The Lecture as a Transmedial Pedagogical Form: A Historical Analysis

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The lecture has been much maligned as a pedagogical form, yet it persists and even flourishes today in the form of the podcast, the TED talk, and the "smart" lecture hall. This article examines the lecture as a pedagogical genre, as "a site where differences between media are negotiated" (Franzel) as these media coevolve. This examination shows the lecture as *bridging* oral communication with writing and newer media technologies, rather than as being superseded by newer electronic and digital forms. The result is a remarkably adaptable and robust genre that combines textual record and ephemeral event, and that is capable of addressing a range of different demands and circumstances, both practical and epistemological.

Keywords: academic history; instructional media; instructional technology; media; pedagogical techniques

The lecture has recently been much maligned as a pedagogical form. In texts on online and classroom pedagogies, it is labeled as old-fashioned "chalk and talk," as mere information transmission, and the lecturer as an antiquated "sage on the stage"—in need of replacement by an interactive, constructivist "guide on the side" (King, 1993). A look at what is currently privileged in everyday practice, however, tells a different story. Video and audio podcasts of talks or lectures are common; TED (technology entertainment and design) talks are a staple for technologists and teachers alike. Lecture hall feedback devices (or clickers) are popular as teaching tools, and the lecture circuit remains a forum of choice for advocates of online education. In my experience, it is not unusual to attend a presentation, like the TED talk "This Is Bull****" by Jeff Jarvis (2010), in which a lecturer takes to the podium only to decry lecturing and the lecture in general.

The reasons for these contradictions can be clarified by taking a look at the lecture as a form or genre and at the complexities of its history and its communicative and "mediatic" dynamics. Such an examination shows that the lecture is a pedagogical form that interconnects multiple media (originally, spoken and written word; later, audio, image, and video) to both reflect and reinforce prevailing epistemologies or approaches to knowledge and its propagation. It is, as Sean Franzel (2010) says, illustrative of the "*intermediality* [italics added] of academic instruction," providing "a site where differences between media are negotiated" as the media coevolve.[1]

I begin this article with examples of conventional critiques of the lecture, followed by a broad overview of its history in Western educational contexts. I conclude by discussing the ongoing vitality and adaptability of the lecture today and by explaining how its survival points to a broader, mediatic understanding of practices and technologies in education.

A forceful yet representative critique of the lecture is found in Diana Laurillard's (1993, 2002) *Rethinking University Teaching,* in which she discusses the lecture as a means of information transmission and dissemination. It is part of a broader category of "non-interactive . . . linear presentational media," including print, TV, and DVD, that are above all associated with a "transmission model of education" (2002, pp. 91, 93). However, the lecture is singled out by Laurillard and others as profoundly defective, inefficient, and outmoded (e.g., Foreman, 2003; Jarvis, 2010; King, 1993). It is, she asserts, "a very unreliable way of transferring the lecturer's knowledge to the student's notes," suited only to "what is elegant or pleasing" rather than what is "difficult and complex" (p. 94). Laurillard and others critique the lecture as a kind of throwback to the "narrative form of the ancient oral cultures," representing "residual orality" in an era in which text is the dominant and most efficient medium (Brent, 2005; Jones, 2007, p. 398). Laurillard goes so far as to say that such residual practices should be insufficient for any university that sees itself as "not enfeebled by tradition":

> Why aren't lectures scrapped as a teaching method? If we forget the eight hundred years of university tradition that legitimises them, and imagine starting afresh with the problem of how to enable a large percentage of the population to understand difficult and complex ideas, I doubt that lectures will immediately spring to mind as the obvious solution. (p. 93)

The survival of the lecture to the present day, in other words, cannot be explained in terms of simple transmission of knowledge, for there are many more powerful and effective ways to achieve that end. The lecture's endurance is not due to its efficacy as a solution to any pressing educational problem; instead, Laurillard insists, it can be explained only in terms of an enfeebling "eight hundred years of university tradition" (p. 93).

In this article, I consider a different perspective. I argue that the centrality of the lecture in university life is not due to

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historical inertia but arises from its ability to reinforce rather than enfeeble academic practices and priorities.

The Lecture as Cultural Preservation

Laurillard and a variety of other scholars—including Marshall McLuhan and Walter Ong—are correct in observing that the lecture is "rooted" in ancient oral cultures or "human orality" (Brent, 2005; Jones, 2007, p. 398; Ong, 1982). But I believe they are mistaken in the inference they draw from this observation. Following McLuhan, they conclude that the lecture is a kind of "residual" communicative form that is clearly superseded by textual and newer electronic media: "The sheer quantity of information conveyed by press-magazines-film-TV-radio far exceeds the quantity of information conveyed by school instruction and texts. This challenge has destroyed the monopoly of the book as a teaching aid" and has rendered the school "an obsolete detention home, a feudal dungeon" (McLuhan, 1960a, p. 1; 1960b, p. 207). But the lecture, I argue, is most effectively understood as *bridging* oral communication with writing, rather than as being a purely spoken form that is superseded by textual, digital, or other media technologies and other mediatic forms as they have coevolved.

As Laurillard's remarks indicate, the history of the lecture goes back far before the advent of the printing press, to the early Middle Ages. In that era even basic textual information was scarce, and media were constituted and interrelated rather differently than today. The lecture played an indispensible role in education, but one very different from the informational functions of transmission or dissemination. Especially in the early Middle Ages, the capacities and resources for reading and writing were scarce and jealously guarded; the lecture was less about broadcasting knowledge than it was about rescuing a written cultural heritage from irretrievable loss and decay (Eisenstein, 1997, pp. 88–126).

The medieval meaning of the word *lecture* is to read or read aloud (meanings reflected in the Latin root *legere* and in French and German cognates today), and that is precisely what a lecture was: a reading or dictation of selections from an authoritative text, most often the Bible or other ancient authority. Books were specifically designed to fit on a podium, or *cathedra,* as it was then called (Briggs & Burke, 2009, p. 54). Books were also sometimes written in *scripta continua,* without spacing and punctuation, requiring vocalization in order to be deciphered. As a result, personal, silent reading is believed to have been relatively rare. Public readings were a popular form of entertainment, and in attending lecture courses, people spoke of going to "hear" the corresponding "books" being read (see Wieruszowski, 1966, p. 190). One could say that the act of reading was typically an act of lecturing (a "reading aloud") and that a lecture was almost always a matter of reading. The two were functionally equivalent.

This was a time when knowledge and truth were seen as having been passed from God to Adam and (via Hermes Trismegistus, some believed) to the present in the form of ancient texts. Teaching and learning were conceptualized as acts of "*re*covery" of this tradition rather than novel "*di*scovery" of something radically new (Harbison, as cited in Eisenstein, 1997, p. 123). Consequently, the lecturer could serve only as a kind of conduit for knowledge from the past and, with his students, as providing a way of reconciling contradiction and giving fuller meaning to those sources. The idea of speaking or extemporizing on one's own ideas was unknown; in fact, the lecturer could be fined for departing from a slavish dictation of the text at hand (Eisenstein, 1997, p. 524). Thus the lecture, or the sermon, as it was also known, was a site of slow oral dictation, careful memorization (Clark, 2006, pp. 68–73), and painstaking note taking.

> Teaching in the medieval university involved different oral exercises and associated writing. . . . Medieval students engaged in various kinds of note-taking from oral teaching, including making minor changes to a ready-made text brought into class, taking more or less sketchy *reportationes* of oral teaching delivered at higher than dictation speed, and copying out under dictation the full text of a course. . . . Large numbers of surviving manuscripts attest to the prevalence of full-text notes taken by students from dictation. (Blair, 2008, pp. 44, 46–47)

This note taking, however, was not just for personal reference and study; it was a way of reproducing the texts themselves. Particularly in the early centuries of the development of the university, "the simplest way of getting [books] . . . was for the teacher to dictate the texts to his pupils" (Hajnal, 1954, as quoted in McLuhan, 1962, p. 95). The result was that "drifting texts and vanishing manuscripts" (Eisenstein, p. 114) copied by students or monks, effectively constituted the body of written information available to the culture. It was the task of educational institutions to preserve this vulnerable heritage "from one generation to the next," above all "by writing" (p. 114).[2]

In the 1450s, into this world of informational paucity the printing press unleashed an era of relative informational abundance. As one writer from the early modern period opined, through the printing press texts were

> multiplied, as now a book is reproduced many thousandfold. Therefore if one, two, three, ten or twenty are burnt or otherwise are given up, there are still very many additional others, so that a book is never totally lost. (Anonymous; see Figure 1)

Naturally, this plenitude of printed information presented a challenge to the function of the lecture as a means of textual reproduction, as a site of dictation and verbatim note taking. Elizabeth Eisenstein (1997) reports that as books gradually became cheaper and more plentiful, lecturing professors were no longer unrivalled as sources and masters of information and learning:

> Gifted students no longer needed to sit at the feet of a given master in order to learn a language or academic skill. Instead, they could swiftly achieve mastery on their own, even by sneaking books past their tutors—as did the young would-be astronomer Tycho Brahe. "Why should old men be preferred to their juniors now that it is possible for the young by diligent study to acquire the same knowledge?" asked the author of a fifteenth-century outline of history. (p. 66)

As Laurillard's (2002) arguments and Brahe's example show, the printing press rendered the preservative and transmissive roles of dictation and note taking redundant in a narrow, functional sense. Despite this, the lecture remained for quite some time the dictation of a text by older men and slavish note taking by the young. In fact, the "revolution" of the printing press, and the

FIGURE 1. *German text celebrating the invention of the printing press.*

attendant explosion of written material (albeit a slow one, unfolding over two centuries or so), did not mark a particularly neat transition of any kind for lecturing and note taking. As the rest of the world was veritably transformed by ready access to the Bible and other print material, dictation and note taking persisted—despite some variance in practice—largely as if nothing had happened. As the Renaissance replaced God with man in culture, and the Reformation exchanged the icon for the book in religion (Briggs & Burke, 2009, pp. 13–60), the lecture retained its basic outlines. This persistence raises some questions: Are there reasons *other* than institutional inertia for the persistence of the lecture as dictation post-Gutenberg? And if the lecture is doing more than transmitting information in an era of informational plenitude, what exactly is it doing?

Although I return to these questions later, the Gutenberg revolution makes it clear that practices in the lecture hall are not to be understood primarily in terms of information, its abundance, its scarcity, or its efficient transmission. The significance and persistence of the lecture over its eight-hundred-year history, in other words, cannot be explained in the terms provided by Laurillard and others of like mind. For if it were a question of more efficient textual transmission replacing antiquated oral communicative forms, we would not have had to wait for radio, TV, DVD, or Internet to believe the lecture redundant. The printing press alone should have marked the end, or at least the beginning of the end.

The longevity of the lecture puts the epistemological underpinnings of these claims into question. The lecture is not simply one among many ways of communicating knowledge, as if knowledge were only the accumulation of data to be combined with the most efficient means of transmission. Instead, knowledge is inextricably merged with pedagogical forms, and the nature of these forms is as much about culture as it is about informational function. In this article, I show how knowledge is enacted and performed in the lecture and how this enactment—and the knowledge brought to life with it—changes over time. When textual scarcity reinforced an understanding of knowledge as more a matter of recovery than of discovery, the lecture was configured in terms of the authority of the textual sources from which knowledge was recovered. The processes of dictation and notation ensured that the lecture did not stray far from this textual authority. Oral performance or speaking in the lecture hall was necessitated by and grounded in the authority of the text, not in the authority or charisma of the delivery or the speaker. Although reinforced by textual scarcity, which disappeared with the printing press, this conception of textually grounded knowledge and its enactment through dictation persisted long after the era of Gutenberg. Conceiving of knowledge apart from the authority and the book seems to have been as difficult in the medieval and early modern periods as it is for us today to conceive of knowledge apart from, say, information and its circulation. And just as the view of knowledge as textual authority was reinforced by the scarcity of the book in the Middle Ages, our current view of knowledge is authorized by the many technologies and practices of circulation and transmission that have become part of our everyday lives.

The Lecture as Authorial Performance

The shift from the dictation of an authoritative text to the various forms that the lecture has taken today did not occur in a clear or steady progression or through a single and definitive change. But aspects of this shift can be traced through the rise, in the early

modern period, of what are known as *glosses* and *commentary*. Explanatory notes, or glosses, were written and copied into the margins of an authoritative text, assisting the lecturer in his commentary on, or explanation of, a given passage. "In the beginning," as the *Catholic Encyclopedia* notes, "masters noted down on their own copies . . . a few words by way of résumé, and as a help in their lectures" (Boudinhon, 1909). Later, glosses themselves would be considered authoritative, allowing a professor to "'read' an exemplar already provided with an authorized 'gloss' which aided interpretation and itself became an object of commentary" (Verger, 2000, p. 836). Glosses in this sense facilitated a move away from slavish dictation in the lecture, enabling the gradual emergence of different forms of commentary as ways of mediating between the traditional textual record and the contemporary reader and his audience. Clark (2006) indicates a gradual shift from linear dictation to more unfettered commentary, saying that by the middle of the 17th century—again despite great variance in practice—the two were competing for dominance:

> A 1642 lecture plan for the Jesuit philosophy faculty at Ingolstadt, for example, set an ideal. . . . The first half hour of each lecture was to be for dictation and the second half hour for glosses and exegesis. Many early modern lectures seem to have become chaotic commentaries, or remained readings aloud, dictations page by page of a textbook. (p. 83)

Clark goes on to say that out of concerns for educational quality, the subsequent century saw a number of governments outlawing dictation altogether. "The eighteenth," Clark continues, "appears to be the century when dictation was first stopped, even if only erratically at first" (p. 85). In other words, it was only some three hundred years after the invention of print that a number of functional attributes, necessitated by preprint conditions, were decisively eliminated from the lecture. Clark goes on to say that one place and one person in particular marked a radical break with the dictated medieval lecture or sermon:

> [It was in] the 1790's in the University of Jena [that Johann Gottlieb] Fichte became one of the first German professors who began officially lecturing without a set text. . . . Fichte and other Romantics began lecturing on their own work without any pretense that they were glossing a text or recapitulating a tradition. . . . Departure from an actual or even virtual textbook as a basis for lecturing constituted the ultimate break with the sermon [or medieval lecture]. (p. 410)

Fichte was a German idealist, a romantic philosopher, a landmark university administrator, and by all accounts, an outstanding public speaker. As a lecturer, he was characterized by his fellow romantics Schlegel and Hegel as "extraordinary" and "rapturous" (Ehrlich, 1977, p. 38). The theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher, also the founder of hermeneutics as the art of interpretation, recognized Fichte's "splendid gift of clarity" but dismissed his "rhetoric" as only serving purposes of "fomentation" and "defamation" (pp. 37, 39). It is reported that Fichte could lecture from a complete text as if he were speaking freely and that he could also speak fluently and at length from a single page of notes (p. 26). He mocked those professors who could only "*recite* what lies printed on the page for all to see" (Fichte, as quoted in Kittler, 1990, p. 155). In a 1794 lecture "concerning the difference between the spirit and the letter within philosophy," Fichte himself said that his principal concern was not what "is printed in books for us to read" but, rather, "what has stirred and transformed our spirit" (p. 207). Correspondingly, the lecture for Fichte was not about the authority of the book but about the spirit that he wished would enliven the audience just as it enlivened the speaker. "The wish with which I conclude today's lecture," Fichte said, "is that . . . from time to time I can succeed in scattering in your souls fiery sparks which will arouse and stir them" (pp. 198–199).

Coming to expression in Fichte's hopes to stir the souls of his audience was a radically new way of understanding knowledge, one that implied a new relationship between text and speech in the context of the lecture. It was the speaker and his own words and ideas that were important, and their value was understood in terms of their effect, like Fichte's, on his contemporary audience. As Clark explains,

> In Romantic Jena and elsewhere, the cathedra [or podium] became a locus where one created knowledge, became a site of the new, radical stress on spontaneity, creativity and originality. . . . A new relation between the Romantic "I" pontificating from the cathedra and the academic chorus[, or audience, began to emerge]. (p. 410)

The lecture, in short, is no longer about the authority of the text; it is about the authority of the lecturer. The lecturer, in other words, is not a conduit for a tradition received from the past, nor is his or her task even a kind of commentary on this tradition. The medieval practice of interchangeable lecturers reading from the same authoritative texts loses its meaning and value. What is instead meaningful and valuable is one lecturer speaking his mind and standing as the authentic origin of his speech—as the author of his spoken thoughts and words.

Seeing Fichte's example as "epochal," media theorist Friedrich Kittler describes Fichte and his Romantic colleagues as enacting a specifically *hermeneutic* epistemological and mediatic configuration. As the art of interpretation or understanding, hermeneutics applies primarily to the text, but what is ultimately most important for hermeneutics is the *spirit* rather than the *letter*. Schleiermacher, the originator of hermeneutics as a formal area of study, described it as a process of recovering to spirit what might otherwise be lost to the letter. For Schleiermacher, who describes thought itself as a kind of inner speaking that is externalized in talking or writing, hermeneutics represents a reversal of this externalization process. Every "act of understanding," Schleiermacher (1998) asserts, "is the inversion of a speech-act (*Akt des Redens*), during which the thought which was the basis of the speech must become conscious" (p. 7). Meaning has its origin in the spirit of the speaker; it is temporarily externalized and enacted through speech, and it finally returns to the inner speech in the minds or spirits of audience members. The written text and even grammar and rhetoric are important for Schleiermacher, but they have value only insofar as they are interpreted or brought to life as *thought*. Texts or written words (and to a lesser extent, speech itself) are only so many supports or prompts to realize and sustain the life of the spirit or, more modestly, the development of understanding and meaning.[3]

Correspondingly, the texts of both the speaker and the note taker in the lecture hall are important only insofar as they capture and enable the creativity and originality of the speaker. Whether the lecture is a lively rendition of a verbatim transcript or an extemporization based on a series of talking points, or is delivered entirely "off the cuff," what counts is its authenticity. Student note taking, similarly, is valued not for creating a verbatim record of a recitation but for capturing the creativity and originality of the speaker—which sometimes was not recorded in any other form. The notes of students form the basis for some of the pivotal works of 20th-century theory and philosophy, as is the case for Ferdinand de Saussure, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Jacques Lacan (de Saussure, 1959; Lacan, 2007; Wittgenstein, 2001).

The Lecture as Dramaturgical Effect

Speaking of the 20th century of course takes us into a period where multiple technologies for projection, recording, and transmission were added to text and speech in the mediatic mix of the lecture. The lectures of Michel Foucault at the Collège de France and of physicist Richard Feynman at the California Institute of Technology, for example, are with us today thanks to audio and video recordings rather than faithful student note taking. Radio and TV also extended the contemporaneous reach of the lecture, with famous examples of broadcasts including lectures by Theodore Adorno (himself a vociferous critic of the mass media). At the same time, different kinds of projection media extended the content of the lecture beyond the spoken word. As one example, the overhead projector (like many other instructional innovations) was first applied to an educational purpose during the Second World War by the U.S. military. It was introduced in its canonical commercial form by 3M in the 1960s ("Overhead Projector," 2011).

Despite these changes, the lecture still, it seems, retains many of its epistemological and mediatic attributes from Fichte's time. Perhaps the most significant difference is simply in the way these are articulated. This difference is illustrated by sociologist Erving Goffman's chapter "The Lecture" in his *Forms of Talk* (1981). Originally delivered at the University of Michigan in 1976 as the Katz-Newcomb Memorial Lecture, Goffman's text provides a kind of secularized update of earlier idealist and romantic accounts of the lecture as an almost Pentecostal propagation of spirit. The uneasy relation between the "dead" letter and the animating force of speech reappears in Goffman's text, as does the related issue of the authenticity of the speaker as the origin of his or her own words. But these are all given a contemporary twist: In place of souls, spirits, minds, inner speech, and thoughts, Goffman invokes his principal contribution to sociology, his notion of the multiple and dramaturgical self. According to Goffman (1959), the self is constituted as a kind of "dramatic effect arising from a [given] scene" (p. 252) with different selves emerging in different situations and moments. Instead of "fiery sparks" of thought and understanding, Goffman focuses on "talk" and its potential to be extemporaneous or "fresh." Speaking of "the multiple senses in which the self of the speaker can appear" in the lecture (p. 173), Goffman says that one particular self will inevitably be most important:

> At the apparent center will be the textual self, that is, the sense of the person that seems to stand behind the textual statements made and which incidentally gives these statements authority. Typically this is a self of relatively long standing, one the speaker was involved in long before the current occasion of talk. This is the self that others will cite as the author of various publications, recognize as the holder of various positions, and so forth. . . . And he is seen as the "principal," namely, someone who believes personally in what is being said and takes the position that is implied in the remarks. (1981, p. 173)[4]

The textual self is responsible for the content of the lecture rather than for its delivery or its form. As Goffman (1981) puts it, this textual self is one that "can be displayed entirely through the printable aspects of words[, as] an emanation from the text itself" (p. 174). According to Goffman, it exists alongside a second self, which one might call the "physical self" (although Goffman does not give it a name). This self is physically present in the lecture, and sometimes obtrusive, when, as Goffman says, it would clear its throat or take an occasional drink of water. A third self involved in the lecture is the "self-as-animator": "the person [that] can be identified as the talking machine, the thing that sound comes out of" (p. 167). It is the self which is responsible for enacting the lecture. This last manifestation, of the self "that is intimately responsive to the current situation" ventures clearly beyond the text, for example, in remarks offered as asides or in the context of openings and closings. The self-as-animator, in these instances, takes over from the textual self and is itself the source of its own speech or content: "Text is formulated by the animator from moment to moment, or at least from clause to clause" (p. 171).

Although he does not say so explicitly, Goffman sees the goal of the lecturer as a kind of combination or collapse of the textual self and the self-as-animator (while the stumbling, throat-clearing *physical* self is kept in check). The self that is addressing and responsive to the occasion should be indistinguishable from the self that is supported and sustained by the text. This combination is achieved, according to Goffman, as a *mediatic* effect, by leveraging and aligning text and speech, or written and oral forms of media, in very specific ways. Goffman (1959) outlines three ways of aligning these two media that were common in his day:

> In our society we recognize three main modes of animating spoken words: *memorization, aloud reading* (such as I had been doing up to now), and *fresh talk*. In the case of fresh talk, the text is formulated by the animator. . . . Fresh talk is perhaps the general ideal and (with the assistance of notes) quite common. . . . [Still] a great number of lectures (because of my incompetence, not including this one) depend upon a fresh-talk *illusion* [italics added here]. (p. 171)

Goffman makes explicit what is implicit in Schleiermacher's notion of the hermeneutic "speech act" and in Fichte's emphatic differentiation of letter and spirit: namely, that the ideal for the lecture is to create an illusion. Parts of the lecture may be memorized, but in a long-standing tradition, it is generally read aloud. And in reading aloud, what the lecturer strives to create is the *illusion* of spontaneity and extemporaneity. The speaker is in this way able to appear as a conduit between his own thoughts and those of the audience. As Schleiermacher or Fichte might put it, it is through the illusion of lively reading or delivery that the

speaker brings to life in the audience the thought that was the basis of the speech—but all the while actually relying on the dead letter.

Fichte's ability to speak freely from both notes and a verbatim text—once seen as a gift worthy of special notice by his illustrious contemporaries—is later portrayed by Goffman as a general ideal, something that should be the goal of every effective speaker. "A great number of lectures," as Goffman (1959) says, "depend on a fresh-talk illusion" (p. 172). As the word *illusion* clearly suggests, this is a performance or act, a kind of sleight of hand. But at the same time, it is obviously not magic. Goffman makes this clear by saying, "Your effective speaker is someone who has written his reading text in the spoken register; he has tied himself in advance to his upcoming audience with a typewriter ribbon" (p. 190).

It is media, in this case the typewriter and typewritten word, that help make the fresh-talk illusion a widespread phenomenon. The lecturer is to use these skillfully and methodically to craft, check, and revise her lecture well in advance of its delivery, to ensure that her delivery appears as direct, responsive, and even as spontaneous as possible. Today, Goffman's typewriter and ribbon have given way to a panoply of devices and media technologies, from a word processor and printer to PowerPoint and its speaker's notes and bulleted lists. In the case of a podcast or videocast lecture like a TED talk, this range of media and bag of tricks is greatly enlarged (courtesy of the multimedia computer), extending from careful audio and video editing to teleprompting techniques or overdubbing.

The Lecture as a Hermeneutic Event

Why does all of this matter for education? This account of the history of the lecture from the medieval cathedra to the fresh-talk illusion highlights both continuities and changes in pedagogical practice in higher education. It suggests that the persistence of the lecture as a pedagogical form is not simply a matter of inertia and tradition but is due to its flexibility and adaptability in response to changes in media and technology as well as in culture and epistemology. In fact, it would probably be more accurate to say that the lecture coevolved with these larger developments, with changes in the performance and meaning of the lecture helping to support and provide direction for developments in culture, as was the case with Fichte's speeches and Schleiermacher's hermeneutics. Not only does this way of understanding the lecture explain its persistence over an eight-hundred-year history, but it also augments and reinforces ways of understanding the characteristics of good pedagogical practice. It provides a way of explaining what is important in this type of practice and predicting how it might change in response to future technological developments—or at least imagining future lecturing practice in an informed way.

To speak first of pedagogical practice, the idea that the lecture is primarily about tying oneself to one's "audience with a typewriter ribbon"—about using available media technologies or techniques colorfully but consistently to support vitality, action, or animation—is central. Studies of effective lecturing—like "how to" publications on the subject—are full of suggestions on how to achieve these effects, on how to bring a body of knowledge alive in the minds of the student audience. Aside from the most pragmatic and cognitive aspects (e.g., the lecturer should be prepared and should structure, but vary, the presentation), these publications focus on the self-as-animator, on *fresh talk,* and on ways of arousing and stirring the attention and thought processes of one's listeners in effect through a hermeneutic *speech act*. Consider, for example, these recommendations from Morton's "Lecturing to Large Groups," a chapter in *Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education* (2009). Lecturers, the author says, should

- share their passion and enthusiasm for the subject by telling students why they are personally interested in this topic. Where possible, this could be a link to their personal research;
- link the lecture to some current news or activity;
- use relevant and current examples to illustrate the point;
- . . . draw on the students' experiences;
- use rhetorical questions to encourage students to keep on track;
- use live links to the web to demonstrate currency of the material being presented. (p. 60)

To return to the language of Fichte and Goffman, it is clear that these recommendations are not about the textual self, or about the dead letters recorded well in advance of the lecture. They are instead about the aside and the extemporization, about the illusion of fresh talk, or the kind of fluid rendition of a complete or partial text that someone like Fichte was able to perform. These recommendations capture the significance of the "speech act" that Schleiermacher sees as essential to understanding.

In other words, the effective lecture is an interpretive, *hermeneutic* exercise, in the sense of the term contributed by Schleiermacher and hermeneuticians who followed him. Knowledge is not limited to the medieval conception of textual authority or even the modern conception of information to be stored, processed, and transmitted. The effective lecture enacts and confirms the hermeneutic conception of knowledge as meaning or understanding circulating through a "speech act." Hans-Georg Gadamer, a 20th-century hermeneutician, provides an updated account of knowledge as an act of interpretation and of its relationship to oral and written media. "Interpretation," Gadamer (2004) says, "is performed by spoken language" (p. 362). "Reading the text" by speaking it, he continues, is "the highest task of understanding" (p. 392). And through this hermeneutic act of the lecture, he concludes, "written tradition is brought back . . . into the living present of conversation" (p. 362). The lecture, in short, transforms the artifact of the text into an *event*—an event in which the text is brought into conversational relationship with the audience and with the present.

Conclusion: The Future of an Illusion

Understanding the lecture in terms of a specifically hermeneutic epistemology brings me to the conclusion of this article—and from the question of practice to a focus on theory. On the basis of this article's analysis of the mediatic history of the lecture, it is possible to derive a set of general observations concerning the relationships among media technologies in pedagogical contexts. First, this analysis has shown how the logic of mediatic and technological change in education is not successive but cumulative. Pedagogical forms that are rooted in orality, such as the lecture, are not simply done away with because new media develop that

are supposedly superior or more efficient. McLuhan was in this sense wrong to insist that the "sheer quantity of information conveyed" by new media, on its own, would render the school "an obsolete detention home" (1960a, p. 1; 1960b, p. 207). Instead of being replaced or rendered obsolete, the lecture, with its oral roots, is complemented, augmented, and reconfigured through changes in textual technologies. The printing press gradually freed it from the responsibilities of information preservation and enabled it increasingly to reflect the position of the individual lecturer—and the living present of the audience. The subsequent introduction of audio, video, and visual aids for the lecture (overhead projectors, PowerPoint, and even teleprompters) further enhanced the lecture's possibilities, being arrayed around the lecturer and the lecture in support of her and the lecturing performance, sustaining and reinforcing the lecturer's position as the authentic origin of her own words. The roles of related technologies in broadcasting and podcasting the lecture are similarly cumulative and complementary in their effects. This accumulation and augmentation, moreover, occurs not through a logic that reflects the indifferent operation of laws of necessity or maximal efficiency but through the more rounded contours of cultural change.

The idea that change in media occurs through gradual, culturally mediated accumulation rather than though abrupt succession implies that individual innovations in media are not in themselves decisive. What is more important than particular media is the *relations among* different media forms and practices. The lecture takes its shape through its position at the confluence of oral and written forms, being first manifest as dictation and manuscript reproduction, then as authorial performance, and finally as textually enabled dramaturgical effect. Speaking of the last of these, Goffman points out that this dramatic effect can be realized by exploiting three possible ways of aligning text and spoken word: as memorization, as reading aloud, and as (more or less) free talk. The options, Goffman is saying, are about how the two media are bridged and configured—and today there are more options with PowerPoint's speaker's notes and other software and hardware technologies developed in support of the culture of the lecture.

The emphasis on the relational and cultural nature of media and their changing significance in pedagogy can be captured in the term *transmedial culture*. This term was coined by Jeanette Böhme in her 2006 book *Schule am Ende der Buchkultur* (*School at the End of the Culture of the Book*) and defined as "structures, within which media-specific symbol-systems are linked" (p. 127). In developing her definition, Böhme draws on a range of theoretical work, from Ernst Cassirer's philosophy of symbolic forms to Manuel Castells' morphology of the network society. Böhme sees the structures and media systems of transmedial culture as already instantiated in a palpable way in the classroom, where various textual media (textbooks, writing exercises) are combined with what she calls "talk and action" (i.e., embodied oral communication). She argues for the cultivation of an educational culture that would be conducive to bringing more forms into transmedial interrelation.[5] The argument that I would like to make in this connection is that my analysis of the lecture—whether despite or because of its long history—shows this form to exemplify these transmedial characteristics. It is an excellent locus for integration of and experimentation with a variety of technologies, combinations, and practices.

The relationships between writing and speech, between visual and auditory media, that are instantiated in the contemporary lecture are, however, fraught with contradiction. The lecture is never simply oral, although in its modern form, it constantly and increasingly seeks to give this illusion. It is the *illusion* of pure orality, in turn, that has left the lecture open to criticism as being outdated or atavistic—harking back to an outmoded past reliant on orality. These tensions are only increased—with video and audio foregrounding the nontextual, and PowerPoint and Smartboards (for example) highlighting text—as both basic types of media (oral and textual) offer new ways to refine and heighten the sleight of hand that underlies the modern lecture. These relationships embody different epistemologies: Text-as-authority gives way to self-as-source, but the text remains authoritative in a sense, and the ability of the lecturer as lecturer lies in concealing the presence of this authority.

Recent developments in media technologies bode well for the future of the illusion that we know as the lecture. The dynamic and multimedial mix provided by the Web presents many possibilities for the lecture that can confirm its current—and long-standing—role as creating a living present for conversation. It does so not only by capturing the lecturer as performer and animator in audio and video but also by providing new and varied ways of inserting this performance into a living present. Not only does the lecturer, in a TED talk, for example, perform for the live audience on the occasion of the talk itself, but his or her lecture is situated in a quasi-conversational context when it is embedded in YouTube or elsewhere in the Web, surrounded with viewer comments and related videos. And there is promise in more elaborate technical aids for the lecturer, such as Elluminate Live, Voicethread, Adobe Captivate, and Prezi. Combined with new technologies, the live lecture is open to new forms of what Goffman (and others) refer to as "backchannel communications." More conversational participation becomes possible through Twitter or chat, sometimes projected behind the speaker for an instantaneous conversational effect. The future of the illusion, in other words, is bright.

NOTES

[1]This article was inspired by Sean Franzel's presentation "The Lecture: A Case Study in the Intermediality of Academic Instruction" at the conference Media Transatlantic: Media Theory in North America and German-Speaking Europe, April 10, 2010. (For the abstract of Franzel's talk, see the conference program at http://www.mediatrans.ca/final_conference_program.pdf. For an audiovisual recording of the talk, see http://www.mediatrans.ca/Sean_B_Franzel.html.) Late in the composition of the present article, it was found to have a number of similarities with a publication by D. Brent (2005), "Teaching as Performance in the Electronic Classroom."

[2]I owe a special debt of gratitude to Emily Hutchison of Thompson Rivers University for her help with this discussion of the medieval lecture and student note taking.

[3]It appears that the pedagogical innovation of Fichte and his fellow Romantics took some time to reach American shores. John Dewey wrote in 1891 of "the introduction of the lecture system" as gradually doing away with "recitation" and "vicious methods of *rote* study" (1969, p. 147). He also envisioned the "mediatic" evolution of this pedagogical form as taking place through "an increasing use of the printing press in

preparing outlines, syllabuses, selections from authorities, etc. . . . giv[ing] us a cross between the seminary [i.e., seminar] and recitation methods" (p. 147).

[4]Goffman took as his paradigmatic example the kind of "invited" guest lecture that he himself was giving at the University of Michigan. This is one in which the speaker's credentials are often enumerated in his or her introduction and are often known in advance in general terms by the audience. As we shall see, however, speaker and text, presence and substance, remain central to the classroom lecture as well.

[5]In this sense, I am making the case that the lecture is not directly illustrative of the "intermediality" of instruction (as is suggested by the title of a presentation by Franzel cited earlier), and not so much about the contact *between* one set of media forms and practices and another (as is suggested by the prefix *inter*). Rather, what Böhme is stressing, and what I believe is more important, is the way that the combination of media produces something new, resulting from a mixture of practices and forms that imply a kind of dissolution of boundaries.

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