**1. First, explain what Postman means by the phrase: “media as epistemology” and specifically include what he means by “truth does not, and never has, come unadorned” (p. 22). Fully develop your response so that it would be clear to someone outside of our course who has not read the book. Be clear in your explanation.**

Neil Postman was a social scientist, professor and author known for his cultural criticism towards electronic-media and -culture. Postman starts of chapter 2. “Media as Epistemology” of “Amusing Ourselves to Death” by saying he “*raises no objection to television’s junk*” (p.16), but wishes to discuss the metaphor of television and the way it influences the dialogue we partake in. He argues that the consequences of “*television-based epistemology pollutes public communication and its surrounding landscape, not that it pollutes everything*” (p.28).

Chapter two is based the premise of “Media as Epistemology” so what does Postman mean by it? Epistemology is part of philosophy in which we understand and apply truth. Definition epistemology; “*the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope, and the distinction between justified belief and opinion*”-oxford dictionary.

What I interpret Postman means by Media as Epistemology is the way a person or society understand and apply truth. *“Each culture conceives of it as being most authentically expressed in certain symbolic forms that another culture may regard as trivial or irrelevant” (p.23).* This means that while some cultures believe that seeing is believing, whilst others many only believe that hearing is believing or reading is believing etc. This indicates the difference in epistemology.

In oral culture “*Rhetoric was not merely an opportunity for dramatic performance but a new indispensable means of organizing evidence and proofs, and therefore of communicating truth”* (p.22). This meant they had limited options but to believe rhetoric as truth, as without a written or illustrated alternative, they have to define their truth based on what technologies they possess. “*To the Greeks, rhetoric was a form of spoken writing*” (p.22).

When the print culture surfaced, civilization started leaning towards the written word as truth. “*In the academic world, the published word is invested with greater prestige and authenticity that the spoken word. What people say is more casually uttered than what they write. The written word is assumed to have been reflected upon and revised by its author, reviewed by authorities and editors. The written word endures, the spoken word disappears; and that is why writing is closer to the truth than speaking.”* (p.21). I find this quote useful in illustrating just how much the written word has biased us towards believing that the written word contains the most truth.

"Truth does not, and never has, come unadorned" (p.22). The way a culture defines "truth" is largely contingent on the means, mediums, and technologies through which they receive it. Postman speaks of that the truth contains a bias for each culture and even illustrates some of our individual biases. As we got to know in Postman’s example of Socrates plea, Socrates did not attempt to formulate his defense in a way that Athenians would consider a “truthful manner”. At the time the Greeks considered rhetoric not as a distracted adornment of truth but rather as the form in which truth was delivered. As “the 280 jurors who cast guilty ballot against Socrates, they did so because his manner was no consistent with truthful matter”, as to speak one’s thoughts in a random manner, without proper emphasis or appropriate passion, was considered demanding to the audience’s intelligence and suggestive of falsehood.

Even though Socrates might have told the truth, he did it in a way which was in conflict with the cultural biases at the time, leading him to be executed. This is what we mean by “Truth does not, and never has, come unadorned”, because our cultural biases can overshadow the truth.

**2. Second, using Postman as well as the supporting articles we read in class for this module, develop a thoughtful and coherent response to the question: "What kind of truth does the Internet produce?"**

As previously said by Neil Postman “*the concept of truth is intimately linked to the biases of forms of expression”* (p.22 of Amusing Ourselves to Death), meaning that what we confine as truth contains biases from our public discourse and culture. It is challenging finding which “truth” the internet produces, as the internet is a unique place. We can compare it with a Swiss army knife; it has multiple tools at your disposal, but which tool you choose and you use them differs. However, how we perceive “truth” from the internet can be affected by external forces like the government, economic incentives, internet provider, webpage creator, etc.

These external forces are tools which can easily be abused if unchecked. We live in a time where political and economic incentives have combined to attack truth and weaken our trust. It is therefore important that we are critical to what we consume and how we consume it, just like postman states in his book “Amusing Ourselves to Death”.

To give a better understanding on how these external forces affect us, we refer to the article “Wearable tech, bodies, and gender” published by Elisabeth Wissinger.   
She refers to Biopower by calling on Lupton’s argument that: *“the “gaze” of power relations already organizing and sorting individuals via interfaces, such as Facebook, Twitter etc., is made intimate and personal by self-tracking cultures and practices.*

Here are more examples Lupton found in how the gaze of powers are organizing and sorting individuals:

* *“...the data production is not always entirely voluntary. There is a “fine line between consensual, pushed and imposed self‐tracking” (p. 124).”*
* *“Lupton also identifies culturally significant neoliberal forces rewarding self‐mastery to produce an optimized, lean, and productive body as a key element in the moral imperative to self‐track”.* (page. 7 of Wearable tech, bodies, and gender).
* “*Lupton points out that this is not the case; in fact, “self‐ trackers have no legal access to their own data, which they may have collected for years” (Lupton, 2016, p. 134) (*page. 7, Wearable tech, bodies, and gender)*.*

Wearable tech projects a false sense of truth by pressuring its users into believing they are unhealthy until they reach certain goals. If you had a fit-bit which said the average daily recommended exercise for an adult is 7000 steps, and you have only walked 6000, instead of rewarding you for walking that far, they manipulate you to think that you failed or weren’t active enough because you did not reach their self-imposed goal.

The forces who control the flow of information, accessibility and technology, are those who sits in control of the power to manipulate and portray their sense of “truth” onto their user base. If one fail to think critically of what we consume we become like puppets (user-base), hanging by the string waiting for the puppeteers (organizations, government) to control the story (truth).

I fear as well that the truth will get deluded from the *“personalized universe that we build through our online social networks (*Reddit especially -Hallvard*) ultimately narrows what we know since it privileges information that is consistent with our views”* (page 4, Is Facebook Making Us Dumber?). If we only get exposed to shared ideas we stop thinking critically, because we are not met with contrasting views, as they might drown in pool of ideas, by being hidden/removed by those of power or by a voting system.

“*We must be careful in praising or condemning because the future may hold surprises for us*” – Neil Postman (page. 29, Amusing Ourselves to Death)

**Sources:**

* Neil Postman, Amusing Ourselves to Death, (1985, ISBN 0670804541, 163 pages)
* Michael A. Cassiactore, Sara K. Yeo (with more), *Is Facebook Making Us Dumber? Exploring Social Media Use as a Predictor of Political Knowledge*, 2018(1-21 pages), Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly (Download date: 08/09/2019, 13:27).
* Elizabeth Wissinger, *Wearable tech, bodies, and gender*, 2017(1-15 pages), CUNY Graduate Center, CUNY/BMCC (Download date: 10/09/2019, 16:53).
* (I assume quotes are not counted towards work the count).