

# The Medium is the Message

## Marshall McLuhan

### Quentin Fiore

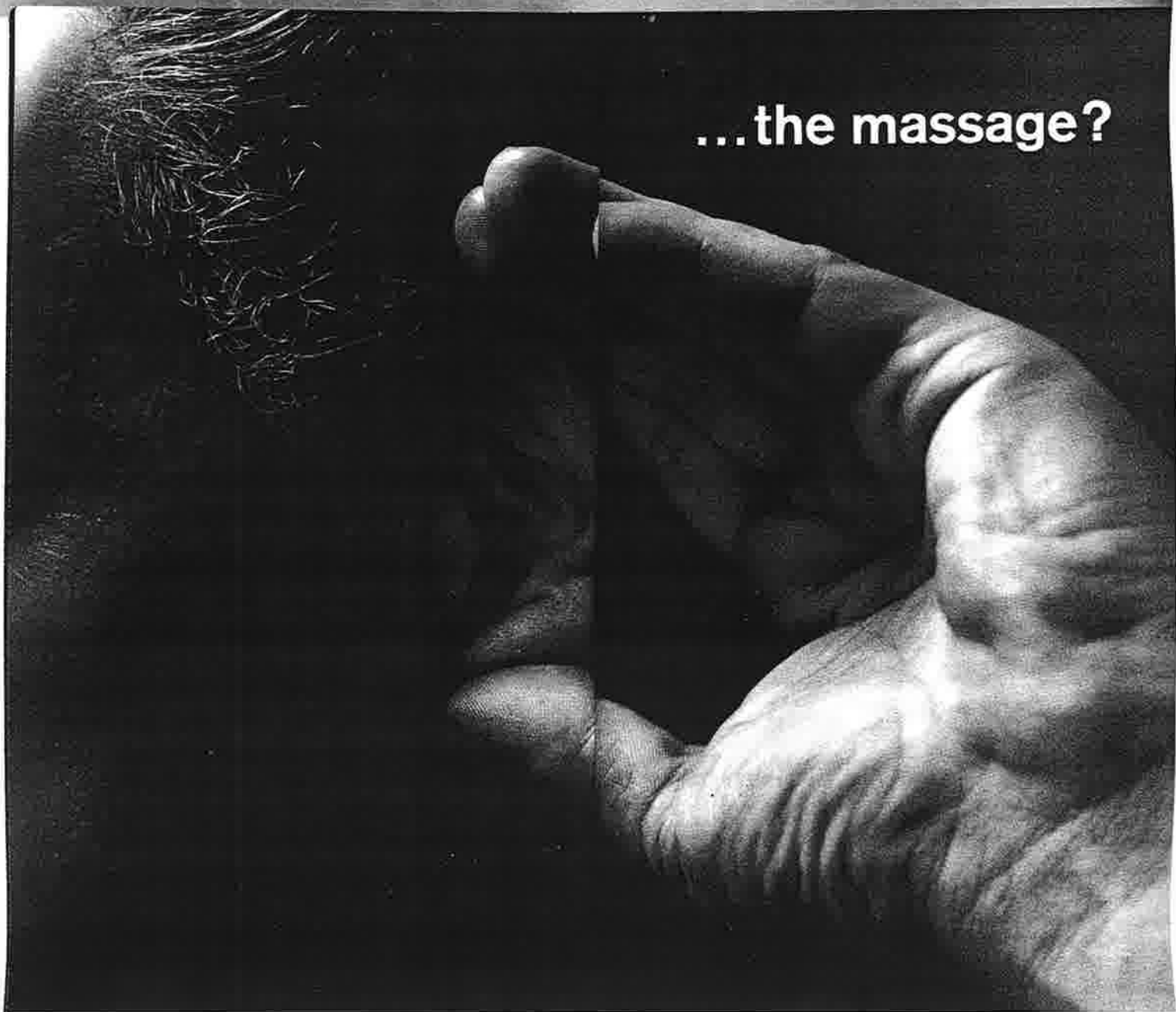
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...the massage?



# and how

**"The major advances in civilization are processes that all but wreck the societies in which they occur."**

**—A. N. Whitehead**

The medium, or process, of our time—electric technology—is reshaping and restructuring patterns of social interdependence and every aspect of our personal life. It is forcing us to reconsider and re-evaluate practically every thought, every action, and every institution formerly taken for granted. Everything is changing—you, your family, your neighborhood, your education, your job, your government, your relation to “the others.” And they’re changing dramatically.

*on line, but not push/move media*

Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media by which men communicate than by the content of the communication. The alphabet, for instance, is a technology that is absorbed by the very young child in a completely unconscious manner, by osmosis so to speak. Words and the meaning of words predispose the child to think and act automatically in certain ways. The alphabet and print technology fostered and encouraged a fragmenting process, a process of specialism and of detachment. Electric technology fosters and encourages unification and involvement. It is impossible to understand social and cultural changes without a knowledge of the workings of media. \*

The older training of observation has become quite irrelevant in this new time, because it is based on psychological responses and concepts conditioned by the former technology—mechanization.

Innumerable confusions and a profound feeling of despair invariably emerge in periods of great technological and cultural transitions. Our “Age of



**30-million toy trucks were bought in the U.S. in 1966.**

Anxiety” is, in great part, the result of trying to do today’s job with yesterday’s tools—with yesterday’s concepts.

\* Youth instinctively understands the present environment—the electric drama. It lives mythically and in depth. This is the reason for the great alienation between generations. Wars, revolutions, civil uprisings are interfaces within the new environments created by electric informational media.

*Lat Age Print BSL 19*

**“In the study of ideas, it is necessary to remember that insistence on hard-headed clarity issues from sentimental feeling, as it were a mist, cloaking the perplexities of fact. Insistence on clarity at all costs is based on sheer superstition as to the mode in which human intelligence functions. Our reasonings grasp at straws for premises and float on gossamers for deductions.”**

—A. N. Whitehead, “Adventures in Ideas.”

Our time is a time for crossing barriers, for erasing old categories—for probing around. When two seemingly disparate elements are imaginatively poised, put in apposition in new and unique ways, startling discoveries often result.

Learning, the educational process, has long been associated only with the glum. We speak of the “serious” student. Our time presents a unique opportunity for learning by means of humor—a perceptive or incisive joke can be more meaningful than platitudes lying between two covers.

“The Medium is the Massage” is a look-around to see what’s happening. It is a collide-oscope of interfaced situations.

Students of media are persistently attacked as evaders, idly concentrating on means or processes rather than on “substance.” The dramatic and rapid changes of “substance” elude these accusers. Survival is not possible if one approaches his environment, the social drama, with a fixed, unchangeable point of view—the witless repetitive response to the unperceived.



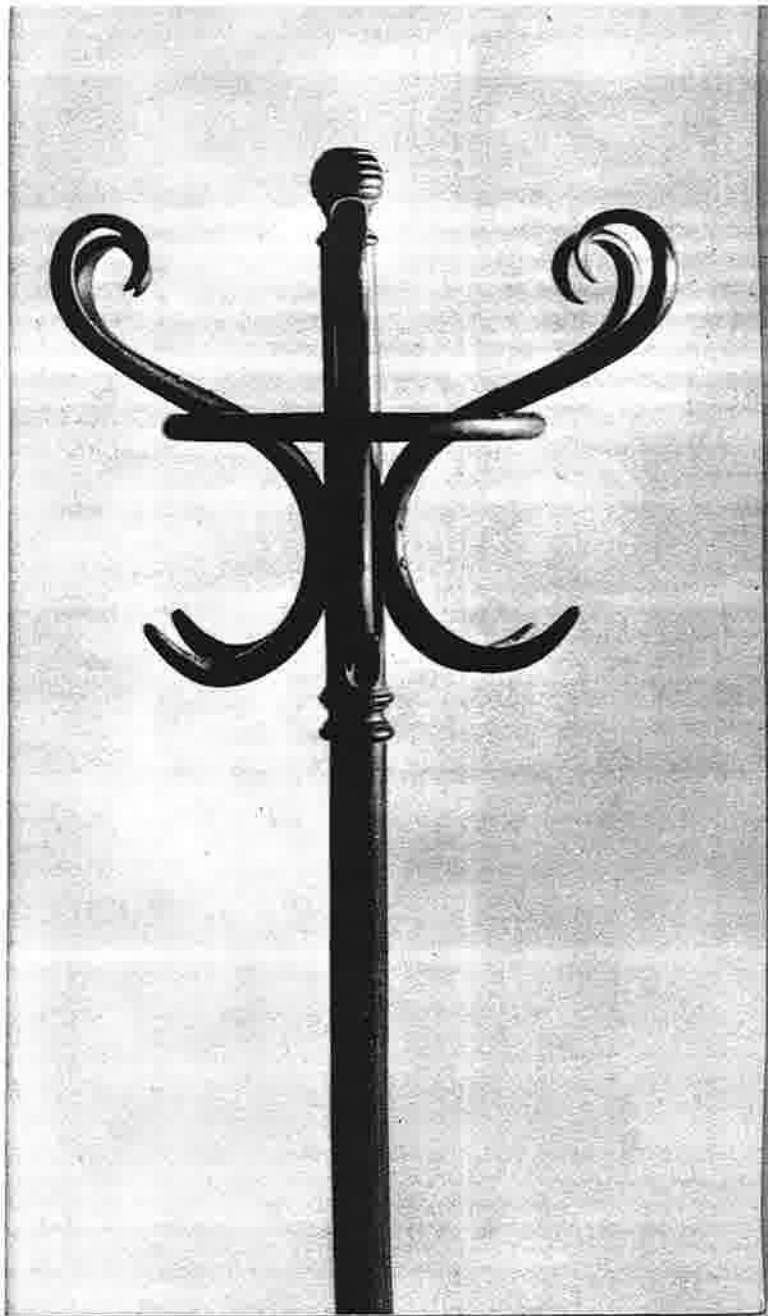


# your family



The family circle has widened. The worldpool of information fathered by electric media—movies, Telstar, flight—far surpasses any possible influence mom and dad can now bring to bear. Character no longer is shaped by only two earnest, fumbling experts. Now all the world's a sage.

Everyone ~~can~~ can  
look like an  
expert online



# your neighborhood



Electric circuitry has overthrown the regime of "time" and "space" and pours upon us instantly and continuously the concerns of all other men. It has reconstituted dialogue on a global scale. Its message is Total Change, ending psychic, social, economic, and political parochialism. The old civic, state, and national groupings have become unworkable. Nothing can be further from the spirit of the new technology than "a place for everything and everything in its place." You can't go home again.





# your education

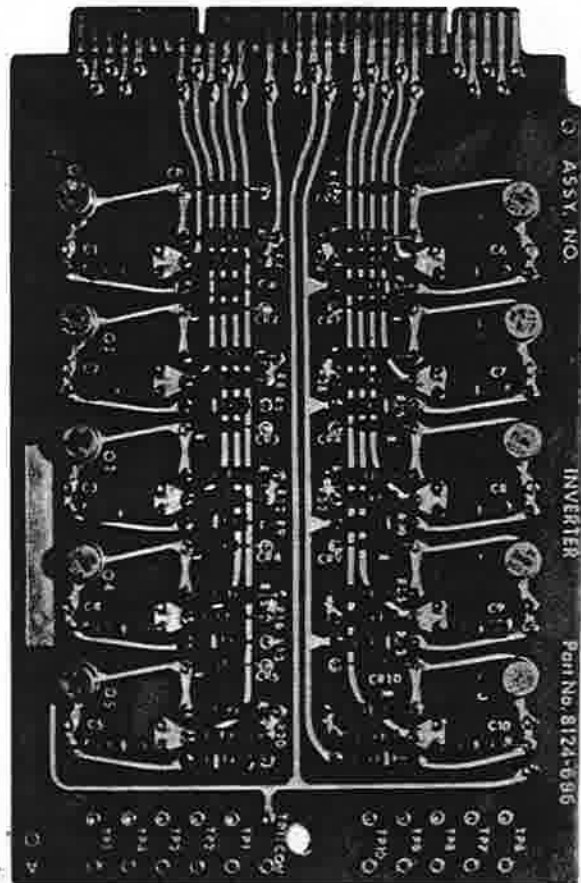


*Schools aren't  
keeping up -  
still a  
problem*

There is a world of difference between the modern home environment of integrated electric information and the classroom. Today's television child is attuned to up-to-the-minute "adult" news—inflation, rioting, war, taxes, crime, bathing beauties—and is bewildered when he enters the nineteenth-century environment that still characterizes the educational establishment where information is scarce but ordered and structured by fragmented, classified patterns, subjects, and schedules. It is naturally an environment much like any factory set-up with its inventories and assembly lines.

The "child" was an invention of the seventeenth century; he did not exist in, say, Shakespeare's day. He had, up until that time, been merged in the adult world and there was nothing that could be called childhood in our sense.

Today's child is growing up absurd, because he lives in two worlds, and neither of them inclines him to grow up. Growing up—that is our new work, and it is total. Mere instruction will not suffice.



# your job



"When this circuit learns your job, what are you going to do?"

"Jobs" represent a relatively recent pattern of work. From the fifteenth century to the twentieth century, there is a steady progress of fragmentation of the stages of work that constitute "mechanization" and "specialism." These procedures cannot serve for survival or sanity in this new time.

Under conditions of electric circuitry, all the fragmented job patterns tend to blend once more into involving and demanding roles or forms of work that more and more resemble teaching, learning, and "human" service, in the older sense of dedicated loyalty.

Unhappily, many well-intentioned political reform programs that aim at the alleviation of suffering caused by unemployment betray an ignorance of the true nature of media-influence.

"Come into my parlor," said the computer to the specialist.

-Dramatization  
technology as  
a job

-This is new media  
Specialists



# "the others"



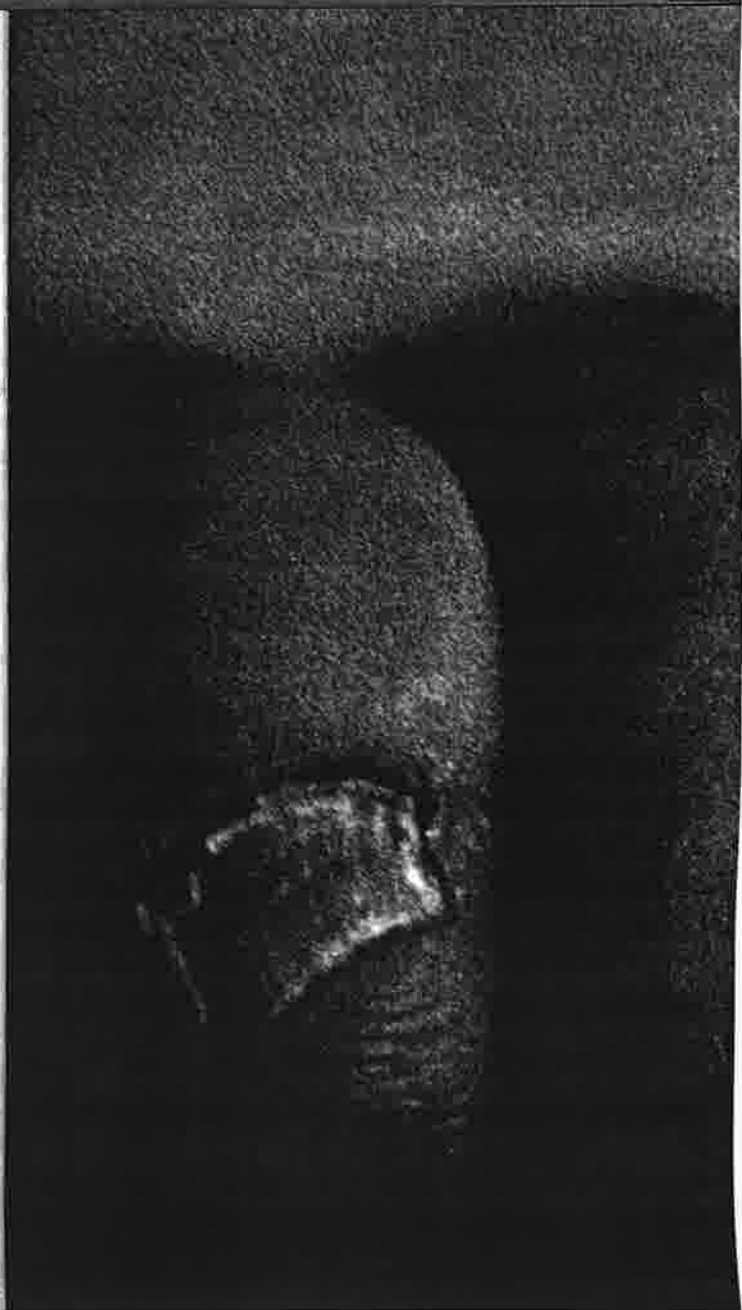
The shock of recognition! In an electric information environment, minority groups can no longer be contained—ignored. Too many people know too much about each other. Our new environment compels commitment and participation. We have become irrevocably involved with, and responsible for, each other.

there  
is  
absolutely  
no  
inevitability  
as  
long  
as  
there  
is  
a  
willingness  
to  
contemplate  
what  
is  
happening

Bo Heer  
Gerson  
(Remediator)

All media work us over completely. They are so pervasive in their personal, political, economic, aesthetic, psychological, moral, ethical, and social consequences that they leave no part of us untouched, unaffected, unaltered. The medium is the message. Any understanding of social and cultural change is impossible without a knowledge of the way media work as environments.

**All  
media  
are  
extensions  
of  
some  
human  
faculty—  
psychic  
or  
physical.**





The Renaissance Legacy.

The Vanishing Point = Self-Effacement,  
The Detached Observer.  
No Involvement!

The viewer of Renaissance art is systematically placed outside the frame of experience. A piazza for everything and everything in its piazza.

The instantaneous world of electric informational media involves all of us, all at once. No detachment or frame is possible.



**“Because something is happening  
But you don’t know what it is  
Do you, Mister Jones?”**

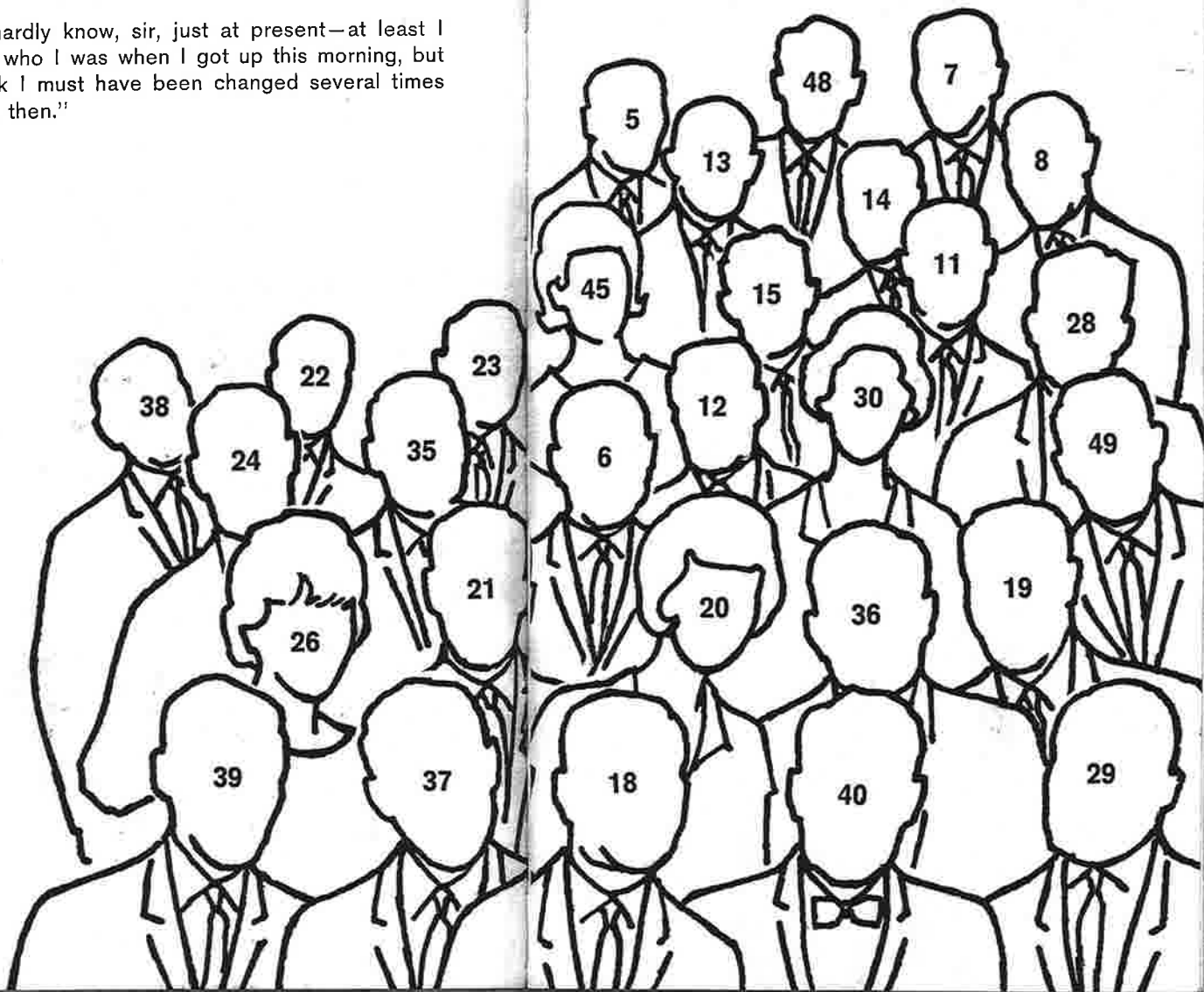
**—Bob Dylan**

"I must have been delirious, for I even sought amusement in speculating upon the relative velocities of their several descents toward the foam below."

In his amusement born of rational detachment of his own situation, Poe's mariner in "The Descent into the Maelstrom" staved off disaster by understanding the action of the whirlpool. His insight offers a possible stratagem for understanding our predicament, our electrically-configured whirl.



"I—I hardly know, sir, just at present—at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then."





“...and who are you?”

