



Universidad
Carlos III de Madrid



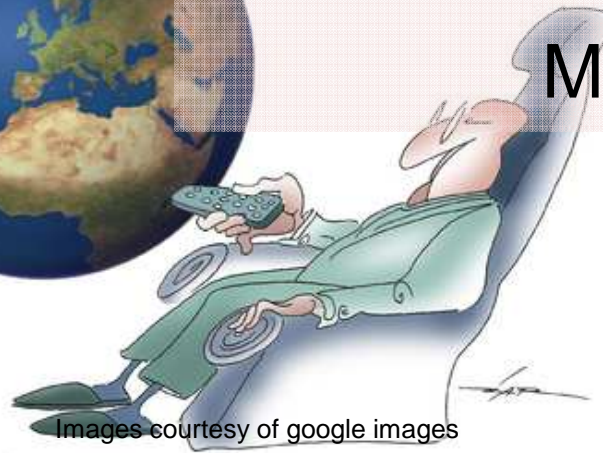
**Many stories.
One world.**

Week 8

Prosthesis

The Medium is the Message

Marshall McLuhan



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María Luengo 2013



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Menu

- Introduction

 - McLuhan: *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*

- Context

- Authors and Texts

- Assumptions

- Concepts

- Arguments about media, effects,
audience

- Critique

• **Prosthesis...**

Definition according to the Oxford dictionary...

- 1) an artificial body part, such as a limb, a heart, or a breast implant
- 2) *Linguistics* the addition of a letter or syllable at the beginning of a word, as in Spanish *escuela* derived from Latin *scola*.

is imploding. During the mechanical ages we had extended our bodies in space. Today, after more than a century of electric technology, we have extended our central nervous system itself in a global embrace, abolishing both space and time as far as our planet is concerned. Rapidly, we approach the final phase of the extensions of man—the technological simulation of consciousness, when the creative process of knowing will be collectively and cor-


• **Prosthesis...**

porately extended to the whole of human society, much as we have already extended our senses and our nerves by the various media. Whether the extension of consciousness, so long sought by advertisers for specific products, will be “a good thing” is a question that admits of a wide solution. There is little possibility of answering such questions about the extensions of man without considering all of them together. Any extension, whether of skin, hand, or foot, affects the whole psychic and social complex.

- ✓ McLuhan makes the history of the mass media central to the history of civilization at large
- ✓ Tech, crucial determinant of the social fabric
- ✓ The role of mass media in social change

- **In contrast to some previous theories**

Some of the principal extensions, together with some of their psychic and social consequences, are studied in this book. Just how little consideration has been given to such matters in the past can be gathered from the consternation of one of the editors of this book. He noted in dismay that “seventy-five per cent of



In a culture like ours, long accustomed to splitting and dividing all things as a means of control, it is sometimes a bit of a shock to be reminded that, in operational and practical fact, the medium is the message.

Lasswell (?)

- **In contrast to some previous theories**

20/Understanding Media

alism in the sixteenth century. Program and “content” analysis offer no clues to the magic of these media or to their subliminal charge.

Leonard Doob, in his report *Communication in Africa*, tells of one African who took great pains to listen each evening



Media **technology** apart from content

McLuhan: “The electric light is pure information.
It is a medium without a message”

Example

For McLuhan, what would be the “message”
of this BBC report on the Eurozone crisis?

Questions

- How do you see **media technologies shaping our lives**, apart from particular content?
- **What does being part of a global village mean to you?** Are we part of one? Is it a positive or negative outcome?

Context

1960 = 1990

- MTV / Satellite Television
- Political Images
- Internet



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Harold Adams Innis



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- 1894 - 1952
- A Canadian economist and historian
- Two major works:
 - *The Bias of Communication Empire*
 - *Communications*

- ✓ Social change is linked to the transformation in the media of communication on which a civilization has been progressively depending
- ✓ The answer to the question of the source of social change was to be found in technological innovation

Authors

Marshall McLuhan (1911-1980)

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



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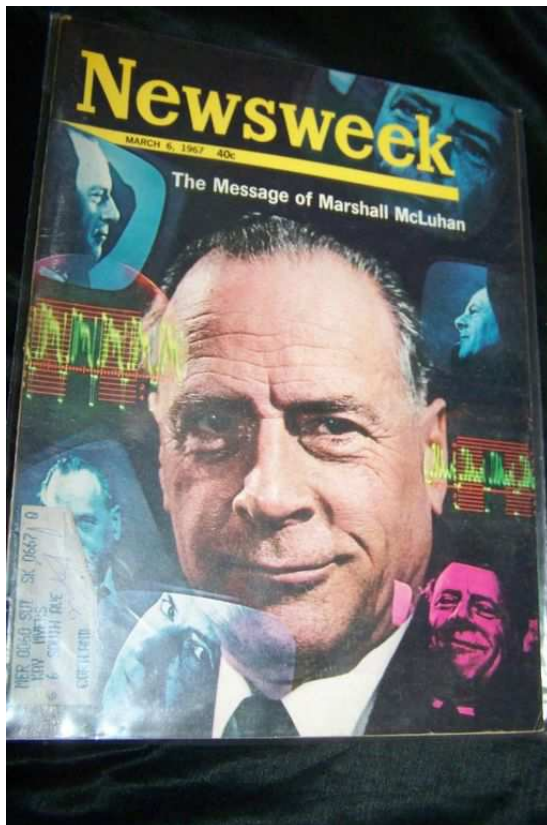


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The Gutenberg Galaxy. The making of typographic man (1962)

Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (1964)

- **The global village**
- **The media is the message**

Technological Determinism

- ✓ Man stands in a unique, symbiotic relationship to his technology
- ✓ Tech as sensorial extensions of human beings
- ✓ Tech as determinant element of the communication process
- ✓ Tech as a crucial dimension of social development

In MacLuhan's thesis, tech is an extension of thought, consciousness, man's unique perceptual capacities

The medium is the message

- The text for presentation and discussion
- “The ‘content’ of any medium is always another medium”
- “the ‘message’ of any medium is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs”
- “It is only too typical that the ‘content’ of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium”

- **Global village**

- For McLuhan, the history of communication splits into three phases:
 1. the tribal state
 2. the dis-tribal state
 3. the re-tribal state
- The re-tribal state corresponds to the appearance of the electronic media. In this state, we are in a global village
- The new electronic media increases interconnectivity between people
 - Television (the extension of sight) and radio (the extension of hearing), recreate the oral and immediate contact of the tribal state

Role of the media

- The media is a vast social metaphor that not only transmits information but determines what is knowledge
- Every medium of communication possesses a logic or grammar which organizes experience

Media effects

- “The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but **alter sense ratios or patterns of perception** steadily and without any resistance.”

- Print culture
- Television
- Computers
- Internet

The logic or grammar of each medium which dominates an age **impresses itself on the users of the medium**, thus dictating what is defined as truth and knowledge

Critique

- The assumption that the pattern of sensory is dictated by the structure of the media seems to be **an oversimplification**
- While any given medium confronts an artist with certain inherent constraints, media still allow wide latitude for innovation and artistic manipulation
- **Is the medium still the message?**