

Preface

by Stephanie McLuhan

This book is the brainchild of David Staines, who recognized the literary potential of the audiovisual material from which it is derived. Although as co-editors we approached the project from different perspectives – David is a literary historian while I am a television producer – we have in common an intimate knowledge of the subject. As well, our longstanding friendship made the collaboration remarkably comfortable.

There is no first time I can remember meeting David. He visited our home many times over the years. It seemed logical, therefore, to call him for advice about what to do with the roughly two dozen tapes of Marshall McLuhan's lectures and television interviews I had collected over twenty-five years. I hoped that David would recommend the ideal university communications department where I could donate them; instead, he enthusiastically said they would make an important book. I was surprised by his suggestion and insisted that we get together to screen the tapes before we made up our minds. When we had done this, he summarized the proposed book: it would consist only of primary-source material that had never been published before, and be based on unedited lectures and television interviews electronically recorded over twenty years

from 1959 until 1979. It seemed straightforward, and so we agreed to commit ourselves to the venture.

After many months, much brainstorming, and a few wrong turns, we finished with our relationship intact. There were some exasperating moments that usually occurred when we were poring over transcripts of the various lectures, which were considerably more difficult to absorb than the television interviews. It would take three or even four readings of a piece to comprehend it fully, mainly because it was packed with so many thoughts and ideas.

In the eighteen selections, which are presented chronologically, there are, of course, ideas that come up a number of times, but it is engaging to follow the development of McLuhan's thought process through the years. His views on his own work and on the world are valuable adjuncts to his publications.

Taken together, these lectures and interviews make up a biography/autobiography enabling you to read Marshall McLuhan in the original where you will find a more accessible, even unmediated encounter than is possible through his books.

In the footnotes we have attempted to identify every quotation. In a few cases, however, we could not locate precise information.

Our sincere appreciation is extended to Tom Wolfe for his masterful Foreword, to the broadcasters and interviewers who created the interviews, and to the university archivists who provided background information on the lectures.