



## RE-TOUCHING McLuhan The Medium is the Massage Conference

**Schedule: Friday 27 May 2011**

<b>18.00</b>	Ambassador Peter M. Boehm: Marshall McLuhan Centennial Welcome Address
<b>18.15</b>	Richard Cavell: Introductory Keynote - <i>McLuhan, Tactility, and the Digital</i>

### Revised Schedule: Saturday 28 May 2011

<b>10.00</b>	Registration and Welcome Coffee
<b>10:30</b>	Stephen Kovats: Conference welcome and introductions
<b>10:40</b>	Dieter Daniels and Christopher Salter: Thematic Introductions
<b>11:00</b>	Martina Leeker: <i>McLuhan today, seen with the eyes of 1960's Neo-Avantgarde and contemporary Media Art</i>
<b>11:45</b>	Claus Pias: <i>Freiheit statt Freizeit</i>
<b>12:30</b>	Katja Kwastek: <i>Mediated Massage Embodiment, Connectedness and Alienation in New Media Art</i>
<b>13:15</b>	Lorenz Engell: <i>McLuhan as Mouse: The Tactile and the Index</i>
<b>14:00</b>	Discussion
<b>14:15</b>	Break
<b>15:15</b>	Michael Darroch: <i>Explorations across Anonymous History and Acoustic Space</i>
<b>16:00</b>	Janine Marchessault: <i>McLuhan's Fair: Expo '67 as Counterblast</i>
<b>16:45</b>	Dieter Daniels: <i>An ear for an eye – Traveling visual, acoustic and tactile space with Marshall McLuhan, John Cage and Nam June Paik</i>
<b>17:30</b>	Discussion
<b>18:00</b>	End





## RE-TOUCHING McLUHAN – The Medium is the Massage Conference



**Start: 27 May 2011, 18:00**  
**End: 28 May 2011, 18:00**  
**Venue: Embassy of Canada**

This international academic conference is curated by Prof. Dieter Daniels of the Academy of Visual Arts, Leipzig and will consist of keynotes and leading thinkers in the field exploring Marshall McLuhan's unique take on sensory effects of electronic media as "extensions of man" and his legacy on artistic and digital cultural practice.

### Conference Speakers

**Richard Cavell:** *McLuhan, Tactility, and the Digital*

**Martina Leeker:** *McLuhan today, seen with the eyes of 1960's Neo-Avantgarde and contemporary Media Art*

**Claus Pias:** *Freiheit statt Freizeit*

**Katja Kwastek:** *Mediated Massage: Embodiment, Connectedness and Alienation in New Media Art*

**Michael Darroch:** *Explorations across Anonymous History and Acoustic Space*

**Janine Marchessault:** *McLuhan's Fair: Expo '67 as Counterblast*

**Dieter Daniels:** *An ear for an eye: Traveling visual, acoustic and tactile space with McLuhan, John Cage, Nam June Paik and Walter Benjamin*

**Lorenz Engell:** *McLuhan as Mouse: The Tactile and the Index*

### About the Conference

*"The television image ... is an expansion of the tactile sense ... a medium, which includes all of our senses in an in-depth interaction."* Marshall McLuhan, 1964

Forty-five years ago, many of the ideas put forward by Marshall McLuhan sounded very daring and provocative. From today's perspective, though, some of them were actually prophetic. This includes his theory of the multi-sensory and crossmodal effects of electronic media. Through immersion (games, virtual reality) and tactile interaction (multi-touch interfaces) these days the corporeality of what is digital has become a natural component of media-based lifeworlds. The enhanced importance of acoustics in the perception of media and media theory is also probably a legacy of McLuhan's. A preview of our contemporary multi-sensory media world can be found in his books "The Medium Is the





Message” (Marshall McLuhan and the graphic designer Quentin Fiore, 1967) and “Counterblast” (Marshall McLuhan and the artist and designer Harley Parker, 1969).

The conference will extract from McLuhan’s multi-faceted and sometimes contradictory oeuvre a thematic vector into today’s media reality. Of special interest here is the impact of McLuhan on the media arts from the 1960s to the present, the “embodiment” of modern media technology, and McLuhan’s own media presence.

**McLuhan and Early Media Arts:** In Expanded Cinema, early video art, and the cybernetic experiments of the 1960s/1970s, many artists (for example, John Cage, Nam June Paik, Stan VanDerBeek, USCO Group) and theorists (Gene Youngblood, Stewart Brand) directly referenced McLuhan. His claims concerning the end of written culture and a new era of electronic totality of the senses, which are spread around in McLuhan’s scripts and interviews, became concrete experiences of a possible future in early media art.

**McLuhan and the Sound of Media:** According to McLuhan, the “auditory space” of electronic media is multi-directional, synaesthetic, and interactive. He argued that we are enveloped by sounds like seamless material as a “pattern in which the components coexist without a direct, linear context or direct, linear connection, and create a field of simultaneous relationships”. In today’s Sound Studies and their critique of the hegemony of the visual, many of these aspects are taken up and developed.

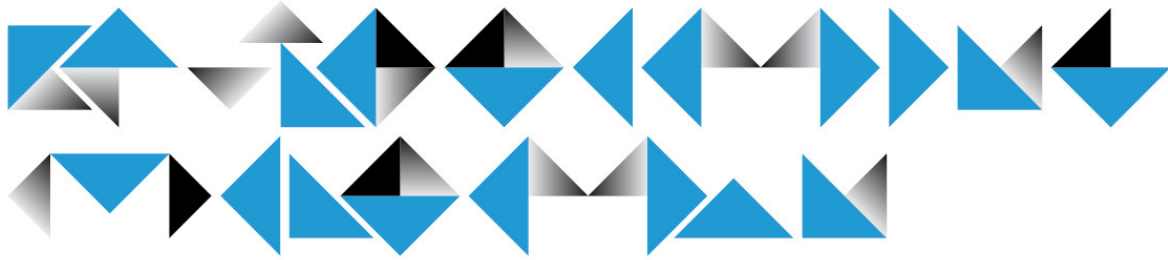
**Tactile Media since the 1990s:** In the interactive and immersive media art of the 1990s, the tactility of the digital world was tested in multiple ways. Only a few years later, interfaces of interactive mass media were configured in a similar way. Parallel to this, over the last twenty years a new approach in media theory has developed that understands HCI (Human–Computer Interaction) as a sensorimotor dialogue rather than code-based programming. Especially through the embodiment of interaction with wireless media (mobile phone, tablet computers etc.), McLuhan’s dictum of the media as the “Extensions of Man” is once again highly topical.

**McLuhan in the Media:** The influence of McLuhan’s work — rich in associations, kaleidoscopic, in parts eclectic — has developed in manifold directions. This includes McLuhan’s prominent role as media personality, especially on television, where his free, intuitive, and gestural rhetoric contributed significantly to his considerable prominence. In this, McLuhan anticipated today’s spectacularisation and popularisation of science in the mass media.

**transmediale** will be convening and running the conference which will include both a ‘traditional’ local audience as well as a live streamed and simultaneously moderated online segment which will serve and document the conference bringing its content beyond the confines of the time/space of the Berlin event. This event is part of the trio of **McLuhan Galaxy** conferences taking place in Barcelona May 23 – 25, and Rome May 30 – June 1, 2011.

*The conference will take place in English / Die Konferenz wird in englischer Sprache stattfinden.*





## Conference Abstracts & Participant Biographies



**Richard Cavell**

**Topic:** *McLuhan, Tactility, and the Digital*

**Abstract:** Fingers are digits and so are numbers. My paper takes its point of departure from this metaphorical confluence to enquire into the relationship between tactility and the digital.

“Tactility” was McLuhan’s term for the senses in interplay which, he theorized, was definitive of the electronic era. McLuhan deployed tactility to identify the involving qualities of electronic culture, as opposed to the abstract qualities of print culture. Yet the involvement promised by electronic media was purchased at a considerable price, since it occurred paradoxically as the product of gaps: as Derrida noted, McLuhan was prescient in theorizing tactility as co-existing with the prohibition of touch.

If the visual world is the product of connected spaces, then the tactile world is one of disconnection—you cannot determine sequence with your fingers. My paper draws extensively on McLuhan’s chapter about “Number” in *Understanding Media*; as he writes there, “number is an extension ... of ... our sense of touch” (107). In theorizing the shift from the eye of print culture to the ear of audile-tactile space, McLuhan was theorizing the shift from the “matching” of analogue culture to the tactile “making” of digital culture. Digital culture is in this sense processual as well as paratactic, and this conjoins it, rhetorically, with the culture of orality. My paper unpacks this hybrid notion in order to interrogate the nature of digital media.

**Biography:** Prof. Richard Cavell is the author of *McLuhan in Space: A Cultural Geography* (2002; 2003; UTP “Classic” 2005; digital publication 2007), the first book to articulate the spatial turn in media studies and McLuhan’s foundational role within it. Professor Cavell is also editor of *Love, Hate and Fear in Canada’s Cold War* (2004; digital 2007), co-editor (with Peter Dickinson) of *Sexing the Maple: A Canadian Sourcebook* (2006), co-editor (with Imre Szeman) of the special double issue of the *Review of Education, Pedagogy and Cultural Studies* (2007) on “Cultural Studies in Canada,” creator of the website [spectersofmcluhan.net](http://spectersofmcluhan.net), and has published more than 70 chapters, articles and reviews. His work has been translated into French, Italian, German, Romanian and Japanese. Professor Cavell has been a faculty member of the universities of Padua and Bologna, and has given invited lectures in such venues as the University of Bologna on the occasion of its 900th anniversary; the Royal Geographical Society; the Sorbonne; the McLuhan Salon of the Canadian Embassy.





The central strand unifying Professor Cavell's research interests is spatial production, which he studies in a broad cultural context. He is currently preparing a co-edited volume (with Norman Friesen) titled *Media TransAtlantic*, which articulates the connections between Canadian and German media theories, and is co-founder (with Geoffrey Winthrop-Young) of MeRG.e, the Media Research Group at the University of British Columbia.



**Martina Leeker**

**Topic:** *McLuhan today, seen with the eyes of 1960's Neo-Avantgarde and contemporary Media Art*

**Abstract:** In order to discuss the relevance of McLuhan's media theory in understanding computing, the encounter between McLuhan and the Neo-Avantgarde of the 1960's is an interesting starting point. This is because in this encounter it becomes obvious that McLuhan mostly (mis-)understood the computer as an analog, electrically resonant medium and not as a processor of information. In his well-known Playboy interview from 1969 he even described his global village, in which the electric and analog view of the computer plays an important role, as an "echo chamber" of psychedelic resonances and telepathy. Some artists of the Neo-Avantgarde followed McLuhan's electric understanding of the computer and intended to construct the echo-chamber. In doing so they fell into a form of media spiritism. The analog re-definition of the computer could be seen as an attempt to overcome the dissolution of the human within the cybernetic realm, thus integrating the human actors beyond the technology of information. In other words, the rescue of the human was partly managed on the basis of psychedelism and spiritism, which may lead to an irrational relationship with media as part of the discursive history of the computer.

So what relevance does McLuhan have in describing and understanding computing today? Looking at contemporary art dealing with media, McLuhan's electric approach to the computer seems to be obsolete. Media aren't seen as extensions of the human any more, as McLuhan said, but they are conceptualized and used as auto-organized and generative data-processing agencies. What, if McLuhan's idea of an irrational binding of the human with technology is passed on through this history of the computer? Whereas McLuhan and the 1960th Neo-Avantgarde succeeded in an electro-psychedelic techno-human merger, does an animism of objects emerge today?

**Biography:** Independent lecturer for Theatre and Media-Science, Martina Leeker was Professor for Theater and Media at the University of Bayreuth until Sept. 2010. Leeker studied Theatre-Science and Philosophy in Berlin and Paris. She completed a training for Theatre and Mime in Paris at Etienne Decroux and Jacques Lecoq as well as further education in dance and plays in Berlin. The focus of her scientific and artistic work is the relation between theatre, performance and digital media. Leeker is







founder member of the transARTES, Akademie für Darstellende Kunst, Medien und Kultur, and chair of the first Bayreuth McLuhan conference (2007), of which she co-published 'McLuhan neu lesen: Kritische Analysen zu Medien und Kultur im 21. Jahrhundert'.



**Claus Pias**

**Topic:** *Freiheit statt Freizeit*

**Abstract (German):** Auf die »sinnlose Aufregung über Arbeitslosigkeit«, so McLuhan einmal, gebe es eine einfache Antwort: »Bezahltes Lernen wird schon jetzt zur Hauptbeschäftigung und außerdem die Quelle neuen Reichtums in unserer Gesellschaft.« Was mittlerweile nur noch zynisch wirkt, konnte in den 1960er Jahren noch mit ungeniert prophetischem Gestus vorgetragen werden. Der Vortrag versucht zu zeigen, daß Aussagen wie diese nicht allein vor dem Hintergrund der damals neuen Medien gelesen werden können, sondern auch im Zusammenhang mit Fragen der Automatisierung behandelt werden müssen. Für einen kurzen historischen Moment, in dem Massenarbeitslosigkeit als Utopie der Umwandlung von Freizeit in Freiheit gedacht werden konnte, schwimmen McLuhans Aussagen wie Fische im Wasser der Episteme ihrer Zeit. Sie bleiben erhalten in der notorischen Rede von »postindustriellen« oder »Wissensgesellschaften«, die diesen Moment selber vergessen hat.

**Biography:** Dr. Claus Pias is Professor for Media-History and Media Theory at the Institute for Culture and Aesthetics of Digital Media (ICAM) at the University of Lüneburg. He studied art history, German literature, and philosophy at the University of Bonn. From 1993-2000, he worked as a research assistant at the University of Weimar, where he also received his Ph.D. He worked as an associate professor at the University of Bochum from 2001-2003, and has held positions at the University of Essen and Karlsruhe's Institute of Design. His research areas include the history and theory of digital media, philosophy and the history of technology. He currently focuses on the history and theory of digital media, especially on cybernetics, the history of computer-simulation, and their application in strategic and military conflict scenarios. His publications include *ComputerSpielWelten* (Munich 2002), *Cybernetics/Kybernetik*. The Macy-Conferences 1946-1953 (Berlin/Zurich 2002/04), *Zukünfte des Computers* (Zurich 2004), *Hermann Kahn – Szenarien für den Kalten Krieg* (Zurich 2006). At *transmediale*.11 he previewed his latest book *Was waren Medien?* which will be published in conjunction with the McLuhan centennial.





**Katja Kwastek**

**Topic:** *Mediated Massage: Embodiment, Connectedness and Alienation in New Media Art*

**Abstract:** McLuhan's famous assumption that technology extends our central nervous system directly into the various social systems has a twofold relevance for media art research. New media art does not only present critical reflections of technologically altered and mediated bodies, it also paradigmatically embodies the new loss of distance between subject and world observed by McLuhan, because it turns recipients from distanced observers to involved participants.

Media as 'extensions of man' affect the potentials of expression and perception alike, directly influencing the interoceptive processing of information. In Australian artist Stelarc's spectacular presentations of telematically controlled bodies however, the recipient is still largely restricted to distanced observation. In contrast, recent performances of Italian artist Sonia Cillari locate the recipients at the heart of the 'mediated massage', though in a very ambiguous role. On the one hand, they directly affect the bodily sensations of the artist, on the other hand, they are captured inside the black box of the interaction space – they are at the same time at the controls and at the mercy of the situation. Whereas Stelarc declared the body obsolete, Cillari emphasizes the ambivalent position of the body in the media society between face-to-face intimacy and remote-controlled response, wireless affectivity and hard-wired intrusion.

**Biography:** Dr. Katja Kwastek is an art historian and coordinator of research at the school of arts at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich. She served as vice-director of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute Media.Art.Research. in Linz (Austria), where she directed the research projects on interactive art until 2009. Prior to this, she worked as assistant professor at the art history department of the Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich and was a Visiting Scholar at the Rhode Island School of Design (Providence, RI). Her research focuses on contemporary and new media art, media theory and aesthetics. She has curated exhibition projects, lectured widely and published many books and essays, including *Ohne Schnur. Art and Wireless Communication*, Frankfurt (2004). She recently finished a book manuscript on the aesthetics of interaction in digital art.





**Michael Darroch**

**Topic:** *Explorations across Anonymous History and Acoustic Space*

**Abstract:** The landmark interdisciplinary Culture and Communications Seminar held at the University of Toronto (1953-55) and the eclectic journal *Explorations* (1953-59) provided the framework in which McLuhan first formulated many of his most important insights into the interplay between media and the senses, including the notion of acoustic space. In seeking a common vocabulary to bridge disciplinary boundaries across literature, anthropology, architecture, economics, and psychology, McLuhan and his colleagues developed a 'field approach' to discern the new grammars and environments created by electronic technology, particularly with the advent of television in Canada in 1952. While Harold Innis' studies of media bias were a central concern, another vital inspiration for their "experiment in communication" was the art and architectural historian Sigfried Giedion's studies of the interpenetration of cultural forms and the 'anonymous history' of humble everyday objects that reveal the essential spirit of their period. Inspired by Giedion, a particular methodology grew out of *Explorations*, using the environment and architecture as the framework for analyzing the effects of media in the televisual age.

**Biography:** Michael Darroch is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication, Media & Film at the University of Windsor, Canada. He is Director of the newly established IN/TERMINUS Centre for Media, Art, and Urban Ecologies, a Co-Investigator for the Visible City Project + Archive, an External Research Associate of the Canadian Centre for German and European Studies, and a member of the Centre de recherche sur l'intermédialité. His research has explored Canadian and German theories of media and materialities, with a focus on practices of media and art in a variety of urban contexts. He is co-editing *Cartographies of Place: Ways of Representing the Urban* (forthcoming, McGill-Queens) and has published essays on the intersections of media, technology, theatre, language, sound, and translation. His current research focuses on transatlantic connections within the history of media studies in Canada.







**Janine Marchessault**

**Topic:** *McLuhan's Fair: Expo '67 as Counterblast*

**Abstract:** *"Bless / Expo 67 / for its manifestation / of Gallic levity and / its reversal of the / second law of / thermodynamics / by hotting up the / southern neighbor / by the Canadian / COLD FRONT:"*  
- Marshall McLuhan, *COUNTERBLAST*, 1969: 57

Expo '67 held in Montreal to celebrate Canada's centenary, represents one of the most important artistic experiments of the twentieth century. The fair showcased numerous tele-communications and audio-visual technologies, and was distinguished by its audacious media experiments. McLuhan's aphorisms were literally woven into the very fabric of the Exhibition. Many have commented that the Exposition did not change the way films were made but the way they were seen. New forms of spectatorship combined with newly imagined theatres and screens, served to align media culture with architecture. This talk will focus on how Expo 67 dubbed "McLuhan's fair" can be read as a utopian media city—a total environment. It examines Expo '67 in terms of a new international approach to architecture and urban planning that was both influenced by and influencing new forms of media production. Of course Expo itself, like all World Expositions, was driven by the economic and political interests of globalization. Yet perhaps one of the reasons that the utopian energies of 'mondialisation' were so strong was that this event coincided with the emergence of a global ecology informed by the technological humanism expressed in the thinking of R. Buckminster Fuller and McLuhan.

**Biography:** Professor Janine Marchessault, author of *Marshall McLuhan: Cosmic Media* (Sage Publications, 2005) and co-editor of *Fluid Screens, Expanded Cinema* (University of Toronto Press, 2007) is Research Chair in Art, Digital Media, and Globalization, York University, Canada. Janine Marchessault is the director of the Visible City Project + Archive which is examining new practices of media in a variety of urban contexts. She is also a co-investigator on the Future Cinema Lab, a joint research project with Film Professors John Greyson and Caitlin Fisher, based in the Faculty of Fine Arts at York University. Funded by the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, the Future Cinema Lab is a state-of-the-art digital media research facility devoted to 'new stories for new screens.' As Canada Research Chair in Art, Digital Media and Globalization, Dr. Marchessault is investigating how the information society is redefining the artist's role and shaping urban contexts. Inherent in her work is the development of new research methods that use advanced media technologies to interpret the cultural ecologies of cities, with the ultimate goal of proposing new planning and policy strategies.





**Dieter Daniels**

**Topic:** *An ear for an eye: Traveling visual, acoustic and tactile space with McLuhan, John Cage, Nam June Paik and Walter Benjamin*

**Abstract:** According to Marshall McLuhan the dominant visual mode of our culture is an effect of the printing press: 'The phonetic alphabet forced the magic world of the ear to yield to the neutral world of the eye. Man was given an eye for an ear.' (Marshall McLuhan, *The Medium is the Massage*, Gingko Press 2001 edition. pp. 44) Accordingly, hearing is related to the associative thought attributed to the right brain, while sight is connected to the left brain's rational structuring.

McLuhan himself contributed in great deal to reasserting the legitimate stature of associative thinking, linking it to hearing and touching. This can be seen and felt by browsing Quentin Fiore's graphic design for the collaborative book 'The Medium is the Massage', and even more in the 'audio book' version McLuhan released in 1968 as an LP. His contentious notion that the television image is an „expansion of the tactile sense“ seems more understandable with today's touch screens than in McLuhan's time. (Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, 1995, pp. 504). His emphasis on the 'tactile' surprisingly connects McLuhan with Walter Benjamin's own theory of media.

However McLuhan's media theory is much less a theory of machines, of communication or of information – but rather a theory of the senses and their multi-modal relationships to media. This made it so influential for the inter-media arts of the 1960's. In their musical and artistic works John Cage and Nam June Paik explored the relationships between acoustic and visual space. Both make reference to McLuhan's propositions. And that television is a tactile medium, as McLuhan always argued, was first put to test by Paik. At this moment in time, the art and the theory of media are two sides of the same coin.

**Biography:** Dieter Daniels is Professor of Art History and Media Theory at the Academy of Visual Arts (HGB) in Leipzig. In 1984, he co-founded the Videonale Bonn and has contributed to numerous projects, exhibitions, and symposia in the field of media art. He has extensively published on twentieth-century art, a.o. on Marcel Duchamp, Fluxus and media art. Between 2005 – 2009 he was Director of the Ludwig Boltzmann Institute Media.Art.Research. in Linz, Austria, and since 2010 serves as head of transmediale's advisory board.





**Lorenz Engell**

**Topic:** *McLuhan as Mouse: The Tactile and the Index*

**Abstract:** The paper re-examines McLuhans founding concept of tactility and develops it further: with the evolution of technology from the tv screen to the remote control to the computer mouse, the tactile has moved away from its all-wrapping, all-including, all-surfacing function, which is basically iconic, to one specific point: the finger tip. This condensing of tactility into one point has already been described by Michel Serres in his “The five senses”. It produces a shift from total participation to deixis, and hence selection, and indexicality. Moving from Serres back to McLuhan, what can we learn from him about tactile worldmaking not by iconic inclusion, as visioned in McLuhan’s “Global Village” and “Massage” metaphors, but by indexical selection?

**Biography:** Dr. Lorenz Engell is a professor of media philosophy at the Bauhaus University Weimar. Since 2008 he has been the Co-Director of the International Research Institute for Cultural Technologies and Media Philosophy (IKKM, Weimar). Lorenz Engell is a leading figure in the first ‘generation’ of academic researchers who recognized media studies as an independent field within the humanities. His focus on film and television culture formed a major point of linkage German academia between McLuhan’s work and Niklas Luhmann’s systems theory.





**Christopher Salter**

**Role:** Conference Moderator

**Biography:** Dr. Christopher Salter is an artist, Director of the Hexagram Centre for Research-Creation in Media Arts and Technology at Concordia University (Montreal) and Associate Professor for Design+Computation Arts at Concordia. He was also Guest Professor at RISD, Brown University and the KhM in Cologne. He collaborated with Peter Sellars and William Forsythe before co-founding the collective Sponge, whose works stretched between artistic production, theoretical reflection and scientific research. Salter's performances, installations, research and publications have been presented at numerous festivals and conferences around the world. His first book *Entangled: Technology and the Transformation of Performance* (MIT Press) was published in 2010.



**Stephen Kovats**

**Role:** *McLuhan in Europe 2011* Network Initiator

**Biography:** Media researcher and architect Stephen Kovats is initiator of the 'McLuhan in Europe 2011' network, examining the impact of the Canadian media philosopher's work on contemporary art and culture in Europe. He was artistic director of *transmediale*, Berlin's festival for art and digital culture 2008 – 2011, previously chief program curator at V2\_Institute for the Unstable Media, Rotterdam and initiator of the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation's Electronic Media Interpretation Studio. His interests lay in the dynamic relationships between media, political, and electronic space, with projects aimed at strengthening the role of art and technology within the transformation of societal and cultural landscapes.

