

THE STYLISTICS OF THE CYBER - DISCOURSE

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The liberation of the discourse

The exchange of information is probably the main process continuously going on in cyberspace. People have always had much to say for themselves and to one another, but no outlet was provided for it, thus they had to keep it private. The societies based on traditional media, from the earthenware tables of the Sinai Covenant to the cathode-ray tubes of television, made a clear-cut distinction between the few who were authorized to speak around and down to, and the many who had but to listen and obey¹. Communication was dominated by the metaphor of the umbrella (Escarpit, 1972): a few powerful entities, the emitters, covered some political-cultural space and exerted their control over more-or-less well-defined, distinct territories. These emitters seldom competed, since the technological limitations of the old times made it more natural for them to tacitly or openly divide their areas of influence. It is true that, apart from the stentorian voices of proclamations and gazettes, the cheap medium of paper also enabled even the barely literate to reliably send messages, an occupation which eventually brought about the art of correspondence. The epistolary space had been, retrospectively considered, a proto-cyberspace, because of the omnidirectional connections it created between the individual minds of men and women. Such connections could very well lead to peculiar consequences **in real life** (IRL). The encounter in Neuchâtel between Honoré de Balzac and Evelyna Hanska was preceded by quite a “hot” exchange of letters, a game not far from cyber-sex, and he first got her address from a newspaper posting, which proves that the gazette’s “classified” section used to be the Bulletin Board Service (BBS) of the time. The invention of the telephone was more prone to stifle the independent voices than to make them heard. People almost put pens aside and started to talk feverishly over the phone. It seemed an empowerment, but it was not. While a letter could be passed on, copied, commented upon, eventually published, the tele-communication was essentially a one-to-one conversation, a basically private one, were it not for the officially appointed technological eavesdroppers².

¹ *Theirs not to reason why / Theirs but to strive and die*, according to the well-known Tennyson’s lines.

² The *Watergate* case was by no means a closing one. Asked if he practices telephone surveillance, one of Mitterrand’s ministers said that, although no official would ever admit he does, they all promise to put a stop to it.

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