

BEYOND ORALITY AND LITERACY: RECLAIMING THE SENSORIUM FOR
COMPOSITION STUDIES

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INTRODUCTION

In his landmark 1982 publication Walter Ong argues that writing transforms consciousness. Writing teachers have always known that. We know that writing changes our students. We know that learning to write better is a part of learning to learn better. However, Ong was talking about writing as a technology. He was arguing that writing, as a technology, transforms human consciousness. He was also arguing that historically and anthropologically, humans have been shaped by writing; he was arguing that writing *has transformed* human consciousness, that in the absence of writing, in the absence of literacy, human beings would have evolved differently than they have. That claim has not been so widely accepted.

That claim must be questioned because it seems to argue for a form of technological determinism. Yet it is a question I, too, ask. As I look at my students and as I help them transform themselves through experiences of writing, I also watch them make use of the latest writing technologies, and wonder sometimes if they are being used by that technology—if only because they seem so little aware of the ways they are immersed in technology. Although the old cliché of the boiling frog implies more danger than I would want to imbue this situation with, a sense of that perspective presents itself here. If you put a frog in boiling water it knows where it is and gets out. I do not suggest that our students need to, or even can get out of the boiling water, but the technology has

imperceptibly surrounded them in ways that they do not realize; they are in water quite different from the pond their parents started out in. This scenario implies that our students are in a different place than we are. I believe they are. I believe that my students interact with knowledge in a different way than I do, and certainly than I did.

One way to identify that difference is to realize that, for me, the source of information was books. I can remember wandering through a library looking at all the books on the shelves and feeling awed, feeling small in the face of so much that I did not know, and for a long time, that knowledge continued to seem inaccessible to me, not meant for me; it seemed properly shelved. For my students, the first stop for information is the Internet. I could verify the change when “google” as a verb was included in black and white in the dictionary. I google, too, but the difference in their experience with googled and printed language remains irrevocably different from my own.

I believe that my students learn differently and I can point to ways that their interactions with technology support my beliefs. However, this does not alleviate the tension inherent in Ong’s claim that technology transforms consciousness. So I ask the question here: does writing transform consciousness? Along with that question, I ask exactly what it is that Ong says about the transformations of consciousness. And I wonder if, in making this claim, Walter Ong is advocating technological determinism. In one sense he is, because he understands the power of technology. At the same time, however, he also understands the power of humanity. Ong pointed to an intricate interweaving when he observed that the method of the sixteenth century rhetorician Peter Ramus was surprisingly similar to computer logic (*Interfaces* 177). Ramus’s method involved ordering the world according to dichotomies, according to a basic “yes” or “no”

form of categorization; that method that underpins the “ones and zeros” logic of the computer. It took four centuries for technology to catch up and enact that logic.

Humanity shapes and is shaped by technology.

Our students shape and are shaped. It feels sometimes as if they are only being shaped, only being molded by the technology, but they are not so passive. It is time for writing teachers to examine more closely what we know and believe about technology, what we know and believe about writing and what we know and believe about human evolution. Walter Ong invited us to that examination decades ago. We took up his invitation for a time and in parts, but we missed the whole. It is time to examine Ong again. This dissertation begins that examination. As I ask those questions, I search for a way to describe change, a way of describing that gets beyond determinism.

Why must we take stock of our situation now? What is so important about the present time? In almost every way there is nothing particularly special about the present time. In almost every way this need to take stock is a perennial need that never completely disappears. In almost every way, this dissertation could come out in any given year, or decade. Almost. The evolution of consciousness is constant, and at certain points along the way we benefit from pausing to examine what we have experienced. At the end of *Orality and Literacy* Ong concluded that, “The evolution of consciousness through human history is marked by the growth in articulate attention to the interior of the individual person as distanced—though not necessarily separated—from the communal structures in which each person is necessarily enveloped” (178). This concept of *interior* is central to Ong’s understanding of humanity, especially the way that one interior reaches out to another interior. Yet evolution to this point has moved towards an

increased sense of self as self. “Self-consciousness is co-extensive with humanity: everyone who can say ‘I’ has an acute sense of self. But reflectiveness and articulateness about the self takes time to grow” (178).

We are further evolved in our attention to the interior of the individual than we were three decades ago. This increased self-consciousness allows us to reflect more fully on our present moment. One sign of this increased self-consciousness is demonstrated in the perspective of national politicians. There was a time when the idea of a legacy was only realized in looking back; history told the tale, and in retrospect greatness was acknowledged. Today we are so aware of the way that time and history shape a legacy that politicians start early. Before his first four years were up, George W. Bush was considering his legacy, and pundits were considering his considerations of the matter. In responding to the attack of September 11, 2001, Bush could not merely do what needed to be done. He also needed to consider what history would say he needed to do. We have known before that momentous decisions shaped history, but never before has that shaping been so self-conscious. We have come to politics that try to write the future, rather than trying to shape the future, and whether it is an attempt to do the right thing or it is an attempt to be remembered as doing the right thing, nothing can be done without a vast amount of self-consciousness. Perhaps Barack Obama's acceptance of the Nobel Prize in his first year in office, just for things he hopes to do, is the ultimate demonstration of this self-consciousness.

None of us can escape this consciousness completely, and with increased awareness comes increased responsibility. We must describe ourselves, using the most recent technology to do so.

This dissertation is in some ways a sequel to my master's thesis. In my master's thesis I made the rather simple observation that we had reached a point as university-level writing instructors where computer classrooms were the norm. We had passed a tipping point where, even though conversations about universal access remained vital, we were forced to admit that the question of whether or not computers belonged in the writing classroom was essentially moot. I asked the next question, "What do we do with them?" and I phrased it pragmatically, from the point of view of many instructors who still favored the scratch of pen on paper, "How do we make the best of it?" That has been the approach to much of the teaching and learning that has occurred in the presence of computers in recent years: making the best of it. I originally thought that was a good question to ask, and for a time it worked pretty well. However, we have again reached a point where we need to shift the conversation. Perhaps more importantly, we have reached a point where we are *able* to shift the conversation. I argue in this dissertation that we are in the process of consciousness transformation yet again. While it is true that we are always changing, the point tipping us into new arenas is that we are more conscious of our consciousness.

I found this happening at the originating exigency of this project. Rather than looking at the computers and wondering how to respond to them, I increasingly found myself looking at my students, the computer users, and wondering what to do with them, how to make the best of that situation. My students are different from me. My students grew up immersed in electronic communication. They grew up immersed in electronic communications and they are different from me; it is tempting to suggest that my students are different *because* of the electronic communication in which they have been long

immersed. However, the lessons of history, as well as the strictures of logic, force us to pause before asserting a causal relationship.

Before shaping the exploration presented here, I tried a number of times to set up a research study to measure change in students. I found it necessary, however, to pause in the midst of attempting to set up such a research project. I paused because every project I designed was based, explicitly or implicitly, on the assumption that students were different and that students were different because of technology. Before doing anything else, I needed to question that assumption.

In order to ask that question I looked closely at Ong's claim that writing transformed consciousness. I looked at how that claim was questioned in composition studies and in literacy studies. What I found is that it is not so easy to pigeon-hole Walter Ong. He has been labeled a "Great Divide" theorist, someone who argues that the invention of alphabetic writing represents a great leap forward, dividing civilized humanity from savage. A quick reading of *Orality and Literacy* implies such conclusion, but careful reading demonstrates more complexity. Careful reading involves reading in the context of the larger body of Ong's work because Ong refers back to earlier work and builds on it. A reading of that larger body of work invited me to reconsider some things that have lain dormant in that work. I discovered that Ong's concept of the human sensorium offers a holistic response to questions about technological determinism, a response grounded in human complexity and autonomy. Not only that, but I also found in that concept of the sensorium a way to describe change that is particularly relevant for us now. Our consciousness, our "attention to the interior of the individual person," has evolved enough over the last three to four decades to make the concept of the sensorium

more relevant than ever before. It can help us describe the multiplicities that we are becoming increasingly aware of. It can help us make sense of our present time, and perhaps offer a guide as we begin to glimpse the future. Walter Ong's work offers compositionists and literacy theorists tools for gaining new insight into the development and growth of literacy, technology, and humanity, tools that are necessary for negotiating the rapidly changing intellectual environment in which we and our students are immersed. Specifically, the concept of the sensorium embedded in Ong's work offers us increased awareness of ourselves and of the possibility of negotiating the changes in which we are immersed.

CHAPTER 1

WALTER ONG'S RECEPTION IN ENGLISH STUDIES

Walter Ong is most widely known for his 1982 publication *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, which he wrote as a way to present much of his earlier work to a broader audience. In particular, *Orality and Literacy* addresses the themes laid out in what is sometimes referred to as his trilogy. Ong sees all of his writing as a body of work and continuously refers his readers back to earlier publications, the themes and ideas of which he continually builds on. However, *Presence of the Word: Some Prolegomena for Cultural and Religious History* (1967), *Rhetoric, Romance and Technology: Studies in the Interaction of Expression and Culture* (1971), and *Interfaces of the Word: Studies in the Evolution of Consciousness and Culture* (1977) are particularly closely aligned. He begins the "Preface" to *Interfaces of the Word* by explaining that: "The present volume carries forward work in two earlier volumes by the same author..." (9). These three works are the foundation of Ong's work on "the word." In discussing "the word," Ong also includes implications of "the Word," a biblical reference to the beginning of John's gospel. All scholarship has religious implications for Ong; he does not delineate between church and academics in most of his work. Paul A. Soukup S.J. lays out rather nicely this potential tension in Ong's work, which really does not become an issue because Ong's peculiar Jesuit approach views all things as one. The

peculiarity of his Jesuit approach lies in his ability to blend evolution, Christianity, humanism, and academic scholarship together in a coherent whole. In fact, his evolutionary perspective is particularly fascinating in this regard. (For more on this see, in addition to Soukup, Ong's own discussions: "Voice as Summons for Belief: Literature, Faith and the Divided Self," and "Crisis in the Humanities.") His entire approach to human communication is couched in assumptions of glacial time embodied by evolutionary understandings. While I do not address the spiritual, specifically Christian, element directly here, this reverence for the word is worth noting at the outset. Certainly he is not the only humanist to revere language.

In the Preface to *Interfaces of the Word*, Ong makes a reference to the reception of his ideas by critics:

The thesis of these two earlier works is sweeping, but it is not reductionist, as reviewers and commentators, so far as I know, have all generously recognized: the works do not maintain that the evolution from primary orality through writing and print to an electronic culture, which produces secondary orality, causes or explains everything in human culture and consciousness. (9)

His understanding at that point is that for the most part critics have not mistakenly interpreted him as suggesting that writing autonomously formed human culture. He feels understood when he explains that writing is a factor among many other cultural factors that participate in the change and flux which is always a part of humanity. However, this is probably the last time that he can rest in that sense of mutual understanding; such generosity among critics cannot be counted on after 1982, when he published *Orality and Literacy*.

While Ong's work reaches across and through many disciplinary aisles, I pay particular attention here to his influence on composition studies and also discuss literacy studies at the intersection between orality and composing.

ONG'S RELATIONSHIP TO COMPOSITION STUDIES

Ong's work on Ramus is a standard in Rhetoric and his work on Hopkins contributes to the study of literature. Yet Ong's interests and publications also span a wider area. He is often referred to with his Jesuit title, "Father Ong," not only in religious publications but elsewhere as well (cf. Paul A. Soukup, S.J. and Betty Rogers Youngkin). Ong's lack of delineation between "religious" and "secular" publications prefaces his holistic, humanistic, and relational approach to scholarship. Thomas J. Farrell has suggested that much of Ong's work represents an early foray into cultural studies. Ong's work is referred to in anthropology, sociology, history, and more. Ong is not a compositionist, but his work, historically, and continuing into the future, influences the theory and practice of composition as well as literacy studies and rhetoric.

In an interview published in *Composition Forum*, Michael Kleine and Fredric G. Gale claim that the interview brings out "...something that Walter Ong has not 'said' before: an elaborated explanation of his sense of the implications of his prior work for the teaching of writing" (66). In the interview Ong says, "We should note that, although teachers of writing tell me that they find helpful the work I have done..., I myself have not spent much time in teaching writing courses, although I have involved thousands of students over the years very deeply in writing" (67). In answering a question on how, then, he would classify his own work, Ong is classically non-categorical: "My thought

often does not admit of categorical classification: it is complex and to find what it is seems to call for 'exploration'" (67). In his own explorations, especially those involving literacy and orality, Ong contributes much to English studies and offers insights for composition studies, but he is not a compositionist. I hesitate to draw such a clear delineation, especially since so much of what we do in composition studies involves the interplay of multiple disciplines and the interweaving of various perspectives on culture and language and humanity. I delineate here to clarify my own approach to Ong. In many ways Ong represents much of what goes on in composition studies. We do, as Ong notes, find much that is helpful in his work. Ong's work brings us into contact with aspects of anthropology, psychology, history, cultural studies, and more. Exploring his work helps us understand language, humans, technology, and teaching in a deeper, more complex, and more complete way. But the fact that he is not a compositionist reminds us that we bring him in to composition studies; the relationship between Ong and composition studies is representative of the way we bring in so much from other disciplines. While for some that relationship with other disciplines has been suggestive of insecurity (see Douglas B. Park's 1979 reaction to Stephen North), it is an inherent part of the discipline—and an inherent strength. To teach writing is to reflect on humanity. To reflect on humanity is to come into contact with others who do the same, and thus to explore and apply what we learn to our own work. In the end, the entire academic enterprise revolves around the question of what it means to be human.

Walter Ong explores what it means to be human. In this, he is representative of the work we do in composition studies. Thus at a certain level we can claim him as our own, for we have used his work extensively. Yet we should never forget that we claim

his work by going out to explore and by bringing back understandings that help us understand our students and our teaching better. The lessons learned from seeing how his work has been used can serve us well in the future as we continue to bring the richness of academic inquiry from other fields into the scholarship of composition and literacy studies

ONG'S RECEPTION IN COMPOSITION AND RHETORIC AND LITERACY STUDIES

My originating question for this project was to ask how and why my students learn, and to explore the extent to which their learning is different from my own. It is a question that leads to an exploration of humanity and change. Walter Ong's work offers insights. The ways other compositionists have used and responded to Ong's work offer additional layers of insight. A review of the literature reveals four main responses to Ong's work in composition and literacy studies. As a teacher of writing, my first thought is always to composition and the composition classroom. My bias is there, and I share the urge of other compositionists in asking the practical question of how this or any theory is going to "help me in my classroom."

Before discussing the four responses in detail, I will explain why Ong "must" be responded to at all. In reviewing the field of composition studies, Beth Daniell identifies Ong's work as part of one of the grand narratives in composition studies. While she does so in a way that unfairly links Ong with the Great Divide theory—a theory of literacy suggesting that the invention of alphabetic literacy caused a great leap forward for humanity, and further suggesting that illiterates are vastly inferior to literates —Daniell is right to suggest that Walter Ong and the Great Divide theory do participate in a grand

narrative in the theorizing about the teaching of writing and reading. Daniell sees the Great Divide theory "as a version of the grand narrative Lyotard calls the narrative of 'speculation' If we understand the origins of, say, literacy, then we will know how literacy changes the thinking of human beings and will understand how individuals progress and how cultures advance" (394). In the same vein, M. Jimmie Killingsworth argues that "literacy" and "orality" are key words that "have been among the most frequently and widely used by the current generation of composition teachers, researchers, and scholars" (26). Discussions of literacy inevitably bring concepts of "not-literacy" into the conversation and Ong has, in addition to putting forward voluminous and salient publications on the issue, coined the term for not-literacy that most often comes to the fore: "orality." Thus, to speak long or often about composition, about student writing, is to speak on some level about literacy, and about orality, and about Walter Ong. In addition, and more so with each passing year, to speak about composition and student writing is to talk about technology, and since Ong presents writing as a technology, his work necessarily plays a part in the discussions there as well, not the least because he also coined a tantalizing term for electronic communication. "Secondary orality" is not clearly defined because it gets applied to a still-developing phenomena, but the urge to explain, predict, and finally define it (or replace it with some better term, definition, or explanation of current reality) is also a part of the nature of composition studies. Thus, sooner or later, to take part in the discussion of student writing is to include a reference to, or to take a position on, Walter Ong.

THE DISMISSAL: DISCARDING ONG AND HIS WORK BASED ON MINIMAL OR MISTAKEN UNDERSTANDING

One response to Ong's work by scholars in English studies, and particularly literacy studies, is to package him with other scholars as a way to dismiss him along with an aspect of literacy that he can be loosely associated with. One such example is Patricia Bizzell in "Arguing about Literacy." Here Bizzell disparages reductionist dichotomous thinking. She implicates Ong by mentioning his name alongside Eric Havelock, whose work has been critiqued as ethnocentric, and then referring generally to "...humanists...such as...Havelock and...Ong" (142). She goes on to explain that: "[h]umanists tend to dichotomize nonliterate and literate states of being, and to reify the two states into all-embracing conceptual universes of orality and literacy..." (142). She continues in her article to refer to "humanists" in a negative light. I agree with Bizzell that the creation and exploitation of dichotomies represent the kind of scholarship that should be avoided and disparaged. And, in fact, Ong agrees as well. In "A Comment on 'Arguing about Literacy'" Ong points to the many places in his work where he clearly does not support a reduction to dichotomous thinking and says that "[r]eductionism is unrealistically simplistic, relationism is complex." Ong concludes by pointing out: "I am sure there are people out there who fit [Bizzell's] recipe for reductionists. I simply have never wished to be numbered among them" (701). While Ong was able to reply to Bizzell's article and thus resist the oversimplification of his work, Bizzell's action is not an isolated incident, but rather a commonplace in our field. I encountered a similar view of Ong's work from my instructors during my graduate course work. I once had a conversation with a professor outside of class in which I brought up Ong's work to discuss the restructuring of consciousness. My professor was quick to sum up my

argument for me by saying: “oh, yes, the Great Divide theory” before moving on to another point in the conversation. I was left wondering what I had missed in my reading of Ong, because I had never read anything in which he presented a Great Divide theory. Further inquiry revealed that the “Great Divide” theory is something imposed upon Ong, a label and a grouping given to him in much the same way Bizzell labels him a reductionist.

The labeling and dismissal can also take other forms. While I discuss the Great Divide theory at greater length below, introducing it here allows me to explore some of the complexity in composition study's use and misuse of Great Divide thinking. Dismissals of Ong happen consciously, as with Bizzell's use of him as a foil, but dismissals also happen at another level; Ong's name is often excluded from the conversation because his work has been dismissed out of hand as irrelevant. This can happen when he is labeled a Great Divide theorist. Other examples, however, demonstrate how inconsistently the label can be applied. In an important twist of terminology and labeling, Kathleen Welch demonstrates how varied the use of the term "Great Divide" theorists can become. In discussing Great Divide theorists, Welch applies the term to those who read a divide between orality and literacy into the work of others. With such an application, Bizzell and Deborah Brandt become Great Divide theorists when they see dichotomous divisions between orality and literacy in the work of others such as Ong. “Both Bizzell and Brandt, following what has become virtually a tradition in anthropological literacy studies and in some areas of rhetoric/composition studies, locate binary opposition and find the privileging of one of the terms” (60). In Welch's understanding, then, Great Divide thinking is thinking that identifies (and assumes)—

either in one's own work or in the work of others—the world operating through binary opposition. Various enactments of Great Divide thinking lead to dismissals of Ong by readers of Bizzell and Brandt, and by many in the fields of literacy and composition studies.

Welch points out that one of the main reasons Ong is so often linked to Great Divide and binary thinking is simply because of the title of his 1982 work *Orality and Literacy*. For her part, Welch argues that Ong presents the two terms not as binary opposites, but as steps in a process which includes manuscript literacy and secondary orality (61).

THE REDUCTION: TREATING *ORALITY AND LITERACY* AS REPRESENTATIVE OF ONG'S THOUGHT

It is significant that Welch identifies Ong's title, *Orality and Literacy*, as a main contributor to the misreading of Ong, because if that particular book lends itself to that interpretation, then there is a good chance that many readers will be led to such an interpretation. If someone has only read one of Ong's books, it was most likely *Orality and Literacy*. It comes highly recommended as a good beginning or overview of Ong's work. Indeed, he composed it in order to make the ideas of his earlier work available and accessible to a wider audience. When we look at Welch's bibliography, she lists eight books and one article by Ong. However, such depth of reading of Ong is uncommon, particularly on the composition side of the aisle. Brian Street relies on *Orality and Literacy*, as do Beth Daniell, and Patricia Bizzell for their explications of Ong's work. The second response to Ong's work is that of reductionism: attempting to use *Orality and Literacy* as sufficient to represent the body of Ong's work.

A glimpse at *Orality and Literacy* can demonstrate what readers will see and what they won't see when they rely solely on *Orality and Literacy*. A quick look at chapter titles offers a beginning: "The Orality of Language," "The Modern Discovery of Primary Oral Cultures," "Some Psychodynamics of Orality," "Writing Restructures Consciousness," "Print, Space, and Closure," "Oral Memory," "The Storyline and Characterization," and "Some Theorems." For the most part these titles draw attention to "oral" and "orality." The first chapter to suggest not-oral makes the argument that writing restructures consciousness, which is one of the chapters that is often the focus of discussion. However, a look at the chapter headings also suggests the ways that Ong places orality and literacy not as opposites or binaries, but as steps in the broader array of human history. He moves on from writing to print and then to a discussion of memory and story line. It is significant that he concludes with "Some Theorems." This overall organization of the book reflects the moves he makes in the chapter on "Some Psychodynamics of Orality," which I discuss in more detail below. By offering theorems he emphasizes the lack of finality that he perceives to be inherent in this discussion. Even though this is in some ways a summation of his earlier work, he still sees much of the discussion as a beginning in need of further exploration and development. Yet, the idea that writing restructures consciousness becomes, for those who tend towards identification of binaries, a summation of Ong's work.

While Ong offers *Orality and Literacy* as a summary of sorts, he repeatedly refers to his earlier work in a manner that assumes or recommends a familiarity with it. Scholars who do not have that familiarity must proceed with caution when they discuss Ong so that they do not imply a deep understanding of Ong's theory if their understanding

of Ong is based solely upon one text, one which Ong himself does not present in isolation. In this way, *Orality and Literacy* should be understood more as an introduction than a summation.

THE (MIS)APPLICATION: THE TENDENCY TO USE ORALITY-LITERACY IN WAYS THAT JUST DON'T WORK

The totalizing effect of orality and literacy discussions has a tendency to lead many in composition studies to find quick and easy applications for Ong's theories in our classrooms. That is always a goal for compositionists who focus on pedagogy: "This is interesting, and that's fine, but how will it help me in my classroom? How can I *use* it?" Some elements of *Orality and Literacy* have been particularly appealing for educators. Ong's discussion of the psychodynamics of orality resounds with educators who have encountered some level of orality in their classrooms. In fact, many educators sense that they have encountered primary orality and in many cases feel they have done battle with it. While some were busy decrying Ong as a dichotomist, others were thinking "hey, my students come from an oral culture—they are steeped in orality; literacy is a foreign land to them. Then they wonder, "How can this help me teach my students?" The most memorable attempt to put orality to work in pedagogical theory was Thomas J. Farrell. His "IQ and Standard English" is infamous and has contributed to further dismissal of Ong and his work, particularly because Farrell and Ong worked together. In "IQ and Standard English" Farrell argues that low IQ scores for African American students can be traced to the non-standard use of the verb "to be." Farrell identifies this language construction as an oral construction and suggests that if we can just get African American students to learn standard edited English usage of "to be" then their IQ scores will rise.

He uses Ong's work on orality to support claims that have been soundly decried by other compositionists as racist.

It is worth spending a fair amount of time looking at Farrell's work on Ong. Upon closer examination I argue that while many scholars who had difficulty with Farrell's work identify racism as the problem (and it is a problem), there is an additional explanation. I argue that Farrell's work represents a misapplication of Ong's work. The evolutionary nature of Ong's theory means that an application within one lifetime, and certainly within one semester of school, is inherently problematic. See below for a further discussion of Farrell.

OTHER PERSPECTIVES

Not all compositionists, however, see student orality as something to overcome or as a problem to be "fixed." Peter Elbow uses Ong's ideas to support the process movement, turning some of the traditional understandings about writing inside out. In "The Shifting Relationship between Speech and Writing" Elbow suggests that awareness of speech-like qualities can be "... a way of teaching to strength..." (290). He composes his argument with an awareness of the ways that orality and literacy have been dichotomized. His approach to speech and writing mirrors his approach to other points of conflict in the profession. Elbow embraces the contradiction by pausing long enough to hold the concepts at arm's length. In an enactment of his own believing and doubting game, he offers three (seemingly) contradictory views. He argues "writing is essentially unlike speech because it is more indelible; writing is essentially unlike speech because it is more ephemeral; and writing is essentially *like* speech (299, emphasis in original).

Elbow argues against the idea that orality is something bad that must be overcome, arguing instead that the very thing causing students to struggle may actually be a *lack* of those things present in oral discourse.

"Teachers and researchers sometimes describe the weakness of certain student writing as stemming from an inability to move past oral language strategies and a dependence on local audience and context. But in reality the weakness of those pieces of writing should often be given the *opposite* diagnosis: the student has drifted off into writing to *no one in particular*. Often the student need only be encouraged to use *more* of the strategies of oral discourse and the discourse snaps back into good focus, and along with it comes much more clarity and even better thinking" (292).

Throughout this article Elbow argues against dichotomy by arguing for an increased awareness of what is going on in the writing and speaking that we and our students do. "This essay is a call for writers and teachers of writing to recognize the enormous choice we have and to learn to take more control over the cognitive effects associated with writing" (283). He agrees with cognitivists that "...students can think better when they can examine their thoughts more self-consciously as a string of assertions arranged in space" (284). In making this claim, Elbow cites Havelock in the same paragraph with Shaughnessy, supporting the global claim that writing helps to separate the knower from the known. However, he shifts from such potentially deterministic perspectives when he insists that traditional schooling often leads student to "...*experience* writing as more indelible than speech..." (285, emphasis added).

Further, he says, "In short, our sense of speech as ephemeral and writing as indelible stems not so much from the nature of speech and writing as media but from how and where they are most often used" (286). Also,

"I come here to what I most want to emphasize: the *mentalities* related to speech and writing. Ong and the others emphasize how the use of writing enhances logical, abstract, and detached thinking. True enough. But there is a very different kind of good thinking which we can enhance by exploiting the underside of writing as ephemeral. And like the effect Ong speaks of, this kind of thinking is not just an occasional way of considering things but a pervasive mode of cognitive functioning. I'm talking about the mentality that gradually emerges when we learn how to put down what's in mind and invite that putting down to be *not* a committing of ourself to it but the opposite, a letting go of the burden of holding it in mind—and letting go of the burden of having it shape our mind. Having let it go, our mind can take on a different shape and go on to pick up a different thought" (288-89).

I have given extended space to Elbow's words here not just for the content of the quotes above, which are important, or for the eloquence of Elbow's language. In the quotes above and in the article as a whole a pattern emerges as Elbow works with the ideas of speech and writing. He is negotiating this space that has been dichotomized, dismissed and misread so often. In his negotiation he argues that the important point is human action. One of the underlying reasons for much of the misreading of Ong has to do with the underlying sense of technological determinism. If writing transforms consciousness and writing is a technology, then Ong's *Orality and Literacy* quickly

seems to suggest that technology—in and of itself—changes humans, and then the fear of determinism shuts down most interaction with Ong's work beyond that point. What Elbow does, however, is to continue beyond that point. He reads along with Ong and agrees with changes in consciousness and with the ways that writing allows for more abstract reasoning and for a stepping out of ourselves to examine our thought. For Elbow, however, the enduring principle is human agency, especially student agency. In his assumption of human agency he takes cognitivism, consciousness, and technology and argues that we (and our students) need to learn to enact these shifts in consciousness. Elbow calls for awareness.

Elbow suggests in another long CCCs article that, "I can imagine colleagues who know me well laughing at this essay for being the longest and most roundabout defense of freewriting among the many I've made so far" ("Music of Form" 655). "Shifting Relationships" can be read as one of those essays also, but it is important for my work here because through it Elbow indirectly calls for a different reading of Ong. Elbow has his own agenda as he presents a reading of Ong that opens possibilities based on assumptions of human agency in the face of human change. Elbow begins his article with a quote from *Orality and Literacy*: "[I]ntelligence is relentlessly reflexive, so that even the external tools that it uses to implement its workings become "internalized," that is, part of its own reflexive process" (283), and uses it to inform his argument for the writing process. "To exploit the speech-like qualities of writing as we teach is a way of teaching to strength: capitalizing on the oral language skills students already possess and helping students apply those skills immediately and effortlessly to writing—a way of

helping with the crucial process Ong calls the "internalization of the technology of writing" (290).

Connections between orality and process are also explored by M. Jimmie Killingsworth in "Product and Process, Literacy and Orality: An Essay on Composition and Culture." In exploring connections between these movements, Killingsworth argues that the terms can be understood as a ratio. "*Product is to literacy as process is to orality. Product and process are code words for a set of generalizations in the history of composition, while literacy and orality represent similar structures in the history of culture*" (26). Killingsworth's discussion reflects Daniell's approach to grand narratives and he acknowledges that he is working with perception, exploring how such things as orality and literacy have been used in composition studies. He admits, "My claims deal not with absolute facts, but with perceptions that affect historical consciousness in the field of composition" (27).

In a way, *process* and *orality* became the passwords of a new generation which served as linguistic identifiers for resistance to the status quo and to the "old way" of doing things. Killingsworth argues that, in 1993 at least, those terms are still calls for resistance. "Despite the desire of many researchers and theoreticians to move forward, the conflicts of product and process, literacy and orality, remain alive for composition practitioners today, a decade after Maxine Hairston welcomed the process revolution in a CCC article that continues to be read and photocopied for training sessions and graduate seminars in composition" (37). Some of that moving forward involves "post process pedagogy" and even "post-post process." Even today the calls for process remain, and they often remain as calls for resistance.

The most important part of Peter Elbow's calls for resistance is that he calls for students and teachers to learn. It is a simple point, and one that correlates with calls for lifelong learning, but when we see Elbow call for us to learn to use language, we can see him moving towards an increased awareness, and in the face of awareness he assumes human agency. Too often others have focused on the distinctions between orality and writing, and on the technology in Ong's transformation of consciousness. Such a limiting focus leads to assumptions that make the differences between orality and literacy seem more important than understanding the depth of human potential and of evolutionary change, a depth that Ong assumes throughout his work.

THE GREAT DIVIDE THEORY IN COMPOSITION STUDIES

Even though Ong does not belong in the Great Divide theory category, his work with orality and literacy, and the resulting misreadings create a situation where in order to understand Ong and to make necessary distinctions, it is also necessary to understand how the Great Divide theory is used and just what it (supposedly) is. As suggested above, the Great Divide theory is not a clearly defined theory at all; it was not laid out in an organized form by a particular individual. Rather, it is an accumulation of ideas, most often an interpretation of other people's ideas, and most often such ideas are presented as an example of thinking to be avoided. In one form or another, those who accept or are said to accept the Great Divide theory claim that writing was such a powerful invention that it altered human development to the extent that humans and human cultures changed radically with the invention of writing, and that individuals and cultures who come into

contact with writing for the first time are also radically and almost immediately and irrevocably changed as well. Literacy is understood as a direct cause.

There are three main stages in the development of this way of thinking about cultures, a way of thinking that generally involves a literate culture examining non-literate cultures. The first stage comes in the early 20th century in the field of anthropology. This stage is represented by the work of anthropologists Lucien Lévy-Bruhl and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Lévy-Bruhl discusses culture in terms of the “primitive” versus the “Western.” In the “Introduction” to *Primitive Mentality*, he sets up his study this way:

“Among the differences which distinguish the mentality of primitive communities from our own, there is one which has attracted the attention of many of those who have observed such peoples under the most favourable conditions—that is, before their ideas have been modified by prolonged association with white races. These observers have maintained that primitives manifest a decided distaste for reasoning, for what logicians call the ‘discursive operations of thought’ (21)

And while he qualifies this reference to the “decided distaste for reasoning” by insisting that “...this distaste did not arise out of any radical incapability or any inherent defect in their understanding, but was rather to be accounted for by their general methods of thought” (21), the concept of a primitive mentality that lacks the ability to reason remains part of what distinguishes “them” from “us”. Lévy-Bruhl sets out to be objective with the admonition to “...rid our minds of all preconceived ideas in entering upon an objective study of primitive mentality...;” however, the divide between us and them is firmly in place and the term “primitive mentality” embeds the idea of division within the language.

Levi-Strauss's study of the "savage mind" similarly invites dichotomy. Levi-Strauss bases his work in *The Savage Mind* on a distinction between "natural sciences" and "the science of the concrete." He claims that "The science of the concrete was necessarily restricted by its essence to results other than those destined to be achieved by the exact natural science but it was no less scientific and its results no less genuine" (16). Despite such claims here for the scientific nature of the savage mind, Levi-Strauss does understand the savage mind to be essentially different. The defining element of that difference for a Great Dividist is the presence or absence of literacy.

The second stage of thinking can be seen in the work of literary scholars such as Milman Parry, Albert Lord, and Eric Havelock. Milman Parry's work demonstrates that the works of Homer such as the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are the work of an oral poet (or poets) and that awareness of the oral nature of composition and communication results in very different readings of Homer than what had traditionally been assumed based on the diction and logic of written composition. Parry suggests that the question of authorship of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* was one that could only be answered with that awareness.

When, by the exact analysis of oral poems in reference to their tradition, we have grasped in detail just how the oral poet works, and what it is that makes a poem good or bad in the judgment of himself and his hearers, we shall then, but only then, be able to undertake to study the authorship of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and to try to apportion that which is due to the tradition and that which is due to the author. (47)

Albert Lord continued Parry's work after Parry's premature death. In *The Singer of Tales*, Lord extends the discussion of this difference between the oral singer in a time

before writing and the writer of word in a time and times after writing became the preeminent habit of human communication. Lord introduces the idea of such a singer by suggesting that "...one cannot write a song" (124). Each performance, each enactment of a song would be different, and would be controlled and affected by the music and the audience. But then, as Lord envisions it, one day a writer took the time to write down the words of one of the performances, and "...unwittingly, perhaps, a fixed text was established. Proteus was photographed, and no matter under what other forms he might appear in the future, this would become the shape that was changed; this would become the 'original.'" Lord goes on to present a view of the divide that involves more evolution than leap, but still the distinction between written experience and oral experience is emphasized:

"Of course, the singer was not affected all. He continued, as did his confrères, to compose and sing as he always had and as they always had. The tradition went on. Nor was his audience affected. They thought in his terms, in the terms of multiformity. But there was another world, of those who could read and write, of those who came to think of the written text not as the recording of a moment of the tradition but as *the* song. This was to become the difference between the oral way of thought and the written way." (125)

Havelock, in *Preface to Plato* develops these ideas in connection with, and in comparison to Plato. Using the concepts of Homeric and Platonic "states of mind," he identifies a sense of self-awareness in the Platonic state of mind that was not present in the Homeric which he discusses as the separation of the knower from the known.

Thus the method was one means of separating the personality of the artist from the content of the poem. Hence it was that in his *Apology*, which whatever its historicity certainly attempts a summation of the Socratic life and of Socrates' historical significance as Plato saw them, the disciple represents his master's famous mission as in the second instance a resort to the poets to ask them what their poems said. The poets are his victims because in their keeping reposes the Greek cultural tradition, the fundamental "thinking" (we can use this word only in a non-platonic sense) of the Greeks in moral, social and historical matters. Here was the tribal encyclopedia, and to ask what it was saying amounted to a demand that it be said differently, non-poetically, non-rhythmically, and non-imagistically.

The divide here is between those who can say what a poem means, who can separate the meaning from the thing-itself, and those who cannot. Homer represents those who cannot, those for whom the poem is the thing and to ask what it means is to ask what a tree means. Havelock suggests that in the Homeric state of mind both a tree and a poem just *are*. The Platonic state of mind, shaped and transformed in the experience of writing and reading, begins to separate what something *is* from what something *means*. Critics do not necessarily argue with the distinctions Havelock identified between Homeric and Platonic states of mind. Rather the portrayal of Havelock's work is such that he was understood to claim that the Greek experience could be generalized to all situations where literacy first was not, and then was present. Critics argue that what was true for Greece, can only be applied to the Greek situation and perhaps to elements of Western culture that claim roots in that situation.

The third stage in the development of ideas representing the difference between oral and literate cultures is represented by the work of Jack Goody and Walter Ong. In making this third classification I begin to make an argument for a reading slightly different from the standard view. Generally, Goody, Havelock, and Ong are lumped together as followers of Parry and Lord, and all of them are cast in the same mold as Lévy-Bruhl and Levi-Strauss. As I discuss further below, however, Goody and Ong offer more complex interpretations that value the influence of literacy without neglecting the value of orality and of oral cultures. We can see some of that complexity in places where Goody tries to come to terms with the work of earlier anthropologists:

In an earlier paper (1963) Watt and I tried to lay out some of the features we saw as being closely linked to the advent of writing and in particular to the invention of the alphabetic system that made wide-spread literacy possible. We suggested that logic in our modern sense (and we did not give the same value to this discovery as Lévy-Bruhl and other philosophers) seemed to be a function of writing, since it was the setting down of speech that enabled man clearly to separate words, to manipulate their order and to develop syllogistic forms of reasoning; these latter were seen as specifically literate rather than oral, even making use of another purely graphic isolate, the letter, in its original formulation. A similar argument applies to the law of contradiction, which Lévy-Bruhl deemed absent in primitive societies. From one standpoint his claim was nonsense. Yet it is certainly easier to perceive contradictions in writing than it is in speech, partly because one can formalize the statements in a syllogistic manner and partly because writing arrests the flow of oral converse so that one can compare side by

side utterances which have been made at different times and at different places. Hence there is some reason behind Lévy-Bruhl's distinction between logical and pre-logical mentality, as well as behind his discussion of the law of contradiction. But the emphasis is quite wrong. Because he fails to consider the mechanics of communication, he is led to make wrong deductions concerning mental differences. ("Evolution and Communication" 7)

Lévy-Bruhl's research, along with that of his predecessors, took place at a time when academia as a whole was increasingly focused on what it means to be a modern human. We were particularly enamored of ourselves and not yet fully skeptical of such amazement at our own advancements. In that context it was not strange for a scholar to suggest that the alphabet was the greatest development in human history, and further that such a development was the cause of many of the human attributes we in the West have come to value and come to point to as examples of our own superiority.

With the reflection afforded by the passage of time, however, we come to understand the ways in which the emphasis was wrong. What can be perceived shifts, and develops, and builds on prior perceptions. For a time, historical and anthropological studies exposed us to cultures and languages that had not developed alphabetic literacy. The question of how we apparently came to be so highly developed was intensified because we had so many examples of "undeveloped" humanity. Not only that, but the cultures that we were quick to denote as "primitive," or even "savage," were consistently ignorant of alphabetic literacy. Thus we had a convergence of history and cultural anthropology to confirm the value of literacy to human development—an apparently great divide.

Admittedly, not all scholars viewed the world this way, and the academic landscape is not as monochromatic as a brief narrative might suggest. Within that distinction lies the narrative of the Great Divide and the reality embedded in the discovery of complex relationships. Recovering, and understanding, a particular way of thinking from the past is very difficult; this is one of the things that Ong explores when he considers what humans were like before the advent of writing. One of the things that Ong demonstrates is how difficult it is for us to understand what it was like to be human at a time removed from our own, especially when the significance of the distance is multiplied by subsequent interiorization of communication technology. Ong argues that it is nearly impossible for a literate human to imagine what life was like before alphabetic literacy; the written or printed forms—and the patterns of thought that accompany them—always get in the way (*Orality and Literacy* 2). A similar phenomenon can be observed with ideas that were once in fashion but have been proven false, such as those referenced above. Over time, a scholarly suggestion that there was some "great leap forward" for humanity becomes like a scholarly suggestion that the earth is flat. And not only does it seem quaint and quixotic (if not downright dangerous), but we find it hard to even imagine how it was possible to suggest such a thing. We are unable to think about a "great leap forward" without including a touch of irony in our thought, if not in our tone. There was a time, however, when a reputable scholar could discuss human development with unfettered optimism and know that everything we had become was no doubt connected to the uniquely human ability to communicate across distance using written language.

THE DIVIDE

The development of the Great Divide theory can be better understood by exploring the work of Jack Goody. Since Ong references Goody often and since critics often treat Ong's and Goody's approaches to literacy as monochromatic, understanding Goody provides insight for how Ong's work is received. Goody's 1963 article "The Consequences of Literacy," a work he published with Ian Watt, is one of the most cited articles in the Great Divide discussions; most often it is cited as an example of erroneous thinking. In the article, Goody and Watt position themselves as very aware of the naiveté of referring to cultures unlike ours as "savage," "primitive," or in any substantial way "less" than our own. However, they still observe the coterminous events of literacy and cognitive development and set out to explore it:

We can no longer accept the view that anthropologists have as their objective the study of primitive man, who is characterized by a "primitive mind", while sociologists, on the other hand, concern themselves with civilized man, whose activities are guided by "rational thought" and tested by "logico-empirical procedures". The reaction against such ethnocentric views, however, has now gone to the point of denying that the distinction between non-literate and literate society has any significant validity. This position seems contrary to our personal observation; and so it has seemed worthwhile to enquire whether there may not be, even from the most empirical and relativist standpoint, genuine illumination to be derived from a further consideration of some of the historical and analytic problems connected with the traditional dichotomy between non-literate and literate societies. (305)

Goody and Watt suggest here that reactions against ethnocentrism have caused academics to throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater. Yet, while acknowledging the problems of ethnocentric views, they attempt to derive "illumination" from the "...differences between literate and non-literate societies."

How those differences are understood varies. John Halverson reads Goody and Watt as among those who operate within the "literacy thesis;" in Halverson's understanding, Goody and Watt attribute "a primary causal role to the invention and spread of the Greek alphabet" (301). The "literacy thesis" is a variant of the "great leap theory;" Halverson imposes it upon Goody and Watt as a part of his argument against the causal role of literacy in cultural change. Halverson is among those who critique Goody and the literacy thesis by pointing almost exclusively to the Goody and Watt article, which according to Halverson is "...a thin tissue of vague suggestions, gratuitous assumptions and unsupported generalizations" (305). Goody is often dismissed, under-read, and misrepresented in ways similar to misrepresentations of Ong. In the case of Goody and Watt's article, some misrepresentation can be averted if we note that Goody and Watt clearly explain that their article is a presentation of possibilities and includes more suggestions for further study than definitive answers; this caveat is often overlooked when the article is cited as a model of mistaken thought. Halverson does acknowledge, at least, that Goody continued to develop his thought in this area. Halverson also notes that of the authors often implicated as Great Dividists, Eric Havelock "never altered his position in any significant way" (301), and Watt moved on to other areas of study, but Goody carried on the discussion and developed his thought further, even to the point of altering some of the ideas suggested in "The Consequences

of Literacy." Such acknowledgement does not keep Halverson from equating Goody with the literacy thesis, but it should.

Examination of the whole body of Goody's work reveals that it is much more complex than can be summed up by implying that Goody believed that literacy represented a great leap forward for mankind. Olson and Cole note that "Goody explained social structure and social change primarily in terms of three major factors" (x). Those are: the development of intensive forms of agriculture that allowed for the accumulation of surplus, the urbanization and the growth of bureaucratic institutions, and the technologies of communication as instruments of psychological and social change. Rosaire Langlois notes the difficulty of approaching or synthesizing Goody's work because of its "vast scope" (3). Despite this variety and scope of Goody's work, in discussions of the Great Divide the 1963 article often stands as representative of Jack Goody.

In addition to the ongoing assumption that Goody and Watt treat literacy as causative, critics of the article often note that Goody bases his suppositions upon what developed in Ancient Greece. Critics argue, therefore, that even if Goody's claims are valid, they are not universals that help explain humanity, but localized lore that explain Greek culture and to an extent the culture of the West that draws much from Ancient Greece. This isolation of Western development is read as a form of ethnocentrism as equally dangerous and detrimental as other types of "great leap" ideas.

The ideas presented in "Consequences of Literacy" must be approached with a critical eye, but a critical eye sees the value and the flaws. Too often, the emotional aspects of Great Divide discussions obscure this critical approach. Rosaire Langlois

demonstrates how reacting against the idea of a Great Divide can lead scholars to inaccurate generalizations.

Goody's theory of literacy and its effects on cognition have come under strong attack during the last decade, and he provided a brief reply to critics in a recent work (Goody, 2000a, pp. 1-25). Three recent articles contain valuable comments throughout, but it is odd that they all make obviously false assertions. Rosalind Thomas (1992) recently wrote, "[W]e tend to have evidence only for what got written down; how can we know, for example, that there was no logical thought before writing?" (p. 20). The simple answer is that Goody never claimed "there was no logical thought before writing." According to Staal (1989) as well, Goody maintains "that not just logic, but the capacity for reason depends on writing" (p. 309). In a similar refrain, according to Halverston [sic] (1992) Goody claims "that logic derives from writing" (p. 314). But Halverston [sic] earlier cited Goody's claim precisely and correctly that "oral man lacked not logical reasoning but certain tools of intellectual operation" (p. 311). Goody has asserted, and reasserted, that literacy only permits the amplification of logic, but does not cause it. It is obvious that preliterate humans had the capacity to reason and even to be scientists: How else would they have managed to domesticate animals and plants or to create viable ways of reproducing themselves in varied environments? Goody has not and, one can safely predict, never will make the claim that logic and reason are entirely dependent on writing (Langlois, 17-18).

I point to these types of misreadings because we see them in composition studies. In our field there is, perhaps, a particularly high risk of misreadings because of the way we

enhance our discipline by integrating work from other disciplines. In this we must rely, to a certain extent, on experts from other fields and the common wisdom in an area of study as we develop ideas and draw our own conclusions. Realizing this, we can see how easily Goody, as interpreted by some in "The Consequences of Literacy" can mistakenly come to serve as representative of Great Divide thinking, even though his work is more complex than can be isolated by a single sound-byte. For further reading on Goody, I recommend *Technology, Literacy, and the Evolution of Society: Implications of the Work of Jack Goody* edited by David R. Olson & Michael Cole.

When we approach with an open mind those who have been implicated in Great Divide thinking, we find echoes of questions we have today about the influence of computer technology on our students. The premise of the 1963 article is still compelling: literacy does seem to participate in transformation. Yet to explore that power is to risk return to dichotomies, either in reality or in the view of critics. To discuss the literate is to automatically raise the specter of non-literate, or illiterate. To claim that humanity changed in some significant way in the presence of writing automatically raises the idea of progress, and with the idea of progress comes the uncomfortable idea that what comes as a result of progress is better than what came before, and thus in the case of changing humanity, we on the side of progress must therefore claim to be better than those on the other side. And not only that, but if there are benefits to literacy, then we as the more advanced owe it to the less advanced to bring them along, to help them to progress, to give them the gift of literacy that they can be as advanced as, as good as we ourselves are. It is worth exploring this thread of thought in order to demonstrate that much of the misreading of Goody and Ong centers on this very problem. That problem is also

connected to the very foundations of pedagogy itself, for what does a teacher do but profess some knowledge and offer it to someone who lacks the knowledge? While the teacher-student model, particularly where the student is younger, is more socially acceptable in our culture, the inherent tension of claiming to know more—which is embodied in the offer to teach someone something—can be problematic in the same way. In composition studies, the Process movement developed in response to this very tension, with discussions of student-centered classrooms and publications like *Writing without Teachers*. M. Jimmie Killingsworth and Peter Elbow pick up this trend and make explicit connections between Product vs. Process and Literacy vs. Orality discussions, as I discuss further below. Such tension is inherent, and thus the new reading of Ong suggested in this dissertation can serve as a call for a more humble and open reading of other authors as well.

Walter Ong's publication of *Orality and Literacy* in 1982 revitalized the Great Divide discussion in many disciplines including composition studies. *Orality and Literacy* summarizes much of Ong's earlier work and packages it for a broader academic audience. However, with that broader audience comes a broader range of response. As noted, in 1977 he is able to confidently observe that his readers have, to date, read generously and have generally appreciated the way that Ong sees literacy as one factor among many at play in human history and development. After 1982, his readers—including many in English Studies—are more likely to see Ong as a Great Divide theorist whose insistence on the transformative power of literacy links him with scholars who represent alphabetic literacy as the great leap forward for humanity.

Ong does take literacy seriously, taking up the torch from Goody and Havelock. Ong also extends this to include taking technology seriously. Ong explores the significance of communication technology through his explorations in Rhetoric and Literary Studies, particularly through his study of Peter Ramus, and he becomes convinced that the technology and the media that humans use to communicate with have a significant influence on how humans come to make meaning in the world. He sees that there is something happening with literacy and sets out to explore the significance. Ong makes two points that are often raised in Great Divide discussions. One is taking technology seriously and arguing, with a backward glance, that writing is a technology and that there is benefit in paying attention to that reality. The second is taking the difference between literacy and not-literacy seriously. He coins the term "orality" as a label for "not-literacy." He further asserts that we need to understand not-literacy in order to understand literacy. This terminology invites dichotomous thinking, with critics accusing Ong of dichotomous thinking and some readers of Ong moving forward with dichotomous concepts. A more careful and complete reading of Ong, however, reveals that taking literacy seriously means taking relationships seriously. A relational understanding complicates and disrupts dichotomy.

I noted above that Ong approaches literacy with a "backward glance." Understanding Ong's historical approach is crucial to understanding his work, and the failure to do so can lead to misreadings. Ong emphasizes the difference between literate cultures and illiterate cultures not to make claims about the power of literacy in and of itself, but to demonstrate to a literate audience the assumptions that can come with being literate, assumptions that can lead to misunderstandings. One of his oft-repeated

examples is to ask his audience to think of a word such as "necessary." He challenges the audience to do so without thinking of the letters that make it up, without envisioning the "n" and the "e" etc. He argues that a literate person always thinks of the written or printed word, of the letters combined to make the word. Ong then suggests that a person who has never experienced literacy would not think that way. The primary oral person, according to Ong, would think of the sound of the word. I would argue that the oral person is more likely to think of the concept, or more concretely to think of examples of what is necessary, rather than thinking the word itself; in fact isolating words as words is a literate activity. In many ways this very exercise qualifies as what Patrick Hartwell highlights as a "dumb question," the kind of question that makes sense to a scientist within the context of an experiment, but seems to make no sense or seems obviously misleading for the subject of the experiment. Even though an oral person's response is open to debate, Ong's example remains useful in its own context; it helps literate persons understand how much of their thinking is shaped by understanding words as collections of letters, how much the materiality of literacy shapes their construction, classification and awareness of knowledge and of the world around them. Helping literate audiences become more aware of the role literacy plays in their thinking is the goal of much of *Orality and Literacy*. However, Ong's insistence on the differences between orality and literacy is often interpreted as elevating literacy, as if Ong's questioning and exploration is conducted as a demonstration of how much better literacy is.

Other studies and publications in the late 1970s and early 1980s also contribute to conversations about the Great Divide. Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole's work among the Vai raises questions about Luria's work and also questions the literacy hypothesis by

indicating that education rather than literacy itself had contributed to most identifiable cognitive changes. Their extremely influential 1981 publication *The Psychology of Literacy* is often cited as a definitive demonstration that the Great Divide is inaccurate. Brian Street also publishes a number of works on literacy around this time. In 1981 in *The Theory of Literacy* he expounds on the distinction he makes between "autonomous" and "ideological" theories of literacy. Street understands Goody and Ong to claim that literacy *by itself* causes changes in human thinking and interaction with knowledge; he refers to such claims as the "autonomous model" of literacy. In contrast, Street offers the "ideological model;" Street acknowledges that human cognition undergoes change, but emphasizes that a whole range of cultural factors are at work, of which literacy is one among many. Due to the popularity of Street's work and the timing of the publication—at a time when cultural studies were becoming more popular along with explorations of multiculturalism—his interpretation of Goody and Ong has been similarly popular. In many cases those who refer to Street's work automatically connect Ong and Goody to the autonomous model.

THE GREAT DIVIDE AS TRADITION

To understand the Great Divide Theory in English Studies we must do more than just look at the studies; we must also look at how they are used. It is in the practice, in the quoting of studies and in the Lore that the myth of Great Divide theorists is woven. Beth Daniell describes it in terms of "Jean-Francois Lyotard's notions of the grand narratives of modernism and the little narratives of postmodernism" (393). She refers to the Great Divide variously as "The Great Leap Narrative" (395) or as "Ong's narrative of

cognition" and she argues that it is one of two grand narratives, along with "Friere's narrative of liberation" that are later deconstructed by little narratives of postmodernism (403). One telling point in her article is where she suggests that "the little narratives present many truths about literacy, not one Truth about it, and while they may show how to correct one injustice, they do not argue that this correction can eliminate all injustice or even a similar injustice elsewhere" (406). She implies here that the grand narratives *do* present one Truth and *do* claim to correct all injustice, and she implies that Ong and Friere make these arguments. However, neither Friere nor Ong makes the grand claims Daniell associates with their names. Rather, such associations arise when others use Friere's or Ong's work, or make accusations in response to Friere or Ong that are not consistent with those author's works. Thus, for example, viewing middle class American students as, and encouraging them to see themselves as "oppressed" represents an application/extension that does not demonstrate a full understanding of Friere and the cultural contexts of his work. Similarly, Ong does not claim one Truth for literacy; he repeatedly qualifies his suggestions and implications as more possible than necessary and as suggestions needing further exploration. He also repeatedly identifies literacy as one factor among many that deserve exploration. In *Orality and Literacy*, he puts it this way:

To say that a great many changes in the psyche and in culture connect with the passage from orality to writing is not to make writing (and/or its sequel, print) the sole cause of all the changes. The connection is not a matter of reductionism but of relationism. The shift from orality to writing intimately interrelates with more psychic and social developments than we have yet noted. (171)

He goes on to emphasize that point by mentioning specific areas, while also developing his claim of relationism.

Developments in food production, in trade, in political organization, in religious institutions, in technological skills, in educational practices, in means of transportation, in family organization, and in other areas of human life all play their own distinctive roles. But most of these developments, and indeed very likely every one of them, have themselves been affected, often at great depth, by the shift from orality to literacy and beyond, as many of them have in turn affected this shift. (171)

However, others who comment on and apply the work of authors such as Ong build a tradition that simplifies the complexity of the work to sound-bytes. In the case of both Friere and Ong, their works are so complex and extensive that it is often more expedient for scholars who see value in their ideas to rely on summaries of their work or on the interpretation of others from which they attempt to draw a few working principles.

APPLICATIONS: CAN WE TAKE ONG TO CLASS?

Below I take a closer look at the work of Thomas J. Farrell. His work, as with others discussed here, brings our exploration to the intersection of Literacy Studies. I focus on the parts of Literacy Studies that more or less specifically address further implications of the Great Divide; I will refer to "orality and literacy theories" interchangeably with Great Divide theory since the "Great Divide" moniker is not stable. In working, for example, with Ong's theories we have already seen how some assume them to be Great Divide theories, even though Ong himself rejects that categorization.

Orality and literacy theories raise two crucial issues. The first issue involves the immediacy of change. The second raises questions about the difference between individuals who are co-terminus and geographically connected, but referred to as "different cultures." In other words, "Do the claims for the revolutionary nature of literacy happen as soon as someone learns to read?" and, "Can differences between, for example, a university professor, a privileged white student, and a Black student from the other side of the tracks be described and responded to in terms of orality and literacy? Can the black student be classified as oral, or residually oral in a constructive way that will help that student succeed in the university setting? The question of immediacy is actually of less immediate concern to compositionists, because rarely in university settings do we encounter someone who can be classified as "primary oral." For this reason the narrative on composition studies has centered on discussions of what orality is for us today, including discussion of residual orality and secondary orality. However, the question of immediacy lends itself to questions of technological determinism as it asks if literacy necessarily changes a person in the way the narrative has suggested it can or does. The compositionist who comes closest to believing in and advocating literacy as individually transformative is Thomas J. Farrell.

THOMAS J. FARRELL

To take Thomas J. Farrell as representative may seem misleading, since much of his work has been rather soundly criticized in our profession. However, even scholars who identify and resent the strong thread of racism in Farrell's work have looked at their students at one time or another and have questioned the implications of varying levels of

literacy their students bring to the classroom, have wondered what effect an upbringing that de-emphasizes literacy in favor of spoken communication has on student writing, and have wondered if any of this "orality/literacy stuff" might provide insights into students who are more successful with spoken language than with written. Thus, though Farrell's solutions are not representative, the issues from which they arise are. He responds to the question of if, and if so how, theories of orality and literacy can be applied to the composition classroom. There is something representative there. I discuss the problems with trying too hard to insert orality and literacy into strict categories in following chapters. Here I will quickly review the problems Farrell encountered.

In his 1977 "Literacy, the Basics and all that Jazz" Farrell has two main agendas. First, he responds to calls for a return to basics that arose in conjunction with the 1975 Newsweek cover story "Why Johnny Can't Write." Farrell argues that a truth hidden by the simple logic of that article is that Berkeley students are very different from CUNY students. In demonstrating and explaining this difference Farrell reveals his second agenda, that of applying Ong's categories to the classroom. "In our present context, the open admissions students who entered basic writing courses at The City College, CUNY, came from a residually oral culture, whereas most of the Berkeley Subject A students, who graduated in the upper twelve percent of their high school classes, are from a secondarily oral culture. The professors represent a highly literate culture."

Much of the organization of this article mirrors the erroneous approach Joyce Coleman observes in her discussion of medievalists. She observes that many medievalists take what Ong presents as fluid, relational, and even somewhat tentative suggestion of characteristics of orality but apply them as if they were part of a concrete

“master list.” “Such is the authority of Ong's list that, in some cases, analyses of texts degenerate into mere exercises in imposing its prescriptive and self-fulfilling categories...” (159). Farrell similarly takes Ong's categories, fills them with students and professors and then proceeds to discuss the implication of those (now self-fulfilling) categories.

The article is criticized, but because Farrell offers many seemingly sound pedagogical principles, and because he responds to the issue of back to basics teaching, the negative response to this article is less vociferous than the response would be to his 1983 CCC article. This controlled approach can be seen in Patricia Laurence's response to "Literacy, the Basics and all that Jazz." She suggests that he "leans too heavily on an historical perspective of language development which ignores the psycholinguistic realities of remedial students and of the writing process. However, I wholly agree with Farrell that the current emphasis on basic skills alone...is...destructive of the process of learning to read and write" (230). Laurence chooses to engage Farrell on pedagogical grounds, with a discussion of how her view of teaching and of students is different from his. She does mention, but does not engage with some of the more significant problems underlying his argument.

Among the problems in Farrell's argument is the way that he advances his claim that "college students move from authoritarian to more subtle and complex attitudes about life as a result of their continued education." That does not seem objectionable at first. However, he conflates education and literacy in the next sentence when he follows up by claiming that therefore "[t]his is just one of the new cognitive structures induced by literacy" (448). Failure to distinguish between education and literacy per se

misrepresents both; education and literacy are not synonymous. In addition, Farrell's references to Piaget and cognitive development (450) as well as suggestions of "thinking capacities" and "higher reasoning processes" highlight problematic biases that come to full form in Farrell's 1983 publication of "IQ and Standard English."

"In "IQ and Standard English" Farrell continues using Ong's categories and says that "black ghetto children come from a functionally oral cultural environment." He makes this claim after implying that low IQ scores by these children are due to the fact that they have not yet learned to think abstractly. He goes on to suggest that "the cognitive differences manifested on these different tests grow out of differences in grammar" and the understanding and proper use of the verb "to be" is exemplary. In 1977 Farrell argues against "back-to-basics." In 1983 he argues in favor of teaching grammar. I suspect that this has as much to do with the heated response to this article as the very real issues of ethnocentrism and racism implicit in his argument. There is reason to question Farrell in both areas. Many have questioned Farrell. In response to Farrell, CCC published four "Responses." There was also a special session at CCCCs to address the concerns many in our profession had about Farrell's argument and the issues raised by it.

The responses detail the ways that Farrell's approach to language and learning is decidedly racist. They also abhor an outcome that could lead to pedagogical decisions based on genetics rather than sound pedagogical theory. Karen Greenberg shows how Labov's and Hartwell's studies of vernacular and dialect critique most of Farrell's assumptions about language use. She concludes by asking, "Would Farrell recommend these same passive, irrelevant, a-rhetorical instructional techniques for middle-class

students who speak nonstandard white dialects?” (460). Patrick Hartwell similarly identifies the racism and questions the resulting pedagogy. However, where Greenburg refers to Ong with some esteem, Hartwell dismisses Ong along with Farrell, with a repeated reference to the “Ong/Farrell party line,” which reads much like “Great Divide theorists.” Hartwell’s only logic in linking Ong and Farrell is to note that Ong was Farrell’s teacher. Pedagogically, Hartwell argues against Farrell’s advocacy of the standard use of “to be” but does see value in many of Farrell’s claims, “becoming literate does involve massive changes in one’s internal grammar and in one’s awareness of language as language. And Farrell is particularly right to stress that the basic writing course needs to concentrate on developing abstract thought through written language” (463-64). In this, Hartwell advocates for a position that links literacy and education and sees the potential for abstract thought to transform students. Margaret Himely critiques the “simplistic” nature of Farrell’s argument. She argues against a causal stance and raises questions about individual transformations as compared to cultural ones. “If indeed the causal movement in cognitive development is from the culture to the individual, what is the nature of that point of interaction” (467)? She questions links between cognition and culture and follows by asking “what are all the specific contextual constraints that shape the “interiorization” of cultural knowledge and hence the particular pattern of individual cognitive growth? Language may indeed affect thought, but is that an all-or-nothing, one-way causal relationship” (467)? In this call for complexity Himely mirrors much of what I call for in this dissertation and what Ong calls for in his work—as can be seen through more detailed exploration. Farrell is simplistic and reductionist in this discussion of IQ and Standard English, but Ong, in his discussion of orality and

literacy is not. R. E. Stratton is given the parting word in these responses and focuses more vociferously on the racism of Farrell's premises. However, Stratton also emphasizes the concomitant injustice implied by Farrell's project—our reliance on standardized tests which imply that knowledge, learning, and humans can be standardized. All of these responses call for a more complex understanding of humanity and a more humane and relational pedagogy to go with it. On that, I couldn't agree more.

ON THE TRANSFORMATION OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The issues raised by Farrell's critics are important for understanding discussions of the uses of orality and literacy studies in composition. The interplay between Farrell and his critics draws our attention to an underlying issue that often goes unnoticed and thus unresolved in Ong's broad coverage of orality and literacy. Farrell seems to assume that the transformation of consciousness that Ong refers to can happen with a single, almost magical, exposure to literacy; he seems to expect that literacy, in the form of grammar, can transform students from who they are to who he wants them to be—at least in terms of language use. In some of Ong's discussion—for example where he relates Luria's research—Ong also seems to suggest that literacy produces rapid, unalterable, and almost irresistible change. In other places, however, Ong presents transformations of consciousness in slow evolutionary change; for example his references to oral residue show that human change in the presence of literacy is not immediate, and if he seems to suggest inevitability, that is partly due to the historical perspective which always leaves us with the impression that what has happened had to have happened. We can imagine

other happenings, but they never carry the existential weight of the history we have actually lived.

That question of immediacy is partially raised by Brian Street when he offers his critique of the Great Divide. Many of Street's critiques are based in concerns of technological determinism, which he critiques with his use of "autonomous" and "ideological" models. A perhaps more significant aspect of Street's work is his suggestion that Ong's methodology is flawed because one cannot be sure whether he is talking about individual or broader cultural changes; Ong seems to switch back and forth without clearly defining this variable.

While Street's critique here is valid, it is not as striking when considered in the context of Ong's purpose. In exploring the developments of literacy, Ong discovered more about literate folk than he did about oral. One of his most important realizations is that it is very, very difficult for literate humans to understand what it would be like to be completely oral. Ong's arguments about thinking patterns of oral humans may or may not provide any conclusive understanding of what it is like to experience the world in the absence of writing, but Ong's research does demonstrate that since literate humans have so much difficulty even imagining a world without writing, literate humans will never be able to completely know what that was like. Ong is less concerned with explaining the oral mind than he is with showing literate humans that orality and literacy are not the same thing and are not versions of the same thing. For this purpose Alexander Luria's work functions quite well. Ong's explication of Luria's work is one of the most often referred to parts of his orality/literacy discussion.

Luria works with "...illiterate (that is, oral) persons and somewhat literate persons in the remoter areas of Uzbekistan (the homeland of Avicenna) and Kirghizia in the Soviet Union during the years 1931-32." (*Orality and Literacy* 49-50). In that work, as Ong presents it, Luria tracks operational thinking by asking his subjects to place objects into categories. The somewhat literate persons are able to group the objects in abstract categories, while the illiterate persons group objects operationally such as putting a log with a saw because the saw is used to cut the log (as opposed to putting the hammer and the knife with the saw in a grouping of tools). Luria's work seems to imply that even a rather brief encounter with literacy is enough to alter thinking and encourage more abstraction. In discussing Luria's work, Ong presents situations where individuals are in some way transformed after exposure to literacy. In other places, however, Ong notes the "tenaciousness of literacy" (115) and emphasizes the change over long spans of time evidenced on a cultural, rather than individual scale.

Luria's methodology has been soundly questioned and the "somewhat literate" persons who demonstrated abstract thinking were more likely shaped by education and not by literacy *itself* (see Scribner and Cole). However, when we look at all the discussions and debates surrounding orality and literacy, there is a way in which the debates themselves support Ong's argument about the difficulty literate persons have in understanding oral persons. Luria's work, Luria's errors, and the subsequent discussion about the nature of literacy and orality—including the work of Scribner and Cole and Street—serve to emphasize that very point. The schooling and education are themselves part of the more evolutionary development, but such schooling is literate schooling and is

designed to motivate the more abstract thinking that Hartwell values in his critique of Farrell.

Looked at from this perspective, the discussion offers some evidence for Ong's claim that writing transforms consciousness. It is perhaps the ultimate parlor trick: ask the question, "What would it be like to experience the world without writing? In trying to think about it, written language becomes the "elephant in the room" that cannot be ignored. All points of reference attach at some level to literate understandings. The result is the logical conclusion that since literate humans cannot step away from literacy far enough to fully understand not-literacy, literate understandings and literate consciousness must be different from (read: have been transformed) oral consciousness. And for the most part, that point is well accepted. Even Street in his ideological model accepts the change; he just questions causation. Remembering then that Ong's purpose is to understand humanity, particularly literate humanity, and to share that understanding with his audience, his point is more methodically sound than Street can see from his perspective.

Thus for Ong, the significance of the difference between orality and literacy is not about great leaps forward, but it is about the difficulty of looking backward. Yet, he still argues the importance of looking backward because even though orality is at some level inaccessible to us, we are still enriched for realizing the difference and for attempting to understand it as best we can.

We experience the world in time. We reflect on the past and we anticipate the future. We inevitably link the two in logical and sometimes illogical ways. Nonetheless, the situatedness of past, present, and future are part of the fabric of the human lifeworld.

One reason for exploring and attempting to understand past changes is for the possibility that it offers us for understanding what we have to face looking forward, because it can be as difficult, though differently so, to understand what is before us, or even to understand where we are now. The tension that arises in trying to describe change is at the heart of Ong's work and at the heart of the misreading of his work

In looking at Ong and his critics and at the whole Great Divide discussion, that whole enterprise boils down to one crucial question: "Does writing transform consciousness?" Ong claims in *Orality and Literacy* that it does (78). As will become clear throughout this dissertation, I agree with Ong, but qualify that by increasing the complexity. Ong also says that writing is a technology, and it is valuable to extend this question to technology, so the question becomes whether technology transforms consciousness, and I can only agree with this by qualifying with a reciprocal question/answer: "Does consciousness transform technology?" The answer to that is also yes. Writing developed out of a human desire to create a more stable record. Poetry increased human recall and served well for a long time, but humans desired more, more recall, and more and better tools for the increasingly abstract thought humans were beginning to engage in and want to engage in more. Technology rises out of human consciousness and in turn, by the use of the technology made by humans, humans develop in new ways, and change. Change represents life. By definition something living is something that changes.

Ong focuses on the ways that language participates in change, which is why he is led to claim that writing transforms consciousness. In order to understand how he comes to that claim we must look to his earlier work. Reading *Orality and Literacy* without a

deeper understanding of Ong's earlier work contributes to misreadings. In the next chapter I explore change and I explore the ways Ong discusses change. The two central indications of change in his work are the concept of "oral residue" through which he emphasizes the evolutionary nature of change, and the concept of "secondary orality," which he offers as a description of the state of orality and literacy in the present or near future. Both of these concepts serve an important role in Ong's work and offer important insights into the nature of change. However, both fall short in important ways. After looking at their shortcomings I identify another concept in Ong's work that is better suited to offer insight for our own present and near-future.

CHAPTER 2

SPEAKING OF CHANGES, OR “HOW THE DIVIDE IS NOT-SO-GREAT”

Humans change. Technology, including writing technology, participates reciprocally in that change, with humans changing technology and in turn being changed as a result of the technology of their own invention. When we acknowledge the change enacted in and through writing and print and digitization we can also acknowledge that the experience of the world in an oral culture is necessarily different from that of our present literate, and electronic, culture. What we must remember, though, is that we have come to this acknowledgement and we have become aware of this necessary difference only over the last hundred years or so; this means that our awareness of change also develops and changes. Change happens, but when it comes to explaining, describing, and understanding the nature of—and explanation for—change, agreement fractures.

Many of the misreadings of Ong arise from misunderstandings and disagreements about the nature of change. Once the idea of a “Great Divide” lost its cultural capital, and scholars came to understand the problems with such an understanding of the past, scholars were still left with the task of describing and explaining the change that all could acknowledge. Primary oral cultures are different from highly literate cultures, and the human participants in those cultures are different also. One of the “solutions” to the Great Divide has been to suggest that rather than describing difference in dichotomous terms, we would be better to think in terms of a “continuum.” Tannen, for example,

recommends "...a continuum of relative focus on interpersonal involvement vs. message content" (15). However, Brian Street critiques this kind of approach, suggesting that it is new language for the same underlying assumptions. He argues that "...the supposed shift from 'divide' to 'continuum' was more rhetorical than real: that, in fact, many of the writers in this field continued to represent literacy as sufficiently different from orality in its social and cognitive consequences, that their findings scarcely differ from the classic concept of the 'great divide' evident in Goody's earlier work" ("Introduction" 4).

In large part, however, Street's concern in regard to claims that literacy and orality are significantly different is connected to concerns about technological determinism. His "ideological model" is set up in opposition to the "autonomous model." According to Street the autonomous model accords agency to literacy by suggesting that change automatically happens because of literacy. Street acknowledges that differences exist, but he wants to be careful not to attribute them necessarily to literacy.

This brief discussion hints at a larger problem which lies at the heart of the orality and literacy debate. The idea of a continuum seems, at first glance, to be something that would be easy for everyone to acknowledge and accept. Street's concern, however, reminds us that consensus is difficult to come by. He argues that it is not orality and literacy that are so different; rather, cultural contexts are most important, and isolating either orality or literacy apart from the social situation is not really any different from positing that humanity took some great leap forward. The real problem underlying much of this discussion is our self-conscious relationship with the idea of progress.

The idea of progress presents itself in the tension that is always in play between “the good old days” and the “brave new world.” At the heart of those two concepts is an inherent dissatisfaction with the here and now. That dissatisfaction is the impetus for learning and growth and change. In this context “change” is coupled with “learning” and “growth” to imply that change is good. To be healthy, humans must grow; this is a biological assumption, but it also gets applied to cultural assumptions. But humans die. And cultures die out. Enlightenment notions of perfectibility that breed nationalism and industrialization give way to Realism and Naturalism. The religious promise of coming perfection becomes an emptier promise with each passing season. The way that scholars embraced and subsequently scorned the idea of a “great leap forward” is representative of the tensions at play in all moments in time. From Plato and Aristotle to Ong, we as humans assume we can and will do better than those who came before, but then at some point we are forced to come face-to-face with the realization that our new world is not as brave as we had hoped. And yet...

BRIDGING THE DIVIDE: HOW RESIDUE RECALLS THE SENSORIUM

One of the markers for change that Ong has discussed in detail is the concept of “oral residue,” which he uses to explore the development and change in the relationship between orality and literacy.

Before examining Ong’s discussion of *oral residue* in detail, we should pause to note that the discussion of oral residue is fraught with opportunities for misreading. One aspect that invites misreading is that Ong’s references to oral residue raise the issue of change over time, and when it comes to change, our culture inherently equates newer

with better. Thus, the most common reading of a situation where oral and literate characteristics interact would be to privilege the literate. Ong worked to operate outside this commonplace, but he is often read as complicit; sometimes even with conscious effort we cannot escape the lure of improvement and forward motion. This is what Street accuses Tannen of: changing the language, but retaining the bias. The second tendency toward misreading has to do with the word *residue*. Consider the connotations garnered from TV commercials; it does not take too much to bring to mind a TV commercial, whether it be for bathroom cleaner, deodorant, or furniture polish that promises to “leave no residue.” Generally connotations for residue suggest something to avoid or get rid of. These two factors conspire to impose a negative reading onto the idea of oral residue, even though Ong does not—at least not always. After further discussion of oral residue I will highlight Ong’s use of the sensorium and explore the ways that the two concepts interact in Ong’s work.

The tension between valuing and devaluing oral residue lends added complexity to development, change, and perception of change across time. The Oxford English Dictionary traces the various meanings that attach to “residue.” The more neutral definition is, “The remainder, the rest; that which is left.” However, other references suggest the negative connotation of the leftovers. “That which remains after a process of combustion, evaporation, digestion, etc.; a deposit or sediment; a waste or residual product,” or more directly, “The leavings of a destructive agent.” And while literate understandings of orality can infer the sense that orality is a destructive agent (cf. Farrell), Ong’s use follows the sociological definition, “A fundamental impulse which motivates human conduct, and which is not the product of rational deliberation.”

Another problem with the term “oral residue” is the further connotations of the adjectival “oral.” As Farrell’s use indicates, “oral” itself can bring up negative connotations—suggestive of something to be avoided. Ong emphasizes orality as a fundamental and ongoing part of human communication. The ongoing, fundamental, and valued factors cannot always be maintained in discussion of oral residue, however—the negative connotations are too strong and even when arguing for the value of the “fundamental impulse,” the lack of rational deliberation reinforces negative connotations. Much of this connotation developed after Ong’s use of oral residue in his work, and much developed as a result of his use of residue. The ideas Ong identifies in his use of “oral residue” are important, but the concept and the term do not offer a solid enough base to understand our own time. It would not be effective to transform this discussion into an exploration of “literate residue” in a digital culture. The overlappings and complexities are too pronounced for such a linear presentation of the next step in development which must overcome the one before. This is why I argue for an increased use and awareness of “sensorium” which allows us to value change over time without discounting that which has changed and has been changed. But first, a look at how Ong uses oral residue.

ORAL RESIDUE

The standard story of orality and literacy suggests that before writing was invented, human culture was oral culture. Then, once writing was invented human culture with writing became a literate culture. Once the idea of a "great leap forward" was complicated by demonstrating progression, development, and baby steps in the invention of writing, we realized that even after the invention and implementation of

alphabetic literacy along the Greek model complete with vowels, change was often slow in appearing. Closer examinations by psychologists, anthropologists and linguists demonstrate the inherent complexity of change and the danger of generalizing across cultures. As Ong points out, all of this thought took time to develop.

In the past few years a fairly adequate set of concepts and terms has been coming into currency to get us through this impasse. We shall use them, speaking of oral performance when we mean verbalization which has no direct connection with writing, and referring to early cultures before script as oral cultures or oral-aural (voice-and-ear) cultures. Of course, long after the invention of script and even of print, distinctively oral forms of thought and expression linger, competing with the forms introduced with script and print. Cultures in which this is the case can be referred to as radically oral, largely oral, residually oral, and so on through various degrees or admixtures of orality. Finally we can use verbalization or artistic verbalization or skilled verbalization to refer to oral performance and writing conjointly or generically. In none of these cases are special definitions of these terms particularly called for. The terms will be used to mean what in context they seem to mean. They are worth mentioning here, however, because they are not as common as they should be. (*Presence* 22)

Of these terms, "residually oral" and "oral residue" gained the most hold on our language.

In part this is because of Ong's extensive discussion of "Oral Residue in Tudor Prose Style." In a book chapter by that name, he defines oral residue as

...habits of thought and expression tracing back to preliterate situations or practice, or deriving from the dominance of the oral as a medium in a given

culture, or indicating a reluctance or inability to dissociate the written medium from the spoken. Such residue is not especially contrived and seldom conscious at all. Habits of thought and expression inseparable from the older, more familiar medium are simply assumed to belong equally to the new until this is sufficiently "interiorized" for its own techniques to emerge from the chrysalis and for those more distinctive of the older medium to atrophy. (*Rhetoric, Romance and Technology* 25-26)

In following up this definition Ong offers an example from the techniques of scribes and type designers. Scribes frequently used ligatures, which were letter combinations much like cursive writing that operated somewhat like shorthand. Early type designers created punches of these ligatures for the letter press, which meant that early type designers created many more punches than would be needed for strictly alphabetic printing. Thus a technique that saved time for the scribes created much more work for type designers, work that is, to us, *obviously* a waste of time, since we understand that the most important thing about the letterpress is the ability to work in conjunction with an alphabet and produce many different words from a limited number of punches. In the case of techniques like this, allowing them to "atrophy" is appropriate. The ligature has no place in printing with the letterpress.

Generally, however, *residue* is used to explain ways of thinking and communicating that were necessary in an earlier noetic economy, and are present but not strictly necessary in later noetic economies. (It is worth noting that Ong discusses residue from a point in time somewhat distant from our own, distance that probably

translates into additional changes in the noetic economy, changes of which he was not aware, and of which we are currently just becoming aware.)

In *Presence of the Word* Ong discusses commonplaces as an example of oral residue (79ff). A commonplace in rhetoric traces its origins back to preliterate times, and is a technique of memory and for oration first, and writing later. The idea of “place” connects with mnemonic devices along the lines of memory theatre. One technique for memorizing an oration was to imagine oneself in a building, often a large public building with many memorable parts. The trick was to build up memorable architectural features in a way that an orator could imagine himself entering the building and in the entryway he imagined, for example, a large gargoyle dancing. As the orator moved forward in imagination, he might move down a hall with many doors leading off. At each doorway there would be some architectural feature, a lampstand, and altar, etc. Then within each room there would be additional items in such a way that the orator could move from item to item in his mind. In memorizing an oration, an orator would connect ideas with each item. The gargoyle might dance if the orator were speaking of a celebration. Or the gargoyle might be crying. I will not extend my list of “mights”, but the idea was that each place could serve as a mental signpost. And so, there was a sense of “places” in the mind where ideas were accessible. The literate mind is familiar with the idea of a container, and so we interpret each room or alcove to hold a particular idea; in an oral mind that container was much more fluid and the place was the beginning of an idea, and the place was a touch-point that spurred the memory. The “common” part of common places referred to the kind of orations that everyone had to know, almost what we might think of as a formula. For example, there were commonalities in the praise for a leader

and in the vituperation of an enemy. It was not just entire speeches that might be so places, but also portions that might be accessed and added to various orations at various times. That concept developed over time. “In one sense of the term, a commonplace or *locus communis* was what we would think of as a “heading,” but, instead of being so conceptualized it was thought of as some kind of “place” (*locus* in Latin; *topos* in Greek, whence our word “topic”) in which were stored arguments to prove one or another point” (80). Ong goes on to discuss ways that Cicero and Quintilian define them, but he notes that, “Whether this place was taken to be in the mind or elsewhere remained always quite vague and unsettled” (80).

Ong traces the commonplaces from oral cultures where they were “...used in true oral fashion not merely as formulas, but as themes which were strung together in traditional, and even highly rationalized patterns to provide the oral equivalent of plot” (84). Ong connects the commonplaces then with the oral tendency to operate within the economy of formulas. He observes this continuing trend in some formulaic writing from rhetoric/education books to Shakespeare through the seventeenth century. “Oral culture had generated the commonplaces as part of its formulary apparatus for accumulating and retrieving knowledge. Script gave further play to the formulary drive, making it possible to assemble and classify the commonplaces by fixing them in one way or another on the surface of the written page” (85). With printing we really begin to see that the residue of oral culture does not fit with the new noetic. “The result of the opportunity offered by print was the thousands upon thousands of editions of commonplace books in various guises which flooded the marketplace for some two hundred years after the invention of alphabetic typography...” (86). For two hundred years there was little awareness that this

collecting and listing was increasingly superfluous. First, as Ong notes, printing made it easy enough to compile such collections, each collection had thousands of entries, and there were thousands of collections with thousands of editions. Second, in addition to such overload which makes them inaccessible due to sheer volume, "...the printed commonplace collections are neglected because they are likely to appear completely irrelevant to anything we esteem or use. They are the flotsam and jetsam of the old oral culture to which the Western world bid adieu in the age of romanticism..." (87).

What, then, are we to do with this understanding? The first thing we do is what Ong was recommending in that such awareness helps us understand rhetoric and dialectic and literature of an earlier time better. In the case of Homer, we discovered that *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* were composed the way they were for a reason, but that they could not be read just like Shakespeare and Mark Twain. In a similar vein, Shakespeare exhibits tendencies of his time towards certain formulary elements of which he is in many ways unaware. So we read backwards with greater understanding. But we must also read forward. While there is perhaps no harm in two hundred years of academic activity that offers little value for the future, we would prefer not to repeat such a pattern if possible; if I am teaching my students to do things and to think in ways that will be of little value in their future, then I would rather know now than later. We have a better chance of shaping the future than scholars of the seventeenth century did, though there is, of course, no guarantee.

In "Oral Residue in Tudor Prose Style" Ong extends that discussion and focuses on the "oral set of mind" (27). He connects the oral set of mind with the rhetorical set of mind. He argues that Tudor prose is particularly important for this discussion because it

is a time of transition. The Tudor noetic was similar to what came before it, still embracing the oral/rhetorical mindset; yet printing was prevalent, so there is a juxtaposition of oral mindset with technology of mass production. Thus, when Ong looks at commonplaces and at *copia*, he is identifying spectacular remnants of the rhetorical past as they burn themselves out in a fabulous explosion of language that mushrooms up into a volume that cannot be examined, into a flood of ink that destroys its own purpose. In some ways this is similar to the development of the epic which, through increasing self-consciousness could only be written as mock-epic before fading away because the epic was essentially an oral genre that could not hold together outside an oral noetic (see *Interfaces of the Word* 189-212). The impetus for *copia*, the urge to have copious amounts of words available is fulfilled in the very existence of print, and so particular phrases and formulas no longer need to be stored; ironically they *are* stored and thus breaking pieces from one book to collect the pieces in another is as inefficient as a print shop using a ligature.

Print becomes the fulfillment of hundreds of years of human ambition, yet in an ironic twist humans did not fully recognize it at first and when we began to, we realized we got a little more than we bargained for. All of the words, phrases, and ideas that can be recorded in books are so copious that they cannot be held in memory. So in discovering and developing, finally, a formula for recording and storing everything we could possibly want to, we find that we still lack immediate access to all of those headings and formulas because we moved our storage to the exterior, only bringing in from remote storage what we can work with at a given time. That is where we see

transformation in action: technology as fulfillment of human desire and action which requires additional change to respond to what we conceived and created.

This realization is easy to arrive at in hindsight, but as scholars such as Erasmus dutifully collected and printed such *copia*, it never occurred to them that their scholarship could possibly be so superfluous. Publishing formulas and phrases in books made them available to everyone who could read a book. But owning the book is different from the essence of *copia* that was the impetus for collecting material and publishing the books in the first place; owning the book is not the same as taking ownership of the content of the book. Ong draws our attention to this point in time because this explosion of *copia* and commonplace approaches the absurd just before giving way to Romanticism. Ong explains that prior to Romanticism, the oral mindset insisted on preservation; it takes time for print to become sufficiently interiorized before there can be a major shift towards originality. Another way to look at it is that the absurdity of repeating other people's lines became clear when the availability of other people's lines was nearly universal for literate people. Thus we came to value originality instead.

While the blend of availability and absurdity is at the heart of the transformation that led to the drive for originality beginning with Romanticism, the drive for originality is not in itself new. Rather, the Art of Rhetoric has always practiced, argued for, and searched for originality at some level. *Copia* used to ensure originality because a skilled rhetorician was able to choose from and juxtapose a wide range of material. NBC ran a campaign to market reruns in the 1990s suggesting that "If you haven't seen it, it's new to you." This has always been the goal of the rhetorician, although the rhetorician's mantra might have been "If you haven't heard it put quite this way before, I have succeeded."

Across time the definition of what was new, as well as the expectations of the audience have merely shifted and been redefined. Yet we still often try to live by the adage of expressing what was oft known, but not so well said before. The noetic economy is always a blend of what is known and what is new. In the introduction to *Understanding Media* Marshall McLuhan recalls the angst of a publisher who complained to him that most books contain at most ten percent that is new, while McLuhan's work was seventy-five percent new. A discussion of the current capacity for newness would be worth exploring further.

The drive for newness that came to its fruition in Romanticism is connected to the misreadings apparent in Great Divide discussions. An unconscious bias towards the new arose from this quest for originality, driving our culture towards an assumption that newer meant better. This set the stage for an arena where the idea of a great leap forward made perfect sense. As we have seen, Goody and Ong worked through a period where awareness of more subtle differences and similarities between cultures and across time came to be variously debated and valued. Although Ong worked hard to complicate and overcome this Western cultural drive to define everything in terms of progress, some of his own descriptions seem to allow, if not invite, such a teleological aura of improvement. For example, when history is explained in stages, it is hard for a literate American not to read a sense of progress into it.

The past century has seen the word enter into a new stage beyond orality and script and print, a stage characterized by the use of electronics for verbal communication. There has been a sequence within this stage, too: telegraph (electronic processing of the alphabetized word), telephone (electronic processing

of the oral word), radio first for telegraphy, then for voice; an extension first of the telegraph, then the telephone), sound pictures (electronic sound added to electrically projected vision), television (electronic vision added to electronic sound), and computers (word silenced once more, and thought processes pretty completely reorganized by extreme quantification). (*Presence* 87-88)

We could continue this description of stages, since the computer no longer silences words, but rather offers new verbalizations and new auditory events. We could point to other ways that humans have improved computer technology and thus improved the ways we are able to communicate. The stages invite us to see the next stage and to talk in terms of improvement, but we risk entering the trap set up by language and bias, the tendency to lend credence to smaller leaps, still relentlessly forward.

Ong's use of oral residue was actually part of his effort across all his work to combat that tendency and to offer new ways of thinking about change while emphasizing the things we can and must learn by being aware of difference. Even as he observed the atrophy of certain uses of language, he continued to value the residue in the ways that he pointed it out to us. Yet *residue* continues to imply something lingering but unwanted, unneeded, or out of place, especially when viewed in isolation.

So "residue" illuminates certain aspects of change, but it does not offer a tool or a method to negotiate our present and near-future. Such negotiation is the goal of this exploration. Ong's work offers an exploration of human change. He used residue to describe the past. To explain the present and near-future he coined the term "secondary orality."

SECONDARY ORALITY: IS THIS IT?

Secondary orality is Ong's explanation for where we are now. He places cultural development on a continuum that moves from orality to literacy to secondary orality. "Here we are in the world of secondary orality, as it may be called, superficially identical with that of primary orality but in depth utterly contrary, planned and selfconscious where primary orality is unplanned and unselfconscious..." (*Interfaces* 298). Secondary orality is an orality based on and rising out of literacy. Secondary orality needs literacy to operate, for so much of what seems spontaneously oral (but is really, planned and/or staged) is dependent upon literacy in the planning and prompting. This is not to mention the fact that the technologies that allow for mass communication depend on literacy in their invention and development. A sense of increasingly oral cultural shifts brought on by radio and television can lead to the suggestion that we are returning to an oral culture. However, aside from the fact that we can never go back, we are much too literate to return, and although it is possible to imagine something after literacy, we are still too ensconced in literacy to consider that completely possible in the near future. Secondary orality is Ong's prediction of what comes after literacy, but he still emphasizes how we are literates even in the time of secondary orality.

That wonder of what is coming next, and the desire to name that something, guided earlier exploration that I have done. Near the beginning of my research I thought perhaps I could name what came next. My sense that secondary orality would not be adequate arose from an awareness of a seemingly competing concept: the visual turn. How could we be part of a visual turn and part of secondary orality? Further dissatisfaction arose from the way that "aural" was elided from the concept. The concept

of secondary orality is important, but not inclusive enough to encompass all that we are experiencing now and in the near future, and not expansive enough to overshadow literacy.

Ong never fully theorized secondary orality, leaving that to others, but that never fully happened. Secondary orality has faded from the discussion in English Studies to a large degree. There exists a sort of tacit agreement that the development of the Internet overshadowed, if indeed it did not fulfill it. Up until the very early 1990s there was some sense that secondary orality could offer "...a powerful field for investigation" (Silverstone 159). However, as Michael Joyce points out, the development of the Internet within ten years after the publication of *Orality and Literacy* did much to temper the idealism (336). "It may be too much to say that Ong is incorporated into a larger organism but not, I think, to suggest that his ideas seep across the viral bounds, intermixing other flows that permeate the emergence of a hybridized, and as yet not fully identified, entity or more properly constantly evolving multiplicity" (339). The idea of secondary orality hybridizes orality and literacy in an attempt to describe, if not predict, the forward and future course of human communication. While secondary orality is indeed a rich concept that has the potential to offer a dynamic exploration of culture, it comes up short both in describing and in predicting.

In large part this shortfall is an object lesson for much of what Ong explains about orality and literacy: it is hard to understand orality or literacy while immersed in it. In much the same way that we could not understand that orality was not merely a derivative of literacy until something different invited us to examine what might exist as not-literacy, so it was difficult for Ong, from his point in time, to understand the ways that the

future would develop into something that was neither literacy nor orality; a hybrid with the limiting metaphors of both must necessarily be insufficient for a time. What we have also seen from Ong's work is that once difference is identified, for a time it is absolutized and differences are defined as great divisions. In trying to define and explain the not-literacy into which we seemed to be entering, or immersed, Ong suggested that we refer to secondary orality. In the end, secondary orality did not represent as great a division as some might have envisioned, nor—as demonstrated below—does it fully describe the difference that does exist.

The idea of secondary orality has, however, been a useful placeholder until we could discover the nuances of the new communication noetic and how we should respond to it. We are aware of the insufficiency of secondary orality; however, the concept of another stage emerging beyond literacy is useful, even necessary, for a time. In many ways that insufficiency is tied to the insufficiency of the ideas of orality and literacy, especially at the level of continuum where we look for the next stage. The insufficiency is evident, but the need to describe things in progression requires it. Thus, the idea of secondary orality exists without becoming fully theorized because it dissipates in the face of the future. We are in a position to embrace secondary orality even as we consider possibilities for not-secondary-orality.

We must accept and embrace secondary orality because orality does not make sense without secondary orality; as Ong explained, it was not until our use of electronic communication invited us to consider not-literacy that we were able to conceptualize the not-literacy of the past and imagine a post-literacy of the future. I have already called into question the orality vs. literacy dichotomy and explored critiques of the continuum

idea. The weaknesses of secondary orality already noted—the lack of inclusivity in terms of “visual” and “aural”—further call into question the long-term viability of secondary orality and invite a description of the present and near future that is much more inclusive of the entire sensorium. I suggest that humanity is ready to seriously consider the underlying unities inherent in all forms and aspects of human communication, involving all our senses while also including the technological tools humans develop to meet our communication goals.

Below, I discuss secondary orality further, discussing the ways the idea is necessary, the dynamic social potential inferred from Ong’s understanding of secondary orality, the ways it necessarily fades, and what options we have for describing and predicting communication developments without it.

SECONDARY ORALITY: COMPLICATIONS

The orality/literacy debate contributed to limiting the conversation about, and muting the possibilities of, the sensorium. This limitation becomes even more important as the conversation shifts to secondary orality. Writing in the very early 1980s, Ong was just glimpsing the possibilities of computers. In his earlier work, discussions of electronic communication and culture referenced primarily television—as one of the newest technologies—but also radio—which was not completely overtaken by television—and film—which invites distinction between the big screen and the little screen; he further includes telephone and telegraph as important electronic discourse. In the way Ong initially conceptualized, and the ways others extended the idea of, secondary orality two complications emerge. Those complications were not obvious at

the time, but were revealed by the passage of time and development of electronic communication. What for Ong was a dynamic realization of the word as sound in a newly developing noetic field has not always developed its potential along those lines. Michael Joyce is right to suggest that “Ong himself was *in media res* of an epic development he both could and could not have seen. Did and did not, in fact” (327).

The first complication involves implications of using the term *orality*. In much of his work, Ong took care to clarify by using *oral/aural*, thereby emphasizing the hearing as well as the speaking within the nature of communication. However, in coining the term *orality* the aural that is a necessary part of *oral/aural* faded from view while being implicitly incorporated into the new term. We must consider the long-term significance of allowing *aural* to fade. In practice, *oral* and *orality* come to carry the meaning of both speaking and hearing. But can they fully do so? If an oral culture is one where speaking is dominant, it seems obvious that what is spoken must be heard. However, language has the power to obscure ideas. *Oral* refers to speaking; *aural* refers to hearing. Ong’s emphasis upon the importance of sound in understanding the word in his discussions of orality keeps sound and, by implication at least, *aural* in the forefront; his persistence keeps it in our consciousness as we explore the meaning of orality and aurality.

Reference to an *oral culture* is intended to refer to a culture where speaking and listening are central. Over time, however, the more bulky *oral/aural* reference has been abbreviated and reduced to *oral* and followers of Ong are less apt to emphasize the aural implications of orality.

The difficulty of assuming that *orality* can carry the meaning of *aural* as well can be seen in the parallel case of contemporary uses of *literacy*. Our culture has set a

priority on children learning the “three R’s,” reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmetic. We focus publicly on the importance of *literacy*, a term that is supposed to carry two of the three “r’s,” reading and writing. Yet in many cases, literacy education emphasizes learning to write letters as a way to learn to read, and once the basic mastery of letters is achieved, literacy carries the meaning *reading* much more than it does *writing*. A literate public is often defined by one that can read the news and necessary instructions. Public literacy initiatives often shortchange the importance of writing as necessary for full participation in a democratic society.

In the dichotomous arrangement of literacy vs. orality, as discussed in our print culture, the dichotomy is presented as spoken vs. written word, but what is meant by “written word” is generally assumed to be printed word, which refers strongly to the ability to decode what has been printed in books. What adds an extra layer of complication in juxtaposing *orality* and *literacy* is that *orality* does not carry the implication of the ability to decode spoken language. Rather, in supposedly carrying the meaning of both transmitting and decoding spoken language, transmission trumps decoding. The idea of orality emphasizes the role of the speaker, the orator; audience participation is acknowledged as a significant factor, but mostly in reference to the effect on the speaker.

In literacy studies it has been necessary to articulate and emphasize the reading-writing connection because certain literacy discussions tend to emphasize and/or make assumptions about one or the other. *Oral* has a harder time carrying both parts equally. That difficulty in comprehending *orality* is compounded in many ways by the existence of multiple terms for reception. *Hearing* and *listening* are both common terms for the

reception of oral communication but neither of them affixes to *orality* in the way that reading and writing affix to *literacy*. Thus, both *orality* and *literacy* are diminished terms, but *orality* more-so. When the term *orality* becomes *secondary orality* those deficiencies are compounded and contribute to the second complication.

The second complication rises from the convergence of electronic communication with the emphasis on orality as transmission. Electronic communications—radio especially, but also television and, in developments after much of Ong’s work, personal computers—accentuate sound, but they accentuate the transmission of sound. Consider the role of radio—and for the sake of this consideration it is also useful to consider CDs and Mp3 players as well—in our culture. The radio is always on in stores, in our cars, and in our homes. To enter a public space without the presence of sound amplified by electronic means is uncommon, and even startling if it happens. However, sound is so ubiquitous, that except in its absence, it rarely warrants our attention. The complication is that sound, and the *aural* activity of listening, is more prevalent in our experience, but is less prevalent in academic discussions.

As will be discussed in more detail below, secondary orality refers to the increasing orality fostered by electronic communication. Starting with the telegraph and moving forward to the personal computer, communication technologies fostered a movement to return communication to the arena of sound. Writing and print in their invention and deployment responded to the human need to communicate across distance. To do so, however, required reducing words to silent, dead, letters which could be reanimated, revocalized, after crossing the distance. Communications technologies mediated across distance in a way that made communication more immediate, and altered

the previous pattern which necessitated the committing of words to writing or print as the primary mediation of language across time and space. This broadcast technology altered our experience of time and space in two significant ways. An individual is able to instantaneously experience sound that originated thousands of miles away. The second significance of broadcast, and of the way that it is a next step forward from the telegraph, is that thousands of other people, who are potentially thousands of miles away from the source and from other receivers, participate in the same communication at the same time. Much of Ong's interest in secondary orality had to do with this transformation of our human relationship with time and space.

ONG ON SECONDARY ORALITY

In *Orality and Literacy* Ong focuses on the two elements of the title without spending much explicit time on secondary orality. In chapter 1 he refers to secondary orality only as a means to define primary orality. “[The orality of a culture] is ‘primary’ by contrast with the ‘secondary orality’ of present-day high-technology culture, in which a new orality is sustained by telephone, radio, television, and other electronic devices that depend for their existence and functioning on writing and print” (11). He explores the concept in more detail in chapter 12 of *Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology*, “The Literate Orality of Popular Culture Today” where he focuses his discussion on the use of formulary devices. He notes that, “Secondary orality is founded on—though it departs from—the individualized introversion of the age of writing, print, and rationalism which intervened between it and primary orality and which remains as part of us.” Further, he says, “The differences, as well as the likenesses, between secondary and primary orality

are intricate. Discussing the differences involves the difficulty which all discussion of the communications media involves: phenomena interact in distressingly criss-cross fashion. Causes and effects are hard to fathom” (285).

By choosing to focus on formulary devices, which allows him to highlight the role of the individualized introversion, the extreme self-consciousness that turns much formulary to irony, Ong leaves untheorized much of the rest of the intricacy involved in understanding connections between primary and secondary orality. I have noted complications above reflective of this intricacy. Ong does leave much about secondary orality for others to explore, and as I show with the work of two rhetoricians below, later attempts to explore and explain secondary orality are not completely successful. As I demonstrate, the reasons for the limited success arise in part from inherent limits in the concept of secondary orality, and part from developments that Ong could not see coming. However, to use Joyce’s concept, there is much that Ong did and did not see. Ong’s work on the role of open and closed systems responds to some of the complications of secondary orality, and what he saw in regard to the sensorium turns out to address the intricacies much more fully than secondary orality can.

DISCUSSION OF OPEN AND CLOSED SYSTEMS IN RESPONSE TO COMPLICATIONS NOTED ABOVE

I noted two complications above that arise from the use of the term secondary orality, complications that reflect the intricacy noted by Ong. The two complications are intimately connected to each other and are tied to the problem of talking about aspects of communication such as transmission and reception. *Secondary orality* is not sufficient as a description of a culture because it is an incomplete term, thus an inherently incomplete

descriptor. Orality only incompletely encodes the meaning of speaking and listening. That complication is accentuated with a shift to electronic discourse because electronic discourse allows for the transmission of recorded sound. The ability to transmit sound has resulted in a proliferation of the transmission of recorded sound. The ability to transmit over distance participates in the extension of the broadcast phenomenon. In a broadcast situation many people hear the same message. While this has always been the case when a rhetor addressed an audience, the scale of the broadcast necessarily increases the size of the audience as well as the number of messages an audience hears.

The proliferation of messages means that there is more sound out there. Think of the radio. A shift of the dial invites a different sound, a different message into our experience. With television the cliché becomes “a hundred channels and nothing on.” When a culture experiences the immersion of sound, of messages, the oral is important, surely, for there is much speaking going on. The aural, however, is perhaps more important because there are more opportunities for members of the culture to take in sound than there are for members to speak. In a technological environment, this tendency towards decreased opportunities increases for a time. The nature of technology tends towards the formation of an elite class because in the early manifestation of a technology, only a select few are able to operate the technology. In the world of communication technologies, an elitist system means that access to the means of producing broadcasts is limited. As I discuss below, this issue of access was a factor in many ways for print, and writing, and even primary orality as well. The biggest difference involves the role of aurality and the extent to which its elision as a significant concept within secondary orality results in a significant portion of a culture remaining untheorized and often all but

invisible. Ong addresses this important cultural factor of transmission and reception of communications in his discussion of open and closed systems. In that discussion he reveals additional criss-cross layers of development.

OPEN AND CLOSED SYSTEMS

One of the things that Ong did see was the importance of being aware of the interaction of open and closed systems in discussions of orality and literacy. This awareness of openness and closure can to some extent address the complications that arise. For Ong discussion of open and closed systems necessarily includes a discussion of humanity.

In the world of living, sentient organisms, communication exists at its peak among human beings. The reason is that communication requires closure, or unification and distinctiveness of a being, maximum interiority, organization from within, like of a system, and openness, or access to whatever is outside the closure. (*Interfaces*, 336)

Ong's discussion of open and closed systems echoes his discussion of interiority, where he notes the relationship between sound and (access to) the interior. One of the unique characteristics of humanity involves this access to an interior, a sharing of the self with another. Yet the interior, the enclosure, remains.

Seeing closure as part of humanity helps us understand the role of closure and openness in human communication. As humanity strives for and reacts against closure, communications can be plotted on a continuum of shifting toward and then away from closure. Ong argues that “[b]y comparison with oral speech, writing is itself a closed

system: a written text exists on its own, physically separate from any speaker or hearer, as no real spoken word can exist. Print creates a world even more spectacularly contained: every *a* in a font of type is exactly like every other; every copy of an edition matches every other” (*Interfaces* 305). That movement from oral to literate cultures as a move from open to closed systems is further demonstrated by metaphors referring to writing, print, and even the human mind as containers. However, we have come to question such metaphors. Our questioning enacts a counter-balance pulling us away from closure towards increased openness. This push-pull experience exemplifies the inherent complexity of human beings. “Humans,” Ong notes, “are both closed and opened to a maximum” (*Interfaces*, 336).

On the one hand, a tendency towards a closed system (and the influence of literacy on secondary orality) is revealed by the elitism of technology development. The radio, for example, with multiple channels of communication bombarding us whenever we open the floodgate of sound, has programs that are prepackaged. Listeners can call in to make requests, which suggests openness, but in the case of songs, listeners request something that has already been packaged and become part of the system. In radio broadcasts, listeners are for the most part just that. For this reason, the aural experience of radio dominates the oral. The television also enables viewers whose primary participation is limited to taking in the message. Through Nielsen ratings an audience might influence programming, but the major role of the majority of participants in television communication is to watch what others have programmed. Opportunities to program are limited. In a then-future that Ong did not foresee when first theorizing

secondary orality, the Internet enacts a drive for openness. YouTube opens the opportunities for programming, for example.

Ong, however, points out the ways that television is an open system, despite, or perhaps even because of the continuing participation of writing and print in electronic discourse. “Today, it appears, we live in a culture or in cultures very much drawn to openness and in particular to open-system models for conceptual representations. This openness can be connected with our new kind of orality, the secondary orality of our electronic age, which both resembles and contrasts with primary and preliterate orality. This new kind of orality, secondary orality, has its own openness, but is itself dependent upon writing and print” (*Interfaces* 305). For Ong, television is the prime example of secondary orality:

The most spectacular and intrusive of the recent technological transformations of the word, television, manifests perhaps most clearly, and certainly most massively and deeply, the breaking up of the closed systems associated with the verbal art forms generated by writing and print. Television blurs the fictional with the real on a scale previously inconceivable. It does so not through deliberate choices made by executives, directors, writers, technicians, performers, or viewers, but rather of its very nature. The “tube of plenty” has generated an other-than-real world which is not quite life but more than fiction.” (*Interfaces* 314)

TELEVISION: A SECONDARY THOUGHT

Television is the prime example of secondary orality for Ong and in many ways the fate of television mirrors the development of secondary orality. First, we should look

at the ways television is secondarily oral. In the early days of television there were more live shows which seemed more completely oral for the viewer, despite the heavy dependence on literacy for everything from planning and scripting to the underlying logic of the electronic components that produce the television itself. Television enacts literacy and print as a basis for what it can communicate. The sit-com or drama is scripted, and the re-take is well-known, even though when we watch a television show we experience seamless dialogue and consistent action and interaction, so there is an illusion of natural interaction between participants. The live talk show has claims to a (seemingly) additional aspect of orality, but it too is dependent on writing and print. The basic organization and the main topic have often been planned, if not exactly scripted. On another layer, the technology of the television itself, the tubes and wires and the cameras, all are products of literacy and of a literate culture, products that could not exist without literacy and print. This projection through electricity dependent on literacy for existence identifies television as secondarily oral. Keep in mind, however, that *oral* here should also encode the prevalence of *aural*. In his discussion of television, Ong maintains his emphasis on sound.

Both visually and aurally (sound is of the essence of television), the instrument takes a real presence from the place where it is real and present and represents it in other localities where it is neither real nor truly present. This representation is not a report. The football game you view on television is going on, its outcome unrealized as yet, and thus unknown. Reports are essentially *ex post facto*. Not all television presentations are simultaneous with reality, but, in a way, all

television presentations seem to be; the fact that the instrument is capable of such presentations defines its impact. (*Interfaces* 315-16)

So if we read television as the prime example of secondary orality it is possible to see the development of secondary orality in the development of television. Ong's perspective on television, however, draws much of its essence from his stance near, and experience of, the early days of television. He uses examples such as a live football game, which is something we still experience, but the filming and announcing has developed to such a degree that the analysis of the implications of broadcasting a football game cannot be the same today. Ong also uses examples such as the shooting in Texas, which happened on live television, to discuss the tension of presence and experience. He also discusses the phenomenon of the mini-series *Roots* and the way that was a collective experience. In all these examples "...the audience could sense its own vast unity" (317).

Roots is a good example of the vast unity, a unity that has dissipated with development of more electronic discourse. First cable television and then the Internet fostered a fragmentation of the unity. With *Seinfeld*, *Friends*, and *Lost*, television continued to foster unity, but the unity was less vast. Each of these became specialties with groups that watched regularly. With the Internet communication and unity continue, but the specialty and sub-specialties unite in a different way. We do not have the same sense of unity that was enacted with the airing of *Roots*. Similarly, it has become difficult to truly unite behind a concept of secondary orality, when the concept keeps dissipating into ever-changing multiplicities.

SECONDARY ORALITY DISSIPATES WITH THE DEVELOPMENT OF ELECTRONIC DISCOURSE

Others have tried to pick up the thread of secondary orality which Ong left untheorized, but it was a thread that became harder to grasp as time went on. In the end, the best gift secondary orality offered was a vision of orality and literacy. If we had not encountered secondary orality we would not have seen literacy or orality as clearly (however clear that actually is) as we do now. Literacy was enriched by an awareness of not-literacy—both what came before and what might come after.

Two discussions of secondary orality, by Kathleen Welch and Michael Joyce, provide particularly informative demonstrations of the ways that secondary literacy dissipates. Michael Joyce suggests that the result is multiplicities, but “multiplicities” is too slippery for conceptual understanding of what is happening to discourse, so we need to go beyond that. However, Joyce’s multiplicities offer a useful transition from trying to shape our understanding using the lens of secondary orality to more fully understanding our experience with the increased awareness of our participation in the sensorium.

KATHLEEN WELCH

Before getting to Joyce’s multiplicities, I will examine Kathleen Welch’s *Journal of Advanced Composition* article, “Electrifying Classical Rhetoric: Ancient Media, Modern Technology, and Contemporary Composition.” In that article Welch invokes secondary orality as a tool for rehistoricizing Classical Rhetoric, specifically Gorgias, Isocrates, and Plato. She argues that the “world of language fluctuations” in which they wrote and spoke is comparable to fluctuation in our own world. Further, she sees in both periods a “denial of technology consciousness.” Welch argues that rhetoric as a field that must

embrace technology consciousness. With technology consciousness rhetoric can embrace using and valuing the newest technology. She argues that Isocrates and Plato "...realized that they needed to be writers and that encoding with the new technology presented a force that could not be ignored or relegated to the status of an addition or a decoration."

In our own time of language fluctuation the issue of encoding remains; we cannot ignore it either. As suggested above, however, the problem of gaining access to the newest technology to an extent that allows for encoding as well as decoding is not quickly or easily overcome. Welch highlights this and argues for teaching students to encode with the latest technology. For Welch, video is the latest technology. She lays out the ways that video is undervalued in the academic community, connects that devaluation with the devaluation of student texts, and argues for revaluing of both.

All of this is important in the discussion of secondary orality, especially when contextualized, within increased awareness of the way that Welch (mis)uses secondary orality. That (mis)use demonstrates the limits of secondary orality and opens up space for discussion of the sensorium. For, to use Joyce's claim again, there is much that Welch can and cannot see, does and does not see. She sees secondary orality, but by equating secondary orality with electronic discourse and using video as her primary electronic discourse she ends up calling secondary orality "visual."

The pressures and possibilities of fourth-century B.C. literacy...for modern electronic discourse systems remain radically different in many ways. People's perceptions have changed radically. Nonetheless, a peculiar characteristic remains in common: the dominance of oral discourse has become more important

since film and video have become dominant symbol systems than at any time since the ancient period.

So far she follows the traditional approach for discussions of orality and secondary orality by noting the dominance of oral discourse. As she continues in that same paragraph, however, she seems to forget about oral discourse altogether.

Modern revolutions in ways of thinking have taken place, and they resemble in substantial ways the revolutions in thinking of the fourth century B.C. These revolutions occur with great pain and difficulty and have made a lot of people angry, including Plato to a limited extent in the ancient era, and literacy hounds such as Allan Bloom to a great extent in the present era. The belief persists now that visual texts are inherently inferior to written texts, a belief that has gone through many permutations since the invention of the camera and that has resulted in discussions about the nature of “realism.” The unexamined belief in the inferiority of visual texts continues to permeate the academy in the United States.

How does she move from dominance of oral for modern discourse systems to immediately referring only to “visual texts”? The answer has to do, of course, with her emphasis on video. Her goal in the article is to argue for the valuing of video as an equally important part of student encoding and decoding as—or perhaps more important than—traditional print texts. In her conceptualization secondary orality equates with electronic discourse and video is the ultimate example of electronic discourse. Thus, logically (even though her logic may be faulty) secondary orality equals video. That might be alright if Welch were discussing the orality of video, but for Welch video’s central claim, and the reason it is not taken seriously in the university, is its visual aspect.

Welch is right in what she says about the status of video and also about the need for students to be able to encode and decode the latest discourse technology. However, secondary orality is not a robust enough concept to carry her argument. She has to bully “the visual” into the discussion at the expense of the very orality of secondary orality. She is in need of a broader technology consciousness herself, a consciousness that invites her to see the visual alongside the oral and the aural. If she were to rehistoricize classical writers using the sensorium instead of secondary orality, her discussion would account for visual without ignoring the oral.

MICHAEL JOYCE

Michael Joyce identifies himself parenthetically as a “pre post-hypertextualist” (326) and it is from this position that he looks back on secondary orality in “No One Tells You This: Secondary Orality and Hypertextuality.” He begins by introducing his topic as a kind of virus and offers an essay that purports to consume itself. And while he does not see or say this, Joyce’s article offers a look at the sensorium and at the ways that secondary orality is the seed that germinates into the sensorium.

My daughter’s first grade textbook has an image of a bisected seed. Captions point to three parts of the seed: the shell that protects it, the tiny plant, and the rest of the seed. Most of the seed is consumed by itself so that it can become a new plant. This image is fitting for the text Joyce purports to share with his audience and for secondary orality, which is the seed that is consumed so that the new plant, the sensorium which has been ensconced within Ong work can have life.

Referring to hypertext, Joyce questions whether some “sunny” predictions, and he includes some of his own, about the possibilities of new textuality, “have adequately foreseen the nature of the transformation of the textual world” (326). Acknowledging Ong’s understanding of transformations, Joyce asserts that “...Ong’s notion of secondary orality has lingered along the bounds of digital discourse like a virus, without, I think, ever completely taking hold” (326). Joyce suggests that such lingering indicates something important. He sets out to “...interrogate and indeed affirm the continued usefulness of Ong’s thinking...” (326). What he finds is “...that what overtook Ong’s research agenda was his vision and the uses it was put to” (328).

In looking at some of the use it was put to, Joyce interrogates Jay David Bolter, and George Landow along with Ong, concluding that “[n]eedless to say, none of the three could quite anticipate the complex syntactical intermixtures and flows of moving and still, silent and voiced, fractal and morphed, evanescent and recurrent image and text whose symbolic structures confront us in electronic media” (329). Here, without using the term, Joyce invokes essences of the sensorium. We can see more such references throughout the article. Referring a few pages later to Bolter again, along with Lance Strate, he says,

To be sure, both wish to situate Ongian orality vis-à-vis electronic literacy, but the one offers a contextual plain upon which the disappearing voice can be heard, while the other presents an ebb and flow of minds and mind. Kveim’s claim (we’ll hear it—actually read it—later here made by writers prior to her cited text here) that the unfixing of the commodified and containerized word in digitalized virtual space in fact marks the distance between the two men’s lists. (332)

“Disappearing voice.” “Ebb and flow of minds.” “Hear it—actually read it.” “Unfixing of the word.” “Digitalized virtual space.” All these are symptoms revealing the virus infecting Joyce’s article; our consciousness has become so aware of the multiple means of representation that we can no longer support the illusion that the word can be contained. This is why the language of systems is inadequate, and even a system purporting to be open, like secondary orality, cannot really open enough to contain our burgeoning consciousness.

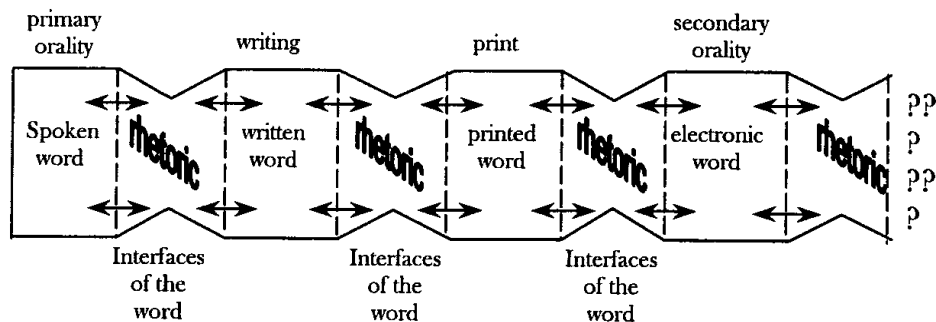
Walter Ong’s earlier work contains the seed for new growth that enacts our burgeoning consciousness, rather than trying to contain it. Embedded in that work is something that he did and did not see, something that was not ready to be fully seen, something that came forth as a seedling whose potential was not fully known. We need a deeper understanding of all that work, an understanding incomplete if *Orality and Literacy* is experienced in isolation. The next chapter lays that groundwork, that understanding that is needed to fully embrace how the sensorium does what secondary orality could not. The next chapter reveals the ways that the sensorium was present in Ong’s work all along, waiting for us to become more fully aware.

CHAPTER 3

BEFORE ORALITY AND LITERACY: EARLIER EXPLORATIONS IN ONG'S THOUGHT

ONG'S EARLIER WORK

For Walter Ong, each publication builds on what came before. In order to understand *Orality and Literacy* we need to understand the major concepts he develops in earlier work. One way to explore that work and identify concepts is to follow the path laid out by Betty Rogers Youngkin. In her response to an interview of Walter Ong by Michael Klein and Frederic Gale, Youngkin points to recurring patterns that she has seen in her own study of Ong's work. She identified two words that "continually appeared and reappeared," *presence* and *transformation* ("Presence and Transformation" 3). I follow Youngkin's method of focusing on concepts that appear and reappear in Ong's work. Youngkin offers a fuller exploration of Ong's work in *The Contributions of Walter J. Ong to the Study of Rhetoric: History and Metaphor*. In that work Youngkin includes a diagram she devised to represent Ong's work (58).



She identifies *presence* and *transformation* in discussing Ong's work, but her diagram reveals another term that appears and reappears in her diagram as well as in Ong's work: *the word*." Three of the four books by Ong discussed in detail in this dissertation carry "the word" in their titles: *The Presence of the Word*, *Interfaces of the Word*, and *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. In Youngkin's diagram, which "encapsulates the paradigm [Ong] uncovered in his study" ("Presence and Transformation" 3), we further see the progression from orality to literacy presented in terms of "spoken word," written word," printed word," and "electronic word." We can also see the way that she presents "rhetoric" in tangent with "Interfaces of the word," operating between, facilitating the transformation of each iteration of the word.

While I run the risk of apparent reductionism if I try to represent all of Ong's work through a set of keywords, I do think that Youngkin is right in doing so. I add to her list, and the selection of keywords below are thus intended to open up Ong's work and also to provide touchstones as I move back and forth between *Orality and Literacy* and Ong's earlier work. I begin by looking closer at Ong's understanding of "the word."

"THE WORD"

The concept of *word* appears seven times in Youngkin's diagram, with three repetitions of "*the word*." We are so accustomed to using this word that we rarely isolate it for individual focus, but understanding it is central to understanding Ong's work.

For Descartes, thought equates with existence. For Ong, thought can only exist in the presence of language; everything begins with the word. Some readers stumble over the fact that Ong also believes that: "In the beginning was the Word" (capitalized in the

person of Jesus Christ), and that "the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning. Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made" (John 3:1-3 NIV). However, even if we keep "the word" uncapitalized, unpersonified, and undeified, there is still logic in Ong's assertion that everything human begins with "the word." When we look at Youngkin's diagram above we see that in Ong's work "the word" crosses all boundaries.

THE WORD IS SOUND(ED)

For Ong the first property of "the word" is sound. In his chapter on "Some Psychodynamics of Orality," one of the most quoted sections from *Orality and Literacy*, he has a section titled "Further Characteristics of Orally Based Thought and Expression" in which he offers nine general characteristics towards which thought and expression in primary oral culture tend. This list is often referred to as a checklist for what Ong says about oral cultures. Ong, however, presents the list as preliminary ideas suggestive of a general trend, ideas which are neither inclusive nor definitive. Critics also often overlook the fact that these are "further" characteristics. The initial characteristics of orality that Ong first refers to (with less conditionality than he does with "the list") are, "Sounded Word as Power and Action," and "You Know What You Can Recall."

In the section on sounded word he discusses sound's relation to time—how it only exists as it is going out of existence and how it cannot be stopped, frozen or isolated; cessation of sound is silence. That reality is foreign to literate folk; people in literate cultures do think of word as something that can exist in space. The reality of this literate assumption is right here "in black and white." Reality is accorded to words on the page.

In contrast to such literal understanding of words, Ong refers to the Hebrew understanding of word as event. Such participatory understanding of words underscores the ways that oral people understand language as "...a mode of action and not simply as a countersign of thought" (32). Ong connects this with the tendency in primary oral culture to imbue words with magical potency. Such examples invite us to become more aware of the ways that sound, and the word as sound, holds primacy in oral cultures. The reference to earlier work that Ong offers here is not, however, one that emphasizes orality but one that analyzes the connection between text and death. In Chapter 9 of *Interfaces* (230-71) Ong traces the literary connection and references to text as a form of death and to text's role as a monument. He does not stop at death, however, but extends the metaphor to the possibility for rebirth. Dead words are brought to life when they are sounded—either with human vocal cords or in the human mind—in reading. Therein lies the potency of words—sounded as they inherently must be to achieve their potential.

Literate folk find such a relationship between word and power difficult to understand. "To learn what a primary oral culture is," Ong says at the beginning of that section of *Orality and Literacy*, "and what the nature of our problem is regarding such a culture, it helps first to reflect on the nature of sound itself as sound" (31). Ong follows that opening sentence with parenthetical reference to *Presence of the Word*. What is offered in *Orality and Literacy* is the briefest of reflections covering a page and a half. The section he points to in *Presence* is twenty-six pages, but he might as well have suggested the entire chapter, "Word as Sound." Spending time in that chapter begins to offer the type of reflection Ong invites his reader to engage in.

Ong breaks the chapter into four sections. First he reflects on “Auditory Synthesis: Word as Event.” He introduces the way that oral cultures experience a word as “...a real happening, indeed a happening par excellence” (*Presence* 111). This matches what he offers in *Orality and Literacy*, but he suggests, “Some are tempted to regard the primitive attitude toward the word as superstition....” In our present context, readers of *Orality and Literacy* are tempted to regard Ong’s reference to primitive attitudes as a move to dichotomize. But, Ong continues, “...there is an abiding truth about it which we can see if we reflect further on the implications of sound in terms of man’s life-world and in terms of actuality in general” (*Presence* 111). Ong calls for further reflection on the “abiding truth” that the word is an event. He reflects further on this idea under the heading, “Sound is more real or existential than other sense objects, despite the fact that it is also more evanescent.” He presents this as a paradox. Writing *seems* more real—to the literate person, at least.

Only with writing, and particularly with the phonetic alphabet, do words readily appear to be disengaged from nonverbal actuality to the extent to which technological man today commonly takes them to be. This is to say, only when words are made out to be something different from what they really are do they readily take on radically distinctive characteristics. We are faced with a paradox here. Reduced by writing to objects in space, words can be compared with other objects and seen to be quite different. But reduced by writing to objects in space, they are one remove from actuality, less real (although more permanent) than when they are spoken. In this sense the spoken word, evanescent though it is, is nevertheless in the deepest sense more real and more really a word than the word

sensed, through writing (and even more through print), as something different from ‘things’.” (*Presence* 114-15)

Ong’s abiding appreciation for complexity is revealed in this passage. While there is certainly room to misread the above passage, there is little room to suggest that Ong favors a simple dichotomy. He does observe difference between the spoken word and written word and between those accustomed to oral communication and those accustomed to communication using alphabetic literacy, but those differences—and Ong’s observations about them—are anything but simple.

The second psychodynamic of orality that Ong introduces is, “You know what you can recall: mnemonics and formulas.” In this section he discusses the difficulty of engaging in sustained complex mental operations. That difficulty is hard for literates to imagine since our point of reference for complex operations of logic is text-bound, and our sense of text is one of unconscious assumption. If Ong had left it there, critics might be justified in suggesting that he views the mental operations of oral individuals and cultures to be deficient—at least in comparison to literates. However, Ong goes on to clarify: “Sustained thought in an oral culture is tied to communication” (34). Words and ideas only exist, in the model of an echo, when they bounce back to us from another. It is this echo that allows for the fecundity of words, which even though going out of existence are also setting up the possibility of reverberation. When words and ideas exist in an oral culture that reverberation must be maintained, which is at the heart of many of the psychodynamics of orality that Ong draws our attention to. In repetition, the reverberation is maintained. In formulas, reverberations are maintained—because in a group there must be some agreement and some training the process of keeping the

reverberation going. Reverberations act as the recording device of the words and ideas of a culture. One, or five, or ten people in a culture may be able to work through and recall complex operations, but that is not enough to maintain a record of a culture. “Heavy patterning and communal fixed formulas in oral cultures serve some of the purposes of writing in chirographic cultures, but in doing so they of course determine the kind of thinking that can be done, the way that experience in intellectually organized” (36). In this, Ong does allow for a certain level of determination: certain thoughts and certain ways of thinking are possible at one cultural moment and not at another.

ON FURTHER CHARACTERISTICS OF ORALLY BASED THOUGHT AND EXPRESSION

I pause here to follow the thread of what Ong presents as further characteristics of orally based thought and expression. Many of the characteristics are related to and participate in the paradox mentioned above. However, in abbreviation and summary they often lose the tension of paradox and seem to carry the mantle of dichotomy. I briefly discuss some of them below in order to read complexity back into them.

The first step to re-establishing complexity is to notice how Ong introduces this list of characteristics: “In a primary oral culture, thought and expression *tend* to be of the following sorts” (37, emphasis added). When we emphasize that everything in the list is a *tendency* rather than an absolute we can begin to overcome the dichotomy hinted at in the headings, where Ong does set the tendencies of primary oral cultures against the tendency of chirographic (writing-based) cultures. For example, he suggests that oral thought and expression tends to be “additive rather than subordinative.” Many of Ong’s readers emphasize the contrast implied in “rather than.” However, it is important to listen

to what Ong does not say as he makes this comparison. At no time does he say that primary oral cultures are not or could not be subordinative. For they certainly can be and are at times. However, the tendency, the preference built in to an oral experience and oral noetic economy, is to communicate, to share experience, in an additive style. In treating additive and subordinative tendencies Ong refers to earlier and later translations of the Biblical genesis story including a discussion of differences between speaker's needs (mnemonic) and readers' needs (complex grammar to provide meaning in the absence of existential context). The additive does not feel normal to the literate reader—although we do see ways that our students are comfortable with it; they are content to begin many sentences with “and” or “so.” Thus either is available for use, but certain cultures tend to make greater use of one or the other. For additional reference Ong recommends Foley's collection of oral narratives for examples of additive tendencies (*Orality and Literacy* 37-38).

The next tendency Ong discusses is that of orally based thought and expression to be aggregative *rather than* analytic. I add the emphasis here to again read in the emphasis often read into the discussion by Ong's critics. That emphasis often draws focus on the analytic aspect; in combination with a focus on our own literacy, the misreading here implies that Ong claims that literate culture is analytic and oral culture is not. However, when we focus differently on the “rather than” we can read these two processes not as opposites, but as different ways of accomplishing the same end. If in choosing how to travel to the other side of town I choose to take the bypass *rather than* going through town, that does not mean the two choices are polar opposites. Both choices get me to my destination, and indeed, depending on the time of day and the day

of the week one or the other may be “better,” whether I define that by time required or by the convenience of picking up my dry cleaning. Aggregative *and* analytic approaches are available to *both* oral and literate cultures (and individuals). Ong merely argues that in a situation where the noetic economy relies on mnemonics, on corporate and individual memory, aggregative tends to be more efficient. “Without a writing system, breaking up thought—that is, analysis—is a high-risk procedure” (39).

In his invitation to his readers to reflect on the complexity involved in aggregative and analytical noetics, Ong refers his reader back to something he examined in *Interfaces of the Word*. There, Ong takes time to look at Milton’s epic in the context of a logic textbook Milton wrote and in the context of other epics; he refers to Spenser, Virgil, Homer, and the development of mock epics. He demonstrates through changes in literature the ways that language, consciousness, and the noetic economy change over time. In his example he traces a thread of development from epithet to logic. Milton occupies a middle ground in that he uses epithet, but does so more consciously, or self-consciously than Spenser does; “in his use of epithets, Milton controls the tradition, whereas in Spenser’s case the tradition is more in control” (203). In *Orality and Literacy*, the discussion of aggregative and analytic management of knowledge is presented as a summary of concepts Ong has explored in more detail earlier. Readers who wish to apply Ong’s work on this matter need to understand the fuller discussion grounded in literary examples. Those literary examples demonstrate the evolutionary development over time. That consideration also helps us as we begin to look forward through the present into the near future. In our current economy of thought we enact more analysis and less aggregation; both remain, but the balance has shifted. Seeing that

as part of a shifting human consciousness reminds us to be open also to future complexity, and to the possibility that analytic might not be the end of the matter after all. It offers a different way of managing of knowledge; it is probably not the pinnacle of knowledge management.

The next characteristic Ong discusses is the tendency of orally based thought and expression to value redundancy or copiousness. “Since redundancy characterizes oral thought and speech, it is in a profound sense more natural to thought and speech than is sparse linearity. Sparsely linear or analytic thought and speech is an artificial creation, structured by the technology of writing” (40). It hardly bears noting that literate persons consider “redundant” to be a negative term. Thus it would be easy to infer a reading in which Ong is devaluing oral thought and expression here. However, that is complicated by his reference to *copia*. Rhetoricians are familiar with *copia*, particularly in connection with Erasmus. Readers familiar with Ong’s earlier work will hearken back to “Oral Residue in Tudor Prose Style” (*Rhetoric, Romance, and Technology* 23-47) where Ong discusses this in more detail. *Copia* is the practice of copiousness. In an oral culture *copia* is essential to the orator who must, by definition almost, always have something to say. *Copia* was that storehouse of things to say and the systemized category of ways to say them. Originally it was a storehouse of memory. It remained an essential part of rhetoric through the time of Erasmus, whose book by that name was a standard of rhetoric in the early 16th century. Thomas O. Sloane emphasizes the pedagogical nature of *De Copia* and of Erasmus’ emphasis on *copia*, and points out how Erasmus tied *copia* to *inventio*.

Erasmus aimed at a certain copiousness first of words and then of thought....

Erasmus had clearly articulated the principle that in education "Words come first, but subject matter is more important." That is, fluency in Latin words, *verba*, comes first before one can hope to master the subject matter, *res*, which depends on thinking like such master rhetoricians as Cicero and Quintilian. To put the matter in technical terms, Erasmian access to *copia* is through "style," one of the five "offices" of classical rhetoric, a journey that culminates in another office, rhetorical thought, or "invention."

Thus, *copia* has much more rhetorical capital than redundancy, even though it, too came to seem redundant, especially since, as Sloane points out, Erasmus' emphasis on invention was often overlooked—in large part due to the copiousness of style, of sheer words, in *De Copia*.

Ong goes on to say, "Eliminating redundancy on a significant scale demands a time-obviating technology, writing, which imposes some kind of strain on the psyche in preventing expression from falling into its more natural patterns" (*Orality and Literacy* 40). Ong's readers need to understand what Ong means by "time-obviating technology." In his discussion of the word, Ong considers the way that the spoken word has a different relationship to time than the written or printed word, not only in evanescence, but in the complex effects of placing the word in space, seeming to hold it in place and to freeze it in time. "...[A]n oral-aural culture is necessarily a culture with a relationship to time different from ours (*Presence* 23). The issue of time is discussed further in *Presence of the Word* as well and again Ong connects time and space. At the same time, he contrasts time and space and observes a disconnect. Sound "...rides in time" (43), but when we

use the alphabet we shift the word, whose essence is sound, into space locking it there. Once we visually lock the word, still carrying the sound essence as potential, into visual space with alphabetic representation of phonemes, we alter our experiential relationship, not just to words, but also to time. In development through writing into print this lock on time becomes more and more a part of our subconscious experience. Ong refers to the calendar and the way that through this metaphor of pages hung on the wall with neatly ordered and numbered boxes, we experience yesterday as “next to” today, and tomorrow comes next, after that. Hopi Indians, however, “...do not think of today as a part or section of time...but rather think of time in terms of its perpetual “getting later” (44). The way a culture represents time shapes meaning in a culture.

Sound’s mirror image—silence—also exists in time and draws our attention to the passage of time. A dramatic pause can be used to good effect by an orator, but if an orator loses control of the silence and allows it to extend beyond the comfort or tolerance of the audience, then the audience will be lost. We need only think of a time that the radio station went suddenly silent, and dead space filled the airwaves, and we wait, almost perched on the edge of interminability for the sound to resume. Such a silence was also the nemesis of the orator; the most obvious signal of ineptitude was an orator without words to orate. Writing, and for us reading, however, is quite comfortable with silence. The blank page may infer a visual silence, but the wait to fill it is less interminable than the wait for sound to fill unexpected, unplanned, silence.

The next characteristic that Ong discusses is the tendency of oral cultures to be conservative or traditionalist. In this section he refers readers to Goody and Havelock rather than his own earlier work. He responds to potential critiques by acknowledging

ways that writing is also conservative. He notes the shift in knowledge management with reference to memory, where most knowledge was communal and the most valued members of society were those who recalled the tales, the tales of community and tradition. When writing and then print assumed this retentive function, "...the text frees the mind of conservative tasks, that is of memory work, and thus enables the mind to turn itself to new speculation" (*Orality and Literacy* 41). Yet, this characteristic, too is a tendency, a preference rising out of cultural necessity, but not absolute. Ong emphasizes that "...oral cultures do not lack originality of their own kind" (41).

This tension between characteristics that oral cultures tend to embody and the characteristics more prevalent in literate cultures continues in Ong's discussion of further characteristics. His includes a discussion of the ways that oral thought and expression tend to be close to the human lifeworld, agonistically toned, participatory, homeostatic, and situational. These discussions follow similar paths in which the primary experience of reality for oral cultures is in the moment. Ong refers readers to his own earlier work, but also relies heavily on Havelock in these sections. The section from *Preface to Plato* cited above represents the general sense of these sections. Havelock shows Plato, in his *Apology*, asking the poets what their poems mean. The poets cannot answer because in their understanding the poems *are*, and nothing gets beyond that. In the sections of further characteristics Ong presents the other tendency, of writing, as the tendency to separate the knower from the known. However, he qualifies this throughout, suggesting that oral culture has its own objectivity and levels of abstraction.

These characteristics and tendencies reemphasize the ways that a careful reading of Ong reveals a pattern of comparison between oral and literate cultures that takes those

differences seriously without being reductionistic. The discussion also reveals the importance of Ong's emphasis on "the word." The word, sounded in oral cultures, contributes to a tendency of communication to shape the use of knowledge in a culture.

A WORD ABOUT SIGNS

The word is sounded, but we must also explore what the word is not. For Ong, "words are not signs" (*Orality and Literacy* 75). With so much emphasis on the word and on sound, and thus on the spoken word, it might seem that Ong subscribes to logocentrism, the belief that the spoken word is prior, and therefore writing is merely a representation of speech. It should be clear by now that with all of the complexity with which Ong interprets language, such an interpretation would not suffice. In fact, much of what he is arguing in *Orality and Literacy* is that orality is very different from literacy, and that it is difficult for literate humans to come to terms with this because of our literate bias. As is fitting based on how we have seen the pattern emerge elsewhere, Ong's understanding of the complexity of language on this point is grounded in his abiding appreciation for the complexity of humanity.

Thought is nested in speech, not in texts, all of which have their meanings through reference of the visible symbol to the world of sound. What the reader is seeing on this page are not real words but coded symbols whereby a properly informed human being can evoke in his or her consciousness real words, in actual or imagined sound. It is impossible for script to be more than marks on a surface unless it is used by a conscious human being as a cue to sounded words, real or imagined, directly or indirectly. (75)

Thus what is “real” in terms of language and communication can only become real in the actions of humans, humans making sound. The words that are evoked in sound by the human who reads represent a transformation; the sounded words are not exactly the words that were written down.

Ong continues this thought when he talks about names by using the example of business signs. Ong suggests that before we became accustomed to labeling things with words, pharmacists and shopkeepers used iconographic signs, such as signs of the zodiac or the barber’s pole. “These tags or labels do not at all name what they refer to: the words “ivy bush” are not the word ‘tavern’, the word ‘pole’ is not the word ‘barber’. Names were still words that moved through time: these quiescent, unspoken, symbols were something else again. They were ‘signs’, as words are not” (76). In extending that idea of names as words that moved through time, he explains, “Our complacency in thinking of words as signs is due to the tendency, perhaps incipient in oral cultures but clearly marked in chirographic cultures and far more marked in typographic cultures and electronic cultures to reduce all sensation and indeed all human experience to visual analogues” (76). Here Ong calls for increased awareness of how we interpret our experiences through our various senses. Understanding the word as sounded is a step towards the fuller understanding of our senses, which I develop further below. “For understanding resides also in the silence out of which man’s word emerges and into which it disappears” (*Interfaces* 143). Visual analogues are not sufficient.

In this discussion of signs, Ong sets himself apart from Derrida. Ong acknowledges that any discussion of writing must unavoidably take into account Derrida’s work. Ong agrees with Derrida that the connection between spoken and written

word is “more than incidental....” Ong goes on to say, however that “...to try to construct a logic of writing without investigation in depth of the orality out of which writing emerged and in which writing is permanently and ineluctably grounded is to limit one’s understanding, although it does produce at the same time effects that are brilliantly intriguing but also at times psychedelic, that is, due to sensory distortions” (*Orality and Literacy* 77). In this way Ong claims his own work to be distinct from Derrida’s and at the same time invites Derrida to learn to deepen his understanding of the orality that precedes writing.

For his part, Derrida operates from the logical position in which he, too, argues that writing cannot be a sign of speech. However, Derrida’s argument is grounded in the logic that writing cannot be a sign because it is not possible for something to be “a sign of a sign” (*Of Grammatology* 43). It is upon that logic that he declares logocentrism to be dangerous. “It is this logocentrism which, limiting the internal system of language in general by bad abstraction, prevents Saussure and the majority of his successors from determining fully and explicitly that which is called ‘the integral and concrete object of linguistics’” (43). What Derrida suggests in the midst of this is something that sounds similar to Ong. “The system of writing in general is not exterior to the system of language in general, unless it is granted that the division between exterior and interior passes through the interior of the exterior or the exterior of the interior, to the point where the immanence of language is essentially exposed to the intervention of forces that are apparently alien to its system” (43). Ong would probably have been more comfortable remaining in the paradox of the exterior and interior passing through each other. In fact

the image calls to mind Ong's discussion of kleinforms, which is a kind of three-dimensional Mobius strip. "In kleinforms closure is open" (*Interfaces* 320).

John D. Schaffer and David Gorman explore this intersection between Ong and Derrida in more detail, arguing that while these two thinkers "...represent a conflict of traditions..." (856) they perhaps have as much in common as they have in difference, which is somewhat the argument that Ong himself makes. Schaffer and Gorman isolate variable treatments of "presence" as indicative of the similarities and differences between Ong and Derrida. "They seem to be using the term equivocally, but each meaning of presence grows from the same root. Tracing the emergence of their attitudes on 'presence', we find not only a common origin but also common concerns. On the subject of presence they suggest that Derrida argues against the possibility of presence because a sign can never contain the signified. For Ong, however, presence indicates the presence of another, and that presence can be invoked in breathing sound back into the written and printed word (858).

THE INTERIORITY OF SOUND

I have more to say about presence below, but something first must be said about "interior." The concept of "interior" is paramount in Ong's understanding of humans and human communication. His argument that we must consciously recapture the awareness of the difference between oral and literate noetic economies is based on the idea that humans have *interiorized* writing to so great an extent as to be unaware of writing as a technology, which is to say that we have taken it into ourselves to such a degree that it no longer presents as foreign; it is almost as natural as breathing and

speaking. The concept of interiority and the interiorizing of technology is a complex one. It seems easy to suggest that we become, over time, accustomed to the presence of certain technologies. Interiorization is that, but it is also more than that. Ong only touches on it in *Orality and Literacy*.

In treating some psychodynamics of orality, we have thus far attended chiefly to one characteristic of sound itself, its evanescence, its relationship to time. Sound exists only when it is going out of existence. Other characteristics of sound also determine or influence oral psychodynamics. The principal one of these other characteristics is the unique relationship of sound to interiority when sound is compared to the rest of the senses. This relationship is important because of the interiority of human consciousness and of human communication itself. It can be discussed only summarily here. I have treated the matter in greater fullness and depth in *The Presence of the Word*, to which the reader is referred. (*Orality and Literacy* 71)

In *The Presence of the Word*, Ong reflects at length on interiors and interiority in connection with literacy, technology, and humanity. I begin this reflection on “interior” by exploring a summary paragraph from *The Presence of the Word*. At the end of a section on “The Word and the Interiorizing of History,” Ong concludes:

Our present concern with the history of the word and of the media of communication, verbal and other, is patently part of man’s larger present concern with history as an interior as well as an exterior reality. The word itself is both interior and exterior: it is, as we have seen, a partial exteriorization of an interior seeking another interior. The primary physical medium of the word—sound—is

itself an exteriorization of a physical interior, setting up reverberations in other physical interiors. (179)

In this passage history is presented as both interior and exterior, as are the word, and humans. Interior and exterior are not stable categories. In an earlier section Ong discusses interior and exterior as “situated” in the same way that left and right are situated; they are “existential” terms. “Ultimately the meaning of in and out or interior and exterior depends on pointing to a historical or existential fact, a fact which appears ultimately to be that of self and other, our experience of ourselves as existing somehow inside our bodies with an exterior world outside” (119). The “interior seeking another interior” refers to humans, particularly human communication. The “physical interior” is also a reference to human. To be human is to be an interior seeking another interior, and language, which is the lifeblood of thought, remains connected to sound because sound is necessary to apprehend an interior. It is in the interior, in human interiority that sound becomes meaningful. Meaning only happens when humans are present to each other, and presence is paradoxically the most natural and the most alien experience of humanity. The history of humanity is the history of individuals in community. Much of Ong’s work can be summarized as an exploration of the ways we humans become present to each other.

One way that Ong traces the relationship between interior and sound is through observation of evolutionary development. At the lowest levels of evolutionary development sound is absent. Protozoans have no voice; from that evolutionary beginning, increases in size and complexity of organism correspond with increases in the ability to make sound and to use sound to communicate. Ong moves the discussion all

the way to the porpoise which seems to have the highest level of intelligence next to humans. However, Ong differentiates between porpoise and human. “The hyperdevelopment of the porpoises’s ‘voice’ and hearing is largely for dealing with objects; man’s corresponding development is interpersonal” (*Presence* 122). The emphasis here on the difference between dealing with objects and dealing with persons points to the significance Ong senses in the possibilities of the sounded word between humans. Humans also deal with objects in our exploration of our world, but objects lack interiority, which means that our interaction with objects are such that we do take something of the object into our interior, but the object is unaffected.

Not only is the interaction of sound and meaning interpersonal, but it is intrapersonal. The quote above refers to “...the unique relationship of sound to interiority when sound is compared to the rest of the senses.” We experience our world and ourselves through our senses. Ong catalogues the rest of the senses, discussing each in turn and comparing the nature of the information and experience humans apprehend through the various senses. His conclusion in terms of sound and interiority is that “Sound reveals interiors because its nature is determined by interior relationships.” In leading up to this conclusion Ong makes note of the unique nature of interiority in that we can knock on a hollow wall and the reverberations identify it as hollow. The only other way to determine the interior is to open it, but in opening it we destroy the interiority; we are able to see the inside, but the inside then becomes not interior, but a visual space available for inspection. This is one of Ong’s models for human experience. We are interiors. We can experience other people through touch and taste and smell and sight, but sound allows for a different kind of experience, a different kind of knowing. It

is this link between sound and interior and knowing that leads Ong to reflect at length on the nature of sound and on the intimate connection between sound and the word. Even ourselves we only experience fully in the enactment of sound, of the sounded word. Because not only are humans interiors, but we are interiors seeking other interiors. Another way to put that is to say that we are present to one another.

PRESENCE

For Ong, one of the most significant characteristics of sound and of the word is the fact that it communicates presence. “For Ong ‘presence’ denotes the quintessentially human, that is, the presence of a human subject behind and in every human communication” (Schaeffer and Gorman 858).

In “Voice as a Summons for Belief,” Ong looks at the question of belief in literature. In that discussion he contrasts “belief that’ with “belief in,” and argues that “belief in” is the more appropriate aspect of literature because “belief in” acknowledges presence, and according to Ong’s understanding of work made by humans, especially work in words, the thought that goes into them is an exteriorization. He compares works that we call art by suggesting that, “The canvas and oils and ground clays and salts with which a painter works are not of themselves means of expression, although they can be made so. But the words with which a speaker or writer works are themselves means of expression, and, no matter what we do with them, this they must remain” (260). In this exploration, Ong considers presence in connection with intentionality. A human-made object such as a spear tip shows thought, but at a different level than a poem, and Ong questions the extent to which a poem can be an object. “This focus of the question of

belief in literature is legitimate. However, we must remember that it considers belief as concerned with a kind of object or “thing,” excised from any personal context.” (Note the echoes here of Derrida’s critique.) “The notion of response to a presence, manifested by voice, drops out entirely, although such a response seems intimately a part of literature” (58). Ong uses the metaphor of the dramatic mask to demonstrate this intimacy, and argues that the poem is like a mask put on by the poet. The reader of the poem (and all literature) reads with a belief in the presence of the poet behind the mask. The reader reads with underlying assumptions of communication, which is possible only when interiors are present to each other, and is not possible when only an object is present.

Presence manifested by voice is what Ong explores more fully in *Presence of the Word*. Because of what he understands about the soundedness of the word, even the word in literature, he cannot read without intuiting the presence behind the word. In *Orality and Literacy*, however, Ong does not discuss presence explicitly. In the section on “Sounded Word as Power and Action” he uses the example of a hunter and a buffalo—if the hunter can hear the buffalo then “...he had better watch out: something is going on” (32). However, he sums up by saying, “In this sense, all sound, and especially oral utterance, which comes from inside living organisms, is ‘dynamic’” (32).

A hunter who hears a buffalo experiences the presence of the buffalo; referring to sound as “dynamic” has very different connotations than “presence” does. I share Youngkin’s claim that *presence* continually appears and reappears in Ong’s work (“Presence and Transformation” 1), yet it is something that readers who have only read *Orality and Literacy* might miss. To understand the value of reflection on presence I will

look at a passage in *Orality and Literacy* that alludes to presence. In the final chapter, where Ong presents “Some Theorems” he takes textualists and deconstructionists to task, or as Ong puts it, “The growing knowledge of the psychodynamics of orality and literacy...cuts across the work of the group we may here call textualists...” (165). Also, he suggests that “[t]he work of the deconstructionists...derives its appeal in part from historically unreflective, uncritical literacy” (169). Ong uses the developments in orality-literacy studies to question both positions. Of the textualists he says, “On this assumption of one-to-one correspondence, the naïve reader presumes the prior presence of an extramental referent which the word presumably captures and passes on through a kind of pipeline to the psyche” (166). According to Ong, “...Derrida excoriates this metaphysics of presence” (166). In rejecting the pipeline model, Derrida concludes that since literature “...does not refer to anything in the manner of a pipeline, it refers to, or means, nothing.” Ong’s response is that “...it hardly follows that because A is not B, it is nothing’ (167).

The overlap with Derrida’s work is significant, although Ong attempts to downplay both similarities and difference, preferring to keep his own work on its own footing rather than problematizing it with comparisons. Ong notes this explicitly in a number of places, particularly in the beginning of *Interfaces of the Word*. In the introduction he cites his awareness of the ways that his work with orality contrasts with Derrida’s.

But this book has its own history, traceable through my earlier works and the references embedded in them; it has also, I hope, its own intelligibility. From the time of my studies of Peter Ramus and Ramism, my work has grown into its own

kind of phenomenological history of culture and consciousness, so I have often been assured by others, elaborated in terms of noetic operations as these interrelate with primary oral verbalization and later with chirographic and typographic and electronic technologies that reorganize verbalization and thought. (10-11)

A few pages later he brings Derrida together with both *presence* and *interior*. He refers to “alienation” as a “favorite diagnosis” and notes obliquely that “...some attention, more analytic than historical or clinical, has been given to certain tensions attendant on writing.” He then footnotes Derrida, noting that “...Derrida’s key distinction between *différence* and *différance* is not phonemic but chirographic” (17). Ong then interprets Derrida’s discussion by placing it in the context of a particular knowledge economy—a particular moment when some ways of thinking are possible that had not been possible earlier. “The proliferation of such terms in the work of Derrida, Roland Barthes, and other structuralists appears to register the sensibility fostered by an electronic noetic economy, a sensibility conditioned to work with massive accumulation of detailed information and rapid exchange of ideas—even though its chief focus of attention is chirographic (and typographic)” (17). We see here Ong observing the world and demonstrating the ways that shifts in the noetic economy open room for certain ways of thinking. Those shifts—transformations—are parallel to the other historical effects Ong observes. He explains that the inventions of writings, print, and electronic verbalizations “...are connected with and have helped bring about a certain kind of alienation within the human lifeworld. This is not at all to say that these inventions have been simply destructive, but rather that they have restructured consciousness, affecting men’s and

women's presence to the world and to themselves and creating new interior distances within the psyche" (17).

For Ong, then, "presence" describes the situation of one human being present to another, one interior exteriorizing itself to another interior. As noted, this is significantly different from Derrida's "presence" which is a question of the presence of the signified, the presence of an object. In *Sourcebook on Rhetoric*, Jasinski mentions neither Ong nor Derrida and limits discussion instead to argumentation as presented in the work of Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca. Here presence becomes the level to which a speaker or writer is to make a concept or idea or argument present to the audience (455-58). This use is closer to Derrida's than to Ong's. Both Derrida and Jasinski focus on the possibility and extent to which an object or idea can be made present though language. This emphasis on the object is the essential distinction. For Ong presence is never about objects; presence in fact disrupts the objectification of literature because humans are always interiors in search of other interiors. Even in the modern tendency for withdrawal, the withdrawing poet draws another along and invites presence in isolation ("Voice as Summons" 274-75).

For Ong, then, humans are not merely "present." Rather they are "present *to*." Men and women are present *to* the world and present *to* themselves; both of these are important but interactions with the things in the world are less fully indicative of presence than being present to another human. Ong insists on the interaction even within human interior. We are not simply present, nor do we have presence; rather we are present *to* and we have presence *to*. We often think of presence as self-sustaining and self-

contained. We sense a presence, usually of something greater or unknown, or we are present. For Ong *presence* is active and interactive.

This sense of presence distinguishes Ong's experience in the world from Derrida's. Derrida's reference is to the presence of a particular referent, as if writing were a transcription of thought. Derrida helps us see the ways that writing has a structure of its own and is not in one-to-one correspondence with either interior thought or with spoken words. However, Derrida is left as a result with nothing. The pipeline model implies a presence that is untenable. Ong's understanding of literature as the manifestation of a presence fills the void left by Derrida's nothing. There is no pipeline, but there is something, or more accurately someone; there is an interior creating the potential for reverberations in another interior.

CHAPTER 4

THE (NOT SO) GREAT DIVIDE: RECALLING THE SENSORIUM

Permeating Ong's work, two more concepts participate more subtly, but they provide the two things this study needs: an answer to Ong's critics—what they are asking for has been there all along—and a way to not only bridge the supposed divide, but a way to do so and then move forward. Those concepts are “sensorium” and “noetic economy.”

The sensorium is understated in Ong's work, but gets to the heart of what he is talking about. It is understated because he assumes his audience knows what he was talking about. By 1982, however, that assumption is perhaps not well founded. The wider audience reached by *Orality and Literacy* does not share the same in-group associations as his earlier work. Also, with continuing shifts in the noetic economy, including increasing digital communication, visual references to knowledge begin to shift our attention away from a balanced awareness of the sensorium. In many cases audiences see in Ong's work only a call to recall sound, which is read as opposition to visual; thus two parts of the sensorium represent conflict rather than balance. We can and must get beyond that dichotomous formulation by recalling *all* parts of the sensorium. We must do so because the language of the sensorium more accurately represents the

evolving noetic economy. “Noetic economy” is likewise a part of Ong’s work, and not fully explicated--especially in his later work.

Below I start by further explicating “noetic economy.” The sensorium must be grounded in it. Increasing awareness of both together can, in turn, increase awareness of changes happening now within the noetic economy and sensorium—our own and that of our students.

NOETIC ECONOMY

Throughout this dissertation I demonstrate that a deeper understanding of larger portions of Ong's body of work can help compositionists use Ong's work more effectively and help literacy theorists understand literacy better. Ong's primary goal in all of his work is to understand and describe literacy, and more importantly, to understand literate humans. Ong explores orality as a way to accomplish that goal. After Ong suggests in “Literacy and Orality in Our Times” that he will explore both the “...persistent problem of moving from oral expression to writing...” and the issue of teaching writing in a time of secondary orality, he insists that, “In both instances my remarks are intended to be provocative rather than inclusive. There is no way to treat this protean subject inclusively” (2). Within and around the discussions of orality and literacy that seem to divide us, there is another underlying discussion which Ong approaches less directly because he seems to take it almost for granted. Also, his critics are more inclined to identify this part of the discussion as a point of agreement. Now is the time to move this underlying area of assumption to the foreground, to bring it to awareness and discuss it

directly. The concept of noetics offers points of connection that will help to dispel the divide.

Ong uses “noetic” in connection with various other terms, referring variously to “noetic operations,” “oral noetics,” “noetic economy,” and “literate noetics,” to name a few. For our discussion here I will broadly work under the umbrella of “noetic economy,” while hinting briefly at distinctions in other ways of representing noetic.

As a way to demonstrate how increased awareness of and discussions in the context of noetics can help dissolve the conflict between orality and literacy I look closer at Beth Daniell’s “The Situation of Literacy and Cognition.” For conflict, we can see Daniell critiquing Ong in the context of Great Divide language:

Recent scholars who believe, along with Eric Havelock, Jack Goody and Ian Watt, and David R. Olson, that literacy causes profound changes in the thought processes of human beings often refer to Luria’s research as they argue for one or another of the cognitive consequences of literacy. Of this group no one seems to place more confidence in Luria’s account of the Uzbek experiments than Walter J. Ong. Like others who see that literacy brings about a mental great leap, Ong sees literacy primarily as a technology that fosters abstract thinking. (198)

Daniell’s critique of Ong based on the way he uses the work of Alexander Luria is an important contribution to orality/literacy studies. Luria’s research and Ong’s application of Luria’s research is problematic and Daniell demonstrates ways that Luria’s research might not speak as clearly to the power of literacy to change individual thought patterns as he claimed. As noted earlier, Ong’s focus is more on how literate cultures understand orality and less on what literacy *does* to an individual or person, but his reliance on a

potentially flawed study does deserve attention. However, critiquing Ong's use of Luria should not translate into a dismissal of all of Ong's claims. Ong uses Luria to show the ways that literate cultures and primary oral cultures operate from very different assumptions. Luria himself participates in that by conducting parts of his study in a very literate manner. Daniell's work demonstrates some of the layers of discussion at play in Great Divide thinking and questions certain deterministic tendencies in Luria's research. She also critiques him at the level of methodology which further calls his research into question.

Daniell's inaccurate linking of Ong to the "great leap," however, increases division, even while her scholarship in regard to Alexander Luria highlights ways that oral and literate discussions and assumptions *can* go awry. However, in the midst of all this dissent and disagreement, Daniell refers to noetics as a potential area of mutual understanding. Daniell dismisses that point of connection in favor of an emphasis on division, but I want instead to draw attention to the possibilities for connection.

Before analyzing Luria's work in detail, Daniell provides an opening for common ground:

In a 1978 essay titled "Literacy and Orality in Our Times," Ong says that writing is "an absolute necessity" for the analytical, sequential, abstract thought that he apparently takes to be the end point of cognitive development (2). Most of us agree when Ong asserts that writing is "absolutely essential" for "certain noetic operations which a high-technology culture takes for granted" (2). Some remain skeptical, however, when he claims that "[w]ithout writing, the mind cannot even generate concepts such as 'history' or 'analysis'" and that writing is "essential for

the realization of fuller human potential and for the evolution of consciousness itself” (2).

I wish join with Daniell on this common ground of “noetic operations” in order to argue that within a discussion of noetic economy there is the potential to reach across the divide, or perhaps the noetic economy has always participated among and with orality and literacy in a way that will allow us to become more conscious of the ways in which the divide was more imagined than real.

UNDERSTANDING “NOETIC”

What then, is meant by “noetics?” When I began, years ago, asking about the change that was evident in my students, I looked for ways to describe and discuss that change. At first it was difficult to precisely identify or describe that difference. I came to the eventual conclusion that our students are different in the ways they interact with knowledge. Explaining what I meant by “interact with knowledge” became a challenge however, because it raises questions of “knowledge” versus “information,” and it invites the question of where learning fits in with this interaction with knowledge, as well as inviting a definition for learning. But I meant all of that, really. All of those questions, and their various answers are summed up in the interaction with knowledge, and the questions being asked are symptoms of the change. What I really meant by changes in “interaction with knowledge” is that we and our students are experiencing a transformation of our/their noetic economy.

The noetic economy is the knowledge economy, which involves the amount of knowledge available and accessible for human use and the ways in which humans do in

fact use and interact with knowledge. It also includes the ways that knowledge affects humanity; the unconscious levels are equally important. As an example, Ong points out that “The generation coming to maturity today has always known the moon as something that men who have been there have reported on” (*Interfaces* 44). That kind of knowledge participates in our noetic economy in ways that we do not ordinarily think about. We know it, but we do not think about knowing it. But whether we think about it or not, it is part of our noetic economy.

The exterior effects of the evolution of consciousness play back into the interior evolution. They do so in countless ways and, in terms of our concerns here, particularly through the exterior technological devices that affect the word, the inventions which enable man to do new things with his noetic world, to shape, store, retrieve, and communicate knowledge in new ways and thus to think in new ways. (*Interfaces* 44)

Ong follows this up with a qualification that is essential for our understanding of Ong’s work, and for understanding the relationship he envisions between humans and the technological devices they use.

The terms just used, “shape, store, retrieve, and communicate” (this last in the sense of “circulate,” “distribute,” “move around”), are diagrammatic terms, applicable directly to mechanical operations. Used to refer to the human mind, such terms, it must be remembered, are reductionist: they provide a model—knowledge is a commodity, and noetic activities move it around—and in providing a model inevitably leave out part of the actuality they propose to deal with. For knowledge is much more than a commodity. Corresponding terms

closer to the real lifeworld or to experienced reality might be, respectively, “generate, remember, recall, share” (or “communicate” if this is taken in its deeper sense as expressive of sharing or psychological need). (45)

Ong demonstrates here his awareness of the tendency towards reductionism in discussing human thought and change. He also demonstrates his resistance to reductionism.

Noetic comes from the Greek “to think” and is used in Ong’s work to refer to the ways of thinking particular to a culture. Underlying this application is the understanding that different cultures have different noetic economies, and each culture is enabled and constrained by the habits of shaping, storing, retrieving, and communicating knowledge, but constraints are also imposed by communication technologies. Throughout this dissertation I negotiate Ong’s comparison of oral and literate cultures. He suggests some tendencies for psychodynamics of oral cultures. Many of those psychodynamics participate in the noetic economy. Along with noetic economy I trace Ong’s use of the sensorium. In the west we are familiar with the five senses. Changes in the noetic economy and sensorium run parallel, because as I explain in detail below, the five senses of the sensorium are rarely enacted or experienced with equivalency. Generally a culture will value some sense or senses above others—the obvious example here being that oral cultures valued hearing above other senses, although not exclusively; they are also often hunting and or gathering cultures, and the sense of smell was highly valued as well, though for a different type of knowledge and communication. Our noetic economy tends to accentuate the visual, though electronic communication has proliferated recorded sound as well, so our sensorium values hearing more or differently, perhaps, than a

culture dependent on writing or print. Shifts in the sensorium are traceable and mirror shifts in noetic economies.

HOW NOETICS CAN BE A FACTOR IN RECONCILIATION

In order to see the importance of increasing our awareness of the concept of and the use of the term “noetics,” I want to break down some of Beth Daniell’s claims quoted above. First, I would like to look at the idea that “Ong says that writing is “an absolute necessity” for the ‘analytical, sequential, abstract thought that he apparently takes to be the end point of cognitive development.” If “*the...thought*” that she is referring to is the way of thinking that our particular history has led us to at this point, then Ong would agree with her. Noetic economies shift and change. As a result certain thoughts, certain ways of thinking, are possible in certain situations and not in others. The analytic, sequential, abstract thought that we have come to value is dependent upon writing. (As noted elsewhere, this does not mean, and Ong does not claim, that analysis and abstraction of some kind are impossible without writing.) Also, when Daniell says “without writing” she means to imply that Ong sees writing as the *cause* of the analytic thought. However, if I shift meaning from what Daniell implies to what she says, then I can infer a situation that breaks the assumption of causation. If I cannot think a certain way without writing, and I live in a time without writing, it is possible that I *want* to think more abstractly, and am beginning to think sequentially, but I need help doing so. I need a tool to help me think the way I want to think—so I *invent* writing. I suggest that such an understanding—while not Daniell’s intent—might promote some level of recognition

since it invites dialogue on the “autonomous” element of the discussion. Perhaps dialogue can contribute to reconciliation.

In the context of that potential for reconciliation consider also the idea of the “end point of cognitive development.” We do not really know what the end point of cognitive development is—and Ong does not claim to know. If it seems that we have reached an end point, it is only because we are only able to describe what we have accomplished. In fact, the ability to describe ourselves as we are is a fairly recent development brought about by increasing self-consciousness. So if Ong seems to use descriptions of where we are as an implication that it is where we should be, then it is only because of how hard it is to escape from where we are, something that Ong himself points out and participates in at the same time.

In raising the question of the end point of cognitive development, Daniell provides us with a small object lesson in the transformation of consciousness. She raises the question of what Ong sees as the end point of cognitive development, and in doing so raises the question in general as to whether there is an end point to cognitive development, and if so, how will we know when we have reached it (although Daniell’s tone implies that no such end point is likely to be reached anytime soon). Ong presents transformation of consciousness as a movement of what was unconscious into consciousness. Cognitive development was once part only of our unconscious. Only relatively recently have humans become reflective enough to think about our thinking. As we become increasingly conscious of cognitive development we not only describe it, but we also try to shape it. And like Daniell we ask whether where we are is the end of the line or not, even as we ask if the point we have reached is a particularly good point to

be at. I would suggest that we are not at the end of the line at all. We become conscious of this when we observe, along with Peter Elbow, that our students are in the process of developing "...a wholly new relationship to words and knowledge—new habits of shaping, storing, retrieving, and communicating what [they] know" (284). Our students are participating in changes—transformations—in their noetic economies. Becoming more conscious of this transformation is the goal of humanity, and the goal of the work underlying this dissertation. Complete reconciliation is probably out of human grasp for the time being—good thing, too, because such is part of what it is to be human. Nonetheless, increased awareness of developments in the noetic economy will—I hope—allow for some increased level of connection, for this is also part of what it is to be human.

EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL OF THE SENSORIUM

"Orality" and "literacy" invite dichotomy. "Continuum" retains dichotomy and maintains the idea of progress. "Residue" invites images of leftovers and sometimes gets used as a catch-all for things that otherwise do not fit neatly into a description. For all of the ways that I have demonstrated that Ong views humanity in a much more complex way than some critics would impose on him, the language so often used to describe the situation continues to contribute to misreadings. While we can never completely escape this problem, there is in Ong's work a concept that can much more successfully embrace the complexity that we can see throughout the entire body of his work. Going forward it is not enough to just recall the depth of earlier work; we must also find a way to decipher a new path. If we do not, we will miss opportunities to respond to change. Fortunately,

one more concept within this broad tapestry offers a way forward that avoids many of the misreadings proliferated by other terms: “the sensorium.”

In his chapter on the “Transformations of the Word” Ong presents the history of the world (and of the word) as consisting of three stages, which should be very familiar by this time: oral or oral-aural, script (writing and print), and electronic (which in later presentations takes the form of “secondary orality”). Ong sets up the discussion of these stages by first discussing awareness. In doing so he implies that while the stages of history are important, the awareness of those stages is more important. We have already lived past stages and are entering into new ones, but it is less the living and more the awareness of living that makes all the difference. And it makes a difference for Ong because that awareness is a product of later stages. “Awareness of the succession of media stages and wonder about the meaning of this succession are themselves products of the succession. We have come into this awareness only as we have entered the electronic stage” (*Presence* 17). He goes on to emphasize that we needed to reach the electronic stage in order to even be aware of the stages at all. Thus Havelock’s claims about the orality of Homer were outside the noetic economy of earlier generations before the electronic stage; those realizations were in the noetic sense “unthinkable” just as evolution and the theory of relativity were once unthinkable. Thus increasing awareness is part of the history of the world.

The increased awareness makes us more aware also of smaller and current stages. Ong demonstrates this by identifying stages within the electronic stage. After doing so, Ong raises a question: “How can the status of the word in such a world be described?” (*Presence* 88). While his question is mostly rhetorical, he offers a suggestion that is

perhaps more of an answer than he was aware of at the time: "The changes in today's sensorium as a whole have been too complex for our present powers of description, but regarding the fortunes of the word as such one fact is especially noteworthy: the new age into which we have entered has stepped up the oral and the aural. Voice, muted by script and print, has come newly alive" (88).

When Ong suggests the "present powers of description" he opens the possibility for a time when powers of description will be greater, a time when our awareness will be greater. We have moved forward since Ong wrote those words, and our awareness and powers of description have increased. This is why "sensorium" makes much more sense now that it ever has before. This is why what was muted and embedded in and underlying Ong's work all along begins to take on new significance for what is now our awareness and our power of description.

Thus we are more aware of what Ong says about how the senses can be muted. When Ong suggests that voice can be muted in one stage and come alive in another he offers a model somewhat different from implications of *residue* which suggest atrophy and death as part of progress. Instead, sound has been muted, which means it can be unmuted; perhaps it is equally good to suggest that we tuned it out, shifted our attention, and constructed a less important position for it. Within the sensorium, however, such constructions, shifts and tunings can be reconstructed, and newly brought to bear in the reshaping of a current noetic economy. When we explore the world with a heightened awareness of the human sensorium we acknowledge the ways that all five senses are active in human knowledge. Referring to the sensorium reminds us to be open to expansive description and open to valuing differences across and within cultures.

What then is the sensorium? Ong refers to it often, but he rarely takes time to define it, in large part because he assumes that his audience will understand the reference. The sensorium, at its most basic, is all the senses together and the result is a situation where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. This is doubly true when we consider that the “five” senses are a cultural construction and not necessarily the only way to discuss what the sensorium is. As noted above, senses develop and change and take on different roles and relevance at different times for different cultures. Ong notes how writing and print muted voice, making sound a less important factor within the noetic economy. Telegraph, radio, and television un-muted sound. Within Ong’s noetic economy, the computer returned some silence, especially in word processing. However, the Internet—that integration of radio, television, computer and human animation—brings sound back to our experience. It may well be that aspects of the sensorium are still beyond our present powers of description, but much is becoming clearer. Before dwelling further on the way the sensorium offers a more complex and fruitful understanding of change—especially in the context of shifting noetic economies—it is worth laying some ground work of historical understandings.

SOME HISTORICAL UNDERSTANDINGS OF THE SENSORIUM

The sensorium was discussed heavily in the nineteenth century, particularly in the fields of psychology, with many of the discussions developing out of faculty psychology. Later, Marshall McLuhan made much of it in his media studies. McLuhan was Ong’s teacher, and without dwelling too long on that relationship, which others have covered, it is worth mentioning that Ong did not exactly pick up from or continue McLuhan’s work,

although their work overlapped in many ways. Reference to the sensorium is one of those areas of overlap, and neither scholar felt the need to define the sensorium as I am doing here; however there is value here in tracing the concept back through McLuhan to some earlier concepts of the sensorium. The role of the senses in understanding has a long history going back at least to Aristotle and Plato. In our current noetic economy we continue that discussion, but we are more likely to discuss senses individually.

Richard Cavell argues in *McLuhan in Space* that some of McLuhan's understanding of the sensorium can be traced to Hermann von Helmholtz. Cavell discusses the history of the sensorium through the work of Jonathan Crary who "has argued that a telling index of the sensorium's history is the use of the camera obscura as a metaphor of human perception" (71). This Cartesian model of knowing gave way by the nineteenth century to our more familiar construct of five senses. According to Cavell, "McLuhan likewise treats the fate of the camera obscura, and its photographic successors, as a moment in the history of the rediscovery of the senses" (72). Cavell goes on to explain that:

According to Crary, "Helmholtz is explicit about the body's indifference to the sources of its experience and of its capacity for multiple connections with other agencies and machines. The perceiver here becomes a neutral conduit, one kind of relay among others to allow optimum conditions of circulation and exchangeability, *whether it be of commodities, energy, capital, images, or information.*' This is likewise the premise of *Understanding Media* (with the significant exception that McLuhan posits greater agency in the human 'conduit'),

and contextualizes McLuhan's reference in *Understanding Media* to 'the great Helmholtz, whose work covered many fields' (271). (73)

The parenthetical reference above to human agency is crucial, not only for McLuhan, but also for Ong and for the present study. We have already discussed in some detail the potential for reading technological determinism into Ong's work, and the ways that he resisted it. So as we come to the sensorium we must revisit the issue with the awareness that despite the sensorium's very humanness, such concepts of conduits, or even McLuhan's ideas of extensions could lead back to claims about the lack of human agency.

In "Inside the Five Sense Sensorium" Marshall McLuhan discusses the senses in the context of new electronic media, particularly television. He connects television to the nineteenth century art movement of synesthesia. He argues that television is "...the overwhelming and technological success of that program after its artistic elements have retired" (46). He bases his claims on the idea that media is an extension of the senses and his interpretations of the sensorium all have to do with ideas of media; when we realize that this article was originally published in an architectural journal, we are reminded of McLuhan's emphasis on space and architectural design. Cavell argues that this emphasis on space is endemic to all of McLuhan's work. McLuhan continues:

What are some of the discernable dispositions with which television has imbued its publics since the mid-1950s? I am working from the observation that our technical media, since writing and printing, are extensions of our senses. The latest such extension, television, I am suggesting, is an extension, not just of sight and sound, but of that very synesthesia which the artists of the past centuries have

stressed as accessible via the tangible-tactile values of the new vision. Television is not just sight and sound, but tangibility in its visual, contoured, sculptural mode. (46-47)

Much like the commonplace books of the seventeenth century were the (literally) overwhelming success of the human push for information storage, the television was an often equally overwhelming realization of human's push for new vision. In our current noetic economy where television is no longer new, it seems fair to argue that the virtual reality that we are becoming more familiar with and the tangibility of the smart phones that populate our world do much more than television ever did to demonstrate this technological success of synesthesia.

In looking at these examples we can see the way that technology, media, and even human sensation are neither stable nor isolated occurrences or experiences. Cavell emphasizes this point also in his discussion of the work of Edwin G. Boring, who, according to Cavell, is a common source for Helmholtz and McLuhan. "What is most important about Boring's study is that it gives the senses a history; to speak of the senses as having a history meant that they were historically produced, that they were social constructs..." (74). Boring suggests that "[t]he classical view of the mind is that there exists within the brain a sentient being, a Sensorium, that seeks knowledge of the external world and can never come closer to it than the direct contact provided by the nerves" (69). Boring discusses this classical view as the "image theory" based on the notion that when humans try to make sense of an object, an image of the object is presented to the mind. "In other words, representation of the objects to the mind is *in kind*" (69). That image theory is critiqued by a theory of functional adequacy based instead on symbolic

representation. Boring notes that the two theories remained undifferentiated enough that proponents of the symbolic theory had to continually battle against the image theory, which allied more easily with common sense. Thus, according to Cavell, "...John Locke's theory of the secondary qualities (1690) was clear enough argument against the image theory," but in 1826 "...Johannes Müller was constrained to combat it with his 'specific sense energies' ...," which Helmholtz extended later in that century.

The above discussion provides a glimpse of the classical view of a sentient being in the mind, a view that is sufficiently removed from our own understanding of how the mind and body work to appear quaint. Yet, in a discussion of *the* sensorium there may be a tendency to anthropomorphize and to give agency to this sensorium in ways that harken back to this classic view. That is a misreading that we need to avoid. Yet, the sensorium is also more than the five senses considered individually because it keeps all of the senses active at all times and because it highlights the importance of the position of individual senses relative to one another. The concept of the sensorium invites us to keep in mind all of our senses. As we do so, we must also keep in mind that the five senses are social constructs, and that not every culture constructs the sensorium in the same way.

Humans have always experienced the world through the sensorium. The nineteenth century merely provided opportunities for increased consciousness that invited a differentiation among senses in connection with increased awareness of our physical interiors. On some level, this type of knowledge is the kind of knowledge Ong talks about when he suggests that to see the interior, the box needs to be forced open—which renders what was interior as surface. So the physiologists had to literally and figuratively open up the human body to understand the interior. Yet, in paradox, once we have

interiorized this knowledge, we can sense the messages moving along neural pathways within our interior; in classical times humans could sense the sentient being in their mind interpreting the representation that was brought before it.

McLuhan goes on to emphasize the aspect of social construction:

What have been the social effects of this sudden extension of our sight-touch powers? What have been the specific changes in our attitudes to public space, to privacy, and to the nature of environmental materials resulting from television? I am assuming that enough has been said to suggest why any new medium alters the existing sense ratios and proportions just as over-all colors are modified by any local shift of pigment or component. (47)

Ong maintains the idea of alterations in sense ratios but his approach is focused more on culture than media. At the beginning of *Presence of the Word*, Ong gives more explicit attention to the sensorium. He begins by saying, “Man communicates with his whole body...” but Ong follows immediately with a qualification, saying: “...and yet the word is his primary medium” (1). That tension between word and body carries through the whole chapter and through much of his work. He claims that “Communication, like knowledge itself, flowers in speech” (1), but he also acknowledges that “...language itself is at its deepest level not primarily even a system of sounds. There is a primordial attunement of one human existent to another out of which all language comes,” (2). Yet Ong always returns to sound and to words, and he argues that that is natural and almost universal. *Almost*, because “...as we have lately learned, the world of sound itself does not have always the same importance in all cultures with relation to the worlds of the

other senses” (3). Ong then considers variations on the different senses in different cultures before returning to the word and its place in our sensorium:

The relationship of sound and of the word itself to the human life-world varies, too. Sound and the word itself must thus be considered in terms of the shifting relationships between the senses. These relationships must not be taken merely abstractly but in connection with variations in cultures. In this connection, it is useful to think of cultures in terms of the organization of the sensorium. By the sensorium we mean here the entire sensory apparatus as an operational complex. The differences in cultures which we have just suggested can be thought of as differences in the sensorium, the organization of which is in part determined by culture while at the same time it makes culture. (6)

We can see from what Ong says above a reminder of how he is neither dichotomous nor autonomous.

In *Interfaces of the Word* he is most explicit. In Chapter Five, "I See What You Say: Sense Analogues for Intellect," Ong addresses the sensorium more directly, and a closer look at that section provides a better sense of how Ong understands the sensorium. However, he also begins by assuming his reader's understanding of the sensorium and only two-thirds of the way through the chapter does he pause to acknowledge that he has "...been taking for granted ...that the economy of the sensorium is familiar to all..." (136). Only at that point does he offer a more expansive discussion of the sensorium.

Ong presents the senses as arranged on a scale:

Touch-----taste-----smell-----hearing-----sight

Movement in this direction → is:

toward greater distance from object physically;

toward greater abstraction;

toward greater formalization...;

toward objectivity, nonsubjectivity;

toward idealism, divorced from actual existence.

Movement in the opposite direction ← is:

toward propinquity of sense organ to source of stimulus;

toward concreteness;

toward matter, potency, indistinctness...;

toward subjectivity...;

toward actual extrasubjective (as well as subjective) existence. (136)

His discussion in this chapter focuses on sight (note the analogue, “focus;” we cannot avoid analogues and many seem to invoke the sense of sight) since he is responding to a perception of increased use of sight analogues for understanding, but he also notes that similar discussion could examine other senses as well.

This means...that we can never entirely dispense with sight (or any other sense knowledge—but here we are concerned principally with sight) as an analogue for intellectual knowing, either by avoiding all reference to sight or by defining sight analogues in terms which transcend sight. The analogy remains both indispensable and defective. We can deal with its defectiveness chiefly by reflection, which is here negatively corrective. Since the intellect can reflect, it can transcend its own limits insofar as it knows them to be limits and thus knows the unlimited or at least the beyond-these-limits as a possibility. (141)

Ong offers this to reemphasize the connection between intellect and the senses, noting that “...even in its reflection on its own identity, the intellect must make its way through the identity of each of the senses. The intellect is not even in itself except by being in some way in one or another of all the senses” (141).

Here the connection between noetic economy and sensorium begins to assert itself. One or all of the senses—and each one interacts with others—in the sensorium allow for the intellect to become conscious and to become itself. What that self is, and how it changes, is intimately tied to the sensorium. Reflection and awareness participate with and within the sensorium.

In literacy, and in discussions of orality and literacy, the entirety of the sensorium easily becomes hidden because literate cultures so often emphasize the visual over other senses. Ong strives to persuade his audience that the visual is not enough; visual is not the only sense in the sensorium and to pretend otherwise is to limit the potential of the intellect for full reflection. In Ong’s discussion of sound and sight, the other senses are also part of his underlying assumption. We will benefit from sharing that assumption. The literate bias and the trend in literacy studies to move towards multiplicity can be shown in a closer look at literacy in the next chapter. The movement of literacy scholars towards multiple literacies is an unconscious acknowledgement of the importance of the sensorium. Making the sensorium more explicitly a part of the discussion will open up possibilities by making scholars more aware of the role of the senses in the noetic economy and by giving scholars language to discuss that role and the changes taking place in the noetic economy, changes which are identifiable in the next generation of learners.

The sensorium forms and is formed by culture. The notion of the sensorium with five parts that clamor for attention and in which some are necessarily more prevalent at certain points and times offers a model of experience that is much more flexible and fluid than discussion of orality and literacy often allow for.

This exploration of the sensorium provides a more embodied understanding than a reader of *Orality and Literacy* generally experiences. As we have seen, Ong's emphasis on sound can obscure—for a reader of *Orality and Literacy* who is unfamiliar with Ong's other work—the ways that Ong is treating sound as one part of the sensorium. Ong emphasizes sound in large part because literates and literacy had tended to overlook sound in their focus on the printed page. Ong, however, values the sensorium as a whole, as a closer look at his work as a whole reveals. That wider look shows that the sensorium offers a means for us to understand our own shifting noetic economy. With the fuller understanding of the sensorium we can see ways that the sensorium helps answer questions regarding literacy and the ways that the sensorium fulfills the promises of secondary orality.

Five senses interacting offers much more complexity than just two. Two can be perceived in dichotomous opposition; five cannot. The push and pull of five senses counteracts the perceived dichotomy that results from only engaging the oral and the visual. Thus, the sensorium, which is embedded in Ong's work, but rarely presented explicitly, can provide a better understanding of Ong's work and a better understanding of human interaction with knowledge in the world. In *Orality and Literacy*, Ong never really pauses to define and explain the sensorium; yet he refers to it often. We can infer that he expected his audience to know what he was talking about, and we are left to make

sense of it through examining examples of his use. However, by putting together the extended parts of his earlier and later work an impression of the sensorium begins to take shape. Before going on to show how the sensorium resolves misreadings, I will draw together the threads of the tapestry and give shape to this essential aspect of Ong's work.

THE SENSORIUM

To understand the sensorium in Ong's work, some of his terms need to be fully present to the discussion. The sensorium acts as an interface between the noetic economy and the interior. The relationship among the three, however, is complex and shifting, with each exerting influence on the other.

First, we must be aware of the "interior." In *Interfaces of the Word* Ong emphasizes the way the individual, the interior, is both open and closed in "open closure."

The focus of closure and openness in human beings is human consciousness itself. What is meant by human consciousness here can be understood by treating it at its center, as caught up in the "I" that I utter. The "I" that I utter is open only to me and closed to all outside me. No one else knows what it feels like to be me. I do not know what any other human being experiences when he or she says "I." In a way it would seem to be "like" what I feel when I say "I," but I am aware that every bit of any person's sense of "I" is totally different from mine. I simply do not know what it feels like to be the other person. Each of us is isolated, sealed off from every other in this way, even husband from wife and wife from husband,

father and mother from daughter and son, brother from brother and sister from sister” (336).

The interior is never fully accessible to another, which is the sign of closure. At the same time, however, the interior is affected and shaped by a myriad of outside influences. Other interiors and the noetic economy shape interiors through interaction with the sensorium, yet the interior can never be accessed directly. Keep in mind what Ong says about an interior: that if you open it up, the interior ceases to be interior and becomes surface. While we need to understand this sense of openness and closure, there is a risk of inserting a container metaphor into the discussion—which would be completely misleading. The interior, after all, is always interior and thus cannot “contain” in the traditional sense. The interior is part of the human paradox that is open closure. The paradoxical and protean interior does interact with the exterior, but always remains interior. The sensorium, acting as an interface, enables this.

“Interface” is the second term that must be present to this discussion. I have not, up to this point, explored the concept of an interface in depth. “Interface” is an important part of Youngkin’s references—particularly her diagram, which presents rhetoric as an interface. Ong, in his most explicit discussion of *Interfaces of the Word*, defines “interface” as “[t]he place at which independent systems meet and act on one another or communicate with one another...” (334). He then goes on to explore the paradox of systems and of openness and closure, which I discuss in more detail above. Ong presents primary orality as a system that interfaces with literacy, and literacy interfaces with electronic culture. However, the word interfaces in other times and places as well. Ong does not directly say that the sensorium is an interface, but such is implied when he

argues that the intellect can only be itself by being in the senses. The interior is a system that interfaces with other systems and can only do so through the sensorium. In one sense the intellect and the sensorium interface. However the sensorium is part of the human experience and not its own system. Thus, the sensorium IS an interface, the point of contact between interior and exterior.

All knowledge comes through the senses to reach the interior. In passing through the senses knowledge does not remain unchanged or unaffected. And the sensorium does not remain unaffected or unchanged. There is a symbiotic relationship in play within the interior and the sensorium and the noetic economy.

Next we need to follow the threads further to demonstrate exactly how that relationship works. In doing so, “noetic economy” must also be fully present to the discussion. Noetic economy, as noted above, is the knowledge economy. It is what is known, what can be known, and it participates in the possible ways knowledge and understanding can be discovered, made, and embraced. The noetic economy is constantly shifting in large and small ways. Our noetic economy includes all the knowledge resources available to us at this time. This includes computers and books and pencils and paper and Aristotle, Copernicus, and Einstein and the reports of the men who have been to the moon. That and more, of course. Within that cultural noetic, there are regional and individual variations. While trigonometry and string theory are part of my cultural noetic, and thus possible for me to know, I will never know them in the depth that another individual might. Also, for the most part, our culture has deemphasized scent and most of our culture would have trouble tracking an animal with the help of our nose—and even the visual sign would be lost to most of us. Yet an individual within our

culture may have access to this noetic, and such knowledge may shape the individual and give shape to other aspects of both the individual and cultural noetic economy. There are limits to what can be known by a particular person at a particular time. The limits and the possibilities define the noetic economy.

The threads are drawing together to give shape. An interior exteriorizing itself. Another interior. The interior is surrounded by a noetic field. Surrounding the interior more closely is the sensorium. Shape. The only constant to the shape is that it is changing. Thus “shifting” sensorium and “shifts” in the noetic economy. The interior, also, is not constant, or rather, to paraphrase Ong, the interior is an inconstant constant. The shape and the shift of any one element affects the others. A change in the noetic economy effects change in the sensorium. A change in the interior affects the noetic economy. One interior exteriorizing itself, when it can affect another interior, further shifts individual noetics and cultural noetics.

The experience of the noetic economy, an experience that humans become increasingly aware of over time, is the experience of being immersed in information. In the information age it is easy to realize that we are immersed in information and information technologies. In the noetic economy that surrounds us are ideas and ways of accessing ideas; Copernicus and Aristotle and pencils and books and computers and string theory and Tarot cards and magazines and billboards all occupy the noetic space (if not the physical space) in and around us. Although visualizations and visual analogues are fraught with complications in a dissertation advocating increased awareness of all the senses, such visualization is useful here. Imagine an interior surrounded by noetics. The interior interfaces with the noetic economy in many, often paradoxical, ways. If, for

example, I want to access knowledge about Aristotle, I encounter the noetic economy in various ways. I have memories of reading Aristotle in undergraduate philosophy courses. I have encountered Aristotle in graduate courses on rhetoric. I have Aristotle's books on my shelf. I have articles about Aristotle saved on the hard drive of my laptop. I have articles saved to thumb drives. Aristotle is part of my noetic economy in many ways and embedded with other parts of that economy.

Aristotle is an interior that reaches across time and space to become present to me. He is not, however, present to me in the way he was present to himself or in the way he was present to his contemporary audiences, or to all the audiences between us. He is also present to other interiors within my cultural noetic. In referring to the interior, Ong claims that every "I" is distinct from every other "I". In much the same way every "Aristotle" is distinct from every other "Aristotle". When I say "Aristotle" I may mean something like what my professor means, but my Aristotle is never the same as "Aristotle" for my wife or brother or mother.

The noetic economy plays into that difference in two ways. One way is through past experience. I have a sister who did not go to college; my experience with Aristotle is different from hers, in large part because I did go to college. This difference points to the kind of knowledge we connect with classrooms and directive learning. That is certainly not absolute. My sister might very well have gained experience with Aristotle in non-classroom ways, through extensive reading and discussions. That type of experience would have been both like and unlike the experience of a college classroom. Experience contributes to and shapes an individual's interaction with the noetic economy. I am

different from my sister in my interior because I have taken in “Aristotle” and Aristotle’s ideas more so and differently than she has.

In part, in a way contributed to by the different shapes of our interiors, that difference also conditions our response when it comes to gaining new knowledge and shaping new ideas. Thus, when I have a project in which I need to refer to Aristotle’s ideas, the resources available to me are conditioned by classes I have had, conversations I have had, and words I have read. Within the noetic economy, however, more is in play than just facts, more even than ideas. The noetic economy is not just knowledge, but also the tools and techniques for interacting with knowledge—a knowledge of a different type, knowing “how to” not just knowing “that.” And within the noetic economy not all of that knowing is conscious. My sister may be “Aristotelian” in a certain way just by virtue of being raised in the West, but she does not need to be aware of Aristotle to hold certain views in certain ways. Her “Aristotelian” way of knowing can shape her thinking and logic without conscious awareness. The technologies of our experiences also give shape to our knowledge. This is where Ong’s realization that we must take technology seriously becomes important.

If, in prior experience, I encountered Aristotle in a book, then there is a good chance that my first imagination of the knowledge connects with the book. This is where the sensorium comes into play and into interfacing with the noetic economy. Luddites have enshrined the concept of the book with references to the smell of dusty pages and the creak of a new binding being broken open for the first time. This attachment is nostalgic, but it is a very sensory nostalgia. It also is not just nostalgia, not just a fond memory to dismiss with a shake of the head and an admonishment to accept reality. No,

knowledge is tied to that experience of the book. We are well aware of the ways that smell can trigger memories that otherwise lie dormant. Similar connections to memory and therefore to knowledge, to activity of the intellect exist in other senses. I moved to a new office recently; I rearranged things and my physical space was different. In the old office, an article that I referred to occasionally was on a shelf above my desk. In the new office I put it in a filing cabinet. However, a couple of months after the move to the new office, I needed to reference that article and I reached for the shelf above my desk. For me, the ideas contained in that article were kinesthetically connected by the act of reaching for the article. I was reaching for the article before I consciously came to the conclusion that the information I needed could be had there. Kinesthetics, sound, smell, and all the other senses participate in our acquisition of knowledge. The intellect activates through the sensorium.

EXAMPLE 1: SHIFT IN THE NOETIC ECONOMY: EVOLUTION OF THE COMPUTER

To understand the significance of increased awareness of the sensorium and of the ways our intellect activates in and through it, consider the evolution of the computer. Once upon a time, computers took up an entire room. A person entered the room and was dwarfed by the machine. It took many people to operate the machine. The machine computed numbers, running operations at the command of persons. The results of the computations needed to be interpreted by a specialist. Computers changed over time: jump ahead to the day the computer became “personal.” Rather than a group of people operating one machine, it was suddenly possible for one person to operate one machine; and not only that, but the person did not need to share the machine with anyone else. If

we interpret this evolution in terms of the noetic economy, the location of knowledge shifted from a room to a desktop. This is of course “knowledge” broadly defined. However, this example does not need to claim that all knowledge existed within the computer, because of course it did not. What was happening was that in reaching for information, something changed. It seems like a small thing to shift from walking to a room to being able to do the same knowledge operation at one’s own desk, but the resulting shift in the noetic economy was significant. The shift in the sensorium is equally significant. Walking is less a part of gaining knowledge. The smells of the office are different from the computer room. The sound changes; the computer still hums, but smaller computer means smaller hum. Smaller hum suggests different presence. The computer is present to us in a different way.

Certain ideas and knowledge that once required a team of people and a significant amount of time now became individual, and as developments continued, less time. (As an aside, we can almost imagine multi-tasking’s relationship with the computer beginning early, when using a computer meant waiting for operations to complete. Doing something while waiting was just more efficient, and over time, task shifting became *rapid* task shifting.) Much has been made of the advent of the personal computer, and the shift was significant for the sensorium and the noetic economy. Also, the move from computers as number-crunchers to computers as word processors demonstrated continuing shifts.

Humans became accustomed, for a time, to working—and working with knowledge—at a desk. People walked to their desks. They brought ideas to the desk and put them into the computer to work with them. Then, when computers became

networked, people increasingly “reached” for information or ideas through the computer and brought information and ideas out of the computer. For a time all of this noetic activity revolved around the desk. The parallels with pre-computer times are evident. Scholars would, and still did, and do, bring books to a desk to reach for the ideas in the book, and to work with them on paper as a way to think things through and work with them in their minds. However, each shift, from manuscript to print to digital words required shifts in the sensorium that paralleled shifts in the noetic economy. I can only imagine that stopping to sharpen a quill pen was a time to stop and think. I imagine that reflection and pen sharpening went together. The smell of the ink, the feel of the quill pen, the scratch of it on the paper. All of these were more than incidental actions. These were all part of the noetic economy, all part of what it meant to learn and interact with ideas. Fast-forward through ballpoint pens and graphite pencils, beyond the personal computer and consider what happened within the noetic economy when the personal computer moved from the desk to the lap. Imagine the person sitting at the desk, keyboard on the desk, large monitor taking up much of the desk, leaning forward to see the screen. Now imagine that person leaning back in the chair, putting feet up on the desk. People did this with keyboards while the monitor stayed on the desk, but the laptop makes this move to relaxation, and to taking the technological part of the noetic along, more complete, with the screen also on the lap. The first interface with knowledge drew closer to the person, became closer physically what it was becoming figuratively: an extension of the person.

And of course, the feet do not need to stay on the desk. They can move to the next room, to the next building, to the couch at home, to a hotel room, and with all those

moves of the feet, the computer comes along. The noetic economy shifts again. Certainly briefcases full of papers and files and books used to travel to all those places (and still do), so perhaps not that much has changed. Yet, everything in the noetic economy changed. Intuitively we know that using a computer is different from using books and pads of paper. However, when that difference remains intuited and remains in the realm of the unconscious we are less able to reflect on the implications of that change. The sensorium interacts with the noetic economy and with the interior, and all shift. I have implied, perhaps that the technology drove these changes, but humans wanted individual control of the computer and humans wanted ways to be able to sit in the easy chair and still interface with the noetic economy. Human desire drives the development of technology.

EXAMPLE 2: EVOLUTION OF MY OWN EXPERIENCE WITH THE COMPUTER

Increased awareness of the sensorium helps us become more aware of the significance of smaller stages of change. If I go back to the first semester of my undergraduate career, I can place myself in a noetic economy in which print is dominant. I understand information and knowledge to be contained in books. I also understand that professors also have knowledge. I bring a pen and a notebook to class. I take notes. Sometimes I doodle. In some classes I doodle a lot and take notes a little. I collect these notes. When a test is scheduled I read those notes for information and I read the book for more information and on the test day I strive to recall what was in the notes. Oddly enough, those doodles help sometimes, because I imagine the swirling black and green spiral at the top of the page when I need to recall the information. The doodles shape my

noetic economy in taking the notes and in recalling them. For papers my first semester, I am likewise limited to pads of lined paper and ink pens. Since professors expect me to hand in typed papers, I find that my sister, two years older, experienced college student, is also a part of my noetic economy. Believe it or not, she agrees to type my papers for me. By my second semester however, she becomes a less willing participant in my learning, due in large part no doubt, to my proclivity for procrastination. She is not always responsive to, “Can you have this done tomorrow?” As a result, I was going to have to learn to write papers earlier, or I was going to have to learn how to type. I, however, do neither; instead I experience a shift in my noetic economy. In the basement of the library are computers. In my second semester I discover that if I bring my books and notes to those computers I can write and type *at the same time*. Imagine my satisfaction in realizing that there was no longer a time lag for having papers typed. Finally I can write my papers the night before they were due and still have them presentable for turning in the next day! It was quite a revelation for me, and since then, writing has, for me, meant keyboard and monitor. I still doodled notes—only much later would I take a laptop to class.

Let’s look at some of this in terms of the sensorium—what language can the sensorium provide that increases awareness and clarity? Start with the sense of touch, and perhaps with the blood flowing in our veins. The old saying “Writing is easy. Just open a vein and bleed,” is a saying that has continued into the keyboard era, but it emerged from quill pen and ink, ink that flowed like blood across the page. The connection between the writer and the pen has been mythologized in many ways, but the idea of thoughts flowing from the pen is a consistent metaphor. In that noetic economy,

metaphorical perhaps, but the knowledge, the ideas are understood to exit the body, to become visible through the motion of the pen which is an extension of the hand. The kinesthetic, the touch of intellectual activity. In my undergraduate noetic my knowledge became visual in response to a keystroke. My professor's knowledge became visible to me through the scrawl of my ink pen on lined paper. In both cases, making the knowledge, the ideas, visible was a part of learning—and not only visible, but also the physical, tactile act of making it visible. It was not something I thought about so metacognitively at the time—it was just something I had been taught to do.

Looking at it from the perspective of the sensorium, however, I can see that what was valued then, for me and for my teachers, was making ideas and knowledge visual in written and printed text. However, knowledge was given to me in text in the form of books and also orally in the form of lectures. The noetic economy of my learning included also the kinesthetic of sitting at a desk and at a computer lab in the basement of library.

THE LANGUAGE OF THE SENSORIUM

In order to increase awareness of the sensorium, to increase our ability to discuss shifts in the sensorium and to increase our ability to analyze and interpret those shifts we need a shift in our language that foregrounds the sensorium. For an example of insufficient language, consider an example grounded in Ong's work. Over time what he began by referring to as 'oral/aural' slowly came to be just "oral." The "aural" faded from our language. This caused problems in communication and in awareness. While hearing sound when someone speaks can perhaps be assumed, the physical act of

listening is very different from the physical act of speaking; within the sensorium this is a very different experience. Within rhetoric it is also very different. In general terms there will be more listeners than speakers, thus the act, the skill, of listening is as important as speaking and should be treated so. Also, “oral” connotes formal speaking situations. In the digital world of what has been referred to as secondary orality the orality may actually be less important than aural. The experience of television is not always about, or only about listening to the words of a particular speaker with a particular message. We “overhear” conversations in sitcoms and dramas. A talk show is often more direct, but even there we listen in on interviews. Commercials are less about speaking and more about color and music, often with some level of text. Commercials depend on the sound, however, to create response in the viewer. The experience is aural and visual.

Along with increased awareness of aural, if we consider visual, olfactory, tactile, kinesthetic, oral, and taste we are already beyond the classic “five senses” and differentiating further will benefit our understanding of noetic economies, interiors, and the sensorium itself.

Understanding the sensorium involves a sort of awakening of the senses through reflection in which we flex our sensory tools; it is like meditation and becoming aware of our own heartbeat. As our heart beats on, with or without our awareness, so our sensorium participates in our noetic economy with or without our awareness. But awareness yields insights. As an example, let us return to the misreadings of Ong that we identified in Chapter 1. I demonstrated there that Ong has been dismissed as dichotomous, that Ong’s work has often been discussed based only on the reading of one book, and that his work has been misapplied. If readers had been more aware of the

sensorium they might have avoided those misreadings. That awareness has the potential to benefit us in two stages. First, we can see the sensorium in Ong's work and can understand his work better because of it. Second, we can become more aware of our own sensorium, which can help us make sense of our own time as well.

CHAPTER 5

APPLICATIONS: THE SENSORIUM HELPS READERS OF ONG SENSE COMPLEXITY, NOT DICHOTOMY

The fact that Ong rarely discuss the sensorium explicitly is one of the reasons that it has been for the most part dismissed. The dismissal runs parallel to the dismissal of Ong as merely a dichotomous thinker. When we become aware of it, however, we find references to sensorium throughout his work, and once we begin to experience the sensorium with him we begin to see a new way to read Ong. The references to shifts from oral to literate and from sound to visual can then be understood as shifts in the sensorium. Ong, in the preface to *Interfaces of the Word*, claimed that the broad scope of his project had been pretty well understood up to that point. I would argue that the reader's ability to read the shifts from sound to visual and back again within the context of the sensorium is part of that mutual understanding. A broader audience, combined with a heightened emphasis on the need for literate folk to understand the difference between orality and literacy diminished that mutual understanding. Reclaiming the sensorium restores some of that mutual understanding. That, in and of itself, is reason enough for this closer exploration of Ong's work. However, increasing awareness of the sensorium offers much more than just a reaffirmation of Ong's work. In fact, that reaffirmation is only valid if we find in Ong's work something that we can use in negotiating the present and near future.

The sensorium helps us in two ways. Reclaiming the sensorium helps us negotiate multiple literacies to provide an awareness of where we are and where we are going, and the sensorium broadens our historical understandings, while providing language that contributes to increased awareness of our present and near future. We have the ability to describe, if not define the changes in which we are immersed.

SENSORIUM HELPS US NEGOTIATE MULTIPLE LITERACIES

Increased awareness of the sensorium helps us look back and aids our understanding of Ong. Awareness of the sensorium can also help us look at our present and into the near future. In the present, literacy in the presence of secondary orality has fractured, with literacies developing into and almost untenable multiplicity. Awareness of the sensorium provides answers to questions that many are asking in literacy studies. It also offers a response to methods of applying Ong's ideas. One of Ong's main critics is Brian Street. Street argues that what is missing in Ong's work is the social aspect of literacy. Street accuses Ong of viewing literacy as autonomous. Street argues for an ideological approach nested in the social realities. I have already demonstrated the ways that Street's reading of Ong is misinformed. However, I do not wish to leave it at that. Not only is Ong's work broader than Street's reading allows for, but Ong's work also offers something more to literacy studies, something literacy studies generally overlooks. Street's call for social literacy combined with others' calls for a new understanding of literacy. That social aspect, combined with increasing questions about how to respond to electronic communication led to the development of New Literacy Studies (NLS). NLS also included calls for a move from a narrow concept of literacy to a more expansive

version that included multiple literacies to account for the variations in social aspects of communication. Those calls for new literacies can be answered in many ways by a return to the sensorium, something that is present in Ong's work all along.

In order to explore the ways that a return to the sensorium can offer valuable perspectives to NLS I will briefly examine two articles that move NLS forward into a focus on the role of the Internet. First I will look briefly at "The New Literacy Studies and the 'Social Turn,'" by James Gee. Then I will look in more depth at "Toward a Theory of New Literacies Emerging From the Internet and Other Information and Communication Technologies," by Donald J. Leu, Jr., Charles K. Kinzer, Julie L. Coiro, and Dana W. Cammack.

Gee, one of the initial proponents, along with Street, of the "social turn" that developed into NLS notes the way that the social turn developed as an interdisciplinary enterprise. "The New Literacy Studies (NLS) was one movement among many that took part in a larger "social turn" away from a focus on individuals and their "private" minds and towards interaction and social practice." He lists NLS among fourteen academic movements across the social sciences that developed this social turn. Many of these overlap with NLS. The multiple variations on the social turn are just part of the multiplicity that develops with NLS. NLS comes to develop the idea of literacies rather than literacy. In this article, Gee presents more multiplicity in a call for multiple aspects to be considered as work. "Situations are rarely static or uniform, they are actively created, sustained, negotiated, resisted, and transformed moment by moment through ongoing work. It is the nature of this work that should, I argue, become crucial to the New Literacy Studies. This type of work I will call enactive and recognition work.

Language is designed precisely to help us do just such work.” We can see in Gee’s call a recognition of the ways that situations are continually in flux. Language can help us do this work, but we have most often, particularly in a literate society, used language to hold something down and lock time into a visual place. Our exploration of Ong and the various responses to Ong’s work demonstrates how literate use of language can work against our awareness of flux.

In “Expanding the New Literacies Conversation,” Leu et al. portray the situation of literacy and literacies in terms of multiplicity.

New literacies means many different things to many different people. To some, new literacies are seen as new social practices (Street, 1995, 2003). Others see new literacies as important new strategies and dispositions essential for online reading comprehension, learning, and communication (Castek, 2008; Coiro, 2003; Henry, 2006; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). Still others see new literacies as new discourses (Gee, 2007) or new semiotic contexts (Kress, 2003; Lemke, 2002). Still others see literacy as differentiating into multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) or multimodal contexts (Hull & Schultz, 2002), and some see a construct that juxtaposes several of these orientations (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). When one includes these different definitions of new literacies with terms such as *ICT literacy* (International ICT Literacy Panel, 2002) or *informational literacy* (Hirsh, 1999; Kuiper & Volman, 2008; Webber & Johnson, 2000), the construct of new literacies becomes even broader. In this breadth, however, there is an opportunity to benefit from the richness of these different perspectives as the

research community develops richer theory to direct our collective understanding of Internet use in school settings. (265)

The breadth certainly offers opportunity, but it can also present a problem. That problem is identified in “Toward a Theory of New Literacies Emerging From the Internet and Other Information and Communication Technologies.” In addition to the social turn, Leu et al. examine the newness of the information and communication technologies (ICTs), particularly of the Internet, which they posit as the center of new literacies. They organize the article according to what they see as “...the important social forces at work today that frame the changes to literacy that we are experiencing,” which they believe include:

- Global economic competition within economies based increasingly on the effective use of information and communication
- The rapid emergence of the Internet as a powerful new technology for information and communication
- Public policy initiatives by governments around the world to ensure higher levels of literacy achievement including the use of the Internet and other ICTs

However, their introduction to the article is particularly interesting. First they posit ICTs as essential to future literacies:

While it is clear that many new literacies are emerging rapidly, we believe the most essential ones for schools to consider cluster around the Internet and allow students to exploit the extensive ICTs that become available in an online, networked environment. In an information age, we believe it becomes essential to prepare students for these new literacies because they are central to the use of information and

the acquisition of knowledge. Traditional definitions of literacy and literacy instruction will be insufficient if we seek to provide students with the futures they deserve.

Notice the call for new definitions. That call is common among literacy theorists. They continue:

Precisely what are the new literacies of the Internet and other ICTs? Any realistic analysis of what we know about new literacies from the traditional research literature must recognize that we actually know very little. Far too little research has been conducted in this area for far too long. This is, perhaps, the most troublesome observation that results from any analysis of research in this area (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003; Leu, 2000a).

This call for research is where awareness of the sensorium can and must come into play. Here the agenda of NLS meets up with the agenda I have been setting out in this dissertation. My students are different from me. Ong helps me see that the difference involves a shift in the noetic economy. When we are aware of shifts in the noetic economy, and when this correlates with an increased awareness of our sensorium, we can begin to ask the questions we need to ask about shifts in the sensorium. Does the use of the Internet shift the balance between visual and aural? Is the proclivity of moving images changing some aspect of the visual elements of the sensorium? If we are aware of the sensorium then our research must use the sensorium. These authors go on to call for new definitions of literacy. After citing the current lack of "...a precise definition of what new literacies are," They argue that, "This makes theory development as well as

systematic investigation impossible.” In response they “have begun to frame a conception of new literacies around the following definition:”

The new literacies of the Internet and other ICTs include the skills, strategies, and dispositions necessary to successfully use and adapt to the rapidly changing information and communication technologies and contexts that continuously emerge in our world and influence all areas of our personal and professional lives. These new literacies allow us to use the Internet and other ICTs to identify important questions, locate information, critically evaluate the usefulness of that information, synthesize information to answer those questions, and then communicate the answers to others.

(Leu, et al.)

The authors qualify their definition by noting the difficulty of using language to keep something stable. “A more precise definition of these new literacies may never be possible to achieve because their most important characteristic is that they change regularly.” While the sensorium is not a definition per se, it can come to operate in lieu of one. Definitions cannot keep up with rapid changes that we experience except in the broadest of terms. The sensorium, however, may provide the orientation and the language we need in order to conduct the research we must conduct in order to understand our students. Such research and subsequent understanding will in turn participate in a transformation of pedagogy.

Brian Street’s work can also be seen as coming to fruition in the sensorium. Street uses Ong as a major part of a call for increased emphasis on social aspects when analyzing cultures and changes within and across cultures. Street organizes his call by setting this need for more socially nested understanding against technologically oriented

understandings of literacy. His goal is to emphasize the ways that literacy is a part of culture; literacy does not cause culture. The development and outcome of this emphasis on social aspects led to a discussion of culture that valued multiplicity and came to understand various ways of knowing within a culture in terms of literacy; hence, in many ways New Literacy Studies blends cultural studies with literacy. However, the multiplicity, once begun, fragments out until every thread of the tapestry is its own type of literacy and perhaps its own type of knowing. Multiplicity led to a sense that definition ultimately was not possible at all. Yet many scholars call for some way to contain the multiplicity in order to find a way to talk about it. The urge for definition and the need to acknowledge multiplicity lead right back to Street's starting point. Deeper within the work of Walter Ong is a concept that accepts the multiplicity and provides enough unity to provide a language to discuss the change. The appreciation for paradox opens up places to interact with the changes and if not to enclose in definition, at least to get some sense of the properties of change.

THEY WERE NOT AWARE: SENSORIUM MAKES SENSE OF THE PAST

History is the place and the practice that has traditionally provided us with an understanding of change. The perspective provided by distance allows for humans to reflect on what has come before. The sensorium offers an opportunity to reflect on the present and near-future in a way that mirrors this historical reflection. The sensorium also provides us with new ways to interpret the past. With the electronic stage of human development came an increased awareness of orality and literacy and potentials for post-literacy. Ong's work grew out of that increased awareness. Increasing awareness invites

us now to participate in our sensorium more completely. This awareness of the sensorium offers new insights into historical development. We can now discern shifts in history that can be explained as shifts in the sensorium. As an example of this I demonstrate how the sensorium can provide a more complete understanding of the development of Current-Traditional Rhetoric.

The legacy of nineteenth century rhetoric is what we call current-traditional rhetoric. When James Berlin introduces the topic he isolates the phenomenon in the work of Barrett Wendell, A.S. Hill and John Franklin Genung. Berlin further reduces the cause to the Committee of Ten that reported on the problems of writing observed in the Harvard entrance exam. Berlin's presentation overly simplifies the cause and reality of current-traditional rhetoric in much the same way that he shows Wendell, Hill, and Genung reducing rhetoric to a few forms and rules. Berlin also points to the way Campbell's and Bain's rhetorics were simplified in the face of scientific approaches to learning. Despite the tendency towards reduction, Berlin does provide a manageable picture of what writing instruction was like, for the most part, at the end of the century: "...the typical composition textbook was devoted to the forms of discourse, stylistic matters organized around the principles of unity, coherence, and emphasis, and discussions of usage and grammar. Superficial correctness had become the most significant measure of accomplished prose" (73).

From the perspective of the twenty-first century this obsession with superficial correctness, the over-emphasis on grammar rules, and a focus on style to the detriment of the wide range of rhetorical possibilities present in a writing situation is inexcusable and it seems that teachers willing to participate in this must have been callous or ignorant.

The current-traditional model serves as a modern trope for how not to do things. And for this purpose it functions well as a seemingly narrow-minded antithesis to what we work to instill in our students, our fellow-educators and ourselves. Recent scholarship has shown that there was a wider variety of educational models than it might seem in looking at textbooks, and scholarship has also shown that even textbook writers were human and taught their students in more enlightened ways than their textbooks might suggest. Recent scholarship has also reminded us that to understand the past we must find ways to explore from the perspective of the century that we are looking at, not the one we are living in. Approaching current-traditional rhetoric with an awareness of the sensorium invites just that kind of exploration.

Since the composition class is about writing, it seems obvious that writing teachers and composition theorists would keep their focus on writing and on changes in writing, in order to understand the way the material environment affects what is going on in the classroom and in students' abilities to write. It would seem obvious, but so often what is closest to us is hardest to see. Such is the case with writing. Even though writing is a subject matter, the fact that everyone has the physical skills for writing allows us to not really think about it on the material level of the physical act of putting ink on the page—which demonstrates a lack of awareness of the noetic economy. Although we do not often think about it that way, writing is a technology which develops and changes over time, as do the tools we use to write with. These changes affect every aspect of writing. According to Bertram Bruce and Maureen Hogan, technologies become “embedded in the living process” to such an extent that “their status as technologies disappears” (270). In the early part of the nineteenth century writing meant using a quill

pen which needed to be sharpened continually and ink which needed to be blotted constantly. Writing was a major process.

The outcome of that process was not completely arbitrary, nor fully planned. Rather, it was result of the constraints of the noetic economy. The flowing script was not used just to be beautiful; rather the tool required wide, slow, arcing letters. Writers followed that laborious route across the page because that is what the writing tool required. A project like taking notes for a lecture required a certain amount of space and set-up and time. And paper was still relatively expensive early in the nineteenth century, to the point where there was no scrap paper; each piece of writing had value.

When twenty-first century teachers look back they remember that of course there were no computers back then. But to remember that there was no scrap paper, and no convenient way to carry a pen in your pocket, is less obvious. Bruce and Hogan claim that even when we try to pay attention in order see the less obvious, the technology still disappears. “As technologies embed themselves in everyday discourse and activity, a curious thing happens. The more we look, the more they slip into the background. Despite our attention, we lose sight of the way they give shape to our daily lives” (270).

That is not to suggest that it is impossible to see, especially with the distance of at least a century. In fact, looking at nineteenth century writing education with the perspective provided by a realization of the effort and finances required to produce a single piece of writing helps us to understand that time period better. Adding an extra layer of awareness through consideration of the role of the sensorium further develops our awareness of shifts and transformations occurring at that time. Bruce and Hogan’s advice about disappearance remains a factor even when we are willing to admit that

writing was different back then, and we have to pay attention—and teach our students to pay attention—to the way things disappear in order to see them. Twenty-first century people are so embedded in print that almost every thought we have reflects assumptions about the nature of information, and the nature of the world, in relation to print. When we assess the past by looking for shifts in the sensorium and the noetic economy we can recollect the nineteenth century more clearly.

Writing technologies changed over the course of the century; writing and learning and teaching changed as well. To explore these differences we can look more closely at two of the theorists who are often listed among those “responsible” for current-traditional rhetoric. We will start with George Campbell and then look at Alexander Bain and explore the ways that understanding differences in their sensorium and noetic economy can provide new insights. Bain was born about a hundred years after Campbell, and current-traditional rhetoric, though “born” during Bain’s life time, was firmly entrenched about a hundred years after his birth. These periods, from the mature practice of Campbell to the mature practice of Bain to the mature practice of current-traditional rhetoric tell a story about the way the shifting noetic economy and sensorium played as much a part in the reification of rules as did one committee’s report.

George Campbell was a man of the eighteenth century. He was born in 1719 and died in 1796. We analyze him as a rhetorician, but he lived and wrote at a time when the boundaries between disciplines as we know them were only just beginning. Scholars of the sciences were familiar with and participated in the work of mathematics, and both participated in discussions of language. In the twenty-first century, familiarity with other fields means that we keep up on the news from that field, or maybe read one of their

journals (and sometimes misread one of their more popular authors). But in the eighteenth century “disciplines” were less delineated, which meant that scholars of various specialties met and discussed and critiqued, and added to each other’s understanding of all areas of study. Writing and print were used extensively to communicate ideas, but these discussions were places where ideas were “drafted,” and much of that drafting was done orally. This is seen in the way Campbell’s *Philosophy of Rhetoric* developed. He explored and expanded his ideas by presenting them to fellow scholars in the Aberdeen Philosophical Society or “*Wise Club*.” When making a presentation for the discussion of ideas he was formulating, Campbell in many cases wrote down what he was going to say, but he conceived of it originally as an oral presentation, a speech. Campbell’s process included written and spoken elements, but he is still solidly in an era when scholarship focuses on speaking; rhetoric, and communication in general, were summed up into speaking. In order to understand Campbell’s sensorium and noetic economy it is useful to take a closer look at how he lays out his understanding of rhetoric—of the shaping and presentation of ideas—in the *Philosophy of Rhetoric*.

Campbell identifies four ends of speaking: “every speech being intended to enlighten the understanding, to please the imagination, to move the passion, or to influence the will” (145). While Campbell limits the ends of speaking explicitly to four, a closer examination of the *Philosophy* reveals a fifth end which is perhaps more important than the other four. It is important for this discussion of literacy, but it is also crucial for Campbell’s rhetoric because it works with each of the other four as an

embedded element directing and coordinating action. It also demonstrates his awareness of the sensorium, even though he does not discuss it as such. The fifth end is memory.

Before writing, all speeches were held in the memory, and so the extent to which memory is relied on affects the discussion of literacy; in a sense it was the original technology of “writing.” Before we get to that discussion however, we need to examine Campbell’s use of memory, especially as he presents it in *The Philosophy of Rhetoric*. Campbell seems to take memory for granted in the first chapter of the *Philosophy*, since he does not mention it explicitly. But by going back to it after a close examination of Campbell’s later discussions of memory, we can see ways in which memory serves an intrinsic and necessary function in all discourse. Campbell admits this in Chapter 8 of Book 1, where he acknowledges the apparent impropriety of leaving memory out of the first chapter. “Some will perhaps consider it as irregular, that I speak here of addressing the memory, of which no mention at all was made in the first chapter, wherein I considered the different forms of eloquence, classing them by the different faculties of the mind addressed” (209). Campbell insists that while memory is a faculty of the mind, it does not belong explicitly in the first chapter because memory is never an end in itself. Rather, memory is subservient to all the other faculties while playing a role in each.

This broad function makes memory a nearly ubiquitous element of discourse. This ubiquity contributes to the ease with which memory is often passed over and not singled out for attention. Memory in the study of rhetoric is often conceived of merely as memorizing the speech that will be delivered, and thus is deemed superfluous once writing and print take over the recording function of memory along with delivery. However, for Campbell it was a physical attribute that participate in all intellectual

activity. The next most visible function of memory is that of getting the hearer to memorize information. While Campbell refers to both of these functions, he values memory in other areas. Memory does not warrant headings or subheadings in Campbell's organization; rather it is a constant element, evidenced in other rhetorical elements, but discussed most explicitly in Campbell's discussion of evidence, specifically intuitive evidence—axioms, consciousness, and common sense. Campbell discusses memory in relation to axioms by referring to the ease with which axioms are remembered through the principle of order, which is the essential nature of axiomatic thought. Campbell also discusses memory under common sense while carefully omitting it from consciousness because he limits consciousness to the experience of things, while placing reflections on experience within the purview of common sense. In this scheme, memory serves to sort and order consciousness by keeping the record upon which a person can reflect. In the case of deductive evidence, Campbell discusses memory in experience, analogy and testimony. Memory is again the underlying element functioning in all three, tying them together and tying them as well to intuitive evidence. Memory is the thread woven through all of Campbell's philosophy which demonstrates the ways that it is fundamental to Campbell's rhetoric. Memory is important for Campbell's sensorium because so much of his sense of learning and knowledge was present to him in his mind. Writing and print were part of his noetic economy, but in a very different way from the expectations in my undergraduate experience where I was expected to make thought visual in order to work with it.

Campbell was a man of the eighteenth century, but his work and thought helped to define the rhetorical principles and practices for the nineteenth century. His

Philosophy and his focus on memory are important for another reason, however. Campbell did not just write the *Philosophy* in order to tell us about rhetoric; he wasn't necessarily trying to advance a discipline. Rather, Campbell was working to discover and explain the way the world, more specifically the way human language and communication, works. In this respect, looking at Campbell's work provides a better understanding of how scholars of the eighteenth century learned, communicated, and wrote—it provides a glimpse of the eighteenth century noetic. But even with our increased awareness, we must work to keep the perspective on Campbell's time. In our noetic, memory often means only of memorization, and in that context Campbell's valuing of memory and distaste for memorization seems strange. To us it might seem odd that a scholar who values memory suggests that if memory were ever proclaimed to be the singular end of a discourse, then for such discourses "...it were better to learn to forget them than to teach them the method of making them to be retained (209)." But it is these areas of potential disconnect that help us to notice what otherwise disappears.

Campbell relied on memory in every element of his communication, yet he insisted it was not the end. No speech, and nothing that could be communicated, should ever have memory as an end in itself. Yet memory is always active in each of the four ends and in the process of getting to those ends. For Campbell, everything about communication happens in relation to memory. Perhaps for a twenty-first century understanding it might help to occasionally replace "the mind" where Campbell uses memory. In the eighteenth century, thinking and composing happen in the mind.

The very idea of "writing" changes over the centuries; the twenty-first century idea inherently includes keyboards and screens. We remember that "writing" refers to

the original activity of the hand and the pen and paper, and once in a while we are self-conscious about using the term “writing” when we compose at the computer. But our “remembering” of the “original” is not always accurate. Because before pens, pencils, and paper became ubiquitous, “writing,” or “composing,” was a function of the mind.

Often when we think of technology we think of major differences and rapid rates of change. But humans are not always amenable to rapid rates of change, so it is not uncommon for generations to pass before the full potential of a technology is realized. Alexander Bain lived a hundred years after George Campbell, and in that time a relatively small step was taken towards the changes brought about by advanced writing tools. Bain’s practice provides an excellent view of this change in regards to the tools of literacy and to the sensorium.

For starters, we should set the noetic stage for Bain. He was born in 1818. He graduated from college in 1840, when the material tools of literacy had begun to become more plentiful, affordable, and easier to use. The Industrial Revolution contributed better pens and pencils and inexpensive paper to the progress of literacy. So about the time that Bain began teaching, this process of increasingly affordable and accessible tools was in motion. Bizzell and Herzberg suggest that Bain was “influenced by the rhetorical theory of fellow Scotsman George Campbell....” (1142). Because of Bain’s position in history, Bain was not only influenced by rhetorical theory but also by the literacy practices of Campbell and of the eighteenth century. Bain learned to read and write and attended school at a time when saving paper was an economic necessity. He therefore learned the value of using his memory as a storage area, not a static storage area for memorization, but a dynamic one in keeping with Campbell’s faculty, where ideas interacted, thoughts

formed and entire speeches were composed. The mind, the memory represented an underlying, interwoven principle of scholarship for Bain.

However, as he began his teaching, technology was delivering more easily accessible and more affordably disposable literacy tools. Also, and this is something we have not paid attention to yet, along with the tools, the Industrial Revolution increased the amount of product. This means that more and more books were being printed and were more affordable. The result of this is that access to the printed page became much more common. Instead of relying completely on conversations, lectures, and lecture notes as sources for information, scholars had increased access to books and printed lecture notes. Instead of just something the professors had, or the library had, books were available to individuals. The advent of relatively cheap books fostered a shift in the noetic economy. This increase in print resulted in an increase in the visibility of scholarship. Ideas came more and more to be understood (although not consciously) as something contained in a writing. For example, in the twenty-first century when we refer to what Campbell “said” we are comfortable in the assumption that we are referring to something written in a book. But if we look back to Campbell for a moment, when he said it originally he did so as a speech, as something he raised for verbal discussion with his peers and colleagues and students. Even though the text was written, the occasion of communication for Campbell was always understood as oral. The nineteenth century lies between Campbell’s speech and our assumptions of print.

This sense of between-ness shows up in Bain’s teaching. Andrea Lunsford takes a close look at Bain’s teaching in order to explore his views on essay writing as a classroom activity or teaching method. Lunsford gives five reasons that Bain listed as

advantages to essay writing for students, and shows how he sees the final two advantages to have downsides which cannot be overcome. According to Lunsford, Bain feels essay writing: 1) makes students develop their own powers and encourages them, 2) leads students to study and research, 3) allows students to put in practice what has already been taught, 4) makes easy work for teachers, and 5) tests students' mental qualities and resources over a broad range of topics. In response to "easy work for teachers," Bain suggests that assigning essays as a part of class is an intolerable form of laziness, since it requires no preparation, nor does the teacher give instruction. In response to testing a "wide range of topics," Bain insists that teachers should test only what they have taught and also raises questions about how the varieties of writing styles resulting from the range of topics are to be fairly assessed. From the twenty-first century perspective, the advantages suggested by Bain far outweigh the disadvantages. Fairness in grading is still an issue, but the workload resulting from assigning essays does not leave room for laziness. Even in the nineteenth century, however, this idea that student writing was not proper as a class activity was not universal. George Jardine promoted the assigning and grading of essays; it was the foundation of his pedagogy. The value and place of student writing was up for discussion. However, just looking at what Bain was opposed to does not provide a complete picture.

The way Bain organized his classes further demonstrates his position in the history of literacy. Bain devoted class time to lectures and to oral examination of students. Lunsford suggests "Bain did advocate at least one formal, regular process in his class, the process of critical analysis, and he saw to it that his students both understood and could use that process" (437). She further quotes one of his students as saying that

Bain “excelled in oral examination in the class.... He also allowed a student to state his difficulties or dispute a point” (437). Bain chose oral techniques as appropriate for teaching. No doubt this was a reflection of how he was taught, and a reflection of how he understood learning to happen, even if he did not fully understand the ways in which it was also a reflection of an earlier century.

While this portrayal of Bain’s teaching points to the ways his practice, his sensorium and noetic economy, shifted in comparison to an earlier era, much of his other work is influenced by the world of print. His work with paragraphs arose from a study of writing. He looked at the way good writers wrote and analyzed their written texts. Out of this examination rose the emphasis on paragraphs. So Bain was aware of and participated in the literacy of his era. It is just that some of the practices of the earlier noetic economy were embedded in his own practice, even while his scholarship addressed the new needs for training in and about writing.

Campbell’s memory and expansive utilization of the mind were on one side of Bain. Current-Traditional Rhetoric is on the other. From the twenty-first century we look at current-traditionalism and wonder how anyone could so completely separate thought from writing. A closer look at evolving experiences of the sensorium provides at least some answers for how that could happen. No doubt those who disagreed with Bain in his time also wondered how he could teach without assigning writing. Yet we have seen how his experience of literacy affected these choices. He was able to defend himself to his contemporaries and in doing so he emphasized the working of the mind; he pushed his students towards critical thinking; he insisted that they answer with what they had been taught. His emphasis on paragraphs and on modes of discourse arose from an

analysis of written texts. He participated in both realms and his active thought process was intended to be distributed within an equally active environment. However, his participation in this shifting noetic economy was not accompanied by awareness.

By the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, however, literacy had embedded itself further into human consciousness. The generation represented by Bain's students became more and more accustomed to seeing print as a container for thought. Their lessons came from written texts as much as from lectures and conversations. And this next transition occurred in such a way as to do damage to writing pedagogy. As we look back from the twenty-first century, we often see Bain as a source of the problems with current-traditional rhetoric. The outcome of his pedagogy is not the problem. Rather, it is his writing and the textbooks that were based on what he wrote. We can see from Bain's opposition to essay writing as a class activity, along with the critical thinking he did insist on, that he would not have approved a current-traditional model that involved narrow writing assignments and grading for grammar. That was not the model he envisioned, nor the legacy he might have hoped for. To put it simply, those who came after just did not understand. What was happening as current-traditionalism settled itself into the curriculum was a failure to translate from one noetic economy to another. Bain was able to succeed by using an older model while also participating in the new, but the generation that followed him was less successful.

The biggest question from twenty-first century perspective is how thought came to be separated from writing; how writing was limited to style and grammar; how anyone could miss seeing that writing is much more than that. A closer look at the technology of literacy provides some answers to those questions. Teachers like Wendell and Hill grew

up in an atmosphere of advanced print literacy. They put a certain amount of faith in what was written. The value embodied by the idea of “seeing it in black and white” was beginning to take hold. I am certainly not suggesting that these men believed everything they read. However it is significant that there was a shift towards expecting a text to be a representation of thought. In this sensorium, knowledge and ideas formed in a visual field. This expectation, when juxtaposed with different expectations from just a generation before, contributed to a reductionist view of writing and rhetoric. When we look back at Campbell, we see that in the eighteenth century composition was a process of a dynamic memory, an activity of the mind. Alexander Bain was raised on this concept and participated in it even as he worked with the increasing amount of emphasis and reliance on written and printed text. In his writings he assumed an audience that thought like he did, an audience that considered critical analysis most important, an audience that used the text as a tool but relied on the mind for thought. The generation represented by Wendell and Hill, however, began their learning and their academic career with print firmly embedded and thought was therefore intimately and irrevocably connected to print. Current-traditional rhetoric is actually a logical outcome of the way Hill and Wendell would have read Bain. Hill and Wendell would have expected the text to contain Bain’s thought. But for Bain, as much thought was in the mind as was in the text. Bain, therefore, made certain assumptions about thought, and about invention, which he did not spell out in his text because he did not know he had to. Hill and Wendell read the text without thinking to question the thought behind it.

The answer to how current-traditionalists could separate thought from writing is that they were drawing from a model that in some legitimate ways *did* separate thought

from writing. They drew from Bain, who drew from Campbell. Campbell really did compose much of his work in his dynamic memory. Writing for him was in many ways a process of transcribing what was in his head onto the paper—economic, material, and historical realities made this natural, and effective. Bain drew from this model, even as print imposed itself on his scholarship and teaching. By the time of Hill and Wendell, the model was still present but literacy had changed so much that it was no longer effective. However, literacy had changed slowly enough and with enough embeddedness that Hill and Wendell were not able to see the change. They presented writing instruction as if thought and writing were separated because they based their theories on texts that assumed that a certain amount of composing and thought did happen before ever approaching the tools of literacy. The result was a square peg in a round hole.

So the path to current-traditionalism is traceable along the path of literacy, and of shifting noetic economies and shifting sensorium, but that is not to say that it was unavoidable. Campbell bases his entire philosophy on memory but it is not explicit in his text. He composed his philosophy to be presented as a speech; it contains everything an audience needs to understand and use. If Wendell and Hill had looked closer at Campbell and his concept of memory, which is a concept of invention, then they could have delivered a dynamic writing process into the twentieth century. However, awareness of difference was limited; the idea that some shift in the human sensorium had occurred, the idea that one generation might interact with information differently, was simply not available to Wendell and Hill. Bain insisted on critical thinking in the classroom. If Wendell and Hill could have followed that and realized the underlying assumptions of Bain's texts, they could have infused life into a study which instead stagnated under the

strictures of grammar rules and style studies. Many influences contributed to the rise of current-traditional rhetoric and the technology of literacy is certainly not the only cause for the reification of composition into style and grammar. But looking closer at the materials of literacy in the context of the sensorium and the noetic economy does at least begin to provide one answer to the question of “how could they?” They could because they were participating in a transformed sensorium, but they were not aware of the changes as they happened.

With an increased awareness of the sensorium we can see a shift in the noetic economy, namely a shift of emphasis from lecture to textbook which can be discussed within the sensorium as a shift from aural to visual and represented in the noetic economy as a shift in which students adjusted the center of their locus of information and idea formation from lecture hall to textbook. In addition, with that shift of emphasis to print and to paper, which was promoted by the availability of paper, aspects of idea formation including invention and revision became more external and the impulse for scholars to bleed ink onto the page and thus to incorporate writing tools more fully into a shifted noetic economy in which the kinesthetic act of putting pen to paper was also an intellectual act of organizing thoughts, of establishing knowledge and of forming new ideas. Students interiorized the pen before their teachers did. Student interior and sensorium and noetic economy shaped themselves to the kinds of organization and externalization of thought that their teachers were unconsciously reaching for, but in the end would not fully embrace because aspects of their noetic economy remained with their upbringing and they never were aware that anything significant was changing at all.

This is just one example of a historical period that can be more fully understood through an increased awareness of the sensorium. To suggest a few, it would be worth going back to Ong's work again, and more fully drawing out the ways that Ramus participated in shifts in the sensorium. Going back to Plato and Aristotle provides an area where awareness of the sensorium can offer scholars insights into changes over a much smaller span of time. Another likely area of exploration would be to compare Rene Descartes and Giambattista Vico. Vico's understanding of history is vastly different from Descartes, and considering differences in their noetic economies and sensorium would provide fruitful illumination and reverberation.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

In Walter Ong's work we find a complex resource grounded in literacy, technology, and humanity; we can draw from this resource as we struggle to shape responses to the evolving realities that develop in conjunction with the rapid development inherent in current information and communication technologies. The concept of the sensorium emanates from Ong's work with particular potency. Its potency has been latent, but with a dawning awareness particularly appropriate for Ong's work, the potential for experiencing our sensorium develops as we experience secondary orality and discover that the reality is rather different from our expectations. Orality and literacy have long been discussed in opposition. Secondary orality was supposed to clarify the progression and explain the union of orality and literacy and a movement to something new. However, shifting noetic economies, in which the Internet plays a significant role, demonstrate that secondary orality is not sufficient. The option of literacy developing into multiple literacies similarly falls short.

Ong helps us begin to question our assumptions when he draws our attention to the fact that orality is not literacy. Ong identifies and names secondary orality while demonstrating that we had not been able to be fully aware of the distinction between orality and literacy until human interaction with electronic communications heightened

our awareness of the possibility of not-literacy. Literacy tends to be totalizing, and for a time we lacked perspective. A central part of Ong's work, and of his praxis, which enables the envisioning of what we might experience beyond literacy is the way that he operates within an awareness of the human sensorium. For a time our awareness of the sensorium and of the shifting noetic economy was limited. However, our present powers of description have advanced enough that we are now ready to observe and embrace the sensorium as we participate in its shifts. We need to embrace the sensorium in our own work.

When we as humans, and scholars, develop our awareness of the sensorium, we increase our awareness of ourselves and we open ourselves to new insights. When we are more aware of the sensorium we are able to observe change in ways that we are not able to observe without it. We come to sense the need to pay attention to the increase in aural and visual aspects of communication with the development and expansion of the Internet. We become aware of the problematic assumptions involved when someone tries to refer to *oral* as if it also carries the meaning of *aural*. We notice the ways that reading and writing enact visual properties, but also enact kinesthetic connections to the sense of touch. We become aware that the touch of a book is different from the touch of a keyboard. Not only is the touch different, but that difference connects to the human participation in the field of knowledge. For Alexander Bain's students, easier access to books shifted elements of their noetic economies and understanding became more closely connected to the content of books and to the reliance on books for both acquisition and recall of ideas. They did not realize that the presence of the book could change

knowledge nor did they realize that shifts in the noetic economy transform (or should transform) pedagogy.

Awareness of change is a crucial benefit of interpreting the world on the basis of experience within the sensorium; we have always been aware of change, but have not always been able to identify and describe it as it unfolds. In the old orality and literacy conversation we were either restricted by dichotomy, as if the two were at odds with each other, or we succumbed to the teleological urge to invest a spirit of progress wherever we identified change. With an increased awareness of the sensorium we are able to reconceptualize our understanding of change. When we were ensconced in the totalizing tendency of literacy it almost made sense to think that such literacy represented an advancement on whatever came before, and there was no self-consciousness in referring to a “great leap forward.” In fact, it is human nature to operate within assumptions of growth. Critiques of the myth of the great leap forward reminded us, however, that the complexities of human cultures cannot be summed up in a simple teleological rendition of history.

Walter Ong’s work is often critiqued under the rubric of the great leap forward; he is labeled as a scholar who assumes a great divide between orality and literacy, and between oral cultures and literate cultures. That misreading contributes to other misreadings and to a dismissal of much of Ong’s work in English and composition studies. Ong’s work is more complex than that, however, and the dismissal has been detrimental. Continued dismissal would be worse. A close look at Ong’s work culminates in a recovery of the sensorium. However, past misreadings should remind us not to let go of the complexity by imagining that just one term can encapsulate Ong’s

work. Our increased awareness of the sensorium needs to arise out of the depth included in understanding Ong's concept of the word, of the interior, of presence, and of the noetic economy.

The sensorium opens us up to a more dynamic and flexible relationship with change. In Western culture the sensorium is conceptualized with the organization of five senses. We can overcome dichotomy with an awareness of the sensorium because *oral* and *literate* are no longer the only players on the cultural field—as if they ever were. Within the sensorium there is no call to pit them against each other.

The sensorium offers us the opportunity to engage the dynamic interaction of five elements. One important caveat must be kept at the forefront of this discussion, however. The five-sense sensorium is socially constructed. Our culture has shaped and classified the sensorium in this particular way, so I work within that as if, almost, it is the only way to conceptualize it—but it is not. The sensorium is a part of the essence of humanity, but the five-sense model of representation is not. It is only essential for us, at this time.

The shifts in the sensorium mean that one of five senses might be more dominant within the noetic economy at one point, and be less dominant at another time. In the old model, something from the past would be understood to atrophy and be replaced by newer and better understanding. Within the sensorium shifts are recognized as a matter of emphasis and perhaps even attention. As humans we emphasize the relevant and in a matter of efficiency we deemphasize the other. It is never as simple as one or the other, and the change need never be permanent. Take for example, the sense of smell. In a culture where hunting and gathering are the primary activity in human life, the noetic economy develops with a need for the sense of smell to be heightened. The scent of an

animal and the scent of vegetables, roots and mushrooms play a huge part in what it means to be knowledgeable in that culture. In a culture where we trust the packaged nutrition purchased at the grocery store, the role of smell in the noetic economy is diminished, which allows for energy within the sensorium to shift. However, scent and smell have not disappeared. The whole sensorium interacts. We still respond to the smell of a library, and the scent released as the spine of a book is cracked. We still orient ourselves in many ways through our sense of smell, but it is not dominant. Awareness of the sensorium helps us recall, however, that within a culture the distribution of sense-dominance is never uniform. We still have wine connoisseurs who depend for their livelihood on subtle distinctions unidentifiable by most members of the culture.

In an example closer to the context of this dissertation, when print was the dominant medium for communicating across space and time the visual was very important for how humans interacted with knowledge. Not only that, but the visual presentation in linear format with high contrast becomes highly valued. The need for this visuality in one area—communication—came also to affect our values in architecture and interpersonal expectations. The straight line and square corner are, for us, necessary elements of what a house is. Other cultures assume rounded models and do not associate our lines with anything very homey at all. Architecture interacts with interpersonal expectations as well. Dividing dwellings into rooms operates as metaphor for divisions relative to personal space and definition of familial relationships. Obviously that discussion raises as many questions as answers, the most relevant of which might be questions of causation. Awareness of the sensorium should lead us to an understanding that no one thing can alter human development independently. Rather, shifts in the noetic

economy present themselves in outcomes that can be observed as patterns across culture. It is only natural, however, that our attention would be drawn to the means of communicating knowledge, and perhaps that we unfairly imbue such with greater influence than it necessarily has in and of itself. We see this when a claim that “writing transforms consciousness” is perceived as deterministic. Similarly, social networking via the Internet seems to be causing change in our culture. However, shifts in consciousness reciprocally cause and/or participate in technological developments, and our sensorium changes shape in connection with material elements such as books and keyboards and responds variously to the sights, sounds, and smells available and most useful for accomplishing goals.

The development of electronic communication technologies increases the emphasis on sound within the sensorium and shifted the role of the visual. Recorded sound becomes commonplace and communication technologies animate language and concepts. In discussion of oral and visual we are often led to represent things in terms of balance. This is fine, as long as we think in terms of *informal* balance rather than *formal* balance. Rather than a teeter-totter kind of balance, imagine stretching the board out to a huge square. Now put five balls of different (and constantly changing) size and weight on the square. Imagine that situation for balance. Fortunately it is not up to us to maintain the balance; the sensorium enacts an essential balance. The teeter-totter model is not representative because we claim to discuss the balance between oral and visual, but find that *oral* and *aural* are not exactly the same thing, which not only upsets the balance, but demonstrates the deficiency of the model. Yet within the sensorium shifts and movement are constant.

Visual, also, is not just one thing, is not as distinct as a single ball rolling around. In many ways, the camera and the video camera enhanced the visual aspects of the sensorium and we began talking about the importance of the visual—we became aware of our visuality in a new way. But of course, what was needed to read pages of handwriting and print if not vision? The distinctions between those kinds of visual activity and the relation to the shifting noetic economy still need to be explored. Reading an image is different from reading print in part because we engage elements of the sensorium when we encounter an image that we do not engage when reading print. Because a picture is a little closer to the experience of the “real” thing, our kinesthetic aspects engage in a unique way. In fact, the motion camera was developed partly in response to that. It seemed like the picture should move, so someone found a way to make it do so.

The burgeoning awareness of the sensorium and of the ways that our noetic economy and our sensorium are in constant flux offers us the opportunity to participate in change without being overwhelmed by it. This developing awareness of the sensorium can also help us explore our past. I have shown how Alexander Bain participated in a noetic economy that was effective for his teachers but was unaware of the ways he was not participating in the noetic economy of his students. In connection with communication technologies, his students were developing along different noetic paths and were shaping different priorities within their sensorium. Since Bain was unaware of the ways that such shifts would alter his relationship to his students and alter his student’s relationships to communication, he was unable to shift his pedagogy to respond to changes of which he was unaware. Looking back with our own increasing awareness of

the sensorium gives us perspective on Bain. We can see that what we came to identify as problematic pedagogy was, for him, the only logical approach.

This understanding can also help us increase our awareness of the present. With the exponential pace of the development of electronic communications we know that we, and perhaps more-so our students, enact an almost constantly shifting sensorium. We are searching for ways to define the literacy that is developing. Brian Street uses Ong as a foil in order to set up the “autonomous” and “ideological” categories. The impetus for that and for the rest of the New Literacy Studies movement was a burgeoning awareness that literacy is not a singular concept; as with all things human, literacy is complex and multifaceted. Calls for multiple literacies increase the (awareness of) complexity. So much multiplicity enacts calls for new definitions. It may be however, that our awareness of complexity has developed to the point where anything but a limited or conditional definition is impossible.

To help us in that endeavor we need a way to describe the change that has happened and is seemingly always in the process of happening. The sensorium provides that for us. The sensorium is not a new theory. It is a part of humanity that needs to be recognized in order to be useful to us. Walter Ong’s work is embedded with the sensorium in ways that he both is and is not aware of. His work is not “about” the sensorium per se, but as we delve into his work we can sense the presence and importance of the sensorium and by exploring his explorations we discover the reasons that his work has continued to seem relevant even as we moved beyond the levels of technology that he theorized. That relevance is that the concepts of noetic economy and sensorium are more relevant to us now than any theory of technology or definition of

literacy. Those concepts are at once more enduring and more fluid and flexible than definitions and theories can be in the face of rapid change.

Walter Ong's explorations of orality, literacy and secondary orality, his enactment of scholarship within the sensorium—an enactment that was more unconscious in that he did not always articulate the interaction of aural, oral, visual, kinesthetic, olfactory, and tactile, but merely referred to the human sensorium which embraced for him all the interactions of the physical and intellectual aspects of human existence—and his understanding of the word, interior, and presence complement the explorations we enact in English studies. However, as teachers we do not just study English; we also study our students, sometimes formally but more often informally. As we interact with our students with an increasing awareness of the sensorium, noticing, for instance that the role of instant communication in their education is more than a distraction, noticing that texting and tweeting are an inherent part of their noetic economies and that the writing process shifts as a result, we realize that their noetic economy is different from our own. Walter Ong's work offers theoretical and practical help for writing teachers. We have seen three major areas where Ong embraces and explores the things that are central to the teaching of writing: literacy, technology, and humanity.

Ong takes literacy seriously. I observe in the discussion of Goody how this can be a difficult and problematic approach to take. To take literacy seriously is to acknowledge that literate cultures are different from oral cultures. Literacy is a powerful force. Saying that seems to imbue it with agency. Thus, taking literacy seriously opens up a scholar to saying, or seeming to say that literacy, in itself, changes humans and human culture. Even when the claim is carefully qualified to suggest that literacy allows

humans to do things and to think in ways that would not be possible without literacy, it seems to be a claim that fits Street's "autonomous" category. However, as teachers of writing we must take literacy, alphabetic literacy, seriously—even as we strive to embrace our students and the cultural diversity they participate in and as we strive to embrace the multiple literacies we are becoming increasingly aware of. In taking literacy seriously, Ong does claim that in the broad evolutionary perspective literacy is an improvement on orality. At the same time, his work represents an attempt to understand orality because orality provides perspective to help us enrich our understanding of literacy. Part of what can be so problematic is that Ong also has to defend his study of orality. Often we treat the past with an unreflective sense of "the good old days" and the myth of a pristine oral culture plays into such ideas. But for Ong, "To approach [orality] positively is not to advocate it as a permanent state for any culture. Literacy opens possibilities to the word and to human existence unimaginable without writing" (*Orality and Literacy* 175). Indeed, we would be hard pressed to find a culture with no awareness of literacy. Our global economy (financial and noetic, both, in this case) precludes any remnants of the pristine. Yet literacies vary across cultures and within cultures. To take literacy seriously is to understand its power, or more accurately, to understand the ability of humans to exert power through it.

Writing teachers all share a basic belief that literacy opens up possibilities for students. That is why we teach writing. The context of teaching forces us to acknowledge the variations in literacy across individuals. Awareness of such variation provided impetus to the multiplicities of literacies as we become aware of student strengths apart from alphabetic encoding. However, literacies such as "visual" digital"

“presentational” and “technological” reveal the difficulty of expecting literacy, even when taken seriously, to mean one thing as we move forward. Those multiple literacies celebrate the diversity of humanity and preface the potential of the sensorium. The sensorium invites us to resist the urge (an urge of a passing and past noetic) to define each of these literacies or to fit them into a definition that includes them all. The sensorium celebrates the variation and offers the possibility of becoming aware of categories even as categories shift and change. The sensorium invites us to participate in the change without reifying.

Ong also takes technology seriously. That can be as problematic as taking literacy seriously. Ong pays close enough attention to technology to see that it is not neutral. It is not just something that happens to be there as humans go on merrily with their lives. Technology can be transformative. Technology does participate in transformations; all that is left to debate is levels of agency. According to Ong, “Technologies are artificial, but—paradox again—artificiality is natural to human beings. Technology, properly interiorized, does not degrade human life, but on the contrary enhances it” (*Orality and Literacy* 83). Ong points to writing as a technology, something he needed to remind his original audience of. We are surrounded by technology, particularly technology that digitally manipulates words, or—to shift agency—that humans use to manipulate words digitally. Agency remains important because when Ong takes technology as seriously as he does, he opens himself to the charge of technological determinism. However, when we understand Ong’s theory of interiorization and his sensitivity to paradox we can see that Ong does not treat technology as something that

overtakes us or something that undermines our will. Instead, technology exists as an inherent part of human action in the world.

The third aspect of Ong's work that is central to English studies is revealed in a question which underlies all of his work, the question of what it means to be human. Ong takes literacy and technology seriously because he takes humanity seriously. This is an aspect of his work, like his discussion of the sensorium, that is not always at the forefront, at least when his critics are discussing literacy and technology and inferring from those discussions that Ong subscribes to technological determinism. Ong's exploration of the word is grounded in an understanding of human use of the word, and in an understanding that understanding and intellection begin with the word. In exploring the interior, the human interior, he explores the ways we interact with knowledge. In exploring presence he reveals the assumption that language and humanity only have meaning within social contexts; he explores what it means to be present to another. For us being present to our students and experiencing our students as present to us is the most salient interaction of literacy, technology, and humanity.

As I trace these three themes through Ong's work, I question one of the claims that Ong makes, a claim that led many people to dismiss him. I asked: "does writing transform consciousness?" As I explored, I questioned whether Ong *really* says that himself, and whether saying it makes him a great divide thinker and a technological determinist. Ong does claim that writing transforms consciousness, but he is not a great divide theorist because he does not claim that writing acts alone. He is aware of the social, cultural, economic, and psychological factors that participate with writing to produce evolutionary transformations of humanity. I ask this question of Ong because I

see the need to ask the question again in our own time, with some revision reflecting an underlying theme of Ong's work: "does technology—in our case computers, smartphones and the Internet—transform consciousness?" Or, to put it another way: "are our students different from us, and are they different because of technology?" I use the pattern laid out by Ong to give the answer. Our students are not transformed by technology—I maintain human agency as a significant part of humanity—but change does occur over time, and technology does participate, along with other social, cultural, economic, and psychological factors. Change does happen. That is an essential part of humanity. However, the sensorium helps us make sense of change in ways that meet the needs of literacy specialists, technologists and teachers, while avoiding the downfalls of great divide or teleological thinking. The sensorium emphasizes connection and embraces change that acknowledges development as ebb and flow, and replaces "atrophy" with a more dynamic awareness of fluctuating emphases.

In recovering Ong's work, I bring forward concepts that are more relevant now than they were when Ong first presented them. We are more ready to embrace them than we were then. This development embodies the kind of evolutionary changes Ong describes and fulfills some of the things Ong was reaching for while also answering some of the theorems he left us at the end of *Orality and Literacy*.

Ong ends his list of theorems with an "inward turn" but he invites us there to also turn outward. His ultimate question, "In what way are the two senses of God's 'word' related to one another and to human beings in history?" is less important for us than the way Ong understands the question's position within human experience. He suggests that "The question is more focused today than ever before." Then he turns outward. "So are

countless other questions involved in what we now know about orality and literacy. Orality-literacy dynamics enter integrally into the modern evolution of consciousness toward both greater interiorization and greater openness” (179). Let’s consider then some of the questions that we are becoming open to in the context of a new understanding of the relevance of Ong’s work.

First, I revive the idea of the noetic economy. The noetic economy is our knowledge economy, the resources that are available within a culture for interacting with and disseminating knowledge and intellectual endeavors. It is a concept Ong uses in his descriptions of oral and literate cultures. Drawing attention to descriptions of noetic economies emphasizes connections across cultures. In a way that is familiar to us when we remind our students to compare *and* contrast, the discussion of noetic economies keeps similarities across culture at the fore, balancing our awareness of difference. Also, this focus on ways of knowing involves a different form of history. Rather than a history of facts, or even a history of action, this exploration of the possibilities for interacting with knowledge provides a unique perspective on a culture that can in turn provide additional balance and perspective when we identify difference in other ways.

The second concept we need to recover is that of the sensorium. Sensorium and noetic economy work together as tools for describing our situation. In looking at our situation, in looking at the state of literacy studies we can see the way that “literacy” has evolved into “literacies”, and we hear constant calls for descriptions, definitions, and theories that can respond to multiplicity and rapid change. Once we acknowledge and understand change we can move forward. The sensorium responds to change, individual and cultural, and does not infer teleological change. Rather, the sensorium shifts, so that

at certain times and places, or in certain individuals at the same time, the different parts of the sensorium are emphasized. We are not able to tune in all of the senses at once. Some will diminish while others are emphasized, but as we can see historically, the sense never completely disappears, and awaits a return to emphasis in a different noetic economy. With this understanding of the sensorium, which can mesh with our increased understanding of learning styles, we can describe our students. This, in turn opens the possibility for researching changes in our students because it provides a way to describe what is happening, even in the midst of flux and change. Electronic communication invites constant change and we cannot wait for things to slow down, or for enough history to have passed to form an objective, distanced assessment of a historical moment.

Although we cannot slow down, we do need to find a way to offer an assessment of our position. The first step towards a future in which we negotiate with an awareness of the sensorium is that of description. We need rich description of our noetic economy and of our students' noetic economy. Then we need to analyze the distinction between them. Leu et al. and Gee, among others, argue that the most pressing need for Literacy Studies is to provide a definition of literacy. It may never be possible to arrive at such a definition. Certainly definitions are helpful and necessary, but to define is to categorize and to contain. We are accustomed to that *modus operandi*, but we may need to consider that such operations are part of a noetic economy from which we are shifting away. Even in cases where we admit a level of unknown we like to operate with a "working definition." The current noetic economy, however, does not facilitate the ability to operate from a definition. Literacy changes, and our understanding and awareness of the instability continue to develop, so that we come to see that perhaps definition is not

possible. However, we are not left, therefore, with no way to describe analyze and even give a sort of shape to things. Within the sensorium fluidity and change are the norm. We can observe the sensory interactions and discuss them, while acknowledging the flux. For example, look at one aspect of the noetic economy—that of sources for an academic project such as this dissertation. What goes on when I interact with that small element of knowledge? Let's look specifically at a missing source. I get to the end of the project and there is a source that I forgot to record that needs to go in my Works Cited. Where do I go for that information? Although I could go to my files, find my notes for that chapter and sift through them until I find the source in question, I do not really do that. The information is more easily accessible online; a quick Google or WorldCat search brings me the information much more quickly. That is just one part of my noetic economy, but it begins to specify one aspect of knowledge storage and retrieval. Ong explains that the intellect cannot operate in separation from the senses. Since humans need the senses—the sensorium—to both acquire and share knowledge, humans also need to be aware of shifts in the noetic economy, the sensorium, and the interior. If we need to be reminded why such awareness might be important, we can recall Alexander Bain. His students shifted in their noetic economy from accessing information readily in their memory, to accessing information in a printed book, and owning that book contributed in large part to their economy of knowledge. It did not seem like a real change at all, other than one of convenience, but the convenience changed everything.

Rich description of our noetic economy can contribute to the next step that needs to be taken. We need to develop a map of the sensorium. There is risk in this process, for “map” suggests visual representation, and we may reify the dynamic, thus attempting

to put into a container that which was not meant to be contained. This is particularly risky because it is we who need to do the work. Bain was not aware of the significance of changes in the noetic economy. He was not aware that such changes could shape a pedagogy that was incompatible with student experience. We are becoming aware. But we could easily impose our antiquated economy upon the future generation. Nonetheless, we must try. We must try because we already do discuss, at varying levels of awareness and explicitness, the human sensorium. I discuss above the ways that the term “oral” is often used to carry also the meaning of “aural.” Within the sensorium there is room to distinguish the principles of human communication through spoken word. It is worth noting that speaking does not directly register on a five sense model; it is not one of the senses. Rather, speaking invokes the sense of hearing in that it is meant to be heard. But it also involves kinesthetic aspects that invoke a connection to the sense of touch. In addition, the role of the tongue in tasting as well as in contributing to the formation of words cannot be overlooked. But aural should not be considered to be limited to spoken words. Recorded and played back words register as a different experience from face-to-face communication. Music adds to the aural experience—and we are never far from music, but we are not always aware of the way music can contribute to the shaping of meaning and knowledge.

One area where we are becoming more aware is demonstrated in the trend in composition studies towards “multimodal” composing. Although multimodal composition is not a uniform concept, the modes do connect with aspects of the sensorium and increased awareness of the sensorium will contribute to our experience with multimodality. The sensorium is not a method or a definition, or even in itself a

theory. The classical view of the sensorium imagined a sentient being in the brain that accessed information about the external world through the nerves. We find such an imagination quaint; our imaginations for the activity of the senses include nerve endings, synapses and different areas of the brain lighting up with activity as a result different sensory input, there is value to the sentient being to the extent that we understand the sensorium to be inside us, to be a part of us. It is a part of us that traditionally reacts and tries to make sense of the information coming in; often that sense making is unconscious. However, as we become more aware of our sensorium we can realize that the ways we respond to sensory input.

In combination with the present work of mapping the sensorium, we can benefit from turning to the past to observe and describe shifts in the sensorium. The places to begin observation are places where we can identify shifts in technology. The shift that Bain was unaware of included the development of printing processes and paper production to the point where books and paper became significantly more affordable, and thus more accessible to students. This dissertation developed in response to a need to find a way to talk about change; thus identifying places of change is an important starting point. When it comes to change we can use the Great Divide discussion as a model to temper our historical explorations. We can focus on moments of particular change. At the same time, however, we describe the moment of change in the evolutionary context. With literacy we find that in human culture it developed over a long period of time. Once humans as a species acquired literacy there were times when particular cultures and individuals encountered literacy, and the developments in many ways happened across a generation instead of across millennia. However, in those times of change, the additional

dynamic of literacy which involves humans exerting power over other humans was also in play. As we pursue historical studies we can observe and describe the dynamics of evolutionary and generational change.

The sensorium can also help us look to the future, and that has been the goal of this project, to question how change happens and whether or to what extent we can be aware of, describe, and respond to change as it happens. We have seen the ways that the most recent technology reveals much about the shaping of the sensorium. For Ong, that was the television. For Welch, it was video. For Joyce it was hypertext. The most recent technology for us, for now is the Internet.

The Internet links us to the greatest repository of information in the history of civilization (Weare & Lin, 2000). It also provides multiple modes of communication (Thorne, 2008). Finally, it is the most efficient system in our history for delivering new technologies to read, write, and communicate (Lankshear & Knobel, 2006). Together these elements permit individuals to construct new information, new knowledge, and even newer technologies. As a result, the Internet is in a continuous state of becoming, regularly transforming each one of us as we, in turn, transform it. (Leu et al. 264)

The “continuous state of becoming” and the use of multiple modes highlight the need for reference to the sensorium. Awareness of the sensorium provides a tool for description that is valuable for research without resulting in static categories. With such, we will be able to observe and describe change within this continuous state of becoming and as a result shape a pedagogy that invites our students, through an awareness of their own

sensorium, to navigate the noetic economy with an efficiency that makes them producers, truly preparing them for the future.

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