

In a Global Village Without a Map: Fashion, (New) Media, and Marshall McLuhan
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Summary by Jessica Brooks

Radio. Television. Internet. All are forms of communication and transmitters of media in today's modern world. There are many views on the influence of these devices, with sides divided on the positive and/or negative effect. Dr. Aspelund discussed the views of Marshall McLuhan and the ideas of those that came before him.

Marshall McLuhan was a professor of literature who analyzed the effect of "new media", which was based on broadcast media from the late 1950s to the early 1960s. McLuhan fell out of favor in the years after his death due to the media evolution of the 1980s. A decade later he came back into favor with the birth of the Internet.

Dr. Aspelund discussed several theorists prior to McLuhan. One was Walter Benjamin, who studied film as media. Benjamin said, "...an unconsciously penetrated space is substituted for a space consciously explored..." Aspelund elaborated on this idea by telling the story of overhearing some people watching the television on September 11th and referring to an event as a "scene." Filmmakers recognize how the world is seen, and in turn tell the story by the angle of the camera. Our brains have now been trained to perceive the world this way. Another person was Martin Heidegger, who wrote about technology, travel and information dissemination. Heidegger said "All distances in time and space are shrinking..." This can be seen even more so in today's modern world, where you can video chat with people halfway around the world any time of the day. Each of these theorists came before McLuhan, proving that he was not far off base with his ideas.

Next was linear time versus the constant present. Aspelund states that electronic communication returns us to a pre-industrial state of oral communication. The written word, with email and text, is now often more common than speaking to a live person. Oral communication is always in "the now." There is no "past" in oral culture, hence the presence of myths and legends in real time. When books became popular, privacy also came into our culture. Rather than have to get in a group to learn, you could learn something on your own.

Aspelund then focused on McLuhan's "Big Three." The first is "Extension of Self." Technology extends our senses. Telescopes and microscopes enhance our eyes, hearing aids and sonar our ears. Our nervous system can be extended through media. Writing, printing and recording can extend our memories. Electronic devices can extend...everything. The second is the "Global Village" where "everyone knows everyone's business." Dr. Aspelund said that everyone thinks this idea is warm and fuzzy, but in fact McLuhan meant that we no longer have any privacy. The world is not better because of tribalism. It is violent and involves a lot of bloodshed. McLuhan later expanded this second idea from a global village to a global theatre where everyone is performing for everyone else. The third and final idea of the Big Three is the "Medium is the Message." Aspelund explained that the effect new communication technology has on culture is greater than the effect of the content it delivers. You can see this through history, from when communication was oral to modern times where it is in print and electronic.

Finally, Dr. Aspelund discussed McLuhan's tetrad. In the center is an idea, and the four sections that surround it are Reverses, Obsolesces, Retrieves and Enhances. The last tetrad Aspelund explored was that of fashion. If pushed, fashion will flip and all subcultures are considered mainstream and all periods current. It is making fashion magazines, editors and

fashion weeks obsolete. It has retrieved craftspeople, such as people on “Etsy,” and participatory social groups. And finally, it has enhanced blogging and e-commerce.

Dr. Aspelund left us with the idea that as the excitement over modern media calms down, there will be a tendency to over interpret and over sell. We will need to be careful of overselling new technology, and the backlash of booms and bubbles. Overall the discussion focused on the impact of media on our culture, our bodies and our interactions with others.