

TWO

Technologies of Language: Writing, Reading, and the Text

In the realm of poverty of imagination where people die of spiritual famine without feeling spiritual hunger, where pens are dipped in blood and swords in ink, that which is not thought must be done, but that which is only thought is unutterable. (Kraus 1984: 71)

The New Age of Orality

If there is so much regularity and uniformity of media, why is there no coherent social formed with and within it? The dream of an informed democratic polity seems as distant today as it ever did. In a slightly different form the same question was asked by John Dewey in 1927 in his response to Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion*. Dewey sought the reason why the 'great community' had not come into being despite movies, radio, trains, and the other early mass technologies. As these technologies certainly organized people socially, and as they facilitated the transmission of both ideas and people, one might well assume they would help to create a well-organized and informed people.

We have everywhere, we are told, the tools and technologies to create a world in which the electronic town meeting, to use Ross Perot's malapropism, is both desirable and possible. Yet the great mass constellations of belief and social action have taken place not in the organization of an informed and active political public but in the creation of armies, as seen in two world wars, and great masses of generally uniformed consumers. There are as well other, more subtle organizations of the social – not around narratives and politics but around aesthetics and feeling states. One sees the popularity of Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings* and the 'O, Fortuna' from Orff's *Carmina Burana* appearing in film and television commercials. These latter are not known as high art, and are rarely seen in terms of the contexts of ideas and aesthetic in which they emerged. Rather, they appear as cultural tropes of affect and shared pathos in the service of advertising or as background to movies such as *Platoon*.

The fate of the public is similar to the fate of the physical world in the era of digital communications. One is asked in the Microsoft advertisement, 'Where do you want to go today?', and one is exhorted by AT&T to 'Reach out and touch someone' on the telephone. Such statements are not just hyperbole; they are also strangely revealing in promising precisely what the particular technologies cannot deliver. The obvious action one cannot perform on a phone is touch someone, and the missing potential of the internet is the mobility to take one somewhere. In this deliberate irony such technologies reveal not a liberating potential but their circulation in the economy of signs. Just as TV dinners cannot create domestic harmony but point to one of the key sites in the loss of domesticity, so communication technologies cannot create communities but only point toward their impending extinction through the duplicitous promise of creating them.

Literacy

In the same manner, the constant reinvention of literacy in various areas of culture points toward the loss of a prior kind of literacy. Numeracy, computer literacy, video literacy, cultural literacy: the metaphor runs out of control. The education business proposes to deliver various forms of literacies for the new needs of technology, but it only succeeds in demonstrating the disappearance of another form of literacy. The missing literacy is not the ability to read but the mental competence to internalize cultural stories, images, and narratives as ideas and to examine them in a critical way. This would involve not educating people about how to make or 'read' films and TV but creating a social world in which reality is not primarily a manufactured commodity to be dispensed and consumed. Further, such a competence would require a vernacular language, a language grounded in one's lived experience within which to form the critiques in ways that were personally meaningful. This critical faculty requires the ability to differentiate one's sense of self from his or her participation in and identification with commodity culture.

The proliferations of literacies do little to remedy the underlying problem: that technical and social complexities of everyday life demand extreme degrees of expertise to achieve the smallest competencies. Rather than uniting people into societies and communities, the expertise itself establishes new values and displaces older ones. Speed, efficiency, and modernity itself undermine the possibilities of meaning and attachments between people and their world. As Nye notes, people 'quickly come to see new technologies, such as electric lights, space shuttles, computers, or satellites, as "natural"'. At the same time, the lifeworlds constructed with older objects ... begin to slide toward incomprehensibility, as those who created that landscape pass away' (1996: 180). The mediation of technological communication renders gratuitous the obligations and mutual respect of people as a feeling rather than as a pragmatic necessity. One does not 'flame'

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others with e-mail, not because one feels a sense of respect for others but because to do so would demonstrate poor 'netiquette' and so mark one as a 'newbie', a dilettante, and a non-expert. Membership in the technological social is predicated on technical performance, and virtue is evaluated in related terms.

A meaningful social and political world would require that each person was involved in some way with the totality of that world. Politics limited to a minor corner of the world is by definition parochial and narrow, as it was when Mill wrote, 'the world, to each individual, means the part of it with which he comes into contact: his sect, his church, his class of society' (1987 [1859]: 77). Individual people cannot be concerned with the common good but only with their self-interests, or at best with the immediately local. Such localism of thought and values is different from the isolation of the preindustrial hamlet or village, for in such settings there is often a necessity for communal politics. We, however, cannot share in even a small fraction of the totality of our society, and as such we are driven to individualism. Within a society that seeks to organize itself in narrowly rational ways, the purpose of individualism – and this is true since the introduction of the word in 1760 – is 'social refusal and self-indulgence' (Saul 1992: 473). The individual as a whole person has no place in a highly specialized society. The only choices are to surrender whole-heartedly to the social or to resist by refusing to participate, by refusing to be efficient, by resisting providing information. One wonders if the sudden rise of privacy as a personal and legal issue, quite apart from the minor matter of economic fraud, arises now because it removes the last great tactic of individual resistance to the social: the refusal to provide accurate and complete information.

The rise of specialisms of all kinds fragments the social world into narrow and unconnected domains of expertise and interests, and the knowledges required to exercise specialisms in activities such as consuming and using things are different from the knowledges required to make things. At the same time, the social refusal of the individual to participate in a shared world, the obstinate clinging to opinions in the face of social facts, produces isolated pockets of mutually negotiated self-interest. Two factors, then, mitigate against the formation of a viable sense of community and commonweal in modern society: structural fragmentation and the concomitant formation of localized and largely unconnected social worlds. Thus Dewey could write, 'There is too much public, a public too diffused and scattered and too intricate in composition' (1985b [1927]: 137).

This narrowing of the social and isolation of people from one another reduce the diversities of human life to simple encapsulations which provide the form but seldom the substance of an idea. For example, in teaching it is difficult to get students to examine complex arguments that they then understand and can use outside the context of the exam or term paper. Rather, many favor 'dot point' condensations of books and articles for which they must 'be responsible' (as if they were baby sitting or taking care of someone's dog) in examination and feel cheated when one does not provide this for them. On the one hand, there is nothing especially new about this; many of the early 'books' of ancient Greece, the *biblos*, were not books at all but fragments and statements used as guides and supplements to oral teachings (Havelock 1976: 69). What differs,

however, is that the contemporary student has the books, and the oral lecture is extension, elucidation, and exegesis. Rather than the oral being a guide through the written, a condensed, epigrammatic form of the written is again demanded as a guide through the oral. In a strange sense, we are creating an epistemological and interactional topography that is similar to classical Athens but differs in some profound and puzzling ways.

Manufactured Social Language and the Hyper-real

As Giddens notes, 'modernity opens up the project of the self, but under conditions strongly influenced by standardizing effects of commodity capitalism' (1991: 196). Culture is, by and large, a product financed by detergents, automobile manufacturers, and pharmaceutical companies, and supported by the increasingly privatized education and information industries. By virtue of making it onto television screens, the radio, the lifestyle pages (increasingly simply called 'style'), cultural artifacts become worth knowing and worth knowing about. Whatever falls below the culture industry radar is counter-cultural, overly specialized, or simply not worth knowing as it fails to be entertaining. As Neil Postman observed, mass media have made entertainment itself 'the natural format for the presentation of experience.' (1987: 87). This shared social experience of entertainment transmits and reiterates all the important messages of the culture, and, in so doing, helps to create people who expect life to be entertaining, to be a spectacle (Debord 1990), and who will tolerate any illogic to continue the show. Entertainment becomes the hyper-real (Baudrillard 1983).

The most stunning illogic concerns the reality of the show itself and the extent to which cultural productions are taken as models of the real. The 'cinematic society' (Denzin 1995) defines itself and the audience in ideologically determined structures of visual representation. What can be seen is important, but all that is produced is the representation, the image of the thing, never the thing itself. Our experience of what is important about the world is thus constructed representationally through a fraudulent mimesis (1995: 199). Yet this imitation appears more real than real and so competes directly with other forms of reality. As a consequence of the 'cinematization of American society', Denzin explains, 'reality, as it was visually experienced, became a staged social production. Real, everyday experiences, soon came to be judged against their staged, cinematic, video-counterpart' (1995: 32). He continues, 'the metaphor of the dramaturgical society or "life as Theater" ceased to be just a metaphor. It became an interactional reality. Life and art became mirror images of one another' (1995: 32). Yet the text is the authority; it is that which is worth remembering, worth repeating, and worth paying for.

The purpose of texts within the cinematic society is to provide templates for thought and action. We live in a world of mimesis; imitation functions as a

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social and psychological norm despite the fact that everyone 'knows' that the representations are not real. Still, these imitations of people, of situations, and of the world stand as substitutes for the physical world and structure our perceptions, understandings, and expectations. As Blumer (1933) documented and as the writers of 1930s film magazines demonstrated, people compare their lives to what they see on the screen, and they model this behavior in their own lives. In part through this mimesis and in part through the substitution of a learned language for a vernacular, the subjectivity of the represented other becomes the subjectivity of the viewer (See Denzin 1995: 199). In this way, an identification takes place which is similar to the mimetic identification which characterizes oral cultures, as I will show later in this chapter. The end of this imitation is the replacement of older subjectivities with new ones finally better suited to living with the constantly changing, Cartesian 'evil deceiver' of the simulacrum.

The derealization of the world

The spectacular, cinematic, virtual world brings about a 'derealization' of the world. The representational world is organized not around the everyday experiences of people, but around the distilled, formalized expressions of power in culture, and as people orient themselves to these structures, those prior structurings of thought and experience are devalued and lost. Externalized language becomes the template for thought (Olson 1994). From the standpoint of what had been, this new creation looks like a kind of destruction. Thus, Paul Virilio (1994) explains this process as a 'wounding of the real' which subsequently wounds everyone who takes part:

This phenomenon is similar to madness. The mad person is wounded by his or her distorted relationship to the real. Imagine that all of a sudden I am convinced that I am Napoleon: I am no longer Virilio, but Napoleon. My reality is wounded. Virtual reality leads to a similar de-realization. However, it no longer works only at the scale of individuals, as in madness, but at the scale of the world. (1994)

The issue of scale is crucial, for the sheer amount of words and statements which one receives every day in a modern industrial society largely guarantees that almost nothing encountered in the world comes without its own, ready-made meanings and a preferred relationship toward us. These implicate both the individual person and the thing so encountered within already established social relations. As a consequence, the ability quickly to determine the form of this relationship is a major social skill and the key to successful shopping.

Words and images, already ordered and structured into easily recognizable forms, displace content. What matters is the surface, and there is no time to look further as a new construction, complete in its merging of sound, image, and text, is already present, displacing and updating the previous one. A variety of devices are used to construct the 'preferred' understanding. Genre, author,

source, medium, format (see Barthes 1972 [1958]; Foucault 1984) all limit the range of possible meanings and guide one to the 'intended' relationship with the word. This occurs largely without the need for conscious thought, for the grammars of video, music, text – that is, the grammars required for mentally inhabiting the spectacular society – are second nature before one starts school.

The dominant, visual media of cinema and television operate primarily through the retelling of national and cultural myths and narratives (Ray 1985). As the studios created cinema and video, they also created the subjects who would expect and take pleasure from these forms. The illocutionary function of music, films, and public language overwhelms all other functions. Oriented toward the visual, the major media must be optically tasty, giving rise to phrases like 'eye candy' to refer to women's bodies used gratuitously to please male viewers. Even those films and videos which do not rely on overstated technical effects for audience appeal still rely on their ability to please visually and thematically. The first pleasure of the cinematic text must be visual before any other identification can take place between the viewer and the screen. The viewer's identification is predicated on the deliberate acceptance of what is on the screen as directly experienced, that is as an *interior* and personal experience that is at the same moment shared by his or her participation in the constructed event. The experience of the viewer is already situated within meaning. One is shown what he or she enjoys through the structuring of that pleasure in a particular narrative and visual form.

There is not a widespread personal examination and introspection about the cinematic experience. Indeed to have a truly personal interpretation is to withdraw from the shared experience of the media event, to be outside the social. Rather, one relates his or her life to the cinematic experience which is already a shared social domain. One has already been told what to feel and think about it, that is, how to consume the event. This is, indeed, the primary function of popular criticism and reviews: to give the dominant or preferred reading (see Denzin 1991). The cultural logic of the cinematic world is to encourage the extension of the experience and lessons of the film into the lived world, to emulate the relationships, feelings, and values of the narratives. This translation of the cultural narrative into the personal world is never a direct, 'hypodermic' effect. Rather, people work the thematic elements into their lives and personal relationships through interpretive acts which remake these into forms with more local and personal meanings (Hebdige 1979; Fiske 1989).

The restructuring of cultural forms and the experience of living through them become the primary way for people to be in the world. The constant interpretation of the cinematic consumer world and the concomitant reconfiguration of the self to fit the latest images and stories induce a detachment from the world. Louis Sass (1992) discovers in contemporary experiences of culture 'a loose sort of unity'. He identifies:

not a single underlying presence but at least a common thread or two. These have to do with the presence of intensified forms of self-consciousness and various kinds of alienation. Instead of a spontaneous and naïve involvement – an unquestioning acceptance of the external world, the aesthetic tradition, other human beings and one's own

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feelings – both modernism and postmodernism are imbued with hesitation and detachment, a division or doubling in which the ego disengages from normal forms of involvement with nature and society, often taking itself, or its experiences, as its own object. (1992: 37)

It is as if people living in the modern world are trapped between a cultural logic that demands the presence of the 'real' in the world and the simultaneous location of that real in one's own desire and experience. The identification of self through the signs of commodity culture encompasses the entire world in a solipsism that can never be completed.

Contemporary orality

The level of dramatic identification in archaic cultures is similar to what one finds in the spectacular or cinematic culture. One finds a tendency toward an almost pathological identification with the narratives, stories, characters, and situations of contemporary media which rivals the psychic participation in the narratives of archaic cultures. Yet we are not an oral or archaic culture in this sense. Our sense of ourselves derives from widely shared social symbols, but we encounter these primarily in highly mediated forms while the personal and local domain forms the sites at which we practice and perform these selves. We have fairly high levels of literacy in all the modern nations of the world, but we have lost faith in the power of the written word and of social signification to deliver the presence of reality, to stop once and for all the endless train of signification (Barthes 1970: 48). Whereas once a consensual social reality, told in myth and story, connected the transcendent to the everyday, no transcendent ordering lies behind language and society, and without such a notion of truth, opinion and propaganda are as good as fact.

No longer existent in the social realm, truth is now located in the illusion of a socially isolated self. Entire industries for shaping, motivating, educating, and maintaining the modern self have emerged from the fields of advertising, psychology, cosmetics, and pharmacology. These and other institutions devoted to the self force consciousness inward in an unending examination and in attempts at improvement to produce the presence of the real. Various forms of sex and sexuality are especially well suited for this convoluted inversion, for they provide the commodified social forms of consumption (clothes, fragrance, activities, prostitutes, cyber sex) as well as the possibilities of various intensities of experience which, in their momentary dissolution of self, can masquerade as genuine, natural, unstructured experience (see Deleuze and Guattari 1987: 162). J.G. Ballard writes that 'many people ... use sex as a calculated means of exploring uncertainties in their make-up, exploiting the imaginative possibilities that sex provides' (1990: 54). One finds that 'dimestore De Sades stalk the bedrooms of suburbia, reenacting the traumas of weaning and potty training'.

Part of the problem of creating a self in the contemporary, hyper-real world arises from the way in which language and symbols are experienced. Not only

are the narratives mimetic, but experience itself is mimetic, for the experienced world exists not in a direct way but as a substitution and simulation based on ideological constructions. This condition did not come into being overnight but evolved slowly as technologies of reading, writing, and thinking evolved in particular cultural contexts. These do not exist separate from consciousness but are interwoven with it. A word must be heard, a book read, an idea shared. Human beings meet each other on the field of perception, but the rules of engagement are framed by language, and this language has grown more remote from the human and more external to experience with each new technology applied to it. While the benefits of a generalized, shared language are indubitable, the principles upon which that language is organized and promulgated, together with the exclusion of other forms of language from the decision-making processes of the shared social world and from the speech of ordinary people, limit thought, perception, and the self to a relatively few forms (see, for example, Weiner 1954).

Harold Innis (1950; 1951) elaborated the importance of alternative languages of social expression in terms of achieving a balance between time-binding and space-binding media. Time-binding media are those best suited to preserving ideas across time, to providing a duration, and they tend to dominate in conservative, religious, hierarchical societies. Space-binding media are better suited to the transmission of ideas through space and are essential for the construction and maintenance of empires. In Innis' view, in order for a culture to grow and thrive in a stable way, there must be a balance between those media that preserve ideas and resist change and those that democratize, transform, and spread ideas. In other words, there must be some 'dynamic harmony between technology and culture' (Kroker 1984: 104). The industrial West, in Innis' analysis, was highly biased toward the spatial media which gave them monopolies of communication in time; newspapers divided the world into days, the television and radio fragment it into minutes and seconds, and, extending Innis' argument, the computer grants control of micro and nano time, creating finally a 'real time' as a new domain. Meanwhile, those institutions which preserve and repair reality across time (Carey 1989) grow increasingly marginalized: the courts, the church, and face-to-face communication.

Innis identified and updated an uncertainty about the meeting of otherness and interiority which has resonated through Western thought since at least the time of Socrates. The contemporary world has, however, become more complicated since Innis' day. Technology has become the experience of nature both in what we see and in the templates of understanding that we bring to it. As such, language itself becomes another thing, and the bringers of language are 'transmitters' of information which is often only data about the world. As late as the mid seventeenth century, Milton could write that 'books are not absolutely dead things'. The experience of language was still the experience of something ontologically similar to another person, albeit mediated in the text. Now, the traditions, institutions, and even the language that sustained and expressed the self in a counterpoise to extrinsic forms of knowledge are eroding. Those techniques which articulated a self balanced between the

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inwardness of eternal self-examination and the extensiveness and loss of ego boundaries in the world now lack the power to function as intermediators between the two domains. Thus, one is faced with a simple choice of trust or law, psychology or moral conviction, a hypertrophied ego from introspection or an over-extended ego from excessive projection and introjection (see Sass 1992: 222, 230).

We may call this process exteriorization: the transfer of what had been the self-regulations of psyche, ordered by learned social rules, into processes and ideas acquired from second-order systems and expressed in artificial, already structured social events. Exteriorization gives rise to increasing alienation from one's own world and one's own thoughts, feelings, and expectations. In short, a vernacular language and world have been replaced with a constructed world, and this warrants further investigation.

The acquisition of vernacular language

The institutions and discourses of every age posit the conditions within which consciousness confronts the self reflected back to it through culture. However, they also provide the processes and substance from which the reactions of consciousness to the world emerge. Consciousness thus exists in the shared social world of culture, language and symbols, but it has as well its own intentions, desires, and experiences quite independently of culture. The tension between culture and self grows proportionally to the degree of divergence between the socially constrained self and the intentions of consciousness. In oral cultures most of language would be articulated within the local, shared social life and as such would be grounded in and expressive of people's experiences. While certain structural conditions of life were certainly outside control (fate, wars, famines, etc.), the everyday expressions of how to be in the world and with other people were, if not homemade, at least locally made. Even ideas which might be imposed from outside the local, for example, Roman Catholicism or occupation by other invaders, did not necessarily profoundly or suddenly transform the everyday social negotiation of experience. Rather, social and epistemological structures coming from the outside were negotiated and translated into the local.²

Reading and writing, in their early development in European culture, followed this same pattern of negotiation. While contemporary writing and reading are personal, silent tasks, undertaken in some degree of privacy, the separation of these activities from the shared social domain took place only slowly and over centuries. Language as something independent of the physical presence of other people, as something which could exist as text or disembodied words, had to be slowly differentiated through a series of technologies which would separate the internal, psychological processes of language from the social settings of language. As language acquired this personal form, the self constituted within language could acquire a similar kind of independence from the social. The self could become, from the standpoint of consciousness, its own perception of the social,

the starting point of all proof of existence, as in Descartes' *cogito, ergo sum*. Descartes' formulation, however, posits the field of perception as already within the shared world of language, as Merleau-Ponty (1962) has shown.

The contemporary possibilities for language and the self are fairly recent phenomena. In earlier times, language was not so transformed by mediating technologies. Speech and hearing are not, in themselves, technologies but rather ways that people are with each other in the world. We do not encounter meaning ready-made in words and gestures. Rather, the word's meaning is 'first and foremost the aspect taken on by the object in human experience' (1962: 403). Words must be situated within a learned social history of convention before they become meaningful, and this occurs through a process of imitation. We learn our tongue, the vernacular language of everyday existence and immediate expression, without formal training (see Illich 1992: 119–42). There is no art, nothing artificial or made, involved in the initial learning of language. Language is acquired in the interactions with those people around one.

As a consequence of learning language within a group which already shares a range of everyday interests, values, beliefs, and expectations, the speaker of a vernacular is integrated into the group as a vital member and participant. Classically, this language was referred to as the *patrius sermo*, 'the speech of the male head of the household' (1992: 133). The society defines itself in its words as much as in its actions, and sharing those words marks one not only as a member but as a creator and preserver of the group. Words and actions are inseparable in an oral culture, for language exists only in the context of people speaking to each other: one stands literally by his or her words.

One's world is circumscribed through the vernacular language which marks the limits of immediately shared understanding. Further, those who do not share the same language are not members of the same local community, whether that community is defined as the *domus* (the household) or as the village or town. The world in which a vernacular is spoken, precisely through the fact that it is immediately shared and negotiated in the day to day, is deeply inlaid with memories, experiences, and meanings which one shares with others and which imbue the world with depths of cultural textures. It is 'a permanent field or dimension of experience' (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 361) and so helps to shape the forms of the self in the terms of that shared understanding and history. Events resonate through time, touching people and places for generations. The interactions of people engender the meanings of their words and actions, and in so doing, create 'a certain hold upon the world' (1962: 354) in which one's self is perceived.

Whatever language might be spoken over the next mountain peak or around the next bend of the river was not the language which one learned at the family table. But still, one would likely have a knowledge of the other tongues. Illich notes that:

communities in which monolingual people prevail are rare except in three kinds of settings: in tribal communities that have not really experienced the late neolithic period, in communities that have experienced certain intense forms of discrimination, and among the citizens of nation-states that for several generations have enjoyed the benefits of compulsory schooling. (1992: 123)

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These foreign languages would also share some characteristics of the vernacular, for they would have been acquired, less fluently perhaps, in just the same ways that the mother tongue was learned: trial and error in everyday situations with other persons. One learns language without reference to formal grammars or schemata.

Vernacular language is distinguished not only by how it is learned but also by the kinds of relationships within which it develops. Vernacular language emerges between beings who recognize the necessity of mutual coexistence and who exist as equally real for each other. While there may be differentials of power between people in the social dimension, in the dimension of perception all people sharing the same field of experience are familiar, and they share as well the ability to organize the reality of that world, its emergence into meaning. Merleau-Ponty writes that:

Once the other is posited, once the other's gaze fixed upon me has, by inserting me into his field, stripped me of part of my being ... I can recover it only by establishing relations with him, by bringing about his clear recognition of me. (1962: 357)

The establishment of relations occurs through the use of language, and the *poiesis* so experienced is the mutual human creation of selves in the shared social world.

When one encounters another in the world, one sees the world around that person differently precisely because the other has the power to act on the world, to organize and arrange it in ways which are independent of one's self.

No sooner has my gaze fallen upon a living body in the process of acting than objects surrounding it immediately take on a fresh layer of significance: they are no longer simply what I myself could make of them, they are what this other pattern of behavior is about to make of them. (1962: 353)

The actions of other people have the potential to be surprising, unexpected, unpredictable. Moreover, the mere fact of their existence in the world guarantees that the world as well will be imbued with the possibilities of their actions. In meeting others, we enter one another's worlds, each stripping the other of part of that person's being, and the only possibility of recovering that lost being is through engaging the other in mutual recognition. Such recognition is established mainly in language, in speaking.

Shared Understandings: Politics and Language

The tensions between vernacular and taught languages reveal but one example of the many social formations of language in competition with one another, and they reveal only one dimension of psychic and social differences associated with differing origins and uses of various types of language. A taught language, a 'mother tongue', could not emerge independently of the institutions of

linguistic scholarship, centralized political organization, the standardization made possible by printing, and so on. In turn, these institutions were created in response to specific natural and social conditions. Some writers have, perhaps, been too quick to generalize sweeping abstractions about the psychic and social effects following from technological changes in language. The rise of writing, in particular, made possible some significant changes in the uses to which language was put and to the structural forms in which it appeared. However, writing arose in various ways in so many widely varied social contexts that generalizations about its impact as a singular event are not very revealing. Further, to attribute to writing alone the many grand changes in, for example, early Greek philosophy and politics, risks overlooking other factors which, taken as a whole, show a much more complex history.

Writing did not change history so much as it was carried along on a flood of sweeping historical changes and in turn contributed to them, becoming useful as a technology of language in the context of new ways of thinking, speaking, and organizing society. Neither were the changes assisted by writing either sudden or dramatic. For example, even after the introduction of writing, the great epics and lesser poems of Greece were told in oral form for hundreds of years. These stories, as the living cultural memory of Athens, had become by the mid fifth century BCE so well established that 'Plato could deal with poetry as though it were a kind of reference library or as a vast tractate in ethics, politics and warfare' (Havelock 1963: 43). The metaphor may be a bit of a stretch, but it illustrates that 'poets were in an important sense the preservers and transmitters of their cultural heritage' (Thomas 1992: 116). A part of the important knowledge of the Athenians was commemorated in Hesiod's *Theogony* where he acknowledges 'the *nomoi* and *ēthea* of all', which Havelock translates as 'the custom-laws and careful/carefully kept folkways of all' (1986: 56). In turn, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Herodotus each cited both Homer and Hesiod as didactic partners in the education of the Greece of his day (Havelock 1982: 123).

In the cultures of early classical Greece, the story was not told for entertainment but rather acted as a 'performative utterance' of a 'verbal archetype' which supplied the group with a 'linguistic statement or paradigm, telling us what we are and how we should behave' (Havelock 1963: 41–2). Eliade explains the role of such statements, writing that in archaic cultures 'reality is acquired solely through repetition or participation; everything which lacks an exemplary model is "meaningless", i.e. it lacks reality' (1954: 34). The learning of these stories combined with their retelling in regular public and private performances ensured that the values and beliefs which they enshrined became the patterns of thought and expression that would guide the actions of the hearers. The ancient Greeks, however, elaborated social forms that to some extent superseded the necessity of repetition in favor of performance within the domain of the *polis*.

Not merely the language provided meaning and reality; for the Greeks, the context in which language was used was an inseparable component of meaning. The concrete forms of the rhetoric and discussion taking place among the members of the *polis* constituted another social center around which wholly new templates for thought, behavior, and social relations could be formed. Meier writes that:

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The Greeks enjoyed not only a civic (or, in their terms, political) *presence*, but also a civic (or political) *present*, which went hand in hand with political identity: a civic *presence* inasmuch as the citizens were able to assert their will by being present and participating in political affairs; a civic *present*, inasmuch as they had a special mode of experiencing present time. The present for them was not the 'moving point of dust where past and future meet', but a broad and richly charged band of immediate experience. (1990: 22)

Thus, there was for the Greeks another social domain for the formation of meaningful existence. It was not found in the stories themselves, but in the emergence of a particular form of social existence which solidified into the *polis*.

Havelock (1976: 5) observes that this participation grew from the specific social system of the *polis*, which preceded the city-state, and Meier (1990) locates the origins of the *polis* within a series of social crises arising simultaneously with the extension of Greek colonies into the wider Mediterranean region (see also Manville 1990). Certainly, around the ninth century BCE a very ancient social organization began to transform, and with it the manner in which people conceived of their relationship to each other changed as well. In practical terms, *oikoi*, or families, began to recognize and define larger social units. In Athens, the hierarchical organization of the social extended from groups tracing a common descent (*genos*) to groups organized around a common ancestor (*phratría*) and finally to the widest group, the *polis* (Benveniste 1973: 258). Each successive step widened the sphere to which the individual person was obligated in reciprocal relations and respect, that is, there was a progressive elaboration and negotiating about who was included among those with whom one shared a sense of *aidos* (see Benveniste 1973: 278, 281).

The Athenian *polis* required first the elaboration of the idea of a shared social space extending beyond family and household and governed by shared rules. It had its roots in the emergence of the *isonomia* that preceded it. The people of Athens agreed to exist under unified, common *nomoi*, that is, the 'norms and relations that a people accept as valid and binding' (Manville 1990: 198; see also Starr 1990: 36–7). The need to negotiate these norms, as well as the criteria of membership and participation within the *polis*, created the social conditions in which persuasive language could emerge. Wilkerson writes that 'rhetoric, as the art of persuasion and compromise, was tailored to fit this new social milieu' (1994: 22). In order for a whole society to understand how another's interest can become a shared interest for all, 'a new political role has to appear, not just a new player to take over an old role. This calls for social reasoning of a quite different and more abstract kind' (Meier 1990: 29). Meier observes that the political order of the *polis* was split off from the existing social order and set over against it (1990: 20). The *polis* necessitated and created a standpoint of self and thought that was separate from the immediate identification with feeling. The abstraction of an artificial social world required new rules for thinking, speaking, and living within it, and the pressures to develop these new skills contributed to the development of critical thought. The transition from the felt, active world of Homer's Achilles to the dialogic, intellectual

world of Plato thus had its roots in the reorganization of Greek society that took place 300 to 400 years earlier. Writing appeared in Greece somewhere within this period, perhaps 1000 to 750 BCE, and many of the changes attributed to the advent of literacy are more social than technological in origin.

Even within the embryonic *polis*, communal and externalized personalities would find their identity not in the personal and isolated *cogito* but in the belief of the group and its values, as these are presented in the traditional tales of Homer and Hesiod as well as in the everyday life and action of ordinary people who sought to create a new kind of social sphere. Even after the advent of writing and reading, language almost always occurred in a social setting with people whom one knew, who were physically close, who participated in the same experience of the narrative drama and in the same dramas of everyday life. These activities constitute the field in which vernacular language emerges, that speech which 'was drawn from the cultural environment through the encounter with people, each of whom one could smell and touch, love and hate' (Illich 1992: 122). In such a setting, one is not what he or she thinks but what he or she does. One existed only to the extent that others wove him or her into their shared social narratives. Only the external manifestation of thought in action would impinge on others and so allow the people around one to comment, to write one into the social reality, and this action was already heavily determined by identification with the group.

Thus, two languages existed even in preliterate Greece: a language of the vernacular, quotidian speech used in everyday settings and the formalized language of the cultural story stock of poems and epics. No conflict existed between these two, though, for they were clearly separated in use, and while the poetic would inform ordinary habits of thought and action, people still spoke to one another in prosaic forms. The separation of a formal language from a vernacular relies on several social structures that would only appear millennia later. The formal, mythic language lent meaning and temporality to life: 'The rest of his life is passed in profane time, which is without meaning: in the state of "becoming"' (Eliade 1954: 35). Similarly, the function of this mythic structure was being transferred to new forms of the social. Still, it was onto these two forms of language that writing was appended. And at roughly the same time, a new rhetoric, political sphere, and politics were emerging as well. None of these can be teased out of the others as cause or effect, for each constituted a part of the great cultural transitions sweeping Greece between roughly the first millennium and the fifth century BCE.

Writing

The phenomenological experience of early writing follows closely from the experience of speech. The habits of thought in relation to language which had developed over tens of thousands of years did not easily change. Different forms of writing developed, transformed, and were taken up in different ways

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in various places and times so that generalizations about the reception of writing are dangerous. Further, our own understanding of literacy, writing, and representation as a whole strongly influences our attempt to appreciate what the emergence of writing meant to people. Deeply embedded within literate cultures that are on the verge perhaps of becoming postliterate, our perception of literacy is fashioned by our uses of it. Only a few records exist that document the emergence of this technology within Greek society, and these tend to focus more upon its effects, the worries which it caused, or the magic of it, than upon the experience of early writing.

The reception and use of writing were initially not as an encoding of speech or thought but as an aid to memory by repeating externally, in concrete form, an act of mental visualization which had already taken place. Carruthers (1990: 11) notes that she could find no single instance where the act of writing was regarded as a supplanter of memory, not even Plato's *Phaedrus*. From its origins in Greece through the middle ages, alphabetic writing was superimposed upon forms of language and memory already present even down to the metaphors used to describe the process of memory. Socrates uses the image of a seal impression on wax to describe memory in *Theaetetus*, and the metaphor of writing or inscription as memory appears in Cicero, Quintillian, and Augustine, each noting the importance of marking things as a sort of mental image to improve memory (1990: 22). Havelock writes that 'the use of vision directed to the recall of what had been spoken (Homer) was replaced by its use to invent a textual discourse (Thucydides, Plato) which seemed to make orality obsolete. The singing muse translates herself into a writer: she who had required men to listen now invites them to read' (1986: 62).

In a sense, then, writing had been imagined before it existed. While Thomas (1992), Carruthers (1990) and others have demonstrated that the visualization of inscription as well as orality itself continued to be significant into medieval times, if one tempers Havelock's enthusiasm a bit, it is possible to say that orality was not made obsolete by textual discourses but rather provided a model for them. It is not until 1500 years have elapsed that writing becomes divorced from speech and is used independently of speech.

Early uses of writing

If the *polis* was essential for the formation of classical, literate, Greece, the appearance of that particular social form may well have contributed to the need for increasingly common and important examples of writing. Writing would not have become widely accepted in Athens and other cities unless there were compelling reasons for taking it up, and these reasons were not immediately recognized by the Greeks. Havelock observes that the first 300 years of writing and reading in Greece were a sort of 'craft literacy' which 'made little practical difference to the educational system or to the intellectual life of adults' (1963: 39–40). Neither was there a driving rationale for most people's

learning to read or write. Harris (1989: 30–5) notes that several factors may have mitigated against the widespread adoption of literacy, including the availability of mediators in the forms of public scribes or readers either for hire or who might render some written work out of kindness. Certainly, there is little evidence that writing was confined to scribes as it appeared as decoration on vases, in graffiti, in dedications, as well as in public inscriptions (Thomas 1992: 57). Indeed, the elite of Athens were orators and performers, while those who initially used the alphabet may well have been of lower social standing such as stonecutters or potters (Havelock 1986: 89).

The audience and purposes of writing remained restricted at least until the fifth century. Early alphabetic writing for the Greeks had, however, many purposes, being used to identify the owners of vases, to inscribe tombs, as religious decorations, and even as nonsense decorations on black-figure vases (Harris 1989: 46; Thomas 1992: 57). Some evidence exists in the form of ‘curse tablets’ that writing was thought to strengthen the power of the spoken word and thus was linked to magic. In short, depending upon who was the recipient of a written thing and what their pre-existing beliefs and needs were, writing was taken up variously. Standardized uses of writing could only emerge out of repeated social usage such as might produce consensus, and there was not the body of literature present to create a community of literate people until Plato or later. While public, official inscriptions indicate some evidence of growing expectation of the presence of literate people in the community, these would still have been a small number. ‘There must have been an audience of hundreds in most cultivated cities, such as Athens, Corinth, and Miletus, and a nucleus of dozens of literate men in many Greek cities [in the sixth century]’ (Harris 1989: 49). Even as late as the middle of the fourth century, Aristotle could write in *Politics* of the four uses of literacy as: money-making, household management, instruction (*mathesis*), and civic activities (1989: 26).

Until around the middle of the fifth century BCE, if a man (and most literate people were male) learned to read or write, it was in a limited way and was not generally acquired until adolescence, that is, after one already had a proficiency in language and a grounding in the narrative literature of the time. Plato notes in Book II of the *Republic*:

You know, I said, that we begin by telling children stories which, though not wholly destitute of truth, are in the main fictitious; and these stories are told them when they are not of an age for gymnastics. (377)

Writing was introduced slowly into existing social and educational systems and these, being exclusive, did little to spread its reception among people outside the elite classes. However, the growing prestige of literacy emerged from its linkage with power: the legal system, in the setting forth of laws in written form and in the demand for legal contracts, contributed to the social stature of literacy and strengthened its relationship to the state (Harris 1989: 69). Literacy came to be seen as more important in the bringing of legal cases and was even a prerequisite for one’s participation in government.

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The acceptance of writing was thus slow, and the changes to consciousness which Havelock and others attributed to writing were likely less spectacular and sudden than they suggested. However, writing does affect thought and language. A totemic consciousness exists only in cultures that are deeply steeped in orality, and the name of the thing has power over it, prompting both euphemistic names and various types of magic. To separate the word from the thing, some sort of distancing of language is needed, and writing provides just the right sort of structure to achieve this. Olson has argued that 'writing is not the transcription of speech but rather provides a conceptual model for that speech' (1994: 89). Olson explains that writing 'spells the death of "word" magic or more precisely, "name" magic. Words are no longer emblems; words are now distinguished from both things and names of things; words as linguistic entities come into consciousness' (1994: 75). As such, the word no longer represents some property of the thing, but now stands in place of the thing. The word can now be examined in relationship to other words and concepts and can become an abstract idea for reflection.

Actions and attributes in oral Greece appearing in the deeds of heroes and gods become in classical Greece philosophical concepts (1994: 76). Creating the word from the flow of sound, writing created the idea of the word and established it as a thing in the world. Havelock (1963: 206) theorized that writing freed the mind from 'long patterns of habitual and mental responses' to set pieces of narrative, thus helping to create the conditions in which rational philosophy and critical dialectics could develop. Writing, in its slow development within the context of spoken language, established a syntax which could then be turned around upon a spoken language and applied to it. Dialectical questioning forced the restatement of things known in the old poetic forms into prosaic forms, disrupting their unquestioned acceptance. 'To ask what [the traditional poem] was saying amounted to a demand that it be said differently, non-poetically, non-rhythmically, and non-imagistically' (1963: 209).

It is impossible to identify with precision the moments these changes began to appear. Possibly some of the changes in attitude toward classical narratives were already taking place in the time of Hesiod (eighth century) and even Homer (eighth or ninth century) (Havelock 1982: 209). Certainly, there are limits to the kinds of complexity of thought an oral culture can preserve, and these limitations may have begun to be felt and addressed around the time of the advent of writing. New social forms of organization appeared around the same times as noted above. For whatever reasons, although the Greeks had taken up a modified Phoenician writing system as an alphabet as early as 750 BCE, the use of this system in any consistent and proficient way did not develop until the middle of the fifth century, and it was at this point that the influences of the new technology were beginning to make themselves known. What we now understand of this period derives from a handful of writings which have survived the intervening millennia, and among the most important of these are the writings of Plato.

Plato

Plato's words on writing contain a complex set of discussions about orality and literacy. There is some evidence that elements of literate thought had already begun to appear in Greek culture as early as the eighth century, but the oral traditions of oratory, drama, and poetry were still strong. Literacy, though present, was not yet widespread. As such, Plato's own understanding of literacy in the setting of his philosophical project reflects an ambiguity toward the new technologies of reading and writing. In the *Republic* he is apparently critical of the characteristics of his oral culture, and in the *Phaedrus* he is critical of writing.

Being literate himself, Plato undoubtedly understood the advantage of literacy in creating a distance between the knower and the known. Havelock regarded those of Plato's dialogues that assail writing and poetry, particularly the *Republic* and the *Phaedrus*, as attacks upon and attempts to separate his language and thought from the pre-existing orality of Athenian culture. This approach explains some of the philosopher's seemingly paradoxical statements about writing and knowledge. Plato's project has been characterized as being, in part, the destruction of 'the immemorial habit of self-identification with the oral tradition' (Havelock 1963: 201). Plato's approach to rationality, as proposed in his academy as well as in his vision of the utopian republic, privileged mathematics, geometry, and analytic thought applied to both the natural world and the human domain. This is not to suggest that the preliterate Greeks were incapable of logic or rational thought but rather demonstrates that a new kind of analytic thought, based upon the analysis of words and concepts as things in themselves, was emerging for a variety of reasons.

Many of the elements of critical thought were already present in Greece before Socrates and Plato and hence before the widespread acceptance of literacy. These had developed through the lyric poets, through pre-Socratic 'adventures in thought', and through the influence of political classes and the rule of law (Wilkerson 1994: 34). Certainly, the continuing evolution of the *polis* and the need to redefine people's relations to one another in an ongoing way also contributed to the elaboration of abstract and critical thinking. As the *polis* was isometric with the cosmos, this social project led to profound reconsideration of all aspects of life. Meier writes that 'for a long time, and especially since the days of Solon, men had seen a mutual correspondence between the order of the *polis* and the order of the universe. Changing notions of the one generated fresh perceptions of the other' (1990: 91–2). He continues, 'Such shattering events called for a profound rethinking of everything, including the relations among the gods' (1990: 92).

Plato's thought and writing thus must be set within the general social context of rethinking the whole of heaven and earth and of developing the rational critical tools for so doing. The ability rationally to assess the world was paramount to Plato's thought. In the *Republic* he writes:

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And the arts of measuring and numbering and weighing come to the rescue of the human understanding – there is the beauty of them – with the result that the apparent greater or less, or more or heavier, no longer have mastery over us, but give way before the power of calculation and measuring and weighing. (602)

The abstract arts of determining the attributes of the physical world assist human understanding, giving people power over the being of the world. This is a knowledge which is present in the Homeric epics, but the Homeric Greeks had no compelling reason to develop such skills as critical thought and rhetoric. ‘The primary condition for the development of the art of rhetoric – belief in the efficacy of human decision – missing in Homer, was not fully present in ancient Greece until the fifth century’ (Wilkerson 1994: 34).

Not only the physical world but also the human world of stories must be examined and abstracted. In the *Republic* Plato discusses as well the need to evaluate the poetry which provided so much social identity of the time. Plato’s issue with the poetic forms is that mimesis, dramatic imitation and impersonation, returned one to the identification with the representation of the thing in contrast to the *episteme* of the academy (Havelock 1963: 31). Rationality depends upon critical thought, and this critical faculty requires that separate examples in a narrative can be ‘torn out of context, correlated, systematized, unified and harmonized to provide a formula’ (1963: 217). Plato seeks to lift events out of the contexts of the poetic and epic forms and analyze, for example, justice itself rather than the acts of just or unjust people. Such an analysis, if not requiring writing, certainly benefits from writing and from the mental techniques that emerge from literacy, that is, from finding moments on the page that do not fade with the speaker’s words and that can be compared, contrasted and analyzed.

The narrative or idea that is thus taken out of the oral context enters a new condition of existence: ‘the absolute isolated identity is not only a “one”, it is also a “being”’ (1963: 219). Created outside the streaming world of time yet referring to it, ‘the abstracted object of knowledge has to lose not only plurality of action in time but also color and visibility. It becomes “the unseen”’ (1963: 219). In other words, the rational process of technology creates something which, for Plato, corresponds with the world of the true, of the form, but this new creation does not appear in the world but only in the mind. The form or the idea can then serve as a model for things that one can make in the world and that have a recognizable and visible being. On this ground Plato may attack not only poetry in general, but Homer specifically:

Friend Homer, then we say to him, if you are only in the second remove from truth in what you say of virtue, and not in the third – not a image maker, that is, by our definition, an imitator – and if you are able to discern what pursuits make men better or worse in private or public life, tell us what State was ever better governed by your help? (*Republic* 599)

Plato charges that Homer’s poetic observations are not true in the sense that they are a received, third-order representation of the world rather than

meditation on the world as it is. He does not dispense with Homer, but locates him within the classification of literature.

The Platonic self

The psychological changes attending the rise of the *polis* and the advent of literacy had begun to appear but had not yet taken hold sufficiently to displace the old psychology of orality, and the greatest proponent of orality was, for Plato, poetry. 'Poetry is not so much non-functional as antifunctional. It totally lacks the precise aims and goals which guide the skilled educator in the training of his intellect' (Havelock 1963: 25). The needs of the new settings in which the thinker and speaker found himself demanded an ability to differentiate, classify, and abstract all manner of things as well as the relations between them. The mimesis or imitation was the process through which the template of oral narrative was taken up, but it was this imitation that caused the problem. He writes in Book X of the *Republic* that 'the imitator is a long way off the truth, and can reproduce all things because he lightly touches on a small part of them, and that part an image' (598). He elaborates that the imitation is both what the poet labors under and what the audience sees as well:

Painting or drawing, and imitation in general, are engaged upon productions which are far removed from truth, and are also the companions and friends and associates of a principle within us which is equally removed from reason, and that they have no true or healthy aim. (*Republic* 603)

Note that Plato locates this imitation not only in art itself, but also within people as a kind of deception or confusion, and it is from this fog of illusion that rationality will free people. People have internalized a false sense of the world based on artistic mimesis, and they must now internalize a true sense of the world.

The way to make a consciousness based on truth rather than upon received wisdom lay not in abandoning the traditional folk wisdom of the epics and poems but in evaluating them critically. Plato does not recommend the destruction or elimination of the old wisdom but rather supports its careful use in society. He recognizes that some narratives might prove unsuitable for children, for the unprepared and unschooled, and might lead them into confusion, and some tales might prove especially damaging. Even these, though, are not rejected completely. Plato recommends of these that:

if there is an absolute need for their mention, a chosen few might hear them in a mystery, and they should sacrifice not a common pig, but some huge and unprocurable victim, so that the number of hearers may be very few indeed. (378)

Rather than use the forms of things as known through poetic imitation, through mimesis, the Platonic science would use 'the unique and exact Forms as models' (Havelock 1963: 30).

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Socrates and Plato did not invent this new consciousness; it had been growing in the minds of many people, and it certainly depended not just upon writing, but upon a range of social factors which are difficult to identify. Undeniably, however, literacy was central in creating new social habits of reading, writing, discussing and understanding language. As noted above, the emergence of this community of literate people depended as well upon a supply of readers and texts. However, in the 400 or so years between Homer and Socrates, changes were emerging in the minds of the Greeks which are of importance to understanding the historical evolution of the self.

The Homeric folk psychology 'lacked a vocabulary and its corresponding concepts for thinking about the mind' (Olson 1994: 240), and especially for thinking about the individual, the subject. Havelock describes Homer's Achilles as an example of a person 'to whom it has not occurred and cannot occur that he has a personality apart from the pattern of his acts' (1963: 197). The person in archaic society exists meaningfully only to the extent that he or she is implicated in the dramas described in the narrative forms, and as such has no self-regulating identity. Such a person 'sees himself as real, i.e. as truly himself only, and precisely insofar as he ceases to be so' (Eliade 1954: 34). There were simply no models for self-directing, self-conscious people in the old poetic forms. Responsibility, motivation, and action arise for the Homeric Greek from the shared social, from gods or causes which are not located within the person or in the mind. In order to shift the location of these to the person, a new language is called for, and numerous terms undergo changes in meaning and usage, not least among them the use of the terms related to mind and cognition.

The creation of a separate domain for concepts is necessary for exploring the characteristics of them. The Homeric Greeks had no words for religion, or psychology, or soul. The meaning of the word *psyche* changed from 'signifying a man's ghost or wraith or a man's breath or his life blood' and came to mean something like "the ghost who thinks", that is, is capable both of moral decision and scientific cognition and is the seat of moral responsibility' (Havelock 1963: 197). The ancient language located mind in the experience of feelings or sensations, caused by outside forces or entities. Thus, '*thumos* is the experience of stress which moves one to action', while '*Phrenes*, lungs, provide a place for retaining words, fears, and even wine, which beclouds *thumos*', and *noos*, derived from 'to see', resides in the chest (Olson 1994: 239). By the middle of the fifth century, these had been refigured into attributes and intentionalities located in the head.

These ways of thinking about the mind were not just descriptions but also prescriptions, mental templates for a new kind of 'common-sense' understanding of what the human being is and of people's awareness of themselves as self-conscious entities who can now be the objects of their own examination and contemplation. In the mental act of creating language as a thing outside the person that could be studied, examined, and theorized, ideas become independent of the spoken word. They change from being 'the winged word that always rushes by before it has been fully grasped' (Illich and Sanders 1988: 7) to apparently fixed forms, timeless ideas, and meanings. The distinction arises

between what is said and what it means, that is, between the spoken sound and what is thought about it. Applied internally to one's own ideas and words, a critical consciousness of self is made possible; and articulated socially, a responsibility for self becomes necessary.

Plato saw a timeless set of forms and truths which must have seemed to be absolutely real for him in his moment of radical vision. He was envisioning the next step that his culture was in the process of taking, and so he saw both the present, in his view mistaken, moment and the future possible world of forms and rational philosophy. What Plato did not envision was that this change was a movement along a continuum from one kind of consciousness to another rather than a progression toward truth as an additive advance in human consciousness.

Plato could make his philosophical move not only because he had writing at his disposal, but also because he had a vernacular language which was separate from the formal language of the poets, separate from the language of the rhetor, and which was newly viable as a means of argument, expression, and debate.

Dialogues of orality and literacy

If writing imposed a new structure onto speech and thought, it also created the possibility that some kinds of information exist outside the mind. The Platonic forms which lay behind all appearance were one kind of external idea, and the histories, philosophies, truth, wisdom, and knowledge were still acquired in the philosophical way, through meditation, but new techniques for manipulating language following the patterns of reading grew to a new importance.

An apparent paradox in Plato's thought concerns his ideas about writing. Writing is a tool, an aid, and not to be overly relied upon. Writing is described in *Phaedrus* as a *pharmakon*, both a medicine and a poison depending on its use. Plato says that 'this facility will make the souls forgetful because they will no longer school themselves to meditate. They will rely on letters. Things will be recollected from outside by means of alien symbols, they will not remember on their own.' The written word can only remind one of what he or she already knows; writing is the semblance of wisdom. 'The danger in it was that men might begin to rely upon writing instead of truly learning things by imprinting them first in their memories' (Carruthers 1990: 31). Thus for Plato, neither the old oral narratives nor the new skills of letters could truly introduce knowledge about the world into the mind. Rather, such knowledge could only be acquired through argument, dialogue, and meditation. This was in part possible because participation in the *polis* had come to provide the social identification for people that had been provided by the poetic forms. Further, the knowledge of which Plato wrote was internalized knowledge acquired through thought and meditation, and such a model of knowledge presages a relation that the physical body would have to book learning through the middle ages (see Illich and Sanders 1988: 24-8).

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As literacy developed in Athens and other parts of Greece, diverse ways of reading different sorts of written material developed. Lists, public laws, *ostraka*, and graffiti would not have been read in the same ways, and philosophical writings or the epics of Homer would have been read differently still, yet all of these are subsumed under the idea of literacy, blurring the differences. Kaster notes that ‘the slow writers, and persons who could painstakingly sign legal documents but were otherwise illiterate, or the man who could only read block letters, would all have called themselves, literate; they were clearly “not without letters”’ (1988: 43). However, the specific modalities of reading as they developed would have become formalized in social structures and institutions which in turn would reinforce their linkages to lines of social power as well as guarantee their continuation through the practices of students. As language became another thing in the world which could be studied and theorized, so it could also be operated upon using empirical and logical thinking to transform it into a tool. Particularly, schools would formalize the new techniques derived from literacy into teachings about reading and about language.

The liberal arts

The project of privileging critical thought was influential on the shape of education and the organization of knowledge through late antiquity and into the medieval period. Music, which had once been a central pillar of education, became less important. Rhetoric, dialectics, and grammar, that is, those disciplines devoted to language and literature, served practically in the presenting of one’s self in formal social settings and so were essential to having a professional and political life. These skills developed a new importance in the Classical period and later. While oratory had always been esteemed in Greece, the art of rhetoric was specifically a technology for enhancing speech and argument oriented toward specific ends, identified by Aristotle as forensic, deliberative, or epideictic, and it separated speakers who meant what they said from those who spoke for an effect. This fact did not go unnoticed, for upon the receipt of this Greek art for manipulating language, many in Rome were skeptical of the effect it would have on debate and public speech. In 161 BCE the Roman senate approved of the expulsion of rhetoricians and philosophers, suspecting that they perverted truth and might invert the common belief, framed by Cato: *rem tene, verba sequentor* (hold to the matter, the words will follow) (see Clarke 1971: 30). The problem with rhetoric is that sometimes the truth will fall before a well-turned argument.

These subjects were not ends in themselves but were preparatory. Seneca argued that the liberal arts prepared the mind for virtue but did not themselves impart it, and centuries earlier Plato, in *Phaedrus* (269), had held the *enkuklia* as subordinate to philosophy (see Clarke 1971: 3–4). Grammar taught literature, essential for knowing the myths and stories and the structure of the language in which they were told. Dialectic or logic, however, in its early form, forced the

restatement of the poetic truths in prosaic forms, demanding an abstraction of content and principles from the rhythms and images (Havelock 1963: 208–9). The most important of the arts after the archaic period, though, was rhetoric, for in both Greece and Rome it led to a political and public career.³ Aristotle writes in the *Nicomachean Ethics* that the highest science is politics, and this was still a politics which sought, at least in theory, to model the cosmic structure in the structure of human relations.

Such applications of deliberate thought for the manipulation of language are not primary functions of language; they are not essential to the learning or practice of language in everyday life, and in fact grammar and rhetoric were taught in Greece only after one had already learned to read and write. Yet such skills are essential to a public life, for in the social field of adults, the world is not self-evidently the same for each. The ends, desires, and skills of one or other persons may, then, provide the motive and abilities to sway others to accept one particular view. Yet, however skilled a Greek or Roman orator might be, however subtle or even misleading his reasoning, in rhetoric one must recognize and engage the other person or persons. They could not be objects to be ignored or organized without their consent within the context of the *agora*.⁴

Medieval writing and the internalization of the word

The emergence of writing created an uneasiness and a tension between the domain of orality and that of literacy, a division that would grow especially as literacy came to be implicated not only with class and prestige but with tradition and thus cultured thought. As early as the fifth century AD the Bishop of Clermont, Sidonius, would write that ‘the educated are as far superior to the uncultured as human beings are to beasts’ (Kaster 1988: 91). Writing, perhaps as early as the sixth century BCE, began to be accepted as a way of storing information separate from speech (Thomas 1992: 64), but the technologies of texts and the mental habits for using them which emerged around the twelfth century increased the independence of the text from spoken word. Certainly something significantly new was introduced to human thought with writing and reading.

The development of a complex epistemology for the written word which was at the same time independent of speech relied on exposure to much writing as well as upon a social consensus about how writing was to be understood. Social institutions such as law courts also were slow to adopt widespread use of writing, and where it was adopted, it always coexisted with oral forms. Thus, a limited number of texts as well as limited exposure to reading in general hampered writing’s taking on of an independent existence and limited literary practices to the courts and monastic settings of medieval Europe. In social function, the

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early written text served as a supplement and record of events which were still grounded in human interactions.

Its very physicality bound the book to a concrete existence in the medium of writing even though an oral dimension was required to liberate the knowledge of the book. Even before the great illuminations of medieval texts, the letters themselves, their color and size and design, were used as mnemonic devices for finding passages of texts. These would be seen not only by the reader but by the audience as well. Illustrations within a text would provide visual metaphors for the written words, further helping the internalization of the text. However the technologies of writing and reading remained separate. Reading by no means guaranteed the ability to write. Clanchy notes that 'writing was considered a special skill in the Middle Ages which was not automatically coupled with the ability to read' (1979: 88). In the new universities of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, reading remained the key skill: 'In lecture, students studied from books open before them, but it is significant, I think, that the manuscript illuminations typically show them without pens' (Carruthers 1990: 159).

Rather than being displaced, orality continued in new forms, operating in tandem with reading into early modern times, and it is the form which this orality took that reveals much about the relationship between reading and speaking. New prose forms of composition and story-telling emerged which coexisted with and influenced the oral forms. Alphabetic writing had appeared in a culture with highly developed social forms of speech and disputation, and when writing was subsequently taken up by people in Sicily and on the Italian peninsula it did not immediately bring the writings of the Greeks but was used in the contexts of the various languages and narrative traditions within which it appeared. The new writing did not yet exist separate from the spoken, and neither did the words within it have real value until internalized within the speaking, the body, the mind, and the soul of the reader.

Certainly technological changes were being made to writing which both improved its permanence and added to its ease of use, particularly as a reference. While the Greeks preferred papyrus which was imported from Africa for their writing surface, the Romans greatly expanded the use of parchment as a permanent writing surface. Parchment is much more durable than papyrus and survives the wet, cold weather of the European climate better. The second technology was the widespread use of the codex, the book form, in preference to scrolls. The codex form enables one to turn to a sought-after page or passage without unwinding a scroll from the end and searching through it, and from late Roman times the codex became the dominant form for storing writing. Those works which were sufficiently popular or which were deemed to be of enough importance were copied into this new form. 'Books that made the transition [to codex form] successfully had a reasonable chance of surviving and being read in the centuries to come, while books that did not were likely to be orphaned' (O'Donnell 1998: 52).

The principal medium of the middle ages continued to be parchment, though paper was introduced into Europe at least as early as the twelfth century by Arabic traders traveling from China. Initially suspicious of the new

material and uncertain of its long-term durability, people were reluctant to use paper and in some cases were even forbidden to do so by law. Within 200 years, however, the use of paper was greatly extended and it had begun to be manufactured in Europe (Febvre and Martin 1976: 20). By the end of the thirteenth century, paper had largely supplanted parchment as the medium for the book.

If spoken language took place in social settings, so too did book reading, and in many cases book writing. The amanuensis who took dictation from a speaker continued in one form or another into the modern era, supplemented by various technologies ranging from the wax tablet and the use of minuscule writing as a kind of shorthand (Clanchy 1979: 89) to, much later, stenographic recording equipment. Throughout the ancient world and the middle ages, books were read aloud and often to others. The orality of the word produced from the written page linked speech to writing from Quintillian through to Hugh of St Vincent. In such practices, 'reading is to be digested, to be ruminated, like a cow' (Carruthers 1990: 164). By the same token, composition was also a *ruminatio*, a regurgitation of what had been taken in, digested, and produced again. Illich cites several medieval references which describe monastic reading in terms of food and oral pleasures. The scriptures are 'sweeter than honey in the honeycomb', and St Bernard, referring to reading, says, 'Enjoying their sweetness, I chew them over and over' (Illich 1993: 54–6).

Writing and reading were heard, and while some people could read in silence, the usual manner of reading was aloud in the presence of others. This social context ensured that reading remained an experience similar to meeting people. One did not simply see the text; one heard it with the same attention that would be given to a speaking person. The book is heard as another person, or as the voices of many people, who has or have a presence in the world of being which, while not quite equivalent with the human, is still not within the world of things. The book has the potential to change the reader's thinking and to reorder the world. In precisely this sense, the author emerges as a textual figure whose importance is assured through his influence on others and his survival in their minds and memories. He does not exist as a person with intentions separate from the text but is found in the text, *ad res* (Carruthers 1990: 190–1).

This physical internalizing of the text ensured as well that meditation, which from the time of Socrates was the only source of true wisdom, kept a place in reading. And as meditation was preserved, so also was memory. Carruther's study reveals that 'medieval culture remained profoundly memorial in nature, despite the increased use and availability of books', and she identifies the primary factor for memory's retention as 'the identification of memory with the formation of moral virtues' (1990: 156).

Such a determined method for testing knowledge within the body through meditation was a significant advance from the studies of Athens where, as Kaster notes, 'far from understanding his culture, the man emerging from the schools of grammar and rhetoric would have no overall view of history, only a memory of disjointed but edifying vignettes; no systematic knowledge of philosophy or of any philosophic school, but a collection of ethical commonplaces' (1988: 12).

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The integration of the old oral skills into the new forms demanded by an approach to a body of literature aided in the development of techniques for balancing orality and literacy to a degree that had not existed before and has not existed since.

Interpretation

The framework of theology, and particularly of the patristic writings, undoubtedly contributed to a solidifying of the practices of both education and literacy. Medieval religious scholars accomplished what the Greeks had never done, that is, to establish a canon of literature under the control of a priesthood, and so to centralize and standardize aspects of reading and scholasticism throughout Europe. Carruthers explains that:

All exegesis emphasized that understanding was grounded in a thorough knowledge of the *littera*, and for this one had to know grammar, rhetoric, history, and all the other disciplines that give information, the work of *lectio*. But one takes all of that and builds upon it during meditation; this phase of reading is ethical in its nature, or 'tropological' (turning the text onto and into one's self) as Hugh defines it. (1990: 165)

To hold and organize everything within the self required memory skills that could only be developed slowly and with practice. This oral linkage kept writing tied to familiar kinds of memory as well. The epistemological function of theology linked the internal memory with an external guide, providing a shared structure to the internal experiences of reading and meditation; theology provided an interpretive dimension.

This interpretive function is required in reading. Olson (1994) has demonstrated that writing lacks the ability to convey directly the illocutionary power of language; writing gives very limited detail about the mental state or immediate intention of the author. The written word is not real in the same way as the spoken word; it cannot present the other speaker as immediately present, and so there is no mutual recognition between people in the literate situation. Reading enabled one to imagine that recognition and identification with the author as with another person were still possible, but the only way in which both the reader and the writer could appear within the sphere of a shared existence would be through the reader's internalizing of the author. As the author's intent through much of the middle ages appeared only on the page, the loss of this internalizing process demanded another way of understanding the author. Without this process, the reader must rely on interpretation to understand intent, and this interpretation relies upon social strategies of reading and exegesis which begin to develop in earnest at about the same time.

Other technologies emerged from changing social conditions, including the rise of bureaucracies and universities, and the need to manage the growing

libraries, chanceries, and correspondence. Certainly increasing numbers of books and papers required more efficient management systems, but also they led to physical systems for linking related parts of different texts to one another. Concordances, indices, and library inventories transferred the connections made in one's mind into the book itself or other writings (Illich 1993: 104). The use of bibliographies was in part St Jerome's fourth century answer to pagan authors (as well as threatened Christians) that Christianity could muster significant numbers of scholars and philosophers (Rouse and Rouse 1986: 133). This is much the same process as bringing witnesses to a court or a hearing, but the witnesses were assembled in the written text. The bibliography begins to appear frequently in the late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries, but its use was changing. Now the bibliography as well as indices were used as methods of cross-reference both to scripture and to other works as an early form of 'non-linear access' (O'Donnell 1998: 56). The writing down of fully-formed complex glosses of works suggests that these were already largely complete and held in memory to be written down later in response to the demand from the universities (Carruthers 1990: 159). No longer would memory or discussion be the sole ways of drawing connections between works; the connections could appear on the page.

However, not everyone would have read in the meditative fashion of monastic tradition, and all written matter did not serve the same function. Both within and without the centers of monastic reading, works written not to enlighten or edify but to document and certify grew increasingly important through the twelfth century. Clanchy (1979: 120) notes that 'for monks, the primary purpose of writing was to inform, or misinform, posterity', as for example in the veneration of a saint or stewardship of his relics. Clanchy continues:

Thus the monastic approach to records was ambivalent: documents were created and carefully conserved so that posterity might know about the past, but they were not necessarily allowed to accumulate by natural accretion over time nor to speak for themselves, because the truth was too important to leave to chance. (1979: 120)

As the status of writing and reading changed, and as the phenomenological experience of them also altered, new ways of thinking which were modeled on the new forms of language took a turn as well. Writers such as Erasmus and Montaigne questioned whether memory and knowledge were coincidental or separable (Rossi 2000). Writing became a solitary practice which no longer afforded readers the encounter with others but rather enabled the encounter with their ideas. Illich writes that:

only after Hugh's death, sounding lines on the page fade and the page becomes a screen for the order willed by the mind. Rather than a means to revive a *narratio*, the theological and philosophical book becomes the exteriorization of a *cogitatio*, of a thought structure. (1993: 105)

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Physical technologies such as page layout and an increasingly uniform script contributed to the visual form of this change in thinking. In its development as an abstraction, the book changed from 'a pointer to *nature* to a pointer to *mind*' (1993: 119), and once freed from the constraint of a human presence, reading became a metaphor for understanding both the 'signs' of a text and the 'signs' of nature.

After Printing

It was not that monastic reading changed or failed. While monastic scholars adopted the new linguistic technologies and applied these to scholarship and teaching, new forms of writing and reading were becoming widespread in other areas of society. The link between the Catholic Church and literacy, always firm, was altered and weakened by a growing number of secular clerks, registrars, secretaries, and accountants (McKitterick 1989; Pryce 1998) and an increasing use of documentation in royal courts (Clanchy 1979). Increasing demand for writing and reading contributed to a growing social pressure for inexpensive reproduction that emerged in Mainz around 1430 and rapidly developed throughout Europe (Febvre and Martin 1976; Eisenstein 1979).

As with writing itself, many of the changes brought by print took place only slowly over centuries while others were much more immediate. Linguistic boundaries were fixed as books began to be published in local languages rather than Latin (Febvre and Martin 1976: 309, 323–4; Eisenstein 1984: 82). Instead of the idiolects of individual Latin writers or the styles of schools (such as were set in the Carolingian court), language became more uniform in spelling, dialect, and grammar within larger groups of people, and this contributed to the emergence of particular dialects and the marginalization of others. Official, national languages begin only after printing.

Other aspects of life were even slower to change, particularly where they reflected people's use of language in traditional or everyday settings. Into the eighteenth century, the printed word continued to have for some a sort of magical quality, as one found in early literacy in Greece. For example, the Bible continued as a sort of icon or talisman, and even waving the pages in the face of a sick person could effect a cure (Houston 1988: 225). Similarly land transfers, although registered centrally in Scotland from 1617 (one of the first countries to do so), continued in the old fashion. 'The written "instrument of sasine" was recorded in official volumes, but the actual transfer usually took place on the land itself, and involved the handing over of a clod of earth to the seller before witnesses' (1988: 224). Eisenstein observes that most rural villages remained a hearing public until probably the nineteenth century, even though they had been transformed: the local story-teller being 'replaced by the exceptional literate villager who read out loud from a stack of cheap books and ballad sheets' (1984: 93). In the United States, such public readings, especially of newspapers, took place in post offices well into the nineteenth century (John 1995).

Among the most immediate changes was the acceleration of messages in writing through society and the sheer amount of written material available. Pamphlets and broadsheets were produced in such speed and abundance that propaganda was erupted in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. In pre-Norman England no library lists over 100 works in its collection (Thomson 1986: 28), while after the advent of printing both monastic and personal libraries commonly exceed 500 holdings (Febvre and Martin 1976: 263–4). The effect of this increase in books, pamphlets, broadsheets and such was not, however, a general increase in universal knowledge, and in much early printing an amplification and reinforcement of existing ideas resulted from the 'ever more frequent repetition of identical chapters and verses, anecdotes and aphorisms, drawn from very limited scribal sources' (Eisenstein 1984: 89). This both increased the spread of mistakes and ensured an often conservative impulse to the emerging literacy. Febvre and Martin write that:

Although printing certainly helped scholars in some fields, on the whole it could not be said to have hastened the acceptance of new ideas or knowledge. In fact, by popularizing long cherished beliefs, strengthening traditional prejudices and giving authority to seductive fallacies, it could even be said to have represented an obstacle to the acceptance of many new views. Even after new discoveries were made they tended to be ignored and reliance continued to be placed in conventional authorities. (1976: 278)

Especially following the development of printing, the author and the text have a status of being which, as it subsequently wanes in the experience of reading, emerges in the philosophical ideas of the Renaissance. One such belief held that there was an occult knowledge in writing which lay behind that which was revealed in the alphabet. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries hieroglyphs were believed to express ancient secrets not captured in alphabetic writing, and some persons theorized the existence of lost languages, the languages of Enoch or Adam, for example, which revealed the true nature and hidden secrets of the universe. By the seventeenth century, 'language was envisioned as an aggregate of discrete sounds, each denoting a mental image, which in turn mirrored a natural world of separate physical objects' (Hudson 1994: 43). From around 1600 on, writing had an ambiguous status in the world, operating now as a corrupter of natural goodness and now as a liberator from ignorance (Hudson 1994; Foucault 1970). The uncertainty about the relationship between writing and orality reflected an uncertainty about the status of the sign and the signifier to guarantee the real.

It is only on the basis of a shared set of beliefs about particular practices and truth that language can be believed to represent what is. Dumouchel notes that:

truth as adequation between what is in the mind and what is in the world is an illusion, the illusion *par excellence* of the Occident, the illusion of a pure presence, God, Nature, Man, that founds and guarantees the system of signs, the illusion of an origin that transcends, orders and guards the domain of signification. (1992: 84)

The Pure Signifier and Lost Presence

Writing and the Platonic *eidos* suppose a truth, a pure signifier that does not refer to anything else except itself (see Derrida 1972). As Dumouchel writes, 'this object would be the object of a perfectly singular experience, in order to be communicable, to gain a signification, it must become an ideal object, an *eidos* ... a repeatable entity that can be associated with the signifier every time it is used' (1992: 83). Initially residing in the group's participation in oral narratives and stories, the truth was simply what was and this was exemplified in the acceptance of a psychic and social template of thought and behavior. A presence maintained with narrative established both the group structure and personal identity within the group. All behavior which was structured within the group had meaning; it took place within a framework which was meaningful because it was impersonal, because it belonged to the group. This presence is not yet differentiated into ideas which might exist within the mind, and so Heraclitus can locate the *logos* – which is still not yet words – as originating outside himself. With the evolution of writing and books, this truth ends up being successively displaced.

Writing produces the signifier as a visible thing, a marker which clearly stands between consciousness and the world and which raises the undeniable awareness that language is now not treating a real world itself, but only a marker for it, its trace (Derrida 1972; 1976). While other social forces undoubtedly contributed to the emergence of the idea as separate from the poetic and epic narratives, reading was the crucial technology required for the elaboration of a signifier which was finally differentiated from the presence of the thing; the old 'word magic' began to break down as the independent word took form. For centuries the truth, the reality of the written word as an instrument for transmitting ideas (rather than as a marker or listing of things), had to be translated into a personal and direct physical experience of the world. This was accomplished through the internalization of words which could be woven into one's own primary perceptual experience of the world. The written words of others were woven as well into the fabric of memory and consciousness in visual metaphors with other visual assistance from the page. As such the 'presence' was still not externalized but existed as a lived experience of thought flavored by reading.

In the late twelfth century, particular technologies of language transformed the scholastic reading into a scanning, an amassing, an accounting and reckoning of ideas which no longer located the presence of god in the *experience* of the word beheld in meditation but in the *idea* of the word. God and truth were no longer present in the word which was now confined to the page but, like Prester John's kingdom, were progressively moved further and further away until their absence in the cultural reality of early modern thinking became unavoidably obvious. The *eidos* became the idea, and this was now becoming simply information.

The presence was apparently missed and longed for. The displaced presence was sought for elsewhere in language: in lost tongues, in occult secrets, and in

the sciences themselves which proposed to replace the lost presence of god with the new presence of a revealed physical world. Leibniz, Descartes and others sought to find a universal system for representing ideas as graphic characters, and Bacon favored an ideolectic system of writing similar to Chinese (Hudson 1994: 44). This language of science combined with the techniques of bourgeois literacy in the service of business, and from them emerged a new language which was true not because it revealed god but because it was efficient, didactic, teachable and, above all, finally necessary to people who were increasingly able to define themselves in groups with which they had only tenuous and literate connections.

The original presence carried in speech was a recognition of the presence of the other which invokes and validates the existence of the self. Reading enabled one to engage the other initially by a psychomotor act of eating and chewing, literally consuming the other, taking the other within to be part of oneself. Interpretive strategies, however, allowed the reader to hold the other in mind as an idea, and in so doing, interpretive strategies shift the focus of attention from the transitive experience to the substantive (see Sass 1992: 220ff). Rather than the experience of the other as presence, interpretation requires the signifier as the present marker of the other, as that which can be interpreted. The place where one would find the illocutionary parts of language shifts to the ideational and epistemological, and as this model of language is imposed on thought (Olson 1994: 89), self begins to be defined in the ideational realm. One's emotional self and experience of the emotive are then the experience not of the other but of the increasingly culturally elaborated *idea of the other*. The self begins to exist within the signs and signifiers alone which can never present the presence that precedes language: the pure gaze of the other.

The illusions which resided in the written word and its discourses of science and power in the end failed to produce the presence of the world, but dramatic changes to the social organization of society, people's constant movement, the diminishing importance of enduring social attachments and affections – all factors that Dewey mentioned in 1927 – have contributed to the absence of a counter-language in which the truth could reside. Hence one sees the rise of religious fundamentalisms of all forms which promise a way of balancing the temporal duration of timeless truth with the spatially biased book. The importance which these movements will have in the future should not be underestimated, for there are few other candidates left who can propose to produce the truth, and very few people seem prepared to inhabit a consciousness of poststructural indeterminacy.

If the other has defined us *a priori* and already has a preconceived view of how *all* people so encountered are to be understood, he or she would be unable to engage in recognizing us as centers of our own subjectivity. Everyone whom such a person met would be already set not only into pre-given social relationships but into a more primordial form as an object. A second possibility is that the available language itself might eliminate the possibility of the other person as capable of determining some significant part of reality. This is the case wherein, for example, technical language determines that a given other person is a set

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of reflex arcs, or an object for experimentation, or a consumer. This is also an argument raised by Plato against the book, and may well be applicable to the experience of watching television.

The television presents language as if it were a person, but we encounter it not as either a thing or a person but as a strange hybrid. Contemporary media technologies present us with language in many forms, but we cannot respond to this language or engage it in dialogue. It orders our world but without a reciprocal relationship that would enable us to order its world. We cannot establish relations with it. In a similar way, the absence of a vernacular language and its replacement with a taught, official language offers few alternatives for meaningful expression. It is, as Dupuy (1980) says, a hellish world, devoid of grace and of the unexpected.

The contemporary world is a place where popular knowledge consists largely of trivia, detached factoids about sports, celebrities, 'personalities', and other ephemera of contemporary life. These are not knowledge or even information; they are tropes, the literary devices of a new kind of orality. Just as a person living in fifth century Athens would be judged by his ability to recall phrases from the *Iliad* and to use examples from this work in everyday speech, so the contemporary speaker is deemed witty by his ability to use lines from pop songs or commercial jingles. As such, 'a growing percentage of personal utterances has become predictable, not only in content, but also in style' (Ilich 1992: 127). The recall of these bits and their use in speech and writing do not constitute literacy – despite the misuse of the word in phrases such as 'cultural literacy' and 'video literacy' – but rather present the material of an externalized language. This language is not, however, rigidly preserved as it would be in an oral culture. Rather, the language itself is constantly remade, its metaphors reworked, the elements of its expression forever unlinked from any stable shared social world.