

Instructor: James Clements
Writing 150
Technology and Social Change
Writing Project #2

Writing Project #2: “I Miss My Pre-Internet Brain”

Purpose: During Writing Project 1, you practiced critical reasoning without research or outside sources. Since scholars tend to build their arguments in the context of or in response to writing that has preceded theirs, you will, for Writing Project 2, participate in an academic conversation with a text I have provided. This assignment asks you to use the ideas found in the assigned sources as a *lens* through which to look at a familiar subject and, hopefully, build an original argument. Whether you agree or disagree with the ideas of the assigned writer, they allow you to look at the world in a new way. You can then test this new viewpoint against your old way of seeing, and, in doing so, either form a new opinion or deepen an old one.

Readings:

McLuhan, Marshall, Quentin Fiore, and Jerome Agel. *The Medium Is the Massage*. New York: Bantam Books, 1967. Print.

Premise: The Canadian philosopher and media theorist Marshall McLuhan is famous for saying “The medium is the message” (which he parodies in the title of our assigned reading). It’s a complex idea, and one that you will come to understand by reading his work closely. Essentially, though, it means that the *form* of the technology that delivers information to us has more of an impact on us than the information itself.

Consider timekeeping. Clocks deliver the time to us, of course (the message), but the existence of sundials, hour glasses, clocks, and watches (the medium) in our lives has changed the way we think about all manner of things, from obvious things like productivity, tardiness, and scheduling, to more subtle things like our sense of mortality, our anxiety, and our connection to the physical world (for example, we no longer wake with the dawn). A similar argument could be made about any significant invention, from fire and the wheel up to the obvious technological innovations of the information age.

McLuhan’s idea is so important because many of these effects are almost invisible. People over the age of thirty *think* they remember what life was like before the internet, but much of the experience remains lost to them (the author Douglas Coupland is famous for saying “I miss my pre-internet brain”). For example, the experience of certain kinds of boredom, certain kinds of loneliness, and certain kinds of freedom are gone forever (for example, who really remembers what it’s like to get truly *lost* anymore?). And the internet is a technology that has appeared during our lifetime. How different were our brains before the invention of electricity? Before *the wheel*? It would take a poet, an artist—or a great essayist to bring it back.

Writing Task: For this paper, you are to choose a particular technology and, using McLuhan’s theory as a lens, answer the following question:

How has your chosen technology changed the way *we think*?