LAWS OF THE MEDIA

STRUCTURAL APPROACH

One way of understanding the structural approach to the
media is provided by Jacques Lusseyran in And There Was Light
(William Heinemann, London, 1964). This book is an account of the
reordering of all of his sensory life as the result of a violent accident
in which he lost his sight. This loss of sight greatly enhanced the
activity of his other senses and led to the development of an inner
sight as well. Altogether, he became aware that in the sighted
world in which he lived, there were a great many assumptions about
perception which needed questioning:

> When I came upon the myth of objectivity in certain
> modern thinkers, it made me angry. So there was only one
> world for these people, the same for everyone. And
> all the other worlds were to be counted as illusions
> left over from the past. Or why not call them by their
> name -- hallucinations? I had learned to my cost how
> wrong they were.
>
> From my own experience I knew very well that it was
> enough to take from a man a memory here, an association
> there, to deprive him of hearing or sight, for the world
> to undergo immediate transformation, and for another world,
> entirely different but entirely coherent, to be born.
> Another world? Not really. The same world rather, but
> seen from another angle, and counted in entirely new measures.
> When this happened, all the hierarchies they called objective
> were turned upside down, scattered to the four winds, not
> even theories but like whims.

(page 112)

The work of Harold Innis in The Bias of Communication and in Empire
and Communication extends to sociology the same principles which Lusseyran
mentions here apropos his private perceptual transformation. Innis
made many historical observations on the differing patterns and structures

in human organization as they related to different means available

for shaping situations. One of his most frequent illustrations of this

principle concerned the two types of bureaucracy that grew from the use

of stone, on one hand, and paper, on the other hand, as materials for

writing. When stone or brick or clay are used as writing materials,

the bureaucracy or human organization of interests and energies tends

to take a priestly form dedicated to stability in time. On the other

hand, when paper is available, the bureaucracy tends to become

military, with a strong interest in the control of space. Innis was

not only concerned with the study of changes in the outer patterns

of human organization resulting from different means of communication

in time and space, but he was much interested in the changes that

took place in the perceptual lives of the people involved in these

changes. He played the inner and outer aspects of innovation and change

back and forth across each other as a figure/ground interface. The idea

of interface, of the resonant interval as "where the action is"

in all structures, whether chemical, psychic or social, involves the

factor of touch. Touch, as the resonant interval or frontier of

change and process, is indispensable to the study of structures. It

involves also the idea of "play" as in the action of the interval

as the basis of human communieation. Since electronic man lives

in a world of simultaneous information, he finds himself increasingly

excluded from his traditional visual world in which space and reason

seem to be uniform, connected and stable. Instead, Western visual

man now finds himself habitually relating to information structures

which are simultaneous, discontinuous and dynamic. Hearing, as such,

is from all directions at once, a 360 degree sphere, as it were,

and electrically, knowing is now from all directions at once in a

360 degree sphere, so that knowing itself has become acoustic in

form, as it were.

In 1917 T.S. Eliot in his Tradition and the Individual Talent

had stressed the view that all art from Homer to the present

formed a simultaneous order and that this order was perpetually

motivated by new experience. His symbolist approach to language

and art and communication is well indicated in his celebrated

definition of "The Auditory Imagination:

> What I call the "auditory imagination" is the feeling
> for syllable and rhythm, penetrating far below the conscious
> levels of thought and feeling, invigorating every word:
> sinking to the most primitive and forgotten, returning
> to the origin and bringing something back, seeking the
> beginning and the end. It works through meanings,
> certainly, or not without meanings in the ordinary sense,
> and fuses the old and obliterated, and the trite, the
> current, and the new and the surprising, the most ancient
> and the most civilized mentality.

(TAKE TODAY - p. 9)

This definition points to the endless process of change and transformation implicit in this simultaneous and homeostatic structure which is dedicated to eternal stability. Much of the confusion of our present age stems naturally from the divergent experience of Western literate man, on the one hand, and his new surround of simultaneous or acoustic knowledge. Western man is torn between the claims of visual and auditory cultures or structures.

In presenting the Laws of the Media, the object is to draw attention to situations that are still in process, situations that are structuring new environments and restructuring old ones, so that it might be said that structures of media dynamics are inseparable from performance. The effort has been to draw attention to the laws of composition as well as to the factors of regulation and interplay.

In The Study of Human Communication (page 192) Nan Lynn stated:

"The ultimate goal of science is to explain by means of a set of theories, events that are observed."

One of the observable features of media is their tendency to create service or disservice environments, whether it is the telephone, the motor car, or clothing. It may well be possible to bring to bear on these man-made environments some of the processes of evolution such as Jean Baptiste Lamarck observed in his Zoological Philosophy in 1809. He had observed an increasing simplification in animal organization and a corresponding diminution in the number of their faculties which he sought to relate to the action of "the infinitely varied environments of all parts of the world on the general shape,

structure and even organisation of these animals..." He proceded to

note the environmental influence as follows:

> Now the true principle to be noted in all this is
> as follows:
> 1.   Every fairly considerable and permanent alter-
> ation in the environment of any race of animals works
> a real alteration in the needs of that race.
> 2.   Every change in the needs of animals necessitates
> new activities on their part for the satisfaction of
> those needs, and hence new habits.
> 3.   Every new need, necessitating new activities for
> its satisfaction, requires the animal, either to make
> more frequent use of some of its parts which it previously
> used less, and thus greatly to develop and enlarge them;
> or else to make use of entirely new parts, to which
> the needs have imperceptibly given birth by efforts
> of its inner feeling; & this I shall shortly prove by
> means of known facts.
>   Thus to obtain a knowledge of the true causes of
> that great diversity of shapes and habits found in the
> various known animals, we must reflect that the infinitely
> diversified but slowly changing environment in which
> the animals of each race have successively been placed,
> has involved each of them in new needs and corresponding
> alterations in their habits.

<div style="text-align: right">(p. 114)</div>

This he follows by a statement of his First and Second Law:

FIRST LAW

> In every animal which has not passed the limit of its
> development, a more frequent and continuous use of any
> organ gradually strengthens, develops and enlarges
> that organ, and gives it a power proportional to the
> length of time it has been so used; while the permanent
> disuse of any organ imperceptibly weakens and x deter-
> iorates it, and progressively diminishes its functional
> capacity, until it finally disappears.

SECOND LAW

> All the acquisitions or losses wrought by nature on
> individuals, through the influence of the environment
> in which their race has long been placed, and hence
> through the influence of the predominant use or permanent
> disuse of any organ; all these are preserved by reproduction
> to the new individuals which arise, provided that the
> acquired modifications are common to both sexes, or at
> least to the individuals which produce the young...

<div style="text-align: right">(p. 114)</div>

The whole action of the environment on the animal organism
may be said to be abrasive and stressful to a degreee Hans Selye
in The Stress of Life has summarized the distress factor:

> There is an element of adaptation in every disease;
> but, in some maladies, the direct effects of the
> disease-producers, in others the body's own defensive
> adaptive reactions, are more prominent. Only in the latter
> case do we commonly speak of diseases of adaptation.

(p. 127)

The work of Hans Selye is highly relevant to media study because,
as he puts it:"Stress research is primarily concerned with these non-
specific reactions."   Environmental stress as a factor in awakening
adaptive reactions to man-made environments is well illustrated in
the experiments carried out in Germany and in the U.K. concerning
TV viewing:

COMMITTEE AS MEDIUM

(A)   Amplifies corporate image of authority

(B)   Individual responsibility via role-playing

(C)   Dialogue = redundant – familiarity breeds consensus

(D)   Flip from job to role = subliminal
e.g. horse
Watergate – nobody makes decision

DREAM

(A) Amplifies some residual trivia of the day

(B) Retiring the threatening day-time figures and images

(C) Retrieval of primitive, infantile experience, again
     from the area of anxiety

(D) Flips into consciousness

MOTOR CAR

(A) Privacy - going outside to be alone -
ego trip - mobile home

(B) Horse

(C) Countryside retrieves knight in shining armour

(D) City - suburb -
helicopter as canal control
traffic jam as logs or ice in rivers?
traffic lights as locks

CLOCK

(A)   Visual time   (HD   C/M)

(B)   Leisure   (C-M   LD)

(C)   History (chronology)
      Eternal present

(D)   Eternity –

PRESS

(A)   Today date-line - point of view

(B)   Yesterday

(C)   Corporate clothing for naked ego

(D)   Collage of community: News behind the news,
       i.e. "not fit to print"

THE CROWD

(A)   Enlarges aggregates, groups -- the one into the many

(B)   Depreciates the individual component

(C)   Retrieves equality and corporate power

(D)   Reverses the many into the one

INSTANT REPLAY

(A) Instant replay of experience = cliche
-- amplifies cognitive awareness

(B) Obsolesces the representational and chronological

(C) Retrieves "meaning"

(D) Flips from individual experience to pattern recognition archetype

SATELLITE

(A)   Enlarges the planet

(B)   Obsolesces Nature

(C)   Retrieves Ecology

(D)   Reversal -- nature is art form.
            Retrieves globe as theatre --
            Population goes from spectator to actor.

ELECTRIC MEDIA

(A) Amplification of scope of simultaneity
and of service environment as information

(B) Obsolesces the visual, connected, logical

(C) Retrieves the subliminal – audile – tactile – dialogue

(D) Etherealization –– the sender is sent

PHOTOGRAPH

(A) Visual - cyclops

(B)   The present

(C)   The past

(D)   Skin flick movies immersion -
one skin for everybody.

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(A)   Enhances visual moment - i.e. isolated - candid

(B)   Real time

(C)   Past

(D)   Movie - audile-tactile

CAMERA

(A)   Snapshot (gun) aggression

(B)   Privacy

(C)   Past

(D)   Immersion – audile-tactile

SPEECH COMPRESSOR

(A)   Speeds – utterance

(B)   Obsolesces vowels and endings

(C)   Retrieves gesture

(D)   Flips into song

<u>First Law of Thermo-Dynamics</u>

(a)   Intensifies matching (visual order)

(b)   Obsolesces making of all non-visual features

(c)   Retrieves plenum

(d)   Flips into vacuum

TELEGRAPH

(A)   Instant news moves to date-line for
      entire community   - one-line headline

(B)   Perspective -- point of view
      Change of writing style

(C)   Mosaic unity (acoustic) - corporate

(D)   Deadline -- tomorrow
      Sender is sent
      The world for a day = date-line -- updating

WRITTEN WORD

(A) Ego – authorship – record
     enlarges public – ego trip

(B) Oral –– song

(C) Retrieves "innermost moral being" (Entralgo 29-30)
     "the very self is largely an archaic self"

(D) Creates new public –– merges ego and ground = monster

ROADS

(A) Amplify space and aggression via centralism
    - speed-up

(B) Obsolesce natural environment of the hunter

(C) Retrieve authority at a distance (i.e. old voodoo)

(D) Landscape architecture

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TYPEWRITER

(A)   Amplifies writing speed

(B)   Obsolesces writing -- mss.

(C)   Shorthand and dictation -- oral
      Poesie concrete

(D)   Composition-as-publication

TELEPHONE

(A)   Amplifies speed of access to user
       --- person to person

(B)   Obsolesces privacy -- space-time

(C)   Retrieves dialogue

(D)   User is sent
       Discarnate phone freaks

PHONOGRAPH

(A)   Extends space-time scope --
        crossing cultural bounds

(B)   Obsolesces live performer

(C)   Sounds of the past

(D)   Muzak (env) = no content but
        user = mimetic icon (ground)

MOVIES

(A) Exaggeration of kinetic-visual reel
    - gesture — "all nights newsery reel"

(B) Real world

(C) Retrieves mime - ghosts - stars — mythic
    dimension = audience - cf. <u>Magic and Myth of the Movies</u>
                                    P. Tyler

(D) Dreams that money can buy
    Dream fantasy - flips into icon - movie stars

RADIO

(A) Instant access to entire planet
Multi-locational, cf. Orson Welle's broadcast
credible via multi-locations

(B) Euclidean space - rational
wire and connections

(C) Tribal ecological involvement

(D) Global village theatre

TV

(A)   Amplification of multi-sensuous
Use of eye as ear, as hand

(B)   Obsolesces radio, movie and point of view

(C)   Retrieves occult = seer

(D)   Flip is to inner trip
Exchanges inner and outer

WEAPONS

(A)   Amplifies body into group
      Corporate role -- hunter or fighter

(B)   Obsolesces the private body

(C)   Retrieves game
      role of food-gatherer

(D)   Flips into over-kill
      Nobel (peace)

AUTOMATION

(A)   Amplifies power to repeat and recall (matching)

(B)   Memory

(C)   Retrieves tribal environment of the hunter
        (espionage) Data-banks

(D)   Pattern recognition -- structure = acoustic modes

Second Law of Thermo-Dynamics

(a)   Enhances awareness of visual disorder

(b)   Pushes aside old acoustic order

(c)   Retrieves pre-visual chaos

(d)   Flips into ppst-visual acoustic order,
        e.g. quantum mechanics

COPERNICAN REVOLUTION

(A) Enhances role of the sun(central)

(B) Pushes aside the crystalline spheres

(C) Retrieves Aristarchus

(D) Flips into relativity -- centres everywhere (decentral) and margins nowhere