

Communication

McLUHAN'S LAWS OF THE MEDIA

TO THE EDITOR:

I have been experimenting with developing a series of "Laws of the Media," which I submit herewith for comment and discussion by readers of *Technology and Culture*. My purpose is to invite criticism, directed not at me or at my rhetoric, but rather at the substance and contents of my thoughts. It seems to me that historians of technology—and kindred students of the sociology and philosophy of technology, economists, practicing engineers, and the like—might enjoy and profit from attempting to disprove my "laws."

So, cognizant of the seeming paradox that a "scientific hypothesis is one that can be disproved," I have put my "Laws of the Media" in a "disprovable" form, hoping that in the course of disproving each of them, many new discoveries might occur.

How did I arrive at these "Laws of the Media"? By a structural approach. The structuralists, beginning with Ferdinand de Saussure and now Lévi-Strauss, divide the approaches to the problem of form into two categories: *diachrony* and *synchrony*. Diachrony is simply the developmental, chronological study of any cultural matter; but synchrony works on the assumption that all aspects of any form are simultaneously present in any part of it. Although I have used the simultaneous approach in arriving at these Laws of the Media, any one of them is susceptible to the diachronic approach for filling in the historical background and details.

Since electric speeds of information constitute a sort of simultaneous structuring of experience, synchrony, representing all directions at once, is, as it were, acoustic; whereas the diachronic, representing one stage at a time, is visual in its analytical pattern. Few people seem to be aware that visual space and order are continuous, connected, homogeneous, and static. In these regards, visual space is quite different from any other kind of space, be it tactile, kinetic, audible, or osmic (smell). Visual space alone can be divided.

You will note that, although these are called Laws of the Media, only a few of them deal with communications media narrowly conceived. Instead, I am talking about "media" in terms of a larger entity