The Medium is the Message?: Radio, Propaganda and Polemics in Anthony Doerr's *All The Light We Cannot See*

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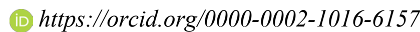
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Abstract
The interface between war and technology has piqued literary interest in recent decades, for technology has redefined human conflicts and disrupted human lives in unforeseen ways. Technological advancements in the field of communication have revolutionised warfare, and radio technology is one such innovation. This article aims to study the medium of radio as represented in Anthony Doerr's novel, All the Light We Cannot See (2014), to gain insight into the pivotal role radio plays in times of crisis. It seeks to explore the relationship between the nature of the medium, the message it carries and the reception of the message, for which it will situate the novel within the theoretical framework proposed by Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan. This, in turn, will also shed light on McLuhan's postulations.
Keywords: Radio Propaganda, War, McLuhan, The Medium is the Message, Anthony Doerr.

The twentieth century has witnessed astonishing leaps in technology that altered the very fabric of the world. With tremendous technological advancements, radical inventions and innovations in transport, communication, media and industry, the technological revolution made the possibilities limitless and fundamentally changed how people live their lives and perceive and experience the world. It is by no accident that the century that made the biggest strides in techno-scientific innovation was also the period of two cataclysmic events in human history. Science, technology, and warfare have always benefited from one another. While science revolutionised and drastically transformed the ways in which wars were fought, wars played catalysts in the rapid development of new tools, techniques, methods and technologies. Technological advancements, which were predominantly associated with the ideas of progress and enhancement of human lives, revealed themselves to be a double-edged sword capable of both ameliorating and endangering lives.

Since the end of World War II, literary narratives of war have explored the inextricable link between warfare and technology. A considerable number of literary texts delved into the war-technology dynamics, contemplating the ways in which technological inventions aided, assisted and transformed warfare. Anthony Doerr's 2014 novel, *All the Light We Cannot See*, is one such account that explores

technological interventions in war, especially in the conduct of strategies. This article examines how the mass medium of radio is deployed in wartime communication, especially as a propaganda tool, in Doerr's fictional narrative set against the historical backdrop of World War II. It will analyse the novel's representation of radio against the conceptions of the prominent media theorist Marshall McLuhan, his most controversial and oft-quoted dictum, 'the medium is the message' in particular, to study the impact the mediating condition of radio technology has on the message and its reception. This study will also use the literary representation of the technology of radio waves in the novel to examine the veracity of McLuhan's claims.

Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* is a historical fiction set in the background of World War II. The novel alternates between two timelines—the beginning and end of World War II—and between the perspectives of the novel's two teenage protagonists—Werner Pfennig, an orphan boy from Nazi Germany, and Marie-Laure LeBlanc, a blind girl living in Paris—and is occasionally told from the perspectives of Daniel LeBlanc, Marie-Laure's father, and Sergeant Major Reinhold Von Rumpel, a Nazi gemologist. The story follows Marie-Laure and Werner Pfennig and the starkly distinct journey they embark on while battling both internal and external conflicts. As the novel progresses and the war escalates, the lives of the two protagonists from opposite sides of the conflict intersect, briefly and unexpectedly, first through the airwaves and later physically amidst the Battle of Saint-Malo fought between Allies and German forces, weaving an intricate story that contemplates human relationships, fate and choices, and free will in the face of adversity.

Since time immemorial, manipulation of truth has been a technique persistently employed in political strifes for power. Political communication of all times has been rife with propaganda, misinformation and disinformation, which is why Hiram W. Johnson famously pointed out that "the first casualty when war comes is truth" (qtd. in Burton 2445). Words have proven to be as sinister a tool as weapons of mass destruction, capable of dividing and mobilising masses, of boosting morale and demoralising and powerful enough to precipitate a meteoric rise of a state, party, or group to power while eclipsing another overnight. The war of words became a disruptive force of unfathomable proportions during the World Wars of the twentieth century, more so during World War II, backed by the new technological advancements. While it is difficult to quantify the extent to which the war of words altered the course of wars and, thereby, the history, the impact it had on the war, on the masses and states involved and on the world, in general, is irrefutable. Propaganda was the subtle yet powerful weapon the National Socialist German Workers' Party, popularly known as Nazi Party, wielded to rise from a small political organisation to occupy the most powerful seat in Germany.

All the Light We Cannot See portrays how truths were bent and facts were twisted with the aid of technology during the Third Reich. The novel, which opens in 1934, presents, in its initial sections, pre-war France and Germany from the perspectives of six-year-old Marie-Laure and eight-year-old Werner, respectively. It is a broadcast Werner hears from a crude radio he salvaged from a trash pile that gives him the first inkling of the wind of change blowing across Germany, makes him aware of something changing, something arising before he notices it in the life around:

> We live in exciting times, says the radio. We make no complaints. We will plant our feet firmly in our earth, and no attack will move us….Is it any wonder, asks the radio, that courage, confidence, and optimism in growing measure fill the German people? Is not the flame of a new faith rising from this sacrificial readiness? Indeed it does seem to Werner, as the weeks go by, that something new is rising. (Doerr 38)

Mass media technology played a pivotal role in Nazi Germany's pre-war propaganda to facilitate conflict. One of the first moves Hitler made immediately after rising to power was to set up the Reich

Ministry of Public Enlightenment and Propaganda, which combined modern media, such as films and radio, with traditional print mediums and publications, such as posters, books and newspapers, to promote their ideology. Among the technological apparatus used to amplify the fascist Nazi propaganda, the radio played so crucial a role that Joseph Goebbels, the chief propagandist for the Nazi party, proclaimed, "It would not have been possible for us to take power or to use it in the ways we have without the radio" (Goebbels). Radio broadcasts embodying ideas of aggressive nationalism, which demands blind adherence and sacrifice on the part of citizens and glorified war, were used to persuade, manipulate and exploit the emotions of the masses. Werner's radio keeps on reiterating an alluring vision of Germany, of a new order and calls for the German public to join the effort. "We hope only to work, to work and work and work, to go to glorious work for the country" (Doerr 39), sings a children's radio choir programme. Radio in Nazi Germany also served to create a rhetoric that dehumanised and demonised Jews and all those who stood against the Nazi fascist agenda. The state-sponsored play broadcasted from Berlin that Werner and the other children in the Children's House tune in to and their collective response to it show how the broadcast media played into the fears and prejudices of the German public and how persuasive they were:

> Then a state-sponsored play out of Berlin begins: a story of invaders sneaking into a village at night. All twelve children sit riveted. In the play, the invaders pose as hook nosed department-store owners, crooked jewelers, dishonorable bankers; they sell glittering trash; they drive established village businessmen out of work. Soon they plot to murder German children in their beds. Eventually a vigilant and humble neighbor catches on. Police are called: big handsome-sounding policemen with splendid voices. They break down the doors. They drag the invaders away. A patriotic march plays. Everyone is happy again. (39)

While the encoded semantic content in propaganda machinery is of utmost importance, its potency, however, is not contingent upon the message alone. The means employed to relay persuasive communication to the target audience are equally important, if not more, in this art of manipulation.

Marshall McLuhan, the renowned Canadian literary critic, philosopher and media theorist, in his seminal work, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (1964), challenges the medium-message dichotomy. His ideas "mark a clear shift away from the mechanical focus of philosophies of technology in the first part of the twentieth century towards what could be termed more postmodern approaches to the question of the nature and effect of technology" (Goody 37). He claims that "the medium is the message" (7), for "the 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs" (8). The Third Reich radio cannot be separated from the message it carried as the electronic medium of propaganda embeds itself in the content, and Doerr's representation of Nazi radio seems to illustrate McLuhan's proposition.

While the plot of the novel unfolds itself through different perspectives, scattered over various timelines and places, the larger-than-life presence of radio remains constant throughout the fragmented narration. "Fizz of the static" (Doerr 33), "hums" (14) of the transceiver, blares and whispers of the broadcasts from radios of varied types, sizes and kinds permeate the pages from the start to the end, signifying an important factor that made radio the ideal propaganda tool, its accessibility. In the small mining village of Zollverein, where economic inequality is wide and stark, radio is not a prerogative of the rich and finds a place in Children's House, an overcrowded, dilapidated two-story orphanage where Werner and his sister grew up, as well as in the most extensive and opulent house of the colony, belonging to Rudolf Siedler, a Nazi official. This accessibility of the medium owes to the simplicity of its design, in Werners's words, "..capacitor, inductor, tuning coil, earpiece. One wire goes to ground, the other to sky" (38). The simplicity of the radio technology, in terms of both its hardware and software, was what allowed Joseph

Goebbels to commission and Otto Griessing, a German engineer, to design a series of low-cost, mass-producible German radios called *Volksempfanger*, roughly translated as 'people's receiver', to take fascist Nazi ideologies to German households (Marsh).

The Nazi leadership, cognizant of the persuasive potential of wireless, strategically exploited the medium not just through the dissemination of tailored content but also through censorship. In her letter to the Professor, Jutta, Werner's sister, talks about the new gigantic transmitter set up in Brandenburg, which "pushes basically everything off the dial" (Doerr 67) and reveals how tuning into foreign broadcasts is banned and qualifies as treason. When the Nazi regulation of broadcasting grows tighter, Werner destroys his priceless possession of hand-built shortwave radio out of fear for Jutta, who listens to the foreign illegal broadcasts of the ongoing war and later replaces it with a cheaper People's Receiver, which is described thus:

> . . . a People's Receiver for thirty-four marks eighty: a two-valve low-powered radio even cheaper than the state-sponsored Volksemfängers he has repaired in the houses of neighbors. Unmodified, its receiver can haul in only the big long-wave nationwide programs from Deutchlandsender. Nothing else. Nothing foreign." (123)

Censorship of mediums of communication, an age-old technique that fascist, totalitarian forces deployed to further their agenda, has always been a part of the propaganda machinery. However, the nature of the radio censorship in Nazi Germany and its manifestation in Doerr's novel, all in the light of McLuhan's maxim 'the medium is the message', demands a closer, more careful consideration. The mass-produced state-sponsored people's radio or *Volksempfanger* was characterised by its inability to capture shortwaves, which in effect, filtered out foreign broadcasts and everything that was not state-sanctioned. "Even the poorest pit houses", notices Werner, "usually possess a state-sponsored Volksemfänger VE301, a mass-produced radio stamped with an eagle and a swastika, incapable of shortwave, marked only for German frequencies" (63). The restriction here, thus, is not simply on the message transmitted but is also directed towards the medium of communication. The myopic understanding of the nature of the medium, McLuhan believes, is what renders the restrictive policies on mass media often ineffectual: "…misunderstanding of the nature of the medium rendered the restraining policies quite futile. Such has always been the case, most notoriously in government censorship of the press and of the movies" (333). It is also worth noting that in the case of Nazi radio, the restriction on the medium is double-fold for "the 'content' of any medium", as McLuhan states, " is always another medium" (333). In view of this concept of 'remediation', a forerunner of J. David Bolter and Richard A. Grusin's new media theory of Remediation, speech which constitutes the content of the medium of radio is yet another medium, as the spoken words carry the inner thoughts and feelings of the transmitter and thus involve a process of 'outering.'

At the centre of McLuhan's conception of the medium being the message is the idea that "all technologies are extensions of our physical and nervous systems to increase power and speed" (96), extensions of the human mind and body, of human faculties and capabilities. Radio, in this regard, is the extension of the human voice, and the Nazi political radio is a technological extension of the fascist ideological voice, an amplified voice that Old Frau Stesemann can "hear… in her tooth fillings" (Doerr 67). The novel *All the Light We Cannot See*, through a particular metaphorical description of radio and its enamoured listeners, clues us in on how pervasive and persuasive the technologically extended voice can be: "Radio: it ties a million ears to a single mouth. Out of loudspeakers all around Zollverein, the staccato voice of the Reich grows like some imperturbable tree; its subjects lean toward its branches as if toward the lips of God. And when God stops whispering, they become desperate for someone who can put things right"(63). The description further directs attention to the recipients of the propaganda messages and their experience of listening. The technology of radio involves the process of extending not just the oral mode of speaking but also the sense of hearing (Levinson 81).

The fundamental idea underlying Marshall McLuhan's dictum, 'the medium is the message', is that the recipient's perception and reception of the message are determined by the distinct experience entailed in the communication models of various mediums of mass communication. The degree of the recipient's participation in the technologically mediated communication, which relates to the general ontology of the mediums, forms a significant factor in determining the efficacy of the propaganda campaign. Based on the extent of the receiver's participation in communication, McLuhan categorises media into hot and cold, medium of high definition with low participation and medium of low definition with high participation, respectively (24) and identifies radios as hot media, for it " do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience" (Goody 64). In Zollverein, the Nazi-controlled radios endlessly emanate political messages about "glorious work" (Doerr 39), rising "new faith" (39), "purification" (63) and "sacrificial readiness"(39), to which Werner and the others in the Children's House are passive listeners. The elaborate narrative that the Third Reich radio weaves goes unchallenged, except for once when Jutta, who listens to the prohibited foreign broadcasts through the secret shortwave radio, reveals Germany as the aggressor bombing Paris.

The blind medium of radio, cutting across the spatial and temporal dimensions and carrying disembodied voices, has a mystical quality. It is this mysticism embedded in the medium that initially enraptured young Werner-"a mouth against a microphone in some faraway yet simultaneous evening - the sorcery of it holds him rapt" (38)-and that Marshall McLuhan was referring to when he described radio as a "tribal drum" (McLuhan 324). Kerstin Schmidt, in her essay, "Radio Voices: Reflections on McLuhan's Tribal Drum", reflects on McLuhan's brief yet significant chapter on radio and notes that his oddly specific metaphor for radio relates it to "ideas of magic and primitivism" (119). Schmidt further, explains:

> Crediting radio with a distinct 'magical power', McLuhan envisions the listeners as 'entranced to the tribal drum of radio that extended their central nervous system'...the radio voice fills vast spaces, but manages to create a most intimate, 'tribal' experience that is perfectly able to effect a person-to person communicative experience at the same time. (119)

Werner's radio receiver, in a short period of time, becomes a part of daily life in Children's House: "Every evening he carries his radio downstairs, and Frau Elena lets her wards listen for an hour. They tune in to newscasts, concerts, operas, national choirs, folk shows, a dozen children in a semicircle on the furniture, Frau Elena among them, hardly more substantial than a child herself" (Doerr 38). This reception of the transmitted content as a group is simultaneously a collective and a private experience, for the content mediated through radio also works on a personal level-engaging, invoking and extending the sense of the listeners in 'high definition'. On the private experience that the medium of radio affords, McLuhan remarks thus:

> Radio affects most people intimately, person-to-person, offering a world of unspoken communication between writer-speaker and the listener. That is the immediate aspect of radio: A private experience. The subliminal depths of radio are charged with the resonating echoes of tribal horns and antique drums. This is inherent in the very nature of this medium, with its power to turn the psyche and society into a single echo chamber. (327)

The medium of radio becomes all the more personal since "listening to the radio was an activity one did in the home (Levinson 88), which in turn offers a "personal, familial proximity" (87). The salvaged Viktoriastasse in the Children's House, the hand-built shortwave receiver Werner keeps in the attic dormer, the American Philco in Herr Seidler's opulent sitting room, the radio transmitter in Etienne's attic, which drives the plot of the novel, all occupy the domestic space. The personal, intimate experience that the medium of radio offers finds its most evident manifestation in Werner and his relationship with radios: "After prayers, after lights-out, Jutta sneaks up to her brother's

dormer … they lie hip to hip listening till midnight, till one, till two. They hear British news reports they cannot understand; they hear a Berlin woman pontificating about the proper makeup for a cocktail party" (Doerr 47). When the scratchy science broadcasts stream into the tiny attic dormer at night, unravelling the scientific mysteries of the world one after the other, Werner, who was always scientifically inclined, retreats into a private world of his own, where only he and the velvety voice of the Professor exist - "Time slows. The attic disappears. Jutta disappears. Has anyone ever spoken so intimately about the very things Werner is most curious about?" (48). The peculiarity of this medium of mass communication to simultaneously reach a wide substantial heterogeneous mass while also appealing to them, to an extent, on a personal level makes it an ideal means for the propagation of persuasive content, which is why the mass-produced, subsidised *Volksempfängers* that spoke Nazism found its way to households of ordinary, unsuspecting Germans.

For McLuhan, 'the medium is the message' because of the "change of scale or pace or pattern" (8) it brings into human affairs. The medium "shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action" (9). The notion of the medium being the message, thus, is constructed upon the premise of the social consequence the technology brings about by amplifying or accelerating the existing processes. Nazi radio propaganda, through its incessant emphasis on nationalism, sacrifice, ethnic purification and Aryan supremacy, facilitated the ideological integration of German citizens and fuelled anti-semitic sentiments to an unprecedented scale, which culminated in the Holocaust and World War II, the biggest genocide and the deadliest war in the human history. Doerr's fictional account of World War II, which begins in pre-war Germany, through the radio voices that pervade the narrative, presents the rising popularity of Hitler, the growing jingoism and antisemitism in the years leading up to the war, the outbreak and escalation of World War II, the desperate attempts to maintain an ideological chokehold on the public amid setbacks in the war through evasion and misinformation. While the novel does not make a direct correlation between the aired propaganda and the changing social behaviours and patterns, the radio voices and messages which progressively become sinister and aggressive in their tone, fervour and content in tandem with various developments during the course of the totalitarian Nazi regime, very distinctly illustrate the indelible link. The subtlety with which the novel approaches the role that the Nazi-controlled radio broadcasts played in the social developments that ensued, however, might not be accidental.

As much as a significant part radio transmissions were in the Nazi propaganda campaign, it would be erroneous to claim that Hitler's totalitarian party came to power because of it. As McLuhan points out, Hitler attained control not through radio "but almost despite it because at the time of his rise to power, radio was controlled by his enemies" (324). Radio in Nazi Germany accelerated Nazism which was already at work, and helped the Nazi regime consolidate its power. The airwaves did not conceive the antisemitism in Nazi Germany, rather they fuelled the existing antisemitic sentiments and prejudices. The radio, in the context of the Nazi state of Germany, thus was a technological extension that extended and amplified the oral mode of speech, which in turn was the medium for nonverbal stereotypic prejudiced thought processes.

While Anthony Doerr's representation of Nazi-controlled political radio in many ways affirms McLuhn's theory, which dismantles the form/content dichotomy, it also poses challenges to his ideas. McLuhan in his postulation, 'the medium is the message', not only prioritises the medium over the 'content' it carries but also deems the content as ineffectual and insignificant, having little to no societal impact as he believes that "the modelling of society's mindset would not happen through topics and opinions but through the structural conditions and the configurations of a certain media technology" (Breitsameter 132). While radio and public systems have helped the Nazist regime in Germany, Hitler's political existence, McLuhan claims, is not because " these media relayed his

thoughts effectively to the German people. His thoughts were of very little consequence" (327) for the "effects of radio are quite independent of its programming" and "the resonating dimension of radio is unheeded by the script writers, with few exceptions" (333).

The German state-sponsored broadcasts and Etienne's Science programme, both transmitted through the same medium, elicit diametrically opposite responses from Werner and Jutta. The Frenchman's radio programme that Wener stumbles upon inspires him to dream. It takes him beyond the coal-mining town of Zollverein to a world teeming with possibilities. He "feels as if he has been launched into a different existence, a secret place where great discoveries are possible, where an orphan from a coal town can solve some vital mystery hidden in the physical world" (Doerr 53). He finds "the air streaming with possibility" (49). The incessant pro-Nazi broadcasting, on the other hand, does not hold the same fascination for him. Werner finds the possibility of a better future not in the promises of glory or the world vision that the Third Reich Radio offers but in the scratchy French broadcast, which talks about coals, electromagnetism and lights. Though Werner does not challenge or actively ponder over the purported facts the Nazi-controlled radio disseminates, his almost indifference towards it deceives his scepticism. Jutta, who sneaks into her brother's attic room to listen to the Professor's late-night broadcast, who secretly listens to the illicit broadcasts, is entirely immune to the persuasive content that the German radio doles out and sees through them. The 'content' that McLuhan dismisses as inconsequential precipitates this disparity in reception.

McLuhan, accused of technological determinism for his invalidation of the content of the medium while crediting the medium for precipitating a social change, was critiqued by many, notable of whom was Raymond Williams. Williams rejects McLuhan's notion, 'the medium is the message' for it "renders human intentionality irrelevant" (Balka 74). Williams takes issue with McLuhan's theory for "reducing the effects of the social uses of technology which is designed, implemented, regulated and used in differing ways which have a multitude of impacts, to a simple technological essentialism that effectively ratifies the existing political system, as the crucial motor of social change is not human actions, but technological usage" (Taffel). The technology of radio, in *All the Light We Cannot See*, diminished neither Werner and Jutta's capacity for rational analysis nor their agency, despite their excessive exposure during the Nazi regime. Moreover, the novel's representation of the radio is not confined to its role in the dissemination of propaganda material during World War II. The elaborate radio system that Werner, enlisted into German service, uses to monitor and track down the resistance is a tool of surveillance. Werner's shortwave radio, which Jutta uses to listen to foreign broadcasts on the ongoing war, serves as a voice of contradiction and thus becomes a subversive medium in her hands. The centrality of radio in French resistance to Nazi occupation also finds its manifestation in Anthony Doerr's narrative. The resistance efforts of the Saint-Malouins under German occupation were organised around radios, which were used to broadcast Allied intelligence in coded messages. It is the radio waves that facilitate the convergence of the lives of protagonists separated by time and space and aid the novel's portrayal of human connection during the detrimental period of war. Marie-Laure's broadcast using Etienne's transmitter while sequestered in the attic, hiding from a Nazi official, is what propels Werner out of the hotel cellar he was trapped in to go to her rescue. The diverse ways in which airwave medium is put into use and the varied impact it has on the characters and social relationships and most importantly, on the social patterns, from the consolidation of the power of the totalitarian regime in Nazi Germany to the subversion of the existing political order in Saint-Malo, dispute the notion of technological essentialism, something with which McLuhan is often charged.

Medium, for McLuhan, was never neutral since "it does something to people. It takes hold of them, it rubs them up, it massages them, it bumps them around" (McLuhan). However, Raymond Williams accuses him of "technological neutrality" (Jones 435) implicit in his proclamation, 'the medium is the message', in his refusal to acknowledge the social and cultural dimensions embedded in the technologies that determine their usage and subsequent impact.

The idea that forms of mediation can be separated from their social production is problematic in light of the formulation 'the medium is the message' and especially so in the context of technologically mediated propaganda. It absolves human beings of the responsibility for the actions that their technological extension effected. The propagandistic ideas propagated through radio technology helped the Nazi consolidation of power, mobilisation of the German public, fuelled antisemitism and facilitated war, but to claim technology as the principal agency of cause for the social and cultural changes is to deny human agency and intervention and thus is a reductionist stance. Though the omnipresent radio in *All the Light We Cannot See* constitutes an integral part of the narrative, shaping and moulding human behaviour and facilitating significant social events, the novel does not subscribe to McLuhan's media determinism.

Although McLuhan was accused of technological determinism by many, there have also been voices in his defence. Differentiating between hard and soft technological determinism, Paul Levinson in his work, *The Soft Edge: A Natural History and Future of the Information* (2005), argues that McLuhan's provocative assertion though may come across as a hard determinism, is in fact a case of soft determinism:

> When McLuhan, for example, observes that "Had TV come first there would have been no Hitler at all", he is claiming that the substance and style of Hitler's message found essential support in the intensely personal but faceless mass delivery of radio—an intimacy between speaker and audience shattered in the more arm's-length, antiseptic images of television… it is hardly an insistence that radio alone or inevitably brought Hitler or the Nazis into being. McLuhan's critics often miss this. Obviously, Hitler was also the result of other factors and human choices.(4)

There have also been readings that completely absolve McLuhan of the charge of technological determinism on the grounds that McLuhan's concept of technology as the extension of human selves—body and mind—, which underlies his theories, resists its categorisation under technological determinism. McLuhan "makes the point that we shape our tools…that 'technology is an extension of man' - that it can be argued that he is not a technological determinist and that his work anticipated the social constructivist view of technology" (Balka 77).

Though McLuhan's unconventional ideas were met with lots of criticism, their revolutionary impact in the field of media studies cannot be denied. His insistence that 'the medium is the message' collapses the form/content dichotomy and has transformed the traditional perception of the nature and character of media, heralding a postmodern outlook on technology. The proliferation of technologies that extend the human body, mind and even consciousness, as McLuhan accurately predicted, in the contemporary digital age, has brought him back in vogue and makes him more relevant than ever. Placing the technological medium of radio at the centre of the Nazi propaganda campaign and the French Resistance during World War II, Anthony Doerr's novel, *All the Light We Cannot See*, affirms McLuhan's postulations while also poking holes into his argument. The role radio plays as a propagandistic medium in the course of the narration demonstrates McLuhan's assertion that the medium through which the message is conveyed determines how it is perceived. The novel's depiction of the Nazi political radio highlights the nature of the blind medium, which helped Nazi Germany create a rhetoric that mobilised hatred and war and actualised their fascist plans. It, thus, attests to McLuhan's claim that the medium is not an

indifferent carrier of the message but actively constitutes the message. At the same time, the novel, with its representation of the diverse impact of the airwave medium depending on the content mediated through it, renounces McLuhan's idea that the content has no bearing upon the effect, a technological determinist claim that renders human agency invalid. Doerr's novel, centred around World War II, thus, with its representation of the medium of radio, simultaneously subscribes to and rejects Marshall McLuhan's theory of media. Moreover, *All the Light We Cannot See*, unlike most fictional accounts of World Wars preoccupied with the dark and destructive side of technology, portrays the multifarious impact technology had in times of extreme crisis, contributes to the ongoing conversation on the relationship between technology and human agency in the Age of Technology, and thus stands apart.

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