



Neil Postman - Amusing and Informing Ourselves to Death

By Julia Schubert

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Seminar paper from the year 2005 in the subject English Language and Literature Studies - Culture and Applied Geography, grade: 1, Martin Luther University (Institut für Anglistik und Amerikanistik), course: Orality and Literacy, 17 entries in the bibliography, language: English, abstract: The central topics of the works of the writer, educator, communication theorist, social critic and cultural commentator Neil Postman have always been the media, their different forms of communication and their meanings to people, society and culture. Any of his books was built around the McLuhan-question: "Does the form of any medium of communication affect our social relations, our political ideas, or psychic habits, and of course, as he [Marshall McLuhan] always emphasized, our sensorium" (Postman: 07/30/05)? Postman was aware of the fact that a new technology and therefore a new medium may have destructive as well as creative effects. During the history of mankind there have been tremendous changes in the forms, volume, speed and context of information and it is necessary to find out what these changes meant and mean to our cultures (Postman: 1985, 160). For him, it is a basic principle that "the clearest way to see through a culture is to attend to its tools for conversation" (Postman: 1985, 8). In the book "Amusing Ourselves to Death - Public Discourse in the Age of Show Business" Postman examines, from a 1980s viewpoint, the changes in the American culture caused by the shift from the Age of Reason with the printed word at its center to the Age of Show Business with television as the central medium - or in simplifying terms the shift from rationality to triviality. Twenty years later, the situation has changed again. This term paper will make an attempt to answer the question what the new media, especially the internet, did to the modern (American) culture and to its public discourse. Obviously, Postman's provocative title "Amusing Ourselves to Death" was just the beginning

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Neil Postman - Amusing and Informing Ourselves to Death By Julia Schubert Bibliography

- Sales Rank: #8998649 in Books
- Published on: 2013-11-23
- Original language: English
- Number of items: 1
- Dimensions: 8.27" h x .8" w x 5.83" l, .12 pounds
- Binding: Paperback
- 32 pages

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