

1. **Overload is not new.** From Blair and Shirky, we saw that the feeling of information overload or abundance is not new.
  - a. Early modern finding devices: alphabet, distinctive page layouts, excerpting, summarizing, florilegia, page numbering, concordances
  - b. Blair argues that the printing press fed a pre-existing desire for too much information—it did not create the desire.
    - i. Example: “Think of IO as ‘just what we swim in’” (Shirky).
  - c. The more information we have, the more we want (Weinberger and Blair).
  - d. Information overload can be a rhetorical effect (Blair).
  - e. Different types of reading: consultation and intensive (Blair).
  
2. **Printing press inspired a different attitude towards information.** Compared to oral culture and manuscript culture (handwritten documents), the printing press inspired the idea that “valuable data could be preserved best by being made public rather than being kept secret,” according to historian Elizabeth Eisenstein (90).
  - a. The move from scribal culture to print culture was traumatic because it signaled widespread literacy, ability of an author to create an audience, desire for coherence in paragraphs, but perhaps most importantly the loss of church control (a filter breaks)
  - b. As Hugo argues, the printing press is a rupture or break
    - i. It’s metaphorical murder of past systems
    - ii. Today, the Internet murders the book (*Gutenberg Elegies*)
  - c. Shirky argues that the Internet does the same: “when you see IO as a fight over flows, it becomes about rethinking the institutional model because we are breaking the system we’ve got. IO is a problem because we don't have the tools to address the landscape or the current problem. We are pitched forward into a new challenge.”
    - i. Example: college tutoring vs. Facebook study group (Shirky)
    - ii. Example: folksonomy and tagging (i.e. Flickr, networked knowledge) disrupts previous system of organizing by classifying and taxonomizing (Dewey Decimal system, hierarchical categorization)
  
3. **With Hugo, we move from human psychology and behavior to the affordances and constraints of the technology itself.** Carr, Weinberger, Blair, and Shirky discuss the effects of new information networks on how we think and know and learn. In contrast, Hugo draws attention to how new “modes” or channels of expression and distribution displace old modes and in turn how that displacement shapes what a culture produces and values.

- a. Example: “Human thought, in changing its form, was about to change its mode of expression. [...] The dominant idea of each generation would no longer be written with the same matter, and in the same manner” (Hugo 1)

**4. Protestant Reformation (1517) and French Revolution (1789) are, in part, reactions against the Roman Catholic Church’s gate-keeping of information.** To use Shirky’s phrase, they are fights over flows.

- a. In the Middle Ages, the church wanted to maintain control over the people by making knowledge scarce. The priest was an exclusive entryway to the Word of God. (This is a hierarchical filtering.)
- b. With power over illiterate masses, church could impose unfair taxes, sell indulgences, conspire with the monarchy, and reap profits in corrupt ways.
- c. Printing shops were at first was controlled by the church, but gradually journeyman printers outnumbered the reach of censorship.
- d. Martin Luther posts his 95 theses in 1517; an event that marks the start of the Protestant Reformation.
  - i. Example: “The 16th century breaks religious unity. Before the invention of printing, reform would have been merely a schism; printing converted it into a revolution. [...] Gutenberg is the precursor of Luther” (Hugo 7).
  - ii. Luther was surprised his theses got printed and read so widely.
- e. Shift from religious hierarchy to secular Enlightenment thought and the emergence of a literate public sphere: “The 18th century gives the Encyclopedia; the revolution gives the *Moniteur*” (Hugo 9).
  - i. Encyclopedia translates literally as “complete instruction” or “complete knowledge” – encompassing or encircling
  - ii. But as we know from reading Ann Blair, encyclopedias are much older than 18th century – remember medieval encyclopedias? E.g. Vincent de Beauvais and his aid for preachers – at 4.5 million words, his goal was “exhaustive encyclopedic mastery” (Blair 35).
  - iii. Hugo links the French Revolution (1789-93) to *Le Moniteur Universel*, which was the main newspaper in France from 1789-1869. The person who controlled the newspaper could influence the content, so it was the newspaper and not encyclopedia that mattered for communicating knowledge.
    - 1. This also a dissolution of firmness from the tower to encyclopedia to newspaper, which is the most ephemeral but also the most ubiquitous, accessible, and infectious.
    - 2. Example: “One can demolish a mass, but how can one extirpate ubiquity?” (Hugo 6).
- f. De-Christianization of France (“The press will kill the church.”)

- i. In the 18th century, the Church was seen as being less useful
- ii. Roman Catholicism remained the national religion in France, and Protestants had been persecuted on and off for 200 years
- iii. Through propaganda pamphlets and posters, the Catholic Church was associated with scheming, corruption, and the Old Regime.
- iv. Monarchy fell in 1792 and distrust between the new Republic and the Church led to the Reign of Terror, during which priests and nuns were put on trial for display, and some were executed
- v. Public worship was forbidden, signs of Christianity were removed from buildings, confiscation of church land, and closing churches
- vi. The revolutionaries wanted to foster a Cult of Reason to displace religion; celebrated secular principles of knowledge, reason, and popular sovereignty.
  - 1. Priest vs. philosopher: Festival of Reason held in Notre Dame cathedral in 1793 to symbolize secularity
  - 2. Example: As the priest stands before “the luminous press of Gutenberg,” he beholds “in the future, intelligence sapping faith, opinion dethroning belief, the world shaking off Rome” (Hugo 1).

5. **Based on a study of Hugo’s many metaphors in “This Will Kill That,” he seems indecisive about technological change.**

- a. Is this because his mother was loyal to the monarchy and his father was loyal to revolutionaries since he was a general in Napoleon’s army? Conflicted childhood?
- b. As an up-and-coming star in French literature, is Hugo himself uncertain about how writers should respond to “the second tower of Babel of the human race”? Is he set back by the “immense construction,” “the new Flood” of print?
- c. Is he thinking/worried/excited about the future and how literature will be filtered and preserved, now that traditional filters are broken?