

Course Paper 2

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1

Taking the example of EITHER Laboon practice by Mokens OR Haka performance by Māori people (not both), explain three characteristics of primary oral cultures aka orality-based thoughts of expression. Add, why the oral cultures like this continue to be significant in a society dominated by literate cultures.

The Haka performance by Māori people is a breathtaking example of primary oral cultures. In their performances, the people demonstrate characteristics of being agonistically toned, empathetic and participatory rather than objectively distanced, and conservative and traditionalist.

The Haka performance is a perfect example of an agonistically toned oral culture. “Many, if not all, oral or residually oral cultures strike literates as extraordinarily agonistic in their verbal performance and indeed in their lifestyle” (Ong, 1982). The “War haka (peruperu) were originally performed by warriors before a battle, proclaiming their strength and prowess in order to intimidate the opposition” Simon (2015). Traditionally created as a war chant, the example we saw in the video showed a Haka performance at a wedding. The war chant was directed towards the groom in this scenario, and the message is clear; take care of the bride. The chant serves as a warning in addition to preserving the traditions of the Māori people

The Haka performance is also empathetic and participatory. “For an oral culture learning or knowing means achieving close, empathetic, communal identification with the known” (Ong, 1982). In the performance, there were a wide array of emotions on display. Many of the performers had threatening facial expressions, frequently putting their tongues out in a form of intimidation. The performance heavily relied on loud, sudden sounds and beats from the performers as well. The performance also elicited emotions from those watching, as the bride as well as other members of the audience burst into tears during the Haka chant.

Finally, the Haka performance is conservative and traditionalist. The Haka chants are a very old staple of New Zealand culture, with records showing the performance as far back as 1769 (Kāretu, 1993). As mentioned earlier, these were initially used to intimidate opponents before battle, but have been preserved throughout the years to be performed at multiple functions. We saw an example in the lecture of the performance being enacted

at a wedding, but there are also examples of the Haka performance being used in sports. The New Zealand men's basketball team, for instance, used the war chant famously against the United States team in the basketball world cup. The dance itself has changed little throughout the year, indicating its conservative status, while the messages and emotions conveyed also have survived through the ages.

2

Taking an example of Donald Trump's speech from the lecture, explain three characteristics of primary oral cultures aka orality-based thoughts of expression. Also, drawing from the analysis that we discussed in the lecture, provide a possible rationale why his speeches may not make sense to some but make perfect sense to others.

The Donald Trump speech from the lecture is a very interesting example of a primary oral culture. It shows the characteristics of being additive rather than subordinate, agonistically toned, and empathetic and participatory.

The Donald Trump speech may be the clearest form of additive rather than subordinate that we have seen. The entirety of the speech is one sentence, put together through multiple "and" statements. Heard all at once and without breaking down the individual phrases, which makes the speech very hard to understand. As a result, some listeners may have trouble following the thought process behind the speech as Trump goes through multiple tangents. Every phrase joined by "and" adds more to his overall argument, but sometimes the claims are not related to the last. As a result, the speech paints an overall picture for his argument yet the individual phrases only add diminishing returns to his final say.

The Donald Trump speech is also very empathetic. He goes into many anecdotes in order to prove his point, such as when he talks about his family member who went to MIT and is an expert in the field. He constantly refers to his own standing in the world, his political party, and the viewpoints he associates himself with. The purpose of this speech is clearly to convince the audience that his viewpoint is right, without having them question the legitimacy of what he is saying. This clearly shows that he is empathetic and participatory.

Finally, the Donald Trump speech is agonistically toned. The entirety of the speech is worded in a competitive fashion. His speech pushes his own personal agenda of accepting nuclear power in the United States, as well as highlighting the differences between Republicans and Democrats. He even plays the victim role, saying that if he were a Democrat he'd be declared much more intelligent than he is.

3

For this question, we'll conduct an experiment. Get on a website that uses algorithms to make recommendations for you (YouTube, Twitter, or Facebook would be good. No porn sites.). Follow its recommended links for 20 or so recommendations. Now write up your results. How did this experience illustrate concepts

from our discussion of algorithms, homophilia, AI bias, and social sorting? Your answer should spend a paragraph documenting the experience (what website did you use, what recommendations did it keep feeding you, how did where you stopped relate to where you started?). Next, identify two insights about the course concepts (algorithms, homophilia, AI bias, and social sorting) based on your experience. Here you should make a claim and support it with evidence from your experience.

I decided to choose Instagram for this experiment. I went onto my “Explore” page, which recommends numerous Instagram posts based on my already pre-existing interests that the algorithm picked up. This is an excellent example for me because I have not used Instagram lately and as such, saw more diversified content appear on my page at the beginning. I decided to click only on basketball-related content, to see how my page would change after a certain amount of time. After every post I clicked on, I refreshed the page and repeated. After only 10 posts, my entire feed was almost completely filled with basketball-related content.

This experience clearly shows the homophilic tendencies that are used by Instagram. We defined in the lecture that “Machine learning systems learn from data, rely on patterns, and make decisions” (Rahman, 2022b). In this scenario, there is an internal machine learning system that is built specifically to create “Filter bubbles”, as we learned in the lecture, which “show you more of the same type of information” (Rahman, 2022b). When I decided to click only on the basketball information, the machine learning algorithm learned from my data and used clear patterns (that I was only interested in basketball) in order to place me in a filter bubble that only exposed me to basketball information. If I was a regular user who was not trying to understand the inner workings of the algorithm, this would show me information that was catered only to my liking and thus make it so that I came back to the app more often. Thus, the algorithm is making recommendations based on what it thinks I (and others similar to me) like to consume.

The second concept this experience illustrated was that of Instagram’s internal algorithms. Becca Lewis’s paper applies to a very similar scenario to what I saw in this experiment. In the experiment, she speaks about how “YouTube’s recommendation algorithm can lead users down a rabbit hole” (Rahman, 2022b). By the end of my experiment, I was solely receiving content related to basketball. As a result, my entire Instagram feed consisted of material that I allegedly like to consume, allowing me to get trapped in the “endless scroll” that we often see as a criticism of apps such as Instagram. This would make me keep using the application, meaning Instagram gets more data on me. And, as we learned in lecture if an app/service is free “you are the product” (Rahman, 2022b).

4

We learned how communication technologies have made it easier for governments and companies to track and surveil our activities. Taking Google and NSA’s data tracking and surveilling practices explain the concept of panopticonism. Next, discuss why these practices are maybe problematic for your privacy and consent rights.

Google is the largest search engine on the planet. In this day and age, almost everyone across the world uses the product on a daily basis (often multiple times in a day). The company has gotten so large that they now have a presence in multiple businesses (phones, cloud services, even autonomous vehicles) and the dictionary even considers “Google” a verb. What many users don’t know, however, is that Google is a very practical example of digital panopticonism.

The definition of panopticonism is “surveillance cultures as an organizing social dynamic and ideology” (Rahman, 2022b). This was originally described in the context of a physical jail cell block design in which the cells were organized in an almost circular pattern, with a surveillance tower in the middle. The inmates were never aware of when they were being watched by the guards in the tower, and as such, operate under the pretense that they were always being spied on. This proved to be a very effective form of administration for the jail cell. The digital panopticon regarding Google is a very similar concept, except the “inmates” being spied on are the users who use the search engine while the “guards” are Google themselves. While using the service, Google is constantly tracking and collecting our data in order to sell to the government.

We learned in the lecture that all people are categorizable into one of three types: privacy fundamentalists, privacy pragmatists, and privacy unconcerned. Privacy fundamentalists protect “privacy first. An ideological commitment to privacy”. Pragmatists trade “some privacy for some benefit”. Finally, those who are unconcerned believe that the “benefits are far greater than any threats” and are “willing to give lots of information for small benefits” (Rahman, 2022b). Those who use Google even though they are aware of the digital panopticonism fall under either the pragmatist or unconcerned category. The products that Google offers are tailored towards ease of use, and as mentioned prior, it has become commonplace in society to rely on Google.

However, since Google is an entity that no one using the internet can physically see, the ever-watching eye is not as apparent. If there were a person staring over your shoulder at everything you typed into your computer (and then wrote down whatever you typed), you would act much differently even if you were in the unconcerned group. This is exactly what is happening every time you enter a search into Google’s website! Privacy and consent are therefore non-existent in this scenario, as every user’s private search histories are logged and bookmarked in Google’s databases (and most likely sold for profit!)

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