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Materials for a reflection on “electronic media” and “spirituality”
R.-F. Poswick, osb - Crec-Avex 9-10 Janvier 2003

I would like to take the largest view possible on what may mean for mankind, in the line of the History of Salvation as thought in the Christian Tradition, the current cultural changes (mostly based on the universal adoption of the “electronic writing”).

1. One must first have a shared understanding of what is the electronic writing: whereform it comes (history), extension of its domain (geomediatic), functioning.
2. One must next see the fields and the ways the electronic writing impact on the life and teaching of Christian communities.
3. To face the changes brought by the electronic writing, we need a new “anthropology” (i.e.: vision of mankind); and this new anthropology calls for a renewed spirituality.

One will find attached some “files”, often in form of question, that could help for such a reflection giving materials in the line of the three steps suggested above.

- Language of the electronic culture ►
- Internet and the new world order for information and communication ►
- Twelve questions to the Churches about computers'culture ►
- How to transfer the Word of God from alphabetic to electronic writing: conditions and challenges ►
- Evaluating a WEB site: some criteria ►

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Language of the computer's culture

1. Computing Jargon ▶
 2. Computing "languages" (programming) ▶
 3. Language of the Computer's Culture ▶
 4. The electronic Writing revolution ▶
- Conclusion: Towards the Homo creativus ▶

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1. Computing jargon

Domain language, slang or a shift in human expression?

- Sigla (new names, acronyms, new meaning)
- juxtaposed names
- degrammaticalization (syntax economy in verbs and particles; terminologization: desambiguation for univocity)
- artificial languages for programming (american/international English subset)
- signal-language (5/5) and logo-language (:o)

2. Computing "languages" (programming) ►

3. Language of the Computer's Culture ►

4. The electronic Writing revolution ►

Conclusion: Towards the Homo creativus ►

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Does logic have heart?

- Electronics (low power) for human communication
- Coding, convention, machine language (from ASCII to UNICODE)
- Assembler, Macros, HTML (XML)
see text on GML to SGML to HTML to XML
- Programming logic
- High level programming languages
see Chart: Genealogy of Programming languages
- Telematics (digitization, electronic transfer, telecommunications)
- Natural language interfaces (speech recognition, automatic translation)

Can "expression" be limited to "coding"?

EXPRESSIBLE = CODIBLE?

3. Language of the Computer's Culture ►

4. The electronic Writing revolution ►

Conclusion: Towards the Homo creativus ►

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3. Language of the Computer's Culture

- The medium is the message
- Impact on person and society
- Reduction of brain processes to material support
- Change in the feeling of space (de-materialization, virtualization, de-localization)
- Change in the feeling of time (light speed and human rythm)
- Planetization (globalization, exploration of the Univers)
- see Chart on time/audience ratio in the media
- see Chart on Electronic media using digital writing

What could be specific to human being?

4. The electronic Writing revolution ►

Conclusion: Towards the Homo creativus ►

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4. The electronic Writing revolution

Does WRITING = CULTURE?

- From biological communication (DNA) to orality
- From orality to pictogram
- From image to sound (conceptualization and alphabetization, linearity)
- Gutenberg: reduction of communication to the (printed) letter
- see Chart of Grammar variables for various media
- Electronic coding (digitization, electronic writing): aleatory, discrete, controlled, materialized, versatile, miniaturized, feasible, fast, universal
- see Chart of the characteristics of electronic writings

Conclusion: Towards the Homo creativus ▶

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Conclusion: Towards the Homo creativus

- Socialization of human consciousness
- Personal freedom and individuation through creativity (social protection of privacy and creation)
- Dual society: 2 or 3 hours of productive work versus life-time human life (creation) - risks of deal between a technocrats'oligarchy and the mass of consumers; or between technicologically rich an technicologically poor
- Voluntary development of human brain in new lines through computer education (underdeveloped human potentialities)
- New relation to knowledge
- Prothetic multisensorial complete communication (virtualization of the relation to the body)
- Homo Creativus (co-creative, oriented towards mastering the universe, voice / expression / consciousness of the creation).

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World new order for information and communication

(a tentative application of the UNESCO Mac-Bride Report of 1980 to the INTERNET -
by R.-F. Poswick, Nov. 1999)

1. Ensure autonomy at the various levels (from information producer to servor, to user).
2. Fight against any inequality of access to this communication tool.
3. Give priority to contents enhancing conscientization and participation of all (we could add: church-linked people should be an example for this!).
4. Give priority to contents for education and personnal development.
5. When creating Web sites, favouring culturally rooted sites; and allow a large diversity and equality for each culture to express itself.
6. Have a collectivist (communitarian or "public service") approach of communication, with educational and developmental aims, and not first a commercial approach.
7. Educating the consciousness of actors in this domain of communication both for freedom and responsibility.
8. Be vigilant to ask for a variety of contents and the possibility for users to remain free in their hoices of access.
9. Strengthening social and communitarian links through the use of this new tool of communication.
10. Help technologically poor people at local level, but also through technology transfer between rich and poor regions or nations.
11. Ensure that Church-linked people and organizations are conforming to those rules for internal as well as for external use; and strengthen their duty to activate those rules in their professionnall environment.
12. Having the will that this new tool develop into a tool for cooperation worldwide.

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Twelve Questions to the Churches about the "Computers' Culture"

This is an update from a questionnaire prepared by Br. R.-F. Poswick, osb, for the European Bishops responsible of the Media, at their meeting in Bad-Schönbrunn in April 1983. The questions are still largely unanswered at the time of the present update: 30th January 2001.

1. Mythisation of the "Computers' Culture" is often expressed: it is either an apocalyptic tool announcing the end of mankind, or it is the way to salvation (cybernetic messianism). Is demythologization enough to make it a culturally neutral tool or environment?
2. How far will the move from alphabetic writing to electronic writing affect and modify a religious culture strongly rooted in "Scriptures"?
3. Will the analogic and symbolic languages used to transmit Faith's contents resist the global or signal language (both reducing reality) of the electronic culture?
4. A pedagogy clearly based on the electronic media changes radically teaching and education, notably suppressing the relationship between a master and a disciple. Are we ready for those changes, notably for religious education?
5. How do we work at filling the gap between technologically rich and technologically poor people? And what are we doing to promote computer literacy for everybody?
6. There is a risk that a lot of brain's activities could be reduced to their economical value counted in "equivalent-to-robot". What are the functions specific to mankind (versus robot)?
7. What alternative "life style" are we proposing in a society and culture where "work" is changing drastically (productivity, time, ways, duration, relation, difficulty)?
8. Facing the trends of this new society (and culture) towards individualism and mass-reaction or manipulation, what is made to promote the person and the community?
9. Do we have an inventory of the fields where faithful see changes to their way of living because of the new culture (ethics, privacy, finances, politics, learning, multiculturalism, pluralism, etc.)? How to deal with those changes in accordance with the message of the Gospel?
10. How could we evangelize the structures of the "Computers' Culture"? what are the key-deciding points in this environment? Are we present at those points?
11. What specific interactive services and data bases must be developed first by Christians, for themselves and for their neighbour (worldwide and at a local level)?

12. How should we manage "economically" (and "financially") the needed changes?



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Some challenges to transfer the Word of God from an
alphabetical writing into an electronic writing by R.-F.
Poswick, OSB, 1999

To transfer the Word of God from alphabetical writing ("scripture") to an electronic writing, one needs to take in account first of all the true nature of this Word (divine and thus transcending any form used for its transmission); but one needs also to take in account the characteristics of the "electronic writing" where they are different, intrinsically or in the way it is used or in its environment, from the alphabetic writing. One must notably take in account the following parameters:

1. Electronic media are circular: using the same writing for graphs, sound, image, transmission, those media are referring or even linking one to another, making, more and more, an environment.
2. Image is fascinating, much more than sound or alpha-phonetic graphs. It fills imagination and hinder imagination to develop freely. How should we put the image at the right place? What is this place?
3. The "ground" (background, environment, general picture) communicates more than the explicit verbal (conceptual) message.
4. There is a permanent and fast renewing (apparently): mode, tubs, stars, happenings, TV and radio programming. Change is an integral part of this new environment.
5. The quest is more and more for usefull information to consume: storry (narratology), discourse (rhetoric) are disapearing; intuition comes before logic.
6. Time duration is replaced by instantaneity; sens of history may be lost.
7. Cultures are interacting permanently and immediately. Space loose its dimension of distance. Religious (notably abrahamic religious) are present daily and everywhere one to another.
8. Knowledge has a value in the information economy; with a risk to reduce human values to its value in "robots-equivalence". This could reach also religious knowledge.
9. A new definition of what could be specific to mankind is developping under the search for artificial intelligence: consciousness, remembrance, judgment, relation, affection, desire.
10. A lot of "intelligent" functions of mankind are already materialized: memory, raisoning, communicating, sensing, etc.
11. Realities are virtualized. Concepts or images which were up to now references are becoming obsolete or difficult to understand (body, king, lam, etc.)
12. Way of life in society is changing: end of work, isolation, interdependance, horizontality of relationship, less responsabilisation,

depersonalization, trivialization, etc.



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Evaluating a WEB site: some criteria

1. Form and nature of the address (reserved names)
2. Time of connection
3. Time to display the home page (server, communication, page layout)
4. Time to display: ratio to amount of information on screen
5. Were are the responsible named, described, signed? (association, webmaster, individual)
6. Reference value of the responsible
7. Layout "readability" (color, types, aggressivity, movement, hierarchy of information, helps, ground)
8. Orthography
9. Pages without information
10. Number of levels (pages) to access a real information
11. Commercial or confidentiality barriers (password, subscription)
12. Quality of information (content)
13. Main "menu" (permanent access, return to)
14. Multilinguism (initial, constant, correctness)
15. Bugs in some links
16. Images (choice, colors, quality, text in image, size, time to display)
17. Buttons (intuitively accessible, with textual explanation, form, visibility, discretion)
18. "Cookies" or other "commercial" aggression (number of "advertising" items or auto-guidance to commercial items)
19. "Plugs in" (transparency, inside or outside the same site)
20. "Links" (form, nature, content: to whom, to which is the site "linked", Back to site)
21. Copyrights management, signature of pages, credits, sources
22. Data Base management
23. Referenciation in various search engine (Google, Yahoo, Altvista, etc.)
24. Updating (last upgrade, frequency)
25. Statistics of access

