

Terence Gordon, *McLuhan for Beginners*, For Beginners LLC, 2012.



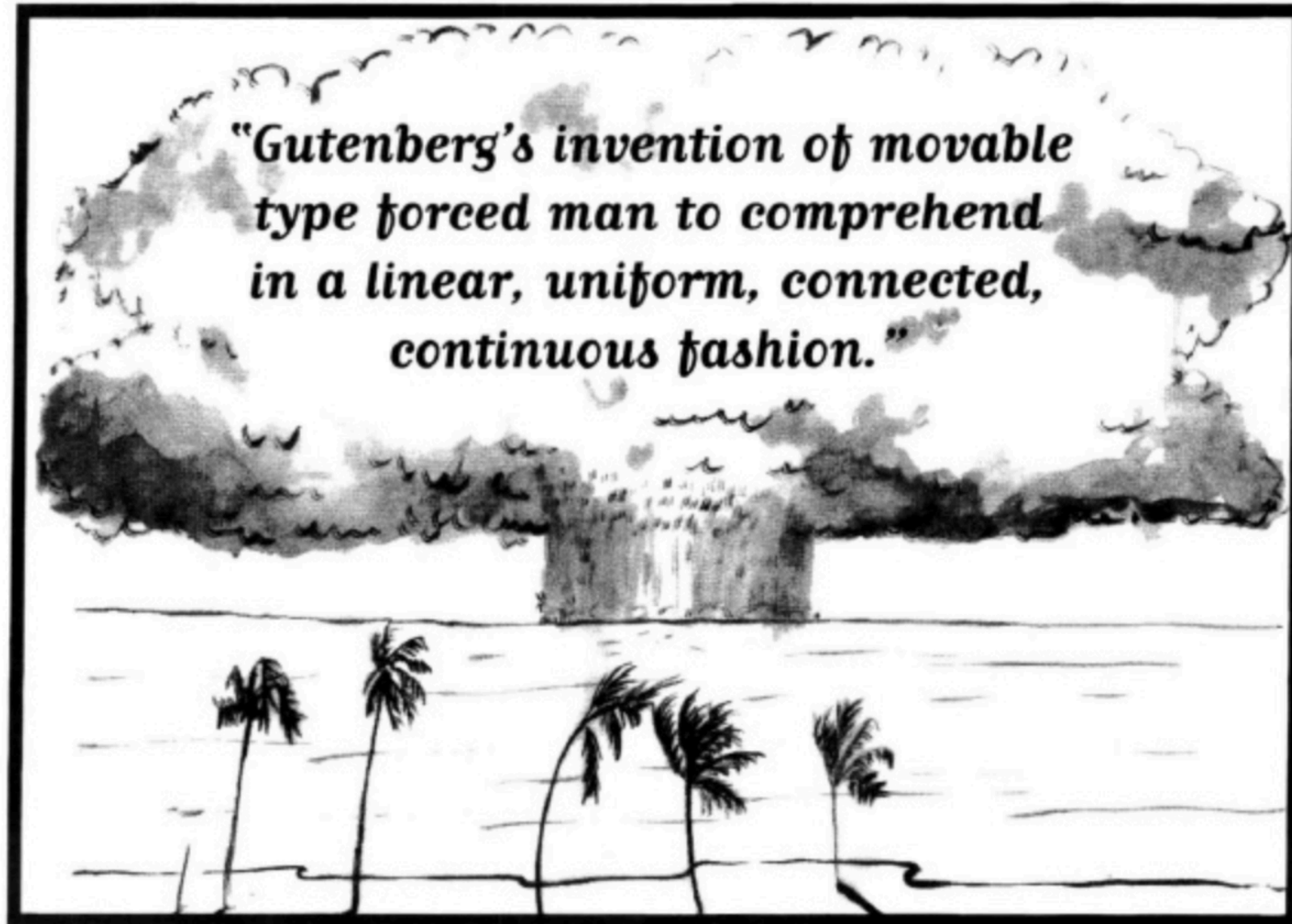
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Kindle版 ¥ 1,875 (2017/06/01)



Before writing became widespread, McLuhan claims, humankind lived in acoustic space, the space of the spoken word. This space is boundless, directionless, horizonless, and charged with emotion. Writing transformed space into something bounded, linear, ordered, structured, and rational. The written page, with its edges, margins, and sharply defined letters in row after row brought about a new way of thinking about space.



IN A NUTSHELL,
MCLUHAN'S IDEA IS THAT
THERE HAVE BEEN THREE
AGES OF MAN:



**I.
The Preliterate
or Tribal Era**

—when the
spoken word
was king and
the ear was
queen—



**II.
The Gutenberg Age**

—when the printed word
was king and the eye was
queen—



**III.
The Electronic Age of Retribalized
(that's right!) Man**

—when **FULL** sensory involvement
(especially touching) is believing—
when all the senses are jesters at the royal
court—(and there is no king or queen)



In this book McLuhan notes that his objective is not to offer a static theory of human communication but to probe the effects of anything humans use in dealing with the world. “To understand media,” he wrote,

If that approach makes academics nervous, it is certainly one that every artist is comfortable with.

McLuhan’s method? It’s all in the fingers:

“Most of my work in the media is like that of a safecracker. In the beginning I don’t know what’s inside. I just set myself down in front of the problem and begin to work. I grope, I probe, I listen, I test—until the tumblers fall and I’m in.” (From the Introduction to Gerald Stearn’s McLuhan Hot and Cool)

(Re)Defining "Message"

HOW, THEN, CAN THE MEDIUM
BE THE MESSAGE?



B

y saying “the medium is the message” McLuhan forces us to re-examine what we understand by both “medium” and “message.” We have just seen how he stretched the meaning of “medium” beyond our usual understanding of the word. He does this for “message” too. If we define “message” simply as the idea of “content” or “information,” McLuhan believes, we miss

one of the most important features of media: their power to change the course and functioning of human relations and activities. So, McLuhan redefines the “message” of a medium as any change in scale, pace, or pattern that a medium causes in societies or cultures.

