

Kate Barker's technological trapeuse through the ages

AS THE MILLENNIUM APPROACHES, IT SEEMS FITTING TO CONSIDER the development of journalism over the past 1,000 years. The first few centuries after New Year's Eve, 999, were pretty sluggish when it came to inventions of future use to the mass media.

It wasn't until 1309, for instance, that the English first used paper—a Chinese brainchild that had been kicking around since 105. By the time the Brits finally figured out the basics, wooden type was in use across central Asia. The West has been playing catch-up ever since. The pencil was invented in 1565, but the eraser didn't materialize until 1770. And it took another 88 years before an enterprising egghead—doubtless a copy editor—thought of attaching it to the end of his lead. My grandmother remembers when ballpoint pens were the latest and greatest, in 1938—a nifty accompaniment to the first spiral-bound notebooks developed in 1924.

The first regularly published newspaper appeared in Germany in 1609. Editorial content couldn't stand alone from the start: classified ads first appeared in a French newspaper in 1631. We were, however, spared the ad agency for another 210 years. An early photo shoot took all day in 1816 when Niépce successfully captured an image after an eight-hour exposure. By 1829, Daguerre joined forces with him and took most of the credit. The paparazzi can trace their noble roots to 1891—when the first telephoto lens was mounted to a camera. The zoom lens, however, wasn't invented until 1932. Flash powder was replaced by flashbulbs in 1930, improving firesafety in photography studios world-wide. The first holographic image appeared in 1947.

The first U.S. patent for a typewriter was issued in 1829. Typewriter ribbon, however, wasn't invented until 1845. Not that you would recognize a "writing machine" made before 1873—when the QWERTY keyboard was standardized. The scanner is oh-so nineties—as in 1890s. By 1902, a modern prototype sent and received pictures—10 years before the *Titanic* sank. Ditto for your answering machine—someone was waiting for the beep as early as 1904. In 1930, AT&T took a stab at a picture phone. We're still waiting. Sputnik was launched in 1954 and the

Americans still aren't over it. The first fibre-optics communications tests began in 1955. A year later, Ampex built a viable videotape recorder but VHS wouldn't win the war with Beta for another 30 years, proving that the technological cream doesn't always rise to the top. The first modern nerd was a woman: in 1843, Lady Ada Lovelace published *Notes*—explaining the basic principles of a computer. Ninety-eight years later, her vision was realized in Zuse's Z3. By 1995, most major U.S. dailies were online.

So now what? We have techno-hopscoched our way through a 1,000 years to a point in the game where reporters need not leave artificially lit cubicles to file a story. A global communications community allows us to bang out an interview from virtually anyone without meeting him, or even hearing his voice. Does this mean we are desensitized and more callous than our hard-nosed, get down and inky, chain-smoking predecessors? Maybe. But without computer-assisted research, the *Ryerson Review of Journalism* could not offer you "Manufacturing Concern," Trista Vincent's analysis of social policy reporting at *The Toronto Star*, or "Black Ties," Lisa Hepfner's content analysis of *The Edmonton Journal* and *Calgary Herald*. Chase producers like those featured in Charmaine Noronha's "Gotta Getta Guest" depend on satellite links and the Internet for their livelihood. Many of us will get a break writing for online publications. Even *The New Yorker's* Malcolm Gladwell, profiled by J. Timothy Hunt, is a past contributor to *Slate*, an online magazine.

While the Spring 1999 *RRJ* does its share of bowing before the technological golden calf, we also take a reflective moment or two. Ryan Jennings revisits an earlier era in "Driving Miss Dempsey," his profile of long-time *Toronto Star* columnist Lotta Dempsey. Tanya Coulthard examines the plight of wildlife journalism in "Battle for Survival," and Rachel Pulfer considers the future of *The Canadian Forum* in "On a Left Wing and a Prayer."

As Y2K slouches ever-closer towards Bethlehem, consider this—you will need something to read January 1, 2000, as you prepare to meet your cyber-god. So take us along for the ride. Redeem yourself, for the end is surely near. Beam me up. ☼

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