

Marshall McLuhan

The Medium is the Message

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1911-1980

- McLuhan was a Canadian academic, a literary scholar whose studies of the effects of advertising and of print media blossomed into a new discipline of media studies
- Far from being an ardent technophile, his attitude toward technology was decidedly ambivalent!
- McLuhan's insights into the effects of media on our culture—and ourselves!—grow more useful every year

What Is A Medium?

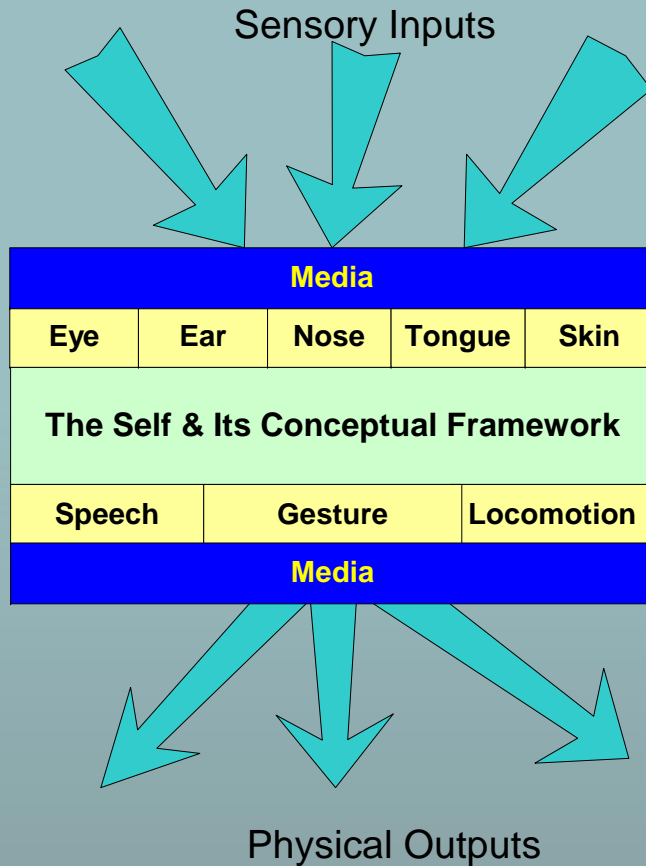
- According to McLuhan, *media* are the extensions of our senses, our bodies, and our minds
- As the caddisfly larva manufactures its “shell” of stones, the bird its nest, the spider its web, *Homo sapiens* manufactures media to protect him/herself from the world
- There is a price, however—media also deprive us of direct experience of the world!



The Mediation Of Experience

- McLuhan believed that media form the all-important *ground* against which all our perceptions and actions are *figure*
- Because they “mediate” all human experience, media play a vital role in determining the conceptual framework of a society or culture
- Only recently have media begun to change at a rate fast enough to be detected by those experiencing their effects!

Media And The Self



As carriers of information, media magnify, filter, and distort inputs to all our senses

A McLuhanesque View Of The Self

Media strengthen, refine, and distort our outputs

The Medium is the Message

Massage or Message?

The title of McLuhan's book was the result of a typesetting error.

The book title was intended to read *The Medium is the Message*.

It was typeset as "The Medium is the Massage."

McLuhan's response when he saw the error: "Leave it alone! It's right, and right on target!"

You can interpret the title as:

- Message
- Mess Age
- Massage
- Mass Age

Source:

McLuhan, E. (n.d.) FAQs – Marshall McLuhan [WWW] Available from: <http://www.marshallmcluhan.com/faqs.html> [Accessed 10/13/2010].



The Medium is the Message

- The content of the media was not as important as the effect that the medium itself had on human minds and culture
- The social change that is brought about by the medium is the message.
- The message is never the content because the content is always the old medium.

What Message?

“Each medium, independent of the content it mediates, has its own intrinsic effects which are its unique message.” – Eric McLuhan

Media are separate languages with distinct grammar and structure to their form.

What is the message of a medium?

- Change of scale
- Change of pace
- Change of pattern

It is the medium that “shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action.” - M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 1964.

Source:

McLuhan, E. (n.d.) FAQs – Marshall McLuhan [WWW] Available from: <http://www.marshallmcluhan.com/faqs.html> [Accessed 10/13/2010].

An Example: The Impact of the Printing Press

- Literacy
- Made information available to the masses
- Schools started
- Regional dialects became standardized
- Latin replaced by national languages
- The Age of Reason and the Renaissance
- Destroyed Feudal Power System and led to Democracy

Trains

Example from McLuhan's *Understanding Media* (1964):

Trains did not:

- Introduce travel
- Introduce the wheel
- Introduce transportation
- Introduce the road

They did accelerate the pace and change the distance over which these things operated.

They created new kinds of work and restructured cities.

They did this regardless of what freight they were carrying.

Love

Imagine you are approached by four women. Each tells you, in an equally genuine and sincere tone of voice:

“I love you.”

One woman is your mother.

One woman is your ex-girlfriend.

One woman is the woman you love.

One woman is a stranger.

Do you, the receiver, receive and interpret the content of the message in the same way from each of the three senders? Or is the medium part of the message?