

THE SEMIURGY OF THE INDUSTRIALLY PRODUCED IMAGE

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Pictures nowadays are a mass-produced commodity. They can be widely reproduced by various techniques including electronics.¹ The natural means of communication, gesture and speech, have been replaced by photographs, films, television, posters, comic strips and magazines, all of which make up part of our environment. The invention and transmission of signs, which constitutes culture, no longer stems from a period of reflection, expressed through writing, whose compact print (originating from the Renaissance) never distracts us. Social dynamism, in generating culture, stands on the level of an experience open to the configuration and the violence whose theatre is the world in its concrete space.

This constitutes such a deep and inevitable revolution that all the arts of the time, even writing, are affected. One can see this in the techniques of the "nouveau roman".² The "nouveau

Translated by N. Slater.

¹ O. Burgelin, *La communication de masse*, Paris, S.G.P.P., 1970.

² *Le nouveau roman hier et aujourd'hui*, Publication of the Centre Culturel de Cerisy-la-Salle, Paris, Union générale d'Éditions, 1972.

roman" exists purely to look, and makes specific use of cinematographic techniques; it describes the artificial environment which hems modern man in. Or, rather than his environment, the labyrinth whose prisoner he is. And just as the infallible way out of the labyrinth is to touch one of the walls with one's hand and to move forwards without letting go, so new fiction-writing lays itself open to the world of objects. Literature was accustomed to work upon a basis of symbols that had already been worked out; now it is treading an unknown path, and is henceforward condemned to wander.

Duration is the category of memory and of silent maturation; it is the integration of an event by the psycho-biological structures of the subject. Space, on the other hand, belongs to the event alone—coincidences, simultaneous happenings, chance occurrences. Its conscious perception is a moment of irruption, and when the will responds to it, it is (as Descartes said of action) a sort of precipitation. Or again, to use an analogy with cybernetics, it is the moment of oscillation and crisis in the search for equilibrium. It is thus a series of crisis structures, subject to accident and chance, which express the general form of experience in our time, and which define modernity.

At the heart of these experiences, the production of pictures on an industrial scale is clearly a highly significant event, for it gives immediate expression to this relationship which we have with space, and it expresses it in the overwhelming omnipresence of our daily environment. Hence discovering whether our senses are enriched or impoverished by the industrialized picture is a question of civilization. The object of the present study is to answer this question by examining significant patterns in the fascination exerted by the industrial image. We will begin by examining how these significant patterns can be reduced by inertia to closed mechanisms acting as factors in the impoverishment of the senses. Thus we shall see in operation three factors tending to impoverish visual images, factors derived from structures pertaining to the industrial production of pictures, namely: 1. the mechanism of the fascination reflex; 2. the reduction of meanings in order to achieve mass consumption of images; 3. the shift towards the norm that is inherent in the structure of technological production. We will consider in due course the interplay of these three factors on their own, without any sort

The Semiurgy of the Industrially Produced Image

of regulation, savagely expressing a socio-economic structure that is a prey to profound dysequilibrium, and determining a closed cultural space in which the invention of new meanings is compromised.

In symmetrical opposition to these negative factors, we shall subsequently witness as a sort of regulation, the operation of three factors that re-semanticize the visual image: 1. recourse to the poetics of "open" works, in the sense of the conscious practice of semiogenesis; 2. tragic vision; 3. the participation of image-creators and their public in the running of the technological image-producing complex.

In conclusion, it will be observed that, taken together, the three factors are the manifestation of an open space of civilization, in which the invention of new meanings is called upon from every side.

But it will thus have become apparent that the world of the industrial image is the setting for a continuous emergence of meaning. And that is why it was in connection with the industrial image that there arose the idea of a semiurgy or sense-producing energy, in a constant state of structuring and destructuring activity; for it became clear that it would be impossible for the moment to constitute a semiotics of the image. The aim of semiotics is to conceive a system of differentiation which is stabilized around a code; it cannot take into account the emergence of signs in an unstructured environment. Semiotics seeks to turn itself into a rational and closed system, in accordance with the ideals of the theorists of the eighteenth century (and Ferdinand de Saussure, because of family and intellectual traditions, is as exacting as they were).³ To invoke semiotics where the industrial image is concerned would be to ideologize. It is not, as some writers would have it, the multiplicity of symbols in the image that impedes the construction of a semiotics of images; it is the fact that its meaning is undergoing its genesis. We therefore suggest a semiurgy whose aim will be to give an account of the ways in which meaning evolves starting from the visual symbol. It will not be a system of differentiation—it is the essential feature of the image that it can never be pinned down in this

³ F. de Saussure, *Cours de linguistique générale*, Paris, Payot, 1972.

way—but, as in generative grammar, it will be an approach that indicates the structures that govern the invention of meanings.

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I. FACTORS IMPOVERISHING THE VISUAL SYMBOL.

A. *The industrial flux of images; fascination.*

It is the mental representation of reality that is involved in any process that produces images. Ever since our earliest childhood we have accompanied our visual perceptions by imaginary representations. Since optical vision only gives us the extent and relative position of objects in two dimensions, it is by the mechanisms of accommodation and convergence, by tactile exploration and the intelligent synthesis of these various experiences that the depth of space and the relief of objects are communicated to us. In this way the child acquires a topological intuition of space, generated by a continuous stepwise process of manual and bodily checking-out, by contact, by successions of muscular adaptation, by coordination of the sensori-motor system—in the same way that the potholer perceives his terrain.⁴

The adult representation of space brings into play the totality of structures of our psycho-physiological organisation; space cannot be thought of as an expanse projected outside of ourselves—it is a construction, it is the continuation of a story that merges with that of our own duration. Our sense of space, therefore, does not cease to create itself, just like human time. Like time, it is dramatic—our will to live never fails to find itself a face here, amid the surrounding violence of the cosmos. The social communication of such experiences no doubt endows space with those features of objectivity that are expressed in the euclidean concept of space, but these are nothing but simple terms of reference, of use in the exchange of goods. A bodily memory, or an affective memory, colour our mental representation of reality with subjective attributes. Hence the ductile quality of images, which explains the hallucinatory quality of

⁴ J. Piaget, *Naissance de l'intelligence chez l'enfant*, Delachaux et Niestlé, 1936.

The Semiurgy of the Industrially Produced Image

desire that enters into almost all our states of consciousness. Desire, in other words, constantly raises up in our imagination the hallucinatory picture of the desired object, like the sheen on a butterfly's wing.⁵ Thus the objects of the real world enter into an imaginary existence which acts as a substitute for the naked force of desire.

Now this hallucinatory image, which actually duplicates reality, comes to govern our consciousness. Of this consciousness, we may say that it is fascinated, since it is attached to the object by virtue of a force of desire which it confuses with its own will, while the will itself is deceived by the effect of the substitution of an image for the need that was actually felt.

We therefore live in an almost continuous state of mild hallucination. However, this state is composed of varying degrees, which we must briefly allude to in order to bring out the specificity of the fascination produced by the industrial image. Among these degrees, we shall pick out two—that of the reflected image, which the accidents of nature offer to our eye, and that of forms inscribed by a gesture of the artist, imposed by him on our activity of imaginary representation.

The reflection of the forest in the surface of a pool is only a fleeting perception—it only forms an image through the complicity of our image-forming memory which completes the forms that have been caught on the water's surface. The imagination is thus particularly activated by these fleeting images—they even constitute an experience that surprises it and reveals the imagination to itself in such a powerful manner that it is caught up in the game. This instantaneous act of recreation, on the shifting surface of the water, is really an immersion in the current of our imagination—a current that has its own, different, flow. It is a dive into the flux of our dreams that we take when we look at the reflections in a watery mirror, and this is why such reflections give us pause—their visual accidents belong to reality, but they are also the direct supports of other images created at the behest of our desires and dreams.⁶

⁵ S. Freud, *La naissance de la psychanalyse*, trans. A. Berman, Paris, P.U.F., 1956, p. 356.

⁶ M.J. Lefebvre, *L'image fascinante et le Surréal*, Plon, 1965.

The fascination of the image created by the hand of man—be it sculpture, painting, or music—is derived from the fact that such works have a dual bond—to objective perception and to the mental organisation of the representation. Springing from the hand of the artist, a work bursts forth in the midst of the other things of this world, but it preserves the trace of a gesture, which obeys only the constitutive structures of the mental representation of reality. The work which offers itself to our perception is thus a test in which the whole individual is involved. Perception taken to its furthest tactile limit, mental representation taken to the furthest limit of the powers of imagination, expression borne onward by a living rhythm, the aesthetic experience is a manifestation of psychic energy at the summit of its hallucinatory power; and therefore it is a more or less pure manifestation of the force of desire, a passion whose aim is a full existence, and not an object.

The industrial image has no correlate in worldly space; it cannot be tested by any physical means. Its correlates are found in imaginary space. Oddly, it is its technological origins that provide it with this luxury. Its technological origins make up for any physical test, for a *test* is precisely what they are! The way that light bites into the silver bromide on a film, the physical impression of the world, the graph of light as it is reproduced by our techniques of communication, all these elude manual and rational control, and it would be vain and almost foolish to demand it of them. The industrial image appears as an objective trace of reality.⁷ Is not the mind of the camera located in its “objective” lens? Technologically, the industrial image lies at the end of a long line of scientific enquiry which has been carried on since Leonardo da Vinci and since the first landscapes were reproduced in the “camera obscura.” Today, the technological production of picture accompanies adventurous men onto the far side of the moon or in quest of the ultrastructure of molecules; it directly expresses his inquisitive intelligence, his everlasting quest for knowledge, his planetary and cosmic adventure. Decked out with the

⁷ E. Morin, *Le cinéma ou l'homme imaginaire*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1958.

⁸ R. Munier, “The Fascinating Image,” *Diogenes* No. 38.

The Semiurgy of the Industrially Produced Image

prestige of all the most advanced techniques, the production of pictures advertises its objectivity, its privilege of expressing immediately our discovery of the world. Here, at a moment where the sciences are mythically lived as symbols of values and of truth—here is a motive for reason to detach itself from its control reflex and to allow itself to be fascinated.

For what truth is the industrial image a vehicle? It can only be a particular way of approaching reality: the industrial image presents itself as our most adventurous way of exploring the horizons that our enterprise opens up for us. It is an expression of our greed to possess and to live, a manifestation of the endless questions posed by our curiosity, the work of our most advanced sciences—it offers the world to human desire.

Because we desire life and ever more life, we pause over the phantoms of photography or the cinema. These impressions of the world have no, or almost no substance. They are only there to evoke those things whose nostalgia we are. A particular childhood photograph may be banal, but for him who contemplates it, it conjures up a lost paradise. He is now no longer considering the photograph—he is lost in his memories, the prisoner of an impossible desire to give birth again to a past that is gone forever. Indeed, if he takes a closer look at the picture he will soon put it down in disappointment, for it is nothing—the enchantment was in the dream from which he has just awoken. This is particularly so in the case of photographs made without art, whose manipulation of the observer is always based on an irritating sentiment⁹ of absence, on a disappointment.

“There is a camera,” says the man caught in the trap of his technological environment today—and believes that he is “plugged in” to the world. He believes this, and he needs his belief. Trapped by the great city, a consumer of standardised and artificial products, behaving in a manner dictated by reflex activity—car-driving, office machines, household machinery—reduced to brief and utilitarian contact with other men, deprived of fresh air, saturated with noise, conditioned even in his leisure pursuits, menaced by the violence that lies at the edges

⁹ M.J. Lefebvre, *op. cit.*

of economic and political life, this man now searches for some reprieve, and finds it in losing himself in the flux of industrially produced images. Their mass consumption—whatever their quality—will be no problem for some time to come. Now it is not an illusion that this man will awake from, but a fascination which ends by making a prey of him, as happens with fascination in animals. Finally, the fascination of the industrial image acts on humanity that has been lured to it, in the same way that the fascination of the snake acts on the rabbit—it acts as an anaesthetic.

B. The reduction of meaning in order to achieve mass consumption of images.

It is psychological determinants, then, that guarantee the image-producing industry its mass consumption. Was it not psychological determinants that brought about its very rapid development in the first place? As a mode of functioning, reflex activity is the simplest, most rational and most economical. It can be incorporated into a scheme and imposed on a calculation. Where a product becomes the object of industrial exploitation—be it cars, vending machines, office machines, ready-to-wear suits or standard-built flats—one also finds that a pattern of behaviour including some astutely observed reflex acts has been defined.

The same process is evident in the industrial production of pictures. The mechanism of fascination plays such a direct part here that it is the first feature the mass-producer will strike upon in his search for a means of satisfying the widest possible demand.

Desire, at the level of its hallucinatory representation (and this is what the mechanical image is, exempt as it is from tactile verification and the test of physical presence) is clearly the desire for an illusion: the one certain thing about it is the absence of the object represented immediately by its spectral essence.

Nowhere is the substitutive mechanism of desire seen better than here. Fascinated by the image, desire expends its energy on an object which is nothing but a mechanically reproduced optical stimulus. The subject of this fascination is therefore forced to return upon himself: he finds and experiences nothing but his

The Semiurgy of the Industrially Produced Image

own desire-laden dream: he is the prisoner of an egotistical self-satisfaction that has no exit to the outside world, prisoner of narcissistic self-love.

The images used in advertising show this clearly, baited as they are with pictures of self-satisfaction. Smoking a cigarette, preferring a particular make of car, picking a holiday resort—all these actions are represented in the same way, by the picture of men and women who are happy in their lot, beaming with the smile of the gluttoned infant. There is nothing—there can be nothing—here, but physical well-being, the happiness of sated livestock. But then, this is only an image—for the extolled product will show itself to be of mediocre quality, disappointing in use, perhaps even harmful.

Hence there is no satisfaction that is not an illusion or a surrogate. But it is necessary, furthermore, for the images that provoke these dreams of desire to be renewed. If the narcissistic fascination is to endure, it demands the production of an uninterrupted series of surrogate images. A recent survey revealed that family quarrels increased in households where television had temporarily not been available. Now the necessity of uninterrupted production is the consecration of the reign of consumption. But the senses can only be impoverished by being fixed on such stereotypes as the whim of fashion has endowed with the quality of desirability.

The mechanisms by which the whims of fashion operate are of the same order as those of fascination and of the reflex it governs. Fashion, a non-verbal communication of a mimetic character, expresses the desire for adaptation at a higher level in the social structure: to follow fashion is to don the appearance and prestige of social success. This gives rise to conspicuous consumption, and bigger profits for industrial production. And furthermore, this is behaviour with an eye to appearances, soliciting other people's attention by taking on the quality of the fascinating object, the fetish if one likes. And as the (now personalised) object diverts people, without in any sense answering their needs, it is necessary for the objects of fascination to be replaced before the illusion is dispelled. If they were to endure, then an objective knowledge in which the subject was disillusioned would replace the faintly hallucinatory perception of nascent desire. The ever-accelerating pace with which

one fashion replaces another, which we observe today, expresses this need for ever more intense hallucinations.¹⁰ But, carried away by the constant succession of prestige-laden appearances, the fascinated subject never leaves the state of mild hallucination in which his condition of a desiring being continues to hold him. So was Narcissus captivated by the deceitful images of himself reflected in the illusory mirror of the water. So too does the consumer demand an uninterrupted flow of images from industry.

C. *Technostructure and homogenisation*

The optical stimulation of the industrial image is at the level of reflex fascination mechanisms, and we have just seen how the frustrations of urban life bring it inevitably into play. There is a third factor, which results from the laws of technological production and economic calculation and which reinforces these effects of concentration and mass-production, or in other words the industrialized character of the image produced by mechanical means.¹¹

The industrial production of images is linked to an industrial environment: it depends on the systematic organisation of its assets, and implies problems of long-term prediction. The technostructure requires specialised personnel, programming, and a bureaucratic apparatus. Will the reference values at least be those of lived experience, those that arise from the solidarity of work? As the imperative demand is for mass-production, the reference values will soon be those that justify the development of the bureaucratic administration: the calculations involved in organising mass-production and in determining its profitability, the rationalisation of production processes and the division of labour. Latently or avowedly, the justifying ideology will be that of a vague progressivism, according to which any technological progress entails some progress on the human level.

A management cadre whose administrative task is to organise programmed production, not individualised creation, will impose such norms and timetables as will allow of predictive calculations.

¹⁰ E. Radar, "The Study of Mime as a Manifestation of Sociability, as Play and Artistic Expression," *Diogenes* No. 68, Winter 1969.

¹¹ O. Burgelin, *op. cit.*

The Semiurgy of the Industrially Produced Image

They will also justify the narrow specialisation of the agents involved. Since this management cadre is situated according to an abstract index, on a particular rung of the bureaucratic hierarchy, at a high level—and since this very situation isolates it to a significant degree, in a particular residential quarter of the megalopolis, the cadre is effectively cut off from fundamental human solidarity, which is born of work as well as proximity. This cadre knows nothing about everyday life, the needs and the culture of the communities it is called on to serve, save in an abstract way, through descriptions, analyses, sociological and statistical studies.

Consequently nothing prevents it from exercising the logic of standardisation, mass distribution and statistical programming, as far as its power and its science permit, where it sees it necessary to apply these to the industrial production of images. Finally it arrives at the job of recruiting those who are to create the images—its programming decides that this is to be done—and here the cadre henceforth lays down its criteria of aptitude and its career conditions. Where have we seen anyone or anything stand up to it? There are certain buildings of very recent construction, offices of the national radio and television networks, that are excellent illustrations of this: one could not imagine anything fitted out in a more standard way. Everything here exemplifies Baudrillard's epigram—"communications are the death of communication."¹²

But the mechanism of the narcissistic fascination reflex is presented as the constant and certain guiding light of the production that is directed by it. Public relations exercises, surveys and statistical interpretations confirm the foregone conclusion: "Here is what the great mass of viewers has chosen," conclude the opinion polls. But there never was any choice: in all the surveys there has never been anything but a reconstitution of the conditions in which the reflex of fascination by images can act. This is why public relations exercises, surveys, inquiries and statistical studies produce such a lot of facts while barely if at all changing the terms of the problem. Investigation, the

¹² J. Baudrillard, *Pour une critique de la politique économique du signe*, Coll. "Les essais," Paris, NRF, 1971.

¹³ J. Cazeneuve, *Pouvoirs de la télévision*, Coll. "Idées," NRF, 1970.

prisoner of the technostructure and of the ideology that justifies it, has not escaped from the determinism of mass production of optical stimuli—from the empty circle of narcissistic fascination.

And yet it was some research carried out by the opinion surveys office of the Rumanian broadcasting company that called our attention to the problems raised by the industrial production of stereotyped cultural values.

When a technocratic group, cut off from the concrete experience of social life, creates an artificial cultural environment, it places the spontaneous expression of communities founded on a number of fundamental solidarities (of work, education, kinship or neighbourhood) out on a limb. The invention of signs, by means of which these communities display their orientation, is progressively dispossessed of its social resonances, and the field of culture is rased flat by the industrial broadcasting of sounds and images. In other words the technological production of images not only makes the integration of cultural tradition impossible, but it taints their very sources. It is therefore not surprising that our awareness of this comes from countries—such as Rumania or Poland—where popular art remains as a true expression of the communal values experienced by the group.

The programmed production of images, on the other hand, transmits stereotypes of a pattern of behaviour adapted to the technostructure. This is what needs to be uncompromisingly admitted—which is not easy, in surroundings where it is precisely the myth of technological efficacy that reigns. But if one agrees to define culture as the home of the invention and transmission of signs, if one is willing to think outside the prejudices of one's time—if one wants to shake off their obscurantism—then one must agree that the production of images, administered by programming and on a mass scale—is merely the transmission of social models; one must, finally, agree that its function merges into that of some huge servo-mechanism providing social control of populations in urban surroundings or surroundings that are about to be urbanised. The vast masses of the industrial city are thus regulated primarily by techniques of social communication which by virtue of this show themselves to be potential tools for the cyberneticisation of the human masses.

In the West, unlike the Peoples' Democracies of Eastern Europe, people are more aware of the logic of consumption, whose

The Semiurgy of the Industrially Produced Image

ubiquitous vehicle is the industrial image. Analysis shows that its signs refer back to the imperatives of a process of production aimed at maximising profits. This determinism acts cumulatively with those of technological production and of the fascination-reflex mechanism, bringing the homogenisation of behaviour and of human brains to the maximum that audio-visual techniques can achieve.

II. FACTORS INVOLVED IN RESEMANTICISING THE INDUSTRIAL IMAGE.

A. The poetics of the sign.

In order that the industrial image may be elevated to the status of a sign, of meaningful invention, it is enough for its significant elements—its optical landmarks—to refer not to the closed cultural space of positive reality (in which case it would merely be a signal), but to the imaginary structuring activity that creates meaning in our consciousness.¹⁴

It is, therefore, through its stimulation of the dynamism of our mental representation that an image is perceived as a sign. For the meaning is here first of all a bodily memory, the symbolic projection of desire by metonymy and metaphor, a progressive construction of the representation, and finally—through this latter and together with it—it is a progression of meaning.¹⁵ The iconic sign is originally tied to those bio-psychical activities that determine our orientation with respect to the background of the world in which we find ourselves. This is a tropism. Thus the image, the mental representation of reality, as soon as it is deciphered, is an inauguration of meaning.

The production of images is aesthetically orientated as soon as the forms that it conveys can reactivate, in the imagining consciousness, the time and the manner in which the meaning was first created. This is the case as soon as it uses fascination as a provocation in which the spectator's imagining activity is challenged in its resources of representation and organisation of

¹⁴ G. Durand, *Structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*, Paris, P.U.F., 1963.

¹⁵ J. Lacan, *Écrits*, Paris, Seuil, 1966.

reality. Through the effects of narcissistic invention and of identification, the aesthetic experience exploits the individual's primal impulses for its own profit; but the demand for a life that is not mutilated, that is open to other people and to the world's horizons, hems narcissism in. Under the influence of an Eros that is broader and deeper than the death-wish of the egotistic self, there is declared the passion of a meaning that is to be shared with everyone alive, the reason and foundation of the artist's intention.

For television to acquire the status of an artistic language, it must be restored to the meanings which its technical capacities give it the task of finding and conveying. So we may see that the light television camera, with its mobility, its ubiquity, and the immediate transmission of images that it can provide, is the very instrument of revelation of social life; its destiny is to unveil the way we invent the gestures of our daily life, the quality of the space in which we live, and the new relationships to which it gives rise. It can even reveal our search for meaning at the moment we have gone astray.

But this unveiling of the world, where one is captivated by the multiplicity of ways of looking at things, and whose rhythm is given by the movement of agile gestures, introduces us to the poetics of a well-defined style—the poetics of the open work.

This was described by Umberto Eco as a programme of information open to exchange with both the spectators and the cultural space in which the work comes into being; in other words, as a sense experience that is being constantly recapitulated.¹⁶

The image is polyvalent as far as its meaning is concerned—it is ambiguous; it is in itself a source of metaphors and an inevitable generator of metonymies. For those who can read its semantic essence, it is the site of a first orientation within the horizons of the world, an interpretation at the level of an inexhaustible reserve of possible meanings, a draft, a task to be undertaken. A semiurgy.

The objects that surround twentieth-century man, the images which reveal his conspiracy, require investigation and interpretation. It is not a writer's mannerism, revelling in the play of partial perspectives, in the segmentation of narrative, in broken

¹⁶ U. Eco, *L'oeuvre ouverte*, Paris, Seuil, 1965.

The Semiurgy of the Industrially Produced Image

rhythms that shatter the fascination, in distancing effects, that awake a critical consciousness in the observer: it is not a writer's mannerism but the very form of the question itself, and the industrial image can become its privileged instrument. With the artists of the "Land Art" movement, photographic images are brought together in collages which present them as a series, in the shape of multiples, or in a juxtaposition of parcelled perspectives. Nevertheless the continuity of one day's light, of a stretch of sea, the shape of a mountain mass, which no photograph can capture in its entirety, remain the only realities designated by the juxtaposed fragments. Thus this reality, which none of these mechanical images exhausts, is the objects to which they all refer. The same would be true if the industrial image were treated in such a way that it introduced one to questions of a cosmic dimension.

It is still exceptional to find the creation of signs which give rise to a new meaning, showing life up on its good side; but every industrial production of images, despite the only too apparent elements which impoverish it, creates some meaning. However vulnerable the creation of images may be to stereotypes, it comprises semiogenesis; all that remains is to make this apparent. It is here that a semiurgy of the image can play a useful part in suggesting tools for the critical evaluation of everything that emerges from the industrial production of images. We will no longer judge the cultural quality of a television programme by its title, whether it is cultural, documentary, entertainment or educational. These rubrics guarantee nothing. A Shakespeare play, a Stravinsky symphony, a university lecture, are of a lower cultural level than their titles suggest, if the photography and the general style of the programme set it at the level of the visual stereotype generally consumed by the viewer; conversely a football match, expressed in a visual grammar which reveals those latent meanings which only the lens of a light camera can reveal, will achieve a definite cultural value. If culture is the site of the invention and transmission of signs, the quality of a pictorial broadcast will be judged by the quality of the visual signs it transmits. A motivated analysis of the semiotic content of the flood of industrial images, which critics will learn to give, will produce a more proper awareness in the public itself of the qualities of meanings achieved.

B. *A tragic vision.*

The consumer of images expects to be diverted. And it is in answering this expectation that the industrial image—a mere optical stimulation—fascinates.

The industrial production of images, for its part, embarks on a system of coded differentiation, both by means of standardising industrial production and by means of normalising a method of behaviour adapted only to technological production; in this way it takes on the function of an immense servo-mechanism aimed at extending social control over the human masses.

The aim of the artist, anxious for ever closer participation, is to qualify the image by the sign. Consequently he uses up his energies in a fruitless pursuit which has the very characteristics of a passion. On each occasion a work of art supposes the entire and unreserved investment of the resources that the individual has at his disposal; it is an act of expenditure of oneself, all azimuths.

Will the artist remain alone in taking up this challenge?

The conditions of daily life create problems, with their graceless work, their solitude, their unpleasantnesses of every kind. Could the men and women of our modern towns accept all this without inner rebellion; without the creation, here and there, and then almost everywhere, of gestures which restore an experience of human community?

The work of death is triumphing over the work of life; how could Eros fail to invent the appropriate images for revealing the meaning of life? Awareness of the risks one takes is becoming paramount: divisions in political, economic and social life endanger the surviving democracies: the risk of world-wide famine gradually crystallizes, accompanied by that of new destructive wars: our human genetic endowment is compromised by the pollution of our environment.

According to Goethe, tragedy “arises from one’s confrontation with an insurmountable contradiction.” Today, the achievements of civilisation are subject to extremes of violence. There is less and less time for diversion, more and more is taken up with activities aimed at the survival of the species. A tragic awareness is taking over, and this can help to give *meaning* to human society. This meaning, infinitely complex but worthy of being invented by man, is one of pacification and mutual help. Apart from that,

The Semiurgy of the Industrially Produced Image

“there is no other path but that of the annihilation of the human race.”¹⁷ This tragic awareness, like a force of attraction, as powerful and vast in its effects as a planet’s centre of gravity, will henceforward act on man in his bewilderment. The signs that he receives from it have meaning in abundance. Will this tragic awareness suffice to bring about the downfall of fascination, with all its inconsistencies, that lies as a bait in the mythology of consumption?

C. Participation in management.

“The complexity and the growing cost of communications have deprived those who create signs of the initiative of communication,” was the verdict of Wiener as early as 1949.¹⁸ Thus technocracy has become the visible form of the alienation of labour. If one is to challenge it, the only way is that of participation in management.

What stage have we reached in the participation of the community in the management of the machinery of technological production? The answer that must be made to this question gives scope for thought. All our cultural organs, radio, television, cinema, press, even education are invariably organised by a hierarchical administration with distinctly bureaucratic leanings. The resulting impoverishment of the sign is blatant, and once more Wiener was the first to measure its extent in a few decisive words: “the quantity of communication per inhabitant meets an ever-decreasing current of communication on a global scale.”

It is in the break with the institutions of communication that we see today new meanings being born: films, manifestos, new teaching methods, movements of spiritual renewal, arise from milieux which have broken with the round of industrial production. “Underground” movements, small communities of artists, intellectuals, teachers, students, linked by their desire for an assurance of freedom, are all manifestations of it; so are the co-operatives of journalists and readers who try here and there to group themselves around an independent press organ.

¹⁷ A. Sakharov, *La liberté intellectuelle en U.R.S.S. et la coexistence*, Coll. “Idées,” NRF, 1969.

¹⁸ N. Wiener, *Cybernétique et société*, Editions des Deux Rives, 1952.

These attempts are the object of various discussions, publications and imitations. They will succeed only if they extend their field of action to the complex systems on which mass communication today depends. This can only be conceived of in a society which has been socially and politically educated in participation.

On the level of the advent of meaning, participation in management lends significance at the level of productive work. It causes the invention of signs to be inextricably linked to the production of goods, and gives life to cultural requirements, without ideological lies. The specific creation of our society is industrial in character, and it is clear that it is on the level of technological production that the significance of our society is based, whether we know it and wish it or not. Thus our only resource is to establish the meaningful solidarity and the human aims, which we know that our society most urgently needs, at the very heart of technological production. But this can only be achieved if the productive communities participate in the management of the enterprise in which they are all engaged.

It remains true that the aesthetic dimension that belongs to the industrial image can only be developed if it opens itself up to various experiences of participation. Productions which were concerned with the unmasking of social conditions with the use of light television cameras, have recently revealed how direct is the language and how infinite are the possibilities of this approach, in Canada, Great Britain and Belgium. The language of the industrial image tends of itself to express the unstructured levels of the manifestation of sociability. Without a doubt, this dimension will grow with the social consciousness of the group. The artist, whose place is "in the forefront, at the boundary of his species," as Valéry put it, anticipates this all-too-slow development with a few works of annunciation.

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The urban condition has given rise to a massive public in which communication is a problem. Techniques of social communication are a means of structuring scattered and amorphous masses. But how can one prevent this structuring from becoming a homogenisation of minds and behaviour which quashes all individual-

ity? How can one oppose a generalised entropy which carries all before it?

An industrial image which is open to the meanings experienced by society, based on the solidarity of labour and of neighbourhood, a human condition defined in terms of planetary destiny, the participation of workers' communities in the management of technological production—these are the factors necessary for the resemanticisation of the industrial image, these are the actions that form the basis of the organisation of the values conveyed by our technical communications networks.

If, as Norbert Wiener wrote, "the aim of cybernetics is to develop a language and technique that allow us to make an effective attack on the problem of the regulation of communications in general, and also to find a suitable repertoire of ideas and techniques to classify their individual manifestations according to certain concepts," then the regulation of communications conveyed by the industrial image is a particular case of the more general science of the government of men. But it is significant to observe that the regulating action will operate to the extent that the differentiated quality of social life, the convergence of ideological systems in carrying out a world-wide policy of assistance, the use of technological power for human ends, are imposed as urgent tasks. And when this happens, signs will be invented to bear witness to community on a planetary scale.