

# “Media Hot and Cold”

## Mcluhan, Marshall

- “A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in ‘high definition’. High definition is the state of being well filled with data.”
  - photograph: high def
  - comics: low def (use Scott McCloud’s argument on fidelity vs connection with comic characters)
  - speech: low def “because so little is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener”
- because cool media leave much up to the audience, they can be seen as “high in participation or completion by the audience.” This is in contrast to hot media, which are low in participation precisely because it leaves so little for the audience to accomplish.
- hieroglyphic/ideogrammic (cool) vs phonetic (hot) writing
- “The alphabet, when pushed to a high degree of visual intensity, became typography.”
- “The hotting-up of the medium of writing to repeatable print intensity led to nationalism and the religious wars of the sixteenth century.”
- “paper is a hot medium that serves to unify spaces horizontally, both in political and entertainment empires”
  - so, a return to the spatial rather than the temporal; is this the reason for European agnosticism? does simply reading detach you from the temporally-bound authority of the bible?
  - even more importantly, if print serves this purpose, electronic screens amplify the effect significantly
- “With print many earlier forms were excluded from life and art, and many were given strange new intensity.”
- “A tribal and feudal hierarchy of traditional kind collapses quickly when it meets any hot medium of the mechanical, uniform, and repetitive kind. The medium of money or

wheel or writing, or any other form of specialist speed-up of exchange and information, will serve to fragment a tribal structure.”

- “Specialist technologies detribalize. The nonspecialist electric technology retribalizes.”
  - don’t specialist technologies also tribalize in that specialists form cliques and even adversarial relationships with other groups of specialists?
  - “The process of upset resulting from a new distribution of skills is accompanied by much culture lag in which people feel compelled to look at new situations as if they were old ones. . .”
- the concentric spiral form, present in “the Hebrew and Eastern mode of thought” as defining of the electric age: “It is a redundant form inevitable to the electric age, in which the concentric pattern is imposed by the instant quality, and overlay in depth, of electric speed.”
- “More and more we turn from the content of messages to study total effect.”
  - “Concern with effect rather than meaning is a basic change of our electric time, for effect involves the total situation, and not a single level information movement.”
- “The effect of hot media treatment cannot include much empathy or participation at any time.”
- “The price of eternal vigilance is indifference.”