

# FROM TO APE APP

## Perspectives on Technological and Social Evolution



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Ever since I read “The Ecstasy of Communication” by Jean Baudrillard\* I have been fascinated with the cultural power of technology. In 1988 he so accurately described the shift from capitalism and production to technology and simulation that was just beginning to take place and what it meant to our human experience as technology obliterated the distances between subject and object.



All the struggle that created the human experience (ie, class struggle) was seemingly disappearing along with perceived distance and with it the fascination, the mystery, the passion and drive that direct our excess energies. Over 20 years later and with all the revolutionary changes from the internet to apps, I can't help but think what he would say about the world we are making for ourselves today.

As a philosophy and art student in the late 80's and early 90's, I was driven by a belief that art could speak in ways that transcended the accepted discourse of logic; that the impact media had on the perceptions of the human race was just being explored, but definitely not understood. One day, I believed, the power of the media and its (either destructive or constructive) ability to change the collective consciousness of the masses (and thus effect cultural change) would be more absolute than any power ever seen before in history. To understand this phenomenon, to me, was essential for I believed (and still believe) that innovation drives art and to be able to use art, design and media for the collective good one must remember that while entertainment distracts art reveals. Therefore, the more powerful the media and communication technology become, the more seductive entertainment is and the more powerful art can be as a tool for cultural change.

*\*Jean Baudrillard 1929-2007 French philosopher, theorist and social critic. One of the foremost intellectual figures of postmodernism and poststructuralism. Ecstasy of Communication, translated from the French by Bernard and Caroline Schutze published by Semiotext(e) June 1, 1988.*



To arm myself with knowledge was an intentional decision I made as an artist and designer, so as to prepare myself for this moment in cultural evolution; the moment when humankind can either free itself from the past and claim a democratic right for self determination and use technology for the common good or fall into the abyss of meaningless indulgence and go the way of the dinosaur.

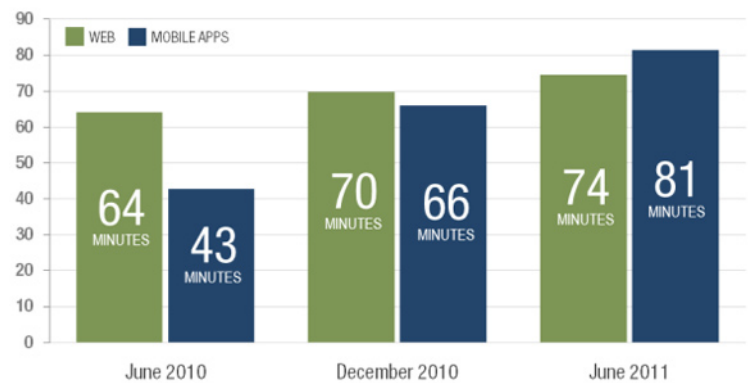
Sounds a bit much? Ah, but you have had these thoughts or ones similar to them at one time or another? Is technology "out of control?" are we being manipulated by the powers that be to focus on our consumerist thoughts and endeavors while the rich and powerful ensure their positions of privilege for the centuries to come? What is the role of the individual during such a significant shift in how we communicate and interact? Will we become more empowered or powerless? Slaves to our own inventions or even, eventually, cyber-humans? A combination of machine and man unable to function in the natural world?

As a thinker, I am compelled to confront these difficult questions; as a designer, I am curious as to the cultural and psychological impact new technology will have; as an artist, I am concerned with my responsibility to reveal and with what intentions, motivations to direct my energies; as an entrepreneur and business owner, I am forced to face the realities and consequences of my actions and how my contributions to the medium will effect a positive or negative impact; and, ultimately, as a human being, I am concerned with my role in history and how my actions will contribute to the positive project (in existentialist terms) called freedom.

What do Apps have to do with all of this? And why now, why 2012? Good question, so lets get into it. I am reminded of a conversation I had with a colleague of mine very recently about how things change because people's sensibilities and therefore expectations change- that cultural and historical shift do not take place inside a vacuum but in the context of revolution be it, political, scientific, artistic or technological but what is happening right now in history is a major shift in several revolutions all at once and it is happening very, very fast. What I am talking about specifically are the massive developments and discoveries taking place in Information Technology, Computing, Quantum Physics, Nanotechnology, Biotechnology, Robotics and Theoretical Mathematics and several sub-disciplines. There is a great series from BBC narrated by Michio Kaku about these revolutions that is very much worth watching and I recommend you just do a search on YouTube and check them out. But to summarize - these revolutions do and will have a massive impact on technology just like pure research has an impact on the direction of applied research. But just like pure and applied research inform and have an impact on each other so scientific and technological revolutions have a similar relationship. For instance, without the instruments that technology develops to observe and manipulate microscopic objects, the revolution in nanotechnology could not take place.

▄▄ *As a human being, I am concerned with my role in history and how my actions will contribute to the positive project called freedom* ▄▄

U.S. Mobile Apps vs. Web Consumption, Minutes per Day



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Sources: comScore, Alexa, Flurry Analytics

*Glenwon*  
we are websites



*the internet of things*

In technological terms there are also revolutions currently developing that inform scientific revolutions, cultural revolutions, political revolutions and so on and their interrelationships are complex but apparent. Hopefully, when you were watching the documentary you noticed how these scientific revolutions are only made possible by the revolutions in computer hardware (processor size and speed), data storage, processing and retrieval (cloud computing) and (what we are concerned with most) information distribution and sharing- in other words the internet and mobile technological revolution and, most recently, the internet of things.

OK, now to get a good overview, and place the current information revolution in context. Let's take a quick look at history to get a good perspective on the changes that have taken place. Let's go back to the very beginning and give ourselves a sort of Carl Sagan like canvas upon

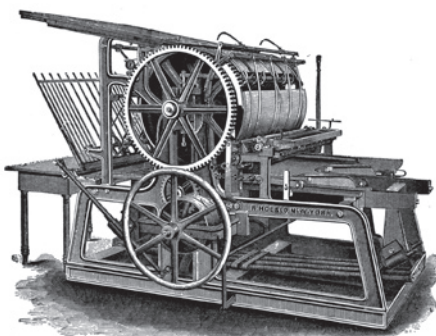
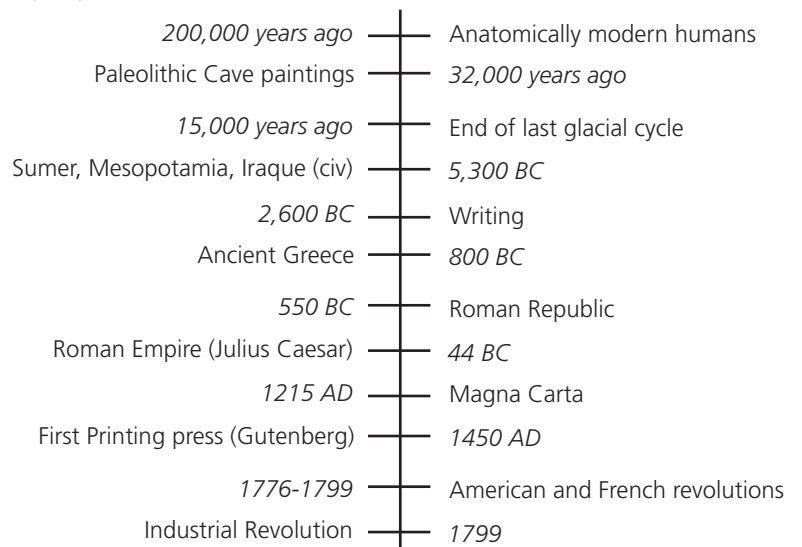


which to paint the landscape of human history.

Now we are getting into serious detail here from the development of the earliest single celled organisms to what we first recognize as the beginning of humans. If you want to get into it here is a link to a very good "Timeline of Evolution":

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline\\_of\\_evolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Timeline_of_evolution)

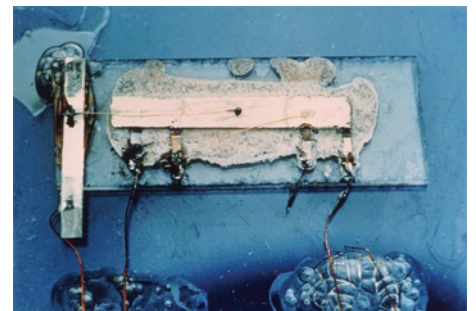
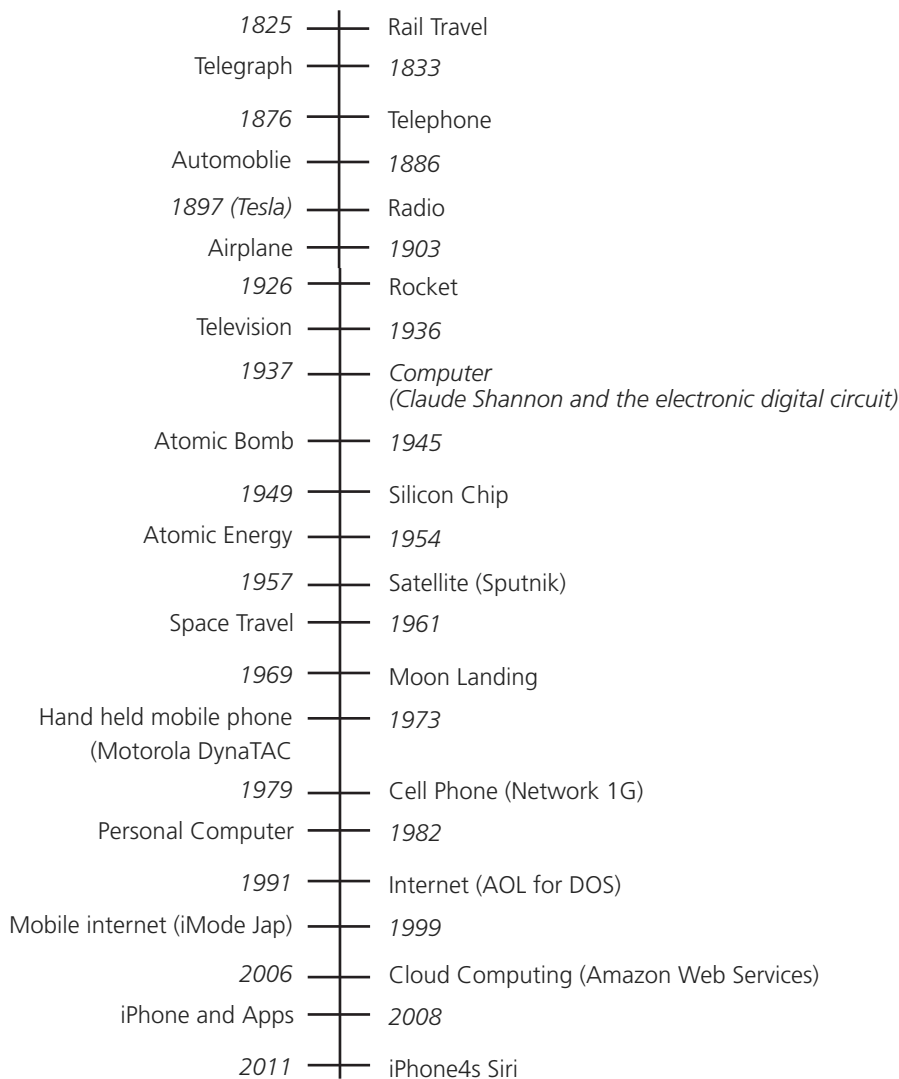
But if you want to skip it lets take a huge 3.78 billion year leap and keep on going:



1450 AD - First Printing Press

OK here is where it gets interesting. You have to imagine now that with each new development more and more discoveries and inventions are needed to contribute to each of the remaining items listed. For instance the amount of background knowledge and expertise required for the major development we call Rail Travel is miniscule compared to that required for the creation of Space Travel.

The following is of course limited and approximate; the developments have been chosen specifically for their impact on travel (movement in real distance), communication (percieved distance) and culture:



1949 - First Silicon Chip

To put things in perspective here, imagine that a stack of 13.75 billion pieces 80g copy paper, one for each year since the Big Bang, it would be about 1375 kilometers high or well beyond the earth's stratosphere into the weightlessness of the exosphere past where most satellites orbit the earth. Then if you look at how long modern humans have existed that stack would only be 200 meters high about 2/3rd the height of the Eiffel Tower. Then if you take the time since the beginning of the industrial revolution it would be only 20cm tall and since the internet as we know it only 2 cm. Now take three pieces of paper out of that stack and that is how long we have had Apps.

We find ourselves at the beginning of a rapidly excelerating technological revolution so, in a historical sense, how do we make sense of what is going on? Why are Apps so important and what does the future hold? The most important thing to remember here is that Apps are unique in that they are a sort of pinpoint for very specific information delivered very quickly anytime anywhere but the power of an app is only restricted to the power of the internet itself. You have to realize that Apps (the fastest little interactive tool in the world) can send and receive information to the Cloud (the fastest and biggest data storage and processing tool in the world) now with 4G networks at the rate of 100 Mbps. This means an App can interact with the Cloud in real time and this makes artificial intelligence (AI) technology like Siri Possible.

*/// Ultimately smart phones and apps will become the way we interact not just with each other but also with objects- the internet of things. ///*





/// No, technology is not dangerous, it is what we do with it that becomes a disaster. ///

Boil it down to the very basic reality what it means is this: Observe and interact with all information and anything connected to the internet, anywhere, anytime, instantly. Apps and mobile technology have the potential to tie everything together, make all data, information etc., accessible and controllable from one central location- your fingertip. Ultimately smart phones and apps (along with Siri) will become the way we communicate and interact not just with each other but also with objects- the internet of things. And this brings us full circle, back to Baudrillard, back to the original question of technology and communication and how the traditional interaction between subject and object is shifting so radically; so radically that not only is the distance that creates a medium for our efforts, a hole to be filled if you will, obliterated by simulation but it is now gone completely not through simulation but instead we become one in reality through integration. When we no longer need to think about communicating we are no longer spiraling through space and time in ecstasy; when communication itself is obliterated through integrating subject and object completely, technology shifts in it's role just as capitalism shifted. Technology is no longer an economic machine and communication is no longer an empty simulation with (as Baudrillard would say) no content, but rather devices themselves become the momentum that propells us into the a future of seamless, effortless, integration between machine and man. A student of mine recently asked me if I thought that the recent breakthroughs and revolutions in technology were danerous and my answer was unambiguous- No, technology is not dangerous, it is what we do with it that becomes a disaster.

Think back 20 years ago (if you are old enough to remember) and you will remember a time when neither you nor anybody you knew had a personal computer, access to the internet or a mobile phone. Back then I didn't even have an ATM or a Credit card and nobody I knew did. If I wanted to communicate with someone very far away, I wrote a letter and I would never have considered sharing my personal life with strangers. The idea of interacting the way we now take as normal behavior was stuff of science fiction with a bit of comedy mixed in. Again, what we do with technology is what makes it good or bad, dangerous or life saving, a disaster or a miracle. There are two sides to every coin, every advance takes something away as it adds to our experince. We have to pay attention and observe the potential hazards as well as the advantages to what we create not only for ourselves but what will be the legacy we leave behind us to future generations. If we focus on the positive we can see how good things are and how far we have come as humans (with the help of technology) in such a short amount of time. To call what is going on today with smart phones, the internet, cloud computing and mobile apps revolutionary is an understatement.

**In the second of this two part paper I will take a closer look at the future and some of the amazing developments that are possible when you take a look at not only the information revolution but several others as well.**

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Schrijf je in voor de nieuwsbrief