

# THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

Media in Film

# MARSHALL MCLUHAN (1911-1980)

- Canadian scholar
- Philosopher and Media theorist
- Deep humanistic background
- Trivium
  - Grammar, Logic, Rhetoric

# MARSHALL MCLUHAN

## (1911-1980)

- Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man (1964)
- The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of the Typographic Man (1962)
- War and Peace in the Global Village



# TECHNOLOGICAL DETERMINISM

- Historians, literature and art scholars, philosophers, sociologists, economists, political scientists, anthropologists, ...
- Main assumption: human free will is a myth.
- Technology is the final engine of human life.
- It shapes human behavior and relationships.
- Technology determines the communication process

# EXTENSIONS OF MAN

- Technology extends the natural abilities of the human being.
- “It is the persistent theme of this book that all technologies are extensions of our physical and nervous systems to increase power and speed”.
- “Any extension, whether of skin, hand, or foot, affects the whole psychic and social complex. Some of the principle extensions, together with some of their psychic and social consequences, are studied in this book”.
- Examples of Technologies:
  - Wheel
  - Clothing
  - Housing
  - Weapons
  - Language
  - Alphabet
- Amputation: the counterpart of the extension

# MEDIA AS EXTENSIONS OF MAN

- Media (communication channels) can be regarded as extensions of man.
- What is what they extend?
- Our senses and nervous system
  - Printing press
  - Telegraph
  - Telephone
  - Radio
  - TV

# MEDIA AS EXTENSIONS OF MAN

- Electricity
- Electric light escapes attention as a communication medium just because it has no content (apparently).
- It is a medium without a message.
- “For electric light and power are separate from their uses, yet they eliminate time and space factors in human association exactly as do radio, telegraph, telephone, and TV, creating involvement in depth”.
- Even though it has no message (apparently), it affects the change or pace or pattern that it introduces in human affairs.



# THE MEDIUM IS THE MESSAGE

- “The medium is the message means, in terms of the electronic age, that a totally new human environment has been created”.
- “The medium is the message because it is the medium that shapes and controls the scale and form of human association and action”.
- “It is only too typical that the content of any medium blinds us to the character of the medium”.
- “The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinion or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without any resistance”.

# HOT VERSUS COOL MEDIA

- A Hot medium extends one single sense in “High definition” (well filled with data). A Cool medium expects low definition (lower level of information).
- A Hot medium does not leave too much space for filling up or completing the information.
- Hot media detribalize / Cool media tribalize
- Hot media: Book, radio, film
- Cool media: Telephone, TV,

# NEIL POSTMAN

## (1931-2003)

- Critic, writer, educator and communication theorist
- Professor of Communication at New York University at the Department of Culture and Communication
- Academic research field: media and education
- Concerned with the unstoppable decline of education in the country

# NEIL POSTMAN

## (1931-2003)

- Crazy Talk, Stupid Talk (1976)
- The Disappearance of Childhood (1982)
- Amusing Ourselves to Death (1985)
- The End of Education (1995)

# THE AGE OF SHOW BUSINESS

- What is television? What kinds of conversation does it permit? What are the intellectual tendencies it encourages, what sort of culture does it produce?
- Distinction between technology and medium:
  - Technology: physical apparatus
  - Medium: a use to which a physical apparatus is put
- Characteristics of the Medium Television:
  - Combination of audio and image.
  - The average shot length on network television is 3.5 seconds.
  - The eye never rests.
  - It offers a variety of subjects.
  - It requires minimal skills to comprehend.
  - It is largely aimed at emotional gratification.

# THE AGE OF SHOW BUSINESS

- “TV offers viewers a beautiful spectacle, a visual delight, pouring forth thousands of images on any given day”.
- “Even commercials, which some regard as an annoyance, are beautifully crafted, always pleasing the eye and accompanied by exciting music”.
- Television has found in liberal democracy and a relatively free market economy a nurturing climate in which its full potentialities as a technology of images could be exploited.
- American TV programs are in demand all over the world.
- The total estimate of U.S.TV exported is over 200,000 hours.

# THE AGE OF SHOW BUSINESS

- Cosmetics has replaced ideology.
- Those with camera appeal can command salaries exceeding one million dollar a year ...
- The container overshadows the content ...
- Can you believe that a presidential election can be lost because the candidate was sabotaged by make-up staff?

# THE AGE OF SHOW BUSINESS

- Is TV entertaining?
- TV “has made entertainment itself the natural form for the representation of all experience”.
- “The problem is not that TV presents us with entertaining subject matter, but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining”.
- “Entertainment is the supraideology of all discourse on TV”.
- “No matter what is depicted or from what point of view, the overarching presumption is that it is there for our amusement”.



# THE AGE OF SHOW BUSINESS

- Anything can become news, but when it come through the filter of TV, immediately becomes entertainment:
  - Triple by-pass surgery
  - Rape or murder trials
  - Terrorist Actions
  - Financial crisis
  - Natural catastrophes
- There is no escape. It you do not get the message from the screen, you get it from other people.

# TEACHING AS ENTERTAINMENT

- The “Sesame Street” Syndrome
- The TV show appeared “to justify allowing a four- or five-year-old to sit transfixed in front of a TV screen for unnatural periods of time”.
- “It was entirely consonant with the prevailing spirit of America. Its use of cute puppets, celebrities, catchy tunes, and rapid-fire editing was certain to give pleasure to the children” (initiation into the fun-loving culture).
- Everybody (parents, educators, legislators) approved Sesame Street.
- The problem was: “Sesame Street encourage children to love school, only if school is like Sesame Street”.

# BROADCAST NEWS (1987)

- Director: James L. Brooks
- Screenwriter: James L. Brooks
- Holly Hunter, Albert Brooks, William Hurt, Jack Nicholson