

LITERACY, ORALITY, TRUTH, AND METHOD

Despite more frequent disclaimers and growing self-consciousness, we still tend to take the text (literature) as the paradigmatic model for hermeneutics or interpretation. What would happen if we were to take oral expression as the primary model?

Almost no languages have ever been written.

*Quote Ellul (citing Dilthey): cite Habermas*

- I. General
- II. Writing as technology.
  - Definition of writing.
  - This is the technology that is part of us: "nevertheless."
- III. Writing and the development of science.
  - Roots in dialogue, paradoxically, but dialogue shaped by writing.
  - ~~Gadamer~~ and others on interpretation, hermeneutics.
  - This grows out of writing primarily.
  - But ~~Gadamer~~ notes its presence in oral exchange: notably Socratic dialogue, in which talk is like textual exchange.
  - Socratic dialogue is literate dialogue.
  - Oral language does not work this way--much. Heath; Luria. "Literacy events."
- IV. Writing and the development of metaphysics.
  - Separation of being and time due to writing.
  - Emergence of " as an issue " " " "
- V. Orality, literacy, truth, and method.
- VI. Writing always emerges as orality.

Nicotiana glauca et consensuanda

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*"total literacy is impossible"*

I

Recent years have produced a vast literature on the interaction of human beings with the technologies they have created. ~~Perhaps~~ Archaeologists were <sup>among</sup> the pioneers here, tracing the social/development of long extinct cultures through studies of their remaining artefacts. Historians of ~~technology~~ <sup>agricultural, and industrial,</sup> have mapped in great detail the development of technologies, military, ~~domestic,~~ <sup>domestic,</sup> from the ~~ancient~~ <sup>bow and arrow,</sup> ancient ~~crossbow and ballista,~~ <sup>crossbow and ballista,</sup> through the use of the windmill and waterpower for milling grain and for ~~powering looms for cloth manufacture on to the printing press and the telegraph.~~ With the onset of high technology, the literature has multiplied beyond all calculation, ~~and the study of the interaction between technology and human~~ <sup>life</sup> life has become more and more intensified, ~~the two~~ <sup>the two</sup> ~~became inextricably entangled with one another.~~ Cybernetics has ~~developed~~ <sup>developed</sup> the comparative study of analogies between technological systems and neurophysiological systems, ~~between~~ and the computer revolution has suggested to some exponents of "Turing's text" that soon we will have computers that can really think, as well as and even better than their creators. ~~Theorists of technology such as Jacques Ellul believe that technology is uncontrollable by human beings, that it simply has its own momentum which we can do nothing about. Interest, fascination, and fears about the interaction of the human and the technological has never before run so high.~~

Certainly at the popular level there is a great deal of talk about computers taking over the world. We hear of computers playing chess and beating human beings at the game. Of course, since there are a finite number of moves and combinations of moves in chess, if one wanted to take the time one could ~~devise a computer program that would~~ ~~be unbeatable, in effect.~~ <sup>in effect</sup> However, this would take some doing. Nils J. Nilsson in his Principles of Artificial Intelligence (Palo Alto, Calif.: Tioga Publishing Co., 1980, p. 115) notes that

For more complex games, such as complete chess or checker games, AND/OR search to termination is wholly out of the question. It has been estimated that the complete game tree for checkers has approximately  $10^{40}$  nodes and the chess tree has approximately  $10^{120}$  nodes. (It would take about  $10^{21}$  centuries to generate the complete checker tree, even assuming that a successor could be generated in 1/3 of a nanosecond.)

Recalling that a nanosecond is one billionth of a second and that the figure here is for checkers, <sup>a much simpler game than chess,</sup> I leave it to my auditors/readers to try to calculate how many centuries it would take to generate the complete chess tree. In playing chess with a computer, one is really playing chess with the person who has programmed the computer, and <sup>although programming has been done to considerable depth,</sup> it appears highly unlikely that anyone ever will program a computer to play the unbeatable chess game. Certainly thus far the best computer chess programs are <sup>all quite</sup> ~~quite~~ vulnerable to master chess players, <sup>who can, after a few games,</sup> ~~run the computer program down the hole pretty fast every time.~~

~~run the computer program down the hole pretty fast every time.~~ <sup>in at least one sense</sup> The mythology about chess is indicative of a widespread and deep-seated fear among many people that computers will take over. And there is some danger that they will. <sup>Computers and other machines</sup> The danger is not that ~~they~~ will team up and throw all the human beings off the earth so as to run it themselves. Anyone who knows about computer--or even <sup>photocopying machine</sup> ~~copy~~--maintenance senses how idiotic this idea is. The danger is, of course, that, having

*in at least one sense  
artificial intelligence*

built such ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ wonderfully complex teahnological products  
 --and they are wonderfully complex, for ~~in the great mainframe computers~~  
 there is no one individual who can ~~explain~~ <sup>account in explicit detail for</sup> everything ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~  
~~that~~ goes on in the software and hardware <sup>of the great mainframe computers</sup> --the danger is that, having built  
 such wonderful machines, we will believe that we, too, are simply machines.  
 And we will treat other human beings and ourselves just as machines.  
 such as they are. / Then the computers will have taken over, ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~  
~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ but we <sup>-- not they --</sup> will have been responsible <sup>for our own plight,</sup> for it will be ourselves  
 and not the computers who think that we are ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ <sup>things, as</sup> computers <sup>are.</sup> And  
 we have not ~~had~~ <sup>had</sup> to have computers to ~~entertain~~ <sup>generate</sup> such thoughts <sup>in human beings.</sup> The histo  
 of mankind from the start is filled will instances of human beings who  
 have treated other human beings as though they were nothing more than  
 things.

With this prelude, I should like to reverse the field entirely  
 and, instead of talking about <sup>technology</sup> ~~machines~~ taking ~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ over humanity,  
 I should like to talk about humanity taking over technology, and at depths  
 which we have thus far hardly found conceivable. There may be some deep  
 message in ~~this~~ <sup>this</sup> for us all.