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Abstract

Augmented Knowledge and Culture

SIC Lecture, NIWI, 3 November 2000.

Recorded for Distribution by WebCast

New media change the structures of knowledge. With the rise of manuscript culture in the Latin West, during the Middle Ages, the Church was the chief guardian of knowledge. After the eleventh century, universities emerged as new centres for learning and knowledge. With the advent of printing during the Renaissance, archives and museums became the memory institutions for Western civilization.

With the advent of computers, the enduring knowledge of these memory institutions gradually being translated from analog into digital form. Computers are also bringing into focus two new kinds of knowledge: 1) collaborative knowledge in the form of collaboratories and virtual laboratories; 2) personal knowledge in the form of e-mail, MOOS, list serves, virtual communities etc. This poses the challenge of a new synthesis between three kinds of knowledge, namely, the new collaborative and personal with the older, enduring knowledge of memory institutions.

It is suggested that there are five major consequences of networked computers. A first is technological. They lead to invisibility. A second consequence is material. They lead to virtuality. A third consequence is organisational. They lead to systemicity. A fourth consequence is intellectual. They can lead to a new contextuality. Finally, at a philosophical level we would suggest that they could lead to a new spirituality. It is also suggested that there are three competing visions for the future: an information highway (United States); information society (Europe) and knowledge society (Japan). The lecture offers a vision for a new synthesis.