The Medium
Is the Metaphor

At different times in our history, different cities have been the focal point of a radiating American spirit. In the late eighteenth century, for example, Boston was the center of a political radicalism that ignited a shot heard round the world—a shot that could not have been fired any other place but the suburbs of Boston. At its report, all Americans, including Virginians, became Bostonians at heart. In the mid-nineteenth century, New York became the symbol of the idea of a melting-pot America—or at least a non-English one—as the wretched refuge from all over the world disembarked at Ellis Island and spread over the land their strange languages and even stranger ways. In the early twentieth century, Chicago, the city of big shoulders and heavy winds, came to symbolize the industrial energy and dynamism of America. If there is a statue of a hog butcher somewhere in Chicago, then it stands as a reminder of the time when America was railroads, cattle, steel mills and entrepreneurial adventures. If there is no such statue, there ought to be, just as there is a statue of a Minute Man to recall the Age of Boston, as the Statue of Liberty recalls the Age of New York.

Today, we must look to the city of Las Vegas, Nevada, as a metaphor of our national character and aspiration, its symbol a thirty-foot-high cardboard picture of a slot machine and a chorus girl. For Las Vegas is a city entirely devoted to the idea of entertainment, and as such proclaims the spirit of a culture in which all public discourse increasingly takes the form of entertainment. Our politics, religion, news, athletics, education and
The Median is the Monster

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part of the content of culture. This idea—that there is a content of culture that is not just moves and manipulations of matter, but movements of ideas—has been a constant theme in McLuhan’s work. He argued that the medium is the message, that the form of communication shapes the content. This is evident in his observation that different media have different effects on society. For example, the printing press, as a medium, allowed for the sharing of ideas on a scale never before possible, leading to the Age of Enlightenment. Conversely, the telegraph, as a medium, allowed for the instantaneous transmission of information across vast distances, leading to the Age of Mass Communication. McLuhan believed that these media were not just tools for delivery but had profound effects on society, shaping the way we think and perceive the world.
The Medium is the Metaphor

What is peculiar about such interpretations of media is that their role in directing what we will see or know is so rarely noticed. A person who watches television or who glances at the back of someone's doormat is not really interested in how his or her concept of the world is altered by the nature of the media through which his or her world is presented, nor is he or she aware of how his or her world is shaped by the use of television or the back of his or her doormat. There is simply no awareness of the medium of the metaphor.

Instead, what is important is the metaphor, to the extent that we may even say that the metaphor (or the back of the doormat) is itself the medium. We are so used to the nature of the medium that we no longer sense a need to take account of it. It has become so seamless a part of our world that we fail to recognize its impact on our perceptions. This is true whether we are talking about television or any other medium.

The Medium is the Metaphor is a way of thinking about the nature of media and their impact on our perceptions. It is a way of understanding how media shape our world and how we perceive it. It is a way of recognizing the power of media to influence our thoughts and actions. It is a way of understanding the nature of the metaphor and its role in shaping our world.
The Medium Is the Message

A Thousand Years of Speeches and Letters

Words, the medium, are the message. The words are the ideas that are being communicated. The meaning of the text is not in the words themselves, but in the way they are arranged and the context in which they are presented.

Pico della Mirandola's Oration on the Dignity of Man

In his Oration on the Dignity of Man, Pico della Mirandola argues that the human being is capable of anything because of the freedom of the individual to choose. This freedom is represented by the Masonic symbol of the compass and square, which represent the ideas of knowledge and virtue, respectively.

The Book of John

In the Book of John, Jesus says, "I am the light of the world. He who follows me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." This passage highlights the idea of enlightenment and the importance of following the path of the light.

The Elements of Style

In his book The Elements of Style, William Strunk Jr. and E.B. White provide guidelines for writing clear and effective prose. The principles they outline—such as avoiding passive voice, using active verbs, and choosing words that are vivid and precise—are still considered essential for good writing today.

The Concept of Time

The concept of time is complex and can be difficult to understand. It is often represented through the use of analog clocks, which show the passage of time through the movement of the hands.

The Power of Language

Language is a powerful tool that can be used to convey ideas, emotions, and meaning. It is through language that we communicate with others and express our thoughts and feelings.
metaphors no longer serve us, we must, in the nature of the matter, find others that will. Light is a particle; language, a river; God (as Bertrand Russell proclaimed), a differential equation; the mind, a garden that yearns to be cultivated.

But our media-metaphors are not so explicit or so vivid as these, and they are far more complex. In understanding their metaphorical function, we must take into account the symbolic forms of their information, the source of their information, the quantity and speed of their information, the context in which their information is experienced. Thus, it takes some digging to get at them, to grasp, for example, that a clock recreates time as an independent, mathematically precise sequence; that writing recreates the mind as a tablet on which experience is written; that the telegraph recreates news as a commodity. And yet, such digging becomes easier if we start from the assumption that in every tool we create, an idea is embedded that goes beyond the function of the thing itself. It has been pointed out, for example, that the invention of eyeglasses in the twelfth century not only made it possible to improve defective vision but suggested the idea that human beings need not accept as final either the endowments of nature or the ravages of time. Eyeglasses refuted the belief that anatomy is destiny by putting forward the idea that our bodies as well as our minds are improvable. I do not think it goes too far to say that there is a link between the invention of eyeglasses in the twelfth century and gene-splitting research in the twentieth.

Even such an instrument as the microscope, hardly a tool of everyday use, had embedded within it a quite astonishing idea, not about biology but about psychology. By revealing a world hitherto hidden from view, the microscope suggested a possibility about the structure of the mind.

If things are not what they seem, if microbes lurk, unseen, on and under our skin, if the invisible controls the visible, then is it not possible that ids and egos and superegos also lurk somewhere unseen? What else is psychoanalysis but a microscope of the mind? Where do our notions of mind come from if not from metaphors generated by our tools? What does it mean to say that someone has an IQ of 126? There are no numbers in people's heads. Intelligence does not have quantity or magnitude, except as we believe that it does. And why do we believe that it does? Because we have tools that imply that this is what the mind is like. Indeed, our tools for thought suggest to us what our bodies are like, as when someone refers to her "biological clock," or when we talk of our "genetic codes," or when we read someone's face like a book, or when our facial expressions telegraph our intentions.

When Galileo remarked that the language of nature is written in mathematics, he meant it only as a metaphor. Nature itself does not speak. Neither do our minds or our bodies or, more to the point of this book, our bodies politic. Our conversations about nature and about ourselves are conducted in whatever "languages" we find possible and convenient to employ. We do not see nature or intelligence or human motivation or ideology as "it" is but only as our languages are. And our languages are our media. Our media are our metaphors. Our metaphors create the content of our culture.
Amusing Ourselves to Death

Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business

Neil Postman

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