

<http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2009-12-01-passig-de.html> (in German)

The German conservative elitist literature magazine Merkur “wonders what the hell the Internet is good for.”

From argument 1 — “What the hell is it good for?” — to argument 9 — new technologies reduce our ability to think, write and read — German writer and journalist Kathrin Passig compiles cultural criticism’s most frequent objections to new technologies, which in recent years have been resurrected in connection with the Internet.

“It’s an amazing invention”, said US president Rutherford B. Hayes about the telephone in 1876, “but who would ever want to use one of them?” (argument 2), while British colonel Sir John Smyth strongly disapproved of the use of the musket in 1591: “The bow is a simple weapon, firearms are very complicated things that get out of order in many ways” (argument 6).

What is really remarkable, writes Passig, is how much critique of new inventions has to do with the critic’s age, and how little with the thing itself: “The same people that greeted the Internet in the 1990s, ten years later reject its continuing development with exactly the same arguments that they poured scorn upon back then. At the age of 25 or 30, it is easy to appreciate and to use technologies if they give one an advantage in terms of status or knowledge. If, a few years later, it is one’s own advantages that need to be defended against progress, then it’s more difficult.”

Passig’s remedy against the trap of recycling worn-out arguments: unlearn. “The adult human being simply knows too many solutions for problems that no longer exist.”