



Print Culture



History of Information

July 16th, 2010

Aspects of Eisenstein's Printing Revolution

- ▶ “typographical fixity...involves the whole modern ‘knowledge industry’ itself, with its ever-expanding bibliographies...issues that are less academic and more geopolitical.”
- ▶ “Typography arrested linguistic drift, enriched as well as standardized vernaculars, and paved the way for more deliberate purification and codification of all European languages.”



Eisenstein's motive

- ▶ "I ran across a copy of Marshall McLuhan's *The Gutenberg Galaxy* ... He pronounced ... the age of Gutenberg to be at an end ... stimulated my curiosity ... about the specific historical consequences of the fifteenth-century communications shift"
- ▶ "McLuhan raised a number of questions about the actual effects of the advent of printing ..." –Eisenstein



McLuhan and Eisenstein

- ▶ McLuhan's Man "When the perverse ingenuity of man has outered some part of his being in material technology, his entire sense ratio is altered. ... In beholding this new thing, man is compelled to become it." --MM *Gutenberg Galaxy*

- ▶ Eisenstein's reader "*Editorial decisions made by early printers ... helped to reorganize the thinking of readers.*" --EE, *The Printing Revolution*



McLuhan and Eisenstein (2)

Question received narratives of the Enlightenment:

- ▶ “...the Age of Reason presents modern scholars with puzzles that can never be solved. So we must not only think about new forms of enlightenment when considering the effects of printing on scholarship. New forms of mystification were encouraged as well.”



Or do they agree?

- ▶ Persisting emphasis on the “power of the word” in Eisenstein
- ▶ Can this be reconciled with McLuhan’s emphasis on the sensory?
- ▶ How different is Eisenstein from Jefferson’s view?



Kittler, *Discourse Networks*

- ▶ “The dichotomy of norm and deviance is so powerful that that dialects are no longer considered human and are instead relegated to the animal realm. Nonetheless the school reformer knew of no measures against animalization besides his own speeches... [so] school reform created a gap that the pure phonetic method would fill.”



Goody and Watt on Plato

- ▶ “‘The printers,’ Jefferson remarked, ‘can, never leave us in a state of perfect rest and union of opinion,’ and as book follows book and newspaper newspaper, the notion of rational agreement and democratic coherence among men has receded further and further away, while Plato's attacks on the venal purveyors of knowledge in the marketplace have gained increased relevance.”

Do we agree with this statement now?



Goody on Nietzsche

- ▶ “It was surely, for example, this lack of social amnesia in alphabetic cultures which led Nietzsche to describe ‘we moderns’ as ‘wandering encyclopedias’ unable to live and act in the present and obsessed by a 'historical sense', that injures and finally destroys the living thing, be it a man or a people or a system of culture.” Even if we dismiss Nietzsche's views as extreme, it is still evident that the literate individual has in practice so large a field of personal selection from the total cultural repertoire that the odds are strongly against his experiencing the cultural tradition as any sort of patterned whole.”



Socrates: The Maladies of the Written Word

- ▶ -Allows for a specious sense of knowledge
- ▶ Lack lucidity/finality
- ▶ Even the best compositions “can only help the memory of those who already know”
- ▶ Discourses that cannot defend themselves of give an adequate account of truth.



Persisting links between writing and logic

- ▶ “Divisions and connections,” says Socrates.
- ▶ The Phaedrus: part of a larger epistemological awareness that sets rules for thinking.
- ▶ Subsequent collection and classification of data. Categorization achieved by Aristotle, etc.

