

The Alphabet

Writing Restructures Consciousness - The New World of Autonomous Discourse (ONG)

Main ideas

Relationship between oral culture and literacy

- Orality in relation to writing
- Looking at 3 technologies: *writing, print, computers*
- Literate humans; beings whose thought processes do not grow out of simply natural powers but out of these powers as structured, directly or indirectly, by the technology of writing
- Writing transforms human consciousness
- Writing established *context-free language* (Hirsch) or *autonomous discourse* (Olson); detached from author
- Oral cultures have autonomy in their ritual culture, vatic and prophecies

Plato's critiques of writing

- *Plato in Phaedrus* - objections against writing, commonly posed against computer technology today
 - Inhuman
 - Destroys memory
 - Unresponsive
 - Defenceless
- Weakness of Plato's critique - put thoughts into writing, just as anti-print positions put objections into print
- Writing, print and computer technologize the world and there is not effective way to critique the technology without the aid of the highest technology available
- New technology is not used to convey the critique, also brought the critique into existence
- Plato's thought process on writing was only possible because of the effects writing has on his mental process

- There are *paradoxes* in the relationships between original spoken word and its technological transformations - association with death
 - deadness of text ensures its endurance throughout contexts

Writing as a technology

- Writing (and alphabetic writing) is a technology, calling for tools and other equipment
- Writing initiated what print and computers continue; the reduction of dynamic sound to quiescent (dormant/inactive) space, the separation of the world from the living present, where alone spoken words can exist
- Writing as artificial, but (paradox) artificiality is natural to humans
- Oral speech - natural
- Talk wells up in unconsciousness
- Writing is governed by conscious decisions and rules
- Technologies are not exterior aids, but interior transformations of consciousness
- Writing heightens consciousness
- Process of internalising technology
- Use of technology enhances the psyche

What is writing or script?

- First script developed among Sumerians in Mesopotamia (3500 BC)
- Aides-memoire; prior aids to communication before writing
- Script more than memory aid
- Script as representation of utterance
- Writing could be seen as any visible or sensible mark with an assigned meaning, however this trivialises writing. Breakthrough when a coded system of visible marks was invested whereby a writer could determine the exact words the reader would generate from the text
- Intermediate stages exist in writing

Alphabet

- Pictograph - picture of tree represents the word tree
- ideograph - meaning is a concept not directly represented by the picture but established by code

- Rebus - kind of phonogram (sound-symbol)

Onset of literacy

- Writing often regarded at first as instrument of secret and magic power
- Some societies regarded literacy as dangerous, demanding a figure to mediate between reader and text
- Texts can be seen to have intrinsic religious value
- Writing interiorised enough to affect processes by Plato's time (three centuries after the introduction to Greek alphabet)

From memory to written records

- Documents did not originally inspire trust
- Idea of symbolic objects
- Before writing was interiorised, people did not feel themselves situated in every moment
- In oral culture - past is not itemised terrain
- Orality knows no lists or charts or figures
- A culture which uses lists and charts as commonplace practices is a result of interiorising print

Dynamics of textuality

- Condition of words in a text is different from condition in spoken discourse
- Written words isolated from text in which spoken words come into being
- Writing as solipsistic operation
- Orality has intonation whereas in text punctuation can signal tone minimally
- Writing mimics conversation

Distance, precision, grapholects and magna vocabularies

- Writings effects are due its removal from the context of moral utterance
- Analytic precision

- Corrections in oral culture vs. written culture; precision is due to the affects of writing on noetic processes
- Writing makes introspectivity possible
- Elaborated code; one which is formed with the necessary aid of writing, and for full elaboration, of print

Interactions: rhetorics and the places

- Interaction between writing and orality - two special developments:
 - Academic rhetoric
 - Leaned Latin
- Transition from orality to literacy slow