

Amusing Ourselves to Death

For the Roger Waters album, see [Amused to Death](#).

Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business (1985) is a book by educator Neil Postman. The book's origins lay in a talk Postman gave to the Frankfurt Book Fair in 1984. He was participating in a panel on George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and the contemporary world. In the introduction to his book, Postman said that the contemporary world was better reflected by Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, whose public was oppressed by their addiction to amusement, than by Orwell's work, where they were oppressed by state control.

It has been translated into eight languages and sold some 200,000 copies worldwide. In 2005, Postman's son Andrew reissued the book in a 20th anniversary edition. It is regarded as one of the most important texts of media ecology.^[1]

1 Summary

Postman distinguishes the *Orwellian* vision of the future, in which *totalitarian* governments seize individual rights, from that offered by Aldous Huxley in *Brave New World*, where people medicate themselves into bliss, thereby voluntarily sacrificing their rights. Drawing an analogy with the latter scenario, Postman sees television's entertainment value as a present-day "soma", by means of which the citizens' rights are exchanged for consumers' entertainment.

The essential premise of the book, which Postman extends to the rest of his argument(s), is that "form excludes the content," that is, a particular medium can only sustain a particular level of ideas. Thus *rational argument*, integral to print typography, is militated against by the medium of television for the aforesaid reason. Owing to this shortcoming, politics and religion are diluted, and "news of the day" becomes a packaged commodity. Television de-emphasises the quality of information in favour of satisfying the far-reaching needs of entertainment, by which information is encumbered and to which it is subordinate.

Postman asserts the presentation of television news is a form of entertainment programming; arguing inclusion of theme music, the interruption of commercials, and "talking hairdos" bear witness that televised news cannot readily be taken seriously. Postman further examines

the differences between written speech, which he argues reached its prime in the early to mid-nineteenth century, and the forms of televisual communication, which rely mostly on visual images to "sell" lifestyles. He argues that, owing to this change in public discourse, politics has ceased to be about a candidate's ideas and solutions, but whether he comes across favorably on television. Television, he notes, has introduced the phrase "now this", which implies a *complete absence* of connection between the separate topics the phrase ostensibly connects. Larry Gonick used this phrase to conclude his *Cartoon Guide to (Non)Communication*, instead of the traditional "the end".

Postman refers to the inability to act upon much of the so-called information from televised sources as the *Information-action ratio*.

Drawing on the ideas of media scholar Marshall McLuhan — altering McLuhan's aphorism "the medium is the message", to "the medium is the metaphor" — he describes how oral, literate, and televisual cultures radically differ in the processing and prioritization of information; he argues that each medium is appropriate for a different kind of knowledge. The faculties requisite for rational inquiry are simply weakened by televised viewing. Accordingly, reading, a prime example cited by Postman, exacts intense intellectual involvement, at once interactive and dialectical; whereas television only requires passive involvement. Moreover, as television is programmed according to ratings, its content is determined by commercial feasibility, not critical acumen. Television in its present state, he says, does not satisfy the conditions for honest intellectual involvement and rational argument.

He also repeatedly states that the eighteenth century, being the *Age of Reason*, was the pinnacle for rational argument. Only in the printed word, he states, could complicated truths be rationally conveyed. Postman gives a striking example: Many of the first fifteen U.S. presidents could probably have walked down the street without being recognized by the average citizen, yet all these men would have been quickly known by their written words. However, the reverse is true today. The names of presidents or even famous preachers, lawyers, and scientists call up visual images, typically television images, but few, if any, of their words come to mind. The few that do almost exclusively consist of carefully chosen soundbites.

2 See also

- Media criticism
- Bread and circuses
- *Is Google Making Us Stupid?*
- *The Global Trap*
- *Manufacturing Consent*
- *The End of Education*
- *Amused to Death*, a 1992 concept album by Roger Waters, inspired by the book.

3 References

[1] http://www.media-ecology.org/media_ecology

4 Further reading

- Postman, Neil (1985). *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*. USA: Penguin. ISBN 0-670-80454-1.
- Postman, Neil (1996). *The End of Education: Rethinking the Value of School*. USA: Vintage Books. ISBN 0-679-75031-2.

5 External links

- The Neil Postman Information Page
- Neil Postman: Collected Online Articles
- Summary of the book

6 Text and image sources, contributors, and licenses

6.1 Text

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Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business

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“We were keeping our eye on 1984. When the year came and the prophecy didn't, thoughtful Americans sang softly in praise of themselves. The roots of liberal democracy had held. Wherever else the terror had happened, we, at least, had not been visited by [Orwellian](#) nightmares.

But we had forgotten that alongside [Orwell's](#) dark vision, there was another - slightly older, slightly less well known, equally chilling: [Aldous Huxley's](#) Brave New World. Contrary to common belief even among the educated, [Huxley](#) and [Orwell](#) did not prophesy the same thing. [Orwell](#) warns that we will be overcome by an externally imposed oppression. But in [Huxley's](#) vision, no Big Brother is required to deprive people of their autonomy, maturity and history. As he saw it, people will come to love their oppression, to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think.

What [Orwell](#) feared were those who would ban books. What [Huxley](#) feared was that there would be no reason to ban a book, for there would be no one who wanted to read one. [Orwell](#) feared those who would deprive us of information. [Huxley](#) feared those who would give us so much that we would be reduced to passivity and egoism. [Orwell](#) feared that the truth would be concealed from us. [Huxley](#) feared the truth would be drowned in a sea of irrelevance. [Orwell](#) feared we would become a captive culture. [Huxley](#) feared we would become a trivial culture, preoccupied with some equivalent of the feelies, the orgy porgy, and the centrifugal bumblepuppy. As [Huxley](#) remarked in Brave New World Revisited, the civil libertarians and rationalists who are ever on the alert to oppose tyranny “*failed to take into account man's almost infinite appetite for distractions.*” In 1984, [Orwell](#) added, people are controlled by inflicting pain. In Brave New World, they are controlled by inflicting pleasure. In short, [Orwell](#) feared that what we fear will ruin us. [Huxley](#) feared that what we desire will ruin us.

This book is about the possibility that [Huxley](#), not [Orwell](#), was right.”

— [Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*](#)

“Americans no longer talk to each other, they entertain each other. They do not exchange ideas, they exchange images. They do not argue with propositions; they argue with good looks, celebrities and commercials.”

— [Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*](#)

“Everything in our background has prepared us to know and resist a prison when the gates begin to close around us . . . But what if there are no cries of anguish to be heard? Who is prepared to take arms against a sea of amusements? To whom do we complain, and when, and in what tone of voice, when serious discourse dissolves into giggles? What is the antidote to a culture's being drained by laughter?”

— [Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*](#)

“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.”

— [Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*](#)

“[M]ost of our daily news is inert, consisting of information that gives us something to talk about but cannot lead to any meaningful action. (68).”

— [Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*](#)

“The television commercial is not at all about the character of products to be consumed. It is about the character of the consumers of products.”

— [Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*](#)

“In America, everyone is entitled to an opinion, and it is certainly useful to have a few when a pollster shows up. But these are opinions of a quite different order from eighteenth- or nineteenth-century opinions. It is probably more accurate to call them emotions rather than opinions, which would account for the fact that they change from week to week, as the pollsters tell us. What is happening here is that television is altering the meaning of 'being informed' by creating a species of information that might properly be called disinformation. I am using this word almost in the precise sense in which it is used by spies in the CIA or KGB. Disinformation does not mean false information. It means misleading information--misplaced, irrelevant, fragmented or superficial information--information that creates the illusion of knowing something but which in fact leads one away from knowing. In saying this, I do not mean to imply that television news deliberately aims to deprive Americans of a coherent, contextual understanding of their world. I mean to say that when news is packaged as entertainment, that is the inevitable result. And in saying that the television news show entertains but does not inform, I am saying something far more serious than that we are being deprived of authentic information. I am saying we are losing our sense of what it means to be well informed. Ignorance is always correctable. But what shall we do if we take ignorance to be knowledge?”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“We do not measure a culture by its output of undisguised trivialities but by what it claims as significant.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“For in the end, he was trying to tell us what afflicted the people in 'Brave New World' was not that they were laughing instead of thinking, but that they did not know what they were laughing about and why they had stopped thinking.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“[It] is not that television is entertaining but that it has made entertainment itself the natural format for the representation of all experience. [...] The problem is not that television presents us with entertaining subject matter but that all subject matter is presented as entertaining. (87)”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Television is our culture's principal mode of knowing about itself. Therefore -- and this is the critical point -- how television stages the world becomes the model for how the world is properly to be staged. It is not merely that on the television screen entertainment is the metaphor for all discourse. It is that off the screen the same metaphor prevails. (92)”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“The reader must come armed, in a serious state of intellectual readiness. This is not easy because he comes to the text alone. In reading, one's responses are isolated, one's intellect thrown back on its own resources. To be confronted by the cold abstractions of printed sentences is to look upon language bare, without the assistance of either beauty or community. Thus, reading is by its nature a serious business. It is also, of course, an essentially rational activity.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“But it is much later in the game now, and ignorance of the score is inexcusable. 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.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“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 than from one whose countenance exudes suspicion and hate. In the Huxleyan prophecy, Big Brother does not watch us, by his choice. We watch him, by ours. There is no need for wardens or gates or Ministries of Truth. 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; a culture-death is a clear possibility.”

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“What the advertiser needs to know is not what is right about the product but what is wrong about the buyer.”

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“...there must be a sequence to learning, that perseverance and a certain measure of perspiration are indispensable, that individual pleasures must frequently be submerged in the interests of group cohesion, and that learning to be critical and to think conceptually and rigorously do not come easily to the young but are hard-fought victories.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“A book is an attempt to make through permanent and to contribute to the great conversation conducted by authors of the past. [...] The telegraph is suited only to the flashing of messages, each to be quickly replaced by a more up-to-date message. Facts push other facts into and then out of consciousness at speeds that neither permit nor require evaluation. (70)”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“The written word endures, the spoken word disappears”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“If politics is like show business, then the idea is not to pursue excellence, clarity or honesty but to appear as if you are, which is another matter altogether.”

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“There is nothing wrong with entertainment. As some psychiatrist once put it, we all build castles in the air. The problems come when we try to *live* in them. The communications media of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with telegraphy and photography at their center, called the peek-a-boo world into existence, but we did not come to live there until television. Television gave the epistemological biases of the telegraph and the photograph their most potent expression, raising the interplay of image and instancy to an exquisite and dangerous perfection. And it brought them into the home. We are by now well into a second generation of children for whom television has been their first and most accessible teacher and, for many, their most reliable companion and friend. To put it plainly, television is the command center of the new epistemology. There is no audience so young that it is barred from television. There is no poverty so abject that it must forgo television. There is no education so exalted that it is not modified by television. And most important of all, there is no subject of public interest—politics, news, education, religion, science, sports—that does not find its way to television. Which means that all public understanding of these subjects is shaped by the biases of television.”

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“I believe I am not mistaken in saying that Christianity is a demanding and serious religion. When it is delivered as easy and amusing, it is another kind of religion altogether.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“It is not necessary to conceal anything from a public insensible to contradiction and narcotized by technological diversions.”

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“Voting, we might even say, is the next to last refuge of the politically impotent. The last refuge is, of course, giving your opinion to a pollster, who will get a version of it through a desiccated question, and then will submerge it in a Niagara of similar opinions, and convert them into--what else?--another piece of news.

Thus we have here a great loop of impotence: The news elicits from you a variety of opinions about which you can do nothing except to offer them as more news, about which you can do nothing.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“People of a television culture need “plain language” both aurally and visually, and will even go so far as to require it in some circumstances by law. The Gettysburg Address would probably have been largely incomprehensible to a 1985 audience.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Parents embraced “Sesame Street” for several reasons, among them that it assuaged their guilt over the fact that they could not or would not restrict their children’s access to television. “Sesame Street” appeared to justify allowing a four- or five-year-old to sit transfixed in front of a television screen for unnatural periods of time. Parents were eager to hope that television could teach their children something other than which breakfast cereal has the most crackle. At the same time, “Sesame Street” relieved them of the responsibility of teaching their pre-school children how to read—no small matter in a culture where children are apt to be considered a nuisance.... We now know that “Sesame Street” encourages children to love school only if school is like “Sesame Street.” Which is to say, we now know that “Sesame Street” undermines what the traditional idea of schooling represents.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“television’s way of knowing is uncompromisingly hostile to typography’s way of knowing; that television’s conversations promote incoherence and triviality; that the phrase “serious television” is a contradiction in terms; and that television speaks in only one persistent voice—the voice of entertainment”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“For the message of television as metaphor is not only that all the world is a stage but that the stage is located in Las Vegas, Nevada.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“. . . we come astonishingly close to the mystical beliefs of [Pythagoras](#) and his followers who attempted to submit all of life to the sovereignty of numbers. Many of our psychologists, sociologists, economists and other latter-day cabalists will have numbers to tell them the truth or they will have nothing. . . . We must remember that [Galileo](#) merely said that the language of *nature* is written in mathematics. He did not say that *everything* is. And even the truth about nature need not be expressed in mathematics. For most of human history, the language of nature has been the language of myth and ritual. These forms, one might add, had the virtues of leaving nature unthreatened and of encouraging the belief that human beings are part of it. It hardly befits a people who stand ready to blow up the planet to praise themselves too vigorously for having found the true way to talk about nature.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“The credibility of the teller is the ultimate test of the truth of a proposition. (102)”

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“The point is that television does not reveal who the best man is. In fact, television makes impossible the determination of who is better than whom, if we mean by 'better' such things as more capable in negotiation, more imaginative in executive skill, more knowledgeable about international affairs, more understanding of the interrelations of economic systems, and so on. The reason has, almost entirely, to do with 'image.' But not because politicians are preoccupied with presenting themselves in the best possible light. After all, who isn't? It is a rare and deeply disturbed person who does not wish to project a favorable image. But television gives image a bad name. For on television the politician does not so much offer the audience an image of himself, as offer himself as an image of the audience. And therein lies one of the most powerful influences of the television commercial on political discourse.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Writing is defined as "a conversation with no one and yet with everyone.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

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

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“It would be a serious mistake to think of Billy Graham or any other television revivalist as a latter-day Jonathan Edwards or Charles Finney. Edwards was one of the most brilliant and creative minds ever produced by America. His contribution to aesthetic theory was almost as important as his contribution to theology. His interests were mostly academic; he spent long hours each day in his study. He did not speak to his audiences extemporaneously. He read his sermons, which were tightly knit and closely reasoned expositions of theological doctrine”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“...On television, religion, like everything else, is presented, quite simply and without apology, as an entertainment. Everything that makes religion an historic, profound, sacred human activity is stripped away; there is no ritual, no dogma, no tradition, no theology, and above all, no sense of spiritual transcendence.”

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“I should go so far as to say that 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. In aesthetics, I believe the name given to this theory is Dadaism; in philosophy, nihilism; in psychiatry, schizophrenia. In the parlance of the theater, it is known as vaudeville.”

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“For no medium is excessively dangerous if its users understand what its dangers are. It is not important that those who ask the questions arrive at my answers or Marshall McLuhan's (quite different answers, by the way). This is an instance in which the asking of the questions is sufficient. To ask is to break the spell.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“We do not measure a culture based on its output of undisguised trivialities, but what it claims as significant.”

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“Every television program must be a complete package in itself. No previous knowledge is to be required. There must not be even a hint that learning is hierarchical, that it is an edifice constructed on a foundation. The learner must be allowed to enter at any point without prejudice. This is why you shall never hear or see a television program begin with the caution that if the viewer has not seen the previous programs, this one will be meaningless. Television is a nongraded curriculum and excludes no viewer for any reason, at any

time. In other words, in doing away with the idea of sequence and continuity in education, television undermines the idea that sequence and continuity have anything to do with thought itself.”

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“People will come to adore the technologies that undo their capacities to think”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“We are all, as Huxley says someplace, Great Abbreviators, meaning that none of us has the wit to know the whole truth, the time to tell it if we believed we did, or an audience so gullible as to accept it.”

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“The television commercial has mounted the most serious assault on capitalist ideology since the publication of Das Kapital. To understand why, we must remind ourselves that capitalism, like science and liberal democracy, was an outgrowth of the Enlightenment. Its principal theorists, even its most prosperous practitioners, believed capitalism to be based on the idea that both buyer and seller are sufficiently mature, well informed and reasonable to engage in transactions of mutual self-interest. If greed was taken to be the fuel of the capitalist engine, the surely rationality was the driver. The theory states, in part, that competition in the marketplace requires that the buyer not only knows what is good for him but also what is good. If the seller produces nothing of value, as determined by a rational marketplace, then he loses out. It is the assumption of rationality among buyers that spurs competitors to become winners, and winners to keep on winning. Where it is assumed that a buyer is unable to make rational decisions, laws are passed to invalidate transactions, as, for example, those which prohibit children from making contracts...Of course, the practice of capitalism has its contradictions...But television commercials make hash of it...By substituting images for claims, the pictorial commercial made emotional appeal, not tests of truth, the basis of consumer decisions. The distance between rationality and advertising is now so wide that it is difficult to remember that there once existed a connection between them. Today, on television commercials, propositions are as scarce as unattractive people. The truth or falsity of an advertiser's claim is simply not an issue. A McDonald's commercial, for example, is not a series of testable, logically ordered assertions. It is a drama--a mythology, if you will--of handsome people selling, buying and eating hamburgers, and being driven to near ecstasy by their good fortune. No claim are made, except those the viewer projects onto or infers from the drama. One can like or dislike a television commercial, of course. But one cannot refute it.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Typography fostered the modern idea of individuality, but it destroyed the medieval sense of community and integration”

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“This is the lesson of all great television commercials: They provide a slogan, a symbol or a focus that creates for viewers a comprehensive and compelling image of themselves. In the shift from party politics to television politics, the same goal is sought. We are not permitted to know who is best at being President or Governor or Senator, but whose image is best in touching and soothing the deep reaches of our discontent. We look at the television screen and ask, in the same voracious way as the Queen in *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest one of all?" We are inclined to vote for those whose personality, family life, and style, as imaged on the screen, give back a better answer than the Queen received. As Xenophanes remarked twenty-five centuries ago, men always make their gods in their own image. But to this, television politics has added a new wrinkle: Those who would be gods refashion themselves into images the viewers would have them be.”

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“Moreover, we have seen enough by now to know that technological changes in our modes of communication are even more ideology-laden than changes in our modes of transportation. Introduce the alphabet to a culture and you change its cognitive habits, its social relations, its notions of community, history and religion. Introduce the printing press with movable type, and you do the same. Introduce speed-of-light transmission of images and you make a cultural revolution. Without a vote. Without polemics. Without guerrilla resistance. Here is ideology, pure if not serene. 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. And in this sense, all Americans are Marxists, for we believe nothing if not that history is moving us toward some preordained paradise and that technology is the force behind that movement.”

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“Exposition is a mode of thought, a method of learning, and a means of expression. Almost all of the characteristics we associate with mature discourse were amplified by typography, which has the strongest possible bias toward exposition: 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; and a tolerance for delayed response.”

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“We may say then that the contribution of the telegraph to public discourse was to dignify irrelevance and amplify impotence. But this was not all: Telegraphy also made public discourse essentially incoherent. It brought into being a world of broken time and broken attention, to use Lewis Mumford's phrase. The principle strength of the telegraph was its capacity to move information, not collect it, explain it or analyze it. In this respect, telegraphy was the exact opposite of typography.”

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“The line-by-line, sequential, continuous form of the printed page slowly began to lose its resonance as a metaphor of how knowledge was to be acquired and how the world was to be understood. “Knowing” the facts took on a new meaning, for it did not imply that one understood implications, background, or connections. Telegraphic discourse permitted no time for historical perspectives and gave no priority to the qualitative. To the telegraph, intelligence meant knowing *of* lots of things, not knowing *about* them.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Terrence Moran, “yapısı gereği imajı ve parçayı güçlendirmeye yatkın olan medyayla tarihsel bir perspektif edinemeyiz” derken tam hedefi vurmaktadır. Moran'a göre kalıcılık ve bir bağlam olmayınca “elde bulunan bilgi parçaları mantıklı ve tutarlı bir bütün oluşturacak şekilde birleştirilemez.” Hatırlamayı reddetmediğimiz gibi, hatırlamayı tamamen yararsız buluyor da değiliz. Onun yerine, hatırlamaya uygun varlıklar olmaktan çıkarılıyor. Çünkü, hatırlamak nostaljiden daha fazla bir şeye eğer, kesinlikle bir bağlamsal temel; olguların onun için düzenlenip modellerin ondan çıkarılabileceği bir şey gerektirir. İmaj politikası ve anlık haberler ise böyle bir bağlam sunmaz. Bir ayna yalnızca bugün giydiklerinizi yansıtır. Dün giydikleriniz konusunda sessizdir.

Bu varsayımların bir anlamı varsa, o zaman Orwell bu noktada, en azından Batı demokrasileri açısından bir kez daha yanılmıştır. Orwell tarihin yıkılışını önceden görmüştü, ama bunu devletin yapacağına, Hakikat Bakanlığı türünde bir kurumun sistemli bir biçimde işe yaramayan olguları yasaklayıp geçmişin kayıtlarını sileceğine inanıyordu. Ancak Huxley'in daha doğru öngörüsüyle, hiçbir şeyin kaba yolla uygulanmasına ihtiyaç duyulmayacaktır. Halka bir imaj, ivedilik ve terapi politikası sunmayı amaç edinmiş, görünüşte hayırlı gibi gelen teknolojiler, tarihi aynı derecede başarılı biçimde, belki daha kalıcı olarak ve hiçbir itirazla karşılaşmadan yok edebilirler.”

— Neil Postman, *Televizyon Öldüren Eğlence: Gösteri Çağında Kamusal Söylem*

“The clearest way to see through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“To engage the written word means to follow a line of thought, which requires considerable powers of classifying, inference-making and reasoning. It means to uncover lies, confusions, and overgeneralizations, to detect abuses of logic and common sense. It also means to weigh ideas, to compare and contrast assertions, to connect one generalization to another. To accomplish this, one must achieve a certain distance from the words themselves, which is, in fact, encouraged by the isolated and impersonal text. That is why a good reader does not cheer an apt sentence or pause to applaud even an inspired paragraph. Analytic thought is too busy for that, and too detached.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“enchantment is the means through which we may gain access to sacredness. Entertainment is the means through which we distance ourselves from it.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“With television, we vault ourselves into a continuous, incoherent present.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Today, we must look to the city of Las Vegas, Nevada, as a metaphor of our national character and aspiration, its symbol a thirty-foot-high cardboard picture of a slot machine and a chorus girl. For Las Vegas is a city entirely devoted to the idea of entertainment, and as such proclaims the spirit of a culture in which all public discourse increasingly takes the form of entertainment. Our politics, religion, news, athletics, education and commerce have been transformed into congenial adjuncts of show business, largely without protest or even much popular notice. The result is that we are a people on the verge of amusing ourselves to death.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“But it is not time constraints alone that produce such fragmented and discontinuous language. When a television show is in process, it is very nearly impermissible to say, “Let me think about that” or “I don’t know” or “What do you mean when you say...?” or “From what sources does your information come?” This type of discourse not only slows down the tempo of the show but creates the impression of uncertainty or lack of finish. It tends to reveal people in the *act of thinking*, which is as disconcerting and boring on television as it is on a Las Vegas stage. Thinking does not play well on television, a fact that television directors discovered long ago. There is not much to see in it. It is, in a phrase, not a performing art. But television demands a performing art.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Of course, in television’s presentation of the “news of the day,” we may see the Now...this” mode of discourse in it’s boldest and most embarrassing form. For there, we are presented not only with fragmented news but news without context, without consequences, without value, and therefore without essential seriousness; that is to say, news as pure entertainment.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Yeni teknolojiler eskiden beri süregelen enformasyon sorununu tepetaklak etmiştir: İnsanlar bir zamanlar enformasyona gerçek hayat ortamlarını kendileri yönlendirebilmek amacıyla ihtiyaç duyarken, şimdilerde, aslında hiçbir işe yaramayan enformasyonların görünüşte yararlı olabileceği bağlamları yaratmak zorunda kalmaktadırlar.”

— Neil Postman, *Televizyon Öldüren Eğlence: Gösteri Çağında Kamusal Söylem*

“The best things on television are its junk, and no one and nothing is seriously threatened by it. Besides, we do not measure a culture by its output of undisguised trivialities but by what it claims as significant. Therein is our problem, for television is at its most trivial and, therefore, most dangerous when its aspirations are high, when it presents itself as a carrier of important cultural conversations. The irony here is that this is what intellectuals and critics are constantly urging television to do.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Marx understood well that the press was not merely a machine but a structure for discourse, which both rules out and insists upon certain kinds of content and, inevitably, a certain kind of audience.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, print put forward a definition of intelligence that gave priority to the objective, rational use of the mind and at the same time encouraged forms of public discourse with serious, logically ordered content. It is no accident that the Age of Reason was coexistent with that growth of a print culture, first in Europe and then in America.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

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Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business

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“The modern idea of testing a reader's "comprehension," as distinct from something else a reader may be doing, would have seemed an absurdity in 1790 or 1830 or 1860. What else was reading but comprehending?”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“It is not necessary to conceal anything from a public insensible to contradiction and narcotized by technological diversions”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“The television commercial has mounted the most serious assault on capitalist ideology since the publication of Das Kapital.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Televizyon okuma kültürünü yok etmiştir. Halbuki zihinsel gelişim için okuma eyleminin yerini hiçbir eylem tutamaz. Seyirci olmak için hiçbir beceri gerekmez. "Televizyon okuma-yazma kültürünü genişletmez ve pekiştirmez. Tersine, okuma-yazma kültürüne saldırır. Televizyon, herhangi bir şeyin devamıysa eğer, on beşinci yüzyıldaki matbaanın değil, 19. Yüzyılın ortasında telgraf ile fotoğrafın başlattığı geleneğin devamıdır.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“belief that where there is a problem, there must be a solution, I shall conclude with the following suggestions. We must, as a start, not delude ourselves with preposterous notions such as the straight Luddite position as outlined, for example, in Jerry Mander's Four Arguments for the Elimination of Television. Americans will not shut down any part of their technological apparatus, and to suggest that they do so is to make no suggestion at all. It is almost equally unrealistic to expect that nontrivial modifications in the availability of media will ever be made. Many civilized nations limit by law the amount of hours television may operate and thereby mitigate the role television plays in public life. But I believe that this is not a possibility in America. Once having opened the Happy Medium to full public”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“although culture is a creation of speech, it is recreated anew by every medium of communication—from painting to hieroglyphs to the alphabet to television. Each medium, like language itself, makes possible a unique mode of discourse by providing a new orientation for thought, for expression, for sensibility.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“La aparición en la arena política del asesor de imagen y el simultáneo declive del redactor de discursos atestiguan el hecho de que la televisión demanda un contenido que difiere del exigido por los otros medios. No se puede hacer filosofía política en televisión porque su forma conspira contra el contenido.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Lo mejor de la televisión es su basura y nadie ni nada está seriamente amenazado por ella. Porque no medimos una cultura por su producción de trivialidades no encubiertas, sino por lo que juzga significativo.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Tüketici psikodramalarla yatırılan bir hastadır.”

— Neil Postman, *Televizyon Öldüren Eğlence: Gösteri Çağında Kamusal Söylem*

“La inteligencia se define fundamentalmente como nuestra capacidad para captar la verdad de las cosas.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Al lector se le exigirá que asuma una actitud imparcial y objetiva. Esto incluye su aporte a la tarea de lo que Bertrand Russell denominó la “inmunidad a la elocuencia”, que significa que el lector es capaz de distinguir entre el placer sensual, el encanto, o el tono insinuante (si lo hubiere) de las palabras y la lógica de su argumento.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Creo que la epistemología creada por la televisión no sólo es inferior a la epistemología basada en la imprenta, sino que es peligrosa y absurda.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Hasta 1890, la publicidad, que hasta entonces se creía que consistía sólo en palabras, se consideraba en una empresa seria y racional cuyo propósito era transmitir información y proponer ofertas. A principios del nuevo siglo, con la intrusión masiva de ilustraciones y fotografías y el uso de eslóganes, los publicitarios dejaron de asumir la racionalidad de sus clientes potenciales. La publicidad se convirtió, por una parte, en psicología profunda, y por otra, en teoría estética.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“El legado más importante dejado por el telégrafo y la fotografía quizá sea el pseudo-contexto. Un pseudo-contexto es una estructura inventada para dar a la información fragmentada e irrelevante una apariencia útil. Pero el pseudo-contexto no proporciona acción, ni solución de problemas, ni cambio. Y eso, obviamente, es entretener. Podríamos decir que el pseudo-contexto es el último refugio de una cultura abrumada por la irrelevancia, la incoherencia y la impotencia.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Cuando se está transmitiendo un programa de televisión, es prácticamente imposible decir “Déjeme pensar en ello” o “¿qué quiere decir cuando afirma...?”. Este tipo de discurso no sólo enlentece el ritmo del espectáculo, sino que crea una impresión de incertidumbre o falta de determinación. Tiende a revelar a la gente que el acto de pensar es tan desconcertante o aburrido en la televisión como lo es en los escenarios de Las Vegas. Los directores de televisión hace mucho tiempo que descubrieron que el acto de pensar no encaja bien en ese medio. No hay mucho que ver en él.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Los estadounidenses ya no hablan entre sí, sino que se entretienen recíprocamente. No intercambian ideas, sino imágenes.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Cada candidato disponía de cinco minutos para contestar una pregunta como la siguiente: ¿cuál es (o podría ser) su política en América Central?. En una circunstancia como esta, la complejidad, la documentación y la lógica no pueden jugar ningún papel, y ciertamente la sintaxis fue abandonada en varias ocasiones. Pero eso no importa, porque los oradores estaban menos preocupados por dar argumentos que en “causar” impresión, que es lo que la televisión realiza mejor.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“La ignorancia es siempre corregible pero, ¿qué pasaría con nosotros si llegáramos a aceptar que la ignorancia es conocimiento?”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Cada uno tiene su opinión. Quizá sea más preciso llamarlas emociones en lugar de opiniones, cosa que explicaría por qué cambian cada semana.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Los tiranos siempre han confiado, y lo hacen aún, en la censura. Después de todo éste es el tributo que los tiranos pagan por suponer que el público conoce la diferencia entre el discurso serio y el entretenimiento, y que le importa.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Todo nuestro pasado nos ha preparado para reconocer y resistir una prisión cuando las rejas empiezan a cerrarse detrás de nosotros. Nos alzamos en armas contra estos problemas. Pero ¿qué si no se sienten gritos de angustia? ¿Quién está preparado para luchar contra un mar de diversiones? ¿A quién y cuándo nos quejamos, y en qué tono de voz, cuando un discurso serio se disuelve en risas estúpidas?”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Finalmente, Huxley intentaba decirnos que lo que afligía a la gente en “Un mundo feliz” no era que estaban riendo en lugar de pensar, sino que no sabían de qué se reían y por qué habían dejado de pensar.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“The television commercial is about products only in the sense that the story of Jonah is about the anatomy of whales,”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“We rarely talk about television, only about what’s on television”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

“Think of Richard Nixon or Jimmy Carter or Billy Graham, or even Albert Einstein, and what will come to your mind is an image, a picture of face, (in Einstein's case, a photograph of a face). Of words, nothing will come to mind. This is the difference between thinking in a word-centered culture and thinking in an image-centered culture.”

— Neil Postman, *Amusing Ourselves to Death: Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business*

MXX: Agent Soldier

"They created me, and it's my time now."