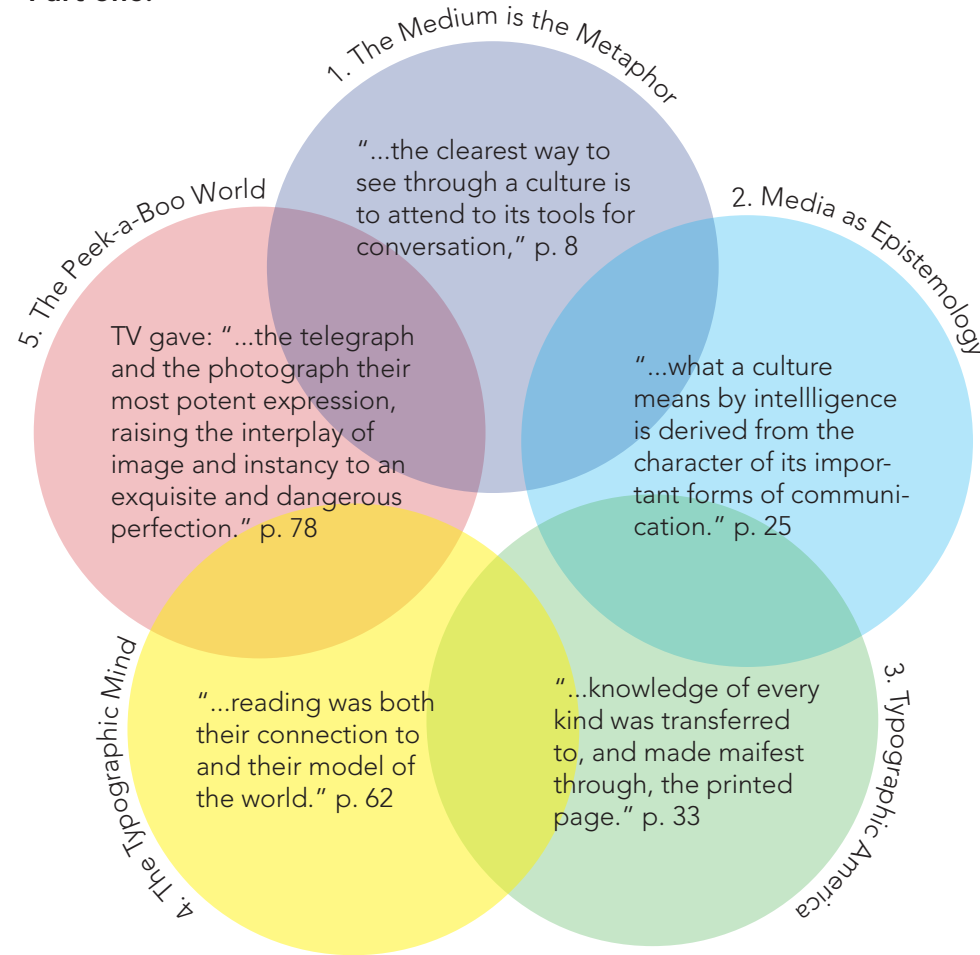


**Part one:**



**1. The Medium is the Metaphor**

The content/value/worth? of our society is reflected by the media that dominates our culture. Marshall McLuhan influence: "...the clearest way to see through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation," a valid point as much of our communication depends on technology, these tools (technology and communication) continue to merge, affecting our culture. p. 8

"In studying the Bible as a young man, I found intimations of the idea that forms of media favor particular kinds of content and therefore are capable of taking command of a culture. (references 2nd Commandment: graven images) "It is a strange injunction to include as part of an ethical system *unless its author assumed a connection between forms of human communication and the quality of a culture.* ... People like ourselves who are in the process of converting their culture from word-centered to image-centered might profit by reflecting on the Mosaic injunction. " p. 9

"We are (taught) that a metaphor suggests what a thing is like by comparing it to something else. And by the power of its suggestion,

it so fixes a conception in our minds that we cannot imagine the one thing without the other: Light is a wave; Language, a tree; God, a wise and venerable man; the minds, a dark cavern illuminated by knowledge. And if these metaphors no longer serve us, we must, in the nature of the matter, find others that will." p. 13-14

**2. Media as Epistemology**

Language defines our culture, and is limited, in part, by our inability to recognize its importance. "Since intelligence is primarily defined as one's capacity to grasp the truth of things, it follows that what a culture means by intelligence is derived from the character of its important forms of communication." p. 24-25

"In a print-culture, we are apt to say of people who are not intelligent that we must 'draw them pictures' so that they may understand. Intelligence implies that one can dwell comfortably without pictures, in a field of concepts and generalization....America was ... perhaps the most print-oriented culture ever to have existed." p. 26

"We are now a culture whose information, ideas and epistemology are given form by television, not by the printed word." p. 28

"Typography fostered the modern idea of individuality, but is destroyed the medieval sense of community and integration...Most of our modern ideas about the uses of the intellect were formed by the printed word, as were our ideas about education, knowledge, truth and information." p. 29

**3. Typographic America**

We came from good stock: Early colonists, 17th century, literacy rate estimated between 89 to 95%, "...quite probably the highest concentration of literate males in the world at the time." p. 31

"...the Bible was the central reading matter in all households, for these people were Protestants who shared Luther's belief that printed was 'God's highest and extremist act of Grace, whereby the business of the Gospel is driven forward.'" p. 32

"Beginning in the 16th century, a great epistemological shift had taken place in which knowledge of every kind was transferred to, and made manifest through, the printed page." Mumford: "...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." p.33

"In 1976, Benjamin Franklin observed that Americans were so busy reading newspapers and pamphlets that they scarcely had time for books." p. 37

Reputation for high level of literacy, not restricted by class standing. p. 39

"The influence of the printed word in every arena of public discourse was insistent and powerful not merely because of the quantity of

printed matter but because of its *monopoly.*" p. 41

**4. The Typographic Mind**

Clearly, a high degree of importance was placed on our use of language. Our early leaders expected to deliver in a well-articulated and comprehensive way - and the population had the strength of mind to actively listen. Lincoln-Douglas debates: "...illustrates the power of typography ...language... clearly modeled on the style of the written word." p. 48

"Public figures (previous two centuries) were known largely by their written words...not by their looks or even their oratory...To think about those men was to think about what they had written..." Contrast with today's public figures: "...what will come to your mind is an image, a picture of a face... Of words, almost nothing will come to mind, This is the difference between thinking in a word-centered culture and thinking in an image-centered culture. It is also the difference between living in a culture that provides little opportunity for leisure, and one that provides much." p. 60-61

"To attend school meant to learn to read, for without that capacity, one could not participate in the culture's conversations. But most people could read and did participate. To these people, reading was both their connection to and their model of the world." p. 61-62

Age of Exposition: "Exposition is a mode of thought, a method of learning, and a means of expression. ...mature discourse amplified by typography... ability to think conceptually, deductively and sequentially...high valuation of reason and order...and a **tolerance for delayed response.**" p. 63

Coming next: the Age of Show Business p. 63

**5. The Peek-a-Boo World**

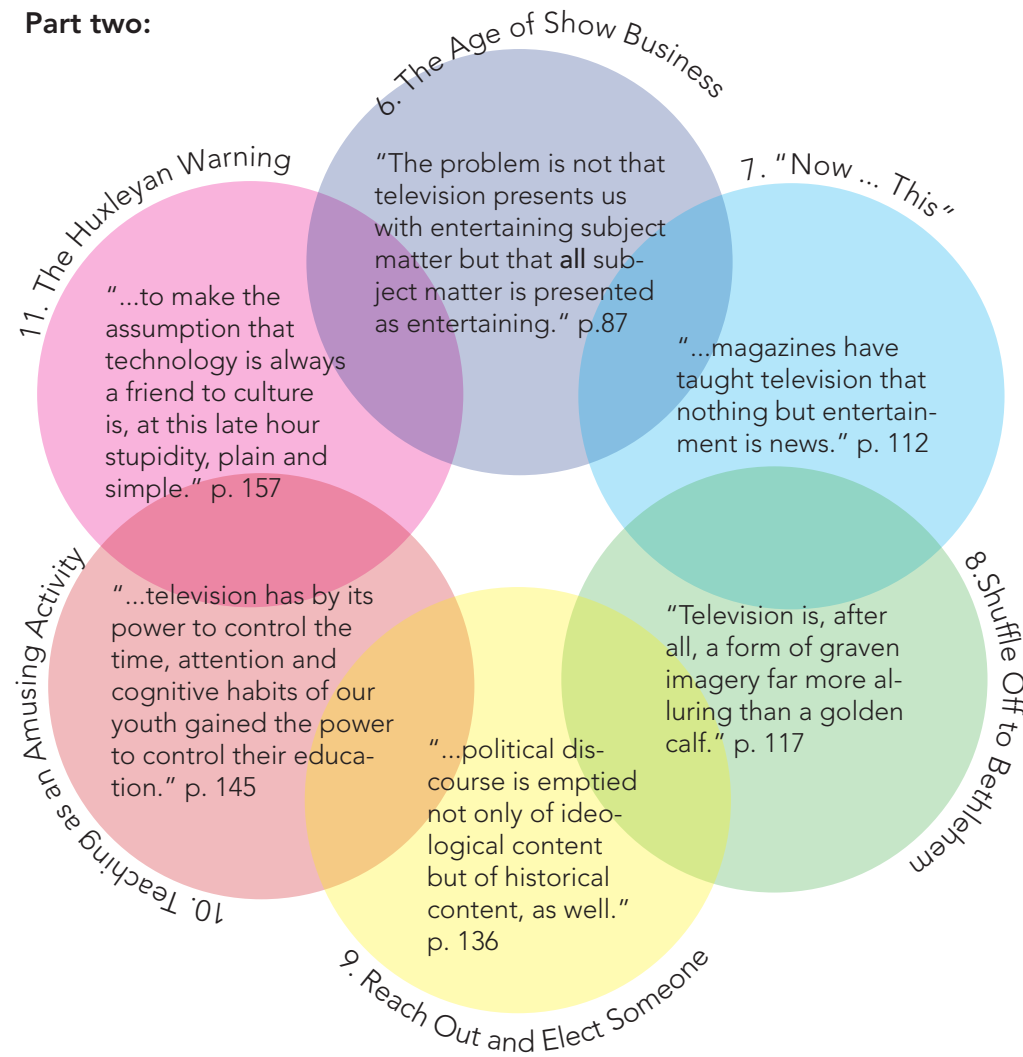
The buying and selling of words and images: the inventions of the telegraph and photograph changed the way we received news and information, diminished its content significantly. Two ideas in 20th century, providing "a new metaphor for public discourse" : "...transportation and communication could be disengaged from each other , that space was not a inevitable constraint on the movement of information." p. 64

Invention of telegraph: Thoreau quote about telegraphy content , he "grasped that the telegraph would create its own definition of discourse... and that it would require the content of that conversation to be different from what Typographic Man was accustomed to...The telegraph made information into a commodity, a 'thing' that could be bought and sold irrespective of its uses or meaning." p. 65

"News of the Day: Water, water, everywhere, without a drop to drink. (Coleridge) "may serve as a metaphor of a decontextualized information environment: In a sea of information, there was very little of it to use." p. 67

With some exceptions, "most of our daily news is inert, consisting of information that gives us something to talk about but cannot lead to any meaningful action....generated an abundance of irrelevant information, it dramatically altered what may be called the 'information-action ratio.'" p. 68

## Part two:



Like telegraphy, photography recreates the world as a series of idiosyncratic events. p. 74

"Television gave the epistemological biases of the telegraph and the photograph their most potent expression, raising the interplay of image and instance to an exquisite and dangerous perfection. And it brought them into the home." p. 78

### 6. The Age of Show Business

Further erosion of our culture: emphasis on performance over content. "Television does not extend or amplify literate culture. It attacks it. If television is a continuation of anything, it is of a tradition begun by the telegraph and photograph of the mid-19th century, not the printing press in the 15th." p. 84

"The problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining." p.87

"It is not merely that on the television screen entertainment is the metaphor for all discourse. It is that off screen the same metaphor prevails." p. 92

Rebuttal during 1984 presidential election (contrasted with Lincoln-Douglas debates: "...complexity, documentation and logic can play no role...on several occasions syntax was abandoned entirely. It is no matter, (they) were less concerned with giving arguments than with 'giving off' impressions..." p. 97

### 7. "Now ... This"

Disjointed messages abound on the screen: without continuity or logic, and information is all about the entertainment factor, whether presented as "news" or other program of amusement.

On sponsors: "...we expect books and even other media (such as film) to maintain a consistency of tone and a continuity of content, we have no such expectation of televisions, and especially television news.." p. 104

"...embedded in the surrealistic frame of a television news show is a theory of anticommunication, featuring a type of discourse that abandons logic, reason, sequence and rules of contradiction." (Robert MacNeil: "...keep everything brief, not to strain the attention of anyone but instead to provide constant stimulation through variety, novelty, action and movement." p. 105

"In the age of television, the paragraph is becoming the basic unit of news in print media...the time cannot be far off when awards will be given for the best investigative sentence. (In reaction to quote from Wall Street Journal editor-in-chief.) p. 112

"Whereas television taught the magazines that news is nothing but entertainment, the magazines have taught television that nothing but entertainment is news." p. 112

### 8. Shuffle Off to Bethlehem

Interestingly, a thread of religion weaves through nearly every chapter in this book, not just this one. The point is that television threatens to turn respected theologies and serious religious traditions into farce.

"Everything that makes religion an historic, profound and sacred human activity is stripped away...On these shows the preacher is tops. God comes out second banana" p. 117

"It is naive to suppose that something that has been expressed in one form can be expressed in another without significantly changing its meaning, texture or value...What is lost in the translation?" p. 117-18

"...the power of a close-up televised face, in color, makes idolatry a continual hazard. Television is, after all, a form of graven imagery far more alluring than a golden calf...Television's strongest point is that it brings personalities into our hearts, not abstractions into our heads." p.123

### 9. Reach Out and Elect Someone

Politics and television are forever entwined, controlling how the public sees the candidates: and looks clearly matter more than content. "Show business is not entirely without an idea of excellence, but its main business is to please the crowd, and its principal instrument is artifice. If politics is like show business, then the idea is not to pursue excellence, clarity or honest but to *appear* as if you are." p. 126

"As Xenophanes remarked 25 centuries ago, men always make gods in their own image. But to this, television politics has adds a new wrinkle: Those who would be gods refashion themselves into images the viewer would have them be." p. 135

The value of history: "As no other medium before or since, the book promotes a sense of a coherent and usable past...But television is a speed-of-light medium, a present-centered medium...In the Age of Show Business and image politics, political discourse is emptied not only of ideological content but of historical content, as well." p. 136

Being rendered unfit to remember: "For if remembering is to be something more than nostalgia, it requires a contextual basis -- a theory, a vision, a metaphor -- *something* within which facts can be organized and patterns discerned. The politics of image and instantaneous news provides no such context." p. 63

Huxley over Orwell, to understand: "...the threat that television and other forms of imagery pose to the foundation of liberal democracy -- namely, to freedom of information." p. 138

"But the Founding Fathers did not foresee that tyranny by government might be superseded by another sort of problem altogether, namely, the corporate state, which through television now controls the flow of public discourse in America." p. 139

"...in the Age of Television, our information environment is completely different from what it was in 1783; that we have less to fear from government restraints than from television glut." p. 140

"...what we watch is a medium which present information in a form that renders it simplistic, nonsubstantive, nonhistorical and noncontextual; that is to say, information packaged as entertainment. In America, we are never denied the opportunity to amuse ourselves... There is no need to rely on censorship if the "public knows the difference between serious discourse and entertainment...(as a result) censorship is not a necessity when all political discourse takes the form of a jest." p. 141

### 10. Teaching as an Amusing Activity

Learning must now be fun is the new mantra. To children, re. 'Sesame Street': "...the idea of being taught by a series of commercials did not seem peculiar. And that television should entertain was taken as a matter of course." p. 142

"(E)ducators...are apt to find new methods congenial, especially if they are told that education can be accomplished more efficiently by means of the

new techniques.” p. 143

“‘Sesame Street’ does not encourage children to love school or anything about school. It encourages them to love television. Moreover, it is important to add that whether or not ‘Sesame Street’ teaches children their letters and numbers is entirely irrelevant ... the most important thing one learns is always something about *how* one learns ... we learn what we do.” p. 144

“...like the alphabet or the printing press, television has by its power to control the time, attention and cognitive habits of our youth gained the power to control their education.” p. 145

*Voyage of the Mimi* project: \$3.65 million spent on educational TV, result is students will learn mainly: “that learning is a form of entertainment, or, more precisely, that anything worth learning can take the form of an entertainment, and ought to...they will expect it and thus will be well prepared to receive their politics, their religion, their news and their commerce in the same delightful way.” p. 154

### 11. The Huxleyan Warning

How we watch more important than what we watch: we’ve let ourselves be lulled into complacency - and it was so easy, wasn’t it? I watched, therefore I learned...right? What will happen to our ability to think critically in future generations?

“What Huxley teaches is that in the age of advanced technology, spiritual devastation is more likely to come from an enemy with a smiling face ...Big Brother does not watch us, by his choice. We watch him, by ours.” p. 155

“When a population becomes distracted by trivia, when cultural life is redefined as a perpetual round of entertainments, when serious public conversation becomes a form of baby-talk, when, in short, a people become an audience and their public business a vaudeville act, then a nation finds itself at risk; culture-death is a clear possibility.” p. 155-156

Are we the slowly boiling frog? It’s our complacency that puts us at risk. “An Orwellian world is much easier to recognize, and oppose, than a Huxleyan. Everything in our background has prepared us to know and resist a prison when the gates begin to close around us.... Who is prepared to take arms against a sea of amusements? What is the antidote to a culture’s being drained by laughter?” p. 156

“To be unaware that a technology comes equipped with a program for social change, to maintain that technology is neutral, to make the assumption that technology is always a friend to culture is, at this late hour stupidity, plain and simple.” p. 157

“Here is ideology without words, and all the more powerful for their absence. All that is required to make it stick is a population that devoutly believes in the inevitability of progress.” p. 157-58

“For no medium is excessively dangerous if its users understand what its dangers are...questions about the psychic, political and social effects of information are as applicable to the computer as to television.” p. 161

“(Huxley) believed with H.G. Wells that we are in a race between education and disaster, and he wrote continuously about the necessity of our understanding the politics and epistemology of media.” Will our fate be the same as those in *Brave New World*? Unaware that we no longer know what we are laughing about and that we had stopped thinking altogether? p. 163

### Additional thoughts:

Throughout this book, Postman asserts that contemporary culture is obsessed with image at the expense of content. As a result of our television-obsessed population, our culture has become trivial in nature, and deprived intellectually.

In Postman’s opinion, a culture’s intelligence is largely derived from the character of its important forms of communication. Before the days of print, the ability to memorize was a requisite - oratorical skills demanded it. And in the Age of Print, a high degree of concentration is also necessary. What does the Age of Television demand from its citizens? Will we remain complacent, and blindly accept of technology as it impacts, and alters our society around us?

According to Postman, this routine acceptance of technology comes at a price. Through the centuries, technology has brought irreparable changes to society: the printing press obliterated oral traditions, and the telegraph removed space from the communication equation. In the same vein, television has ruined our verbal traditions, and has impacted education to the extent that learning has become dependent on entertainment by our students.

Has the influence of television-based teaching options completely undermined the traditional classroom experience? Is it more than our children’s attention spans that have been compromised? Has the passive nature of television-watching eliminated our need for critical thinking?, i.e. “perplexity” (p.147)

The computer has the potential to erode cultural and community life at ever-increasing speeds. Does it also have the power for good?