

Session Two--History of Media and Media Ecology  
Dr. T. David Gordon

I. History of Media: Four (Six?) Eras of Media

- A. Orality
- B. Manuscript (Handwriting, Chirography)
- C. Printing Press
- D. Electronic and Photographic
- E. Digital

II. History of Media Ecology

- A. Moses/Yahweh and images: All other ANE religions employed carved or molten images/idols, as an act of honor (like statues today) so prohibiting this was strange.  
Ex. 20:3 “You shall have no other gods before me. 4 “You shall not make for yourself a carved image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. 5 You shall not bow down to them or serve them, for I the LORD your God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers on the children to the third and the fourth generation of those who hate me, 6 but showing steadfast love to thousands of those who love me and keep my commandments.
- B. Socrates and writing (*Phaedrus*, 274-277)
- 1. Writing aids recollection, but injures memory. [275a-b] “for this discovery of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners’ souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember of themselves.”
  - 2. Writing does not permit the auditor to make inquiry. “He would be a very simple person, and quite a stranger to the oracles of Thamus or Ammon, who should leave in writing or receive in writing any art under the idea that the written word would be intelligible or certain ... I cannot help feeling, Phaedrus, that writing is unfortunately like painting; for the creations of the painter have the attitude of life, and yet if you ask them a question they preserve a solemn silence. And the same may be said of speeches. You would imagine that they had intelligence, but if you want to know anything and put a question to one of them, the speaker always gives one unvarying answer.” [275d]
- C. The Catholic Counter-Reformation and the Printing Press
- 1. It would undermine the church’s authority
  - 2. It would spawn vastly differing individual interpretations. Others (e.g. Walter Ong) later objected to the individualism it would promote.
- D. Jacques Ellul and photography (*The Humiliation of the Word*), because it would diminish language (and with it, reason).
- E. Marshall McLuhan and electronic technologies. They are “biased” towards space rather than time; they alter the relation of proximate and distant (and the courtesies that proximity promotes, altering social structures, e.g. “global village.”)
- F. Neil Postman and television: *Amusing Ourselves to Death*. Television trivializes everything, and thereby cultivates a lack of seriousness and an expectation of amusement.
- G. Nicholas Carr, Mark Bauerlein, Maggie Jackson, Winifred Gallagher, Maryanne Wolf and distracting digital technologies.