

1915 - Coast - to - Coast calling

In 1915, with the completion of coast to coast telephone lines, and utilizing Lee DeForest's 1907 patented three-element vacuum tube technology, Alexander Graham Bell was able to make the first transcontinental telephone call to his old friend, Thomas Watson. Radio waves had been discovered and were being used for radio communication. 1915 was also the year that the first radiotelephone call occurred, from Virginia, USA, to Paris, France (<http://www.greatachievements.org/>).

Now that telephones had been commercially available for almost 40 years and becoming increasingly common, social commentators worried about its impact on society. They believed that it promoted familiarity but discouraged neighbourhood solidarity. They felt it prompted a rise of commercialization, changes in social organization, an evolution of the familiar household and a certain egocentrism from community to individualization (Fischer, 1992). Along with the social changes, and those occurring due to the automotive evolution, telephone technology fostered the global change to the point where a new society had been born. No longer did social interactions need to be planned well in advance, but could be organized and accomplished in a much shorter time frame. As noted by Fischer, telephones had altered the conditions of daily life, but not the basic characteristics of life.

Although Kern and Meyerowitz both contended telephone technology to be deterministic, Fischer points out that this debate can be problematic due to the ways in which we think about the causation. For example, Kern contends that the telephone's ring is sudden and demanding, whereas a letter is leisurely. However, the opposite may be true. Depending on the circumstances, one may actually be waiting for a call to relieve worry or grief (Fischer, 1992). Technology can be seen as two-way street. Society adapts to technology, but society pushes technology to match our life. The weaker technologies are either weeded out altogether or re-invented to match society/the consumer's need or wants similar to the way oral traditions had evolved (Ong 2002). Telephone technology allowed for rural and city landscapes to be equal and family members could easily and regularly stay in contact. If children were sent to schools away from home, there was now the ability to maintain solid familial bonds.

Even though telephone subscriptions continued to rise rapidly, fierce competition and a hunger for market shares, continued to push telephone companies to

advertize. What had started out as a business tool had quickly replaced the telegraph and began to be mass produced for the everyday family. Whether or not you agreed with the ideas that it weakened local ties and was a impersonal tool, or that it promoted contact with other societies and was the beginnings of social acceptance, you had to agree that telephony provided a public service, especially in the medical care industry. Instead of needing to run or drive to the nearest doctor, he was now a phone call away and emergencies could be handled more expeditiously.