

Orality and Literacy - two levels of interface

Orality as exemplified in Tribal, Indigenous Cultures, such as the Mardu Australian Aborigine, the Crow American Indian, or Chukchi of Siberia

Literacy as exemplified in Euro-American Culture

Keep in mind the **technological development** of literacy itself. **Cuneiform** was developed by the Sumerians around 2800 BCE, which was fundamentally a series of pictographs, used for recording ideas and numbers associated with economic transactions. Semitic languages, such as Arabic, Aramaic, Hebrew and Phoenician, around 1500 BCE, developed consonants, and Greeks around 500 BCE first to add vowels to language. Carbon 14 dating, place the Dead Sea Scrolls (900 documents on papyrus and animal skin, including the entire Hebrew Bible) around 335 BCE - 107 BCE



1. the Physiological Experience as mediated through each mode:

orality - an auditory experience that **involuntary unifies** the listener in an event as a **transitory, evanescent process**, conceptualizing that **event** as reality

literacy - the reader **voluntarily engages objects** on a page as if permanent representations, conceptualizing an **objectified and separated concreteness** in reality

2. the ways Meaning/Knowledge are elicited, organized, stored and communicated as mediated through each mode:

orality - pervasively embedded in socially **experiential situations** (as engaged in stories, ritual, dance, song, regalia, art, architecture, landscape), and **contextualized in interpersonal dynamics** (terse, minimized use of function words such as prepositions and conjunctions, variation in intonation, personal pronouns are indistinguishable)

literacy - **formalized and decontextualized**, and **non-socially, non-experiential** (books, computer)

- **Orality** spawns a participatory, non-dualistic engagement in a reality that is understood as continually unfolding, as “becoming,”
- **Literacy** tends to render you as a “subject,” an estranged viewer of a reality fixed as an “object.”

For further discussion see:

Frey, Rodney. 1995. *Stories That Make the World: Oral Literature of the Indian Peoples of the Inland Northwest*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press. Pp. 141-147.

Goody, Jack. 1987. *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Ong, Walter. 1982. *Orality and Literacy: The technologizing of the world*. New York: Methuen.