
Re:Search

**On *Mr. Burns*,
A Post-Electric Play and a Western Understanding of the Human
Response to the Loss of Electricity**

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ABSTRACT

This essay is in part a "psychological" analysis and in part an experimentation on applying media studies to interpret a contemporary piece of literature, *Mr. Burns, A Post-Electric Play*, by Anne Washburn. This is because I find this play as a proposal in that it offers us one illustration of how humans may react to the sudden loss of electricity. I intend to analyze this reaction and offer a way to understand why humans may react to the sudden loss of electricity the way the characters in the play do. It is of course not the only way and I am aware of some of the problems that may arise in going with this interpretation. Yet I do want to demonstrate how far, given the space provided, such an interpretation may go. With that said, I propose that the play offers us how people may cope with the loss of electricity, suggesting that how they cope reflects a bias that media studies can explain.

KEYWORDS

Sarah Bay-Cheng, Ritual storytelling, Theatre guilds, Opera, Coping mechanisms, Bias, Television, Marshall McLuhan, Extension

Mr. Burns, A Post-Electric Play by Anne Washburn (first performed in 2012) concerns a world where, due to a vague nuclear incident, electricity and the technologies associated with it cease to operate. In Act I, after this incident, the characters in the play gather around a fire to talk about a television show they used to watch: *The Simpsons*. In Act II, seven years after this conversation, the same characters act out everything they used to watch on television, including *The Simpsons*, to make a living. In Act III, seventy-five years later, we are left with the performance of a play that centers around the Simpsons family during a nuclear incident without knowing which character, if any, wrote it. Overall, throughout the three acts, what we are witnessing is the human mind adapting to a sudden change, i.e., the loss of electricity in its environment. This essay, then, is an examination of the process by which the characters in *Mr. Burns* are trying to cope with the consequences of losing electricity.

According to Sarah Bay-Cheng, in her article, “Virtual Realisms: Dramatic Forays into the Future,” *Mr. Burns* “stages a future where the threat is not from too much technology, but too little. [Washburn] envisions a time without electricity as the return of theatre as the dominant form of mass media, ironically by remediating media of the past” (693). In other words, a world without television as its dominant form of mass media necessitates the emergence of another form of mass media to take its place: theatre. Theatre resolves the threat, or rather, the question of how to progress from a culture now made obsolete, where television was the dominant form of mass media. It is appropriate, then, that in *Mr. Burns*, the characters do not completely turn away from television, which would disregard the fact that we do not necessarily stop thinking about what we once relied on that easily. It is more likely that we would still think about it, with the real question being what do we then do with those thoughts. Thus, it follows that theatre does not neglect technology just because it has ceased functioning; rather, theater preserves technology. The play assumes that technology has played a significant part in people’s lives where television was a dominant form of mass media entertainment. It is in this sense that we understand the idea of theatre remediating media of the past, notably television’s most well-known content: *The Simpsons*. *The Simpsons* serves as the artifact of a society that once possessed a certain technology (Bay-Cheng 694). Out of all the artifacts a past society could be represented by, the characters in *Mr. Burns* go with *The Simpsons*, a form of mass media entertainment. As Bay-Cheng puts it, “*Mr Burns* imagines a world in which the largest source of

collective knowledge is an irreverent television show and the only form of media left is theatre” (695).

As for how she supports her claim that theatre becomes the dominant form of mass media, Bay-Cheng notes how each act of the play reflects a form of theatre. In Act I, the characters recall a Simpsons episode. During their conversation, they notice a stranger and react by pointing guns at him. However, they eventually calm down, tolerating his presence. After the fact that the stranger is not hostile is established, they act out “a sad shared ritual” in which each one announces “the names and ages of lost loved ones” from their notebooks with the hope that the stranger met some of them and could offer new information about them (Bay-Cheng 694). Following this ritual of “post-Internet, solemn social networking” is the “shared ritual of collective storytelling”, a cheerful activity, featuring the stranger performing a song that the Simpsons episode they recalled made a reference to (Bay-Cheng 694).

Seven years later, in Act II, the same characters form “theatre guilds,” practicing roles for commercials, songs, and the Simpson episode they talked about earlier (Bay-Cheng 695-97). Further, they compete with other guilds in recreating them. To enact television shows, they pay whoever can provide accurate knowledge about their content such as specific lines of the cartoon characters. Already we can notice a relationship between *The Simpsons* and theatre. Theatre is being used to preserve *The Simpsons*, as well as other things they used to enjoy on television. Bay-Cheng thinks that the purpose of this preservation is to relieve the characters from the harsh reality of living without electricity. This is supported in a quotation from Quincy, one of the characters, in which he explains why they refuse to let meaning, the most powerful reminder of their reality, be part of the entertainment they produce: “Things aren’t funny when they’re true they’re awful. Meaning is everywhere. We get *Meaning* for free, whether we like it or not. Meaningless Entertainment, on the other hand, is actually really hard” (Washburn 70). All their efforts are directed to producing a reality that has no reference to reality. It is a setting that only theatre can contrive, a setting where the only type of entertainment that exists is that which keeps their attention away from the harsh reality of their world (Bay-Cheng 697).

However, Bay-Cheng claims that Act III, set 75 years after the previous act, is absent of this need for relief. Act III presents us with only the performance of a play. Though theatre is still used to present *The Simpsons*, it presents the show as a meaningful “tragic high opera” in contrast with the literal reenactments of cartoon scenes in Act II (Bay-Cheng 697). Everything is

sung or rapped. The main characters of this *Simpsons* play—Homer, Marge, Bart, and Lisa—experience a nuclear incident and are forced to seek refuge within a boat. However, Mr. Burns appears, threatening to kill them. As the play goes on, Mr. Burns kills every family member except Bart, who, in turn, manages to stop him. Both Mr. Burns and Bart have lines that reflect their views of the world. When Bart is about to dump Mr. Burns into the river, the latter discourages the former from thinking he has in any sense won by stating, “God or fate, fortune or / any assortment of sentimental / somesuch” (Washburn 93). He assures Bart that he will continue to haunt him. As for Bart, after this haunting message, he remains optimistic: “I’m a boy who could be anything / And now I will do everything” (Washburn 94). Thus, Bay-Cheng’s conclusion reflects that the thespians and their audience no longer view theatre and *The Simpsons* as a source of relief from reality (697). This is partly because the television show has achieved literary status as a myth, reenacted repeatedly through theatre (Bay-Cheng 697). Thus, the purpose of reenacting *The Simpsons* as only an amusing television show they used to watch was to find relief from reality in Act II. According to Bay-Cheng, the purpose of reenacting it as a tragic opera is to demonstrate how humanity, through theatre, reconciles creatively with the fact that they have lost electricity permanently (698). The opera itself serves as a cultural artifact of this reconciliation, of a society that has recently lost electricity whereas as mentioned earlier, *The Simpsons* serves as a cultural artifact of a society where electricity existed. As for the phrase “through theatre,” I mean it in the most encompassing sense, since Bay-Cheng notes its presence throughout all the acts of *Mr Burns*. In Act I, theatre resided in ritual storytelling, or the casual, passive reenactments of past mass media entertainment – *The Simpsons* (Bay-Cheng 697). What I mean is that the characters were merely recalling the episode and repeating some of the lines to keep a conversation going. Bay-Cheng also notes that a stranger performed a song that the episode referenced to add on to the gaiety of the conversation (697). In Act II, the characters functioned as theatre guilds, where they strictly and literally reenacted past mass media entertainment. In addition, theatre guilds valued accurate knowledge of the original material to base their performances off of (Bay-Cheng 697). In Act III, we were left with an opera, a meaningful reenactment of past mass media entertainment (Bay-Cheng 697).

However, while Bay-Cheng characterizes ritual storytelling, theatre guilds, and opera as forms of theatre, I find them to be different ways of coping with the present situation. In other words, I find ritual storytelling, theatre guilds, and opera to be coping mechanisms. I also

consider the activity where the characters announce the names of their loved ones as a coping mechanism as well. If you recall, this was where Bay-Cheng found it reminiscent of social networking. This leads me to my first claim to illustrate what is the process by which these characters respond to the loss of electricity. My first claim, then, is that *Mr. Burns* proposes a future where humanity, through a series of coping mechanisms, attempt to leave behind one that is the most effective. The announcement of names, ritual storytelling, theatre guilds, and opera make up this series. They are all different types of activities designed for relief. How, then, does each act demonstrate a coping mechanism at work?

If you recall, Bay-Cheng pointed out how Act I was reminiscent of social networking and ritual storytelling. The former is a coping mechanism in that it is a way characters try to comfort themselves, given the permanent situation they are in, by finding more information about individuals important to them. This is the least effective coping mechanism because it emphasizes the need for relief the most. It relies too much on the desperate hope of learning something more about their lost loved ones by the most meager means – the mere chance that a stranger has met them and can tell more about them. It is liable, then, to too much disappointment. It is also the least effective because of the way this mechanism is carried out. It is done without any feeling, except for the feeling of having your hopes crushed. For instance, when one character, Jenny, asks the stranger, Gibson, if he heard anything about someone named Casey Martin, the latter says he has. However, it turns out to be someone else. As Jenny says, “Oh. Fuck. / Okay. / Okay, that’s not him . . . I haven’t talked to the guy in over a year, anyway, I don’t even know why he’s on my list. Um . . . / Do I have more?”; this is followed by the description: “*She might be near tears at this point*” (Washburn 27).

The second coping mechanism, ritual storytelling, is more effective. Ritual storytelling is a coping mechanism in that the characters find relief by having a nostalgic conversation. As noted before, each character tries to remember something from the same Simpsons episode they watched. When Gibson recalls a character’s line that others fail to remember, they respond with delight, enjoying his contribution. Matt says, “*Yes. Yes . . . (Laughter, thigh slapping) Yes*” (Washburn 37). When asked to try to recall the rest of the episode, Gibson confesses “I can’t I can’t I really wish I could” (Washburn 37). Thus, this coping mechanism has two problems. It is effective as far as they can keep remembering lines from a Simpsons episode and thus maintain the gaiety of their conversation. However, they cannot, needing others to provide more lines.

Secondly, the relief one can derive from recalling an episode and talking about it is limited because there is a desire to do something more with what they know.

These two problems necessitate a more effective coping mechanism – the theatre guilds in Act II. Functioning as a theatre guild, the same characters reenact commercials, popular songs, and Simpson scenes. They are preserving past mass media entertainment by imitating the content of television while paying anyone who can provide more content to imitate. In addition, this coping mechanism, the production of meaningless entertainment, provides relief from the reality they live in by substituting in place a reality where there is “[n]o motivation, no consequence. . . . Where else do we get to experience that, *nowhere*”(Washburn 70). This difference makes the mechanism superior to previous ones. It is better than the social networking mechanism because it draws attention away from a reality that operates by consequences, by the fact that a nuclear incident has deprived them of contact with their loved ones. It is better than the ritual storytelling mechanism because it lets the characters to not just merely recall past entertainment, but perpetuate it through imitating it. In other words, their impression of *The Simpsons* is made stronger through performance than through conversation. Yet, this mechanism cannot last, as the ending of Act II shows where armed gunmen suddenly assault the characters, putting an end to their reenactments. This reflects the need of an even more effective mechanism that is not liable to the hostility of other theatre guilds in competition with each other for bigger audiences.

This leads to Act III, where we reach the last and most effective coping mechanism—a tragic opera about *The Simpsons* that anyone could act out (and thus not something exclusive to one guild), but more importantly, a mechanism that causes the thespians and their audience to forget their need for relief. Though this opera draws from the content of the previous two acts, it does not draw from it literally. For example, in Act I, the character Maria narrates how one person dies from radiation in their attempt to restore power: “And he’s thinking, all I want is to get around that curve up there . . . Feets, just carry me that far. Feets don’t fail me now” (Washburn 35). In the opera of Act III, Nelson from *The Simpsons* is given the line: “Feets don’t fail me feets don’t fail me . . .” (Washburn 76). A catchy line is then developed from a sad narration. In Act II, the characters enact a commercial where one of the lines is “Delicious. Rejuvenating. I feel like a Brand New Woman” (Washburn 52). In the opera of Act III, where one of the main roles is Homer, one of his lines is the optimistic phrase “I’m a brand new man” (Washburn 78). The line of a commercial becomes a line of hubris. Thus, Act III makes

figurative use of the content of Act I and Act II, and of the knowledge and performances of the characters in those acts. By figurative, I mean that Act III uses past experiences as material to base off for their opera.

To contrast, in Act II, the reality created by faithfully imitating past entertainment did not work because it was liable to the hostility of competition. What I mean is that any guild can reenact past entertainment using their own memories or relying on another's. In addition, since past entertainment was valued for its nostalgic relief, multiple guilds were set up to profit from that relief. However, an opera that figuratively presents *The Simpsons* is not bound by this necessity to be faithful to the original material. Consequently, this renders the value of imitating the content of television useless. The opera still provides relief however, but in a literary sense, like Aristotle's concept of the tragedy purging away an audience's emotions. Rather than providing the type of relief felt by performances directly reminiscent of television, the opera provides the type of relief felt when a play skillfully operates on the audience's emotional involvement with the plot and its characters. The audience that feels this relief forgets the need for the former type of relief. By having the audience invest their need for relief in their emotional involvement with the play, it sets aside their need to be relieved any further, specifically the need for relief through theatre guilds. This is how the opera works as a coping mechanism.

To reiterate, each act of *Mr. Burns* shows a coping mechanism at work, and each one is characterized by a need for relief. In Act I was the social networking mechanism and the ritual storytelling mechanism. The former sought relief in learning more about loved ones. The latter sought relief in recalling more about *The Simpsons*. In Act II was the theatre guild mechanism, which sought relief in recalling more about *The Simpsons* as well as other past entertainment and reenacting them truthfully. In Act III was the final coping mechanism that sought relief in reenacting *The Simpsons* and the past experiences of the characters themselves figuratively. This mechanism is the most effective as it is the only one in use after Act II, or after seventy-five years. Having answered the question in what way each act demonstrates coping mechanisms at work, the next question that will prompt us further in our search is: Do any of these coping mechanisms operate by some principle or bias that reveals more about the process by which the characters respond to the loss of electricity?

Going in order then, the social networking mechanism does not operate by anything that will tell us more about the process. There is nothing further to explain about the desire to know

about what has happened to your loved ones after a nuclear incident. It is for this reason that this coping mechanism is the most natural in that it does not operate by something hidden. What, then, do the other three mechanisms operate by? This leads to my second claim about the next two coping mechanisms in the following sentences. The collective storytelling mechanism and the theatre guild mechanism operate by a hidden bias. Both mechanisms reflect how much the characters throughout Act I and Act II unwittingly rely on television as their main perception (in other words, television is the bias) of others and of theatre, despite that television is no longer available. To be more precise, television influences how they derive relief from others and from other media. This claim partly derives from Neil Postman, a writer on media studies, who, in his *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, explores the idea of television affecting the way we perceive everything. He explains that television instills subtly within us the false idea that entertainment is how everything - all experience and subject matter - should be represented (Postman, 87). It instills within us the false idea that it is natural to assume that all experience and subject matter should be, in some way or another, entertaining (Postman 87). We take “how television stages the world” to be “the model for how the world is properly to be staged” (Postman 92). What I am doing here is deriving from Postman’s idea that television makes entertainment the representation of everything, including relief. Thus, the characters derive relief from others and from other media only if they are entertained. This constitutes a bias as it will be seen in the ritual storytelling mechanism and the theatre guild mechanism.

As it was mentioned earlier, the bias is present in the ritual storytelling mechanism. It is present through the characters that seek relief not only in recalling more about a Simpsons episode, but also those who do recall more about it. In Act I, a group of characters talking about a Simpsons episode they watched discovers a stranger nearby named Gibson. Despite initial caution, they allow Gibson to participate in their conversation. At some point, the conversation stops because the group reflects upon the eerie subject of a man who died near a nuclear reactor, having failed to restore power in time after the nuclear incident. The silence continues until—“(Creepy voice.) O I’ll stay away alright. I’ll stay away. . . forever,” at which point Gibson is threatened by guns (Washburn 36). However, he prudently assures the group, explaining that what he just said was the very line they were trying to recall earlier in their conversation about a Simpsons episode. At this point, relief takes over and laughter ensues: Gibson is alright. The voice and the italicization of “forever” is still sinister, but it’s presented in a humorous light.

Furthermore, Gibson's expression of this line is ambiguous. To the tense campfire group, already occupied by macabre thoughts, it seemed a provocative threat. To the reader familiar with the show, it was an untimely attempt to lighten the mood, but to the manipulative, it was a moment's insight and a wasted opportunity on Gibson's part. The one who is familiar with the entertainment others relate to is the one who gains the trust expressed in relieved laughter. My claim that television influences how characters derive their relief from others is demonstrated in Gibson's line. It is when the understanding of his words as a threat suddenly changes to a joke. It is as if there were no further tests to determine Gibson's authenticity and amenability to the group, the only apparent test having been whether he had sufficient knowledge of a television show. To reiterate, because the group seeks relief in the recollection of a Simpsons episode, this implies in seeking relief from those who can recall it. Those who can recall entertain the listeners and gain their trust. This is implicit in the group's change in perception of Gibson's line from threat to joke.

The bias is also present in the theatre guild mechanism, where television influences how characters derive relief from other media – namely, theatre. They derive relief from theatre by living out the content of television as it were. This is demonstrated in Act II, where the characters act out the content of television, attempting to create a reality that is musical through performing chart hits such as, “I'm wet with the rain / I'm all drenched with tears” (Washburn 67); a reality that “is *welcoming*” through commercials (Washburn 53); and a reality that is meaningless through cartoons (Washburn 70). The reality these characters are recreating is the reality presented by television, with theatre being the only means. Furthermore, they justify their efforts to create this reality. For instance, when one character, Maria, desires to go further than imitating television, believing “[they] have an opportunity here to provide . . . *meaning*” (Washburn 70). Another character, Quincy, responds: “Things aren't funny when they're true they're awful. Meaning is everywhere. We get *Meaning* for free, whether we like it or not. Meaningless Entertainment, on the other hand, is actually really hard” (Washburn 70). Thus television influences their understanding of the relationship between meaning and theatre, how the latter must be in service of preserving past entertainment at the expense of the former.

So far, we have progressed from the first claim that the human response to the loss of electricity was a series of coping mechanisms, each one more effective than the last. Upon further examination, there was a bias running throughout the ritual storytelling mechanism and

the theatre guild mechanism. Both mechanisms demonstrated the influence of television at work. There remains then the last mechanism to search a bias for – the opera mechanism in Act III. However, the bias that runs through this mechanism comes from a source other than television. I mentioned earlier that the opera mechanism produces a different type of relief. I will be proposing then that this is attributed to a different bias. The bias that produces the relief achieved by the opera mechanism is different from the bias that produces the relief achieved by the last two. Marshall McLuhan, another thinker of media studies, described this bias in his *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*.

McLuhan theorized that “[a]ny invention or technology is an extension or self-amputation of our physical bodies” (54). By extension, he meant in the sense that all what we could not do originally, we did later with what we made (McLuhan 52). Each invention functioned far better than what our corresponding body part took much effort in engaging in (McLuhan 52). To offer a quick example, McLuhan analyzed the wheel as an extension of the foot (52). Besides using examples like this, he entrenched his theory of technologies being extensions of ourselves by bringing up self-amputation as an analogy (McLuhan 52). When the body suffers from irritation but fails to determine where this is caused or granted that it does determine where but cannot avoid it, the body resolves this issue by amputating a part of itself (McLuhan 52). More precisely, he says that when the central nervous system is under stress, it resolves this stress by separating itself from “the offending organ, sense, or function” (McLuhan 52). Through this separation arises the concept of the extension of the body (McLuhan 52). Returning to the wheel example, the need to keep up with the expansion of trade stressed the incapability of the feet to travel more and transport more goods (McLuhan 52). The foot was the offending body part (McLuhan 52). To meet this need, the foot was amputated (McLuhan 52). This is to really say that at some point, humans projected their stress - about their feet unable to meet the necessity - unto material, inventing the wheel (52). The wheel was a version of the foot, “the feet in rotation” (McLuhan 52). In turn, the wheel, though alleviating the stress, emphasized its own role as a substitute for the feet (McLuhan 52). Adopting the wheel, or any other invention comes at a cost (McLuhan 52). To bear the intensity an invention brings to human activity, the nervous system becomes numb (McLuhan 52). By numb, it is meant that the nervous system prevents itself from recognizing the wheel as an extension of the body part it enclosed against (McLuhan 52). In other words, whenever one invents something, he is only able to think

of how his invention will affect people practically (McLuhan 52). However, he does not foresee the larger picture of his invention (McLuhan 52). He is sensitive to its practical effects, but numb to its perceptual effects (McLuhan 52). This numbness is the bias I refer to in the opera-mechanism. To clarify something, the nervous system and one's understanding of an invention are the same. I merely wanted to show the progress of this analogy until reaching what it ultimately means to us.

An illustration McLuhan employs to clarify the idea of the nervous system being numb to an impactful invention is the audiocassette (53-54). The patient wears headphones and operates the audiocassette by increasing the volume (McLuhan 53-54). When the volume is high enough, the noise prevents the patient from feeling pain when the dentist uses his drill (McLuhan 53-54). By overstimulating one body part, the ear, the patient becomes numb to pain (McLuhan 53-54). Borrowing this analogy, McLuhan claims that the invention overstimulates by revolutionizing the ways people used to operate, rendering them insensitive to how it drills into us its own perception of the world (53-54). Numbness also ties into a more startling point when McLuhan interprets ancient texts to illustrate further about this bias. The first is the myth of Narcissus where he is so enamored by his aquatic reflection, thinking it to be someone else, that he neglects to do anything else, - even keeping his body alive and thus dies, fixated (McLuhan 51). Narcissus becomes numb, dulled to be a passive observer of an "extension of himself by mirror" (McLuhan 51). The takeaway from this is that "men at once become fascinated by any extension of themselves in any material other than themselves" (McLuhan 51). In the myth, his body was extended in water and Narcissus, in complete, ignorance was in rapture of it. Had he been deprived of water, it would be no exaggeration to say that he would not have yearned for it because it was necessary for his body, but that it was a pleasurable extension of it. The other ancient text McLuhan refers to is Psalm 119: "Their idols are silver and gold, / The work of men's hands. . . . They that make them shall be like unto them; / Yea, every one that trusteth in them" (54-55). The idol, just as Narcissus's reflection, is an extension of humans themselves in material other than themselves (55). McLuhan gleans from this that "the Psalmist insists that the beholding of idols, or the use of technology, conforms men to them," that humans come to worship extensions of themselves and embody those extensions (55). The takeaway from this text is that we cannot effectively use them unless we suspend our will, otherwise our will interferes with their use (McLuhan 55). It is difficult, then, to be detached from the media we use

since we first make ourselves passive agents (McLuhan 55). Media is not meant to suit us; we are meant to suit it.

As to how this relates to my third claim, what I want to apply from McLuhan's thoughts is the general idea that what we produce corresponds to a desire within us. A desire can be frustrated by our inability to fulfill it, becoming a source of stress. However, with access to outside materials, we can fulfill our desire by producing something. This comes at a cost—ignorance. We become ignorant of our product's real functions as a mirror and idol. My third claim, then, is that the opera-mechanism operates the same way as this product. In McLuhan's example of the wheel, people felt compelled to keep up with the increasing demands of trade, such as more travel and more goods. In *Mr. Burns* the characters are compelled to meet the demands of their environment: living without electricity. In McLuhan's example, the foot was the source of stress, the offending organ, the frustrating reminder of their own limits. They externalized this stress unto material, producing the wheel.

In *Mr. Burns*, their stress derives from the desire to find relief in meaning which both the ritual storytelling mechanism and the theatre guild mechanism cannot provide. Both of these mechanisms ultimately stem from the desire to find relief in meaningless entertainment. Thus, the desire for relief in meaning was necessitated by a reliance on meaningless entertainment as their main source of relief, producing stress. Drawing from the first claim, the characters go through multiple ways of coping with their situation. This continues until they touch upon the one coping mechanism that succeeds in fulfilling this desire by externalizing their stress unto theatre, the product being the opera. Drawing from the second claim, the coping mechanisms all operate on some bias. Ritual storytelling reflects the bias of television pervading the characters' perceptions of others. Theatre guilds reflect the bias of television pervading their perceptions of theatre. The opera reflects the bias of an inventor that pervades his perception of his own creation. The effect of this bias is that the characters, whether the characters from the first two acts or the thespians and the audience of the last, do not realize that the opera is an extension of themselves. They do not realize that they externalized their stress through non-electric means: the opera. The opera then functions like the aquatic mirror for Narcissus, preventing the characters from perceiving the opera as the externalization of this stress. Lastly, the opera serves as an idol, a reality where wills are fully suspended. The thespians must continually perform it, like an idol's priests, because of its effectiveness as a coping mechanism as passive agents, or

roles in the play. The audience are also passive agents in that they behold the idol—the performance of the opera. In summary, I attribute the human response to the sudden loss of electricity, as presented by *Mr. Burns*, to coping mechanisms that operate by the hidden biases of technology, whether it be the technology of the past or the technology that one invents.

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