

Is there a future to writing?

Apparently there is none. Writing has been, up to the present, that code in which most of our cultural informations were elaborated, transmitted and received, and in which they were stocked. But we have now a better code to do this. Technical images are more performing. Everything that may be written, may be imagined better. Photographed, filmed, videotaped, or synthetized with a computer better than written. It is easier to correspond through images than through writing, easier to discuss economic, technical, political or social problems through image than through writing, easier to make science, philosophy and even poetry through image than through writing. Things that cannot be written may be imagined (many of those things which cannot be uttered). Image is a better vehicle for information than is writing, because the image surface is composed of an infinite number of lines, which is the reason why to describe an image fully one would have to write an infinity of texts. Images may be transmitted in great numbers, and with a great velocity, once they are electromagnetized, and only videotexts may compete with them in those aspects. Images may speak and emit other kinds of sound, and thus surpass the phonetic meanings of writing. It is easier for the receiver of a message to watch an image than to read a text. And images may be stored more efficiently than texts. Therefore, writing is about to become an antiquated code, like the Egyptian hieroglyphs or the Indian knots, and only archeologists, historians and other specialists will have to learn how to write and read in the future.

But I do not like this. Nor do a lot of other people. Why don't they? Out of inertia. They have learned how to write at school, this took an effort, and now they want to take advantage of it. But of course: they will not admit that they are lazy. They therefore surround writing with a hallow of elegance. They proclaim that writing is a noble gesture to which we owe things like Homer, Aristotle and Newton, (not to mention the Holy Bible and the writings of those people themselves). But how do they know that Homer, Aristotle, Newton and the author of the Holy Bible would not have preferred to make a film instead of writing? And how do they know that they, themselves, would not be better advised to snapshot instead of writing?

As for me, (and for people like me), that laziness is not all there is to it. I admit the evidence against the continuation of writing, and still go on doing it. Because I believe that writing is the way through which I can best express my thoughts, my wishes and my desires, in short: my "forma mentis". Of course, this belief of mine may be mistaken. I should for instance learn how to synthetize digital images, before I call writing "my vocation". But let us admit that my belief is correct. Would that not be a proof that my "forma mentis" is antiquated? That progress has bypassed me, that I am a sort of dinosaur? To be sure: progress is silly, and dinosaurs are pretty animals in their own way. Still: is it not about time to ask whether writing is not becoming an absurd endeavor, like wanting to communicate with others through Chaldean?

The sort of questions one would have to ask is this: What distinguishes writing from similar gestures? Like drawing? Or painting? Or photographing? Or pressing computer keys? And also: Is there ~~such a~~^{some} thing common to all kinds of writing? To sculpting letters in marble? To using a brush for ideograms on silk? To typing? To dictating into a recorder? And also: How did writing come about? How did it look like before people started to write? How would it look like if they stopped doing it? And all those questions would have to be asked of reading as well as of writing. They may all be summed up this way: Why does one write and read? To what purpose? and how does one do it? If one had answered those questions, then, and only then, could one ask: How about stopping the whole thing?

Now those seem to be simple questions. Unfortunately, they are not. One would have to literally write a book, just to ask them in a civilized manner. Such a book would be of interest to a number of people. For instance to those who believe that they must go on writing in spite of everything. Or to those who believe that writing can never be abandoned, because it is noble. Or to those who are ready to give up writing. This is, by the way, the reason why I shall attempt to write such a book. But there is a little problem to that project. Namely that such a book would be a book. Instead of being what? That is precisely the question.