

Interpretation (hermeneutics)

See also Words are ultimately defined by the nonverbal

Although writing creates thought of a sort impossible to primary orality and is, in a certain sense, if not "the full manifestation of discourse" (Ricoeur, Interpretation Theory 25-26), at least a source of a fullness (~~and the inevitably dialectically set-up thinness~~) of discourse unrealizable by primary orality, nevertheless to settle on writing ~~xxx~~ as the paradigm of all discourse is to set up its time-obviating mechanisms and fixity as ideals (this is the understanding of Derrida's doctrines of the "trace" and différance) and thus to distort our understanding of discourse and of thought itself. By cutting off writing from its origins in orality, this ploy makes deconstruction ^{a for some conclusion} ~~imperative~~; writing on its own cannot hold up.

Rhetoric as interpretation. Public debate as interpretation.

Grammar and interpretation. Literates are inclined to think that is the chief business of grammar to establish stability, whereas the chief business of grammar is to make communication possible--which does not always imply stability. In oral cultures, grammar changes rapidly and effectively.

Dick Ohmann's essay in NAHD: how facts can be true facts and still interpretation.

Schools: oral interaction with written texts. Impossible without text; but without orality, ineffective.

Roman Catholic Church: still radically oral (word of Pope).

Medieval law: word of sovereign was the law. Written documents were implementation or interpretation, subject to further oral action. ~~Clanchy~~ Ganshof as cited in PW. Clanchy: written text validated by oral witness (still: notary). Stock on interpretation, ~~xxx~~ oral and written and complex interaction.

Interpretation in law courts. Work of late Helmut Esau on Nixon tapes as heard and as transcribed--totally different effects often.

Technology and interpretation:

Writing, print, electronics (radio & TV, computers).

Interiority of technology.

Technology and interpretation of the self (interiorization).

In Ellul's "technological system" the verbal and intellectual and interiorizing elements seem not to be taken into consideration.

Biblical interpretation of (earlier part of) the Bible shows little concern with recreating the original context in order to retrieve meaning.

Medieval interpretation follows pretty much the same pattern.

With Protestantism (after print) and in an anticipatory way with Lorenzo Valla (Donation of Constantine), A.D. 1407-1457, on the eve of print.

Interpretation a situation in terms of exact verbal directions (as on packaged goods today) is brand new, unknown in old rhetorical tradition a production of typographic textuality (exactly repeatable verbal statement)

(MORE)

Interpretation (hermeneutics)

There is a massive literature on interpretation (hermeneutics). Hans-Georg Gadamer's in his ~~Frankfurt and Munich~~ work translated into English as Truth and Method gives a masterful account of the development of hermeneutic problematics from Kant through Schleiermacher and Dilthey on into the present. A more recent collection ~~edited~~ by various hands, Hermeneutics: Questions and Prospects, edited by Gary Shapiro and Alan Sica, brings the questions--or concatenation of questions--into the 1980s. While acknowledging the importance of this ~~work in the movement~~ vast and intricately interwoven tradition or set of traditions, the present work starts out from a quite different tack: ~~hermeneutic~~ interpretation ~~is growing out~~ at its origins before writing and as a sequel of ~~its~~ writing and print as such, as well as computers. The earlier work started with textual hermeneutics and, while in ~~Gadamer~~ and Ricoeur and others it attends to a degree to interpretation ~~of~~ oral utterance and through oral utterance, it does so with virtually no attention to what is now known of orality-literacy contrasts.

Oral retelling of a story narrative by this narrator to this audience as an interpretation of other retellings--the paradigmatic case of interpretation (narrative underlies other verbal art forms).

Interpreting a situation in terms of exact verbal directions (such as on packaged goods today, in automobile manuals, etc.) is a brand new thing, unknown in the old rhetorical tradition, a product of typographic textuality (exact repetition of visual statement involved).

James Macpherson (1736-96), in his Fragments of Ancient Poetry Collected in the Highlands of Scotland and Translated from the Gaelic or Erse Language (1760) and in his Fingal: An Ancient Epic Poem in Six Books ((1762) and his Temora, an eight-book epic (1763), was at the edge of the orality-literacy shift. The consensus of critical opinion is that he had liberally edited traditional Gaelic poems--whatever that means. In other words, he had interpreted them as oral poets do.

In our own day, Roger Abrahams, who knows and says exactly what he is doing, has had to handle traditional Afro-American stories in a similar way, interpreting them for his twentieth-century American readers: "I have recast these stories in the standard vernacular of the American 'common reader' while attempting to maintain the cadences of the personal style of the storyteller and its local tradition of telling. . . . I have tried to maintain the spirit of the storytelling."--Afro-American Folktales (1985), p. xvii.

Every translation involves trade-offs and is, at least in some limited way, an interpretation.

INTERPRETATION IS A HOLISTIC ACTIVITY. This is like Heidegger's idea of the hermeneutic circle: foresight
 SPOKEN WORDS ARE HOLISTIC. ~~adjusted to things themselves~~
 (Gadamer T&M 235-6)

The inward (and complementary outward) turn of interpretation: epic to novel, faculty psychology to phenomenology, etc.

Verbal interpretation must begin this way--orally. Interpretation of texts reconstitutes the oral process by splitting: isolating (in pretence) text from context.

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Interpretation (hermeneutics)

Although scientific hermeneutics started with the study of texts, and scientific oral hermeneutics grows out of this, still speech demands interpretation or hermeneutics not because it is written but because it is speech.

Only totally unambiguous words, totally clarified by nonverbal context, would appear to be "I" and "thou" ("you"); linguistically, "~~speakers~~" mean whoever it is speaks or is spoken to. Cf. Ricoeur IT 4x6 notes.

The values that interpretation always involves are not established basically by texts. See Fish et al., in Jane P. Tomkins RRC.