The Problem of Power

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An Essay Reviewing:

Orality and Literacy, Walter J. Ong
The Parable of the Tribes, Andrew Schmookler
The Brothers Karamazov, Fyodor Dostoyevsky
Confucius, Ezra Pound (Tr.)
The Real Work, Gary Snyder

Alienation

'Separate the word from the body. That's death.'

The speaker is an old Navajo woman. She is speaking to her grandson. He has recentlv completed a doctoral degree at an Eastern University and now would like to record his grandmother's stories on magnetic tape. She does not want to let him separate her words from her body. She will not let him take her words away from their relationship as grandmother and grandson to store them for others to hear.

When people use sounds in a certain complex set of patterns in relating to each other we call that process language. That is how it was for unknown ages before writing. That is how it is now. But for those who write, for those who read, it is forgotten that language is sounds we make and sounds we hear. For us language has become letters, words, sentences, grammar. For us language has become writing.

This is so such so that we say easily and without thinking that we speak 'words'. And yet people who speak but do not write rarely talk of 'words'. They talk about meanings and intentions and relationships among people and relationships between people and the world. We are so committed to writing that we talk and write about such people by reference to literacy. We call them non-literates, pre-literates, or worse, illiterates. Writing has come to be a central feature of humanity in our imagination.

Walter Ong in his book *Orality and Literacy* is caught in this snare. He wishes to write about what it means to use language without a knowledge of literacy. But he is writing and you are reading. Both he and you are so deeply steeped in a historical tradition of literacy and a lifetime education in literacy that a world or a life outside of writing is virtually impossible to imagine.

Ong traces the gradual separation of the word and the body from when it was first made an object in writing several thousand years ago to its nearly complete alienation in the electronic media of our present. Ong, a deeply literate scholar, loves our literacy. He praises its artificiality.

> To say writing is artificial is not to condemn it but to praise it. Like other artificial creations and indeed more than any other, it is utterly invaluable and indeed essential for the realization of fuller, interior, human potentials. Technologies are not mere exterior aids but also interior transformations of consciousness, and never more than when they affect the word. Such transformations can be uplifting. Writing heightens consciousness. Alienation from a natural milieu can be good for us and indeed is in many ways essential for full human life. To live and to understand fully, we need not only proximity but also distance. This writing provides for consciousness as nothing else does.[1]

Walter Ong would no more trade his literacy for a pristine oral world than we would. But in writing his history of the heightened consciousness of literacy he points out that we have paid dearly for our consciousness. We live in constant peril of the dark side of alienation. We have a sense of isolation, meaninglessness, and powerlessness.

In fact you could say that isolation, alienation and powerlessness form the central theme of our present life. This theme could also be phrased in its current guise of egotism, individualism, and power. We have chosen to review five books in this essay to help us think through the problem of power as we understand it today.

Walter Ong's book *Orality and Literacy* tells of the wedge being driven between the body and the word from the invention of writing to our electronic media. There is a parallel argument in Andrew Schoookler's book *The Parable of the Tribes*. This book tells the story of the separation of human society from the earth in our development of civilization. Schnookler believes that as we used agriculture and the division of labor to break our ties to the biological constraints of life in a bioregion of the earth we gave ourselves an unprecendented freedom to expand population and to move. 'Out of the living order there emerged a living entity with no defined place.'[2]

As literacy drove a wedge between the body and the word, civilization drove a wedge between the earth and human society.The distance between the earth and human society increased as a complex chain of technologies and social structure intervened. The reward was unprecedented freedom to develop. The price was anarchy among civilized groups.

Before our break from the earth, Schmookler writes, the earth itself constrained our expansion. Once we broke that tie we found our civilizations in conflict with each other. It was this anarchy that gave rise to the principle of power.

Schmookler writes in *The Parable of The Tribes* that 'no one is free to choose peace, but anyone can impose upon all the necessity for power.'[3] Once one group chooses to aggressively dominate there are only four possible responses others can make: they can do nothing and be destroyed, they can be absorbed and transformed, they can try to withdraw (which is probably no longer an option) or they can imitate the strategies of power of the aggressor. Four options:

> 1. Destruction
> 2. Absorption and transformation
> 3. Withdrawal
> 4. Imitation
>
> In every one of these outcomes the ways of power are spread throughout the system.... A selection for power among civilized societies is inevitable.[4]

This thesis parallels Ong's thesis. As Ong writes that we have paid for our literate knowledge in a currency of isolation and alienation, Schmookler writes that the price we pay for our civilization is that we now live under permanent conditions of a struggle for power. Ong focuses on the consciousness of the individual while Schmookler is concerned primarly with the societal alienation from the earth. Both believe that this alienation is irreversible, the permanent condition of mankind from now on.

Just a little over one hundred years ago one of the literate world's most profound thinkers articulated this theme in a way that has not been improved on greatly since. Fyodor Dostoyevsky at the end of his life watched the rise of the European belief in the superiority of man's rationality. It was the beginning of the period in which European man would believe, as Nietszche put it, that God had died. In the place of God man had begun to elevate his own rationality as the determiner of life on earth.

In his novel *The Brothers Karamazov* Dostoyevsky wrote of a period of the greatest cynicism toward the life of the earth spreading throughout Europe in the form of atheistic rationality. Dostoyevsky's understanding of love is that it is love for all of God's creation, man, animals, the earth itself. This love balances and constrains man's rationality.The nihilists, believing that they had freed themselves from God's presence, believed that 'everything is permissible'. Dostoyevsky felt that modern man was buying his freedom from the church at the price of losing his connection to other people and the earth itself.

In a prophetic passage Dostoyevsky writes of the growing sense of isolation.

> To transform the world, it is necessary that men themselves should suffer a change of heart. Until you have actually become everyone's brother, the brotherhood of man will not come to pass. People will never be able to share their property and their rights fairly as a result of any scientific advance, however much it may be to their advantage to do so. Everything will be too little for them and they will always murmur, envy and destroy each other. You ask me when will it come to pass? It will come to pass, but first the period of human isolation will have to come to an end. 'What sort of isolation do you have in mind?' I asked. 'Why,' he replied, 'the sort of isolation that exists everywhere now, and especially in our age, but which hasn't reached its final development. Its end is not yet in sight. For today everyone is still striving to keep his individuality as far apart as possible, everyone still wishes to experience the fullness of life in himself alone, and yet instead of achieving the fullness of life, all his efforts merely lead to the fullness of self-destruction, for instead of full self-realization they relapse into complete isolation. For in our age all men are separated into self-contained units, everyone crawls into his own hole, everyone separates himself from his neighbour, hides himself away and hides away everything he possesses, and ends up by keeping himself at a distance from people and keeping other people at a distance from him.[5]

A century before Ong and Schmookler, Dostoyevsky wrote that there is a necessary balance among the earth, life and man's rationality. We separate our word from our bodies, ourselves from other humans, and our societies from the earth only at the price of alienation, isolation and tremendous suffering and destruction. Ong and Schmookler believe that these alienations are inevitable and irreversible. A century ago Dostoyevsky believed there was hope. We do not know what he would think if he had known of the wars of the past one hundred years, each more terrible in its destruction of life and our ability to recover than the one before. We do not know what he would think if he knew of the brutal and cynical destruction of people and nations under Hitler and Stalin and so many others since. He certainly would have gained little satisfaction in being able to say, 'I told you so.'

We want to ask in this essay: What is a person to do in such a world? How can we begin to reunite the body and the words? How can we dislodge the wedge driven between civilized society and the earth? How can we reestablish a communion with the sacred?

These are not simple matters. Even if we were to choose to give up our electronic media as many of us have done, do we want to abandon our literacy? We do not. The size of the world population commits us to modern agricultural techniques and distribution systems that we could only abandon at the price of terrible world suffering. And yet we continue our civilization at a tremendous cost to the earth and its life.

It may seem surprising that we start to look for an answer to such an acutely modern question in ancient writings. Confucius lived in China 25 centuries ago, five centuries before Christ. China had lived through the beginnings of civilization by then.The Chinese had been literate for centuries and yet had held their literacy in check with a strong counterbalancing oral tradition.

Confucius asked himself and his followers the same questions we are asking now: How can we contain the raw exercise of power by governments, our own and those of others? How can we balance the artificiality and alienation of literate and civilized knowledge? How do we maintain respect for others?

Confucius looked to his past for the answers, He studied the periods of peace and harmony and then incorporated the principles he found there into his teachings. Those teachings were to become the foundation on which China maintained cultural coherence from the time of Confucius to the present.

It is said that as a young man Confucius met the much older Lao Tzu and was scolded for being overly concerned with government which, according to the story, Lao Tzu believed was forever hopeless. It is also felt by many present-day Chinese and others that the extreme conservatism of the Confucian tradition was responsible for the terrible decadence into which China had fallen by the beginning of this century. Those criticisms, early and late, should not blind us though to the insights we can gain from a careful study of Confucius.

This is his summary of how the empire is brought intobalance:

> The men of old wanting to clarify and diffuse throughout the empire that light which comes from looking straight into the heart and then acting, first set up good government in their own states; wanting good government in their states, they first established order in their own families, wanting order in the home, they first disciplined themselves; desiring self-discipline, they rectified their own hearts; and wanting to rectify their hearts, they sought precise verbal definitions of their inarticulate thoughts, wishing to attain precise verbal definitions, they set out to extend their knowledge to the utmost. This completion of knowledge is rooted in sorting things into organic categories.[6]

Confucius immediately turns us from the exterior question of government to the interior problem of rectifying the heart.This is done, he says, by giving attention to our language. Attending to our language is done by extending our knowledge to the utmost. Extending our knowledge is done by sorting things into organic categories. That is the important thing.

Now if we want to follow the advice of Confucius we will start with the organic categories and work our way out through careful language to self-discipline, setting our houses in order and on to good government. But what does Confucius mean by sorting things into organic categories? In this we take our lead from the poet Gary Snyder. He ends a poem called 'For/From Lew' with the lines.

> What I came to say was,
> teach the children about the cycles.
> The life cycles. All the other cycles,
> That's what it's all about, and it's all forgot.[7]

This is what Snyder calls *The Real Work*.

> I asked myself a lot: what is the real work? I think it is important, first of all, because it's good to work--I love work, work and play are one. And that all of us will come back again to hoe in the ground, or gather wild potato bulbs with digging sticks, or hand-adze a beam, or skin a pole or scrape a hide—we're never going to get away from that. We've been living a dream that we're going to get away from it, that we won't have to do it again. Put that out of our minds. We'll always do that work. That work is always going to be there. It might be stapling papers, it might be typing in the office, but we're never going to get away from that work, on one level or another. So that's real. The real work is what we really do. And what our lives are. And if we can live the work we have to do, knowing that we are real, and it's real, and that the world is real, then it becomes right. And that's the *real work*: to make the world as real as it is, and to find ourselves as real as we are within it.[8]

For Snyder the real work is learning not to falsify. We dig in the garden or we staple papers or we drive to work or we sit at the word processor typing out this essay. Seeing that those things are real and that we are real when we are doing them is where we begin to sort things into organic categories. Only by starting there can we clarify our language, and begin to put the empire in order.

Snyder tells us in this collection of talks and interviews from the years 1964 through 1974 how he has extended his knowledge by studying the ways of Native American people and tribal people elsewhere, Chinese, Japanese, and Indian traditions. He has used this study of our human past much as Confucius used his studies to search out and understand the principles of peace and harmony that will guide us through our present alienation from ourselves and the earth.

Like Confucius 2500 years ago, Snyder uses his knowledge of the past not as a nostalgic reminder of what we have lost but as the firmest base on which to build the future through the real work of our present lives. It is a point we will return to: The most important constraint on the exercise of power is a respect for the future. The way we come to imagine our future and prepare ourselves for it is to study the past.

The Separated Word

In order to write about the problem of power we now need to prepare ourselves with an understanding of the past. Walter Ong’s book *Orality and Literacy* shows us how our thinking about power gets undermined by the very language we use intalking about it. We need to go back to the first separation between the body and the word, the writing that turns sounds into visible objects.This is how Ong puts it:

> Writing makes 'words' appear similar to things because we think of words as the visible marks signaling words to decoders: we can see and touch such inscribed ‘words’ in texts and books. Written words are residue.[9]

A written word is a kind of residue. It is an object that continues to exist through time, after the moment of writing, after the death of the author, or even long after there isn’t anyone left who knows how to read it as in such cases as the Dead Sea Scrolls or Mayan hieroglyphics.

It is no wonder that we have come to grant more permanence to the written word than to the spoken word. And yet it is only the object, the physical trace, that is permanent, not the meaning. Have you read Shakespeare lately? or Chaucer? or Beowulf? As the years pass it becomes harder and harder for us to extract the meaning from those objects which themselves have not changed at all.

And so, with a wisdom that surprises biased literates, an Alaskan woman from an oral tradition says, 'Speaking is permanent but what you write is nothing. You can always tear up a piece of paper or burn it but once something has been said, it can never be taken back.'

Speaking is permanent because it is based on the relationship between or among the people talking. The permanence of writing comes out of its separation from those relationships. As writing objectifies the word it also removes it from direct human relationship.

Our five senses enter into this, especially hearing and seeing. Ong writes that vision is our 'dissecting' sense, but that sound is our 'unifying' sense. As we look we analyze, as we listen we are drawn into rhythmic participation with the sound.

To illustrate this Ong writes,

> Only after print and the extensive experience with maps that print implemented would human beings, when they thought about the cosmos or universe or 'world', think primarily of something laid out before their eyes, as in a modern printed atlas, a vast surface or assemblage of surfaces (vision presents surfaces) ready to be 'explored'. The ancient oral world knew few 'explorers', though it did know many itinerants, travelers, voyagers, adventurers, and pilgrims.[10]

People in an oral world organize their experience as experience, in a literate world they organize their experience through analysis and distance.

Any use of language depends on context for interpretation. Ong believes that spoken language, because sound unifies, encourages the use of the situational context for interpretation. Written language can be scanned; you can jump back to earlier points or forward to conclusions. And so, written language uses the text itself as its primary context.

Ong mentions the work of the Russian psychologist, Luria. He found that literate people use only the text itself as the basis for reasoning while non-literate people use what they know of the situation as the basis for their reasoning. This, Ong believes, is a direct consequence of the fact that you see writing but hear speaking.

The way we think is also affected by whether we speak or write, according to Ong. In an oral society sustained thinking is done through talking with others. Thinking is fundamentally conversation and storytelling. In a literate society thought is isolating. The writer and reader cut themselves off from others. The study and the library are places of silent isolation so that individuals can pursue their thoughts undisturbed by others.

> Writing is a solipsistic operation. I am writing a book which I hope will be read by hundreds of thousands of people, so I must be isolated from everyone. While writing the present book, I have left word that I am ‘out’ for hours and days—so that no one, including persons who will presumably read the book, can interrupt my solitude.[11]

Hugh Kenner in *A Colder Eye* reminds us that the Irish, a still highly oral culture, mistrust books in spite of their writers Swift, Shaw, Yeats, Joyce, or Beckett.

> Irishmen do not as a rule buy books, have never bought them, have even inherited a tradition whereby to write when vou might be talking is an unnatural act.[12]

Even at the beginnings of Western literacy Plato was deeply suspicious of writing. Ong writes that the same objections that are commonly urged today against computers were urged by Plato in the Phaedrus.

> Writing, Plato has Socrates say in the Phaedrus, is inhuman, pretending to establish outside the mind what in reality can be only in the mind.[13]

Plato argued that writing also destroyed human memory.

And so the statement of the Navajo woman pierces to the heart of the matter. It is inhuman to separate the word from the body.The word becomes an object, it takes on a false permanence. The word comes to take precedence over the situation, analysis takes precedence over participation, isolated thought takes precedence over conversation and storytelling, the individual takes precedence over the community.

This is just the first wedge driven between the body and the word, but once the wedge is driven and the word is made independent of the flesh, the written word takes on a life of its own.

In the West the second great wedge which opened a space between the body and the word was the printing press in its rapid spread throughout European society. Many writers in writing of the effects of printing have failed to distinguish between the effects of the press alone and the more varied developments usually meant by speaking of this period as the Renaissance. And yet all agree that the press has figured in as a central feature of our life since the Renaissance.

Ong returns to an important idea of Marshall McLuhan. This is the idea that with the Renaissance printing press came the concept of a 'public'. Before print made it possible to replicate thousands of identical texts, manuscripts still showed the hand, the body, of the calligrapher. Each copy of a written work has cost the toil of a calligrapher and so texts were few and the reader was not normally all that distant from the writer.

With the spread of the press, works began to be written for a larger group of readers, readers who were not known to the writer, nor ever would be known. And at the same time the physical traces of the author, or at least the calligrapher were removed. The abstract concept of the 'public' came intoexistence with this readership. The tenuous tie of personal relationship between the writer and the reader, a tie that had persisted into the manuscript period left over from an oral society, was broken at this point. From then on writers and readers of books were to remain largely anonymous to each other.

Along with the creation of the public came the standardization of language in dictionaries and grammars, Elio Antonio deNebrija's grammar and dictionary of Castillian Spanish coming exactly at the time of Columbus was the first instance in which a European language began to use the printed book for its standard of usage. Others were not long in following suit. The printed book, the dictionary and the grammar, soon became the touchstone of both written and spoken usage.

To this day deviations from the printed standard are thought to be deviations of ignorance or insolence. Social custom now takes the normal body of speech and puts it on the rack of the printed standard. The separated word now is not only separated from the body, it calls the body to task. And when Confucius says he seeks 'precise verbal definitions of inarticulate thoughts' our literate minds interpret this as the need to restore speech to the dictionary-grammar standard. And yet he must have meant something quite different if you observe his practice.

Remember, Ong writes that thought in an oral society is conversation and storytelling, not writing which isolates individuals. Confucius, like Socrates in Greece, sought precise verbal definition of inarticulate thought in talking with princes, friends, and students. Precision of language in this understanding lies in precision of relationship, not in abstraction away from relationship into the standard of the printed book. It is the printed book that has led to this serious misunderstanding of how to achieve disciplined thought.

But that is something we will need to return to later. We now need to consider the third wedge driven between the body and the word. This is something quite near to us and we need to be cautious not to overstate. Ong chooses to describe the world of our modern electronic media as 'secondary orality'. The non-literate or even anti-literate bias of our electronic media, but especially television and films, at first has led people to believe that we are returning to a world that shares more with primary orality than with the immediately preceding world of print literacy.

But Ong points out first that the electronic media are totally dependent on literacy. Everything from the scripts which are used to the high levels of technology needed to produce equipment point to this base in literacy from plots to blueprints.

We think the single most important aspect of this third wedge, the electronic media, is their broadcast nature. Speech works in a ratio of one-to-one or one-to-several. In fact before the use of loudspeakers it was a rare orator who could speak effectively to more than perhaps a few hundred people. And those all had to be present at once.

With writing the ratio may not change much. A letter is normally to one or just a few people. A manuscript may have only several hundred readers. But the writer and the reader are separated from each other in time. And so a distance comes between them. In fact, the writer and reader must be separated. What can be more annoying than someone reading over your shoulder or reading your writing as you write? For most of us it is completely debilitating. So while the ratio did not necessarily change from speaking to writing, a distance came between writer and reader.

Print changes the ratio significantly as well as increasing the distance between writer and reader. The normal ratio in printing becomes one to several hundred at a minimum, normally it is one to several thousands. Feedback from reader to writer becomes awkward or impossible.

With the advent first of radio and now of television and film the ratio becomes several writers, speakers, actors, and producers to millions of listeners or viewers. Even while there is an illusion of greater presence of the bodies of the speakers, even though in radio and television they may be speaking before us and not writing, their words have been separated from their bodies. In fact, in television and film even the images of their bodies themselves have been separated from their bodies. This third wedge has followed the precedent of the word and has now separated the body from itself.

Walter Ong believes that the separation of the body and the word, while artificial, has brought us fuller human potential. On the other hand he notes the problems of alienation and isolation that have come with our technologies of the word. Though there is a tradeoff between the values of literacy and its costs, Ong believes there is no alternative. He believes that writing is a 'particularly pre-emptive and imperialist activity that tends to assimilate other things to itself.'[14] Literate people tend to deny the value of the oral tradition. All we know of the Ancient Greek oral tradition, of course, is what has come to us filtered through the rather biased screen of the literate Greeks.

And now the pre-emptive nature of the separated word is seen again in the way electronic media have begun to screen print literacy. Authors who are legitimated by an appearance on a television talk show have their books read, or at least bought. Other authors' books are read, but less so than those which are reviewed and advertised in the electronic media.

The books of the past century, printed as they have been on papers soaked in acids and not washed are disintegrating. At the same time more books are being transferred onto microfilm, microfiche, and magnetic media. It is likely that future generations will know of our literacy only through what has been transformed onto electronic media of storage, much as we know the oral traditions of our world and our past only by what has been transformed through writing.

Ong tells us that as the word first became an object in writing it also reached back to transform our understanding of speech.The increasing separation of the word from the body has also brought with it a transformation of our understanding of both the word and the body, language and humans. To think about how we can return to sorting things into organic categories as Confucius teaches us to do, we have to work back through transformations of our understandings of both ourselves and our languages.

Historically we have moved from the first separation of the word from the body in writing to the extreme alienation of broadcast electronic media. And as we have moved historically we have learned to bring up our children to keep pace with our own transformation.

A child is born into a world of relationship. Our first uses of language are to express and negotiate relationship. Later we use language to express ideas, as M. A. K. Halliday has shown us in his book *Explorations in the Functions of Language*. Very quickly, however, babies are shaped to the imaginations of their elders.

Literacy is so much a part of our image of ourselves that we have come to regard it as a natural human endowment. This has led us to regard non-literates, both tribal people and our children, as somehow less than natural, or at least as les sthan mature. 'Illiterate' is a very serious insult in ourminds.

And yet we have known that we ourselves begin our own literacy around the early school years. By then some linguists believe we have developed the full fundamentals of our language's grammar. Most of us would not claim that full literacy is achieved until some time well into adulthood.

In recent years there has been a fascinating series of studies of the ways in which humans become literates. This research literature is vast and complex and still only partial with a strong bias yet toward Western alphabetic literacy. But thereare insights worth noting. Here we want to mention only one aspect of the learning of literacy, the very earliest stages, because it has been shown that what we have said regarding the history of literacy is carefully reconstructed in each case of a child learning to read.

In literate society it is a widespread practice to carry infants about saying, 'What's that?' and then taking any noise or gesture from the child as an answer. This is then confirmed by the caregiver. 'Yes, that's a ball.' 'Yes, that's a man.' And these are usually said with an intonation of considerable surprise as if the adult were very pleased with this prodigious intelligence in one so young.

It is the first stage as well of the bedtime story. A book is held and the caregiver points to pictures and says, 'What’s this?' The child is expected to answer quickly. It is important to notice here because we forget it so easily that a picture in a book of a cat is decidedly not a cat as we assert but an image of a cat. From the very first we teach our children to obliterate the distinction between the real and the images of the real.

We use the word 'obliterate here intentionally to call attention to the ways in which our literacy comes to erase all that comes before it. The word 'obliterate' means to erase something written. And yet, as Ong has argued, literacy itself obliterates that which is not written. The image of the cat comes to be the reality, the cat the image. We reconstruct Platonism with each new child,

This practice in naming is so fundamental a practice that it comes as quite a surprise that it is not at all a universal strategy for bringing an infant into membership in a society. It is a peculiarity of our society that we emphasize a child's ability to objectify the world by naming objects as his or her first linguistic activity.

The history of literacy begins with making the word become an object, separating this object from the body. It ends, or at least reaches the present, in making an object of the self as well. In our own research we saw highly literate parents coaching an infant, a one year old, in making third person references to herself. By the time this child was two years old, still long before she was literate, she spoke of herself in the third person.

> There was a girl. She went out to get snow. She made a hole. She went back. She cried.[15]

Ong writes that with literacy it is the text that forms the primary context by which we interpret language, not the situation. With this two year old we have such conversations as this one in which the text dominates the situation.

> Rachel: I heard the fire when I was outside.
> Mother; You heard the siren!
> Rachel: I heard the fire when I was outside.
> Father: What did the fire sound like?

Rachel: It sounded like 'tire'.

We think that this linguistic trick, based on rhyme, shows the literate tendency to separate the language from its real world context, what is often called decontextualization.

Long before the child in our society begins to read or write the child is carefully schooled by his or her elders in the essence of literacy, taking the word as an object, objectifying the self as a third person, giving greater attention to the text than to the situation, and a host of other features. By the time a child begins to read or write the die has been cast. In a series of practices which range from prompting a child to answer direct questions to insisting that he or she listen quietly to the bedtime story, we prepare our children to accept the alienation and isolation of the literate character.

And so both historically and in our own lives the same stages are found: making the word and the self an object, separating this objectified word from the body, accepting the alienated roles of senders and receivers, but primarily receivers. It is doubly difficult for us to override our historical precedents and our early education. We find it almost unimaginable that there is a mature, adult state of mind and human relationship in which body and word are unified, a state in which our bodies speak our voice without the mediation of writing or electronics. But this is where we must begin or to where we must return if we are to understand the injunction of Confucius to begin to set the empire in order by sorting into organic categories.

To start on this return to organic categories we will follow the lead of Gregory Bateson. In his book *Mind and Nature* Bateson reminds us that language is primarily about relationship. Language is only secondarily about ideas. Our centuries of literacy and our lifetimes of literacy have shifted our focus from what is primary to what is secondary, from the relationship function of language to the ideational function of language. Bateson reminds us that whatever else language does—and language is certainly complex—language is an elaborate and subtle means by which humans relate to each other as mammals.

If this seems strange to focus on, recall that we can and do talk to our dogs and cats and other animals. For some years scientists have harped on the apparent inability of other animals to understand our language. They have used this as an argument for a superior positioning of humans on some human-constructed scale of ascendancy. What is so often missed is that our animals do understand what is being said about relationship. And we understand them.

Bateson reminds us that the first but also continual issue in communication between mammals is the question of territory. We need to establish and maintain our relationship as mammals occupying the same territory. Neither territory nor relationship can be taken for granted, from university professors quarreling over the relative sizes of their offices to the hiker who meets an animal in a berry patch. Territory and relationship can never be considered to be established once and for all. It goes on throughout every contact.

As speakers in an oral economy of relationship we are first and always bodies moving in physical space. Everything figures into this, sight, smell, touch, position, gestures, displays, advances, retreats, the clothes we wear or do not wear, the smiles we make or fail to make. As bodies our mammalian reality is the first and continual reality in relationship to each other. Our bodies speak as just one way of constantly negotiating our mammalian presence among mammals in the same territory.

Our language is just one means of negotiating our claims on each other, but our language has become in our minds our greatest asset. As we have separated the word from the body and as we have given over more reality to the separated word than to our own bodies, we have come to think of language as primary and our bodies as secondary. And we pay for this historical self-deception in alienation and stress.

You can phrase this mammalian relationship as a question:

> What’s going on here?

In any contact with other mammals (actually with everything else too) we are constantly negotiating that question, whatever else we might be talking about. Our problem in understanding this is that our language has so deeply objectified the word and the body that relationship has become objectified as well. To get a glimpse of what we mean we can give an example from another language.

A man is telling you about hunting when he was a young man. He tells about the time he went after a lynx with a twenty-two rifle and finally shot the lynx. When he tells that part and says, 'I shot it with the twenty-two,' you can ask: What was the relationship between him and the lynx? What does the grammar say about that?

This is not as simple to say as it first appears but it is something like this: 'I (the main actor or agent) using the twenty-two shot (an action transferring an act from me to an object) the lynx (the object which received the force of my action.)

Now this sentence actually came from a story told in Koyukon, an Athabaskan language spoken along the Yukon and Koyukuk Rivers in Alaska. In that language the answer to 'What's going on here?' is different. The sentence comes out

> Twenty-two aahaa biyi³ k’ilt³tu³.
> Twenty-two with it-with I shot (a gun)

Literally this is something like 'Using the twenty-two, along with the lynx as my co-actor, I shot the rifle.'

The answer to the question, 'What's going an here? is very different. In the Koyukon grammar You shoot 'with' a lynx in the same way that in English you go to the corner drugstore with a friend. It is something the two of you do together.

That's what we mean by language always being about relationship. In English the relationship is encoded as a separated actor and object, the actor taking the initiative, the object receiving the effects. It is unilateral, one-way action. Cause and effect. Sender and receiver.

In Koyukon the relationship is encoded as a joint activity, something the hunter and the lynx do together. Even haircuts are like that in Koyukon as a matter of fact. The reciprocal prefix is used in the verb to make it say something like 'I (and John) gave him (John) a haircut.' Of course we know that a haircut takes cooperation. Try giving a haircut to a four year old who finds it itchy. In English we don't bother to put the cooperation into the grammar.

Whether the cooperation and negotiation is put into the grammar and so fixed inevitably into speech (and writing), or the negotiation is in equally subtle intonation, tone of voice and phrasing, in primal oral communication the negotiation of relationship is constant. It is there in everything you say. The question of 'What's going on here?' is dealt with constantly.

What happens as the word is separated from the body? The power to define the situation is concentrated asymmetrically in the author. The relationship is decided in advance of the reading by the writer. As the reader you can take it or leave it.

We are now very sophisticated in our understanding of the interpretive role of the reader. As post-structuralists we know that the text, any text, gets its meaning out of the interpretive frames that the reader applies to the text. Nevertheless, the primary power relationship is asymmetrical.The author gets more to say in framing an answer to 'What's going on here?' than the reader, and the author gets to frame this answer for even thousands at a time, The reader's interpretive power is limited to his or her own reading of the text.

Now with print others figure into this picture. The publisher, the printer, the bookseller all start to take a role in defining the human relationships but still the author, the editor, the reviewer, and the bookseller, have greater rights in defining what’s going on than the reader, the buyer, the consumer.

As broadcast media enter the picture we see the negotiation of 'What's going on here?' is virtually absent. Several people, writers, actors, producers, sponsors and the like determine and millions are free only to take it or leave it. Apparently millions are willing to take it.

Let's return to the question: What's going on here? The main point is that when people talk to each other the first and constant concern is how they are relating to each other. This concern is rarely conscious, of course. In fact raising it to consciousness often undermines the discourse. The question is embedded in subtle shifts between active and passive voice, it is in shifts among pronouns, it is in tones of voice and gestures. We have only climbed mountains in North America and then only with people who speak English and so we cannot verify that German climbers shift from formal to informal pronouns for ‘you' when they cross a certain elevation going up. But this is what we mean, the language changes when the relationship changes, and the relationship is tied to what is going on.

Now a reader may object that in writing one can also use extremely subtle shifts of mood, pronoun, voice, tense, or aspect to show subtle shifts in relationship. In fact, someone will think that these subtleties are significantly greater in writing than in speech. Back to organic categories. The subtleties of relationship in writing are relationships between fictional characters, not real people living in real bodies.

As the criticism of the past decade has seen so clearly, even the extremely subtle relationships between the author and the reader are between a fictional author and a fictional reader, what Chatman calls the 'implied author' and the 'implied reader' in his book *Story and Discourse*. They are fundamentally relationships between alienated selves. The relationships we are talking about are between and among real people who reside in real bodies right here on the earth.

Two people are severely limited in their ability to negotiate what is going on between them when writing intervenes. When print intervenes they are even more limited. When the intervening medium is broadcast television, film or radio there is virtually no possibility of negotiation. But these media are not the only limits on a person’s ability to negotiate his or her relationships with others.

We know the old saw about flogging the messenger who brings bad news. This recognizes that even in a primal oral society a message may be separated from the person of the bearer of the message. In cases of extremely delicate relationships it is customary in many oral societies to use a messenger or a go-between as a way of leaving yourself a means of getting out of a bad situation with grace. Even in an oral society the go-between or messenger can be used to separate the word from the body and create an asymmetry of the power to define the situation on the side of the person who originates the message.

The principle is that power to define what is going on in a relationship can be concentrated by any means that changes the situation from one of mutual negotiation of relationship into the polarity of sender and receiver.

Other factors also limit mutual negotiation. The more people there are in a situation the less any one of them can negotiate the overriding sense of what is going on. When Hektor rides up and down the lines of flagging Trojan soldiers urging then into renewed battle there is less negotiation in this oral exchange than in the simple but literate exchange of letters between friends. And so 'hectoring' has become a verb form indicating a unilateral but decidedly oral means of seeking to limit the negotiation among people in a relationship.

In the same way limiting the time for an event can have the same effect of forcing someone's sense of the situation to prevail over mutual negotiation. This is the primary and oral means we use these days in such things as committee meetings to enforce a particular view of the proceedings on the participants. It is well established that in such critical situations as job interviews placing a time limit on the event makes it easier for the hiring authority to control the negotiation unilaterally.

And so the separation of the body from the word that comes with literacy is only one among several means we have to limit the ability to negotiate the question of relationship, the question, What's going on here?' But while literacy is only one way in which power becomes concentrated on the side of the sender of the message, literacy has grown to such gargantuan proportions in our imagination that it has become our central symbol of the sender-receiver relationship. Literacy has become our primary symbol of the asymmetry of power. To recover a sense of human relationship comes very near to being an abandonment of literacy.

But it is not the abandonment of literacy. In the first place, literacy is not the sole cause of the polarization of power into the asymmetry of sender and receiver. Other conditions can produce this same block between people on negotiations of the sense of what is going on. Crowding the situation with too many participants or limiting the time in which a decision must be made can have the same effect.

Even more important than these, from earliest childhood we are schooled in accepting these asymmetries of power. As we teach our children to be good readers through the bedtime story we also teach them to accept the receiver relationship. As we teach them to promptly respond to direct questions we prepare them to accept cross-examination. As we teach them to speak of themselves in the third person we prepare them not only to read and write but to accept alienation as the natural human condition. As we teach them to read silently our greatest literature, we also teach them that thought is isolating and that social isolation is the milieu of great thought.

It is not a misuse of the word to say children are 'schooled' in accepting asymmetries of power. Schools are normally designed to have just this effect if they accomplish nothing else. In schools the typical human relationship is one to many. That words are objects is rigorously emphasized in myriads of displays in construction paper, chalk, and plastic of letters and words. This objectification is more deeply engraved in the animated walking and talking images of letters and words in much educational television programs as *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company*.

In schools the chasm between author and reader is more deeply cut by the use of secondary writings such as text books rather than primary sources. The objectification of the self is the capstone on the structure of alienation which is placed and mortared in with 'teacher talk'. 'Is that the way we behave, Tommy?' 'Now John will read.' In teacher talk and its related genres, baby talk, pet talk, and patient talk there is a recurrent theme of dependency, of the asymmetry of power. Schooled in this dependency it is no wonder that as literate, schooled adults we find it difficult, even painful to re-examine the question of power by getting back to organic categories.

Sylvia Scribner and Michael Cole have written of several kinds of literacy in several societies of the world in their book *The Psychology of Literacy*. Following up the work of Vygotsky and Luria, they wanted to see if literacy carried with it certain inevitable consequences for how people think. They found from their research that literacy itself did not have these effects but that schooling did. In three different cultures they found that schooled, literate adults were more like schooled literate adults in the other cultures than they were like unschooled, non-literate adults in their own culture. Schooling appears to be the single strongest force in producing the characteristics of literate consciousness, the separation of the word from the body, in the creation of the asymmetry of power manifested in the relationship of the sender and the receiver.

We conclude that literacy is not the unique cause of the alienation and isolation in our modern lives even though it is implicated. With Walter Ong we would agree that literacy at least brings with it some compensation for this alienation in our great literature and philosophy. There are other causes, chief among them our child-rearing practices and schooling. The asymmetrical concentrations of power on the side of the sender is the outcome of both our history and our current practices of education. We prepare our children to accept easily the outrages of our history.

Literacy has risen to our attention in recent years not because it is the sole cause of our alienation but because it is the deepest symbol of that alienation. But literacy does not only function as a symbol of deeper and broader cultural practices of power. Our literacy is the source of a different kind of problem altogether.

A trick is played on us by our literacy that makes it difficult for us to think about power in organic categories. Writing objectifies the word. We come to think first of the word as an object. It is not long before we come to think of the meaning of the word as an object as well. This has happened to us when we think, talk, and write of power.

The concept of power has become an object in our minds. Power itself has become an object in our minds. We think people and groups 'have' power, or we think they do not 'have' power. Power in our imagination is now reified, it exists independent of the actions of people in relationship to each other. Power has become an object, a kind of mass noun, like sugar or water, which someone can have more of than another. And in keeping with our present acquisitive obsession with ownership we seek to accumulate power or bemoan our poverty of power. It is hard for us to think of this in any other way.

Back to organic categories. Primary communication is oral. It is first of all and always a negotiation of the sense of 'What'sgoing on here?' It is first and always an issue of relationship. Limit the negotiation through writing or any other means and you create the asymmetry of the sender and the receiver, an asymmetry of power, a unilateral limiting of the relationship.

Power is not an object you can have, power is a limit placed on the negotiation of relationship.

Now we can understand why everyone feels powerless. The grass is greener on the other side of the fence. Power is a false object, a reification. It is a trick of our language and of our literacy. It is possible to believe in power as an object as long as you do not try to look at it closely. As an object power is a mirage that disappears as you try to approach it. When you get there, there is something else, vapors arising from the earth and sunshine. As you reach out to grasp power you find something else, just me, just you and the question: What's going on here?

This is returning to organic categories to clarify our language about power: you, me, and what's going on here between us? The body and the word are reunited.

A Difficult Book

Andrew Schmookler's book *The Parable of the Tribes* was a difficult book for us to read. Schmookler reads widely and has made a synthesis of ideas which are spread throughout a large literature. Few readers will have read so widely and thought so synthetically. But that is not the book's only difficulty.

Schoookler writes in the strongest form that since the rise of civilization our lives are inevitably lived within a struggle for power. The choice is not ours to make.

His observations have been made often enough by others. It is common sense that the powerful get more powerful. The oppressed become more oppressed or as their only alternative seize power and become the new oppressors. It is commonsense.

Since the writings of Rachel Carson there has been a growing awareness that we have fouled our own nest with our civilization. Our so-called freedom to expand has been bought at a terrible cost to the life of the earth itself. And it has not been a free lunch. We have bought our separation from the earth on credit and we have been notified that the bill is now past due.

But these are things that are troubling about the world, not about the book *The Parable of the Tribes*. We do not want to flog the messenger for bringing us a frightening message. Schmookler has much to say that is valuable. His text ranges across the history of civilization, the current awareness of an ecological crisis and our fears of extinction in nuclear war. But in writing of these things he uses our accepted and objectified language of power. In adopting our common habit of speaking and writing he writes of power, society, civilization, mankind, and even reason as objects.

Accept, even for a moment, that power is an object and forget, even for a moment, that you should be concerned with relationship and you will be snared in a gloom of powerlessness.The *Parable of the Tribes* has much to offer, but it is everywhere undermined by our common language and our ways of thinking about power.

And in our common language of power we have done more than make power an object, we have given life and agency to power. We speak and write of 'powers' such as the United States or the Dallas Cowboys. We even now have elevated at least the United States and the Soviet Union in calling them 'superpowers'. Our simple acceptance of this linguistic shift has led us to speak and think of power as we would think of a billiard ball, as a Newtonian object which is subject to cause and effect, motion and inertia, and being matter in our minds, power is an object which can undergo transformations of state but never, never dissolution into nothingness.

As you read Schmookler's book, notice each time a concept such as power is treated as if it were an object. One example should be enough to see what we are doing to our thinking by using this language of power. Take these three sentences:

> But our machines of power persistently threaten to shape our lives to their inhumane pattern. Shaped by power, our systems are in many ways not our tools. Indeed, they press us to become instruments to their ends.[16]

On first reading it is hard not to say, 'Yes, yes, they do press us to conform to their ends,' This is how we feel. And yet what machines?

In the first sentence the writer gives to power the material objectivity of the machine. But it is not an inert machine, it is one which has the ability to threaten us. Then the writer treats our lives as though they were passive objects which receive the threat of these malicious, agentive machines.

In the second sentence the writer adds the new objects, our systems, which are also passive objects, the recipients of the shaping done by the now fully active power. But it is denied that our systems are simply inactive objects, they are now our tools. And we see in the third sentence that the writer treats our systems now as also agents which act on us. We are, in fact, now the inanimate objects, the instruments which our systems use at the bidding of power.

When we use our language this way in speaking or writing we gain a certain strength of argument. When power is first objectified and then given agency and intent it is hard not to think that we are indeed powerless. But what we gain in argument we lose in our clarity of thought. As we reify the abstract world around us and give it agency we depart further and further from the organic categories.

This is the difficulty we find in Schmookler's book. He, like many of us, has fallen victim to our persistent objectification, all in the interest of helping us to understand and deal with the problem of power and our separation from the earth.

A Long Book

The 900 some pages of Dostoyevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* may put off a reader used to the quicker pace of the thirty minute television murder plot. It too is constructed around a murder, but that is really only the foundation on which Dostoyevsky builds the structure of his novel. Even at 900 pages Dosteyevsky apologizes for leaving out many details that he might otherwise have put in. And the book we have, he writes, is just the first novel of two he intended to write.

By the mid-19th century the ideas of the Enlightenment had spread throughout the cultivated elite of Russia. Dostoyevsky was disturbed by what he saw coming. He forsaw a period in which men would choose to trust their reason above their hearts, in which men would be willing to sacrifice the present generation for the promise of a better future, in which men would forget or revile their God. *The Brothers Karamazov* is thought by many to be Dostoyevskv's greatest novel because in it he incorporates the main themes with which modern, rational man has been troubled.

The question that Dostoyevsky asks again and again is; What makes life worth living? or in its alternate form: Is there any justification for the suffering that we see on earth?

Two of the brothers, Ivan and Alyosha have a discussion in BookV, the famous 'Pro and Contra' section of the novel. Ivan, the intellectual and atheist, cannot accept the idea of God because of the suffering God allows in the world. He believes that we must use our rational powers coupled with our new sciences to rise above our suffering and create a human paradise on earth. Ivan believes that this is necessary, even at the cost of sacrificing the present generation. He is a man who loves humanity, but as his brother Alyosha points out to his, he hates people.

The monk, Alyosha, is willing to accept his own suffering as his lot, but will never accept that suffering shall be inflicted on a single person, however great the promise for the future might be.

Dimitry, the eldest brother, like his father, believes first in the gratification of his own desires at whatever cost.

Dostoyevsky presents the modern choices in the characters of these three brothers. He sees that the only escape from the coming terrors of rationalism, technology, and anthropocentric humanism is through love and a deep spiritual acceptance of life on earth. Perhaps because he is a Russian, Dostoyeysky does not seek his Christian salvation in another world, he insists that this is Paradise right here if we will only come to understand it.

The Brothers Karamazov is an important book to read, not only because it is great literature. Our present sense of alienation and powerlessness is not new. It did not arise with our new electronic media, mass market advertising, and broadcast commercials. This isolation and alienation from each other and from the earth was acute enough a full century ago for Dostoyevsky to have been able to paint a full-color picture of the suffering and madness we were bringing upon ourselves.

An Old Book

We do not know much about Confucius. We have little more than some of what he told his students which some of them wrote down.These are the *Chung Yung* 'The Unwobbling Pivot', sometimes called 'The Doctrine of the Mean', *Ta Hsio* 'The Great Digest', sometimes called 'The Great Learning' and *Lun-yu* 'TheAnalects'.

The thought of Confucius was a balance between writing and speaking. He studied the written histories and poems of his past and collected them as the texts for his students. In balance he did his thinking in conversation with his students and with princes and other governmental officials. The thoughts of Confucius became the analysis and the process by which China maintained 25 centuries of continuing identity. Those of us who are concerned about social order in a world of competing designs would do well to study the thinking of Confucius.

Confucius believed that man was the measure of man. Even this is not easy for us to understand. In the West we have measured man on a hierarchical scale. Man has been measured against God and found lacking. Or man has been measured against animals and found superior. We have compared ourselves to pottery at the time of the Ancient Greeks and found ourselves to be the less than perfect products of a craftsman's art. We have compared ourselves to machines beginning in the early industrial period and found ourselves inferior in strength but superior in reason and will. Now we compare ourselves to computers and strive to measure up in speed, power, and ability to solve rational problems.

What we have rarely done in the West is to look simply at ourselves without either a dominating comparison with animals and other life or a shrinking feeling of guilt over our inadequacies in the face of God.

And so when Confucius looks directly at man it is not the arrogant humanism of the Enlightenment or of the present metaphor of the spaceship earth which places man in the position of God or at the very least the intelligent pilot. The Confucian understanding of the centrality of man is not the atheistic humanism of Ivan Karamzov for whom 'everything is permissible' because man has replaced God. Confucius sees things more directly, in organic categories. Man is the central image for man because man is nothing other than man.

Confucius refers to the ancient poem from the *Book of Odes* which asks: How do you cut an axe-handle? You use an axe. And the pattern you need as you make the new handle is there in your hand as you do it.

> One seizes one axe-handle in cutting the other. One can, at a glance, note a divergence from the model. Thus the man of breed uses men in governing men. Having eliminated the defects, he stops.[17]

In another place he says,

> Government is rooted in men, it is based on man. And one reaches men through oneself.[18]

In Confucian ethics,

> The archer, when he misses the bullseye, turns and seeks the cause of the error in himself.[19]

You study the organic categories and you will rectify the heart. You learn about men by studying yourself. This leads to self-discipline.

> The man of breed cannot dodge disciplining himself. Thinking of this self-discipline he cannot fail in good acts toward his relations; thinking of being good to his blood relations he cannot skimp his understanding of nature and of mankind; wanting to know mankind he must perforce observe the order of nature and of the heavens.[20]

And so for Confucius everything leads to everything else. But our knowledge is never cut loose from its root; knowledge of the world as well as good government is tied to the self-disciplined ordering of one's own heart.

The Real Work

The Real Work is a book of edited transcriptions of words once spoken. Like Confucius 2500 years before him, Snyder does much of this thinking by talking with others.

The real work of Gary Snyder has been to sort ideas into organic categories in order to restore the balance of mind, spirit and body. By intense study of the past extending beyond the neolithic, contemplation of the future, and much work clarifying language, he has been able to convey how anomalous a society we live in. He would like our knowledge, like our food, to be more organic.

> Americans have a supermarket of adulterated ideas available to them, thinned out and sweetened, just like their food.[21]

He sees the widespread alienation as an attempt to separate the mind from the body.

> If there is any one thing that's unhealthy in America, it's that it's a whole civilization trying to get out of work—the young, especially, get caught in that.There is a triple alienation when you try to avoid work: first, you're trying to get outside energy sources/resources to do it for you; second, you no longer know what your own body can do, where your food or water come from; third, you lose the capacity to discover the unity of mind and body via your work.[22]

Snyder sees the alienation from work as a manifestation of what he calls 'fossil fuel subsidy'.[23] The separation of societies from the earth has been made possible largely by the use of fossil fuels for warmth, manufacture, and transportation. With our subsidy running out, people have begun to take stock of its enormous costs not only in

> human alienation but air and water, stands of trees, and all the larger, more specialized, rarer birds and animals of the world who pay the cost of 'America' with their bodies.[24]

The end of the fossil fuel subsidy means that Americans can no longer maintain their accustomed mobility. We must dig in and sink roots where we are and discover what kind of place we are living in. He sees this not just as a necessity but a process with economic, ecological, and spiritual benefits.

> So the ecological benefit of rootedness is that people take care of a place because they realize that they're going to live there for a thousand years or more.[25]

Economic and ecological benefits both come from learning about the past of the region from the original inhabitants of the area and extending the future with which they concern themselves about the place. The spiritual benefits come not only from getting to know the archaic spirits that reside in the place, but also from human relationships.

> Because by being in place, we get the largest sense of community. We learn that community is of spiritual benefit and of health for everyone, that ongoing working relationships and shared concerns, music, poetry, and stories all evolve into the shared practice of a set of values, visions, and quests. That's what the spiritual path really is.[26]

Community comes of reuniting society with the earth.

With the oil running out, Snyder tells us “the actual 'real wealth' is knowing how to get along 'without'”.[27] Power is looking within yourself to see what spiritual resources are there and sharing with a community. Another form of wealth is a healthy family, concerning yourself about how your children are educated and brought up within your community. Meditation puts you in touch with 'the power within'.

Snyder's work to sort ideas into organic categories is based on an ecological model.

> As the evolutionary model dominated nineteenth and early twentieth-century thinking, henceforth the ecological model will dominate our model of how the world is—reciprocal and interacting rather than competitive.[28]

While the model of Social Darwinism sought to objectify mind and split it off from the body, then elevate man above other creatures and civilized man above primitive man because he possessed ‘mind', the ecological model seeks to restore the balance between mind and nature.

Snyder describes a condition of an ecological system called ‘climax', an optimum condition of diversity and stability also called 'maturity'. This condition recycles much energy from dead leaves and rotten wood.

> All of evolution may have been as much shaped by this pull towards climax as it has by simple competition between individuals or species.[29]

In this sense of maturity it is primitive and not civilized societies that are mature. He suggests, as many others have, that the place of human beings in this scheme has to do with their large brain and language. However, he parts ways with the Social Darwinists in thinking that far from being the epitome of evolution, modern civilized man may be as anomalous as the dinosaur. The Koyukon language with its reciprocity built into its grammar may be a more appropriately evolved language and more adaptable in a climax community than our objectified English.

Snyder compares a climax forest to a human community in which the language of poets, singers, and storytellers gives expression to 'enlightened mind' which feeds on inner consciousness in touch with universal archetypes. By giving precise verbal definition to inarticulate thoughts, they help govern the community.

Snyder's real work begins with learning about the earth and its living forms by direct perception and meditation. He takes Basho's advice,

> To learn about the pine, go to the pine. To learn about the bamboo, go to the bamboo. But this *learn* is not just what you think learn is. You only learn something by becoming totally absorbed in that which you wish to learn.[30]

By becoming absorbed in pine or bamboo, we overcome the objectification that the nouns 'pine' and 'bamboo' have made habitual in our consciousness.

He says the Japanese and the American Indians know how to learn this way, and that it's not hard if you start early. It is made harder for us because we spend our first years asking and answering the cross-examining questions, 'What's that?', 'What do you call that?' Becoming absorbed in plants, animals, rocks, he sees earth as a living web of complex relationships among myriad lifeforms.

In his poetry Snyder articulates this perception, which resonates with the insights of archaic and primitive poets and philosophers. His poems embody natural rhythms, and he restores the word to the body by frequently reading poems out loud. He sees as ideal a state in which poetry, song, and dance are united in a community rooted in a particular place.

At the same time that he treats the earth and all its history as a climax system, feeding on ancient Asian and aboriginal lore and ways of being, he urges us to cultivate our own mature communities within the distances we can walk or ride a horse. With our bodies, our senses, our hands, our voices, the real work is to recreate a balance between human societies and Mother Earth, getting in touch with the power within.

Yes, but...

We are caught in the belief that power has reality. We hear someone saying, 'Yes, but ... What if for all you say, someone chooses to exercise force over you? What then?' Or we hear someone saying, 'We can't count on others also adopting the principles of self-discipline and restraint.' How do you respond to someone who exercises power over you?

This is not easy, but Robert Axelrod, in a book called *The Evolution of Cooperation*, makes a convincing case that there are strategies you can use to induce cooperation in power-maxisizing aggressors. These strategies are the same ones Confucius and Snyder advise us to use.

There is more to Axelrod's argument than we want to write about here. Axelrod is a political scientist who uses computer simulation to approximate political strategies for making decisions. We want to focus on just one point of important insight. The most important strategy you can use to induce cooperation is what he calls 'enlarging the shadow of thefuture.' A power-maxisizing aggressor will be induced to cooperate with you just to the extent that he believes his interaction with you has a future.

We find the word 'shadow' casts an ominous note in his phrasing and prefer to think of this as 'enlarging the future' rather than 'enlarging the shadow of the future.' Axelrod writes that you can enlarge the future in several ways. First, you can make the interaction more durable. Many of our social institutions have just this function from marriages to business contracts.

You can also increase the number of exchanges between parties. A business which does repeated business with another business will be more inclined to cooperate and less inclined to cheat or force unilateral profit than a business relationship of one exchange.

A third way in which you can enlarge the future is to 'decompose' a single exchange into a series of exchanges.

We can paraphrase Axelrod's insight. You can induce cooperation in another by increasing the sense of relationship between and among parties in the exchange, As Snyder has said about communities and bioregions in *The Real Work*, the key is commitment to the future of the relationship.

What does enlarging the future mean in practice? It means that any limit you place on relationship is self-defeating. It ascribes power to the other party. It reduces the other party's expectation of cooperation. Limiting relationship limits the means of cooperation.

To return to Schmookler's analysis, withdrawing is not a defense against power, nor is withdrawing a capitulation to power. The concept of power only arises when one seeks to limit the negotiation of the relationship. Withdrawal confirms the limiting of relationship and so participates in the creation of the concept of power.

Similarly, absorption and transformation are not defenses against power nor capitulations to power. When one accepts the unilateral definition of the relationship, one confirms the limit on relationship and so participates in the creation of the concept of power.

But it is not just a question of enlarging the future. The other side of the coin is watching that we do not limit the future. When we limit the future we induce non-cooperation. Planning is our most frequent and most effective way of limiting the future.

In recent years we have become obsessed with planning. This has been manifested in everything from the fad of management by objectives to the Club of Rome or the host of 'Year 2000' commissions. We think this is because of our current obsession with power. A plan is a move to concentrate the sense of what is going on, to limit possibilities of relationships, by limiting our concept of the future.

We want to distinguish between planning and preparing. By planning we seek to limit the future, to control outcomes, to eliminate change, the random, the wild, and to limit human responses. Our plans for the future dictate our current choices and our current relationships. A plan exercises an abstract power on the present and fixes relationships.

Preparing is different. In preparing we must always expect diversity of outcomes. In preparing we enlarge the future as we look to it. In preparing we expect the random, the wild.

The difference between planning and preparation is also encoded in our current language. Planning has been encoded as a noun, an object, in the word 'plan' but preparing has remained free of this reification. We cannot say that we have a 'prepare'. We can 'have' one, two, or several plans, but we can only prepare ourselves.

In passing we should also notice that writing shares much with planning, little with preparation. Something written becomes a limit on future interpretations. The law is the best example of the way in which we use writing to control outcomes, to limit futures and relationships.

Both in planning and in preparing we look to the future, but in planning we seek to restrict the future, in preparing we seek to make ourselves ready. In planning we express our belief in our reason and our ability to control outcomes, people, technology. In preparing we express our belief in our adaptability, our responsiveness, our willingness to accept what is. By planning we restrict cooperation in others and reinforce asymmetries of power. By preparing we induce cooperation and open ourselves to relationship.

We believe that the only 'defense' against a power-maximizing aggressor is this: Do not accept the reification of power or you will not be able to think straight, refuse to accept unilateral definitions of the situation, and enlarge the future through maintaining relationships and preparing oneself.

Getting on with the Real Work

The problem of power is the problem of our age. Since the time of Dostoyevsky writers have wrestled with our disturbing sense of alienation, isolation and powerlessness. This alienation comes of separating the word from the body, the society from the earth, and our reason from our spirituality. The real work we have to undertake is getting back into relationship with ourselves, each other, and the earth.

The books we have reviewed in this essay show us the way. There are four tasks. learning the past, learning place, enlarging the future, and cultivating relationship.

Learning the Past

We need to study all around the margins of literacy and civilization. This means Plato's *Phaedrus*, Heraclitus, the Stoics. It means *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* of Homer. It means *The Upanishads*, *The Rig Veda*, *The Bhagavad Gita*, and *The Diamond Sutra*. It means *The Bible*, and *The Koran*, *TaoTe Ching* and *I Ching*, *The Book of Odes* and Confucius.

Studying around the margins of literacy also means learning the oral traditions of the present: Tlingit potlatch oratory, Athabaskan riddling, the *yukar* epic tradition of the Ainu, the stories of Belle Herbert of the Yukon Flats area of Alaska, 'The Deserted Boy' of Louis Simpson of Yakima, Washington, the Zuni stories of Walter Sanchez, Chief Henry's stories, the 'Pretty Languages' of the Navajo, Yellowman.

There are many people alive in our world today who still know what it means to live on the earth their ancestors all the way back lived on. They know the land, the creeks and salt licks, the stages of the willow growth when uncle was a boy and the condition of granduncle when he crossed that high saddle at 50 degrees below starving after caribou and why you should never yell at a moose that you wish it would fall off a cliff. They know the weather and know what this snowfall tells you about next summer's berries and lightning fires and what the lightning fires tell you about where the animals might go.

And they are willing to teach those of us who are willing to learn what it is like on the earth underneath our civilization. Go to them and study.

But also learn from the children who are the margins of literacy. Watch how we seek to mold them into our own alienated image. Learn from their love of the spoken word. Learn from their insistence that the context and the relationship do matter. As the poem says, 'Teach the children about the cycles/The life cycles. All the other cycles.'[31]

Learning Place

We are part of the life of the earth. Learning place means learning how you fit into the life of the earth. Learn the plants where you live, concentrate on the native ones, the ones that will come back if you leave the earth alone. Learn which of them you can eat. Learn which of them other animals need to eat. Learn which ones will make you sick. Learn which of them you may kill with the wrong overlay of civilization.

Learn the history of the earth where you live. How deep is the soil and of what is it made? When was the last earthquake, the last eruption of a volcano, the last flood and the last drought?

What animals now live in your region with you? Which ones have lived there in the past and how long ago was that? What do they eat? How wide is their range? How can you leave their pathways unobstructed?

And learn how the earth is being used now. Where do you get your water and where does it go when you have made it into sewage? What energy sources do you use? Which of your energy sources are local and which are imported from outside your region?

Ask yourself what your region is. What is its natural carrying capacity and how many now live in it, man, plants, and animals?

Learn the people of your place. Who were the people who lived there first, who came next? What languages did they speak?

Where did they come from or did they originate there? Where do you fit into this picture? How has your culture and language fared in relation to those who preceded you? What are the names of places there? Whose language is used to name those places?

Is there a political division of your bioregion, a city, county, state, or national boundary crossing it? How has your bioregion fared on the two sides of the boundary?

Learning place also means a commitment to place. What is your commitment? Are you there to stay or just passing through? What is your attitude to those who stay and those who pass through? With whom do you identify and with whom do you connect yourself?

And what are the cycles of your place, the natural and the civilized? How do they match up? How much daylight is there on the summer solstice? How dark is the winter solstice? When do trees bud, when do the leaves drop? When do the rivers flood and when do they dry up? What fish runs are there and when? What grasshoppers infest your land and on what cycles?

But also when is commercial work abundant and when is it scarce? How tied are you to national and international political and economic cycles? Does a drought in Brazil affect anything but the price of a cup of coffee? Learn the cycles of your place and ask yourself how well you are tuned in to those cycles. This is the heart of a spiritual understanding of the earth. It is the beginning of the return of society to the earth.

Enlarge the Future

You study the past in order to prepare for the future. You learn place in order to prepare for the future. Shift your thinking from planning to preparation. Do not ask: What is the best plan for our bioregion? Ask: How can we prepare for what will happen? This is not simply reactive. This is not subjecting yourselves to the will and power of others. Preparing opens you to relationship, to negotiation. Relationships and negotiation induce cooperation in others.

Increase your contacts with others who limit your sense of what is going on. Make your contacts more durable. Make each exchange smaller in scope to increase the frequency.

Above all do everything you can to encourage others to enlarge their vision of the future. But do not fall into grandiose, escapist dreams of technological solutions. These limit our future by denying our ignorance of what is to come. Encourage others to enlarge their commitment to the future, not of humanity in general, but of your place, your bioregion. Tie the future to organic categories, fields, hills, rivers, tides and currents of oceans, islands, salt licks; people friendly and supportive, and people cranky and obstructive.

Deny the objectivity of power, enjoy the reality of people, the earth and the cycles.

Cultivate Relationship

Learning place will teach you your relationship to the earth. Enlarging the future means cultivating relationship. Confucius points the way to cultivating relationship with other people. He said he could learn from anyone; the other's good qualities he emulated, the other's bad qualities he corrected in himself. Do not let relationships become instrumental—this is planning, it limits the future. Cultivate relationships to get on with the real work of self-discipline and rectifying your heart.

You may worry that this knowledge is too reclusive. Confucius tells us not to worry about that. He says,

> Not worried that men do not know me, but that I do not understand men.[32]

But above all, to cultivate relationship, don't pass the buck.

> If you hate something in your superiors, do not practice it on these below you; if you hate a thing in those below you, do not do it when working for those over you. If you hate something in the man ahead of you, do not do it to the fellow who follows you; if a thing annoy you from the man at your heels, do not push it at the man in front of you. Do not in your relations with your left-hand neighbor what annoys you if done at your right, nor in your relations to your right-hand neighbor what annoys you if done at your left.[33]

Even though others objectify power, do not objectify power. Even though others seek to limit relationship, do not limit relationship. Even though others limit the future through planning, enlarge the future by preparing yourself and your community. Even though others know nothing of the past and of the earth, learn the past and get to know the earth.

This is the real work and the solution to the problem of power.

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