

THE MEDIUM IS NOT THE MESSAGE, THE PSYCHIC IS

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Abstract:

McLuhan's forecast about the influence of technology on culture and his Laws of Media, predict a future, which denies spirituality and replaces it with terrorism, chaos, and addiction. The spiritual crisis in our contemporary world has influenced our understanding of the terms medium and psychic. Thus, a spiritual belief has been turned into a materialistic idea. The misuse of the terms medium and psychic, illustrate how technology's materialistic influence has denied spiritual truths. McLuhan foresaw this world through his analysis of media, which is why the medium is the message.

Keywords: media, medium, fortuneteller, McLuhan, spiritualism, laws of media

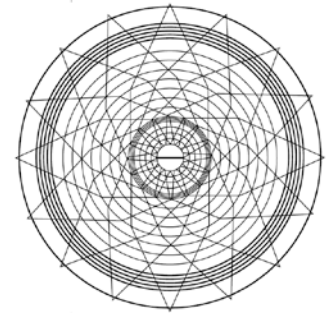
Many communication scholars have examined McLuhan's phrase "the medium is the message." Some have come to realize that this phrase can have many different meanings and relationships to communication media. McLuhan's forecast about the influence of technology on culture and his Laws of Media, predict a future, which denies spirituality and replaces it with terrorism, chaos, and addiction. Ironically, the word medium both refers to technology and people who speak to the dead. The philosophy of the latter attempts to bring spirituality into everyday life. As technology fosters terrorism through media, mediums attempt to bring harmony into the world. Through cultural understandings of mediums and media, the destructive behavior of humans is prevalent in global culture. McLuhan foresaw this world through his analysis of technology.

When the phrase "the medium is the message" is used to examine mediums, it can be used to understand the difference between a medium and a psychic. In American culture, the traditional concept of a Spiritualist medium has been replaced by the psychic medium. Originally, mediums tended to follow the religion, philosophy and science of Spiritualism. Spiritualist philosophy is generally not taught in contemporary culture, therefore it is unknown and often misunderstood. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle describes Spiritualism in the following way: "Spiritualism is a system of thought and knowledge which can be reconciled with any religion. The basic facts are

[Scientific Articles]

Barnes S.

The Medium is NOT the Message, the Psychic Is



the continuity of personality and the power of communication after death” (p. 247). This leads to a belief that mediums can communicate with the spirit realm and deceased loved ones.

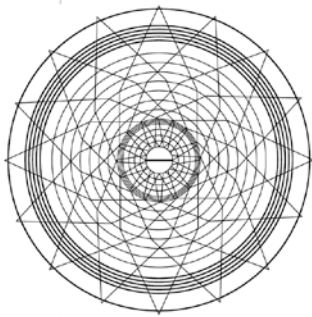
A significant difference between Spiritualism and other religions is a belief in principles to guide individuals on a path to a spiritual life. According to the Spiritualist National Union (see www.snu.org.uk), these include “the brotherhood of man” and “personal responsibility” for all deeds done on earth. Traditionally a medium follows positive spiritualist teachings and believes in the continuity of life after death. In contrast, many psychics do not follow this spiritualist tradition. For example, many American television mediums have stated in their shows that they come from a Catholic background (see Thibodeau & Barnes, 2017), which means they may or may not be aware of natural law.

Natural Law

Spiritualist mediums believe in natural law or laws that are the innate and spiritual rules of the universe. Natural law is defined as “the Infinite, Eternal, Unchangeable, Omnipresent principles, inherent in nature” (p. 2). Natural law rules all things in nature including the spiritual and material. One of its key principles is that positive behavior and thinking brings more positive results. Conversely, negative thinking and actions attract negative energies and situations. Chapman (1922) believes natural law could help bring us freedom and happiness here and hereafter. Moreover, he argues: “Under natural law there is absolutely no motion, no action, without energy to cause motion or action” (p.34). Thus, human decisions shape their future. In terms of natural law, the commercial and material tend to be in opposition to the spiritual. Technology most often is a product of the material world. According to McLuhan, technology can help bring about negative aspects of society (see McLuhan & Fiore, 1968).

In 1872, Andrew Jackson Davis (1872) wrote, “Materialism characterizes the sciences of this age: and hence it is not to be expected that the spiritual truths, which remain in Nature's casket as yet unlocked to men of popular science and learning, should, when revealed, be recognized and acknowledged by them” (p. 68). Materialistic values are even stronger in a technological age. McLuhan's strong anti-materialist view is reflected in his criticism of the values of American television (see McLuhan, 1964). Today the world is more commercial and materialistic than it was in the past.

Founded in the concepts of wealth and greed, materialists are more concerned about their financial resources than they are about their fellow human beings (see Mumford, 1934). This has profound implications for past and contemporary political structures. For example, materialist views contributed to the last two World Wars and conflicts. Moreover, after the Second World War, capitalism became a major political system. The buying and selling of goods and products drive capitalism. Sales need to continually increase for the economy to grow. Mumford (1934) states: “The aimless expansion of production is in fact the typical disease of capitalism” (p. 390). Thus,



[Scientific Articles]

Barnes S.

The Medium is NOT the Message, the Psychic Is

materialism is associated with concepts of consumption and the buying of products is considered good.

Living in the material world, people's life experiences tend to be placed within the concepts of good and evil. Certain acts are considered to be positive and others negative. However, the idea of spiritual progression goes against these orthodox ideas because good and evil are subjective rather than objective terms (see Holmes, 1938). All life is in the process of change. As higher states of existence replace lower ones, individuals strive to live good and spiritual lives.

In natural law, what we reap is what we receive. Positive energy brings positive energy back to us. The ultimate judgment of our behavior is not made by others, instead needs to be evaluated by ourselves. People may escape punishment in the material world. However, the same is not true in the spiritual realm. In natural law, an individual cannot escape the consequences of their actions. All behavior is accounted for, whether it is good or evil. In the spirit world there is no heaven or hell, only degrees of spiritual evolution. In the 1960s, McLuhan warned people about the negative impact of technology and its influence on culture (see McLuhan, 1964). His statements were predictive of what happened. Following natural law, the negative impact of technology would bring about negative consequences.

The Medium is a Medium, The Psychic is Not

An individual's actions and thoughts have social consequences, just like technology has influences. Thoughts also impact natural law (see Holmes, 1938). McLuhan (1964) wrote about the different influences media have on humans. Switching back to the topic of mediums, their thoughts could have a different effect than the thoughts of psychics because the thought processes are diverse. In popular culture, the terms "psychic" and "medium" are often used interchangeably, although they are not synonymous forms of communication. In McLuhan terms, the medium is the medium through which the message is conveyed.

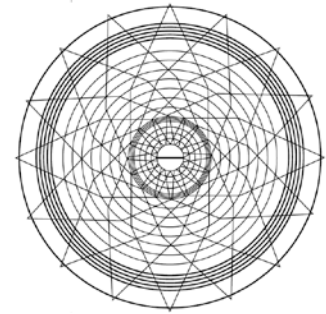
A medium believes his or her communication act has three components—spirit message, medium as communication channel, and receiver of the message. In this process, the medium is receiving information from a source outside of their conscious self. As a result, a medium may not remember the spirit communication that transmits through them because the message is not part of their conscious memory (see Thibodeau & Barnes, 2017).

In contrast, psychics work from a vibration emanating from the recipient and a spiritual message is not necessary in the process. As a result, psychic communication has two components—psychic and message receiver. The psychic attunes his or her awareness to the message receiver and senses the information from said client. Vanden Eynden (2011) states: "A psychic picks up her impressions through ESP, or extrasensory perception" (p. 5). A psychic may also use a mind-to-mind link with the

[Scientific Articles]

Barnes S.

The Medium is NOT the Message, the Psychic Is



recipient of the message. As a result, psychics are an instrument for interpreting impressions and symbols, rather than communicating with a spirit personality, as mediums claim to do.

The medium links with a spirit personality and then presents the message. Consequently, the medium is a channel for communicating a message rather than the means for creating it. A medium claims to be on a different vibration or wavelength than most people. Moreover, the medium believes he or she receives his or her information from a spiritual communicator. Spiritual messages are positive in nature and the messages from Spiritualist mediums could help to counterbalance the negative influence of technology. However, people do not generally recognize this aspect of mediumship. Moreover, the commercialization process of television has blurred the definitions of a psychic and medium to eliminate the Spiritualist qualities (see Thibodeau & Barnes, 2017).

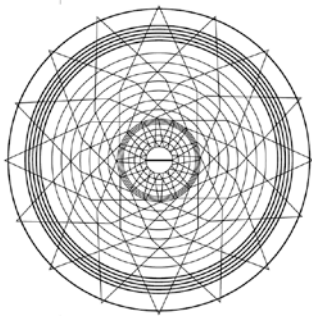
Researchers, television producers, and the general public often confuse a mediumistic versus psychic message in their descriptions of mediumship. This has been occurring since the 1930s, when Boddington (1938/1995) states:

Psychic development has but little spiritual value unless it is used to comfort the bereaved and prove spiritual verities. A Voodooist can be as capable a medium as a saint, but the former will appeal to base instincts, while the influence of the saint will be uplifting in addition to proving psychic powers....The highest form of intellectual expression will combine psychic unfoldment with spiritual development. (p. 190)

Consequently, mediums and psychics perform two separate acts of communication. In one, the medium is not the message because the communication is coming from the spirit plane, which tends to be a positive and healing message. Mediums need to be spiritually focused to communicate. In contrast, the psychic is the source of the information and spirit is not necessary. A difference can be detected in the message itself (see Thibodeau & Barnes, 2017). The messages from psychics could have both positive and negative influences, depending upon the personality of the psychic. As communicators, mediums project positive thoughts and vibrations, which is needed to oppose the influences of a material and technological world.

Rhetorical Relationships

Understanding the difference between psychics and mediums can be explained in rhetorical terms. For example, Thibodeau and Barnes (2017) utilized a rhetorical method to examine spirit communication and mediumship. Moreover, rhetorical analysis is commonly used in media and visual communication research (Barnes, 2011; Foss, 2005). Additionally, rhetoric is a method that has also been used in paranormal research on mediums (see Wooffitt & Gilbert, 2008).



[Scientific Articles]

Barnes S.

The Medium is NOT the Message, the Psychic Is

In mediumship, the essence of the communication comes from a spirit entity. The communication is then expressed through the medium. Thus, the medium is only a conduit through which the communication occurs. Finally, the content of the communication is presented to a recipient. Thus, it is a triune process involving spirit information/communicator, message channel, and receiver (see Thibodeau & Barnes, 2017).

The triune process of mediumship can be compared to a traditional rhetorical model. As Aristotle (2013) states, rhetoric is the art of persuasion. Rhetoric was originally used to describe oral communication. There are three characteristics of Rhetoric. They are Ethos (speaker), Pathos (audience), and Logos (argument). Ethos refers to the source's credibility or the integrity of the speaker. Pathos refers to the audience and how the message is received. Logos refers to the nature of the message being presented to the audience. The medium or message channel receives input and influence from the message communicator (spirit) and conveys that information to the message recipient. Applied to rhetoric, the model is Logos/(spirit message information), pathos/(message recipient), and ethos (medium/speaker). Putting it all together, a triune system of spirit communication is created.

Spiritual Crisis

McLuhan was neither a medium nor psychic, but he was aware that the world was moving toward a spiritual crisis (see Marchand, 1989). His predictions about the future of media indicate a world of violence (see Shayon, 2005). The book *War and Peace in the Global Village* by McLuhan and Fiore indicates this. McLuhan shared the same concern with Spiritualists about the future of mankind. Today, our cultural understanding of mediums along with McLuhan's future prophecies depicts the world we live in.

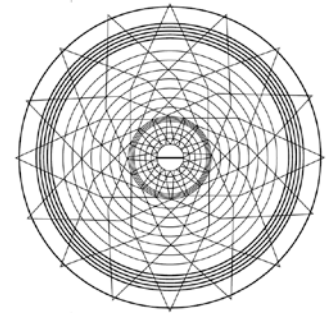
Communication students are constantly getting the terms media and mediums confused. After years of making a note on student papers that mediums are psychics, this author's current research reveals that she has been wrong. A medium is not the same as a psychic. These differences are also described in the dictionary meaning of the words. Medium is defined as "[a] person believed to be in communication with the spirits of the dead" (Landau & Bogus, 1975, p. 450). A psychic is described as "sensitive or responsive to phenomena apparently independent of normal sensory stimuli" (p. 587). Thus, a medium is in communication with the spirit world and a psychic is generally not. The psychic is processing information without the presence of spirit. The message comes from them, which is not the case with mediums where the messages come from deceased personalities and spirit guides. Therefore, the medium is not the message, but only the messenger of spiritual thought.

The phrase "the medium is the message" can be interpreted in a number of different ways. As Strate (2005) argues, "The medium is the message expresses with

[Scientific Articles]

Barnes S.

The Medium is NOT the Message, the Psychic Is



perfect economy the idea that how we do something has much to do with the results we obtain, no matter what our original intent may be” (p. 28). Barnes (2005) states, “The medium influences the content and what can be created and transmitted through it” (p. 284). Media directly shape and form information and how it is understood, even when people are not aware of its influence. McLuhan (1964) was trying to make us conscious of this concept.

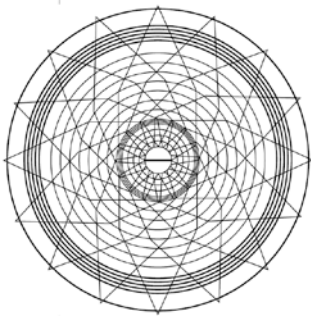
Much of McLuhan’s writing is about the impact of technology on culture. Psychics and mediums utilize the technology of speech. McLuhan does state that the content of speech is thought (see McLuhan & Zingrone, 1995, p. 151). Mediums are purported to share spiritual thoughts, which tend to be uplifting and healing. Also, according to natural law, positive thoughts bring about positive actions. As the definitions above state, the thoughts communicated by mediums are different than the thoughts of psychics. Thus, as communication scholars, we would expect these two forms of communication to have different emotional and social consequences (see Postman, 1985). McLuhan states: “For the ‘message’ of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs” (p. 152). However, the content of the media can blind us to the character of the medium. This is true for mediums and psychics because many people believe the content is the same. However, one is grounded in spirituality and the other is not.

McLuhan as Fortuneteller

Another title that people confuse with mediums and psychics is fortunetelling. A fortuneteller is defined as “one who claims to foretell a person’s future” (Landau & Bogus p. 280). Mediums do not predict the future because they know people have free will. Consequently, the future is never set because people can make choices¹. Additionally, fortunetelling has nothing to do with spirit communication, therefore fortunetelling is similar to being a psychic when considering how mediums and psychics communicate. Moreover, when people consult psychics they are often asking about future jobs and boyfriends. Or, what their future is going to be. Moreover, some people confuse the concept of fortunetelling with mediumistic or psychic skills because their questions are often about their future.

McLuhan was prescient about the influence of media on culture. He realized that the media could blind us to the character of its message. As Strate (2005) contends, “The medium is the message implies that different media give us different messages, different worldviews, different ways of life” (p. 28). *The Medium is the Message* by Marshall McLuhan and Quentin Fiore visually and verbally depicts the influence of electrical technology on culture. The juxtaposition of visual and verbal information

¹ These statements are based on ten years of working as a Spiritualist medium. Moreover, the author has a certificate from the Spiritualist National Union (CSNU).



[Scientific Articles]

Barnes S.

The Medium is NOT the Message, the Psychic Is

reveals a future where the image would replace the word in cultural contexts. As the book states:

Media, by altering the environment, evoke in us unique ratios of sense perceptions. The extension of any one sense alters the way we think and act—the way we perceive the world.

When

these

ratios

change,

men change. (p. 41).

In *Understanding Media*, McLuhan (1964) wrote a chapter called “Weapons: War of the Icons.” He states: “In fact, the war of the icons, or the eroding of the collective countenance of one’s rivals, has long been under way. Ink and photos are supplanting soldiery and tanks” (p. 294). Marketers have known for a long time that the power of the image influences people on an unconscious level. It has been stated that up to 90% of our brain’s activity never reaches the conscious mind (see Van Praet, 2012). An example of this is how the brain perceives visual scenes from a movie. People see these mediated images as if they were in real life. Our conscious mind has to tell us that the movie is fiction (see Barnes 2017). McLuhan predicted the visual world, in which we live today. News stories about the foreign influence on American politics illustrate how new media are being used as weapons in the United States (see Carroll, 2016).

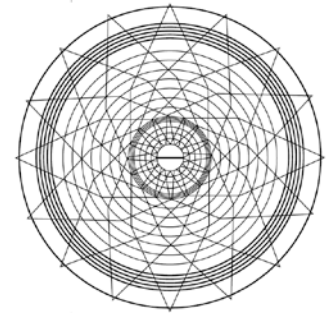
McLuhan foretold that we would be living in a world characterized by the “electric battle of information.” Images would go far deeper and become “more obsessional than the old hot wars of industrial hardware” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 295). Moreover, he argues that all wars have been fought by the latest technology. McLuhan (1964) contends, “it is this trend toward more and more power with less and less hardware that is characteristic of the electronic age of information” (p. 298). The power of software programs such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, and other social media applications demonstrate how this statement is true today. Terrorist organizations use these technologies to spread their propaganda messages of hate (see CBS News, 2018).

McLuhan warns that low technology countries could be a threat. Cultures without advanced technology tend to be predominantly oral with an understanding of oral propaganda. The power of terrorist propaganda persuades people from non-terrorist countries to join their cause. An example is the attack in New York City by resident Sayfullo Saipov. He was providing support to a terrorist organization because “he was inspired by the Islamic State to inflict mayhem and chose Halloween because he figured there would be more people on the street” (Barrett, Zapotosky & Berman,

[Scientific Articles]

Barnes S.

The Medium is NOT the Message, the Psychic Is



2017, n.p.). Instructions on how to conduct this type of attack were posted on the Internet.

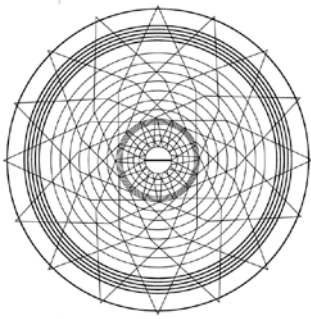
In a world dominated by electric technology, “all technology can plausibly be regarded as weapons” (McLuhan, 1964, p.299). Consider how individuals who were inspired by terrorism now use the car and truck as weapons to kill innocent people. Those who lack advanced technology have developed methods for turning planes, cars, and trucks into weapons of destruction. The orchestrated attacks on America September 11, 2001 illustrate this point. McLuhan warns us that technologies such as the atomic bomb are “a threat to all that lack it” (McLuhan, 1964, p. 299). Today, terrorists use our ordinary technology to fight against us and disrupt daily routines.

In contrast to terrorists that use ordinary technologies against the Western World, Americans use guns. MacAoidh (2017) argues that McLuhan’s medium is the message explains the massacre in Los Vegas by Mark Steyn. MacAoidh (2017) contends that instead of a terrorist attack, Steyn wanted “to telegraph to America in graphic form the hard irrefutable evidence that guns and gun ownership and the ease of gun purchase in America are an evil and must be controlled” (p. 7). All of the guns Steyn brought into his hotel room to fire on an unsuspecting crowd demonstrate this point.

There are still some people who blame the gun problem on deranged individuals rather than the technology. The idea that technology is neutral is an industry perspective and one that critics utilize to argue against technological determinism (see Williams, 1974, Wyatt, 2008). Technological determinism contends that characteristics inherent in the form of a technology influence its use in society, or the medium is the message, as MacAoidh argued above. The free will argument contends that the structure of a technology cannot impose itself on human beings. However, McLuhan was attempting to warn us that the influences of our media occur on a more subtle level that is not in the ordinary awareness of human consciousness. Thus, the term “the medium is the message” attempts to wake people up to the inherent features of technology.

McLuhan is associated with the determinist perspective because he argues that the intrinsic form of a medium influences people. For example, inherent in gun technology is the ability to kill people. However, this part of the gun message is often socially ignored. It is argued that people can use guns for war or peace. It is all in the realm of human choice. Nevertheless, inherent in the concept of guns is the idea they can be used to kill. This is the type of inherent idea that McLuhan wanted to make us aware of.

Another example of McLuhan’s predictions can be found in *War and Peace in the Global Village*, where the authors describe drug abuse in the United States. “Drug taking, which is today inspired by the penetrating information environment with its feedback mechanism of the inner trip, is as involving as the electric world itself” (McLuhan & Fiore, 1968, p. 80). Moreover, they contend that bright students were taking these drugs. Today, we live the world of an Opioid Epidemic (see CDC, 2017).



People are addicted to prescription drugs. These individuals come from all walks of life and treatment for this problem has become a major social issue. By understanding the power of media, McLuhan was able to project a future vision that has now come true in a number of ways.

Natural Law and the Laws of Media

Mediums don't foretell the future, however McLuhan did. Nevertheless, this is not to imply McLuhan had psychic abilities. Spiritually, Shayon (2005) states that theology was an unstated background to McLuhan's media theories. McLuhan himself was a Catholic and all religions work with natural law in one way or another. For instance, McLuhan "said the rosary, went to Mass almost every day, prayed to St. Jude (patron saint of lost causes) in exceptionally trying circumstances, and was particularly devoted to Mary, the Mother of God" (Marchand, 1989, p. 45). Marchand claims that Mary was an inspiration for McLuhan's work. In Catholic terms, a saint inspired him. From the Spiritualist viewpoint, spirit guides influenced his ideas. Both are messages from the spirit realm. Moreover, as Marchand contends, McLuhan described his prayer as "a constant, nonstop dialogue with the Creator" (p. 46). This follows the first principle of Spiritualism, a belief in "The Fatherhood of God."

Although McLuhan did not believe in the supernatural world, it could be argued that he was working with natural law, the foundation of mediumship. The negative aspects of media will bring about negative features in culture. Terrorism, shootings, and drug addiction are the hallmarks of contemporary culture. As Shayon (2005) argues: "McLuhan's essential insight was apocalyptic in the Fourth Gospel sense—he lifted the veil on our serious human situation and made us see it as it really is—a spiritual crisis" (p. 207). Moreover, McLuhan was concerned about the consequences of technology on contemporary Christianity (see Gordon, 1997).

Today's spiritual crisis was echoed by Sam Sorbo in Fox News who (2017) states: "The spirit of our time is gradually revealing in our culture a subversive, resolute, and increasing hatred toward God and Christianity, and an irresistible temptation toward evil that betrays man's innate desire for power: a longing to be God" (p. 3). This statement summarized the materialistic world we live in.

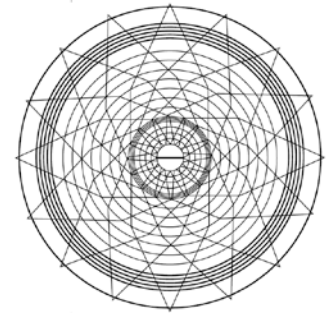
McLuhan's anti-materialist view is depicted in his analysis of the values of American television. For instance, in *Understanding Media* McLuhan (1964) states: "The aggressive lunge of artistic strategy for the remaking of Western man has, via TV, become a vulgar sprawl and an overwhelming splurge in American life" (p. 280).

McLuhan's laws of media also work to foretell a difficult future. The laws of media state: "that every medium exaggerates some function. Spectacles exaggerate or enlarge or enhance the visual function; they obsolesce another function; they retrieve a much older function; and they flip into the opposite forms" (McLuhan and Staines, 2001, p. 243). When the laws of media are applied to Spiritualist mediumship, the

[Scientific Articles]

Barnes S.

The Medium is NOT the Message, the Psychic Is



results support McLuhan's view on the influence of electric technology on culture. Spiritual mediumship exaggerates the positive, it makes negativity obsolete, it retrieves spirituality, and flips into materialism. Television's transformation of spiritual mediumship into psychic mediums illustrates this point. Television turns the concept of spiritual mediumship into a form of entertainment (see Postman, 1985). The spiritual aspects of the message are replaced with emotional reactions. The final step in the *Laws of Media* can be illustrated by the increase of television programming on psychic mediumship and the materialist values embedded in the programming (see Thibodeau & Barnes, 2017). What was a spiritual pursuit is now edited to amuse the viewers.

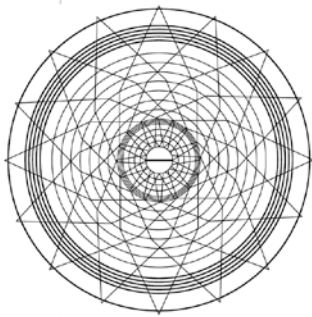
The media can blind us to the character of the medium. As Strate (2005) contends, "The medium is the message implies that different media give us different messages, different worldviews, different ways of life" (p. 28). Currently, our worldview tends to divide people against each other, and create a society of fear and terrorism (domestic and international). Our media supports this view by producing shoot-them-up films and misinformed cultural beliefs, such as the misrepresentation of mediumship. Today, more than ever, people need to be aware of the influence of technology on culture.

Counterbalancing the Effects of Media

We can counterbalance the negative effects of technology by creating a more positive and supportive culture. McLuhan believes that hope for mankind is "through the transformation of mankind by the sacraments of the Church, and the development of the awareness of self through community" (Gordon, 1997, p. 222). Participating in community involves the Biblical concept: "whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them" (Hanegraaff, 2007, p.1140). This is the second principle of Spiritualism, "The Brotherhood of Man" (see www.snu.org.uk).

All religions follow natural law in one way or another. As Sorbo (2017) contends: "The people who still trade in the Judeo-Christian ethic of 'love one another' and 'life has value' are not called simply to defend their position, but to fight for it, before the overwhelming tide of YOLO [You Only Live Once] selfishness inundates us with the intolerance and bigotry integral to the religion of self" (pp. 4-5). Movies highlighting the positive aspects of human life and ones that share uplifting messages help to turn this cultural tide.

The true message of mediumship needs to be embraced and cultural misunderstanding rectified. People need to go back to a gentler time where the idea of "love thy neighbor" prevails. As Sorbo states, we need to embrace forgiveness, grace, goodness, and love to challenge the world-view of technology.



[Scientific Articles]

Barnes S.

The Medium is NOT the Message, the Psychic Is

Conclusion

The media are the messages the mediums are not. The message inherent in mediums is one of spiritual value, which is greatly needed in today's world of spiritual crisis. McLuhan's prescient predictions about media and technology have come true and people now need to counterbalance their effects by turning back to concepts of love and kindness. Ironically, the word medium is used to both refer to technology and people who believe in spirituality. The consequences of technology, predicted by McLuhan, could be counterbalanced by the spiritual nature of mediums, not psychics.

Instead of focusing on the material aspects of media, we should use them to bring people together in our global community. McLuhan hoped that mankind would transform through religious beliefs. Imagine a world in which the media distribute messages of understanding and compassion instead of fear. The message would help to bring about a more peaceful place to live and the media would no longer be shaping the message. As a result, the phrase "the medium is the message" would become obsolete.

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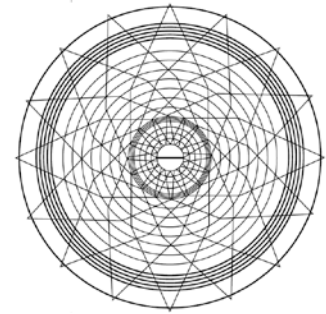
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Barnes S.

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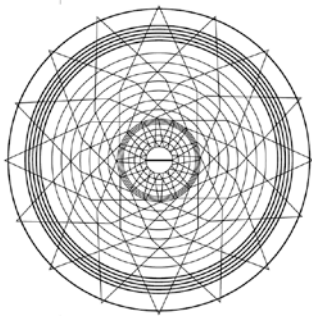
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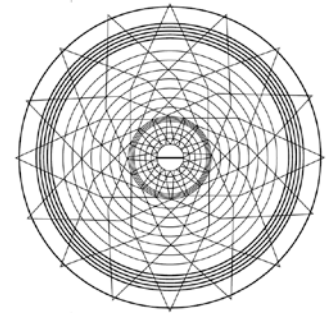
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СРЕДСТВО КОММУНИКАЦИИ НЕ ЕСТЬ СООБЩЕНИЕ, НО ЕСТЬ ЯСНОВИДЕЦ

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Аннотация:

Многие исследователи коммуникации рассматривали с разных точек зрения утверждение Маклюэна "средство коммуникации есть сообщение". Некоторые из них пришли к тому, что эта фраза может иметь много разных значений, как и много разных взаимосвязей с миром медиа и коммуникаций. Маклюэн предсказывает грядущее влияние технологий в своей книге "Законы медиа", где он предвосхищает будущее, в котором отрицается духовность, заменяемая терроризмом, хаосом и зависимостью. Иронично, что слово "medium" относится и к технологии (средство коммуникации) и к людям, которые разговаривают с мертвыми (медиум). Философия последней трактовки может стать попыткой вернуть духовное начало в повседневную жизнь.

Автор представленной статьи показывает, как из-за текущих культурных трактовок слов "медиум" и "медиа" в глобальной среде доминирует деструктивное человеческое поведение – и как сам Маршалл Маклюэн предвидел его через свой анализ средств коммуникации и технологий.

Ключевые слова: медиа, медиум, прорицатель, Маклюэн, спиритизм, законы медиа

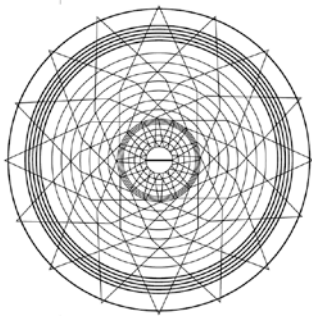
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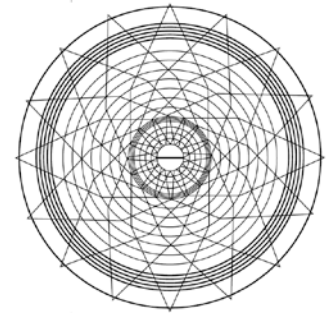
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