



## Laws of Media: The New Science

*Marshall McLuhan , Eric McLuhan*

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Marshall McLuhan has been described as Canada's most exciting and original thinker, a member of the small company of intellectual geniuses this country has produced. Works such as *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, *The Mechanical Bride*, *From Cliche to Archetype*, and *Understanding Media* have established his reputation throughout the world and have profoundly influenced our understanding of contemporary communication. In his later years McLuhan was working on a 'unified field' theory of human culture, an effort in which he collaborated with and was assisted by his son, Eric McLuhan. This book is the result of that collaboration. The McLuhans are retrieving another way of understanding our world, a way known to some ancient Greeks (but not Aristotle), to medieval thinkers, to Francis Bacon and Giambattista Vico, and to T.S. Eliot and James Joyce in this century. It is based on the use of words and the consequent power of the 'logos' to shape all the elements of culture - media - with which we surround ourselves.

The authors explain how the invention of the alphabet led to the dominance of visual-space conceptualizations over those of acoustic space and its creative words (and word-plays). They consider the differences between the left- and right-hand sides of our brains, and use Gestalt theories of figure and ground to explore the underlying principles that define media.

'Media,' the word so closely connected with Marshall McLuhan's thought, is here explored in its broadest meaning, encompassing all that has been created by humans: artefacts, information, ideas - every example of human innovation, from computer program to a tea cup, from musical arrangement to the formula for a cold remedy, from an X-ray machine to the sentence you're reading right now. All these are media to which can be applied the laws the McLuhans have developed.

The laws are based on a set of four questions - a tetrad - that can be applied to any artefact or idea:

What does it enhance or intensify?

What does it render obsolete or displace?

What does it retrieve that was previously obsolesced?

What does it produce or become when pressed to an extreme?

Inherent in every human innovation is an answer to each of the questions of this tetrad; anything that does not contain answers to these four questions is not the product of human creation.

The laws identified by the McLuhans constitute a new scientific basis for media studies, testable, and able to allow for prediction. It takes in all human activities and speech; it breaks down barriers and reconsiders them as mere intervals. In the McLuhan tradition, this New Science offers a whole new understanding of human creation, and a vision that could reshape our future.

## Laws of Media: The New Science Details

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## From Reader Review Laws of Media: The New Science for online ebook

### Adam Roan says

basically this is a post-modern essay book... very cultivated knowledge that is blended together with some interesting notes.

What did I think??! it was a decent read, I think the footnotes were more precedent than the actual text.. perhaps a big gripe for me when I read McLuhan is how thought and subsequently his writing is seemingly jarred when you analyze how his writing is supposed to speak volumes of a particular topic... this book is certainly post-modern and an academic exercise. if a book is sequenced in such a way that it spends far too less time on it's form and content.. than I am weary of its execution.

for instance, his analogies on left/right brain hemispheres have been proven to be scientifically false.. because it turns out, we do not have a dominate side to our brains.. the brain works more like a lattice, certain spots are brighter than others, and ultimately, i believe, biological determinism of the left/right hemisphere is false... of course, this doesn't rule out a dominate hemisphere, but it seems likely that our brain is wired for inactivity, which makes the whole debacle between whether we have a dominate side more moot.

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### Hugh says

Currently stalled...lots of food for thought, but very inside baseball and academic in the first few chapters.

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### David says

interesting stuff....to say the least....

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### Manik Sukoco says

Laws of Media may not be McLuhan's best-known work, but it is one of his best in terms of insight and intuition. The work, based partly on scientific assumptions (e.g. the idea that we are becoming less rational and more emotional as a result of the impact of electronic media), tries to explain many of the enigmas of the life of media in the twentieth century (art, for example) in terms of the relation between the human mind and technology.

Some ideas are, I think, quite convincing, and no doubt very fascinating. His explanation of solipsism in art (and not only in art) as a misunderstanding of the new concepts of modern science and electric technology is extremely interesting.

Much as physicists had to create a new mathematics and geometry to explain new concepts in less analytical a way than they could with the old means, so artists had to resort to new, simpler ways to express a new sensibility. But they did so only towards the end of the century. Modern art, this seems to imply, was a transitional phase between the art of the "Gutenberg Age" and the new means of expression (if one may call

them "art" at all) of the 21st century.

I find much less convincing the second part of the book, where McLuhan describes the life of media (all media, from the wheel to the stirrup, down to the TV set) by way of what he calls "tetrads" (groups of four concepts that describe the birth, life and obsolescence of every medium).

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