**Title:** ***Hidden Curricula of the institution? Media Ecology***

Perry Shaw describes *the hidden or implicit curriculum* of an institution as “the potent sociological and psychological dimensions of education which are usually caught rather than intentionally taught.” This raises questions about digital media and its influence upon modern communication to form understanding and ways of “being in the world.”

In this presentation, I would like to add a further dimension to Shaw’s schema by exploring the notion of media ecology as hidden curriculum. That is, how might the adoption of new modalities of communication shape behaviour. This begs deeper questions; to what extent *is the medium the message* within the academy? What formal causes underpin institutional life and practice? This workshop will attempt to construct an evaluative template by which to chart more clearly old and new forms of communication technology, their historical and ecological imprint on the institution and their sensory footprint.

# **Introductory / Preamble**

Perry Shaw defines three distinct categories of curriculum.[[1]](#footnote-1)

* The explicit curriculum – public and stated educational events
* The hidden or implicit curriculum – the potential sociological and psychological dimensions of education (caught rather than taught)
* The Null Curriculum - what is learnt through what is not taught

**Background Narrative**

The area I am particularly interested in is “Hidden Curriculum” – the sociological and psychological elements of learning. When pastoring I spent a lot of time thinking about church culture. This fostered an approach to leadership that gave fresh perspective to the implicit nature of learning within an institution system; in my case a church community. The pressing question that emerges is, “what going on that we don’t see.” How is the culture of this church community forming congregants?”” This area of research got me thinking about sociological and psychological aspects of congregational life. For example, Sunday services, Christian calendar events and so forth. One sphere of activity was use of visual imagery to market and promote church events. This morphed into research around the use of visual technology (data projectors, PPTs, the Stage, Website media etc) as a viable means to communicate with congregants. Moreover, my master's thesis looked at the extent to which visual technologies might be re-shaping and influencing church culture and more specifically congregant identity. My interest in offering this paper is to explore the implicit curriculum of media and more specifically digital media.

My Ph.D. work picks up on this interest which led me down a road of thinking more widely about the senses; the way in which human perceptions are shaped by technology. So, what I want to do in this session is to offer some exploratory concepts. I want us to consider the how we use our senses; how the use of technology has its own hidden curriculum in leveraging one sense at the expense of the others. When adopting a modern technology, we seldom ask, what is gained and what is lost in its use? Pragmatism is usually our default setting.

In this paper, I draw on Marshall McLuhan’s dictum – *The medium is the message*. This dictum points to an interdisciplinary or multi-disciplinary field – Media Ecology. Note, I use the term ‘Field’ as the idea conveys there is more than one discipline or established body of knowledge at play.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Media Ecology:**

**Definitions:**

Dennis Cali in *Mapping Media Ecology* acknowledges seven separate way of conceptualizing Media culture.[[3]](#footnote-3) The one I want to utilize is *Media Ecology as the Study of Media as Environments.* This is the most familiar conceptualization of the term and the one most written about. McLuhan popularised the term in 1967. This was in an essay where he equated media ecology with environments and “drew an analogy between those who study media and those who study natural environment.”[[4]](#footnote-4) McLuhan states that …

*“It is now perfectly plain to me that all media are environments. As environment, all media have all the effects that geographers and biologist have associated with environments in the past. Environments shape their occupants.[[5]](#footnote-5)*

***Environment:*** The idea of environment captures the interplay of people and technology. This is to suggest that “human beings stand at the centre of a media environment that shapes their consciousness.”[[6]](#footnote-6) Cali states that “within this mediated ‘ecosystem’ various media interact, overtake, replace, or distinguish each other as they move toward some kind of balance in the system as experienced by people.” [[7]](#footnote-7)

***Perception and the human sensorium:*** Walter Ong in *The Presence of the Word* picks up a similar perspective (media environments) and speaks about “the human sensorium, and of a ‘shifting sensorium’.” [[8]](#footnote-8) Ong states “because words are always primarily spoken things – writing transposes language to a spatial medium, but language that has come into existence in the world of sound remains permanently as part of this world – to a certain degree the oral-aural world, the world of voice and hearing which a child enters in learning verbal communication will retain its paramountcy for good.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

***Culture:*** Cultures do vary in how they utilize their sense-faculties, particularly in the way in they apply their conceptual apparatus to the various senses. (example: Hebrew = understanding *is* hearing // Greek = understanding is a kind of seeing). Ong goes on say that “the relationship of sound and of the word itself to the human life-world varies”.[[10]](#footnote-10) Sound and sight must therefore be considered in terms of the shifting relationship between the senses. In this respect, “it is helpful to think of cultures in terms of the organisation of the sensorium.”[[11]](#footnote-11) This would also apply to educational institutions which take-on a specific organisational culture. Laidlaw College as an evangelical college is a child of print culture (as I suspect most are within this setting). This means, retrospectively, we are mostly shaped and conditioned by print. This is evident in Laidlaw's distant learning programs. But before exploring this space we need to define the sensorium.

***The Sensorium*** … is the entire sensory apparatus as an operational complex. In Western culture, the sensorium consists of the five senses. There is a common awareness today that changes in technology have had a significant effect on the organisation of the sensorium.

***Technology***: To appreciate these changes and technological shifts that have occurred in communication over several millennia, it is helpful to be aware of historical periods of (communication) technological change and development. This entails a short history of communication. 5 epochs from Poe. [[12]](#footnote-12)

1. Talking culture 180, 000 BC to 3500 BC
2. Writing / Manuscript Culture 3500 BC -1400AD
3. Printing Culture (fixed text – printing press) 1400-1900
4. Electric Age & the emergence of Audio-visual 1900-1990
5. The age of digital media and internet connectivity 1990-+

Electric ➡ digital

Talking

Print

Manuscript

If we were to equate the modern age with the printing culture we might describe the child of this age as typographic … that is, he or she ‘understands and perceives their world via print - words on paper – visual sense. The modern age, however, is largely a thing of the past. Today’s communication environment is vastly different to those of our parent or grand-parents - we live by the Internet, mobile phone, mobile computers, and digital devices working on multiple platforms (Facebook, emails, Moodle etc, etc). The mediums that surround us now are no longer visual but also is audial-tactile. In addition to these changes, communication at all levels of life now moves faster than it ever has – at light speed. This aspect of communication changes the game so to speak. When communication travels at speeds faster than the human body can physically move, the environment becomes dynamic and discontinuous. Travel measured in time and distance no longer resembles a linear pattern of order.

**Language as Structural Space**

A helpful way to think about this is to consider the spatial elements of both the visual and acoustic spaces (in terms of the sensorium).

*Electric culture perception*

*Print culture perception*

*Resonant interval*

**Touch**

(the locus of the senses)

**Acoustic Structured Space**

**Visual Structured Space**

Synthesthesia

*Sensus Communis*

Mimesis

*Note: descriptions and themes are not intended to be dichotomies*.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Markers** | **Descriptors & themes** | **Descriptors & themes** |
| ***Culture*** | Print | Electric / digital |
| ***sense*** | visual | acoustic |
| ***Focus*** | Linear & sequential | Dynamic & chaotic |
| ***movement*** | Connected and continuous | Discontinuous and unconnected |
| ***Brain*** | Left hemisphere thinking | Right hemisphere thinking |
| ***Approach***  ***& Goal*** | Modern science  Knowledge | Neo-medieval  Wisdom |
| ***Reference*** | Static – objective – conceptual | Dynamic – subjective – perceptual |
| ***Arrangement*** | fixed | ever moving |
| ***Field*** | Outward orientation | Inward orientation |
| ***personhood*** | Separated posture of self | Discarnate posture of self |
| ***Formation*** | “Becoming” ➡ “Being” | “Being” and “Becoming” are simultaneous |

***What does this all mean for the implicit curriculum of an institution?***

**Theologically**

* *Means acknowledging the human person as a whole person – i.e., all of the senses*

It could be tempting to reduce religion to one specific condition of the sensorium. This is perhaps the fallacy of the modern era where earlier oral-aural world “with its concentration on voice and sound,” finally give way to the visual world of print.[[13]](#footnote-13) The print world enthroned the visual sense by setting in place a visual structured space such that the only trusted sensibility was the eye. The visual sense thus became the sovereign arbitrator of objective truth – what is true is what is seen. Forthwith, visual culture has dominated the other senses such that they are unable to voice their sensibility within the wider complex of *being* human in the world. This emphasis has enabled Western culture to advance exponentially in technological know-how. In one sense, the discovery of electricity is an outcome of modern science. However, advances in technology haven’t necessarily come with the moral vision or the anagogical wisdom to deal with the ecological effects of technology which could threaten our survival as a species. The technological push for faster, more efficient forms of communication have made things more expedient but not necessarily more human.

* *Means acknowledging the uniqueness of Christian Faith and the Sensorium*

Ong notes problems concerning the relation of religion to the sensorium.[[14]](#footnote-14) Christianity is unique as it is a revealed Religion. This is to say that it is unique in that it has a peculiar relation to history. As Christians, we are not encouraged to flee from time but are to live in time in order to be redeemed (Luke 1). Ong states, “because of [Christianity’s] belief in God’s personal entry into history through the Incarnation, Christianity, even more than the Hebrew religion, not only is situated in time but also feels itself unequivocally as situated in time, though it looks to eternity.”[[15]](#footnote-15) He goes on to argue that Christianity came about in a determinate culture – a culture that located itself in a story which came by divine revelation itself. Divine revelation is indeed inserted in a particular sensorium; “a particular mixture of sensory activity typical of a given culture.”[[16]](#footnote-16) It is important to keep in mind that these people recognised revelation with “a particular sensory organisation in their life-world and thus certain specialised ways of thinking and knowing.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

Quote: In this milieu, the question of man’s relation to the word of God or to the bearing term “word” becomes of crucial importance. Could the cry of Nietzsche’s madman, “God is dead” derive from the fact that He cannot be readily found by the old signs in the newly organised sensorium where the word stands in such different relationship to the fact that He cannot be readily found by old signs in the newly organised sensorium where the word stands in such different relationship to the total complex of awareness by which man earlier situated himself in this life world? Could Martin Buber’s more sensitive suggestion that this is an age in which God is “silent” reflect the same state of affairs? Could it be that God is not silent but the man is relatively deaf, his sensorium adjusted to the post-Newtonian silent universe?[[18]](#footnote-18)

* *Means acknowledging the heritage and legacy of the tradition we are within*

I am part of a Pentecostal tradition which values expressions of faith as outward – passion, body movement and expressions of devotions, more sensual … an oral culture. Often the experience of a gathering is the locus of learning – the implicit curricula …

*Timeout-Talk about values of your tradition. However, I am part of an evangelical college which is founded upon printed materials.*

**Exercise:** *Discuss in groups the following questions*

1. What forms of communication does my institution value?
2. What mediums are used in the delivery of learning?
3. What senses are exercised through this delivery platform? What is implicitly assumed or put another way “not included” or “overlooked”?
4. Why is it this way?

Smith and Smith make a case that “the emerging paradigm” of Christian education “refused to settle for models that positioned faith and learning as merely complementary or parallel.”[[19]](#footnote-19) As such “conversations about Christian education have focused on content implying that Christian teaching simply means the correspondence of “Christian ideas and perspectives.”[[20]](#footnote-20) The emphasis of learning here is on epistemology or theology which communicates subject matter as apart-from (or distant too).

Examples: two distant learning courses – specimen A and specimen B

James Smith in *Imagining the Kingdom* comments that “Education operates on [a] pre-theoretical register whether we recognise it or not. Pedagogies of desire form our habits, affections, and imaginations, thus shaping and priming our very orientation to the world. So, if a Christian education is going to be holistic and formative, it needs to attend to much more than the intellect. His focus is on “nonconscious understanding”. He goes on to articulate a Christian philosophy of action. These ….

1) recognise the nonconscious, the pre-theoretical drivers of our action and behaviour, centred in what he calls *the imagination*

2) account for the bodily formation of our habituated orientation to the world and thus

3) appreciates the centrality of story, as rooted in this “body basis of meaning”.

He goes on to say that Christian formation is a conversion of the imagination affected by the spirit, who recruits our fundamental desires by a kind of narrative enchantment –

by inviting us into story.[[21]](#footnote-21)

Smith and Smith propose a pedagogy that is about the whole body – “historical practices” become an implicit feature of those practices that characterise course and classroom. They draw on Wenger (who talks extensively about “communities of practice”) to suggest “certain forms of participation are available” for a given member of the group which is re-configured when part of another group. Accompanying participation is a process of reification (ideas at work are turned into something – objects, gestures, sounds, picture). They state that “as they work and negotiate the meaning of their actions over time, members of a community become aligned to one another and develop a repertoire – a set of behaviours having particular meaning for this group.” Repertoire acts like habitus – becomes a way of naming the boundaries that form between the different communities of practice of which any given individual is a part. This develops into a shared repertoire of meaning. In relation to all of this, Smith and Smith offer a convincing argument that implicit in the inherited practices of the Christian tradition is a kind of pedagogical wisdom on which we can draw for Christian teaching more broadly.”[[22]](#footnote-22)

Smith’s emphasis on the whole person (as the body) does not include discussion on the perceptual senses and technology. My interest thus lies in understanding how technology fits within a “bodily basis of meaning.”

**A “bodily basis of meaning” in the face of DIGITAL technologies – some challenges[[23]](#footnote-23)**

* *We are becoming increasingly discarnate –* we are becoming what we behold - information has become disembodied – potentially no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation. Information has lost its body. This construction implies that “embodiment is not essential to the human being.”[[24]](#footnote-24)
* *We are forgetting the joy of embodiment (2 John 12)*
* *We are ignoring our finiteness*
* *We are becoming careless with words*
* *We are losing interest in the gathered church* – Christianity is rooted in Christ’s incarnation who became flesh within a human community.

**Some questions**

* Digital communication is here to stay, so how do we think about the technologies we are using?
* What formative influences are they having on students? What is the implicit curriculum?
* How do we access and consider the media ecology of our institution?
* How do we think more holistically about the body senses in the learning experience?

**An Heuristic tool - McLuhan’s Laws of Media**

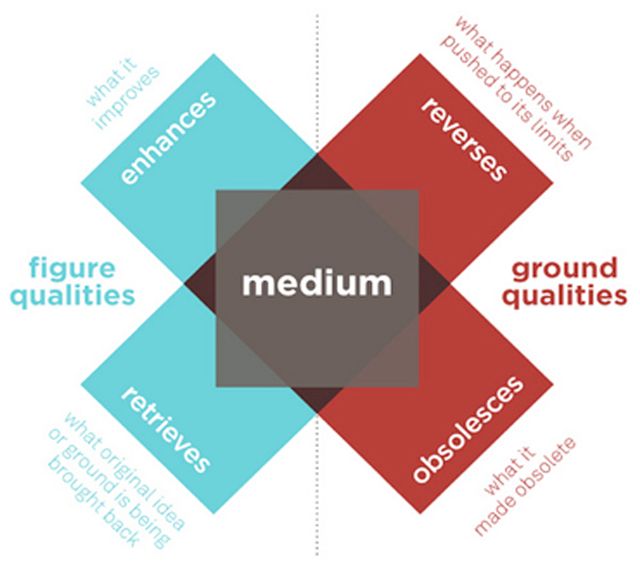
At the heart of this new science is McLuhan’s development of the four laws of media which are visually understood as the tetrad. This is regarded as a heuristic tool and consists of four questions.

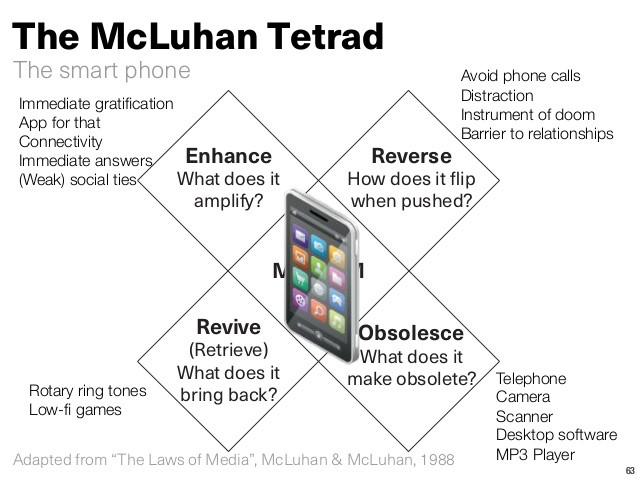
1. What does the new thing enlarge or enhance or amplify?
2. What does it retrieve or bring back in a new way?
3. What, when it is pressed to an extreme, is the area of reversal?
4. What does it side-line or make superfluous or “obsolete”?

Cali notes that these four laws can be abbreviated - “enhancement, obsolescence, recurrence and reversal.” [[25]](#footnote-25) These laws, according to McLuhan and McLuhan can be applied to “every human artifact of whatever kind including clothing, styles in art, literature, music, philosophical systems, and even laws of physics and chemistry, or civil laws or parts of speech.”[[26]](#footnote-26)

**Christian themes worth exploring in relation to digital media**

* Incarnation - What is it to be human? >>> Learning as an embodied practice – Christian identity?
* Participation – faith is participative – what would classroom or distance learning look if we thought more deeply about embodied participation. What practices might be important?
* Perceptual communication over conceptual communication – How might we think about place? How do places of learning invite perceptual involvement – awareness of God’s transcendence and immanence (mindful that one without the other is problematic.

**Appendix:**



*What can we say about Print culture?*

Print culture had the effect of slicing and dicing culture into compartments. It isolated sight which lead to the isolation of one emotion to another. This had the effect of reducing experience to a single sense which provided a fixed position, a uniformity in which ideas could be abstracted, codified, and with keyhole precision, replicated. The reason for this may indeed lie in the way print is able to situate words in space and leverage the sensorium so that sight becomes the only plausible option among the senses that can be relied upon to truly comprehend the world. Ong takes up a similar position noting sight-dominance had its beginning with writing but was unable to flourish until the age of print. He expands this further by stating that, “Writing moves words from the sound world to a world of visual space, but print locks words into position in this space.”[[27]](#footnote-27) This is a subtle but significant shift which both “confirms and extends the new visual stress of applied knowledge” on a linear path toward assembly-lines and mass-production.[[28]](#footnote-28) As McLuhan helpfully notes, the more literate a culture becomes, greater is the propensity of its people to be “detached from the world in which they live.”[[29]](#footnote-29) Print culture in effect recalibrated the manuscript culture of medieval life and commodified western thought into visual abstractions of social enterprise and human consumption.

*What can we say about electric culture?*

He states, “Unlike earlier hardware technologies, these new forms operate at speeds approaching light, virtually instantaneously.”[[30]](#footnote-30) Moreover, earlier technologies moved goods and information within a time/space equilibrium comparable to human scales of travel time and distance. However, when the time-space ratios of distance and travel changed (due to radio, telegraph, phone and TV), the ratios changed. This made the old space/time ratios obsolete. Distance and time were no longer obstacles to communication. This made life fast which delivered a more instance view of the world as something prefaced by the moment – the now. The possibilities of radio, telephone and TV opened the door to imagine oneself as simultaneously here and there, in an infinite number of places at the same time. It became the new way of being in the world. The discarnate-self was not bound by the body rather freed from its’ physical constraints. Eric McLuhan argues that “the new media, then, are not manifestations of physical communication so much as manifestations of metaphysical communication [as] they entail the transformation of the users.”[[31]](#footnote-31)

The impact of this on physical spaces and, more importantly, “gathered spaces of worship” over the second half of the twentieth century have, in one direction, been the obsolescence of certain architectural styles. These might include vaulted ceilings and sound resistant surfaces which were integral elements of a church’s acoustic integrity. With the adoption of the microphone, at least in free-type churches, the need for vaulted ceilings and cathedral-type acoustics changed. The microphone created a whole new kind of space – one that ushered in the age of the entertainer, the celebrity, the showstopper with the mythical voice of a broadcaster.

The microphone, in a symbolic way marked a significant shift in the mediated décor of church spaces. The vernacular of the day, previously subjected to one major amplification, the visual, increasingly gave way through the twentieth century to a sensorium that wanted to combine both the visual and the auditory. The convergence of these two major amplifications (particularly in protestant traditions), in part, dis-stabilized the expected routines of congregants by challenging as well as dislocating the rhythms and practices members had become accustomed too. The playing field of a Sunday worship gathering with its rituals and practices, which were entirely plausibly within a print oriented culture, appear somewhat dowdy alongside the sensibilities afforded by electric media. The printed text of a hymn book becomes less appetizing, albeit, less palatable given the habitus of one’s everyday life experience as a continuous montage of audio-visual soundbites geared to your grab attention. While on the surface the microphone appeared to be an innocuous device, a sensible addition to enhance communication, its effects on the sensorium marked a cataclysmic shift. The hegemony of eye was displaced by the ear’s non-linear aversion to be in sync with the non-scripted aberrations of popular culture. [[32]](#footnote-32)

Time and distance are of the essence. In numerous ways, the reality of electric media has complicated human involvement. Meaning as we know it continually changes with the acceleration of information. The once assured patterns of personal and political interdependence become less predictable due to the electric flux of accelerated information. The TV image, which introduced live footage of moving as well as converging images of light and sound opened a new existential space. Its immediacy to bring daily events of local and global significance to the screen exerted a unifying synesthetic force on the sense-life. And like most technology that produce an amplification favouring one sense to the detriment of all others, TV is also quite explicit in its separation of the senses. According to McLuhan, “TV is above all, an extension of touch, which involves maximal interplay of the senses.”[[33]](#footnote-33) That is “all things are sudden, counter, original, spare, strange” to the sense of touch.[[34]](#footnote-34) This is in sharp contrast to the visual sense which (when extended by phonetic literacy) fosters “the analytic habit of perceiving” single facets of life apart from each other; that is, it is able “to isolate the single incident in time and space.” [[35]](#footnote-35) The TV image, on the other hand (as an extension of touch), reverses this literacy process of the sense-life. Rather than a fragmentary sense of detachment and distance, the TV image creates a field of close engagement and near inclusiveness. It opens spaces which predicate immediate involvement.

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1. Perry Shaw, *Transforming Theological Education: A Practical Handbook for Integrative Learning* (Carlisle, United Kingdom Langham 2014), 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It is worth while noting that field is a metaphor. “This spatial metaphor can be traced back the culture of ancient Greece, derived via alphabetic literacy and the ability that writing affords us to rearrange and organise knowledge visually and categorically, in , in spatial arranged on a writing surface or page. Lance Strate, *Media Ecology: An Approach to Understanding the Human Condition* (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2017), 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Dennis D. Cali, *Mapping Media Ecology: Introduction to the Field* (New York: Peter Lang, 2017), 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Ibid., 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Marshall McLuhan, “Education in the electronic age”. Cited in H.A. Stevenson, ER.M. Stamp, and J. D. Wilson (eEds)., The best of times / the worst of times: Contemporary issues in Canadian education (pp, 515-531), Toronto: Holy, Rinehart, and Winston of Canada Limited. 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Cali, 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 7. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Walter J. Ong, *The Presence of the Word : Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (New York, NK: Sunny Press, 2000), 1-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Ibid., 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Ibid., 6. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Marshall Poe, *A History of Communications : Media and Society from the Evolution of Speech to the Internet* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2011). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Ong, 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid., 11-12. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Ibid., 11. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Ibid., 16. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
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20. Ibid., 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
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22. Smith, 16-17. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
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25. Cali, 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Marshall McLuhan and Eric McLuhan, *Media and Formal Cause* (Houston, Tex.: NeoPoiesis Press, 2011), 141. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Walter Jackson Ong and John Hartley, *Orality and Literacy : The Technologizing of the Word* (London; New York (N.Y.): Routledge, 2012), 119. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Marshall McLuhan, *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (Toronto: University of Toronto, 2010), 142. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Ibid., 87. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Eric Eric McLuhan, *The Sensus Communis, Synesthesia, and the Soul: An Odyssey* (Toronto, Canada: BPS Books, 2015), 55. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Eric McLuhan, ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. McLuhan notes that “[t]he stripping of the sense and the interruption of their interplay in tactile synaesthesia may well have been one of the effects of the Gutenburg technology. Marshall McLuhan, McLuhan, 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. *Understanding Media* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1995).Understanding Media, 333. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid., 334. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)