

When Whitney told me that she wanted to do a podcast about AI, I thought that I should plan what I wanted to talk about instead of just being Whitney's silent sidekick because I am interested in tech and observing and understanding AI, as well as exploring how it can be used to help me. I don't think AI as a tool to help people is necessarily a bad thing. I think a lot of people are torn because its easy to see how it has the potential for harm but it also has great potential to assist.

I was to discuss a book and a documentary that I think have a lot of common themes and encourage people to check them out to keep this information in mind as AI continues to develop. They both have a lot of great information about what people in power want and how people can be controlled and have their realities manipulated.

I think it's easy to imagine how AI is going to be used to manipulate people so the more aware we are, the better off we are.

The documentary is the 2016 documentary [Hypernormalisation](#) from [Adam Curtis](#) - I'm sure a lot of UH listeners have seen this. The book is from 1964 - Understanding Media: Modern Extensions of Man.

Below are some brief notes from each of these works that I hope will intrigue people enough that they read and watch both.

Hypernormalization

[Wikipedia](#) lists information about each chapter.

The documentary starts:

"This film will tell the story of how we got to this strange place. It is about how, over the past 40 years, politicians, financiers and technological utopians, rather than face up to the real complexities of the world, retreated. Instead, they constructed a simpler version of the world in order to hang on to power."

"And as this fake world grew, all of us went along with it, because the simplicity was reassuring. Even those who thought they were attacking the system - the radicals, the artists, the musicians, and our whole counterculture - actually became part of the trickery, because they, too, had retreated into the make-believe world, which is why their opposition has no effect and nothing ever changes."

"But this retreat into a dream world allowed dark and destructive forces to fester and grow outside. Forces that are now returning to pierce the fragile surface of our carefully constructed fake world."

Larry Fink and Aladdin

01:17:30

In 1986, Larry Fink of BlackRock built a computer called Aladdin because he lost one hundred million dollars in a deal and had been sacked. He became determined it wouldn't happen again.

Fink's aim was to use the computer to predict with certainty what the risk of any deal or investment was going to be.

The computer constantly monitors the world and takes things that it sees happening, then compares them to events in the past. It can do this because it has in its memory a vast history of the past 50 years, not just financial, but all kinds of events.

Out of the millions and millions of correlations, the computer then spots possible disasters, possible dangers lying in the future, and moves the investments to avoid any radical change and keep the system stable.

Eliza

01:22:00

20 years before this, in 1964 a program was built that also gave people a sense of stability.

Eliza was a "computer psychotherapist" program. Users could talk to it and the computer would repeat what they said back to them. The creator was shocked that people, including his secretary, attributed human like feelings towards the program.

"Created to explore communication between humans and machines, ELIZA simulated conversation by using a pattern matching and substitution methodology that gave users an illusion of understanding on the part of the program, but had no representation that could be considered really understanding what was being said by either party."

Researchers realized that people liked to see themselves reflected back to them. This can be seen by looking at the evolution of computers and the internet since then. People like the internet because they can find people like themselves.

Right now, for a lot of people, they like their internet relationships more than they like their in person relationships. If AI reflects someone back to themselves, they might eventually like AI more than humans.

"The computer doesn't burn out, look down on you, or try to have sex with you. In an age of individualism, what made people feel secure was having themselves reflected back to them, just like in a mirror."

After this computer science moved towards intelligent agents that would collect and research how people used computers in order to be able to predict what people would want in the future. It was a system that ordered the world in a way that was centered around you. And in an age of anxious individualism, frightened of the future, that was reassuring just like Eliza”

I saw this doc years ago and as I was reading McLuhan's book, I found myself thinking of it and Eliza often.

Read more about Eliza

- [Weizenbaum's nightmares: how the inventor of the first chatbot turned against AI | Artificial intelligence \(AI\) | The Guardian](#)
- [ELIZA—a computer program for the study of natural language communication between man and machine](#)
- [The computational therapeutic: exploring Weizenbaum's ELIZA as a history of the present | AI & SOCIETY](#)

McLuhan

Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man by Marshall McLuhan (1964)
[Archive.org](#)

Marshall McLuhan coined the phrase "the medium is the message." He is considered to be the father of modern media studies and was a media darling for about a decade. He was elevated by some ad executives and did a lot of speaking and media appearances. I think his ideas deeply influenced culture AND the power systems creating new media.

Articles have been written about "the man that predicted the internet/ChatGPT in 1960" and I think it is a very good time to be looking at what someone that was able to see so clearly into the future has to say about understanding the environment we live in and how the media of our time shapes us.

McLuhan proposes that a communication medium itself, not the messages it carries, should be the primary focus of study. He coined the phrase, the medium is the message.

What is a medium?

"Medium" is "any extension of ourselves" or any new technology. McLuhan considers the wheel, fork, lightbulb all extensions of man because they extend our senses - **allow us to sense further than our selves.**

The title is *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, meaning, understanding the personal and social consequences of any medium, aka

"any extension of ourselves"

"What we are considering here, however, are the psychic and social consequences of the designs or patterns as they amplify or accelerate existing processes. **For the "message" of any medium is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs.**"

The medium influences how the message is received.

"The medium itself alters the content" or "alters the sense ratio"

Identity

All media shapes our identity. because it shows us content from the previous medium, we can see who we are and imagine who we can be.

It is interesting that artists and writers are some of the most offended by the new medium- this is bcz their very identity as artists are at risk.

McLuhan also talks in the book about how artists are always the ones to use the new technology to express

Electric vs Mechanical

McLuhan talks about mechanical technology and electric technology.

Mechanical technologies are: wheels, roads, printing

Electrical technologies are: lightbulb, television, internet, AI

Electric technology is an extension of the nervous system- the wheel is an extension of the foot. Media is an extension of ourselves. It extends our capabilities and in the process, it changes how we think, and how we interact with one another.

Mechanical technology detribalized humans.

The story of *The Ugly American* describes the endless succession of blunders achieved by visual and civilized Americans when confronted with the tribal and auditory cultures of the East. As a civilized UNESCO experiment, running water — with its lineal organization of pipes — was installed recently in some Indian villages. Soon the villagers requested that the pipes be removed, for it seemed to them that the whole social life of the village had been impoverished when it was no longer necessary for all to visit the communal well. To us the pipe is a convenience. We do not think of it as culture or as a product of literacy, any more than we think of liter-

Electric technology is retribalizing humans. "This shift causes stress in the ways we interact with one another. **Our lack of awareness of how technology changes the way we interact is a threat to civilization.**"

This next quote talks about where we are right now- the place where new medium meets old medium.

"The hybrid or the meeting of two media is a moment of truth and revelation from which new form is born. For the parallel between two media holds us on the frontiers between forms that snap us out of the Narcissus-narcosis. The moment of the meeting of media is a moment of freedom and release from the ordinary trance and numbness imposed by them on our senses."

"If we understand the revolutionary transformations caused by new media, we can anticipate and control them; but if we continue in our self-induced subliminal trance, we will be their slaves."

- Marshall McLuhan - [Playboy Magazine](#) (1969)

We need to be aware of how AI changes the way we interact with people, information and our surroundings. We can't remain in a Narcissus-narcosis where we remain ignorant of the medium we are living in.

Narcissus-narcosis

This means, being so involved in looking at the content that you fail to see the medium.

"I call this peculiar form of self-hypnosis Narcissus narcosis, a syndrome whereby man remains as unaware of the psychic and social effects of his new technology as a fish of the water it swims in. **As a result, precisely at the point where a new media-induced environment becomes all pervasive and transmogrifies our sensory balance, it also becomes invisible.**"

We are so involved with ourselves that we fail to see how the self got the information that it got



The point of the Narcissus myth is not that people are prone to fall in love with their own images, but that people fall in love with extensions of themselves which they are convinced are not extensions of themselves.”

Marshall McLuhan

‘The Agenbite of Outwit’

1963



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Chapter 4 - The Gadget Lover - Narcissus as Narcosis

"Socially, it is the accumulation of group pressures and irritations that prompt invention and innovation as counter-irritants.

War and the fear of war have always been considered the main incentives to technological extension of our bodies.

Indeed, Lewis Mumford, in his *The City in History*, considers the walled city itself an extension of our skins, as much as housing and clothing."

"The principle of numbness comes into play with electric technology, as with any other.

We have to numb our central nervous system when it is extended and exposed, or we will die.

Thus the age of anxiety and of electric media is also the age of the unconscious and of apathy.

But it is strikingly the age of consciousness of the unconscious, in addition.

With our central nervous system strategically numbed, 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.

Apparently this could not have happened before the electric age gave us the means of instant, total field-awareness.

With such awareness, the subliminal life, private and social, has been hoicked up into full view, with the result that we have "social consciousness" presented to us as a cause of guilt-feelings.

Existentialism offers a philosophy of structures, rather than categories, and of total social involvement instead of the bourgeois spirit of individual separateness or points of view. In the electric age we wear all mankind as our skin."

We become what we behold

"We shape our tools and thereafter our tools shape us." This misattributed quote is discussed [here](#).

This [video](#) from Hans-Georg Moeller is a great summary of many of McLuhan's ideas. Moeller is a philosophy professor known for his idea of Proficiency - how we present ourselves through our profile. This is related to identity, a big theme in McLuhan's book.

"Three different major paradigms of identity formation are distinguished from one another: a sincere identity is constructed through a firm commitment of the self to its social roles; an authentic identity is constructed through the creation of a social persona on the basis of one's unique and original self; a 'profilic' identity, as we call it, is shaped by successfully presenting a personal profile under conditions of second-order observation as they prevail, for instance, in the social media, but also in other contemporary social systems."

[Sincerity, authenticity and profilicity: Notes on the problem, a vocabulary and a history of identity - Hans-Georg Moeller, Paul J. D'Ambrosio, 2019](#)

Read more about McLuhan:

- [Marshall McLuhan: Electric Age Prophet in a Post-Gutenberg Galaxy - CLM Northwest](#)
- [Channeling McLuhan | WIRED](#)
- [Macro Media Literacy. Media Literacy, or Critical Media... | by Andrew McLuhan | Medium](#)
- [This Is Marshall McLuhan - The Medium Is The Message \(1967\) - YouTube](#)