

CMNS110 - Reading Summary One  
*“The Persistence Of The Word”, James Gleick*

Instructor:  
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“The Persistence Of The Word”, by James Gleick talks about the various different ways of how modern technology have created a secondary quality of being verbally communicated. He indicates that, to concise the technologies of information internalised over two millennia requires a leap of imagination backward into a forgotten past. He further explains that the one technology that is by far the hardest to erase from our minds is writing. This is because of the fact that every detail we know about our past selves is because of writing and to erase writing means to erase our past. In the 1960’s and 70’s, Ong declared the electronic age to be a new age of orality, but of ‘*Secondary Orality*’. By this he meant the spoken word taking a new form/structure, it being amplified than its previous utilisation. We can quite literally hear the word taking its voice against universal text from a particular sender.

Gleick further talks about how Language is not a form of technology, no matter how efficient or well developed we make it. It is not a separate entity from the mind but more rather what the mind does in order to better understand the surroundings. He says, “*Language in fact bears the same relationship to the concept mind that legislation bears to the concept of parliament.*” Writing is a concrete performance but when the word is inscribed in paper or stone, it takes a separate existence as an artifice. And just like many other technologies, it inspired many other iterations of it, just like getting a software update to an operating system. On the other hand, the written word is also dissimulating in many ways. It is very far fetched from the real, the free flowing sound of language. Consequently, It served as a method to draw

knowledge away from a person, as a way to place a person's memories in storage. He also explains the cruciality of transition of the representation of things to the representation of spoken language. There is a transition of pictographic to ideographic to logographic. Writing allows for definition and classification. Power is a factor that we have to consider when we talk about writing as tool/technology. It is one of the sole factors that comes into play when talking about the influence it had on the structure, depth and transmission. But, this also works as a double edged sword as Writing and Language on their own also played as a great influence on power.

The Persistence of Writing made it possible to impose a certain structure on what was know about the world and then, what was known, about knowing. In that context, Spoken words also transport information but not with the same level of self-consciousness that writing makes it possible. He finally concludes the reading by referring to a statement by Ong, which says, "*It is demoralising to remind oneself that there is no dictionary in that mind, that lexicographical apparatus is a very late accretion to language.*"