

# The Georgist Journal

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## GUEST EDITORIAL

Considering the rising interest among nearly all Georgist groups in carrying Henry George's reform and philosophy to the general public, I would like to call attention to Marshall McLuhan's remarkable book, Understanding Media. It examines the nature of the various media of communication and their impact upon pre-industrial, industrial and post-industrial societies. For the Henry George movement, McLuhan's findings are significant because a fundamental understanding of how communications affect mankind is important to spreading our ideas.

In his opening essay, "The Medium is the Message," McLuhan introduces his thesis: "The 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace that it introduces into human affairs." The two primary (and opposing) technologies McLuhan focuses on are the machine technology beginning with Gutenberg, and the automation technology developing today. While machine technology structures society by fragmentation and centralization, the essence of automation is integral and decentral. In other words, automation, far from being merely the current phase of the machine revolution, is fundamentally different in kind and in impact from its precursor.

With this distinction in mind, McLuhan then groups media into two types, "hot" and "cold." Hot media are those structurally similar to machine technology; communication is one-way, one is acted upon and need not become involved. Radio, movies and newspapers are examples. Cold media by contrast are those structurally characteristic of pre- and post-industrial technology, often two-way; becoming involved is part of the process. Examples are the telephone and television. Why TV? McLuhan's distinction here is basic. One may call it information density. "A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in 'high definition.' High definition is the state of being well-filled with data." With a cold medium so little information is provided that much must be filled in by the receiver, hence the involvement. Movies, having high definition, are hot; television, being of low definition, is cool.

As, in McLuhan's view, technologies, media and societies can be hot or cold, the effect of hot or cold media on hot or cold societies can be expected to be quite different. Excellent examples are given.

For Georgists the question is, What is our medium? All messages are expressed in one medium and communicated in another. It is, of course, the (hot) medium of the printed book carrying George's message expressed in the (cool) medium of speech which has dominated the Henry George movement in its first century. In the coming years we must answer these questions: In what media should George's reform and philosophy now be expressed? In what media should they now be communicated?

But here is the real question: Is not any great philosophy a medium itself? And how does one communicate a medium?

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