

## **Technology as Language**

**By Alex Moore (Phi. 3930)**

Written language has long been the preferred form of communication in the west. It is the official communication route for every school, business, agency, organization, and institution. Without it the west would be lost. It is no longer seen as a subordinate to the spoken word. Stories are told through books. Instructions are given through books. Personal accounts, proposals, and narratives are all written. In classrooms around America students frantically write notes, desperately trying to keep up with what the professor is saying. Their minds focus solely on the task: symbolic translation, abstraction. What is the purpose of language? When and why did it take over? How do we change? Written language is a technology that has taken over, our society is founded on it, and the effects of this takeover are crippling.

The purpose of oral language is communication. It is an aural representation of thoughts, ideas and experiences. The sounds and rhythms of language represent concepts and ideas. This audio-symbolic representation seeks to retell an experience, whether it is internal or external. In its most beautiful form, language is an attempt to recreate the immense sensation of experience. At its worst, it is an attempt to recreate an attempt to recreate. Language by nature is a mere translation of an experience. No matter how descriptive or elaborate, language is at least two degrees away from experience (the first being some sort of conceptualization). It lacks essentialities of experience, and therefore the only hope of communication lies in shared experiences. The idea of shared experiences seems to be a paradox. How could two people ever have the same

experience? They can't. They can only have similar experiences. Needless to say, much is lost in translation.

Written language shares some qualities with its predecessor. Its goal is also communication of thoughts and feelings. Written language also tries to retell an experience. The use of symbolic representation allows concepts and ideas to be translated. The result of symbolic translation is disembodiment. The mimetic recreation no longer has a connection to its creator. The rhythmic nature of oral language is lost along with the acoustics. These essential differences lead to a necessary separation of oral and literary cultures.

An oral culture is defined by its use of story telling and myth making in order to recreate the original act. In these cultures very specific mythic stories are laid out. In these stories, models of perfection are manifest through gods or goddesses. Each individual and community in turn mimic the creation story through acts. Decisions are made by mimicry of the divine. An individual's success would then be a direct result of his/her ability to internalize the model set forth by the myth. The myth shouldn't be seen as a speculative narrative on the events leading to creation. It should instead be seen as a holistic model of how all creation works. Seemingly idealistic myths of creation can now be seen as pragmatic models of creation.

Oral cultures focus heavily on how things are said. What is said often relies upon how it is said. Rhythm and vibration manifest their importance in oral culture through song. One of the most obvious examples of this is the Sanskrit scripture of the Bhagavad Gita. This ancient song utilizes acoustics and language to tell the tale of Arjuna. The use of song in oral cultures is commonplace. Song is an inseparable part of ritual and rite.

The aboriginal tribes in Australia viewed their continent as a song itself. Each crack or mountain was seen as a vibration of the original song of life.

The Greeks used myth in the same way as the Hindus. Their culture may be better understood by modernity due some close ties between the two. Much of modern culture is of Greek revision. There is, however, a rampant misconception concerning our Greek predecessors, it has to do with the nature and purpose of their complex myth system. The Greeks, like all the other oral cultures, focused heavily on Creator and sustainer gods. These gods and goddesses served a much higher purpose. Through their acts each one symbolized a model of perfection. The role of the created was to duplicate the acts of the creator. This feature manifested itself throughout all Greek myth. Each new generation was an abstraction from the former. Through this pattern all life is created, sustained, and destroyed. Greek polytheism is not, then, a literal cosmological explanation. It should be seen as a holistic cosmology that is manifest, not only in the myths but also throughout life itself.

With the advent of Aristotelian logic and the rise of the Roman Empire, a literal abstraction can be seen. Focus was shifted slowly to textual indoctrination. With Aristotle came the idea of correspondence. Epistemology shifted from geometries to forms. Things can be known only through their correspondence with other things. Man can only know himself through the study of nature. Theories and universalities became the goal of science. Science played the role of dictator. Things, written and proven through scientific laws and logic, governed knowledge. The Roman Empire, in an attempt to recreate the golden age of Greece, failed miserably. The essence of their failure was that they

misinterpreted what made Greece great. It wasn't the architecture, the sculptures, or their multiple Gods. It was the philosophy that governed their daily lives.

The Romans did not govern their lives through sound philosophy, as Plato would say, instead theirs was governed by doctrine. The will of the people was governed by the will of the rulers. Widely accepted theories became truth. Transgression of these truths was certain to lead to death. Fear took over. Literal truth took over. The Romans then took their newfound power and conquered the west. The infection spread throughout Europe. Soon the Empire would fall, but the spirit would live on. The spirit of the Roman Empire was strong. It was fueled by the eagerness of its subjects to give up their will.

Christianity was the unwitting dauphin. Constantine, in an attempt to unify Rome, chose Christianity as universal religion. This marriage of Roman epistemology and Christian ideology marked the eventual take over of the Church. With the help of the Church, Constantine systematically picked through the gospels. Control was paramount. The new unifying religion of the west must not allow for dissent. The religion was corrupted into the worst form of idolatry. With his mass influence, Constantine managed to indoctrinate his whole world. The worship of scripture eclipsed the acts of Christ. Christ became a symbol of subservience. The Greek tradition of emulation had been eliminated from the religious experience. There could be no spirituality, because there were no spirits. The will of the people had been crushed and the rise of the Christian Church was inevitable.

With its takeover of the West, the church gained tremendous power. A religion, whose basis was pure, had been corrupted. It had been corrupted into a form of mass control. Obedience became an essential ingredient to survival. Texts had replaced images.

Dissent meant death. The Church dominated all thought. Its Inquisition ruled everything from philosophy to science. Galileo's intuitions were silenced with one fell swoop. Philosophers were forced to compromise their intuitions and keep within Church perimeters. They knew the price of refutation. Descartes philosophies were a direct attempt to reconcile his love of science with his duty as a Christian. The schism, the reformation, and subsequent Protestant churches are just examples of further abstraction. Their main theme still based in Roman thought. By the end of the catholic reign Christianity had become so perverse that it was no longer even one religion. Each new dissident would form a new splinter of the original.

Christianity has become the universal model of discontinuity. It is a religion based on literal translation, in which the creator is divorced of his creation. In this model, there is one ultimate substances divided into three parts: God, Man, and Nature. Each one is disconnected from the other. God created Man, God created Nature. Man can know God only through the study of Nature. This view allows no access to the self. This idea forces the self to look outward for the answers. What it finds is others, like the church. These outsiders are then free to manipulate. With the use of holy doctrine and divine gospel, the Church creates an arena of control. If one should step out of line, hell and damnation would surely follow. Through blind submission to the will of others, the individual is subverted. This subversion of the individual continues to day. We, as westerners, have assimilated these literal ideas in to our daily life. Most are unaware of the Roman influence on thought.

The Roman intuition is most apparent in our school system. From an early age knowledge is forced upon the individual. Rules are laid out with no explanation. The

child is taught to behave and not question. If a child were to ask why, the answer is a disingenuous “ because I said so”. The knowledge that is given through the education system is sent through a filter of censorship. Truth has no place in the classroom, only acceptable opinions. History is told from one perspective. Science is taught as the technology of fact. Human emotion and innate intuitions are put to death in the very young. Programs like music and art receive the least amount of funding. The programs that revive imagination are in a constant state of jeopardy. Learning to read, write, and regurgitate is the most important thing. Without these technologies how would a student ever be able to survive? The success of student is measured largely by their ability to sit still, follow the rules and restate information given to them by books. More and more students graduate with less and less knowledge. As these students go to college, they are pushed to major in business, accounting, or law. The ultimate goal of education is money. Students copy notes and overheads scarcely hearing the lecture. The words of the professor are robotically translated into symbols. Flashcards, study groups, and notes become the technologies of memorization. The idea that true knowledge comes from experience and action is foreign. The grade and diploma is all that really matters.

Although education is bad, the most damage is done at home. Each child is born with the potential for wisdom. Their ultimate gaining of this wisdom, however, is largely in the hands of mom and dad. Parents who carry on the western tradition will have children who do the same. The chain must be broken. Awareness is key. Parent must instill a seed of curiosity and imagination. We all could take a lesson from the oral cultures of the past. As Whitney Houston would say, “ I believe the children are our future, teach them well and let them lead the way. Show them all the beauty they possess

inside.” She is now a crack head but this brief moment of insight shows that wisdom comes from all places.

Money, greed, and power seem to be the key elements to success as a westerner. The ability to capitalize on every situation makes a good man. The U.S. has been fully commercialized. No one is safe but those who refuse to participate. Children, adolescents, young adults, adults and the elderly are the targets. People think that style is wearing the latest fashion. Women and men obsess about weight. Fad diets have infected our culture. Vanity is a high paying business. Gluttony is also very lucrative. The restaurants with the largest platters of food get the most customers. If they can eat it all they don’t want it. Balance and equilibrium is an unknown concept. More, more, more, that is the mindset. The individual is cut out of the loop. Sales and marketing departments around the country make life decisions for the masses.

The execution of the self may be most evident by the way we deal with healthcare. Early on, we are taught to look without for the answers of health. It is a foreign concept that one can heal oneself. To stave off depression take a pill, to stave off a cold take pills, to get rid of headaches, backaches, infection, and etc, it is ingrained that we need medication. Doctors don’t help patients know their bodies. Doctors use universal models of health to treat individual problems. Patients are not individuals; they are cases of similar symptoms. The best doctor is the body. No one in the west knows this. Every one in the east knows this. They know that the best way to fight illness is to live in harmony. Harmony with others, but mainly harmony with the self is the key to good health.

Language should be seen for what it is. It is a technology. This technology, like all technologies, has a specific place in the world. It is important that one not take over the others. We are in a state of crisis in the west. The technology of language, specifically written, has eclipsed the others. Most people sit in a cave seeing only the shadows of reality. With our ability to use oral and written language, we have moved one step beyond other animals. This fact however has led us to further abstraction, and this can cause more confusion. We must use all of our technologies in their correct place. In this technological age, it is easy to get hung up on one or another. The best thing we could do is, take a lesson from the ancients. Our technologies are here to help. They must be used in the right place at the right time. We must listen and recreate that first act of Creation.

Note: This essay is written on the application of Language as uncovered in *Habits of Mind: An Introduction to Clinical Philosophy* by Antonio T. de Nicolas and the Essay “Technologies of Transformation” in the web site: [www.unf.edu/~adenicol/](http://www.unf.edu/~adenicol/)