

Communication Technology Epochs

500 B.C. Greece *Phaedrus*

Plato quoting Socrates

Writing destroys memory and weakens the mind, relieving it of...work that makes it strong. Writing is an inhuman thing.

Socrates was nervous since his information technology of the day, memorization, was about to be replaced by a new information technology, the stylus.

1844 May 2

Samuel Morse

“What hath God Wrought?”

The first telegraph message from Washington DC to Baltimore by Morse

Faster way to send messages over long distances, created new industries, new businesses practices, new social relations, and new ways of conducting international diplomacy or warfare; similarly, it engendered new sociopolitical geographies, new definitions of news if not information itself, and metaphysically, new concepts of time and space in human imagination.

Electronic media completely obliterated our traditional notion of time and space in human communication and culture.

News from European capitals took from 2-6 weeks to reach London and 4-8 weeks to get to America. Morse used the term “global village.”

1934

Technic and Civilization

Lewis Mumford

Epochal Historiography of Media: It conceptualizes human history according to the four major communication epochs:

- Orality - no writing
- Literacy - writing and the shift of the monopoly of knowledge
- Typography - the printing press and democratization of information
- Electronic Media - introduced entirely new way of knowing and perceiving because of a set of temporal and spatial, as well as symbolic and physical structural bias that are unlike the previous three communication epochs.

1962

The Gutenberg Galaxy

Marshal McLuhan

A study of the impact of mechanically reproduced literacy – the flood of publishing that became possible after the invention of the printing press.

Argument: Print forcibly revolutionized western societies, making possible the Reformation, the rise of the competitive city-state, the democratic impulse, the development of science, and even changes in architecture.

1964 *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* Marshal McLuhan

“The Medium is the Message”

The transformation of technology have the character of organic evolution [literally] because all technology are extensions of our physical being.

1982 *The disappearance of Childhood* Neil Postman

Literature created a divide between adults and children and television lowered the wall.

1982 *Orality and Literacy* Walter Ong

Writing Restructures Consciousness

Describes writing as a wholly artificial technology that is powerful enough to transform human consciousness. The key to that transformation came when writing could represent an entire human utterance.

1985 *Amusing Ourselves to Death* Neil Postm

The Peek-a-Boo World: A critique of American television culture

Analogy- We all build castles in the air- then the problem comes when we try to live in them.

Television - An event pops into view and then vanishes again.

Television: There is no subject, from any realm of contemporary life, that escapes the medium’s reach and grasp, and once grasped, that is not shaped by it. Even if this shaping means minimizing or debasing entire subjects and their importance. Consequently, a citizenry that looks to television for most, if not all of its serious public discourse, finds itself more consumer than citizen, more amused than interested and enlightened, and more lulled than stirred to action.

1997 *The Civilization of Illiteracy* Mihai Nadin

Visual Literacy: Design carries over many formal requirements from practical experiences subordinated to literacy. But there is also an underlying conflict between design and language, moreover between design and literacy. (596)