



## II. EXPRESSION OF CREATIVITY: MASS CULTURE AND MEDIA CASES

### THE QUESTION CONCERNING MEDIA EFFECTS AND ORIGINS

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*Received 15 December 2014; accepted 22 December 2014*

In this paper I seek to raise the question concerning media effects and origins. The medium can be conceived as the message and communicative environment. Furthermore, media are the extensions of man's consciousness and senses. By these extensions subjectivity seeks for self-preservation, painless contact and socialization. One can understand the nature of connectivity not by exploring the content of a medium but the effects and development of communication. Media develops like a metaphor, that is to say every medium tends to transform into another medium and to translate knowledge from one kind to another. Furthermore, the content of any medium is another medium. The content of the writing is oral speech. The content of latter is nonverbal psychic processes with their basic drives such as *libido*, death drive and narcissism. These drives generate ambiguity in media development and effects.

Keywords: communication, death drive, Sigmund Freud, Marshall McLuhan, media.

#### Introduction

The phenomenon of medium can be thought about in many different ways. This paper will attempt to open up access to the concept of mediality by way of questioning the origins and effects of media on a human being in general. The question of the effects of media can be answered taking into consideration the insights of communications scholar Marshall McLuhan (1911–1980). The answer to the origins of media can be discovered with the aid of the theory of psychoanalysis. The connection between McLuhan's theory of media and psychoanalysis has already been explored elsewhere<sup>1</sup>. This paper will not concern itself with the effects of psychoanalysis on McLuhan's

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<sup>1</sup> Especially, in the following books: Wolfe 1969; Cavell 2002; Marchessault 2005.

theory of media; rather, it will attempt to find points of convergence between philosophy of media and psychoanalysis with the hope of an eventual synthesis of the two. The question of the origins of media will be explored using two main Freudian psychic drives: love and death. The phenomenon of medium as such will be discussed in this paper using McLuhan's theory.

McLuhan sees media as the extensions of human condition and activities, namely, the extensions of the senses, organs and the human body in general. Moreover, media, according to McLuhan, have always existed in an environment where they could interact and even extend each other. This kind of extension is possible because, McLuhan believes, the content of one medium is always another medium, ultimately leading to the medium of language beyond which one can find various mental processes. He considers speech, writing, press, roads, photography, clothing, housing, automobiles, cities, watches, money, weapons, electrical devices or, in a nutshell, practically everything that civilization has created and continues to create, as media. However, medium for McLuhan is not exclusively and merely a cultural object created by humans for practical or expressive purposes; rather, it is a communicative object that has an important effect on the individual as well as culture at large. Let us investigate this phenomenon more closely. What is the medium?

### The medium is the message

This above mentioned quite original and broad conception of media echoes the etymology of the word "medium" itself. The Latin adjective *medius* means, first of all *medial, intermediate*; but it also means *middle, central, profound* and, paradoxically, it can also mean *mediocre, common, public*. A noun *medium* (plural *media*) is also ambiguous. It can mean *an intermediate, an interval* and also *a middle, the center or what stays in the center* but also *the public, the community* (Andrews 1879). The etymology of the word *medium* suggests, on the one hand, the relativistic division between the outside and the inside<sup>2</sup>; on the other hand, it is something that embraces<sup>3</sup> and penetrates, in other words, the phenomenon that constantly oscillates between the inside and the outside, between the center and the periphery. It unites while dividing but at the same time it never divides absolutely; it divides leaving a certain connection. Today we widely use one variant of this notion, usually in the plural – *media* – initially meant to describe some kind of mediation, tools, or gadgets, and from the early 20th century starting to denote mass media.

McLuhan urges us to ponder beyond the usual use of the word *media*, denoting mass media, and to view the phenomenon of mediality from a wider and deeper perspective. His postulate "the medium is the message", has become a slogan which has opened up many debates. If the medium is understood as the means of transmitting

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<sup>2</sup> It is especially noticeable in the case of electricity that is paradigmatic for McLuhan's theory of implosive mediality.

<sup>3</sup> e. g., air and the mediality of sound conditioned by it.

something, then the idea of seeing the medium as the message itself is controversial because the medium transmits information without being the information itself. McLuhan, however, thinks that there is no actual controversy precisely because he does not think that the message expresses the content. The message is a pure form. It is the form that has a crucial, even decisive transformative effect. Such a pure form is an environment, a medium like, for example, air or electromagnetic field. Taken from this perspective, the message can be seen as pure container and, at the same time, the process of transmitting, transferring or “transporting” toward the contact but also the contact itself, which transforms both the sender and the addressee.

The notion of communication in regard to the mediality is also important. In many cases, the verb *to communicate* has a transitive meaning. In that case, the notion of communication brings content into focus. But even so, the content is accidental, not essential. The verb *to communicate* also has an original intransitive meaning. To communicate means to have relation to, to join, to intercommunicate, to participate and thus to share, to transmit something. The slogan “the medium is the message”, then could mean that any kind of subjectivity is being embraced and saturated by the (web of) media. A human being in principle abides in communicative environment in which he inevitably has contacts and is also transformed by those contacts (not contents).

So when the publisher made a typographical mistake in the title of the book that McLuhan wrote together with his colleague Quentin Fiore: “The Medium is The Message: An Inventory of Effects” (printed as *The Medium is the Massage: An Inventory of Effects* (McLuhan, Fiore 1967b)), McLuhan reacted with enthusiasm. After all, the essence of the message implies interaction, friction, a mutual “massaging” contact between the subject and its environment. Therefore, things like crutches, a written text, narcotics or a computer are all media in that they are certain means of “massaging” communication, not in a sense of an informative content, but in a sense of a formal mutual effect as found in any kind of contact. On the other hand, as was mentioned before, McLuhan is not primarily interested in the medium as the means of mass communication and not even as the concept of species to describe the tools; what he is interested in is how a particular thing or at least artifact implies a certain kind of mediality.

### Linear writing and the electric communication medium

McLuhan likens his idea of the medium as the message to the paradigmatic example of electric light. Electric light is pure (from the physical point of view) contact and, at the same time, at least today, is a necessary condition of communication. The ubiquitous space of technology has a profound influence on human sensory perceptions and consciousness. Perhaps some doubts could be raised with regard to, say, whether a watch, a typewriter, or an automobile can actually change our habits of perception. However, nobody would be able to deny the irreversible effects of the use of electric light energy on us. In case of global failure of electricity, contemporary society would become completely paralyzed, just as our senses experience when a light bulb burns out. What is the essence of electricity? It can be used to boil water or

to watch TV. But these are the accidental manifestations of electricity, just separate contents of it. Electricity as pure form enables the operation of those contents. The electrical synapses run in the web of our neural system. Electricity as a paradigmatic medium comprehensively shows that the medium itself harbors communication and the message precisely because the medium controls and governs every aspect of human action and relationship.

The content of media is very multifarious but not crucial to our understanding of the functioning of today's society. From the narrow theoretical point of view, the electrical light may appear inconsequential to human communication because, seemingly, it itself does not contain any informative content, unless it is used to advertise something on a billboard. But in that case, we would be interested in exploring only the content of the light or the way it is used and not the light itself, leaving the essence of the idea of the medium completely behind. According to McLuhan, "The message of the electric light is like the message of electric power in industry, totally radical, pervasive, and decentralized. For electric light and power are separate from their uses, yet they eliminate time and space factors in human association exactly as do radio, telegraph, telephone, and TV, creating involvement in depth" (1994: 9). So it turns out that not the exploration of the concrete content of technology but, rather, the exploration of the technology's influence on the human environment, of culture and of the technology's origins can reveal the essence of the medium.

The effects of technological advancement inevitably cause changes, sometimes even radical ones, in culture and our perception of the world. To locate these changes McLuhan employs gestalt "figure-ground" correlation theory. The content of the medium (information) correlates with the form (technology) in the same fashion as the gestalt figure correlates with the background. On the other hand, any medium, just like any gestalt figure, is composed of an organic totality based on the conditions (background) of its own time and space. Every medium is included in another medium. Therefore, media have to be investigated from the perspective of their contexts paying special attention to their history and change. McLuhan developed a fourfold principle of the effects of media which can be discovered asking these four questions that he calls *tetrad*: 1. What does the medium enhance or intensify? 2. What does the medium render obsolete or displaced? 3. What does the medium retrieve that was previously obsolesced? 4. What does the medium produce or become when pressed to the extreme? (1988: 5–8).

The last three thousand years in Western Europe were the years of the development and prevalence of the medium of alphabetical writing: from the invention of the Phoenician alphabet to the mass reproduction of printed texts. This period was also the time of the development of all kinds of mechanical technologies that in turn spatially expanded the capabilities of human organs and senses. According to Harold Innis (1894–1952), the transition from spoken to written word culture in the first millennium BC, signified the formation of the linear rational kind of thinking inclined to use subtle distinctions and monologue (1991: 7–9). The written codes enabled uniformity, justice, and a belief in laws, but at the same time they also helped to facilitate a certain stagnation within the culture and its worldview. The authorities of the tribal

chief, a priest, or a ruler were overrun by the authority of a written text. The tradition of the oral transmission of myths was replaced by the study and elaboration of written theologies. The prevalence of a written text assigned much greater importance to logic and philosophy and in turn evoked skepticism regarding Gods among the literate of antiquity. A literate individual became distinguished from the collective consciousness which has been supported by the oral tradition of the tribe. “The oral tradition emphasized memory and training. <...> A simplified and flexible alphabet and the spread of writing and reading emphasized logic and consequently general agreement. The spread of writing widened the base by which the screening of ability could take place. <...> A writing age was essentially an egoistic age” (Innis 1991: 9).

McLuhan agrees with Innis that the main features of every literate society is continuity of space and of time, the uniformity of code and the rational subject's ability to separate herself from feelings, from clan and family. One legend from ancient Greece tells us that when Cadmus sowed dragon's teeth, armed soldiers grew. McLuhan draws a parallel between the alphabetical writing and a row of teeth and uses this ancient legend as an allegory for the influence that the invention of an alphabet had for its contemporaries. Literacy not only sets an individual apart from the tribe and guarantees his autonomy, but also enables the governmental authority within a society to move from religious to military structures. A written text together with the mechanization of life enabled the explosion of expansive and aggressive powers in human civilization. McLuhan's tetrad scheme supports an argument that the technology of writing makes the visual sense's function stronger and more widespread, but diminishes the role of other senses, such as sound, touch, and taste. This “overuse” of visual function in the literal society leads to a more fragmented sensory, social, and cultural life. It becomes especially obvious after the invention of the printing press and its widespread dissemination. With the help of armed forces a written text channels the expansive destructive aggression, whose chaotic, spontaneous eruptions were controlled by the tribe. But what happens to the written word when it is pressed to an extreme in the era of mass literacy? This question can only be answered looking at the effects of our globally electrified life on literate culture.

With the dawn of the electric age starts a radical transformation of consciousness and social life. In a certain respect, the sensually fragmented whole, the main feature in the period of written text, in the digital age is subverted again in favor of the primordial synesthetic whole. McLuhan believes that Cubism is a good example of this new kind of consciousness. Cubism abandons the illusion of perspective in order to focus solely on the sensory whole alone. Sequence gives way to the simultaneous. The reading consciousness is being transformed in consciousness of integral structure and shape. “Specialized segments of attention have shifted to total field”, states McLuhan, “and we can now say, “The medium is the message” quite naturally” (1994: 13). In the past it seemed that the meaning and the importance of the message was in its content (or in the information it carries), the content that needed to be decoded raising such questions as, “what does it mean?”, or “what is this book about?”; unlike today, when thanks to the electric transmission of the message, it again becomes easier and more natural to perceive instantaneously the meaning of the whole of the structure, its form and function.

It is also evident that this transformative process of sensibility and worldview (from written to electromagnetic) is not completely finished. Some still try to deny the important influence of the electromagnetic medium on our culture. Especially it is the case with the people who conservatively cling to the past and thus are unable to judge the profound transformative effect of electricity on the Western literate culture. So-called modern rationalists have a hard time trying to understand the essence of the spoken language used by the ancient cultures. For instance, the exegetes of the Holy Scripture insist on using the linear analysis even though the object of their investigation does not properly yield to this kind of treatment. Usually they attempt to explain the relationship between God and a human, between God and the world, as well as between a human and his neighbor in a strict systematic way. They hold an opinion that one thing discursively follows the other in the linear fashion. In the Bible, however, all of those relationships exist together simultaneously; they constantly interact among each other and never amount to any coherent whole. The sensibility of the Ancient Hebraic and Eastern tradition in general gives birth to the thinking style that is in principle acoustic and vocal. It is a concentric rather than linear way of thinking or, in other words, the movement toward the center of meaning is of a spiral type. Every significant thought is continuously being repeated over and over again, each time by means of a different form. A listener is not so much being informed about the content but, rather, transformed by sacred truths in order to be provoked to experience again and again a non-textual message existing beyond rationality.

This kind of supererogatory form comes back in the age of the speed of light where instantaneous and ubiquitous electricity presents the content in the concentric rather than linear way. McLuhan pointedly notices that, “the concentric with its endless intersection of planes is necessary for insight. In fact, it is the technique of insight, and as such is necessary for media study, since no medium has its meaning or existence alone, but only in constant interplay with other media” (1994: 26). We live in the age of the thinking mode that is deeply permeated by electricity and its effects, but it is also still the age of confrontation with the linear, segmented, analytic ways of thinking characteristic of the preceding mechanical age. Nevertheless, today it is crucial to comprehend not so much the contents of the message, but more the totality of their effects on our thinking. As was mentioned before, the essence of the message and communication in general is not a certain content as the amount of informative data. The message or communication is, first of all, a formative “massaging” effect. The effect covers the whole situation and not just some isolated level of information (McLuhan, Fiore 1967a: 288–290).

### Mediality and the *sensus communis*

The process of mechanization fulfills the need to develop various specialized forms. The development of media, according to McLuhan, is driven by our natural need and ability to grab a thing and drop it so we can grab another instead of it, as if to satisfy the need to expand the domain of our actions (1994: 56). This functions as a metaphor which represents the subject’s urge to reach out beyond its present capability. The

medium acts as a metaphor: it “translates” experience into new forms of expression. Language is perhaps the best example of this kind of “translation”. A word is the extension of consciousness (if consciousness and speech are not logo-centrally identified with one another). It equips a subject with an ability to distinguish herself from her natural environment and helps to create a safe distance from it, as if to supply this subject with a new understanding of her natural environment in order to come back and subjugate it. Language is the technology of explication, an intricate system of metaphors that allows the subject to express or, in other words, to externalize the subject’s sensations and feelings. Vocalization of sensory perception recreates experience.

However, during the moment of contact a human being is transformed as well. This transformation becomes especially sensible in the age of electricity. The human subject herself becomes a form of information and the technological expansion of her consciousness acquires a new extent. The subject is increasingly externalizing herself. Such electrical devices (media) as mobile phones, satellites, or internet provide an opportunity for a human nervous system to expand globally; and thus extended human body itself becomes the informational system. The medium of electricity is gradually transforming our world into one big global village. “Electromagnetic technology requires utter human docility and quiescence of meditation such as befits an organism that now wears its brain outside its skull and its nerves outside its hide” (McLuhan 1994: 57). A human becomes an acquiescent servant of digital technology. Moreover, she becomes a subsidiary mechanism. In the ancient times humans were dependent on the extensions of their physical organs, but that dependency was fragmented and partial. The implosive electrical medium is all-subsuming and complete.

Humans have always been interested in pursuing unity. However, the notion of unity has always been changing. Classical philosophy expressed it in the form of the concept, *sensus communis* (Aristotle already talks about it in his “On the Soul” (Wallace 1882: Γ1, 425a)). A subject perceives the world with her five senses. Those senses act in concert, not separately. This way it is possible to perceive a particular and at the same time to abstract a universal in it. Experience as a whole is perceived through one general sense (*αἴσθησις κοινή*). Thomas Aquinas inherits this Aristotelian notion. *Sensus communis* enables the sense of entirety and judgement (Sancti Thomae de Aquino 2011: p. I, q. 1, art. 3). The humanistic tradition of the 18th century offers a very different kind of conception of the *sensus communis* strongly rooted in the Roman tradition. The *sensus communis* for this tradition means social justice and a general feeling of wellness, which is peculiar to every individual in the community. The abstract Greek notion of the *sensus communis* now gives way to the Roman practical tradition based on loyalty and respect for the laws. *Communis* no longer means a sensory unification but a sense of community and citizenship. The English humanist Anthony Ashley-Cooper, 7th Earl of Shaftesbury (1801–1885) describes this “common sense” as sympathy or the union of sympathies, interconnectedness among the members of a community based on solidarity, friendly wit and humor (2001: especially p. III, sect. I). In German thought *sensus communis* acquires a narrower meaning of a simply natural logical way of thinking that they call *gesunder Menschenverstand*. However, according to Hans-Georg Gadamer, this German

*gesunder Menschenverstand* is too limiting and lacking important socio-political and moral connotations (1986: 31). The French tradition, however, manages to keep a more authentic meaning of *sensus communis* because it understands *sensus communis* as *bon sens* (good sense)<sup>4</sup>. In his speech given at the award ceremony at the Sorbonne in 1895, Henri Bergson describes this *bon sens* as a feeling that surpasses abstract rationality, yet this sensation is also not the whole of the five senses, but, rather, it expresses an individual's ability to orient herself in her social environment and in the bearings of interpersonal relationships. It is also important to note that this feeling is not inborn; one must constantly work on adapting to new social situations daily. This is the only way to put practical truth and justice into action. It turns out that *bon sens* is in actuality a social sense (*sens social*) and is the common source of rational thinking and will (1957: 84–94).

Sadly, the events of the first part of the 20th century seem to have shattered all hopes for a common human purpose of peace. Enlightenment's rationality became merely utopian. *Sensus communis* seemed to have been dispersed into many isolated fractions with no hope of piecing them together into one sensible whole. However, McLuhan does see hope of this ancient type of sensible wholeness in the new media of electricity. *Sensus communis* can today be seen, extended and transformed in computer technology. The harmonious relationship among all the senses can be created through programming. According to McLuhan, this new utopia provides the hope that with the help of electromagnetic technologies it will be possible to expand collective human consciousness without limit and the era of languages and national borders will eventually become history (1994: 130). The simulation of direct and total consciousness will require no national languages; instead, it will operate as one mass electronic consciousness, as global thermostats will perhaps in the future render obsolete those extensions of skin and body which are homes. The question McLuhan asks looking into the future is: "If the work of the city is the remaking or translating of man into a more suitable form than his nomadic ancestors achieved, then might not our current translation of our entire lives into the spiritual form of information seem to make of the entire globe, and of the human family, a single consciousness?" (1994: 61).

One can conclude that it is possible to observe the tendencies toward unity and separation, toward contact and isolation in the history and development of media as the extensions of man. Two radical moments emerge in the history of media: alphabetic writing and electrification. Alongside the mechanization of culture the former stimulated fragmentation; the latter is moving fast toward unity and globalization. Despite McLuhan's optimism, it is still unclear whether this new society of information will necessarily become the society of true communication and solidarity.

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<sup>4</sup> Here it is important to keep in mind that Latin adjective *communis* from which derives the above discussed *communicatio*, just like a noun *communio* (*kinship, union, Communion*), all share the same root with a more primordial noun *munus*, which has a strong ethical content and means *duty, responsibility, gift, sacrifice*. Thus, *communis* and *communicatio*, because of their shared root with *munus*, seems to describe some kind of altruistic social relationship.

A dystopia is equally possible, where the future subjectivity would get “frozen” in narcissistic virtuality. In order to see whether there is a possibility for either (utopia or dystopia), we would need to investigate the roots of media emergence in human subjectivity.

### Sensibility and *libido* in the origins of mediality

Where do the subjective conditions of any medium start? As was mentioned before, for McLuhan media first of all are the extensions of the senses and human body organs. By changing direction, we should be able to dig deep into the topic of mediality even before its association with the sensory perception, or before its connection to the rational consciousness. McLuhan notices that the history of media and what they seem to contain strongly suggest that one medium is always born out of another. As was proposed earlier, the content of one particular medium is always another medium: it genealogically and chronologically follows the preceding medium. The content of a written text is a spoken language, the latter's content is thinking, and the content of thinking is deep psychic processes. The explanation of the primeval tendencies of subjectivity can be sought in the so-called depth psychology and in particular in the psychoanalytic findings of its originator, Sigmund Freud.

For a long time the father of psychoanalysis based his theory on the sexual drive (*libido*) claiming that it was the ruling force in human life and also the culprit of many conflicts. The pleasure principle was believed to be the chief principle regulating psychic processes. Freud discovered that the human psychic tendency is to release or at least to reduce the tension created by the accumulation of unfulfilled needs. However, the principle of pleasure, residing in the substratum of primary instinctual processes, is constantly being restrained by the reality principle (external circumstances temporarily disturbing this pleasure principle and sometimes absolutely preventing the libidinal hunger from subsiding). So it was believed that the conflict or tension between these two forces (*libido* and reality) creates the basis for the psychological economy (Freud 1955b: 353–357). After discovering that *libido* energy has a narcissistic character and even going as far as to say that it permeates the biology of every cell, Freud was able to expand his concept of sexual instinct. He called it *Eros*, a natural force of attraction always working on sustaining all the elements of biological substance. Freud realized that the sexual drive is the manifestation of this general life-affirming tendency called *Eros* when directed toward an object. The attraction of *Eros* in nature is responsible not just for the sexual drive but also the sustenance of any other biophysical structure, and the preservation of life in general.

In his study *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, Freud also starts talking about another, quite different kind of psychic phenomenon that seems to be dealing with difficult, unpleasant situations, remembrance of trauma and an exhausting repetition of the same dream over and over again. Any of us can perhaps remember the persistent recurrence of tormenting dreams. Those dreams could, and very likely do mean a person's re-living of her past trauma. Instead of treating this trauma as an event belonging to the past, the reoccurring dream tries to keep it current. What is espe-

cially surprising is that this compulsion to keep traumatic events present cannot be explained away either by the pleasure principle or by the reality principle. Given these empirical findings, Freud is compelled to make an argument that in the deepest layer of psychic life one encounters another instinctual principle that is of a quite different character from the pleasure principle (1961: 12–17). It seems to perform a quite unexpected function of trying to deliver the psyche back to the pre-traumatic state through the weary, compulsive repetition of an unpleasant stimulation. The observation of this tendency suggests that there is in humans a not clearly definable and outwardly not easily recognizable driving force whose purpose seems to be to help the psyche regress to a pre-traumatic, perhaps even to a primeval state of *numbness*.

In returning back to McLuhan it is important to remember that he sees the origins of media, or at least the rise of technology, in the human ability to grab and drop one thing after another. Let us look more closely at this. Perhaps one confronts here not just the ability to do it but also the libidinal desire to grab a thing knowing that if this thing starts causing pain or discomfort, or even appears to be dangerous, one could easily let go of it. Or maybe even it is related to a primeval fear of pain and a subject's basic need to push that pain away, to disconnect herself from it, to isolate. There is an inclination to think about human senses as orifices that erotically absorb the external objects in order to make them into representations for our consciousness. However, sensibility prior to the perception of something is a passive nervous reaction to pain as well as extrinsic irritants. Experience starts with sensibility. Pain is prior to the pleasure of recognition. It is often thought that sensibility is the material for representation. However, our eyes are not just for looking, ears are not just for listening, skin is not just for touch, but those organs are primarily for the passive experiencing of reality, or pure sensibility that is already present in the inception of sensory intuition and it is also its cause.

Sensibility as sense perception cannot be reduced to pure matter for rational subjectivity. Sensibility, muddying the rational mind already signifies before understanding. From the perspective of traditional philosophy, communication as expression and as an exchange of meaning has always had a rational character. Today this kind of approach is being challenged and criticized. One of the examples is the phenomenological revision of subjectivity and sensibility in Emanuel Levinas' philosophy. The sensibility of the primordial pre-reflexive and pre-discursive states has an utmost importance in everyday life and communication. Precisely in this state emerges radical experience of other(ness). According to Levinas, sensibility as the fragility of human physiology as well as the vulnerability of the senses feels deep inside the pain of the contact, and together with it anxiety and sleeplessness. The primary condition for contact and communication is sensibility seen as a primordial psychic passivity and vulnerability. Because of its sensibility, a subjective mind deeply feels the danger of possible injury and hurt. But precisely in this place of vulnerability, a subject can be awakened from a deep "autistic" and "solipsistic" sleep. This is where the possibility of communication is born. According to Levinas, this is also a place where ethical relationship and morality emerge. "The subjectivity of a subject is vulnerability, exposure to affection, sensibility, a passivity more passive still than any passivity, an

irrecoverable time, an assemblable diachrony of patience, an exposedness always to be exposed the more, an exposure to expressing, and thus to saying, thus to giving” (1994: 50).

Freud also talks about the feeling of uncanny<sup>5</sup> otherness that can be found deep in the consciousness. This notion of uncanny does not seem to be in agreement with the fear of death, which arises when the erotic tendency toward survival and propagation is, for one or another reason, disturbed. Alongside this erotic tendency and beyond it there resides a primeval sensibility whose primary goal is to spontaneously avoid pain at any cost coming from both, inside and the outside. The feeling of the uncanny can be born out of the tension between hunger, inquisitiveness or sexual drive on the one hand, and the avoidance of pain and any contact on the other. Freud notices that guarding against all those irritations is more important than acceptance of them. If so, then would not it be possible to make an assumption that from the beginning the transition from inorganic to organic nature was challenged by the reaction of the primeval living organism to the destructive outside forces? The consequence of this reaction could had been the spontaneous primeval striving on the part of a now living organism to go back to the original inorganic, painless state of nature (Freud 1961: 18–22). At this point, perhaps it is possible to conclude that together with the emergence of a live organism there also appeared the protective layer, a membrane, that could arguably be seen as the prototype of media. The membrane is that primeval isolating, filtrating and connective environment.

### Narcotic, erotic and destructive mediality

The Greek myth of Narcissus is relevant for our purposes. On the one hand, narcissism is commonly believed to mean the excessive love of oneself. It arises when for whatever reason, it is not possible for a subject to achieve or to own the object of desire or when she is unsuccessful in retaining possession of it, and because of that her libidinal energy turns back onto the subject (Freud 1955a: 249–250). On the other hand, narcissism can be interpreted as an economical psychic tendency to sustain its internal balance through the utmost internal concentration and wasting very little energy outwardly (Freud 1961: 45–46). This less common interpretation seems to express the allegorical meaning of the Greek myth. McLuhan also notices and pays attention on the fact that this Greek name Narcissus (*Νάρκισσος*) and a noun *νάρκωσις*

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<sup>5</sup> Freud analyses this equivocal notion in his study *Das Unheimliche* (Freud 1955c). The adjective *unheimlich* means *uncomfortable, scary, causing the sensation of uneasiness*. It is also the privative of an adjective *heimlich* (*hidden*). In most cases the privative prefix creates an antonym, but in this case, paradoxically, *hidden* and *uneasy* are closer to being synonyms rather than antonyms. The notion of *heimlich* (*hidden*), in a similar way to the notion of the medium, has an ambiguous meaning. It stems from the noun *Heim* (*parents' house or the house in which someone was born*). So it turns out, that something that is considered to be familiar and intimate is already or will also be hidden from her. The morphology and the etymology of the word *Unheimlich* makes a reference to the domain of the unconscious, where the familiar and the intimate is also alien and uncomfortable. Freud sees this condition of consciousness as, on the one hand, something familiar pushed out into the unconscious where it becomes estranged and, on the another hand, as the above mentioned ambivalent condition of repetition-compulsion.

(*narcosis*) which means numbness and innervation, have the same root and belong to the same semantic field. The psyche and senses react to the overwhelming outside irritations by shutting off, by the numbing of the senses or by even “self-amputating” one of the organs and replacing it with some medium. This seems to show one more time that the medium not only extends before the contact, but also, or perhaps even more importantly (or primarily), isolates through distancing and because of that, direct communication becomes less painful. From this it becomes clear why a human being sometimes so quickly and to the point of inebriation feels a strong attraction to any kind of self-extension in a substance outside of herself. “The principle of self-amputation as an immediate relief of strain on the central nervous system applies very readily to the origin of the media of communication from speech to computer” (McLuhan 1994: 43).

Freud tries to go even further. A temporary numbing of pain and self-protection is only a certain way a more general latency tendency expresses itself. Little children as well as persons who in the past have experienced traumatic events seem to need to compulsively repeat those unpleasant experiences. This does not seem to agree with the pleasure principle. Finally, Freud ventured into hypothesizing that there must be a deep psychic drive within us that cannot be identified with the pleasure principle guided by *Eros*. He even risks questioning whether this newly discovered drive may be at the core of all organic being (1961: 29–30). This instinctive drive in nature manifests itself as a continuous striving toward the primeval condition that a living organism, forced by the external obstructive circumstances, had to abandon. This reminds us of a certain inertia and avoidance of progress or perhaps even the compulsion to regress on a being’s part. It turns out that the organic forces are first of all, rather conservative and dependent on inertia, which is constantly being disturbed by the outside forces and irritations. It seems that evolution may be “pushed forward” by some kind of accidental anomalous change in the living organism, the change that made the organism to adapt rather than just a simple striving to survive. The primary tendency of a living being is the compulsive returning and eventual regress toward complete numbness. According to Freud, “the elementary living entity would from its very beginning have had no wish to change; if conditions remained the same, it would do no more than constantly repeat the same course of life. <...> If we are to take it as a truth that knows no exception that everything living dies for internal reasons – becomes inorganic once again – then we shall be compelled to say that “*the aim of all life is death*” and, looking backwards, that “*inanimate things existed before living ones*” (1961: 32).

One could hypothesize that during the time of inorganic matter some kind of junction of still unknown forces brought life into being. Eventually that life acquired consciousness. Later the explosive life-supporting and propagating medium emerged. But, actually even from the start, the sensitivity to pain and avoidance of the outside destructive influence (the tension of irritation and pain) motivated the organism to strive to go back to the “blest” state of inorganic quietude. That, according to Freud, might be the primeval attraction of death, or the death drive, that was later labeled by Freudians as *Thanatos*. However, it is curious to notice that we can hypothetically

suggest the existence of those two basic instincts (*Thanatos* and *Eros*), but in reality it would be very hard to tease them apart because they usually act simultaneously. It is especially noticeable in the case of erotic attraction that can end in the aggressive hatred of the once loved one (Freud 1955d: 45–46). Perhaps sadism, intermixed with sexual attraction, rises precisely from the above mentioned auto-destructive death drive, which, previously acting as a masochistic instinct, is now because of the self-preservation instinct directed toward an object outside of itself. It is also possible to observe the reverse situation where the aggression directed toward another object is somehow inhibited and later manifests as a auto-destructive attack on the subject herself (Freud 1955d: 52).

Media extend, i.e., verbalize, articulate and materialize psychic drives. The general-ogy and development of media also seem to harbor the ambivalence caused by the binary interaction of life-sustaining and life-destroying (self-amputating) drives. Media feed a human “erotic hunger” but at the same time also create the conditions for many new partial needs. A human being finds answers to this situation in developing more technologies. The need to expand and fulfill those newly emerging needs also accelerates the speed by which it is done. So by letting a subject to acquire the object of desire and by creating a communicative environment, the medium, because of the above mentioned ambiguity, also (re)acts destructively. For example, roads connect far away cities and communities, but usage of the roads is potentially more dangerous to human lives than safely spending one’s time in the house. McLuhan claims that, “The principal factors in media impact on existing social forms are acceleration and disruption” (1994: 94). The amount of people killed in automobile and plane catastrophes proves the point.

When some media stimulate communication, accelerate the speed that creates such an overload of so-called erotic excitement of the senses, the reverse actions need to be called upon, for example, the actions of such thanatic or narcissistic media as narcotics, alcohol and even guns. When the numbing effect of these media becomes a destructive addiction, then for the purposes of balance, one needs to employ the kinds of media that can help bring the individual back to the “erotic” and social life. Sometimes the same medium can have both isolating and uniting effects. The medium of a written text and the medium of roads enables telecommunication but at the same time it can also have a numbing, alienating effect by separating an individual from his own feelings and from his clan. Technologies expanded our nervous system to the remote parts of the globe, but the boundary between the private and the social space has almost been erased. Social impositions provoke psyche to numb and auto-destruct. The extent of antidepressant usage, alcohol consumption, low birth rates and suicide all attest this point. Today, Western culture is more and more often been called the culture of death. The age of electric media fluctuates between anxiety and apathy; it is also the age of the “active” unconscious. “With our central nervous system strategically numbed”, states McLuhan, “the tasks of conscious awareness and order are transferred to the physical life of man, so that for the first time he has become aware of technology as an extension of his physical body” (1994: 47). When a private as well as the collective unconscious enters the public realm, a new social phenom-

enon emerges, that is a global consciousness that carries with itself the sense of global responsibility but also the burden of global guilt. To assuage this enormous social tension, the individuals of the “global village” often surrender to the industry of mass dizziness and illusion.

The dominance of a writing and along with it, the linear kind of thinking and expansive industrialization, gave way to the era of the electric implosion. Today, the previously fragmented and individualized society finds itself engulfed in the world of electric technologies that provide a strong incentive to participate, for better or worse, in the global unification processes, global sensibility, and the possibilities and challenges of collective responsibility. Today’s human being is faced with this dual character of reality: on the one hand, the extreme individualism formed by linear writing and mechanization; and on the other hand, the massification enabled by the development of the new media. The purpose of the philosophy of media is to create bridges between the tradition of humanities and the technological innovations. Philosophers need to understand the nature and significance of human extensions in order to see how those extensions can be used properly without a detrimental side effect. McLuhan’s optimism is inspiring: “In the electric age, when our central nervous system is technologically extended to involve us in the whole of mankind and to incorporate the whole of mankind in us, we necessarily participate, in depth, in the consequences of our every action. It is no longer possible to adopt the aloof and dissociated role of the literate Westerner. <...> The partial and specialized character of the viewpoint, however noble, will not serve at all in the electric age. <...> We are suddenly eager to have things and people declare their beings totally. There is a deep faith to be found in this new attitude – a faith that concerns the ultimate harmony of all being (1994: 4–6).

## Conclusions

The medium is the message. It means that the crucial effect of the medium on the senses or on the organs which are extended by it, as well as on the subjectivity in general is carried by the medium’s form and not its content.

Mechanical and linear writing media extended human senses and organs, out of which an eye was the dominant one, in a fragmented mode. The basis of new media – the electrical technologies – act in a concentric and all-encompassing way, rather than in an old linear manner; in other words, the mechanical fragmentation seems to give way to the all-embracing effect of electricity.

The history and formation of media shows that the content of one medium is always another medium from which the former emerged. The medium of spoken language from which writing later evolved but maintained the latter as its content, occupies a very significant role in the history of culture. The content of the medium of language is psychic processes that contain deep in their origins ambiguity of such psychic drives as *libido*, destruction and the compulsion for numbness that precisely follow all development of media.

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## MEDIJŲ POVEIKIO IR IŠTAKŲ KLAUSIMAS

Nerijus ČEPULIS

### Santrauka

Šiame straipsnyje keliamas techninio medialumo ištakų ir poveikio žmogui bei kultūrai klausimas. Pradedama nuo Marshallo McLuhano kultūros tyrinėjimų. Jie parodė, kad pačią mediją, o ne jos turinį galima suvokti kaip pranešimą, tai yra kaip komunikacinę aplinką, per kurią ir kurioje lavinama žmogaus sąmonė ir jauslės. Lavinimas visada veikia ne tik kaip kontakto sąlyga, bet ir kaip narcisistinis atsiribojimas. Linijinio rašto ir mechanines technologijas keičiant koncentriškai veikiančioms elektrinėms medijoms, tapo akivaizdu, kad komunikacijos pobūdį labiau atskleidžia ne turinių analizė, bet poveikio mastas ir medialumo raida. Ji rodo, kad medijos turinys yra kita medija, sudariusi sąlygas tai medijai vystytis. Ypatingą vietą kultūros istorijoje užima kalbos medija, kuri, transformuodamasi į raštą, liko jo turiniu. Kalbos medijos turinys yra sąmonės procesai, kurių ištakose galima aptikti giluminių psichikos paskatų, tokių kaip *libido*, destruktivumo ir nejautos siekio, ambivalentiškumą, kuris savo ruožtu lydi visą medijų raidą. Panašus ambivalentiškumas atsiranda dėl medijų poveikio.

Reikšminiai žodžiai: Sigmundas Freudas, komunikacija, Marshallas McLuhanas, medija, mirties potraukis.