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## The State of Ong Scholarship

A Symposium  
at Gonzaga University

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# The State of Ong Scholarship

## Editor's Introduction

Though not schooled in communication research or media studies, Walter J. Ong, S.J., had a long connection with both, beginning with his studies in the history of rhetoric and continuing through his reflections on the impact of literacy and other technologies on human thinking, as *COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS* has pointed out in the past, most notably in an assessment of his work shortly after his death in 2003 (Soukup, 2004). Father Ong himself also had a long association with the Centre for the Study of Communication and Culture, the original publisher of *COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS*. Having suggested the name for the research center, he later served on its board and, after its relocation from London to Saint Louis University, worked with the staff and published several essays in *TRENDS* (1996, 1998).

The centennial of his birth in 1912 saw any number of commemorations, conferences, and publications. Most recently, the Department of Communication and Leadership Studies at Gonzaga University in Spokane organized a symposium on his work, not so much to look back on what he had done but to look forward. Titled "Technology, Rhetoric, and Cultural Change: Walter J. Ong, S.J., in the Age of Google, Facebook, and Twitter," the symposium brought together a group of Ong's former students and a group of younger scholars to explore the ongoing relevance of Ong's work. *COMMUNICATION RESEARCH TRENDS* is pleased to publish some of the papers from the conference. What might Ong's thinking—rich in so many areas—prompt in communication study today?

Sara van den Berg, the director of the Ong Center for Language, Media, and Culture at Saint Louis University and former Chair of that University's English Department (where Ong taught from the 1950s to the 1980s) offers a look at the state of Ong scholarship. She points out that scholars from many disciplines besides communication draw on Ong's work and situates them by describing their work as falling into three categories: about Ong, with Ong, and like Ong. Her overview most closely resembles the kinds of review essays *TRENDS* usually publishes. In this issue, it situates what follows by suggesting the categories for these essays.

*About Ong:* Thomas Zlatich, one of Ong's students and a professor at Saint Louis College of Pharmacy,

presently works with van den Berg in editing a manuscript that Ong left unfinished, one on language and hermeneutics. In this essay "The Persistence of Memory," Zlatich develops what Ong argued, pointing out that all language requires interpretation or hermeneutics. Communication and memory, despite our technologies, are not digital nor can they be reduced to such. For Ong the person goes beyond the technology. Paul Soukup, S.J., from Santa Clara University also addresses the theme of hermeneutics, tracing how Ong turned to hermeneutics in the light of the rise of digitization in communication. Communication demands hermeneutics the more abstract it becomes, the more separated from human living. In a world of greater digitization, scholars can learn from Ong's reasoning about the need for, and the role of, hermeneutics.

*With Ong:* Several ask whether the concepts Ong drew from his comparisons of primary oral cultures, literate ones, and electronic ones could carry forward into digitally mediated ones. Thinking like and with Ong, James Jarc, from Gonzaga University, examines what he terms, "mobilitarity," the literacy emergent with mobile telephony and its "smart" descendants. Kristina J. Morehouse and Heather M. Crandall, both of Gonzaga University report an empirical study of virtual grief—how people publicly grieve on social media sites—and the ways that this practice bridges oral, literate, and secondary oral expression.

*Like Ong:* Some younger scholars take ideas from Ong and extend them into new areas. Dung Tran from Loyola Marymount University examines the situation of lecturers seeking labor union membership at Catholic universities, taking his lead from Ong's ideas about Catholic identity. Kateland Wolfe from Georgia State University poses an interesting question about audiences and how collaborative writing may or may not have changed them.

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# Current Opportunities in Ong Scholarship

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As I wrote this, an essay that began as a conference address, I was surrounded by papers and books, typing on a computer, and imagining myself speaking these words to the conference registrants. Oral culture lived in this moment, but I was happy to rely on print and new media as well. This is the media ecology we inhabit, one that Walter J. Ong helped us understand. In late 2012, we marked the centenary of Ong's birth, remembering the distinguished cultural historian who investigated the past, analyzed the present, and imagined the future. The 100 years since his birth have seen enormous changes—in science, politics, and culture, in social organization, in media, and in every sphere of knowledge. Last year was also the 10th anniversary of his death, and in that decade, too, much has changed. One might think that the work of a single scholar would have been consigned to the dusty shelves of a few libraries by now. Yet in the past few years, major presses have re-issued three of Ong's major books. The University of Chicago Press published his first book, *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (1958/2011b), with a new foreword by print historian Adrian Johns. Cornell University Press published, for the third time since 1977, a collection of Ong's essays, *Interfaces of the Word; Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (2012). And the 30th anniversary edition of Fr. Ong's best-known book, *Orality and Literacy: Technologizing the Word*, was re-issued by Routledge with a long introduction by John Hartley, a noted Australian communication and technology scholar (2011a).

These publishers and scholars did not indulge in nostalgia. They saw the ongoing importance of Ong's work, both in itself and in the issues it addresses. And they were right. After a period of some quiescence, there are new scholars turning to his work for new projects of their own. To celebrate the Ong centennial, sessions at academic organizations featured the work of established and emerging scholars in media theory, Biblical studies, and literary criticism. Scholarly journals published groups of essays, in particular the "Walter Ong Forum," with essays by Thomas D. Zlatich, Paula McDowell, Twyla Gibson, Jerry Harp, Sheila

Nayar, and Sara van den Berg (*Religion and Literature*, 2012), and the Ong centennial issue of *EME: Explorations in Media Ecology* (2013), with essays by Paul Soukup, Abigail Lambke, Sheila Nayar, Jerry Harp, Calvin Troupe, Thomas J. Farrell, Thoms D. Zlatich, and Eberly Mareci. Many of the essays in these two journals were originally presented at the 2012 conference of the Media Ecology Association. The Saint Louis University Library made Ong's correspondence and manuscripts available to scholars who visit the Ong Archive in person or online. Jerry Harp is preparing an edition of Ong's correspondence. Tom Zlatich and I are preparing for publication *Language as Hermeneutic*, a book manuscript found among Fr. Ong's papers.

To review and assess the current state of Ong scholarship, we can take three different approaches. The first assesses Ong's own scholarship in its own contexts, explicating his ideas, and discussing its impact on specific fields. The second explores the relevance of his work today: what has been superseded and what remains useful and important. The third investigates opportunities in new areas, bringing to bear not the specific theories and insights of Walter Ong but rather the practices he modeled for us: a combination of curiosity, insight, speculation, and scholarly rigor. That is to say, there are opportunities for scholars to work *about* Ong, *with* Ong, and *like* Ong.

## A. About Ong

Ten years after Walter Ong's death, we can begin to assess his work in its historical contexts. We can observe changes in the fields where he worked and can test his ideas about cultural change by describing actual changes we are observing. Like him, we can offer speculations based on sustained study. There are waves in scholarship, as there are in fashion, architecture, politics, war, religion, and culture generally. Ong both rode the waves and described bigger waves of belief and expression. Scholars in the Humanities work in the field of description, and we often debate competing narratives. We are familiar with the competing narratives of the past century in literary studies:

from philology and literary history, to New Critical explication of the self-contained text, to all the methods of the late 20th century fascination with self in society—feminism, psychoanalysis, critical race studies, disability studies—to the new emphasis on other contexts: ecocriticism, animal studies, material culture, print, film and media studies, digital humanities, genomics, the posthuman body, and much else. But all our preoccupations come back to language, whether we are scholars of literature, linguistics, communication, or technology. Language in all its forms—whether African drums or Victorian poetry—was what fascinated Walter Ong. He argued that modes of language—oral, chirographic, print, electronic—shape us and shape culture.

Ong was above all a Jesuit, and was part of a remarkable generation of Jesuit intellectuals in America and Europe. They include Henri de Lubac, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and Michel de Certeau in France, as well as distinguished Jesuit scholars in the United States. John O'Malley, University Professor at Georgetown, has spearheaded a stunning expansion of Jesuit historical studies, but I believe it is time for that work to include a sustained discussion of Jesuit intellectuals in the latter half of the 20th century—a topic that no one to my knowledge has investigated. One place to start is Schroth's recent survey of American Jesuit history; he devotes a number of pages to Ong as a representative of the Jesuit intellectual community (2009, pp. 232–238). Each Jesuit develops his own "way of proceeding," so these men can in no way be linked together in their work, but only in what John O'Malley has called an "intellectual ministry" (personal communication, 2006). Ong knew and valued the work of Teilhard de Chardin and other Jesuits, but he was also influenced by secular intellectuals: McLuhan, Gadamer, and many others.

So where does Walter J. Ong fit now? What relevance do his ideas have?

To literary critics at the turn of the 21st century, his work faded from view. Two of his most important literary works were *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (Ong, 1986), and his edition of Milton's *Art of Logic* (Milton, 1982). Literary critics were interested in Victorian fiction more than Victorian poetry. Miltonists, for their part, preferred poetry to prose, and read Milton's prose, moreover, only for his politics, not his logic. Ong, who had been President of the MLA and an Honored Scholar of the Milton Society of America, worked in areas that interested only a few.

To literary theorists, Ong was most interesting as the opponent of Jacques Derrida, but Derrida seemed to win that theoretical contest. Ong wrote in the tradition of Rousseau, arguing that writing develops from speech. Derrida disagreed with that tradition, and thought we begin *in medias res*. Everything is always already written, Derrida argued, although meaning is always marked by *différance*: deferral, delay, discrepancy between word and idea. Ong, on the other hand, in *Orality and Literacy*, explicitly argued against Derrida that individuals and cultures developed speech, then literacy; after writing came print and electronic communication (1982, pp. 166–171). For him, each mode of expression structured consciousness. Culture is a palimpsest, an ecology of all these forms of communication. Older modes endure; they do not disappear. Orality endures in print and new media as "secondary orality," the illusion or representation of speech based in technologies that depend on literacy.

Now the winds have shifted. Victorian poetry is back. Milton's *Art of Logic*, edited by Ong years ago, is being re-edited and discussed anew. The debate between Derrida and Ong has faded. French theory lost its compelling novelty, and Derrida's arguments have become familiar, what is useful absorbed. It may well be time for Derrida to be in eclipse, and for Ong to be revisited. I think the literary scholars who are most interested in Ong's work are those who focus on print culture. Paula McDowell, for example, a literary scholar at NYU, is publishing exciting work on the "genealogy" of "print culture" and "oral tradition" in 18th-century England (2010). Her essay (2012) on the ongoing impact of Ong's scholarship in print and oral interactions was published in a special Ong Forum in *Religion and Literature*.

The fascination with the liberal idea of selfhood that peaked in the 1950s was evident in Ong's interest in psychoanalysis—he led a popular reading group of analysts and literary scholars in St. Louis—in his book on Hopkins, and in his critique of New Criticism, "The Jinnee in the Well-Wrought Urn" (1954), in which he wittily defends the importance of the person, the artist, in the work of art. He maintained his commitment to the person, the "I"; Ong first cites the work of Heidegger, Lavelle, and Martin Buber on "I-Thou" relationships in "Voice as Summons for Belief" (1958b). However, in a late essay, "Hermeneutics Forever" (1995), he set the self as a "Nameless 'I'" in relation to the other, to "Thou," whether in spoken encounters or in texts. Ong's

emphasis on intersubjectivity is shared by contemporary psychoanalytic theorists, who argue for a model of self-development based in encounters with others (Mitchell, 2003). So, too, his emphasis on language is something he shared with such major psychoanalytic theorists as Roy Schafer (2011).

Most scholars today show more interest in Ong's work on language as communication than in his literary criticism. What seems to me most useful today is Ong's work on media. Here the work of Derrida is instructive. When Derrida turned to electronic media (in *Echographies of Television*), he was more like Ong. However, in treating both mass media and theology, Ong seems to have the advantage. *Echographies of Television*, a book of interviews (1996 French; English translation 2002), emphasizes what Ong would have called "secondary orality." That is, Derrida argues that televised speech and images are "produced," and that they depend upon prior writing in order to be generated and distributed. Derrida seems to be reaching for is the concept of "secondary orality," an especially important concept that Ong developed in order to avoid an oversimplified divide between orality and literacy. That concept is, I believe, of special interest to people working today in the area of media theory.

At the other extreme from technology for Derrida is something that, like technology, is equally nonhuman and human: religion. Like Ong, Derrida (in his more recent work) pondered the problem of religion in the modern age. As the philosopher John D. Caputo, writes in his introduction to *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion without Religion*:

Derrida confesses up that he has all along had religion, his own religion, without religion, and that the failure to understand his religion has resulted in reading him less well over 20 years. [His] book, *Circonfession*, forces us to proceed without seeing, without knowing. (1997, p. xxviii)

Ong had religion *with* religion, faith in a creed not solely his own—beyond himself—but that faith permitted him to proceed without seeing, without knowing. In the *via negativa*, the negative theology familiar to believers, God cannot be known as an object, but can be known only through what is not God. If Derrida makes us uncomfortable by challenging what and how we know, Ong makes us discover new possibilities in what and how we know, building upon and explaining rather than denying established ways of thinking. We need Ong to show us what is at stake in Derrida's claims. We need Derrida to keep us from too easily acquiescing to Ong. Rather than not

knowing, Ong relies in the Jesuit concept of the power of the sensorium, the five senses, to give us access to the created world and thereby to its Creator.

Although Ong's primary identity was as a Jesuit priest, his work avoided dogma. In his Terry Lectures at Yale, published under the title *The Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (1967), he considered words in the presence of the Word, and the Word present in words. These lectures discuss the Hebrew and Christian tradition, regarding the human word as sound (in oral speech) and sight (in print). What interested Ong was change: how an established method—Scholastic logic, for example—could be displaced and replaced by Ramism, for example, and what might remain constant in the face of change. For Ong, constancy resided in the fact of being human in a sacred world. No change in words and their use would alter his commitment to the eternal Word. All language, all communication, all media, aspire to union with that Word. Paul Soukup, surveying the role of religion in Ong's work, regards *The Presence of the Word* as "a bridge between Ong's religious writings and his work on language, consciousness, and communication" (2006, p. 183). There can be no doubt that Ong set forth his theological argument to a secular and historically-minded audience who were sympathetic to the idea of language as aspiration, if perhaps unsympathetic to belief.

That lack of sympathy is nowhere more evident than in Frank Kermode's (1968) attack on the book in a review linking Ong to McLuhan (whose work Kermode despised). Kermode labeled Ong and McLuhan as "Catholic technophiles," but he had grudging respect for Ong as the more serious scholar. Ong, he declared "says very extraordinary things but assumes that he has to vouch for them." Kermode tries to turn Ong's formulations against him, arguing that the "sheer density" of his book is "highly typographic" and exemplifies "print style"—that is to say "no style at all." What might have been vivid in the lecture hall, Kermode declares, was damaged by the transition to print, "bruised with learning."

### B. *With Ong*

Fortunately, others did not agree, and found Ong's work in all its variety seminal for their own work. His ideas inspired Werner Kelber's landmark studies on orality in the Bible (1983, 2013). As Director of the Humanities Institute at Rice University, Kelber convened annual conferences on orality and literacy for seven years, featuring distinguished scholars

in Biblical studies, history, linguistics, and religious studies. The seventh and final conference focused on orality and literacy in the sacred texts of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. One of the regular attendees at that conference was John Miles Foley, distinguished for his work on orality, who drew on Fr. Ong's formulations to develop his own studies of oral literature and the Internet (1998, 2012).

Kelber and other scholars—leading specialists in psychoanalytic I-Thou communication, in children's acquisition of literacy, in social theory, media studies, and communication—came to St. Louis for a national conference in 2004; the papers, along with Thomas M. Walsh's definitive bibliography of Ong's work, were subsequently published a few years later (van den Berg & Walsh, 2011).

That is not to say that everyone agrees with his formulations. Initially, Ong was regarded as a leading cultural anthropologist, but scholars came to question whether his work offered a complete paradigm for oral or literate cultures. Literacy scholars have replaced Ong's dichotomized formulation of orality and literacy with a more complex and nuanced understanding of "literacies." In our own society, we are aware of different levels and types of literacy. We often use the term "functional literacy" to describe the skill required in daily life, but we expect far more from a college-bound student taking the SAT verbal test, or a document analyst, or a professional translator. Sligo (2014) uses the term "liminal literacy" to describe the minimal literacy present in many societies. There are different modes of oral culture as well, and scholars have offered insightful commentaries on both orality and literacy as complex social practices. Moreover, indigenous cultures that are presumed to be oral in fact demonstrate multiple literacies. Scholars have increasingly recognized that Ong's ideas did not close down inquiry, but opened it to their own new discoveries. Orality has come in for revision not only among anthropologists but among post-colonial studies. The debate about "the Great Divide" between oral and print culture, and the attack on Ong by critics who attributed to him an ideology of "progress," has long since been superseded by newer cultural theories that enrich our understanding of the linguistic capabilities of oral cultures (Street, 1993; Grossman, 2013). Recognition of the simultaneity of oral and print as ways of knowing has displaced the dichotomy model.

To communication scholars, Ong remains important as a theorist of language and media. The "aural-oral Ong" and the concept of "secondary orality" in

new media attract more and more attention. It is not surprising that this conference on "Ong and New Media" was organized by John Caputo, a communication scholar, or that Ong is regarded as a major theorist in media ecology, a field pioneered by Neil Postman and developed by communication theorists. Abigail Lambke, whose recent dissertation at Saint Louis University focused on Ong and sound, recently presented an essay that included a tape of Fr. Ong, which she then playfully distorted and altered and placed in a different media context (2013a, 2013b). She brought Ong inside the media ecology on which he comments in so much of his work.

He regarded sound and speech as an event in time and space, but modern technology has expanded the range of sound to new borders, or no borders at all.

We might pause for a moment to consider a bit of Walter Ong's own placement in time and space. He was born in Kansas City, and was a Midwestern, Catholic intellectual all his life. After graduating from Rockhurst College, at the western border of Missouri, he went to the eastern border to join the Jesuits at Saint Louis University, where he would spend most of his life. There he combined his loyalty to Catholicism with the intellectual rigor of Jesuit scholarship and the visionary thought of Marshall McLuhan, who directed his Master's thesis on the poetry of Gerard Manley Hopkins. McLuhan and Ong were the same age. McLuhan soon left for Toronto, where he would write his visionary commentaries on print culture and media theory, but the two men remained colleagues and friends. If McLuhan was a revolutionary, Ong sought ways to map the future while staying grounded in his theological commitments and his study of the past. He sought to master the complexities of cultural history. Ong remained plainspoken and accessible in his treatment of ideas, committed to the hard work of scholarship even as he grew more and more visionary and speculative. If McLuhan specialized in memorable gnomic pronouncements—we still remember "The medium is the message"—Ong tended to formulate dichotomies, developing catalogues, lists, and road maps of cultural assumptions and change. It is only when we try to unpack his apparently definitive statements that their provocative implications emerge to challenge our own assumptions.

Ong's theological education as a Jesuit scholastic was initially shaped by the Philosophy Department at Saint Louis University, where Thomist thought reigned supreme. Perhaps in reaction to that, Marshall

McLuhan introduced Ong to the work of Peter Ramus, whose challenge to Thomistic methods marked a major intellectual revolution in Early Modern Europe. When Ong left Saint Louis to do doctoral work at Harvard, he reflected on that challenge to Thomism, and chose to do his dissertation on Ramus. In preparation, Ong traveled throughout Western Europe to inventory library holdings of the writings of Peter Ramus and his colleague, Omer Talon. Ong's massive 1700-page dissertation, the longest ever submitted at Harvard, was subsequently published as *Ramus, Method, and the Decay of Dialogue* (1958/2011), along with *The Ramus-Talon Inventory* (1958a), and became a classic work in the history of ideas.

To study the change in thought pioneered by Peter Ramus did not mean that Ong was anti-Thomist or pro-Ramus. In fact, his often sardonic comments in *Ramus, Method and the Decay of Dialogue* and in its companion piece, the *Ramus and Talon Inventory*, seem rather to suggest his lack of sympathy for Ramus as thinker and as man. His initial summary of Ramus says it all:

Ramus was not a great intellectual but a savant with wide-ranging interests whose most distinctive attitudes were superficially revolutionary but at root highly derivative. His way of attacking the genuine weaknesses of the scholastic heritage while preserving unwittingly the basic presuppositions responsible for these weaknesses (and for much strength) made his views congenial to the vast numbers of impatient but not too profound thinkers who became his followers, and it gives both him and them tremendous historical value today. (1958/2011, p. ix)

Not just sardonic but judicious, Ong showed the complicated role Ramus played in fostering change. No hero, Ramus, perhaps not even a true innovator, but able nonetheless to influence many others to change how thinking and rhetoric were taught in European universities. There has been renewed interest in Ramus. Howard Hotson (2007) challenged Ong's rather negative assessment of Ramus in a major study. Conferences in Scotland in 1997 and 2008 resulted in the publication of an important collection edited by Steven Reid and Emma Wilson (2011), following on an earlier collection (Feingold, Freedman, & Rother, 2001). A major opportunity exists for new scholarship on Ramus using resources in St. Louis. Fr. Ong purchased for the Saint Louis University Library Ramus's own copy of his major treatise on rhetoric, with annotations in his hand preparatory to a second edition that

was never completed. That book has been digitized, and is available online at the Pius XII Library website.

### C. Like Ong

The titles of sessions and papers at the recent Gonzaga University conference point to exciting new opportunities for Ong Scholarship. Every one of those topics was important to Walter Ong, and every one presents new opportunities. That is not to say that anyone should simply follow his lead. Too much has changed, but I would suggest that mapping those changes and looking forward to the ratio of constancy and change is the critical legacy he left. That legacy is open-ended, and capacious. Its hallmarks are curiosity, intellectual pleasure, and an affirmation of the human as well as the divine.

The themes of the conference suggest themes of future research for students of Ong: technology, rhetoric, and cultural change. For Ong, language is not a kind of technology, but rather the expressive system conveyed through technologies—whether drum, pen, printing press, digitization, quantum computer, or biocomputer.

Further, the topics of the sessions at the conference offer some indication of the range of Ong's thought and the areas of his interest:

- Literature
- Orality
- Language Studies
- Philosophy
- Secondary Orality

In literature, his work on Milton's *Art of Logic*—growing out of Ong's critical assessment of Ramus—is attracting new attention because of the new edition of Milton's works. His criticism of Gerard Manley Hopkins' poetry continues to be influential, as Victorian poetry re-emerges as a new focus of Victorian studies. After many years of neglect, both major critical reassessments and an important new anthology have been recently published (Cunningham, 2011, 2014; Cronin, 2012).

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# The Persistence of Memory: Picturing Ong's Oral Hermeneutics

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In 1994 Walter Ong offered to the journal *Connotations* his essay "Time, Digitization, and Dali's Memory," a reflection on Salvador Dali's most famous painting, *The Persistence of Memory*, which eerily depicts limpid, melting timepieces over a surreal barren landscape (see p. 12). The editors rejected it, judging it to be more philosophical than philological: an "essay on human time" (Leimberg, 1995). They were correct. The essay is a meditation on how time and memory can be an index of our humanity.

Ong developed this Dali essay from another unpublished manuscript of the 1990s, his book-length *Language as Hermeneutic*, which he described as a synthesis of his life's work (1990). Later, Ong wrote that he was abandoning the manuscript he had been working on since 1988, finding it "unsatisfactory" (1994b). He did not explain the reason for his dissatisfaction. In addition to "Time, Digitization, and Dali's Memory," he derived at least four subsequent essays on hermeneutics (1995, 1996a, 1996b, 1998), in part from *Language as Hermeneutic*. Previously, Ong had addressed hermeneutics twice (1987, 1988). Among his unpublished drafts is the unfinished essay, "Hermeneutic Encounter in Voice and in Text." For more on Ong's oral hermeneutic, see Zlatic (2012).

In the draft of *Language as Hermeneutic*, Ong explored how a hermeneutic based upon sound can generate insights into time, memory, and digitization that are obscured by a visually-based hermeneutic. That and the unpublished Dali essay provide a better understanding of how Ong's oral hermeneutic can help not only preserve but enhance our humanity in the digital age of artificial intelligence, Google, Facebook, and Twitter.

Memory had long been of interest to Ong, in part because of his education at Saint Louis University within a milieu of a "Saint Louis Thomism" that focused on the relation of the senses to noetic processes (Ong, 1974, 1981; Farrell, 2000, pp. 38–44). The fascination with memory stayed with him, for as he later wrote, "Memory, in its initial role and in its transformations, is in one way or another a clue to nearly everything that went on as discourse moved out of the pristine oral world to literacy and beyond" (1982a, p.

14). Since media are regarded by some as memory storage outside the human mind, Ong in his studies of media ecology appreciated scholars such as Frances Yates (1966), Mary Carruthers (1990, 1992), and Werner Kelber (1997) who explored shifting understandings and valorizations of memory through the centuries, partly in relation to the communications technology within cultures situated within primary orality, residual orality, writing, and print. (Ong's Dali essay seems to have been inspired in part by Carruthers' works, with his submission to *Connotations* prompted by her essay there, Ong, 1994a). Within an oral culture, memory was enshrined as a storehouse of knowledge, and even up through the early age of print, memory retained its centrality in human thought and communication. Even though medieval *memoria* took a step toward digitization by associating memory with scanning a visual field, it remained connected through rhetoric to the human life world, and was linked not only to invention or creativity but to character development—or as Ong said, to the "heart" rather than the "head" (1992, pp. 123–124). On the other hand, Ong's antipathy to Ramus's "method" owed more than a little to its reduction of memory to an afterthought. Later with the celebration of imagination in the age of Romanticism, memory—mere memorization—was scorned.

As noted by the editors of *Connotations*, Ong also took a more metaphysical approach to memory, exploring its relationship to time and the unconscious. Historically, oral mnemonics and the various arts of memory or "artificial memory" extending from Simonides to the present, could be employed to retrieve specific information, but the memory, trained or untrained, is not limited to recall. The distinctive feature of the natural (that is organic) human memory is that its relationship to time is unitive rather than fractioning.

In the opening sentence of the Dali essay Ong repeated a major theme of his metaphysics: time is not merely adjunct to but a "constituent of material being" (cf. Ong, 1968; 1991; Zlatic, 2010). Organic matter is possible only after billions of years of evolutionary processes; time is built into our bodies as matter moved toward greater and greater complexification and interi-

orization, culminating in the deeply interiorized human self. It is not just that we are in time but that time is in us. This embodiment and interiorization of time is consistent with the thinking of Teilhard de Chardin, about whom Ong wrote:

The Jesuit paleontologist and cultural historian, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, has gone further in interpreting personal, interior consciousness as the focus of the entire evolutionary process, cosmic, organic, and historical . . . [attending to] the way the physical universe evolves toward “inwardness” and consciousness and to the way consciousness itself evolves as man fills and organizes the earth. (1968, pp. 21–22)

Although time may legitimately be considered a fourth “dimension,” unlike the other three it is a continuing process that is not composed of discrete pieces and is thus not susceptible to calculation by division, that is, to digitization. Human memory and consciousness, embedded in time, similarly resist analysis (i.e., breaking into pieces) and thus digitization. This intuition, welling up out of his unconsciousness as well as being formulated in consciousness, is what Dali pictured in “The Persistence of Memory” (see p. 12).

In *Language as Hermeneutic* (in which he first discussed Dali’s painting) Ong argued two theses. First, two dialectical forces operating on the contemporary human mind are digitization and hermeneutics. Working from the research of Schmandt-Besserat (1992), Ong proposed that digitization is a trait of all writing systems from the very beginning and has since been extended and accelerated through print into the electronic age, digitization referring to reduction to separate, numerable forms, that is, to digits. “Knowledge thought of as so reduced we commonly designate as ‘information’ or ‘data’ (that is, what is ‘given’)” (*Language as Hermeneutic*, p. 94; 1996b). But, Ong finds, the age of digitization is also the age of hermeneutics, involving an obsession to unify and make sense of the information that digitization produces—that is, to interpret and communicate.

His second thesis in *Language as Hermeneutic* is that all language is hermeneutic. That is, all language use is interpretative. No human statement is ever complete in and of itself, leaving nothing more to be said. Ong illustrated this with an aphorism he never tired of repeating: “there are no completely explicit statements—including this one.” Every propositional statement is an abstraction from the plentitude of being.

[T]ruth can never be simply propositional, as the Ramist and Cartesian drive in Western noetics had commonly supposed or implied. Every propositional truth is limited in explicitness and thus demands interpretation. Every statement is embedded in history, nonverbal history even more than verbal history. (1995, p. 18)

Embedded in history and context, the meaning of any statement is derived not only from the words but from the existential situation in which the words were uttered, or written. In order for us to understand one another, we must, as Valesio (1986) and Tyler (1978, 1988) advise, “listen to the silence,” for

every act of saying is a momentary intersection of the “said” and the “unsaid.” Because it is surrounded by an aureola of the unsaid, an utterance speaks more than it says, mediates between past and future, transcends the speaker’s conscious thought, passes beyond his manipulative control, and creates in the mind of the hearer worlds unanticipated. From within the infinity of the “unsaid,” the speaker and the hearer, by a joint act of will, bring into being what was “said.” (Tyler, 1978, p. 459)

Ong cannot be more emphatic in stating “The truth of the most clear-cut proposition is *never* within the words alone, but in the words-plus-existential-context” (1995, p. 19). Further, the meaning of words is negotiated through not only conscious but also unconscious and subconscious factors—many of which are beyond recording through digitization. A problem, however, Ong maintains, is that hermeneutics traditionally has been conceived in terms of visualist or textualist models for understanding, as practiced by Dilthey, Schleiermacher, and to some extent even Gadamer and Ricoeur. Such models are less likely to register the non-digitizable silence that undergirds human communication. Thus Ong proposed that an oral hermeneutic is needed to supplement visualist paradigms that obscure the fact that all language use is interpretative, or hermeneutic.

In his later years Ong, with seemingly a bit of modest pride, reminisced:

I recall many talks with Hannah Arendt and remember her observation to me on one occasion, “Walter, you have a dialectical mind.” I thought this was true and still believe it is true still, but it was good to have this unsolicited diagnosis from one of the chief world authorities on the subject of dialectic. (2001)

In a letter in which he attempts to give Kenneth Woodward some “foci” for an article about his thought, Ong summarized his thinking this way, “In sum, Ong’s work deals with antithesis and conflict, as focused in verbal communication, but his work is synthesizing and unifying in bent” (Ong, 1993a). Much of his thinking engages paired terms, and his oral and written hermeneutic are differentiated by the relationships that sound and vision have with time and space: time-sound-knowledge-memory-negotiation-community are dialectically paired with space-vision-information-recording-digitization-alienation. Or to align them differently: time/space, sound/vision, knowledge/information, memory/recording, hermeneutics/digitization, community/alienation. These are instances of the larger dialectic that directs much of Ong’s thinking: cleavage and integration, the one and the many.

Natural memory, like language, is rooted in time, and its relationship to knowledge is not fixed but fluid—it is a process rather than a product, whereas retrieving recordings is a spatially conceived activity in which information is isolated and dissected. Ong was not hostile to digitization. He aspired to be a “bridge builder” (between secular and religious knowledge and between the humanities and technology) (Ong, 1993a; Nielson, 1992), and he saw the value and necessity of digitization in the development of consciousness. However, it is the dialectical interplay of time and space, vision and sound, digitization and hermeneutics, that deepens the interiority of human consciousness, stimulating integration at deeper levels of complexity. This is the message Ong hears in “The Persistence of Memory.”

As an always ongoing event in time, existing only when it is going out of existence, because of its resistance to digitization, sound advertises the existence of another world beyond digitization, a world of resonances with meaning. This is the world which Dalí’s painting, “The Persistence of Memory,” reopens to us. (1994c, p. 20)

In his submission letter to *Connotations*, Ong described “Time, Digitization, and Dalí’s Memory” this way: “It contrasts the digitization of time represented in Dalí’s nonfunctional ‘melting watches’ with actual human memory . . . , of itself non-digitizable. (Computers do not have human memory but only recall, which is a different and lesser thing)” (1994a). Human memory, unlike computer recall, is active, imaginative. As Ong stated in *Language as Hermeneutic*, all language use is hermeneutic partly because the constantly

changing contexts for statements change the meaning of the statements. Memories, and memories of memories, similarly are relived in changing contexts and are filtered through both conscious and unconscious motivations, and they are organized in non-linear fashion according to the dictates of present concerns, as registered in Mark Twain’s quip: “When I was younger I could remember anything, whether it happened or not; but I am getting old, and soon I shall remember only the latter” (Paine, 1912, p. 1269). Rather than a simple retrieval of data or facts, human memory is a living, evolving expression of identity, an interiority that in its functioning is not only retrospective but creative, not isolating but integrating present associations with previous ones. Human memory is inventive, creative. Mechanical digitized memory is wonderfully astounding in its capacity and speed but it is also limiting; it produces an “artificial past,” for it cannot encode the shadows or echoes of meanings that attend to all thinking and discourse. In similar regard, Lanier (2010) warns of computer “lock-in”—structuring programs that are difficult to modify because of the difficulties their change would have for subsequent hardware: “Lock-in removes ideas that do not fit into the winning digital representation scheme, but it also reduces or narrows the ideas it immortalizes, by cutting away the unfathomable penumbra of meaning that distinguishes a word in natural language from a command in a computer program” (p. 10). Natural human memory recalls not just words but the penumbra of past and present associations that the words evoke, not just the content of a message but the context for a human interaction, including the unsaid and sometimes unsayable.

For the image of Dalí’s painting, please refer to the Museum of Modern Art site, at [http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object\\_id=79018](http://www.moma.org/collection/object.php?object_id=79018)

**Salvador Dalí, “The Persistence of Memory”**

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Dali had the genius to entitle his painting “The Persistence of Memory.” This title gets to the heart of the digitization issue through the collapsed digitized time that the painting presents. Beneath all digitization, living human memory remains always within non-artificial human time, using digitization productively but not reducible to digitization. Human memory is involved with time more totally and unequivocally than is digitization. True human memory has persisted all along. (Ong, 1994c, p. 12)

At a conference a skeptical co-panelist challenged Ong regarding his valorization of sound over sight by pointing to a projected image in the room and remarking: “see, a picture is worth a thousand words.” Ong quickly retorted, “But you had to use words to make that point.” In *Orality and Literacy* Ong added, “. . . a picture is worth a thousand words only under special conditions—which commonly include a context of words in which the picture is set” (1982b, p. 7). Here too it is worthwhile to note how the words, “The Persistence of Memory,” open up interpretations by widening and deepening the context for the image.

Years earlier, Ong attempted to identify for a dissertation writer the tenor of his thought: “In one way, my concern with such [metaphysical] statements and my concern with communication are convertible with one another, as both are convertible also with my concern with personalism” (Ong, 1974). Ong’s “metaphysical” reflections on time and memory in the Dali essay are reverberations from his oral hermeneutic that locates meaning not on surfaces or in circuitry but in the negotiation between unique interiors. Communication is rooted in personalism, and personalism is rooted in the nature of language itself

Ong argues in *Language as Hermeneutic* that language learning is not a process of naming, not a matching game of word to thing; rather, it is rooted in intentionality—the ability to understand prior to speech the intention on the part of another human being to communicate, the ability to be attuned to another human consciousness and to enter into that consciousness prior to any words being interpreted. Language develops out of silence, the non-linguistic setting in which words are used to explain the situation even as the situation gives meaning to the words. Computers lack that non-verbal context. And, “the computer lacks rhetoric, out of which logos and logic grew and in which they remain embedded” (p. 97). He continues, “Despite all the work to achieve ‘artificial intelligence’ through the computer, the computer always lacks the living

silence in which . . . human thought and language is embedded, it lacks the unconscious in which human thought and language are also embedded, and it lacks the biological substructures in which human thought and language are embedded (p. 97). Ong agreed with information specialists (Shannon, Carr, Gleick, Leith, Schoenhoff) that information theory cannot create purpose or “meaning”: “. . . information theory carries within it the concept of ‘intention,’ an elusive psychological and philosophical concept which information theory itself simply cannot grasp. Information theory is wrapped up not in information but in an enigma” (1989, p. 217). Ong frequently cited Leith (1990) and Schoenhoff (1993) to argue that the foundation of computer science is sociological, rooted in human goals and activity. For instance, in his Preface to Schoenhoff’s *The Barefoot Expert*, Ong suggested the advantages of approaching digitization through an oral hermeneutic:

Computers have developed at the end of a long noetic tradition tracing back largely to the ancient Greek formalization of knowledge by a logic which encouraged the view that truth is maximized in propositional statements. (An alternative persuasion might be that truth is maximized in human living and/or in deep personal relations) . . . This kind of conscious personal encounter is not enframed in computer language. Computer language is enframed in personal encounter. (Ong, 1993b, pp. ix–xi)

While acknowledging the seemingly boundless potential for artificial intelligence within computer applications, Ong was insistent on the irreducibility of personhood through machinery. “Mechanical models for communication-processes such as are used in information theory are helpful, but are all grossly deficient and of themselves misleading because they have no way of representing the interiority essential to all human communication, the individual personal consciousness itself, utterly different in each one of us” (1980, p. 139) Digitized encoding can be copied exactly and, given sufficient terabytes or petabytes, can be shared endlessly and completely, but human memory, like the human self, is distinctive, unique, irreproducible in its totality, and impervious to complete revelation.

The importance of memory for personalism is particularly evident for Ong in his religious faith. A member of the Society of Jesus, Ong believed Christianity to be a religion of memory, recalling Jesus’s words at the Last Supper, “Do this in remem-

brance of me.” But this memory is not of specific words or facts (which are abstractions from being) but of a person. Ong previously had referenced Gabriel Marcel’s distinction between two types of belief: “faith that” something is true versus “faith in” someone, that is, faith based on propositional knowledge versus faith based upon interpersonal communion (1962b). For Ong, focus solely on the of recall of verbatim words or recorded “facts” is a reduction of memory. Of course scholars must contextualize the words of the Bible within its own time, for instance by awareness of the psychodynamics of orality (as for instance Kelber, 1997, has attempted), but for the believer the words must also be re-contextualized within the present, within the framework of contemporary knowledge and communications technology. Since there are no completely explicit statements and since the meaning of words always is negotiated in part by the present context, the memory that Jesus commands is subject to ongoing interpretation. The purpose of living memory is not definition but encounter (Ong, n.d., “Hermeneutical Encounter”). It is not only retrospective but future-oriented. Ong takes Jesus’s words, “I am the way and the truth and the life” (John 14:6) to mean that “full truth, self-contained truth is not a statement at all, but *is* nothing less than a *person*”—and this is paradigmatic for all human speakers, regardless of religious belief (1995, pp. 19–20). The “I” who speaks cannot be digitized or reduced to statement.

So, with digitization, Ong’s concern was not that machines would become hominized but that humans could become technologized. In *Language as Hermeneutic*, Ong explained therefore that just as the data or information produced by digitization requires hermeneutics to integrate and communicate knowledge, so to come to deep understanding, Logos, that is fractioning reason, will always need to be accompanied by unitive Mythos—by myth, literature, religion, paradox, aphorisms, and so on, which work by indirection to utter the silence that gives meaning to words (*Language as Hermeneutic*, Ch. 13) and to alert us to the unique, interiorized human person that escapes digitization. (Ong had advanced a version of this theme 44 years earlier in an essay originally published in 1950 and reprinted, 1962a.)

Research continues on the plasticity of the human brain in response to omnipresent electronic technologies that we employ, and debate certainly will continue on whether Google is “making us stupid.” But perhaps the question we should be asking is, “are Google

Twitter, Facebook and other digitally-mediated experiences making us forget?” Or rather, by decontextualizing our experiences of the world and one another and by mediating those experiences through digitization, are electronic media inhibiting us from forming memories that extend deep into our conscious and unconscious minds, living memories that echo and resonate understandings and relationships that escape digitization?

Neither a technophobe nor an alarmist, Ong welcomed digitization, though he was more aware than most of us of the need to temper its vision and to supplement it with an oral hermeneutic more adept at speaking the unspeakable. The visual maps of digitization are not the territory of human reality—it is nice to have them around to get where we are going, but it cannot choose for us our destination. Optimistic as always, Ong suggested that the first answer to the problem is awareness, awareness of what is happening, why it is happening, and how it might be changed. The truth shall set you free, free to cultivate Mythos in its various forms to preserve the richness of human experience that can be occluded by spatializing and fractioning methods of interpretation. Dali’s painting pictures for us Ong’s oral hermeneutics: despite exhaustive digitization, memory persists. We need to remember that.

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# Why “Hermeneutic Forever”?

## Walter Ong and Understanding Interpretation

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### A. Ong on hermeneutics

Toward the end of his career, Walter Ong mused on hermeneutics in an essay he titled, “Hermeneutics Forever” (1995/1999), tellingly published in *Oral Tradition*. For Ong, interpretation, like so much else, begins in human life and human presence, in what essentially involves an oral process. He writes, “In a quite ordinary and straightforward sense, to interpret means for a human being to bring out for another human being or for other human beings (or for himself or herself) what is concealed in a given manifestation, that is, what is concealed in a verbal statement or a given phenomenon or state of affairs providing information” (p. 183). He aims for a comprehensive definition: humans (and, he argues later, only humans) interpret, but we interpret any manner of things, events, and language—anything that carries information. And interpretation makes that information meaningful: it moves it from information to communication, a distinction he elaborates in an essay published shortly after the one on hermeneutics. Again, he provides definitions:

“Communication” . . . consists of interactions between conscious human beings (paradigmatically, “I” and “you”). By contract, “information” is something transmitted by a mechanical operation—no consciousness as such involved, but only various signals or indicators moved spatially over “channels” from place to place. In this sense of information, familiar in information processing and information theory, the “message” has “nothing to do with any inherent meaning,” but “is rather a degree of order, or non-randomness, that can be measured and treated mathematically” (*New Encyclopedia Britannica*, 1987, Vol. 6, p. 312). (Ong, 1996, p. 4)

All of this is vintage Ong. Communication begins with presence and ultimately makes one’s interior available to another.

Ong continues his reflections on hermeneutics with two other characteristic moves. First, he narrows “interpretation” to “hermeneutics,” noting that

hermeneutics “commonly refers to reflective or ‘scientific’ interpretation” (1995/1999, p. 188). Second, he suggests stages of interpretation, aligned with the stages of cultural expression he had identified in earlier works: oral cultures, chirographic cultures, typographic cultures, and electronic cultures. Each of them creates a hermeneutic style and necessity of interpretation: “oral interpretation of oral utterance”; “textual interpretation of oral utterance”; “chirographic (handwritten) interpretation of written text”; “printed interpretation of printed text”; “electronically implemented hermeneutic of oral utterance”; and “electronically implemented hermeneutic of written or printed or electronically produced text” (pp. 188–192). Hermeneutics becomes more and more important as human culture becomes more enmeshed in electronic or digital communication.

He explains why in two different places. First, interpretation becomes necessary because human communication remains open: there is always something more to be said.

We need to remember that, by a well warranted extrapolation from Gödel’s proof, any sort of closed system is impossible. Neither oral language nor text nor electronic “artificial intelligence” can be a closed system. They are all interactive somewhere with something other than themselves. (1995/1999, p. 189)

Even natural phenomena remain open to interpretation: the dark clouds mean rain, my elevated heart rate tells me I’m nervous, and so on. Interpretation and hermeneutic open up systems of expression to other such systems. There is always more to be said, as each individual and culture adds its own understanding. Though he cites Gadamer’s (1960/1983) work in the essay, Ong make no reference either to Gadamer’s powerful image of the fusion of horizons (pp. 273ff), a most appropriate image for how each culture and individual adds to the hermeneutic conversation, nor to his image of hermeneutics as playing catch, throwing the ball of conversation back and forth (p. v).



Second, in the 1996 essay, Ong repeats the growing importance of hermeneutics. “When a communications system, which works between persons through symbols, is overloaded with great masses of information, you create an urgent need for interpretation or hermeneutics. . . . Total verbal explicitness is impossible: Any statement can call for further interpretation that makes its meaning” (p. 11). He more clearly connects hermeneutics to digital culture as well:

Digitization proceeds by division of what it deals with into numerically distinct binary units. Hermeneutics drives ultimately not to divide (although it may make tactical use of division) but to form wholes, ultimately to relate everything that is known to everything else that is known. (p. 12)

In making this claim, he refers to the 1995 essay where he suggests the psychological necessity of such integration by reference to the long observed hermeneutical circle, whereby we interpret the unknown by relating it to the known (1995/1999, p. 197).

Ong’s insistence on hermeneutics grows out of the psychological importance of communication, of the human need to make one’s interior known, of the need to connect the “I” and the “Thou” (1995/1999, pp. 200–202), phenomena that for Ong explain communication. The need for hermeneutics also grows out of the ever more complex and creative means of human communication and the technologies invented to achieve those: writing, printing, electronic systems, and digital processing. As more humans create more expression, they increase the need for interpretation: the more expression, the more commentary. But because our communication begins with presence, every interpretation or hermeneutic process in some way depends on verbalization.

In verbal communication, the hearer must be aware that the speaker intends the utterance to be a word or words and not just noise; the speaker must know that the hearer knows this, and the hearer must know that the speaker knows that he or she (the hearer) knows it. The hermeneutical circle again. We are somehow inside one another’s consciousness *before* we begin to speak to another or others. (1995/1999, p. 203)

In this conclusion, Ong echoes Dilthey’s analysis of historical understanding. For Dilthey, later generations of historians can understand the actions of earlier peoples because they share a human experience, on the basis of which they can construct an historical world

(1910/1976). The hermeneutical circle moves from personal experience to the experience of the other to the historical grounding of that personal experience, Ong’s “somehow inside one another’s consciousness.”

Ong’s essays on hermeneutics and on digitization provide a kind of catalogue of hermeneutic actions: where hermeneutics arises and the kinds of commentary it fosters. The essays also place hermeneutics as an activity that complements textual bias and moves to restore the personal, the “I” and the “Thou.”

### *B. Another view of the necessity of hermeneutics*

In these essays Ong provides a kind of communicative and psychological grounding for hermeneutics. In doing so, he also points to other factors, other ways to tell story, though he only hints at them.

In other writings, culminating in *Orality and Literacy* (1982), Ong summarizes research on the differences between primary oral cultures (those that do not have writing or even any sense that writing exists somewhere else) and chirographic cultures. For one chapter, he chooses the memorable title, “Writing restructures consciousness” (p. 78). In a kind of anticipation of this, decades earlier in his studies on Ramus, Ong had already gathered evidence that printing (and writing before it) changed education by restructuring rhetoric (1958). The impact of the twin technologies of writing and rhetoric provide another avenue to understand hermeneutics.

The very word for this “reflective or ‘scientific’ interpretation” (1995/1999, p. 188) comes from the name of the Greek god Hermes, the god of the crossroads; the god of the places people meet; the god of crossing the bounds of trade, of language, of translation (Soukup, 2008, p. 41). Surely, Ong is correct to highlight interpretation when people meet in conversation, when people bring out what is concealed in their interiors. In those situations, it suffices to ask a question when understanding fails. Such questioning or interpretation has a natural quality and the languages people speak remain (to use a visual term) transparent. The same more or less applies in interpreting nonverbal expression or natural phenomena. We know why we smile and what a smile means or, doubting the genuineness of the smile, we can always ask. We recognize or interpret rain clouds but we can always talk about the weather. The relationships among people in such oral interactions are direct. We can easily imagine that the first reflective, if not scientific, interpretation comes when language becomes a barrier, when humans can no longer take its operation for granted, when

humans can no longer ask a question, can no longer participate in the oral interpretation of oral utterances.

A more reflective interpretation, that is, the invocation of Hermes, occurs when people have to think about why language does not work. When people speak different languages and cannot understand one another, they must rely on gestures, or better on a translator. In other words, hermeneutics arises with mediation—the god at the crossroads, the barter of goods, the translator intercepting language. The scientific part of the interpretation process begins when people need to understand how the process works and seek to make it work more smoothly. This hermeneutics comes into greater prominence with greater mediation. It seems rather straightforward with a translator standing between two interlocutors. But what happens when technologies introduce other mediations: temporal or spatial mediation? Early markings, whether on trees or cave walls or wherever, demanded hermeneutics: what did these things mean? Because they often outlived their creators, conversational interpretation was no longer possible. How do people determine what a given sign means when the individual who made it cannot explain it? More sophisticated writing systems both expanded the possibilities of communication and created a much more complex mediation, each in its own ways: pictographs, hieroglyphics, and alphabetical systems. Each mediated human communication in particular ways and each subsequently required hermeneutics. As with most communication practices or technologies, people did not think about them as long as they worked. Plato's well known objection to writing (*Phaedrus*, 275)—that a written text cannot answer a question, cannot enter into a dialogue or verbal exchange, cannot, as Ong notes, interpret itself (1995/1999, p. 196)—highlights one area when the communication technology does not work according to the existing practices. And that drove people to think about how to make it work, to think about hermeneutics.

Over time people created methods of understanding and methods of interpretation so that mediating technologies might function more smoothly. And over time, these evolved into cultural practices of shared knowledge. Ong describes some of these in his chapter on the characteristics of primary oral cultures in *Orality and Literacy* (1982, pp. 31–77). In their more highly developed forms, such cultural practices of knowing constitute a rhetoric, a means of ordering, storing, recalling, and presenting knowledge in order to

smooth out the interpretation process. In this view, rhetoric has become a hermeneutic process. It stands in that middle ground between the speaker and the audience or between an individual and a body of knowledge and provides a kind of information management system. Rhetoric first assists and then replaces dialogue so that everyone—or at least everyone trained in rhetoric—might know how to interpret the conversation interrupted by the distances posed by communication. Those distances could result from a formal speaking situation where questioning could not occur, from the time between thought and speaking, from the use of writing and its distances of space and time. The general rhetorical system of information management continues to this day, though it changes in form as cultures discover new ways to communicate.

In reflecting on the rise of hermeneutics, Ong reminds us of one such method that has persisted:

With handwritten texts, interpretation becomes more urgent, precisely because there is no direct dialogic interaction—the writer and the reader or audience need not be and normally are not present to each other. Since verbalization always implies dialogue, the writer and reader have always to fictionalize one another into a dialogue setting (Ong, 1975 [Here Ong refers to his essay, “The Writer's Audience Is Always a Fiction”]). (1995/1999, p. 196)

This rhetorical practice actually resembled a conversational interaction, at least at first. A great deal of evidence from the classical Greek and Roman world shows that people heard written texts performed for them rather than read those texts themselves (Ward & Trobisch 2013, pp. 3–33). In other words, the practice of the reader attempted to recreate the dialogue. Such readers received a great deal of training so that the rhetoric of reading re-introduced aspects of speech into texts: not just voice, but inflection and other nonverbal qualities. Once again, the distance introduced by the technology of writing necessitated a parallel development of a hermeneutic practice. However, that hermeneutic practice gradually achieved a kind of transparency. Listeners in the classical world could appreciate the performance of a text without knowing the (rhetorical) art that made both writing and reading possible.

Classical and medieval education focused on rhetoric because rhetoric unlocked the information stored in the practices of writing and reading. Students learned to find arguments and manipulate the com-

monplaces first to learn information management and then to bring the information so found forward in a compelling way, whether they performed their own orations or dictated them for others to perform. The education system emphasized a hermeneutic process in order to make communication transparent. It worked as long as speaker and audience knew the system (Soukup, 2012).

But technologies of communication changed the process of knowing and shifted the demand for hermeneutics. Two things happened. First, the technologies allowed a greater mobility of knowledge: written texts moved across cultural boundaries and across time. People no longer knew what the creators of those texts had taken for granted or what methods the relevant rhetorical systems had employed. Here the Bible provides a good example. Early biblical translators (of the Septuagint, for example, or even of the Vulgate) had some knowledge of the biblical world and of the biblical rhetoric. Centuries and even a millennia later, monks and theologians could read the texts but did not know the biblical world. They understood the technology of writing and language encoding, but not the cultural information. They knew classical rhetoric, but not the information processes of the Hebrew Bible. Not surprisingly, these medieval readers developed some of the first hermeneutic systems: the larger the gap between them and the texts, the more need for the assistance of Hermes. By the medieval period, that gap included language, time, cultural distance, and even the mutation of rhetoric as an information management system. To use a more modern idiom, those decoding the information stored used a slightly different key from those who had encoded it. It worked on some things but not on others. And, given the seriousness of the Bible (God's very word), the disagreements about interpretation and the tools of hermeneutics became serious indeed. The initial success of writing as a communication medium worked so well that no one really thought about how or why it worked, and few suspected that writing itself was the problem. (Ong, 1995/1999, p. 200, adds an interesting aside that fundamentalism results from people's presumption that a text constitutes a closed system, that written communication works perfectly, without—in my words—the rhetorical or information management that supports it.)

Second, a different process became entangled in the linguistic, cultural, and temporal distances resulting from communication technologies. Human thought had become much more abstract. Each tech-

nology of communication led to a more abstract way of thinking. That is, each communication technology interposed something between human beings and their dealings with each other or their interaction with the world around them. A cave painting, for example, replaced the elk with its image. The written letter replaced the voice of the writer with the voice of the reader (or the imagined voice of the writer). The printed book replaced the lettered manuscript. The recorded sound replaced the live performance. The digital file replaced the book, the image, the voice, etc. As McLuhan pointed out over 50 years ago, the process acts through iterations: the content of any communication medium is another medium (1964, p. 7). A similar thing—perhaps more easily recognized—occurred with money. Humans moved to subsequently more abstract measures of value: from real goods (livestock, for example) to precious metals equivalent in value to those bartered good to coinage guaranteed by a king or emperor to paper money backed by a government to numeric representations (bank accounts or credit cards) to digital strings stored in a database. Each step moves farther away from the physical world and more into abstraction. Rushkoff (2013) notes much the same thing with time. “Clocks initially disconnected us from organic time by creating a metaphor to replace it. Digital time is one step further removed, replacing what it was we meant by ‘time’ altogether” (pp. 112–113). The same thing happens with thinking: people work with symbols, with abstractions. But, as Ong noted with digitization, something must reconnect the elements. The more abstract the relationship, the greater the need for the reintegration of experience, the greater the need for hermeneutics.

The success of the communication technologies masked the fact that they depended not only on the technology itself (writing, art, music, printing, and so on) but also on a knowledge or information system. Each communication system and each level of abstraction has its own rhetoric or information management system. And, at some point, the communication systems break down without this other knowledge.

To put it a different way, technology involves forgetting, perhaps not at first, but over time. From Plato to Nicholas Carr (2010), people have noticed this and warned of it: Plato bemoaned the fact that writing would destroy memory—why remember when people could write things out? Carr has documented how the ease of digital dependence alters people's brains: why critically read or evaluate texts when Google's algo-

rhythm can do it for you? But technology fosters forgetting in other ways, too.

A new communication technology offers a new rhetoric. The process often takes years, even centuries to come about, as Ong documents in his historical studies of rhetoric and Ramism (1958). Eisenstein (1979) offers another example with the invention of the essay by Montaigne as a way to make the printed book into a medium of intimate communication (pp. 230–231). The same thing occurred in the decades-long process by which film makers created a storytelling medium from what began as a recording device. The rhetoric must provide a way to store and locate information, quickly and transparently. In all of the instances just adduced, the new medium would not have succeeded unless it convinced people to forget its existence, to let the rhetoric work directly on the reader, hearer, or viewer. To see the book as a series of printed pages blocks the voice of the writer; to look for the artifice in film prevents the suspension of disbelief. Communication technology works best when people forget about it. In fact, in order to work, technology must become transparent and to do so, it must erase what it builds on.

With communication technology in particular, people think they experience the reality and not the abstraction, not the symbol. Drawing on Baudrillard, Rushkoff explains the process:

It's a progression akin to what postmodern philosopher Jean Baudrillard called the "precession of the simulacra." There is the real world, then there are the metaphors and maps we use to represent that world, and then there is yet another level of activity that can occur on those maps—utterly disconnected from the original. This happens because we have grown to treat the maps and symbols we have created as if they are the underlying reality. (2013, p. 113)

The confusion of image or abstraction and reality—the forgetting of the difference—finds constant reinforcement in the mediated communication process because that process must work quickly and with apparent ease. To remind people of the distances (whether physical, linguistic, cultural, psychological, or other) disrupts communication. Better to forget than to interfere.

From this perspective, that very forgetting is the birth of hermeneutics. The rise of hermeneutics and its importance parallels the rise of communication technologies. Those technologies move people farther and farther from the life world, from that world of immedi-

ate perception and immediate interaction with others. Ultimately, people need hermeneutics to bridge what becomes lost in the technological abstraction and to illuminate the rhetoric of information management incorporated in each communication technology. Hermeneutics repairs by illuminating the process and by reconnecting what the various technologies and their rhetorics divided. Gadamer's great image of the fusion of horizons (1960/1983, p. 273) proposes one solution, one that reconnects what technology separates. The process he proposes in that image makes us interact with a separated individual (through, for example, an original document or even a video window) more consciously and makes us more conscious of what we bring. At the very least, the willingness to bring horizons into contact reestablishes the interpersonal that, in Ong's view, lies at the heart of all communication. Gadamer's hermeneutic would bring people closer to each other.

Gadamer's larger hermeneutic procedure invites people to reflect on the historicity of understanding (pp. 235ff). This historicity makes conscious both the individual's prior judgments (or prejudices in Gadamer's terms) and the various levels and processes of mediation introduced by texts and other communication technologies. It is a hermeneutic that makes the familiar strange so that people can perceive all that the communication process does. In this, it resembles a choice that a translator (the embodiment of Hermes) makes in creating a "subversive" translation—one that makes the receiver aware of the strangeness of the translated content (Gutman, 2013, p. 112) and thus aware of the person(s) involved. Their horizons do differ but communication that is too transparent ends up hindering what Ong terms "the presence of one *person* to another *person* or other *persons*" (1995/1999, p. 201, italics in original).

For Ong, hermeneutic exists as a commentary and as a corrective. Viewed from his discussion of the persistence of hermeneutics (1995/1999), hermeneutics accompanies every communication form—oral, chirographic, printed, electronic—in an unending conversation that ultimately reveals the interior of one person to another. Viewed from Ong's more implicit acknowledgment of technological intervention in communication, as discussed here, hermeneutics not only accompanies every communication form but corrects what those forms add to the communication process. Its role becomes one of maintaining the person-to-person com-

munication, what Gadamer suggests in his dedicatory quotation from Rilke, who describes becoming “the catcher of a ball / thrown by an eternal partner” (Gadamer, 1960/1983, p. v). Hermeneutics restores conversation.

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# Mobiliteracy: Applying Ong’s Psychodynamic Characteristics to Users of Mobile Communication Technology

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## A. Introduction

In *Orality and Literacy*, Walter Ong outlines key characteristics of both oral and literate cultures. In doing so, Ong demonstrates the psychodynamics involved in the oral/literate shift and creates a set of working criteria for identifying behaviors and cognitive patterns in the distinct populations. While Ong does address electronic technology in his exploration of “secondary literacy” (1982, p. 120), the focus is still on the use of speech and aural communications vis-à-vis writing and print. Additionally, Ong briefly discusses the hybrid “verbomotor lifestyle” (p. 67) in which literate cultures maintain traits of orality. In light

of media evolutions since Ong’s writing, I believe that there is a yet another culture emerging—perhaps a subset of secondary orality—that requires definition and exploration; one that is primarily typographic yet exhibits many of the defining traits of oral culture.

This essay will utilize Ong’s nine characteristics of orally based thought and expression to define a new hybridized culture that I will refer to as “mobiliterate.” It is not my intent here to specifically address the impacts of technology on formal education or literacy as the ability for one to read and write. Rather, this essay will explore broader cultural and linguistic

changes. Through technical and sociological research points, I will argue that the mobility and connectivity of new media are changing the psychodynamics of communication and dramatically impacting contemporary thought and expression.

### *B. Background and evolution of technology*

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, mobile communication technology was rapidly making its way into popular consumer culture. In its infancy, the technology afforded users a minimal level of options. In recent years, however, mobile communication technology has exploded. In 1997, the wireless industry association CTIA reported that the average number of text messages sent each month was 1.2 million. By the end of 2012, an average of 171.3 billion text messages were sent each month (ctia, 2013) and recent reports indicate that more than 50% of Facebook's 901 million active monthly users access the social media site through a mobile device (socialbakers.com, 2012). Despite the rapid advances of smarter and more efficient devices, communication on a mobile device via text or sms remains time consuming, tedious, and cost prohibitive.

The limitations imposed by mobile devices force text message users to reimagine their messaging strategies, and subsequently, their actual language and syntax. Early multi-tap "keyboards" included only 12 keys and two or three "functional" keys for capitalization and special characters. In order to type the word "you" in a message, a user would have to tap eight times on three separate keys. Comparatively, pressing the number eight key just twice renders the letter "u." This function has led to using simple letters for phonemic representations of common words such as "you," "are," "be," and "see" (u, r, b, c). In this example, the technological limitations of text messaging led to the creation of a new codified language unique to mobile communication. The habit of character thrift, I believe, derived from the need to constrain a message to the still-present 140 or 160 character limit imposed by mobile service providers. Despite the incredible advances in technology since the first multi-tap keyboards, this dialect remains a common trend in mobile communications and is making its way into many other forms of digital and oral communication. While there is more to this evolution than simple technological determinism, it is apparent that more than three decades of technical limitations have played a part in shifting the constructs of communication and altered our literate minds as well as the roots of our orally based cognitive processes.

### *C. Additive and subordinative*

In a literate culture, discourse is subject to grammatical constructs that help individuals communicate a message. Oral cultures, on the other hand, operate at "the convenience of the speaker" (Ong, 1982, p. 37), and somewhat independent of the formal rules of grammar. Oral discourse relies heavily on the shared context of the speaker and audience to impart meaning, and in this way, formal language construct becomes less important.

In a new mobiliterate culture, a similar grammar-independent, pragmatic style has been evolving in many forms of CMC and mobile media. As Baron (2005) points out, "Teens often use spoken language to express small-group identity. It is hardly surprising to find many of them experimenting with a new linguistic medium (such as IM) to complement the identity construction they achieve through speech, clothing, or hair style" (p. 30). This experimentation naturally extends from the constraints of the communication medium to the content of the message, leading to increased use of context specific idioms and reduced dependence on traditional grammar for understanding.

If this new style is abandoning formal syntactics in favor of individualized pragmatics, thought in digital-lingual culture must develop accommodations for learning and memory. Without a standard set of rules (grammar) with which to interpret messaging, how can societies expect to share knowledge, continue tradition, and construct cultural identity?

### *D. Conservative or traditionalist*

In contrast to Ong's notions of orality preserving tradition, I believe that mobility is contributing to a dilution of conservative communication and an increase in more fluid, interpretive methods of accumulating and disseminating knowledge. Ong (1982) states that "By storing knowledge outside the mind, writing and even more, print, downgrade the . . . repeaters of the past in favor of the younger discoverers of something new" (p. 41). Downgrades of traditional resources are a hallmark of the digital era. With any number of apps dedicated to highly specific niches, mobile users no longer need to consult volumes of encyclopedia to find something; they simply need the correct search terms. By culturally downgrading a centralized information source such as *The Oxford English Dictionary*, mobiliterates are forging ahead with learning new things from a variety of sources and challenging single-source knowledge acquisition models. Even

though the advent of technology such as open wikis has democratized the perpetuation of knowledge, it remains difficult to publish from and tedious to read on mobile devices for an extended period of time.

Emerging data suggests that mobile technologies will soon eclipse traditional personal computers as the go-to devices for gathering information. A Pew Internet study suggests that more than 30% of Americans now own a tablet device, up from 3% in May of 2010 (Zickuhr, 2013). With its affordances of immediate access to information from multiple sources, mobility puts the user in charge of his or her experience. When the individual is in charge of the acquisition of knowledge, the process is undoubtedly rooted in the individual's frame of reference and reflects interests in close alignment with the user's situation. As in oral culture, knowledge acquisition for mobiliterates is greatly aided if the information is presented in context.

#### *E. Aggregative and analytic*

Thought in primarily oral cultures is tied closely to the ability to remember facts and content. In order to create memorable stories, for example, oral communicators embed "parallel terms . . . antithetical terms or phrases . . . epithets" (Ong, 1982, p 38). These terms add up to give oral communication high "formulary baggage" and "aggregative weight" (Ong, 1977, pp. 188–212).

In a similar sense, then, mobiliterate communication has created a style filled with formulary baggage. Because of the vast amount of data available and the expected speed of access to that data, mobiliterates have developed systems of indexing, optimizing, and cataloging information. What we might call "meta data" has made its way into the messaging itself and adds incredible formulary baggage to information. It often has little to do with the actual content of the communication but rather implies meaning through social contexts. A contemporary example of embedded (often antithetical) terms is the use of hash tags on the popular social media sites, Twitter and Facebook.

According to Twitter's online documentation, "The number sign or pound sign (#), often called a hashtag, is used to mark metadata keywords or topics in a Tweet. It was created organically by Twitter users as a way to categorize messages" (twitter.com, 2013). In March 2012, Twitter's corporate blog boasted, "today we see 340 million Tweets a day. That's more than one billion every three days" (twitter.com, 2012). Just as in oral cultures, the challenge of processing that amount of information would be nearly impossible

without adding some aggregative weight. The addition of metadata is crucial for Twitter users to gain easy access to the information they need later. Mobile technology has created a unique situation in which communication is instant and transactional, yet requires aggregative supplements (hash tags and metadata) to assist users with more efficient recall and to communicate layers of implied interpretive meaning. While this information is readily available, mobile interfaces tend to focus on real-time data and less on comprehensive search and archiving tools. This trend may provide a background for the emergence of another key attribute of orality: repetition.

#### *F. Redundant and copious*

Despite the amount of data (and metadata) available to mobiliterates, text messages, tweets, and Facebook posts are often quite redundant, and certainly copious. As an example, Mueller (2012), a popular social media blogger, admits to his readers, "I'll tweet my latest blog post out about three or four times during the day." His justification is directly in line with the common practice of repetition in more traditional media. From a marketing, and further, a personal relationship standpoint, increased numbers of messaging touches create "a reduction in the uncertainty and conflict initially induced by a novel stimulus" (Putnam & Sternthal, 1990). Reduction in uncertainty creates "positive habituation" (p. 345). I believe that this insistence upon repetition and mundane copiousness illustrates a shift to highly individualized and often narcissistic attitudes that are becoming common in mobiliterates. Mobile communication, specifically text messaging and microblogging, is about the poster and often has little to do with the perpetuation of "formal" knowledge. In this sense, mobiliterates understand that traditional written knowledge is there when needed, but mobility is more efficient for immediate communication needs.

#### *G. Close to the human lifeworld and situational rather than abstract*

Due to the technological constraints of mobile devices, much of the messaging through these channels is transactional, situational, and often extremely close to the human experience. A surprising example of the intimacy of mobility is the rise in "sexting" on mobile devices. The data are widely varied, but some studies indicate that as many as 27% of teenage users have sent some form of sexually explicit message, photo, or video from their mobile device (Fleschler Peskin,

2013). Further research is needed to fully understand the impacts of mobility on human sexuality and the associated shifting social norms; however, the early numbers are an indication that mobile communication is shaping a new human lifeworld, brining us closer as individuals, and yet, lowering our inhibitions by increasing our feelings of anonymity.

From a broader social perspective, the affordances of mobility have allowed distant individuals to communicate in almost real time. A 2011 Pew Research Center study indicated “Cell owners between the ages of 18 and 24 exchange an average of 109.5 messages on a normal day” (Smith, 2011). In an average day, that means sending or receiving a message every nine minutes. This frequency, combined with the limitations of mobile messaging tools, puts mobile communication firmly in a situational and transactional category. In the context of Ong’s definitions, mobile communication, like orality, is rarely concerned with “facts divorced from human or quasi-human activity” (Ong, 1982, p. 43). Mobile communication is almost entirely concerned with what is happening right now, to the user, in the context of the relationship with the audience.

Ong spends a significant amount of time addressing the impacts of situational thought on cognition and provides some insightful real-world examples in the text. The underlying concept of situational thinking, according to Ong is that “Oral folk assess intelligence not as extrapolated from contrived textbook quizzes, but as situated in operational contexts” (p. 55). Communicators in oral tradition disseminate information that is practical and applicable to the listener and further, form their very concepts of reality around what can be seen and touched rather than what has been laboriously cataloged in print. In mobility, most communication is firmly rooted in situational and operational contexts such as making plans, “checking in” to places, or even placing orders for lunch. Given Ong’s deep exploration of situational thinking, further analysis should be given to fully assess the impacts of mobile communication on mobiliterate cognition.

#### *H. Agnostically toned*

When we come to understand digital communication as primarily situational, we can begin to see overlapping characteristics of both orality and literacy emerge. Writing, as Ong (1982) points out, “fosters abstractions that disengage knowledge from the arena where human beings struggle with one another” (p. 43). While the content of mobile communication may be pri-

marily situational, texting and email, for example, allow the audience to respond outside of real time. Unlike oral discourse where exchanges are instantaneous, mobility enables users to hide behind the technology, distancing themselves from the exchange, and perhaps reducing any conflict inherent in the messaging.

At the same time, however, ignorance of context in mobile communication can lead to increased personal hostilities and “personal tensions” (p. 44). As Ong outlines in this section of the text, orality’s agnostic programming “situates knowledge within a context of struggle” (p. 44). Mobile communication, then, absent of universally knowable reality for the users, is likely to continue along an agnostic trajectory. In this sense, mobile communication echoes the abstraction of literate thinking while drawing the communicators into heightened ambiguity from the lack of contextual knowledge. With the blurring of the knowable realities created in mobile cultures and collapse of context present in CMC, individuals must become more objective in their participation in the creation and perpetuation of culture.

#### *I. Objectively participatory*

Ong clearly separates the ideas of empathy and participation from objectivity and personal distance. I believe that mobiliterates have erased this line completely and established a culture of objective participation in knowledge acquisition and reality. As we have seen, mobile technology affords users the opportunity to carefully analyze communication while still closely participating in the exchange. Mobility allows for objectivity.

As Ong continues, he demonstrates that objectivity in oral culture is subject to a “communal reaction” or “communal soul” (p. 44–45). Mobility and connectivity have deepened our sense of community and made us keenly aware of the close link between communicator, message, and audience. For mobile communicators, participation in knowing and shaping reality is subject to an increase in both personal transparency and distanced anonymity. This unique blend of characteristics of mobiliterate culture has changed our understanding of conflict and shifted our approaches to harmonious living.

#### *J. Homeostatic*

The constructs of orality (and mobility) tend to limit the depth and abstraction of discourse and focus instead on framing the communication in such a way as to make the most impact. “[O]rality fosters personality



structures that in certain ways are more communal and externalized, and less introspective than those common among literates. Oral communication unites people in groups” (Ong, 1982, p. 69). In oral and mobile communication, words must be chosen carefully. As previously discussed, mobile communication often lacks shared context and its technological limitations prevent deep, extended discourse. In the purest sense, then, one-to-one mobile discourse remains close to orality in its ability to maintain contact and subsequently relationships among individuals.

Weisskirch (2011) explored impacts of mobile communication on parent-child relationships and demonstrated several scenarios where relationships were altered through cell and mobile contact. The immediacy of mobility allows for instant gratification for both the parent and child. Weisskirch demonstrates that “Adolescents who call their parents seeking support or guidance report better relationships” and “parents feel better about themselves when adolescents call to ask and confer and when the parents call to track schoolwork” (p. 450). It can be inferred then, that real time communication with family and close support networks can enhance homeostasis among networks. It should be noted that Weisskirch also demonstrated negative impacts of the mobile tether when communication was authoritarian or overly disciplinary in motivation. He concludes, in part, that “although the technology affords the ability to easily call, parents may create greater conflict by calling for these typical parenting activities” (p. 450). Like oral communication, then, effective mobile messaging requires a reflexive understanding of context and a more artistic, rhetorical approach to communication.

### K. Conclusion

Mobiliteracy blends psychodynamics of orality and literacy to create a unique framework for communication, behavior, and acquisition of knowledge. Mobile communication is simultaneously additive and subordinative and operates somewhat independent of formal language constructs. Metadata and formulary baggage such as hashtags, coupled with systematized access to data makes mobility both aggregative and analytic in nature. Mobiliterate communication demonstrates redundancy, yet in a way that is individually liberal as opposed to traditionalist oral thought. Because mobile devices are ubiquitous in today’s culture, their use is becoming increasingly close to our deepest human experiences. As a result, mobiliterates may demonstrate agnostic and situational thinking. Finally,

in an effort to maintain homeostasis in a collapsing social context, mobiliterates have learned to be objectively participatory in the exchange of information and acquisition of knowledge.

Mobile technology is an extremely fast-growing technology with implications that are just beginning to be understood. This essay has attempted to outline the shift in cognition and communication among the mobiliterates, and I believe we will see further evolutions as mobile technology gains deeper adoption across socioeconomic groups. Further research will demonstrate *how* exactly mobility is changing our culture and cognition, but I believe that contemplating the unique traits of orality, literacy, and mobiliteracy will be important in addressing *why* these changes are taking place. By understanding the psychodynamics of mobiliterates, I believe we can begin to address the technology’s impacts on important aspects of society such as education and public service.

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## Virtual Grief

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### *A. Introduction*

The advent of social media has altered the communication of relationships in myriad ways. High school friends—lost years before to different colleges, cross-country moves, and growing families—return to contact via social networks. Communally speaking, social media relationships are held together by seemingly random posts about trips to the grocery store or a night at the movies that lead to days of commentary from family, friends, and acquaintances. More seriously, social media also appear to change the ways we grieve with one another, our communal expression and ritual of grief.

In years past, information about a friend's death most often moved from person to person by a visit or telephone call, where careful phrasing and a kindly presence or tone helped soften the news. What was commonly viewed as normal grieving occurred at a visitation and funeral attended by family and friends. Later, people brought food to a repast or reception and sent flowers and cards to the bereaved. Then, with the formalities ended, the bereaved continued with the process of recovery on their own.

Now, the popularity and ease of social networking sites such as Facebook have altered the way people hear about a death, with the news often shared in waves of postings that can quickly overwhelm a user's newsfeed. However, this online conversation doesn't stop at the initial revelation; instead, it can continue with family, friends, acquaintances, and now strangers online for days, weeks, months, and even years afterward. Increasingly, the public and private spheres of life are blurring, challenging longstanding traditions of the boundaries between personal and shared information.

Changes in ritual communication practices have created different norms and traditions of grief in the context of social media and perhaps beyond. By looking at artifacts of mourning expressed through Facebook and other social networking outlets, this research considered what might be gained and lost in this new configuration of grief, both for those immediately affected by the death and those tangentially connected. Because the research dealt with what Walter Ong, S.J., called secondary orality, we used his thoughts to consider whether social media is moving grief into a third public digital space that shares characteristics of both orality and literacy.

When Ong (1982) talked about literate culture, he argued that written words take the author out of the discourse (p. 77). Referencing Plato's Socrates, Ong stated that "real speech and thought always exist essentially in a context of give-and-take between real persons. Writing is passive, out of it, in an unreal, unnatural world" (p. 78). A reader can't argue or even discuss the words with the author like he or she would in an oral culture. However, in the world of social media, a discussion does take place—an engagement in communal ways similar to those found in oral cultures. People comment and respond. They dialogue and, in some unusual ways that will be noted later, they disagree and criticize. Social media, while clearly the work of a literate culture, shares a great many of the characteristics of orality that Ong discussed. For example, there are elements of the human lifeworld. People are talking about grief, a foundation of the human experience, and they are demonstrating empathy, digitally mediated but still meaningful. Also, like orality, the postings are agonistic in that social media cre-

ates a space for interpersonal interaction and impact and, occasionally, argument. However, social media exists in that literate sphere, as Ong said, where “written words are residue” (p. 11). We found Ong’s work a useful heuristic, then, as we conducted a pilot content analysis of Facebook pages that memorialize the dead. Through this process, we found several ways that virtual grief appears in a social media context, sitting between oral and literate culture and giving rise to the contours of this changing practice of collective mourning. Broadly, we found that in this public and private sphere, everyone can participate in the grieving over someone’s death—even the death of a person they didn’t know. We also found a change in the amount of time spent grieving. Through social media and practicing virtual grief, the bereaved can subtly seek solace forever, reminding others through posts, keeping the loss in the present. Finally, we found “new” or emergent ways of coping with grief. Each theme is detailed in the next section.

### B. Virtual grieving

In years past, grief was more a private experience; now, increasingly on Facebook and other social media sites, the grief is public. Public and two-way communication means everyone can participate in the grieving over someone’s death. For instance, last December, a Washington state couple died on their way to Montana to celebrate their anniversary. In an online comments section opened up by local news station, people unrelated to the couple commented on the tragedy, responding to each other’s posts and seemingly sharing in grieving a couple they didn’t know. This public opportunity easily derailed into irrelevant side commentary, such as in the case of this same couple that died. A random comment criticized the grammar of another comment. While the site was intended for condolences, it instead devolved into a verbal match wherein one person called the other a “whiner.” In this way, what Ong described as the agonistic element of oral culture, takes place in written form, name calling that is “standard in oral societies around the world” (p. 44) but highly unusual in the context of death.

In a more intimate example, a wife lost her husband. The husband’s Facebook page shows a post from a friend who writes about having a drink in memory of him. Another friend posted about having imagined she saw him on a street corner and commented about how much she missed him. In traditional ways of grief expression, the wife most likely would not know about all the public grieving of her husband—particularly

five months after his death. Now, the ability to post on a social media site is normalizing what might once have been considered trespassing on the wife’s grief because most people would consider it rude or invasive to publicly bring up another person’s loss. In a newspaper article about her recently published book about her daughter’s death, author Linda Hunt talks about how people avoid discussing loss. “To the dismay of many bereaved parents, after a brief time, people rarely want to talk about the dead child for fear this will be upsetting. These silences add another layer of pain” (as cited in Hval, 2014, p. D6). Possibly these postings from friends and family allow an outlet for the bereaved to feel that their loss is not forgotten and, in some possibly comforting way, shared.

Time spent grieving is also different virtually with possibly no end in sight. We saw many cases where those left behind have a lingering and public relationship with the deceased. In one instance, a woman posted a photograph of her husband at Christmas and mentioned how hard the holiday was without him. At least 50 people responded with words of comfort. As Didion wrote in *The Year of Magical Thinking*, a book about losing her husband and daughter in quick succession, Americans view grief as something to be overcome and hidden.

When someone dies, I was taught growing up in California, you bake a ham. You drop it off by the house. You go to the funeral. If the family is Catholic you also go to the rosary but you do not wail or keel or in any other way demand the attention of the family. (2005, p. 61)

Ceremonies such as funerals were divined to help provide closure, but with social media, the grief appears to be endless and shared. The woman whose husband died wrote recently that she planned to keep his Facebook page up forever. Her comment received 460 “likes” and 25 comments.

Another woman frequently comments on Facebook about the baby she lost 10 years ago in childbirth, and often what results is something akin to a grief circle, where people add comments about their own lost children—some from people she obviously knows and some she clearly doesn’t. Like Ong’s oral culture, social media is “empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced” (1982, p. 45). While the written word “sets up conditions for ‘objectivity,’ in the sense of personal disengagement or distancing,” orality focuses on the subjective, “encased in the communal reaction” (p. 45).

Our final theme involved ways of coping with loss. In the past, people dealing with loss might have used tattoos and car decals as public grief displays, and these may have prompted discussions with strangers. However, any conversation that arose from these would go largely one way—now there is this new emotional outlet, this give and take, this reaching out and, often, receiving solace. This communal reaction often becomes aggregative, where people rely on similar—often the same—words to express their condolences. Commenters repeat phrases: “Thinking of you.” “So sorry for your loss.” “Rest in peace.” As Ong wrote, “Once a formulaic expression has crystallized, it had best be kept intact” (1982, p. 39). These repetitive phrases seemingly provide solace and support for the bereaved. In the instance of two teenage girls who died last fall in a car accident in Washington state, the Facebook page dedicated to them is maintained and *growing*. The mother of one of the girls regularly comments, and people interact with her—even people who often say things such as, “You don’t know me, but . . .” The interaction is ongoing. In terms of time and in terms of interaction, this human lifeworld of oral culture takes place online. As Ong (1982) said, “oral cultures must conceptualize and verbalize all their knowledge with more or less close reference to the human lifeworld, assimilating the alien, objective world to the more immediate, familiar interaction of human beings” (p. 42).

All these notations don’t take into account the phenomenon of parasocial relationships, wherein one person knows a great deal about another, while that person knows nothing of the first—such as with celebrities or public figures. Consider the death of Nelson Mandela or of the actor Philip Seymour Hoffman. Many people learned about these deaths first via social media. Some posters reacted as if the loss were quite personal, sharing favorite movie scenes or quotes. In regards to Hoffman, who died of a heroin overdose, many commenters talked about the manner of his death and a small few criticized what they considered his poor choices.

Facebook has created a new grief support outlet—an online community, available at the publishing of a post. Social media allows for more intense and more frequent interaction with the bereaved, changing what people say and keeping the death more present. Recently, according to Dennis (2012) who examined self-help books meant to offer guidance to people experiencing grief, “grief theorists have endorsed the value of attaining new meaning(s) and continuing

bonds with our lost loved ones instead of ‘moving on from,’ ‘letting go of,’ or ‘achieving closure from’ them” (p. 393). Apparently, according to Brody (2009), support groups for bereavement can be helpful to the grieving process, depending on who is in them. This raises questions about the effectiveness of public Facebook support.

Clearly, in the areas of public and private and interaction and time, the experience of grief and the ways of coping with grief are changing. What does not appear to be changing or even present in social media grief are expressions of anger, deep depression, guilt, disbelief, yearning, or bargaining. In our sample, Facebook posts did not have comments that signal these “common” emotions from family, friends, or strangers, aside from the derailed conversation about grammar use.

These findings bring up some questions about the implication of these changing practices and norms of grief. While social media is a form of secondary orality with many traces of oral culture as Ong described, changing ways bring changes in consciousness that should not go unnoticed. It is intuitively good to have social support for loss. Is public support also good? We aren’t so quick to leave the past behind, and our notion of getting over loss can linger indefinitely—maybe forever. Are we moving away from the closure that our ceremonies and rituals involving death provide? Ong (1982) wrote that while written text is removed from the “living human lifeworld, its rigid visual fixity assures its endurance and its potential for being resurrected into limitless living contexts by a potentially infinite number of living readers” (p. 80). His words seem prescient when considering Facebook and other social media sites that have seemingly endless potential in a digital and communal space and context.

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# Faith and a Contemporary Context for American Catholic Higher Education

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## *A. Introduction*

While Walter Ong, S.J., is well known “for his studies of orality as the foundation of human thought and language” (Schaeffer & Gorman, 2008, p. 856), his lesser known religious writings merit more attention (Farrell, 2003, p. 456). According to Soukup (2012b), Ong wrote “extensively on religious topics throughout his career, applying to the religious his observations on communication” (p. 30). Since intellectual and technological activities were accepted as correlatives, Ong (1969) reasoned that religious thinking and communication modes were linked as well (p. 462). As a “particularly sensitive observer of the religious scene” (Soukup, 2012b, p. 30), Ong focused on context, calling attention to background realities often taken for granted (Soukup, 2012a, p. 840). An awareness of these realities can avail the discovery of communication—“the person-to-person connection—that lies at the heart of any faith seeking understanding” (p. 840).

Of central concern for the Catholic faith is the fortifying of its Catholic culture, mission, and identity in higher education (John Paul II, 1990; Ormerod, 2013). According to Garcia (2012), fundamental changes in the Catholic Church’s self-understanding after Vatican II (1962–1965) initiated an identity crisis for both Catholic higher education and the church at large (p. 106). Since 1965, stakeholders and stewards of Catholic colleges and universities have struggled mightily with a whole host of complex issues (Morey & Piderit, 2006, p. 3). Gallin (1992) summarized this 50 year period of startling change, significant soul-searching, and extraordinary maturing: “With a more diverse student body, a decline in the number of religious, and the visible changes in discipline and social mores on campuses, the general public, as well as the various constituencies, found it hard to know what made the university ‘Catholic’” (p. 1).

Despite these challenging changes, Ong (1990) contended that contemporary Catholic institutions of higher education had a clear desire to “open them-

selves to persons and points of view other than exclusively Catholic while maintaining a genuine Catholic identity” (p. 347).

This era of expansion and transformation was (and still is) marked by a process of professionalization. By adopting the American corporate model of the university along with the values and standards of secular academic culture (Crowley, 1993, p. 157; Rausch, 2010, p. 19), Catholic colleges and universities entered the mainstream of American Higher Education (Greeley, 1967/2013, p. 23; Leahy, 1991, p. x). Emblematic of this shift was the legal separation of the colleges and universities from the founding and sponsoring religious communities to a governing board of trustees comprised of both lay and religious members, the latter group often representing the founding and/or sponsoring religious communities of the institution (Dosen, 2009; Geiger, 2003). Reflecting on these realities, Rausch (2010) rendered the following judgment:

Thus they are church related rather than canonically Catholic; like other institutions of higher learning, they value their institutional autonomy and their freedom of inquiry. . . . For many of them, a tendency to minimize Catholicism in their self-descriptions developed in order to attract a more diverse student body, gain financial support, or out of fear that the school be seen as “unwelcoming” or “oppressive” for others. (pp. 1–2)

In response to the pressing problem of pluralism haunting Catholic higher education, Ong (1990) performed a thorough examination of the word “Catholic” that provides a suggestive way of thinking about the dynamic tension between the religious, educational, pluralistic, secular, and economic forces facing contemporary American Catholic institutions of higher learning.

With all of this in mind, this essay is divided into three sections. First, I offer a brief word about Walter Ong, S.J., as an American Catholic thinker (Farrell,

2012, p. 24) whose scholarship emerges from a place of faith (Strate, 2002, p. xii). This is followed by an explication of Ong's etymological examination of the word "Catholic" and his related reflection on Matthew 13:33—the Gospel parable which likens the reign of God to the yeast a woman used to leaven a batch of dough. Third and finally, Ong's (1996) "sense of Catholicism as a living and growing reality" (p. 33) is then applied to the contemporary context of contingent faculty hiring practices which could benefit from Ong's inclusive and imaginative proposal for thinking about the dynamic tension between Catholicism and the increasingly secular and money-minded realities at American Catholic colleges and universities..

### B. Faith and scholarship

As a professed member of the Society of Jesus, an ordained Roman Catholic priest, and published author of books such as *Frontiers in American Catholicism* (1957); *American Catholic Crossroads* (1959); *Darwin's Vision and Christian Perspectives* (1960); *The Barbarian Within* (1962); *In the Human Grain* (1967); and *Hopkins, the Self, and God* (1986), as well as other analytic essays that treat religious themes, it should come as no surprise that Ong (1992) found "Faith, as known to Christians, to be a direct gift from [a living and loving] God" (p. ix) that rests on trust (Ong, 1996, p. 42). With regard to theology and theological development, Ong (1995) opined that, "Without faith, there are only interesting intellectual pirouettes, exercises in abstract design, arabesques, sad tracings involving no human figures and no encounter with real history. Without faith, religion can indeed be an illusion and has been" (pp. 174–175).

Although Ong's scholarship emerged from his Catholic-Christian commitments, Strate (2002), a Jewish man of faith, found that Ong's scholarship could be appreciated by non-Catholics (p. xii). In Strate's view, faith did not negatively impact Ong's work from a purely secular perspective (p. xii). Recognizing the particularity of each human person, Ong (1992) also felt that faith existed "for living human beings in contexts that are inescapably historical and subject to change" (p. ix). Soukup (1992) stated that for Ong, "faith rises from a landscape of human activities and events, of human senses and consciousness . . . a faith lived out in the specifics of life" (p. xiv).

### C. Etymology: The Meaning of Catholic

Ong's expansive understanding of the human person is evidenced in his translation of the word Catholic as "through-the-whole, outgoing, expansive" (Ong, 1977, p. 330), a rendering that Haughey (2009) hailed as a "substantial contribution to our understanding of the term" (p. 41). Despite its more common interpretation as "universal," Ong (1990) pondered the following: "If 'universal' is the adequate meaning of 'catholic,' why did the Latin church, which in its vernacular language had the word *universalis*, not use this word but rather borrowed from Greek the term *katholikos* instead, speaking of the 'one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church' (to put it into English) instead of the 'one, holy, universal, and apostolic church'?" (p. 347). In contrasting the meanings of *universalis* and *katholikos*, Ong found the origin of "universal" in Latin to have likely come from the two root-words meaning "one" and "turn," which evokes an image of "something like an architect's compass which is used to make a circle around 'one' central point" (Horan, 2012, ¶ 9). While universal is inclusive in that it gathers all that are within the boundary of the line used to create the circle, by virtue of the boundary it excludes those that fall outside of the "universal" border (Ong, 1996, p. 32). Conversely, *katholikos* comes from the Greek that simply means, "through the whole or throughout the whole—*kata* or *kath*, through or throughout; *holos*, whole (Ong, 1990, p. 347).

For Ong (1990), this unequivocally positive and expansive notion of "throughout the whole" resonated with Jesus' parable of the leaven or yeast in Matthew 13:33: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed with three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened." As a plant and fungus, yeast grows without limitation. Conceived as Catholic in this manner, the Church can be understood as an organic reality that is constantly growing. Ong (1996) noted that in contrast with the Church of the 19th century, "the faces of the participants of the Second Vatican Council and the appearance of its Catholics from across the world in the media today make it quite evident that the Roman Catholic is no longer a Western or European phenomenon" (pp. 32–33). Ong's research and reflection resulted in the following conclusion about faith and scholarship: "This sense of Catholicism as a living and growing reality I believe has been a dominant feature of my own

sense of the relationship between scholarship and faith” (p. 33).

#### *D. Application to American Catholic higher education*

With regard to Ong’s (1990) rendering of the term Catholic as “throughout-the-whole” (p. 347), MacKenzie (2000) maintained that,

Father Ong’s point here is that the Catholic mind, like the Catholic institution of higher learning, is one that strives for inclusivity, for a permeation of the whole, for connection and relationship between and among cultures, races, ideas, fields of study. This is the sort of striving we should be seeking and encouraging in our faculty as well. . . . The faculty of a Catholic university should be people who are willing, even driven, to go beyond the boundaries . . . to find where the connections are, and where the gaps are. (p. 236)

In our contemporary context, the striving for inclusivity, for a permeation of the whole, for connection and relationship at American Catholic colleges and universities must include adjunct faculty, an ever growing group of overworked and underappreciated educators who by virtue of our part-time employment status, are often standing outside the circle of institutional support.

The trend toward employing primarily part-time contingent faculty members has developed over decades. According to the 2012–2013 annual report of the American Association of University Professors, “the number of full-time tenured or tenure-track positions increased just 25% to 308,400, in the 36 years from 1975 to 2011, while part-time appointments rose more than 300% in the same period, to 762,000” (as cited in DeLany, 2013, ¶2). Tierney, Co-Director of the Pullias Center for Higher Education at the University of Southern California, concurred, stating: “Adjunct professors are the highest number of hires in the United States right now” (as cited in DeLany, 2013, ¶4).

Riley (2011) offered the following explanation for this hiring practice:

In more recent years, administrators and department chairs have turned to adjuncts in order to save money and keep senior faculty members happy. Because adjuncts typically receive lower salaries and no [health care benefits], are willing to teach large introductory classes that tenured faculty don’t want, and are willing to sign up at

the last minute, they have been a godsend for universities trying to tighten their belts. While tenured professors are a fixed cost for a university, adjuncts are not. And while tenured professors can and often do decline requests by department chairs, adjuncts are so desperate for work that they rarely refuse an assignment. (p. 78)

Riley’s reflections resonate with my seven years of experience as a part-time faculty member who just a few years ago was commuting between three of the five Catholic colleges and universities in Los Angeles to teach. While educational accompaniment is an edifying endeavor, the low pay and lack of job security has compelled some adjuncts to consider collective action in order to improve working conditions.

The formation of labor unions has always been encouraged and supported by the Catholic Church (Benedict XVI, 2009, #64). On the 90th anniversary of Pope Leo XIII’s (1891) groundbreaking social encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, John Paul II (1981) asserted that,

The attainment of the worker’s rights cannot however be doomed to be merely a result of economic systems which on a larger or smaller scale are guided chiefly by the criterion of maximum profit. On the contrary, it is respect for the objective rights of the worker—every kind of worker: manual or intellectual, industrial or agricultural, etc.—that must constitute the adequate and fundamental criterion for shaping the whole economy. (#17)

For John Paul II, as a mouthpiece for the struggle of social justice, the task of the union is to “defend the existential interests of workers in all sectors in which their rights are concerned” (# 20).

The Church’s official teaching on a worker’s right to unionize emerges from a belief in the dignity of each human person. This belief has been affirmed by many popes, including Leo XIII (1891), John XXIII (1961), John Paul II (1991), and Benedict XVI (2009). For Pope Francis (2013), a fundamental element of human dignity is one’s work. He asserted that, “Work, to use a metaphor, ‘anoints’ us with dignity, fills us with dignity, makes us similar to God, who has worked and still works, who always acts; it gives one the ability to maintain oneself, one’s family, to contribute to the growth of one’s own nation” (¶3).

Although Catholic social teaching is generally supportive of unions, Jesuit Father Michael Sheeran, the current president of the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities (AJCU) and past president of

Regis University, stated that, “the question of whether a higher education union is appropriate in a given set of circumstances tends to vary from city to city” (as cited in Schmidt, 2013, ¶9). And while that may be true, the decision of part-time faculty to unionize at Georgetown University, “the oldest Catholic and Jesuit institution of higher learning in the United States” (Georgetown University, n. d., ¶1), can serve as an important educational blueprint for all stakeholders in American Catholic higher education. In an election conducted by the National Labor Relations Board, “311 of the 650 eligible voting members members [at Georgetown University] participated in the election, and 72% voted in favor of forming a collective bargaining unit” (Tanaka, 2013, ¶2).

Particularly instructive were the positive public statements issued by Georgetown University Provost Robert Groves and Service Employees International Union Executive Director, David Rodich. Groves expressed sentiments of respect and admiration:

As stated in Georgetown’s “Just Employment Policy,” the university respects employees’ rights to freely associate and organize, which includes voting for or against union representation without intimidation, unjust pressure, undue delay, or hindrance in accordance with applicable law. We appreciate the participation of all of those voters who cast ballots in the election and we will respect the wishes of the majority vote. (as cited in Griffin, 2013, ¶20)

Rodich also characterized the proceedings as a respectful process. He praised Georgetown administrators for “putting their social teaching into practice by remaining neutral and respecting the right of adjunct faculty to organize” (as cited in Tanaka, 2013, ¶5).

To further contextualize the Georgetown situation, Jesuit Father Charles Currie, also a past president of the AJCU and currently executive director of the Jesuit Commons, an international effort to link Jesuit higher education with marginalized populations, noted that since Georgetown adopted an employment policy that called for service employees to be offered fair and competitive salaries in 2005, “a culture has developed where folks are more open to that kind of thing” (as cited in Schmidt, 2013, ¶ 26). Currie also commented that, “It is awkward for a Catholic institution to appear to be fighting a union, but then there are other realities involved” (as cited in Schmidt, 2013, ¶24). While there are no simple answers to this complex issue, hopefully the respectful process that characterized the

Georgetown adjunct faculty unionizing proceedings can serve as an example for other Catholic institutions that find themselves in a similar situation.

Although Ong’s (1990) writings did not consider the efficacy of adjunct faculty unions at Catholic colleges and universities, he did acknowledge the dearth of easy answers to the problems plaguing Catholic higher education (p. 347). At the same time, he recognized the urgency of maintaining and strengthening the Catholic university and the Church at large:

Solutions have to be worked out as we come to understand better the Catholic Church and the forces the church is called on to work with. Many models have been proposed for thinking about the church and, by implication, about the Catholic identity of Catholic universities and colleges. (p. 347)

Regardless of solution, the manner in which Catholic colleges and universities respond to the concerns of adjunct faculty may offer insight into the level of self-understanding an institution has of its Catholic mission and identity. As Murray (1960/2005) maintained, the way a community engages in conversation—“its whole manner of living and talking together” (p. 117)—is central to the identity of that community. If the vast and complex enterprise of American Catholic higher education is to remain a community of students, scholars, staff, and administrators explicitly committed to sharing an intellectual journey “in pursuit of the wholeness of truth driven by the dynamism of catholicity” (Kalscheur, 2012, p. 934), it will require collaboration with as many knowledgeable people it can relate to (Ong, 1990, p. 363), with its considerable cadre of contingent faculty.

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## Does Changing the Distance Between the Audience and the Text Change the Amount of Control the Audience Has Over the Text?

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Collaborative, interactive composing practices brought about through digitalization, such as open source websites that provide collaborative opportunities—like Wikipedia and google docs, interactive fiction, and interactive documentaries—nominally claim to bridge the gap between author and reader in textual formats through this act of interactivity. However, it is because of the interactivity that the digitalization allows for in these composing practices, that they do not promote collaboration between the “author” and “reader,” but instead encourage change in the reader to become the “ideal reader.” I will support this claim by first using Flusser (2011) to show that interactive fiction is not just a popular game of the 1990s but that it indicates what the future of composition will look like. Then I will place Ong in opposition to Flusser to show how written texts act in opposition to digital texts. And finally, I will use interactive fiction, because it provides the most interaction, as an example of how interactivity does not support reader’s engagement in the making of the text, but forces specific interpretations on the reader instead.

Flusser (2011) argues that composition is no longer the act of producing text because texts “have recently shown themselves to be inaccessible” (p. 7) due to the changing of the system within which they function. With the increased digitization of the world, physical, known objects become further and further removed from the words that represent them. And the world becomes less and less dependent on the actual physical object. That is, texts “don’t permit any further pictorial mediation” (p. 7), meaning that there is no longer a definite need for the object being represented to have a connection to an object in the physical world. An example for this is that companies will sometimes trade monetary reward for attention, like when a company offers a free product to a picture that receives the most “likes” on Facebook. The connection between these two things being traded is not readily tangible; it is instead valued because a company or person has placed value on it. Flusser’s argument is that “apparatuses must be developed that grasp the ungraspable, visualize the invisible, and conceptualize the inconceivable” (p. 16). These apparatuses become the pro-

grams that we create to define rules and transfer the rules from simple manipulation to something that can be made tangible.

Flusser assumes that these apparatuses are in direct opposition with written texts by his arguing that “linear, historical consciousness, informed and produced through texts, inhabits a world that demands to be explained and interpreted, decoded . . . from now on, all pointers, signs, traffic signals, and indicators point eccentrically away from us, and nothing more points towards us” (pp. 46–47). This is a point that texts diametrically oppose, according to Ong. Ong (1980) argues that “our fascination with the psychodynamics of reading can be understood as a stage in the evolution of human consciousness, that is, in the evolution of mankind’s way of relating the human interior to the exterior world and to itself” (p. 137). Flusser seems to suggest that since the “signs” no longer point towards us, but away from us, that the internalization tendencies Ong had observed, must be a phenomenon that is left behind with written texts.

The interactivity of collaborative texts makes them seem like a conversation. The program asks for input from the user, and the result is that the user gets to help create the story. Ong (1980) suggests that conversation is an event, but not writing. A conversation happens when interaction is possible, and this interaction is not possible in written texts. Ong posits about written texts: “discourses . . . cannot be questioned or contested as oral speech can be because written discourse has been detached from its author” (1982/2012, p. 77). It seems that in the instances of these interactive programs, the discourse cannot be detached from its author. It seems that since the reader is a part of creating the text, the discourse is creating the text and is not removed from it.

However, these are not real conversations; they simply mimic the act of a conversation. The reason that these programmed compositions cannot be truly interactive is because what Ong calls “computer languages,” “do not grow out of the unconscious but directly out of consciousness. Computer language rules (‘grammar’) are stated first and can be abstracted from usage and stated explicitly in words only with difficulty and never completely” (1982/2012, p. 7). The interactivity of these texts makes them mimic a conversation had in the analogue world. However, in the digital world, this is only the mimicking of a conversation, because the digital interface is using rules that are stated first, by the programmer, and do not arise out of the

interaction between author and reader. The rules, or programming, that make the conversation possible in the first place control the extent of the conversation and allow for conversation to exist only within the pre-existing boundaries of what the program knows.

Moving through any interactive program does not change the program, as the rules are set. It changes the reader. It changes the reader because he or she must conform to the structure of the interaction not only enough to follow the rules, but to guess the rules determining what is acceptable. This appears the most clearly in interactive fiction. In a program like “inform,” the system knows a set number of words and equations. For example, it is programmed to know that a sentence on the axis “is” sets the words equivalent to each other. It also knows words such as “room,” “person,” “thing,” etc. The program only recognizes things that end in “ing” as being action verbs. Even though these are rules of the program that the programmer (the author) must deal with when creating the story, they are rules that severely inhibit the reader in his or her interpretation of the text.

First, the user must correctly interpret the text. The user must read the prompt on the screen and equate the words on the screen with what it was the author was thinking at the time of conception. The reader must imagine what the creator had in mind, and use that to create the correct situation in his or her head. Then the reader must respond in a way assumed by the reader. For example, if the reader finds a book in the room that he or she is in, the reader must do with the book what has been imagined by the creator. Should the reader attempt to interpret the book instead of read it or memorize it, the system will respond that the action is “unavailable” until the user finds the word pre-programmed by the user. Should the reader fail to find the word that the user has programmed to prompt the next action, the reader will be stuck and unable to move on. The author is alive in this instance; the author is very much alive and very much affecting the reading of the text.

This would not happen in a novel. There are few checkpoints in written text to check, let alone ensure the correct interpretation of the work. Should the reader imagine that a tree is actually a rock throughout the entirety of the book, the story could still progress forward. The relationship between the object and the rest of the story can still be known, and thus the function will still be the same, even if the exact item is different. Each reader will have a slightly different experience as he or she moves through the novel based on his or her

experiences with objects in his or her world. However, in the interactive fiction, the reader will have to change his or her conception of what an item is. Each different reader will have to come to understand each item the same. They may not move through all of the same rooms, or they may create a different order of the story. But each player will have to agree with the creator on what an object is, how it is imagined, and how it can be used before moving on in the world. This does not change the text as much as it changes the user. Not only that, but it works to reward the ideal user. And some people, because the rules are not knowable, will never get to interact with the story at all. After typing “put” and every synonym for “put” 20 times a reader may have forgotten that “place” is about the same word and will not be able to move on in the game because the computer never recognized his or her manipulation of the word as they most readily understood it.

Just because the creation of the text includes input from the reader does not mean that the reader is taking a part in controlling the interpretation of the text. In fact, because of the pre-programmed rules that control the language which the digital interface has access to in order to communicate with the reader, the reader has less control over his or her interpretation of the text and must change himself or herself in order to be the “ideal reader” and get through the text. This provokes the question: are collaborative, interactive composition processes changing the texts that are being created, or are they just changing the readers who have access to them? This is a question that deserves examination before acceptance and appreciation for the words “collaborative” and “interactive” bring the digitization of texts storming into a new era of creating and dispensing meaning-making.

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## Book Reviews

**Byers, Andrew.** *TheoMedia: The Media of God and the Digital Age*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2013. Pp. xii, 240. ISBN 978-1-61097-988-7 (paper) \$28.00.

*TheoMedia* attempts a theology for communication (or at least for contemporary communication) through a biblical engagement. In his concluding chapter, Byers describes the task and approach:

The stated purpose of this book is to provide a rough theological framework for appropriating new media by carefully reading the ancient media of our holy texts. Scripture has been identified as a sufficient source for the church in the digital age, and we have worked through the biblical story of redemption. What the previous three sections have offered is a *reading*, a theological reading of scripture’s portrayal of media. (p. 220, italics in original)

The book, then, looks back in order to look forward, applying a biblical hermeneutic to the digital world.

To accomplish this, Byers mixes his systematic, chapter-by-chapter development of the theme with nine “TheoMedia Notes.” These latter “are like blog posts that . . . complement the discussions in the larger chapters, usually addressing the practical side of the concepts” in each chapter (p. 16). The book, then, deals in interpretation, but interpretation of the kind that applies a biblical knowledge to a new situation. To set the stage, Byers offers two claims:

First, *if God himself creates and employs media, then there must be a theological logic that can guide how we produce and use media and communication technology today*. Here is the second claim: *Christians are called to media saturation, but he primary media that are to shape, form, and saturate our lives are the media of God—TheoMedia, the communicative and revelatory means God employs to share himself and to influence humankind as his image bearers*. (p. 18, italics in original)

The overall process of the book depends on the ideas that God does indeed communicate and that God has used (or rejected) media in the past. Our understanding of media in the present must begin in those places. Early chapters rehearse some of the religious problems with contemporary media and how various Christian writers have responded or addressed these issues.

The argument proper begins in Part 2, “The Sights and Sounds of Israel’s God.” Creation involves natural communication—and these are TheoMedia. God’s instructions to Moses on the construction of the Tabernacle lead to divine media. God uses dreams and visions and appearances throughout the Old Testament. God communicates both immediately and through media, something that provides a baseline for our understanding of communication. Part 3 turns to verbal communication, “The Speech and Texts of Israel’s God.” Here Byers argues that God has chosen to favor words over images..

Part 4 turns to the New Testament and develops a “media Christology,” one that moves from the Incarnate Word into the Church. Though sensory experience matters, word and spirit receive priority. Blessed, Jesus teaches, are those who have not seen and yet believe. While God can address the full human sensorium, the Scriptures clearly show a preference for hearing.

The book, then, moves throughout the Old and New Testament, asking how God has communicated, what the believers recall of those methods, and what the Bible canonizes.

Byers proposes a creative and challenging hermeneutic for Christian communication. At the same time, he lapses into some inconsistency, typically but not always applying a rather literal interpretation of the biblical texts, even though many of them may use more analogous language than he credits. Some of this may result from the theological differences regarding Biblical interpretation among the Christian churches, but it leads to a narrowing of the scope of the work. However, the proposal of a hermeneutic as the basis of a theology of communication offers an important tool for those interested in communication in and for the church, and for those interested in a means to offer a cultural critique in a rapidly changing communication context. Biblical media are, after all, still media and can teach us important lessons.

Each chapter features footnotes; the book has a brief bibliography but no index.

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**Campbell, Heidi A.** *Digital Religion: Understanding Religious Practice in New Media Worlds*. New York: Routledge, 2013. Pp. 272. ISBN 978-0-415-67610-6 (cloth), \$115.00; 978-0-415- 67611-3 (paper) \$34.95.

Heidi Campbell’s edited overview of what she terms a new “subfield of inquiry” is a comprehensive guide to recent scholarship in the field of religion and new media.

The book is divided into three sections, the first of which explores the crosscutting themes of ritual, identity, community, authority, authenticity, and religion. The second section provides two recent case studies from different religious contexts linked to each major theme. Finally, the third section offers a variety of theoretical, ethical, and theological reflections on the studying of religion and new media.

All the chapters circle around the difficulty of defining “digital religion.” According to Campbell, the early distinctions between what Helland famously described as “religion online” and “online religion” is becoming increasingly blurred. For her, digital religion is “a new frame for articulating the evolution of religious practice online, as seen in the most recent manifestations of cyberchurches, which are linked to online and offline contexts simultaneously” (p. 1). Later she describes it as “the technological and cultural space that is evoked when we talk about how online and offline religious spheres have become blended or integrated” (p. 4). In the book’s reflective concluding chapter, Stewart Hoover observes that “We must see digital religion as being about the generation of models of practice and the ability to produce meaning in the world that relates to the religious” (p. 268). Gregory Grieve, in his exploration of the topic of “religion,” maintains that “digital religion is unique because it uses the technological aspects of new media to weave together non-scientific metanarratives with the technological ideology surrounding the digital as a way to address the anxieties produced in a liquid modern world” (p. 134). So, in summary, the concept of “digital religion” is thought of as (1) an observational “frame”—the way we observe religious behavior, (2) the technological and cultural “space” within which that behavior takes place, (3) the “practice” that constitutes such behavior, and (4) and the “meaning” that the behavior expresses.

Another common thread is the awareness of the development of the scholarly field itself. The consensus is that scholarship has gone through three distinctive phases or waves since the mid-1990s. Campbell herself identifies a first wave of documenting and learning, a second of critical analysis, and a third more theoretical phase (p. 8–11) Mia Lövheim in her chapter on identity follows the same path, the waves being

characterized as plurality and experiments, critical empirical studies, and studies of religious identities online being integrated into everyday life (p. 45–49). Gregory Grieve is more astringent, noting an initial “ideology of awe” in the face of the new technology followed by a “routinization of digital ideology,” which in turn was followed by studies examining more closely “authority, co-production, and convergence” and how offline and online religion are integrated (p. 110–113).

The intermingling of offline and online worlds is explored through the thematic chapters and the associated case studies. Grieve’s study of what is meant by “religion” in the digital context highlights the different ways in which the elements of “myth, ritual, and faith” are combined by individual and groups. He observes that digital religion is a response to the fluid, “liquid” nature of modern life so that “individuals have to actively explore and create novel, elastic, temporary, and flexible forms” of religious experience because, he claims, traditional religious communities and institutions are being “dissolved.” The two related case studies, by Erica Baffelli on the Internet practices of the Japanese new religion, Hikari no Wa, and by Nadja Miczek on Internet and New Age individuals, illustrate the complexity of the topic. The Japanese case study shows how the Internet can be used by a religious group to reinforce its common identity and gain greater public recognition while the New Age study stresses again how individuals use the Internet to create their own unique religious identities.

Christopher Helland’s chapter on ritual, which he defines for his purposes as the “purposeful engagement with the sacred” (p. 27), once again emphasizes the sheer variety of forms ritual can take and the need for scholars to broaden their definitions to encompass this variety. He argues that “people are using the Internet as a mechanism to help facilitate the ritual—they may not be doing anything ‘online’—yet in other cases they are engaging in ritual in cyberspace itself” (p. 37).

The two case studies on ritual reveal how different religious traditions are able to adapt to the online environment. Heinz Scheifinger’s study of online Hindu puja (ritual worship of an image of a god or goddess) concludes that the essential nature of puja allows “online puja to be a “valid and efficacious form of a ritual” so that it does not “constitute a fundamentally different experience from the carrying out of worship in a traditional setting” (p. 122). Louise Connelly’s study of Buddhist meditation in *Second Life* describes how the

Buddhist Center in the *Second Life* environment enables “Buddhists and non-Buddhists to participate in a variety of non-religious as well as religious practice and ritual.” This has also meant a greater degree of intermingling of different traditions that would be seen in “in real life” (p. 133).

The overview of identity and the Internet by Lövheim concludes that “religious identity online is not that different from religious identity in everyday offline life” (p. 52). She also counters the tendency to over emphasize the individual nature of identity by arguing that “religious identity in modern society is still a social thing, deeply anchored in the social situations and relations individuals want and need to stay connected to in order to find meaning and act in everyday life” (p. 52). The related case study by Vit Sisler on Islamic video games explores how such games can help players adopt the identity of a hero rather than as a victim or villain. A second case study, by Lynn Schofield Clark and Jill Dierberg, investigates how young people construct their religious identities through digital storytelling.

Campbell herself takes up the theme of community and notes that society offline and online is becoming increasingly networked. Online religious groups differ from traditional religious communities precisely as “rather than operating as tightly bonded social structures, they function as loose social networks with varying levels of religious affiliation and commitment” (p. 64).

The chapter by Tim Hutchings on the “online churches” of St. Pixel’s and Church Online explores how these networked communities offer different kinds of experience to offline churchgoers. “St. Pixels has created a space for debate and friendship, while Church Online offers world-class preaching and the chance to share in an evangelism movement that claims to be highly successful” (p. 170). On the other hand, the case study by Oren Golan on Chabad Jews reveals how a highly structured Ultra-Orthodox Jewish offline community can deliberately and successfully use its web presence to promote institutional growth and visibility both to outsiders and insiders.

The theme of authority is studied by Pauline Cheong who argues that studies tend to conceptualize the study of authority either primarily as relationships of disjuncture and displacement, in which traditional religious authority is threatened, or of continuity and complementarity, in which religious authority can be supported and even enhanced. Like Golan’s study of the Chabad Jews, Tsuriel Rashi’s case study of the

kosher cell phone is another example from the Ultra-Orthodox Jewish community in Israel of how religious authority can be retained even when it seems that technology must undermine it. Approaching the topic from a different angle, Paul Teusner's study highlights the paradox facing Christian bloggers in Australia as they seek to challenge religious institutional structures and patterns of authority. In order to be visible online, they have to adapt to similar patterns and structures of authority, this time determined by search engines like Technorati, where authority rankings are given to the most regular and prolific and to those who write about public issues.

Kerstin Radde-Antweiler tackles the difficult theme of authenticity. As she points out the term holds together the distinct notions of authentic as something true or genuine and the related idea of being real or true. These meanings can be seen to inform the numerous debates about whether online interactions, especially bodily interactions in environments like *Second Life*, are "real" or "only virtual." Other questions are raised about whether online sacred spaces are or could be "authentic." In addition, other discussions are about the credibility of online sources and the extent to which they could embody authentic religious authority. Radde-Antweiler questions whether authenticity as an analytical category is still helpful. She concludes by taking up De Witte's suggestion that further research should focus on the "work of construction itself," asking, for example, questions like "why do some religious actors judge certain performances or traditions as authentic, and why do others not? How do they legitimize these judgments?" and so on (p. 99). The related case study by Nabil Echchaibi is a study of how a progressive Muslim web site seeks to define what is religiously authentic. In so doing it poses a challenge to the authority of other sites that have different conceptions of what constitutes authentic Islam. Rachel Wagner's case study considers six different types of smart phone religious apps: prayer, ritual, sacred texts, religious social media, self-expression, and focusing/meditation. She examines how the user's choice of these apps may challenge the ability of existing religious authority to determine what is or is not authentic, particularly as they encourage an individualized form of religious experience in which the users put together their own eclectic mix.

The final part of the book consists of reflections on the studying of religion and new media. Knut Lundby categorizes research on digital religion by clas-

sifying the theoretical frameworks through which researchers have conceptualized the subject. He considers five approaches to religion in "new media" that he thinks have been particularly influential and identifies key authors associated with each approach. The five approaches are: "technological determinism" (McLuhan); "mediatization of religion" (Hjarvard); "mediation of meaning" (Hoover); "mediation of sacred forms" (Lynch); and "social shaping of technology" (Campbell). In his discussion of McLuhan, Lundby might have also mentioned his contribution to the emergence of the "media ecology" approach to the interaction of religion and media.

Mark D. Johns considers the ethical issues which arise when studying concepts like identity, authenticity, and authority online. Stephen Garner argues that to be relevant theological reflection will have to work in partnership with other disciplines and experiences in grappling with the diversity and complexity of digital religion.

Each of the thematic sections are followed by an annotated list of recommended reading as well as a bibliography. Overall this compendium will prove to be an invaluable resource for all those wanting a thorough state-of-the-art review of recent qualitative research in digital religion.

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**Gray, Jonathan and Amanda D. Lotz.** *Television Studies*. Malden MA: Polity Press, 2012. Pp. 200. ISBN 978-0-74565-098-2 (cloth) \$64.95; 978-0-74565-099-9 (paper) \$22.95.

*Television Studies* is a fantastic resource for scholars because it is an essential look back at the formation of the field, which makes the road ahead easier to see. To accomplish this backward look, Gray and Lotz "mined a rich array of articles and chapters that offer drips and drabs of events that retrospectively might be considered as the origins of television studies" (p. 16). As you read their book, you imagine that they began writing together to answer questions they field about their own scholarship. As the process unfolds, and as they trace the history of television studies in the U.S. and Britain from the 1960s through the 1990s, *Television Studies* becomes a kind of guidebook. *Television Studies* is comprehensive and concise divided into four chapters in the sub-areas of programs, audiences, industries, and contexts.

Gray and Lotz ask, why television studies and why now? People don't watch television like they used to. The answer is, "while patterns of use and the screens we use are changing, the need to understand the relationship of television as a business, cultural storyteller, and object of popular interest remains as crucial as ever" (p. 2).

*Television Studies* is easy to engage and useful to read. For example they write, "Here's a bit of a mind-bender: someone can study television and not be doing 'television studies,' while someone else can also be studying something other than television (like YouTube) and be doing 'television studies'" (p. 3). The authors then identify that television studies research includes at least two of the three areas among programs, audiences, and industries, and always includes a discussion of context.

In setting the context for *Television Studies*, Gray and Lotz trace the historical shifts from the 1960s through the 1990s. In the 1960s, for example, media effects research dominated until the 1970s when television studies changed paradigms to dwell on questions of pleasure in viewing rather than questions about television's impact on reality. The 1970s is also when academics began to take television studies more seriously. Since the publication process takes time, sharing ideas from research did not occur until the 1980s, and when it did, it had the added advantage of "cross-fertilization" between U.S. and British scholars. By the middle of the 1990s, course offerings of television studies were common and television studies became academically institutionalized.

In addition to historical shifts, Gray and Lotz include the key intellectual influences of television studies, which are social sciences, humanities, and cultural studies. They cover these intellectual influences to provide the "backstory for contemporary conditions." From social sciences came funding for effects research because of the existing radio, film, and newspapers. The social sciences also prompted questions about the relationship between mass media and social movements. From humanities came literary, film, and rhetorical studies methods and theory that could be applied to this new, influential, storytelling, meaning-making medium. From cultural studies came theory and methods about class, gender, race, youth, and nation. Cultural studies also included a focus on power and ideological control. As Gray and Lotz describe early theorists and thinkers in television studies, they also discuss what bothered and motivated

these early thinkers about cultural issues of the time. *Television Studies* is useful then, for scholars who need to situate their own philosophical questions against this history of the field of inquiry and within an intellectual tradition.

Each chapter, be it programs, audiences, industry, or context follows a pattern: how the topic has been studied, the places those studies began, reasons for certain approaches, and the approaches that endure. Each chapter lists seminal research in that area. Gray and Lotz also discuss each area's peculiarity. For example, programs research could not gain intellectual traction until the 1970s, and audience research was bound for some time by a polemic argument over active audience theory. Each chapter concludes with future research directions and questions for that topic. In all, the chapter structure supplies the field-shaping questions, authors, theories, methods, and important readings. In Gray and Lotz's words, "knowing something about the formation and trajectory of television studies . . . promises a fast track to developing more sophisticated approaches over time" (p. 3). Those doing media studies research will find this book useful. If you are teaching media studies, cultural studies, mass media and society, or even research methods, you will find this book a handy companion text.

Gray and Lotz pull together a coherent past that becomes a newly visible and useful present. They are then able to offer suggestions for how television studies might move forward productively from this fresh location and perhaps through different mediums. They identify the need to speed up conversations that new technologies offer. In their words, "a thriving television studies must be one in which scholars can also discuss the here and now in the here and now" (p. 144). Two current locations where you can see examples of these conversations among scholars are [flowtv.org](http://flowtv.org) and *In Media Res*.

In the end, Gray and Lotz reflect on their own book and ask, "Have we made television studies impossible?" The answer is no but the caveat is that television studies researchers must be "mindful." Mindful as in filling in your mind, reading widely, becoming aware of the possibilities, becoming attuned to asking what each research decision leaves out and at times, explaining those choices (p. 144). These are good practices for all scholars.

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**Mumby, Dennis K. (Ed.)** *Reframing Difference in Organizational Communication Studies: Re-search, Pedagogy, Practice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications Inc., 2011. Pp. xiii, 311. ISBN 978-1-4129-7007-5 (cloth) \$110.00; 978-1-4129-7008-2 (paper) \$60.00.

*Reframing Difference in Organizational Communication Studies: Research, Pedagogy, Practice* offers a clear perspective of the relationship between difference and organization, with an emphasis on how it can be (a) examined as a communicative phenomenon, (b) taught pragmatically, and (c) used as central construct in applied organizational communication research. The edited book is a compilation of essays that “systematically examine difference as a defining feature of organizational life” (back cover). Specifically, the book is divided into three parts. Part 1 (Chapters 1–4) focuses on *Theorizing Difference and Organization*; Part 2 is entitled *Teaching Difference and Organizing*; and Part 3 centers on *Applying Difference to Organizational Change*.

Chapter 1, “Knowing Work Through the Communication of Difference: A Revised Agenda for Difference Studies” by Karen Lee Ashcraft begins with an alternative conceptualization of difference. Specifically, Ashcraft theorizes it as “an organizing principle of the meaning, structure, practice and economy of work” (p. 4). The next chapter “Intersecting Difference: A Dialectical Perspective” by Linda L. Putnam, Jody Jahn, and Jane Stuart Baker offers a dialectical approach to difference. The authors begin by briefly reviewing three approaches to the study of difference prevalent in the literature: (1) difference as deficient, (2) difference as value added, and (3) difference as discursive practices. Then, they “propose a dialectical approach to the study of difference, one that draws on difference as a discursive practice” (p. 36). Finally, the authors provide exemplars.

In Chapter 3, “Theorizing Difference From Transnational Feminisms,” Sarah E. Dempsey argues that “the term transnational feminism not only refers to feminist analyses of globalization, but also points to the increasing importance of the transnational context for feminist praxis” (p. 69). Thus, she offers a rich examination of “the intersectional character of difference, placed in the context of real world globalization processes and the need for praxis-oriented ways to address the effects of globalization” (p. x). In contrast, Chapter 4, “Leadership Discourses of Difference:

Executive Coaching and the *Alpha Male Syndrome*” by Gail T. Fairhurst, Marthe L. Church, Danielle E. Hagan, and Joseph T. Levi, achieves two things: (1) sets the context by examining one performance management technology, executive coaching; and (2) examines the gender text in *Alpha Male Syndrome (AMS)*, a book written by Kate Ludeman, and Eddie Erlandson. In addition, through the examination of business press literature and a review of 12 current books on executive coaching, the authors tackle the question “How representative is *AMS* of executive coaching literature?” (p. 93).

The chapters of Part 2 focus on teaching difference. “Critical Communication Pedagogy as a Framework for Teaching Difference and Organizing,” by Brenda J. Allen, offers a description of critical pedagogy as it is a foundation to critical communicative pedagogy; suggests ways to “apply critical communication pedagogy to teaching organizing and difference” (p. 104); and “discusses challenges and benefits of using [the] approach” (p. 104). Allen also provides a course overview of “Difference Matters in Organizational Communication: Power in the Ivory Tower” along with aspects of how it was implemented. Chapter 6, “But Society is Beyond \_\_\_sm’(?): Teaching how Differences are ‘Organized’ via Institutional Privilege ←→Oppression,” by Erika Kirby explores the ways she encourages “students to recognize how differences based on social identity (social identity differences: SIDs) are often organized in ways that are oppressive to some and to be reflective about their privilege in order to transform the ways they think about and act upon difference” (p. 127). Kirby is clear to articulate that for her “the goal of studying institutional oppression is for students who are targeted based on a given SID to become *empowered* and for students who are privileged/agents to recognize their privilege and become *allies* against oppression” (p. 145).

Chapter 7, “Teaching Difference as Institutional and Making it Personal: Moving Among Personal, Interpersonal and Institutional Constructions of Difference” by Jennifer Mease, addresses a challenge that she has learned while helping students challenge individual human differences and move toward an institutional understanding of human differences. She states: “The challenge, I have learned, is not to get students to think institutionally *rather* than individually, but to help students understand that the personal is never separate from the institutional” (p. 152). Specifically, she reveals how “by examining organiza-

tional processes using the frame of the social humans, teachers can encourage students to develop a critical and principled response to these [conveyor] belts at work in students' daily lives" (p. 170).

In Chapter 8, "Difference and Cultural Identities in Aotearoa New Zealand: Pedagogical, Theoretical, and Pragmatic Implications of the Josie Bullock Case," Shiv Ganesh states that his "objective is to situate pedagogical issues in organizing difference with reference to contemporary cultural and political tensions in Aotearoa, New Zealand" (p. 173). He achieves this by detailing what had grown in the media as the Josie Bullock case, the case of a probation officer running afoul of different cultural traditions. Then he examines the case using three lenses—*organizing*, *reorganizing*, and *disorganizing*—to highlight the complexities of identity and difference that are embedded in the case and work together as both analysis and strategy to create progressive pedagogy on cultural identity issues (p. 188).

Part 3 on applying difference to organizational change includes chapters 9 through 12. Chapter 9, "Different Ways of Talking About Intervention Goals" by John G. McClellan, Stephen Williams, and Stanley Deetz, focuses on "workplace diversity programs aimed at supporting the careers of women in university and corporate settings" (p. 194). Specifically, the authors "use case studies to identify and review four selected discourses associated with intervention programs attempting to promote difference by supporting the careers of women" (p. 194). The four ways of talking about difference in organizations include talking about diversity, equity, advancement, and development. The authors "elucidate not just the implications of each distinct way of talking, but . . . advocate an informed, reflexive approach toward combining elements from multiple areas for more effective intervention programs" (p. 215).

Chapter 10, "Intersecting Differences: Organizing [Ourselves] for Social Justice Research with People in Vulnerable Communities" by Patricia S. Parker, Elisa Ocegüera, and Joaquín Sánchez, Jr., examines how the authors, as "a research team with diverse identities engaged in a community-based research project" (p. xii). They state that the chapter provides the "themes that emerged from our reflexive conversations held over the past two years that reveal the radical adjustments we made and are making to our identities as critical ethnographers and new members in a community doing social justice work together" (p. 221). In addition, they state that their purpose in writing the chapter "evolved as an investigation as researcher-researched,

elite-other, and academy-community" (p. 239). Chapter 11, "Problematizing Political Economy Differences and Their Respective Work-Life Policy Constructions" by Patrice M. Buzanell, Rebecca L. Dohrman, and Suzy D'Enbeau, explores "how difference is implicated in and reproduced by macrostructures of political economies and at the microlinguistic levels through particular linguistic choices" (p. 256). The focus is on the "popular and academic discourses that have constructed work-life balance issues in different ways" (p. xii). The chapter concludes with "a list of pragmatic suggestions for discursive and material change" (p. 259).

The final chapter "The Worlding of Possibilities in a Collaborative Art Studio: Organizing Embodied Differences With Aesthetic and Dialogic Sensibilities" by Lynn M. Harter and William K. Rawlins, puts a key emphasis on moving between ethnographic experiences with Passion Works—a nonprofit studio housed within a sheltered workshop sponsored by the Athens County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities—and dialogic theory to develop a communicative understanding of aesthetic rationalities as knowledge producing resources for organizations that do the work of social movements (p. 269). The authors provide five dialogical aesthetics of the studio. They state: "By embracing aesthetic and dialogic sensibilities, Passion Works has made a social service organization more responsive to the interests of its clients" (p. 287).

The edited book is a collection of essays that shed a different angle on difference as a defining feature of organizational life. It also has author and subject indices.

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**Osborne, Tony.** *"Greed Is Good" and Other Fables: Office Life in Popular Culture.* Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, An Imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2012. Pp. 205. ISBN 978-0-313-38575-9 (cloth) \$48.00; 978-0-313-38576-6 (e-book).

*"Greed Is Good" and Other Fables: Office Life in Popular Culture* is a book in which the author's primary purpose is "to document the pervasiveness—and, in some cases, the origins—of the main narratives that have shaped today's attitudes and beliefs about office life" (p. 22). The book examines "office" life in the midst of popular culture.

Chapter 1, "The Great American Dilemma: Conformity or Rebellion?," begins with a paragraph that places the book in context: "An indistinct yet

clearly grasped placed called ‘the office’ occupies a vast space in popular culture” (p. 1). Osborne exposes the office-themed stories embedded within popular culture. The chapter has rich content about the many expressions of “office” such as sitcom offices, businessmen and executives, and a state of mind. It is through these that Osborne leads the reader to the dominant ideology: “Beyond rows of mahogany desks, gray file cabinets, ringing telephones, and clacking typewriters, ‘the office’ is an ideology, a way of viewing and structuring life” (p. 10). Thus, he argues: “Office culture governs and structures society” (p. 10).

Chapter 2, “My Approach and Some Reflections on Pop Culture and Such,” previews the approach taken to examine “how office life has been portrayed in popular culture through a mix of both mainstream and submerged voices” (p. 13). Osborne makes clear that his approach is “impressionistic and idiosyncratic rather than comprehensive or encyclopedic” (p. 14). His work is grounded on “a heterogeneous conception of popular culture that includes both mainstream and nonconventional channels of communication” (p. 22). The next chapter, “Early Mass Culture: Print from the Victorian Era to the Roaring Twenties,” begins with works by Charles Dickens and Herman Melville. Within the chapter many ideas, perspectives, attitudes, and images are examined including small-town office life, unrequited kindness in a bank, skyscrapers, the telephone, office politics and changing fashions, “business women” versus “women in business,” as well as success and the business college.

Chapter 4, “Sponsored Films: Quaintness with a Radical Bite,” brings to the forefront corporate videos that may have been left “lying hidden in boxes and cabinets in corporate storage vaults and warehouses” (p. 64). Osborne prefaces the actual films by sketching the philosophy of Jam Handy, an innovative film maker of training films and other visual materials. The chapter then unfolds a variety of orphan films including an anonymous silent film. Chapter 5, “The Organization Man and His Kin: Preachers and Salesmen,” combines many details about books such as the 1956 *The Organization Man*, by William H. Whyte and 1955 novel, *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, written by Sloan Wilson; as well as the speech, by Russell H. Conwell, “Acres of Diamonds” to examine the perspectives of office life such as submissiveness, wealth, rags-to-riches, the salesman, and more.

Chapter 6 continues the theme of office representation: “The Office in Drama and Comedy during the

1950s and 1960s.” The chapter explores several ideas of office in popular culture beginning with the movie, *Executive Suite*. Osborne states: “One of the ultimate symbols of making it and the goal of every corporate climber, is attaining a perch in the ‘executive suite’” (p. 111). Exploring the 1957 comedy, *Desk Set*, Osborne argues: “*Desk Set* is significant historically because it probes the ideological core of American culture from the vantage of two of its constituent myths: love and getting ahead” (p. 117). Ideas examined in this chapter also included office romance, climbing the ladder, consultants and computers, pop and high culture, scientific management, and others. In addition, other programs are explored such as *The Jetsons*, *Mad Men*, and *Bewitched*.

Chapter 7, “Greed is Good: The 1980s to Present-Day America,” explores sources that continue to reinforce and create other areas of shared attitudes and perspectives about office life. By way of illustration, “economics became the most popular major: it was seen as the road to the most coveted career—financial analyst for an investment bank” according to Michael Lewis, author of *Liar’s Poker*. Some of the sources discussed include a collection of short stories—*Wall Street Stories*; a newsletter—the *Pan Am Quipper*; novels such as *Bonfire of the Vanities* and *Up in the Air*; a movie—*The Method*, and more. Office life concepts of outsourcing, hiring executives, and firing executives are also articulated.

Chapter 8, “Sealing the Pyramid: Common Types and Office Games,” explores the concept of typologies. Osborne states: “Typologies frame fragmentary bits of knowledge into coherent pictures” (p. 167). Thus, there are many types of people and behaviors that have been used to build typologies. “Naturally, certain types of people are shaped in part by the professions and the kinds of offices they work in” (p. 168). This chapter discusses bosses, White Hair—“an executive who looks an acts like an elder statesman” (p. 171)—sales types, general rules and ranked types, and more.

Overall this book draws on a distinct variety of sources—books, public speeches, magazines, blogs, documentaries, corporate training films, and more—to articulate the range of competing values interlaced throughout office life within popular culture (back flap). It also has an epilogue, notes, bibliography, and index.

The book is well designed for courses in any discipline that focus on the rhetoric of popular culture, as well as those that solely focus on communication and popular culture.

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