

OBJECT CARD

ITEM NUMBER 34568

COLLECTION TITLE

Media Systems and Cultural Control

AUTHOR:

Marshall McLuhan & Quentin Fiore

ITEM TITLE:

"The Medium Is The Message"

DATE OF CREATION:

1964

OBJECT FORMAT/ TYPE

Printed book chapter (published in Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, McGraw-Hill, New York).

LANGUAGE

English

PHYSICAL / MATERIAL STATUS

Mass-market paperback. Typographic, linear, paginated.

SCOPE AND CONTENT

The item states that the primary effect of any medium lies not in its content but in the structural change it produces in human perception, behaviour, organisation, and power. The "message" of a medium is defined as the change in "scale, pace, or pattern" that it introduces into everyday life.

CONTEXT / HISTORICAL NOTE

Composed during the rise of electronic, broadcast media (television, radio, electrical networks) and the decline of exclusively print-based culture. The item records contemporary anxiety around real-time, mass, simultaneous communication in the early 1960s.

FUNCTION / MECHANISM OF EFFECT

The record identifies three recurrent impact vectors for any medium:

1. Scale: expansion of reach.
2. Pace: acceleration and synchronisation.
3. Pattern: reorganisation of social relations.

Example held in the item: the electric light is logged as having "no content," but as enabling continuous activity after dark, altering labour and public space.

SENSORY / PERCEPTUAL PROFILE

The item distinguishes media by the sensory regimes they impose:

1. Print: visual, linear, solitary, analytic; privileges private, sequential reading.
2. Electronic broadcast: simultaneous, multi-sensory, collective; privileges shared immediacy.

Media are described as reconditioning attention, not merely transmitting information.

SUBJECT FORMATION

Each medium is said to produce a compliant subject type:

1. Print produces an individual, self-directed, "rational" reader.
2. Television produces a synchronised, affective viewer aligned to national time.
3. Classroom/timetable produces a regulated body that accepts externally set rhythm, posture, and address.

POWER / CONTROL NOTE

The item treats media as infrastructures of control.

1. Broadcast concentrates narrative authority in those who can transmit at scale.
2. Electric light extends productive hours and normalises continuous availability.
3. Classroom space/time standardises behaviour and attention.

Control is described as redistributed by the medium's structure, not by the "content" delivered.

DECLARED / IMPLIED ASSUMPTIONS

The item operates on two assumptions:

1. Human behaviour is plastic and will be reshaped to match the dominant medium.
2. Technological form drives cultural form; media structure society more than society structures media. McLuhan, 1964.

SELF-POSITIONING NOTE

This object is itself a print text asserting that print's logic is being displaced by electronic media. The record therefore sits inside the transition it describes. The contradiction is treated as evidence, not error. McLuhan, 1964.

ACCESS / STATUS

Widely reproduced theoretical text. Unrestricted for study.

REFERENCE

The Medium is the Message: An Inventory of Effects Berkeley: Gingko Press [1967]