

COM 242

Chapter 12 Marshall McLuhan: A Less Scientific Approach To Media Impact

TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 1963

The New York Times

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Media Guru McLuhan Takes On Criticism At Academic Forum

By WILLIAM K. STEVENS

CAMBRIDGE, Mass., Feb. 9 (AP) — The crowd works of

skill. Charles Darwin's

of English college students

of a special atmosphere, and

with its special sense to dis-

shared on an MP's sensation

of 1962, though the in-
tentionally took the in-
tentionally took the in-

intentionally took the in-



American students crowded Galagano in 20-foot bank owned by island resident. In background is James Island.

French-British meeting, the

the students found out 20

high, from their own "The

party" with guests.

On the afternoon of Feb. 9,

the students found out 20

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Members of expedition showing film on Corvo in La Comuna (Chileno) in Chilean coastal range between Santiago and Valparaiso. From left: Werner Brandt and Flynn Dorewan, professional cameramen; and C. Fritz Lindberg, Joseph A. Feste and Robert Fyffe, three of the students.



Marshall McLuhan
Quentin Fiore



Lead issues from Galagano, one of the students in background. Sketch of Charles Darwin done four years



Sketch of Charles Darwin done four years

An Inventory

of Effects

The students found out 20

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On the afternoon of Feb. 9,

highly specialized as to form

and function and the closely

related Darwin 1937 from in-

land to island.

Before the species were

Continued on Page 38, Column 6

Criticism 1: Lack of Scientific Proof

"Where are the scientific evidence to support your theories?"

- No data collected, no content analysis, surveys or experiments to test ideas
- Simply proclaim about the effects of mass media
 - ◇ unfalsifiable (provides a great contrast to scientific thinking)

McLuhan's Rebuttal

- Sees himself as a prober, an explorer
- Producing scientific knowledge was never his intention; preferred the luxury in thinking without clear-cut proofs

(Sparks, pg. 226)

- A literary scholar without training in empirical methods
- Expressed strong interest in human psychology
- His work was invariably grounded in a humanistic scholarly tradition

Criticism 2: Inconsistent & Vague

"Why are you inconsistent with your vague slogans?"

- Change of ' *The Medium is The Message*' ◇ ' *The Medium is The Massage*'
- Showed his own lack of clarity; made McLuhan seemed unsure of himself
- Academic world needs more depth and explanations for the slogans/ aphorisms which are just verbal missiles to keep pace with change

*(Empire & Communication, Vol. 28[4]: 509
Michael MacDonald, 2006)*

McLuhan's Rebuttal

- Any approach to environmental problems must be flexible and adaptable
- Considers himself a generalist, not specialist
- Only by standing aside from any phenomenon and taking an overview, can you discover its operative principles

*(<http://www.vcsun.org/~battias/class/454/txt/mclpb.htm>
The Playboy Interview, March 1964)*

Criticism 3: Global Village A Myth?

"How relevant is tribal age to global village?"

- It was a chaotic environment during the tribal age as men were not civilized
- Global village only marks the triumph of capitalism that shatters the 'unity of the world' unlike McLuhan's ideal of humanity's unifying network of communications

(Guy Debord cited in
Empire & Communication, Vol. 28[4]: 505
Michael MacDonald, 2006)

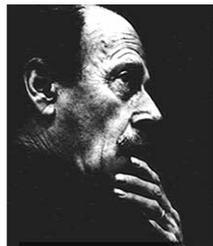
McLuhan's Rebuttal

- Our whole cultural habitat is being transformed by media into living organism
- A tribe is not necessarily conformist just because it is inclusive
- Global village makes maximum disagreement and creative dialog inevitable
- Uniformity and tranquility are not hallmarks of the global village

(<http://www.vcsun.org/~battias/class/454/txt/mclpb.htm>
The Playboy Interview, March 1964)

Break

(10 minutes)



Marshall McLuhan
1911-1980

enter the medium

Source URL: <http://www.marshallmcluhan.com/>

Visionary, Prober,
Social Psychologist

in other terms **Complicated**

"All media are extensions of some human faculty – psychic or physical."

(The Medium is The Message, McLuhan, pg. 26)

MARSHALL WHO?

Herbert Marshall McLuhan

- Canadian scholar, born in Edmonton 1911
- B.A & M.A in Uni of Manitoba, Cambridge University
- Coined the term '*media*'
- Wrote books that propelled to limelight

(Sparks, pg. 227)

The Eras of Human Communication

The Tribal Age → The Print Age → The Electronic Age

- Oral communication
- No well-developed alphabet or system of writing
- Strong reliance on acoustic or sounds
- State of '*all-at-once*'ness
- Sensory balance: 5 senses were important sources of information
(Sparks, pgs. 227-228)

- Emergence of phonetics and invention of printing press
- Sense of sight became predominant
- Linear information processing
- Alter our basic thought patterns
- More emphasis on deductive logic
(Sparks, pgs. 228-229)

- Living on the cusp of two great communication technologies - print and electronic
 - Return to the tribal age's form of communication
 - The experience of the '*global village*'
- "The medium is the message"
(Sparks, pgs. 229-230)

The Medium is The Message

Understanding "McLuhanisms"

- A "message" is "*the change of scale or pace or pattern*" that a new invention or innovation "*introduces into human affairs*"
(The Medium is The Message, McLuhan, pg. 8)
- Most people think of content as agents of change
- What really changed people was the medium
- All media are extensions of people
(Sparks, pgs. 231-232)
- If we discover that new medium brings along effects that might be detrimental to our society or culture, we have the opportunity to influence the development and evolution of the new innovation before the effects becomes pervasive

(http://individual.utoronto.ca/markfederman/article_mediumisthemessage.htm
Federman, para. 10)

"Societies have always been shaped more by the nature of the media with which people communicate than by the content of the communication"

(cited in Sparks, pg. 232)

The Medium is The Massage

- Title of his book was a mistake
- Had '*Massage*' on the cover when it came back from the typesetter's
- Supposed to have read '*The Medium is the Message*'
- When he saw the typo he exclaimed, "*Leave it alone! It's great, and right on target!*"
- 4 possible readings for the last word of the title: '*Message*' and '*Mess Age*', '*Massage*' and '*Mass Age*'
(<http://www.marshallmcluhan.com/faqs.html>
Eric McLuhan)
- Likened media to chiropractic



Hot & Cool Media - War

- **Cool Media:** High levels of participation & involvement
Includes television
- **Hot Media:** High information definition & did not involve the message recipient
Includes radio, newspapers and film
- After the Vietnam War was '*televised*', Americans found a television war most unpleasant
- War does not play well on TV (i.e. Iraq War & Bush)
- Portrayals of violent event on TV is very involving

(Sparks, pgs. 235-236)

Hot & Cool Media - Politics

John Kennedy VS Richard Nixon

(a McLuhan Comparison, 1960 Presidential Campaign)

- Kennedy as the '*cool*' speaker:
Low definition qualities that had viewers filling in the gaps to his personal identification
- Nixon as the '*hot*' speaker:
High definition, had a sharply defined image and action that made him appear phony

(<http://www.vcsun.org/~battias/class/454/txt/mclpb.htm>
The Playboy Interview, March 1964)

Influence today

- Bill Clinton '*cooler*' than George H.W. Bush in 1992 campaign
- George Bush '*hotter*' than John Kerry in 2004 campaign

(Sparks, pgs. 236-238)

Not Scientific

McLuhan is prophetic on some issues but hopelessly naive on others



Richard Nixon = Hot Media

John Kennedy = Cool Media





What's drugs got to do with it?

- McLuhan spoke of the metaphor for getting high on drugs as being '*turned on*'
(Sparks, pg. 239)
- This was said to be similar to TV viewing:
 - i) The experience is unlike a drug user's when he is tripping
 - ii) The experience removes one from reality to the realm of fantasy
- Viewers can be addicted to TV just like the drug user is addicted to substance

Education in Electronic Age

- 2 different generations: **Electronic** vs. **Print**
- **Print**: Linear way of processing information
 - Information level **inside** classroom is **higher** than outside
 - In other words, children went to school to get information through literary works that they could not find anywhere else
- **Electronic**: Sensory balance (more visual; similar to the tribal age)
 - Information level **outside** classroom is **higher** than inside
 - Because of television, children are more informed even before they enter school
 - Going to school is an *interruption* of their education

(Sparks, pgs. 233 - 234)

Education in Electronic Age

- Predicted music to thrive in electronic age
- Participants gain information that is richer because the electronic age experience encompasses all human senses
- McLuhan believed education would be successful only to the extent that it is adapted to new electronic forums
 - E.g.: The purpose of academic blogs for COM125
- Predicted turmoil and struggle as 2 great communication technologies clashed in this century
 - Could explain the drop in SAT scores

(Sparks, pgs. 233 - 234)

McLuhan's Influence Today

- "*Technological Determinism*" :
the medium, not the message determine changes in human behavior
- Now that our world has undergone a dramatic shift into an age of technological innovation, a new generation is turning to McLuhan as they explore the impact of new media:
 - Scholars like **Neil Postman** and **Joshua Meyrowitz** not only supported his ideas, but their works on media effects were extensions from McLuhan's

(Sparks, pg. 239)

McLuhan Our Nostradamus?

- McLuhan understood the relevance & prevalence of mass media on contemporary culture
- He foretold developments with almost prophetic accuracy simply because he watched, listened and questioned what was going on around him:
 - In 1960, he told top executives of IBM that people would have computers in their homes in the New Info Age, but was scoffed at as nobody could possibly have a house big enough to hold a computer
 - In 1965, McLuhan said that one day people would be able to watch movies in their own homes by putting '*something like a paperback*' into their television; blockbuster opened its doors in 1985

(Source:
<http://www.mcluhanfestival.com/default.asp?path=mcluhan&load=bio>)

" The Message is the Medium is the Massage "

Presented by:

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