

1 June 1993

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Dear Brian,

I enjoyed your interview with Douglas Davis. As a lifelong student of media, Marshall McLuhan was my favorite teacher. I wish I could have been with you to help explain "The medium is the message".

McLuhan believed that the environment created by a new medium - or technology - is far more powerful in its effect on us than is its content. For example, the phonetic alphabet - as the birthplace of the straight line - created Euclidean geometry, Western Civilization, and the modern army (you can't have a platoon without a straight line). The content of the alphabet, literature and number, certainly assist in the shaping of thought and behavior, but on a level less profound than the forces unleashed by the nature of the medium itself.

Jumping ahead to television, is the violence on tv nearly as destructive as the psychological, emotional, social, and physical adaptations required from each of us as our world dissolves from fixed, well-defined, relatively slow-paced mechanical space to vague, moving-at-the-speed-of-light, now you see it now you don't electronic space? What's *on* tv has become a distraction, obscuring our view of a medium more tactile than visual. While we are sleep(walk)ing through life, the hidden environments of television are working around the clock on our psyche, our self image, and our relationships with one another. Many in the business are fond of saying: "lighten up, it's not brain surgery!". I say it is brain surgery (and I have my doubts about many of the other doctors in the operating room).

McLuhan was one of the first cultural anthropologists to learn and then teach the habit of looking at the effects of a medium to understand it, rather than looking directly at it. On a recent visit to Lithuania - where I enjoyed conversations with people who never interrupted me nor one another - I wondered if the American habit of interrupting the tv viewer several times each half-hour slowly but surely teaches us that it is acceptable to interrupt and to be interrupted. That is an illustration of "The medium is the message".

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I look forward to another opportunity to visit with you. My series-in-development FIELD TRIPS will be appearing soon on NEWSCHANNEL 8. as a result of your suggestion, I am including kids on the show.

Best wishes, [REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

P.S. The title of McLuhan's 1969 book, *The Medium is the Massage*, alludes to the how new media have a way of numbing - massaging, if you will - our sensory apparatus so that only the artist, the child, or the outcast is alert to the psychological and social havoc brought about by new media. McLuhan defined the role of the artist in society as like a D.E.W. (Distant Early Warning) line for those of us who, preoccupied by our vested interests in the way things are, fail to see the boulders falling on our heads. I'm afraid - for both of us - that I could go on and on .



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