

Amusing ourselves to death by neil postman



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Summary Essay of “ Amusing Ourselves to Death” This is a breakdown of Neil Postman’s “ Amusing ourselves to death”(1985), which must be written to explain the effects that high volume of emails, text messages, video games, and internet television has on the human race and the way we think. In the first chapter of the book “ The Medium is the Metaphor” Postman (1985) begins his argument that he presents through out the book. Postman (1985) explains how knowledge is no longer gained from print, but from visual. This change is dramatic and irreversibly and the two print and visual can not accommodate one another.

In chapter 2 Postman (1985) lays out a plan for the book. Postman (1985) rants and raves about how television is evil and has destroyed our minds and way of thinking. “ The Medium is the Metaphor” is the beginning chapter which Postman (1985) expresses his concerns about the media and the damages it has caused in our lives. Postman (1985) suggests that different American cities have served as the primary metaphor for the United States at different times.

Boston once was central for its revolutionary ignificance. Then, New York became the fundamental design because of its reputation as melting pot. Chicago had its day during the industrial expansion. Postman (1985) proposes that Las Vegas due to its devotion to entertainment is best symbolized.

This is where Postman (1985) discloses his main thesis “ all public discourse increasingly takes the form of entertainment”, which is how we are “ slowly amusing ourselves to death” (p. 3-4). Postman (1985) speaks about Ronald

Reagan who at the time was the President, naming him a Hollywood actor and touches on other political figures that worry more about their appearance than their ideas and respect. Postman (1985) introduces his hypothesis by presenting the pure notion that the ideas any society expresses will be dictated by the forms in which it communicates them. He defines cultures as “ conversation” metaphorically, as representing “ all techniques and technologies that permit people of a particular culture to exchange messages” (p.

6). Backing up his attestations, he gives several examples. Native Americans communicating long distances using smoke signals, they could likely not have had philosophical communication. The limitations of the form affect what can be realistically communicated. As another example President Taft was a fat man, one who would more than likely not be elected today because of his appearance. However, in a world without television he would be elected due to his intelligence and political arguments which held more clout than appearance.

Postman’s (1985) most important example “ the news of the day” could not exist without proper media to give it expression (p. 7). Even though corruption has always occurred amongst the human race, it was not as bearing on a person’s everyday life until media made it possible for them to be communicated at a faster pace. In this chapter Postman explains how we have turned from the “ Age of Typography” to the “ Age of Television” and how the young require all communication to be in the form of entertainment (p.

8). He implies that our form of speaking works through “ media- like without telling us anything. They limit and regulate what the world must be (p. 10). Postman (1985) then speaks about the clock and how it serves as a metaphor for the way we look at the world, moments turning into other moments. The clock serves s a conversation man has with himself through technology.

Postman (1985) suggests writing “ freezes speech” in an unalterable form, it allows for one man’s thoughts to inspire a critical reaction, to create an ongoing conversation that only deepens the perspectives of the original thought (p. 12). Postman (1985) explains his digression as central to his purpose to show how “ our own tribe is undergoing a vast and trembling shift from the magic of writing to the magic of electronics” (p. 13). He is saying that our technology and tools are serving as a type of mind control and we are n deep.

In Chapter 2 “ Media as Epistemology Postman (1985) begins to tell us his plans for the book. Epistemology means the theory of knowledge, how we gain and use knowledge. Postman (1985) wants to clear his name of being a snob by insisting that his focus is on epistemology rather than aesthetics. He insists that he not only appreciates Junk, but also finds it harmless. He believes that television is at its best when it aims solely to entertain, but that it is at its worst and most dangerous when “ its aspirations are high” (p. 16). Postman (1985) takes the time to explain what he eans by epistemology and the chapter title. He believes that every medium has resonance, for it is a metaphor with large scale implications. In. particular, a medium or

technology of communication imposes itself on the way we understand and define truth. Postman (1985) speaks of truth as a bias for each culture and illustrates some of our own biases.

He does not mean to suggest that all means of deriving truth are equal, but only means to show how our media is so crucial towards determining how we derive truth. And from that he wishes to show how television has led us to grow sillier by the minute" (24). Our culture conversations take place solely through image, and so do its limitations to carry truth limit our ability to communicate truth. Postman (1985) announces his intention to further explore the idea of intelligence in a print culture in following chapters.

He wishes to show how our ability to manage truth has declined as a result of the television age. " We are undergoing a vast and trembling shift from the magic of writing to the magic of electronics". Postman (1985) will further explain this in his chapters to come.