Khemraj Persaud

Professor Lestón

ENG 1710-HD10

*Language and Technology: The Shaping of Me*

Abstract

In this essay, *Language and Technology: The Shaping of Me,* I am going to share some of the ways in which language and technology have touched my life. From some of my earliest memories and how my family influenced me using language to how language permits me to express myself socially, academically, and creatively and how technology helps me achieve that, this essay will describe my experiences and how they have molded me into the person that I am today.

*Language and Technology: The Shaping of Me*

Language and technology are cornerstones of human society, as they have allowed us to communicate and grow throughout our history. My relationship with language and technology over the years has been a complex and dynamic one. One of my earliest memories is of me playing with my newborn brother in a small living room. I remember playing with him and lots of toys. We had tons of coloring books, as well. I recall enjoying filling in the empty pictures with color, bringing them to life. I did not have a strong urge of wanting to write, but I remember for a time I wanted to draw. Unfortunately, the talent for it was not great enough to warrant further pursuit. My appreciation for writing would come later. As far as language goes, I can still envision my grandfather bouncing me on his knee, teaching me inappropriate words to say just for a laugh. As I got older, and my grasp of language and technology improved, it was apparent that they would be driving factors in my life.

Even at an early age, I was able to form friendships easily by my use of language. I had a way with words and a way of understanding how others communicated that permitted me to not only fit in but to flourish socially. Words have always been important in my life and that comes in part from my parents’ attitude towards education and literacy. My parents are not the most literate people in the world, in fact, I would consider them to be primarily oral people. It has always been a phone call over a text. Only within the last few years have they really started to embrace texting. With that being said, studying and high grades were a must growing up and they stayed on top of me to succeed academically. When I think about learning to read and write, one of the first important memories that comes to mind is in the third grade when I was being taught to write in cursive. I enjoyed the way the pencil flowed as all the letters I was writing connected on the page. Reading, and reading aloud more specifically, always came easy to me, to where I was always the first to volunteer to read something in class.

I went on to study theatre arts and perform as an actor in New York City for several years. Theatre acting is one of the oldest mediums for the use of orality, which also includes literacy as an actor must read and memorize their lines before reciting them on stage. Personally, I am more partial to speech over writing. I took a playwrighting class and found it to be interesting. The words must be written before they can be memorized and performed, so there is no loss of importance to me regarding writing, but orality is what brings those words to life. It is what conveys the message of the story to the audience, while also allowing an actor to make a connection with said audience. My love for acting stems partly from my love for television. Growing up, my family and I would always watch our favorite movies and shows together while we ate dinner, so it played a key role in my upbringing. Neil Postman wrote in his article, *Technopoly,* *“After television, the United States was not America plus television; television gave a new coloration to every political campaign, to every home, to every school, to every church, to every industry.”* (Postman, pg. 18.) Without the technology of the television, one of my main passions could have been vastly different.

I was heavily involved in the performing arts growing up, especially in my 20s. I starred in multiple Shakespearean plays and performed in a few musicals when I was acting and even went on to become a musician. I sing and write original lyrics, so music has always been a huge part of my life. Without writing, I would not be able to create a complete song. I taught myself to sing by listening to my favorite bands and trying to mimic their voices as they sang. Digital technology played (and continues to play) a large part in my musical life. Any time I go to the studio to record a song, I am singing into a high-grade microphone that feeds into sound boards and equalizers to record my voice. These files are then produced digitally to create the best sounding product.

More broadly, technology has been entangled in my life for as long as I can remember. From analog technologies like cassette tapes for music where I discovered my passion for singing and VHS for movies that sparked the thought that I could be an actor, to digital technology like the small IBM computer with a 12” screen running MS-DOS I had in my parents’ room, technology has always been present in my life. I grew up during the time when analog technology started to phase out and digital technology took over and continued to evolve. I went from using loose leaf paper to draft essays to using word processors on my laptop. I could not leave the house without my Sony Walkman to go to middle school. Then, it would seem as if in a blink of an eye that morphed into my MP3 player when I was in high school. I personally had a Micro Zen MP3 player, but everyone went crazy for the iPod when it came out. I got my first cell phone when I was 16 years old, a Motorola StarTAC. Before long, I was part of the Nextel family going from the i90 to the i880. I eventually made my way to the Samsung family and have not looked back since. These gadgets (continue to yield major influence on the) shaped social statuses for their users, blurring the lines between technology and culture.

As I have gotten older and re-entered the academic arena, literacy has thrust itself to the forefront of my life. Since last fall, I have been taking courses that have been challenging my literary abilities. Last semester, I took Health Psychology with Dr. Amanda Almond and truly pushed my research and communication skills when we worked on an Honors Scholars project together. This class also brought into focus how important technology is at the collegiate level. We relied on digital technology for our weekly class meetings and one on one meetings as we met via Zoom. I also used Microsoft PowerPoint to create the poster presentation for my project on the sociopolitical determinants of a neighborhood in Queens, NY. I used writing and notetaking to organize my thoughts before using digital technology to produce a final product. It was interesting to read, write and attend class from home during that time. I was always used to physically going to school, taking notes with pen and paper.

Now that I am back on campus in the present, I often find myself thinking of the future. The state of technology is always changing, and it is important to consider how this affects our day to day lives. Technology that allows people to work collaboratively and connect instantly no matter their whereabouts, and access to this technology, is paramount for the future. The internet must remain an open-source environment if we are to continue to rely on it for free communication and information. One byproduct of this technology that I am not a fan of is social media. I have been on social media since its inception with sites like Sconex, MySpace and the original Facebook. What once was an engaging way to connect with friends and loved ones has become a place that can breed toxicity, misinformation, and dangerous conditions. Social media is not inherently bad, but the way in which people have chosen to use it is the issue. This is on par with a quote I have used in a previous assignment but fits perfectly. McLuhan writes, *“…General David Sarnoff made this statement: ‘We are too prone to make technological instruments the scapegoats for the sins of those who wield them. The products of modern science are not in themselves good or bad; it is the way they are used that determines their value.’”* (McLuhan, pg. 11).” I use social media sparingly, mostly to pass the time when I am bored, but I do my best to stay off it as much as possible. It can be an extremely negative place, and it can be easy to get caught up in it. I am fortunate enough to not have been involved in any major arguments online.

Language and technology have played pivotal roles in my life. They gave me the means to express myself socially, academically, and creatively. Language has given me the ability to forge relationships that will last a lifetime. Technology has allowed me to nurture those relationships by being able to stay connected. Language has afforded me the opportunity to communicate efficiently and effectively in my pursuit of higher education. Technology has enabled me to access accurate information and help me produce presentable writings and assignments. Language is the lifeblood of my creative pursuits, whether it be the orality of acting or singing as well as the writing of lyrics or plays, and I use technology to capture and share my creations. Without these two pillars of society, the world would be a much different place, and I shudder to think of what that world would be like.

References

Postman, Neil. “The Judgement of Thamus.” Essay. In *Technopoly: The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, Pg. 18. New York: Knopf, 1993.

McLuhan, Marshall. Essay. In *The Medium Is the Message*, Pg. 11. Corte Madera: Gingko Press, 2005.