Writing a Revolution:
From Oral to Literate Cultural Transmission in Ancient Athens

by

Alexander H. Pack
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“Instead of being something said once and for all – and lost in the past like the results of a battle, a geological catastrophe, or the death of a king – the statement, as it emerges in its materiality, appears with a status, enters various networks and various fields of use, is subjected to transferences or modifications, is integrated into operations and strategies in which its identity is maintained or effaced.

(Michel Foucault, The Archaeology of Knowledge)

“The medium is the message.”

(Marshall McLuhan, Understanding Media)
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I. INTRODUCTION

There is nothing natural about writing. In fact, it is one of the most difficult things that we have to learn. After twelve years of writing-intensive schooling only 27% of US students can write at or above the “proficient” level according to the National Center for Education Statistics, defined strictly functionally as being able to “address the tasks effectively and fully accomplish their communicative purposes.”¹

The average US student spends 1260 hours a year in school and 250 doing homework (a little over eighteen thousand hours by twelfth grade) with a significant amount of that time spent writing or learning to write in some manner. Malcolm Gladwell, famously, has claimed that it takes about ten thousand hours of experience to achieve expertise in a field – for violinists to hone their craft, the Beatles to become an expert rock band, or Bill Gates to be a top coder. Yet after at least ten thousand hours of writing practice and training, most students cannot communicate as effectively through writing as they could through speech as a toddler.

Writing is difficult because humans naturally try to connect with others. To communicate means literally to “share;” it presupposes a social interaction – a reader, a setting, a reason, a method, a whole world – that needs to be understood before one can write. We often forget that it is impossible to communicate without context or audience, but one cannot share with an unknowable abyss.

Writing is monumental. In its permanence it demands that we share something with people that we may never know or see, who live in lands and times that we can hardly imagine – but we must try to imagine. It threatens to tell everyone, ever, what

you have said – indeed, this is usually the goal. In its materiality it is quite different from speech, the woven ephemera by which you have always proclaimed and constructed yourself. The written word is a part of you that is immediately severed, alienated, up-for-grabs for strangers to interpret and judge – often to misinterpret, to heap their contexts upon your creation without your approval, to judge this ‘you’ that you allowed to be published. As a reader, we can feel privileged or awed to enter into this long line of tradition and preserved monumentality, what T.S. Eliot calls the “historical sense:” a feeling that the whole of literature since Homer is behind a single text. Reading a classic book promises to be transformative and captivating, but it can also be daunting.

It is no wonder that people are looking for more ephemeral and comfortable means of communication. Snapchat is the most recent communication technology sensation. An ‘ephemeral’ photo-messaging app, it allows smartphone users to share photos and short videos (‘snaps’) that disappear after 1-10 seconds. Users can share emotions, thoughts, and experiences more quickly than through speech or writing, in an interface designed to mirror the experiences of conversations and small, in-person interactions. It is anything but monumental. Snapchat is where one goes to share the silly antics and the mildly interesting, the small and unexpected events rather than the great moments. There are over 400 million ‘snaps’ sent a day. After three thousand years of monumental communication to an abyss, people seem ready to celebrate the routine and the mildly interesting again.

There is a large cottage industry of media theorists examining the meaning of everyday life. Most fall into two camps of polemic: the cynics and the utopists.

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2 Eliot (1926).
Sherry Turkle, Director of the MIT Initiative on Technology and Self, has spent time on both sides, but in her recent opinion piece in the New York Times she shakes her head forlornly at ‘the documented life’ and what it means to no longer “experience interruptions as disruptions.” “It is not too late to reclaim our composure,” she warns.

I set out to write this thesis on modern communication technologies such as Snapchat and Facebook, to examine the ways that technology shapes and is shaped by us. I was determined to look at these new innovations non-normatively and from an academic standpoint, to examine the way that they shape our social conditions and cultural systems, which in turn shape the culture that we consume and produce, the identities that we create, and the mode of social change by which we are swept up. Unfortunately, I quickly ran into two substantial, interrelated problems.

First, the scholarship is often more polemic than scholarly. Warnings and prophecies abound. Some of this is unavoidable with a topic so relevant as this: Turkle is a brilliant and thorough researcher, but it is almost irresponsible to not advocate for policy change as a recognized expert in the rapidly changing, critical field of social studies. As Schumpeter notes, the great economists Keynes and Ricardo suffered the same problem; two great minds writing during the political turmoil of the Great Depression and the Corn Laws (respectively), neither could resist infusing their great general theories with implicit advice on every page, advice which “carries meaning only with references to the practical exigencies of the unique historical situation, of a given time and country.”

Second, the inevitable tendency to mix theory with policy combines with the radical newness of the subject matter to make Internet studies an extremely

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3 Schumpeter (1936).
speculative affair. Keynes was fortunate that his advice-laden theory concerned a subject that will forever be a monument in the history of economics (the Depression), but Ricardo did not and his theoretical relevance has borne the brunt of it. In a book that landed her the cover of Wired magazine, Turkle (1997) wrote a fascinating analysis of a popular and growing category of Internet-based community that has long since gone obsolete. It is all too easy to write only about the “practical exigencies of the unique historical situation” when discussing fast-changing technology.

The more I researched these recent communication technologies, the more I realized how desperately the subject as a whole needed new historical comparisons and scholarly theory. The third major problem that I discovered with the study of communication technology, and perhaps the most damning one, is that it has almost always been characterized by the first two problems of polemic and speculation. As soon as a new communication technology arises scholars jump to polemic and speculation, often shallowly mining historical examples of prior communication technology shifts in order to make suitable comparisons and lend gravitas to their contemporary claims. More concerned with the present than the past they leave the field of study before they are able to generate the sort of powerful but historically accurate theory that they might otherwise have been able to create – a piece of work worthy of the permanence of writing.

Ancient Greece, always something of a treasure trove for philosophers and social theorists looking for grand historical comparisons, has been subject to this pattern countless times. Halfway through the 20th century, many of the original media ecology and communication technology theorists, such as Marshall McLuhan and
other members of the Toronto School of communication theory, became interested in comparing the transition from orality to literacy in Ancient Athens to contemporary transitions from literacy towards electronic communication technologies. They sought to understand how the changing means of cultural transmission structured the mode of social change, identity, and consciousness in Athens and transfer the results into modern times.

In a thought-provoking but ambitiously grand article, Goody and Watt (1963) claimed no less than democracy, rational thought, philosophy, and historiography as the outputs of writing. Havelock (1963) followed this piece with an immense claim about Plato, arguing that the philosopher’s well-known detest for poets is a modern misinterpretation of the fact that he actually composed *The Republic* as a full-scale attack against oral-culture in order to replace it with a text-based culture of his own devising. Both articles are now critiqued heavily for their grand claim-making based on empirical inaccuracies, and yet there is a certain irony to this critique. The controversy and fame of their writings essentially launched the field of Ancient Greek literacy studies in a backlash for a more accurate understanding. Before them there was very little empirical or theoretical consensus to go on, but now we have decades of thorough scholarship on the subject of both Greek literacy and the oral tradition – the before and after of the communication technology shift. By proving them wrong, classical scholars have generated an impressive amount of knowledge that Havelock could have only dreamt of bringing to bear on his grand questions.

The time is ripe for scholars who are interested in the relationship between communication technology and social change to return to Ancient Athens. Historical

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comparisons are important in the study of technology and social theory more broadly. They can offer us a valuable platform and framework for conceptualizing the changes going on around us in a way that does not lead to narrow or polemical conclusions.

The study of Ancient Greek literacy is also important in its own right, for it offers us a new way to understand the role and perspective of Athens’ citizens – the authors who were experimenting with a radically new cultural transmission technology and the consumers whose lives were changed by it. Literacy developed more quickly and comprehensively in Ancient Athens than in any other Greek city-state, such that by the 5th and 4th centuries BCE – known as the Golden Age of Athens – literacy and text-based cultural transmission were prominent and widespread. Literacy emerged alongside some of the most important and revolutionary events in both the history of Greece and the history of the West in general. It is very possible that literacy had a hand in those developments, and perhaps the conclusions of this thesis will help future work prove such a ‘grand claim.’

In my thesis I endeavor to answer the three following questions about the communication shift in Ancient Greece:

**Key Questions**

1. What different kinds of culture succeed – which is to say, become absorbed into the Athenian ‘cultural commons’ – as a byproduct of the transition from oral-based to writing-based cultural transmission technologies?

2. How does the shift from oral-based to writing-based cultural transmission technologies create a different set of social conditions within Athens?
3. Building on the prior two questions, what are the implications of the shift from oral-based to writing-based cultural transmission processes for social change in Ancient Athens? We are particularly interested in three levels of social change: ideological-discursive (characterized by systems of thought), individual and social identity, and social-material.

The subject of my thesis – or explanatory variable, as it were – is a shift in the modes of cultural transmission processes. Cultural transmission is a general term, often defined in sociology and psychology as the way a group of people within a culture tend to learn and pass on new information. Alternatively, I also refer to the subject of my thesis as ‘communication platforms,’ ‘information and communication technologies (ICTs),’ and other various reorderings of those phrases. I explain the key cultural transmission processes in significant detail within the body of my thesis, and so it is not particularly necessary to limit myself to a stringent definition of the general case.

The dependent variable of my thesis is also purposefully general, as it would be much more problematic to overlook a key answer to Question 3 because it falls outside the scope of my analysis than it would be to include a few too many answers. Nevertheless, I categorize the levels of social change along three lines: ideological discursive, individual and social identities, and social-material change.

Answering my three questions requires breaking up my thesis into three chief subcomponents. In the first chapter, I examine a salient oral-based cultural transmission technology prevalent from the preliterate and early literate periods of Ancient Athens (loosely the 8th through 6th centuries BCE). I construct a basic model
to more rigorously describe what I call the Oral-Bardic cultural transmission process, which traces the evolution of cultural output in the preliterate performances of bards throughout Ancient Greece. In so doing, I am able to deductively infer the expected cultural output and social conditions that may arise as a consequence of the oral-based process (Questions 1 and 2). I do the same in the following chapter for a salient literate-based cultural transmission technology prevalent during approximately the 5th and 4th centuries BCE, the Literate-Platonic model. Having generated answers to Questions 1 and 2 for both oral-based and literate-based cultural transmission processes, I am then able to bring those answers to bear on Question 3 in an examination of the shift in cultural transmission processes.

**On the Shoulders of Four Giants – Theoretical Cornerstones**

My approach to answering my thesis questions is necessarily extremely multidisciplinarian, resting upon four distinct intellectual disciplines and bodies of theory. My thesis could not have occurred without the impressive scholarship from the following four disciplines: theories of communication and media technology, the context of Ancient Athenian literacy and orality, the model-based methodology of the social sciences and particularly economics, and a method of analysis and process-focused examination from Foucault.

**Communication and Media Technology Theory**

Innis (*Empire and Communications, Bias in Communications*), McLuhan (*The Gutenberg Galaxy, Understanding Media*), and others associated with the Toronto School were some of the first to study the relationship between communication technology and social change. Although important in understanding the influence of
ICTs on personal identities and social outcomes (the individual and material level, respectively), they largely failed to pick up on the crucial, prior relationship between ICTs and systems of thought (the ideological-discursive level), writing, as they did, before Foucault brought such concepts into the intellectual mainstream. Most of their theories are too general or too speculative to apply rigorously to the study of Ancient Athens, but their efforts at drawing attention to the role of communication technology in our everyday lives is critical to my thesis.

**The Context of Ancient Athens: Literacy and the Oral Tradition**

There are two fairly distinct fields of classical studies that I incorporate into my thesis: discussions of Athenian literacy and discussions of the Greek oral tradition. The latter is based largely around the sub-discipline of Homeric studies, which underwent a tremendous breakthrough with the publication of the Parry-Lord theory of oral-formulaic composition in 1960. Studying illiterate bards in Yugoslavia (which neighbors Greece), they theorized that the Homeric epics were a product of the oral tradition – rhapsodies of formulaic episodes, phrases, and clichés, stitched together sequentially over the course of centuries by perhaps hundreds of different, illiterate poets, whose poetic and stylistic choices were determined almost exclusively by the need to make their stories as memorable as possible. This Parry-Lord thesis is still generally upheld as the key theoretical model for oral composition and transmission. Their research launched the global study of oral tradition and opened the door for an eclectic group of scholars to participate in discussions of Homeric studies and the oral tradition: from classicists to anthropologists, philosophers to

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5 Lord (1960).
media theorists. I incorporate this research into the first chapter of my thesis in order to construct an amended model of the bardic transmission process in Ancient Greece that is tailored to answering my key questions.

To inform the second chapter of my thesis, concerning writing-based cultural transmission processes, I utilize several recent (1990s–present) empirical examinations of literacy and the textual dissemination of ideas in Ancient Athens, without which my models would have been impossible to construct. These scholars have emerged in a reactionary context against the grand theorists such as Havelock (Preface to Plato, The Muse Learns to Write) and Goody and Watt (1963). The studies of the grand theorists have been consistently critiqued for sometimes severe empirical falsities. More problematic is that Havelock appears to have almost single-handedly caused a half-century of classicists to refrain from claiming any effects of literacy on Ancient Athens. In the last few years, however, there is evidence for an increasing appreciation of their approach to discovering the influence of literacy.7 Butler (2002) published an exceptionally well-received book on the influence of writing and publication for Cicero, arguing against the conventional wisdom that Rome was a primarily ‘oral society.’8 Ober (1989, 2008) uses recent literature on literacy and information transmission to examine their influence on the Athenian

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6 For instance, Thomas, one of the most brilliant and thorough scholars of Greek literacy and oral tradition, did not really begin writing about literacy until 1989 (1989, 1992). For dates on a few other scholars of Greek literacy, see Missiou (2011), the first edited volume on the rise of Athenian literacy (Yunis, 2002), Allen (2011), and Ober (1989, 2008). Some of the more recent of these studies, notably Allen’s, could not have even existed without digital data collection technologies (2011: 3, on her indebtedness to computers).

7 See Thomas (1992) and Missiou (2011). For a general shift back toward Havlock’s themes, if not actual conclusions, see how Allen (2011: 168) even calls Havlock’s argument about Plato “the nearest antecedent” to a major subsection of her argument, while criticizing Havlock’s numerous misinterpretations.

8 Butler (2002).
political system. The first edited volume to pressingly argue for the significance of writing in the Greco-Roman world was recently published by Johnson and Parker (2009).\(^9\) In a recent examination of the fragmentation of public forums for media performance in Ancient Athens, Wallace (1995) even speculates that may be a “much broader cultural model that affects many aspects of [Athenian] life.”\(^10\) In chapter three, I attempt to construct such a model, which is greatly improved by Wallace’s excellent empirical observations about the role of media in Athens.

Allen (2011) has published perhaps the most significant attempt to recenter writing-based cultural transmission processes as a significant component of Athenian social life and change. She returns to Havelock’s initial question of why Plato wrote (the book’s name is literally *Why Plato Wrote*) and examines Plato’s influence on 4\(^{th}\) century Athenian cultural life as a case study on the relationship between ideas and events. The text underlies my model in chapter three and is in many ways the work of scholarship that my thesis responds to most. I will give a somewhat extended summary of her arguments.

Allen argues that Plato wrote in order to “effect political change,” to “change Athenian culture and thereby transform Athenian politics.”\(^11\) For Plato, philosophy was a mode of being and thinking, a way of life, and he hoped to spread it to others. It is quite difficult to convince people to radically alter their way of life, especially an entire city of people, yet Plato believed that he might be able to do so through writing. Allen gives us a commendably bold reinterpretation of Plato, who has long been imagined in the Christian tradition as an apolitical, ascetic philosopher with his head

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\(^9\) Johnson and Parker (2009).  
\(^{10}\) Wallace (1995).  
\(^{11}\) Allen (2011: 4).
in the clouds. While her analysis of Plato’s intentions sets the stage for my argument, I do not actually engage with this question in my analysis, as I am most interested in Plato’s actual influence irrespective of his intentions.

Allen answers my interest in the second half of her book, an empirical examination of Plato’s influence on 4th century Athens. Allen argues that Plato’s ideas launched a ‘culture war’ in Athens several decades after his death, a tense and momentous period in Athenian history where disillusionment with the Athenian way of life caused people to search, perhaps unconsciously, for a new one. Plato’s ideas were well-situated to take advantage of this culture war. Allen’s assessment is highly useful, insofar as it is an apt and well-researched case study upon which to build and test my model.

Allen’s work is also an ideal foundation from which to build upon. In her laudatory review of Why Plato Wrote for Classical Philology, Saxonhouse notes that Allen’s contributions to classical studies is twofold: explaining why Plato believed that his written words would have the impact that they do (in Part I) and then to illustrate this claim [in Part II] in the confines of fourth-century Athenian politics.12 There is a conspicuous gap here between the two parts however, as proving that Plato believed his written ideas carried social power does not prove that they actually did. Saxonhouse concludes that Allen’s book is a bold yet modest proposal, a “starting point” that is held back by “the notorious difficulties of causation.” If Allen’s project is to have the sort of impact on social change theory that she would like, it may require follow-up from a “social scientist to whom the task of analyzing the causal

12 Saxonhouse (2012).
claims in the second half of the book must fall.” To this point, let us discuss the third intellectual cornerstone of my thesis.

**A Model-Based Social Science Methodology**

Already we have seen, section two calls for a broader, more rigorous model as a way of structuring and describing the role of cultural transmission technologies in Ancient Athens (Wallace 1995, Allen 2011). While a significant amount of scholarship has been produced concerning the state of literacy and communication technology in Ancient Athens, no scholar has yet published a systematic attempt to trace the influence and implications of these technologies. Allen comes closest insofar as she provides us with empirical evidence of the influence of certain writings, but she leaves open the questions of how and why her discovered outcomes occurred. Havelock, then, is still perhaps the last person to try to explain the causal connections on a large scale, but his approach relied on a method of psychological analysis – concerning the conscious-shifting effects of reading alphabets and other things – which is now outdated.

Instead, this thesis relies on a particularly structured mode of analysis that is, admittedly, more common in the social sciences and even to economics than to classical studies or media ecology studies. I use a fairly rigid model-based methodology by structuring observational evidence and some existing theory into models, applying analytical tools more akin to game theory or rational expectations theory to them, and inferring general insights through reasoned deduction. Although I rely on numerous prior texts for my model-building, like the Parry-Lord ‘model’ of oral-formulaic composition as a basis for the orality model, and take the bulk of my
evidence for the literary model from Allen, no prior text that I have encountered in this field has at all attempted to create ‘models’ in the systematic manner of economists, political scientists, or natural scientists.

What does modeling bring to the table? It gives me a way to describe the on-the-ground realities of cultural transmission in Ancient Athens through the focused and narrow perspective of the cultural transmission technique itself. Some of the contextual nuances of Ancient Athenian cultural transmission are necessarily lost when using models, but this can also be a positive: a model that is too complex leads to less incisive and significant results, such that a level of imposed simplification could strongly help my analysis. Furthermore, it allows me to methodically trace the processes and mechanisms by which cultural platforms can influence society. I can, therefore, construct the sort of causal narrative that is crucial to building upon Allen’s project. To tie my inferred model-based results to the large-scale implications and effects of shifting cultural transmission technologies, however, I need one more method of analysis.

**Foucault and the Knowledge-Power Relationship**

Allen wishes to explicate the relationship between ideas and events, yet doing so requires an understanding of a sub-relationship: the connection between discursive knowledge and power. In translating the model-based ‘results’ of my chapters into conclusions about the influence of a shift in communication platforms – i.e. using the answers to Key Questions 1 and 2 to generate answers to Question 3 – I must use a framework that focuses on the relations of power that are linked to discourses. Foucault, particularly his genealogical methods as developed in his latter years,
provides us with the theory, framework, jargon, and concepts for discovering and articulating the knowledge-power relationship. Several Foucauldian terms will arise in the course of thesis – such as technologies of the self, conditions of possibility, discursive formations, and surely more. I will try to define them clearly when they do. Essentially, the Foucauldian methodology is useful in this thesis insofar as it points me toward the analysis of two key aspects: processes and mechanisms of domination as well as behavioral strategies. Both help me to explicate the knowledge-events and knowledge-power relationship in a process-focused way.

**Beginning to Begin**

Before we begin, it is worth signaling that we will be uncovering and discussing a significant number of results and implications of the cultural transmission processes in this thesis – about 26 distinct results (answers to Key Questions 1 and 2) and thirteen distinct implications (answers to Key Question 3).

For clarity, reference, and for the more visual-learners, please see the cumulative list at the end of chapter four. In short, by comparing the results of the Oral-Bardic to the Literate-Platonic transmission techniques, we are able to understand how the shift to writing influenced social change along three levels: the ideological-discursive, characterized by a community’s changing system of thought; individual and social identities, characterized by the changing experiences of audiences; and social-material life more broadly, characterized by the changing relationship between knowledge and power. After inferring our model-based insights, we compare them to Allen’s case study of Plato’s influence on the unprecedented ‘culture war’ of 4th century Athens. The results of this comparison are startling: the
emergence of a textual transmission process may have been a necessary condition for the very existence of ‘culture wars’ as a mode of social change, such that Plato’s influence may have been just as much a product of his clever and timely exploitation of the writing process as a product of his actual ideas.

On my methodology, in truth, I have not come across any scholarship that takes such a multi-disciplinarian approach as the one in this thesis. While it is a risk, I believe that the question of how communication technologies influenced Ancient Greek life is ready to be answered more comprehensively and more ambitiously than any time in the last fifty years. I am particularly hopeful for the merger between a more analytical, model-based methodology from the social sciences (particularly from economics methodology) and the traditional methods of textual analysis and archaeological discovery (in the non-Foucauldian meaning) that characterize the study of Ancient Athens. Allen mentions explicitly that she would not have been able to write the empirical assessment in Part II of *Why Plato Wrote* were it not for relatively recent advances in digitalizing classical evidence. As statistical techniques and computing power advance further, I imagine that there will be even more room for social science methodologies – whether of model-building or data analysis – to complement traditional classical scholarship.

Lastly, by using a tripartite approach – of comparing two relatively distinct models of cultural transmission as they developed and interacted in a critical moment in time – to answer our three key questions about the role of literacy-based cultural transmission in Athens, we will be in a better place to also discuss contemporary
shifts in cultural transmission technologies, such as with Internet-based ICTs. As we have used Allen’s work as a foundation to create this thesis, perhaps our conclusions on Athens can be used in some future work as a platform from which to discuss how Internet transmission technologies can also affect a community’s cultural output, social conditions, systems of thought, identity-formation, and mode of social change.

The comparison between the emergence electronic communication technology and of writing has been bungled before due to slipshod and sweeping approaches, but this can change. Ong has claimed that the computer and writing are the two most transformative communication technologies in human history. If any historical comparison deserves to be made and could sufficiently shed light on the sweeping changes that we are encountering now, it is this one: between the shift from oral to literate cultural transmission processes in Ancient Athens and the emergence

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13 On the insights and limitations of models, however, see Morgan (2012).
II. THE ORAL-BARDIC MODEL

Introduction

For several hundred years scholars have puzzled over what was known as the Homeric Question: who exactly was Homer? It stemmed not from one specific problem with Homer, but from a confluence of vaguely off-putting concerns about Homer and his poems: that we have no bibliographical record of the author, that he occasionally contradicts himself in his poems, and that his poems are oddly formulaic and repetitive, as when Achilles is repeatedly described as “swift-footed,” even when resting.

Few guessed that the answer would have anything to do with pre-literate ‘orality,’ a culture and epoch typically written-off as pre-cultural and primitive until Alfred Lord and Milman Parry published their joint discovery in the 1930s, popularized in 1960 with the publication of Lord’s *The Singer of Tales*.

Their research also became the basis for the burgeoning study of oral tradition, and opened the door for a variety of tangential scholarly questions about this previously trivialized form of cultural transmission. An eclectic group of scholars, from classicists to philosophers, continue to study both ancient and contemporary cases of the oral tradition, in order to better shed light on how a predominantly oral-based culture – ‘orality’ – influences a community’s cultural style, cultural content, and mentality.

The latter question, of whether and to what extent the shift from an oral to literate mode of cultural transmission transforms the social conditions and mode of consciousness of a community, has generated particularly insightful debate. For the question, ultimately, transcends the parameters of Homeric studies and even classical
studies more broadly. Instead, it delves into the fundamental questions concerning the nature of oral culture, the society that produces it, and the way that a society’s communication technology can transform its people.

When analyzing a major technology shift, such as the transition from an oral to literate mode of communication in Ancient Athens, it is critical to analyze both the old and new technologies. Only then would we be able to understand how the shifting cultural transmission process recreates the set of social conditions that partially determine numerous other aspects of the broader Athenian society. For us modern-day readers, who have lived in thoroughly literate societies all our lives, it is significantly more difficult to understand the oral technology of cultural transmission than the literate. Indeed, if we agree that an orality-era mentality is markedly different from a literate-era mentality, it can be difficult for us even to, as Ong puts it, “forget enough of our familiar present to reconstitute in our minds any past in its full integrity.” Thus, because we will never really be able to understand orality intuitively, orality scholars such as Ong tend to consider their studies partially as a process of ‘reconstructing’ a culture and mode of consciousness for modern readers, usually through deductive techniques.

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14 However, we ought to be careful to not fall into the trap of thinking of oral and literate technology as a discrete binary. Literacy in Ancient Athens was also significantly different from what we think of as literacy today. Thomas (1992), for instance, employs the distinction between ‘comprehension’ and ‘phonetic literacy (the ability to decode words silently versus merely pronouncing syllables orally) that Saenger (1989, esp. p. 142) coined in his study of literacy in the Middle Ages. Methodologically, it would be better to think instead in terms of the myriad possible oral and literate types of technologies, all of which arose and were proliferated in particular social contexts and for particular uses. This chapter focuses on the oral technology (or practice) of bardic performances, due to its importance and prevalence in Ancient Greece, but a more comprehensive study would do well to include other communication technologies of orality-era cultural transmission as well.

There is a critical problem with most of these studies, however. Ong (2002, originally 1982) and Havelock (1986) rely extensively on the Parry-Lord theory of oral-formulaic composition in order to deduce key aspects of the orality-era mindset. I would argue that they are held back by their reliance on a theory of oral composition that is simplistic and relatively ill defined. As Thomas (1992) has argued persuasively, the simplicity of the Parry-Lord model has led both them and their followers to focus too rigidly on the purportedly homogenizing and formulaic aspects of oral composition, to the point that they marginalize the creativity, innovation, and the celebration of the individual that were so clearly endemic to Ancient Athenian culture. I will need to rectify this problem in order to proceed with my comparative model-based analysis. Thus, I use the logic of social interaction, an evolutionary mindset that has been historically developed by game theorists, and a synthesis of empirical observations from both past and present oral societies, to create a more sophisticated but still simple evolutionary model of the oral-based cultural transmission process in Ancient Greece – the ‘Oral-Bardic’ model. Doing so will help me shed light on the three key question mentioned in the above chapter.

**The Homeric Question**

Parry and Lord’s paradigm-shifting answer to the Homeric Question (*The Singer of Tales*) is still something that many classicalists find uncomfortable to believe, if not outright incorrect. Martin West in *The Making of the Iliad*, who has been called the most brilliant Greek scholar of his generation, does not even agree

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16 They use other evidence as well, namely the interpretation of Ancient Greek texts and, particularly for Havelock, deductive reasoning based on characteristics of the Greek’s uniquely (at the time) phonetic alphabet. The latter reasoning, however, has been widely criticized by contemporary classics scholars, as Thomas (1992) recounts.

17 Thomas (1992: 50).
with the orality theory of Homer. He reverts to the pre-orality “analytical” method of resolving the Homeric Question popular with 19\textsuperscript{th} century scholars, and theorizes that one master poet painstakingly textually ‘revised’ (rather than ‘stitched together’) many other, textual, snippets of the Homeric epics, over the course of several decades. Bizarrely, he actually admits himself that critics may dismiss his book as “a self-indulgent bacchanal of the imagination,” given its necessary speculative approach to a lack of hard evidence. Or, as one reviewer puts it, that his answer to the Homeric Question “corresponds to no empirical reality.”\textsuperscript{18} If I might indulge in a bit of psychoanalysis: to a genius scholar who grew up in a modern world where singular genius, creativity, and particularly originality are celebrated, I can see why the dirty truth – that the Homeric genius is a product of illiterate entertainers – might be hard to accept.

Notwithstanding the few holdouts, the majority of scholars that ascribe to Lord’s orality-formulaic theory are predominantly concerned with answering the myriad Homeric Questions that Lord’s answer to the initial Homeric Question has produced. Jensen (\textit{Writing Homer}) gives us the most comprehensive theory of modern oral cultures as they apply to Homer, drawn from significant fieldwork into modern oral epic cultures. She is perhaps the authority on empirical information about the cultural transmission process in orality. Taking Parry-Lord as a canonical baseline she identifies the synchronous variation in composition that bards did in their performances as “composition in performance,” similar to the constrained inventiveness and improvisation of jazz players.

\textsuperscript{18} Ford (2012)
Nagy (*Homeric Questions*) presents the most ambitious model for answering what has become one of the most important debates in Homeric studies: how Homer was written, and how the written and orally composed poems interacted. He takes an evolutionary model (developed over the course of perhaps a dozen books, spanning over decades), and so seems similar to what I propose. However, he relies on a complex relationship between the oral tradition and written manuscripts – with ‘variants’ from the oral tradition picked up in the different manuscripts, over a five-stage two-thousand-year period – to argue that oral tradition eventually ‘crystallized’ over time into the two cohesive poems that we have today. Nagy’s model has generated some controversy, including criticisms that his evolutionary model breaks too radically from the generally accepted Parry-Lord theory of oral composition, but also on empirical grounds. Jensen, in particular, argues that his theory of how the oral tradition narrows and crystallizes stories into two overarching, cohesive ones, bears out in no modern examples of oral composition.

Jensen and Nagy also differ strongly in their explanations for how the Homeric texts that we read today were eventually created. Nagy argues that Homer evolved through a modified Oral Tradition that includes the standard bardic transmission process as well as through transcription (i.e. with many different oral and written versions, both based on each other). Jensen, meanwhile, believes that the poems were dictated at Athens’ Panathenaic festival (522 BC) by one winning genius poet, written down and perhaps compiled slightly, and then archived for several centuries while an oral, Homeric tradition continued to thrive independently. She posits that the recorded Homer barely influenced the oral tradition, instead only
gradually becoming the canonical Homer through proliferation in schools. Rosalind Thomas, a scholar of early literacy and the oral tradition in Ancient Greece, also believes generally in a theory of a literate ‘monumental poet,’ who borrowed from the oral tradition but, in an act of singular genius, developed it into the poem that we revere today.¹⁹

While this heated controversy over the question of how the Homeric poems were eventually recorded is not in itself relevant to my thesis, it brings up an important point: that the Iliad and Odyssey which we are all familiar with today are not the products of purely oral technologies. They come to us as texts, and so are inherently ‘mixed’ works. Thus, while some of the most important insights that we have on the oral transmission process comes from the field of Homeric scholarship, we cannot learn about the oral transmission process – and its effects on a community’s cultural commons and consciousness – merely by working backwards from the Homeric poems. Instead, I would argue that the best way to do so is to construct a model of the cultural transmission process in orality and make reasonable deductions based off of it, as I do in this paper.

Amongst the other important sources for my model are Scodel (Listening to Homer), who looks at how Homeric poems were performed in orality and emphasizes the dynamics of the audience and reception, and a wide range of authors that explore oral traditions in different geographies and periods, such as Finnegan (Oral Poetry), and the edited volume Oral Art Forms and their Passage into Writing. Of those that have used Parry-Lord’s model of oral composition to analyze the effects of orality, Ong (Orality and Literacy) and Havelock (Preface to Plato) are perhaps

¹⁹ Thomas (1992; 35).
the most prominent. Ong, a disciple of Marshal McLuhan, does so through the lenses of media and technology theory, while Havelock, a maverick classicist, does so as part of a grander argument that reimagines Plato as the champion of the new, literate mentality, recasting Plato’s opposition to poetry and mimesis as opposition to the anti-analytical, anti-abstract, anti-rational and ultimately orality-era mindset that the poets represented.

They extrapolate from Parry-Lord to claim that the mode of consciousness in orality was broadly defined by the “formulaic constitution of thought.” The form of oral culture must be as mnemonic as possible, in order to ensure that it would not be lost. Formulaic thought, rhythm, patterns, and repetition were essential for knowledge to be recalled and passed on. Thus, even thinking complexly in non-formulaic ways, or not in terms of a ‘memory system,’ would be a waste insofar as it would quickly be forgotten, even to the thinker. Hence, consciousness in orality is a function of a perennial memory constraint. Both scholars have generated powerful insights about orality, but both also tend to write in sweeping generalities, perhaps in part due to being tied to Parry-Lord’s simplistic oral-formulaic composition theory. Although Parry-Lord do tell a revolutionary story of cultural transmission in orality, I hope to improve on theirs by creating an evolutionary model that is more intentional and clear about my assumptions and about the key interaction nodes, players and their preferred strategies. I use Basu (Prelude to Political Economy), several contributions from the field of new institutional economics (Economics as a Process), and Weingast’s methodologically insightful model of the political foundations of democracy as a

**The Oral-Bardic Model: Evolutionary Replication**

The evolutionary process of orality in Ancient Greece, by which certain tales are replicated and absorbed into a community’s cultural commons while others are not, can be thought of as a process of supply and demand. A certain group of professional bards carry a supply of diverse tales in their memories. They perform their tales to different audiences, and if a tale meets all the audience’s demands it is absorbed into its cultural commons. If another bard happens to be in that audience he may learn that story too, leading to its likely replication. If it doesn’t meet audience demands the tale is modified or eventually replaced by another in the singer’s repertoire. For both simplicity and practically I have modeled the replication of refinements within one story (S), which follows the same supply and demand pattern as replication between different stories: bards bring innovations to an audience and the innovation is either maintained, rejected, and/or replicated by other bards according to the logic of the social interaction. Below I will elaborate on the two types of players (supply-side bards and demand-side audiences), clarify the replication and mutation processes, and walk through the model in-depth.

**Supply Side: Bards**

The bard’s vocation in Ancient Greece was a difficult one. He – and it was always a he – was as much an artist as any performing singer or actor is today, requiring the voice, musical chops (he often played an instrument), and stage presence that both professions need to possess. Further, the role required significant
intellectual demands on his memory. Altogether the vocation commanded a significant degree of professionalism and training, although the profession’s prestige varied between different oral cultures (several cultures thought of the bards as modern cultures think of Gypsies). In many areas, including possibly Greece, bards that sang epic poems – as opposed to simpler, or more light-hearted stories – were particularly well regarded, and the right to perform epics was bequeathed only to certain families.

Bards underwent extensive training and apprenticeship from an early age in performance, musical, and memorization techniques. After apprenticeship they would travel extensively in order to discover and learn new tales, eventually building a diverse repertoire in order to satisfy specific audience requests. They would typically travel less frequently as they aged, collecting less new stories and instead focusing on and refining the ones that they already knew.

Bards had a clear economic incentive to refine their stories to audience demands. They were often paid as street performers are now, asking for collections at the end of their story (or sometimes, devilishly, they would stop their tale at the most suspenseful part to ask for donations). Otherwise patrons would pay them to perform at specific events, and would probably not hire them again if they had disappointed the audience. Sometimes the incentive to cater to audiences could be even more than economic: the Odyssey mentions a bard who so upset his audience that they nearly killed him. The content of a bard’s stories truly lived or died by the audience’s reaction.

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20 Jensen, 82.
21 Ibid, 91.
Besides the need to meet the audience’s preferences (i.e. ‘demand’), a bard’s stories are determined by two factors: his personal preference for a story and his memory constraint. The former, however, can be set-aside from our evolutionary model as a random as long as there is a large enough $n$ of bards.\textsuperscript{22} Thus, the memory constraint becomes the key supply-side evolutionary criteria. Although extraordinarily good by today’s standards, a bard’s memory was still limited. There are three salient consequences of this memory constraint. First, a bard can only remember a limited number of stories, which would be trivial compared to any decent-sized library. Second, the singer’s tales must be as memorable as possible if they hope to be retold. Third, the bard simply cannot memorize the entirety of a tale, especially of an epic.

Oral bards across the globe are compelled by these latter two facts to do two fundamental tasks: ‘mental editing’ in between performances and “composition in performance.”\textsuperscript{23} Every performance required at least some degree of improvisation or freestyling, called “composition in performance.” A scholar reports that even when one bard was asked to memorize another bard’s story, there would still be only about 70\% overlap in content.\textsuperscript{24} Bards had no choice but to innovate and experiment. Next, bards would edit their poems at two different stages: first, between first learning and

\begin{itemize}
\item This holds true so long as we have a statistically large enough group of bards whose personal preferences are distributed randomly. Of course it is possible that bards, as a distinct social class, could have a systematic bias to prefer a certain type of tale. However, these types of preferred tales would also have to be equally as ‘profitable’ as other tales (i.e. generate the same positive audience response), so that the choice between telling a tale or innovation that the author preferred versus did not prefer would be between two Pareto optimal points. Although interesting, let us disregard this caveat for a) simplicity, and b) a lack of insight into the particular cultural preferences of Ancient Greece’s bardic class.
\item Lord (1960).
\item Ong (1982: 64).
\end{itemize}
performing a tale, for mostly mnemonic purposes; and second, he will also mentally edit his stories after performances, upon reflecting on what parts of his story – particularly, his spontaneous, freestyled additions – were and were not well received by his audience.

**Demand Side: Audiences**

Bards would perform anywhere that people congregated. Of their own accord they might perform in market places or public gathering spots. They were also often hired by patrons to sing at certain events, like weddings. Many were also regularly part of religious festivals. Their performances were generally less formal than we might think of them today, but ranged widely depending on the setting. It was not unusual for bards to engage the audience in their storytelling, with call-and-response routines or even having short conversations with audience members in the middle of the performance. Hecklers were not uncommon, either. Other bards were also often in the audience, and would be more likely to replicate the original bard’s stories or innovations if they were well received.

Although each audience in Greece could be quite different, all saw bards as fulfilling two functions: as entertainers and ‘historians.’ Audience preferences flowed from those functions. From the former, we can say that they preferred stories that were ‘pleasing’ – the essential but ineffable quality that causes a tale to ‘stick’ and become popular. Given that the aim of this study is to understand what was distinct about cultural transmission in orality we luckily do not have to concern ourselves with the impossible task of pinning down this preference, as it remains approximately constant throughout all types of cultural transmission – oral, literate, or beyond.
**Contextual Validity**

The latter function that audiences expected a bard to fulfill – that of a ‘historian’ – requires some explanation. Today we go to a musical concert or theatrical show and do not typically expect to come away with fundamental knowledge about our ancestors, our tribal or national history, or any of the other knowledges that constitute our social identity. Stories in orality were expected to do so, and therefore had to be ‘truthful’ not in any historical or objective sense but in a way that maintained the integrity of the present over the integrity of the past, affirming the audience’s tribe as a culturally and historically valid community.\(^\text{25}\) This often resulted in a sort of “structural amnesia.” For instance, an epic poem that recounts a preliterate Ghananese tribe’s central political myth states that the tribe’s founder had seven sons, who each ruled the tribe’s seven territories. When scholars checked back on the tribe several decades later, after wars had caused the seven territories to consolidate into five, they found that the poem had actually changed as well, to claiming that the founder had only five sons.\(^\text{26}\) In orality stories need not be objectively or historically accurate to meet audience demands, only ‘contextually valid.’ The bards are held to high standards, too, as audiences were typically already fairly familiar with the stories – or at least their community’s changed version of the story – and could therefore take the bard to task.\(^\text{27}\)

An audience’s demand for ‘contextual validity’ in their stories is perhaps both partially exogenous and endogenous to the technologically determined cultural transmission process. Most arguments point to it being exogenous from the

\(^{25}\) Jensen, 89.
\(^{26}\) Ong, (1982:46).
\(^{27}\) Jensen, 101.
transmission process: the relationship between history and objective truth is wrapped up in the broader story of the ascent of reason and objectivity over time, which is explained by the classical story of civilization’s grand progress from tradition to modernity. Marx would argue that it is caused by changes in the mode of economic production, while Max Weber would argue that the trend of rationalization is caused by religious and a confluence of other values. Some social theorists, however, do argue that it is due to shifts in the communication technology (i.e. endogenous in my model), like members of the Toronto School of communication theory, including Innis and McLuhan.

It is always difficult to choose between contradicting but equally impressive grand theorists. Instead, it might be best to stay within our field of research, looking for empirically backed conclusions by scholars of Ancient Greek literacy and examining evidence of our own. As for scholars, in her review of the literature Thomas strongly argues against the ‘broad’ theorists, finding that ‘narrow’ theorists who ascribe to an ‘ideological model’ of literacy (as a technology whose uses and effects are determined by the social context with which it develops) are more compelling.\textsuperscript{28} Lloyd, in a thorough study of how rational scientific inquiry gradually emerged out of ‘magical’ practices in Ancient Greece, also argues that unique political and social conditions within Athens were more important than the rise of literacy technologies.\textsuperscript{29}

Empirically, arguments that tie literacy to the ascent of reason and the decoupling of culture from ‘contextual validity’ also tend to have a chronology

\textsuperscript{28} Thomas, 25.
\textsuperscript{29} Lloyd, 622.
problem. While the desire for ‘contextual validity’ in history and stories has greatly decreased over time, it still exists even today, in our highly literate and rationalized society. The Catholic Church claims the historical veracity of “apostolic succession,” the notion that the Catholic ministry – and it alone, of all churches – can be linked by continuous succession to the apostles. The US has founding myths about George Washington (and his cherry tree) and other founders that persist in our cultural commons despite their historical inaccuracies.

One last empirical fact in support of ‘contextual validity’ as an audience demand that is exogenous to the process of cultural transmission is the fact that the switch from desiring ‘contextual validity’ to ‘historical truth’ occurred so quickly in Ancient Athens. Although only at the beginning of its gradual transition to a literate society, Athens’ earliest writers showed a newfound proclivity for objective knowledge and historical truth. Herodotus and Thucydides both pioneered the idea of historical veracity, while Socrates and Plato constructed philosophy as a discipline devoted to the pursuit of truth. Athens’ transition away from ‘contextual validity’ in its cultural commons occurred far more quickly than most other societies where literacy was being introduced, indicating that a greater factor than just the transition to literacy was at play.\(^{30}\) Such empirical examples point to the fact that the demand for ‘contextual validity’ is exogenous, which allows us to work it into our model without problems. However, there is an interesting theoretical argument in support of

\(^{30}\) There are several theories that seek to explain Athens’ unique proclivity towards the truth. The Pythagorean cult, for instance, one of the earliest communities of truth-seekers, was driven by powerful religious and mystical beliefs. Lloyd (1979) connects the rise of rational scientific inquiry in Ancient Athens to Athenian political and legal customs: the celebration of agonistic competition and of “equal speech” (agon and isegoria).
The above tree diagram explains the evolutionary process of cultural transmission and replication in orality for a certain, random innovation (or, synonymously, mutation) $x$, within a larger story $S$. For simplicity we will assume that the bard only tells one
story, and adds only one type of mutation per performance (although in actuality the bard often told multiple stories and included myriad ‘innovations’ in each telling). We assume also that the bard is operating at memory capacity, and is therefore unable to add more to the story. Thus, an innovation is defined not as an addition to the story but as a substitution to its existing content.

We start with a given Story S performed in performance A.1 by Bard A. During his speech, he improvises and comes up with mutation x, thus telling the story (S+x). Although he is forced to improvise due to his memory constraint he may do so strategically as well, such as to contextualize and adapt the story to his audience, in order to both conform to their notion of contextual validity and to maximize their pleasure.

The audience then responds to the bard’s innovation x, governed by the dual criteria of pleasure and contextual validity. Their feedback usually comes nearly instantaneously; an apt comparison might be to how quickly a stand-up comedian realizes whether a new joke is well received. Bards read the audience’s reactions, which may be either subtle or quite obvious (like when they start throwing rocks). For simplicity, we will say that audiences either clearly accept or reject mutation x. If accepted, the mutation will be absorbed into a community’s cultural commons, although at this point it will not necessarily be replicated.

If rejected, Bard A will either modify his story to remove the innovation or keep it in his speech. If the former, he removes mutation x from the story between performances in the mental editing (refining) phase, and then in his next performance A.2 he will tell story S again, adding mutation y instead during the composition-in-
performance phase. He hopes that mutation y will be accepted where x was not. At
this point in the tree diagram x has been completely removed: it has neither been
absorbed into a community’s cultural commons nor replicated. If the Bard instead
decides to ignore the audience’s response and keep x he will continue telling x in
future performances (as well as e, a catch-all for other mutations), and it will persist
until either it is eventually accepted or until the bard retires. Incidentally, it is entirely
possible that a mutation might be accepted by some audiences but not others. We
could represent this probability of acceptance as ‘p’ if we would like, but for the sake
of simplicity, and because the inclusion wouldn’t be particularly useful for answering
my formal questions, I will leave it out of the model.

If on the other hand the audience accepts mutation x from performance A.1,
Bard A will continue to tell x in future performances; note that this far-left node
functions the same as the far-right node, except that, in this part of the model, x has
been absorbed into a community’s cultural commons. Mutation x will only be
replicated if and only if the bard-to-bard “critical transmission phase” occurs,
whereby it then becomes one of innumerable mutations that have gone into crafting
this evolutionarily-developed story.31 We will assume for simplicity that this only
occurs if another bard is in the audience, and also that the bard will only even
consider replicating the story if he sees that the audience accepts it.32

31 Ibid, 142.
32 We could problematize both of these assumptions. First, several other methods of bard-to-
bard transmission existed, such as taking on apprentices and assistants. This would imply that
taking on apprentices increases the chance of one’s mutations being replicated. (Perhaps not
coincidentally I have heard that a similar correlation exists amongst academics, between the
number of grad students a professor advises and the likelihood that hir ideas will not fall out
fashion amongst the next generation of scholars.)
He will then choose to replicate mutation x if it meets his dual criteria of memorable and personal preference, with the latter criteria being a wash, however. Thus, memorability of the mutation is the defining criteria for replication, and if Bard B finds the mutation memorable enough he will replicate it through a process of post-performance mental editing, whereby he reconfigures mutation x into x’, a mutation that integrates with his personal mnemonic structure. Further performances by Bard B, like example B.1, will then be a base story S’ (S+x’) plus any improvised mutations z. This evolutionary cycle could then continually indefinitely, with the tree diagram starting with Bard B and Story S’, for thousands of bards over the course of centuries.

Note that Bard B’s mental editing process is different from Bard A’s insofar as he reconfigures x again for mnemonic purposes into x’. In fact, this process (and section of the diagram) is essentially Parry-Lord’s original, simpler model of oral-formulaic composition, which Ong summarizes succinctly as arguing that “virtually every distinctive feature of Homeric poetry is due to the economy enforced on it by oral methods of composition.”33 Although a useful starting-point, I would argue that building the performance-audience dynamic into my model, as I have done, is essential for conceptualizing the cultural transmission process and its outputs.

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Second, although audience acceptance in performance A.1 is a useful signal of future audience acceptance, a bard might also replicate another bard’s rejected mutation if he believes that he will be able to make it accepted for other reasons (i.e. if he thinks his musical or storytelling abilities are better than the other bard’s, or if he thinks it would be more appropriate for a different audience). But these are fairly minor caveats that need not be addressed beyond footnote musings.

33 Ong, 21.
Characteristics of the Model

While the cultural transmission process in orality overall is quite different from the text-based one of literacy, two characteristics seem particularly critical. The first is the dynamic between immediate audience feedback and consequent refinement. With literacy, feedback is a slow and discrete process: authors might ask colleagues to edit their works before publishing, receive feedback from reviewers within several months of publishing, and might not even receive the most important feedback – on whether their work has been memorialized as a ‘classic’ – until well after their death. In oral performances feedback is so immediate that bards might even reactively refine their stories during the same performance – think how a bard might backtrack after getting a negative reaction from the crowd. Further, the feedback occurs continuously throughout the entire performance, which the bard monitors closely by reading his audience’s reactions. The implication of this dynamic is stories that are highly iterative, which respond quickly to near-instant and comprehensive feedback. A modern comparison might be if an author asked a focus group to respond to every single line of his text, and then somehow incorporated those responses through dynamic refinement.

The second interesting characteristic is the practice of sequential refinement, where Bard B freely refines over Bard A’s innovations (changing x to x’, adding z). The implication here is that stories are ‘crowd sourced’ across generations, where each bard’s story (S) is a stitched-together confluence of the best contributions of hundreds of bards before him. The potential for crowd sourced content is significantly less likely in a literate culture, for the simple reason that pages of writing are harder
to edit and reconfigure than a speech.\textsuperscript{34} The word ‘crowdsourcing’ also has a very Internet-related connotation, which I bring up intentionally. Several Internet theorists, such as Yochai Benkler, point to the advent of open-source software development, or crowd sourced content sites like Wikipedia, as a fundamentally new mode of ‘peer production,’ which would be impossible without the Internet’s networked, collaborative functionalities.\textsuperscript{35} Although the Internet appears to create a system of synchronous crowdsourcing, whereas orality encourages sequential crowdsourcing, it seems clear that the technology of the cultural transmission process is the major force behind the predominance of both.

\textbf{Results: Expected Cultural Output}

Once bardic personal preferences and audience entertainment pleasure have been neutralized, there are two essential criteria for cultural evolution in orality: the supply-side memory constraint and the demand-side need for contextual validity. Based on these criteria and the overall transmission process we can make several claims about what these stories will look like. To list a few of the most salient:

1. \textbf{Stylistically formulaic}: Bards will shun intricate phrasings and syntax in favor of those that are more memorable. Few mnemonic devices are as powerful as rhythm, and so verse plays a crucial role in these stories.

\textsuperscript{34} This is not to say that multi-person and multigenerational refinement did not happen at all in literacy. Stephen Greenblatt’s \textit{The Swerve}, an analysis of how Lucretius was rediscovered and replicated, discusses how the cultural replication process amongst monks in the Middle Ages led to numerous textual refinements and amendments by the monk copyists. Yet neither the scale of refinement nor the number of creative participants matched that of orality’s cultural transmission process. (Side note: thanks to Professor Bonin for pointing this book and fact out to me).

\textsuperscript{35} Benkler (2006).
2. **Narratively formulaic**: Plots will be formulaic as well, for memorability. The *Iliad* in fact has several recurring plot/episodic themes, such as ‘the council,’ or ‘the gathering of the army.’\(^{36}\) Although bards were capable of impressive narrative subtlety, like flashbacks and subplots, plots as disjointed as, say, Joyce’s *Ulysses* would be too difficult for both the bard to recall and the audience to hold in their minds.

3. **Redundant**: Repetition is another useful mnemonic device that would make strategic sense to utilize. We could also think of several other characteristics along these lines, i.e. stylistic devices that make memorization easier.

4. **Homeostatic**: Stories will morph to maintain the equilibrium of the audience community, affirming its common practices and norms as historically coherent. The pursuit of historical truth, or any other historiographical standard, is generally secondary or unimportant.

5. **Thematically Majoritarian**: Where story iterations are a function of the immediate feedback of crowds, the majority of the crowd – or at least the vocal majority – will determine the type of thematic refinements and that succeed. Story content and themes will reflect the most popular tastes and preferences of a community as opposed to minority ones.

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**Results: Social Conditions**

The characteristics of the cultural transmission process and its outputs have wide-ranging effects. Fundamentally, the stories that we tell and listen to are reflections of ourselves; they are critical factors in the formation of a person’s cultural

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\(^{36}\) Lord, (1960: 68)
identity and in the construction of society writ large. As well, the technical process by which culture is transmitted can be just as important as the actual content. We can identify at least five salient social conditions that arise from the evolutionary model and the analysis thus far, and deductively infer their potential effects.

1. **Memory Constraint**
   The memory constraint limits the diversity of culture in a society, as no man can keep a library in his head. This lack of diversity would apply to the content that citizens can use for analogies and metaphors (plots, characters, and situations)\(^{37}\) and also to the actual size of a vocabulary – in terms of both the amount of familiar expressions or phrases in a language, and perhaps even the amount and diversity of actual words themselves.

   We could expect this to lead to generally more homogenous thought processes between people in the same oral culture, since the mental connections that people make and the mental ‘reference points’ that they use (i.e. examples, allusions, allegories) will overlap more so than with the more diverse, sprawling cultural commons found in literate and digital cultures. This (relative) homogenization of a community’s thought processes, however, is independent of whether the community actually values individualism and uniqueness. I can’t see any reason why they could not exist simultaneously in the same community, as in Ancient Athens.

2. **Group Audiences**
   Culture would be predominantly transmitted in groups, as bards would prefer to perform to as large an audience as possible for maximal payment.

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\(^{37}\) Allen (2011) argues that one of the most important reasons behind Plato’s decision to write dialogues was his theory of language, and particularly metaphor, as a powerful agent of social change.
Members in a community will tend to have a larger set of shared experiences than communities in literacy, where people are free to absorb culture in solitude. This is similar to but also distinctly different from the first condition. A modern comparison to the first condition would be how many Americans used to get their news from Walter Cronkite, and therefore had a shared set of knowledge and reference points. A modern comparison to the second condition would be how Americans can recall their location and mental state during the 9/11 bombings, a shared experience. The effects are similar for both, though: bringing a community together and making them more likely to be ‘on the same page’ (pun absolutely intended).

3. **Crowd Sourced Stories**

The characteristic of multigenerational crowdsourcing implies that cultural content *writ large* will be more crowd sourced, rather than individuated.

The concept of an authorial ‘voice’ in orality therefore differs subtly but substantially from today’s notion, perpetuated by writing instructors, that writers need to find their original and distinct voice. In orality the notion of a literally distinct voice, as embodied and wrapped up in a physically unique performance, must have been obvious to audiences that are used to getting their culture from a physical person. Along with the necessity and importance of frequent, spontaneous experimentation (oral-formulaic composition), specific performances could be highly individualized, unique, and innovative. The crowd-sourced epic poem though, despite being composed of thousands of innovations by unique individual performers, would not in a macro sense be individualized, nor would an individualized ‘authorial voice’ emerge.
4. **Memory Archiving**

Individual memory is the predominant mode of cultural recording and archiving, as opposed to an unchanging ‘systemic memory’ such as texts in an archive.

The concepts of authenticity, genuineness, ‘literary canon’ and ‘scripture’ that we now ascribe to certain texts would have been much different in orality. Indeed, I would question whether one could even have a preliterate ‘canon’ as we think of it today, in a world where the average epic differs by at least 30% from one retelling to another. Consider how early Muslims used the Quranic descriptor “People of the Book” – referring to the Christians and Jews, the other faiths that held written scripture – as one of their most meaningful ways of distinguishing between types of cultural communities. In a community where literal cultural preservation was impossible, concepts of a ‘canon’ and of ‘scripture’ would have at least been much more fluid than they are today, if not perhaps even significantly less important overall.

5. **Iterative, Continuous Feedback**

Bards needed to be responsive to the audience’s immediate, continuous feedback in order to successfully refine their stories. The most successful bards would therefore be those that could anticipate or predict an audience’s reaction, rather than those that just guessed (throwing mutations against the wall and hoping that they stick).

Bards were highly empathetic and excellent readers of social dynamics.

6. **Immediate Demand Pressure**

The stakes were high for bards: their art was judged critically by a temporally and geographically bound audience, and if the bard did not respond quickly to the
audience’s critiques their mutation or story would be swiftly rejected, leading to neither replication nor cultural absorption. Oral transmission creates the conditions that culture must be immediately responsive to demand pressure, by specific audiences that must be encountered in person.

These two forces are practically nonexistent in literacy, where culture would be under significantly less immediate evolutionary pressure to respond to audience demands, and where the nature of that audience would differ, too. In literacy, writers can write for any audience that they wish, with little geographic or even temporal restrictions. Thucydides was perhaps the first author to clearly recognize this: as he says at the beginning of his grand History of the Peloponnesian War, “I have written my work, not as an essay which is to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time.”38 Looking at the original Greek shows us even more clearly how Thucydides is making a powerful, conceptual break from the orality-based norms of cultural transmission that preceded him. He says that he wants his work to be an eternal κτήμα – a possession, or piece of property – rather than a παραχρήμα ἄκοβεν, which literally means something “to be heard on the spot.”

This social condition gives a surprising case for the criteria of ‘contextual validity’ being partially endogenous to the cultural transmission process. Why? In orality, the bard must perform for a specific, contextual audience; to do this successfully he must use persuasive techniques such as building rapport with audiences, but he also must adapt his stories to fit the specific audience’s preferences for both pleasure and contextual validity. In literacy, the author has much more freedom; he can write for a specific audience in the world that he has not yet met, or

38 Thucydides (History of the Peloponnesian War, 1.22).
even simply for ‘posterity’ (a completely unknown audience), and because of slackened demand pressure audiences living hundreds of years after his death may be the ones to absorb his work into the cultural commons. Because his audience is impersonal and decontextualized he also does not need to refine every sentence in response to audience feedback – focus-group style, as in orality – which gives him more freedom to pursue his personal preferences instead.

The cultural producers that most took advantage of this slackened demand pressure and depersonalized transmission, whether consciously or not, were those who were unpopular during their own lives – such as Thoreau, Edgar Allen Poe, even Marx. We often say that these authors were “ahead of their time,” but what I think we really mean by that phrase is that the author’s content was only ‘contextually valid’ for contexts and communities that were not their own, and only resonated with future communities or communities in different parts of the world from the author. Indeed, all three of my examples are cases where an author was ignored for extending genres and ideas in ways that challenged the expectations of contemporary audiences. Unlike in orality, however, literacy and writing made it possible for authors to write the stories that they preferred to write, even if they were ‘contextually invalid,’ and yet still, eventually, be replicated and absorbed into a cultural commons. The key difference in this regard between oral and literate transmission techniques is one of memory. In orality, all culture is dependent on personal memory to be maintained, whereas literacy can rely on a sort of systemic memory that can exist outside of any one person’s. As such, if a piece of culture (or cultural innovation) is lost in orality it must be reinvented to be recovered; if lost in literacy it need only be retrieved.
Literacy gives culture an opportunity to be more heterogeneous by delaying the homogenizing effect of contextual validity. Even more interestingly is that, in doing so, literacy also makes it more likely for population mutations to persist and expand, i.e. for obscure, oddball cultural outputs to drive genuine change in social communities.

To understand how this process works, take for example the community of Christendom in Europe during the Late Middle Ages, and suppose that it is composed 100% of people that care more about contextually valid stories that affirm their religiously-oriented community than rationalist-truth stories. If preliterate, the oral transmission process will ensure that any rationalist-truth stories go extinct quickly. If literate, however, the rationalist-truth stories can continue to exist, albeit as unpopular stories, for perhaps hundreds of years. Now suppose that the population mutates to include 5% people that prefer rationalist truth to contextual validity. This mutation could be random, or caused by the non-technological forces that led me to assume above that audience desires for ‘contextual validity’ are partially exogenous. In a literate culture this mutation group can discover the unpopular rationalist-truth story, which can influence them to be even more heterogeneous than before (insofar as one’s cultural consumption influences one’s identity and mode of thought), and through further proliferation the text can persuade others to prefer rationalist-truth to contextually valid stories as well.

In fact, this example is essentially the story that Stephen Greenblatt tells about the rediscovery of Lucretius in his book *The Swerve: How the World Became Modern*. A disillusioned monk comes across the last copy of Lucretius’ scientific
(and atheist) poem *On the nature of things*, makes dozens of copies of the text and sends it to similarly disillusioned colleagues, who continue to slowly proliferate it until, eventually, the text “changed the course of human thought and made possible the world as we know it… inspiring artists such as Botticelli and thinkers such as Giordano Bruno; shaped the thought of Galileo and Freud, Darwin and Einstein.”^39

Perhaps modernity would have arisen anyway without Lucretius, if someone eventually ‘reinvented’ the sort of poetic insight that Lucretius came up with, and concomitantly perhaps audience preference for ‘contextual validity’ would have diminished over time as well. Nevertheless, literacy absolutely expedited the process. After all Lucretius was not the only classical-era secular author that was rediscovered in the Late Middle Ages. Most of what we now have from the Greeks and Romans had neither been replicated nor absorbed into Europe’s cultural commons for centuries, due to them being ‘contextually invalid’ to the Christian priests and monks that controlled the replication and cultural transmission process. Would there have been a Renaissance – and attendant shift away from ‘contextual validity’ as a cultural criterion – at all if Europe had never discovered Lucretius and the other classical authors?

The audience criterion of contextual validity is thus caught in a strange feedback loop. By only allowing community-affirming stories to survive it causes cultural, and therefore social, homogeneity amongst communities. But it is also directly caused by that very social homogeneity, so that changes in the cultural replication function – such the addition of writing, as a new technology for cultural storage and replication – can undermine its hold on audiences.

Conclusion

Building a workable and well-defined model of orality’s cultural transmission process was an essential prerequisite to answering the first two of our three key questions. I expanded my model significantly from Parry-Lord’s original model of oral-formulaic composition, creating an evolutionary model that focuses on the supply-and-demand style interaction between bards and audiences, clarifying assumptions, locating key interaction nodes, and explaining strategies in-depth. While there is always a question of whether a complex system may not be amenable to game theoretic modeling and its necessary simplifications, I found that the technology of bardic, orally-based cultural transmission is just simple enough of a process to be ideally suited for it. I identified several caveats to the model and explored areas where it could be expanded in footnotes, but none proved particularly important enough to merit inclusion or modification of the model.

Building this Oral-Bardic model has helped us to generate a fair amount of deductive insights that help to answer our key questions. Discovering that the transmission process leads to highly iterative and crowd-sourced stories helps to clarify the divide between scholars such as Havelock and Thomas – the former who see the Parry-Lord model as leading to non-individualized and homogenous cultures, the latter who find this difficult to square with the facts of Ancient Athens and other contemporary preliterate cultures – insofar as it provides a model for how individuated, unique performances can aggregate into a non-individuated (crowd-sourced), evolutionarily-developed story overall.

We will keep our results in mind as we proceed to the next chapter, skipping forward a few centuries to explore the literate-era cultural transmission process that
came to rival and oppose the Oral-Bardic process: Plato’s textual-based cultural transmission process.
III: THE LITERATE-PLATONIC TRANSMISSION PROCESS

Introduction

In the last chapter we were able to show how a certain orality-era transmission process in Ancient Greece was able to profoundly structure the course of preliterate life. We were able to do so by constructing a model of a particularly pervasive and influential oral-based form of cultural transmission: the bardic storytelling process, by which the famous Homeric epic poems were constructed and disseminated. By logically mapping the bardic cultural transmission process – clarifying assumptions and built-in incentives, locating key interaction nodes, and explaining strategic responses to the incentives – we were able to understand several characteristics that are fundamentally unique to the cultural transmission process itself. Through understanding these characteristics, we were able to deductively predict several aspects of the cultural content and “second-stage game” social conditions that such a cultural transmission process would generate, producing several novel insights about the importance of information and communication technologies (ICTs) – i.e. the means of communication – in Ancient Athens.

To study the influence of the disruptive shift from oral-based to literate-based ICTs in Ancient Athens, we intend to follow roughly the same methodology in this chapter: constructing a model of a literacy-era, textual-based transmission process that was as pervasive and influential as the bardic process. In order to function as a suitable comparison to the bardic process, however, the textual transmission process must also fulfill a third criterion. It must occur at the approximate turning point between orality and literacy for the Hellenic communities in which it was
disseminated. In fulfilling this third criterion, we will be able to compare the characteristics and implications of this writing-based cultural transmission process to the orality-based process and will, therefore, be able to isolate the specific effects of communication technologies on cultural output and on social conditions, particularly with respect to identity-formation. The Platonic dialogues, and more broadly the Platonic, writing-based cultural transmission process, meet these three criteria.

Modeling the orality-era cultural transmission process required using an existing model as a baseline, the Parry-Lord theory of oral-formulaic composition, and then making several major, structural amendments to it by synthesizing an eclectic set of modern Homeric and comparative ‘oral tradition’ scholarship. Fortunately, there are numerous articles and books that have partially modeled the Platonic writing-based transmission process already – some in a much more direct way than the scholarship used in the last chapter – which we will synthesize and repurpose in order to create our own model. One of the most timely and best works within this literature is Danielle Allen’s 2012 book Why Plato Wrote, a methodical and thorough analysis of Plato’s theory of language, how his texts were disseminated, and of the writing strategies that he employed in order to purposefully change Athenian social life. She also spends the second half of the book analyzing the effects of Plato’s writing, and his concomitant strategic decisions, on 4th century Athenian society after his death. This latter analysis is particularly useful to our discussion, as it allows us to empirically test the Platonic transmission model’s effect on Athenian social conditions, which we were largely unable to do for the bardic transmission model.
By analyzing Allen’s explication of the Platonic transmission process, and its influence in comparison to our orality-era insights from the prior chapter, we will be able to deduce characteristics that are fundamentally unique to the writing-based cultural transmission process. We can then both deduce and induce the aspects of the cultural content and social conditions that such a cultural transmission process would generate. In short, we will be able to answer the first two key questions about the shift in communication technologies in Ancient Athens:

In answering these questions we will be able to more precisely understand the effects of the most significant change in communication technology in human history, the transition to literacy and writing, on a specific community – Ancient Athens in the 5th and 4th centuries – a change that is enormously and disproportionately influential in the course of Western civilization and thought. Much in the Western world has changed between Ancient Athens and the present, but Athens laid the groundwork for how we think and act today on a grand scale. For instance, numerous contemporary discursive formations were first formalized in Athens, such as philosophy and political science, and the textual transmission process that we model here was integral to their development, dissemination, and influence.

In regard to the influence of these discursive formations, Allen’s empirical conclusions about the influence of Platonic philosophy on 4th century Athens may very well be the most important source for answering our questions on the impact of information. Allen breaks new ground within the field of classical studies by showing, more concretely and thoroughly than ever before, how the revolutionary shift in Athenian systems of thought prompted by Plato’s writings were able to affect
Athens equally as revolutionary social change. Allen invites us to think of her text as a case study – and a landmark one, no doubt – on the relationship between ideas and material events.

By going a step further, however, and framing Allen’s empirical conclusions in the broader context of a textual transmission process, we are able to recognize that her conclusions also testify to the revolutionary influence of writing technology on the ideas-events relationship itself. Through careful, grounded, but ‘imaginative’ and big-picture analysis, we can see that ICTs can partially determine the mode of social change on multiple interrelated levels: on the way that systems of thought shift (the ideological-discursive), that identities and beliefs shift (the individual), and that social-material outcomes shift.

**Why Study the Platonic Transmission Process?**

Plato’s cultural transmission process is not the only one that we could analyze as a representative of writing-based techniques, just as the bardic process is not the only one that we could analyze as representative of oral-based techniques. Ancient Athens bore witness to many different literacies, as its citizens took up and experimented with literacy techniques in a variety of contexts and in the service of a variety of causes. For instance, Ober (*Democracy and Knowledge*, among others) and Missiou (*Literacy and Democracy in Fifth-Century Athens*) examine how writing-based record keeping was developed, disseminated, and influential in the service of Athens’ democratic political structure.

However, Plato and his writings are as prime examples of accessible literacy techniques for cultural transmission and will serve well for the purposes of this thesis.
There are three criteria by which a cultural transmission technique should be judged in order to compare it to the bardic transmission technique and to analyze it for similar purposes: by its influence, its pervasiveness, and its role—intentional or not—in the transformation period between orality and predominant literacy in Athens. Let us examine each criterion in turn.

That Plato and his writings are extraordinarily influential now is uncontested. That his writings were highly influential during the Roman and Christian periods of the early first millennium—for the Stoics, or for early Christian thought—has been well documented. There is much less scholarship that assesses Plato’s influence during and around his own lifetime, however, in the 5th and 4th centuries BC. The second half of Allen’s *Why Plato Wrote* in large part tackles this assessment through its analysis of the political and ideological conditions of late 4th century Athens. We will discuss her assessment in depth later in the chapter, but in short, she finds Platonic thought to be highly influential in framing and shaping the key political debates of the 4th century, between Demosthenes on one side and Lycurgus, Aeschines, and several other key Athenian figures on the other. Ultimately, she finds that Platonic thought became embedded in Athenian language, culture, and institutions.

The second criterion, Plato’s pervasiveness, is a sensitive subject, because it relates directly to a difficult question in Platonic studies: does Plato ever reach a general audience in Ancient Athens, rather than just a socioeconomic and political elite, and if so, does he write for them intentionally? The first question requires us to understand the extent and intensity of literacy in Ancient Athens, a controversial
question that has generated some important new findings in the last several years. Thomas’ classic *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece* (1992) represents the standard belief that Athenian readership in the 5\textsuperscript{th} and 4\textsuperscript{th} centuries was limited to a small group of elite families, but recent work by Missiou (2011) also points to more widespread literacy.

As for the second question of Plato’s intentionality, Allen argues clearly for the affirmative, that Plato acted primarily as a “think-tank activist,” both imagining and anticipating a general readership of his dialogues, “even in advance of their general emergence.”\textsuperscript{40} Other, more ancient sources, agree with her optimistic conclusion. In a quote that Allen made the epigraph to her book, the Greek biographer Diogenes Laertius (3\textsuperscript{rd} century CE) calls Plato a “politician or political leader to judge from his writings.”\textsuperscript{41} Dicaearchus, a Greek philosopher and student of Aristotle (ca. 350-290 BCE), bought wholeheartedly into the idea of Plato’s general readership, writing that, “by composing his *logoi*, Plato, as it were, led to philosophy countless people.”\textsuperscript{42} Beyond direct readership, Allen also argues persuasively for Plato’s pervasive dissemination through indirect cultural sources, such as in comic theatre, where he was frequently the subject of jokes. Plato’s appearance as a cultural reference is both evidence for the pervasiveness of the Platonic transmission process – that his ideas were so well known that comedians were comfortable referencing them without explanation – and a mechanism by which tens of thousands of audience

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{40} Allen, (2011: 5).
\item \textsuperscript{41} Diogenes Laertius, 3.23
\end{itemize}
members could access the basics of Plato’s ideology. This oral method acted as a complementary mode of transmission to Plato's texts.\textsuperscript{43}

Nevertheless, Allen’s claim that Plato intended to write for a general readership – whether he actually ended up doing so or not – is fairly controversial. Ultimately, there is simply not enough information to know for sure, as Plato was famously reserved about inserting himself into his writings. To be safe, we will follow Thomas’ (1992) mainstream opinion that Plato’s notional audience for his dialogues was likely a socioeconomic and political elite, but that his actual audience may have been much larger as literacy, throughout the 5\textsuperscript{th} and 4\textsuperscript{th} centuries, expanded in an egalitarian context. And just because Plato wrote for an elite audience does not mean that he did not write for scale: the Athenian ‘elites’ constituted perhaps several thousand people and as a group they held an outsized influence in shaping Athens’ culture and sociopolitical structures.

The third criterion is that the chosen transmission process must have been influential and pervasive during the transformation period from orality to literacy in Hellenic communities. According to Havelock, Plato did even more than merely write during a transformative time: Plato played an active, and in fact central, role in the actual transformation from orality to literate culture in Athens. As Havelock writes, “Plato, living in the midst of this [literate] revolution, announced it and became its prophet.”\textsuperscript{44} He was the champion and standard-bearer of what Havelock and others, such as Ong, would call the “literate mode of consciousness.” Critics tend to argue this point heavily from numerous angles. Many observe that Plato’s dialogues were a

\textsuperscript{43} Allen (2011: 5).
\textsuperscript{44} Havelock, (1963: vii)
mixed text, full of an “intertextual mode,” as Nightingale calls it, through which Plato sets intentionally ambivalent boundaries between philosophy and other genres. A growing group of scholars see “Platonic writing as itself a kind of poetry.” Others even claim that Plato incorporates a significant amount of the formulaic patterns that are key telltales of the oral mode of communication.

All of these critiques of Havelock may well be true, but we would argue that they are not particularly surprising in the context of ideological and social change. The fact that Plato may have incorporated poetic formulaic or an “intertextual mode” into his texts does not necessarily disprove Havelock’s point. Even the most revolutionary of philosophers can be surprisingly conservative and steeped in the pre-revolutionary mode of thought, especially when bidding for legitimacy, credibility, and mass appeal from necessarily pre-revolutionary audiences, as Plato was. Observing this phenomenon in Marx, whose revolutionary zeal would trounce Plato’s enthusiasm even on a bad day, Schumpeter looks at how Marx constructed communism by masterfully wedding a prophetic, extra-rational, and utopian civic religion to a rational, purportedly scientific theory of “historical materialism.” Framing and conveying his message in such a way so as to tap into the scientific, positivist mindset of the bourgeois era – whether intentionally or not – was arguably the key to Marx’s success. Thus, “there is no paradox in saying that Marxism is essentially a product of the bourgeois mind.” There are many more parallels we could draw too: how Marx spent his earliest days trying to refute the philosophy of

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46 Halliwell (2011: 241-2)
47 Gibson (2005).
48 Joseph Schumpeter (1942: 6)
the Young Hegelians on their own terms, like Plato does with his “intertextual”
inclusions of poetry and rhetoric; or how for all Marx’s incites to economic
revolution, his theory of labor and value, the cornerstone of his economic framework,
comes fundamentally from David Ricardo, the staunchest pro-capitalist of the
classical economists.49 If it is not a paradox to call Marx the prophet of a post-
bourgeois world and yet call Marxism a bourgeois concept, can Plato not be both the
prophet of post-orality and yet a product of it as well? As Marx writes, each epoch
carries within itself the seed of its own destruction. Indeed, the fact that the Platonic
transmission process is so obviously mixed – at the most basic level, dialogues are
writing that are always mimicking the oral dialogical mode – makes it only more
clear that Plato stood at the fluid epicenter of the oral-writing technological
transformation.

Thus, Plato’s form of written dialogues reflect a cultural transmission process
that was influential for political life in 4th century Athens and onwards, pervasive to a
general readership even after Plato’s death, and at the center of a transformation in
the way Greeks communicated. When examining the spread of a new communication
technology, it is important to understand why and in what context it arose. All
technology arises as a solution to a specific problem in a specific social context, and
its early dissemination is typically a function of how efficaciously and efficiently it
addresses that problem. Only later does it begin to change the social context in which
it arose. Thus, the next questions that we should ask are: why did Plato choose to use
writing, and what was the cultural and technological context surrounding literacy in

49 Ibid, 23.
Plato’s Athens that enabled him to do so? In answering these questions, we will be better able to understand the fundamentally new ‘solution’ that writing offered Plato.

**Why Plato Wrote: Building a Scalable Technology of the Self**

Plato was born to an aristocratic family in Athens in 424/3 BCE, a time when philosophy was a radically new and ambiguous mode of thought. Even the word ‘philosopher’ was barely in use. Socrates, although famously one-of-a-kind, was ironically often called a *sophistēs*, or ‘sophist,’ a type of fast-talking rhetorician that the Socratic school would eventually come to fundamentally oppose and identify against.\(^{50}\)

At the age of twenty, Plato began to formally follow Socrates, and grew disillusioned with the city after Socrates’ death in 399 BCE. Having previously entertained the possibility of entering politics, Plato instead embarked upon the life of a teacher, philosopher, and perennial writer for which he is known today. He moved to Megara, on the border of Attica, where a community of philosophers had gathered in the wake of the trial, and then traveled fairly extensively as a teacher, thinker, and occasional private tutor to political elites (such as in Syracuse, in 367 BCE and 361 BCE), eventually returning to Athens where he set up his famous Academy. By his death in 348/7 BCE at the age of seventy-six, he had written more than two-dozen dialogues.

There is widespread uncertainty over what to make of Plato’s normative and political aims, especially in regard to Athens, his home city and the *polis* that he mentions most in his writings. Allen has called him Western Civilization’s first

\(^{50}\) Socrates was also called several other things, including *phrontistēs*, or ‘thinker.’ See Edmunds (2006).
“think-tank activist,” and recent scholarship has crystallized around the opinion that he had far greater aims than merely political. As Nightingale notes, Plato was the foremost figure responsible for appropriating and reintroducing the term “philosophy,” defining it as both a form of thought, which was to be radically different from other modes of discourse such as poetry and rhetoric, and a “unique set of ethical and metaphysical commitments that demanded a whole new way of living.”  

Philosophical discourse was introduced not just as a personal intellectual activity but also as an instrument to generate widespread political, cultural, and social change in Athens and throughout Greece – to transform Athenians into a wisdom-loving people with philosophy and Forms-based reason inscribed into the laws and institutions of the polis.

Plato saw poetry, as well as a host of other genres of discourse, as the primary culprits behind the broken Athenian system of values he hoped to replace. In the Republic, Plato likens the poetic experience to a “kind of psychic poison” (as Havelock translates it), using the word lobei (λώβη), a term with medicinal overtones. Yet why does Plato put so much stock in the (corruptive) power of the poets? Havelock argues that, to Plato, the poets are a proxy for the cognitive effects of oral culture more broadly, which fits into Havelock’s grand theory that the transition from an oral to literate culture was a defining and fundamentally dividing shift in Greek intellectual history. Although hotly criticized by fellow classicists, many are now beginning to incorporate parts of his interpretation into their scholarship on Plato.

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51 Nightingale (1995: 10)
52 Havelock (1995: 5).
Allen does so most persuasively, arguing that if Plato did not necessarily see orality as his great enemy, he recognized in poetry an impressive power. She believes that Plato ascribed to a comprehensive theory of language: that through psychological, sociological, and philosophical channels, language and symbols had the power to shift people’s individual belief systems and actions. Plato recognized that poets had taken advantage of this power of language by offering *logoi* that have *enargeia* or vividness – that spring to life in a cultural consumer’s mind and implant themselves therein. Allen calls this idea “surplus linguistic power,” a type of power that can be exercised by any communicator. In his belief in the concept of a “dominant ideology” that is largely determined by modes of discourse, Taylor notes that we can think of Plato’s theory of language as surprisingly Foucauldian. In that vein, we can think of philosophy’s various practices and activities for intellectual enlightenment – including the discursive ones, such as dialectic and reading Platonic dialogues – as ‘technologies of the self.’ Foucault defines these technologies – in the non-colloquial sense as tools or capabilities given by the practical application of knowledge – as that which “permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality.” Performing these techniques constitutes and then reifies one’s self in an ideal image. For Plato, this idea meant that he could use writing to alter an Athenian reader’s conception of

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self, identity, and belief-system. As Allen sums it up, for Plato, “symbols mold souls.”

Thus, Plato wanted to refashion Athenians and Athenian society, and he saw philosophical discourse as a means of doing so. Yet for all Plato’s personal writings, he also expresses major reservations about the medium of writing itself, referring to it in the *Phaedrus* as a ‘drug’ (*pharmakon, φάρµακον*) that harms memory, and in the *Seventh Letter* as only the image or representation of truth. As an image of the truth, writing can only help its readers attain two of the four rungs of knowledge in Plato’s hierarchical epistemology, as represented in his Line Analogy, the lowest and the third lowest. The lowest, conjecture, could be acquired through ‘shadows’ and second-hand, often artistic renderings or descriptions of objects or events, like poetry; the third-lowest, ‘thinking,’ could be performed by studying natural or man-made models or diagrams. A *logos* can thus be either a ‘shadow’ or a ‘model,’ depending on whether it can be used by the reader to access imperceptible, reason-based concepts. For instance, Homer’s Iliad is a ‘shadow’ insofar as it uses *mimesis* to appeal to our emotional and aesthetic senses rather than our faculties of reason, and therefore cannot give us access to concepts of truth. On the other hand, a description or diagram of the solar system would qualify as a ‘model,’ insofar as it appeals to reason and helps us, through visualization, imagine the true form of the Universe.

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55 Allen (2011: 54)  
56 Plato, (Phaedrus, 275a).  
57 Plato (*Seventh Letter*: 341c-341e).  
58 There are four epistemological modes by which humans make cognitive use of images (including verbal images, *logoi*) in the Line Analogy. In ascending order they are: conjecture through images, belief through considering real-world artifacts in their particularity, thinking through considering real-world artifacts as models, and understanding of the Forms. See Book 6 of the *Republic*, 509c-511e, or also Allen’s helpful diagram of the analogy (Allen, 2011: 40).
top rung, an understanding of the Forms, comes only through dialectic and is virtually unreachable by visualization methods, a belief that Plato maintained from his mentor, Socrates, who refused to write.

If Plato believes that writing is an inferior mode of communication to dialectic, such that it can at best lead readers to partial truth and at worst lead them to poetry-style mental disease, why would he ever write? Here Allen gives us her most intriguing insight, the idea that Plato is a pragmatist as well as a metaphysicist, a notion that encompasses two beliefs. First, that he is a consequentialist, who believes that it is sometimes best to tell metaphysical lies if it is ‘pragmatically efficacious’ and, second, that he would subscribe essentially to the epistemological approach to pragmatism made famous in the early 20th century. Thus, if using writing-based communication can help Plato revolutionize Athens’ system of values then he will do so, even if it is metaphysically problematic.

**Athenian Literacy**

The extent to which writing could help Plato to effect broad change is a function of three variables: the size and influence of Plato’s audiences, Plato’s popularity with his audiences (his communicative persuasiveness), and the extent to which he is able to transform his readers by incorporating *enargeia* into his writings (i.e. making his texts technologies of the self). The latter two are endogenous to the model that we will outline below, insofar as they are determined by Plato’s strategic choices (or any author’s choice, in the evolutionary and competitive sense that an equivalent philosopher could replace Plato’s influence as a cultural creator if he is

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59 Allen, (2011: 20)
more persuasive or ‘vivid’). The size and influence of Plato’s audience is partially endogenous, but also partially exogenous insofar as it is a function of the literacy rate, which sets the maximum audience size. As an exogenous component of the textual transmission model that helps to frame its context, the literacy rate therefore bears further examination.

The history of writing in Ancient Greece begins with Linear B, a syllabic script used narrowly by Mycenaean palaces for warehousing purposes during the Late Bronze Age (1400-1100 BCE). Literacy vanished, however, with the collapse of the palace system during the Greek Dark Ages, and we have no trace of it until 750 BCE, when it reemerged using the phonetic alphabet that we know as Greek today and which was appropriated from the Phoenicians. Writing developed gradually, using a variety of materials in different contexts: potsherds for casual writing like shopping lists, lead for private letters because it was foldable, wax tablets for schooling (which, unfortunately for archaeological purposes, are very ephemeral), papyrus and parchment for books and monographs, and stone or occasionally gold monuments for major inscriptions or decrees.  

By the 5th century, Ancient Athens and Greece were still defined by a multiplicity of literacies from both the supply and demand side. Writing cropped up for widely different purposes and in different contexts (supply side), which did not always blend together in the way that they do now, and, as a consequence, various groups of people possessed widely different reading skills (demand side). As Thomas argues, we should think of literacy through an “ideological model” as fluid, non-binary, and both shaping and shaped by its social context. As a baseline, however, she

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60 Thomas, 82-86.
distinguishes between two broad types of literacy, ‘phonetic’ and ‘comprehensive’: an ability to decode texts syllabically for oral pronunciation versus an ability to decode silently for understanding.\textsuperscript{61} Phonetic literacy was widespread in Athens by the 5\textsuperscript{th} century, whereas comprehensive literacy – the sort required to read something like Plato – was more prevalent in the 4\textsuperscript{th} century as Athens became more “document-minded.” As Yunis notes, literacy was also highly class-based; the only two groups of people who were fully literate were the elites who encountered written texts daily for political, legal, financial, and personal affairs, and the non-elite functionaries, such as scribes and archivists. Only a segment of those elites actually owned and read books or studied written texts for non-practical purposes.\textsuperscript{62} Further, although literacy grew throughout the 5\textsuperscript{th} and 4\textsuperscript{th} centuries, there is no reason to believe that oral-based communication decreased; we know that arenas for oral communication, like theaters and political forums, were expanding in the 5\textsuperscript{th} century, and that mixed-media formats were common as well.

Interestingly, Athens appears to have been far and away more literate than the other city-states, in large part due to its uniquely complex democratic-administrative systems. Athens was a relatively sprawling city-state, encompassing far-flung \textit{demes} across Attica, and mass literacy became an essential communication tool for managing and distributing political knowledge among its citizens.\textsuperscript{63} Literacy developed hand-in-hand with an egalitarian ideology,\textsuperscript{64} such that one was encouraged

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid, 9.
\textsuperscript{62} Yunis, (2002: 6)
\textsuperscript{63} For an excellent, groundbreaking analysis of how Ancient Athens built institutions, social networks, and open-access knowledge systems into its democracy, see Ober (2010).
\textsuperscript{64} Relatively egalitarian, at least. Citizenship in Ancient Athens was still not extended to large groups of people – women, slaves, foreign workers.
to become literate out of a patriotic duty to the democracy. In this context, Missiou (2011) has recently shown that literacy may have been even more widespread than previously thought by observing that many of Athens’ bureaucratic postings, that required functional literacy, were assigned by lot, such as the Council of 500, the city’s full-time governing body on which citizens served for a year.\footnote{Missiou (2011). For the social and political pressure surrounding literacy see 145, and for a fascinating discussion of the dynamics of literacy apprenticeship and standardization within the Council of 500, see 134-142.}

It is clear that literacy had the potential to offer a think-tank activist like Plato a reach and influence well beyond the access available to him if he were to have confined himself to oral-based and dialectic communication, such as individual tutoring or even exclusively managing his Academy. That said, we should be careful to not assume too large an audience for Plato’s works. Even today, where most citizens of developed countries have the reading skills to comprehend Plato’s fairly complex syntax – which was not necessarily true amongst 5th or even 4th century Athens – only a relatively small elite ever read him, usually in select high schools or universities.

Nevertheless, Plato himself observes in the \textit{Seventh Letter} that writing has the potential to be “of great benefit to mankind” in a broad sense. More people outside of the author’s spatial and temporal limits can have access to the written word, owing to its durability and capacity for broad dissemination.\footnote{Plato (\textit{Seventh Letter: 341d}) τοῖς τε ἅνθρωποισι μέγα ὀφελος γράψαι.} For a thinker who hoped to achieve widespread social change in Greece and particularly Athens, who believed in a Foucauldian theory of language as capable of shifting beliefs and therefore action, who could temper his metaphysics with pragmatism, and who lived in a society that
was rapidly becoming more and more literate and “document-minded,” writing presented itself to Plato as a clear way to effect change on a potentially limitless scale.

Next, let us dig more deeply to develop a model of how the Platonic transmission technique occurred, so that we may compare it to our orality-based bardic transmission model to observe the changing influence of the writing-based communication medium.

The Platonic Cultural Transmission Model

Introduction and Preemptive Responses to Methodological Critiques

The process by which Plato created and transmitted his cultural output (logoi) can be modeled in a somewhat similar way to our orality model. For one, we would do well to focus on one piece of logos and trace its movement from creation to reception in order to understand the way that it shapes and is shaped by its social context. However, a critical difference between Plato’s writing-based transmission technique and the bardic technique is that cultural replication is not longer necessarily indicative of popularity. With writing, however, a text can be unpopular and yet still ‘replicated’ insofar as it is not destroyed, so that it does not make sense to characterize it by a model of evolutionary cultural replication and refinement. Rather than construct a model that describes the ‘evolution’ of a story through a series of refinements, we should instead focus more holistically on the evolution of an economy of discourses – a system of thought. Because cultural preservation is no longer as tied to the replication function, we should also redefine our criteria for a certain logos to be deemed evolutionary successful. To qualify, a logos should not
just be capable of persisting in a community’s cultural commons, but also be able to
effect change on ideological-discursive, individual, and material levels. In order to
determine whether a logos has met this expanded criteria we will want to broaden the
model’s scope, tracing a logos from creation to dissemination, to its reception by
audiences, and to how that reception collectively influences a community’s social
conditions. The process will also be much more intuitively obvious to us, for although
literate technologies were quite different between Ancient Athens and today, they
were also strikingly similar.

Intuitiveness aside, there is still a sizeable evidence problem with modeling
Plato’s cultural transmission process versus the bardic process. With the bardic
process, we were able to substitute our lack of empirical knowledge on how bardic
culture was processed by Greek audiences with a synthesis of cross-cultural
comparisons between other societies with thriving oral traditions. No such
contemporary substitute exists for 5th and 4th century Athens and its writing-based
cultural techniques, and in fact our semi-intuitive understanding of textual
transmission – what Ong calls our modern “textual bias” – makes it methodologically
dangerous to attempt to even analyze contemporary substitutes. For this reason, we
employ the approach to interpreting Greek sources spelled out by Harvey Yunis
(2003), which more or less characterizes the approach used by the other contributors
to his edited volume, Written Texts and the Rise of Literate Culture in Ancient
Greece:

Little information exists about who among contemporaries
actually read Thucydidides and Plato and to what purpose. Yet it is
possible to observe what artistic provisions these writers make to
accommodate, encourage, or direct interpretation on the part of their reader. (Yunis, 2003: 198)

In other words, where we lack the empirical information to build our model, we can project forwards from the authors, examining how Plato expects his readers to behave through his “artistic provisions.” On the other hand, where we do have the empirical information but not a clear idea of the author’s intentions, we can also work backwards as Allen does with her analysis of Plato’s intellectual impact on 4th century Athens’ political discourse.

There are two particularly problematic critiques of this methodology that bear telling. The first is that it describes an outcome that may have existed only in a philosopher’s mind and not in actuality. Pairing the forward-looking textual analysis with a backwards-looking empirical analysis can help mitigate this problem, especially as techniques of measuring and analyzing the history of intellectual thought improve over time. The second critique is that this approach presumes some sort of intentionality on behalf of the author (or perhaps even an unconscious intentionality?), which can be particularly problematic in the case of someone like Plato, who took great pains to separate himself from his works by always using other characters as narrators. Although Allen’s text has generally been well received, there will perhaps always be a high degree of fundamental uncertainty associated with any scholarship that presumes a major and nuanced intention upon Plato, especially one such as grand, unified, and ‘project’-like as Allen’s. Fortunately, this thesis ultimately abstracts from questions of Plato as an author himself, focusing instead on implications of Plato’s writings as a case study for understanding the communication technologies that undergird his work. Thus, while the specific Platonic case study
may be subject to this second critique of unclear intentionality, our general model is
not.

**The General Model**

A distillation of the literature leads us to a seven-step Platonic-based cultural
transmission model based on both Plato’s theories and beliefs as well as Allen’s
empirical synthesis: (1) the author creates a *logos* and (2) transmits it textually to a
reader, which sets off a chain of internal effects. First, it (3) makes a new concept
visible to the reader, which (4) “shifts the landscape of [the reader’s] imagination,”
which (5) manifests itself in a change in the reader’s beliefs and value-system. These
then (6) constitute new rules of action for the reader, which, through interaction with
social forces within the Athenian ‘action arena,’ is manifested (7) both individually in
the reader and collectively in society.

We construct our general model predominantly from a synthesis of Allen’s
study of how Plato expects and portrays his dialogues and textual ‘images’ to be
transmitted and consumed. Allen never actually introduces a ‘model’ herself, but her
book provides us with the sort of close and pointed analysis of Plato’s dialogues, as
well as a comprehensive assortment of other evidence, that lend themselves well to
model-building. She identifies all seven of these stages, but the bulk of her analysis
covers stages 2-5, which we will call the ‘reader interpretation’ stages, as well as
stage 7, which occurs in the second, empirical half of *Why Plato Wrote*. 67

We have also incorporated evidence and insights from a variety of other scholars
when necessary, particularly to flesh out the stages that Allen does not directly

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67 Allen, (2011: 59, 145)
address. For the cultural creation stage (1) we pull from studies of Thucydides’ writing process; to round out the textual dissemination stage (2) we employ general scholarship on Ancient Greek literacy technologies and the stage where textual logos are transformed into individual action (6) we appropriate a concept taken from a contemporary institutional analysis framework, called the ‘action arena’.

The logic of this model is to follow a piece of logos – a story or Platonic dialogue – through the transmission process, highlighting its influence in various stages. The three italicized, non-boxed words (‘contextually valid audience found,’ ‘persuasive,’ and ‘enargeia’) represent criteria that the logos must meet in order to pass through to the next stage. If it fails any stage, we can deem the logos unsuccessful at influencing widespread social change.

The two primary players in the model are the ‘author’ and the ‘audience.’ The author in our model is not necessarily Plato, but someone who is modeled off of Plato – that is, any creator of logoi from 5th and 4th century Athens who wants his text to be used as a ‘technology of the self’ in order to transform his audience into ‘better’ people. We will also assume that the model author is pragmatically efficacious, insofar as he hopes to make a scalable impact and effect social change through his writing. The audience, on the other hand, is a much less certain entity than it is the bardic process, where it was a group of people that the author could physically see and hear. As Ong notes, compared to oral-based transmission processes the writer’s audience is always a “fiction,” which is fundamentally different from characterizing them as merely bard’s audience only temporally and spatially further away. Decontextualized and decollectived, a writer must always construct an audience in his
imagination, cast them in some sort of role, and then implicitly call on them to play their assigned role. To the extent that he has fictionalized an audience with some degree of specificity, we may call it the author’s ‘notional’ audience.

Next, we will examine each stage in-depth. Since this model is predominantly built around one case of textual transmission, Plato’s, we will rely heavily on the case study of Plato’s written dialogues in order to contextualize each stage. We will also discuss the strategies and tactics that an author can use in each stage to maximize the probability of success for his logos. Understanding these strategies is critical in order to deduce what sort of cultural output results from the model (Key Question 1).

However, it is important to remember that the logos stays essentially unchanged as it moves throughout the process. Unlike the evolutionary model of culture created in the prior chapter, the author cannot easily alter the logos after the culture creation stage. The author can at best try to make provisions for his logos to find a contextually valid audience, be persuasive, and have enargeia, by preemptively and strategically incorporating those features into his text in the first ‘culture creation’ stage. Of course, it is also possible for the author to fulfill these strategies unintentionally. By including deductively reasoned success ‘strategies’ in our examination of the model we need not imply any assumptions about Plato’s (or any author’s) intentionality.

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68 Ong (1987).
69 Changes can be made to texts through new editions, and modification by editors. However, this is much more difficult than the crowd-sourced modification process in orality. Similarly, it is also much more difficult than editing digitalized information.
Figure II: The Literate-Platonic Model

Stage 1 – Culture Creation and the Thucydidean “Writing Workshop”

There is unfortunately no direct evidence for how the cultural creation process – which is to say, the writing of logos – worked for Plato. As a workaround, we will do as we did when modeling the bardic process and instead incorporate evidence from comparatively similar contexts. There are a few descriptions of how ancient writers worked written by the writers themselves, such as from Polybius and Virgil, but perhaps the most thorough evidence of how ancient writers worked comes from analyses of Thucydides.
Thucydides, an Athenian aristocrat and a banished *stratēgos* (military general) responsible for the bungled Thracian campaign of the Peloponnesian War (424-423 BCE), wrote his massive *History of the Peloponnesian War* over a period of 35 years around the turn of the 4th century. He never finished the account, and it even ends mid-sentence. An unknown editor who published it posthumously, most likely Xenophon of Athens, fortunately left all of Thucydides’ work untouched, instead merely adding to it and compiling Thucydides’ rough drafts and unfinished notes rather than rewriting them. The editor’s additions are fairly easy to distinguish, too.\(^70\)

By a great stroke of luck, we thus have access to what Canfora calls Thucydides’ “‘[writing] workshop’… his ‘collection of raw materials’ as it was when the work was suddenly interrupted, […] preventing some parts of it from being rewritten into a ‘definitive’ form.”\(^71\) Several Thucydidean scholars have analyzed these sections in order to understand Thucydides’ ‘cultural creation’ process, which Canfora synthesizes (and adds to) adroitly in his article from the edited volume *Brill’s Companion to Thucydides* (2006), the most recent comprehensive review of what is known about Thucydides to be published since 1968.\(^72\)

It is doubly fortunate that Thucydides is the Ancient Athenian author on whose writing process we have such a wealth of information as he is remarkably similar to Plato insofar as writing technologies and goals are concerned. Like Plato,  

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\(^70\) Canfora (2006). Canfora also argues that the editor was most likely Xenophon of Athens, a Greek historian, soldier, and student of Socrates who was a contemporary to both Thucydides and Plato. Like Plato, he wrote numerous Socratic dialogues, and like Thucydides he wrote numerous histories, including the *Hellenica*, which was written as an explicit continuation to Thucydides’ *History*. Canfora argues that Thucydides’ rough drafts and notes are preserved in sections 1.2.3.10 of the *Hellenica*, as well as large parts of Thucydides’ Book 5.

\(^71\) Ibid, 23.

\(^72\) Stronk (2007).
Thucydides is both a pragmatist and a truth-seeker, who viewed his History as both an end (to preserve the past) and as a means to end, of guiding human action and the behavior of his readers. He believed that the right kind of knowledge could promote the overall good, and therefore, like Plato, he endeavored to construct through his writings a broader discursive discipline and mode of thought. Ober (2006) identifies this practice as the “invention of political science,” arguing that Thucydides intended his work as a sort of “political systems users’ manual”: a Foucauldian technology of the self that his readers could use to transform themselves into more capable sociopolitical actors. In fact, Thucydides believed even more than Plato in the power of texts to transform society as evidenced by his extracurricular activities, or lack thereof; he neither took students, established an academy, nor even gave speeches of his work (Plato did all three). Instead, Thucydides appears to have believed that his disciplinary invention could be communicated entirely through the medium of the written text.

Thucydides is also considered, perhaps unsurprisingly, a vocal opponent of the orality-era culture of his time. Scholars point to his famous mission statement in line 1.22.4, which we have already discussed briefly in the prior chapter, as evidence that Thucydides viewed writing as a medium that could transcend the temporal and

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73 Thucydides (Histories: 1.22.4). The relevant Greek: διὸ δὲ βουλήσονται τὸν τε γενομένων τὸ σαφὲς σκοπεῖν καὶ τὸν μελλόντων ποιῆσαι αὕτης κατὰ τὸ ἀνθρώπινον τοιοῦτον καὶ παραπλησίαν ἔσπερα, οὐκέτα κρίνειν αὐτὰ ἄρκοιντος έξει. There is some debate about the meaning of this passage, such as from Gomme (1952), which Ober (2006) views as an attempt to downplay Thucydides’ grander motivations and to keep him within the fold of disciplinarian historians. I follow Ober’s more modern (and modernist) interpretation.

spatial audience restrictions of speech. He contrasts his written work disdainfully with logos that is “to be heard on the spot” in the context of an ἀγώνισμα (agonisma), which E.C. Marchant defines in his annotations as a “performance, ‘feat,’ ‘show piece,’ or ‘prize,’ and here specifically of a prize composition.” Thomas (2000) argues that we should interpret ἀγώνισμα not only as a reference to Herodotus – the first Greek historian, whom Thucydides sets himself in historiographical opposition to throughout his work – but also to the entire performance culture of his time.

Given such tremendous similarities – Thucydides’ also considered his writing a technology of the self that he wrote to effect widespread change, and he wrote and took part in the paradigm-shift from oral to literary modes of discourse – it would not be inappropriate to claim that this thesis’ model is almost as much a Thucydidean cultural transmission process as a Platonic one. Plato and the construction of philosophy are more relevant for our purposes insofar as he touches most directly on identity and self-transformation issues, but we could just as well discuss Thucydides as the paradigmatic case study of how writing technologies influenced a community’s cultural output and social conditions.

75 Again, the translation is, “I have written my work, not as an essay which is to win the applause of the moment, but as a possession for all time.” In Greek: κτήμα τε ἐς αἰεὶ μᾶλλον ἢ ἀγώνισμα ἐς τὸ παραχρῆμα ἀκοῖειν ζήγκειται.
76 Marchant (1909).
77 Thomas (2000).
78 There are some differences between the two ancient authors, however. On their different non-pragmatic, truth-seeking ends, see Bakker (2006), who argues that Thucydides believed that textually-transmitted historical analysis was the only way to acquire real knowledge. On their different writing-related strategies, see Yunis (2006) for a comparative assessment of each author’s response to the “absent author problem.” By embracing the ambiguity of reader interpretation, Thucydides seeks to incorporate the ‘critical interpretation’ process of reading into the broader ‘technology of the self’ that is his text, whereas Plato avoids the ambiguity of interpretation by obscuring the role of the author – and thus, the author’s absence – as much as possible. Interestingly, the upshot is that Thucydides appears to have a more expert
Having shown that Thucydides is a close substitute to Plato in terms of his approach to writing, we can now examine Thucydides’ writing process as a means of inferring the mechanics of Plato’s culture creation process. As it turns out, Thucydides’ process was in many ways similar to that of modern historians and social scientists. It followed approximately the three-part method of history-writing outlined by the Greek historian Polybius of the second century: collecting data, organizing materials, and then composing elegant prose. Canfora finds evidence of painstaking revision, with multiple stages of drafts and sketches. Thucydides also took copious notes, perhaps even daily, over the course of his thirty-five years of writing. Unlike the bardic process, where much of their stories were created extemporaneously in front of audiences, Thucydides had years of reflection time at his disposal. He could use notes to surpass his memory’s mental carrying capacity such that, combined with his ability to write privately and on his own time, he was even able to write his material out of order. Although famous for the strict chronological ordering in his History, he appears to have completed his work in non-chronological blocks (for instance, his writings on the first and eighth year of the war were both relatively unpolished).

Most unusually, Thucydides appears to have never engaged with his audience in a ‘live’ setting. Similarly, Plato is known to have only given one public speech in Athens, which Aristoxenus reported to be a confusing and mathematical examination of a notional audience in mind, whereas Plato has in mind a comparatively more general, mass notional audience. (2006: 212). Regardless, neither of these differences is substantive or pointed enough to make us reconsider comparing the two, at least in terms of their habitual writing processes.

79 Polybius (The Histories, 16.17.9)
80 Canfora (2006)
of ‘The Good’ that left audiences puzzled. Unlike the bardic process, where bards were immediately subject to audience pressures and, therefore, produced highly iterative stories (among other results), Plato and Thucydides created their *logoi* without any significant audience interaction. This separation must have had some sort of affect on the content of their *logoi*, at least stylistically. Thucydides even famously claimed that his work would be less pleasurable to listeners because of his refusal to indulge in τὸ μυθόδεες (1.22.4 – *muthodes, legend, romance, fable*).

It is sometimes unclear whether either Plato or Thucydides even had a notional, ‘contextually valid’ audience in mind at all when writing. Plato’s notional audience is hotly contested between elites and masses, and Thucydides appears to be writing predominantly for an undetermined group of people in the indeterminate future (ἐς ἀιδ). In many cases, Thucydides in particular appears to be writing more towards the audience that he wants to create – prototypical political scientist – rather than one that actually exists. Broadly, then, the single author on the ‘supply side’ does not necessarily interact with the indeterminate audiences on the ‘demand side’ in the Platonic transmission process, which gives him much greater freedom to create culture in correspondence to his own preferences.

**Stage 1.1 – Author Strategies for Culture Creation: Finding a Contextually Valid Audience**

The first strategic decision that the author can make is about which audiences he plans to reach with his writing, i.e. his notional audience. It would be strategically sound of him to target audiences that are either particularly large or particularly influential, insofar as he wants to maximize impact. Plato’s preference for tutoring

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81 Aristo xenus (*Elementa Harmonica*, 39.9-40.4).
aristocrats, elites, and even political rulers (as in Syracuse) makes sense given his desire for scalable impact yet limited time resources. Texts, however, do not have tutoring’s time-based limitations, such that it could be just as reasonable, if not more so, for Plato to target large audiences (‘the masses’) as it could be to target small but influential audiences (‘the elites’), an argument that Allen addresses repeatedly. Nevertheless, there is one important caveat to this notion of preemptive strategic planning by the author: intended audiences do not necessarily equate to actual audiences. A text is as likely as not to fall flat for its target audiences while becoming wildly popular and influential with another, unexpected audience. The extent to which an author can truly plan an audience-targeted strategy may be limited.

The second strategic decision that an author can make is to ensure that their *logos* is relatable to a certain audience. In order to make a *logos* relatable audiences it must seem to solve a certain problem in the audience’s life – whether this be an existential ‘problem,’ or cultural, or so forth.

**Stage 2 – The Textual Dissemination Process**

If a written work happened to find a ‘contextually valid’ audience – by the author’s design or not – the next step would be being published and disseminated through Athens by text. Although oral modes of communication continued to thrive in 5th and 4th century Athens, the parchment-based written text became the primary medium for transmitting philosophy, particularly by the 4th century, as well as an increasing variety of other learned subjects. Socrates (through Plato) gives us some evidence of this transformation himself. In the *Phaedo*, Socrates stumbles across

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82 Kahn (2003).
someone reading an Anaxagoras book and then reads it for himself, most likely silently. In the *Apology*, he claims that copies of Anaxagoras’ text were easily available and on sale for a drachma in the Agora. We have other anecdotal sources as well that substantiate the notion of a text-based cultural dissemination: Athenaeus reports that Pisistratus, Euripides, and Aristotle all had fairly famous private book collections, while Harris (1991) claims that an inter-city book trade was prevalent by the 370s.

The size and extent of Athens’ commercial publishing industry is unclear, however. We must remember that publishing before the printing press, without its capacity for standardized binding and formatting, was a much more informal process. As Thomas (2006) notes, we have explicit evidence for only two kinds of publications, both of which are non-commercial. First, we have texts made by the author for his private use (such as texts for the purpose of memorization in preparation for a public speech), and, second, we have unofficial texts that are created by listeners from their hypomnemata (recollected notes from conversations and speeches).

Different publishing formats lead to different modes of cultural consumption. Today, we think of reading as something that is done privately and silently – in an office or bedroom, or, more romantically, while curled up by a fireplace. Textual transmission does not necessarily imply a solitary, silent reader, but we do have some

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83 Plato, (*Phaedo*, 97b-98b). See also Burnyeat (1997) for silent reading.
84 Plato (*Apology*, 26d-e), A drachma is about a day’s working wages. For reference, the median daily wage in the US is $16 an hour, so a drachma might be worth about $128.
85 Gulick (1927).
86 Harris (1991: 85).
evidence that such a reader did exist in Athens, albeit as a minority. The solitary, silent reader appears several times in Ancient Greek culture – most explicitly from the works of Euripides, Aristophanes, and Antiphanes, but also from others (such as Socrates, mentioned above) – which leads most scholars to conclude that while the practice of silent reading in antiquity may not have been common, it was neither astonishing nor particularly abnormal.88

Yet 5th century Athens was characterized by mixed modes of communication, and so it is unsurprising that books were also disseminated and consumed in oral contexts. Philosophers and sophists used texts in order to memorize their publically performed speeches literally, a feat that was not even considered useful (let alone possible) by the Homeric bards. They would then take questions or engage in group discussion with their audience afterwards, sometimes passing around the text of their speech to those who asked.89

Texts also prompted a new, unexpected form of discursive practice: private readings in private houses, where authors or book-owners would read texts aloud amongst a small group of like-minded friends. This recitation was commonly followed by fervent discussion. Often, authors would use these settings as an opportunity for further revision before publication. These private discussions could become much more grounded and pointed than the free-flowing conversations found in symposiums, where wine was more likely to set the agenda than a specific text.

88 See Gilliard (1993) for a critical overview of the recent literature concerning silent reading in the Greco-Roman world. For such a small question it has generated an unusual amount of controversy and research, largely because it is one of the many seemingly innocuous questions that have been pulled, like pawns on a chessboard, into the grand, Havelock-centered debate concerning orality, literacy, and the existence of ‘residual orality’ in Ancient Greece.
89 Thomas (2006).
Thomas notes that this quasi-private method of textual dissemination in Ancient Athens may have been just as important for Athens’ cultural development as publication in the grand public spaces, and likely more important than the private mode of reading, tied in size as the private mode of reading was to the nascent commercial sector.90

In sum, the textual dissemination process took three major forms. In descending order of importance, they are: the public-private form of private group readings, the public form of texts in the service of oral-based performances, and the private form of solitary and silent reading.

Stage 2.1 – Author Strategies for the Textual Dissemination Process: Persuasiveness

If a *logos* has reached this stage in the cultural transmission process then it has been successfully disseminated amongst an audience that is potentially interested in its message. In order to convince its audience to consume it, however, it must now be persuasive. A textual analysis of Plato’s dialogues could unearth his innumerable narrative and stylistic tactics of persuasion, not least of which is simply his seemingly innate elegance with prose. However, there are two overarching strategies to which we should pay particular attention that could both probably fall under the broader, Aristotelian maxim to ‘know your audience.’

1. Do Your Market Research: Target Audience Segments

90 It is interesting that we are able to observe the causal relationship between the size of a commercial publishing industry and the growth of private (solitary and silent) reading even in Ancient Athens, at the publishing industry’s nascent beginnings. The relationship becomes much more pronounced with the invention of the printing press, which launched commercial publishing to an unprecedented scale and, with it, individualism. In fact, this causal relationship is arguably the intellectual cornerstone behind media ecology theories of the printing press’ influence, such as in Marshall McLuhan’s influential *The Gutenberg Galaxy* (1962).
Building upon the first criterion of finding a contextually valid audience, the next logical step is to play to one’s target audience. Socrates knew this well: one of his strongest critiques of writing, given in the *Phaedrus*, is its indiscriminating reach, insofar as it does not “know for whom it should speak and for whom it should stay silent.” Critchley even argues that the *Phaedrus* – where Socrates teaches Phaedrus, an Athenian who loves stories and cannot get enough of sophistic speeches, to be critical of rhetoricians and to seek philosophical *eros* – should be read as a reflexive case study showing how a philosopher can use targeted dialectic practices to persuade his one-man audience. Socrates shows how necessary it is for a philosopher to meet his partner-in-dialogue on his own terms: he leaves his urban comfort zone to walk with Phaedrus outside the city’s walls, tells fanciful stories about an Egyptian king, and even composes two sophistic speeches at Phaedrus’ insistence. For a man who distrusted storytelling, loathed rhetoric, and drank hemlock rather than leave his beloved Athens, this is quite a feat of targeted salesmanship.

Unlike Socrates, who had never published texts, Plato discovered that he could also use writing to target specific audiences, at least to a point. Platonic scholars often divide Plato’s dialogues into two blocks, usually along chronological lines. Kahn suggests that we should think of these two blocks of texts as also intentionally corresponding to two different audiences – exoteric and esoteric. The former are shorter and tend to utilize dramatic storytelling techniques. They are aimed at introducing a wider circle of educated readers (or listeners) to philosophy and include texts ranging chronologically from the *Apology* to the *Phaedrus*. The second

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91 Plato (*Phaedrus*, 275e). καὶ οὐκ ἐπίσταται λέγειν οἷς δὲι γε καὶ μὴ.
92 Critchley (2013)
group of dialogues is more technical works that are targeted towards philosophers, including the *Parmenides, Theaetetus, Sophist,* and others. Such an audience segmentation technique is not uncommon amongst proselytizing groups; Bible teachers, for instance, often recommend that newcomers to Christianity begin by reading the Gospel of Mark, for its short length and fast-pace, or the Gospel of John, for its simplicity and narrative emphasis, rather than the obscure and plot-less Book of Revelations.

Socrates was certainly able to make his dialogical conversations more targeted than a text could ever be, but Plato’s ability to write different kinds of *logoi* for different audiences was nevertheless a clever strategy that helped make his texts to be more persuasive to their target audiences.

2. Speak Their Language: Credibility through Traditionalism

In the *Rhetoric,* Aristotle gives us three primary means of persuasion: *ethos* (credibility), *pathos,* and *logos.* We would argue that we could explain many of the oral and poetic communication styles found in Plato’s dialogues – including perhaps even the dialogue form itself – by understanding them as tactics used by the author in order to cultivate *ethos,* in the same way that Marx couched his own revolutionary arguments in thoroughly bourgeois and traditionalist communication styles.

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94 There are countless Christian websites that give advice on how to start reading the Bible. The following two are characteristic: [http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/where-is-the-best-place-to-start-reading-the-bible-for-a-new-christian/](http://www.whatchristianswanttoknow.com/where-is-the-best-place-to-start-reading-the-bible-for-a-new-christian/)
[http://cms.intervarsity.org/studentsoul/item/start-reading-bible](http://cms.intervarsity.org/studentsoul/item/start-reading-bible)
95 The strategy of writing different *logoi* for different types of audiences did not end with Plato. In marketing, this is called ‘customer segmentation,’ and marketers have made great strides in the past several years to personalize advertising messaging more than ever before. Through Big Data, the ability of Internet companies like Google and Facebook to track users’ ‘digital footprints,’ and sophisticated statistical techniques, modern advertising could one day become more persuasive and responsive than even a conversation with Socrates.
Strategically, the best way to gain the trust of the bourgeoisie – i.e. to cultivate *ethos* in order to create persuasive *logoi* – is to talk like a bourgeoisie and appeal to bourgeois instincts. In the same way, Plato couched his revolutionarily philosophic arguments in a language and communicative style that would appeal to the Athenians, who had been raised on a diet of oral-communicated poetry and speech.

In *Genres of Dialogue* (1995), an analysis of the puzzling ways that Plato plays with and incorporates non-philosophic literary genres into his dialogues, Nightingale stops just short of making this argument herself. She argues that Plato’s use of an ‘intertextual mode’ and his composition of ‘mixed texts’ serve several instrumental functions: to parody and criticize alien genres (poetry, rhetoric), to construct philosophy as a genre by ‘identifying against’ others, and also, just as importantly, to deliberately blur the boundaries between philosophy and alien genres. In this way, Plato’s texts are both “conservative *and* transformative… [Affirming] similarity and continuity even as [they] rebel against their predecessors.”96 We and Nightingale are agreed in the belief that Plato wrote “mixed texts” to blur the boundaries between philosophy and alien genres, but she goes on to guess that he does so because of an extremely foresighted sense that completely divorcing philosophy from other genres would someday lead to disciplinary decay and a belief in the usefulness of interdisciplinary studies. Both strike me as highly anachronistic, but Nightingale is at least clear that her hypothesis is only speculation.97

Even though our explanation makes strategic sense in the deductive context of our cultural transmission model, we might simply wish to defer to Nightingale’s

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96 Nightingale (1995: 8).
erudite intuition, were it not for the fact that Thucydidean scholars recently discovered nearly the same phenomena in the *History*. Rengakos (2006) highlights Thucydides’ epic, tragic, and even Herodotean heritage, which are particularly notable through Thucydides’ frequent use of the “mixed narrative form that combines plain narration with μίμησις [mimesis].” Thomas (2006) notes the text’s similarity to the writing practices of the sophists and even the medical writers, arguing that Thucydides almost certainly knew about the rhetorical techniques commonly associated with both groups and, therefore, appropriated them intentionally as he needed them.

Between Thomas (2006) and Nightingale (1995), we can say with some confidence that both Plato and Thucydides appropriated rhetorical techniques from alien genres – outside of philosophy and political science, respectively – both intentionally and strategically. Ultimately, we can never really be sure of either author’s goals behind their strategies, but inasmuch as both authors were motivated by a desire to transform human action at scale through the constructions of new discursive disciplines (according to Allen and Ober (2006), respectively) and insofar as using “intertextual modes” and “mixed narrative forms” make it more likely for *logoi* to appear credible and therefore satisfy the success criterion of ‘persuasiveness’ (in the context of the cultural transmission model), it seems likely that Plato and Thucydides were making the same strategic bid for credibility as Marx, the strangely conservative revolutionary.

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Stages 3-5 – The Reader Interpretation Cascade: Conceptual Visibility, Imaginative Shifts, and Belief Change

A *logos* reaches the third stage of the model if it is able to successfully find a contextually valid audience, is textually disseminated at sufficient scale, and is deemed persuasive by enough of its consumers. Cultural consumers, and in particular readers (a shorthand term to encompass cultural consumers of texts in both the private and quasi-private contexts of consumption) will then interpret the *logoi* in such a way that corresponds to Plato’s comprehensive theory of language, which is discussed throughout the *Republic*, particularly during the explanation of the Line Analogy.¹⁰⁰ For Plato, the power of symbols (including *logoi*) comes from their ability to make an invisible concept, like the tri-partite soul, visible to a person (stage 3). To the extent that the concept has been described vividly, the reader can then recall it whenever he would like, allowing it to seep into his conscious and unconscious thoughts and expand the contours of his imagination (4).¹⁰¹ In the *Seventh Letter*, Plato imagines this stage as culminating in “a sudden… light that is kindled by a leaping spark.”¹⁰² According to Plato’s partially pragmatist ideology this “light” then manifests itself in a change in the reader’s beliefs (5), which changes his rules of action (6) according to a complex formula. For Plato, texts are only one of several Foucauldian self-technologies that can change people’s beliefs, behaviors, and sense of self and identity, but they are far and away the technology – in both the colloquial and Foucauldian sense of the word – with the greatest potential for scale.

¹⁰¹ Ibid, 81.
We group stages 3-5 into a broader ‘Reader Interpretation’ stage just as Allen does, because of how interdependent and continuous these stages are to each other. One cascades into the next. Granted, the three stages do not necessarily occur in the same period of time. It might take months or years before a newly visible concept will fully shift a person’s imagination, change his beliefs, and constitute new rules of action for him to follow. Yet if Plato’s textually transmitted logos hopes to drive change on both an individual and social level, it must go through the reader interpretation channel in its completion, without skipping any of the three stages.

**Stages 3-5.1 – Tactics for Achieving Enargeia (Vividness)**

It is possible for a logos to be widely disseminated amongst a receptive audience, found to be persuasive by that audience, and yet not shift that audience’s beliefs and rules of action. Indeed, today we read many logoi that we may enjoy, find persuasive, and that introduce us to new concepts, but do not shift the landscape of our imagination or fundamentally challenge us to change our beliefs. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates imagines logos as merely a seed that is planted in the mind of the listener or reader; in order for it to grow and come to life it must have a certain quality to it,\(^{103}\) which Socrates refers to as enargeia or vividness.\(^{104}\) As Allen argues, the goal of Plato’s writings is to achieve enargeia, to write logos capable of sparking the light of clarity (πυρὸς) in the cultural consumer’s mind. In so doing Plato can effect scalable change, and thus we can say that writing that has enargeia is “pragmatically

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\(^{103}\) There are also several other factors that determine whether the logos seed will be able to come to fruition, besides the quality of the words. One is “the quality of the soil in the student’s mind,” as Allen (2011: 26) calls it, i.e. the student’s receptiveness to philosophy. Plato’s belief that not every mind is fundamentally receptive to philosophy is perhaps the primary intellectual basis for his famously elitist attitudes.

\(^{104}\) Plato, (*Phaedrus*, 278a). See also Allan (2011: 26) for interpretation.
efficacious" for Plato. Allen culls together several of the tactics that Plato uses in his dialogues to achieve *enargeia* and even tests several of them empirically in the second half of her text. The three most salient tactics that she identifies for achieving *enargeia* through text are:

1. **Exploiting psychic structures**
   Allen identifies Plato’s ability to tap into three psychic structures in particular: maternal proximity, paternal authority, and the fear of death.\(^{105}\) Anticipating many of the insights that Freudianism and even the modern PR industry have made in the 20\(^{th}\) century, Plato realized that he could make his texts more vivid by tapping into his audience’s basic psychological desires and recognitions.\(^{106}\)

2. **Exploiting extended metaphor**
   A real fear amongst philosophers is the potential for future generations to misinterpret their arguments altogether by taking them out of context. In the political culture of 4\(^{th}\) century Athens, Plato was largely able to avoid this problem by his impressive ability to link concepts together through extended metaphor and imagery. Allen compares Plato’s influence during that era to Aristotle’s sway, whose writing employs much fewer metaphors, and finds that orators were more likely to adopt Aristotelian terms like *prohairesis* (deliberated commitment) out of context. From Aristotle Athenian politicians appropriated ideas, but from Plato they developed ideologies.\(^{107}\)

\(^{105}\) See Allen (2011, 163) for a brief literature review on comparisons between Freud, Plato, and psychology.

\(^{106}\) For a fascinating (if only tangentially related) examination of the influence of Freudianism on the modern PR industry, see the BBC documentary, “The Century of the Self” (2002). In short, it argues that psychoanalytic theories of the mind and psychological techniques have been foundational in 20\(^{th}\) century methods of social manipulation. In employing basic psychic structures in his texts, Plato anticipated a hugely successful intellectual insight.

\(^{107}\) Allen (2011: 94)
3. **Actionability**
   It is not enough for a *logos* to be interpreted by readers in a way that resounds with them and changes their beliefs. To qualify as vivid and to generate social power *logoi* must create rules of action for the reader that are not overly abstract but that can be readily applied through concrete practices.  

**Stage 6 – The Action Arena**

If *logoi* in the Platonic transmission model is sufficiently vivid then it is able to profoundly influence the beliefs and rules of action of its audience members. Yet influencing individuals alone is not enough to cause widespread social change amongst a community, even if a *logoi* is able to influence a large percentage of that population. For commons-based social settings, micro-level changes do not sum evenly on the macro-level. In order to incorporate this inconsistency into our model we appropriate an analytical tool called the “action arena” from the classic Institutional Analysis and Development (IAD) framework.  

Associated with the school of New Institutional Economics – an interdisciplinary group of political economists and sociologists – it was developed as a systematic approach to understanding social choice and change within institution-laden social settings. The “action arena” is its analytical centerpiece; it is the social space in which individual actors interact with each other for a broad range of social purposes and is constructed by the institutional and structural components of its social setting.  

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110 Although the IAD framework was developed initially to study explicitly collective-action settings, such as communities dominated by common-property regimes, it can also be used to examine any ‘commons’-based social setting. Its particular *raison d’être* amongst the many existing sociological frameworks is in its interdisciplinary synthesis. From classical institutional analysis it emphasizes the importance of culture and symbolism, from
We can think of the Action Arena as the space where an Athenian individual’s beliefs and rules of action engage with the confluence of incentives that represent his social context – with the city’s social and legal norms, political and religious institutions, economic and material conditions, and so forth. For a very basic example suppose a group of Athenians read Plato’s *Republic* and find it persuasive enough that they shift their actions so as to work towards the removal of all poets from Athens. If they are politicians, they may go to the Assembly and introduce a law to ban poets, and if they are merchants, they may refuse to do any trade with the poets. Regardless of their methods in the action arena, they will have to engage with other actors, such as the poets themselves, with the democratic political institutions, and with broader, contextual factors, such as religious norms, socioeconomic classes, and Athenian notions of communitarianism. In the process, the original beliefs and rules of action of the group of Plato-reading Athenians, the Athenian social context, and the contours of the action arena itself will all have almost certainly changed. There is an immense amount of sociological theory that describes how these interactions in the action arena take place, but we need not delve into them here. What is important is that we have incorporated an analytical tool into our model that allows us to conceptualize social

neoclassical economics it emphasizes individual agency and strategy (economists often use rational choice theory and/or game theory with the IAD framework), and from its initial focus on “Tragedy of the Commons” problems it inherits an emphasis on community-based social interaction.

The Athenian *polis*, with its strong communitarian ethic as well as its unique culture of agonistic individualism (see for example Nietzsche (1996, originally 1872), Arendt (1998, originally 1958, and the summary of Athens’ cultural context by Nisbett (2001)), is a suitable subject of analysis for the part of the IAD framework that I appropriate. The IAD framework is also well suited to my general endeavor, given my approach on community-based identity-formation, cultural artifacts, and individual strategies.
change in Athens that is not purely determined by individual-level belief-systems and rules of action.\footnote{In fact, the IAD framework includes a more nuanced “action arena” than I present here. I have chosen to only appropriate its core feature, the two-way interaction between individual actors and “action situations” (a blend of contextual forces), for much-needed simplicity and also for the fact that my thesis is not concerned with the influence of the Platonic cultural transmission process on Athenian institutional development itself, per se.}

**Stage 6.1 – Preemptive Strategies for the Action Arena**

The extent to which Plato considered how his *logoi* would fair in the “action arena” – and the audiences who championed it – is unclear. Allen does not give us any analysis of how Plato might have perceived the action arena and its potential roadblocks to his mission. Certainly, Thucydides does not seem to take the contemporary Athenian action arena into direct account, given that he claims to be writing for future audiences just as much (if not more) than current ones.\footnote{Ober (2006) makes an interesting argument on this point. In inventing “political science” as a mode of thought, Thucydides’ goal is to create future actors who have a better, more holistic understanding of the complex sociopolitical systems that backdrop the ‘action arena,’ and who understand its essential reflexivity (the feedback loop between actor and context). Through this knowledge, Thucydides’ readers will be better equipped to assert their political agency, to become “leaders with Periclean abilities.” (2006: 157). In other words, Thucydides is concerned with the action arena, but on a level removed from the sort of strategic, *logoi*-focused way we are looking at it.} Yet Plato was once an aspiring politician before he met Socrates and was born to a politically active family (two of his uncles were part of the oligarchic coup of 404 BCE), so surely he had a good idea of how social change and policy reform occurred in Athens.

The argument that Plato focused predominantly on educating political elites – which is true for those whom he tutored but contested in regard to his notional audience for his written works – would make some sense in the context of the action arena, given the disproportionate political agency afforded to elites. Nevertheless, Athens was a radically egalitarian community, such that we could just as easily argue...
that it would make more sense for Plato to target a ‘mass’ audience (or at least an audience beyond the aristocracy) if he hoped to effect widespread social and political change.

**Stage 7 – Social Outcomes**

Once a *logoi* has passed through all prior six steps its effects can be observed through numerous types of social outcomes. Allen tracks the influence of Plato’s dialogues on 4th century Athens along four broad categories: institutional transformations, changes in public opinion, the changing policy reform landscape, and shifts in identity-based groupings. By focusing on Athens in the late 4th century, she examines Plato’s influence several decades after his death, which increases the likelihood that the influence that she finds is due more to Plato’s writings than to his in-person activities.\(^{113}\)

Before discussing the specific social outcomes in 4th century BCE, it is important to mention the circular nature of our model. All of the social outcomes of the model feed back into the cultural creation stage, insofar as they determine the social context in which both cultural creators and audiences live within.

Fourth-century Athens is an important case study for another reason, too. Beginning in 330 BCE, Athens entered what Allen identifies as a unique historical moment. All aspects of Athenian social life were overtaken by an intense “culture war,” a paradigm-shifting occasion where “coherent alternative conceptual visions gained argumentative traction at the core of Athenian politics.”\(^{114}\)

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\(^{113}\) Incidentally, Allen also chose an era in Athenian history with a relatively large dataset of political speeches, writings, archaeological evidence, and so forth – which is highly useful for supporting her empirical approach.

Lycurgus and Demosthenes were the two protagonists on either side of this culture war, but behind them were large and distinct social factions. Behind these factions were the city’s leading intellectuals, rhetoricians, and philosophers, whose ideas permeated the heated political debates. And no intellectual influenced the ‘culture war’ more than Plato. Allen tracks changes in political vocabulary amongst 4th century political orations, noting that philosophical terminology and concepts formed the key intellectual basis for many of the era’s most important policy debates. Lycurgus and his faction tended to use Platonic language while Demosthenes and his faction opposed most Platonic language and ideology bitterly and pointedly.

As the intense ‘culture war’ of the 4th century indicates, Plato’s foremost influence on his polis was in the way that his texts reworked identity-based social groupings. Plato’s dialogues shifted the readers’ beliefs and rules of action, causing readers to reconfigure their identities and social identifications, which, in the words of Hattam and Lowndes (2007), a pair of political scientists studying the similarly profound effects of philosophical ideas on the course of American political development, “[rearranged] the social cleavages and political alliances of the day.”

Intense factionalism developed in Athens, with philosophical ideology becoming the primary point of contention in determining the city’s leadership.

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115 Ibid, 98.
116 Despite the title of her book, Allen admits that the question presented in the second half of her book – of how ideas, particularly those of Plato, influenced political events and resulted in material outcomes during the ‘culture war’ – precedes her second question of why Plato wrote, both chronologically in the composition of her book and in general importance.

In indication of Allen’s open-minded and lofty mission, the last line of her prologue reads, “My hope … is that this book, in addition to answering the question of why Plato wrote, will mark trailheads that might be pursued toward the goal of answering our long-lived questions about the relationship between ideas and events.” (2011: 8)

Policy reforms were influenced strongly by Platonism as well. On the three most important policies of the era – how to respond to Macedonian aggression, how to reform Athenian institutions in the face of perceived cultural degeneration, and what to think of the steady conversion of democracies to oligarchies across Greece – Platonic language and concepts provided key arguments for Lycurgus’ policy agenda. Many of the ‘Platonic’-side reforms ultimately won the day. Two key legal reforms that were first proposed in Platonic texts became law in 317 BC (the “guardians of the law” and the “guardians of women” policies), and Athens decided on a relatively laissez-faire approach to its neighboring democracies’ transformations into oligarchies.¹¹⁸

Several key, Platonic-based institutional changes also occurred in the 4th century. The Areopagus, a key judicial body, was slowly converted into a council of experts, closely resembling Plato’s proposed “Nocturnal Council” from his Laws. Altogether, Allen notes that Athenian democracy, “under the influence of Platonic ideas… drifted toward a managerial form.”¹¹⁹ Public opinion shifted, too. Whereas in Socrates’ time public approval of philosophers was so low that Plato and his peers thought it prudent to flee the city after the trial, Allen observes that the Athenians actually protested en masse against an anti-philosopher decree passed in 307 BCE.¹²⁰ In short, during one of Ancient Athens’ most dramatic and perhaps earliest paradigm shifts – in both its political sphere and broader cultural trends – Plato and his newly constructed discipline of philosophy played an integral and influential role.

¹¹⁸ See Allen (2011: 138) for a brief explanation of these policy reforms.
¹¹⁹ Ibid, 140.
Allen cautions us to not underestimate the importance of this realization. Writing in the book’s epilogue “to my colleagues”, she hopes that the second half of her work will be taken as a case study of the broader process by which the ideas of intellectuals can come to shape a community’s values and identity. In this respect, we would argue that *Why Plato Wrote* is a landmark examination of an extraordinarily important and often understudied theory of social change. In 1935 the economist John Maynard Keynes, who doubled as a think-tank activist in the same mold as Plato, famously wrote in the conclusion to his monumental *The General Theory of Employment, Interest and Money*:

> The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong, are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influence, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. Madmen in authority, who hear voices in the air, are distilling their frenzy from some academic scribbler of a few years back. I am sure that the power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas.\(^{121}\)

Keynes is doing more than just making an offhand or self-congratulatory remark here. In social theory, structural theories of social change are prominent; the ‘powers of vested interests,’ which act as proxies for structural concepts like Marx’s relations of production or Theda Skocpol’s (1979) macro-political forces, are often considered to be the predominant drivers of social change.\(^{122}\) Keynes is taking a strong stand against those structuralists in support of a more ideologically driven social theory. Although he does not have evidence to support his belief, he hopes that the influence

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\(^{121}\) Keynes (1935).

\(^{122}\) Skocpol (1979).
of his own book on Western economies will become a successful case study in itself, just like Plato’s *Republic* was for 4th century Athens. In *Why Plato Wrote*, Allen makes a courageous, if not completely successful, push toward proving Keynes’ belief.\(^\text{123}\)

\(^{123}\) I would argue that there are two key problems still standing in Allen’s way. First, that she did not sufficiently account for the effect of writing as a technological medium in determining the parameters of Plato’s capacity for ideologically-driven social change (she comes very close though – instead of only asking “Why did Plato write?” She would have been better served by then asking, “Why was it important that he *could* write?”). However, I will address this problem thoroughly in the next chapter.

The second key problem is Allen’s empirical methodology. The primary method by which Allen hopes to track Plato’s influence is through tracking political vocabulary usage. She comes up with a list of words and phrases that she believes are ‘Platonic’ in origin, and then uses a digital database to count up how many times each 4th century Athenian political speaker used those words. The first methodological problem is that she cannot prove that certain words are ‘Platonic,’ ‘Isocratic,’ or ‘Aristotelian’ in origin. Second, comparing the sums of word counts between two politicians, like Lycurgus and Demosthenes, cannot tell us whether Lycurgus’ increased usage of those words is significantly different from Demosthenes’ instead of just attributable to statistical noise.

There are some existing statistical techniques that Allen could employ to mitigate both problems. For the first, although it is difficult to prove that any one word is Platonic, Allen could hedge her risk of collecting false positives by constructing a large basket of ‘Platonic words and phrases,’ and then score texts on how ‘Platonic’ they are based on their use of those words. This is how most ‘sentiment analysis’ works, and I would encourage her to use the techniques developed for sentiment analysis (which are unsurprisingly cutting-edge, given their commercial applicability to market research) instead of relying on raw word counts, as ‘scoring’ texts by how ‘positive’ they are (i.e. sentiment analysis) is not fundamentally different from scoring them by how ‘Platonic’ they are. Ultimately, most sentiment analysis techniques still use Allen’s method of counting the number of ‘coded’ words as their baseline approach, but they supplement that basic technique with ever more sophisticated machine learning functionality.

Allen could solve her second methodological problem fairly easily by running statistical significance tests (using a normal or t-distribution) on her Platonic word counts, in order to observe whether Lycurgus’ higher use of Platonic words than the average orator’s use of them – or compared to orators from different social factions – is attributable to more than just randomness. She could also run statistical significance tests to compare the sentiment analysis-style scores that she would have generated from the above techniques, although these tests may be a bit more difficult to run.

Ultimately, however, the above techniques are relatively small fixes; existing techniques for measuring relationships of influence from one thinker or text to another are unfortunately primitive at best (which, to be fair, Allen understands, hence why she supplements her empirical analysis with textual analysis). Yet I have high hopes that this will soon change. Text mining – the ability to analyze ‘unstructured’ data like text just as well as we can analyze structured data like numbers – is developing quickly as innovations in machine learning, statistical analysis, and computational linguistics converge. In a world
Conclusion

In this chapter we have continued to work towards an answer for the two questions that we introduced at the beginning of the last chapter: what are the impacts of new writing-based cultural transmission technologies in 5th and 4th century Athens on 1) the city-state’s cultural output and ‘cultural commons,’ and 2) its social conditions, particularly those conditions that are most significant for assessing identity-formation and social change. My method of answering these questions has been to construct a model of a significant writing-based cultural transmission process in Ancient Athens, in order to compare it to the orality-based bardic transmission model more directly.

In the last chapter we constructed our model primarily based on one case, albeit of a wide group of people: the ‘Homerids,’ or epic storytelling bards of Ancient Greece. We needed to construct our writing-based model on a similarly influential, pervasive, and timely – in the context of the shift between orality and literacy – example. Plato’s dialogues and his overall transmission process fit those three criteria best, although we observed that Thucydides’ History of the Peloponnesian War also fit those three criteria fairly well. Thus, we constructed a model of the ‘Platonic cultural transmission process,’ with some aspects of the ‘Thucydidean cultural transmission process’ incorporated into it where necessary.

where market researchers will be able to analyze our preferences and opinions in-depth through our social media conversations (which is already happening) and where Spark Notes (both summaries and analysis) will be written by computers (which may happen soon), the implications for scholarship on the history of thought, particularly for studying causal relationships and picking up on patterns of influence within and between texts, will be enormous.
We looked at the cultural and technological context in which Plato came to use writing. Examining the evidence for ancient literacy, we characterized Ancient Athens as probably the most literate of the Ancient Greek city-states. Although ‘comprehensive literacy’ in the ancient world was reserved for a small elite, literacy rates were likely increasing at surprising speeds in Ancient Athens, owing primarily to the egalitarian and democratic context in which Athenian literacy arose. Based upon an assortment of recent Platonic scholarship, including Allen’s, we concluded that Plato likely anticipated this general readership. Further, as a pragmatist he believed that texts could act as Foucauldian ‘technologies of the self’ to transform their audiences. The textual cultural transmission process represents a fundamental technological breakthrough in expanding a cultural creator’s power to exert influence over large amounts of people, a concept that Allen dubs “surplus linguistic power.” And Plato was one of the first to recognize – or at least take advantage of the fact – that it could help him effect widespread social change in Athens.

We then introduced a model of the Literate-Platonic cultural transmission process to rigidly examine how textually transmitted culture could impact individuals and society writ large. It traces a written cultural production (*logoi*) from its creation, dissemination, interpretation by readers, interactions in the action arena, and through to its social outcomes. There are two key players in this model: the supply-side author and his demand-side audience, which is both notional and “fictional” in comparison to the bard’s audience. In our write-up of the model, we also do two things at every stage: contextualize each stage by examining and historically presenting the relevant information from Plato’s actual cultural transmission process (and Thucydides’ as
well, when appropriate), and discuss deductively-reasoned ‘strategies’ for creating successful *logoi*. The latter is key to understanding what sort of cultural output results from the new writing-based transmission process, and fortunately it does not require that we assume intentionality on the part of the author.

Unlike the last chapter, however, we have not presented the ‘results’ of our study, i.e. our answers to the three key questions. Given that our analysis and results will be comparative, in order to describe the oral-literate Athenian transition overall, we handle this part in the next chapter, which exclusively studies the effects of the shift in cultural transmission technologies.

In the next chapter, we will synthesize the many aspects of our Literate-Platonic model, compare them to our inferred results of the Oral-Bardic model, and deductively infer answers to our three key questions for the oral-literate Athenian transition overall (expected cultural output, expected social conditions, and expected effects) from that comparison. By analyzing the effects of the changing cultural output and social conditions on Athenian society, we will generate a few big-picture insights about how major shifts in information and communications technologies (ICTs) transform individuals and societies more broadly. We will see that the shift to writing-based technologies and literacies during Ancient Athens, slow and mixed as it was, reconceptualized the way that individuals constructed identities and that social change occurred, especially during the culture war of 4th century Athens.
IV. Tying the Models Together

In the prior two chapters we set the scope for our analysis of the influence of information and communication technology (ICT) in Ancient Athens and constructed two models of orality-era and literate-era cultural transmission technologies. We also added to our intellectual arsenal a synthesis of the most salient expected cultural output characteristics and social conditions from the bardic process and analyzed their likely effects. We are now ably prepared to generate the key, big-picture insights that will help us to pinpoint the influence of writing on Athens’ 4th-century culture war and to better understand the level of influence that ICT shifts have overall.

First, however, we must address a few key limitations. We must recognize that our models do not give us a full picture of Athenian cultural or social conditions. While the bardic model was influential and pervasive to Athenian life, a multiplicity of cultural transmission technologies proliferated in preliterate Athens – whether inter-family conversations or religious festivals – and influenced Athenian society as well. The same is true for the Platonic cultural transmission technology; it is both highly influential and pervasive but ultimately only one of several ICTs that shaped Athenian life. Second, it would be facile to say that communication is all that determines a community’s cultural outputs and social conditions. Economic relations, macro-political forces, geographical and bio-physical conditions, all play an outsized role, which we built explicitly into the literate-Platonic model through the ‘action arena.’

We are interested in assessing the influence of shifting communication technologies in isolation, however, not identifying every variable responsible for the
dramatic ideological, individual, and material change that characterized 5th and 4th century Athens, particularly during its culture war in the 4th century. In choosing two of the most prominent communication technologies to model, whose respective practitioners – poets and philosophers – were extraordinarily influential to Athenian life in ways that were often directly at odds with each other, we therefore approximately isolate the influence of these changing ICTs.

We will begin by answering the first two key questions: what sort of changed cultural outputs and social conditions can we expect as a result of the shifting cultural transmission technologies in Ancient Athens. We will take the Oral-Bardic technique as a sort of baseline that characterizes the effect of a prevalent orality-era ICT on cultural output and social conditions in the ‘initial’ situation of preliterate Athens, and then compare this to the changes brought on by the advent of the Literate-Platonic transmission technology. Next, we will use our answers to the first two questions – the changed social conditions and expected cultural output – to answer our third question, about their broader implications. These implications will be our key insights on the role of writing as a technological platform for communication and transmitting cultural information in Ancient Athens.

Finally, it is important to note that we have a clearly defined scope for our analysis – the social context of Ancient Athens, and the transition from storytelling performances to texts. By narrowing our scope we are able to reach powerful

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124 In terms of dates, the bardic model was the preeminent form of cultural composition (Parry-Lord’s oral-formulaic composition theory) up until at least the 6th century, when a first attempt to produce a definitive, textual version of the Homeric epics was organized at the Panathenaic Festival. The bardic model persisted throughout 4th and 3rd century Athens as well, however, through a variety of poetic and dramatic performance settings.
conclusions, which can themselves be used as a platform to discuss other, similarly significant shifts in ICTs throughout history.

**Comparative Results**

First we analyze the results of the two models, comparing the Literate-Platonic to the Oral-Bardic in order to understand the key changes that literacy and textual transmission brought about.

**Expected Changes to Cultural Output**

No communication technology is ever “neutral.” When Marshall McLuhan claims polemically that, “the medium is the message,” he means that the transmission process for cultural content sets constraints, opens up new possibilities, and creates incentives that influence cultural output. Specifically, we compare two sorts of cultural output, the storytelling of orality-era bards and the learned *logoi* of literate-era thinkers who hope to have a major, scalable impact on the lives and thoughts of 4th century Athenians.

If an author is to alter his cultural content for the specifics of his medium he must either be permitted access to a radically new compositional method or be responding strategically to incentives inherent in the textual transmission process. These alterations need not be conscious if we assume a fairly robust evolutionary model, whereby *logoi* that align with the strategic incentives for success (whether purposefully or not by its author) will garner influence over *logoi* that do not. Thus, we can deduce the changes to Athens’ evolutionarily successful cultural output from two sources: our examination of the new “writer’s workshop” afforded to writers of texts, and the difference in success strategies that we identified between the two
transmission processes. That is: the strategies that are new to the Literate-Platonic model, and the strategies from the Oral-Bardic model that are no longer relevant.

1. **Stylistically and organizationally complex**
   
   Writers like Plato and Thucydides were able to take notes, write drafts and sketches, and revise over the course of years without losing memory to time. Their *logoi* could be more memory intensive, insofar as it could pay more attention to details – such as dates, or approximate quotations from speeches that occurred decades prior – and could employ a more complex structure and organization than merely that method which is most memorable.

2. **Technologies of the Self as Cultural ‘Solutions’**
   
   The most important strategy for the first criteria, finding contextually valid audiences, is to create content that is relatable in the context of an audience’s social life, in order for it to act as a ‘technology of the self’ that can solve a major problem-of-existence in the lives of audiences. Further, the more relatable a *logoi* is to a reader’s social life, the more likely they will be to translate their changed beliefs and identities into rules of action.

   This expected change is similar in ends to the Bardic-Orality expectation that cultural output be homeostatic, which, put another way, merely describes how bards morph their stories in order to solve each community’s specific cultural problems. For example, consider the Ghananese tribe that consolidated from seven to five territories, and its founding myth that correspondingly shifted from a father with seven territory-founding sons to five. The tribe’s cultural problem was that they no longer felt historically validated as a community, which the storyteller’s modification solved.

   Although the concept of orality-era homeostaticness is fairly similar to this cultural
output expectation, we leave it on list as a reminder of how even the successful *logoi* from the Literate-Platonic process needed to be socially relatable and constructed.

3. **Targeted to audience segments, not majoritarian**
   To fulfill the criteria of persuasiveness, we can expect textually transmitted culture to be more targeted toward specific, yet necessarily “fictionalized,” audiences by the author. Authors that adopt this strategy will write different *logoi* with different audiences in mind, tailoring all the other strategies listed here to a specific audience segment. In contrast, the bards had to tailor their stories to the majoritarian, vocal whims of the crowd.

4. **Targeted to most influential audience segments**
   Given the above criteria, what audience segments are strategically more useful to target? Broadly, our answer is the audience segment which is most likely to translate their *logoi*-based change in beliefs and identities into success in the action arena. Specifically, these tend to be either groups with high influence per capita, such as elites or politicians, or groups that make up for their low influence per capita with large overall populations.

5. **Thematically and conceptually radical**
   The orality-era constraint that stories must be thematically and stylistically formulaic no longer applies with writing, which lifts the individual’s memory constraint. Granted, there is nothing in our Literate-Platonic model that directly indicates that the ideas within *logoi* are more likely to succeed if they are radical, but we can deduce that the orality-era discouragement to non-formulaic thoughts had been lifted, such that it was overall relatively more likely for radical *logoi* to succeed in literate cultures than in orality.

6. **Stylistically conservative**
It is hard enough to convince audiences of a radically unfamiliar idea without also having to convince them to read a text in a radically unfamiliar style. Thus, to be persuasive many of the most influential, revolutionary *logoi* are presented in ironically conservative styles – Plato’s arguments against poetry are couched in poetic, storytelling communication styles, and Marxism defends itself with bourgeois-scientific methodology and capitalist economic frameworks.

**Expected Changes to Social Conditions**

Let us next turn to the Athenian social conditions that surround the creation, dissemination, and consumption of cultural information. What social conditions were introduced with the advent of the Literate-Platonic transmission process, and, where applicable, what Orality-Bardic social conditions were superseded or changed? We touched upon many of the answers to this question in the course of our walkthrough of the Literate-Platonic model, and in the list below we pull out some of the most salient of the discussed differences.

1. **Disembodied Transmission**

   With writing’s fundamental preservative capacity, any oral-based cultural transmitter (the author) is capable of transmitting his *logoi* to his audience without being present. The circumambient context of a *logoi* need not necessarily include the author himself.

   The transmission context need not include a group audience, either. In the bardic process, both a story’s influence and the bard’s remuneration were tied to the size of his audience, which encouraged a clustering of bodies, so to speak. With a disembodied transmission process, neither incentive for large group audiences exists, such that audiences could interact with the texts in non-group settings.
We noted in the second chapter that the presence of an embodied audience makes bards more ‘empathetic,’ and because of the iterative feedback-based model of story modification culture in the bardic model would be more empathetic and responsive to audience reactions. With a disembodied transmission model, all of these qualities fall away. Authors must resort to “fictionalizing” their audiences, and to the extent that they want to target or preemptively ‘modify’ their stories to specific audiences, they must use their “fictionalizations.”

2. **Spatial Expansion of Transmission**

   A *logoi* may be transmitted to audiences that are situated beyond the author’s immediate location without modification. An author can therefore write for non-local audiences, whether known or unknown. The potential reach or scale of influence afforded to authors is enormously greater than that of bards.

   The ability to write for specific, distant audiences proved especially important for our case studies, Plato and Thucydides. Interestingly, both authors were Athenian natives who were more or less forced to compose and transmit a substantial amount of their writings in exile. Thucydides was exiled from Athens after suffering a military defeat as a *stratēgos* in the Peloponnesian War, giving him time and space to devote to full-time research. He was unable to finish his *History* before his death, but it is perhaps not a coincidence that his text, composed in exile, includes scathing criticisms of several ‘demagogic’ Athenian politicians. Plato although never formally exiled, left Athens in the wake of Socrates’ trial with a large group of philosophers who feared the public backlash against philosophy. Without the textual transmission process’ spatial expansion, we might have had very different *logoi* by our two authors, if they had even dared to create *logoi* at all.
3. **Temporal Expansion**
   As written texts replaced individual memory as the primary means of knowledge archiving, a *logos* may be transmitted to future audiences that did not exist when the *logoi* was composed. Authors can reach audiences with their original *logoi* through intermediaries, without modification, even in death. Plato and Thucydides both greatly benefited from their intellectual immortality; Plato’s influence on Athens is first prominently noticed several decades after his death in the late 4th century, and both authors’ influence has lasted well into the contemporary era.

4. **Single Authorship**
   A *logoi* is no longer necessarily crowd-sourced. A single author can compose it.

5. **Slackened and Less Immediate Demand-Side Constraints to Transmission**
   In the Oral-Bardic process, a *logoi* must have been immediately approved – or at least not immediately booed – in order to be transmitted and replicated. In the Literate-Platonic process, one cannot receive immediate feedback from the audience, and sometimes the “success” of a *logos* – as measured by its ability to effect widespread ideological, individual, and/or material change – is not even determined until decades or centuries after its author’s death.

   Combined with the first three conditions (disembodied, spatially, and temporally expanded transmission), demand-side constraints were all-around lessened with the Literate-Platonic process. Authors could write for audiences who did not yet exist, in faraway locations, which greatly reduced the chance that they would be persecuted for their ideas. We would expect this to undermine the main effect of that immediate and intense demand pressure, identified in chapter two, as enforcing
cultural homeostasis and contextual validity. We will discuss this further in the next section.

For now, we should point out the key upshot of a lack of demand pressure, which is that authors will generally have much less exposure to audiences in general. Authors could make up for this lack of exposure by “fictionalizing” their audiences, or by simply creating stories more in-line with their personal preferences, and hoping that these stories will one day, somewhere, be picked up by an interested audience.

6. **Textual Finality**
   A *logoi* is no longer necessarily created iteratively. The combination of writing’s capacity for preservation and single authorship means that a *logoi* can acquire a sense of finality.

7. **Private Cultural Consumption**
   A textual *logoi* can be read by a “solitary, silent” reader in privacy, as opposed to the group audiences that defined the Oral-Bardic process. The upshot is that, as the idiom aptly goes, no longer will everyone (or most people) in a community be (forced to be) “on the same page.”

8. **Quasi-Private Cultural Consumption**
   A textual *logoi* can be consumed in a new array of ‘quasi-private’ contexts.

One of the most popular and significant in Ancient Athens was the “private readings in private houses” format, where authors, or those who purchased books, would gather with small groups of like-minded friends in private homes to read aloud from their books. Such readings were frequently followed by intellectual discussion. Often people would gather in private houses to meet a famous sophist hosted by a wealthy Athenian.\(^{125}\) Several other quasi-private forums for textual transmission occurred as

\(^{125}\) Thomas (2006: 182).
well, such as schools and symposiums. Generally, the textual transmission process leads to a fragmentation of the forums of cultural dissemination.


Neither the cultural creation nor cultural dissemination process is constrained by an individual’s memory, or at least not nearly to the extent in which this was true with the bardic process. Many of the supply-side constraints in the bardic process were removed, replaced by the cultural creation process that we might call the “writer’s workshop,” in reference to the scholarly analysis of Thucydides’ writing style and methods. In a “writer’s workshop,” the writer may use memory-outsourcing tools such as notes and drafts; he may outline, and he can rearrange his writing fairly easily. Thus, culture no longer needed to be as mnemonically formulaic, organizationally simple, or homogenous.

10. Economic Prerequisites for Transmission

The economic contexts governing cultural transmission differ greatly between these two models. In Ancient Greece during orality, bards were usually a distinct socioeconomic class, whose members worked together to provide the training (including musical) and apprenticeship necessary to engage in bardic storytelling. They earned their livings through a variety of channels including patrons, individual employers who hired them for specific functions, and the street performance model of crowd-sourced revenue generation. Authors, on the other hand, needed to be able to write but did not necessarily require any other training. Otherwise, however, they also needed to be able to disseminate texts. Economically, this required baseline writing materials to cover the initial production costs and then either a significant time
commitment or labor costs in order to ‘mass produce,’ transport, and distribute (either freely or at a price) their writings.

Given the relatively large expense, only the wealthy could likely afford to publish their *logoi* without profit. It is unclear how easy it would have been for authors to take advantage of the commercial publishing industry however. Intellectuals who offered a paid service, such as entry into a school or tutoring, could also meet the economic prerequisites insofar as they used publishing as a marketing tool. Plato, for instance, may have published his texts partially as a PR maneuver to promote his academy, which means that he was able to publish his texts as a sort of investment for future recuperation.

**Notes on a Culture War: The Second-Stage Effect of Writing for Athens and Beyond**

Our first two key questions were concerned with discovering the ‘results’ of our two models, insofar as our method of answering them has been to compare the deductively inferred results of the models together and observe the resulting changes to cultural output and social conditions. Our third key question is broader, and builds off the prior two; we are interested in understanding the implications of the shifting oral to literate cultural transmission technologies on 4th century Athens, especially along three levels of social change: ideological-discursive, individual and social identity-formation, and social-material outcomes. By understanding (with our prior questions) what new or different things writing-based textual transmission made possible – its ‘condition of possibility’ – we can now ask what kind of activities and reconfigurations may have occurred under its influence.
Methodologically, we need to look beyond comparative model-based
deductive inferences to answer our third question. Instead, we will also compare our
inferred results to our understanding of the empirical facts-on-the-ground in 4th
century Athens, as well as several other test cases. In so doing, we are able to use the
Athenian context as the two-way case study that it is: as both a tool for testing the
veracity of our model-based predictions and, insofar as it allows us to observe the
effects of the orality-literacy shift materially, a tool for further solidifying and
crystallizing our theoretical conclusions.

The most timely and significant empirical event that backdrops our discussion
is the ‘culture war’ of 4th century Athens, as described in Allen (2011). Scholars have
long recognized the intense sociopolitical factionalism that characterized late 4th
century Athens, as represented in the political context by the debates between
Demosthenes and Lycurgus. Allen moves the classical scholarship forward by
arguing persuasively for a more universalizing understanding of these debates,
configuring them as a broader ‘culture war’ and representative of a paradigm-shift in
Greek systems of thought – particularly, but not exclusively, toward Plato-infused
philosophy – as they drove a mirror paradigm-shift in social and political life.126 By
comparing my model-based deductions to her novel explication of the Athenian
culture war – my causal narrative to her empirical evidence – we are able to bring her
argument to bear on the broader relationship between writing, power, knowledge, and
social change on which she speculates.

There are three channels through which the orality-literacy shift in textual
transmission processes and the introduction of a writing-based communication

platform influenced Greek life: through the changing role of the author and ideological production (the supply-side), through the changing experiences of audiences (the demand-side), and through the changing relationship between power and discursive knowledge. These three channels also correspond approximately to three interrelated modes of social change that are also transformed: systems of thought, individual and social identities, and social-material life.

The Role of the Author and Ideological Production

**Intentionality and Planned Change**

As Allen says, “Plato wrote to reorder the symbol garden of Athenian culture.” He did so by writing texts that functioned as technologies of the self, through which he could help transform Athenians in very specific ways. Yet we should wonder that Plato even thought he was capable of doing something so ambitious, intentional, and specific.

In the Oral-Bardic process, individual bards were practically incapable of planning for the sort of intentional, preemptive, large-scale changes that Plato caused. For one, their choice of story content was driven largely by the immediate demand pressures (O.6) of their group audiences (O.2). If a bard said the wrong thing, he would be quickly and decisively reprimanded by his audience—hopefully with just boos, but perhaps with sticks and stones. An author like Plato, however, was much less limited in the kind of logoi that he could write. He was shielded from the unavoidably iterative effects of an audience’s immediate feedback (L.5), while the disembodied, spatial and temporal separation between him and his audience protected him from the very real physical danger of angering one’s audience (L.1-3). Overall,

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127 Ibid, 68.
authors were much freer to inject their own supply-side preferences into the cultural creation process than bards.

Even if bards were as capable as intentionally planning the content of their stories, in an evolutionary, crowd-sourced composition process (O.3), they had no way of knowing which aspects of their stories would be either replicated by other bards and added to a community’s ‘cultural commons,’ or forgotten completely (O.4). Authors, on the other hand, were often the sole authors of their texts (L.4), a fact so predominant that it is literally the reason that we call literate-era cultural creators ‘authors.’ Unlike in orality, the textual transmission process granted written texts a level of finality and staying power (L.4) that culture in the bardic process, with its dependence on finicky individual memory as a method of preservation (O.4), could never have. Certainly, a classic bardic story, such as the Iliad, transformed Greek listeners on a wide scale, but the kind of affects that it would have on its listeners was determined entirely by the supply-demand (bard-audience) social interaction logic. Meaning could not be easily determined by the intent of just one specific person.

The author’s capacity for intentional and planned social change owes itself in large part to the textual transmission process.

**Diversity of the Cultural Commons**

In the bardic process, group audiences (O.2), the individual memory system of archiving (O.4), and the memory constraint (O.1) combined to set a ceiling for the diversity of a community’s cultural commons. The memory constraint and concomitant memory-based system of cultural archiving set an approximate but very real cap on the actual size of a cultural commons – no bard can fit the Library of
Alexandria in his head. The constraint also encouraged memorableness for individual stories and even on a more microscopic level, limiting the size of a language. In orality, bards served as a community’s encyclopedia and dictionary; with these critical reference tools subject as they were to individual memory, the number of stories (or ‘encyclopedia entries’) and even the size of a community’s working vocabulary were necessarily limited. The difference could be vast: in 1983 Ong noted that standard English had a recorded vocabulary of at least a million and a half words that were easily accessible for use, whereas many simple oral dialects had only a few thousand words.\textsuperscript{128}

Group audiences led to a lack of cultural diversity because they encouraged cultural output that was majoritarian (O.10). The audience feedback that bards would incorporate into their story refinements (O.5) would be only the majority’s opinions. This is not to say that there would be no diversity of culture whatsoever, as bards might be able to perform different stories for different types of audiences or different types of stories that appealed to different audience preferences. Consider an analogy to the radio, where instead of ‘pop’ music (the most popular aural culture in absolute terms) playing on every station there are different stations that cater to the diversity of aural types of culture of which a listener might be interested – talk radio on the commute to work, country music on the commute back, and pop music at night. However, each station will play the most popular country music, the most popular ‘pop’ music, and discuss the most popular topics. If the population of listeners is large enough, there may even be radio stations specifically for ‘minority preferences’ – perhaps Latin music stations in Los Angeles or a left-leaning talk show (the unicorn

\textsuperscript{128} Ong (1983: 7).
of all radio broadcasting) in Portland – but they will still play the selections that are most popular within that minority audience group. Bards would do the same thing: memorizing a diversity of types of stories (both epics and shorter pieces, war stories and stories for wedding, and maybe even stories to appeal to a particularly large audience minority). Nevertheless, the sheer volume and diversity of music that can be accessed via non-ephemeral recordings (whether records, tapes, CDs, or digital) vastly outweighs that which is available through only non-recorded channels, such as radio. Culture that is archived through recordings results in a larger cultural commons, and a cultural composition process that is not immediately determined by majoritarian preferences results in a more diverse cultural commons at every size level.

The textual transmission process released the cap on the diversity and quantity of the cultural commons, but the textual composition process also made it easier for authors to create more diverse stories. The bardic memory constraint was replaced by a “writer’s workshop” of writing tools and methods with which the author could play, allowing them to experiment with diverse writing styles and structures (L.9). Cultural output could be more complex, innovative, and eclectic both in terms of its style and organization (L.11) and its themes and concepts (L.15).

**Producing Radical Ideologies**

Within the more diverse set of *logoi* that the textual transmission process permitted one specific type received special encouragement; authors like Plato could also intentionally create radical *logoi* and ideas more easily. Spatially, bodily, and temporally separated from their audiences (L.1-3), cultural creators were for the first
time safe to compose and disseminate radical ideas of the kind that could have otherwise gotten them punished or even killed – whether by unruly mobs, insulted political leaders, or a combination of the two (as with Socrates). Both Plato and Thucydides took advantage of this security, writing critical texts that challenged the Athenian status quo but while usually located a safe distance from the city. Furthermore, we know that authors were more technically capable of producing thematically and conceptually radical texts (L.15) due to the lifting of the memory constraint (L.9), which made it possible for them to compose logoi that was not necessarily memorable, formulaic (O.7), or spontaneously created.

I do not mean to argue that the author’s newfound distance from both physical danger and from the demand pressures of the performer-audience immediate feedback system (L.5) meant that he merely had more options as to what he could say. Rather, I am arguing that the Literate-Platonic transmission process explicitly encouraged more radical ideological productions, insofar as its cultural composition process was less demand-driven. Allow me to make an analogy.

Earlier we mentioned that the person-to-person system of iterative feedback between bards and their audiences would be similar to a modern author who hires focus groups to test every sentence of her book. But there is actually a serious problem with overusing focus groups: it creates an extremely consumer-driven product development process, which tends to result in incremental iterations rather than radical changes. This incrementalism is actually a well-documented problem in business theory literature, specifically for companies that incorporate focus groups and other consumer research directly into their product development processes.
Clayton Christensen calls this the Innovator’s Dilemma: a good company will naturally listen to its customers when deciding how to improve its products or services, but the more it lets customers drive its product development decisions, the more likely it will be to reject breakthrough innovations – ‘disruptive technologies’ – that will ultimately displace its products completely.\(^\text{129}\) The mechanism behind this paradox might be summed up best by a quote that has been famously attributed to Henry Ford (which Steve Jobs often quoted in interviews): “If I had asked people what they wanted, they would have asked for a better horse.” Instead, Ford built the automobile, a ‘disruptive technology’ so radical that no customer could have imagined it.

The same logic applies for ideological, as opposed to material, productions. Separating the audience from the cultural development process does more than merely give the author more freedom to compose culture according to his own preferences and intentions; it makes it more likely for new ideas or logoi to be big, radical ideas. It alters the rate of change by which systems of thought progress.

We should note that this radicalizing effect of writing technology is not necessarily positive. To the same degree that it encourages breakthrough innovations it also discourages incremental iterations, what Christensen calls “sustainable” (rather than “disruptive”) technologies. Incremental iteration through audience feedback has its place, too. It results in cultural creators that must be more empathetic to their audiences (O.5), as opposed to the removed, strategic, manipulating social engineer.

\(^{129}\) Christensen (2013).
that we might imagine as the ideal author of the Literate-Platonic process.\textsuperscript{130} Further, this conclusion only concerns supply-side shifts in ideological productions; who is to say whether general audiences will be equally as receptive to radical rather than incremental ideological shifts? What if the separation of audiences from the cultural development process results in a population that is overall less interested in culture and less influenced by it? For scholars like Allen who are interested in understanding and promoting the relationship between ideas and events – really, for every intellectual who, like Plato, hopes to affect change – this possibility is disconcerting. We will discuss it further in the next section of this chapter, on audience identities.

\textit{Authorial Credibility}

In the textual transmission process the role of the author becomes much more pronounced, to the point where he becomes a central source of credibility, valorization, and classification in a community’s broader discursive practices, even beyond his death. Foucault has discussed how the concept of an ‘author’ represents much more than merely the typical notion of a historical person, particularly in his lecture, “What is an Author?”\textsuperscript{131} He urges us to instead think of the author as an “ideological product,” who fulfills certain “author-functions,” which are “characteristic of the mode of existence, circulation, and functioning of certain discourses within a society.”

\textsuperscript{130} Unsurprisingly, this characterizes Allen’s understanding of Plato – as a strategic pragmatist, who was willing to spread “noble lies” to the masses if it could trick them into acting rightly – fairly aptly. It also fits the traditional understanding of Plato as an elitist social engineer and a cold ideologue. And to play with the author-businessman analogy even more, it also happens to be a fairly accurate characterization of Steve Jobs.

\textsuperscript{131} Foucault (1987: 124-142).
Allen’s empirical methodology of tracking the use of certain ‘Platonic’ vocabulary and phrases is in fact predicated on one of the more prominent Foucauldian author-functions, that of classifying and organizing thought. Allen even argues that contemporary audiences would have understood Demosthenes’ *ti logous platteis?* response to Aeschines (“Why do you draw word-pictures?”) to mean, “Why do you talk like Plato?”

Plato’s name, as well as several of his well-known words, phrases, metaphors and theories, functioned to classify different discursive formations and sociopolitical factions within the city because of their capacity to valorize and legitimate those groupings.

The notion of credibility as tied to a specific author is now one of the most important reasons behind many author-functions, but it was practically nonexistent in orality. The crowd-sourced cultural evolution process (O.3) meant that cultural output was a product of dozens of different authors, devaluing the role of any individual bard. That orality-era archival techniques were so poor and reliant on individual memory (O.4) also made it nearly impossible for specific bards to be recalled after their deaths. This is not to say that bards did not seek other sources of credibility and legitimization however. Many of them relied on the denotation of the ‘bard’ classification itself for credibility, as a somewhat exclusive and professionalized vocation. Most bardic performances begin with an ‘Invocation of the Muse,’ where the bard explicitly asks the gods to sing or speak through him. This implied lack of agency contrasts starkly to the nearly mythic reputation that authors like Plato or

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132 Allen, 104.
Aristotle commanded (particularly after their deaths).; it is a clear sign of how little credibility and legitimation the bard commanded as an individual.\footnote{For instance, the first lines of the Odyssey: ἄνδρα μοι ἐννεπε, μοῦσα, πολύτροπον (Tell me, O Muse, of that many sided man). The first lines of the Iliad: μὴν ἂν ἄειδε θεά Πηλημιάδεω Ἀχιλῆς (Sing, oh goddess, of the wrath of Achilles son of Peleus).}

If the author-function is characteristic of the “mode of existence” of certain discourses, then both shifted dramatically with the advent of the textual transmission process. The possibility of singular authorship (L.4) and a textual finality (L.6) transformed the author into a subject of discourse rather than just a carrier. This transformation actually seems to have occurred quite early; many of the earliest discovered pieces of Greek writing are merely signatures with proper names. Thomas suggests that those early graffitists were driven by a quintessentially Greek desire to leave a memory and eternalize one’s name – a sign that the Greeks recognized writing’s temporally expansive capabilities early on.\footnote{Thomas (1992. 61).}

Plato almost certainly used the new textual transmission process intentionally to generate credibility and a reputation for himself, perhaps disseminating his dialogues, in large part, as a way to build a public persona and even attract applicants to his Academy. Nor is he the only intellectual to have taken advantage of a new cultural transmission technology to elevate his profile. Jardine’s \textit{Erasmus: Man of Letters} (1994) persuasively explains how the 15th century Renaissance humanist intentionally and elaborately manipulated the new medium of printing, using it to construct an image of himself as what we might call the first ‘European’ and the first ‘Man of Letters.’ His early, fervent, and strategic adoption of the printing press as a
mode of mass dissemination made him something of a literary celebrity across Europe and an important, respected public figure.\textsuperscript{135}

\textit{Scriptural Culture and Cultural Stability}

The shift to a textual transmission process led to a corresponding shift in the loci of power in Ancient Athens. Textualness itself became a source of power, imbuing \textit{logoi} with a sort of ‘monumentality,’ and even taking on sacred overtones that encouraged cultural stability.

The fundamental feature of the bardic process was the ease with which culture could be lost. I would not be surprised if a substantial amount of cultural practices in preliterate communities were invented as attempts to solve this problem – the vocationalization of the bardic class, ancestor worship, even religious rites and doctrines (developing sacred bodies of knowledge), might all have originated as tactics of information preservation. Yet none were as useful as the written text, which could preserve information in a way that made it easily unchangeable (L.6), capable of being consumed a limitless number of times, and accessible in the distant future (L.3).

As Thomas notes, “writing preserved but it also exaggerated or dignified the act it preserved,” in a symbolic and powerful way.\textsuperscript{136} For instance, curse tablets were commonly produced throughout Ancient Greece and known as a way to intensify a curse’s effect – some curses were even written on both sides of a stone, to double their power. Stone inscriptions of laws were the earliest and most prominent example of writing in the archaic \textit{polis}, yet they were created for no less superstitious – or,

\textsuperscript{135} Jardine (1993).
\textsuperscript{136} Thomas (1992. 71).
more politely, ‘symbolic’ – reasons than curse tablets. Stone inscriptions lent a “monumental weight and perhaps religious authority to the new political organization of the developing city-state,”¹³⁷ which necessarily shifted the locus of power away from prior practices and modes of communication.

For laws and the political sphere, this shift in power and symbolic authority often came at the expense of prior lawmakers and the executors of laws – notably the ‘Big Man’ despots of the preliterate age.¹³⁸ Ruling with informal authority through relationships and persuasion, they institutionalized their symbolic power through charisma and techniques of personal heroization. One of the most interesting cases of such a power transfer is that of the legendary Lawgivers, Solon of Athens and Lycurgus of Sparta. As the myths go, Solon and Lycurgus were rulers who initiated sweeping reforms and codified them as everlasting law codes in their respective cities. Then, strangely, they both promptly left their cities – Solon for ten years, Lycurgus forever. Szegedy-Maszak observes how this departure was crucial to the archetypal Greek lawgiver myth; “the fact that the lawgiver himself retained the power to change the code made him a potential threat to its operation. In the legends, the danger is relieved in two ways, by the death of the lawgiver or by his departure into self-imposed exile.”¹³⁹ The case of the lawgivers shows how this transfer of power from individuals to ‘monumental’ institutions must work: the lawgiver had to literally die or exile himself in order to secure his legacy beyond his own life. The lawgivers are a case of authorial power transferred nobly and voluntarily, but such

self-sacrifice was not necessary; as writing and texts developed into a prominent node within the nexus of power in the Greek world, imbued with notions of monumental authority and transforming *logoi* into truth-discourses, the individual political agent was forced to cede influence.

Interestingly, Plato actually played a role in promulgating the concept of a lawgiver. One of the vocabulary words that Allen charts as Platonic and influential is νομοθετής (*nomothetēs*), the singular of ‘founding lawgiver.’ In his later texts, particularly the *Laws*, Plato is highly interested in writing’s ability to institutionalize and monumentalize a law code. He advocates for a *polis* governed by what Nightingale (1999) calls a “model [of] a sacred text of laws,” where written laws are accorded an “almost scriptural status.” Plato would have law-breaking be considered an act of impiety, such that, as he writes, “service to the laws is [considered] service to the gods.”

The written text took on significant symbolic connotations in Ancient Greece as a wellspring of monumentality and even religious authority. I would drop Nightingale’s ‘almost’ qualification and argue that the textual transmission process engendered a scriptural conception of the text. The practices and nodes of power that it displaced, such as the Big Man social organization, were characterized by both political and cultural instability, but the scriptural text was anything but. A source of monumentality, religious authority, and timelessness, the text gave Athens what all canon gives to its followers: cultural and intellectual stability.

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140 Allen, 102.
141 Nightingale (1999, 102).
142 Plato (*Laws*. 762e).
The Unique Power of the Author: Scalable but Targeted Technologies of the Self

As Plato quickly discovered, textual transmission can be more than just a second-best alternative to dialogical communication. For one, it had a scalable impact across time and space in a way that oral modes of transmission could not, reaching more people. Yet in many ways it could even be more persuasive per person than oral communication. Because authors could control the final composition of their texts they could preemptively construct their writings as ‘technologies of the self’ to transform people in very specific, intentionally planned, ways. The “writer’s workshop” gave authors a greater set of tools and methods in creating these technologies of the self. They could even target specific audience segments to an extent (L.13), and would have ample opportunity to develop and test the most appropriate writing techniques.

Writing is also a fundamentally visual medium, which gives it unique pedagogical capabilities compared to the bardic transmission process. Plato himself concedes that visual-based learning can sometimes help students to progress more quickly towards non-visual understandings of the Forms, insofar as it has enargeia (vividness).

One might respond to this line of reasoning by arguing that an author’s careful, premeditated plan to influence his readers in a specific way can often go awry. How many a scholar has published her book and waited months before receiving any reviews or reception, only to find that her main argument had been

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143 Or in a language that may be more familiar to some readers: the textual mode of transmission could yield both higher GDP (Global Domestic Persuasion) and GDP per capita levels.

144 Allen, 38.
glanced over or misinterpreted? Publishing is like throwing your book into an abyss and waiting, helplessly, to see what comes out. Yunis calls this the “absent author problem” – how does an author anticipate the reader’s burden of interpretation and attempt to guide the reader’s pursuit of meaning despite her absence? It is a difficult question, but Yunis contends that both Plato and Thucydides considered it when they wrote their texts. Each responded differently, according to their didactic ends. Plato attempted to minimize the interpretive ambiguity of his texts, or at least their most important arguments, so that his readers could understand his singular conception of the truth as explicitly as possible. On the other hand, Thucydides actually embraced text’s possibilities for open-ended interpretation, making his own opinions intentionally ambiguous and inconsistent depending on the historical context, because he believed that his readers should learn to contextually evaluate multiple different opinions from different perspectives.

Although textual transmission has a fundamental element of misinterpretation built into it, the process opens up so many new possibilities for authors to influence their readers, which were completely unavailable to orality-era bards, as to perhaps compensate.

**Surplus Linguistic Power**

In the epilogue to *Why Plato Wrote*, Allen defines the type of *logoi* that succeeds in her model – that passes through the three criteria of finding a contextually valid audience, persuasiveness, and having *enargeia* – as that which carries “surplus

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linguistic power.” It is the reason why some ideas are taken up as rules for action and others are not, why some political sound bites go viral and others fall on seemingly deaf ears, and so forth. What I hope to have shown through this section is that new cultural transmission technologies fundamentally shift the location and potential intensity of “surplus linguistic power.” The written text in Ancient Athens was a communication platform; it opened, closed, modified, and incentivized a world of new possibilities in which power could operate, shifted who was able to exercise power and to whom it was subjected, and created new spaces for its exercising.

Texts offered unprecedented scale, allowing a single author to communicate directly with a limitless number of people simultaneously with no theoretical spatial or temporal boundaries (L.1-3). They offered authors the ability to intentionally compose their logoi in concordance with some strategic design and focus, to create works that are ‘technologies of the self,’ to harness visualization for manipulating audiences, and to construct themselves as a source of credibility and valorization. Once created, the scriptural nature of the text could then imbue successful logos with a sort of monumentality that made them able to be enshrined and canonized, achieving a sort of cultural dominance and stability that was nearly impossible to replicate in orality.

To be sure, the author in the Literate-Platonic model is not some exogenous actor who swoops in from a Great Man theory of history. Even a ‘successful’ author is still an ideological product, and future discourses could easily reimagine the ‘author’ as something very different from his identity as a historical person. Similarly, his logos could also be reimagined very differently from how he intended them to be

146 Allen, 2011. 146.
imagined. As we saw with the Greek lawgivers, the individual author must be sacrificed as a historical person to the extent that he takes on author-functions, and if his *logoi* are to gain scriptural-level authority. Consider how different Plato the historical person was from ‘Platonic’ the adjective and author-function, which is thrown around constantly in all sorts of contemporary discourses. People are the vehicles through which power is circulated, not its source and generator.

The textual transmission process instigated a widespread shift in “surplus linguistic power” as it concentrated on and plotted a vector through the authors of texts and the spaces in which they acted. The shift does not seem zero-sum, either. By creating the possibility for scripturally connoted culture, by introducing the author to a “writer’s workshop” of new communicative techniques and styles for achieving *enargeia*, by allowing single authors to harness visualized learning at scale, and by creating the possibility for many more social conditions and techniques besides, the textual transmission process intensified and increased the potential application of “surplus linguistic power” in Ancient Athens across the board.

**Audience Experiences and Identity-Formation**

In the prior section we discussed how the textual transmission process instigated shifts in the modes of existence of the ‘author’ and the production of ideologies. We described how writing transforms the mode by which changes in a community’s systems of thought occur, but we have not yet discussed how the shifting communication platform influenced audiences directly, the demand-side of our model. We must ask how the new forms of ideas that are encouraged by the textual transmission process – radical, intentional, targeted as technologies of the self
are received by their audiences if we are to understand the way that linguistic power is exercised and impactful in Ancient Athens.

Allen posits a three-stage process for how ideas came to have social influence in Ancient Athens, which we mapped in the Literate-Platonic model. To review: first, ideas were disseminated and incorporated into Athens’ cultural commons (changing systems of thought). Second, audiences digested these ideas in the reader interpretation phase, which changed their beliefs, which constituted new rules of action and behavior. Individuals adapt their identities and identifications to conform to their new beliefs (changing individual and social identities). Third, these new rules of actions and identities generate a wide range of sociopolitical outcomes, played out in the action arena. Allen is particularly interested in the immediate effects of changing identity-formation, which is the reconfiguration of “fresh alliances and group formations… and shifting political cleavages,” insofar as these reconfigurations are both important shifts in the material world and easily trackable – a sort of proxy for widespread social and material change.147

It is to the second-stage then that we should now turn, exploring how the textual transmission process transformed the mode of existence of individual and social identities. Just as authorship took on new roles, so did audiences. We begin by asking what these new roles were that audiences came to play, which requires that we return briefly back to a supply-side analysis of authors, and then move toward investigating the following, seemingly basic, questions. How did audiences receive textual transmissions? In what new locations and spaces were linguistic power

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147 Allen, 145.
exercised? These are critical to understanding the shifting audience experience in the textual transmission process.

**Contextually Valid or Fictionalized Modes of Identity-Formation**

Although we discussed how a disembodied textual transmission process characterized by slackened, less immediate demand pressure led to the production of more radical *logoi*, we did not provide a causal narrative of how these radical ideas were actually accepted by audiences. In fact, we left the discussion on a disconcerting note, asking whether readers might simply reject these new radical ideas presented by authors. After all, audiences presumably continued to reject radical ideas that they encountered at bardic and poetic performances – which were no less prominent in 5th and 4th century Athens than in more preliterate eras – for being insufficiently ‘contextually valid.’ What was different about texts?

Our answer lies in the relation between cultural consumption, identity-formation, and Ong’s concept of “fictionalization,” which we have mentioned briefly in the prior chapter. In orality, bards had to satisfy the criteria of ‘contextual validity’ with their stories, which is to say that they had to affirm the beliefs, identities, and identity-forming histories of their audiences. The textual transmission process, however, was decontextualized to the author: he was never sure who was reading his text, nor of where, when, why, how, and with whom it was being read. Yet writers must always have a notional audience, and so the author imagines one based on some preconceptions or observations. In doing so, fictionalization encompasses two events: an author imagining an audience cast in some role, and the audience correspondingly fictionalizing itself. As Ong writes, readers must learn how to “conform themselves to
the projections of the writers they read, or at least how to operate in terms of these projections."148 We might understand this as the immersive property of reading, the concept that the popular fiction writer George R.R. Martin describes when he writes (through a character), “A reader lives a thousand lives before he dies. The man who never reads lives only one.”149 Reading challenges the imagination over a protracted period of time, encouraging remarkable amounts of self-fictionalization. Ultimately, self-fictionalization through a specific practice is essentially synonymous with the application of a technology of the self, such that the fictionalizing speaker can often be said to be creating a technology of the self.150

Fictionalizing occurred in the bardic process, too, since all speakers must make assumptions about and characterize their listeners in some way. The ‘Homeric dialect’ was not spoken by Greeks in their daily lives; it was “once upon a time” language, as Ong puts it, and was a means of placing audiences within a fictionalized world in a fictionalized role.151 But oral communication has what Ong calls a fundamental “momentum that works for the [mitigation of fictionalization],” due to one key difference between the two modes of cultural transmission processes: the Oral-Bardic process is a two-way street between fictionalizing performers and reacting audiences, with performers empathetically and immediately incorporating audience reactions into their future fictionalizations, while literate processes are not.

148 Ong, (1987: 12)
149 Martin (2011).
150 Alternatively, we could perhaps say that ‘fictionalization’ is the primary way that media shapes identity. There are probably several academic disciplines that describe this same process, each in their own terminology.
We must turn back briefly to the supply-side in order to understand the curious paradox by which bards were largely incapable of persuading their audiences to adopt radical ideas, but also to understand what kind of authors actually could use literacy to do so – to successfully “fictionalize” their audiences in such a way as to generate lasting, radical shifts in their beliefs, identities, and rules of action.

In the most practical sense, the two-way street of oral performance meant that bards had access to concrete data on their audiences, which determined how they could fictionalize them. First, bards could typify audiences by observing their physical characteristics and expressions, refining their stories in response. Second, bards could typify them by their immediate reactions, incorporating that feedback into their responses. The immediacy of the latter is particularly problematic, however, because it means that the bard will only be receiving and responding to the surface-level and non-reflective reactions of the audience.

Authors in the textual transmission process, on the other hand, had virtually no data or demand feedback to help them categorize their audiences (L.5). At first glance, this seems bizarre and begs the question of how they could ever ‘successfully’ fictionalize their audiences without knowing how their audiences would behave or respond. Paradoxically, authors were freed by their lack of data. It allowed them to target specific audience segments – fictionalized by them, of course –, which they could identify by more than just physical characteristics and superficial, immediate reactions. This notion of a lack of data as freeing for fictionalizations, and therefore for both the production of ideologies and the reshaping of identity, finds a parallel in business theory. Generally, the most important and practical tip for companies
worried about the Innovator’s Dilemma mentioned earlier is to set up special product development teams that are completely autonomous from the rest of the company and its daily business needs, such as the pressure to solve short-term problems for clients or consumers. In other words, the best way to encourage radical innovation is to keep them away from as much feedback and pressures to conform to customer preferences as possible.

Even exposing these autonomous teams to any consumer-focused data (‘audience feedback’ in our model) is dangerous, because, as Christensen points out, “markets that do not exist cannot be analyzed.” He argues instead that companies should use an “intuitive process” for developing disruptive technologies based on “pattern recognition.” A subscriber to the theory that new technology must solve problems in order to take hold, he goes on to say that companies can create an intuitive process by hiring product development managers who have experience in wrestling with the sorts of problems that the autonomous organization is trying to solve with their disruptive technology. As Christensen notes, “It is not as important that managers have succeeded with the problem as it is for them to have wrestled with it and developed the skills and intuition for how to meet the challenge successfully the next time around.”

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152 As Clayton Christensen puts it: “With few exceptions, only instances in which mainstream firms have successfully established a timely position in a disruptive technology were those in which the firms’ managers set up an autonomous organization charged with building a new and independent business around the disruptive technology. Such organizations, free of the power of the customers of the mainstream company, ensconce themselves among a different set of customers – those who want the products of the disruptive technology.” (Christensen, 2013, xx).


154 Christensen (2003a).
Notably, our two case study authors, Plato and Thucydides, give us two of the strongest examples of radical yet successful fictionalizations in the textual transmission process. Both authors are inventors of some of the most disruptive ideological productions in Western thought: the disciplines of philosophy and political science. Interestingly, their experiences and sets of background knowledge match almost exactly with Christensen’s predictions, and they incorporated into their ideological productions the sort of information that oral performers could not access. Whereas bards could fictionalize their audiences and make contextually valid stories based on observed physical characteristics and immediate feedback, they had little insight into either their audience’s mental characteristics or long-term, non-immediate reactions. In contrast, Plato and Thucydides both developed mental fictionalizations of their audiences, characterizing them by their states of mind and modes of perception. They also created *logoi* that were not immediately digestible – they took time and reflection to truly appreciate, and while preliterate audiences certainly did reflect on the bardic stories they heard, the bards themselves had no systematic access to those long-term, reflective reactions.

Instead of analyzing and responding to the empirical data as bards did, Plato and Thucydides seem to have developed their fictionalization based the intuitive pattern recognition that comes from experience, as Christensen predicts. Although little is known about Thucydides life, we know that he was one of the ten *strategos* (military leaders) in Athens during 423-4 at a critical point in the Peloponnesian War, which Thucydides claims to be the greatest (in scale and complexity) “movement”
(κίνησις) in all Greek history, if not mankind. We can surmise that he was politically important in Athens, if only by observing the importance of some of his fellow strategos in 423-4, such as Nicias (negotiator of the Peace of Nicias in 421), Cleon (the greatest demagogue of his era), and Lamachus (elected to co-lead the symbolically important Sicilian Expedition). Further, his life was marked by great political failure: he participated in the Battle of Amphipolis, one of Athens’ most strategically disastrous military defeats, and although he was said to have minimized Athens’ losses considerably, he was exiled from Athens for twenty years – not for a failure of military strategy, but for his failure to successfully understand and play the game of politics. With such a deep track record of wrestling with and failing in political problems it is no surprise that his History has been a manual for political scientists seeking to understand the intricacies of the political system and for political actors seeking to learn how to maneuver skillfully within it.

Similarly, Plato spent his formative years reflecting on truth and the good life as a follower of Socrates and moved within circles of philosophers afterwards as well. He was well placed to offer a solution to the existential problems that Athenians encountered in the 4th century.

There is no manual for how an author can successfully fictionalize his audiences in a way that leads them to radical transformations. The sort of strategies for achieving persuasiveness and enargeia in the prior chapter can help an author turn a good idea into a popular logos, but it cannot help an author to figure out a ‘good’ idea – to fictionalize a role for his audiences that appeals to them as a way to solve a

155 Thucydides (The Peloponnesian War: 1.1).
157 Ibid.
cultural or existential problem in their lives, or that convinces them to transform themselves in the pursuit of that solution. This is a problem with no easy answer, which has confounded the millions of people who have tried and failed to change the world through technological invention (whether material or ideological), but we know, at least, that the embodied, two-way street of the bardic cultural transmission performance-setting discouraged the discovery of these disruptive inventions in profound ways. By loosening authors from the need to be immediately contextually valid to their audiences, the textual transmission process encouraged the development of a type of culture creator who could fictionalize his audiences in radical ways – which is to say, transform what was ‘contextually valid’ for his audiences – precisely because he was no longer as capable of fulfilling the criterion of ‘short-term’ contextual validity.

In short, authors can pull their readers towards radical new identities through fictionalization, which was made possible by the new ‘decontextualized’ settings of textual cultural transmission. Yet cultural transmission always has a context, even if the author is not aware of or present within it. Decontextualization for the author helped him to fictionalize his audiences in radical ways, but did the new contexts of cultural transmission make it more amenable for audiences to accept these radical fictionalizations? We have hinted briefly at the answer throughout this thesis. Let us now answer the question directly by examining the new contexts, spaces, and locations in which audiences consumed culture and through which linguistic power flowed.
The Fragmentation of Literary Transmission Forums in Athens: An Overview

In the bardic process, stories were performed in a variety of settings, from street performances to religious rites. Due to the economic incentives of the underlying cultural transmission model, however, performances tended to occur with one simple but critical unifying theme: they were performed to fairly large groups of live and lively audiences. In contrast, the textual cultural transmission process manifested itself in a gradual “fragmentation of the forums of literary performance” in late 5th and 4th centuries Athens.

Strikingly, Wallace charts a correspondence between the fragmentation of forums and the fragmentation of culture into its constituent components. In the 5th century, poetry as represented by the theatrical drama – and before that, the bardic performance – was the most highly developed, hierarchically unifying mode of cultural communication: the cultural activities of acting, music, dance, and serious thought were all subsumed into and expressed by the drama. In the 4th century each of these cultural activities spun off from the drama, were transmitted through new cultural transmission technologies, and were composed by increasingly specialized groups of cultural creators. Our Literate-Platonic model is only one of several new communication technologies to have emerged during this time. It served as a new platform for the creation and transmission of ‘serious thought,’ as the “drama no longer carried the weight of Attic society's deepest political and religious reflection,”

158 That said, it is important to note that some oral performances do not have an audience giving immediate feedback. For instance, it would have been inappropriate for audiences to verbally criticize a performance in certain formal settings, such as religious festivals, where bards were called upon to perform fairly predetermined stories. Bards would receive less feedback in these situations, but the actual ‘audience experience’ on the demand-side was not substantially different between these and the more typical, highly audience-engaged bardic performances.
and the Plato-like author replaced the poet as the model “counselor of society.”

Instead, drama transitioned in the 4th century into a less comprehensive and topical medium of cultural transmission; “bourgeois drama” began to emerge, with invented stories (as opposed to retellings of the ancient myths) that were more sitcom-esque and character-focused.

How can we explain this fragmentation of the different roles and aspects of culture? As Wallace himself speculates, there may be a “much broader cultural model that affects many aspects of [Athenian] life.” Our framework of tracing the implications of shifting communication platforms for cultural transmission – of which the Literate-Platonic model is but one of potentially many models within that framework – may be what Wallace is looking for. From our discussion above we can already see how writing technology as a new communication platform may have established the necessary conditions for the specialization of cultural creators – the slackened demand pressures that gave authors the space to inject their own preferences and “disruptive” innovations, the capacity for intentionality, the credibility attached to the author, and the command of greater potential linguistic power across the board. To see how the cultural fragmentation was affected by and affected audiences – the other, demand-side of the causal story – we need to examine these newly fragmented forums. Thomas (2003) identifies three types of forums by which the publication and transmission of texts occurred: private reading; the “display performance” (epideixis), a new genre of predominantly oral-based public

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160 Ibid, 209.
161 Ibid, 218.
performances; and the quasi-private form of group readings, characterized by a mixed media format of both reading and oral-based discussion.\textsuperscript{162}

The public “display pieces” are an ideal example for how early adopters of a new communication platform often try to situate them within the preexisting platform.\textsuperscript{163} These were showy lectures in public spaces, public demonstrations of knowledge or a presentation of some form of ability, and used either as a form of publicity or sometimes costing a fee. The speaker would rarely actually read from a text, as this was frowned upon, but would instead write their speeches (at least partially) beforehand and memorize them. Although this method appeared similar to the bardic and other traditional forums for oral performance – such as giving speeches in the assembly or courts – the bardic process was one of simultaneous composition and transmission, whereas the display piece was only a means of publishing a finalized text. Display pieces were not crowd sourced, and often audiences were not able to participate or show their reactions to the performance at all. The best-known surviving display pieces are Gorgias the sophist’s \textit{Palamedes} and \textit{Helen} although authors outside the sophistic genre also performed in these settings; some of the early medical texts preserved under Hippocrates’ name are believed to have been written as display pieces. Yet both Plato and Thucydides hated these public, text-based performance settings, and Thucydides lumped “speech-writers” (\textit{λογογράφοι}) together with poets as those whose genres constituted inferior claims to truth.\textsuperscript{164} The “display piece” cultural transmission context is clearly not part of the Literate-

\textsuperscript{162} Thomas (2003: 172).
\textsuperscript{163} Ong (2002: 112-115). See also p. 9 for the great irony that for over two thousand years the most comprehensive academic subject in western thought was rhetoric, the study of oratory.
\textsuperscript{164} Thucydides (\textit{The Peloponnesian War}: 1.21).
Platonic transmission process, and while it is an intriguing forum in the early transition from oral to literate transmission technologies, we would do better to focus our analysis on the other two, more radical and private, transmission contexts.\footnote{For more on the display piece, including evidence for the facts given in this paragraph, see Thomas (2003: 173-180).}

**Private Cultural Consumption: Individual and Heterogeneous Identities**

The private context of cultural consumption is perhaps the best known and most important of writing’s effects on the history of western civilization. The practice of private consumption was still nascent in the 5th and 4th century such that its implications were not yet manifest in Athens during the era of our investigation. Nevertheless, given its importance we should still briefly describe what these future implications might be. Perhaps future scholars will be able to empirically observe even its earliest traces in 4th century Athens.

The demand-side transition from a person experiencing culture as a group audience to consuming it privately (L.7), silently, with the ability to reread, alone in the privacy of his own home and alone with his thoughts, is seismic. Instead of having one’s cultural consumption be determined by the schedule of bardic performances, an Athenian could pick and choose the sort of culture that he wished to consume. The larger and more diverse cultural archive that the textual transmission process brings forth also gave them a larger and more diverse menu of cultural options. Consumers in the bardic process were all “on the same page,” so to speak, whereas consumers of the textual transmission process could each create a sort of “syllabus of the self.” The heterogeneity of cultural diets led to a community of Athenians with heterogeneous identities and beliefs.
The fact that this form of reading is experienced privately, instead of in public groups, is also important. Because of the empathetic and participatory character to bardic performances (O.5), an individual’s reaction was not expressed as an individual per se. As Ong writes, it is encased in a “communal reaction, the communal ‘soul’.” Communal experiences forge bonds, uniting individuals into a sort of shared identity and solidarity.

When cultural consumption becomes a solo activity, the ‘communal soul’ is replaced by what Watt (1957), cited by Ong, refers to as an “internalization of conscience,” an increasingly interiorized world with individualized thought. This individualization emerged gradually. Watt, a literary theorist, originally traced it on the supply-side to the literary tradition of the confessional launched by St. Augustine, which would reach its great heights with Romanticism and the rise of the novel where, as Ong paraphrases, “the feeling for the ‘round’ human character is born – deeply interiorized in motivation, powered mysteriously, but consistently, from within.” With Goody, Watt went on to essentially launch literacy studies, especially as pertaining to Ancient Athens, with the publication of “The Consequences of Literacy” (1963). They used Ancient Greece as a case study to argue that literacy and the private reading culture helped to make audiences amenable to this sort of individualist concept of the self – as well as a much larger array of concepts such as democracy, rational thought, and philosophy.

166 Ong (1983: 45)
167 Watt (1957: 75).
While many of Goody and Watt’s broader conclusions have been discredited, their arguments about the influence of literacy and private reading on individual identities and constitutions of the self have been maintained in several areas of scholarship. The notion that the novel as a platform for cultural transmission is largely responsible for the production of the modern ‘individual’ as a ‘“round’ human character’ is now widely accepted – there are 800 words written about “The modern individual” on the Wikipedia page for the “Novel.”¹⁷⁰ More broadly, Foucault spoke at the end his life of beginning an ambitious project on the rise of the self, a “genealogy of how the self constituted itself as subject.”¹⁷¹ Instead of adopting the sort of communication-technology determinism that characterized Goody and Watt’s (1963) analysis – as well as Havelock’s works (1963) – Foucault wished to trace the roots of the ‘self’ to a series of practices and technologies of the self in the Greco-Roman period. Private reading, as well as several personal writing technologies – such as letter-writing, and the use of hypomnemata (ὑπομνήματα), wax tablets for personal note-taking that were a predecessor to the ‘commonplace book’ of Early Modern Europe – were important practices in the emergence of an individual self, albeit not the only ones.¹⁷²

Even the earliest practices that Foucault examines come mostly from the 3rd and 2nd centuries BCE. By his estimates, the emergence of an individuated and interiorized mode of identity can be traced on the supply-side to when the self becomes both the subject and object of discourse – such as in confessional practices, diaries, letters, and so forth – which occurred rarely in Ancient Athens between the

¹⁷¹ Foucault (1985: 11).
5th and 4th century. This discursive method of tracking the emergence of the individuated self matches the results of our own demand-side, practical method of tracing the rise of private reading: both were, ultimately, only nascent in 4th century Athens.

In conclusion, Athenian identity was not quite as influenced by ‘private reading’ as early classical scholars (Goody and Watt, Havelock) once thought. Yet in other ways it did fragment away from the ‘communal soul’ characterized by the bardic process and into a more heterogeneous form. The transformation arose out of a much more popular and significant context for the textual transmission process, the quasi-private mode of consumption.

Quasi-Private Settings: Receptivity to Minority Opinions

With the emergence of the “bourgeois drama” in Athens the cultural transmission of “serious thought” characterized by intellectual and political discussion had been spun-off from its theatrical setting. Yet we know that political activity did not disappear in the 4th century – indeed, the average Athenian may have been more politically active than he had ever been before. To what new forum did political debate and discussion move, then? Similarly, with the fragmentation of the

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173 Interestingly, the use of the hypomnemata notebooks of the early 4th century is one of the oldest technologies of the self that Foucault identifies. He sees them as a technology of self-administration, by which individuals held themselves to account in a practical way – the first instance of a discourse that treats the self as both subject and discourse. In the Phaedrus, Plato discusses them directly and expresses concern over their growing popularity in (4th century) Athens. Unfortunately, however, hypomnemata were allegedly written on wax tablets, which fade quickly and were meant to be reusable ephemera. Very few wax tablets have survived with content intact from the classical period, and as far as I know, none from 4th century Athens (interestingly, a substantial amount of the surviving ones come from the ruins of Pompeii – such was the difficulty of preserving them). Without the evidence, we have no idea whether Foucault’s theory is accurate, or what these hypomnemata were really used for in practical terms.

public forums for literary transmission in Ancient Athens, the ‘communal reaction, the communal soul’ that characterized public group performances in the bardic transmission process had to fragment as well. We must thus ask two questions: in what forum did the “serious thought” of the Literate-Platonic model occur, and by what mode of individual identity was it characterized? If not yet private reading, we should look to the quasi-private forums of cultural transmission.

There were several quasi-private forums that existed in 4th century Athens. Wallace discusses the emergence of the philosophical academy, which facilitated the discussion of “complex and unconventional opinions in the areas of religion and politics,” primarily due to their security and physical distance from the public spaces – philosophers such as Plato and Isocrates still remembered how Socrates was executed for discussing radical philosophy in public spaces.175 Wallace mentions the symposium as well, Athenian drinking parties that often included a variety show’s worth of singing, extemporaneous speech making, and lively intellectual debate (and also drinking games). In Plato’s Symposium, we see well-regarded intellectuals giving extemporaneous speeches and then discussing them afterwards.

Thomas (2003) identifies one of the most important of the quasi-private modes of cultural consumption (L.8) as that of “private readings from written texts in private houses.”176 The readings were often followed by, and set the agenda for, lively conversations amongst small and congenial audiences. They also gave authors the opportunity to test their ideas and make textual revisions before publishing publically. This quasi-private mode mixed two forms of discourse popular in Athens at the time:

175 Wallace, 206.
its famously lively oral debate culture on the one hand, and on the other, the oral
performance of texts – i.e. a more subdued version of the text-based, sophistic
“display pieces” that dominated Athens’ public areas. These private readings also
bore striking similarities to the other two quasi-private forums that Wallace mentions.
Like the philosophical schools they offered secure, private spaces for the sort of
discussions that were not always appropriate for public spaces although they were for
common citizens instead of professional philosophers. They were also located in
mostly the same physical spaces as symposiums; the key difference between
symposiums and “private readings” fits into the broader theme of unifying versus
fragmented spaces: symposiums were free-flowing, wine-soaked events where music,
entertainment, and serious thought all comingled, whereas the “private readings”
were more focused on the cultural transmission and discussion of serious thought
alone.\textsuperscript{177}

The emergence of these sorts of quasi-private, intellectual, and literary
discursive arenas tend to have undue influences wherever they arise, although very
few classicists have analyzed their importance in Ancient Athens.\textsuperscript{178} Instead, it would
behoove us to draw parallels to comparable discursive arenas in other historical
periods, which have already been scrutinized. Namely, these quasi-private Athenian
forums are strikingly similar to the institutions of intellectual exchange that Habermas
discusses in \textit{The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere} – the British
coffeehouses, German “table societies” (\textit{Tischgellschaften}), and the French salons

\textsuperscript{177} In fact, these “private readings” do not even seem to have a formal name – either given
contemporaneously by its participants or nowadays by current scholars. It would perhaps be
reasonable to even say that these “private readings” are a more focused, specific sort of
symposium.

that emerged in the *ancien régime*. All three Early Modern spaces were made possible by the unprecedented growth in the information and news economy, particularly the publishing and newspaper industry as it grew from mass printing technologies. All three were centered upon the published text.

Let us look in particular at the French salons, many of which were reflexively modeled off the Athenian symposium. They emerged as institutional settings for the discussion of literary texts amongst the literate class and occurred in the living rooms of private homes (just as our private readings and symposiums did). Similar to our private readings, authors would use salons to submit ideas for discussion before publishing, such that the salon became the location of “first publishing.” For Habermas, the salon is crucial to the development of a bourgeois public sphere and modernity. He sees these spaces as first forming a “literary public sphere,” which emerges out of the private sphere of the “conjugal family” – hence, a quasi-private sphere that was both part of ‘society’ and yet sheltered from it. Free from economic, social, or political pressures (in its ideal-type) and centered upon a text, the very fact of “discussion within such a public presupposed the problematization of areas that until then had not been questioned.” In these new quasi-private spaces, ideas that were previously unthinkable or unquestionable were suddenly in play.

Through quasi-privateness, radical new ideas in prerevolutionary France, which translated into radical identity shifts. Yet these did not occur in a disembodied vacuum, nor were they the ideal-typical manifestation of a Kantian republic of letters

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that Habermas makes them out to be. Like Athens, Revolutionary France was characterized by quite a few literacy-enabled, new forms of intellectual sociability: cafes, societies, lodges, and clubs (the Jacobins being the most famous of all) joined the more gentlemanly salons as physical spaces for, according to Chartier’s cultural history of the French Revolution, “domestic congregation, by gathering together a specific, discrete community.” Intellectual identities were inspired by texts, channeled through quasi-private spaces for intellectual sociability, and reconfigured into social groups. Even some salons often turned into intellectually rousing meeting-grounds for factions. France’s quasi-private textual transmission forums helped spawn hundreds of radical ideological-political factions, which represented a radically new mode by which social identity was constituted on the individual level and by which the ideas-events relationship occurred more broadly. In Britain it was the same: Habermas notes how political parties emerged out of the clubs and other quasi-private spaces for critical public debate, which were politically institutionalized as parliamentary factions.

As the growth of the publishing industry carved out an assortment of quasi-private, mixed oral-literate cultural transmission forums across Europe in 18th century, so did the early roots of publishing do so in 4th century Athens. An author’s

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181 As Robert Darnton points out, Habermas is a social theorist rather than social historian. When he evokes 18th century spaces of literary transmission and discussion he does so to evoke an ideal-typical public sphere, using it as a standard to measure the degradation of the public sphere by consumerism and the mass media in the 20th century. (Darnton 1991) In fact, Habermas does mention Freemasonry and other examples of secretive, less inclusive institutions of reason-based intellectual exchange, but dismisses them – with an astounding lack of historical justification – as temporary organizational structures that were eclipsed by normatively better, inclusive forms of social intercourse.


logos that was once too dangerous, too ‘contextually invalid’ and offensive, or too disagreeable to the opinion of the majority to be presented in public forums could be discussed in Athens’ quasi-private spaces. All three such spaces – schools, symposiums, and ‘private readings’ – made it easier to find and attract a ‘contextually valid’ audience for radical logoi, but they also affected audiences in more transformative ways. Audiences who had no particularly radical or minority belief-systems could be persuaded to adopt them through the mixture of logoi and oral discussion presented in private readings. Audiences with some sort of existing predilection for radical opinions or tastes – which we could simply explain as random ‘population mutations,’ without needing to further explain the origin of such predilections – could finally encounter the cultural content that speaks to them profoundly (through either private or quasi-private contexts), triggering a switch in their minds. Furthermore, minority opinions and beliefs could be encouraged, nursed, and eventually guided towards personal and social identity reconfigurations through the small-scale social environments. Identities beg to be socially affirmed and validated as they were in Athens’ quasi-private spaces rather than repressed. With the fragmentation of literary forums comes a fragmentation of tastes and identities (not necessarily within a single person, but of a community holistically), originating first in individual-level intellectual differences but soon valorized and affirmed by distinct communities of peers. As these new spaces for cultural consumption engendered new social identities, authors and presenters could find either disciples or intellectual comrades-in-arms. With the text’s monumentality and capacity for scriptural qualities, an author could even expect his intellectual group to outlast him.
Of course, Athens already had a tremendously inclusive public and private sphere. Yet Habermas interprets Europe’s quasi-private literary spaces as transitional in the broader emergence of a new public sphere out of the private. In Athens, these quasi-private forums occurred in the opposite direction as public spaces for the transmission of “serious thought” fragmented into quasi-private spaces. If functioning private and publish spaces already existed, why did quasi-private spaces appear at all? The textual transmission process allowed for the possibility, but to be adopted we must ask what problem in Athenian life they solved. There is no clear answer, but I would speculate that it may be the problem that Habermas himself identified, concerning the differences between Athens’ debate culture in its public spaces and the model of ‘critical rational debate’ in Europe’s quasi-private spaces;

With the background experience of a private sphere that had become interiorized human closeness it challenged the established authority of the monarch; in this sense its character was from the beginning both private and polemical at once. The Greek model of the public sphere lacked both characteristics… the conduct of the citizen was agonistic merely in the sportive competition with each other that was a mock war against the external enemy and not in dispute with his own government.185

Plato and Thucydides both despised the agonistic mode in which Athens’ famous public debate occurred – Thucydides makes this explicit, saying that he wrote so that his text would not be a ἀγώνισμα (agonisma, competition piece) – because they believed that it was an inferior mode of seeking truth.186 As Habermas notes, the development of truth-oriented, critical rational debate culture requires a certain degree of privateness, an “interiorized human closeness.” The multiplicity of

185 Ibid, 52.
186 Thucydides (The Peloponnesian War: 1.22).
Athenian quasi-private forums for the sort of “serious thought” literature that Plato and Thucydides published may have arisen as a solution to Athens’ rhetorician-focused debate culture; certainly Habermas at least believes that the institutional innovation of a private-based public sphere is normatively superior for the evaluation of “serious thought.”

We see that both the private and quasi-private contexts for textual transmission fundamentally encourage a new mode of identity formation among audiences. In private spaces readers are able to construct a ‘syllabus of the self,’ making individuating choices about the sort of culture that they wish to consume and how they wish to interpret it – an impossibility before textual communication platforms. Through quasi-private contexts readers are able to receive social validation and affirmation for their individuating beliefs. Where the public spaces of the bardic process encouraged individuals to repress their non-communitarian beliefs, in the textual transmission process readers could construct social identities around their minority opinions. What we see, in short, is that the textual transmission process enabled two new modes by which identity-shifts occurred: receptiveness to minority, radical, and sometimes individuated opinions and beliefs, as well as new social settings that encouraged the transformation of those beliefs into socially-validated identities.

To be clear, my argument is not that the textual transmission process encouraged any particular change in beliefs and identities. Rather, as a
communication platform it reconfigured the very way that identity could shift. Textual transmission both permits and encourages identity-shifts through fragmented rather than public channels, in individuating and ideological-faction-forming rather than in communitarian ways, and with a heightened predilection for radical rather than incremental shifts.

The Relationship between Power and Discursive Knowledge

We have so far examined the ways that the textual transmission process makes possible and often encourages changes to the supply-side and demand-side of cultural transmission, reconstituting the role of the author and the production of ideologies, on one hand, and the experiences and identities of audiences on the other. Correspondingly, we have examined how writing influences the mode of change of a community’s system of thought and of individual-level social identity. We have mostly observed the demand-side and supply-side in isolation for analytical purposes, but cultural transmission is ultimately a two-way street. It is the interaction between the demand-side experiences and the supply-side possibilities for ideological production that generate the most intriguing possibilities. Cultural output is produced with a notional audience in mind, disseminated in certain forums that it has a hand in constructing, and then interpreted by readers who do any number of likely things. They may throw it away, change their beliefs, change their social identities, change their actions, or change the context and meaning of the original text in ways that the author could not have imagined or intended. A successful *logos* will have all of these things done to it. Perhaps readers may even be inspired to write their own culture.

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187 We should note that the argument only applies to the parts of identity that are culturally and discursively determined. It is not every part of a person’s identity, although the exact role of culture and discourse in identity-formation has always been contested.
After all, authors are not aliens who descend upon earth to change it; they are not even unchanged by their own changes. They are merely readers trying to tap into the enormous potential linguistic power that flows throughout the textual transmission process.

Let us now synthesize our conclusions so far concerning the demand-side and supply-side, on systems of thought and identity, together. In doing so, we can observe the influence of the textual transmission process on the relationship between power and discursive knowledge more broadly, tracking its influence on the mode of existence and change of social-material life. This operates at a level removed from Allen’s work. She studies the relationship between discursive knowledge and events in a particular case study (Plato and Athens), observing and tracking the rise of Plato-esque social groups, legal reforms, and so forth. The relationship between knowledge and power has a different focus that is more process-centric, asking how and by what mechanisms knowledge can influence events. It requires a descriptive analysis of the causal mechanisms and processes that connect discursive knowledge to events, in order to track the flows and exercises of power as opposed to its material outcomes. Providing and interpreting this descriptive analysis has been the main thrust of my thesis. By examining the shifting processes and platforms for cultural transmission in Ancient Athens we are able to understand how the knowledge-power relationship itself shifted.

Although Allen does not study the knowledge-power relationship directly, her knowledge-events focus has generated empirical conclusions that can help to both test and shed light on the knowledge-power relationship. For power leaves observable
traces in the form of social-material events and outcomes. This section is therefore composed of two parts. First, we will introduce Allen’s empirical overview of the 4th century Athenian culture war as well two other brief test cases, in order to check whether our inferences and conclusions so far have not been completely off-the-mark. Second, we will combine our empirical assessments with our supply-side and demand-side conclusions so far, in order to make one particular but ambitiously large conclusion concerning the influence of writing-based textual transmission technologies on social change in Ancient Athens.

*Functioning Ideological-Factionalism: Athenian Schools of Thought*

Analyzing the changed audience experiences and settings that arose with the textual transmission process, we saw that the process permits and encourages a more fragmentary, radical, and minority-receptive mode of identity change. Furthermore, by synthesizing our supply-side and demand-side conclusions thus far we are able to hypothesize about how this outcome would occur. Phrased in the terminology of our conclusions thus far, our hypothesis is the following: the textual transmission process increases the heterogeneity of a cultural commons, encourages the production of radical ideas relative to the bardic process, and makes it feasible for authors to target audience segments (L.13). The existence of quasi-private forums for cultural consumption makes audiences more amenable to both receiving and acting upon radical, minority opinions. As audiences receive targeted, radical *logoi* in these quasi-private forums they will be more likely to shift their beliefs and identities in radical ways, as well as to act on these identity shifts in social settings – what we call loosely the ‘action arena.’
We can visualize this hypothesis within the context of the Literate-Platonic model. The hypothesis clarifies the connection between the following stages in the model (2-6): the textual dissemination process (2), the reader interpretation cascade (3-5), and the action arena (6).

**Figure III: Ideological-Factionalism Hypothesis**

As Allen notes, one of the most basic ways in which citizens translate shifts in beliefs and identity into new rules of action is by participating in sociopolitical groups,
creating new cleavages and social alliances. We saw this clearly with our brief comparison to 18\textsuperscript{th} century France, whose quasi-private spaces and rapidly expanding print-based cultural transmission technologies sparked the formation of myriad new factions and political clubs. This causal relationship between ideas, identity, and social groupings is fortunate, because there is ample data on sociopolitical group reconfigurations in Ancient Athens, allowing Allen (or us) to trace the influence of ideas on 4\textsuperscript{th} century Athenian social life. The way that social groups evolved and how their reconfigurations led to material changes in social life is crucial to understanding the power-knowledge relationship. There are three basic questions that we thus need to ask about the culture war in 4\textsuperscript{th} century Athens and, more broadly, about the major social changes in any of our other test cases. First, was it associated with a rise in factionalism, i.e. an ecosystem of social groups characterized by clashing, multiple, heterogeneous, minority opinions? Second, was it associated with a rise in ideological-factions in particular, i.e. factions centered upon heterogeneous cultural output and representative of fundamental shifts in its members’ identities and belief-systems? Third, are these ideological-factions based on the ideologies of successful authors, i.e. cultural creators who tapped into the allegedly greater (according to our conclusions) potential linguistic power derived from the textual transmission process? I will check my conclusions against three test cases of social change that occurred during this orality-literacy transitional time period in Greece.

We should first check our three questions against the case study from which a substantial portion of our second model is derived: Allen’s empirical assessment of 4\textsuperscript{th} century Athens, which I discussed in detail in the prior chapter. We should expect
the insights from our model-based analysis to accurately describe the mode by which these changes occurred. Largely, they match up quite well. Answering our first question, Allen found that Athens was characterized by the unprecedented influence of factions, each centered upon starkly different, radical ideologies and cultural outputs. Faced with a “culture war,” Athens’ cultural commons was characterized by heterogeneous, radical ideas, the sort that could not be easily reconciled with each other. As opposed to the more fast-paced, linear mode of evolutionary change that distinguished the cultural commons in the crowd-sourced bardic process – where cultural output that was irreconcilable to the existing cultural commons were forgotten for not being contextually valid, and where cultural refinements were easily and fluidly incorporated into a bard’s existing cultural corpus – Athenian culture in the 4th century differentiated itself more than it coalesced. The culture wars were a cultural revolution with a multiplicity of sides, each with their own culturally derived paradigms for how Athens and Athenians should be (which answers our second question).

Analyzing the political speeches of the leaders of the more Plato-derived factions, Allen finds that they seemed to be genuinely (and even to some extent unconsciously) influenced by a Platonic worldview. Instead of merely appropriating certain Platonic concepts haphazardly for their own political ends the politicians Lycurgus and Aeschines seemed to genuinely subscribe to an overarching Platonic ideology.\(^\text{188}\) To the third question, the most successful faction was the one based on Plato’s cultural output. As the Greek thinker who most took advantage of the new medium of writing, and who most believed that it could be a source for vast linguistic

\(^\text{188}\) Allen (2011: 94).
power and influence (which is the central argument of the first half of *Why Plato Wrote*), this matches our theoretical predictions. Unfortunately, Allen does not systematically track the influence of any other thinkers, such as those behind Demosthenes’ less successful anti-Plato faction. She does briefly compare Plato’s influence to Aristotle’s and finds that Plato’s was more ideologically comprehensive, perhaps because he employed many of the strategies mentioned in the previous chapter – for targeting to audience segments, achieving persuasiveness and *enargeia* in his arguments – whereas Aristotle largely did not.

A second test case comes from Foucault who, in *The History of Sexuality: Volume 2 – The Use of Pleasure*, catalogues the history of sexual thought in late 3rd through 1st century Greece, primarily Athens. A genealogical inquiry into the origins of the modern notion that each human has a “sexuality,” he traces sexual thought to the emergence of “demands of austerity” as a topic of moral conversation. We cannot really glean anything about how communication technologies influenced social life through Foucault’s genealogical project, but he does give us data on how the system of thought of a small, specific topic developed in literate Athens. Of the pre-sexual discourses on austerity, he writes:

> They appeared in “scattered centers” whose origins were in different philosophical or religious movements. They developed in the midst of many separate groups. They proposed… different styles of moderation or strictness, each having its specific character of “shape.”189

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189 Foucault (1985: 21).
This contrasts his later examination of the relatively more monolithic, dogmatic economy of discourses on austerity from the early Christian era. In Athens, radical cultural productions on the new topic of austerity developed in a localized, heterogeneous, and incoherent way, just as our conclusions predict. Four of the most prominent “scattered centers” of demand austerity that Foucault mentions are the discourses within early Stoic, Epicurean, and Pythagorean schools of thought, as well as Plato’s *Alcibiades* dialogue. Interestingly, three of these four “centers” were literally *schools* of thought, centered around quasi-private forums for cultural consumption within Athens: Plato’s walled Academy, Zeno’s Stoic school, and Epicurus’ school of small but devoted followers who met originally in his garden. The fourth “center” emerged within the quasi-religious culture of Pythagoreanism; although not in Athens, it was located in a secretive school-cum-monastery, and was less literate-based than the other three schools. These ‘schools of thought’ were geographically characterized rather than defined; though centered in specific quasi-private spaces members of the Athenian schools were fully integrated into the Athenian *polis* as a community and their influence and intellectual membership extended throughout Greece. In this niche example it appears that the Athenian system of pre-sexual thought – the topic-specific subset of the Athenian cultural commons – was characterized by marked heterogeneity and arose in the context of identity-shaping ideological-factions.

The last test case that I will examine is the collection of ‘factions’ explored in Thucydides. They appear in his famous section on *stasis* (3.82-3), or internal war, which often arose within Greek city-states during the Peloponnesian War. These

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factions arose in the 5th century and in cities with significantly lower literacy rates than Athens, allowing us to see whether ideological-factionalism occurred without the textual transmission process. Since our conclusions indicate that the textual transmission process is a necessary condition for the emergence of ideological-factionalism this test case allows us to try to falsify our theory. As Thucydides explains, factions within the city would emerge as ‘oligarchic’ or ‘democratic’ to court either Spartan or Athenian support, so as to overthrow the city’s government and switch its side in the war. When subterfuge, plots and coups dragged into protracted internal strife however, all hell broke loose (literally: πᾶσα ἰδέα κατέστη κακοτροπίας). In an explanation that would go on to profoundly influence the political philosopher Thomas Hobbes, Thucydides defined this stasis as the unbridling of human nature, the natural effect of warfare – that ‘violent teacher’ – which reveals man’s natural lawlessness, treachery, and baseness when unconstrained by the structures of civilization. Thucydides interpreted the rise of factionalist behavior as part of the general emergence of stasis and therefore always normatively bad; it has no place in the communitarian cultures of Greek city-states, and reemerges only when civilization breaks down.

Thucydides’ factions appear to be very different from the ideologically-driven schools of thought – the ideological-factions – that the textual transmission process helped to develop in Athens. The Athenian ‘schools of thought’ were semi-inclusive factions of spatially (and even temporally) unaffiliated Greeks bound together in an

191 We should note that there is next to no remaining discursive evidence from these cities in stasis, such as Corecyra, through which we could analyze ourselves to determine things like literacy rates. Instead, we have to rely on the reported evidence of Athenians, such as Thucydides (The Peloponnesian War: 3.82-3).
intellectual sort of community, often (but not always) compelled to join via self-transformative exposure to the founding author’s texts. Thucydides’ Hellenic factions, on the other hand, feigned oligarchic or democratic ideologies purely to receive aid from competing superpowers; they adopted contrived missions and ideologies for their own purposes when in reality, as Thucydides writes, their “party associations are not based upon any established law, nor do they seek the public good; they are formed in defiance of the laws and from self-interest.” They are exclusive groupings that are bound together instrumentally and by mere political expediency – what Thucydides calls a “fellowship in crime.” That they so often feigned a sort of ideological fervor was perhaps even a legitimization tactic, a nominal appropriation of and intentional reference to the concept of principled ideological-factionalism that was emerging in Athens in order to disguise their actual, instrumental nature. If so, this legitimization tactic would further prove the newness and uniqueness of Athens’ ideological factions.

Our three test cases are only a small start, but they have shown us that we are at least on the right path. First, we see that our deduced conclusions are strikingly similar to the social results and identity-group dynamics that Allen analyzes concerning the Athenian culture war. In answer to our three questions: change in both discursive formations and social life in literate-era Athens was consistently correlated with the emergence of factions, with ideological-factions in particular, and with ideological-factions that were centered on successful authors such as Plato. While our answers to our three questions do not prove our hypothesis, of course, they do allow us to reject the null hypothesis that Athens’ ideological-factionalism and its active

193 Thucydides (History of the Peloponnesian War: 3.82.6).
textual transmission process are unrelated. At the same time, these ideological-factions were associated with the emergence of fragmented, quasi-private forums for textual transmission, a more radical and heterogeneous cultural commons, and evidence for several other of the implications that we predicted from our models. Second, the specific case of Athens’ system of pre-sexual thought during the 3rd century, as examined by Foucault, seems to have been even more heterogeneous and localized than the discursive formations in Allen’s example. These varied cultural outputs were composed and transmitted in the quasi-private schools, private reading groups, and intellectual communities that flourished with and relied upon the rise of the textual transmission process. Third, we examined the Thucydidean factions throughout 5th century Greece as a counterpoint to the Athenian context. It is a uniquely useful test case, insofar as it allows us to observe whether the ‘ideological-factions’ that we predicted to be an offshoot of the textual transmission process existed as such in less literate city-states. Not only did we discover that ideological-factionalism did not exist, but the fact that Thucydides inextricably ties factionalism to *stasis* and to a Hobbesian state of nature implies that factionalism itself – whether ideological or not – was something that the Greeks believed to have no place in the communitarian *polis* social structure and the culture of intellectual discourse that characterized it. In other words, the concept of ideological-factionalism may not have even existed as such in the 5th century.

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194 The results also allow Allen to reject her own null hypothesis that Athens’ factions were not influenced by Plato’s writings or thoughts. In particular, the answer to our third question indicates that Plato’s strategy of writing was effective in generating surplus linguistic power. 195 Or at least, this is something that Thucydides, or perhaps Athenians, believed (if not ‘the Greeks’ overall). Thucydides also implicitly excludes family ties and clans from his definition of a faction. Thus, we get the conventional definition of Athenian life: a private
Overall, it is unclear whether systems of thought, culture, and individual identity were even characterized by a radical, ideological-factionalist mode of change before the growing adoption of the textual transmission process in the 5th century. Is it possible that factions operating as identity-based subgroups operating in a quasi-private sphere within a broader community – which is to say, united by necessarily unpopular, minority-held principles and shared beliefs rather than pure instrumentalism – did not exist before the emergence of writing-based platforms for cultural transmission? And given their critical role in Athens’ culture war, is it possible that the ‘culture war’ of 4th century Athens was in fact the first of its kind in the history of the west?

*A First Derivative Theory of Social Change*

We have shown so far that our deductive conclusions about the effects of writing-based cultural transmission technologies correspond well with Allen’s empirical assessment of the culture war in 4th century Athens. Allen gives evidence to her hypothesis that Plato’s ideas influenced Athenian social change at several levels but she does not give an on-the-ground, practical explanation of how this occurred. Insofar as our predicted outcomes match Allen’s observed outcomes – such as in predicting the role of ideological-factions, the spread of radical and heterogeneous ideas, the intentionality of authors, and so forth – it seems that our models of different cultural transmission processes have succeeded in adequately filling in many of Allen’s explanatory gaps. We also showed that many of Allen’s observed outcomes did not occur in cases where our model of textual transmission was inapplicable (such as in a sphere (*oikos*) and a public sphere (*polis*), private identities and public identities. The ideological-factionalism that I trace pokes a hole in that dichotomy, particularly as they arose
as the less literate Hellenic city-states and their experiences with factionalism during the Peloponnesian War) and that they occurred in greater intensity where our model was particularly applicable (such as the Foucauldian analysis of sexual thought, which occurred in ‘schools of thought’ characterized strongly by the textual transmission process). We have not yet filled-in the most important of Allen’s explanatory gaps, though. She makes a much grander claim than those that I have so far provided explanations for: that Plato’s influence on Athens should be taken as a model case of the way that knowledge influences events. Could the writing-based platform for cultural transmission help to explain her larger claims, too? I believe so. First, let us examine the broader scholarship on the relationship between knowledge and events in order to see whether our method of analysis cannot give us a new perspective by which to answer them.

*The Relationship Between Ideas and Events*

The influence of intellectuals on social life is the guiding light of Allen’s book. She does not seek to answer it herself, but instead hopes that her text “will mark trailheads that might be pursued toward the goal of answering our long-lived questions about the [relationship].” Allen (2011: 8). She also gives a brief, critical account of recent attempts at answering this question in the last century. She begins with Thomas Kuhn’s classic conception of the “paradigm shift” as a way of conceptualizing revolutions in scientific ideas. Breaking dramatically from the standard Whig account of scientific development as cumulative and progressive in a fairly linear way, he argued that science developed as a “series of peaceful interludes punctuated by

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196 Allen (2011: 8).
intellectually violent revolutions,” in which “one conceptual world view is replaced by another.”197 Although Kuhn does not agree that his argument can be applied wholesale to changes in the social world, most social sciences have appropriated at least his arguments about the revolutionary rate of change of scientific knowledge. Foucault does so in his characterization of “epistemes,” chronologically distinct, unconscious structures that underlie the production of knowledge in a certain time and place. Epistemes are paradigmatic insofar as they are characterized by disruptive transitions and “define the conditions of possibility of all knowledge.” Of course, the episteme is different in that its object is all knowledge, not just scientific disciplines. The consequences of this enlargement are significant: insofar as an episteme characterize all knowledge it is a fundamental ordering device for all aspects of social and material life.198

More recently, the knowledge-events question has been taken up in the context of empirical social scientists by scholars engaged in the study of “social revolutions.” The dividing line has been drawn between those who, like Theda Skocpol (1994), believe that structural forces – economic and macropolitical – are most important in explaining revolutionary contexts versus those who believe in the primacy of ideology, in a Foucauldian sort of way, such as Bill Sewell (1994). Allen explains that Sewell argues for the “fundamentally discursive nature even of structural phenomena.”199

Calling *Why Plato Wrote* an examination into the “discursive basis of our material lives,” Allen clearly takes the side of ideological primacy. Ever the interdisciplinarian, she finds intellectual support from Hattam and Lowndes (2007), scholars of American political development. She appropriates their conceptual innovation of tracing the effects of discursive changes on material life through the intermediary stage of individual identity shifts, which “rearrange the social cleavages and political alliances of the day.”\(^{200}\) In doing so, they incorporate post-structuralist insights on the cultural and discursive basis of identity without contradicting the competing structuralist and non-ideological interpretations of social change (a problem that Sewell falls into). Allen argues convincingly that Plato also agreed with this theory of discursive change. Unsurprisingly, it is the tripartite theory of social change that underlies my model: on the first level discourse is composed and enters the cultural commons, on the second it is interpreted by readers and molds their identities, and on the third it affects social life and material outcomes. Conveniently, structuralist, economic, and non-ideological theories of social change can find their way into each cascading level of both of my models. Taking the Platonic-Literate as an example, structural variables can: structure whether the *logos* is accepted and popularized, structure the way that readers interpret the *logos*, structure the extent to which readers can affect social change through the action arena, which results in outcomes that circle back to structure the cultural composition stage through influencing the cultural creator’s background, personality, and understanding of his notional audience.

While the extent to which structures affect each level of social change – and which structures do so – is important in the grand theory of how ideas influence events, I am not interested in that question. I make no pretense of attempting to model the influence of every explanatory variable in the ideas-events relationship; instead, I model the implications of just one, the cultural transmission platform that sets the technical parameters and ‘conditions of possibility’ for discursive production and cultural consumption. In constructing the Literate-Platonic model I even made small modifications to the informal ‘Allen-Plato’ model which it is based upon in order to make my model as agnostic as possible between the two sides of the debate; neither the ‘action arena’ nor the circular nature of the model come from Allen or Plato. For while scholars of social change such as Skocpol and Sewell are doing fascinating and compelling research, I am less interested in what divides these two opposing “poles” than what unites them. Ultimately, they both primarily study “social revolutions”\(^{201}\) as the primary locus of social, structural, and cultural transformation. Foucault studies epistemes. Allen identifies a “culture war” in her case study. Sewell, Skocpol, Allen, and Foucault all implicitly agree about the rate of social change. This, of course, is

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\(^{201}\) There are two dominant definitions for social revolutions, one by Huntington (1986: 39), the other by Skocpol (1979: 3-4)

“A revolution is a rapid, fundamental, and violent domestic change in the dominant values and myths of a society, in its political institutions, social structure, leadership, and government activity and policies. Revolutions are thus to be distinguished from insurrections, rebellions, revolts, coups, and wars of independence.” (Huntington)

“Social revolutions are rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures; and they are accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below. Social revolutions are set apart from other sorts of conflicts and transformative processes above all by the combination of two coincidences: the coincidence of societal structural change with class upheaval; and the coincidence of political with social transformation” (Skocpol: 3-4)

Neither apply wholly to Athens’ “culture war” of course, but they bear similarities in terms of rapid and fundamental shifts, and particularly with Huntington’s values- and myths-based definition. We shouldn’t consider this too problematic, however, as they are meant to apply to the Early Modern and Modern era (particularly Skocpol’s with its focus on class).
the ‘revolutionary’ rate, the Kuhnian theory of change as characterized by long
periods of relative peace punctuated by violent revolutions between competing (and
often incommensurable) intellectual worldviews, as opposed to the Whiggish
narrative of history as steady progress. It is in regards to this relationship that I argue
writing has a profound, structural effect.

*The First Paradigm Shift*

Fundamentally, Allen argues that Plato “helped launch a culture war,” and
that in turn he did so with the help of the textual transmission process. Indeed, our
conclusions indicate that he had a lot more help than Allen may have expected: the
textual transmission process may very well be a necessary condition for the very
existence of a culture war. Let us review and synthesize our evidence. From our
analysis so far, the textual transmission process helped Plato launch his culture war in
three ways.

First, it gave him significantly greater capacity for exercising linguistic and
social power. Authors had access to wider audiences and while they could not
ultimately control how a reader interpreted their texts their ability to intentionally and
singularly control the content of their *logos* certainly helped them. They were able to
take on certain ‘author-functions’ that made them symbols of credibility, and the
text’s scriptural and ossifying properties made it much more likely that their influence
could be felt after their deaths.

Second, it gave Plato greater freedom of composition. Largely removed from
the highly participatory group audiences of the bardic process, authors were subject to
significantly less intrusive demand pressures. On the other side of the equation, the
lack of a memory constraint no longer capped the size or complexity of their compositions. Invariably, this freedom led to a higher quantity, diversity, and volatility of *logoi*. The homogenous and homeostatic cultural commons that characterized the bardic process fragmented into a collection of heterogeneous and radical cultural outputs.

Third, the textual transmission process affected audiences in just the sort of way that a radical author such as Plato would have liked. It fragmented the public forums of cultural dissemination into a range of private and quasi-private spaces, simultaneously increasing a citizen’s receptivity to minority and radical opinions as well as making it easier to act upon them. The combination could be potent. Schools and salon-style private reading groups flourished with and formed around the literary transmission model. Between the bardic and the literary eras, cultural creators transitioned from a traveling and semi-distinct vocational class to quasi-religious leaders of large, devoted (even bordering on fundamentalist) groups.

To be sure, authors still faced many constraints. The economic constraints to publishing at scale were probably significant, and not just anyone could go off and lead a school as Plato did, or spend decades writing as Thucydides did. Editors could still manipulate an author’s texts. Nor was the author ever completely free from audience pressure, as his *logoi* still had to satisfy the criteria of seeming to ‘solve’ cultural or existential problems in order to be consumed. Nevertheless, the Athenian textual transmission process was an overwhelming boon for authors like Plato. It represented an enormous opportunity for successful authors to exercise social and
religious power and to build ‘schools of thought’ of radical-minded people within a community.

All these implications of the textual transmission process seem to encourage the formation of paradigm shifts and the ‘revolutionary’ mode of social change. Indeed, it is difficult to see how such a mode of social change was even feasible in the preliterate, bardic era. The textual process encourages a cultural commons that is radically heterogeneous in its evolutionarily stable form, with ‘schools of thought’ bred in quasi-private spaces of cultural consumption that constitute new, heterogeneous and occasionally radical shifts in individual identities. A Platonist in 4th century Athens will have a very different answer to the question of how he should live his life – in an existential, all-encompassing way – than an old-school democrat and sophist like Demosthenes. If not incommensurable, this difference can be very difficult to reconcile in a non-revolutionary way. It results in a historical moment when, As according to Allen’s definition of a culture war, “coherent alternative conceptual visions gained argumentative traction at the core of Athenian politics.”

At the same time, the paradigm shift mode of social change is constituted by long interludes of relative cultural stability before and after the revolution. The textual transmission process also does this insofar as texts are a fundamentally stabilizing force. Plato’s ideas may have begun as radical, but after several hundred years of devotion to his teachings and dialogues they lose a bit of their counterculture feel. To the extent that an author’s fundamentalist school of thought is institutionalized, such as Plato’s disciples or through the Pythagoreans, cultural stability becomes doubly enforced: ossified institutional cultures ossify already

202 Allen, (2011: 99)
ossified texts. Until, sometime much later, new shifts occur, for varying reasons that need not relate to shifting cultural communication technologies.

Arguing that 4\textsuperscript{th} century Athens was characterized by a paradigm shift – or at least a ‘culture war’ that was structurally similar to a paradigm shift in terms of its rate of change – is not particularly novel. Yet I propose that it may have been the first ‘paradigm shift’ mode of social change in the history of the west. Just as the implications of the Literate-Platonic model of textual transmission coalesced to encourage a stable-then-revolutionary cycle in terms of the rate of social change, so did the Oral-Bardic model coalesce to encourage a quick-but-incremental rate of social change. To clarify, I use ‘paradigm shift’ as a shorthand, for what I am really arguing is that the whole theory of the rate of social change that is so accepted today – which goes by episteme, paradigm shift, social revolution, and perhaps more – claims the textual transmission process as a necessary condition. It is part of the new possibility space associated with writing.\textsuperscript{203}

In the bardic process, the cultural commons evolved nearly constantly. Stories were highly iterative as empathetic bards were acutely attuned to audience pressures. Due to the individual memory mode of archiving those prior, non-replicated iterations tended to be lost forever. Even replicated stories changed dramatically from telling to

\textsuperscript{203} To visualize the relationship, we could probably use the inverse cubic function (using the real-valued root) to represent the first derivative (the rate of change) of the relationship between, say, “ideas” and “time.” Graphically: “change in ideas” would represent the y-axis, “time” would represent the x-axis. Of interest would be the area around the y-axis. The change in ideas grows very slowly and gradually, increases exponentially during a revolutionary crisis and then finds its inflection point at the y-axis (where the graph shifts from concave up to concave down), decreasing in speed until it levels out.

\begin{equation}
\quad y = \sqrt[3]{x}
\end{equation}
telling. The concept of memorization as a literal, word-for-word activity was foreign to bards; attempts to test it according to that accuracy metric indicate that the same story would differ by about 70% – with significant variability – from one telling to the next.\footnote{Ong (2002: 64).}

A common stereotype is that oral cultures are highly traditional, but in terms of net cultural or even identity-based ‘change’ over an extended period of time I would not be surprised if it vastly exceeded many less ‘traditional’ communities, such as Athens. Many of an orality-era community’s cultural practices may in fact have originated as attempts to slow down the rapid pace of cultural change. Furthermore, many characteristics of the bardic process served to ensure that the cultural changes were of an incremental rather than disruptive nature, through the strict demands of ‘contextual validity’ and the inabilities of an author to “fictionalize” his audiences. Audiences were highly participatory and often gave immediate feedback, incentivizing the replication of non-reflective stories and disincentivizing radical stories and identity-molding fictionalizations.

Ideological factionalism within a broader community or city-state, a factor that we have identified as a key component of Athens’ culture war, did not seem to exist in orality. While Athens and perhaps Greece overall were famous for the heroization and emphasis on personal agency in their myths and culture, there is no trace of ideological-factionalism as a contextual feature of preliterate Athenian culture. Nor can we infer it as an implication of any aspects of the Oral-Bardic process.
Identity-forming factionalism, quasi-private contexts of cultural consumption, and heterogeneous and radical cultural identities are the key effects of the Literate-Platonic model that support our argument in a theory of ICT-determined rate of social change. If they are lacking in the Oral-Bardic model, should we assume that the rate of social change in orality was more characterized by, say, the Whiggish theory of a progressive rate of change? One could perhaps make a reasonable case for this, given the proclivities toward incremental yet rapid cultural change through the bardic process, but I would hesitate to associate any progressive theory of sociocultural change to orality-era Athens. My use of the word ‘evolutionary’ refers to the dynamism of the cultural commons without any normative attachments. Nor do we need to posit a replacement theory for the rate of social change to prove the ‘revolutionary’ one is inaccurate. The essential point is that we can track a definite shift in the pace of social change that parallels the rise of the textual transmission process in Athens.

This is a significant claim to make, and I will qualify it partially: my analysis leads me to believe that the textual transmission process encourages a revolutionary pace of social change only to the extent that ‘change’ is influenced by discursive and cultural transformations. Depending on one’s preferred social theorist this is either a trivial or an enormous qualification. It is necessary, however, because I derived my insights from a model that admits the role of ideology as an explanatory variable for social change and, simply, because the implications of a platform for cultural transmission are almost entirely mediated through cultural transmission. Thus, it is unclear how many levels of social change this theory applies to. Kuhn’s concept of
paradigm shifts is most accepted as it applies to changes on the level of systems of scientific thought. Similarly, it appears that the influence of the textual transmission process is most apparent on the level of systems of thought, such as how the transmission process helped to launch a ‘culture war,’ encouraged the production of radical and disruptive discourses that become the bases of new disciplines of thought (philosophy and political science for Plato and Thucydides), and so forth. Our argument concerning the shift from identity-formation through the criteria of ‘contextual validity’ to the process of ‘fictionalizing’ makes a case for the textual transmission process’ influence on the rate of change at the level of identity, while the introduction of ideological-factionalism makes a case for change on the level of social-material outcomes. Still, the mode of social change whose rate of change is structured by the textual transmission process depends ultimately on whether you believe that discourse and ideology structure social change at all.

**Conclusion**

In this chapter we have tied together the results of our Oral-Bardic and Literate-Platonic model and brought them to bear in examining the relationship between shifts in cultural communication platforms and shifts in social life. The textual transmission process emerged in Ancient Athens amidst an unprecedented level of social change to the city’s systems of thought, modes of identity-formation, and social-material concerns. Essentially, we have asked to what extent the textual transmission process can be implicated in those broader changes. Restated in the language of our key questions, we have asked how the changed social conditions and
cultural output arising from the oral to literary shift in cultural transmission influenced a broader, “second-stage evolutionary game” within Ancient Athens. how the rise of the text-based cultural transmission process in Ancient Athens is implicated in the broader social changes that struck Athens during its rise.

There are many moving parts in this chapter. I have tried to make the relationship between social conditions, expected cultural output, and their respective implications as clear as possible, but it is very easy to get lost. For reference and clarity, I have summarized our key social conditions, expected cultural output, and implications for both the Oral-Bardic and the Literate-Platonic model into four lists. The parenthetical number in the last two columns show how the lists connect. The numbers in the third column, “Literate-Platonic Results,” refer to the factors in the previous two columns that are altered. The numbers in the fourth column, “Implications of the Shift,” refer to the factors in the third column that contribute to that conclusion

Figure IV: Cumulative Lists
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Oral-Bardic Results</th>
<th>Oral-Bardic Implications</th>
<th>Literate-Platonic Results</th>
<th>Implications of the Shift</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. Author + Ideological Production (Systems of Thought)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Conditions</td>
<td>Social Conditions</td>
<td>Social Conditions</td>
<td>Social Conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory Constraint</td>
<td>Disembodied (2)</td>
<td>Intentionality (1,4,5,6,11,13,15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group Audiences (spatially &amp; temporally local)</td>
<td>Spatial Expansion (2)</td>
<td>Diversity of Cultural Commons</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crowdsourced Stories</td>
<td>Temporal Expansion (2,3)</td>
<td>Radical Ideologies (1-3,5,15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No author-based credibility</td>
<td>Single Authorship (3)</td>
<td>Authorial Credibility (4,3,6,16,10)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory Archiving</td>
<td>Slackened, less immediate demand pressure (5,6,10)</td>
<td>Scriptural Culture + Cultural Stability (1,3,6,13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iterative Feedback</td>
<td>Empathetic bards</td>
<td>Power of the Author: Scalable, Targeted Technologies of the Self (4,6,9,10,12,13,16)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate Demand Pressure</td>
<td>Textual Finality (4)</td>
<td>Surplus Linguistic Power (1-3,4,6,13-14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeostatic, non-fictionalized audiences</td>
<td>Private Consumption (2)</td>
<td>Contextually Valid vs. Fictionalized Identity-Formation (1,5,12-14)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iterative Feedback</td>
<td>Quasi-Private Consumption (2)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory constraint lessened, replaced by &quot;writer's workshop&quot; (1)</td>
<td>Economic prerequisites for transmission</td>
<td>Fragmentation of Literary Transmission Forums in Athens</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Output</td>
<td>Complex Style (4,7,8)</td>
<td>Private Cultural Consumption: Individual Identities (7,9,11,15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formulaic</td>
<td>Cultural Problem-Solving (9,10)</td>
<td>Receptivity to Minority Opinions (Quasi-Private Spaces) (1,7-8,13)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less radical or complex ideas</td>
<td>Targets Audience Segments (2,6,9,10)</td>
<td>Schools of Thought (8,12,13,15)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Redundant</td>
<td>Targets Influential Segments (6,10)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeostatic</td>
<td>Thematically Radical (9,1,6,7,10)</td>
<td>Cascading Paradigm Shifts and the Episteme</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contextually Valid</td>
<td>Stylistically Conservative (9)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less &quot;fictional&quot; audience segments &amp; ideological minorities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
V: CONCLUSION

**Answering the Three Key Questions**

1. *What different kinds of culture succeed – which is to say, become absorbed into the Athenian ‘cultural commons’ – as a byproduct of the transition from oral-based to writing-based cultural transmission technologies?*

   As the oral-formulaic composition process that characterized the Oral-Bardic model gave way to the “writer’s workshop” metaphor of an author isolated from his audience the author was afforded significantly greater freedoms of production. No longer limited by the memory constraint he was free to produce innovative and complex styles, narratives, themes, and ideas without worrying that the complexity would dissuade other cultural creators from replicating his *logos*. No longer subjected to such an intensity and immediate demand-side pressure the author was also able to target and write for specific audience segments, perhaps even segments that existed spatially or temporally far away from the author. Homeostatic, majoritarian-based ideas gave way to complexity, experimentation with radical ideas, and explicit audience segment targeting.

2. *How does the shift from oral-based to writing-based cultural transmission technologies create a different set of social conditions within Athens?*

   The shifting cultural transmission processes influenced social conditions in both profound and eclectic ways. On the demand-side, audience settings shifted steadily over time. Scholars have observed a gradual fragmentation of the forums for public cultural consumption during the 4th century and it appears that the shift in cultural transmission processes may very well have been involved. The modes of private reading and group-based, mixed oral-literate modes of cultural consumption led to the emergence of private and quasi-private spaces for cultural consumption.
The latter were particularly important: schools, symposiums, and private group readings emerged as locations for the distribution of radical, minority opinions. On the supply-side, authors were also freed from the disembodied, spatially and temporally expanded nature of the textual transmission process. Separated from their audiences, however, they were also less empathetic and responsive to their audience’s demands. Yet this very process freed them from the requirement of producing ‘contextually valid,’ incremental rather than disruptive cultural innovations. Athens’ cultural community grew less homogenous and *logoi* that succeeded would often be rewarded with a sort of scriptural monumentality that could preserve it in a community’s cultural commons for centuries.

3. **Building on the prior two questions, what are the implications of the shift from oral-based to writing-based cultural transmission processes for social change in Ancient Athens?** We are particularly interested in three levels of social change: ideological-discursive (characterized by systems of thought), individual and social identity, and social-material. The first level of social change represents the ‘supply-side’ of my analysis and examines how the role of the author and the production of discourse are transformed. Overall, we noted a shift in power toward the text-based cultural transmission process, legitimizing and privileging the role of the author as a vehicle for social power. We noted also that the textual transmission process of Ancient Athens encouraged a more heterogeneous and perhaps even radical cultural commons.

The second level of social change represents the ‘demand-side’ of my analysis, examining the roles and experiences of audiences as cultural consumers. We see that audiences receive text-based cultural transmissions very differently from oral-based, in an array of private and quasi-private spaces that may have also led to a general fragmentation of the public forums for cultural consumption in 4th century
Athens. This fragmentation had crucial implications for audience social identities: as quasi-private forums replaced public forums, audiences became more receptive to receiving radical or minority opinions. They were also more easily able to form ideological, identity-based factions in response to their shifting opinions.

On the third level we synthesize our supply-side and demand-side insights to examine the ways that the knowledge-power relationship shifted with the advent of writing. The results are surprising. Ideological-factionalism, quasi-private spheres of cultural consumption, and heterogeneous and radical cultural identities combine in a way that encourages both revolutionary change and a sort of ossification of identity and culture through the institutionalization of ideological schools of thought. We are able to see how our conclusions play themselves out through the case study of 4th century Athens that Allen provides for us. If Allen’s empirical analysis holds, we observe that writing may have done more than just allow Plato to launch one of Athens’ first ever ‘culture wars.’ Instead, writing may have been a necessary condition for ‘culture wars’ to occur at all.

To Classics – Expanding Upon Allen’s Why Plato Wrote

I have tried to make two substantive types of contributions to scholarship on Ancient Greek literacy: my conclusions and unique methodological approach.

In my conclusions concerning the results of the model – in terms of changes to expected cultural output and social conditions – I have endeavored to be as rigorous with my logic as possible. Frankly, by themselves most of my results seem more like trivial observations than major insights. One might fairly ask what the point is of building a model over the course of some fifty pages just to conclude that the textual
transmission process results in ‘textual finality’ or ‘single authorship.’ Yet it is purely through the combination of seemingly trivial results that my implications are derived. For example, the profound change to individual-level identity arising from the shift to cultural output that ‘fictionalizes’ audiences (instead of being contextually validating) is derived from five simple facts: that the cultural transmission process is more disembodied than the bardic process, that it is characterized by slackened and less immediate demand pressure, that it can target audience segments and influential segments, and that it must the criteria of solving cultural problems. The combination is much more powerful than its parts.

We were able to successfully apply our conclusions to the outcomes that Allen traces for 4\textsuperscript{th} century Athens. We can conclude that Plato’s choice to write was a substantial factor in his success, insofar as the ways and means by which his ideas took hold appear to closely match the cultural transmission-based mechanisms that we hypothesized. In fact, it is likely that Plato’s effective use of writing technology was a necessary condition for his level and mode of success. The textual transmission process admits a revolutionary pace of social change as a ‘condition of possibility,’ encouraging fragmentation and radicalization of the cultural commons and creating the quasi-private spaces in which a distinct form of organization could develop: the ideological-based, identity-forming faction.

Several insights in particular merit further research. The notion of a burgeoning quasi-private sphere – which Thomas (2003) and Wallace (1995) both find evidence for – throws a wrench in the standard conception of Athens as defined by two distinct spheres – a private one characterized by intense individualism that
allows the citizen to enter a communitarian public sphere. Instead, we have found that the emergence of quasi-private spheres in the 4th century had a profound influence on Athenian culture. As well, the role of schools of thought, scriptural culture and cultural stability, and the general idea of a ‘first derivative theory of social change’ merit further research as well.

Secondly I have tried to make a substantive contribution to classical scholarship through my methodological innovations. Responding to Wallace’s (1995) and Saxonhouse’s (2012) calls for a broader cultural model and a social science methodology, respectively, I have utilized an interdisciplinary approach by building two basic models of cultural transmission processes and analyzing them in the context of a Foucauldian knowledge-power framework. Although quite rare in classical studies, it is my hope that interdisciplinary scholarship between classics and the social sciences will one day take hold. Social science techniques for tracing causal processes and recognizing patterns and relationships across large amounts of data could have a transformative impact on classical studies. Indeed, as data and text mining techniques become only more advanced over time entire fields of the histories of thought may be transformed fundamentally. Concomitantly, classics’ emphasis on textual analysis, interpretative rigor, and contextual understanding could shed light on many social science questions as well, as the success of interdisciplinary-minded classicists, such as Ober and Allen, have confirmed.

**A Preemptive Critique of the Model-Making Process**

Although I have been careful in the construction of my models and have attempted to test them in numerous ways, ultimately models are meant to be tested
and broken. Often it is by trying to break a model that we discover the most important things about the phenomena that we are modeling in the first place. Thus, I lay out three ways in which the type of models constructed here could be critiqued, falsified, and/or improved.

First, a model’s assumptions could be improved – i.e. changing its components and aspects. If the body of knowledge concerning literacy and the oral tradition in Ancient Athens increases substantially then we should absolutely expect that the models in this thesis be revised or replaced. In fact, I amended the Parry-Lord model of oral-formulaic composition precisely because the literature on oral traditions had advanced so far around it.

Second, the logic of my model could be improved. A useful way to increase a model’s logical rigor is to include mathematical elements in it, therefore tying its relationships and claims to standardized logical theories. This could be an interesting and welcome refinement to the two models.

Third, it is always useful to continue testing a model, ideally by applying the criterion of falsifiability to it. If there are not enough possible test cases during the time period and location that the model was constructed for – i.e. around Ancient Athens from the 8th to 4th century – it could be useful to test the model against a case study of revolutionary cultural change in another cultural context as well.

**Implications for the Future**

The notion that revolutionarily paced cultural and social change is a product of the textual transmission process has significant implications. For one, it implies that our age of electronic communication may no longer be characterized by the
revolutionary – i.e. steady-then-radical – pace of change. Interestingly, there are several futurist scholars who argue this very point. Kurzweil for instance, has plotted the known ‘paradigm shifts’ in the history of scientific development and found that the time between paradigm shifts is actually accelerating, i.e. repeating at smaller and smaller intervals every year. If a community experiences radical paradigm shifts every few years, or perhaps even every few months, does it really qualify as a paradigm shift? While writing encouraged a steady-then-revolutionary pace of change, perhaps in the future that will gave way to revolutionary-then-revolutionary change – or rather, exponential change.

Setting aside the specific insights generated from this thesis our general framework for interpreting the changes in cultural transmission processes in Athens could be directly applicable to the study of contemporary changes in cultural transmission technologies. Many of the framing devices I use are easily translatable, such as looking at the contexts of cultural transmission from a demand-side, examining the role of cultural creators in the production of ideologies, the interaction between cultural creators and cultural consumers, and so forth. As with this thesis’ contribution to classical studies, I hope that both the insights and the methodological aspects of our analysis will prove highly applicable for future research.

205 I commend Kurzweil for one-upping my own first derivative theory of social change with a second derivative theory of social change.
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