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Mind vs. Media

A Civil War between Typography and the Mediated Image

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Abstract

*“In every tool we create, an idea is embedded that goes beyond  
the function of the thing itself.” (Neil Postman)*

The past thirty years have marked the start of a new kind of civil war in our digitally powered American society. There is a deep chasm between the cry for the lost art of typography and the mediated power of the Image. We are a culture battling a war in our own heads, attempting to assimilate Images without replacing the need for a written text.

This thesis will argue that the mediated Image is not a death sentence to critical thinking; rather it is an undeniable, inescapable power that can be used to positively influence our culture. It will research the history of fear found in many revolutionary novelists and theorists, and how that fear has gone beyond the point of being a warning symbol, becoming a paralyzing lamentation for the lost art of the past.

It will ultimately answer the nagging question of our present society: Has the rise of the mediated Image replaced the written text and its requirement to digest information in rational and analytical manner?

## Mind vs. Media

## A Civil War between Typography and the Mediated Image

## A Lamentation For Typography

*What is Typography?*

The most basic definition states: “The design, or selection, of letter forms to be organized into words and sentences to be disposed in blocks of type as printing upon a page” (Typography, 2009). Beginning with the primitive form of hieroglyphics carved into stone tablets and empowered by Gutenberg’s invention of the printing press in 1439, the process of typography has revolutionized the world in the distribution of knowledge. Perhaps most significantly important to the argument of this thesis, is the affect that typography has had on American government, culture, and worldview. Neil Postman once stated: “For two centuries, America declared its intentions, expressed its ideology, designed its laws, sold its products, created its literature and addressed its deities with black squiggles on white paper. It did its talking in typography, and with that as the main feature of its symbolic environment rose to prominence in world civilization” (2005, p. 63). With the help of the written word, men were able to document and preserve philosophy, scientific theories, religion, politics and declarations of independence.

*Plato’s Mimesis*

Dating back to 427 B.C., men have feared that a day would come when the need for typography would be replaced. This fear was based on the theory that the image would destroy mankind’s ability to reason and think analytically. The first to document and recognize the impact that images would have on the written word was Plato, one of the greatest philosophers that ever walked the earth. He understood that mankind’s ability

to document his thoughts, which is the wonder of the written language, would be the birth of philosophy: “Writing freezes speech and in so doing gives birth to the grammarian, the logician, the rhetorician, the historian, the scientist – all those who must hold language before them so that they can see what it means, where it errs, and where it is leading” (Postman, 2005, p. 12). A written text calls for the ability to criticize, dissect, and ponder on the words and worldviews of the human race.

In stark contrast to the enlightenment of the written word, Plato perceived art as merely an imitation of the real Form and believed that as an imitation it distracted its viewer from the truth of the original Form: “According to this theory, since art imitates physical things, which in turn imitate the Forms, art is always a copy of a copy, and leads us even further from truth and toward illusion. For this reason, as well as because of its power to stir the emotions, art is dangerous” (Clowney, 2008, para 5). Plato defined art as *mimesis*, which basically means *imitation*: “The perpetration of mimesis is the creation of illusion and, consequently, the distortion of reality. The effect of this illusion and distortion, he says, is to hobble the *logistikon* of the soul—our capacity to measure, number, and weigh that which is real and undistorted” (Allert, 1996, p. 31). Based on this idea, Plato concluded that the mimetic artist endangered the human soul by tempting it lean on the emotions that aesthetics draw from. Plato declared that anyone interested in the truth must study philosophy, the art of wisdom. Because artistic images stand merely as a representational form of truth they ultimately draw the viewer farther away from pure knowledge and wisdom.

As a philosopher, Plato’s epistemology is understandable. Because philosophy is the pure pursuit of wisdom, anything that threatens that pursuit could logistically be

considered dangerous: “Since accurate understanding is a principle goal of philosophy, and since mimesis is held to hamper accurate understanding, it could hardly be seen as anything other than a stumbling block to the philosophic life” (Allert, 1996, p. 31).

Although his theories were disputed and rebuked for hundreds of years afterwards, Plato’s mimesis laid the groundwork for the fear that would come with the age of technology at the turn of the twentieth century.

*Soma: the Aldous Huxley Theory*

In 1932 revolutionary novelist Aldous Huxley wrote a fictitious tale that became remarkably accurate with time. His frightening novel *Brave New World* called America to examine what the new phenomenon of technology and the mediated image would do to the American mind. At the time, Huxley was merely envisioning an extreme magnification of what he saw in the culture surrounding him:

In 1931, when *Brave New World* was written, I was convinced that there was still plenty of time. The completely organized society, the scientific caste system, the abolition of free will by methodical conditioning . . . these things were coming alright, but not in my time, not even in the time of my grandchildren. The prophecies made in 1931 . . . has emerged from the safe, remote future and is now awaiting us, just around the next corner. (1958, pp. 237-238)

It was impossible to imagine how close to the mark he would actually hit. As the written word became increasingly vague, conceptual theorists began to dive deeper into the issues that the novel addressed.

Huxley mourned over the death of typography by the hands of the people. He directly pointed out that not only had typography been lost, it had been replaced by our

love for entertainment and the mediated Image: “Huxley feared that the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance . . . tyranny failed to take into account man’s almost infinite appetite for distractions” (Postman, 2005, p. xx). This concept can be most clearly seen through the usage of the drug *Soma* in the novel. The characters of *Brave New World* digested the Soma pill whenever they felt human emotion. It acted as a desensitizer and took them on *vacations*, which can be best understood as what a modern drug user would call a *trip*. It allowed them to travel away from reality into a feel good world where they did not have to deal with the struggles and trials of life: “And if ever, by some unlucky chance, anything unpleasant should somehow happen, why, there's always soma to give you a holiday from the facts” (Huxley, 1998, p. 36).

Although Soma is a modern day drug used as a muscle relaxant, there is no direct reference between this drug and Huxley’s theory. So where does the idea of Soma come from? Soma is actually a “leafless East Indian vine; its sour milky juice formerly used to make an intoxicating drink. Personification of a sacred intoxicating drink used in Vedic ritual” (Soma, 2009). Soma is also sometimes used as an alternate name for the human body. Therefore, the word actually embodies a double meaning: an intoxicating religious substance and the human body. Considering this basic definition, it is apparent that Huxley intentionally chose the word Soma to define the characteristics of the uses of his drug creation.

Consequently, there is a deeper idea that Huxley embedded in the usage of the Soma drug. He used it as a representation of the instant gratification of the media and entertainment. A tool to dull the senses and the ability to think introspectively, Soma implied that the control of technology reached beyond the emotions to control people

both physically and biologically. It provided an empire of the *feelies*, a superficial world where the intellect was destroyed in response to a mediated society. Huxley stated:

Linda got her soma. Thenceforward she remained in her little room . . . in bed, with the radio and television always on, and the patchouli tap just dripping, and the soma tablets within reach of her hand - there she remained; and yet wasn't there at all, was all the time away, infinitely far away, on holiday; on holiday in some other world, where the music of the radio was a labyrinth of sonorous colours, a sliding, palpitating labyrinth . . . where the dancing images of the television box were the performers in some indescribably delicious all-singing feely. (1958, p. 92)

Soma, embodying many of the negative qualities of the media, emphasized Huxley's fear of what would happen to the individual's pleasure seeking mind. He strongly believed that only the written text allowed for the ability to think independently. When the eye views words, it views its content alone, which gives a person the ability to decipher the information for himself. In contrast, the televised image holds no such restraint on the mind. It allows its viewer to gather in a throng of people and become subject to *herd mentality*, ultimately losing the ability to decipher information and becoming lost in the image and opinions of others. Huxley stated: "Christ promised to be present where two or three are gathered together. He did not say anything about being present where thousands are intoxicating one another with herd-poison" (1958, p. 275).

Huxley's continued his discussion in *Brave New World Revisited* through what he called the *Great Abbreviators*. He used this phrase to describe a society that continuously shortens their attention span and intake of information through the media. Huxley wrote:



“The soul of wit may become the very body of untruth. However elegant and memorable, brevity can never, in the nature of things, do justice to all the facts in a complex situation” (cited in Postman, 2005, p. 6). His ideas and beliefs about the retardation of the abbreviated computerized mind marked the beginning of a whole new study in the field of communication theory: “The contemporary propagandist can make use of the television to broadcast the image . . . thanks to the technological process, Big Brother can now be almost as omnipotent as God” (Huxley, 1958, p. 270).

### *Orwellian Nightmares*

In accordance with Huxley’s fear, 1948 saw the arrival of Big Brother when George Orwell penned his revolutionary novel *Nineteen Eighty-four*. In the novel, Orwell predicted a society of complete government control; a civilization without the means to attain any information outside what *Big Brother* (the government) instituted. This was clearly stated through the actions of the protagonist, Winston Smith. The first chapter of the novel describes Winston committing a *Thought Crime* by making a fatal decision to keep a journal of his thoughts, which immediately made him a threat to his society.

Orwell wrote:

The thing he was about to do was to open a diary . . . if detected it was reasonably certain that it would be punished by death . . . He dipped the pen into the ink and then faltered for just a second. A tremor had gone through his bowels. To mark the paper was a decisive act. (2003, p. 6-7)

The act of the human mind dictating through a pen on paper immediately brought enlightenment and set Winston Smith aside from the robotic human behavior of his peers.

It was in the simple act of writing and reading that found the demise of Smith and spoke volumes about what the loss of a pen and paper would do to American individualism.

Through Winston's written act of rebellion, Orwell predicted what he believed would be the future of our fast paced technology. It was a mind-blowing concept for the world of 1948. What would the world be like without the written word, and what would be the consequences of the mind when a word is substituted for an image? It was a scary idea and an instrument of illumination for the power of typography:

In Orwell's writing, the degeneration of language itself becomes a metaphor for squandered gains, carelessness and the unconscious rush of the herd toward the edge of a cliff. His humanity compelled him to warn us and to fight against it, but the genius and tragedy of his vision was its prophecy.

(Price, 2008, para. 8)

Orwell and Huxley's fear were so compelling that it has been taught as a revolutionary hypothesis towards the function of the mediated image. Many theorists used their ideas as the basis for new communication models, but no one took it more to heart than Neil Postman in his political novel: *Amusing Ourselves to death*.

*Typographic America (Neil Postman)*

In 1985, building off the groundwork of the fear of men like Plato, Orwell and Huxley, Neil Postman published *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, a lamentation for the loss of typography and an outcry against the mediated and televised Image. In his novel, Postman made a strong argument for a traditionally literate America. He called America to remember that ninety-five percent of the men aboard the Mayflower were literate and that during the nineteenth century many Europeans traveled to America and marveled at

its literacy and printing tradition. There was a day, back in 1842, when Charles Dickens was received with the comparison of a modern day celebrity. There also was a time when the American people could not get enough of Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* which was estimated to have sold over 350,000 copies in its first year of publication.

In agreement with Martin Luther, the man who famously nailed his 95 Theses to the door of the church, Postman pointed out that printing was:

God's highest and extremist act of Grace, whereby the business of the gospel is driven forward . . . Print made a greater impression than actual events . . .

To exist was to exist in print: the rest of the world tended gradually to become more shadowy. Learning became book-learning. (2005, pp. 32-33)

Thanks to the printing of the written word, America developed into an intellectual nation. They became a people who would read in every leisure moment they had; who would sit through hours of political lectures and then debate what they had heard for long afterwards. Consequently, whole events were centered around receiving written and orated information.

Postman strongly declared that we had lost the tradition of our past, and the result was the ultimate disintegration of the mind's ability to think in abstract terms: "We might even say that America was founded by intellectuals, from which it has taken us two centuries and a communication revolution to recover." (2005, p. 41) He blamed the rise of computer mediated communication as the reason we were no longer taking the time to read books and buy newspapers, and claimed that it had diluted the intellect of the nation

as a whole: “The form in which ideas are expressed affects what those ideas will be” (2005, p. 31). The ultimate form, Postman believed, being the written and printed word:

Whenever language is the principle medium of communication – especially language controlled by the rigors of print – an idea, a fact, a claim is the inevitable result . . . meaning demands to be understood. A written sentence calls upon its author to say something, upon its reader to know the import of what is said. (2005, p. 50)

Postman believed that the demands of the image lacked those qualities because it cannot allow for its reader to digest or criticize, but only to look and receive.

Postman termed the age of typography as *The Age of Exposition*:

Exposition is a mode of thought, a method of learning, and a means of expression. Almost all the characteristics we associate with mature discourse were amplified by typography, which has the strongest possible bias towards expression: a sophisticated ability to think conceptually, deductively and sequentially; a high valuation of reason and order; an abhorrence of contradiction; a large capacity for detachment and objectivity; a tolerance for delayed response. (2005, p. 63)

Characteristics of a mind formed by the written and printed word were obvious, and thanks to typography, the greatest time of American reason heightened at the revolution of the written word: “The process encourages rationality; that the sequential, propositional character of the written word foster the . . . analytical management of knowledge” (Postman, 2005, p. 51).

The decline of the printed word was marked by the year 1890, when typographic advertising gave way to taglines, slogans, buzz words, jingles and banners that simplified language in order to quickly grab the attention of the general public. The advertisements of the eighteenth century assumed that the general public would be able to rationalize large amounts of information, but at the turn of the twentieth century America waved goodbye to a world where the “resonances of rational, typographic discourse were then to be found” (Postman, 2005, p. 58). Postman observed: “Advertising became one part depth psychology, one part aesthetic theory. Reason had to move itself to other arenas” (2005, p. 58). Although he recognized that words do not always hold truth, Postman believed that the power of typography was in the reader’s ability to question the validity of the words: “In the 1890’s that context is shattered, first by massive intrusion of illustrations and photographs, then by the nonpropositional use of language” (2005, p. 60).

Neil Postman’s claims were bold and brimmed with concern for the path of our society. Although there can be no argument towards the power and positive impact of typography on the American mind, his pessimism failed to take into account that the Image contains many of the same qualities that the written word embodies, mainly its power to enlighten, inform and educate on the aesthetic level.

### The Power of the Mediated Image

#### *What is an Image?*

According to Webster, an Image is: “A physical likeness or representation of a person, animal, or thing, photographed, painted, sculptured, or otherwise made visible” (2005). Other than Plato’s criticism of the arts, most of the world embraced the beauty of

the image until the turn of the twentieth century. Until that point, the image was considered an asset to society, especially in artistic mediums. The change was made when technology opened up the door to image manipulation:

Electronic image manipulation arrived in force in the 1980s with a powerful new breed of computers that cost on the order of \$500,000 or more and occupied an entire room. More compact and far less expensive desktop systems soon proliferated. The necessary hardware and software for at least limited image control became available at chain-store prices (Goldsmith, 2009).

With the tools to manipulate the image in the hands of the average American came the ability to alter the way an image is received, in essence the ability to manipulate the mind.

In his book *Languages of Visuality* Beat Allert states: “It seems that the eye has had dominion over all other senses from antiquity until now, and that various regimes of vision and simultaneously existing scopic regimes influence the ways we use language, thus infiltrating our lives” (1996, p. 1). He claims that images are complex things that require insight into the “substructures of thinking where images are translated into words” (1996, p. 2). This is where a defining point is made: the function of typography and the uses of images do not differ in many of their qualities. In essence, they both play necessary roles in one operating cycle: words describe pictures and pictures describe words. This understanding has the ability to alter a worldview and ultimately sheds new light on the image-centered world our culture has established.

*Enlightenment Through a Camera Lense*

*Television: a New Kind of Conversation.* As a result of the institution of the mediated image, America discovered a new way of exchanging information. A different conversation was created, a language spoken through images rather than words. This is mimicked in Postman's theory: "Television gives us a conversation in images, not words" (2005, p. 7). Ultimately, it raises the question that Beat Allert dared to ask:

What are the shifting relations between images and texts, between the visual and the verbal? To what extent are texts visual and images textual? And how literally can we take the notion of "images" in our time when they are . . . increasingly defined by new simulation techniques and computerized vision? (1996, p. 2)

To answer this question, we must look to the uses of the mediated Image in America. Inherent in the tools we use to communicate can be found the new language of our times; their uses, their abuses, and the stain it left on society.

Alexis de Tocqueville, a revolutionary political scientist of the nineteenth century, once said: "The invention of firearms equalized the vassal and the noble on the field of battle; the art of printing opened the same resources to the minds of all classes; the post brought knowledge alike to the door of the cottage and to the gate of the palace" (Postman, 2005, p. 38). Does not the television and the Internet provide an even broader service concerning the reach of knowledge? The British Broadcasting Company (BBC) allows world events to be viewed by any one with a cable cord. It allows instant access and the ability to view the needs of the entire world with the click of a button. Easy and accessible, the television places knowledge at the fingertips and equalizes our culture, allowing the common man to view as much of international events as the president of the

United States. In this way, the mediated image accomplishes much of the same educational effects that Postman, de Tocqueville, Plato and Orwell praised of the written word.

In the late 1990s the popular television series *Wishbone* was launched by the Public Broadcasting system (PBS) for four seasons. The show was based upon a dog that lived through literary classics and was aired to encourage and enhance young adolescents learning experiences:

The live-action series on PBS aims to introduce classic literature to--and help to cultivate a love of reading in--6 to 11-year-olds. The adventures of Wishbone, a winsome Jack Russell terrier, humorously draw on literary works by Dickens, Homer, Twain, Shakespeare, and other immortals . . . distributed 500,000 "Wishbone" teaching sets to elementary school librarians and teachers around the country . . . Participating teachers selected a two-month period . . . to challenge their pupils to read three books preferably classics. (McCormick, 1996)

Because of the television series, a child in grade school could experience the epic wonder of the Iliad, a novel high above the average child's learning capabilities. Although a child lacks the ability to comprehensively read an abridged version of the Iliad, they can see it in video form and understand its themes. To this day, nearly fifteen years later, the power of the images of *Wishbone* are still imbedded in the memory of now college age students. A poll taken at Liberty University of 50 students showed that 42 of them remembered the show and still referenced the images and themes they learned as a child in their college English classes. The power of the mediated image helped them



to recall and understand works such as *The Odyssey*, *Romeo & Juliet*, *Pride & Prejudice*, and many more.

The language of the televised image, our societies new way of conversing with one another, has helped enhance educational principles. Rather than discourage its viewer to read, the images in series like *Wishbone* excite the desire to know more about literary classics. As America continues to infiltrate mediated images into their communication style, the more dependent the image becomes on the written text. The war between typography and images that we have created becomes a figment of the imagination in light of a new relationship: books are turned into images and in return encourage society to look to their source of inspiration.

*The Art of the Film*. Stanley Kubrick once said: “A film is – or should be – more like music than fiction. It should be a progression of moods and feelings. The theme, what’s behind the emotion, the meaning, all that comes later” (2009). Like most tools that use the mediated image, the art of filmmaking was never intended to replace fiction. Rather, it was an artistic medium that found its grounds closer to the form of music in its intentions to enhance, through images, the themes within novels and stories. Frank Capra, an award winning film director popularized through his revolutionary film *It’s a Wonderful Life* used this description: “Film is one of the three universal languages; the other two: mathematics and music” (2009).

Consequently, some theorists have argued that film brought to life the original intentions of classic literature. Karl Marx stated: “Is the Iliad possible, when the printing press and even printing machines exist? Is it not inevitable that with the emergence of the press, the singing and the telling and the muse cease; that is, the conditions necessary for

epic poetry disappear?” (Postman, 2005, p. 43). The question that follows his is: does not the ability to record a video bring back this lost art form? Is it not more in line with the ancient storytellers of the past, who brought life to these epic tales through their voice and their gestures and the way they used their facial features? Because of the beauty of the mediated image in film, millions of people can now experience the epic wonders of seeing a story performed, rather than read. In this way, the original intentions of texts like *The Iliad* are magnified through the mediated image and in fact do more justice to the story than the words themselves.

In Erwin Edman’s book *Arts and the Man*, he states: “The eye is the eye of a human being, and what is visually present may, like the words of prose or poetry, stir imagination” (1956, p. 87). In other words, images rely heavily on the sensational. They require the use of senses such as hearing and sight and by doing so inevitably call the viewer to feel the question being asked by the image. Edman continues:

It is not sufficient that the picture move us through the vicarious presence on a canvas of a moving object; it must stir us in a more immediate fashion through the direct appeal of sense . . . colors are not simply what they are to the eye; they are associated with sensations or memories pleasant and unpleasant: red with blood, blue with sky, yellow with sunlight and summer, black with mourning, and gray with autumn or with gloom. In some unexplained way, so interrelated are our sensations and our memories.

(1956, pp. 89 -90)

Film calls upon all of the human senses, it encourages the intellect, the memories, and the stories that have been written and the way people have lived them.

Another extension of filmmaking, the creation of the documentary, has continued to rise in popularity over the past decade. Specifically intended to educate and inform, they cover an extensive range of critical issues in our current world:

In the last decade, documentary films have experienced a surge in mainstream popularity, as demonstrated by the financial and critical successes of *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004), *An Inconvenient Truth* (2006), and *March of the Penguins* (2005). The public's appetite for documentaries has increased, and the costs for production have decreased. In both developed and developing nations, much of the world has gained access to lower-cost video equipment, to the Internet, and to uploading content on sites such as YouTube or MySpace . . . Cameras of many kinds are worn 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, and material is streamed live on the Internet. (Coffman, 2009)

These films, created by both professionals and the average man, shed light on current issues and have the ability to educate millions at a time.

This year, a new non-profit organization called *Give Us names* was created for the specific purpose of producing documentaries to help advertise and bring in funding for other global nonprofits that are suffering financially. Their goal is to use the technology of documentaries to make society aware of the need of non-profits and in turn benefit the well being of thousands worldwide. Without the wonder of video technology, they would not be able to pursue their goal of educating America of the needs of other countries. They rely upon the modern technique of storytelling, an educated and influential process: “Storytelling practices and critical thinking skills are consistently taught in the media classroom, along with technical expertise” (Coffman, 2009). Not much unlike the

disciplines taught for written stories, the art of documentaries rely upon use of image technology and the ability of the mind to critique and analyze information.

*A Photographed World.* A discussion of the mediated image would be incomplete without touching upon the art of photography: “Photography is a way of feeling, of touching, of loving. What you have caught in film is captured forever, it remembers little things, long after you have forgotten everything” (Siskind, 2009). A preservation technique, photography captures moments that can define and change a culture.

In December of 1984, *National Geographic* photographer Steve McCurry was sent to Afghanistan to photograph the bloody civil war against the Soviet Union and the tyranny of Marxism. While he was there, he took a picture of an Afghan girl with fiery green eyes and a face of such intensity that the photograph took the world by storm: “What emerged was a searingly beautiful image of a young girl with haunting eyes who came to symbolize the plight and the pain and the strength of her people. National Geographic chose a close-up of the girl as the cover photo for the article, which ran in the June 1985 issue. Her sea green eyes striped with blue and yellow peered with a mixture of bitterness and courage from within a tattered burgundy scarf. The "Afghan girl" touched the souls of millions” (National Geographic, 2009). Even McCurry could not have known the impact his camera had captured that day. Because of his photo, countless Americans became aware of the crisis going on in Afghanistan and the needs of the country in a time of war.

Once again, the similarities between the uses of the image and the uses of typography contain a striking resemblance. In Lambert Zuidervart’s book *Artistic Truth* he quotes: “Both depiction and description participate in the formation and

characterization of the world; and they interact with each other and with perception and knowledge” (2004, p. 165). A depiction, which is exactly what an image is, calls its viewer to question the validity of the image. Mimicking the same function of words on a piece of paper, the image questions truth and falsities, incites exploration and arguments, and carries an invitation to see something previously undepicted: “In aesthetic experience the emotions function cognitively: we discriminate among them and relate them in order to gauge and grasp the artwork and integrate it with the rest of our experience and the world” (Zuidervaart, 2004, pp. 169-170). Images are not devoid of cognitive development. Mediated images, the pictures that are viewed through the lenses of technology, hold the same qualities that the written text introduced to our American culture hundreds of years ago. The function remains the same, it is simply manifested in a new way of expression.

*Typography is not dead.* It is critical to remember that typography is not dead. Although American culture has changed drastically, it has not changed to the point of losing appreciation for old modes of communication. The institution of the expression of the image did not eliminate the need for a written text. Because of this, it is not false to say that the theories of Plato, Neil Postman, and Aldous Huxley held some holes in their attitude concerning the mediated Image. Like Speer who claimed: “Many a man has been haunted by the nightmare that one day nations might be dominated by technical means” (Huxley, 1958, p. 270). These men became blinded by their concern. They lived in fear that one-day technology would cause mankind to become robotic beings. Aldous Huxley claimed:

The machine is a menace because it robs man of his creativity and makes

merely a passively efficient *robot*. These menaces have killed people's instinctive love of the fully integrated life, and the result is that they lose their sense of values, their taste and judgment become corrupted, and they have an irresistible tendency to love the lowest when they see it. (Birnbaum, 2006, p.156)

The mediated image, although powerful, does not possess the ability to turn an individualistic human into a robot. When these men claimed that television would eliminate the need for books they failed to take into account that a culture's need to rely upon the intuitions of the imagination are as essential to mankind as breathing. People will continue to read, no matter how many movies and televised images are produced, because words are an essential and indispensable form of communication.

Consider the phenomenon of the *Harry Potter* book series: "The Harry Potter series is the most unusual, special counter-cultural phenomenon. An entire generation of readers has read the story several times" (Granger, 2008). The books appeal to a new era of postmodern readers:

Through the characters' choices and realizations, young readers are introduced to the complexities and ambiguities of the contemporary world. Harry and his friends embrace these qualities of postmodern childhood and question injustices established by and through the adult wizarding world. (Chappell, 2008)

The last book of the series sold over 8.4 Million copies the first day it hit the shelves. It proved to the world that children and adults alike still have a thirst to read and have not yet lost their love for the written word.

*In Favor of Free Will*

*Postmodernism.* The institution of the mediated image has not changed individualism in American culture. Thomas Jefferson, one the founding forefathers of the United States of America wrote:

We (the founders of the new American democracy) believe that man was a rational animal, endowed by nature with rights, and with an innate sense of justice, and that he could be restrained from wrong, and protected in right, by moderate powers, confided in persons of his own choice and held to their duties by dependence oh his own will. (Huxley, 1958, p. 262)

They believed that mankind was in his nature a free being, and would desire and seek to be free from oppression no matter what the odds. Now more than ever, a few hundred years after these words were written, America remains a culture that prides itself on individualism. Philosophers have come to call this age as the era of Postmodernism, a time that is marked by our culture's desire to be free from judgment and what communication theorists call *Group Think*. Contrary to Huxley's fear that the mediated image would destroy individuality, people have a desire to be involved in an individualistic culture more than they ever did before. They thirst to know and be known, and use digital means to acquire information and shout to the world of their discoveries found in the process.

When Wikipedia hit the world of the Internet no one expected it to become the phenomenon that it was. The site, along with other information search engines such as Encyclopedia Britannica online and Google, receives countless visits daily. According to the Alexa Web Information Company:

Wikipedia is the 12th most visited web site in the USA today, with around 10.65 million users visiting the site daily and a total reach of just shy of 39 million of the estimated 173.3 million Internet users in the USA. The average daily page views per user is 4.8 so their estimated traffic is around 51.16M pageviews/day (2009).

These sites are designed and used as information resources and millions of people visit these sites because they still have a hunger to attain and retain knowledge.

America has changed, for sure. Postman is correct in this regard. Most Americans no longer have the attention span to sit through seven hours of a public discourse, but they have the ability to go through twelve years of education and four more years of college studies. The weight that a high school degree used to hold has been lost in a society that calls for higher education. According to an article in USA Today:

Americans are more educated than ever before, with a greater percentage graduating from high school and college than a decade ago, [U.S. Census data.] Eighty percent of Americans are graduates of high school or higher, compared with 75.2% in 1990, the 2000 figures show. That change came about in part because of a decline in the rate of students dropping out before ninth grade: 7.5% in 2000, compared with 10.4% in 1990. (2009)

The growth of colleges and universities in the United States is unparalleled as people continue to seek higher levels of education. This fact stands as a statement towards the truth that the American people still spend the majority of their time learning and receiving information.



## Conclusion

### *Point of No Return*

America has reached a point of no return. In the introduction to Neil Postman's *Amusing Ourselves to Death*, Postman's son writes of a teacher who challenged her students to take an e-media fast to strengthen the claims of the book. The students were required to fast from media and electronic devices for twenty-four hours: all television, cell phones, internet, radio, iPods, etc. To enhance the research for this thesis I conducted a similar experiment among my peers. I conducted a case study with a sampling of five students from Liberty University. Each student was instructed to restrain from the use of the electronic devices and the influence of the media for a twenty-four hour period. Results are as follows:

Student A missed an important update and change to their class assignment for the next day because of failure to check their email account. Student B missed an important phone call regarding a job opportunity. Student C drove to Starbucks to meet a friend for coffee and waited for forty-five minutes unaware that they had received a text canceling the appointment. Student D missed a traffic warning on the radio and was stuck in bumper-to-bumper traffic for two hours. Student E was the only one who had no major occurrences or issues with the experiment.

Four out of five students involved in the case study suffered major repercussions during their e-media fast. It is crippling to attempt to filter the effects of the media out of the daily life routine. To do so would result in being cut off from the life flow of society. It is impossible to be a responsible student and not check the main source of communication between the university and its student: the email. A diligent worker

cannot reject a phone call from their employer. Travel safety relies on radio warning signals. Failure to watch the news or check the Internet would result in a division from the modern world and its events. The American people can cry for the lost forms of the past, or they can move forward and accept the changes of society.

Like the snowflake, no two humans are yet to be made alike. As long as every human being is entering into the world with different DNA systems, people will continue to think and be individuals. Mankind continues to come out of the womb crying to be heard and will never ultimately be silenced by the television screen. They will continue to read, write, film, photograph and speak in the pursuit of wisdom and knowledge.

Postman's theories were the final extension of a decade long cry of fear: fear of the unknown, fear of the machine, fear of the Robot that could one day take over the world. Along with Orwell and Huxley, he stood on the street corners with large red hexagons declaring: "Stop! Think about what we are doing with our minds!" Some yielded to their warnings, others ignored them. But eventually, the highway of communication moved into the passing lane and crossed over into another state.

With the new millennium came a point of no return. The sun rose in favor of the Image, declared its power, and sent rays of an incalculable effect upon the earth. Neither a drug, nor a death sentence, it stands as a tool that holds the ability to change the world.

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