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| McLuhan, Marshall (1911-1980) |
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| Born Herbert Marshall McLuhan in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, Marshall McLuhan was a literary critic, communications theorist, public intellectual, and the father of modern media studies. McLuhan rose to international fame as a ‘media guru’ in the 1960s when works like *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), *Understanding Media* (1964), and *The Medium is the Massage* (1967) became best sellers. His dictum, ‘the medium is the message’ — which packages McLuhan’s notion that humans and human society are more profoundly affected by the formal properties of the media through which they communicate than by the specific content transmitted — became widely known, if not widely understood, during this period. Though his public and academic influence waned in the last decade of his life, interest in McLuhan’s ideas was revived with the expansion and popularization of the internet. Among the many thinkers he has influenced are Neil Postman, Jean Beaudrillard, and Friedrich Kittler. |
| Born Herbert Marshall McLuhan in Edmonton, Alberta, Canada, Marshall McLuhan was a literary critic, communications theorist, public intellectual, and the father of modern media studies. McLuhan rose to international fame as a ‘media guru’ in the 1960s when works like *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962), *Understanding Media* (1964), and *The Medium is the Massage* (1967) became best sellers. His dictum, ‘the medium is the message’ — which packages McLuhan’s notion that humans and human society are more profoundly affected by the formal properties of the media through which they communicate than by the specific content transmitted — became widely known, if not widely understood, during this period. Though his public and academic influence waned in the last decade of his life, interest in McLuhan’s ideas was revived with the expansion and popularization of the internet. Among the many thinkers he has influenced are Neil Postman, Jean Beaudrillard, and Friedrich Kittler.  McLuhan’s major works collectively argued that electronic media such as television and radio would serve to lessen the Western emphasis on logic and linearity, to promote group consciousness over individuality, and to break down the division between author and reader, performer and spectator. Each of these points emerged from McLuhan’s understanding of the development of print culture, which he argued first established the conditions that electronic media were serving to reverse. For McLuhan, it was the repetition and uniformity of the printing process that promoted the repetition and uniformity of Western linear logic; it was the mass-produced book, read in private from the reader’s fixed point of view, that encouraged the notion of individuality; and it was the notion of the book-as-commodity, along with the related notion of copyright, that established individual authorship over collaborative production. While McLuhan’s accounts of the social effects of print and electronic media have been widely influential, they have also been criticized (notably by Raymond Williams) as deterministic.  McLuhan’s thought was strongly influenced by modernist literature and modernist literary theory. He studied under I. A. Richards and F. R. Leavis at Cambridge in the 1930s and frequently described his method as the application of New Critical methods to new media (cf. Marchand, Pressman). McLuhan credited modernist painter and writer WYNDHAM LEWIS with the insight that media functioned as ‘environments’ for ‘shaping sensibility’ [[link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8MgdBgfZZeU>]]. His works frequently cite modernist writers such as Lewis, Richards, Leavis, JAMES JOYCE, EZRA POUND, and T.S. ELIOT. Elena Lamberti has further argued that McLuhan’s prose style — often gnomic, aphoristic, and seemingly disconnected — was influenced by modernist writers. McLuhan was himself influential in shaping modernist literature and criticism of the mid-twentieth century, particularly in his native Canada, where he worked directly with the novelist SHEILA WATSON, whose dissertation he supervised, and the playwright Wilfred Watson, with whom he co-authored *From Cliché to Archetype*. Key Works: *The Mechanical Bride: Folklore of Industrial Man* (1951)  *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of Typographic Man* (1962)  *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (1964)  *War and Peace in the Global Village: An Inventory of Some of the Current Spastic Situations that could be Eliminated by More Feedforward* (1968)  *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (1967)  *Laws of Media: the New Science* (1988)  *From Cliché to Archetype* (1970) |
| Further reading:  (Cavell)  (Coupland)  (Lamberti)  (Marchand)  (Pressman)  (Williams)  (Willmot) |