

Mark Slade.
LANGUAGE OF CHANGE —
MOVING IMAGES OF MAN
Toronto: Holt, Rhinehart &
Winston of Canada, 1970.
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*Be thou the first true merit to
 befriend;
 His praise is lost, who stays 'till
 all commend.
 Short is the date, alas, of modern
 rhymes,
 And 'tis but just to let them
 live betimes.
 No longer now that golden age
 appears,
 When Patriarch — wits surviv'd a
 thousand years:
 Now length of Fame (our second
 life) is lost,
 And bare threescore is all ev'n that
 can boast;
 Our sons their fathers' failing
 language see,
 And such as Chaucer is, shall
 Dryden be.
 (from) "An Essay on Criticism."*

Oddly enough, in spite of a time gap of more than two hundred years, and the irony of the fact that their concern is with mutability, Alexander Pope and Mark Slade are talking about the same thing and both have confidence in what the latter refers to as "the control that can be exercised over change by understanding." Both are keenly aware of the "monstrous examples of men losing control of change." Where Pope can write: "Short is the date, alas, of modern rhymes," the present author notes that "Much of present-day culture is as disposable as a

paper cup."

The theme is not foreign to contemporary society. Talk of change dominates conversations in universities, in labor and business groups, in social and political movements of all kinds. What one voice decries as a breakdown of structures, another hails as a step towards liberation. Both voices assume that the world is changing.

Mr. Slade, however, takes exception to this assumption and demonstrates with a most persuasive wit that what is actually changing is "our vision of the environment, our ability to control its resources." Our vision is expressed in the imagery we most constantly employ and is rooted in a few very basic metaphors, which the new technologies are altering.

The author sees the "image in motion" (i.e. film, television, satellite) as the language of this change.

From this point in his thesis, the book goes on to do several things, perhaps too many things considering its length. One of the good things it does is provide an enlightening analysis of the moving space and the moving frame as these relate to film and to television. The essential differences between these two media are described theoretically and concretely through reference to numerous films and television shows. An added bonus, by the way, is the list at the end of the volume of seventy-one films referred to throughout the book. Groups willing to check off the titles each member had seen will soon realize how comprehensive a visual vocabulary most college and university people share.

A second valuable aspect of this book is that it provides fresh dis-

cussion of Marshall McLuhan's initial insights in a way that deepens and extends their relevance and serves to hasten their synthesis into older theories of the nature of the media of communication. Mr. Slade makes a reasonable claim for the urgency of this investigation. "Assimilation cannot be delayed for a generation while the young are patiently instructed in a heritage which is itself undergoing visible convulsions. Young people are making it perfectly clear that it is impractical to wait for tomorrow's daylight to illuminate today's spectre."

This book should prove most helpful to those teachers who are attempting to assimilate the language of change not for, but with their students. From an educational viewpoint, Mr. Slade, who directs media research institutes for the National Film Board of Canada, achieves the most acceptable basis yet encountered by this reviewer for the encouragement of communications and media courses.

"The fact is that no media communicate. Communication is not the fallout from technology; rather it is the only personal means known to us for establishing human rapport. Films say nothing. People do the saying. Our big problem in this century is to restore to human beings, emancipated by technology, the person-to-person touch that the technology steadily removes from social intercourse.

"Our new languages, unless they are shaped in their turn by personal strivings for human meanings, shape a reality that nobody wants. Emphasis on the personal can therefore be seen as a survival response of mass man in a mass society ordered by mass media."

Understanding through personal experience of the various media and more particularly through the attempts at personal expression through the media are obvious paths to "doing the saying," to "establishing human rapport."

If the book at first strikes one as cluttered in seeming to refer to

so many and such varied fields of human experience, second thoughts will show the author's conclusion that "the language of change is a richly endowed meeting place for all disciplines." The feat here being attempted is the formulation of definitions that seem startlingly new because they are inter-disciplinary. The chapter "Inside Fields of Vision" wherein *Flatland*, the film produced by Harvard's Carpenter Centre, is used as the vehicle of just such a process of definition, demonstrates the method most brilliantly. It includes the following sly remark: "Anathema to authors of dictionaries and other purists, such definitions surely, are quite acceptable and legitimate for artists, children and human beings."

Mr. Slade is not loud in his praise of the contribution made by educators to the exploration of the language of change. He groups them with politicians as among those conservative elements who are "recoiling from the underground discontent and failing to grasp the significance of the process." Whatever questions one may wish to bring to the validity of such a conclusion, the very tenor of the accusation marks *Language of Change* as a volume no teacher can afford to ignore.

More important than the tenor, however, is the content of the remark: a serious and knowledgeable treatment of issues which no one interested in education can ignore. As Mark Slade writes: "— educators should know that the Trojan horse within their gates is teeming with moving images."

And he plays it cool too! His last word is: "For those who don't feel like looking in the Trojan Horse's mouth: peace."

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