

CENTRE FOR SENSORY STUDIES

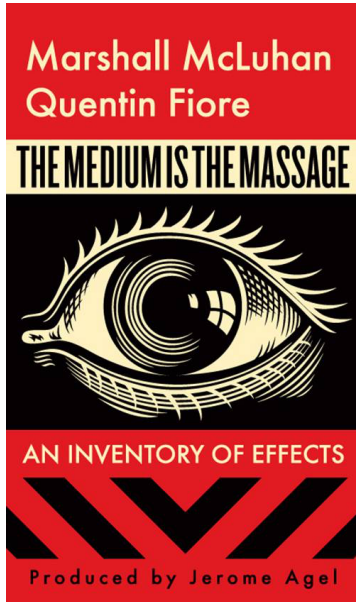
TALKING SENSE LECTURE SERIES

The Medium is the Massage: Marshall McLuhan's Tactile Turn

William J. Buxton

Thursday 24 March 2022

13:00-14:40, Virtual Registration: <https://bit.ly/3MYs4R5>



Marshall McLuhan's best-known studies of media are likely *Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962) and *Understanding Media* (1965). Yet by far his most successful media text commercially was *The Medium is the Massage*, for which he is listed as co-author (with Quentin Fiore), with Jerome Agel listed as the book's "producer." By virtue of its status as an "electric information age book" it represented a radical departure from McLuhan's writings. It belonged to a genre of publications from the late 1960s to the mid 1970s (spearheaded by Agel) taking the form of cheap, diminutive paperbacks that conveyed the thought of important contemporary thinkers to a mass audience using innovative graphic and montage techniques. My presentation explores what McLuhan meant by his claim that a paperback of this kind should be seen as a *tactile* rather than a *visual* package. To this end, it examines the implications of the book for our understanding of the interplay between media and the senses. Particular attention is given to its complicated provenance and how it fit into a broader campaign in which McLuhan largely became a branded celebrity rather than a ground-breaking thinker and author.

William J. Buxton is Professor Emeritus of Communication Studies at Concordia University in Montreal. Author of numerous articles on intellectual and cultural history as well as the sociology of knowledge he has most recently edited and co-edited four collections entitled *Harold Innis and the North: Appraisals and Contestations*; *Harold Innis's History of Communications: Paper and Printing from Antiquity to Early Modernity*; *Harold Innis Reflects: Memoir, World-War I Writings and Correspondence* and *Harold Innis on Peter Pond: Biography, Cultural Memory, and the Continental Fur Trade*. He has edited and written an introduction to the 3rd University of Toronto edition of Harold Innis's seminal text *Empire and Communications*. It will be published in the Summer of 2022. More generally, has been awarded a research grant from the Insight Program of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada to write a history of the Toronto School of Communication, with specific reference to the contributions of Harold Innis and Marshall McLuhan. To this end, he is now examining in detail the writings of McLuhan. Specific attention is given to the extent to which his views on the senses were rooted in his broader intellectual and cultural concerns.

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