



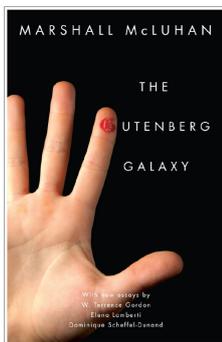
## Do not machines create humans as much as humans create machines?

### Second subject: Print

Carefully study the following documents: primary sources (visual elements, quotations) and secondary sources (analysis by an expert). You will have to account for the extent to which print had a dramatic impact on humans, altering their lives, their social structures, their consciousness, their thinking processes.

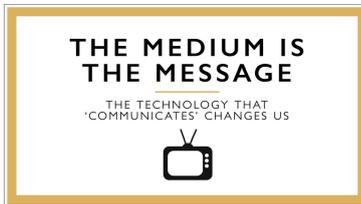
You may work in groups to organize your short synthesis and present your findings to the rest of the class. Work through the documents step by step, as they are becoming more and more explicit.

Document A: Cover for Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, 1962



Notes and analysis:

Document B: Quotation by Marshall McLuhan



Notes and analysis:

Document C: “‘The Gutenberg Galaxy’: How McLuhan Opened a New Path in the Digital Age to the Socratic Ideal of the Examined Life,” article by Federico Ponzoni (January 29, 2016)

*The Gutenberg Galaxy* is a book about the effects of the introduction of a movable type press on practically any- and everything conceivable, from politics to economy, from science to art, from society as a whole to the individual's perception of time and space. McLuhan's book is based on a core argument: the human being's five senses are organized as a whole into a *sensorium*. The internal organization of the *sensorium* functions according to laws that prioritize one sense or group of senses over the others. [...] All this means that if you communicate only orally (i.e., if you live in a culture that has not discovered writing), your *sensorium* will be organized by laws that give priority to hearing and touch over that of sight. [...] In other words, the communication technology a given culture uses determines how individuals belonging to that culture perceive the world. The way in which the individual perceives the world in turn determines the whole cultural landscape in which the individual lives in terms of values, social organization, beliefs, practices, etc. [...]

McLuhan is not the only one suggesting that technology tends to shape decisively both culture and society. Harold Innis in his *Empire and Communication* suggests that it is impossible to think of a human society organized as an empire without a communication technology that allows messages to be interchanged across long distances. Walter Ong in his *Orality and Literacy* describes the psychology of the oral man. He also depicts how the psychological structure of the oral man changes when writing is introduced.

[...] [A]ccording to McLuhan we have to reject something very deeply rooted in our comprehension of communication: the possibility of separating form and content. According to McLuhan, the “medium is the message.” One possible way of understanding McLuhan's line—which I find the most convincing—is the following: a given communication technology, a medium in McLuhan's terminology, has effects on society as a whole. These effects are produced almost entirely by the introduction of a new communication technology, regardless of what is actually communicated through it. For instance, books change our way of perceiving space not because something is written in them such that we have to perceive space in a new way, but because reading in a sequential line changes the way we use our eyes. This change brings with itself a new understanding of space itself. From the point of view of the change brought by reading books in the understanding of space, *what* is written in a book, its content, is altogether indifferent. [...] [C]ommunication technology cannot be used innocently. The more we use technology, the more we are somehow also used by it. As an example, we can think of how our smartphones have extended our work time. We bought a smartphone as a useful tool that should make our life easier (with a smartphone and Google Maps you won't get lost anymore), but we may find ourselves answering emails from our boss at odd hours (which leads to a reduction of the quality of time we spend with our families).