

The Computer Revolution Hasn't Happened Yet

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The printing press was invented in the middle of the 15th century, yet it took 100 years before a book was considered dangerous enough to be banned, 150 years before science was invented, almost 200 years before a new kind of political essay was invented, and more than 300 hundred years before a country with an invented political system (the US) could be argued into existence via the press and a citizenry that could understand the arguments. Schooling and general literacy were also fruits of the press, and also took many centuries to become established.

The commercial computer is now about 50 years old and is still imitating the paper culture that came before it, just as the printing press did with the manuscript culture it gradually replaced. No media revolution can be said to have happened without a general establishment of “literacy”: fluent “reading” and “writing” at the highest level of ideas that the medium can represent. With computers, we are so far from that fluent literacy — or even understanding what that literacy should resemble — that we could claim that the computer revolution hasn't even started. This talk will try to put a shape to the real computer revolution to come.