

DIGITAL IMAGING AND PHOTOGRAPHY

SUNDAY, 21 FEBRUARY 2010

Cyberculture to E-Culture (sounds so late eighties early 90s)? Erm... Towards E-topia? Part 1

At the moment I sense a creeping technological determinism in my writing. From John Berger's discussion of television, film, photography and oil painting to the more recent programmes on the virtual revolution, we see the ways in which technology seems to shape our perception of the world around us and shapes 'our' culture and helps us re-present reality. Like Vertov's 'mechanical eye', which was 'free... for today and forever from human immobility' (Berger, 1972 p.12) our 'eyes' can travel immense distances through networks of the World Wide Web and the Internet. We can now visit the Grand Canyon on our computer screens via Google Earth. There is another invention that radically changed European culture and politics, an 'ancestor' of the WWW: the European technology of printing and moveable type, in the 15th Century by Johannes Gutenberg. This technology was a key development in the Renaissance and became a major factor in the Reformation. To those privileged to read (remember most Europeans of the fifteenth century were illiterate), all world knowledge in the west resided in two sets of texts: The Bible and the works of Aristotle. Today, we throw the equivalent amount of information into the recycling bin after we have finished with our Sunday newspaper. How many words exist on the WWW? It is also important to note that in the 15th Century 'our' main source of information came from village gossip, art and the pulpit.

Tim Berners-Lee, the 'inventor' of the web and the HTML code (of course he had a little help from Ted Nelson who devised hypertext), has on a number of occasions explained his role as inventor and as an observer and commentator of its use and rapid expansion. The Internet was initially invented in the 1960s, a product of the military-industrial complex to allow scientists and the military to share information and maintain communications in the event of a nuclear attack. Post cold war, from being a tool of largely governmental agencies the Internet quickly became a global network.

The idea of a global network of easily accessible information is a product of liberal capitalism and a democratic society. These inventions have created a virtual soapbox, where theoretically everyone has the right to publish: a right to free speech. Tony Benn the ex-labour MP, sees the Internet/WWW as something that is beyond the control of governments. However, since many sites are unedited there is the threat of misinformation and for the potential circulation of dangerous ideas.

POSTED BY JOHN HUDSON AT 15:16 

LABELS: CYBERCULTURE, CYBERSPACE, DIGITAL, DIGITAL CULTURE, MEDIA TECHNOLOGIES AND PUBLIC SPHERES, MODERNISM, NEW MEDIA, THEORY, WEB 2.0