



Becoming Beside Ourselves: The Alphabet, Ghosts, and Distributed Human Being

Brian Rotman

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Becoming Beside Ourselves continues the investigation that the renowned cultural theorist and mathematician Brian Rotman began in his previous books *Signifying Nothing* and *Ad Infinitum...The Ghost in Turing's Machine*: exploring certain signs and the conceptual innovations and subjectivities that they facilitate or foreclose. In *Becoming Beside Ourselves*, Rotman turns his attention to alphabetic writing or the inscription of spoken language. Contending that all media configure what they mediate, he maintains that alphabetic writing has long served as the West's dominant cognitive technology. Its logic and limitations have shaped thought and affect from its inception until the present. Now its grip on Western consciousness is giving way to virtual technologies and networked media, which are reconfiguring human subjectivity just as alphabetic texts have done for millennia.

Alphabetic texts do not convey the bodily gestures of human speech: the hesitations, silences, and changes of pitch that infuse spoken language with affect. Rotman suggests that by removing the body from communication, alphabetic texts enable belief in singular, disembodied, authoritative forms of being such as God and the psyche. He argues that while disembodied agencies are credible and real to "lettered selves," they are increasingly incompatible with selves and subjectivities formed in relation to new virtual technologies and networked media. Digital motion-capture technologies are restoring gesture and even touch to a prominent role in communication. Parallel computing is challenging the linear thought patterns and ideas of singularity facilitated by alphabetic language. Barriers between self and other are breaking down as the networked self is traversed by other selves to become multiple and distributed, formed through many actions and perceptions at once. The digital self is going plural, becoming beside itself.

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