Dear Dr Howard,

I would like to thank you and the reviewers for the opportunity to revise and refine my work. I greatly appreciate the clarity and guidance you provided.

I have structured the response letter in two parts. Part A contains my responses to the questions you raised following the external reviews, and Part B discusses several theoretical sources highlighted in your feedback. letter addresses the following key points: the concept of *touch* (tactility) and its use, the intersection of media bias and sensory bias as an explanation for the continuity of analog media, identifying the book’s target audience, the need to balance contemporary relevance with historical perspective, and strengthening the integration of media ecology as a theoretical framework.

I trust the following responses clearly demonstrate how I intend to address these points in the revised version of the book.

David levin

**Part A: Response to the Editor and Reviewers**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Comment | Response |
| **R1**  Commentary on the conceptualization of ‘touch.’ | The distinction of **touch** is a central axis and connecting principle throughout the book. It serves to explain the persistence of paper-based products (Chapter 2), the role of newspapers and printed books (Chapter 3), the contribution of material objects to processes of reading and writing (Chapter 4), and the surprising revival of vinyl records and instant photographs (Chapter 5). In Chapter 6, I compare the experience of touch in the digital age with that of paper products, showing how these two forms of interaction coexist within the media ecology of the twenty-first century.  Following the reviewer’s recommendation, I will adopt the term **“incorporeal”** to describe the nature of digital content and will use it to sharpen the book’s central thesis. Regarding paper or plastic objects, touch enables us to assess their stability and distinguish them from other objects. This, in turn, grounds both personal meanings (such as evoking memories) and the ability to spark a “social imaginary” – connections to abstract entities such as tradition or social status. In contrast, when considering the smartphone, the tangible object is the device itself, while its contents are incorporeal. Here, the social imaginary is linked primarily to values of efficiency and to the ordering logic of the capitalist world.  In line with the reviewer’s request, I will briefly address the significance of **touch** in relation to the concepts of **ownership** and **aura**.  Regarding ownership, the reviewer suggested examining the idea that we experience a stronger sense of possession toward a physical object that is “with us” than a digital product that exists “out there,” in a place that does not actually exist. I agree that we have ownership of an object when it is “with us” because it occupies physical space in our homes, while the digital cloud cannot be imagined as a tangible location. This highlights the difficulty people face in conceiving ownership over metaphorical representations of paper-based products in digital media. Despite aggressive campaigns, Bitcoin is not perceived as equivalent to cash; NFT-based art does not replace works with a physical presence; and digital books have not eliminated printed books from home libraries. As Pressman has shown, the figure of the book as a cultural totem has indeed been carried over into digital forms, but has not eliminated print.  Thus, the experience of ownership is rooted in touch. Contact with a material object distinguishes it from other items. It generates a sense of possession, even in the case of a transient object like a newspaper (as Larry David humorously illustrated in an episode of *Curb Your Enthusiasm*, which I analyze in Chapter 3). By contrast, touching a screen does not produce the same effect, but rather a fleeting sense of access—more akin to a lease that eventually ends, as the reviewer aptly suggested.  Another concept I was asked to address is Walter Benjamin’s notion of **“aura.”** I accept the reviewer’s suggestion to deepen my engagement with this concept, and I will do so in the introduction and other book chapters (for example, Chapter 5). Integrating the concept of aura into the themes of my book is intriguing. Benjamin argued that aura—the sense of reverence in a ritual, unique encounter with a cultural object—depends on distance and the absence of touch (as when one contemplates a sublime landscape). However, I suggest that it is precisely touch that enables material objects to produce a sense of uniqueness. My central claim is that the tactile experience restores to printed objects part of the aura that the digital age has weakened. Manovich’s discussion of the work of Benjamin and his successors helps to reconcile this apparent contradiction and strengthens my argument. According to Manovich (2001), electronic reality eliminates the very notions of distance and proximity, since anything can be viewed from anywhere at the same time. I add that in the mobile age, where everything appears “within reach,” differentiation is further eroded, thereby highlighting the importance of material touch.  In sum, while Benjamin located aura in distance, I argue that it is **touch**—especially in an era of proliferating screens—that restores a sense of uniqueness and aura to printed objects and their materiality. I elaborate on this point in Chapter 2 (on the preference for printed sacred texts) and in Chapter 5 (on vinyl records).  Considering the role played by technology and media industries in the model presented in the book, I accept the reviewer’s comment and will expand on this point in the English edition . In the current version, I already refer to the activities of these industries in several contexts,. Among other things, I discuss the failure to replace material objects through verbal metaphors (such as “digital cash”) or visual ones (such as adopting the look of print in digital books). I also examine, the industries’ efforts to actively promote physical media—for example, campaigns in support of bookstores, the design of stylish book covers (Chapter 3), and the renewed marketing of vinyl records and instant cameras, particularly aimed at Generation Z (Chapter 5).  Reviewer 1 requested that I address Walter Ong’s conceptual framework. According to Ong, the spoken word is an **event**; it disappears immediately, and its effect exists only in the moment of utterance or when recalled from memory. In contrast, when written on paper, the word becomes a **thing**; it is fixed, stable, and a participant in constructing knowledge, since it endures beyond the moment. The word on a digital surface represents a third category, often described as **liquid writing**. It is not bound to a material substrate but merely “hosted” by it, existing as code stored in computer memory or on a server, and becoming present only at the moment of display. For this reason, it is temporary and system-dependent, with limited durability, and vulnerable to constant revision and deletion, and phenomena such as link rot. Defining the word as a “thing,” therefore, requires attention to the surface on which it appears. A word traced in the air or sand cannot survive, whereas on paper, its durability depends on the quality of the substrate. Throughout history, the quality of writing surfaces, such as parchment, papyrus, and paper, has shaped not only the endurance of words but also the symbolic meanings attached to them. The digital surface also carries meaning, but of a different kind: words are not bound to it but merely hosted, and interaction is directed primarily toward the device as a whole, “the box,” rather than the page or the book.  Thus, a fundamental difference emerges; while paper-based surfaces allow for direct tactile interaction with the written word, the digital surface mediates touch through the device. The word on a screen is neither a fleeting “event” nor a fixed “thing,” but rather a liquid, incorporeal, and system-dependent manifestation. |
| **R2**  Recommendation to foreground the argument regarding how the intersection of media bias and sensory bias functions as an explanation of the continuity of analog media. | The reviewer suggests that the theoretical background of the book should sharpen the intersection between media bias and sensory bias as an explanation for the continuity and perdurability of analog media, particularly paper-based products, in the digital age. The point of departure for my discussion is that the study of paper’s functioning as a medium requires an understanding of how sensory configurations shape the experience of media, and through this, perceptions of reality and ways of thinking about social institutions. Since media are understood in media ecology as “extensions of the senses,” the choice of medium directly affects sensory bias. This idea, articulated by scholars such as Ong, includes a rereading of Innis’s work on the “bias of communication,” and is further developed through a reinterpretation of McLuhan’s concept of tactility—not as touch in the narrow sense, but as the integration of multiple senses. I intend to argue that this perspective provides a phenomenological and affective contribution to the study of media change and continuity, one that complements and extends existing approaches based on media specificity, media affordances, and market imperatives.  In this spirit, I will argue that paper-based and screen-based media mobilize different sensory constellations and therefore highlight different aspects of reality. Paper integrates touch and vision, generating experiences of permanence, tradition, and authority, while digital media are grounded mainly in vision and hearing, producing experiences of fluidity, immediacy, and globalization. Building on this, I will further develop the notion of perdurability, understood here as the long-term survival of paper-based media within the digital ecology, through the three qualities of stability, differentiation, and uniqueness. I will also emphasize that these qualities are not natural or inherent media attributes, but outcomes of social, cultural, and institutional practices.  Examples include the continuing authority of printed sacred texts, which endure not only as institutional practices of preservation but also as communal symbols, where the sensory experience of touch and vision reinforces their perception as stable and unchangeable objects. Another example is the revival of vinyl records and instant cameras, which have returned from historical oblivion to mainstream cultural use, gaining distinctiveness and uniqueness through their association with authenticity and nostalgia, grounded in the tactile and visual experience of ownership and differentiation. Importantly, these examples are not passing trends but long-standing phenomena that have unfolded over a long span of years and acquired historical significance in the context of Western culture. In this way, the connection between sensory bias and the socially constructed qualities of stability, differentiation, and uniqueness will provides a phenomenological and socio-cultural explanation for the perdurability of analog media in general and paper-based media in particular, securing their continued relevance in the digital age. |
| **R2**  The audience for the book has not yet been clearly defined. | I thank the reviewer for the critical comment regarding the target audience and the writing style. Indeed, the current version of the book partly draws on the Hebrew edition, which was written with the intention of addressing both a wider educated readership and first-year undergraduate students, and therefore at times has a readable and accessible tone that resembles a trade book. In my view, the book is positioned productively in the space between academic writing and more pedagogical or popular writing. Several indications substantiate this view. First, the Hebrew edition received recognition and attention from academic circles—it was shortlisted for an award by an academic association and was the subject of an academic symposium. The book was also positively reviewed by cultural journalists, indicating its relevance to scholarly and general audiences. Second, the book has been integrated into undergraduate syllabi in various courses, including the history of technologies, media ecology, the history of journalism, and publishing studies, and has served as an introductory text enabling students to engage with the field. Third, this style of writing is very natural for me: over a career spanning three decades, I have authored numerous textbooks and learning guides for the Open University and the Ministry of Education, and thus the combination of pedagogical clarity with theoretical grounding is an integral part of my work.  That said, I am fully aware of the difference between a trade book and an academic monograph, and in the English edition, I intend to place greater emphasis on theoretical depth, the development of conceptual frameworks, and reflexive discussion, so that the book meets the expectations of an academic audience of scholars and instructors. The theoretical refinement will be consistent with the directions I am already committed to developing, namely, the intersection of media bias and sensory bias, and the exploration of stability, differentiation, and uniqueness as qualities of perdurability. Further elaboration of the connection to media ecology theory appears later in my response. I will also ensure that the writing remains clear and instructive so that the book can serve as a classroom resource for introductory courses. In this way, the book will combine a theoretical scholarly contribution with pedagogical value, making it suitable both for the international academic market and for undergraduate teaching. |
| Comments regarding the need for a careful balance between highlighting contemporary interest and historical perspective.  . | The examples I included may appear superficial and perhaps anecdotal rather than illustrative of historically significant phenomena. My intention in adding such examples to the book proposal was to demonstrate the contemporary relevance of the phenomena. I acknowledge that focusing on these examples in isolation rather than the broader historical context may have created an imbalance between contemporary interest and historical perspective. I wish to clarify that all the examples in the book are integrated into what I consider to be representations of broader historical phenomena, and they will always be presented as part of a wider discussion. For instance, the story of Bitcoin in El Salvador illustrates not just an innovation but, more importantly, the unsuccessful attempt at an institutional retreat from the idea of a “cashless society,” while reaffirming the importance of paper currency, at least in its symbolic function, as representing the stability of banks and the differentiation of banknotes from any other piece of paper.  Regarding Trump’s signing ceremony, this is indeed an anecdote that will be incorporated within a broader discussion of the long-standing practice of American institutions preserving legal and national security documents in paper form. In the case of Sam Altman, I will clarify that this example serves as a contemporary illustration of a longer historical continuity in which paper remains central to thought processes, but it will not be a focal point. Overall, I intend to ensure the proper balance between contemporary examples and deeper historical discussion, with all examples explicitly tied to the theoretical framework of stability, differentiation, and uniqueness as qualities of perdurability. |
| The current engagement with media ecology trends tends to be superficial. | The original book was based on the theory of technological affordances, whereas the international edition has been reframed according to the media ecology approach. There is no fundamental contradiction between the two theories, and I find that the new framework, into which the materials from the book’s original edition are integrated, is relevant and illuminating. I wish to emphasize that the choice of media ecology as the framework is not a “cosmetic” move intended merely to justify the book’s inclusion in the series. Instead, it represents a substantive and necessary adaptation to the issues under discussion, since it enables a **comprehensive and systematic** examination of analog media’s perdurability in the digital age. In revising the book, I also intend to engage more explicitly with the canonical contributions in the field and with recent scholarship published within the *Understanding Media Ecology* series.  I regard media ecology first and foremost as a theory of relationships. Similar to the ecology of plants or animals, different media that jointly occupy a shared social space adapt to coexistence in the sense that they divide functions among themselves, or that one medium is absorbed into or enriches another. This relational system is updated with the introduction of new technologies, which activate the human sensory system in new ways. Furthermore, one cannot speak of media ecology without speaking about its audiences and the production systems surrounding it . Media ecology theory opens a wide field of research. Other related theories, such as the affordances theory, offer valuable insights into specific aspects but do not capture the broader canvas. This breadth is precisely where the strength of media ecology theory lies..  Upon rereading Chapter 1, I see the validity of the comment that the media ecology perspective is not sufficiently embedded in this chapter. In the final version of the book, I will expand the ecological perspective by showing how shifts in dominant media have shaped sensory hierarchies—from the rise of modern science, through the “visual turn” in Western culture, to the contemporary “moment of touch.”  In these contexts, which already appear in the book, I will examine the dominant medium and its implications for the sensory system and sharpen the analysis in the spirit of media ecology with respect to the structure of the system and the relationships (both symbiotic and non-symbiotic) among the inhabitants of the media ecology of that period. The book, on the whole, already develops these dynamics in detail. For example, in Chapter 5 , I discuss how the return of Polaroid cameras illustrates the coexistence of digital and analog functions. I will revise this sections and many others as well to ensure the framing is clear and explicitly ecological, and that the discussion of media ecology does not appear as a secondary add-on but as a central and integrated axis. This will also guarantee a better balance between the sensory focus (particularly touch) and the ecological conceptualization. Finally, this refinement will allow the book to make a distinctive contribution to media ecology as a theoretical field and to the broader understanding of the continuity of analog media. |

**Part B: Key Scholarly Sources for the Book’s Theoretica framework.**

The reviewers noted that there is room for further elaboration on the book’s engagement with media ecology and the use of sources, and emphasized the importance of developing a more integrated and comprehensive relationship with the scholarly literature.

. Here, I focus on sources not detailed in the book proposal, the sample chapter, or the previous part of my response to the reviewers. The table presents key points from the sources (Column 2) and their main contribution (Column 3) to the book as a whole and, more specifically, to the discussion of media ecology in this context. This part of the letter is not intended merely as a technical response to the reviewers’ comments. It emphasizes that the book is grounded in a broad and integrated theoretical framework, one that is not limited to empirical description but also provides a principled discussion of the place of material media within today’s media ecology.   
The order of presentation in the table follows the alphabetical sequence of the authors’ last names, rather than any ranking of their importance or relevance.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Source** | **Key Points** | **Contribution to the Book** |
| Benjamin, W. (1936/2008). *The work of art in the age of mechanical reproduction;* Penguin Manovich, L. (2001/2013). *The language of new media* MIT Press | Benjamin describes the concept of *aura*. A historical work of art creates a cultic experience that depends on distance. Vision preserves the aura, whereas touch is perceived as intrusive and cancels it. According to Benjamin, cinema produces a tactile-like sense of closeness, weakening and even abolishing the aura.  Manovich extends Benjamin’s argument into the digital age. He claims that digital culture as a whole follows the path of cinema, blurring sensory distinctions and relying on immediate accessibility through touch. | The continuum from Benjamin to Manovich illustrates the shift from a sharp distinction between the senses (vision preserves aura, touch cancels it) to a cultural landscape in which touch has become the dominant mode of access. Manovich extends Benjamin’s concepts by showing how the process that began with cinema expands into a fundamental structure of digital culture. The book already discusses how physical touch on paper generates a distinctive, cultic, and unique experience, different from the fleeting contact with digital content. In the revised version, I will explicitly connect this discussion to the theoretical framework of Benjamin and Manovich , showing how paper-based technologies persist alongside digital, not as nostalgic relics, but as media with enduring cultural and sensory significance. |
| Bolter, J. D., & Grusin, R. (2000). *Remediation: Understanding new media.* MIT Press. | |  | | --- | | 1. The concept of ***remediation*** describes the process by which one medium maintains a symbiotic relationship with another: sometimes by becoming its content, and at other times by serving as a code, symbolic form, or aesthetic style. The computer, for example, remediates almost every other medium—writing, books, magazines, paintings, photographs, sound, telephone, radio, film, and television—turning them into the content of websites and multimedia presentations.At the same time, computer displays and interfaces themselves become content for older media such as film or television series*.*   . | | The book already highlights examples of symbiotic relationships and mergers between different media, such as printing a photo album from the internet . In the revised version, I will add further examples, including the digital pen and paper-like displays for reading devices. Together, these examples will illustrate the theoretical foundation offered by Bolter and Grusin and reinforce the perspective of media ecology. In the context of *remediation*, new media do not abolish paper-based ones but rather rearticulate and revitalize them within a broader ecological environment. |
| Hall, E. T. (1966). *The hidden dimension.* Anchor | Hall links the organization of space to individual and cultural differences. He examines how different cultures perceive and organize space, and how this is tied to tactility, vision, and other senses. | Hall’s anthropological framework ***will*** provides empirical grounding for the theoretical claims of McLuhan and Ong regarding sensory bias, thereby contributing directly to understanding media–sense relations in media ecology. I intend to draw on his work more explicitly in the revised version, in order to demonstrate how changes in media environments are reflected in observable cultural and behavioral differences. In this context, the book will highlights the historical and changing nature of the relation to touch, for example, following technological inventions such as the microscope (Chapter 1) or the light switch (Chapter 6), and in adding a westeren- cultural dimension to the history of touch–vision relations in Western culture, as discussed in Chapter 1. |
| McLuhan, M. (1994). *Understanding media: The extensions of man.* MIT Press | McLuhan defines tactility as an “interplay of the senses,” and not solely as physical touch. The age of writing and print has created a predominantly single-sense experience, whereas electronic media—especially television—generate a tactile experience in many ways comparable to interpersonal communication. | The concept of tactility helps explain the continued presence of paper-based products alongside their digital alternatives. In the revised edition, I will build on this by diverging somewhat from McLuhan’s definition of tactility proposing the following. While printed letters in themselves are not tactile, when they appear on paper or in a book, they become part of a distinctly tactile experience. I will argue that in today’s media ecology, two groups of media coexist, each providing different tactile experiences: paper-based media rely on a combination of vision and touch (and to a lesser extent, hearing), while digital media offer a tactile interaction oriented primarily toward vision and hearing (and to a lesser extent, touch). In this way, the rivised text will illustrate how sensory balances are reshaped—a key concept at the core of media ecology theory, which emphasizes the interrelations among senses, technologies, and cultural environments. |
| Postman, N. (1979). *Teaching as a conserving activity*. New York, NY: Delacorte Press. | Postman argues that schooling should function as a thermostat, not automatically mirroring the dominant culture but rather acting as a counterweight to its values. According to him, the dominant culture is disseminated primarily through television, which displaces and undermines rational discourse. This rational discourse, for Postman, is associated with print culture and is also emphasized by other scholars in the media ecology tradition, such as McLuhan and Innis. Schools, therefore, are required to preserve and strengthen print literacy and its unique gifts as a counterbalance to the power of television and electronic culture. | One of the central ideas of media ecology I address in my book concerns the web of relationships between different media and between media and the institutions and audiences surrounding them. In Chapter 4, I examine the tensions between paper-based and screen-based media. Similar to Postman’s claim, my work also indicates that learners and teachers still perceive paper-based media as a support for rational thinking and cultural continuity. Postman’s work will help frame this chapter in the conceptual language of media ecology. It will contribute to the construction of a coherent theoretical framework anchored in the ecological perspective on media. |
| Strate, L. (2017). The human condition as the subject of media ecological investigation. Review of Communication, 17(4), 240–256. | Strate presents media ecology as an approach that focuses on relationships between different media and between media and their social and cultural contexts. At any given moment, a society operates within a unique media environment, where forms of communication, consciousness, and culture emerge. Media do not act as mechanical causes, but the media ecology as a whole—production and reception together—enables or constrains ways of thinking, perceiving, and living socially. | Drawing on Strate’s writings on the topic, the book discusses the ecological understanding of paper and plastic technologies within the broader media environment of the 21st century, dominated by digital media. His perspective will helps me to explain how material media continue to be present and even dominant in contexts with symbolic and identity significance (such as sacred texts), and how they reappear in symbiosis with digital media (for example, digital pens, digital photo albums). I have already begun to incorporate Strate’s ideas in response to earlier comments, and I will continue to develop this integration in the revised edition. In this way, Strate’s framework reinforces the book’s contribution to media ecology by emphasizing interrelations rather than one-directional causality. |