

McLuhanism

by Bluebird & Finch, March 2016

“The ‘hot’ wars of the past used weapons that knocked off the enemy, one by one. Even ideological warfare in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries proceeded by persuading individuals to adopt new point of view, one at a time. Electric persuasion by photo and movie and TV works, instead, by dunking entire populations in new imagery.” (UM 339)

2016 is a year to return to Marshall McLuhan. His books are more readable than you might expect, given the scope and ambition of them. But the ideas that have always felt most opaque to me are his two most famous ones: hot and cool media, and the medium is the message. This year's landscape is the first place I've begun to truly understand these two ideas, so I'm using this post as a place I can return to, and build upon that understanding.

I do need to make a small feminist caveat: Douglas Coupland's wonderful biography [[Marshall McLuhan: You Know Nothing of my Work!](#)] revealed that he was a bit of a misogynist, like so many of our intellectual heroes. He did at least write a book about the objectification of women [[The Mechanical Bride](#)]; about how advertisements treat women as strangely sexualized objects like cuts of meat, or machines, which they still do. And at least we have Donna Haraway as his queenly successor.

With thanks to marshallmcluhan.com.

Hot Medium	Hot Media
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● extends single sense in high definition ● low in audience participation ● engenders specialization/fragmentation ● detribalizes ● excludes ● uniform, mechanical ● extends space ● horizontally repetitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● photograph ● radio ● phonetic alphabet ● print ● lecture ● film ● books
Cool Medium	Cool Media
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● low definition (less data) ● high in audience participation ● engenders holistic patterns ● tribalizes ● includes ● organic ● collapses space ● creates vertical associations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● cartoon ● telephone ● ideographic/pictographic writing ● speech (orality) ● seminar, discussion ● television ● comics

The Medium is the Message

Each medium, independent of the content it mediates, has its own intrinsic effects which are its unique message.

The message of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs. The railway did not introduce movement or transportation or wheel or road into human society, but it accelerated and enlarged the scale of previous human functions, creating totally new kinds of cities and new kinds of work and leisure. This happened whether the railway functioned in a tropical or northern environment, and is quite independent of the freight or content of the railway medium.