Journal of Mass Media Ethics
Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:
http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t775653682

Aristotelian Ethos and the New Orality: Implications for Media Literacy and Media Ethics

Charles Marsh [a]
[a] William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications, University of Kansas.

Online Publication Date: 01 January 2006

To cite this Article Marsh, Charles(2006)'Aristotelian Ethos and the New Orality: Implications for Media Literacy and Media Ethics',Journal of Mass Media Ethics,21:4,338 — 352

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1207/s15327728jmme2104_8

URL: http://dx.doi.org/10.1207/s15327728jmme2104_8

Journal of Mass Media Ethics, *21*(4), 338–352

Aristotelian Ethos and the New Orality: Implications for Media Literacy and Media Ethics

Charles Marsh
William Allen White School of Journalism and Mass Communications
University of Kansas

❑ *Modern converged mass media, particularly television and the World Wide Web, may be fostering a new orality in opposition to traditional alphabetical literacy. Scholars of orality and literacy maintain that oral cultures feature reduced levels of critical assessment of media messages. An analysis of Aristotle's description of ethos, as presented in that philosopher's* Rhetoric*, suggests that an oral culture can foster media that deliver selective truths, or even lies, thus ranking poorly in hierarchical ethical schemata such as those developed by Kohlberg, Gilligan, and Baker.*

Emerging theories of orality and literacy can help explain Aristotle's (1954, 1991) puzzling, even troubling description of ethos, the persuasive value of a speaker's character. In doing so, these theories present a sobering possibility for the effects of converged mass media on media literacy and media ethics in the 21st century: Do modern mass media diminish the critical thinking skills of media consumers, refashioning media literacy, "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages" (Baran, 2004, p. 51), to a point at which media-delivered selective truths, or even lies, gain uncritical acceptance? By their very nature, are multisensory media unintentionally but unethically forsaking the core journalistic values of "enabl[ing] the public to make enlightened decisions" and eschewing technologies that "distort reality" (Radio–Television News Directors Association, 2000)? We can address these questions, in part, by examining Aristotle's concept of ethos, developed in fourth-century B.C. Athens in a transitional media environment that orality–literacy scholars find similar to our own.

Aristotelian Ethos

The puzzling nature of Aristotle's (1954) views on ethos begins with that philosopher's clear position, as presented in the *Rhetoric,* that ethos is

generated by and within the speech itself, not by an audience's knowledge of the speaker's character before his performance:

> Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. … This kind of persuasion, like the others [logos and pathos], should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he begins to speak. (§ 1356a)

Of Aristotelian ethos, Kennedy (1996) declared, "Perhaps the most conspicuous lack in the *Rhetoric,* given Aristotle's own conception of the subject, is its failure to take account of the role in rhetoric of the authority and prestige of the speaker" (p. 176).

Rejecting a strict interpretation of what Aristotle clearly said, one modern critic bluntly attacked the plausibility of such an ethos: "In a society so small, where everyone knew one another, how could [Aristotle] think—was he really that dumb—that a person of bad character could hoodwink the other leaders of society?"[1] Thonssen and Baird (1948) concluded that the only way to accept Aristotle's concept of ethos is to see it as a pristine, intellectual construct that cannot function in the real world.

Another option, however, is that Aristotle meant what he said, that in the Athens of the fourth century B.C., a speech-derived ethos—ethos purely as a media construct, divorced from a speaker's history—could sway audiences. Although the explanation for this phenomenon begins even earlier with Aristotle's teacher, Plato, it engenders disturbing possibilities for modern media literacy and media ethics: It presents the prospect that the very nature of multisensory journalistic media may undermine the critical thinking abilities of their audiences. As I discuss later, alphabetical literacy nurtured intellectual skills that sparked, among other disciplines, the diverse field of modern ethics (Havelock, 1986). Is it possible that substantial alterations in media literacy, specifically a shift from an alphabetically literate culture to an oral culture, could both increase the credulity of media audiences and diminish the mental abilities necessary for ethical analysis?

Plato, the Oral Spell, and Ethical Schemata

Plato's dialogues (Hamilton & Cairns, 1989) and modern studies of orality and literacy may help explain Aristotelian ethos (Marsh, 2004). In detailing the power of poetry and oratory in preliterate and early literate Greece, the latter being precisely the time of Plato and Aristotle (Yunis, 2003), orality–literacy scholars have described a condition they term the *oral spell,* a phenomenon capable of mesmerizing both speaker and audience (Havelock, 1986, p. 31). Yunis (2003) described Plato's assessment of such a spell:

> Insofar as the [poet's] audience undergo a poetic experience, they do not attend to the distinction between words and meaning and do not consciously consider the meaning of that which is being said to them. Rhetoric, in Plato's view, has a similar effect. … Like the poet, the rhetor enchants the audience, as Plato is fond of stating. In both poetry and rhetoric, the critical faculties of the audience, if they have any, are crippled; the audience become spellbound, and they receive the discourse uncritically. (p. 205)

If such a dreamlike, uncritical state were possible, if a rhetorician or orator could, like a poet, cast an oral spell, we may have our explanation for the implausible, even alarming notion that in classical Athens, a communicator's ethos could be a media construct divorced from the communicator's history. Such a spell would be anathema to Plato because he passionately believed that we reach absolute truth through the conversational, contentious give and take of dialectic (Plato, 1989c, 276–277; Plato, 1989e, Plato, 1989e, III & X).

Because Aristotle presented rhetoric as it was, not as it should be (Kennedy, 1994), he described a process of persuasion that included the effective presentation of selective truths (Barney & Black, 1994) or outright falsehoods, even in regard to the establishment of the speaker's own character (Marsh, 2003; Wardy, 1996),[2] a practice that, by modern standards, we would term unethical. For example, using Baker's (1999) five-level schema of ethical communication philosophies, Marsh (2001) relegated selective-truth messages to the entitlement model, which ranks below the enlightened self-interest, social responsibility, and kingdom of ends (Kantian) models (and ranks above only the self-interest model). In Kohlberg's (1963) standard six stages of moral development, self-serving media messages involving lies or selective truths would typify the second stage (instrumental relativist orientation), in which "each person is free to pursue his or her *individual* interests. … There is still no identification with the values of the family or community" (Crain, 1985, p. 121). In Kohlberg's hierarchical schema, stage two ranks as a preconventional morality stage. In Gilligan's (1982) three-step care-based hierarchy, self-serving selective truths and lies would rank in the lowest stage, typified by "caring solely for self, at the expense of others if necessary" (Goree, 2000, p. 105).

Because more than one orality–literacy scholar has charged that that our current media environment is shifting technologically advanced cultures into a new orality (Ong, 1982, p. 11; Havelock, 1986, pp. 17, 31), the possibility of an oral spell that allows preconventional ethical behavior, selective truths and outright lies, may be more than a historical anomaly that helps explain Aristotelian ethos. The oral spell may have growing relevance for our own media environment. Is it ethical, for example, for us to develop multisensory media of such potential? Given the possibility and

dangers of an oral spell, what evidence, if any, affirms the existence and effectiveness of such a spell in fourth-century B.C. Athens?

Evidence of the Oral Spell

Orality–literacy scholars maintain that a modern, media-literate society lacks the ability to appreciate the power of the orator in a preliterate or early literate society (Havelock, 1986). Ong (1982) began his seminal *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word* with this declaration:

> Many of the features we have taken for granted in thought and expression in literature, philosophy and science, and even in oral discourse among literates, are not directly native to human experience as such but have come into existence because of the resources which the technology of writing makes available to human consciousness. We have had to revise our understanding of human identity. (p. 1)

Ong later added, "The effects of oral states of consciousness are bizarre to the literate mind" (p. 30).

Connors (1986/1990) presented compelling proof that both Socrates and Plato acknowledged and feared the oral spell. In "Greek Rhetoric and the Transition from Orality," he offered a catalog of references to the oral spell in the works of Plato and others, including these instances in the Platonic dialogues:

- In *Protagoras* (Plato, 1989d, 315a), Socrates noted Protagoras' power of "enchanting … with his voice" and confessed that he—Socrates himself—was "under his spell" (Connors, 1986/1990, p. 101).
- In *Menexenus* (Plato, 1989b, 235a), Socrates acknowledged that orators "bewitch our souls" (Connors, 1986/1990, p. 100).
- In *Sophist* (Plato, 1989f, 234c), a speaker similarly decried the ability of orators to "bewitch the young through their ears with words" (Connors, 1986/1990, p. 91).

Connors noted similar passages in Plato's *Phaedrus* (Plato, 1989c, 238d, 241e) and the *Symposium* (Plato, 1989g, 215c–e). To Connors' evidence, we could add Socrates' comparison, in *Euthydemus,* of sophists to enchanters (Plato, 1989a, 289e, 290a). "Throughout the dialogues," Connors concluded, "Socrates admits that he is not immune to the blandishments of poetry and rhetoric; even as he condemns them, he is in danger of seduction by them" (p. 101).

Both Havelock (1986) and Connors (1986/1990) described Socrates' persistent efforts to break the oral spell by interrupting the orator, disrupting the seductive presentation that can bewitch and enchant. Building on the work of Havelock, Connors wrote

> Socrates' answer to the danger of the rhetorical spell is to prevent it from being woven. Throughout all of the early dialogues, Socrates struggles hard to control the form that discourse will take. What he constantly tries to do is *subvert rhetorical magic by interrupting it with questions.* The very form of the dialectic method was the younger Plato's direct antidote to the spell of rhetoric as it was his indirect challenge to the power of poetic cultural transmission. (p. 102)

Ong (1982, p. 13), Connors (1986/1990, p. 99), de Romilly (1975, p. 16), and McLuhan (1962, p. 38) all used the words *magic* or *magical* to describe the power of the oral spell in classical Athens. Havelock (1986) wrote that the power of the skilled orator was "formidable and majestic and yet at the same time spellbinding" (p. 120). Purcell (1996) held that a skilled orator could speak "in a striking, sonorous, almost hypnotic way" (p. 13). Connors summarized

> I believe that oral rhetoric attained its great power and popularity among fifth and fourth-century Greek states by utilizing—in a quite conscious and "literate" fashion—the mechanisms of passive oral consciousness described by Havelock, mechanisms that still existed in most people and that made the Athenians of Socrates' and Plato's times peculiarly receptive to certain sorts of carefully wrought oral persuasion. (p. 93)

Working with and within this great power, Aristotelian ethos could function free from fear of contradicting, or even acknowledging, what people thought of an orator's character before he began to speak. Masterful communicators in classical Athens could, if they chose, use properties of the dominant medium, speech, to deliver selective truths and lies to credulous audiences.[3] They could, in modern parlance, "shoot the magic bullet." Plato knew and feared this aspect of orality, but it remained for modern theorists to explain how it might work.

Explaining the Oral Spell: McLuhan's Cool Media

McLuhan recognized the power of Plato's oral spell in his difficult notion of cool media. McLuhan's resurgence in recent years is, in part, surely due to his prescience in predicting media that have increasingly appealed to a variety of senses (McLuhan, 1964, p. 56)—for example, any CNN newscast with its mixture of listening, watching, and reading.[4]

Cool media, according to McLuhan (1964), are distinguished by "a kind of commitment and participation in situations that involve all one's faculties" (p. vii). Cool media stimulate "synesthesia" (McLuhan, 1962, p. 26) and "the interplay of the senses" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 67). Television was McLuhan's (1964) ultimate cool medium because it is (to use another challenging McLuhan phrase) highly tactile (p. 286). "Tactility," McLuhan (1962) wrote, "is the interplay among all the senses" (p. 102).

By contrast, hot media are highly focused media that appeal to a single sense—books and radio, for example: "A hot medium is one that extends one single sense in 'high definition'" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 66). A hot medium "allows of less participation than a cool one" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 37). This distinction leads to a key point: As participation increases, McLuhan (1962) concluded, detached, analytical thought decreases; cool media, multisensory media, "are recreating within us the mental processes of the most primitive men" (p. 42).

McLuhan's notion of cool media and their inherent, mesmerizing, multisensory suppression of detached, analytical thought helps explain Plato's notion of the oral spell. Speech, for McLuhan, is the oldest cool medium: "The spoken word involves all of the senses dramatically" (1964, p. 81).

Cool Media and Media Literacy

Modern convergence leads to multimedia in mass media, and multimedia, being multisensory, are intensely cool, perhaps even cold, if McLuhan's term might be extended. For at least two reasons, modern mass media present the possibility of a modern oral spell, with all the inherent ethical ramifications of such a phenomenon:

- Modern mass media are multimedia and multisensory. The Census Bureau ranks television, broadcast and cable–satellite, as the most popular mass medium, accounting for more than 1,500 viewing hr per viewer per year. Radio is a distant second at approximately 1,000 hr. The most-used predominantly print mass medium, newspapers, ranks fifth, behind television, radio, recorded music, and the Internet (Baran, 2004, p. 22).

Again, CNN news broadcasts may be today's ultimate expression of a multisensory cool medium. However, Web-delivered newspapers now have audio–video capacity, just as online radio now has print and video capabilities. As computers increasingly merge with televisions, the Web could well become the assuredly cool dominant mass medium of the near future.

- Modern mass media, particularly television, do not foster dialogue with mass audiences; a modern Socrates cannot interrupt and interrogate them, disrupting a possible oral spell and shifting seduction into dialectic. Compared with ordinary conversation, wrote Baran (2004), mass media content is "inflexible, unalterable" (p. 8).

Conceivably, the converged, multisensory mass media of the 21st century could lead to a powerful redefinition of media literacy, with significant consequences for the ethical practice of multimedia journalism. If, with the National Leadership Conference on Media Literacy, we define media literacy as "the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages" (Baran, 2004, p. 51), the reemergence of an oral spell would weaken at least three of the four qualities of such literacy: analysis, evaluation, and communication

(response or feedback). Supported by orality–literacy theorists, McLuhan believed that multisensory media are the primary cause of such a regression.

Modern Media and the New Orality

Typography-based hot media ended tribalism and gave birth to individual consciousness, McLuhan (1964) wrote in *Understanding Media* (pp. 155–161). With the modern dominance of cool media, however, we have reversed that trend:

> The electronic implosion [of multisensory media] now brings oral and tribal ear-culture to the literate West. Not only does the visual, specialist, and fragmented Westerner have now to live in closest daily association with all the ancient oral cultures of the earth, but his own electric technology now begins to translate the visual [reading] or eye man back into the tribal and oral pattern. (McLuhan, 1964, p. 58)

McLuhan's (1962) "global village" exists in a state of what he labeled "post-literacy" (p. 60), a state later termed "the new orality" by Ong (1982, p. 11). New multimedia mass media are eroding alphabetical literacy (McLuhan, 1964, p. 85), leading us, whether we wish or not, to "re-enter the tribal night" (McLuhan, 1964, p. 47). As modern mass media retribalize the West, we lose our notions of separate, individual identities and our sense of chronological time (McLuhan, 1964, p. 87), a seeming recipe for a return to conditions that allowed Aristotelian ethos with its predication in primitive or nonexistent critical thinking. "If we persist in a conventional approach to these developments," McLuhan (1964) wrote, "our traditional culture will be swept aside" (p. 75).

"What If He Is Right?"—Tom Wolfe

This is standard McLuhan fare and, as such, certainly has not gone unchallenged. "If I have inadvertently suggested that [McLuhan's] *Understanding Media* is pure nonsense, let me correct that impression," wrote Macdonald (1967). "It is impure nonsense, nonsense adulterated by sense" (p. 205). A frustrated Hazard (1967) charged, "It is impossible to check out all his wild surmises" (p. 173). However, as Wolfe asked, famously and repeatedly, "What if he is right?" (Wolfe, 1967, p. 31; Wolfe, 2004, p. 23).

Significantly, McLuhan was not a voice in the wilderness. Scholars of orality and literacy, none of them students of mass media in a journalistic sense, have echoed his assessments. The late Eric Havelock was a Yale University professor of classics. In *The Muse Learns to Write,* he declared,

> The Greek story [of a shift in the orality–literacy equilibrium] is self-contained, yet the crisis in communication which it describes as taking place

> in antiquity acquires a larger dimension when measured against what appears to be a similar crisis in modernity. … The potential of the oral spell had been reasserted after a long sleep that had set in perhaps about the time McLuhan said it had, perhaps earlier, perhaps later. As we now probe orality in history we are probing its partial resurrection in ourselves. (Havelock, 1986, pp. 17, 31)

The late Walter Ong was a professor of humanities at Saint Louis University. In *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word,* Ong (1982) described the "secondary orality of television" (p. 122) and noted that electronic media in general have "brought [our] consciousness to a new age of secondary orality" (p. 135), with secondary orality being a powerful force that, unlike primary orality, has a knowledge of print (p. 11). Like McLuhan, Ong (1982) maintained that vision (alphabetical literacy) is a "dissecting," analytical sense, while hearing (secondary orality) is nonanalytical (p. 72). Ong, again, used the phrase *new orality* to describe the nonanalytical "present-day high-technology culture" (p. 11).

Qualities of an Oral Society

McLuhan noted three qualities that characterize oral cultures: reduced individualism, reduced Western sense of chronology, and reduced analytical thinking. Including those, scholars of orality and literacy have noted at least five qualities that characterized Greek oral culture, the culture of Aristotelian ethos and primitive critical thinking. The five qualities were the increased importance of memory and the consequent inability to engage in sustained abstract, analytical thought, the cultural importance of speech, a focus on the present, and the flat quality of characterizations in narratives (Marsh, 2004). If we are indeed entering a new orality, these qualities may be the framework within which media literacy operates, a framework that can foster the media-delivered selective truths and lies of a preconventional morality.

Increased Importance of Memory

Because cultural norms in an oral society are transmitted and stored orally (Havelock, 1982; Thomas, 1992), memory has a powerful social function, both for speakers and for audiences. Havelock (1986), Ong (1982), and others have held that members of an oral culture devote so much intellectual energy and storage capacity to memorizing cultural history and norms that little ability or inclination remains for analytical thought. In fact, Thomas (1992) noted that the Greek word for truth, *aletheia,* means the opposite of forgetfulness, *lethe* (p. 115). Aristotle (1954) himself, in the *Rhetoric,* underscored the importance of memory in his analysis of "things that must be good": "good parts, strong memory, receptiveness, quickness of

intuition, and the like" (§ 1362b). In an oral culture, human intellect operates not as an analytical device but as a storage unit, a function that would help allow an uncritical acceptance of media messages.

Inability to Engage in Sustained Abstract, Analytical Thought

Memory's inadvertent role as a barrier to analytical thought in oral cultures is a core belief in Ong's (1982) *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word:*

> In an oral culture, to think through something in non-formulaic, non-patterned, non-mnemonic terms, even if it were possible, would be a waste of time, for such thought, once worked through, could never be recovered with any effectiveness, as it could be with the aid of writing. It would not be abiding knowledge but simply a passing thought.
>
> A sound-dominated verbal economy is consonant with aggregative (harmonizing) tendencies rather than with analytic, dissecting tendencies (which would come with the inscribed, visualized word).
>
> In an oral culture, the flow of words, the corresponding flood of thought, the *copia* advocated in Europe by rhetoricians from classical antiquity through the Renaissance, tends to manage discrepancies by glossing them over—the etymology here is telling, *glossa,* tongue, by "tonguing" them over. (pp. 35, 73, 104)

Media audiences in an oral, memory-driven culture, thus, would not, perhaps could not, devote intellectual energy to challenging media-delivered selective truths or even lies that otherwise could be defeated by close scrutiny.

In *Science and Sanity*, Korzybski (1933/1958) described a vicious circle in cultures without strong powers of abstract reasoning: A lack of abstraction increases the number of words needed for specific items, such as names for individual trees rather than abstractions such as *tree* or *forest*, thus further taxing intellectual capacity that could be used for abstract thought.

Cultural Importance of Speech

Another barrier to an audience's scrutiny of media-delivered half truths or lies in an oral culture is, ironically, the ethos of the speech act itself. Havelock (1982) was an early proponent of the view that oral cultures use speech to record, remember, and transmit cultural norms:

> The religion, law, and custom, the ethical and historical consciousness of an oral culture are not in themselves capable of incorporation in visible models. Their close conservation depends upon strictly verbal description handed

> down between the generations. Description here passes into prescription. What is done becomes what ought to be done. (p. 127)

Thomas (1992) added, "[Oral] poets were in an important sense the preservers and transmitters of their cultural heritage" (p. 116). In a culture conditioned to accept important social truths through speech, in a culture of declining alphabetical literacy, media-delivered messages, true or not, could gain status as cultural pronouncements.

Modern studies of journalism and the collective memory of a society note the formative and even potentially manipulative power of journalism over such memory (Schudson, 1992; Zelizer, 1992). Zelizer maintained that journalists can be "cultural authorities" (p. 4), who in the past, have sometimes "marginalized other groups with alternative versions of the same events" (p. 9). Conceivably, the increasing social importance of memory in the new orality could increase the cultural authority of journalism, an authority with an increased ability to abuse the credulity of audiences.

Focus on the Present

Citing the earlier work of Goody and Watt, Ong (1982) concluded

> Oral societies live very much in the present … sloughing off memories which no longer have present relevance. … In functionally oral cultures the past is not felt as an itemized terrain, peppered with verifiable and disputed "facts" or bits of information. (pp. 46, 97, 98)

Purcell (1996) wrote that oral discourse in classical Athens "was concerned with the situational context and was therefore not as accountable to interdependence across situations. Its correctness was judged, or reacted to, instantly" (p. 11). In an oral culture, an audience's inability, lack of motivation, or even lack of notion to compare discrepancies between past and present facts would be ideal for Aristotelian ethos, which would allow a speaker to create a favorable media-delivered ethos in contrast to a previous, less favorable one.

Flat Characterization in Narratives

In his cross-cultural studies of myths, Claude Levi-Strauss (1996) offered a valuable framework for understanding characterization in the oral performances of oral cultures: "In the course of a myth, anything is likely to happen. There is no logic, no continuity. Any characteristic can be attributed to any subject; every conceivable relation can be met. With myth, everything becomes possible" (p. 119).

Deep and consistent characterization was not a quality that Greeks sought in oral performances that delivered cultural norms, often in the guise of myths, to be held in memory. "We know now that the type 'heavy' (or 'flat') character derives originally from primary oral narrative, which can provide characters of no other kind" (Ong, 1982, p. 151). Schloemann (2002) maintained that audiences in classical Athens viewed rhetorical performances as entertainment, expecting in oratory much of what they found in oral poetry and drama. Thus, in an oral society, media audiences may shun complexity in characterization, which combined with the tendency to embrace the present at the expense of the past, could allow a politician, for example, to gloss over a previous, unfavorable ethos.

These five characteristics—the increased importance of memory and the consequent inability to engage in sustained abstract, analytical thought, the cultural importance of speech, a focus on the present, and the flat quality of characterizations in narratives—describe the culture and media literacy within which Aristotle wrote that ethos should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he begins to speak. Without connecting these qualities to Aristotelian ethos or preconventional morality, McLuhan detected and predicted the further, media-fueled increase of three of them, and all five qualities are associated with oral cultures.

Conclusions

A media-generated retreat into an unanalytical culture, in which media that foster preconventional morality hold sway, is a worst-case scenario. As Ong wrote, secondary orality, for all its power, is not primary orality. A knowledge of print does abide. The previous five qualities belong to primary orality. However, McLuhan, Havelock, Ong, and others have noted their growing presence in our media-saturated secondary orality: the new orality.

In *The Muse Learns to Write,* Havelock (1986) posed one of the many questions that the shifting balance of orality and literacy creates regarding media literacy and ethics: "Can moral philosophy find any comfort in a historical formula which proposes that the language of ethics, of moral principle, of ideal standards of conduct, was a creation of Greek literacy?" (p. 121). Anyone who has read this far into this article is surely a reader and may find comfort, and even pride, in the notion that the alphabet helped stimulate an intellectual revolution that helped create modern ethics.

However, what if the reverse is true, as McLuhan, Havelock, Ong, and others feared? If alphabetical literacy is a foundation of critical thinking and, consequently, modern ethics, what might be the consequences of its demise? The oral spell that Plato decried actually breathes life into aspects of the magic bullet theory of media effects, which no doubt many profes-

sors (myself included) have introduced to students as a quaint relic of unsophisticated cultures.

If the oral spell once again becomes reality, if media literacy is redefined, if we create journalistic media capable of delivering compelling selective truths and lies, the irony (to select one among many important considerations) would be profound. The English word *literacy* derives, of course, from Latin *littera* ("letter"). And letters, with all they engender, are precisely what would be diminished in the new reality of the new orality.

Notes

1. This comment came from an anonymous reviewer for the *Journal of Public Relations Research,* who rejected a manuscript I sent to that publication. *Public Relations Review* (Vol. 29) included the revised article as "Antecedents of Two-Way Symmetry in Classical Greek Rhetoric: The Rhetoric of Isocrates" (Marsh, 2003). I remain grateful to this reviewer for asking questions that helped lead to the present article. Sattler (1947, p. 58), Kennedy (Aristotle, 1991, p. 38n), and Garver (1994, pp. 184, 189) each argued that Aristotle's *Rhetoric,* although ambiguous, focused only on speech-contained means of creating persuasion. They suggested that for Aristotle, other tactics of persuasion (he mentioned witnesses and written contracts) were external and, thus, not part of the art of rhetoric. However, how could Aristotle ignore the possibility of a preexisting ethos, particularly one that might contradict a speech-constructed ethos? Why, in listing influential external (nonspeech) elements of the process of persuasion (Aristotle, 1954, 1355b), did Aristotle not mention the speaker's preexisting ethos?

   Lest Aristotle seem unethical in putting forth such a definition of ethos, Kennedy (1994, p. 56), Black (1958/1994, p. 99), and others noted that he presented a descriptive rather than a prescriptive rhetoric. In his extensive study of classical ethos and pathos, Wisse (1989) debunked the notion that Aristotle's nobler *Nicomachean Ethics* complements and explains the troubling ethos of the *Rhetoric:* "The point of view adopted in the *Rhetoric* sometimes makes it almost incomparable with other treatises. I therefore emphatically refrain from using the rest of the Aristotelian Corpus in interpreting the *Rhetoric.* … The *Ethica Nicomachea* … cannot be used for elucidating the *Rhetoric*" (pp. 12, 30). In his study of the awkward relation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric* to his *Politics* and *Ethics,* Halliwell (1996) concurred.
2. To believe that Aristotelian rhetoric would take advantage of an oral spell, were one possible, requires no stretch of the imagination. Aristotle (1954) presented a descriptive, not prescriptive art in which he defined rhetoric as "the faculty of observing *in any given case the available means of persuasion*" (§ 1355b, emphasis added). The *Rhetoric,* furthermore, abounds with examples of Aristotle's low opinion of Athenian audiences (Trevett, 1996).
3. Far from being a solution to the oral spell, writing—an increasingly common ability during the lifetimes of Plato and Aristotle (Connors, 1986/1990, p. 92)—presented, to Plato, a problem of equal magnitude. His strongest attack on the inability of writing to participate in dialectic, to bring audiences to the truth,

appears near the end of the *Phaedrus:* "Written words … seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing forever" (Plato, 1989c, 275). Following this passage, Plato immediately moved to the virtues of dialectic, which avoids oral spells and unresponsive texts and leads participants to true wisdom.

Plato's worst-case-scenario medium, thus, might well have been one that could cast the oral spell but could not be easily interrupted and interrogated. Because such a medium could not be easily knocked off its stride, it could allow an even more powerful version of Aristotelian ethos with its inherent possibility of seductive selective truths or even lies. Such media might well exist today under the name of multisensory mass media.

4. Wolfe (2004) maintained, "The Internet lit McLuhanism up all over again, and the man himself was resurrected as something close to a patron saint" (p. 25). In the journal *Economy and Society*, Merrin (2002) noted "a renewed interest in Marshall McLuhan's media theory" and concluded that "for many, his description of an electronic society and culture is more recognizable today than it was in his lifetime" (p. 369). Gingko Press currently is publishing a new series of critical editions of McLuhan's works.

References

Aristotle. (1954). *The rhetoric and the poetics of Aristotle* (W. R. Roberts & I. Bywater, Trans.). New York: Modern Library.

Aristotle. (1991). *On rhetoric: A theory of civic discourse* (G. A. Kennedy, Trans.). New York: Oxford University Press.

Baker, S. (1999). Five baselines for justification in persuasion. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 14,* 69–81.

Baran, S. J. (2004). *Introduction to mass communication: Media literacy and culture* (3rd ed.). Boston: McGraw-Hill.

Barney, R. D., & Black, J. (1994). Ethics and professional persuasive communication. *Public Relations Review, 20,* 233–249.

Black, E. (1994). Plato's view of rhetoric. In E. Schiappa (Ed.), *Landmark essays on classical Greek rhetoric* (pp. 83–99). Davis, CA: Hermagoras. (Reprinted from *The Quarterly Journal of Speech, 44,* 361–374, 1958)

Connors, R. J. (1990). Greek rhetoric and the transition from orality. In E. P. J. Corbett, J. L. Golden, & G. F. Berquist (Eds.), *Essays on the rhetoric of the western world* (pp. 91–109). Dubuque, IA: Kendall/Hunt. (Reprinted from *Philosophy and Rhetoric, 19,* 38–65, 1986)

Crain, W. C. (1985). *Theories of development* (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.

de Romilly, J. (1975). *Magic and rhetoric in ancient Greece.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Garver, E. (1994). *Aristotle's* Rhetoric*: An art of character.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gilligan, C. (1982). *In a different voice: Psychological theory and women's development.* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Goree, K. (2000). Teaching moral development in journalism education. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 15,* 101–114.
Halliwell, S. (1996). The challenge of rhetoric to political and ethical theory in Aristotle. In A. O. Rorty (Ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's* Rhetoric (pp. 175–190). Berkeley: University of California Press.
Hamilton, E., & Cairns, H. (Eds.). (1989). *Plato: Collected dialogues.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Havelock, E. A. (1982). *The literate revolution in Greece and its cultural consequences.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Havelock, E. A. (1986). *The muse learns to write: Reflections on orality and literacy from antiquity to present.* New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Hazard, P. D. (1967). The analogy between print and electronic media history means nothing. In G. E. Stearn (Ed.), *McLuhan: Hot & cool* (pp. 171–173). New York: Signet.
Kennedy, G. A. (1994). *A new history of classical rhetoric.* Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Kennedy, G. A. (1996). Reworking Aristotle's *Rhetoric.* In C. L. Johnstone (Ed.), *Theory, text, context: Issues in Greek rhetoric and oratory* (pp. 169–184). Albany: State University of New York Press.
Kohlberg, L. (1963). *Stages in development of moral thought and action.* New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston.
Korzybski, A. (1958). *Science and sanity.* Lakeville, CT: International Non-Aristotelian Library. (Original work published 1933)
Levi-Strauss, C. (1996). The structural study of myth. In R. Segal (Ed.), *Theories of myth: Structuralism in myth* (pp. 118–134). New York: Garland.
Macdonald, D. (1967). He has looted all culture. In G. E. Stearn (Ed.), *McLuhan: Hot & cool* (pp. 203–210). New York: Signet.
Marsh, C. (2001). Public relations ethics: Contrasting models from the rhetorics of Plato, Aristotle, and Isocrates. *Journal of Mass Media Ethics, 16,* 78–98.
Marsh, C. (2003). Antecedents of two-way symmetry in classical Greek rhetoric: The rhetoric of Isocrates. *Public Relations Review, 29,* 351–367.
Marsh, C. (2004, April). *Ethos and the alphabet: Orality and literacy in the rhetorics of Aristotle and Isocrates.* Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Classical Association of England and Wales, Leeds, England.
McLuhan, M. (1962). *The Gutenberg galaxy.* New York: Signet.
McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding media* (2nd ed.). New York: Signet.
Merrin, W. (2002). Implosion, simulation and the pseudo-event: A critique of McLuhan. *Economy and Society, 31,* 369–390.
Ong, W. J. (1982). *Orality and literacy: The technologizing of the word.* London: Routledge.
Plato. (1989a). Euthydemus. In E. Hamilton & H. Cairns (Eds.), *Plato: Collected dialogues* (pp. 385–420). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Plato. (1989b). Menexenus. In E. Hamilton & H. Cairns (Eds.), *Plato: Collected dialogues* (pp. 186–199). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Plato. (1989c). Phaedrus. In E. Hamilton & H. Cairns (Eds.), *Plato: Collected dialogues* (pp. 475–525). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Plato. (1989d). Protagoras. In E. Hamilton & H. Cairns (Eds.), *Plato: Collected dialogues* (pp. 308–352). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Plato. (1989e) The republic. In E. Hamilton & H. Cairns (Eds.), *Plato: Collected dialogues* (pp. 575–844). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Plato. (1989f). Sophist. In E. Hamilton & H. Cairns (Eds.), *Plato: Collected dialogues* (pp. 957–1017). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Plato. (1989g). Symposium. In E. Hamilton & H. Cairns (Eds.), *Plato: Collected dialogues* (pp. 526–574). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
Purcell, W. M. (1996). *Ars poetriae: Rhetorical and grammatical invention at the margin of literacy.* Columbia: University of South Carolina Press.
Radio–Television News Directors Association. (2000). *Code of ethics and professional conduct, Radio–Television News Directors Association.* Retrieved May 29, 2005, from http://www.rtnda.org/ethics/coe.shtml
Sattler, W. M. (1947). Conceptions of ethos in ancient rhetoric. *Speech Monographs, 14,* 55–65.
Schloemann, J. (2002). The audience's attitude towards oral and written oratory in classical Athens. In I. Worthington & J. M. Foley (Eds.), *Epea & grammata: Oral and written communication in ancient Greece* (pp. 133–146). Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.
Schudson, M. (1992). *Watergate in American memory.* New York: Basic.
Thomas, R. (1992). *Literacy and orality in ancient Greece.* Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
Thonssen, L., & Baird, A. C. (1948). *Speech criticism: The development of standards for rhetorical appraisal.* New York: Ronald.
Trevett, J. C. (1996). Aristotle's knowledge of Athenian oratory. *Classical Quarterly, 46,* 371–379.
Wardy, R. (1996). Mighty is the truth and it shall prevail? In A. O. Rorty (Ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's* Rhetoric (pp. 56–87). Berkeley: University of California Press.
Wisse, J. (1989). *Ethos and pathos from Aristotle to Cicero.* Amsterdam: Hakkert.
Wolfe, T. (1967). Suppose he is what he sounds like? In G. E. Stearn (Ed.), *McLuhan: Hot & cool* (pp. 31–48). New York: Signet.
Wolfe, T. (2004, Spring). McLuhan's new world. *Wilson Quarterly, 28,* 18–25.
Yunis, H. (2003). Writing for reading. In H. Yunis (Ed.), *Written texts and the rise of literate culture in ancient Greece* (pp. 189–212). Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.
Zelizer, B. (1992). *Covering the body.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.