

Discussion Questions

1) John Dyer (Ch. 6, pp. 87-88) discusses Marshall McLuhan's tetrad of media (and technological) effects¹. Of any medium, one can ask the questions

What does the medium enhance?

What does the medium make obsolete?

What does the medium retrieve that had been obsolesced earlier?

What does the medium reverse or flip into when pushed to extremes?

In your group, select one technology and discuss it in terms of McLuhan's tetrad of questions.

2) These four aspects of technology happen simultaneously. The advantages and disadvantages of each of these aspects are, in general, incommensurate. The beneficial aspects of the technology do not nullify the problematic aspects; they exist alongside them. As a consequence, technology is ambivalent, rather than neutral.

In your group, discuss the ambivalent nature of the technology that you considered under Part 1.

3) *Technological instrumentalism* holds that the way people use technology is determined by the people, not the technology. *Technological determinism* holds that the way people use technology is determined by the technology, not the people. Dyer (Ch. 6, pp. 93-94) steers a path between these two with the idea of *embedded values*: in designing objects, we design certain values into them. We *can* then use them in other ways, but we *tend* not to.

In your groups, discuss – for the same technology as before – the values that have been embedded into it.

¹ Originally raised by Marshall McLuhan (1994) *Understanding Media: The Extension of Man* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press).