

Text-Image.

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I propose a model for the history of visual communications as follows: (a) Anthropoids become human when extending a hand towards the surrounding world. By this act of "understanding" the events that come in and go, the world changes into a "circumstance" composed of objects, and man into a subject of the world. This permits man to change the form of the objects, to "inform" them. Informed objects, (for example knives made of silex), are the first media of visual communications

(b) Hands are synchronized with the eyes that control them. Man learns to look first and to act according to vision. The problem here is to fix vision and to render it accessible to others. Image making must be invented. Once man succeeds in projecting surfaces of the objects seen against walls, (for example at Lascaux), an intermediate zone of imagination interposes itself between man and the objective world. Man becomes homo sapiens sapiens. Images are the second medium of visual communication

(c) Images are meant to be maps of the subjective world, but they may hide the world they were meant to represent. If they become opaque for the world, man can no longer use them for orientation, and he then lives in function of the images. This is idolatry. To overcome this alienation, man must learn to explain the images, to render them transparent. He does so by plucking the image elements from out of the surface and by aligning them in a calculable sequence. He invents linear writing. Thus the imaginary scenes are changed into linear processes, and man becomes a historical being. Linear texts are the third medium of visual communication

(d) After a long contradiction between texts and images, during which texts become ever more imaginative and images ever more conceptual, print is invented, and the texts become dominant. The images are expelled from daily life into ghettos, and the texts become ever more inimitable. In order to overcome this divorce of culture into textual, (scientific) culture and image, (artistic), culture the technical images, (photography and so forth), are invented. Their purpose is to render the texts imaginable again, and to re-introduce images into daily life. However, the technical images, unlike the traditional ones, are point-like mosaics, and they are products of point-computing apparatus. They therefore do not meet directly the scenes they show, but they mean them through the mediation of

apparatus programs. These technical images are the fourth media for visual communication.

Having thus proposed a model which is meant to show that technical images, unlike the traditional ones, are post-alphabetic inventions and thus dominate texts, I go on to discuss the problems of a society informed by those images. Until recently the technical images were broadcast from programming centers towards solitary receivers. This is a typically "discursive", centralizing and totalitarian situation. Telematics now begins to establish cross-connections between those receivers. As long as the programming centers continue to dominate, now true dialogue through the telematic images is possible, and telematics will only serve as feed-back to central programs, (example: opinion polls). But we may take a further step back from technical images, and learn how to criticize and transform them. If so, telematics may offer an opening toward a cosmic dialogue through synthesized images, a truly universal democracy. Both virtualities are now open: either automatic image totalitarianism, or a creative universal dialogue through this new form of imagination. No doubt the future will lie somewhere between those two extremes, but it seems to me that now is the moment to reflect on this challenge.