

JIRYUNG AHN

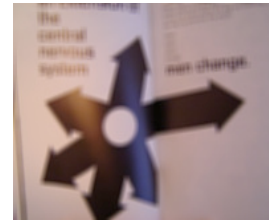
READER'S RESPONSE TO MARSHALL MCLUHAN  
AND QUENTIN FIORE'S *THE MEDIUM IS THE  
MESSAGE*

...the message? I thought this was  
supposed to say the message? Have  
I been misreading this, or does McLuhan  
intend another message?

The medium used to be found in the message. But in the “collide-oscopic” barrage of image and text that resulted from Marshall McLuhan’s 1967 collaboration with Quentin Fiore, the medium becomes the *massage*. *The Medium Is the Massage* reflects the tumultuous decade of the 1960’s. McLuhan and Fiore demonstrate with photographs, cartoons, newspaper headlines, backwards and upside-down writing, and other graphical innovations, that “information pours upon us, instantaneously and continuously” (p.16). The book is also filled with quotations from Alfred North Whitehead, James Joyce, Lao Tsu, John Dewey, John Cage, and Bob Dylan.

The text encourages readers to look outside of themselves, and question the influence of media upon them, by using humour and multiple modes of communication. McLuhan and Fiore’s book is described as: “a collide-oscope of interfaced situations” (p. 10). McLuhan demonstrates how media reshape and restructure patterns of social interdependence and all aspects of our personal lives.

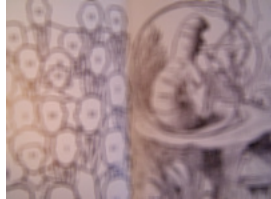
“All media are extensions of some human faculty-psyhic or physical” (p. 26). In general, we have taken for granted the kinds of changes media evoke. The influences of media are so prevalent they effect our personal, political, economic, psychological, aesthetic, moral, ethical and social constructions. Consequently, operating without knowledge of the way media works, makes any understanding of social and cultural change impossible. “There is absolutely no inevitability as long as there is a willingness to contemplate what is happening (p. 25).”



What is the message? The message is that the extension of any one sense will alter the way we think and act; the way that we perceive the world. McLuhan observes that “we have now become aware of the possibility of arranging the entire human environment as a work of art” (p. 68). Additionally, “its message is total change, ending psychic, social, economic, and political parochialism. The old civic, state, and national groupings have become unworkable” (p.16).

McLuhan mentions in closing that the environment we create becomes our medium for defining our roles. For example, the invention of type-face created

linear, or sequential thought, thereby separating thought from action. Now, with television and folk singing, thought and action are closer and social involvement is greater. “We again live in a village” (p. 157). We are living with media and by the media; we are constructing, deconstructing, and reconstructing our life with (in) media.



McLuhan’s ideas about the nature of media, the increasing speed of communication, and the technological basis for our understanding of who we are come to life in this volume. Although originally published in 1967, the art and style in *The Medium is the Massage* seems fresh and the ideas are even more relevant now that computer interfaces are gateways to the global village.

When I am faced with a very new situation, I tend always to attach myself to the objects, to the flavor of the most recent past. I look at the present through a rear-view mirror. I march backwards into the future.

“...and who am I?”

“I — hardly know just at present — at least I know who I was when I got up this morning, but I think I must have been changed several times since then.”

#### AFFILIATIONS

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