On the embedment of classical models of dichotomy in modern anthropology:

The case of literacy studies

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Literacy and strategies of textual self-legitimacy

In the final part of his work *Phaedrus*, Plato presents his readers with a remarkably subtle proposition. In order to distinguish true philosophical knowledge from both oratory and written discourse, he lets Socrates confront Phaedrus in a long dialogue. To Phaedrus, the written word seems *the* effective means to achieve true knowledge, unlike oral speech, laden with rhetoric and persuasion; but for Socrates that is clearly not so. Therefore, he proceeds to "report" (or, as Phaedrus later suggests, to make up) an old Egyptian myth, where the demon-god Thoth offers king Thamus his most cherished invention: the art of writing; writing, he says, would be the solution to overcome ignorance and loss of memory. But the king thinks otherwise; he is really not interested in taking up this invention he sees as both dangerous and utterly useless:

> "You, who are the father of writing, have out of fondness for your offspring attributed to it quite the opposite of its real function. Those who aquire it will cease to exercise their memory and become forgetful; they will rely on writing to bring things to their remembrance by external signs instead of on their own internal resources. What you have discovered is a receipt for recollection, not for memory. And as for wisdom, your pupils will have the reputation for it without the reality: they will (…) be thought very knowledgeable when they are for the most part quite ignorant. And because they are filled with the conceit of wisdom instead of real wisdom they will be a burden to society.
>
> (Plato, *Phaedrus*, LX, 275a-b)

Having told this story, Socrates then argues that *true* philosophical knowledge cannot be achieved - on the contrary, it is in fact denied - when one naïvely believes in the all-encompassing power of the written

medium. How, indeed, can one search for reminiscences of the ideal pre-forming reality, enclosed deep inside oneself, if one is to rely on shadowy codes from the external material world?

> "Writing involves a similar disadvantage to painting. The productions of painting look like living beings, but if you ask them a question they maintain a solemn silence. The same holds true of written words; you might suppose that they understand what they are saying, but if you them what they mean by anything they simply return the same answer over and over again. Besides, once a thing is committed to writing it circulates equally among those who understand the subject and those who have no business with it; a writing cannot distinguish betweeen suitable and unsuitable readers. And if it is ill-treated or unfairly abused it always needs its parent to come to its rescue; it is quite incapable of defending or helping itself.
>
> (Plato, *Phaedrus*, LX, 276a).

The subtlety of Plato's argument may only be adequately apprehended when we take into account the fact that he resorts to the fictional capabilities of his writing style to persuade his readers both of the ontological limitations of written speech, and of the validity of his own point of view. The contents of the book are the presupposed transcription of an oral dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus (whether the original dialogue has taken place or not is quite irrelevant). So, by simulating an oral context, he offers his readers a seemingly paradoxical and self-referential proposition. Writing techniques - such as story-telling, explanatory commentary, contending dialogue in direct speech - are called upon to help expose the intricate limitations of written words, its pervasively negative influence on human knowledge, its potential for deception and wrongful persuasion. But, at the same time, they serve the writer's purpose of very strongly convincing the reader, through a "strange loop" of textual composition, that the truthfulness of Socrates' point of view can be communicated through writing.

Let it be noted that it was the crystallizing and preservative nature of the written support used as communicating medium that has eventually ensured the very lasting presence and influence of Plato's ideas in western intellectual tradition. As Arthur O. Lovejoy has so masterly demonstrated in his seminal work *The Great Chain of Being*, this was clearly the case with the perpetuation of platonic dualism and its interaction with hierarchical and unilinear models of explanation in western philosophical and scientific productions. To the point that, for many centuries, and to this day, Western thought and linguistic systems have been visibly entrapped by an organizing mould that propounds a unsurpassable, irreversible distinction between material and ideal universes - the path leading from one ("this-worldly" and concrete) to the other ("other-worldly" and abstract) being conceived as an ascending, linear, ladder or chain (Lovejoy, 1967: 25, 58-59).

In a clear assumption of this heritage, nineteenth century evolutionist anthropological discourses made extensive use of analogical schemes that fused dualistic sociological classifications with a linear conception of Man's historical evolution culminating in western style modern civilization. This analogical, non-demonstrative thinking was rooted in the possibility of categorizing certain types of society and culture as surviving pictures of civilized Man's earlier stages. Being a central part of anthropology's literary tradition, the evolutionist model hasn't stopped haunting later theories, even if its plausibility was, since, militantly denied.

Interestingly, there has also been a visible, rather uncritical, acceptance of those same ideological constraints of dualism in twentieth century anthropological production. This continued acceptance is somewhat intriguing since the discursive and intellectual matter from which anthropology has traditionally seemed to distil its theoretical propositions derive, partly at least, from wholly distinct (i.e., non-western) modes of thought. Such modes frequently resist every attempt to be encased by our dichotomous models of interpretation - as anthropologist Edmund Leach alerts us in his book *Rethinking Anthropology* (1961: 9-26). Mostly by defect, the history of mainstream anthropological thought has shown us how difficult, how untenable, is the task of translating recursive, cyclical, ambiguous, transformable categories into a dualistic and linear mould.

Moreover, when browsing through anthropological literature, we cannot but confirm the extreme resiliency of the self-legitimizing features of writing techniques and its role in the preservation of ethnocentric ideologies and modes of thought. In fact, even radical cultural relativists refrain from doubting the potential of (their own) written speech to communicate true meaning, to explain, to achieve knowledge - specially since it frequently arises in opposition to the researcher's oral interaction with non-literate people. One such example is Rodney Needham's work on symbolic classifications, duly criticized by, among others, Jack Goody - in his 1977 book *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*. Very possibly, the co-existence of these two facets (dualistic and linear models of organizing thought, and self-legitimizing features of written speech) has actually been a unifying factor in an otherwise immensely heterogeneous and eclectic social science.

In the even more specific case of anthropological contributions to the so-called area of literacy studies, where attention to these matters acquires a more stringent expression, the persistency of the dualistic approach has been the subject of much criticism and revision, in the past twenty or thirty years. The "old" dichotomous perspectives that promoted and developed a succession of negative definitions of the anthropologist's object (as

primitive, undifferentiated, a-historical, irrational, pre-logical, etc.), were seen to wane before a supposedly alternative model. Superficially at least, this model implied the abolition of generically opposing methodologies with ethnocentric intentions (i.e., the "West" and the "rest"). That, at least, has been the contention of some of the proponents of such models (see: Goody, 1988; Greenfield, 1972; Olson, 1977; Olson, 1995).

I am referring to those proposals which sought to understand the cognitive and sociological impact of literacy practices which sociologist Brian V. Street has critically defined as "autonomous models" of literacy - to distinguish them from his own "ideological model". Street contends that "what the particular practices and concepts of writing and reading are for a given society depends upon the context, that they are already embedded in an ideology and cannot be isolated or treated as 'neutral' or merely 'technical'" (Street, 1984:1). According to those who adhere to the "autonomous model" of literacy studies, on the contrary, they can and must be (neutral). In a recent book, cognitivist David R. Olson reasserts this view. He considers technological aspects of literacy - that is, writing and reading as both a communication and cognitive technology - to be sufficiently objective to qualify as independent and fundamental causes for a whole series of both sociological and cognitive historical transformations that have affected the members of literate societies (Olson, 1995:258-260; see also: Olson, 1977:258). Similarly, for W. Ong, who is interested in inspecting the origin and evolution of the "self-conscious individual" (Ong, 1976:134), "writing raises consciousness" and:

> ...makes possible increasingly articulate introspectivity, opening the *psyche* as never before not only to the external object world quite distinct from itself but also to the interior self against whom the objective world is set.
>
> (Ong, 1982:105).

But Olson's and Ong's views, like many other researchers', have been deeply influenced by the work of Jack Goody in this field. In many respects, this anthropologist's studies on the impact of literacy have effectively set the terms for an on-going discussion on the relation between literacy, society and cognition. To a large extent, the model developed in his early book *The Domestication of the Savage Mind* (1977), and the arguments advanced therein were not substantially modified in his later research on the same subject *(The Logic of Writing and the Organization of* Society, 1986; *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral*, 1987). Considering this, I presently propose to go back to that study and briefly review some of its methodological constraints.

Excursus: a developmental view of literacy and its implications

In *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, Goody states that culture can be seen as the sum of communicative acts (Goody, 1988:37). So, "...an examination of the means of communication, a study of the technology of the intellect, can throw further light on developments in the sphere of human thinking" (1988:9). Any change in the technology of communication implies changes in culture, social organization and in mental organization: "The written word does not replace speech, any more than speech replaces gesture. But it adds an important dimension to social institutions" (1988:15). Last but by no means least, the author conceives that those technological changes ultimately imply important and irreversible modifications in mental organization itself: "[I] see the acquisition of these means of communication [i.e., the advent of writing] as effectively transforming the nature of cognitive processes" (1988:18).

For Jack Goody, the development and the extension of cognitive capabilities in Man are believed to be a function of the development of communication techniques (specially, the "material concomitants of the process of mental 'domestication' [i.e., writing]"; Goody, 1988:9). Thus, he notes that

> A continuing critical tradition can hardly exist when skeptical thoughts are *not* written down, *not* communicated across time and space, *not* made available for men to contemplate in privacy as well as to hear in performance
>
> (Goody, 1988:43).

On the contrary,

> Writing makes speech 'objective' by turning it into an object of visual as well as aural inspection; it is the shift of the receptor from hear to eye, of the producer from voice to hand.
>
> Here, I suggest, lies the answer, in part at least, to the emergence of Logic and Philosophy (...): the formalization of propositions, abstracted from the flow of speech and given letters (or numbers), leads to the syllogism. Symbolic logic and algebra, let alone the calculus are inconceivable without the prior existence of writing. More generally, a concern with the rules of argument or the grounds for knowledge seems to arise, though less directly, out of the formalization of communication (...) which intrinsic to writing.
>
> (Goody, 1988:44-45).

More specifically, for instance, Jack Goody "finds" that the difference of emphasis in concepts of time (in literate and non-literate societies), "can reasonably be related to differences in technology, in procedures for the measurement of time":

> For example, the concept of chronology is linear rather than circular; it needs numbered series starting with a fixed base, which means that some form of graphic record is a prerequisite.
>
> (Goody, 1988:45).

Furthermore, Man's cognitive capabilities seem to follow a clear cumulative and progressive path. Communication tools, such as writing, "are not only the manifestations of thought, invention, creativity, they also shape its future forms. They are not only the products of communication but also part of its determining features" (Goody, 1988:9). Among these, alphabetic writing, of the type invented in the West, is the most potent of all, since it clearly affects the structure of the brain:

> The existence of the alphabet (...) changes the repertoire of programs [the individual] has available for treating his data. Whether or not it changes the hardware, the organization of the central nervous system, and if so over what time span, is another matter, but on the analogy of language, the possibility is there. (...) I would argue that changes (differences) of the kind I have mentioned could be described as differences in the modes of thought, or reflective capacities, or even cognitive growth.
>
> (Goody, 1988:110-111).

This view is coupled with a cosmological approach to human evolution, in which technological and cognitive progression follows a historical path, directly correlated to a linear geographical progression, from a central point in the Ancient Middle East:

> All these [modes of communication and cognition] were influenced by major changes on the means, such as the development of scripts, the shift to alphabetic literacy, and the invention of the printing press. I repeat that I am not proposing a single-factor theory; the social structure behind the communicative acts is often of prime importance. Nevertheless, it is not accidental that major steps in the development of what we now call 'science' followed the introduction of major changes in the channels of communication in Babylon (writing), in Ancient Greece (the alphabet), and in Western Europe (printing).
>
> (Goody, 1988:51).

As Goody sees this evolution, therefore, the invention of writing in Sumer, of the alphabet in Greece, and of printing in Western Europe, were not the product of historical, civilizational changes. They were instead the actual causes for such changes (later, we shall deal with his remark on the "single factor theory"). Moreover, he contends, the development of rationality, of analytical thought, of critical capability and, generally, of individual conscious reasoning was brought about by these same inventions (see below).

It is important to focus on the context in which Jack Goody presents his view of the connections between literacy, society and cognition. Such context was one of strong opposition to what he saw as the spread

of synchronic binarism in European anthropological thought - itself a consequence of the declension of historical models. As his initial remarks indicate, Jack Goody is particularly interested in re-introducing a "developmental framework", which may permit him (or, as he writes, "most of us") to speculate on "the way in which modes of thought have changed over time and space" (Goody, 1988:1). But, he notes, anthropological and sociological thought in the twentieth century "has been non-developmental". The reason is

> Because the anthropologists and sociologists interested in these questions have tended to set aside evolutionary or even historical perspectives, preferring to adopt a kind of cultural relativism that looks upon discussions of development as necessarily entailing a value judgement on the one hand ad as over-emphasizing or misunderstanding the differences on the other. Such objections are founded not only on the appealing premise that all men are equal. They also stem from the undoubted difficulty that speculations upon developmental sequences often create for the analysis of a particular set of data.
>
> [But] in acknowledging the necessity of proving rather than assuming difference, it is only too easy to set aside the developmental questions, as pseudo-historical, as 'evolutionary', as speculative. Yet having done so, we nevertheless fall back upon a mode of discourse, a set of categories, such as primitive and advanced, simple and complex, developing and developed, traditional and modern, pre-capitalist, etc. which implies change of a more or less unidirectional kind.
>
> (Goody, 1988:2).

That is, by refusing to interpret sociological differences in the light of linear and progressive evolution, European anthropology was beguiled by the dichotomies inherited in its methodological choices. Societies studied by anthropologists were (ethnocentrically) characterized in strict opposition to the "West". "They" were defined by what in them differed from "Us", and thus the same unidirectional evolutionary scheme was implicitly reaffirmed. Moreover, he reminds the reader that the use of dichotomous classification is illusory and ethnocentric:

> The division of societies or modes of thought into advanced and primitive, domesticated or savage, open or closed, is essentially to make use of a folk-taxonomy by which we bring order and understanding into a complex universe. But the order is illusory, the meaning superficial. As in the case of other binary systems, the categorization is often value-laden and ethnocentric.
>
> (Goody, 1988:36).

But, on the other hand, Jack Goody considers that an alternative relativist point-of-view can dangerously minimize these important and noted social and cultural differences.

> While we need to reject the radical dichotomy that has dominated so many approaches to this problem, it would be a great error to substitute a diffusive relativism that fails to recognize the differences implicit in the means of communication implied in the terms 'oral' and 'written'...

(Goody, 1988:26).

Jack Goody (see p....., above) has already clarified the nature of these “implicit differences”, when he evoked how the "hardware" - i.e. the human brain - is transformed on contact with literacy. Below, we shall try to evaluate Goody's contention of a "need to reject the radical dichotomy". Meanwhile, it is worth noting that he sees himself as searching for a "third hypothesis", for a balance between dichotomy and relativism, and between synchronism and evolutionism. Thus, he proposes to resort to a renewed interest in history, viewing (as he puts it) differences as changes: "...the specification of difference is not in itself enough; one needs to point out to mechanisms, to causal factors" (Goody, 1988:36). Furthermore, "there is no single 'opposition' but rather a succession of changes over time, each influencing the system of thought in specific ways" (1988:46). His is not, he considers, "a great-divide theory. It sees some changes as more important than others, but it attempts to relate specific differences with specific changes" (1988:50).

But Jack Goody willingly concedes that anthropology's dichotomous approaches nevertheless point to important, unequivocal differences that do not need demonstrating but outright assumption. In fact, to a certain degree, at least, one should assume difference, instead of feeling the necessity of proving it (1988:2); Because there are such things as "observed differences" (1988:10), one would then readily acknowledge that

> Problems in human thought cannot be treated in terms of universals alone. Not only anthropologists have called attention to difference in cognitive styles in various cultures; the specification of difference is a commonplace and common sense reaction to the clash of cultures
>
> (Goody, 1988:161).

In fact, Goody goes as far as informing his reader that those same dichotomies he had critically reviewed earlier are not to be dismissed at all. They simply have to be incorporated in a developmental scheme, able to bring out the "specific causal mechanisms" that end up revalidating the dichotomic principle:

> While I would accept most of these statements as pointing out to certain differences between two broad groups of societies, the West and the rest, the dichotomies need to be treated as variables, both as regards the societies and as regards their characteristics. A dichotomization of this kind is often a useful preliminary for descriptive purposes; once we accept it as such, we can go further and attempt to elucidate the possible mechanisms that bring about the differences, a step that usually involves modifying or even rejecting the original dichotomy. Without in any way insisting upon a single-factor theory, I want to try to show how these differences can be partly explained (rather than simply described) by looking at the possible effects of changes in the mode of communication.
>
> (Goody, 1988:41).

The remark of the "single-factor theory" set aside (we shall deal with it below), some important propositions should be retained:

- Dichotomization is a "useful preliminary" in the process of assessing a previously assumed great divide between "the West and the rest",

- The specific technological mechanisms that imply changes in the modes of communication, and hence of cognition, eventually explain the existence of the differences described by social scientists;

- The study of the development of the technologies of communication may modify or even reject the *apriori* assumption of a great divide.

We can guess that in Goody's mind some peculiar methodological constraints had imposed the assumption of an "original dichotomy" between "the West and the rest", even if its categorical expressions, present in the works of previous social scientists (primitive vs. modern, savage vs. domesticated, etc), had seemed rejectable, at first. By considering "objective" technological changes in human communication, he had believed that the "old" ethnocentric oppositions, as well as the confusing relativist stances, might profitably have been substituted by a more general and inclusive explanation - to be found somewhere in between the relativist and the binarist perspectives:

> The balance of my argument continues to be a delicate one. In the first place, I have attempted to set aside radical dichotomies; in the second, I reject diffuse relativism. The third course involves a more difficult task, that of specifying particular mechanisms. (...) I have tried to analyze some aspects of the processes of communication in order to try to elucidate what others have tried to explain by means of those dichotomies.
>
> (Goody, 1988:50; see also: 16, 47-48).

There is some reason to doubt that Goody is, as he says, searching for a delicate balance between what he sees as Lévi-Strauss' durkheimian strict dichotomies (Goody, 1988:7, 147) and Ruth Finnegan's loose relativist stances (1988:26, 164). On the previous occasion of the publication of an article debating Lévi-Strauss' *La Pensée sauvage* (Goody, 1968), he had actually been criticized by Finnegan as a champion of the "great divide" and a proponent of a "single-factor theory" (Horton & Finnegan, 1973). It rather seems that the balance he is looking for is actually a strategic one, superficially influenced by the changes in the reading and writing

context of post-colonial anthropology. His self-legitimizing rhetoric thus balances between his radical and rather archaic perspectives on the non-universality of human cognition (hence his benevolent review of Lévy-Bruhl's concept of the pre-logic mind, from which he coined the notion of a pre-literate mind, 1988:), and the "anthropologic correctness" implied in his "need to reject the radical dichotomy".

As we can see at the end of his book, he eventually conveys the idea that - probably due to those same constraints - the "original dichotomy" was not after all rejected, nor even radically modified:

> I am aware that throughout this discussion I too have tended to drop into a dichotomous treatment of utterance versus text, the oral against the written. But, as has been emphasized, the changes are numerous, so too are the relationships centering upon these changes.
>
> (Goody, 1988:151).

Taking into account this late recognition, it is now possible to shed some new light on many earlier assertions, such as: "I certainly do not wish to deny that there are differences in the 'thought' or 'mind' of 'we' and 'they'..."(Goody, 1988:8; see also, for instance, 3). Some others, like the following: "...we need to reject the radical dichotomy that has dominated so many approaches to this problem [oral vs. written communication]" (1988:26), seem either insincere or a signal of a rhetoric *reductio ad absurdum*.

A crucial argument in Jack Goody's thesis is that writing, on the whole, has introduced Man to the advantages of non-contradictory and differentiating mental processes:

> The specific proposition is that writing, and more especially alphabetic literacy, made it possible to scrutinize discourse in a different kind of way by giving oral communication a semi-permanent form; this scrutiny favored the increase in scope of critical activity, and hence of rationality, skepticism, and logic to resurrect memories of those questionable dichotomies (...); the human mind was freed to study static 'text' (rather than be limited by participation in the dynamic 'utterance'), a process that enabled man to stand back from his creation and examine it in a more abstract, generalized, and rational way. By making it possible to scan the communications of mankind over a much wider time span, literacy encouraged, at the very same time, criticism and commentary.
>
> (Goody, 1988:37).

Writing has also led mankind into crossing the threshold of the realm of individual conscious reasoning:

> I would maintain that the shift from utterance to text led to significant developments of a sort that might be loosely referred to as a change in consciousness and which in part arose from the great extension of formal operations of a graphic kind.

(Goody, 1988:75).

These differentiating and introspective mental achievements are denied, or at least undervalued, by oral communication in non-literate societies, where intellectual processes are totally permeated by (pre-) logical ambiguity and vulnerable to irrationality: "Inconsistency, even contradiction, tends to be swallowed up in the flow of speech (parole), the spate of words, the flood of argument" (Goody, 1988:43).

When illustrating the arise of consciousness that the invention of writing permits, Goody refers the way non-literate listeners of a tale deal with repetition and innovation:

> [When a story is told] many participants think they are hearing or telling the same tale. But they have no text to effect that comparison and (...) their ability to compare and, what is more important, correct (...) is very limited. In any case, people enjoy a new twist and, in the absence of copy, may convince themselves that this change is in fact part of the true, the earlier version.
>
> (Goody, 1988:116-117).

Their consciousness of change and their acoustic memory seem to have a very limited scope. Goody recalls that when reciting the "Invocation of the Bagre", a Loo-Daga (a member of a West African society that plays an important illustrative part in Goody's argument, when he reaches out to his "personal experience") is unable to achieve exact repetition: "Repetition is rarely if ever verbatim". Still, if during recitation one makes a mistake, the listeners will immediately correct the speaker. "Do we have here a fixed model, a model in the head as well as a model in the mind?", he asks (1988:118-119).

It could be argued that matters of consciousness and non-contradiction are not easily subjected to the kind of dichotomizing that Goody favors (between the oral and the written): if writing is not permeable to unconsciousness and contradiction, how is one to interpret the previous sentences? On the one hand, he ascertains that the Loo-Daga have no consciousness or memory of changes in an oral narrative, but still they enjoy the introduction of changes (in order to convince themselves that these don't exist?). On the other hand, though exact repetition cannot be achieved, any change in an invocation is immediately censored.

But in Jack Goody's view, as we have seen, contradiction and ambiguity are the qualities of "utterance", not of "text". An important and inescapable question is, then, that we must either determine that there are equivalencies between oral modes of communication and cognition in literate and non-literate societies - an equivalence that Goody refuses to make - and thus the central argument for the existence of an "objective"

dichotomy is a fallacy; or there is no such equivalencies and we must accept that any non-literate semantic system "is unknown to [us]" (1988:71). But in this case there can be no doubt that a great divide is being reaffirmed, one that in fact interdicts us from assessing or even guessing what and how "They" think. If that is so, how can we "observe differences" that we imply exist between "our" semantic and cognitive system and "theirs"? Goody prefers not to deal with this dilemma throughout the book, and this is why he ends up, in all likelihood, feeling somewhat surprised by the sudden awareness of his tendency to dichotomize where he consciously thought he was transcending and bridging dichotomies.

It is virtually impossible to ascertain that this trend from holism and logical ambiguity to individualism and abstract rationality was effective in the pre-historical periods when literate societies weren't yet literate. Also, Jack Goody doesn't offer his reader sufficient ethnographic evidence to corroborate the existence of such cognitive gaps. In these matters, and contrary to what he notes early in the book (see p....., above), it is not only sufficient, but in fact necessary, to assume difference, instead of proving it when one is willing to work under the constraints of a presupposed, and unconfessed, "Great Divide".

Goody contends that only the alphabet, of the sort invented in Ancient Greece, has allowed more complex forms of mental organization. With those forms, came the development of philosophy, of scientific thought, the analytical and critical search for universal truth. In turn, these forms gave rise to a whole series of sociological and technological changes that culminated in Western style modern civilization (1988:10, 14, 44). In his view, the establishment of differences must always call for an evolutionist point of view - in this area, at least, distinctions in communication and cognition are to be understood as the result of developmental, progressive change.

There is nothing truly original or new in this argument. A negative vision of what anthropology's traditional object of study is (or is thought to be) becomes intertwined with an ethnocentrical scheme of self-legitimatory value. Jack Goody establishes a sharp split between two mutually incomprehensible modes of cognition: that of "oral societies" which anthropologists study (even if their semantic systems must remain "unknown to them"), and of "literate societies", to which anthropologists belong to (and to which dualistic moulds they necessarily submit their discourses). He describes the former as totally ambiguous and lacking individual reflective thought, unable to recognize contradiction where it may present itself; the latter is qualified

as complex, rational and, since ancient Greek times, impregnated by the virtues of the Aristotelian logic - namely, the principle of non-contradiction or exclusiveness.

It has already been mentioned that the author doesn't for a moment wish more than to assume, instead of to demonstrate, the existence of this cognitive gap. But because such gap actually stands as a regulating rule throughout his whole book, it is important to take notice of its formation. He actually presents himself to his readers as a non-authority in historical studies of literacy (as an "amateur"; 1988:IX, 18, 153). But, all the while, he punctuates his discourse with recurrent and authoritative mementos of his "personal experience" as a field anthropologist among the Loo-Daga of West Africa (1988:8, 12-13, 108, 116-119). In Goody's argumentation, this so called pre-literate society is actually erected as illustrative proof of the incapacity of all non-literate humanity to use and develop formal ways of knowing - because it lacks the communication technology and the cognitive means to develop individual, rational, dichotomizing and critical thinking.

In fact, what Jack Goody offers his readers is to reinstate the full vigor of nineteenth century evolutionary schemes. To achieve this, he establishes a rule of strict analogy between modes of cognition supposedly characteristic of contemporary non-literate societies (as illustrated by his somewhat meager findings among the Loo-Daga), and pristine modes of cognition that pre-existed the invention of writing in literate societies. To achieve this "examination of the ways of thinking of earlier times and of other cultures" (1988:51), he considers he has only to reflect upon the "potential effects of writing [that] can be assessed from an ethnographical analysis of contemporary writing or from a historical study of earlier written materials" (1988:78). Through this conjectural analogy, the otherwise unreachable "savage mind" of pre-historical, pre-literate humanity can then be seen to stand in the opposite pole to that of Western style "domesticated" and alphabetized civilization.

This tendency follows three convergent methodological paths:

1) Monocausality - i.e., writing is described as the motor of outstanding cognitive modifications affecting, as he says, both "software" (modes of thought) and "hardware" (neural structures in the brain);

2) Unilinearity - a clear geo-historical line of changes in the technology of communication, in cognition processes, and in the complexity of social organization (namely the invention of individualism) is

established between two extreme poles: pure, pristine orality and western alphabetical literacy. This historical series of transformations follows a path from East to West (from ancient Sumer, to classical Greece and Rome, to post-medieval Western Europe);

3) Dichotomy - The former anthropological dichotomies are substituted by new, supposedly more objective, ones: he contrasts the logic of orality (ambiguous, irreflective, unconscious, circular) and that of writing (non-contradictory, rational, conscious, linear); he further opposes western alphabetical writing (analytical, abstract, critical) and all other writing systems (symbolic, associative, non-dialectical).

There is, in the first chapter of The Domestication of the Savage Mind, a sentence of a particularly mystifying character. It reads as follows:

> ...I am not attempting to put forward a simple, technology determined, sequence of cause and effect; there are too many eddies and currents in the affairs of men to justify a monocausal explanation of a unilateral kind. On the other hand, there is a halfway house between the choice of a single cause and the complete rejection of causal implications, between the diffuseness of structural causality and of functional fit and the selection of a single cause; there is the whole area of causal arcs, of feedback mechanisms, of the attempt to weight a plurality of causes.
>
> (Goody, 1988:10).

Further on, on chapter three of the book, which is an attempt at tackling the criticisms that Ruth Finnegan and Robin Horton had directed against his earlier book, Literacy in Traditional Societies (Horton & Finnegan, 1973), there are three instances of rhetorical negation:

> Without in any way insisting upon a single-factor theory, I want to show how these differences can be partly explained... (1988:41);
>
> I do not maintain that this process is unidirectional let alone monocausal (...). [But] in drawing attention to the significance of this factor, I attempt to avoid the conceptual slush into which one flounders...
>
> (Goody, 1988:46)
>
> I repeat that I am not proposing a single-factor theory (...). Nevertheless, it is not accidental that major steps in the development of what we now call 'science' followed the introduction of major changes in the channels of communication in Babylon (writing), in Ancient Greece (the alphabet), and in Western Europe (printing).
>
> (Goody, 1988:51)

Of course that the assertion "what we now call 'science'" has the same self-referential and legitimizing value as passages such as "the emergence of what we call history" (1988:148). In the context of a study where an initial dichotomic perspective is questioned only to be again validated, the notions of "our " science" or "our" history stand here as exact opposites of "their" myths. The process of "domestication" of the illiterate "savage mind" is one of developmental social and cognitive change induced, or better still, determined by the evolution of literacy. With this methodological framework it would really be a strenuous task to search for the "whole area of causal arcs, of feedback mechanisms, of the attempt to weight a plurality of causes" hidden in the interstices of an (unconsciously) monocausal and unilinear working method and script.

The heritage of dichotomy: truth as illusion as truth as illusion

In argumentative terms, the presented vision of classical Greek heritage is an essential key in the elaboration of this thesis. Furthermore, one thing seems clear from this brief outlook: that, in spite of a superficially critical position against anthropology's dualistic approach, its methodological tradition is not only accepted but turns out to be quite essential to the proper elaboration of Goody's argument. In cognitive terms, he suggests that there are analogical connections between the macro-history of writing and the micro-history of anthropological thought: he insists on the idea that tabular, pictographic systems must be perceived as the germ from which the later invention of alphabetical writing sprang up (1988.70). Likewise, he thinks that anthropology's dichotomous models of French (durkheimian) influence are to be taken in as a "useful preliminary" in the creation of a supposedly more general explanation (his own). Although not explicitly or consciously assumed by the author, the acceptance of such influence had an important consequence in Goody's proposal: to uncritically reinstate, or revalidate, the dualistic ideologies inherited from classical Greece and modulated by western Christian thought.

The traditional fiction of the separate existence of a lower material universe and a higher, ideal universe, seem here to be translated into the contrast between two antithetical modes of cognition: the concrete, perceptive, "savage" mind; and the abstract, rational, "domesticated" mind. In this system, "We" position

ourselves at a much higher level of an ascending linear order than "Them" - that is, all those other past and present non-alphabetized or non-westernized societies.

The heritage of this sort of dualism is such that, being one of many possible ways of organizing and knowing "reality", its strength seems to have historically rested upon its self-legitimizing features. Every attempt to approach any "reality" through the filters of this dualism is bound to end up as a self-referential and opposing activity.

When reviewing C. Lévi-Strauss' discussion of the relation between *mûthos* and *historia*, Goody remarks:

> Without going into the many ambiguities involved in the definition of myth, there is a sense in which this concept often involves a backward look, which is either untrue or unverifiable. And in the most literal sense the distinction between *mythos* and *historia* comes into being at the same time when alphabetic writing encouraged mankind to set one account of the universe or he pantheon beside another and hence perceive the contradictions that lie between them. There are thus two senses in which the characterization of the 'savage mind' as pre-historical or atemporal relates to the distinction between literate and pre-literate societies.
>
> (Goody, 1988:14-15).

According to the general precepts of his dichotomic approach, Goody translates the intricate relation between myth and history in *La Pensée Sauvage* as one of simple distinction. But at this stage, the reader feels that "going into the many ambiguities involved in the definition of myth" might be a meaningful checking system to evaluate the idea that the alphabet is the causal factor of a non-contradictory reason. Because it seems from the above quote that the distinction between *mûthos* and *historia*, or indeed between *mûthos* and *lógos*, can only be maintained as long as we accept the existence of a "great divide" between the illusions of non-literate minds and the truths of literate (alphabetic and westernized) ones.

Jack Goody's founding ideas in the area of literacy studies hardly seem original or truly anti-dualistic. In fact, his view of the influence of the alphabet upon classical thought systems is actually shared by a legion of European classicists. The generally accepted idea is the following: due to the intellectual discipline allowed by alphabetical reading and writing techniques, mythical and magical ways of thinking were progressively superseded by a more consciously rational, analytical and logocentric mind, in classical Greece (see mainly Havelock, 1982). What this might actually mean is that the dualistic ideas that influenced the Western mind with

the notions of mutual incompatibility and contradictory opposition, eventually became the vehicle through which the birth of dualism itself was to be understood. In other words, it wasn't necessarily because the Greek mind became "domesticated" by writing - i.e., that it grew rational, abstract and introspective - that dualism was created as an "objective" organizing mould. On the contrary, it was because dualistic ideas came to impose an unsurpassable contrast between *mûthos* and *lógos* that the "logographer" would qualify his own writing and ideas as objective and able to express true knowledge.

We shouldn't nevertheless minimize the fact that, historically, implicit and explicit meanings of both *mûthos* and *lógos* haven't presented themselves as non-changeable, extra-contextual, or even dichotomous at all times. On this important topic, we can look for help in the inquiries of French classicist Marcel Detienne on the origin and evolution of the relation between those Greek concepts and their descendants, in his work *L'Invention de la mythologie* (Detienne, 1981). Originally, *mûthos*, like *lógos*, seem to have had the meaning of "truthful speech": "...*mûthos* est et restera un synonyme de *lógos*, tout au long du VIe siècle et même dans la première moitié du Ve" (Detienne, 1981:93). As in Homer's epic poems, in Hesiod's *Theogony* the semantic scope of *mûthos* is to a great extent interchangeable with that of *lógos*. Through a *mûthos*, Hesiod narrates the *lógos* of the golden, silver, bronze and iron races; and Empedocle proposes to his disciples that they listen to his *mûthoi*, i.e. his the words of truth (1981:95-96). Later, with Herodotus and Pindar, the meaning of *mûthos* seems to have undergone a visible semantic inflexion: the word still refers to the idea of "account" or "discourse", comparable to the *lógoi*, but it wouldn't designate a "truthful speech" anymore. In Detienne's view, the birth of myth was not the expression of a "pensée mythologique des origines", but of a sense of disbelief and from *parphásis*, the "speech of illusion" (1981:96-97). Herodotus, who describes himself as a "logographer", is, in Aristotle's view, a simple "mythologist" because he reports in writing the oral "illusions des autres" - that is, absurd and unbelievable fictional accounts he had heard in his travels (1981:104). And so, "né illusion", it becomes a "simple reste, tantôt rumeur grise, parole d'illusion, séduction mensongère, tantôt récit incroyable, discours absurde, opinion sans fondement" (1981:104, 232).

Later still, Thucydides, the historian of the Peloponese war, radically opposed the concepts of *mûthos* and *lógos*. To Plutarch, as Detienne reminds us, it had seemed possible to extract true *historia* from the mythical order (*muthôdes*), by submiting it to the *lógos*, or rational examination (*The Life of Theseus*, 1, 5; in: Detienne,

1981:107 n.75). On the contrary, for Thucydides, in the end of the fifth century BC, there is already no possible compromise of the *lógos* with what belongs to "myth". It is as a written truth that permits memories to remain unchanged that *lógos* now opposes *mûthos*, qualified as oral fiction, ephemeral, changeable and thus unreliable (Detienne, 1981:107).

Thucydides and Plato, whose views were already invoked in the beginning of this article, clearly disagree on which powers should be attributed to writing. Visibly, writing, of the sort invented in Greece, can be either qualified as speech of truth or of illusion. But, nevertheless, both authorities appear to agree on one thing: on the power and utility of the dualistic mould as a means to shape and self-legitimize one's ideas and discourse.

In the thirty years that have gone by since the publication of Jack Goody's *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, its influence in the area of literacy studies has meant, to many, an acceptance of the ideological mould that shape both its method and its object. It is true that, to others, an alternative approach has implied a "move towards an ideological model" to conceptualize literac(ies), in terms of inquiries into the social value of ideologies of communication (Street, 1993:10). Never-the-less, a more critical review of the dualistic ideas upon which literacy studies developed must not be neglected, for it may open up a rich field of anthropological inquiry into the connections between our communication medium, our methodological constraints, and the way we define the distance between observer and subject. Only then can we weigh more accurately the importance and scope of the contemporary forms of materialization of thought.

One last word must be said about the context in which the self-legitimizing features of Goody's ideas and their persuasiveness are to be understood. The reader is offered a comparative study that argues for the all-encompassing influence of literacy on the added rational, critical, analytical capabilities of the human mind; and he happens to show a particularly weak will to deny that those capabilities are in fact due to the writing and reading processes. This is maybe due to a situation where the reader is exposed to Goody's seductive *parphásis* and is faced with a flattering self-referential proposition, from which he has trouble distancing himself. That is, thanks to the fact that he can read and write, he learns from Goody that his cognitive capabilities are sophisticated enough to make him understand the justness of the author's ideas about writing's potential to develop one's cognitive capabilities.

And, Plato would add, the reader "will be thought very knowledgeable when [he is] for the most part quite ignorant ".

Post-script

What I have intended to put forward for the reader's evaluation is not so much Jack Goody's *parphásis*, but my own. The present English text is actually a rough and hasty reconstruction of lost scribbles presented orally at a Conference of the *International Society for the Study of European Ideas*, that took place in York, in August, 1997. It was discussed at a research seminar jointly held by I.S.C.T.E. and the Universidade de Évora, in March 1998. The original notes, written in Portuguese, were taken from (and annotated on) a Portuguese translation of Jack Goody's *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, and were used in a series of courses and seminars on Methodological Problems in Social Sciences, in I.S.C.T.E.. I kept taking notes of the resulting (oral) discussions in the margins of my original Portuguese copy, as well as in the original English copy, in manuscript notes and in computer documents – until the interwoven network of references, opinions, questions from various minds and diverse media became too confusing.

The decision of presenting an English-written inspection of what is implied in the (English) notion of "literacy", and thus confronting my notes and thoughts with a different linguistic structure was a costly one, since my familiarity with this language is obviously limited. There are, then, some curious challenges implied in the presenting of the present article to a mainly Portuguese public. The original, and very un-systematic, versions of it were written and discussed in Portuguese; later English versions were presented, at different times, to Portuguese and International English-speaking audiences; finally, an unfortunate (?) incident has caused the material disappearance of parts of my first English version of this text. I had to rely on my mental memory of both written and oral inquiries, since I lost a paper notebook I kept and I could not retrieve part of the disk memory of a damaged computer file where I held information on the subject.

I hope the destiny of this text may stand as a test to some limitations of dualistic ideas and of a too self-glorifying vision of " our literacy".

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