nineteenth-Century Visual Culture

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# John McHale, Marshall McLuhan, and the Collage “Ikon”

Article by Rachel Stratton

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## Abstract

Over the course of the 1950s, the Scottish writer and artist John McHale was committed to exploring the effects of fine art, advertising, and new media on the human experience. He was a prominent member of the Independent Group (IG), which met at the Institute of Contemporary Arts in London (1952–1955), and was among the first artists in the group to travel to the USA, returning with a tranche of advertising imagery that became influential for their thinking about the mass media environment. McHale was also an early advocate of Marshall McLuhan’s media ecology theory and responded to it in his own artwork and writing. Focusing on a formative period for McHale, between 1954 and 1960, when he developed his collage practice, undertook a scholarship with Josef Albers at Yale University, and became a leading voice in the IG, the essay considers McHale’s writing and art practice as an evolving response to McLuhan’s media ecology. It identifies McHale’s two-part essay “The Expendable Ikon”, published in *Architectural Design* in 1959, as a key text for understanding his artwork and writings on the relationship between the fine arts and the mass media during this period.

## Introduction: McHale and McLuhan

In 1959 John McHale, the Scottish artist, writer, and participant in the Independent Group (IG) wrote to the Canadian academic Marshall McLuhan, informing him that: “for some years, since *The Mechanical Bride* was published, I have looked out for such articles as you have produced and they have been of immense value to myself and others here who are interested in the mass media”.<sup>1</sup> An earlier draft of the same letter had put this in more emphatic terms, insisting that for artists in Britain, McLuhan’s work was “of great interest and considerable influence”.<sup>2</sup> In the letter sent to McLuhan, McHale cited articles dating back to 1947 and the “Culture and Communications” seminars that McLuhan held at the University of Toronto between 1953 and 1955, revealing an early and sustained engagement with McLuhan’s work prior to the publication of his best-known book *Understanding Media* (1964).<sup>3</sup> McHale also shared his own developing theories on media ecology, enclosing with his letter a copy of his two-part essay “The Expendable Ikon”, published in *Architectural Design* in February (fig. 1) and March 1959 (fig. 2).<sup>4</sup> This confirmed to McLuhan that discussions he was leading in North America about the

language of the mass media were also now taking place in Britain. Furthermore, it posited “The Expendable Ikon” as a complement to McLuhan’s “most stimulating and informative text” “Myth and Mass Media”, which had been published in *Daedalus* a month after McHale’s piece.<sup>5</sup> The artist was at pains to emphasise the didactic function of mass culture, stating that “for myself, and others who are interested in the mass media, this interest has been particularly directed to [its] role [in] the education of the artist and designer”.<sup>6</sup> McHale’s letter initiated a back and forth with McLuhan that lasted throughout the 1960s and 1970s.<sup>7</sup> The letters underscore the importance of McLuhan’s writing for the development of ideas and practices by members of the Independent Group, a radical group of young artists and architects who met at the Institute of Contemporary Arts (ICA) in London and were concerned with ways technology and the mass media shaped human experience. Lawrence Alloway later cited McLuhan’s publication *The Mechanical Bride* (1951) as a key text for the group.<sup>8</sup>



Figure 1

John McHale, “The Expendable Ikon 1”, *Architectural Design*, Issue 2, Volume 29 (February 1959): 82–83. Digital image courtesy of The Standard Catalogue Company (all rights reserved).



Figure 2

John McHale, “The Expendable Ikon 2”, *Architectural Design*, Issue 2, Volume 29 (February 1959): 82–83. Digital image courtesy of The Standard Catalogue Company (all rights reserved).

The essay, “The Expendable Ikon”, which McHale had enclosed in his first letter to McLuhan, examined the communicative function of images and the means by which the mass media conveyed the stereotypical mid-century Western experience. Working on the premise that “the whole range of the sensory spectrum has been extended [such that] man can see more, hear more, travel faster—experience more than ever before” and that “his environment extensions, movie, TV, picture magazine, bring to his awareness an unprecedented scope of visual experience”, the essay made the case that images had to respond in kind and become “loaded” with associations about “man’s total environment”.<sup>9</sup> The term “ikon” signalled that the meaning of mass imagery extended beyond the representation of the figure depicted, in much the way that a religious ikon embodied an inconceivable divine entity and sought to induce a spiritual experience through the image of Christ, the Virgin Mary, or a saint. The unusual spelling may have been intentionally used to foster the connection to Eastern Orthodox ikons but more likely is that McHale adopted it from Reyner Banham, who used the same spelling in the catalogue for the exhibition *This is Tomorrow* in 1956.<sup>10</sup>

In “The Expendable Ikon” McHale categorised some prevalent trends in ikon-making in contemporary mass media. He cited Marshall McLuhan as an important source, describing *The Mechanical Bride* (1951) as a “classic of its kind”, while at the same time distancing himself

from McLuhan's "moralising" tone.<sup>11</sup> Although McHale initially subscribed to McLuhan's warnings about the potentially corrupting nature of the mass media, by the end of the decade, he was more circumspect. Their ambitions were aligned but not quite the same—McLuhan's purpose being to understand the social and cultural implications of mass media, where McHale was equally interested in the question of where this expanded visual environment left fine art. By working through McLuhan's ideas over the course of a decade, McHale came to understand the potential dangers of the mass media but also—as indicated in his initial letter to McLuhan—to appreciate what the fine arts could learn from its advanced methods of persuasion.<sup>12</sup> The distinction he made between the two was based on their longevity or lack thereof. The fine arts—the traditional preserve of ikon-making—stood the test of time, while mass media was characterised by rapid and continual change, its ikons only ever as relevant as the last photo-shoot, movie, or song released. This expendability, McHale argued, gave a more accurate picture of the cultural environment of the mid-century but it also represented a challenge to those artists who acknowledged its didactic potential as they grappled with the question of fine art's function in a mass media age. The Independent Group, whose first series of seminars (1952–1953) had focused on technology, turned their attention to the relationship between fine art and mass media for their second series (1955–1956), and explored it through exhibitions, including *Parallel of Life and Art* (1953), curated by Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi, Alison Smithson, and Peter Smithson at the ICA; *Collages and Objects* (1954), curated by Lawrence Alloway at the ICA; and *This is Tomorrow*, coordinated by Theo Crosby at the Whitechapel Gallery (1956).<sup>13</sup> In "The Expendable Ikon", McHale focused on popular ikons like the pictures of Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley that pervaded popular magazines. Elsewhere, however, he also applied the term to his own artworks, writing in the catalogue for the exhibition *Three Collagists* (1958) that his works were "in the nature of ikons" because they captured the human image in the "extended environs" of the mass media.<sup>14</sup> A photograph of McHale posing alongside his *Self Portrait* (1955), taken for the journal *Uppercase*, reflects this through its mirrored composition, the subject split between McHale's exterior appearance and his symbolic representation of self as a television-shaped head covered with advertisements (fig. 3).<sup>15</sup> The exaggerated sensory features of *Self Portrait*—its enlarged eye, mouth, and outstretched tongue—emphasised the sensory overload of this new media environment, not merely a new visual education but a titillating sensorium. The work disregards formal likeness and instead seeks to capture the impact of the 1950s on the artist's sense of self. Depicted as a generic receptacle filled with vivid advertising imagery, *Self Portrait* presents McHale as a product of his environment, his identity forged by the consumer boom he experienced while living in the USA in 1955.<sup>16</sup> As this essay will show, collaged ikons such as these served as tools for analysing new media languages and their impact on human experience, a task McHale carried out in parallel and crossover with McLuhan. In this regard, they are not only the products of this expanded visual environment, but they are also a form of research that contributed to the burgeoning field of media ecology.<sup>17</sup>



Figure 3

Unknown artist, *John McHale with Self Portrait (1955)*, 1956, photograph. Collection of Yale Center for British Art, gift of Magda Cordell McHale. Digital image courtesy of the estate of John McHale / Yale Center for British Art (all rights reserved).

## McHale's Collage Books, 1954

McHale's use of advertising imagery began in earnest in 1954 when he produced a series of collage books for Lawrence Alloway's exhibition *Collages and Objects* at the ICA.<sup>18</sup> As well as contributing artwork, McHale worked closely with Alloway to design the exhibition and its catalogue, using industrial materials such as fencing mesh and perforated bricks for the exhibition design and continuing the theme of assemblage in the catalogue, where quotations from artists were collaged together in a non-hierarchical arrangement.<sup>19</sup> The exhibition traced a genealogy of collage from Cubism and Dada through Surrealism to the mid-1950s, and positioned the IG, as well as the British Constructivists, as the next generation to be concerned with the materials of the modern environment and the disruption of hierarchies between "high" and "low".

Two works McHale produced for the exhibition, *Shoe Life Stories* (fig. 4) and *How I Took to Washers in Luxury Flats* (fig. 5), illustrate the decisive shift McHale made at this time, from abstract constructivism to the proto-pop aesthetic that has since become synonymous with the IG. These participatory works allowed visitors to manipulate the text and imagery covered pages to create different juxtapositions, in an attempt to convey the abundance of information that a person daily consumed. In *Shoe Life Stories*, the pages are covered on both sides with images of luxury consumer goods and the fragmented body parts of glamorous female models, all interspersed with snippets of text, the meanings of which shift as new associations of word and image are brought into relation. The incrementally narrowing pages alter the iconographic landscape with each turn, demonstrating the importance of the medium's structural architecture to how information is received. Similarly, in *How I Took to Washers in Luxury Flats*, the ribbons of paper gradually disclose and conceal images: a picture of a monkey kissing a man, a leggy model, or a fragmented photograph of Winston Churchill in his second term as prime minister.

Different combinations of word and image form as the ribbons are moved at random, creating ironic and satiric juxtapositions, as for example when the statement “rich, tender and triumphant” appears below the image of Churchill, whose reputation as Britain’s saviour during the Second World War was by 1954 in tatters.<sup>20</sup>

John McHale, *Shoe-life Stories*, 1954

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(1 of 28)

Figure 4

John McHale, *Shoe-life Stories*, 1954, collage book, 25 x 21 cm. Collection of Yale Center for British Art (MSS 60 Box 4, item 2a, Cabinet L). Digital facsimile courtesy of the estate of John McHale / Yale Center for British Art (all rights reserved).

Figure 5

John McHale, *Why I Took To The Washers In Luxury Flats*, 1954, collage book, 46 x 24 cm. Collection of Yale Center for British Art, Gift of Magda Cordell McHale (MSS 60 Box 4, item 1 (Cabinet L)). Digital facsimile courtesy of the estate of John McHale / Yale Center for British Art (all rights reserved).

McHale's move from the abstract language of constructivism to the language of the mass media arrived just as McLuhan's early media theory was beginning to make him an international name, with the establishment of his "Culture and Communications" seminars at University of Toronto (held between 1953 and 1955) and, shortly after the publication of *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* in 1951. With its Duchampian title, this critical study of popular advertising and media was among the first publications to consider how technology-driven media, such as advertising, altered human perception and experience. McHale drew on the ideas expressed by McLuhan in the central collage in *Shoe Life Stories*, showing how technology had expanded "the range of the sensory spectrum" in the hybrid figure with its binocular legs and oversized sensory features.<sup>21</sup> In forging a comparison between the figure and the dog, the collage asks audiences to contemplate humanity's exponential development beyond the rest of the animal kingdom; the dog's identity remaining fixed, whereas the figure's is forged by the "environment extensions" available to it.<sup>22</sup>

What becomes abundantly clear in looking at McHale's collage books from 1954 is that the artist adopted a scepticism about mass advertising, which was shared by McLuhan—a facet of the IG's



fascination with mass media that is rarely foregrounded. *The Mechanical Bride*, far from a straightforward celebration of the mind-expanding potential of popular culture, sought to raise awareness of the manipulative techniques used by advertisers, stating that:

*Ours is the first age in which many thousands of the best-trained individual minds have made it a full-time business to get inside the collective public mind. To get inside in order to manipulate, exploit, control is the object now ... To keep everybody in the helpless state engendered by prolonged mental rutting is the effect of many ads and much entertainment alike.*<sup>23</sup>

The book was a call to arms to make the public aware of these manipulative techniques and to foster a society with “trained perception and judgement”, the idea being that basic knowledge of the advertising industry’s mechanisms of persuasion would make people less susceptible to blind manipulation.<sup>24</sup>

McHale’s collage books also seem to draw attention to the potential of advertising language to manipulate consumers. The shifting configurations of words and iconography make meaning unfixed and entirely context-contingent, and the oscillation between text and image activates the viewer’s perception in a Benjaminian-style distraction that challenges the truth-value of the images depicted.<sup>25</sup> The striated faces in *How I Took to the Washers in Luxury Flats*, for example, highlight the tendency of human perception to form a *gestalt*, even where there is none, and thus challenge the truth-value of vision. Similarly, the perseveration of eyes in *Shoe Life Stories*—in both word and image—reveals the levels of perception and interpretation involved in reading symbols. In this latter collage book, the text surrounding the figure offers a coded warning: on one side the words “true” and “you never know” calling into question the notion of absolute truth; and on the other side the phrase “your nerves” evokes the nervous system and its role in governing sensory perception and emotion. In *Shoe Life Stories*, McHale judges truth in advertising to be a faculty of subjective experience and invites audiences to engage actively in the perceptual process, that they may avoid blind manipulation.

The intertextual medium of collage became crucial for McHale’s investigations into the dually dangerous and expanding language of mass advertising. *Shoe Life Stories* conveys a message similar to McLuhan’s: that humans faced major changes to their environment amid this influx of information. It too warned individuals to educate themselves about the structures and mechanisms of persuasion, to avoid acceptance of all information as absolute truth. These arguments were also central to Alfred Korzybski’s pedagogical tome, *Science and Sanity*, which was circulated among the IG and later lionised by Reyner Banham as one of the group’s principal theoretical texts in the documentary film *Fathers of Pop* (1979).<sup>26</sup> Within the context of the IG’s reckoning with systems of knowledge and notions of truth, advertising gained educational importance, both as a means by which the arts embraced technology and as a source for exploring the processes involved in the construction of meaning. McHale began to explore this in a more systematic manner in 1955, when he undertook a year of study with Josef Albers at Yale, combining intensive training in colour perception with exposure to advanced printing techniques and the methods of persuasion used in American mass media.

## Colour and American Advertising

The 1950s was a decade of intellectual exchange between the USA and the UK. Thanks to the Marshall Plan initiated between Western countries in 1948, transatlantic travel and trade became more accessible, and McHale was a direct beneficiary. Only the second member of the IG to visit the USA, McHale’s year abroad played a pivotal role in the group’s access to American mass

media when he returned to Britain with a trunk filled with advertising imagery.<sup>27</sup> In Reyner Banham's words, this collection of images was a "treasure chest that has become something of a legend in the annals of Pop Art", providing one of the first opportunities for artists in London to survey American mass media and to examine its more advanced printing techniques.<sup>28</sup> Many of the images McHale collected are now in the John McHale archive at the Yale Center for British Art and, while frequently studied in relation to his collage work, they have not been taken seriously as a collection in their own right. In fact, McHale's year-long scholarship at Yale has never been properly assessed until now. Thanks to the discovery of unpublished archival material from McHale's time at Yale, we now know more about this formative period and its importance for his own developing media ecology theory.

McHale's tutelage under Albers marked a turning point in his thinking and practice. In letters he wrote to the artist Magda Cordell—another founding member of the IG—he discussed taking electives titled "Man's Orientation" and "Cultural Background", and on the history of art from the Renaissance to the nineteenth century.<sup>29</sup> It was also at Yale that McHale met Buckminster Fuller and began a life-long friendship with the designer, who was a visiting critic for architecture at the Yale School of Fine Arts.<sup>30</sup> While there, McHale visited the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and the Rhode Island School of Design, schools committed to integrating the arts and technology, and immersed himself in American movies and magazines. It was a year of theoretical and artistic development, during which time McHale began to engage more deeply with the issues raised in McLuhan's *The Mechanical Bride* and to develop his own methods of assessing the language of advertising media.

The trunk of brightly coloured advertisements that McHale collected while in the USA highlights his new fascination with the use of colour in mass media.<sup>31</sup> A photograph depicts McHale and Cordell surrounded by this collection, with magazines haphazardly piled on floors and shelves, and advertisements pinned to the notice board behind them (fig. 6). The vast repository of images offered McHale and Cordell, who often worked together on design and collage projects, a ready source of materials and ample scope for colour analysis of the kind McHale was learning with Albers. Once back in Britain, the imagery became a resource for other members of the IG, allowing them to study the latest innovations in printing technologies and the effects these had on viewing experiences. The impact of these colourful images must indeed have been profound, a way of puncturing the drab, greys and bleak beiges of the urban landscape and dominant visual culture, a picture of which Lynda Nead vividly paints in *The Tiger and the Smoke: Art and Culture in Post-War Britain*.<sup>32</sup> The repository proved to be an essay, not only on how colours interacted with one another but also in the ways that advertisers sought to exploit sensory and emotional responses to colour to excite desire. Alloway later confirmed that it was *colour* that compelled McHale to gather the imagery, writing that the artist "returned with a great collection of popular magazines and an habituation to colour reproduction of a level not yet usual in Europe".<sup>33</sup>



Figure 6

Unknown artist, *John McHale and Magda Cordell*, circa 1956, photograph. Collection of Yale Center for British Art, Gift of Magda Cordell McHale. Digital image courtesy of the estate of John McHale / Yale Center for British Art (all rights reserved).

In his famed colour courses at Yale, Albers taught students about the subjectivity and contextual specificity of colour perception. The course was structured around a series of exercises in which students brought together three or more pieces of coloured paper and examined their behaviour in relation to one another, in a bid to encourage students to develop their eye through experimentation.<sup>34</sup> Albers wrote that his classes “began with the material, color itself” rather than immediately introducing established theories of colour perception, in the hope that students would learn through experience and avoid “mechanical application” of someone else’s perceptual theory.<sup>35</sup> A photograph from 1952 shows Albers’ students busy at their experiments, cutting and pasting mass-produced pieces of coloured paper to create different patterns like those displayed on the back wall (fig. 7). Albers maintained that this process of trial and error taught students to decipher “discrepanc[ies] between physical fact and psychic effect” and thus become conscious of the degrees of abstraction from reality involved in colour perception.<sup>36</sup> Colour, observed as different wavelengths of light that are translated by the eye and computed in the brain, highlighted what Albers described as the “unending deception of our perception”, the gap between experience and reality.<sup>37</sup>



Figure 7

*Josef Albers and students in the colour course at Yale, 1952, photograph. Collection of The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation. Digital image courtesy of The Josef and Anni Albers Foundation (all rights reserved).*

During this time, McHale wrote often to Magda and her then husband the composer Frank Cordell, to describe the colour problems that preoccupied him, expressing his frustration at the difficulties he faced with the work and with Albers himself. In one lengthy letter, he complained bitterly about his inability to engage directly with colour and material at an emotional-sensory level, writing that:

*My thinking in relation to my work seems [to] be initially the strong feeling about something, as yours, but there I go on thinking about it and thinking how I am going to do it and so on, so in the end there is but a very tenuous emotional link with the eventual created object because each adjustment and qualification of it has occurred in the abstract and not on the plane of action about it and interaction with the material ... By the time I put it down, the context has vanished because the subject or event has been changed by abstracting it and so I am stuck with a half dead object which has been strangled by abstraction.<sup>38</sup>*

McHale's irritation at his inability to operate at the level of sensory, material engagement reflects the importance it was given in Albers' courses. As we saw in the collage books, McHale was already concerned with the sensory experience of the mass media prior to going to Yale and his letters from the USA suggest that the tutelage he received under Albers galvanised him to explore this even further. In one, he described his particular interest in the entropic effects of colour, using "bits of coloured photos, so that the edges smear and blur in together".<sup>39</sup> In another, he discussed showing his latest collages and "photo-image[s]" to Albers, and having them dismissed out of hand. Albers, McHale writes, went off "on his usual tirade against expressionism" and claimed that "anyway Schwitters had done all this before". Albers' purism clearly irked McHale, who was as engaged in the idea that 'fashion and style [are] important phenomena' as Albers was in discrediting them.<sup>40</sup> In this remark, we begin to see McHale's

attitude towards mass culture shift. Faced with his tutor's essentialising view of art and design, McHale came to value that very thing that Albers despised: its expendability.

Despite their differing perspectives on art, however, McHale seems to have valued what he learned from Albers and was keen to display his acute awareness of the ways in which colour provoked emotional responses. In an article he wrote about Albers for *Architectural Design* in 1956, McHale maintained that "patient research in colour perception has produced colours which blur, melt and flicker as we observe them, in such a fashion that we are forced to participate in their metamorphosis even to the point of disquiet".<sup>41</sup> He explored this idea in the collage *Pink Eyes* (1959), which drew on his studies in colour dynamics to produce a figural work that flickers and flashes at the edges, its instability defying notions of absolute or "pure" form (fig. 8).<sup>42</sup> The pulsating borders imbue the image with a nervous quality that evokes real and imagined phenomena in McHale's environment, from the pixelated images of the television screen and the frenetic whirring of the IBM computer, to the flashes of scenery viewed from a moving automobile or the lit-up billboards of Piccadilly Circus and Times Square. Alloway's comment that McHale believed in "no core of human nature, given and absolute" has its visual proof in the figure's instability, which, through the clashing, eye-popping colours creates the sense of a dynamic being constantly in flux.<sup>43</sup>



Figure 8

John McHale, *Pink Eyes*, 1959, oil and paper collage on canvas, 152.4 × 101.6 cm. Collection of Yale Center for British Art, Gift of Magda Cordell McHale (B1995.24.2). Digital image courtesy of the estate of John McHale / Yale Center for British Art (all rights reserved).

To negate any essential core of human nature assumed that identity, personality, and behaviour were shaped by individual experience and interaction with the environment, perhaps a signal as to why McHale deemed it so important to study the effects of new media. Albers' colour course contributed to this endeavour, providing McHale with enough experience of how colour relationships work to begin his own McLuhanian self-education in the language of advertising.

He wrote in a letter to the Cordells in 1955 that, “after the Whitechapel [*This Is Tomorrow*] if all emerges in one piece we’ll have an exhibition of the Expendable Ikon stressing Giantism in Ads ... in building up new images of man”.<sup>44</sup> The advertisements he had assembled abroad provided research towards this project, all using heightened scale and bright, saturated colours set against cooler ones to push the product for sale to the forefront of the viewer’s perceptual field. For example, in an advertisement McHale kept for spaghetti sauce, the composition is organised according to a hierarchy of importance: the sellable product dominates the frame and the vibrant red of the sauce thrusts it forward, demoting the spaghetti and the marble counter to a position of secondary importance (fig. 9). Advertisements like this one would likely have featured in McHale’s exhibition, were it ever realised. Although it did not come to pass, the idea points to his ambition to explore the identity-forming components of advertising imagery and, through the medium of the exhibition, provide a forum for ICA audiences to familiarise themselves with the tools and methods by which advertising achieved its powerful effects on consumers.



Figure 9

*Advertisement for Franco-American Spaghetti Sauce*, circa 1955, four colour printed. Collection of Yale Center for British Art, Gift of Magda Cordell McHale. Digital image courtesy of the estate of John McHale / Yale Center for British Art (all rights reserved).

The advertisement for spaghetti sauce was one among many in McHale’s collection aimed at selling food products, all of which used bright colours to entice the consumer. Alloway noted this trend later when he wrote in 1984 that McHale had been fascinated by close-ups of food, “the visions of popular appetite, chocolate landscape cake, salad sculpture, solid-gold chicken”.<sup>45</sup> While Alloway emphasised the surreal absurdity and creative licence taken by advertisers to sell products, he failed to make the connection with McHale’s concurrent colour studies, in which he was learning about how colour stimulated the senses and provoked emotional responses. Fresh from Albers’ instruction, McHale can hardly have been blind to the way advertisers exploited hot, saturated colours to arouse a synaesthetic form of perception, the suggestion of taste evoked through visual perception alone.

A collage by McHale from 1956 explored the emotional effects of colour in food advertising, the characteristically genderless and shapeless figure filled with spliced close-ups of spaghetti sauce, ketchup, and other red food products, all mixed together as though consumed like the products themselves (fig. 10). The visual connection between these mangled fragments and the figure's luscious red lips conflates consumer desire with sexual desire, and, with the products for sale no longer discernible, the collage strips away all materialistic pretence to reveal the base emotional instincts to which such advertising appealed. McHale maintained that it was this ability to abstract from, distil, and ultimately clarify the human experience that made ikons valuable, drawing on Kenneth Boulding's publication *The Image: Knowledge and Life in Society* (1956) to explain that an ikon or image was akin to a worldview constructed by each individual to make sense of their environment. Thus, in a collage like that described above, the ill-defined figure and fragments of advertising did not have meaning in and of themselves, rather they allowed the viewer to generate meaning through emotional response and personal association.<sup>46</sup>



Figure 10

John McHale, *Untitled 1*, 1956, collage on paper.  
Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of the estate  
of John McHale / Private Collection (all rights  
reserved).

In the same year, McLuhan published “The Educational Effects of the Mass Media”, which set out the need for greater media literacy in society. Building on his belief that each type of media was like a different language that stimulated new forms of experience, the essay stressed the necessity to “first master and then teach these new languages in all their minute particularity and riches”.<sup>47</sup> McHale’s systematic collecting of advertisements, training in colour perception with Albers, and planned educational exhibition promised to do precisely that. Despite his later praise of *The Mechanical Bride* in “The Expendable Ikon” as a much-needed “quantitative study” on mass media languages, McHale had by this time already conducted his own quantitative study, and amassed a cross-section of imagery to decipher trends within it.<sup>48</sup> McHale’s singular focus on advertising imagery, in contrast to the broader span of media in McLuhan’s project, prioritised



changes specifically to the visual experience, which would become vital to his reassessment of fine art. He distinguished his quantitative approach from the “qualitative” methods employed by his peers Alloway and Banham, whose “detailed researches in iconography” he nevertheless commended.<sup>49</sup> In doing so, McHale aligned his own approach with a McLuhanian methodology and positioned himself as the purveyor of this type of analysis within the IG.

## Myth and Mass Media

Concurrent with collecting and surveying mass advertising, McHale was also cutting up and condensing such imagery into collaged ikons like those already discussed, each one an act of restructuring the media’s syntax to, as McLuhan put it, impose “control over media old and new”.<sup>50</sup> Collage thus served as a tool for processing the language of advertising, aligning McHale’s ikons with McLuhan’s definition of myth in “Myth and Mass Media” (1959) as “a static abstraction from a live process”, or the ability to condense the dynamic structures of languages into a “single inclusive image”.<sup>51</sup> This echoes McHale’s own definition of the ikon as a “symbolic construct” that aided comprehension of the mid-century experience. However, where McLuhan’s understanding of myth encompassed all media languages, McHale began to differentiate between types of ikon and their distinct functions: those born out of the mass media, continually reorienting and regenerating in response to the latest consumer desire; and those of fine art, able to stand the test of time. Thus, through engaging with McLuhan’s “most stimulating and informative” essay, McHale sharpened his own position on the relationship between the fine arts and the mass media.<sup>52</sup>

McHale identified two types of ikon: (i) the fine art—or mythic—ikon; and (ii) the expendable, mass media ikon. Collages, such as *Untitled Figure [2]* synthesised the language of advertising into a single image that offered insight into this media language, abstracting from the original images and the products for sale, to focus attention on the advanced colour printing techniques used to structure the image and manipulate consumer desire (fig. 11). Where advertisements, according to McLuhan, encompassed in a single image “the total social action or process that is imagined as desirable”, myth stood as a record of this anticipated metamorphosis.<sup>53</sup> In this way, McHale’s ikons acted as a McLuhanian myth: an “abridged logic” or a “multilayered ... montage” that rested on top of the language of mass advertising in order to make sense of how its structures achieved this projected reality.<sup>54</sup> The expendable ikon, by contrast, was a product of mass culture that provided insight into societal trends in mass taste and fashion, rather than individual perception and experience. The ubiquitous image of Marilyn Monroe that papered every popular magazine, for example, was plucked from the continuum of images and imbued with “pin-up” status in what McHale described as an almost “academic gesture”, such that her image came to embody and illustrate mass cultural construction of the sex icon in the 1950s.<sup>55</sup>





Figure 11

John McHale, *Untitled [Figure]*, 1957, pasted paper on paper, 91.4 × 60.3 cm. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of the estate of John McHale / Private Collection (all rights reserved).

A film McHale planned to produce in 1959 provided another opportunity to explore the similarities and differences between fine art and mass media ikons. Prompted by the trend towards figuration he identified first among his IG peers, and then among sculpture students at Yale—who were beginning to reject Abstract Expressionism’s hegemony and return to the human form—McHale conceived of a short, colour film called *The Human Image at Mid-Century*.<sup>56</sup> He wrote to Alfred Barr for advice on artists that might be suitable for this project, setting out his intention to include “artists who have in common a preoccupation with an approximate image of man (or woman) as their main communicating symbol”.<sup>57</sup> He listed numerous British, French, and US artists who illustrated this trend: Willem De Kooning, Francis Bacon, Jean Dubuffet, Magda Cordell, and Eduardo Paolozzi among them. The whereabouts of this film, if it was ever made, are unknown but in its concept it had affinities with the Museum of Modern Art’s exhibition *New Images of Man*, which was due to open a few months after McHale wrote to Barr. Barr passed on McHale’s letter to Peter Selz, the curator of *New Images of Man*, who responded to him with an expression of surprise that so similar an idea was being explored in Britain.<sup>58</sup>

However, while Selz enthused about the similarities between McHale’s film and his exhibition, there were noteworthy differences, which speak to the Scotsman’s greater concern with the relationship between fine art and mass media. Selz’s exhibition sought to present, “a new image of man, often shattered, or distorted, reflecting the anxieties of our century”, through a checklist of exclusively male artists, including many of those McHale had mentioned in his letter.<sup>59</sup> It was an entirely phallogentric view of the mid-century Western experience and one told solely through the prism of fine art, although many of the artists did incorporate elements of mass culture into their work. McHale’s film, although equally Western in perspective, notably included work by

Magda Cordell, whose embryonic, sci-fi-inspired figures encapsulated what Giulia Smith has described as a kind of “ur-feminism”.<sup>60</sup> Based on an anti-hierarchic stream of images—echoing the very first meeting of the IG in which Paolozzi ran a series of images through an epidiascope—the film would have presented the artwork as a form of communication, and considered the different types of information offered by the expendable mass media ikon and the permanent work of art.

McHale assessed the differences between these two types of ikon, and how they communicated, in his essay “The Fine Arts and the Mass Media” (1959), which responded to Alloway’s almost identically titled piece, “The Arts and Mass Media” from 1958.<sup>61</sup> It is in the differences between their writing that McHale’s more faithful adaptation of McLuhan’s ideas come to the fore.

McHale likely agreed with Alloway’s assertion that mass imagery “accompanies the changes in our life far more closely than the fine arts which are a repository of time-binding values”.<sup>62</sup> It implied that the mass media reflected moment-to-moment experiences whereas fine art preserved human experience for posterity, and prefigured similar arguments McHale put forward in both “The Expendable Ikon” and “The Fine Arts and the Mass Media”. However, Alloway conceived of fine art and mass media as two points on a continuum along which all visual culture occupied a position, such that art, movies, and advertising were all regarded as individual channels within a “general form of communication”.<sup>63</sup> McHale’s vision of mid-century communication was rather messier and far more resonant with McLuhan’s work, which he had been studying for nearly a decade by this point.

In answer to Alloway’s continuum model, McHale described art as “one node in a mesh of interrelated networks spread over the communications system”, placing greater emphasis on the interaction between different media channels.<sup>64</sup> McHale argued that the mass media actually altered how art was consumed and experienced, so much more likely were audiences to access art through a magazine, newspaper, or television than in person. “Photography and modern printing techniques” he wrote, “produce a new visual image, the ‘experience’ of which is, in reality at some remove from that engendered by the original artefact”.<sup>65</sup> The advent of television had catalysed this perceptual transformation even further through “fancy lighting”, the “mobility of viewing”, and “transmission through the electronic medium”.<sup>66</sup> McHale gives the example of Kenneth Clark and Henry Moore discussing the Elgin Marbles for Clark’s series, *Is Art Necessary?* (1958), in which viewers accompanied the two on a night-time tour of the British Museum, their torches accentuating and dramatising the contours of the ancient relief. The scenes were then transmitted by analogue signals to television transmitters and appeared as black and white, pixelated pictures on a small screen, a vastly different experience to that of viewing the works in person.<sup>67</sup> McHale’s essay reflected McLuhan’s mantra “the medium is the message” in suggesting that the mode of communication, rather than the content itself, shaped the viewing experience.

Television and how it altered human perception became a prominent theme for McHale in the series of two- and three-dimensional collages titled *Telemath* produced in 1958. This is evident in *Telemath* (fig. 12) and *Telemath VI* (fig. 13), where collaged ikons of the kind already discussed are accompanied by a screen-shape also filled with images and text from the mass media.

McHale exploited the qualities of collage to illustrate the overlapping interaction of different media in the modern environment, returning to his tranche of advertisements for source material. In *Telemath*, McHale paired a picture of a cake with a decontextualised, close-up fragment of imagery, which reads as a series of abstracted forms with a complex rendering of shadows. Much as in Clark’s *Is Art Necessary?*, the angle of the television camera and use of spotlights on the

Elgin Marbles dramatised the play of light and shade, here the close framing and removal from context enhances the formal qualities of this image and imbues it with an aesthetic quality lacking in the picture of the cake. One fragment appeals, the other less so—yet in subsuming them both to the screen-like form, McHale implied that the experience of viewing was shaped by the same technology, exploiting the collage medium's ability to layer images to visually illustrate the interrelatedness of all media and his divergence from Alloway's flat continuum model.

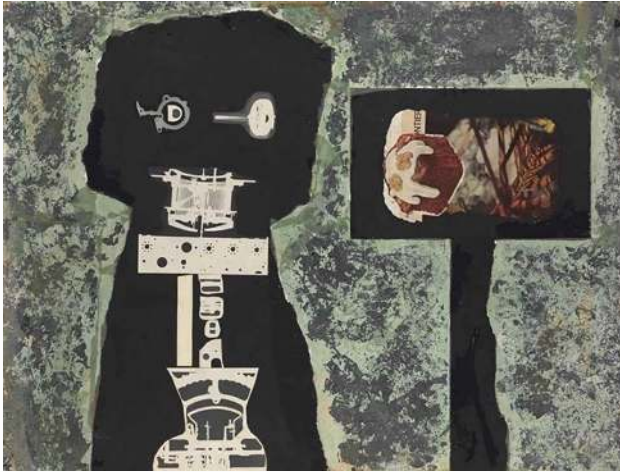


Figure 12

John McHale, *Telemath*, 1958, oil and collage on board, 91.5 × 122 cm. Private Collection. Digital image courtesy of the estate of John McHale / Private Collection (all rights reserved).



Figure 13

John McHale, *Telemath VI*, 1957, oil paint and printed paper on board, 91.7 × 122.1 cm. Collection of Tate (T07102). Digital image courtesy of the estate of John McHale / Tate (all rights reserved).

The similarity in the form and shared materials of the figure and screen in both *Telemath* and *Telemath VI* also convey the bleed between mankind and its technological environment. We know from sketches McHale produced for a sculpture in the same series (the whereabouts of which is unknown), that he carefully plotted the materials in advance, labelling each section (figs. 14–16). He ensured that both figure and screen were constructed from the same components: plaster, chicken wire, plastic polymer, and mass media collage fragments. The screen was to be constructed from a transparent polymer, allowing the viewer to physically look through it and take in what McLuhan described as the “striking” feature of television, that “the image is defined by light through, not by light on”.<sup>68</sup> These works offered McHale an alternative medium to writing by which to think through the way screen media shaped human perception, the immediacy of visual comprehension, and the qualities of the collage medium offering a more direct, if less proscribed, statement of his findings than writing.

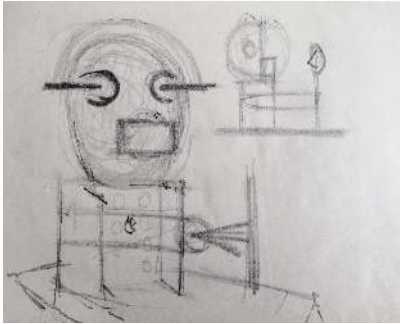


Figure 14

John McHale, *Sketches for a Construction*, circa 1955, pencil on paper. Collection of Yale Center for British Art, Gift of Magda Cordell McHale. Digital image courtesy of the estate of John McHale / Yale Center for British Art (all rights reserved).

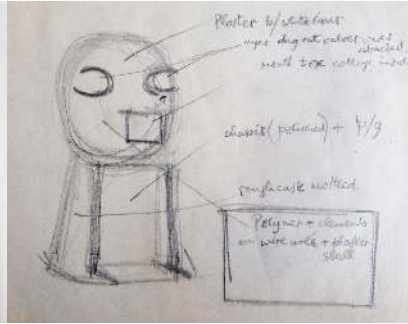


Figure 15

John McHale, *Sketches for a Construction*, circa 1955, pencil on paper. Collection of Yale Center for British Art, Gift of Magda Cordell McHale. Digital image courtesy of the estate of John McHale / Yale Center for British Art (all rights reserved).

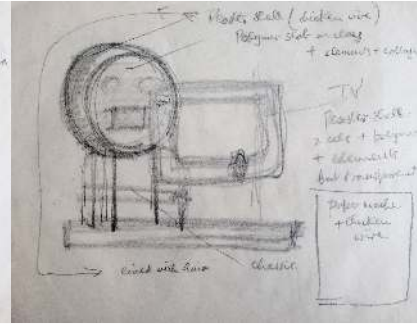


Figure 16

John McHale, *Sketches for a Construction*, circa 1955, pencil on paper. Collection of Yale Center for British Art, Gift of Magda Cordell McHale. Digital image courtesy of the estate of John McHale / Yale Center for British Art (all rights reserved).

The fact that McHale chose to examine the “new languages” of mass culture through different forms of media—including collage, film, sculpture, and the written word—is testament to his close reading of McLuhan and interest in the media ecologist’s methods.<sup>69</sup> In *The Mechanical Bride*, McLuhan advocated for translating information into different media to raise “awareness of the widest bearings of one [media] situation on another”, the message changing each time it was passed through a different medium.<sup>70</sup> In McHale’s film, *The Human Image in Mid-Century*, fine art and mass media ikons would have been transformed into a curated sequence that invited viewers to compare imagery from across the advertising-to-fine-art continuum. If made, the film would have been screened with a film projector in a dark room, flooding viewers’ vision in high definition but requiring little other interpretative effort. This, McLuhan claimed, made film a “hot” medium, one rich in sensory data that flooded the field of vision with the imagery of the mid-twentieth century. Film lent itself to this type of survey, as it provided a cross-section of visual culture which audiences had little choice but to absorb from start to finish. Individual ikons within McHale’s ordered selection could, therefore, not be easily selected and removed from the continuum without replaying the entire reel.<sup>71</sup>

According to Theo Crosby, collage offered a very different function for McHale: it was a means of “recreating the multi-evocative image”, allowing “contradiction between the whole and its parts”, and “involv[ing] the spectator”. Written in 1958, these statements imply that collage was regarded by McHale’s contemporaries as a cool form of media, one that provided partial sensory data and required “completion by the audience”.<sup>72</sup> In a work like *Telemath VI*, the subject is represented in low-definition, that is, it vaguely resembles a human figure. The placement of the camera lenses, the air-conditioner, and the snippets of text register to viewers as eyes, an ear, and a spinal cord only because of their position in relation to one another. Beside the figure is an almost identical shape yet it reads as a screen, which serves to show the informational gaps filled in by the viewer. Unlike his film, these individual figures did not provide a survey of human imagery at mid-century but rather condensed the expendable mass media into a fragmented and relative structure.<sup>73</sup> The “low-definition” of the collage medium and consequent reliance on

active participation meant that McHale's ikons remained open and sometimes, as in *Pink Eyes*, even visibly unstable.

### **Conclusion: "The Man from Mascom"**

When McHale's review of McLuhan's book *Understanding Media* (1964) came out in 1967—titled "The Man from Mascom" in a reference to the field of mass communications—McHale had been contemplating and responding to McLuhan's ideas about the way technology altered human perception and experience for nearly two decades.<sup>74</sup> McHale was by this time living in the USA and working with Buckminster Fuller on Futurist projects at the University of Illinois, and had a greater breadth of understanding about how these rapid changes in technology affected human sensibility and the future of humanity. Reviewing *Understanding Media* gave McHale the space to summarise McLuhan's contribution and to synthesise his own engagement with the author's writing. He credited McLuhan with creating "a new theory of social change", one that was deemed to be "strikingly apposite to our now global requirements" because of its focus on the *effect* of communication as opposed to its local content or meaning.<sup>75</sup> McHale also touched on McLuhan's importance for his and the IG's work, describing *The Mechanical Bride* as "one of the first primers on how to read the Pop environment", which had allowed McHale to undertake his own investigations into the effect of the mass media on human perception and the impact for the fine arts.<sup>76</sup> At the same time, McHale distanced himself from McLuhan's "moralising" tone, reading into his media ecology, as so many critics did, an overarching message about the homogenisation of culture by technology. This is perhaps more revealing of developments in McHale's thinking than McLuhan's, as it demonstrates a shift from his initial engagement with *The Mechanical Bride* and its warnings about the dangers of advertising media, towards a greater focus on how McLuhan's methods and ideas could be utilised to study the way fine art transmitted knowledge and was consumed in an age of mass media.

The concept of the "expendable ikon" responded to a belief he shared with McLuhan that reality was a "construct" into which each person was "enculturated".<sup>77</sup> The consequence was a focus on language as a foundational factor in constructing human identity. McHale's artworks, as well as his collection of mass media imagery, attempted to make sense of the languages of fine art and mass media, the one a repository for knowledge that survived through history and the other providing expendable imagery that changed as rapidly as human wants and desires. McHale utilised fine art as a form of McLuhanian myth-making, to make sense of the ever-shifting field of communication that the mass media provided. He began this endeavour with his collage books from 1954, looking at the role of structure and syntax in how human beings formulate meaning, but once enrolled in Albers' colour course, turned instead to the collage ikon, which more directly dealt with the effect of advertising and its advanced colour-printing technologies on identity-formation. Through McLuhan, McHale came to understand that each medium has a unique set of qualities that structure the information transmitted, thus he explored his ideas through his writing, collages, and film. *The Human Image in Mid-Century* removed ikons from the field of visual communication to which they belonged—either the museum or the magazine—and placed them in a successive stream, allowing audiences to undertake their own quantitative analysis of the representation of man and woman in the middle of the century. Although McHale dedicated his energy in the 1950s to investigating the perceptual changes brought about by the mass media, he continued to believe that art also shapes human identity. Perhaps this is what ultimately set him apart from McLuhan and his media ecology. In emphasising the continuing importance of art as a form of knowledge transmission, and the

ability of the arts to open itself up to technology and mass media, McHale offered an alternative to the idea, held by McLuhan and many others in the 1960s, that mass media technologies had the potential to homogenise culture and control mass audiences.

## Acknowledgements

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## About the author

Rachel Stratton is a writer and curator. Since completing her PhD in 2018, she has worked as an Associate Lecturer at the Courtauld Institute of Art and as a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Yale Center for British Art. She is currently writing a book titled, *Grammars of Form: Art and the Crisis of Language in 1950s Britain*, supported by a Paul Mellon Centre postdoctoral fellowship.

## Footnotes

1. Letter, John McHale to Marshall McLuhan, 1959, John McHale papers, Buffalo NY (uncatalogued).
2. Letter, John McHale to Marshall McLuhan, 1959, John McHale papers, Buffalo NY (uncatalogued).
3. Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964). Marshall McLuhan set up the “Culture and Communications” seminars with Edmund Carpenter at the University of Toronto in 1953. The seminars, which ran for two years, brought together academics and graduate students from Anthropology, Economics, English, Psychology, and Town Planning to explore how the methods used in each discipline codified reality. The findings were published in the journal founded by McLuhan *Explorations: Studies in Culture and Communication*.
4. John McHale, “The Expendable Ikon 1”, *Architectural Design* 22 (February 1959): 82–83.
5. Letter, John McHale to Marshall McLuhan, 1959; Marshall McLuhan, “Myth and Mass Media”, *Daedalus* 88, no. 2 (1959): 339–348.
6. Letter, John McHale to Marshall McLuhan, 1959.
7. Marshall McLuhan’s archive contains fourteen correspondences between McHale and McLuhan dating between 1959 and 1979: Marshall McLuhan papers, Library and Archives Canada, MG 31, D 156, Vol. 31, file 34; McLuhan and McHale also met in person when McLuhan visited him and Buckminster Fuller at Carbondale, Illinois, where they had established the World Resources Inventory Office.
8. Lawrence Alloway, “The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty”, in David Robbins (ed.), *The Independent Group: Postwar Britain and the Aesthetics of Plenty* (Cambridge, MA: MIT University Press, 1990), catalogue of an exhibition at the Hood Museum of Art, Dartmouth College [et. al.], 1–18 February 1990, 59. According to the art critic and historian Irving Sandler, McLuhan only became influential among American artists after the publication of *Understanding Media* in 1964: Irving Sandler, *American Art of the 1960s* (New York: Harper & Row, 1988), 79.



9. McHale, "The Expendable Ikon I", in John McHale, *The Expendable Reader: Articles on Art, Architecture, Design, and Media (1951–79)*, edited by Alex Kitnick (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 49.
10. Lawrence Alloway, Reynier Banham, David Lewis et. al., *This is Tomorrow* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1956), catalogue of an exhibition at Whitechapel Gallery, 9 August–9 September, 1956.
11. McHale, "The Expendable Ikon I", in Kitnick (ed.), *The Expendable Reader*, 51.
12. Letter, John McHale to Marshall McLuhan, 1959.
13. The Independent Group programme for 1955 is reprinted in Anne Massey, *The Independent Group: Modernism and Mass Culture in Britain, 1945–1959* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 142–144; Nigel Henderson, Eduardo Paolozzi, Alison Smithson, and Peter Smithson (eds), *Parallel of Life and Art* (London: The Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1953), catalogue of an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, 30 November–4 December 1953; Lawrence Alloway (ed.) *Collages and Objects* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1954), catalogue of an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, 13 October–20 November 1954; Theo Crosby (ed.), *This is Tomorrow* (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 1956), catalogue of an exhibition at The Whitechapel Gallery, 9 August–9 September 1956.
14. Lawrence Alloway (ed.), *3 Collagists: New Work by E.L.T. Mesens, John McHale and Gwyther Irwin* (London: Cambridge Contemporary Art Trust, 1958), catalogue of an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, 3–29 November 1958, unpaginated.
15. Theo Crosby (ed.), "John McHale", *Uppercase*, 1 (London, Whitefriars Press, 1958), unpaginated.
16. McHale spent a year in the USA studying at Yale in 1955–1956.
17. Alex Kitnick lays the groundwork for this study in his discussion of McHale and McLuhan in Alex Kitnick, "Hip-Artificer", in *The Expendable Reader: Articles on Art, Architecture, Design, and Media (1951–79)*, edited by Alex Kitnick (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 12–30.
18. Lawrence Alloway (ed.), *Collages and Objects* (London: Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1954), catalogue of an exhibition at the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 13 October–20 November 1954.
19. Letter from Lawrence Alloway to Ove Arup, 20 December, 1954, Collages and Objects exhibition file, 13 October–20 November, 1954, Collection of the Institute of Arts, Tate Archives, 955.1.12.61.
20. Winston Churchill served as prime minister of Great Britain from 1940 to 1945 and again from 1951 to 1955.
21. McHale, "The Expendable Ikon I", in Kitnick (ed.), *The Expendable Reader*, 49.
22. McHale, "The Expendable Ikon I", in Kitnick (ed.), *The Expendable Reader*, 49.
23. Marshall McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (London: Gerald Duckworth & Co Ltd, 2011), 4.
24. McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride*, 22.
25. Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1935), in Hannah Arendt (ed.), *Illuminations: Walter Benjamin Essays and Reflections*, translated by Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 238ff.
26. Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity: An Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics* (Lakeville, CT: Institute of General Semantics, 1995 [1933]); Julian

- Cooper, *Fathers of Pop*, 1979, Arts Council of Great Britain, 47 minutes.
27. The first member of the IG to visit the United States of America was Geoffrey Holroyd in 1948.
  28. Reyner Banham on John McHale in Charlotte Kotik (ed.), *The Expendable Ikon: Works by John McHale* (Buffalo, NY: Albright-Knox Art Gallery, 1984), catalogue of an exhibition at the Albright Knox Gallery, 12 May–8 July 1984, 37.
  29. Letter, John McHale to Magda and Frank Cordell, Tuesday [undated, circa 1956], 12.30pm, 3 and 4, John McHale papers, Buffalo NY (uncatalogued).
  30. Buckminster Fuller began as a visiting critic in the Architecture department at Yale University in 1956 on the invitation of the architect George Howe. John McHale became friendly with him while himself at Yale and subsequently wrote the first official biography about Fuller: John McHale, *R. Buckminster Fuller* (New York: George Braziller, 1962). They continued to collaborate on projects throughout their lives.
  31. Much of the mass media material McHale collected is now in the John McHale archive, Yale Center for British Art, MSS 60 (Cabinet L).
  32. Lynda Nead, *The Tiger in the Smoke: Art and Culture in Post-War Britain* (New Haven, CT: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 2017).
  33. Lawrence Alloway, “John McHale [for a Catalogue of His Collages]”, undated, 2, Lawrence Alloway Papers, Getty Research Institute, LA, 2003.M.46 Box 26 Folder 13.
  34. Frederick A. Horowitz and Brenda Danilowitz, *Josef Albers: To Open Eyes* (London: Phaidon Press, 2009), 73–75.
  35. Josef Albers, “A Method of Teaching Color Based on Training in Visual Perception”, (1958), 1, Josef Albers papers, Yale University Manuscripts and Archives, MS 32 Box 2, Folder 27.
  36. Albers, “A Method of Teaching Color Based on Training in Visual Perception”, 2.
  37. Albers, “A Method of Teaching Color Based on Training in Visual Perception”, 2.
  38. Letter, John McHale to Magda and Frank Cordell, Sunday [undated, circa 1956], 10.30pm, 2, John McHale papers, Buffalo, NY (uncatalogued).
  39. Letter, John McHale to Magda and Frank Cordell, Sunday [undated, circa 1956], 10.30pm, 2.
  40. Letter, John McHale to Magda and Frank Cordell, Tuesday [undated, circa 1956], John McHale papers, Buffalo, NY (uncatalogued).
  41. John McHale, “Josef Albers”, *Architectural Design* 26, no. 6 (June 1956): 20; Reprinted in John McHale, *The Expendable Reader: Articles on Art, Architecture, Design, and Media (1951–79)*, edited by Alex Kitnick (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 40–48.
  42. The IG’s disdain for the concept of “pure” form is best evinced by Alloway in Lawrence Alloway, *Nine Abstract Artists, Their Work and Theory* (London: Alec Tiranti Ltd, 1954), 5.
  43. Lawrence Alloway, “Introduction”, *Class of '59: An Exhibition of Paintings, Sculptures, Collages, by Magda Cordell, Eduardo Paolozzi, John McHale* (Cambridge: Cambridge Contemporary Art Trust, 1959), catalogue for an exhibition held at the Contemporary Art Trust, 7–19 February 1959, unpaginated.
  44. Letter, John McHale to Magda and Frank Cordell, Tuesday [undated, circa 1956], 3.
  45. Alloway, quoted in Kitnick, *The Expendable Ikon*, 31.
  46. Kenneth Boulding, *The Image: Knowledge in Life and Society* (Ann Arbor MI: University of Michigan Press, 1973 [1956]); Kenneth Boulding was notable in the 1950s for having founded the Society for General Systems Research in the USA, along with Ludwig von Bertalanffy.



47. McLuhan, "The Educational Effects of the Mass Media", *The Clearing House* 30, no. 9 (May 1956), 524.
48. McHale, "The Expendable Ikon 1", in Kitnick (ed.), *The Expendable Reader*, 51.
49. McHale, "The Expendable Ikon 1", in Kitnick (ed.), *The Expendable Reader*, 51.
50. McLuhan, "Myth and Mass Media", 347.
51. McLuhan, "Myth and Mass Media", 340 and 339.
52. Letter, John McHale to Marshall McLuhan, 1959.
53. McLuhan, "Myth and Mass Media", 340.
54. McLuhan, "Myth and Mass Media", 347.
55. McHale, "The Expendable Ikon 1", in Kitnick (ed.), *The Expendable Reader*, 51.
56. Letter, John McHale to Magda and Frank Cordell, [undated, circa 1955].
57. Letter, John McHale to Alfred Barr Esq., 19 September 1959, John McHale papers, Buffalo, NY (uncatalogued).
58. Peter Selz (ed.), *New Images of Man* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1959), catalogue of an exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, 30 September–29 November 1959.
59. Selz, *New Images of Man*, dust jacket.
60. Giulia Smith, "Painting that Grows Back: Futures Past and the Ur-Feminist Art of Magda Cordell McHale, 1955–1961", *British Art Studies* 1, (2015) DOI:10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-01/gsmith.
61. John McHale, "The Fine Arts and the Mass Media", *Cambridge Opinion*, 17, (1959), reprinted in John McHale, *The Expendable Reader: Articles on Art, Architecture, Design, and Media (1951–79)*, edited by Alex Kitnick (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011), 64–73; Lawrence Alloway, "The Art and Mass Media", *Architectural Design* 28 (February 1958): 84–85, reprinted in Richard Kalina (ed.), *Imagining the Present: Context, Content and the Role of the Critic* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 55–61.
62. Alloway, "The Arts and Mass Media", in Kalina (ed.), *Imagining the Present*, 56; The term "time-binding" came from the semanticist Alfred Korzybski. It attempted to explain the ability of human beings to pass knowledge from generation to generation through material culture and the written word. Korzybski considered the human time-binding capacity to be the key to the development of the human race beyond that of the rest of the animal kingdom, see Alfred Korzybski, *Science and Sanity*, 371ff.
63. Lawrence Alloway, "Personal Statement", *Ark* 19 (March 1957): 28–29, reprinted in Richard Kalina (ed.), *Imagining the Present: Context, Content and the Role of the Critic* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 52.
64. McHale, "The Fine Arts and the Mass Media", in: Kitnick (ed.), *The Expendable Reader*, p. 66.
65. McHale, "The Fine Arts and the Mass Media", in Kitnick (ed.), *The Expendable Reader*, 67.
66. McHale, "The Fine Arts and the Mass Media", in Kitnick (ed.), *The Expendable Reader*, 68.
67. McHale is referring to *Is Art Necessary?*, "Encounters in the Dark", episode 2, written by Kenneth Clark, Associated Television (ATV), 17 March 1958.
68. McLuhan, "Myth and Mass Media", 345.
69. Edmund Carpenter and Marshall McLuhan, "The New Languages", *Chicago Review* 10, no. 1 (1956), 46.
70. McLuhan, *The Mechanical Bride*, 22.
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