

The following quasi-phenomenological descriptions intend to illustrate the concept of techno-magination. It is the capacity to codify and to de-codify techno-images. The hypothesis here submitted is that such a capacity is different from imagination in the traditional sense. That the production and the deciphering of traditional images demands a different sort of capacity from the one demanded by techno-images. (Like photographs, films, TV programs, X-rays, holograms and the like.) And that this challenge which the techno-images present is one of the most fateful ones presented us by the present situation.

Such a hypothesis is based on the following diagnosis: The codified world which surrounds us no longer consists predominantly of linear texts, but of techno-images. It is they which carry the majority of messages which inform us. In such a situation the capacity to decipher techno-images, "techno-imagination," becomes indispensable for living, even for mere survival. And many symptoms point to the fact that our techno-imagination is sadly underdeveloped. We are incapable of correctly codification and de-codification of the techno-images which surround us. We are incorrectly pre-programmed for the codified world that programmes us. As are illiterates in a world programmed by alphabetic texts. We do not master the "grammar" and the "orthography" of our codified world.

This might be one possible explanation of our present crisis: that we are incapable of orientation within the type of world we were projected into. Now each type of code produces, (and is produced by), a specific existential climate. Traditional images go on in the climate of magic, and linear texts in the climate of historical existence. We are not correctly pre-programmed for an existence within a world in which techno-images prevail. Our schools programme us for a historical existence, for a linear culture. This makes it difficult for us to overcome historical categories of thought and action, and to think and act in a way appropriate to a world codified by techno-images. Our categories of thought and action do not accord with the world we live in. The following descriptions intend to illustrate this.

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If one thinks of filming, one cannot help to compare it with photographing. A series of differences become evident. For instance: photographic images are fixed and silent, filmic ones move and speak. Such differences do not touch upon the essence, (the "eidos"), of films, however. To make films is to manipulate events, to photograph is to manipulate, scenes. The universe of films is a context of processes; the universe of photographs is a context of situations. The differences between the two codes must refer to this difference of meaning, if they are to be revealing of the essence.

The meaning of filmic messages is a wavelike context, the meaning of photographic messages is a sandlike context. To go from one context into the other involves translation, (trans-coding). This necessity to constantly trans-code is a characteristic of the present codified world. An example is the universe of physics, where we have constantly to trans-code from an ondulatory to a quantic structure of the physical world.

If we observe the act of photographing, we must concentrate our attention on the photographer and his camera. It is a motion which may be interpreted as a search for a point of view with regard to a situation. And it has a quantic structure: it consists of a series of jumps. This search is determined by complex factors, of which the situation itself, the mechanism of the camera, and the intention of the photographer are the most obvious factors. If we were to define ideology as insistence upon a specific point of view, the act of photographing is a post-ideological motion: it jumps from one point of view to another. To the photographer each situation is surrounded by a cluster of equivalent points of view, and it is the better known, the greater the number of points of view we look at it from. Yet such a post-ideological attitude does not imply objectivity: the numerous points of view are still a matter of more or less subjective choice. In fact: the photographer is better aware of his own subjectivity than is the ideologue. This is an example of how techno-imagination overcomes historical consciousness.

If we compare filming to photographing we are tempted to compare the motion of the photographer with the motion of a cameraman. We can then observe how the jumping motion changes into a gliding one. The quantic character changes into an ondulatory one: and becomes "travelling", "scanning", "zooming", "close-up" and so forth. If we were to call the search for a point of view by the term "doubt", we might say that photographic doubt is more methodic, more cartesian than is filmic doubt, which is more hesitating. The cameraman does not jump to conclusions, as does the photographer: he permits his decisions to merge one into the other.

But of course: such a comparison is misleading. The photographer and his camera produces the image, but the cameraman and his camera only produce the pretext of the image, namely the ribbon which is the raw material of the film producer. That ribbon is a strip of linearly ordered photographs and sound traces. It is true that such a ribbon manifests a techno-imagination which is different from the photographic one: it is a different sort of doubt, a different method to overcome historical consciousness. Still: the true film producer, the man with scissors and glue, employs yet another type of techno-imagination. He stands above the ribbon, he transcends it.

Film critics discuss the number of filmig dimensions: the two dimensions of the screen, the three dimensions of the sound, the dimension of the time of unrolling the film, the dimension of the time meant by the history the film tells and so forth. This is not a proof of adequate techno-imagination, and the film producer is not concerned by such problems, at least not primarily. From his point of view the film has two dimensions: it is a ribbon. It is a necklace-like structure which consists of pearl-like elements, (images), which may be counted, calculated. Still: it is not like an abacus. Its elements may not only be counted, but also re-arranged with scissors and glue. For the film producer the ribbon is a linear code, like the alphabet or the arabic numbers, and it may be used for message transmission. In itself the ribbon is not a message to be "read", it is not a text, but a pre-text.

The position which the film producer assumes with regard to the ribbon transcends linearity, (of texts, of the calculus, of linear logic, of historical time). Linearity becomes the raw material to be manipulated from outside. The film producer does not act within history, (as does the hero), but he acts upon history from outside history: he produces a history. His action is similar, in many respects, to Divine action in the judeo-christian sense of that term.

Like God, he sees the beginning and the end (of the ribbon) simultaneously. Like God, he can interfere in history from outside. But his powers exceed, by far, the powers of the Almighty. He can repeat events, he can make them run from future toward the past, he can jump events, he can accelerate events or slow them down, he can glue beginning to end and thus transform linear history into a cyclus. Unlike the Jewish-christian God, and unlike the Aristotelian Unmoved Mover, the film producer is a composer of history, not only its author and its disturber.

It is his aim to transform the linearity of the ribbon into a history to be projected upon a screen. Like the composer of music he is committed to a game, a "ludus imaginum" instead of a "ludus tonalis". But unlike the accords of the musical composer, which are tonal structures, his accords are compositions of scenes which mean events. His flash-backs, short-enings and so forth are a play with linear time, and they result in time circles, time spirals, time ellipses. He is a composer of time forms, of forms of events of which the elements are scenes. He thus transcends both magic and history: the cycle of the eternal return, (birth, death and re-birth), and the linearity of history are, to him, just two of possible time forms. His techno-imagination transcends both the magical and the historical levels of existence. both retribution and causal thinking.

In fact: in film making two levels of existence must be distinguished. On the one are the actions of actors, scenarists, make-up men, cameramen and so forth. They produce the film ribbon, the pre-text. On the other level are the actions of the film producer. The first level corresponds to what we call "historical action", or "drama". The second level is a new one. But the first filmic level is no longer "historical" in the traditional sense of that term. For two reasons: One is that the various roles played on that level are far more specialized than in traditional historical action. In traditional history actors, make-up men and cameramen, (heroes, propagandists and historians), are not as easily distinguished as they are in film making. The other reason is that in film making the historical level functions quite obviously with regard to the level of film production. It is quite conscious of the fact that its purpose is to provide raw material for a transcendent manipulation. Thus film making renders obvious that history no longer goes on in the same way it did before the emergence of filmic techno-imagination.

This may be stated as follows: For historical consciousness to be is to become. For filmic techno-imagination becoming is an illusion which results from a specific and perfectly calculable projection of still images, on a screen. On the other hand, filmic techno-imagination is conscious that the stills are no more "real" than are processes. It knows that both stills and movies are "trompe-l'oeil". The ontological dispute between Heraclitos and Parmenides has lost its meaning on the level of techno-imagination. The grain of sand of the scene can be projected on the screen to create the illusion of motion just as easily as a process can be frozen on the screen to create the illusion of a still situation. The overcoming of historicity by filmic praxis is not a return pre-historical magic. But it destroys the faith in the reality of becoming, of development, of progress. It is no longer possible to believe in historical action if the hero can be frozen into an idol, nor is it possible to believe in idols, if they can be put in motion on a screen and behave like heroes.

Nonetheless ~~the film producer is not a "technocrat"~~ in the sense of purely formal transcendence of historicity. He is not a "manipulator of events". The historical "dramatis personae", the actors, cameramen, make-up men and so forth are not his puppets, and there are no strings by which he can make them act. He depends on the historical action just as much as history depends on him. They form two different aspects of the same apparatus, the "film industry". Historical action is not eliminated by filmic techno-imagination: it is transformed. Technocracy is bad techno-imagination: history goes on, but it has now a different meaning. It now means the raw material for posterior, transcendent, game-like transformation.

The cinema may be understood as a cave, which is both an uterus and a grave, in sum as a Great Mother which gives birth to everything and devours everything. And Plato's myth of the cave may be seen as the first film criticism. This sacrality of the cinema is a fact: it occupies a position in the present codified world which may be compared to the position occupied by churches in medieval situations. But there is another way to approach the cinema, if the purpose is to analyse film consumption. It may be seen as a sort of Noah's arch where we can escape to from the rising flood of the techno-images which surround us.

The cinema is one of the remaining places where silence and darkness reign, before the screen begins to glow and the loudspeaker begin to speak loudly. The images and sounds which irrigate us day and night and which seduce us shamelessly to behave in a consumer fashion have been arrested at the cinema entrance. We are allowed to concentrate, to withdraw into ourselves. This is the reason why cinemas are often confused with theatres, as the word "movie theatre" suggests. The term "theatre" stems from "theoria", which means contemplation. In fact, of course, the cinema is a communication medium which has little in common with a theatre. There is no "sender of a message" in the cinema, as there is in the theatre, but only a transmitter of messages, namely the projector. The sender stands outside the horizon of the cinema, and is entirely inaccessible for the receivers of the filmic message. It is a "channel". Still: during the intervals between programs the cinema is, in fact, and possibly against the intentions of its programmers, a place for contemplation.

That contemplation is not within the programs of cinemas^{as} may be seen from the fact that they do not arise, genetically, from the classical theatre, but from the classical basilica. The basilica was a vaulted hall, as may be seen in the Roman Pantheon. It first served as a sort of supermarket, and was later transformed into a temple, and later still into a church. In the present situation the basilica was transcoded, and its two original functions became first separated and later re-connected. It became a supermarket on the one hand, and a cinema on the other. We can observe how those two basilica functions become re-connected within the Shopping Center, where supermarket and cinema stand side by side and complete each other. One cannot be understood without the other.

The supermarket is a vaulted labyrinth composed of techno-images, the purpose of which ^(is) to devour people, to consume consumers. Its entrances are wide open to create the illusion that it is a public space, a market place, an "agora" of a non-existent polis. But this a trap. A true market place is a political space destined for "dialogue", for the exchange of goods and opinions. No such exchange takes place within the supermarket.

It cannot take place, because the supermarket is filled with "white and black noise", with images and sounds which prevent dialogues between its victims. It is a private space meant for private persons, which are called in Greek "idiotes". The proof of this is the fact that its exits, as opposed to its entrances, are narrow slits closely watched over by guardians. It is a prison, the most private of all spaces. To escape that prison people must stand in a queue and pay a ransom. Such a mythological description of the Supermarket, with its Cretan connotations, cannot be avoided.

The cinema is the other face of the same coin. Its entrance is a narrow slit, in front of which queue those who want to be initiated in its mysteries, and they have to sacrifice an obulus if they want to be admitted. There are mysterious shimmering lights and appealing images all around that entrance, and they promise delights out of this world for those who enter. But once the program announced at the entrance is over, the cinema doors open wide and the faithful emerge through them in the form of a massive stream which flows toward the wide open entrances of the supermarket. The queues in front of the cinema entrance and at the supermarket exit are the same mythological serpent: a mass which was moulded into a line by the codified world. This is the metabolism of consumer society: people are programmed within the cinema for supermarket consumption, and they are released from supermarkets for re-newed cinema programming. Such are the rotating blades of the techno-image ventilator which propels the masses toward progress.

But the belly of the cinema is quite unlike the supermarket belly. It is not a labyrinth, but it has a cartesian structure. It contains geometrical, extended things, the seats, which are ordered and numbered with arithmetical ciphers. Extended things meant to be adequated to thinking things. As soon as the program begins, as soon as the gigantic shadows appear on the screen and the sound waves fill the hall, those thinking things extend themselves upon the extended things and become, themselves, extended. This miracle of trans-substantiation, this marvellous "adaequatio intellectus et rei", is the true purpose of the cinema program. It transforms thinking things into consuming and consumable masses.

Somewhere above, behind and beyond the heads of the spectators there is an apparatus, the projector, and it is served by a technician, if it is not yet fully automated. The apparatus projects the program elaborated by an absent producer upon the screen and into the sound pool of the hall, in order to plunge the spectators into its time

compositions. The spectators are fully aware of this procedure. Many of them possess similar, smaller apparatus at home, and they know of the methods by which they are being programmed. But in spite of this they turn their heads away from the screen and toward the apparatus only if there is some defect in the apparatus function. For instance if the shadows on the screen begin to jump instead of gliding. If they turn their heads they do so in anger about the defective functioning on their programming. Unlike the Platonic cave prisoners they do not want to liberate themselves from the illusion: they want it.

Strictly speaking this is an incredible behavior. That people collaborate to such an extent with the apparatus the purpose of which they know to be their own transformation from thinking into extended things, into masses. This incredible behavior may be explained as a sort of despair. People know that the apparatus behind their heads is not a sender of messages, but the last link of a chain which connects them with the inaccessible sender. They know that the film which unrolls in the apparatus is a copy of an inaccessible original, and that countless identical copies are being unrolled all over the world. Thus it would be quite unreasonable to try and burn the film or to destroy the projector, if the intention were to liberate oneself from apparatus programming. The centers of programming are untouchable by revolutions. The cinema is a place which excludes revolutions, and this is one of its programs.

But such a sort of explanation of the incredible behavior is not true. People do not collaborate with the apparatus out of desperation. They collaborate, because they love to be programmed. They pay to go to the cinema, because they want to buy illusion. They chose between various cinema programs, because they want their program to be varied. And this is the reason why the techno-images are not truly magic. They do not function like the Malay shadows do: people do not believe in them. It is true that the cinema goers are faithful, but their faith is a bad one. They know better. But they do not want to know what they know. This is not magic, it is self-delusion.

Now such a deliberate suppression of techno-imagination on the part of the consumers of techno-images is fully understandable. It would be intolerable for the consumers to decipher the meaning of the techno-images correctly. It would imply the corruption of all the values they possess. People do not want to know, they do not dare to know the true meaning of the programs they are exposed to. The reason is the techno-images constitute a code which turns around the usual relation between significant and signified, between symbol and meaning.

All the previous codes mean, in the last analysis, the concrete world. They serve as tools of orientation within the concrete world. All previous codified worlds are means to mediate with the concrete world. This is not true for the world codified by techno-images. For it, the world of concrete experience is nothing but a pre-text. It is the raw material with which the techno-images produce a new sort of world. The techno-images do not mediate between man and the world of his concrete experience. They mediate between man and programs.

The cinema is a good example of this inversion of meaning. What the news-reel shows is not a concrete event, but a composition achieved by the film producer with the help of scissors and glue. The concrete event is its pre-text. The people which are shown in news-reels are not historical persons, (heroes), but a kind of cinema actors. This is true not only of politicians, but of athletes, terrorists, scientists, saintly persons as well. They all do what they do with a view to the camera, and to the scissors and glue of the film producer. The moon was conquered by American astronauts to be shown in a cinema program, the Buddhist monk burned himself in Saigon to be seen by cinemagoers, and terrorists kidnap airplanes with a view to future cinema showings. The techno-images are the voyeurs which hide behind all the key-holes of all historical events, and all the participants in those events do what they do to be seen thus. History now goes on in function of the film producer. It is his scissors and his glue which give history its meaning.

This is the reason why ontology, the attempt to distinguish between various levels of reality, and between reality and fiction, is no longer useful. A documentary film, a film of science fiction, a film of political commitment, or a Hollywood film are equally fictitious, and equally real. They are all time compositions. The events in Iran, the inventions in a scientific laboratory, or the film script, are all pretexts for such compositions. And their meaning is to program the masses. Everybody knows that: the Persian mullah, the scientist, the script writer, the film producer, the cinema goer. But nobody, except perhaps the film producer, wants to know that.

Because to accept such a knowledge implies the abandon of every traditional commitment to history, to science, to progress. It implies the abandon of every historical value, for instance of christianity, of humanism, of marxism. Our techno-imagination is underdeveloped, because we dare not decipher the techno-images correctly. We prefer to collaborate with the apparatus that programs us, instead of facing the fact that our values are no longer appropriate to the world we live in.

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It therefore seems to be an unreasonable endeavor to argue in favor of a fully developed techno-imagination, as this essay does. Almost nobody wants it. What almost everybody wants is an ever better functioning apparatus. An ever more perfect illusion. Still: one thing seems to be certain. If we persist in our techno-image illiteracy, we shall be ever more perfectly programmed, until a point is reached where we shall be no longer capable of seeing through the meaning of the images that program us. When this point is reached, an apparatus totalitarianism will have been established.

We have not yet reached that point. It is still possible, with a great effort, and at great risks, to try and decipher the meaning of the techno-images that surround us. Whether it is desirable to do so is a different question. It is this question which the present essay wants to submit for consideration.