

SECONDARY ORALITY

“...I style the orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print, ‘primary orality’. It is ‘primary’ by contrast with ‘secondary orality’ of present-day high-technology culture...” (Ong 11)

“Writing is always a kind of imitation talking, and in a diary I therefore am pretending that I am talking to myself. But I really never talk this way to myself. Nor could I without writing or indeed without print.” (Ong 102)

“The electronic transformation of verbal expression has both deepened the commitment of the word to space initiated by writing and intensified by print and has brought consciousness to a new age of secondary orality.” (Ong 135)

“...typographic folk believe that oral exchange should normally be informal (oral folk believe it should normally be formal).” (Ong 136)

“At the same time, with telephone, radio, television, and various kinds of sound tape, electronic technology has brought us into the age of ‘secondary orality’. This new orality has striking resemblances to the old in its participatory mystique, its fostering of a communal sense, its concentration on the present moment, and even its use of formulas. But it is essentially a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print, which are essential for the manufacture and operation of the equipment and for its use as well.” (Ong 136)

“Unlike members of a primary oral culture, who are turned outward because they have had little occasion to turn inward, we are turned outward because we have turned inward.” (Ong 136)

“...we have decided that spontaneity is a good thing. We plan our happenings carefully to be sure that they are thoroughly spontaneous.” (Ong 137)

“Electronic media do not tolerate a show of open antagonism. Despite their cultivated air of spontaneity, these media are totally dominated by a sense of closure which is the heritage of print: a show of hostility might break open the closure, the tight control.” (Ong 137)

“Genteel, literate domesticity is rampant.” (Ong 137)

“Traditional printed narrative is largely thought of as the transcription of a hypothetical oral activity: a speech line running from a point of commencement to an end.” (McCaffery & Nichol 62)

*Many texts now are very speech-like?
What about “spoken word” or instant messenger or online chat?
Weblogs may be considered diaries? Or narratives? Letters? Addresses?
What about this notion of netiquette?*

ADVANTAGES/LIMITATIONS/CONSEQUENCES OF LITERACY
ORALITY VERSUS LITERACY

“...oral art forms were essentially unskillful and not worth serious study.” (Ong 10)

“Writing, moreover, as will be seen later in detail, is a particularly pre-emptive and imperialist activity...” (Ong 12)

“Fortunately, literacy, though it consumes its own oral antecedents and, unless it is carefully monitored, even destroys their meanings, is also infinitely adaptable.” (Ong 14)

“To say writing is artificial is not to condemn it but to praise it. Like other artificial creations and indeed more than any other, it is utterly invaluable and indeed essential for the realization of fuller, interior, human potentials. Technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word. Such transformations can be uplifting. Writing heightens consciousness. Alienation from a natural milieu can be good for us and indeed is in many ways essential for human life. To live and to understand fully, we need not only proximity but also distance. This writing provides for consciousness as nothing else does.” (Ong 82)

“Technology, properly interiorized, does not degrade human life but on the contrary enhances it.” (Ong 83)

“Havelock believes that this crucial, more nearly total transformation of the word from sound to sight gave ancient Greek culture its intellectual ascendancy over other ancient cultures.” (Ong 90)

“Serious literature was elitist and wanted to be known as elitist.” (Ong 93)

“Translation was transformation. Interaction produced all sorts of special results.” (Ong 114)

“One consequence of the new exactly repeatable visual statement was modern science.” (Ong 127)

“What is distinctive of modern science is the conjuncture of exact observation and exact verbalization: exactly worded descriptions of carefully observed complex objects and processes.” (Ong 127)

*What are the consequences of literacy?
What happens to an oral culture that is “given” literacy?
Who gets to read? Who gets to write?
Illiterates versus literates?
What do we do with the negative connotations of “illiterate”?
What about access to reading, writing, technology of literacy?
What about western bias?*

TECHNOLOGIZATION OF THE WORD AND PRINTING

“Writing, in this ordinary sense, was and is the most momentous of all human technological inventions. It is not a mere appendage of speech. Because it moves speech from the oral-aural to a new sensory world, that of vision, it transforms speech and thought as well.” (Ong 85)

“The alphabet implies that matters are otherwise, that a word is a thing, not an event, that is present all at once, and that it can be cut up into little pieces...” (Ong 91)

“Print suggests that words are things far more than writing ever did.” (Ong 118)

“Alphabet letterpress printing, in which each letter was cast on a separate piece of metal, or type, marked a psychological breakthrough of the first order. It embedded the word itself deeply in the manufacturing process and made it into a kind of commodity.” (Ong 118)

“Print situates words in space more relentlessly than writing ever did.” (Ong 121)

“Most readers are of course not consciously aware of all this locomotion that has produced the printed text confronting them. Nevertheless, from the appearance of the printed text they pick up the sense of the word-in-space quite different from that conveyed by writing. Printed texts look machine-made, as they are.” (Ong 122)

“Print encourages a sense of closure, a sense that what is found in a text has been finalized, has reached a state of completion. This sense affects literary creations and it affects philosophical or scientific work.” (Ong 132)

“Ferdinand Kriwet has claimed that ‘the age of the book has yet to come,’ asserting the deep belief current in so much contemporary literature that we have not yet discovered the correct way to utilize the book-machine.” (McCaffery & bpNichol 72)

How did printing change literacy?

What are the ramifications of printing?

Dictionaries and “correct language”?

Personal privacy?

Private ownership of words? Plagiarism?

What are the difficulties of translation? Transcription?

Discuss intertextuality.

Consider the notions of ‘originality’ and ‘creativity’.

What happens when a text is about reading reading?

What if a text is not easy to ready?

WRITING

“Writing, commitment of the word to space, enlarges the potentiality of language almost beyond measure, restructures thought, and in the process converts a certain few dialects into ‘grapholects.’” (Ong 7-8)

“Written words are residue.” (Ong 11)

“What the reader is seeing on this page are not real words but coded symbols whereby a properly informed human being can evoke in his or her consciousness real words, in actual or imagined sound.” (Ong 75)

“Writing establishes what has been called ‘context-free’ language, discourse which cannot be directly questioned or contested as oral speech can be because written discourse has been detached from its authors.” (Ong 78)

“A script in the sense of true writing, as understood here, does not consist of mere pictures, of representations of things, but is a representation of an *utterance*, of words that someone says or is imagined to say.” (Ong 84)

“With writing, words once ‘uttered’, outered, put down on the surface, can be eliminated, erased, changed. There is no equivalent for this in an oral performance, no way to erase a spoken word...” (Ong 104)

What is writing?

What is a script?

What is literacy?

Discuss the notion of ‘backward scanning’.

What about writing online?

What about writing for other media such as television or film?

ISOLATION/INCLUSION/COMMUNITY OF LITERACY
SOUND VERSUS SILENCE

“Sound exists only when it is going out of existence.” (Ong 32)

“Sight isolates, sound incorporates.” (Ong 72)

“The centering action of sound. . . . For oral cultures, the cosmos is an ongoing event with man at its center.” (Ong 73)

“Writing. . . is inhuman, pretending to establish outside the mind what in reality can only be in the mind. . . writing destroys memory. . . a written text is unresponsive. . . the written word cannot defend itself as the natural spoken word can. . .” (Ong 79)

“One of the most startling paradoxes inherent in writing is its close association with death.” (Ong 81)

“The paradox lies in the fact that the deadness of the text, its removal from the living human lifeworld, its rigid visual fixity, assures its endurance and its potential for being resurrected into limitless living contexts by potentially infinite number of living readers.” (Ong 81)

“In high technology cultures today, everyone lives each day in a frame of abstract computed time enforced by millions of printed calendars, clocks, and watches.” (Ong 97)

“Words are alone in a text.” (Ong 101)

What is sound? What is speech?

Words have power.

What are the differences between speech and writing?

Do you hear a voice when you read silently? Who's voice?

What about Plato's condemnation of writing?

Are the condemnations applicable to web texts?

ORALITY

“The basic orality of language is permanent.” (Ong 7)

“Oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing at all, writing never without orality.” (Ong 8)

“...I style the orality of a culture totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print, ‘primary orality’. It is ‘primary’ by contrast with ‘secondary orality’ of present-day high-technology culture...” (Ong 11)

“...a literate person cannot fully recover a sense of what the word is to a purely oral people.” (Ong 12)

“oral art as ‘epos’” (Ong 13)

“voicings” (Ong 14)

“The fact that oral peoples commonly and in all likelihood universally consider words to have magical potency is clearly tied in, at least unconsciously, with their sense of the world as necessarily spoken, sounded, and hence power-driven.” (Ong 32)

“...an oral culture simply does not deal in such items as geometrical figures, abstract categorization, formally logical reasoning processes, definitions, or even comprehensive descriptions, or articulated self-analysis...” (Ong 55)

“orality knows no lists or charts or figures” (Ong 97)

What is orality?

Primary orality versus secondary orality?

What are the advantages/limitations of orality?

What is the value of orality in a literate, technologized world?

How does a literate person imagine, access, or evoke primary orality?

What do we call oral texts? Oral-aural art? “Oral literature”?