

Computers and Media: McLuhan & Responsive Media

CSCI 1200

Marshall McLuhan



Marshall McLuhan

Marshall McLuhan was a Canadian philosopher of communication theory

His work is viewed as one of the cornerstones of the study of media theory

As well as having practical applications in the advertising and television industries

Predicted World Wide Web almost thirty years before it was invented..

Effects of Media on Society

Does popular media have a wide-ranging effect on society?

- Self-focused versus community-oriented

Laws of Media (1988)

Published posthumously by his son Eric.

McLuhan summarized his ideas about media in a concise tetrad of media effects.

The tetrad is a means of examining the effects on society of any technology (i.e., any medium) by dividing its effects into four categories and displaying them simultaneously.

McLuhan designed the tetrad as a pedagogical tool, phrasing his laws as questions with which to consider any medium.

*Four simple questions
that reveal the future
of all technology.*

Laws of Media

ENHANCE

OBSOLESCE

RETRIEVE

REVERSE

Enhance

What human trait or experience does the medium *enhance*?

- What is the intended function
- What does it improve or make more efficient
- Does it extend part of the body or senses
- Does it extend an aspect of the human mind?
- Does it amplify some human capability?
- Does it extend the individual, group, or society?

Example: Radio

Enhancement: What the medium amplifies or intensifies?
Radio amplifies news and music via sound.

*“you shape your tools
in your own image,
and in their turn, they
shape you”*

Obsolesce

What pre-existing technology, method, system, or medium does the medium *obsolesce*?

- What technology does the new medium replace?
- What does it render unnecessary?
- What procedures does it short-circuit or bypass?
- What happens to the older, obsolesced medium?
- Does it disappear entirely, become an art object, or find a new niche?

Example: Radio

Enhancement: What the medium amplifies or intensifies?
Radio amplifies news and music via sound.

Obsolescence: What the medium drives out of prominence? *Radio reduces the importance of print and the visual.*

Retrieve

What technology, method, system, or medium that was previously abandoned or obsolesced does this medium *retrieve*?

- What archaic elements are made relevant again?
- What previously marginalized or repressed ideas, practices or artifacts are brought to the fore?
- What aspects of the prehistoric, ancient, medieval, or early modern world are revived?

Example: Radio

Enhancement: What the medium amplifies or intensifies. *Radio amplifies news and music via sound.*

Obsolescence: What the medium drives out of prominence. *Radio reduces the importance of print and the visual.*

Retrieval: What the medium recovers which was previously lost. *Radio returns the spoken word to the forefront.*

Reverse

When fully utilized or pushed to its extreme, what will the medium *reverse* into?

- What effects will the medium create that are opposite to what was originally intended?
- What are the contradictions inherent in the technology?
- What is the ecological impacts?

Example: Radio

Enhancement: *What the medium amplifies or intensifies?* Radio amplifies news and music via sound.

Obsolescence: *What the medium drives out of prominence?* Radio reduces the importance of print and the visual.

Retrieval: *What the medium recovers which was previously lost?* Radio returns the spoken word to the forefront.

Reversal: *What the medium does when pushed to its limits?* Acoustic radio flips into audio-visual TV.



Television

Enhances our ability to see and hear across time and space

Obsolesces radio (forcing it to reinvent itself)

Retrieves the hearth and campfire as the centre of communal entertainment

Reverses into new forms of individual and social isolation



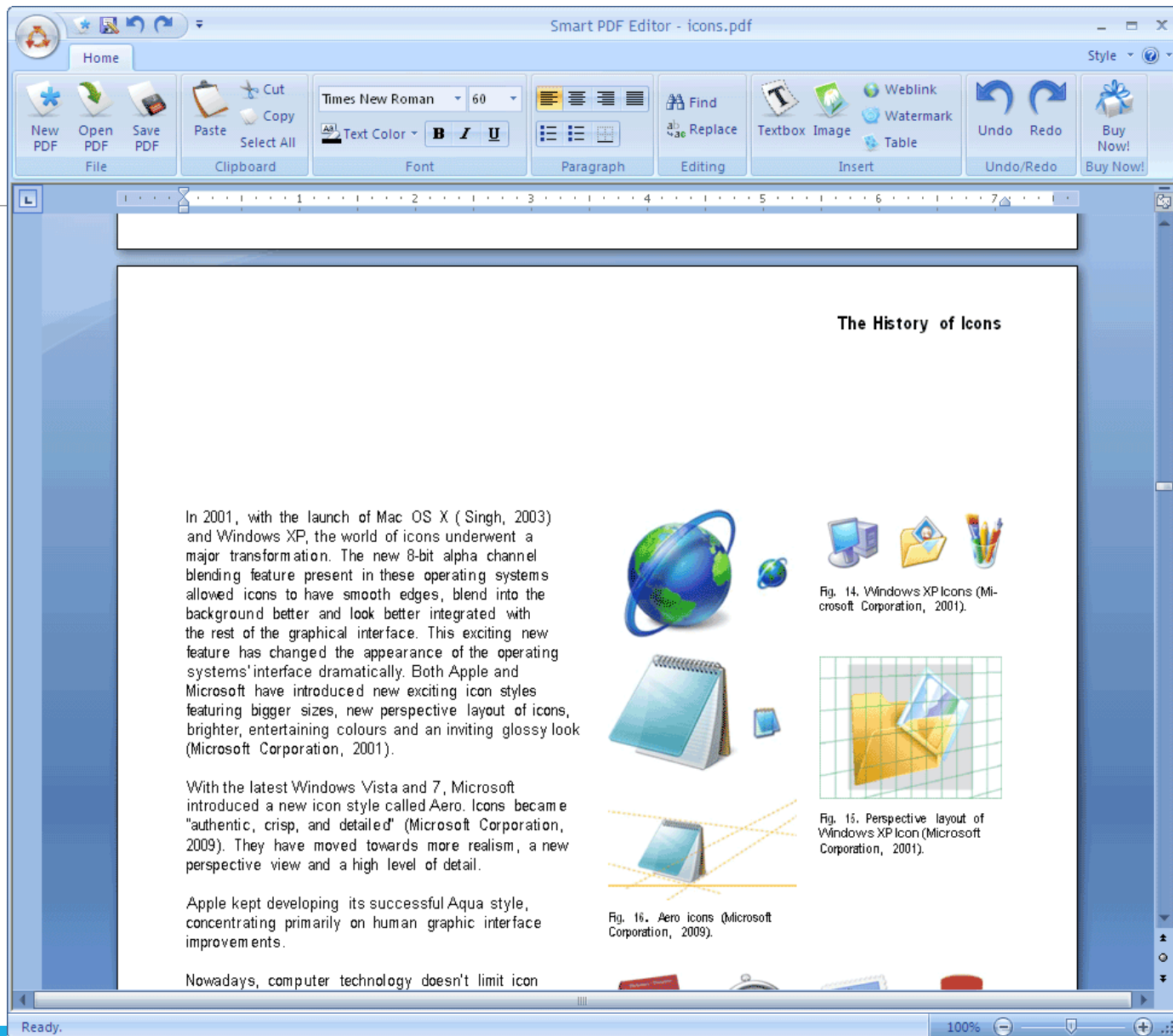
Automobile

Enhances our mobility

Obsolesces the horse and buggy

Retrieves the knight in armor

Reverses into the traffic jam



Word Processing

Enhances our ability to produce printed text

Obsolesces the typewriter

Retrieves the scroll and the manuscript as open, changeable text

Reverses into oral communication through speech recognition and synthesis software

iWatch - Exercise

<http://www.apple.com/ca/apple-events/september-2015/>

Enhances..

Obsolesces..

Retrieves..

Reverses..

Digital Camera – Exercise 2

Enhances..

Obsolesces..

Retrieves..

Reverses..







“McLuhanisms”

The Medium is the message.

Truth is what we make in our encounter with the world that is making us.

With telephone and TV it is not so much the message as the sender that is “sent”.

People do not actually read newspapers. They step into them every morning like a hot bath.

The future of the book is the blurb.

Electric information is an extension of self.

Time

In 2006 Time magazine names “you” as its person of the year to reflect the importance of user-generated internet content as a driving force in the modern world



Role of the Audience



World is a Global Village

Global Village: McLuhan described how the globe has been contracted into a village by electric technology

Watching World is a Global Village (CBC)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HeDnPP6ntic>

Responsive Media

Old Spice

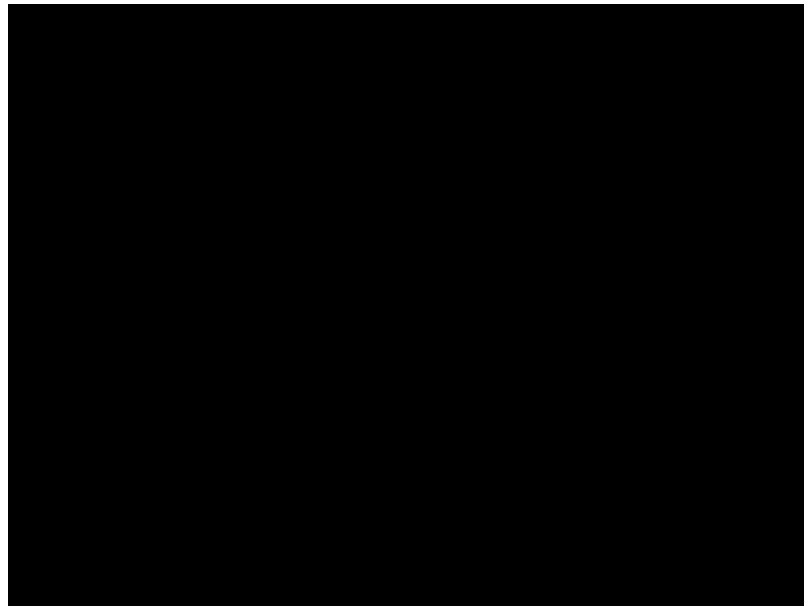
Summer 2010: Old Spice media campaign

Started with a TV commercial, the origin of “Old Spice Guy”

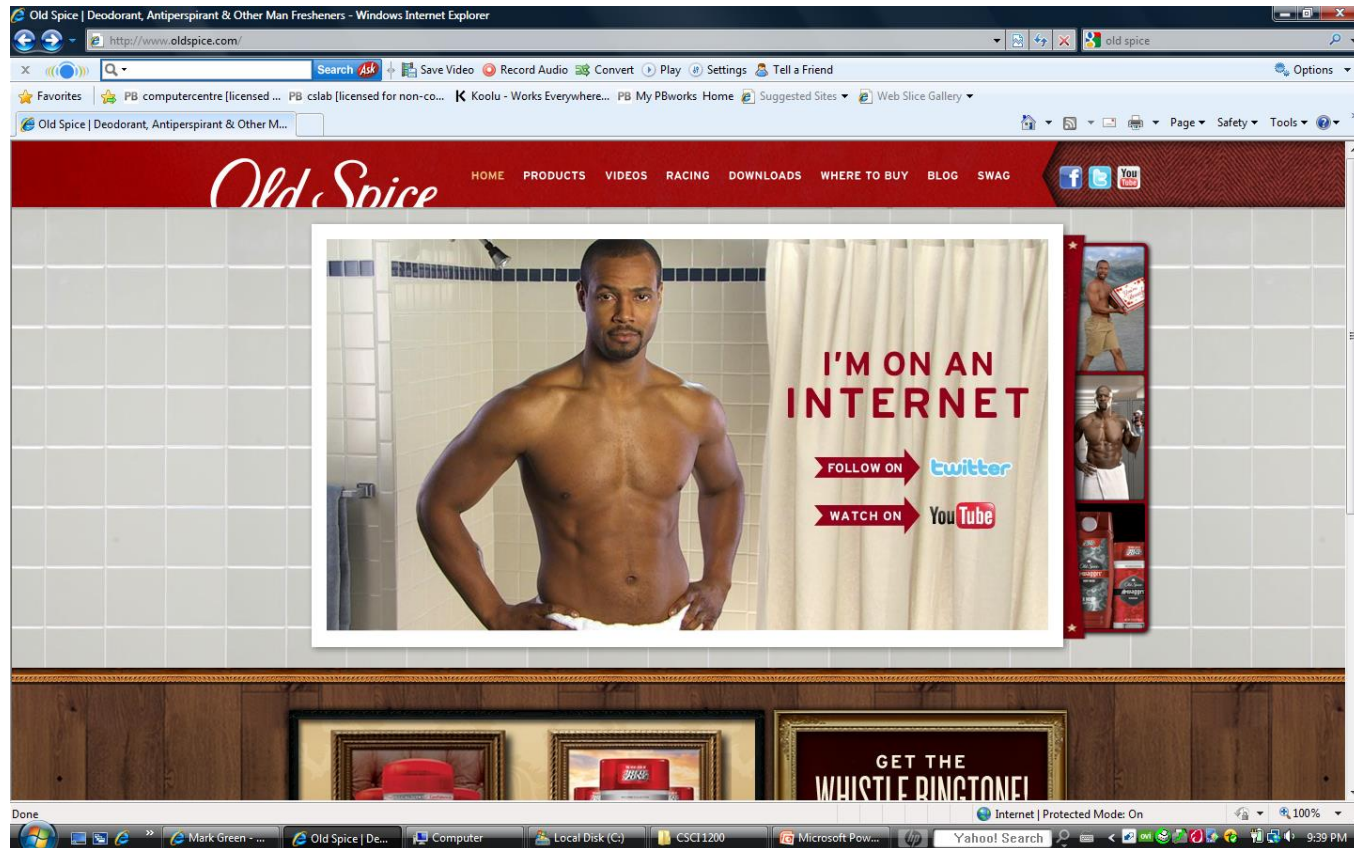
A success, a lot of attention, got people talking

The campaign then moved to the Internet

Old Spice - Commercial



Old Spice - Website



Old Spice

The campaign moved to YouTube and Twitter

Old Spice Guy responded in near real time to comments from fans, videos posted on YouTube

This is a type of Artificial Reality Game (ARG), which has been very successful in advertising

Old Spice - YouTube



Old Spice - YouTube



Old Spice - YouTube



Old Spice - YouTube



Old Spice - YouTube



Old Spice - YouTube

Basically an electronic conversation, mediated by the Internet

Broadcasting a TV commercial is very expensive, can easily get into the \$100,000 range for national exposure

But, YouTube is free, if we can get a similar number of viewers this is a real bargain

Some of the YouTube videos got over 1 million views, this is much better than a TV commercial

Old Spice - YouTube

This got into papers and TV news, a major news story

It took on a life of its own, called *viral marketing*

Significant increase in Old Spice sales!

Old Spice - Conclusion

A good example of the interplay between different media, and different technologies

What this course is about, how technology and media interact

How innovative combinations of different technologies produce essentially new types of media, new ways of communicating our messages

McLuhan's Wake

Watching McLuhan's Wake (parts)

<http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0391328/>

Full verion:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A9y-ZAldxrE>

Exercise

Other examples of *responsive mass media*?

Your Action Items

Read chapter 1 and 2 of course text



Summary

We:

- Introduced the life and work of Marshall McLuhan
- Discussed responsive media