**Postman—“The World Weavers/The World Makers”  
Reading Notes  
Glen McClish**

Begin with intellectual context—Postman writes in the technological determinist tradition (for example, *Amusing Ourselves to Death*) that has been heavily influenced by Marshall McLuhan (*Understanding Media*), although the best work has been done by people like Walter Ong (*Orality and Literacy*).

He’s reacting to and trying to differentiate himself from previous conservative critiques of the educational system by E.D. Hirsch (*Cultural Literacy*) and Allan Bloom (*The Closing of the American Mind*) that called for more traditional forms of education. Hirsch advocated for cultural literacy in the form of lots of facts and information.

Principal claim: Definitions, questions, and metaphors should be given the highest priority in school (135). Note key word “urging” here.

Reason: Definitions, questions, and metaphors are three of the most potent elements with which human language constructs a worldview (135).

Warrant: Teaching how worldviews are constructed through language should be the school’s highest priority (135).

Backing: The linguistic turn of the early twentieth century. Rhetoricians would claim that the rhetorical turn of the second half of the twentieth century is perhaps even more important and gets to these issues more effectively; this might be good ground for advanced discussion about how this entire argument could be used to back the way we teaching RWS courses.

Initial ethos: A kind of grumpy sage, authoritative without citation, brusque and confident, not out to ingratiate himself with the audience, seems to start almost in the middle of an argument with no formal introduction, but there’s a bit of play or improvisation—“How shall I say it?” (133).  
Comment about absurdity is kind of cranky (134).

No real contract or introduction in Swales’s terms; he just starts with the three elements of the claim.

Definition discussion comes first—he means this to be linguistic although we could read this as rhetorical—a terministic screen issue, perhaps (133).

Then he goes to the issue of questions (133).

Takes on Hirsch and Bloom here, establishing niche and distance from these conservatives (134).

Next is the issue of metaphor—once again rhetoricians eagerly claim this ground (134).

His discussion really owes a lot to Lakoff and Johnson (*Metaphors We Live By*), he should be quoting them.

Harkens back to golden age—a favorite *topos* of Postman, which kind of fits with sage ethos (135).  
Nice discussion of analogies (135).

Then comes the claim and reason (135).

Examples of reason based on power of metaphors to shape thought about medicine and justice (135-36).

Reason discussed further, with heavy debt to Lakoff and Johnson—“the structure of reality” (136).

With the introduction of the term “control,” we have a kind of subsidiary reason to bolster our primary claim:

Primary claim and sub reason: Definitions, questions, and metaphors should be given the highest priority in school because they provide students control of their situation (136).

Warrant: “It needs hardly to be said that one of the purposes of an education is to give us greater control of our situation” (136). (nice occultatio) Then this sub argument is kind of dropped; this segment really needs more fleshing out, since it’s instrumental in provocative ways.

Discussion of how schools use approaches that undermine Postman’s approach, with IQ test as example (136).

Discussion of opposition, which he tries to undermine (137).

Falls back on importance of early linguistics, thus demonstrating the linguistic turn as motivating and backing his argument—this is old stuff and again where’s Lakoff ?(137).  
Authoritative quotation from Richards (137).

Goes to additional discussion of importance of definition, using word instrumental that really lets rhetoric in for us (138).

Long example about jokes lightens ethos considerably and seems to be a change in tone (138-39).

Then shifts back to metaphor discussion (139).

Helen Keller thing is pretty arbitrary—perhaps excusable from a sage who has the right to be disjointed (139).

Then he moves into a discussion about how to operationalize the main claim—this very rhetorical in some ways (139-40).  
This discussion of style and tone he actually evokes rhetoric and makes the case for the art quite broad (140-41).

Then Postman launches a kind of add-on, loosely related argument about technological literacy (141):

Claim: The effects of technology—rather than how to use it—should comprise technological education (part of the humanities) (142-43).

Reason: The effects of technology shape and control much of our culture (have “remade the world”) 142.

The reason is supported by subfield of technological determinism—the best of which is Ong, rather than McLuhan (“The medium is the message”) (141-42).

Warrant: essential/incidental philosophical pair (implied, perhaps)—effects are essential, the user manual is incidental

In addition, there’s a warrant about the importance of stressing what shapes our culture and our worldviews in education

Prolepsis (143)

Interesting analogy (143),

Postman then moves into what could be seen as Student Learning Outcomes for technological education, although they need to be moved past Hirsch-like nuggets of knowledge into things students can do (verbs), as his test questions demonstrate or at least suggest (143-44).

This might be a good activity to do with students, incidentally.

SLO’s 3 and 4 include a few links to first argument, but I wish the connections were stronger.

Final sentence makes interesting claim about a positive outcome of technology education: show how world *should* be remade—put very deliberate agency into technological change (144).

This point shows the connection between the two arguments is based on the reasons and warrants, which emphasize the importance of stressing elements of our lives that shape our worldviews and cultures.