ACCSCIENCE PUBLISHING

Beytulhikme An International Journal of Philosophy

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLE

Marshall McLuhan's Understanding of Human Perception in the Context of Technical Extensions: A Philosophical Examination of the Problem of Transformation from Tribal Man to Electronic Man

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Citation: Aktay, M. & Selim, F. (2026). Marshall McLuhan's Understanding of Human Perception in the Context of Technical Extensions: A Philosophical Examination of the Problem of Transformation from Tribal Man to Electronic Man. *Beytulhikme An InternationalJournal of Philosophy*, 16(3): 1033-1045.
https://doi.org/10.36922/BIJP94779

Received: June 5, 2026

Revised: July 18, 2026

Accepted: July 25, 2026

Published online: September 30, 2026

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Abstract

Marshall McLuhan, a prominent communication theorist, offers a historically distinctive theory of the philosophy of the human being. Within a broader understanding of humanity, McLuhan provides key insights into technology-based perception and mind. This study focuses on the problem of how human auditory and visual perceptions shape human experience within the context of technical extensions. Specifically, it analyses how communication technologies have transformed, altered, or enhanced human life. Within this framework, the discussion addresses the stages through which the transformation from tribal individuals to the literate, typographic, graphic, and electronic types of man occurred. The study demonstrates that when McLuhan speaks of human types, he is not referring to a specific biological distinction, but rather to the ways in which homo sapiens are shaped by their environment and by technological advancements. Our aim is to understand how the environment that produces human types has been historically shaped by regimes of perception. The scope of this study is limited to examining McLuhan's observations on the philosophy of the human in relation to subject types. Accordingly, our methodology consists of a conceptual examination of McLuhan's philosophy of the human. The limited number of studies on McLuhan's philosophy of the human renders this work original. In this context, our goal is to analyse technical extensions—writing, the printing press, the camera, and electrically based tools—and to reveal how they shape the regimes of perception that influence different types of human beings.

Keywords: Marshall McLuhan, technical extensions, tribal man, electronic man, typographic man, auditory and visual perception.

1. Introduction

McLuhan is a prominent Canadian thinker. While Darwin came to the fore in biology, Marx in political theory, Einstein in physics, and Freud in psychology from the nineteenth century to the first quarter of the twentieth century, from the second half of the twentieth century onward there is no name other than McLuhan that has so dominated communication studies in particular (Wolfe, 2004, p. 20). McLuhan puts forward significant observations insofar as he addresses the individual and social effects of perception- and communication-based transformations in the historical development of humanity. In these transformations, tools and extensions exert a determining influence on human consciousness and perception. In his view, within the historical process these effects emerge not through linear progress but through cyclical patterns operating via specific perceptual changes (McLuhan, 1962). In this respect, McLuhan may be said to stand close to Ibn Khaldun's cyclical understanding of history (Ibn Khaldun, 2005). According to McLuhan, there is a necessary relationship between the human being and society through the perceptual changes within these cycles. For example, when we look at the history of homo sapiens, we see that the picture has served an important participatory function in relating to the world. At the same time, the question of whether the picture on the cave wall is an extension of man, or whether man himself has become an extension of the picture on the cave wall, opens the relationship among technics, the human, and the world up for debate. For McLuhan, as humanity relates to the world through the tools of extension, these extensions gradually become a specific medium, and the medium becomes a specific meaning. For this reason, the idea that "the medium is the message" is significant insofar as the regime of perception constituted by technical extensions transforms human behavior and the world of meaning (McLuhan & Fiore, 1967). Why is this idea important? Because if the tool bound to the medium determines meaning, the hermeneutic relationship among text, meaning, and content is pushed into the background (Cavell, 2016, p. 21). In this respect, McLuhan may appear close to post-structuralist thought insofar as he shifts the center of meaning toward the medium, the structure, and the tool, and to postmodern thought insofar as he emphasizes the decentering of meaning. Yet he does not fall entirely within either approach, for he agrees neither with the post-structuralists' placing of language at the center nor with the postmodernists' claim that truth and the grand narratives have dissolved. The reason is that McLuhan was influenced by the Catholic intellectual tradition and to a certain extent defends metaphysics; he thus keeps his distance from post-structuralism and postmodernism. Nevertheless, with his claims that meaning departs from its central position and that the media construct reality, he has joined the ranks of the thinkers who diagnosed the crisis of representation early on.

McLuhan seeks to reveal how human beings relate to the world through extensions, how the image-based crisis of meaning arises, and how it is transformed. For although humanity has sought to understand the world since ancient times, he argues that this quest, grounded in extensions and media, has mostly encountered errors, deficiencies, and problems. McLuhan maintains that we must first comprehend the ground, the environment, and the medium in which we find ourselves, and then analyse how they are transformed through figures. Indeed, it is mistaken to understand life through figures without grasping the environment and the medium, or to substitute figures for the medium. He explains this situation with the phrase "at jet speeds, rearview mirrors are not very useful" (McLuhan & Powers, 1989, p. viii). McLuhan foregrounds the fact that, in the historical development of humanity, the structures of medium, ground, environment, and figure have undergone specific transformations. In making these analyses, he conducts in-depth examinations of the transformation of perception from the oral-culture structure of tribal society to the written systems of civilization. In this respect, McLuhan demonstrates his originality by treating in detail the debates concerning the relations among writing, speech, and perception that lie at the foundation of the transformations the West has undergone. On this basis, it may be argued that he touched, earlier than Derrida, upon the logocentric (speech/discourse) problem that he saw at the foundation of the Western system of thought. While for McLuhan the foundation of Western civilization lies in the problem of visual sensation created by the phonetic alphabet, for Derrida the foundation of the Western system of thought lies in being, speech, and discourse (Derrida, 1997). Derrida argues that meaning is a *pharmakon*—that is, that it is to a certain extent not pure and that, rather than remaining the same, it changes under different conditions (Derrida, 1981). Although McLuhan accepts the concept of the *pharmakon*, he notes that in the context of medium, ground, and figure, life changes continuously, yet these changes are perceptually based. McLuhan argues that Derrida's logocentric understanding is primarily grounded in auditory perception in tribal societies. For McLuhan, Western civilization comes to the fore with technical meanings not through logocentrism but through the hegemony of the visual that begins with the phonetic alphabet. While McLuhan's critique of Western civilization rests on forms of visual domination, Derrida's rests on logocentrism. In fact, McLuhan's discussion of the problem of speech and writing in the context of regimes of perception, before Derrida, demonstrates his originality.

Another aspect of McLuhan's importance is that he was among the first thinkers to foresee that the technological tools of our age would surround and take hold of human beings. In this regard, he prioritizes the problems created by exponential technological speed. It may be said that he laid the foundations for such popular formulations of thinkers like Byung-Chul Han as the "fatigue society" or the "achievement society." At this point, it should be stated that on technological problems McLuhan is not a mere pessimist. Moreover, it is valuable that he does not remain at the level of criticism but puts forward in-depth analyses and diagnoses. Frankly, his position can be defined by neither the label "technophile" nor "technophobe." It should be emphasized that McLuhan is rather focused on analysing the perception-based transformations and changes brought about by technology. Finally, although McLuhan positions himself outside this binary opposition, according to Umberto Eco he is one of the important figures who constructed that very opposition (Eco, 2020, pp. 20–21).

Historically, rather than turning to the question of whether technical extensions are good or bad, McLuhan focuses on the human forms molded in the context of the auditory- and visual-based perceptions they shape. These human forms or types differ according to their modes of sensory organization. The changes brought about in human types—centered on perception—by transformations such as, first, oral culture; second, the printing revolution based on written culture; and finally the electric revolution will be analysed. The aim of this study is to dwell on how the transformation of perception and meaning, together with the cyclical progression of the human, gives rise to human types. There are few studies on McLuhan in Turkish, and these have treated the thinker within the confines of communication, media, and journalism rather than philosophically. In this study, an in-depth analysis and an original evaluation of his thought, especially from the perspective of the philosophy of the human, will be set forth. In this context, the study assesses how the relationship that the human establishes with the world and society through technical extensions is philosophically shaped by perception-based limit situations. According to McLuhan, as the human perceives the environment through extensions, this balance of perception began to fragment with the development of the phonetic alphabet. At this point, our aim is to address how the integrity of attention, distance, experience, and action was lost along with the fragmentation of the concept of perception. The main focus of this study is on how, with the transformations of regimes of perception in the media of oral, written, and electronic culture, the contents of the human's environment, ground, and figures were subjected to change. First, the human types constituted by the regime of perception in oral and written culture will be discussed. Second, it will be analysed whether the visual sense affected by written culture was transformed by the printing revolution. Third, the reasons for the perceptual transformations of the new human type—the electronic man or the neo-tribal man—brought forth by the electric age that emerged through the Industrial Revolution, up to the present day, will be discussed. Finally, the importance and meaning of the transformations of tribal man, literate man, typographic man, and electronic man will be dwelt upon. The scope of our study is limited to the analysis, synthesis, and critique of the transformations of the original human types that McLuhan treats in terms of medium, tool, and perceptual change. The method of the study is to examine the concepts belonging to McLuhan's philosophy through conceptual analysis and critical reading. In this respect, the study dwells on problems such as the experiential aspect of perception becoming calculable, the differentiation of the image from content, the estrangement of content from experience, the confinement of distance to interfaces, and the reduction of value to speed. In this way, the meaning of the human within transformations in regimes of perception is discussed.

2. The Problem of the Regime of Perception: Sensory Balance within Oral Culture

McLuhan is one of the thinkers who examine in depth the effects of technical-extension-based perceptions—within the specific historical transformations humanity has undergone—on culture, society, and intersubjective relations. Therefore, to understand his philosophy, it must be taken into account that he approaches historical transformations not solely against a political, moral, or cultural background, but places the medium, the extension, and regimes of perception at the center. To explain this, he speaks, first, of the tribal period; second, of the period of literacy that begins with the invention of the phonetic alphabet and reaches its peak with the emergence of the printing press; and third, of the electronic period (Aden, 1969, pp. 359–360). McLuhan begins his account of the regime of perception—historically related to the balance and order of the senses—with the understanding of tribal man. In this context, he investigates which sense lies at the center of the sensory world of tribal man. In his view, the fundamental sense determining the face-to-face contact of tribal life is hearing. "Tribal, non-literate man, living under the intense stress on auditory organization of all experience, is, as it were, entranced" (McLuhan, 1962, p. 24). Why, according to McLuhan, does the auditory sense lie at the center of a balanced and ordered experience? To answer this question, we must understand such factors of the auditory as its directionlessness, simultaneity, and centerlessness.

For tribal man, the foundation of common

consciousness lies in the encompassing character of the auditory. For this reason, McLuhan notes that tribal man is at the same time "acoustic man." Although the auditory sense is central in this man, he knows the world through the commonality of all the senses. For McLuhan, tribal man or acoustic man comes to the fore as a human type brought into being by oral culture. Through the transformation of this oral culture, he historically analyses the meaning and importance of the social sphere. At this point, to understand the importance McLuhan attributes to oral culture, we also need to grasp the structural elements of the perceptual regime of that period. In this context, in connection with McLuhan, it becomes important to consider the structural elements underlying auditory sensation in Ong's understanding of oral culture. For this, we must address the following structural elements of "primary orality": additive, aggregative, redundant, homeostatic, agonistic, empathetic and participatory, situational, and conservative/traditionalist (Ong, 2012, pp. 36–57). These concepts contain the fundamental meanings that sustain the auditory-verbal balance based on oral culture. These meanings bring into being social commonality, unity, and the depth of action within life. Ong explains how the perceptual meaning at the foundation of oral culture operates through these concepts. To a certain extent, these concepts constitute social memory in accordance with the flow of time. At the same time, they harbor the depths that bring into being a living, emotion-based experience. Ong's fundamental observation is that the oral culture preceding written culture is not a deficient or flawed structure but produces a memory that creates a profound unity. Ultimately, philosophers such as Ong and McLuhan seek to demonstrate that oral culture is not random but has a specific structure. In this respect, concepts such as the additive, the aggregative, and the redundant stand at the foundation of cultural memory; concepts that bring into being conservative and balanced structures stand within the relationality of society; concepts that bring forth the situational stand within the concreteness of the auditory; and concepts oriented toward struggle and participation stand within the unity of action—together, they bring oral culture into being. While Ong emphasizes how this structure of oral culture is formed, McLuhan addresses why this culture is important and valuable. At this stage, the structural elements Ong treats constitute the fundamental content of McLuhan's concept of the tribe. The fact that McLuhan charges these structural features with perception-based cultural and normative meanings also brings his originality to the fore. At the same time, it is significant that he reveals how the mode of auditory sensation at the foundation of oral culture organizes these structural elements.

McLuhan's analysis of his understanding of oral culture in terms of the unity of sensory relations is connected with his refusal to view tribalism as a paradisiacal state, a condition of value, or a nostalgic period. At this point, elements of oral culture such as the additive, the aggregative, and the homeostatic emerge through the regime of sensory organization. At their foundation, the auditory sensory system stands at the center. With regard to these concepts of oral culture, why is the auditory rather than the visual sense at the center? Because, according to McLuhan, while visual structure requires distance, exteriority, the analytic, and hierarchy, the auditory structure emphasizes the individual's being continually within life without withdrawing. The auditory structure based on oral culture produces a profound participation in common meaning and life not in a uniform manner but through its simultaneous interaction with the other senses (Carey, 1967, p. 16). The individual's state of being within this life occurs through continuous flow, transition, and intensification. McLuhan emphasizes that the empathetic and participatory character of this state keeps the individual alive by continually orienting him toward face-to-face relations. At its foundation, together with auditory sensation, lies the necessity of a certain participation. Indeed, as sensory participation decreases, the human being who begins to use visual-based extensions, by amputating himself from sensory perception, grows distant from experience, action, culture, and tradition. The importance of this situation is that McLuhan laid the foundations of deconstruction (*déconstruction*) before Derrida (Cavell, 2016, p. 10). McLuhan positions the human being, through perception, within a relation of interiority and exteriority toward medium and figure. The human being's exteriorization of himself through visual culture brings forth what amounts to a perception-based logic of deconstruction. In this respect, the disruption of sensory balance with visuality may lead to deconstruction by destroying vitality and experience. On the other hand, however, the auditory, perception, sensation, and experience in oral culture are also close to the phenomenological understanding. This is connected with Merleau-Ponty's view that perception to a certain extent constitutes a bodily world, through which the state of being within a situation emerges (Merleau-Ponty, 2002). However, while Merleau-Ponty establishes being-in-the-world through the body, for McLuhan being-in-the-world is established through historically changing regimes of perception. Because McLuhan accepts the historical cycle, he treats the continuous transformations of the regime of perception in auditory terms, whereas Merleau-Ponty relates the auditory and perception not to regimes and structures but to individual perceptual continuity. In this respect, while McLuhan brings forth the simultaneity of the auditory through society, culture, and extensions, Merleau-

Ponty argues that the auditory and perception have no cyclical or extensional dimension.

McLuhan's originality lies in his being the first to reveal that regimes of perception have changed historically, from the tribe to the digital age. Fundamentally, in tribal man, what is foregrounded is listening and orientation within the auditory context. What must be noted here is that McLuhan neither exalts nor sanctifies the auditory sense. For this reason, McLuhan stands in a position different from Feld's sound-based approach to social relations and everyday frameworks. Feld foregrounds the understanding of "acoustemology" (acoustic knowing) grounded in local experiences (Feld, 2012). While Feld addresses a specific theory of knowledge based on hearing, McLuhan treats hearing more in terms of the state of being within a specific perceptual medium in the tribal condition. At its foundation, according to him, in the tribal condition the question "how do we know?" has not yet arisen. Why is this important? Because, according to McLuhan, oral culture is oriented not toward epistemological inquiry but toward holistic life practices. Together with this claim, the structure of consciousness of McLuhan's tribal condition includes the features we enumerated above, such as audiality, community, and distancelessness. The knowing of man in the tribe exists not in an analytic, reflective structure but together with rituality, audiality, and sociality in life. Later we will analyse whether this returns through digital culture in the electronic age. But before addressing that, we must analyse how written culture transformed this participatory, simultaneous, and auditory unity.

3. The Dissolution of Oral Culture through the Phonetic Alphabet: The Problem of the Fragmentation of Sensory Harmony

According to McLuhan, while the human being in tribal society related through sensation and contact, a historical rupture occurred. Before this rupture, in the oral, auditory-based culture, sound presented holistic lived experience through perception. Sound holistically encompasses everything from an event to the environment. According to McLuhan, sound emerges above all within the deep archetypes of society (McLuhan & Watson, 1971). The concept of the archetype at this point encompasses deep acoustic, collective, and ritual terms that clichéd patterns cannot reach. This encompassing also carries many cultural and traditional meanings. However, according to McLuhan, the problem of expressing sound through signs in writing displaced many features of the medium, such as participation, wholeness, and surrounding. The phonetic alphabet at the foundation of this problem consists of symbols used to transcribe sounds into writing (Matsumoto, 2009, p. 386). Why does McLuhan think that this phonetic-alphabet-based writing system created a rupture? Because McLuhan argues that writing-based grammar cannot holistically explain the deep meaning of oral culture (McLuhan, 1966). Through the alphabet, sounds are reduced to analytic, formal structures outside vital unity or meaning. In his view, the letter at the root of the alphabet confronts us as the technicized form of *logos*, which means thought, reason, and speech. Latin concepts such as *grammaticus* (grammatical), *littera* / *litera* (letter), and later *litteratus* / *literatus* (literate, learned) are to a certain extent derived from the Greek concepts *gramma* (written thing, letter) and *grammatikē* (proficient in grammar) (Barnhart, 1995, pp. 326–327, 437). For McLuhan, *grammatikē* in fact exists as the technicized trace of meaning. This technicization entered into relation with *grammatikē* as the root of such sciences as music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy (McLuhan et al., 1989, pp. 32–33). In this respect, according to McLuhan, with the alphabet—that is, writing—becoming determining, the radical effect of the sense of sight, biologically present in primates for a million years, emerges with full clarity culturally, socially, and individually. In fact, he is speaking no longer of a biological or physical revolution but of a visual-based perceptual cultural revolution. In this way, the writing practices at the center of human life reduce time from flux to the linear, and speech to simple signs and letters. In this context, the writing system, with a new mode of thinking, has opened Pandora's box (Wertime, 1966, p. 506). At this point, the theory's problems of the mechanical, the individualist, and sensory amputation, based solely on visual space, characterize a new era. McLuhan likens these problems of sensory amputation to Narcissus falling in love with his own reflection and drowning in that reflection (McLuhan, 1966, pp. 51–53). In his view, first the phonetic alphabet, second the printing revolution, and third the camera distorted one's own perceptions. Within the phonetic alphabet, the printing revolution, and the camera revolution, man, like Narcissus, fell in love with his own image-based perceptual extensions. While with the phonetic alphabet and the printing revolution writing becomes an extension of the mind, it at the same time cuts off living experience (autoamputation).

According to McLuhan, it is fundamentally the phonetic alphabet that initiates the falling in love with one's numbed extensions—through visuality, individuality, analytic thinking, and linear motion. McLuhan expresses this as follows: "No other kind of writing save the phonetic has ever translated man out of the possessive world of total interdependence and interrelation that is the auditory network" (McLuhan, 1962, p. 22). In his view, with respect to the phonetic alphabet, the visual-based kind of writing henceforth renders visual sensation sovereign. With the

phonetic alphabet, homo sapiens' transition to a new model of thought grounds biological, political, and value concepts through a change of perceptual regime. This is precisely what makes McLuhan important. While many philosophers, such as Sartori and Han, foreground the concept of *homo videns* ("seeing man") in the post-industrial era (Sartori, 2006), McLuhan proclaims the sight-based literate man through the technical extensions of the phonetic alphabet. Although this bold view of McLuhan's may at first seem exaggerated, he thinks that the phonetic alphabet, when considered in relation to its own period, created a rupture as radical as that effected by the camera in our age (McLuhan, 1962, p. 23). First of all, the phonetic alphabet came into being by imposing visuality. In his view, *homo videns* brings forth the literate man of a new regime of perception beginning with the phonetic alphabet. What does this mean? Its meaning, first of all, is that to understand the foundations of McLuhan's philosophy one must grasp that he employs the technique of alphabetology. Alphabetology (alphabet studies), brought to the fore by thinkers such as Havelock, Ong, Flusser, and Logan, is an approach that dwells on how the alphabet transforms thought, emotions, perception, the individual, and society—how it constructs them. According to Logan, the roots of Western civilization—in Western science, mathematics, jurisprudence, politics, economics, social organization, and religion—are intrinsically connected with the phonetic alphabet (Logan, 1987, pp. 17–18). In Logan's view, the phonetic alphabet not only enabled the emergence of Western civilization but also laid the foundations of its system of thought. Havelock, one of the important alphabetologists, argues that the alphabet necessitated analytic thinking and brought into being a new mode of thinking through text, memory, and language. He discusses whether it is fully possible to reduce the overflowing, deep world of oral culture to the meaning-structure of written culture—like ordering a garden of wild plants, pruning it, and cutting the tall trees short (Havelock, 1963). Indeed, while Havelock discusses how far the label on the bottle explains the water inside, he also considers whether the alphabet developed a new meaning through abstract contexts. Unlike Havelock, McLuhan also discusses whether the phonetic alphabet transformed the human being. In this context, McLuhan argues that the visuality at the foundation of the phonetic alphabet's structure of consciousness began to destroy the sense of time, producing a scattered sense of time in place of the sequence past–present–future. At this point, a new structure of subject—solitary, turned in upon itself—is at issue. As can be seen, McLuhan dwells on certain harsh transformations related to the phonetic alphabet. At this stage, McLuhan is influenced by Harold Innis. He expresses this as follows: "The alphabet is an aggressive and militant absorber and transformer of cultures, as Harold Innis was the first to show" (McLuhan, 1962, p. 48). Although Innis is not exactly an alphabetologist, he dwells on the phenomena of authority and politics that come into being with the alphabet. McLuhan is influenced in particular by Innis's view of the alphabet as an instrument of space, the state, and political organization. It is important that, with respect to the alphabet, Innis foregrounds power's self-development, self-imposition, and political formations (Innis, 2022). The key point of McLuhan's being influenced by Innis is the idea that no matter how high a society rises as art, it remains a tribe unless it develops through the phonetic alphabet. In this context, the fundamental point of transformation is the destructive, annihilating power of the phonetic alphabet over the old. McLuhan focuses precisely on this point: on why the alphabet is a destructive power, and on the effects of its visuality, its abstraction, its analytic structure, its power to intensify individuality, and so forth. Ultimately, in explaining the foundations of the regime of perception, McLuhan foregrounds, first, the importance of participation and collective memory together with audiality in tribal society, and second, the individualist aspect and analytic structure of thought of the sight-based literate man that begins with the phonetic alphabet. By treating this philosophy of perceptual regimes, we have laid an important foundation for understanding his philosophies of technological tools, media, and communication. On this basis, the printing revolution—which he regards as the radical transformation of the human—will be addressed, and it will be emphasized how typographic man remains within the regime of visual perception constituted by technical extensions.

3.1. The Transformation of Life with Respect to the Printing Revolution: The Problem of Typographic Man

McLuhan argues that the factor enabling the sense of sight to come to the fore through the regime of perception is the phonetic alphabet. However, although the phonetic alphabet triggers a certain visuality, it does not fully bring forth the radicality of visuality. McLuhan's originality consists in his setting forth in detail the philosophy of the visuality and sensory imbalance that begin with the alphabet and evolve toward radicality with the printing revolution. To explain the importance of visuality for the subject, McLuhan undertakes a detailed examination fundamentally of the distinction between figure and ground (McLuhan et al., 1989). At the foundation of the concept of seeing, what is striking is not the ground but uniform figures. According to McLuhan, the sense of sight has a structure that continually brings forth uniform meanings, reducing everything to specific forms (McLuhan, 1964, p. 136). The hegemony of the visual meaning that imposes itself with the phonetic alphabet becomes effective with the printing press

revolution in the fifteenth century (McLuhan et al., 1967). This point is, for McLuhan, a very important stage on the way toward the radicality of visuality, because this revolution brings to the fore the first mechanical medium to change humanity's habits and cultural structure. The fundamental revolution that printing effected in a mechanical sense is its introduction of the concept of infinite repetition into cultural and social life. According to McLuhan, it was Gutenberg, the founder of the printing press, who first incorporated this mechanical infinite repetition into our lives (McLuhan, 1966, p. 112). In his view, this mechanical infinite repetition was so effective that it brought into our lives fundamental concepts such as infinity, uniformity, calculability, and measurability. At the same time, a new world of meaning comes into being through mechanical meanings based on geometry, mathematics, and physics. At this point, Husserl argues that the emerging tools of mechanical and technical origin brought forth the crisis of the lifeworld by dressing even spirit in the garb of mathematics (Husserl, 1994). Although McLuhan does not speak of a crisis as Husserl does, he emphasizes that with the printing revolution a new world based on modern mathematics, mechanics, and technics—and an original human type—are at issue. He expresses this as follows: "This is to say, banish the new medium of print with its fragmented technology of uniform, lineal repeatability, and modern mathematics disappears" (McLuhan, 1966, p. 113). Mental, emotional, and cultural themes have henceforth come under the influence of uniform mechanical visuality.

According to McLuhan, Gutenberg, who rendered the culture of writing and the alphabet radical, created a new "galaxy" (McLuhan, 1962, pp. 40-41). With the printing revolution, while the transparency of standard, systematic, orderly pages increased the act of reading, an individual and silent meaning emerged. The root of this change of medium with the printing revolution lies, first of all, in the association of the same type of texts demanded by the system with a standard readership. While the system printed the same type of texts, it is significant that especially in the first fifty years of printing, books on religion reached a wide readership (Eisenstein, 2025, p. 42). In subsequent centuries, as diversity increased—that is, as the diffusion of knowledge accelerated with the printing revolution—new types of subjects emerged. At this point, McLuhan's conception of typographic man manifests itself. According to McLuhan, the fundamental characteristics of typographic man, formed within the mechanical medium, are individuality, linear thinking, the search for control, and an analytic structure. According to Eco, these characteristics of McLuhan's typographic man, emerging with the printing revolution, are the most fundamental path for understanding the change of the subject through mass media (Eco, 2020, p. 56). For it is a fact that the bodies and senses of the mechanical subject-forms developing with the printing revolution have become part of technological extensions. In this respect, a fundamental technology such as the printing press does not merely carry information; it also shapes society and culture, beginning from the subject's perception. According to McLuhan, the technical extensions of the printing press transform not only memory and perception but also language (McLuhan et al., 1971). The emotional, ritual, and collective meanings belonging to oral culture are now reduced to mechanical, repetitive, "clichéd-language" meanings. While the depths of archetypes now disappear, superficial linguistic cliché-forms come into being. In this context, technological extensions emerge not merely as tools but as a reality that shapes the world. The printing-press tool here signifies the exteriorization of the human body, senses, and perceptions through technical extensions. What must be noted here is that while McLuhan's construction of typographic man begins with the phonetic alphabet and reaches its peak with the printing revolution, he attaches particular importance fundamentally to the change in intersubjective communication and perception. For Eisenstein, it is valuable that McLuhan addresses how, together with the social and psychological effects of the printing press, intersubjective communication was damaged and face-to-face contact was replaced by the problem of reduced interaction (Eisenstein, 2025, p. 79). However, according to Eisenstein, it is not easy for the effect of the printing revolution to spread generally or for such an effect to emerge. Similarly, according to Williams, the printing revolution merely added some new readerships to the specific readership formed in the medieval period (Williams, 1966). In this context, it may be noted that McLuhan's formation of typographic man is not instantaneous but processual. Nevertheless, McLuhan argues that this formation would be rapid, in necessary cooperation with the extensions of technological tools. Williams criticizes this, noting that it would be more realistic to dwell on the subject's relation with understandings such as culture and politics rather than on the transformation of the subject in the context of perception and communication through technical extensions (Williams, 1966). According to McLuhan, without a perception-based perspective grounded in the influence of technical extensions, the transformation of politics and culture is difficult. On this matter, although McLuhan may be thought to take a highly assertive stance, it must be clearly understood that he explains life on the basis of perceptions. In this respect, McLuhan defines typographic man—whom he explains on the basis of visuality through the technical extensions of the printing press—as a reality. This human type emerges as a visual

meaning shaped by the printing press. After a certain time, the technical extensions of the printing press also construct, in the new center shaped by the printing press, the world to which typographic man is attached. That is, the medium is continually constructed through technical extensions, and then the human constitutes himself in the context of the regime of perceptions. For typographic man, who acquires a new meaning in the world shaped by the printing press, McLuhan uses the "projector metaphor": the subject existing with visual meaning in the world shaped by the printing press, while animating the text, so to speak, plays in his mind the visuality at hand (McLuhan, 1962, pp. 124-125). For McLuhan, typographic man within the extensions of the printing press is attached and dependent on this technology like its child. For the subject, these extensions are determined not so much by content as by forms and images. These extensions render his life fixed and reproducible. What must be noted here is that what changes and transforms is not images or forms but the mode of seeing. As technical extensions change, these modes of seeing are transformed as well. In this context, new techniques that take the place of the technical extensions of the printing revolution that constructed typographic man begin to bring the graphic man type into being.

3.2. The Problem of Graphic Man within Visual Culture

According to McLuhan, the technical extensions that began with the phonetic alphabet and were constituted by the printing revolution have seized the private and public spheres. In his view, typographic man, formed after the printing revolution, while rapidly adapting to new technical extensions, now begins to analyse the world through specific representations. At this point, the problem of the new world picture (*Weltbild*), which Heidegger claims came to the fore with the modern age, also becomes visible (Heidegger, 2001). The new subject approaches nature and living beings not in unity but as a usable, measurable standing-reserve of resources. According to McLuhan as well, typographic man interprets the world not as being there but merely as a represented image. McLuhan explains this situation through the printing revolution, while Heidegger explains it through nature's transformation into a standing-reserve via the science- and modern-technology-based concept of enframing (*Gestell*). Although McLuhan was influenced by Heidegger, he differs from him in focusing fundamentally not on Being but on the transformation of perception and sense. In this respect, as technical extensions become radical and advance, the individual's perceptual and sensory experiences will come under ever more intense influence. For McLuhan, the technical extensions of the printing press place the human under a faster and more transparent role on the basis of visuality. After the printing revolution, the domain in which the foci of visuality and representation of typographic man—in whom technical extensions have become radical—reach their peak is the problem of the image's being placed at a more central point, as with the camera and photography. In his view, what fundamentally brings forth representational meanings in a radical sense is the existence of the camera and photography. The camera's power to be everywhere and to relate objects to one another brings into being visuality's monocular point of view (McLuhan, 1966, p. 170). This monocular aspect of visuality, brought to the fore by the printing revolution, is handed over entirely to new technological extensions with the camera revolution. Henceforth everything is serially produced through a singular and distanced mechanical point of view. Representations are continually recorded, stored, and controlled by technical tools. McLuhan gives the following dialogue as an example of the radicalization of technics in daily life: a person says, "My, that's a fine child you have there!" Mother: "Oh, that's nothing. You should see his photograph" (McLuhan, 1966, p. 169). Indeed, through the photograph everything becomes a simple, superficial meaning. At this point, according to Flusser, image culture exists fully with photography (Flusser, 2000). The most important aspect that allowed photography to spread rapidly among people is that it brings forth superficiality rather than depth. Similarly, according to Barthes, although photography has the aspects of *studium*, expressing superficiality, and *punctum*, expressing depth, as technology advances, the aspect of superficiality becomes increasingly preferred (Barthes, 1993). This superficiality seizes everywhere and begins to multiply. In this context, McLuhan treats this new human type as follows: "The step from the age of typographic man to the age of graphic man was taken with the invention of photography" (McLuhan, 1966, p. 171). According to McLuhan, the graphic man type lives in a world in which the meaning of time has been lost. For the graphic man type, the reason for the acceleration of time lies not in reality and linear time but in his defining everything through representations. In his view, matching the image with reality is like perceiving life through the camera of a traveling tourist (McLuhan, 1966, p. 177). For graphic man, the speed of the visuality brought into being by technical extensions signifies something beyond the linear level. For while it was the technical extensions of the printing press that brought about continuous linear speed for the typographic man type, since it is the representation-based camera, television, and photography themes that bring graphic man into being, what is now at issue is not the linear but simultaneous density. While everything happens and is over in an instant, perception is continually concerned with micro-shocks. The human remains

continuously within uninterrupted stimuli. At this point, the graphic man type exists to a certain extent within synopticon surveillance models. The synopticon surveillance model expresses the state in which the many watch the few and the subject continually remains within mass micro-perceptions (Mathiesen, 1997). Graphic man exhibits a relation of compatibility or incompatibility with technical extensions regarding a specific sensory molding. As technological extensions change the subject's perceptions, new human types emerge. To adapt to technical extensions, the subject continually engages in a mutual feedback loop with them. In McLuhan's view, as each technical extension changes the ratio of the subject's senses, new levels of perception emerge. With the phonetic alphabet revolution literate man, with the printing revolution typographic man, and with technical extensions such as the camera the graphic man model came into being. McLuhan designates the graphic man type as a special human model adapted to the radical dimension of the visual perceptions beginning with the phonetic alphabet. After this stage, he reveals that with the electric and internet revolutions, visuality slowly diminishes and the sense of hearing—that is, tribal man—begins to revive. McLuhan presents this idea with a new outlook that is generally different from and original relative to many philosophers of technology. For according to McLuhan, as a requirement of the cyclicality of time, re-tribalization emerges as a renewed form of the human model.

4. Globalization in the Electronic Age: The Problem of Electronic Man

According to McLuhan, as the electronic age emerges, the regime of visual perception that began with the phonetic alphabet is losing its hegemony in the context of cyclicality. This situation is expressed, as a perceptual transformation, in terms of the tetrad structure as follows: enhances/amplifies, obsolesces, retrieves, and reverses—producing a counter-effect when pushed to the extreme (McLuhan & McLuhan, 2017, pp. 11–12). First of all, when we apply this tetrad structure to the phonetic alphabet: first, it enhances reading and writing; second, oral language habits are to a certain extent disabled; third, the vocal expressions of the past are analytically brought to light again; and fourth, with excessive individualization, meaning becomes multiple (McLuhan et al., 2017, p. 236). Then, when we apply this tetrad transformation to the printing revolution: first, it enhances the rapid multiplication of information; second, the old limits of the diffusion of knowledge are rendered obsolete; third, it retrieves ancient knowledge; and fourth, it produces the effect of uniform thought and an excessively centralized structure. McLuhan's fourth-stage expression, reversal, poses the problem that all technical extensions in history, when pushed to the extreme, turn into their own antithesis. According to Gordon, the problem of counter-effect that arises when technical extensions and regimes of perception are pushed to extremes can be explained by the metaphor of the large table. For example, while a large table initially brings forth positivity by bringing people closer and increasing their commonalities, after a while, as the crowd at the table grows, the table begins to pose problems of tension and the violation of space (Gordon, 1997, p. 127). According to McLuhan, the problem of visuality—which began especially with the printing revolution—getting ahead of the other sense modalities has affected humanity for centuries. However, the hegemony of visuality has weakened with the extensions of new means of communication. This gradual transformation occurred first with the new means of communication called the "triple-t revolution": the telegraph, the telephone, and the typewriter (Fishwick, 1999, p. 1). Together with this triple revolution, and with a technical device such as radio as well, the auditory perception of tribal man came to the fore once again. The most important aspect of these revolutions is that mutual communication came to the fore again and destroyed the influence of the individualism underlying the literate, typographic, and graphic man types formed through the phonetic alphabet, the printing revolution, and the camera revolution. At this point, a global change and transformation is at issue. On this basis, globalization brought forth the emergence of a specific new world order that reorganizes time, space, human relations, and objects and encompasses processes in fields such as the economic, the cultural, and the communicational (Silbey, 2006, pp. 245–248). After 1980, thinkers such as Roland Robertson, Anthony Giddens, Theodore Levitt, Saskia Sassen, Arjun Appadurai, Susan Silbey, and Ulrich Beck began to use concepts such as globalization and globalism systematically in different fields. McLuhan's most fundamental difference from such theorists is that rather than developing globalization in economic, cultural, and theoretical terms, he focuses on the perceptual transformations created by communication technologies. It is significant that McLuhan brought forth the idea that instantaneous communication was beginning to globalize in the 1960s with his understanding of the "global village," and that he was one of the first thinkers to analyse it systematically (Sartori, 2006, p. 93). His sentence "The new electronic interdependence recreates the world in the image of a global village" (McLuhan, 1962, p. 31) foregrounds the process of globalization at an early stage. At the foundation of this expression "global village," the concept of electronic man manifests itself together with electronic communication. In this context, in his view, as the speed of people's instantaneous communication with one another

increases, they become part of a web, as in tribal society. Sartori states that what renders McLuhan's expression "global village" not fully global is that technical tools do not reach everywhere (Sartori, 2006, p. 69). However, when we look at our age, with the proliferation of technical tools such as artificial intelligence, it may be said that the force of this criticism has diminished.

According to McLuhan's global village theory, it may be said that with the merging of the tribal mass with technology, the expression "global tribe" has emerged. That is, as electronic media begin to come into play, instead of an image-centered understanding such as individualism, the movement is toward an auditory-centered global world within collective perception. The idea of the global village fundamentally bears the connotations of proximity and vitality. The important question at this stage is whether everyone's experiencing similar emotions at the same time opens the door to a positive or a negative world. McLuhan gives no definite answer to this question. He offers a description of a new world of perception concerning how technical extensions such as the telegraph, telephone, typewriter, radio, and computer transformed people's lives. In this situation, just as tribal man brought into being the oral culture and mythological world of meaning constituted by the tribe, electronic man also constitutes new myths through the technological world (McLuhan, 1966, pp. 38–39). At this point, while myths in oral culture provided people with a world of meaning regarding what to think, the internet-centered media that is everywhere imposes how to think through games of perception (McLuhan & Fiore, 1968). In this respect, McLuhan is also one of the pioneers of Haraway's claim that modern technological tools, as micro-electronic devices, are seen as God-figures because of their being everywhere (Haraway, 2006, p. 11). In this context, Haraway argues that since people focus on life technologically, it would now be more desirable to be a cyborg (a human-machine unity) than a goddess. Ultimately, for McLuhan as well, electronic-based technological tools can enable people to form a tribal-like community again in a collective manner. According to McLuhan, one is connected to technological tools by adapting within a servomechanism (McLuhan, 1966, pp. 55–56). At this point, McLuhan likens the relation between technological tools and electronic man to the relation between the flower and the bee. Just as the bee, by fertilizing the flowers, causes them to change form, the human, while enabling tools to take on new forms, also changes them. Just as the bee is attached to the flowers, the human too is attached and dependent on the world of technology. For this dependence to continue, the new forms of technological tools must continually satisfy the human's wishes and desires. Because the boundlessness of these satisfactions and desires will greatly harm people, after a certain stage they become numbed without being able to raise their pleasures any higher. However, according to McLuhan, since in our age one remains within too many technical extensions and does not turn toward a single perceptual fetishism, numbness is not permanent. Because in our age no single hegemonic technological device imposes itself upon the human, one continually lives within wakefulness and numbness among technical extensions. At this point, since we are not within a complete simulation, we can pass all at once from a technical visual-perception state containing different perceptual extensions to an auditory-perception state. In his view, this can provide a certain wakefulness. But within this wakefulness and numbness, is exploitation not at issue?

5. The Human within Technological Tools: The Problem of Exploitation

In our age, the question of whether the human determines technology or technology determines the human persists as a fundamental philosophical problem. To understand where McLuhan can be positioned in the context of this problem, a comparative evaluation must be made with the approaches of the contemporary philosophers of technology Bernard Stiegler and Byung-Chul Han. First, according to Stiegler, the individual's memory systems and the image-based concept of attention are controlled by technological tools. In Stiegler's view, with technological tools attention is not only seized; in the hyper-industrial epoch it is also systematically produced by way of channeling and control (Stiegler, 2014, p. 64). In this hyper-industrial epoch, when within the flowing temporal objects brought into being by the mass media the same audiovisual consumption behaviors begin to be repeated every day, situations arise in which depth and meaning are flattened (Stiegler, 2014, pp. 17–20). According to Stiegler, within post-industrialism the human's attention, emotion, and desire participate in the process of production and consumption. In the hyper-industrial epoch, not only the produced commodity but every emotion and thought is integrated into the market system through the culture of production and consumption by means of computational technologies (Stiegler, 2015). Han states that Stiegler noticed that exploitation in the hyper-industrial epoch is psychopolitical—that is, he noticed the micro-perceptions that are psychological techniques (Han, 2017a, p. 26). However, according to Han, Stiegler's dwelling especially on television-based forms of exploitation left his analyses concerning digital tools limited. For this reason, Han focuses on the forms of exploitation caused by digital tools, one of the fundamental realities of our age. In his view, digital tools design the behavioral patterns of the masses through refined psychological techniques and micro-perceptions, without a central point and without depending

on a specific perspective (Han, 2017b). On this basis, he argues that with the tools of digitalism we live in a system in which everyone reaches everyone and everyone surveils one another. This system presents a world of meaning in which everyone, by exhibiting and exposing one another, begins to become transparent and is flattened. Han argues that in the digital world the human values an auto-erotic self-love and self-directedness. In his view, although one is free, within infinite options the subject comes into being only in the context of excitement, speed, and flexibility. Ultimately, he argues that in a world governed by artificial-intelligence-based algorithms, the human has lost the power of action, experience, and independence (Han, 2022, pp. 5-6). In short, although Stiegler argues to a certain extent that technology exploits the human's attention and perception, Han maintains that this gives rise to problems of exploitation at more extreme dimensions, such as burnout and existential captivity. Although McLuhan's philosophy of technology may seem similar to those of these thinkers, it differs significantly from both. First, McLuhan argues that dominant media forms significantly transform people's experience of time, perception, and meaning. In this respect, he may be thought close to Stiegler and Han. However, McLuhan sees technological tools not as danger and exploitation but rather as realities that historically cause human perceptual transformations and changes. While Stiegler and Han see relations of power and economy at the foundation of technological tools' exploitation of people, for McLuhan an emphasis on an instrument of power that would directly explain exploitation does not come to the fore. It can be seen that while McLuhan speaks of people's historically specific transformations—literate, typographic, graphic, and electronic—in the face of technics, he does not address hegemonic powers based on a specific power. The fundamental deficiency on this matter is that he does not sufficiently take into account the fact that great transformations such as the Industrial Revolution were controlled by certain states, institutions, and economic structures, and that he does not establish a strong relationship between the economic dimension and globality (Freind, 1999, pp. 57–58). It can be seen that when McLuhan explains the human's change and transformation historically through technical extensions, his thinking concerning power and hegemonic forces is lacking. It may be argued that he disregards Western powers' exploitation of people through capitalism. Although he treats people's transformation through technological extensions as a new world order, it is not certain whether he harbors concerns about the technology that would arise with the new world order. Ultimately, it is seen that McLuhan does not focus on the dangers of the human's loss of the meaning of existence through cyborg debates and artificial intelligence tools.

6. Evaluation and Conclusion

In this study, it has been our aim to reveal the transformation of human types through technical extensions in the context of McLuhan's philosophy of the human. These subject-forms are not an independent, specific psychological style or type but realities brought into being by the medium and the environment. According to McLuhan, the subject-forms extending from tribal man to electronic man are the results of adaptation to historical technical extensions and of perceptual organization. In the study, first the tribal man type was treated, and evaluations concerning this subject type were made in the context of audiality, memory, speech, and perception. Then, in the context of the technical extensions of the alphabet, the situation of the literate man type within regimes of visuality-perception was analysed. McLuhan argues that the technical extensions at the foundation of this regime of perception constitute different human types through audiality and visuality. In his view, audiality is related to collective, and visuality to individual, meanings. What must be noted is that he does not dwell in detail on whether the audiality at the foundation of tribal society or the visuality constituted by the civilization beginning with the alphabet is good or bad. For his aim is not so much to produce value judgments as to show how perceptual transformations shape the human and society.

McLuhan's fundamental emphasis is that the literate man emerging with the phonetic alphabet is most of the time unable to notice that his mode of thinking has been transformed by the hegemony of visuality. For this reason, for the individual and society to be correctly understood philosophically, these perceptual transformations must be analysed. In the study, it has been determined that the regime of visual perception constituted by technical extensions is effective in different fields. It has been critically treated that the technical extensions of the phonetic alphabet lie at the foundation of Western society; and the problem has been discussed that, with the world and the human turning into a readable text, nature and society are reduced to heaps of meaning that are examined, analysed, fragmented, measured, and calculated. It has been emphasized that the interaction arising between the mechanical structure of thinking and the printing revolution constructs a new subject. In this respect, McLuhan's concepts of typographic man, graphic man, and electronic man have been evaluated as an original discussion of the philosophy of the human. While the printing revolution determined the human's individuality-based linear mode of thinking, optical visual tools such as the camera strengthened the human's construction of the world through visual perception; the electronic revolution

positioned the human within multiple perceptual modalities and mosaic interactions. Therefore, the technical tool is not merely a simple device that is used; it is a determining medium that regulates the human's mode of relating to the world, from perception to memory and to the understanding of time. For this reason, we have drawn attention to the dangers of interacting with technological tools in our age without analysing their effects.

In conclusion, as McLuhan claims in his global village theory, it is a fact that television and similar technical tools control our lives. Although McLuhan lived before the Web 1.0 era and the spread of the computer revolution, the ideas he put forward remain current. For in every period, even if their effects change, there are technical tools that determine social life, from forms of power to hegemonic perceptual structures. At this point the following conclusion emerges: power does not determine the effect of technological tools; technological tools determine the manner of behavior of power. In a sense, while McLuhan says that media tools transform the human, power and culture are transformed along with it. That is, while describing the system, he does not foreground judgment. In this respect, he generally uses the concepts of transformation, development, or change rather than exploitation. From this aspect, McLuhan foregrounds that we should attend to the ways technological tools are used so that we pay heed to the human's transformation. In his view, the emergence of exploitation, threat, or fear toward technology can cause us to understand the human's transformation incompletely. In fact, although McLuhan in a certain manner approaches the idea of technological determinism, the point he fundamentally dwells on is the effort to enable the human to understand the technical medium in which he lives. Therefore, rather than praising or disparaging technology, it is necessary to understand its meaning, its value, and its determining position in human life. In this respect, McLuhan's philosophy of the human provides the advantage of understanding or comprehending the medium created by technology. In this context, the technology–human relationship should be evaluated as a field in which technology radically transforms the human and requires us to rethink problems such as existence, freedom, and immortality. However, McLuhan puts forward this evaluation by approaching a posthumanist framework, without taking the subject as fixed, focusing on its changing meaning in the midst of networks. McLuhan criticizes human-centered ideas in technology debates and strikingly emphasizes the fact that whenever the subject enters into a relation with technology, it will turn into a new human type. In his view, since the human is shaped through the extensions of technology, it can be seen as possible that he will merge with the machine. For the human, within the extensions of technology, is already in a sense at one with the machine, even if partially. McLuhan's failure to discuss sufficiently the existential transformations of the human interacting with technology through problems such as freedom, death, and capitalism limits the solution-producing capacity of his approach. Therefore, although McLuhan offers new possibilities for understanding the modes of relationship between the human and technology, he is open to criticism insofar as he disregards hegemonic forces and does not foreground their influence.

Acknowledgments

None.

Funding

None.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Author contributions

Conceptualization: All authors *Formal analysis:* All authors *Investigation:* All authors *Writing–original draft:* All authors *Writing–review & editing:* All authors

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data

No datasets were generated or analyzed during the current study.

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