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MANSARAM AND MARSHALL MCLUHAN: COLLABORATION IN COLLAGE ART

ALEXANDER KUSKIS

Abstract | Mansaram is an Indo-Canadian artist who immigrated to Canada in 1966 with a prior interest in the media ideas of Marshall McLuhan, sparked by reading about him in LIFE Magazine. In Toronto the media guru soon introduced him to Av Isaacs at his Yonge Street gallery, which led to a 1967 Happening there called East-West Intersect, influenced by McLuhan's ideas. Between 1966 and 1972 Mansaram worked on his Rear View Mirror series of paintings and collages, to one of which McLuhan contributed several items of textual content. Collage with its mosaic structures appealed to McLuhan because he thought it better represented the post-literate "allatocness" of electronic media and acoustic space, which better integrated the full human sensorium and called for pattern recognition for comprehension. McLuhan had a high regard for artists for their integral awareness and sensitivity to changes in sense perception, enabling them to act as a distant early warning (DEW) line against potentially harmful effects of technology. He viewed their art as anti-environments to the electronic media maelstrom. Mansaram has enjoyed increasing recognition through recent exhibitions, but some of Canada's premier art galleries have yet to acquire or recognize his art, although the Royal Ontario Museum is planning to do so.

Résumé | Mansaram est un artiste indo-canadien qui a immigré au Canada en 1966 possédant un intérêt antérieur pour les idées médiatiques de Marshall McLuhan, suscité par la lecture d'articles à son sujet dans LIFE Magazine. À Toronto, le gourou des médias l'a rapidement présenté à Av Isaacs à sa galerie de Yonge Street, ce qui a mené à un « happening » en 1967 appelé East-West Intersect influencé par les idées de McLuhan. Entre 1966 et 1972, Mansaram a travaillé sur sa série de peintures et de collages Rear View Mirror, dont une à laquelle McLuhan a apporté plusieurs éléments textuels. Le collage, avec ses structures en mosaïque, plaisait à McLuhan parce qu'il trouvait qu'il représentait mieux la « concordance » postlittéraire des médias électroniques et de l'espace acoustique, qui intégrait mieux l'ensemble du sensorium humain et appelait à la reconnaissance des formes pour la compréhension. McLuhan avait un grand respect pour les artistes en raison de leur conscience intégrale et leur sensibilité aux changements dans la perception des sens, leur permettant d'agir en tant que réseau d'alerte avancé (DEW, pour « Distant Early Warning ») contre les effets potentiellement néfastes de la technologie. Il considérait leur art comme des antienvironnements au tourbillon des médias électroniques. Mansaram est de plus en plus reconnu à travers les expositions récentes, mais certaines des plus grandes galeries d'art du Canada n'ont pas encore acquis ou reconnu son art, bien que le Musée royal de l'Ontario ait l'intention de le faire.

*The West shall shake the East awake ...
while ye have the night for morn ...
—James Joyce, Finnegans Wake*

Marshall McLuhan's corpus of published work includes many collaborations with associates, including Quentin Fiore, Harley Parker, Wilfred Watson, Barrington Nevitt, Kathryn Hutcheon, Bruce Powers, McLuhan's son Eric, and others. He published more collaboratively written books than self-written ones. Analogous to his favourite method of discovery, which he called probing, collaboration offered McLuhan a means or method of dialogical perception that is "discontinuous, nonlinear; it tackles things from many angles at once" (McLuhan and Carson 403). This essay describes a different kind of artistic collaboration for McLuhan, one that demonstrates his eagerness to understand and experiment with unfamiliar and new media: his collage art with Indo-Canadian artist Panchal Mansaram. This essay describes the collaboration and its artistic outcome, *Rear View Mirror 74 (RMV 74)*, considering what attracted McLuhan to the work as well as his more general views on art and artists.

According to Mansaram in a personal interview by the author of this essay, McLuhan acted with "innate kindness and generosity" in helping him get started in Canada as a newly landed Indian artist. McLuhan was likely attracted to working on one of Mansaram's *Rear View Mirror* collages for a couple of reasons. First, from his reading of modernist writers such as Charles Baudelaire, James Joyce, and T.S. Eliot—whose works in some ways anticipate subsequent East-West artistic interactions and exchanges including The Beatles' pilgrimage to India and Ravi Shankar's popularity in the West—McLuhan was keenly interested in the

proposed theme of the intersection of Eastern and Western cultures. These perceived cultural interactions were a subset of McLuhan's "global village" metaphor: the people of India and the West coming to know each other through media and mutual visitations. Second, collage art appealed to McLuhan because he associated it with the ancient mosaic form, which integrated the whole human sensorium of vision, hearing, taste, smell, and even touch, and could better reflect the simultaneity of post-literate electronic technology, the output of which would require pattern recognition to apprehend.

Panchal Mansaram, known professionally as P. Mansaram or sometimes just Mansaram, immigrated to Canada from India with his wife and daughter in 1966. He had a special interest in the work of Marshall McLuhan, initially inspired by reading an article about him in *LIFE* magazine. The February 25, 1966 issue of *LIFE* had published an article titled "Oracle of the Electric Age," which mentioned that artists, musicians, critics, and theatre people, particularly those in the avant-garde, found McLuhan's media theories to be artistically relevant and exciting, so much so that there had been a Marshall McLuhan-themed Festival of the Contemporary Arts at the University of British Columbia the previous year (Howard 91). Intrigued and excited by McLuhan's ideas on technology and culture, Mansaram wrote the University of Toronto English professor to convey his admiration for his work.

In 1966, Mansaram immigrated to Canada with his wife Tarunika and their three-month-old daughter Mila. Arriving in Montreal, they initially explored the city and its Expo 67 World's Fair site, then under construction, before settling in Toronto—initially living at the Waldorf Astoria Hotel on Charles Street. He

soon contacted Marshall McLuhan, who invited him to meet him at his office at the University of Toronto, where he was about to be interviewed for French Television. After witnessing the taping of this interview, Mansaram went with McLuhan and a writer friend to The Isaacs Gallery at 832 Yonge Street, where he was introduced to its owner, the now legendary and recently deceased Av Isaacs. This introduction led to a Happening in 1967 at the Isaacs Gallery titled *East-West Intersect*, produced by Mansaram and influenced by McLuhan.

Early Life in India¹

Mansaram was born in Mount Abu, a hillside town in Rajasthan, India, where the Maharajas owned summer palaces (McGovern, “Collaborative Collage Painting”). His father encouraged him to study engineering for its greater employment opportunities, but after spending four years in a science college, he enrolled instead in the Sir Jamsetjee Jeebhoy School of Art (often shortened as Sir J.J.) in Bombay (now Mumbai), from 1954 to 1959.

His artistic talents enabled him to secure free tuition, including free residency in a school hostel and eventually a gold medal and fellowship to teach at the Art School. He also met his future wife Tarunika, who is also an artist, at the School. In 1959, he won the highest cash prize at the Bombay State Art Exhibition, in competition with numerous professional artists. In Bombay, Mansaram took full advantage of the cultural life of this cosmopolitan Indian city, befriending art critics, the editors of several magazines, and attending lectures by the world-famous philosopher, Jiddu Krishnamurti, who lectured at the Art School compound. After art school, he moved to Calcutta for his first job, where he met Satyajit Ray, the

world-famous filmmaker. Watching Bengali films created an ambition in Mansaram to become a filmmaker himself.

He won a Dutch government scholarship at the State Academy of Fine Arts in Amsterdam during 1963-64, where he started to experiment with collage art. In 1964, Mansaram discovered inscriptions on a rock surface while visiting Greece, which inspired him to introduce writing into his collages. His own collage style later included pages of printed text, handwritten manuscript pages and notes, and even hand-drawn scribbles juxtaposed with canvas figures and images.

Back in Delhi, he met the English art-critic George Butcher, who had come to India to research his PhD thesis on Modern Indian and Folk Art; he later moved to Montreal. It was George Butcher who showed Mansaram the *LIFE* magazine article that introduced him to the Canadian media theorist and led him to seek out McLuhan after arriving in Canada.

Working with Marshall McLuhan

In Toronto, Mansaram’s family were befriended by and socially engaged with the McLuhan family. Marshall McLuhan sometimes personally drove over to pick up the Mansarams at their hotel to host them at his home at 29 Wells Hill Avenue. Corrine McLuhan baked cookies for Mansaram’s daughter, while Marshall enjoyed tending the fireplace while they chatted.

During 1966 and 1967, Mansaram painted several pictures for McLuhan, including a portrait of the scholar as a media guru. In the late 1960s, he also created a collage that was used as the cover art for two McLuhan-authored high-school English textbooks: *Voices of Literature*,

Part 1 and *Part 2*. In 1994, he designed the cover art for *Who Was Marshall McLuhan?* by Barington Nevitt, a collaborator of both Marshall and his brother Maurice McLuhan. Marshall asked Mansaram to create collages on their furnace in the basement of their family house; two of the daughters, Elizabeth and Teri McLuhan, recollect playing in front of these works with their brothers when they were children. (McGovern, "Collaborative Collage").

In 1967, Mansaram made an important career move when he accepted a position as a high school art teacher with the Hamilton Board of Education, and moved to the Hamilton-Burlington area, west of Toronto. He began his teaching career at Hamilton's Central Secondary School with its special art program, which employed eight art teachers. The students spent half of each day studying art and the other half on academic subjects. After two years, his whole school was moved to a new building in downtown Hamilton, Sir John A. Macdonald Secondary School. After later transfers to Glendale Secondary, then Barton Secondary, he took early retirement from teaching in 1989, allowing him to concentrate on his artistic endeavours full time.

Mansaram became involved with several workshops at McLuhan's now famous Monday Night Seminars at the University of Toronto. From one of these unstructured and interactive group discussions came the idea of a Happening with the intersection of Eastern and Western cultures as its theme.

The *East-West Intersect* Happening 1967

Popular during the 1960s, Happenings were inspired by the ideas and techniques of Futurists, Dadaists, and Surrealists, with the American

painter and art historian Allan Kaprow being a principal proponent of this new theatrical form (Brockett 625). Happenings appealed to McLuhan's interest in new artistic forms that engaged in Figure/Ground analysis of artifacts in their everyday environments. Kaprow was also interested in the environments surrounding art works, arguing that, particularly with performance art, audiences should be given assignments and comprise part of the total context. Such performances were typically non-linear narratives, with audiences involved in the action, and would usually include improvisational elements. McLuhan encouraged Mansaram to pursue this initiative, despite being unable to attend himself, as he was going to be a visiting professor at Fordham University in New York during the 1967-68 academic year as the Albert Schweitzer Chair in the Humanities.

Before leaving for New York, McLuhan sat down with Mansaram for a short interview during which the artist sought the media scholar's advice about the production of his *East-West Intersect* Happening. McLuhan discussed issues such as the convergence of Western and Eastern cultures in the global village; Eastern elements in the literary works of T.S. Eliot and James Joyce; the strong Eastern influence on Western culture in the 1960s; the tribalism of hippie culture in Toronto's Yorkville district at that time; time and space in the Electric Age; and the effects of TV on oral cultures. The previously unpublished interview is available online on the McLuhan Galaxy blog (Mansaram "An Unpublished Interview with Marshall McLuhan"), the official blog of the McLuhan Estate.

The most important cultural takeaway from Mansaram's interview with McLuhan and his

subsequent *East-West Intersect* Happening is McLuhan's discussion of the convergence of Eastern and Western cultures. He was aware of that convergence from his knowledge of how modernist writers such as Charles Baudelaire, James Joyce, and T.S. Eliot as well as artists such as Paul Cézanne and Pablo Picasso included Indian elements in their works. He would have been aware of the hippie movement's embrace of Eastern religions and its emergence in popular culture. Toronto's focal point for hippies during the 1960s was the Yorkville area. Yorkville Avenue was just six blocks north of St. Michael's College, where McLuhan taught.

McLuhan's observations about East-West convergence anticipate such pop cultural events as the Beatles 1968 trip to India (Swanson "History of the Beatles") and the growing fame of Ravi Shankar in the West. McLuhan told Mansaram:

Well, the simple fact of the matter is the whole world is an East/West happening, and while the Western world is going Oriental, the Oriental world is going Western. This has been going on for a century, and so what could be a bigger East/West happening than that? See, all the Western artists have gone Oriental since Baudelaire, and all the painters, all abstract art is Oriental art. ("An Unpublished Interview with Marshall McLuhan")

McLuhan later connected East-West convergence to the hippie movement, with its predilection for psychedelic drugs, electronic technology and media:

I think the problem about the East/West Happening is that it is very difficult to find a difference between the East and

West. The West is so eager to appear Eastern in everything and is so keen on the inner trip. In the Electric Age, by the way, in the Electric Age the whole world is taking the inner trip; because of the circuit, the feedback, the electric technology is psychedelic. So the Western world is going Eastern in that sense of inner trip. ("An Unpublished Interview with Marshall McLuhan")

The *East-West Intersect* Happening was produced for two nights in 1967 at the Isaacs Gallery. Elements that Mansaram proposed to include in it were a dancing go-go girl juxtaposed with another woman doing a Western concert dance in a cage; a five-minute 16-mm film of McLuhan speaking; a Dictaphone-recorded interview of McLuhan by Mansaram; talks by a hippie leader, a theosophist, and a Buddhist monk; taped Indian-influenced Western music as well as Western-influenced Indian music; portions of Western films; Indian films with little narrative line, but using music, dance, and circus elements; and an installation by Peter Sepp and Mansaram. The Happening was covered on television by the prime-time CBC program *The Way It Is* on Saturday night. Surviving media artifacts from that event include: the five-minute 16-mm film of McLuhan, the recorded interview, the transcript of the Mansaram interview (Mansaram, "An Unpublished Interview with Marshall McLuhan"), and Mansaram's photographs and documentation of the event.

All the above media artifacts of the original Happening of 1967 were resurrected, or in McLuhan terminology, retrieved, in June 2012 by Ed Video Gallery in Guelph, Ontario for an exhibition of Mansaram's collages, paintings, and media art, including his collaboration

with McLuhan. The theme of *East-West Intersect* was recapitulated under the title *Intersec-tion: Mansaram & McLuhan*, described on the poster as “Collages, paintings, and media art by P. Mansaram inspired by and in collaboration with Marshall McLuhan from 1966 to 2012” (Beedham, “Medium = Message”).

At around the same time, Mansaram started working on a series of paintings which he titled *Rear View Mirror*, which became a sustaining focus from 1966 to 1972. He produced a film on the same subject in 1966, later re-edited in 2011 for screenings at Ed Video in Guelph, Ontario in 2012 and the Experimenta 2013 Film Festival in Bangalore, India. Mansaram described this project: “As in the case of ‘Rear View Mirror’ we are constantly creating our past, while living in the present. Past appears in present in various forms; paintings, drawings, photos, memories, words, sculptures, films. I have woven some of those remnants thru this medium” (“Festival Programme 2013”). The title refers to a McLuhan meme, the idea that we drive into the future using only our rear view mirrors: “We march backwards into the future. Suburbia lives imaginatively in Bonanza-land” (McLuhan and Fiore 74-75). Initially, the paintings were displayed at George Rackus’s Picture Loan Gallery, one of the oldest art galleries in Toronto.

Mansaram also made other experimental films, including *Intersect* (1967), inspired by the films of Satyajit Ray and Ritwik Ghatak, and reflecting his collage work, which combined radio and television commercials with film content. His later film *Devi Stuffed Goat and Pink Cloth* (1979) is another collage made in Mumbai; it explores the gaze of an Indian artist in Canada looking back at his nation of origin (“Festival Programme 2013”). Commenting on

Mansaram’s work in a personal letter sent to Mansaram in 1973, Marshall McLuhan wrote that, “Mansaram is a kind of two-way mirror, living simultaneously in the divided and distinguished worlds of the East and West.”

The Mansaram-McLuhan Collaborative Collage

The title of the collage to which McLuhan added his touch is *Rear View Mirror 74 (RVM 74)* [Fig. 1], part of Mansaram’s *Rear View Mirror* series created between 1966 to 1972. Mansaram started *RVM 74* in 1969 and added several additional elements over four decades later in 2011. It was recently acquired by the Royal Ontario Museum in Toronto (ROM), along with many of his other paintings, collages, prints, and supporting documents.

To appreciate *RVM 74*, it is necessary to identify and interpret the approximately two dozen images and textual passages introduced by Mansaram and McLuhan. McLuhan added the six English-language passages. Starting at the top of the collage and moving counter-clockwise, McLuhan’s contributions are as follows:²

1. NOW THAT LADER’S GONE,
I MUST LIE DOWN AGAIN
WHERE ALL LADDERS START IN THE
FOUL RAG & BONE SHOP OF MY HEART

This is a quotation from W.B. Yeats’s *The Circus Animal’s Desertion*, which, according to Eric McLuhan in a personal email to the author of this essay, is often cited in *From Cliché to Archetype*. There are errors, no doubt intentional, in the way it appears on the collage. In a personal email to the author of this essay, Mansaram stated that McLuhan wrote the quotes on the collage in pencil and then

Mansaram highlighted the letters with a magic marker to make them legible.

2. HOW PIERCEFUL GROWS
THE HAZY YON
HOW MYRTLE PETERED [unclear]
THOW UP [unclear]
FOR SPRING HATH
SPRUNG THE
CYCLOTRON,
HOW HIGH BROWSE
THOU,
BROWN
COW?

In a personal email to the author of this essay, Eric McLuhan identified this as being one of the *Songs of Pogo* on a record by Walt Kelly, an American animator and cartoonist who initially worked for Walt Disney and later created the Pogo comic strip for Dell Comics (Stern “We Have Met the Enemy”). The text contains errors, as Mansaram’s intention was to communicate the idea that “the medium is the message”: that the overall form and ground of an artifact are its transformational elements far more than its content. The last line — “HOW HIGH BROWSE THOU, BROWN COW?”— is a take on a speech exercise used in the U.S. South in the early 20th century, to train a speaker in forming vowels: “How now brown cow?” Again, as Mansaram informed that author of this essay during a personal interview, McLuhan wrote the quotes on the collage in pencil and then Mansaram highlighted the letters with a marker to make them legible.

3. HELP
BEAUTIFY
JUNKYARDS
THROW
SOMETHING

LOVELY
TODAY

As Eric McLuhan informed this author in a personal email, McLuhan saw this writing on a billboard advertising a junkyard in Toronto. In correct grammar, it would read: “Help beautify junk yards. Throw something lovely away today.” The quote comes up elsewhere in a moderated conversation between McLuhan, Malcolm Muggeridge, and Norman Mailer, the former telling the others that “There’s a wonderful sign hanging on a sign in Toronto, which says, Help beautify junkyards—throw something lovely away today. I think this is a thought that conservatives need to consider” (Lennon 134). McLuhan inserted the phrase in other contexts as well; in this case, Mansaram applied this McLuhan-supplied phrase to the collage in his hand.

4. THE
PARANOIDS
ARE
AFTER
ME

This was a wisecrack that Marshall McLuhan thought up, as related to this author by Eric McLuhan in a personal email. Again, McLuhan penciled the quote onto the collage and then Mansaram highlighted it.

5. “H M McLuhan” on the right side of the collage and a little above half way up, tilted vertically, is Marshall McLuhan’s signature which he added himself.
6. Time wounds all heals heels

This appears on the right side, just above McLuhan’s signature, but the phrase is upside down to the viewer; “heals” is crossed out and

“heels” is substituted above it. The phrase is a rearrangement of the aphorism “Time heals all wounds.” According to the online Quote Investigator Garson O’Toole (“Time Wounds All Heels”), Groucho Marx delivered the phrase in the 1940 film *Go West*, but the expression had already been in circulation at least since 1934.

Mansaram provided the rest of the collage images, as well as the non-English texts—almost two dozen elements. The dark strip of fabric along the top, with its motif of birds and flowers, occupies about 20 percent of the collage, representing nature or, in the artist’s words, the “master controller of the world.” Farther down on the right side are a peacock, a potted plant, and another flower, once again symbols of the natural ecology; another flower occupies the centre of the collage, to the right of the dome. There are several symbols of the divine: at bottom centre is a representation of the pre-Vedas Indian god of the wind, Varun; to its left is a generic image of a god; to its left is a 3-D postcard of Jesus Christ; finally, the dome just to the left of centre represents temples, synagogues, or churches. Miscellaneous elements include a sword or dagger, which might represent defense, justice, or punishment—all of which guard civilization; at the bottom, to the right of centre, is a segment of text from a Toronto Greek newspaper; immediately above the dome, and slightly to its right, is a large colourful lottery poster from India, depicting pictures of two well-known Indian actresses of the time, with rows of little envelopes containing rewards to be won by shooting a pellet gun at balloons mounted on a board; there is a manuscript with an X through it to the right of HELP BEAUTIFY JUNKYARDS, with the X signifying the irrelevance of content, in other words, that “the medium is the message.”

The irrelevance of content is also represented by the text that looks like Hindi or other Eastern script, but is meaningless scribbles, just below the right-hand section of the dark bird/flower motif band along the top. The same applies to the upside-down scribbles, just above the dagger’s handle. The textual images in English, pseudo-Hindi, and Greek represent the Gutenberg era of print literacy. In 2011, Mansaram added representations of electronic media to signify a new communication era: the brown circle below the centre and slightly to the left is a compact disk (CD), below it and to the left is the first iPhone, and to its left is a pre-Xerox blueprint used by architects. Above the blue patch and the compact disk are four TV sets in a row. The first and third from the left display flower images, a juxtaposition of nature and technology; the second has side doors closed over the picture tube, and the fourth has a black X over it, again suggesting the irrelevance of the programming that appears on it—“the medium is the message.”

Finally, there is a photograph of Marshall McLuhan in the centre, smiling and with his right hand in a pocket while his left hand clutches a book. Mansaram took this photo near McLuhan’s Coach House, behind what is now the Kelly Library at St. Michael’s College, University of Toronto. Mansaram has signed his work vertically, almost in the centre of the collage, with his starting and completion dates indicated by “69/2011”—spanning almost a half century.

Mcluhan’s Take on the Collage Art Form

On a page that is untitled and unpaginated, preceding page one of the Prologue to *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), McLuhan wrote of his “mosaic or field approach,” stating that it represents



Figure 1. Rear View Mirror 74 (RVM 74) - Collage by Mansaram and Marshall McLuhan (1969, with new elements added in 2011)

“the galaxy or constellation of events” in a “mosaic of perpetually interacting forms that have undergone kaleidoscopic transformation—particularly in our own time.” That is an apt description for Mansaram and McLuhan’s *Rear View Mirror* 74, which represents elements from the converging cultures of India and the West, including aspects of their natural ecologies, media ecologies, and religious symbols. Elena Lamberti argues that meaning from such a mosaic assemblage is acquired:

... through the interplay with its own ground. By doing so, a pattern gets created and in turn revealed through our active observation. Pattern recognition is the way we approach all mosaics: we look for the overall design that the assemblage of the various tesserae brings to light, something which transcends their mere sum. (xxviii)

Such mosaic structure forces viewers to employ pattern recognition, to pay attention to the total design, and to participate in the process of deriving meaning from what they are experiencing. It promotes active engagement, rather than the passive and detached observation that is characteristic of representational art.

McLuhan appreciated collage art and supported this aspect of Mansaram’s artistic expression because he sensed that this art form better reflected the post-literate “allatonceness” (McLuhan and Fiore 63) world of electronic media and technology. As Margarita D’Amico argues, “In his own published work if McLuhan was not the first to have used collage, [but] it is he who has best captured the totally new character of the new mass means of communication and the social impact of new technologies” (Nevitt and Maurice McLuhan 232). The superseded

Gutenberg era of widespread literacy based on the dominance of writing and print media in the form of relatively inexpensive books, magazines, journals, and newspapers favoured visual space. Yet what McLuhan called “new media” favoured the ear via technologies such as radio, movies, TV, recorded music, and satellites, which replaced visual space with acoustic space. The visual aspect still existed in film and TV of course, but sight was no longer the most dominant of the senses in the new electronic media.

Marshall McLuhan and Barrington Nevitt opined that:

Our world ... is an invisible Rim Spin—all the communication that surrounds us. It is like a cyclone, a vortex that has transformed the old world of visual connections into a new world of audile-tactile resonances: a global theatre of instant awareness. (Nevitt and Maurice McLuhan 231)

In a collaborative text with Marshall McLuhan first published in Spanish in Venezuela, D’Amico linked collage and mosaic using McLuhan’s terminology:

We live in an acoustic space ... like discarnate minds floating in the magnetic cities of radio, television and satellites. ... Our world is a great multimedia poem. To understand this world we must study its processes, investigate their effects to recognize their causes: to program our future ... Perhaps our one possible approach may be of mosaic type or collage, rather than a lineal one of logical demonstration. (Nevitt and Maurice McLuhan 231)

The art of the previous Gutenberg era of print had been mostly representational: street scenes, natural landscapes or seascapes, and portraits that were identifiable as such. The introduction of perspective, around the same time in the mid-15th century as Gutenberg's invention of moveable type, enhanced the lifelikeness of this representationality (McLuhan, *Gutenberg Galaxy*). Just as the linearity of typeset printed pages endowed readers with a fixed point of view, perspective in art made "the single eye the centre of the visible world" with everything converging on it "to the vanishing point of infinity" (Berger 16).

Yet electronic media substituted simultaneity or all-at-onceness for linearity and ABC-mindedness, and acoustic space for visual space, thus eliminating perspective and the possibility of a fixed point of view. Representational art was no longer reflective of electronic media, satellites, space flight, and new conceptions of space/time that they stimulated. Abstract art in its non-representationality provided one solution, and the ancient art of collage provided another. D'Amico explains why mosaic and its application to collage art appealed to McLuhan:

Mosaic emphasizes that all elements together create the total effect. As for collage, the association, arrangement and juxtaposition of objects, phrases, different concepts, both heterogeneous and absurd, that comment upon and influence each other, all of this has very close affinities with concepts of chance, accident or "serendipity" (making accidental discoveries of valuable, but unsought, knowledge), important concepts in present science and culture. (Nevitt and Maurice McLuhan 231-232)

Marshall McLuhan, a cultural medievalist by training, was especially interested in the lower three of the seven liberal arts of the medieval educational curriculum: grammar, rhetoric, and logic. He was aware of medieval artistic expression beyond the literary, including the pre-Renaissance mosaic art that followed the Byzantine practice of decorating walls and ceilings with tesserae. Art historian Alexander Nagel explains that the medieval mosaic represented for McLuhan "a mode of apprehension" that integrated the full human sensorium of vision, hearing, taste, smell, and even touch, whereas Western representational art biased perception in favour of the eye and sequential vision:

Mosaics engaged an integrated medieval "sensory ratio" where the visual was not disconnected from the other senses and if anything was subordinated to the "audile" and "tactile" forms ... [In] *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, [he wrote that the mosaic is] "a multidimensional world of inter structural resonance"—in contradiction to modern perspective, which was "an abstract illusion built on the intense separation of the visual from the other senses. (160)

Indeed, McLuhan found "the mosaic mode of being relevant in the new age of electronic media, which were exploding the bounds of a mechanically understood world, putting things once again into multiple relation across space and time" (Nagel 160).

Mansaram also related a relevant side note to this essay's author: at the opening of his 2012 exhibition of collages at the J.M. Gallery, now the Ashok Jain Gallery in New York, Teri McLuhan, a documentary filmmaker and daughter of Marshall McLuhan, commented to

Mansaram, “That is how my dad spoke, just like your collages.” Those who are still mystified by some of McLuhan’s cryptic and non-linear pronouncements might possibly agree.

Final Remarks: McLuhan’s Take on Mansaram’s Art

Marshall McLuhan followed the modernist writers that he greatly admired—especially Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, James Joyce, and Wyndham Lewis—in holding artists in high esteem for their perceptual acuity and “integral awareness” (*Understanding Media* 65), which equipped them to be what Ezra Pound called the “antennae of the race.” In his introduction to the second edition of *Understanding Media*, McLuhan explained that art is a kind of radar or “early warning system” that enables the alert to anticipate social and psychic effects before their potentially harmful consequences (x) and to develop appropriate controls. He considered art to be particularly important in the technological era that he lived in because the effects of the new electronic technologies were subliminal but had the effect of altering human “sense ratios or pattern of perception” (*Understanding Media* 19); users had no resistance because of their lack of awareness. However, what he called the “serious artist” can “encounter technology with impunity, just because he is an expert aware of the changes in sense perception” (19). This idea of the arts as being defensive and prophetic elevates the importance of the arts well above the common idea of its being mere self-expression for artists and aesthetic enjoyment for viewers.

McLuhan developed his art-as-early-warning-system metaphor into the Distant Early Warning system, or DEW Line, referring to the defensive system of radar stations installed

across Canada’s Arctic north during the Cold War. Art as a DEW Line was a powerful metaphor during the Cold War with North Americans as well as the rest of the world. McLuhan later applied the DEW Line metaphor to his *Marshall McLuhan DEW-LINE* newsletter, published from 1968-1970 by Eugene M. (“Tony”) Schwartz in New York. The off-shoot DEW-LINE playing card deck (1969) similarly intended to stimulate problem-solving in a “thinking-outside-the-box” manner.

Just as he had adopted a broad view of what constitutes a medium, McLuhan considered an artist to be any person “in any field, scientific or humanistic, who grasps the implications of his actions and of new knowledge in his own time” (*Understanding Media* 65), including business scholars such as Peter Drucker and futurists like Buckminster Fuller. However, McLuhan held certain modernist writers and painters in especially high regard for their capabilities in the training the perception of readers and viewers. “Integral awareness” implies an integrated human sensorium in which the other senses are not subordinated to the visual sense, a sensibility that McLuhan attributed to James Joyce especially, whom he referenced probably more than any other artist in his own work. He sought this Joycean sensibility in the work of visual artists as well, especially in the painters and designers in Toronto at the time such as Sorel Etrog, Harley Parker, René Cera, and, of course, Mansaram.

McLuhan also viewed the arts as cognitive and social correctives to the harmful aspects of electronic media. Artists could help people adjust their perceptual capabilities to the new environments resulting from new media by creating anti-environments with their art works:

Art as an anti-environment is an indispensable means of perception, for environments, as such, are imperceptible. Their power to impose their ground rules on our perceptual life is so complete that there is no scope for dialogue or interface. Hence the need for art or anti-environments. (E. McLuhan and Gordon 3-4)

Influenced by Edward T. Hall, McLuhan held that the “ground rules, the pervasive structure, the overall pattern eludes perception” by those living in it, “except in so far as there is an anti-environment or counter-situation constructed to provide a means of direct attention” (qtd. in E. McLuhan and Gordon 4). In other words, those living in any environment are oblivious to it, as the one thing they can never see is the element through which they move: “we don’t know who discovered water, but we’re pretty sure it wasn’t a fish” (qtd. in S. McLuhan and Staines 106).

Anti-environments are important for their capacity to raise subliminal and hidden environments to conscious awareness, the first step in “understanding media” and thereby gaining control over them. In a *Playboy* interview (1969), McLuhan urged: “The central purpose of all my work is to convey this message, that by understanding media as they extend man, we gain a measure of control over them.” Alice Rae notes McLuhan’s use of “The Emperor’s New Clothes” to illustrate the manner in which only someone on the outside of an environment can see it for what it is. McLuhan’s interpretation of the Hans Christian Andersen story was that:

“Well-adjusted” courtiers, having vested interests, saw the emperor as beautifully appointed. The “antisocial” brat,

unaccustomed to the old environment, clearly saw that the Emperor “ain’t got nothin’ on.” The new environment was clearly visible to *him*. (qtd. in *McLuhan and Fiore* 88, original emphasis)

Today, as throughout history, artists are often outsiders to the power and moneyed interests of those who manage, own, and benefit from the global high technology corporations. Like the “antisocial brat” of Andersen’s story, artists can see the downsides and the losers of the technological maelstrom. While new technological extensions of ourselves generate what McLuhan called “Narcissus narcosis” (*Understanding Media* 41), numbness, and somnambulism, artists sharpen our perceptions, making us aware of subliminal technological environments and aiding us in overcoming the disservices of new technologies.

How much of what has been described in this theoretical discussion of McLuhan’s views on the relationship between artists and society did the media scholar see in the artistic work of Mansaram? Clearly, he principally saw it as a convergence of Eastern and Western cultures and sensibilities, a subset of his global village idea that he described in *The Gutenberg Galaxy*: “The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village” (31). As in a village, people were becoming more aware of each other because of television, movies, radio, telephones, and affordable global travel:

Ours is a brand-new world of all-at-onceness. “Time” has ceased, “space” has vanished. We now live in a “global village” ... a simultaneous happening. Information pours upon us, instantaneously and continuously. As soon as information is

acquired, it is very rapidly replaced by still newer information. Our electrically configured world has forced us to move from the habit of data classification to the mode of pattern recognition. (McLuhan and Fiore 63)

Mansaram's art is an anti-environment to the increasingly technologized culture of North America, which Neil Postman, a New York University colleague of McLuhan, would later term technopoly: a state of mind that "consists in the deification of technology, finds its satisfaction in technology, and takes its orders from technology" (Postman 71). Mansaram's collages are anti-environments to representational art and its recognizable images of external reality. McLuhan especially appreciated Mansaram's collages, which he insisted better reflected the "all-at-onceness" of electronic communication and information. McLuhan later showed his approval by writing the following appreciation of Mansaram's collage art in a personal letter:

The work of Mansaram presents a natural dialogue between the cultures of the East and of the West. His Oriental frame of reference and sensibility ... brings many forms and many media to participate in one another. Mansaram's cosmopolitan perception enables him to entertain Western leitmotifs easily and naturally. As the West loses its intense visual preference and enters the iconic world of sculptural and acoustic values, the painterly and graphic idiom of India gains steadily in Western habits of acceptance. The work of Mansaram brings the mosaic forms of T.S. Eliot and James Joyce to the Orient in the very moment and by the same means that Mansaram enables us to contemplate the Orient as a variant modality of The

Waste Land. In short, Mansaram is a kind of two-way mirror, living simultaneously in the divided and distinguished worlds of the East and West.

Mansaram has enjoyed dozens of exhibitions of his art in galleries in both Canada and India. Since 2012, he has been gaining greater recognition with major exhibitions in Mumbai, Bangalore, Guelph, Mississauga, Hamilton, Toronto, and New York. Although important galleries have acquired some of his paintings and collages, the National Gallery of Canada and the Art Gallery of Ontario have not yet been among them. Recently the Royal Ontario Museum (ROM) undertook a major acquisition of over 700 of his works. According to Dr. Deepali Dewan, a Senior Curator in the Department of World Culture at the Royal Ontario Museum, itemized in a personal email to the author of this essay, this acquisition was comprised of 94 works on paper, 11 large paintings or collages, 216 prints from his *Image India* series, 13 black-and-white or hand-painted photographs, and 125 supporting documents including exhibit posters, postcards, and pamphlets, with more items to be assessed and counted. Why this recognition from a museum, rather than Canada's major art galleries? The ROM clearly acknowledges and declares its purpose in its mission statement: "to be a champion for the natural and cultural worlds; to serve as a forum for our diverse communities; and to create knowledge that contributes to a better future" ("Purpose and Strategic Objectives"). Canada's major art galleries might still need to do more to acknowledge Canada's multicultural diversity through their collections, or so it seems by examining the example of Mansaram's heretofore neglect.



Figure 2. Marshall McLuhan & P. Mansaram at the opening of Mansaram's "Rear View Mirror" Exhibition at the Picture Loan Gallery in Toronto, 1974

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Image Notes

Figure 1. *Rear View Mirror 74 (RVM 74)* – Collage by Mansaram and Marshall McLuhan (1969, with new elements added in 2011)

Figure 2. Marshall McLuhan & P. Mansaram at the opening of Mansaram's "Rear View Mirror" Exhibition at the Picture Loan Gallery in Toronto, 1974

Notes

1 Previously unpublished biographical information by Scott McGovern of Ed Video, Guelph from notes supplied by Mansaram. McGovern, Scott. "Collaborative Collage." *McLuhan Galaxy*, 6 Aug. 2012, mcluhangalaxy.wordpress.com/2012/08/06/collaborative-collage-painting-marshall-mcluhan-mansaram/

2 Eric McLuhan kindly assisted in identifying the quotations on the collage that are in English and were contributed by his father.