No One Tells You This:
Secondary Orality and Hypertextuality

Michael Joyce

No one tells you this: virus is a boundary condition, by definition on the threshold between simple microorganism or extremely complex molecule, atomic form or living thing, imminence or existence. The notion of virus itself is viral: in hospitals there are creatures, once one of us, whose very limbs are gnawed by subcontinental viruses, self-devouring anti-selves. Similarly there are forms embedded in e-mail letters (or what once were letters, missives, messages, conversations would beg this question—no one tells you this) poised likewise, likewise autophagous. Wasn't language always this? Isn't it?

What follows is a somewhat autophagous essay on secondary orality in the form of a virus or counter-fugue or a list or a (hypertext) (narrative). You may think of it as overlay, as echolalia.

Let us begin with an orthodoxy, molecule already gone over to organism, this from Doug Brent, one of the more thoughtful rhetoricians engaged with electronic textuality (1997):

> Fast modems, cheap(er) connections and (relatively) easy html editors are beginning to do for webtext what Ong claims the phonetic alphabet did for writing: transforming a complex and elitist form into a communication tool that any schoolchild can master. Many, including myself, have argued that this form will revolutionise reading and writing in positive ways congruent with the postmodern view of discourse. But I am not convinced that these sunny predictions about hypertext, including my own, have asked all of the really tough questions that need to be asked . . . in this transformed textual world.

Brent seems here to have in mind the core of Walter Ong's extension of Eric Havelock's thought, that separation of "the knower from the known" wherein "writing makes possible increasingly articulate introspectivity, opening the psyche as never before" (1982:105). Yet he and, as will be

seen, the field in general—which is to say rhetoricians, pedagogists, theorists, artists, and other practitioners of electronic literacy—seem caught in a curiously doubled (not to say contradictory, but rather, as befits the field, multiple) argument: the opening of the psyche to articulated introspection is itself a sort of elitism, one that dismantles a more participatory—nay even interactive—communicative structure in favor of particulate, not to say fragmented, isolation.

Gathering haecceity is easy in electronic literacy. Search and select, cut and paste, or drag and drop, any schoolchild is its master, though I am less sure than Brent that the latent democracy of textuality enables an easy mastery of introspectivity to either schoolchild or teacher. Indeed, there is something of a conundrum, an almost mathematical riddle, involved in an argument that the movement from orality to literacy to the digital presents progressively less complex and elitist forms.

I, too, am not yet convinced that the sunny predictions about hypertext, including my own (1995, 2000), have adequately foreseen the nature of the transformation of the textual world. It is clear that the near afterthought of Ong's notion of secondary orality has lingered along the bounds of digital discourse like a virus, without, I think, ever completely taking hold. To inquire into why that is may offer some insight into the current state of electronic (a term I prefer to digital) literature as well as, one hopes, interrogate and indeed affirm the continued usefulness of Ong's thinking as electronic literacy emerges into what I have called elsewhere post-hypertextuality, as well as into whatever maturing literacy may follow the post-dot.com market boom and bust here on the slope of the new millennium.

What I have in mind is something of the kind of homeostatic retrospective genealogies that Ong himself lists among the hallmark psychodynamics of orality, wherein "the part of the past with no immediately discernible relevance to the present had simply fallen away [and] the present imposed its own economy upon past remembrances" (1982:48). Whether such a process can tease out the nature of the present economy is, of course, exactly the method and intent of Foucault's methodology, which so exasperated Father Ong, a fine historian, on account of its concern with "correcting modern views rather than . . . explaining the past on its own terms" (166).

I am neither a historian nor a (new, old, or post-) historicist, but rather a mere artist (worse a post-modern artist; worse still, if not worst, a pre post-hypertextualist). Yet this inquiry of mine (already itself self-referentially poised on the viral cusp between argument and narrative, simple microorganism or extremely complex molecule) to some extent addresses

itself to the call for a renewed literary history that falls among the first of Ong's so-called "theorems" from 1982. His closing chapter in *Orality and Literacy* proposed the theorems as something of a conventional coda hewing closely to the protocol of academic discourse so dear to dissertation directors and university press editors: review of literature, argument, augmentation of prior knowledge, suggestions for further research. It was a research agenda that might be best understood as in the form of a catalogue of ships in Ong's sense of the same in the *Iliad* as "not an objective tally but an operational display" (99).

It was a research agenda that would soon be overtaken by the actual (or, in the oxymoron I am fond of, actual virtual) technologizing of the word that the then quaintly termed "computer revolution" worked in ways Ong could not have imagined.

Indeed, who could? Ten years after *Orality and Literacy* the world wide web sprung born from whatever hydra or godhead spawned it. Seventeen years before its publication, that hydra had been named hypertext by Ted Nelson (then briefly at Vassar during years when Eric Havelock roamed this campus and, according to the published evidence, each of them chatting at times with a then young Dante scholar, now also become a Vassar hypertext creator, John Ahern, whom Ong also cites several times, the world of academic orality and literacy, then and now still a small village, its time "empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced" [Ong 1982:45] even now). Twenty-two years after that baptism and five years after Ong's book I published my own putatively "first" hypertext novel at the actually first-ever ACM international hypertext conference in Chapel Hill, a meeting that saw its own catalogue of however leakily launched firsts, from Hypercard to my novel *afternoon*.

This particular homeostatic genealogy is, of course, meant 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.

In some sense Ong, like many of us, saw it coming in the way Coyote sees Roadrunner coming in the cartoon, a speck on the horizon instantly becomes a typhoon and then a dusty cloud you are left run over by and lying in. All you have left are stars in your eyes, footprints on your forehead, and the echo of a beep-beep.

Reading Ong somewhere between 1984 and 1988 (a place that was not of course a place at all but rather an event until the development of print as Ong would remind us) when I met her, the hypertext writer, Carolyn Guyer (truly a reader imbued with what Ong calls "residual orality"—the entire white space at the bottom of the page (77) following Ong's use of the phrase "spatial reductionism" in her copy is filled with a long chirographic

note that begins, "Have you invented this term or is it a standing concept? Either way, I question it . . ."—so much for Plato's objection to unchallengeable writing in the *Phaedrus*!), wrote another note of marginalia (though clearly not a marginal note in her eyes or mine as I read her copy of the text preparing this essay) next to, and contesting, the following sentence of Ong's, which she had bracketed (1982:130):

> Print eventually reduced the appeal of iconography in the management of knowledge, despite the fact that the early ages of print put iconographic illustrations into circulation as they had never been before.

"We may have interiorized print (text) deeply," Guyer writes in her note, "but not to the extent that we don't think visually (iconographically). In '82 you wouldn't have known about the Mac" (n.d.) she tells him or herself and now me and you, whoever either of us may be.

Another way to say it is that what overtook Ong's research agenda was his vision and the uses it was put to. Ong's thinking situated itself within both a viral rhetoric and a cyclic narrative worthy of the epic rhapsodist that has raged unabated from the dawning horizon of hypertextuality to the twilight of the dot.com gods. Secondary orality takes its place among *loci communes* in the double sense of "analytic and cumulative" commonplaces Ong identifies as "keeping alive the old oral feeling" (111).

It is interesting to track the rise and fall of these commonplaces through the flurry of citations in three successive and vastly influential books by arguably the leading rhetorician and theorist of hypertextuality and new media, Jay David Bolter. In *Turing's Man: Western Culture in the Computer Age* (1984), an extraordinary survey and vision of the emergence of the computer, there are no indexed instances of citations of Ong, although *Ramus' Method and the Decay of Dialogue* (1958) is cited in the bib. There are two indexed references to orality, one citing Vico and the ancients and another, quite tellingly (pun intended) in a sub-section titled "Silent Structures," which makes the claim that "we have developed steadily away from oral culture" and toward the computer "where symbols are drained of connotations and given meaning solely by initial definition and by syntactic relations with other symbols" (145). It is worth noting in passing that in his justly influential "yellow book" of hypertext, *Hypertext: The Convergence of Contemporary Critical Theory and Technology* (1992), George Landow contests as mistaken Ong's nearly identical claim that "the sequential processing and spatializing of the word, initiated by writing and raised to a new order of intensity by print, is further intensified by the computer" (Ong

1982:136). Needless 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.

Obviously one may argue that Bolter's book emerges in the shadow of Ong's, and if not precisely in the same season as it, then at least before its fruit had ripened and its seeds dispersed. Indeed by Bolter's *Writing Space: The Computer, Hypertext, and the History of Writing* (1991), there are six citations of Ong, including both a discussion of "Writing and analysis," (208-10) that extends to a consideration of both Jack Goody and David Olson, as well as the prominent inclusion of Ong in Bolter's own somewhat compressed version of the conventional research agenda *cum* homeostatic genealogy that appears as the coda to *Writing Space* (239):

> What is still needed . . . is a text that combines the research of the historians of writing (Sampson, Diringer) with the work on oral theory of Havelock and Ong (as corrected and supplemented by Olson, Finnegan, Goody, and other sociologists and anthropologists) and further with the work of Derrida and other post-modern theorists. The study of information technologies (by Beninger, 1986 and others) must also be included.

Here again, in the midst of this non-historical and non-historicist narrative of history, it is worth looping forward (and back) to (and from) Landow to note his speculation on Ong's claim, following Plato, that "books, unlike their authors, cannot really be challenged" (Landow 1992:83). In suggesting the ability of hypertext to challenge the unchallengeable text, Landow asks, "If hypertext situates text in a field of other texts, can any individual work that has been addressed by another still speak so forcefully?" (*idem*). That is, he argues that instantaneous intertextuality itself is something of a challenge to centrality, especially to the degree that the equal weight given citation and main text on the computer screen levels their appearance and importance.

Thus it is not surprising that linked to the above-cited coda in the hypertext version of Bolter's *Writing Space* (Landow's books have hypertext versions as well)—a text distributed free of charge and separately from the academic publishing of the printed book (and thus doubly outside the economy of scholarly discourse)—he writes (Bolter, Joyce, and Smith 1987:n.p.):

> Or do we need such a history? Does not the very notion of a history that combines and reconciles the two streams belong to the technology of print,

which demands a single analytic thread—stability and a unified point of view.

To be sure, there is no one to answer his question in this text, although I am obliged to report that in the particular copy of the hypertext version I consulted for this essay, there *were* anonymous contributions, including commentary and additions from the field of other texts, most likely left there by a student of mine from some past class.

We learn from leavings. My own stack of books flaps a hundred wings like irradiated dragonflies, a hundred (a mythical number, an icon for number) narrow neon post-it notes tabbing my catalogue of Ong citations in various texts and my citations of those texts alike, that is, the container and the contained at once.

(*Two parenthetical, paradoxical parables of space and time:* At a hypertext conference once I shared, mostly silently, a dormitory suite at a college in Maine with Ted Nelson, the baptizer of hypertext. I could not fail to notice that his daybooks flapped similarly with—literally—hundreds of such tabs. I later learned that he added cross references to these tabs, linking tab to tab and tab to page and page to tab by scribbled annotations on actual note papers. Still later—at another conference, this time a Marriott or Ramada—no one could fail to notice that Nelson videotaped every moment of his exchanges, public and private, with others, doing so in what is called "real time." In a variation of the Zenonian paradox, a wag wondered how he would know when to stop, "I mean he'll have to stop at a point where the duration of the tapes equals the time he has left to live in order to be able to watch it all.")

Two catalogues (non-parenthetical):

[1] The literate mind is analytic; the oral mind is aggregative. The literate mind is objective; the oral mind is traditional and unable to detach itself from its context. . . . The difference that literacy makes, is evident in a culture's "texts." Oral cultures produce poems, stories, mythology, lore, and dramatic performances; they do not produce philosophic essays, technical studies, scientific treatises, or textbooks of higher mathematics. Oral cultures do not send out anthropologists to study literate cultures and explain the differences between orality and literacy. (Bolter 1991:208-9).

[2] [M]embers of the Chicago School, notably Robert Park, Earnest Burgess, and Roderick McKenzie, developed a sociological approach to the study of cities and communities, which they referred to as human ecology [which held that] technologies of communication . . . are essential, often defining components of any human environment. One

graduate of the Chicago School who took this lesson to heart was a Canadian named Harold Innis [who] in turn laid the foundation for what is sometimes known as the Toronto School, whose "membership" includes Marshall McLuhan, Eric Havelock, and Edmund Carpenter. Insofar as "Toronto School" refers to a pattern of influence rather than strict geographical location, membership is also extended to Walter Ong, Jack Goody, and a number of other scholars, many of whom have studied and/or taught in the New York metropolitan area; the list includes Louis Forsdale, Tony Schwartz, Neil Postman, Gary Gumpert, John M. Phelan, Joshua Meyrowitz, and Henry Perkinson. It might in fact be more accurate to talk about a combined Toronto-New York School. Or, given the fact that McLuhan and Carpenter spent a year teaching at Fordham University, that Carpenter also taught at New York University, as did Ong, it might make sense simply to talk about a New York School. (Strate 1996a:n.p.)

These catalogues, of course, are incommensurable. Mere lists. Following the catalogue above Bolter cites Goody (Goody 1977:81, in Bolter 1991:209):

> The list relies on discontinuity rather than continuity; it depends on physical placement, on location; it can be read in different directions, both sideways and downwards, up and down, as well as left and right; it has a clear cut beginning and a precise end, that is, a boundary, an edge, like a piece of cloth. Most importantly it encourages the ordering of the items, by number, by initial sound, by category, etc. And the existence of boundaries, external and internal, brings greater visibility to categories, at the same time making them more abstract.

These catalogues, of course, are extensible. More than lists. Kathrine Kveim (1998:n.p.) cites Ong:

> Ong said that print commodified the word in that "[t]ypography had made the world into a commodity. The old communal oral world had split up into privately claimed freeholdings." (Ong 1982:131). As in the commodification of art and cultural products in the culture industries, this clearly is transferred to the new media. The dialectic of the secondary orality is seen in digitalisation's resistance towards this sort of containment. Paradoxically, or dialectically, literate culture makes linear digital programming possible but also makes the "word" lose its fixity in space and belong to anyone—like the oral world that existed in the realm of sound, uncontainable and evanescent (Ong 1982:5ff).

Certain words emerge from the substratum, cluster, coruscate: boundary and container (the latter evident only to the reader who has paged

forward to the title of the Strate citation). (*Some commodities:* I know for a fact that Bolter attended university in Toronto; I know by their spellings that Brent and Kveim were educated in the commonwealth; I know from the URL and institutional affiliation that Brent is at a Canadian university. This is the experimental part of this text. This is an instance of rhetoric. This is a philosophic apostrophe. At least one of the sentences before this cannot be true.)

More, there is in the first two catalogues above the germ of difference between the largely post-modernist and hypertextual view of orality that Bolter represents and the largely late modernist and phenomenological view that Strate represents. Despite his characteristic scholarly calm and clarity Bolter lists unfixed (aggregative), or at least counterposed, attributes, divorced from any place or time except perhaps Ei(se)nsteinian literary history. Strate's equally calm genealogy continues to recognize discrete places, schools, lines of transmission, tradition, and, of and in course, individual talent. To be sure, both wish to situate Ongian orality vis-à-vis electronic literacy, but the one offers a contextual plane 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 text cited 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.

The space marking the distance between is occupied by the virus and the argument alike. The space between is the link that participates in both what was and will be, in imminence and existence (between imminence and existence there is no between), that is, hypertext.

Doug Brent questions "whether hypertext is friendly to rhetoric, for it presupposes an exchange of positions, each of which can be articulated as a position in ways that hypertext may not allow for without denying its own mandate as hypertext" (1997:n.p.). He notes (*idem*) that

> The waters are further muddied by confusions of terms. . . . Philosophers sometimes reserve the term "philosophy" for arguments intended to establish a position, and speak of "rhetoric" (often with a tacit "mere" in front of the term) as either discourse without rigorous intellectual engagement, or as the superficial set of forms that the underlying series of positions may take.

Yet in the course of trying to avoid "this largely semantic dispute" and "clarify [his] own use of the terms as a rhetorician rather than as a

philosopher," Brent promptly walks into the swamp of orality and literacy (*idem*):

> Rhetoric is exploration (Oakeshott) or argument (Burke) for an audience. The rhetor must consider how her arguments will work in a particular context—particular readers, particular occasions, particular purposes. . . . By this definition, when philosophers write down their philosophies for others, they are doing rhetoric. Aside from the ironic savour of this point, it is important because it suggests that philosophers-as-rhetoricians (that is, whenever they speak their philosophy) must consider the rhetorical arrangement of their arguments. This is not a trivial point when considering whether hypertext is friendly to rhetoric.

It doesn't seem clear whether Brent is clever or confused in the phrase "whenever they speak their philosophy" or whether in the midst of an earnest attempt to think through a boundary condition (between oral and written argument forms as they determine or are altered by the web) he merely means to wrangle philosophers into the rhetoricians' corral regardless of whether or not they are speaking or writing on the page or for the web or in the public square.

Meanwhile Lester Faigley disputes Ong's (and followers') "characterization of oral language as more paratactic and written language as more hypotactic" as "little more than another folk belief that runs contrary to actual practice," citing research that suggests that "oral language is typically more grammatically complex than written language" (1992:203).

This would, of course, suggest that a secondary orality—and even more a written language infected by the uncontainable echolalia of the same—might be even more complexly overlaid and layered. That is surely what hypertext writer and theorist J. Yellowlees Douglas must mean in her snappish (and snappy) characterization of secondary orality on the second-to-last, literally penultimate, page of *The End of Books—Or Books without End* (2000:171), when she calls it "a superficial category that ignores the script lurking behind every exchange of words on television or radio."

It is possible that Douglas may have had in mind my own characterization of the inherent overlay of hypermediated text (1995:110):

> At first electronic writing appears to threaten the essential "thisness" of text, yet whole cities are painted in it. . . . [T]he everpleasant teevee, the constant tube—pours forth a shimmer of transcendent text. A newscaster reporting the decline of literacy never considers the transitory nature of the text which headlines that decline in the graphic over her shoulder—a franchised graphic up and downlinked from the network in New York. Nor does she consider the equally transitory nature of what she mouths, a

script which has made its way from terminal to teleprompter to unheeding air without benefit of paper. . . . Later, the videotaped newscast may be summoned within the text of an hypermedia system, and there the original graphic may be frame-captured and optically scanned, and the recorded audio digitally decoded, and broadcast turned back into text. The existence of any atom of literacy—text itself, the word "thisness," etc.—depends upon our interaction with it.

In any case by the time of the third Bolter book, *Remediation* (Bolter and Grusin 2000), there are no Ong citations, none also for orality. Which might suggest that the word is fully remediated.

("I'm all eyes," as the saying goes.)

Indeed it can be argued, in passing, that secondary orality as a figure for electronic textuality was overtaken by the visual. Or, to put it more exactly, the grammatological. Sight trumps sound.

Ong's own epigram "Sight isolates, sound incorporates" (1982:72) in fact suggests a kind of trumping relationship, where the unfixed and incorporated isolate assumes a higher, albeit solitary, status and power. Ong's remarks on Derrida in the final theorems of *Orality and Literacy* thus conclude with dismissal of mere play (of signifiers) (1982:170):

> *L'ecriture* and orality are both "privileged," each in its own distinctive way. Without textualism, orality cannot even be identified; without orality, textualism is rather opaque and playing with it can be a form of occultism, elaborate obfuscation—which can be endlessly titillating, even at those times when it is not especially informative.

Putting aside the obvious question of the difference between titillation and information (i.e., if it feels good, know what?), the tonal aspects if not oral dimensions of Derrida's *différance*, *sous rature*, and borderless if not endless traces that, at this distance, make the grammatological critique of the phonocentric-logicentric episteme itself more porous an edge than the fabric of difference that Goody imagines, more porous and more felt. "Felt" in this case can be understood in the ambiguous sense of both the emotional boundary and the "anti-fabric" Deleuze and Guattari characterize in their famous essay on the smooth and the striated (1983:475):

> Felt is a supple solid product that proceeds altogether differently, as an anti-fabric. It implies no separation of threads, no intertwining, only an entanglement of fibers obtained by fulling (for example, by rolling the block of fibers back and forth). What becomes entangled are the microscales of the fibers. An aggregate of intrication of this kind is in no way *homogeneous*: it is nevertheless smooth, and contrasts point by point

with the space of fabric (it is in principle infinite, open, and unlimited in every direction; it has neither top nor bottom nor center; it does not assign fixed and mobile elements but rather distributes a continuous variation).

Distributed, continuous variation evokes a sort of spaceless space (indeed Deleuze and Guattari argue for something very like this in their notion of deterritorialization) and problematizes Ong's fundamental critique of what he imagines to be (not to say mistakes as) the textualists' "illusion that logic is a closed system," an architecture. "Oral cultures," Ong claims (1982:169),

> hardly had this kind of illusion, though they had others. They had no sense of language as "structure." They did not conceive of language by analogy with a building or other object in space. Language and thought for the ancient Greeks grew out of memory. Mnemosyne, not Hephaestus, is the mother of the Muses. Architecture had nothing to do with language and thought. For "structuralism" it does, by ineluctable implication.

It is the preacher and poet who sees the structure in structuralism (although it seems a homilist's conceit to fault the holy tinkerer Hephaestus in passing for his lack of maternal qualities, and a literary scholar's—lovely, loving—conceit to echo James Joyce's "ineluctable modality of the visible"[1934:31]).

Jay Bolter and I called our microcomputer hypertext system, begun three years after Ong's book, *Storyspace* (Bolter, Joyce, and Smith 1987). But building language into an object out in (cyber)space was not the accomplishment of hypertext systems such as ours or those several others before or after it that more often than not still saw themselves as children of Mnemosyne. Our *Storyspace* was meant as a *Wunderkammer* or memory palace; its true predecessors were systems with names like Vannavar Bush's "Memex" or Douglas Engelbart's "Augment," suggesting how they were meant to augment memory and intelligence, by either adding back or keeping in place the traces of their making in Nelson's hypertext text's more text than text. Ong is this much right in his mythological attribution. It was instead a Hephaestian tinkerer's system, an alchemist of text, born of physicists (at CERN, an atomic physicist's instititue in Switzerland), given (graven) images in the fantasizing gleam of a boy's eyes (Illinois graduate student, Mark Andreesson, who left to found Netscape after devising the way to show images in html, hypertext mark-up language), which turned word to picture through a script lurking behind every exchange.

If the textualists prevailed over the oralists in winning the heart of hypertext, it is not so much that Derrida had a six-year head start in a culture

not likely to credit duration (and in fact more given to that old channel-zapper Hermes than to Mnemosyne); nor entirely that Landow famously (and unfortunately) declared hypertext a testbed for deconstruction (1992:3), but rather that within a decade of Ong's *Orality and Literacy* (the University of Illinois' Mosaic, the first web browser and precursor of Netscape, appears in 1992) the web emerges, viz.

>
> <img src= *"Ut pictura, hyperpoesis"* >
>

We will probably all feel better at this point if we can count (on) some things. Without indulging too much in what might already seem a parody of a certain kind of quantitative research, it may nonetheless be (pardon the term) illustrative to look at Ong citations in five collections of essays regarding electronic literacy and pedagogy whose publication dates bracket the emergence of the web.

In Delany and Landow's 1991 collection, *Hypermedia and Literary Studies*, there are five citations of Ong in three different essays. Two—Bolter's citation of Ong's Ramus book in conjunction with his discussion of "spatial arrangement of topics" (108) and John Slatin's inclusion of Ong with Havelock and Lanham as figures pointing to the "point in history . . . when writing itself was a radically innovative technology" (157)—are good, conventional scholarship that nonetheless makes clear that Ong was to be considered in framing good, conventional scholarship. (Again risking a sort of parodistic move, it may be interesting to note that Derrida is cited five times in two essays.) Delany and Landow's introductory essay, however, engages Ong directly, not to say impolitely: "Computers may re-create certain qualities of pre-literate culture more pervasively than even Walter J. Ong has been willing to admit" (1991:12). After citing Ong's notion of secondary orality, they further cite and quarrel with Ong's insistence that "the sequential processing and spatializing of the word . . . is further intensified by the computer, which maximizes commitment of the word to (electronic) local motion, and optimizes analytic sequentiality by making it virtually instantaneous" (136, cited in Delany and Landow 1991:12).

Later hypertextual theorists (see below) will see hypertextual instantaneity and complexity as the spatio-temporal equivalent of Ong's "sounded word," which "exists only when it is going out of existence . . . [and] is not simply perishable but essentially evanescent, and sensed as evanescent" (1982:32). However, Delany and Landow are at this early stage a little more cautious, merely suggesting that "by inserting every text into a web of relations, hypertext systems promote non-sequential reading and

thinking and hence produce a very different effect" (1991:12). Indeed, in a sly move earlier in their essay, the author-editors had already inserted Ong's text in an earlier kind of hypertextuality, (textual) local motion, and relational web, by citing him in a numbered footnote, though not in the main text by name, following a sentence on the "stubborn materiality of text" (*ibid*.:4) that in endnotes refers to their suggestion that "in oral cultures, of course, the text had a quite different status in the mind, one that was closer in some respects to the hypertextual model," and this is followed by a bibiliographic citation of *Orality and Literacy*.

In what seems rhetorical wiliness or perhaps paratactic rhetoric, Delany and Landow, like Brent above, wrangle hypertextuality into orality's corral with an insistently oral diction (viz., the occurrence of "speak," "comments," "dialogue," and "voice" below) (*ibid*.:13):

> But if hypertext fosters integration rather than self-containment, always situating texts in a field of other texts, can any individual work that has been addressed by another still speak so forcefully? One can imagine hypertext versions of books in which the reader could call up all the reviews and comments on that book; the "main" text would end up inevitably as part of a complex dialogue. . . . [Hypertext] destroys one of the most basic characteristics of the printed text: its separation and univocal voice . . . [and] forces it to exist as part of a complex dialogue.

As a midway point in Landow's unindexed 1994 collection, *Hyper/Text/Theory*, still early in the academic publishing cycle for any significant appearance of web citations, I count a half dozen Ong citations in three essays, four of them clustered in a single one.

Hawisher and Selfe's 1991 collection, *Evolving Perspectives on Computers and Composition Studies: Questions for the 1990's*, is something of a high-water mark. Fourteen citations of Ong (versus five of Derrida) in six different essays (versus three) include a handful of good, conventional citations but otherwise the tone is engaged, even critical, in essays from pioneer scholar/teacher/theorists already in the days before the web and before computers were used in a day-to-day sense not just as tools for learning and teaching but as learning environments. Nancy Kaplan (1991:23) cites Richard Ohmann's critique of what she calls Ong's "famous claim" for the new ways of thinking the computer offers. "As the computer revolution unfolds," Kaplan writes, "Ohmann reminds teachers of English that literacy has a history imbricated with technology and that 'technology . . . is itself a social process, saturated with the power relations around it, continually reshaped according to some people's intentions' [Ohmann 1985:681]." In a later essay in this collection Ruth Ray and Ellen Barton

also summon Ohmann among others to critique the "technicist thinking" of Ong and others, which they say "typically leads to the institutional imperative, in which the technology contributes to the authority of the institution by dictating what and how things will be done and how people and things will be evaluated" (1991:282). It should be said that Faigley mounts a similar, even more powerful critique of how "secondary orality is an unsatisfactory way of conceiving of an array of electronic communications technologies. . . [which] have the paradoxical effects of both helping to bring about commonality and at the same time social division" (1992:204).

In another essay in the Hawisher and Selfe collection, hypertext fiction writer and theorist, Stuart Moulthrop, reminds "teachers of writing. . . face-to-screen with the technological future . . . that we have all been here before" (1991:261). In a catalogue of "readers of the postmodern scene" who see both the return of "the fluidity and openness of preliterate culture" (Ong) or even "announce a 'techno-primitivism' that embraces the power and dynamism of technology but rejects its cult of rationality (Jean Baudrillard, Arthur Kroker, David Cook)," Moulthrop reminds us of the Frankenstein myth: "Print is 'dead' but like assorted poltergeists, ghouls, aliens, and things-that-will-not-die in our horror movies. . . . 'Gutenberg technology' always rises again" (262).

Finally, in a careful, brilliantly laid-out, and elegant—as well as witty, viz.: "although there can be no hard evidence for such assertions, one must assume language to be of extreme antiquity" (1991:208)—essay, John McDaid, also a hypertext writer and theorist as well as a media ecologist in the lineage of Strate's genealogy above, situates then current considerations of secondary orality and mediation within that genealogy, offering a series of tables "representing correlations between media and their social impacts . . . derived from the work of Elizabeth Eisenstein, Eric Havelock, Marshall McLuhan, Walter J. Ong, and Neil Postman" (208). This son of such a line does not shy away from criticizing Ong the father (209-10):

> [T]he Greeks found themselves poorly served by the evanescence of speech, just as we today find ourselves at a juncture where the linguistic conceptions occasioned by day-to-day reality have broken down. Unlike prelinguistic symbols, which were inclusive potentials for meaning, oral language cuts up the world and then exteriorizes it projecting it onto the world as the way things ARE. And language-level decisions about 'the way things are' were formed at pretty low levels of sophistication. . . . Conceptions formed in such media environments break down quickly when operated at relativistic velocity or on a submicroscopic scale. Language makes us good at billiards, bad at quantum tunneling . . .

> [which] may become a non-trivial issue as we discover which of these
> skills, in the long run, is more important.

The world wide web is arguably still more like billiards than quantum tunneling, but McDaid nonetheless sets the stage for an examination of secondary orality at warp speed. By the time of the next two collections I consider here, the web is more or less here (wherever that is), and hypertext has more or less become the web (before that point there were dozens of largely local—that is, non-networked, micro-computer, and mostly text-based—systems including our *Storyspace*, Apple's Hypercard, and so on).

Strate, Jacobson, and Gibson's 1996 collection, *Communication and Cyberspace: Social Interaction in an Electronic Environment*, and the however incestuous (one identical editor, one ex-editor a contributor, yours truly also, same press) Gibson and Oviedo 2000 collection, *The Emerging CyberCulture: Literacy, Paradigm, and Paradox*, are very firmly of the media ecology lineage that Strate and McDaid each outline above, the editors and several contributors being former graduate students in Neil Postman's NYU media ecology program. Thus, if only on account of his—root sense—familiarity, Ong wins the citation contest hands-down: twenty-four to three over Derrida in the 1996 author index, ten to four in the subject index (that is, if you count "orality" as "Ong," otherwise he's not an entry in the latter at all). In the 2000 collection it's twenty-three to zero in the author, and fifteen to four in the subject (where "orality" does not appear as an entry).

But something else is happening, a different contest, a differing content: in the 1996 subject index there are five mentions of graphics, three of graphic user interface (GUI), twelve of multimedia, eleven of videogames, twenty-six of virtual reality, six of virtual sex, seven of the world wide web, and thirty-some of the internet. The numbers are similar for the 2000 collection. (By way of comparison there are four total listings for multimedia in the Delaney and Landow and the Hawisher and Selfe collections combined, none for the world wide web or internet)

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 with other flows that permeate the emergence of a hybridized, and as yet not fully identified, entity, or more properly constantly evolving multiplicity.

In the 1996 Strate, Jacobson, and Gibson collection, Ong is evoked as a vital, if not a viral, boundary figure, a measure of bounds. His thinking is brought to bear on what in his essay John Phelan (1996:42) calls "Secondary Tribalism" (foreshadowed by Moulthrop above). Meanwhile, Moulthrop in

this collection (1996:250) discusses Ong in relation to hypertext on the internet versus hypertext on closed systems including CD ROM; while Strate meditates upon the possibility that a "new consciousness . . . may emerge through a synthesis between our physical selves and the dream selves we generate in cybertime" (1996b:373). In a particularly rich instance, in her essay "Charting the Codes of Cyberspace," in a section entitled "At the junction of orality and literacy," Judith Yaross Lee considers how "when interactive digital video merges with e-mail . . . [a]lthough this . . . medium will almost certainly rely on familiar facial and body 'language,' users will find themselves in unfamiliar waters as they attempt, anew, to chart its codes" (1996:293) To this new encoding she summons as progenitors (and likewise, one thinks, as wayward children) Ong and Derrida, together (293-94):

> Although he agrees with Derrida on almost nothing else, Walter Ong noted . . . that writing by definition is "discourse that has been detached from its author" [1982:78]. Not so for the e-mail writer. The electronic text embodies the author—the virtual speaker who meets the reader, who becomes embodied by a similar process in response. Thus, although e-mail derives from both writing and speech, it does not homogenize traits from each other into a synthetic mixture or blend. Rather, like a child, it has some traits from one parent and some from the other, and the combination has a life of its own.

The Gibson and Oviedo 2000 collection not surprisingly features both as rich a range of situating Ong's thinking and as earnest and organic a summoning to the kind of dual-lineage hybridity that Lee outlines above. In the editor's introduction, Stephanie Gibson imagines "a paradigmatic possibility . . . that we may one day be less and less concerned with preserving what we compose . . . [and] live more and more with the constantly mutating text of Ong's 'present moment'" (10). As warrant for this claim she offers how "web pages change daily, sometimes even momentarily . . . [leading] to altered relationships between writer, text, and audience" (*idem*). In what increasingly becomes a commonplace among theorists of electronic literacy, Gibson offers the speed of (visual, textual) communication as evidence of its sharing the gene of orality (10-11):

> Electronic journals . . . have a much more rapid turn-around time than traditional print journals, and they allow for a closer to real time dialogue about their contents. An article published in an online journal can be debated in a much more lively fashion than one in a print journal—a fashion closer to face-to-face debate.

In a later essay contributor Sue Barnes says it baldly: "This instantaneous characteristic turns the printed word into a more oral medium, the computer replaces the voice as a communication channel. The written word . . . substitutes for the spoken word" (2000:193).

The ghost haunting these speedy arguments for the mutation of space back into time is of course Paul Virilio (another—ghostly double—is Deleuze and Guattari's notion of deterritorialization noted above/earlier/once). That ghost walks the stage in Lance Strate's dizzying consideration of "Hypermedia, Space and Dimensionality," wherein (during which) the two finally are as pressed together—felt—as Deleuze and Guattari's heterogenous "aggregate of intrication" cited above.

"The point here is that hypertext and hypermedia are part of a much larger phenomenon," as Strate writes. He continues (2000:277):

> Time itself has long been spatialized through the linear metaphor of the time line, the graph metaphor of the calendar page, and the circular metaphor of the traditional clockface. This tendency affects computing, and is, in turn, affected by the computer, in whose memory banks commodified historical information may be deposited or withdrawn. The flowchart, the fundamental diagram of computer programming, is a highly spatialized representation of events unfolding in time, and has become a key image in contemporary culture. . . . It is branching and multidimensional, but it is also spatialized and static in its layout. Hypertextual time can be represented in this spatialized format, so the reader may explore and navigate through a hypertextual network that links representations of different moments or eras. And while the general tendency toward spatialization is a limiting factor, there is still a great deal of readerly freedom that can be provided in this presentation of the temporal dimension.

We will stay with Strate for another (last) long moment as he lays out and explores another, rather abstracted, combined, and combinatorial catalogue and genealogy, however not without first noting that what is most striking in the preceding citation is the (Our) town square it evokes ecphrastically. The image, if not Habermas's public sphere, complete with bank and clock tower and rails or roads or riverbanks going somewhere, evokes the HO-scale towns of model railway crossroads or—more likely for a grown-up boy of Strate's generation—the three-quarter-scale town center of Main Street USA, Disneyland. As the work of other equally nostalgic would-be media visionaries like Lucas or Spielberg suggests, such a tiny town is good to have in mind as one sets off into multidimensional narrative universes such as those Strate suggests (*ibid*.:278), where

What is significant . . . is not that they include the higher dimension of time; after all, time is represented in traditional narrative and dramatic forms from oral storytelling to the novel, and in audiovisual media. Time itself, however, tends to be presented as one-dimensional and generally linear in these older forms, while computer software is more open to multidimensional temporal modes. Thus, it becomes feasible to represent and to navigate through parallel time lines . . . or time lines that exist at an angle to each other so that, from a vantage point on either line, events on the other line would appear to be moving at a much faster rate (MacBeath). Two separate time dimensions could also move in opposite directions from each other (Whitrow). A computer mediated narrative can easily present both objective time and a corresponding sense of subjective time held by a human agent, which Herbert Zettl sees as equivalent to the horizontal and vertical dimensions of space. Multiple dimensions of subjective time could then be represented if more than one character is involved. Or we could construct and explore the links between the sacred and profane temporal dimensions imagined by Mircea Eliade.

We are very far from Walter Ong by now. We can hardly hear him over this distance. We are likewise far from the Lionel town, Disney's land, Habermas sphere, or even the village lights along the tracks of the thin, liminal membrane where the virus resides, devouring or becoming us, becoming to us. Inevitably, unerringly, the media ecologist's contextual plane and the postmodernist ebb and flow of minds have not so much merged as disappeared into the pixel-sized vanishing point of virtual parallel lines. It would be easy to have fun with Strate's earnest description of alternate dimensionalities and narratives if I hadn't tried to imagine and write them (for) myself. It is pleasant for now to wonder who is MacBeath, this cross between MacBeth and breath, or to imagine the kind of tweed worn by a man named Herbert Zettl, and to wonder also whether he ever runs into Whitrow (though it is a shock I confess to run into old friend Eliade here in the mi(d)st—as much a father to me as Ong was once during those long-ago years in my Jesuit college). Aside from my fathers, Strate's list of names is unknown to me, uncited below because I prefer for now to leave them so, less unknown than known by the stories the sounds of their names raise: wearing tweed, moving through alleys, calling after Whitrow, looking up at the spherical moon.

As I leave you, dear reader, for the present moment also.

Vassar College

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