defining types of media - media "hot" and "cool"
"A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in "high definition." High definition is the state of being well filled with data. [...] A cartoon is "low definition" simply because very little visual information is provided. Telephone is a cool medium, or one of low definition, because the ear is given a meager amount of information. And speech is a cool medium of low definition, because so little is given and so much has to be filled in by the listener. On the other hand, hot media do not leave so much to be filled in or completed by the audience. Hot media are, therefore, low in participation, and cool media are high in participation or completeion by the audience." (24-5)
hot versus cool

hot media
- high-definition (provides more detail)
- linear (the path is more pre-defined, less choice)
- passive participation (more passive role in the experience)

cool media
- low-definition (provides less detail)
- non-linear (the path is less pre-defined, more choice)
- active participation (more active role in the experience)
## McLuhan examples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>hotter</th>
<th>&lt;----- &gt;</th>
<th>cooler</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>movies</td>
<td>&lt;----- &gt;</td>
<td>television</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>photographs</td>
<td>&lt;----- &gt;</td>
<td>cartoons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>phonetic alphabet</td>
<td>&lt;----- &gt;</td>
<td>hieroglyphics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lecture</td>
<td>&lt;----- &gt;</td>
<td>seminar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>print culture</td>
<td>&lt;----- &gt;</td>
<td>oral culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the waltz</td>
<td>&lt;----- &gt;</td>
<td>the twist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>normal glasses</td>
<td>&lt;----- &gt;</td>
<td>sun glasses</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
degrees of hotness and coolness

Different degrees of hot or cool, some media hotter or cooler than others.

Hotness or coolness of a medium can vary over time. McLuhan's example of jazz that moved from a phase of hot jazz to cool jazz. Or consider the quality of television images becoming more and more high-definition over the years. Effect of a particular medium can also be different for different cultures. Media not necessarily used or understood in the same way across different cultures. A medium might be defined as hot in one culture but cold in another.
working within a medium - "hot" vs. "cool" in TV
the cool qualities of television

low-def (quality of the image is less important to the content)

non-linear (less pre-defined)

more active participation (viewer has more of an active role in deciding what parts of this less pre-defined image to take in)
cool qualities of television

Example of TV news shows where we are given a constantly shifting mosaic of images and text, compared with the more linear uniformity of presentation common to radio news
e.g. MSNBC: http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/31510813/#36182090

Hot films made cooler on TV. Even when a film is shown on TV we are still often made aware of the network logo in the corner of screen. Interruption of ad breaks common to most channels. TV film not necessarily watched in the dark as you would a cinema film.

Reality shows. Anything on MTV.
what works on the medium of TV - Nixon vs. Kennedy

Nixon's intense (hot) image vs. Kennedy's relaxed and less-defined (cool) image

Listeners on the radio (a hot medium) at the time generally thought Nixon had come across better than Kennedy on the debate, but people who watched the same debate on TV (a cool medium) thought that Kennedy had come across better.
what works on the medium of TV - Nixon vs. Kennedy
what works on the medium of TV - Nixon vs. Kennedy

Looking less classifiable (less high-definition) suits the cool medium of television.

"When the person presented looks classifiable, as Nixon did, the TV viewer has nothing to fill in. He feels uncomfortable with his TV image. He says uneasily, 'There's something about the guy that isn't right.' The viewer feels exactly the same about an exceedingly pretty girl on TV, or about any of the intense 'high definition' images and messages from the sponsors. [...] For the hot movie medium needs people who look very definitely a type of some kind. The cool TV medium cannot abide the typical because it leaves the viewer frustrated of his job of 'closure' or completion of image." (McLuhan, *Understanding Media*, p.361)
a hot medium "electrocuting" itself in a cool one

"Kennedy was the first TV President because he was the first prominent American politician to ever understand the dynamics and lines of force of the television iconoscope. As I’ve explained, TV is an inherently cool medium, and Kennedy had a compatible coolness and indifference to power, bred of personal wealth, which allowed him to adapt fully to TV. Any political candidate who doesn’t have such cool, low definition qualities, which allow the viewer to fill in the gaps with his own personal identification, simply electrocutes himself on television — as Richard Nixon did in his disastrous debates with Kennedy in the 1960 campaign." (McLuhan, Playboy interview) Note that McLuhan is talking about Nixon and Kennedy as if they are mediums.

Brad Pitt vs. Friends: "hot stuff!"
Obama - hot or cool?
television today - what works? why?

reality television - low-def participants and images, non-linear viewing, active participation by the audience (voting etc.)

news television - non-linear viewing (multiple stories, frames, text and images)
can a revolution be "televised"?

McLuhan writes about how French and American revolutions happened under the "hot" push of print and "carried out by the new literati and lawyers." Power of written pamphlets and constitutions.

"By stressing that the medium is the message rather than the content, I’m not suggesting that content plays no role - merely that it plays a distinctly subordinate role. Even if Hitler had delivered botany lectures, some other demagogue would have used the radio to rettribalize the Germans and rekindle the dark atavistic side of the tribal nature that created European fascism in the Twenties and Thirties. By placing all the stress on content and practically none on the medium, we lose all chance of perceiving and influencing the impact of new technologies on man, and thus we are always dumfounded by - and unprepared for — the revolutionary environmental transformations induced by new media." (Playboy interview)

Walter Benjamin at end of 'The Work of Art in the age of Mechanical Reproduction' on futurists & fascism ("Fiat ars – pereat mundus" - let art/media/technology be created, let the world perish).