

# Bracketing

## The Gutenberg Parenthesis

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- **Gutenberg Parenthesis**
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# OT (printing) IT

- Round brackets by which a parenthesis is opened and closed are themselves inventions of the printing craft
- Parenthesis = phrase, word inserted into passage which is already complete
  - Parenthesis amplifies some meaning / trend
  - Linked to, but distinct from, what lies outside the brackets
- Temporal Bracketing
  - Linked to turning the world textual
  - World turned textual at different times at different places
  - ... at different times among different social groups
- The world between Oral Traditions (OT) and Internet Technology (IT)

# Opening the Brackets I

- Remember Primary Orality
  - Stretches from early humans till establishment of print cultures
- Emergence of Script and Textual cultures important landmark
  - But did not shake the primacy of orality
- Brackets of the Gutenberg Parenthesis open with Print Cultures
  - Not the moment when the technology starts
  - Rather the moment when Print becomes
    - Irreversible, Commonplace, “Planet-Scalable”

# Opening the Brackets II

- 1500 c.
  - Emergence of Print Culture in Europe
  - Regional, gender, social, economic skew
  - Only well-off men of certain professions were literate
- 1820-40
  - India becomes a Print Culture
  - India?
    - Urban Bengal Presidency; Madras, Bombay
    - Massive gender, caste, income, region skew
    - Even today a quarter of Indians may be illiterate (but are they outside print culture?)
- Globally some places, people are just adopting Print Culture



# Opening the Brackets III

- Script gets standardised and fixed
- Writing practices – grammar, style, syntax – get standardised / fixed
- Language gets standardised and fixed
- Mass production and consumption of printed matter
- Oral world cannot exist outside the realm of print
- “Lock in” of Print
- Impact visible on Economic, Social, Cultural, Political, Individual realms

# Inside the Parenthesis

- Shift from ear to eye (oral / aural to sight and material)
  - From speaking to silence
- Production, distribution, storage of information-knowledge transformed
- Emergence of the Book
- Finite product
  - Beginning and end
  - Limited both in temporal, physical, and intellectual sense
  - Commodity = unit of knowledge

# Media and Material

- Knowledge is contained in silos
- Bound between Covers in a Volume
- Book as container
  - “Print is curiously intolerant of physical incompleteness. It can convey the impression, unintentionally and subtly, but very really, that the material the text deals with is similarly complete and self-consistent. Print makes for more tightly closed art forms. Print culture ... tends to feel a work as ‘closed’, set off from other works, a unit in itself.”

# Containment

- Physical and psychological boundaries around a text
  - Defined by materiality
  - Also personnel
- Printed material/medium is unidirectional from author to reader
- Each printed commodity is a tome, a monument
- “Within the Gutenberg Parenthesis, a work is normally the achievement of a specific, named author, contained within the canon of his works, and the right to copy (and change) it belongs to him, unless he has assigned or sold it to another person or institution: protected by this legal boundary, the work is a private realm to which others do not have access.”
- Printed text “is self-contained, and resists any textual intrusion or extraction that would compromise its integrity. The technology places not merely physical but psychological boundaries around the text. We take for granted the absolute textual inviolability [of printed text]”.



# Accumulative

- Inside the Parenthesis is a new Mentalite
  - Mental Architecture; Ways of Seeing
- Life inside the Parenthesis foregrounds
  - Unit of Knowledge and Knowledge as Unit(s)
    - Which now are fixed and available repeatedly over time and space
  - The Creator of Knowledge and the Knowledge of Creators
  - Commodification of ideas and people
- Print Culture enables the rise of
  - Religious Reformation
  - Intellectual Renaissance
  - Scientific Revolution

# Static

- Printed Texts are fixed
  - That is what gives them the ability to turn knowledge into a super-power
- The units of knowledge create a sense of knowledge as infinitesimally divisible
- Knowledge that is created is fixed, delineated, and additive
- Reality is understood as fixed, delineated, and additive
- Reality as Structure, or System
- Change as external to Structure or System

# Closing the Brackets I

- Orality never ended
  - Transformed with print culture but...
  - Remained central to human life
- Emergence of Audio and Visual Media
  - At the High Noon of Print Civilisation (1850s to 1950s)
  - Telegram
  - Telephone
  - Radio
  - Cinema and Television

# Closing the Brackets: Telegram

- Still text based...
- But electronically mediated
- Electronic media
- Speed of transmission of information
- 1860s: Underwater telegraph cables linked Europe and America
- First crack at static printed text



# Closing the Brackets: Telephone

- Negligible Text mediation
  - What was it?
- Two way real time communication which is entirely oral
- No textual residue
- Ephemeral and instantaneous
- Dynamic and not Static

# Closing the Brackets: Radio

- Mass Orality
- Content may well be mediated by text
  - News, Advertisements, Structured Programmes
  - Semi-Static
- Many other content open and extempore
  - Interviews, Commentaries
- One way communication
- Difficult to control airwaves, unlike Print
- Audio media like records, cassette tapes are contained like print products but oral
  - Have ability to be repeated by listener (reader)

# Closing the Brackets: Cinema and Television

- Audio and Visual as one undifferentiated media
- Shares many features of Radio but deeper impact due to visuals
- Ability to (re)create (a)new situations and reality
  - Merge imagination and reality
  - Create imaginary worlds as real and experienced
- Dynamic
  - Even though creation of films and television requires lots of textual mediation

# Features of the New Orality

- Analogue
- Mass (Re)production Possible
  - Mass consumption of Oral (and audio-visual) media
  - Entertainment and Education; Fact and Knowledge
- Massive costs of Production
  - Production remains in the hands of a few
  - Easy to control for States and Corporations (the few)
- Trains people to again foreground sound over text



# Closing the Brackets: Digital World

- Mass Orality
- Hierarchy between producer and consumer of media CAN now be broken
- Dynamic by design
- Media is stored not as text but as ephemeral electrons
  - Not the same as sound
  - But not material as paper and text
- De-contained information
  - No one really knows where and how it is stored
  - Not even necessary for its use
- The non-materiality of digital knowledge

# Connection

- Oral knowledge rests on connections
  - Between humans as a community
  - Within humans as memory
  - Knowledge vanishes in the absence of connection
- Printed matter exists without human mediation
  - In Units, In Silos, Detached and Self-Contained
  - A feature of all text
- Digital media necessitates de-containment
  - “...if ‘containment’ distinguishes many features of both media technology and cultural production within the Gutenberg Parenthesis, the pre- and post-parenthetical periods share not merely its absence, but the presence of features that have the common quality of *connection*.”

# Outside the Brackets: Fragmentary

- Media outside the Brackets tends to be fragmentary
- Tied to context and ...
- Recreated each time with the new context
- Unlike in Print Cultures, there is no 'free-standing complete work-in-itself'
- Engagement in Oral and Digital Cultures comes from new and innovative ways in which older material is
  - Remixed
  - Rematched
  - Reworked
  - Re-presented
- What are its consequences for Knowledge Production and Perception of Reality

# Outside the Brackets: Unstable

- Media is unstable: Oral or Digital
- For knowledge to survive, need to constantly upgrade, or at least refresh, media on which info-knowledge is stored
- Media can be changed from one materiality to another
  - Rapidly
  - By non-experts



# Outside the Brackets: Deterritorialised

- Media and communication are deterritorialised
- Boundaries are only to be broken
  - “Nothing remains private online”
- “...hypertextual operations and digital networks have deterritorialised the text. They have brought about the emergence of a text without clear boundaries, without a definable interiority. Now there is text, as one might speak of water, or sand. The text is put in motion, taken in a flux, vectorised, metamorphic”.

# Outside the Brackets: Flux

- How does one read a text?
- Does a text always remain a text?
- Is there any boundary between text, sound, image?
- Democratised consumption of media
  - Does this democratise knowledge?
- Whatever the author creates, can be morphed by the reader-consumer

# Closing the Brackets

- Will that ever happen?
- New Orality founded on an interiorisation and massification of textual culture
- But it does not anymore require a majority of people to know text
- How will it play out in the 21<sup>st</sup> century is anybody's guess
  - Lack of sufficient research
- Enjoy the ride!

# The End

- The end semester exams will cover the entire semester's teaching
- Revise and remember the readings
  - Irony, ain't it?
- The New Grading Plan

Type of Evaluation	Weightage (in %)
Quiz-1	15%
Mid SemExam	25%
Quiz-2	15%
End Sem Exam	45%