

ETEC 540 Assignment 2: Video Documentary

Full Marks: The pre-digital writing communication technology

of mark-making prior to the first alphabet

June 2015

THE SCRIPT:

http://prezi.com/xx-fcsu4fjr1/?utm_campaign=share&utm_medium=copy

Introduction

The goal of *Full Marks: The pre-digital writing communication technology of mark-making prior to the first alphabet* is to provide an outline of the physical findings discovered by researchers in relation to written communication technologies prior to the creating of the alphabet by Sumerians approximately 5,000 years ago and their impact on the development of literacy and education. This video, using Prezi software, was produced as a course (ETEC 540) requirement for the UBC Masters of Educational Technology program. It is hoped that educators teaching secondary or first year courses in post-secondary education would consider incorporating this material into their curriculum.

Full Marks will highlight a number of archaeological sites where a variety of symbols in the form of pictographs, ideographs and hieroglyphics have been uncovered. Attention will be given to the materials and mark-making implements used by the originators.

Through suggested interactive activities provided on this topic, students will be exposed to a deeper understanding of early forms of communication technology and instill in some students an inquisitive interest in this field of research.

Instructors may wish to focus on portions of the video in group dialogues with their students or have the students explore further aspects of the topic of early communication tools. Student discussions or projects might investigate prehistoric sites closer to their own home.

Frame 1 TEXT: (title) *Full Marks: The pre-digital writing communication technology of mark-making prior to the first alphabet*

(forward to next frame)

Frame 2 TEXT: Introduction “Words spoken are symbols of affections or impressions of the soul; written words are symbols of words spoken. And just as letters are not the same for all men, sounds are not the same either, although the affections directly expressed by these indications are the same for everyone, as are the things of which these impressions are images.” – Aristotle (Coulmas, F. (2003).

Frame 3: Image of Aristotle

Voice: (delay start to allow audience to read quote by Aristotle.) To understand the significance of writing systems we start with Aristotle’s notable definition whereby he directs us to the theory

of ideas, signs (visual, technical and vocal) and material objects being interdependent and that “forming signs for other signs as their referents” is the function of writing. “Writing is not only preceded by, but also subordinate to, vocal speech.” (Coulmas, 2003).

Frame 4: Image of Plato

Voice: And Plato, he saw the act of writing to be a ‘memory aid’. “He was concerned with the communicative function of writing and saw that it was the tool of artificial intelligence as opposed to empathetic dialogue-generated insight, but he was deeply sceptical of the new technology and the form of knowledge it made possible” (Coulmas, 2003).

According to Battestini (Coulmas, 2003) “the function of writing, in the semiotic sense, is not to represent speech or language... but thoughts” (Coulmas, 2003).

Florian Coulmas tells us in *Writing systems: an introduction to their linguistic analysis* that even though “there is no objective measure...the Internet explosion has laid to rest the idea that for the human race at large writing is only a ‘minor’ form of communication.” That it would “not be risky to call writing the single most consequential technology ever invented” (Coulmas, 2003).

Coulmas sees writing as having two distinctive traits. The first trait being that it is visible and the second being that it “consists of signs ... relatively durable marks that have an assigned external referent” (Coulmas, 2003).

Over the remainder of this video we will be exploring signs; the earliest known marks made by our ancestors. These tools of communication, though visually simple in nature, are full of symbolism, full of meaning and full of mystery.

A lot of what is known about life during this time period comes to us through the research of archeologists and other specialists who have undertaken to decipher possible interpretations of found prehistoric images and marks. We will explore some of these precursory forms of written communication systems that lead to the development of the first alphabet.

[Rock art] constitutes by far the most important record we possess of humanity's history before the invention of writing. It also provides invaluable source material for the study of human beings' cognitive development" (Anati, 1998).

“Everything in present knowledge points to the fact that writing was engendered independently by several relatively advanced sedentary civilizations characterized by urbanization, division or labour, and a surplus economy” (Coulmas, 2003). Four known writing systems (Mesopotamian, Egyptian, Chinese and possibly one Meso-American) are thought to have developed their own separate writing system while most others have borrowed elements and adapted them to their own. (de Voogt, 2012)

Frame 5 TEXT: A simple timeline. (Click on the red hyperlink)

Voice: Maybe at this time we need to look at a Timeline.

(Note to Instructor: You may need to scroll down slightly to view both the timeline and the accompanying images at the same time. The black arrow ► is at the right to move forward along the timeline.)

(Activity 1): As a group project, students could devise a shared, progressive timeline for the class or students may create their own individual timeline.

Frame 6: Image of world map

TEXT: The Bigger Picture

Frame 7: Image of world map

Voice: So where are these sites located?

It is thought that the first writing system appeared as inscriptions on clay tablets in Mesopotamia, created by the Sumerians of Uruk (Iraq). In 1929-30 the German archaeologist Julius Jordan uncovered ‘a system of recording numerals, pictographs and ideographs on specially prepared clay surfaces’ (Schmandt-Besserat, 1978).

Preceding this discovery, A. Leo Oppenheim hypothesized from the Nuzi, Iraq excavation materials that a bookkeeping system using tokens was in use. An inscribed hollow egg-shaped clay tablet was used to hold a number of clay tokens. These geometrical shaped tokens “included spheres, disks, cylinders, cones and tetrahedrons” (Schmandt-Besserat, 1978). Schmandt-Besserat suggests “images of the tokens soon supplanted the tokens themselves, and the

evolution of symbolic objects into ideographs led to the rapid adoption of writing all across western Asia” (Schmandt-Besserat, 1978).

Frame 8: TEXT Sumerians

Voice: “The repertory of characters used by the Uruk scribes [Sumerians] was large: it is estimated at no fewer than 1,500 separate signs” (Schmandt-Besserat, 1978).

Frame 9 TEXT Egyptian Hieroglyphs

Voice: Francois Champollion’s decipherment of the Rosetta Stone in 1822 had demonstrated to the world that Egyptian hieroglyphs could actually be read and thus constituted writing” (Coulmas, 2003).

“Battestini favours such a wide notion of writing [so as to include all graphic means of conserving and communicating thought, especially language-neutral systems he calls ‘mythographic’ of which there is an abundance in Africa, the continent whose peoples have commonly, and wrongly, been characterized as writingless” (Coulmas, 2003).

(Activity 2): Resource: Selden, D. (2013). *Hieroglyphic Egyptian: An introduction to the language and literature of Middle Egyptian hieroglyphs*. Berkeley: University of California

Press. Have your students gather examples of these symbols as used today. Students may then explore what meaning might be attached to them. Or students could try creative writing by ‘translating’ a short poem or joke.

Frame 10 TEXT: Use of Cuneiforms (Pictograms)

Voice: “The oldest form of writing extant is the Sumerian cuneiform script” (Lindley, 1998). It is estimated that there were approximately fifteen languages that used the cuneiform style.

They “took a major step forward when they moved from the concrete to the abstract, from pictographic (picture) writing to phonetic (sound) writing. By realizing that one symbol or syllable could stand for more than one thing –what linguists call the rebus principle- they were able to increase the power and scope of written communication” (Lindley, 1998). But it is thought by some researchers that they didn’t actually create an alphabet. That distinction is given to the Egyptians.

(Activity 3): Have students read the article “Texts, tablets, and teaching” by Steve Tinney (Tinney, S. (1998). Texts, tablets, and teaching. *Expedition*, v. 40, 2). In this article, Tinney uses the information from the archaeology sites of Ur and Nippur to envision school for student scribes with their cuneiform tablets. Discuss in class the similarities and changes in education from the student perspective.

Frame 11 TEXT: The use of Tokens

Frame 12 TEXT: Stone Age Jottings (chart)

Voice: “Human beings produced graphic signs for many millennia before writing was invented. They drew pictures, cut notches into sticks, arranged pebbles in heaps and figures, tied knots in cords, scratched patterns onto rocks” (Coulmas, 2003). We will find “unmistakable evidence of aesthetic sensibility” when we go back in time to the earliest caves in France (Coulmas, 2003).

Canadian anthropologist, Genevieve von Petzinger, compiled a graphical database of the geometric signs known to exist in the caves of France so as to examine in a digital format the array of mark-making “for patterns of continuity and change over time and space” (von Petzinger, G., 2005). There is now digital documentation on 146 painted caves.

Note to Instructor: A description of the various signs can be found in von Petzinger’s Master’s thesis starting on page 41 under the heading *Non-Figurative Typology*.

<http://hdl.handle.net/1828/1402>

Frame 13 TEXT: Signs

Voice: Today Archaeologists have a new set of tools to assist them in recording and cataloging cave art.

Frame 14: Revealing the invisible. (Click on link. Use sliding arrow to view image changes.)

Frame 15: TEXT: “I think the availability of technology has really changed the way we are able to do research. I am certain that there were past researchers who would have liked to study the signs in the way that I have, but without the software programs that I had available to me, there is no way that it could have been done at the speed that I was able to do this, nor would they have had such easy access to the data once it had been collected” G. von Petzinger

Frame 16 TEXT: 26 signes apparaissent de maniere recurrente dan les grottes francaises

Frame 17 TEXT: Writing implements Writing materials Writing surfaces

Frame 18 Text: Impact on today's society

Voice: “Some things about rock art from the distant past are still relevant today. The visual language of early hunters is a universal language since, quite apart from systems of representation and styles that are often very similar in different parts of the world, it also displays combinations of figures and symbols that derive from the same logic, suggesting a similar way of thinking and of self-expression” (Anati, 1998).

Do we see these prehistoric marks as Plato might, as just symbols to aid memory? Are they ‘silent’ or ‘dead’? Or could they have a story to tell?

Are words being seen in a new light, given new meaning? Wall paper? High Five?

Forerunners of today's human communication systems. One theory on writing by Gelb “assumed two principles that have driven the development of writing: economy of effort and the ‘natural’ desire to reduce complexity” (Coulmas, 2003).

“Writing systems are highly complex instruments shaped by the interaction of material and systematic factors, which relate to, but are not the same as, those of speech” (Coulmas, 2003).

Frame 19 TEXT: Etiquette when interacting with artifacts

Voice: There are prehistoric sites in North America that we haven't touched on but may interest you. Before we close, let's look at what we should do when we encounter prehistoric art.

Frame 20: TEXT: North American Ancient sites (click on link)

Frame 21 TEXT: References (partial as need to add data on images -2nd frame may be needed)

Acknowledgement

The producer greatly appreciates the support, through written correspondence, from Dr. Genevieve von Petzinger along with her husband and photographer, Dillon von Petzinger; and looks forward to reading her upcoming articles and soon to be published book.

References

Images (*TO DO need to consult APA on format of entries*)

(*TO DO double check all images are accounted for*)

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https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/35/Aristotle_Bust_WhiteBackground_Transparent.png

Cave images of El Castillo in Spain, Dillon von Petzinger:

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Clay Tokens, Susa (CC) © Marie-Lan Nguyen / Wikimedia Commons

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Music

Ephemeral Rift (2012). When my Spirit calls – Native American flute in F. On ccMixer
[MP3 Format Sound (.mp3)]



EETC 540 Video EphemeralRift_-_When_My_Spirit_Calls_-_Native_American_Flute_in_F_.mp3

Text

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