



Speed of Cultural Change

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Source: *College Composition and Communication*, Vol. 9, No. 1 (Feb., 1958), pp. 16-20

Published by: National Council of Teachers of English

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/354088>

Accessed: 08/04/2009 00:11

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ter all, is something that is shaped into being for a special purpose, much as a technical object. The design engineer should be guided in his work by the requirements of function almost alone. (Of course, if he happens to have a boss who likes to embellish the object with useless doo-dads, why then he may have to modify his work accordingly to keep his job—as automobile designers do every day; but we try never to have in mind unreasonable situations of this sort). It is as pointless for the design engineer to use three bolts where one would do (both for safety and function), to make an object square when its use dictates it should be round, to take the long way through a process when there is a short way, as it is for the technical writer to commit any of the sins I have mentioned. Technical writing—informative writing of any sort—should be as clean, as functional, as inevitable as any modern machine designed to do a job well. If I will not be misunderstood in throwing out this thought, I should like to suggest to you that good technical writing should be like good poetry—every word

in its exact place for maximum effect, no word readily replaceable by another, not a word too many or too few, and the whole combination, so to speak, invisible, not calling attention to its structure, seemingly effortless, perfectly adapted to its subject.

If one takes this general approach to the shaping of a piece of technical writing, and there really can't be much excuse for any other, then there is no need to worry about any of the sins I mention. Virtue may not come at once or automatically, for good writing never comes without effort, however fine one's intentions, but it will certainly come, and perhaps even bring with it that same satisfaction the creative engineer experiences. Technical writing cleansed of its sins is no less worthy, no less impressive, an enterprise than good engineering itself. Like mathematics to physics, technical writing is a handmaid to technology, but like mathematics, too, it can be a helpmate, that is, an equal partner. But it can achieve this reward of virtue only by emphasizing the virtues of writing equally with those of technology.

Speed of Cultural Change¹

MARSHALL McLuhan²

There was a young chap who took his girl to a very wonderful restaurant and the very first spoonful of soup he put in his mouth scalded him and he looked wildly around for a minute and then he let it go all over his date, and after they both recovered a bit, he said, "You know, there are some people who would have swallowed that." But I am really not here, I hope, under any false pretenses,

and I don't want to make any great personal impression, for I think the situation we are all involved in is too important for that. It is so accelerated a situation that to articulate quickly what is going on requires the skill of a sports announcer. We really have, in order to keep up with ourselves, to develop that sort of sport-announcing reportage on just the plays that are going on around us. There were three umpires once who were having a little chat and comparing professional notes, and one said, "Well, I calls 'em as I sees 'em," and the second one said, "As for me, I calls 'em as they are,"

¹A slightly revised tape recording of a talk presented at the luncheon of the Conference on College Composition and Communication, Hotel Leamington, Minneapolis, November 29, 1957, during the convention of the National Council of Teachers of English.

²University of Toronto

and the third one said, "Until I call 'em, they ain't." Now, I don't want to get into that third position for I think it is the temptation of all persons in the field of English to feel that until they have decided to recognize that something is going on, it just "ain't."

I am going to use a sort of headline technique here of presentation for a while, but I want to comment on the headline form before beginning to use it. It is called a form of outrageous generalization when I use it. I see it as a beach-head of the mind. The headline itself is mainly the product of the telegraph. When news begins to come in so fast that it can't be spelled out, can't be organized editorially, then the editor has to package it in capsulated form by new methods as best he can, and he tosses the final package to the audience and says "Do it yourself, I have collected the data, it is up to you to put it together."

The first phase of the electronic revolution produced the headline among many other language changes. Now, in the 1840's when the telegraph was in a very early phase, Edgar Allan Poe made the first imaginative response to this new medium. I think this is a key point for all of us in the field of English, since it concerns the meaning of the media for the teaching of English. I think Mr. Edgar Allan Poe has a lot to say to us because he invented simultaneously two new techniques of communication that were previously unknown in literature, or almost unknown—the symbolist poem and the detective story. Now, the very peculiar property of these two forms is that the audience is expected to be co-author, co-creator. You are not given a completely processed package, you are not given an object ready for quick and easy consumption. You are given a series of clues, and a series of parts with instructions, hints, and suggestions and

the general over-all instruction, "Do it yourself."

It has taken us 100 years from then to realize that the meaning of the electronic revolution is a "Do -it-yourself movement." We have been so fascinated by the mechanical and the mechanistic and the automatic that we have overlooked the obvious meaning which has been known to the poets and painters for a century. The electronic revolution means "do it yourself"—"you are the poet." Mr. Eliot constantly annoys people who ask him, "Did you, when you wrote this line in Sweeney," or some other poem, "did you mean so and so?" And Mr. Eliot always says, "Well, I must have, if that's what you got." This seems utterly baffling and unreasonable to the ordinary inquirer, but it is part of this basic attitude of "Do it yourself, you are the poet, too."

Poe's way of accepting the technological challenge offers, I think, a strategy of culture; and when you look at the way in which poets have, not just beginning with Poe, but much earlier, responded to technological change, and general, environmental change; when you look at Chaucer and his response to the new languages that were pouring into the English world at that time, or look at any poet's response to his new environment, you will always find an imaginative acceptance of the challenge, and a new mode of presenting poetic experience resulting from this acceptance. So you can use the history of poetry as a kind of inside history of the human imagination at grips with the technological over the centuries. Poe grasped the fact that the instantaneous movement of information put the consumer of the same in a creative role previously held as a monopoly by the writer.

This matter of what Toynbee calls challenge and response between language arts and the developing technol-

ogy of the West is a totally unlooked at field; but you cannot study contemporary literature without becoming very much aware that this is a fact. The use of movies, of newspaper technique and many other media by Eliot, Joyce, and Pound is very well known. Now, in presenting these matters I don't want to be in the position of the amateur photographer who enthusiastically displayed some of his exhibits to his friends saying: "Now, I want you especially in the next picture to observe the look of amazement that comes over the car driver's face as he drives around the bend and sees me standing in the middle of the road just before he goes over the side of the cliff!" I don't want to make these presentations quite so distracting or terrifying. I really want you to check situations that are here being referred to.

We have as a result of the electronic revolution grown up on mechanization. This is not entirely sudden, yet when people talk about the mass media today they still seem to think they are talking about mechanical media. Our new media are not mechanical; there are no moving parts. The moving picture is a machine, but radio and television are not machines in the older sense. The moving picture is a mechanical means of producing a certain kind of illusion while radio and television are not. The movement of information by electronic means is instantaneous and there is no mechanism that can do this. It is this astonishing new dimension of the instantaneous that has transformed our human interrelationships into a pattern of conspicuous coexistence. Mr. Caldwell's wonderful talk last night³ about the interdependence resulting from new global conditions, fits my occasion here equally well. There is a new interdependence,

not only of people, but of media (and of school subjects) resulting from the instantaneous movement of information. You can't send information instantly without creating a new pattern of learning and new undeveloped countries of the mind as well. It is very different from any previous methods of moving information except those in tiny primitive communities. Now, one of the amazing things that happen when a medium of any sort is used with increasing skill is that a kind of reversal of characteristics occurs. I have noted this many times in historical studies of media, but I do not pretend to understand why it should be so.

Let me illustrate from the thing familiar to us all, the road. Let us take only the road on this continent in our own time. At first it is devised to move the country or things from the country to the city. As it improves it serves even more to bring the city to the country. As it improves some more it begins to become a substitute for the country—you take a spin in the country, meaning on the highway. As it improves some more it becomes a wall a thousand feet high between you and the country. When by road it is impossible to get to the country anymore, we build a new kind of country to fit the new kind of highway and we now call it a throughway. Now this is straight technological change within the one medium, the road; but related to this change is the car which has moved rapidly in very recent years from the status of vehicle to the status of clothing, as pointed out by Reuel Denny. You might have imagined that a car was safely and permanently categorized as a means of transportation, but far more obviously it is now a form of dress and of status.

Now these reversals occur in all media. The book has undergone these reversals many times. It began merely as a cheaper form of manuscript. But with-

³Oliver J. Caldwell, Director, Division of International Education, U. S. Office of Education, talking on "How Wide Is Your World?"

in a century—say by the time of Montaigne—even the printers recognized that it was not a substitute for the manuscript, and so they agreed to paginate books. Manuscripts were of little use as works of reference and so were not paginated. But to Montaigne the true meaning of print was revealed, as was the meaning of the telegraph to Edgar Poe. Montaigne saw that print afforded a wholly new intellectual experience and challenge. His *Essais* are, as he tells us, a *peinture de la pensee*, a painting or snap-shotting of the mind in movement—candid camera technique applied to thought and learning processes. When all the consequences of this impact of print on the mind had been worked out, the movie was born, and is the complete reversal of print. Yet Montaigne saw the fact of print from the beginning as a series of still shots of the mind in motion.

Photography is a curious example of similar reversal. At first a form of intensifying publicity, it drove the rich of 1900 into lives of obscurity because whereas, up to that period they had been luxuriating in publicity, they found the intense publicity of the photograph too much for them. They changed their whole way of life. Conspicuous consumption as seen in the lives of the few ceased with the photograph, and it became rather a means of advertising consumption by the many. Another reversal now comes with the rich clamoring to get in at the back door of the photographic studios to act as clothes horses and models for the world of color photography.

But these reversals you will find are predictable in all the media. The new media are not mass media any more than language is, which is a mass medium if you think about it for a moment. New media are new languages and as much as French, or Russian, or Italian in ear-

lier periods of our own language, these new languages modified the existing media in the sixteenth century as much as press and movies, etc., modify English today.

We are today hearing about TV for the classroom. Meanwhile psychologists are experimenting with means of tapping brain centers and feeding visual imagery directly to brain centers of people who have no sight. Can you not see looming something far more ludicrous than anything that Orwell ever dreamed of? Namely the cranium plug. It may be possible for all of us to be wired not for sound but for Greek, or physics or English. Plugged in to some new subject, we can go to bed with a sleeping pill and wake up vastly learned. This is the Rip Van Winkleism of the future. We could all of us, as someone said, "Join the herd that was shot around the world." This was apropos of the Sputniks to come.

Margaret Mead in her book *New Lives for Old* has described a situation which is very relevant to us all, a situation in which people move from the stone age to the jet age in ten years. As a result of this study done in the Admiralty Islands twenty-five years ago and again recently, her conviction was that change is harmless provided it occurs fast enough. This is somewhat like the "painless" removal of a large strip of adhesive from the chest by a quick yank. I think, however, that the meaning is somewhat different. I think the meaning is this: that you can move from the stone age to the jet age because you are moving from a culture in which everything is simultaneous, in which everyone knows everything and everyone hears daily everything that happens, to a similar culture on a vast global scale, in which the intuitive and the immediate and total consciousness of the primitive man becomes the most universal and civilized form of consciousness.

We are moving very rapidly and at high speed naturally from an area in which business has for, say a century, been our culture, to a situation in which culture is going to be our business. And intermediate between those two poles stands the entertainment industry, which has been processing materials from each of these poles. The entertainment industry is a huge cultural jungle which we have done very little to sort out or make meaningful to our charges, our students, so far. As entertainment increasingly moves toward culture, it becomes more and more easy for us to tackle this job. We are familiar with those numerous management training programs in which Proust and various other great books are compulsory reading for executives. The executive world today no longer regards culture as antithetic to its kind of life. On the contrary, as business becomes more and more co-extensive with the whole consumer world, it feels that it

must achieve mastery of the highest culture of its time so that it can produce good executives. A few months ago there ran week after week an advertisement which many of you have seen in the *New York Times*: "Wanted: 16 girl Ph.D.'s, field of no consequence, no dancing experience necessary, MA's need not apply. These 16 girl Ph.D.'s to form the Hi-Fi Beta chorus of the Flamingo Room in Las Vegas." You have executives mastering Proust on one side and the Flamingo Room advertising for Ph.D's on the other side. This is the sort of thing I had in mind when I made that outrageous generalization that we are moving from a period in which business has long been our culture to one in which culture is our everyday business. Last year T. S. Eliot spoke in this city on *The Limits of Criticism* to an audience of 13,273 people in the Sports Stadium. Criticism may have its limits, but culture does not!

Intensive Adverbs from a Quantitative Point of View¹

NORMAN CLIFF²

Psychologists studying linguistic behavior are interested in a variety of problems: the discrimination of speech sounds, language-learning, translation, the development of meaning, to name a few. One problem of considerable interest is that of describing the psychological process of verbal communication, how words are used to transmit an intended message. Since this process is the major concern of teachers of composition, the results of some recent experiments on an aspect of this problem may be of interest.

¹The research discussed in this paper is published in more detail under the title *The Relation of Adverb-Adjective Combinations to their Components* as a Research Bulletin of Educational Testing Service, 20 Nassau Street, Princeton, New Jersey.

²United States Public Health Service

In general, a mathematical description of a phenomenon is to be desired because of the advantages accruing from the conciseness of mathematical statement and the high development of the rules for handling mathematical statements. Simplicity of mathematical statement is also highly desirable. At the present time a fair amount of effort is being directed toward simple quantitative descriptions of the process of communication, describing the quantitative properties of various types of words.

The first clear-cut quantitative description of the way a word is used to come to light is that of the intensive adverbs. We are all familiar with the way they are used to alter the intensity of the word they modify, making it more or