VILÉM FLUSSER   Toward a Phenomenology of Television.

A: The purpose of this paper: It is becoming ever more obvious that TV is one among the most important instruments of which we dispose at present. Like the Bomb and the computer its future use will determine in part the way of life of this and the next generation. The problem of this use is therefore too serious to be abandoned to technicians. It must be approac ed from many levels, and analyzed as deeply as possible, if we are to dis cover its range and its "essence" (eidos). Its range, (the virtualities it encompasses), has not even been mapped as yet, and its "essence", (its underlaying project), is, inspite of the relative recentness of the in- strument, in danger of being forgotten.

   Not as if TV had not been watched with great attention by many. Ther is in fact a tendency in many observers, (mostly theoreticians of commun- ication), to autonomize its problem. Take it out of its social context and thus transform TV into a sort of autonomous idol. (The same idolatr- ous tendency can be observed with regard to computers.) It tends to for- get that TV, (like every instrument), belongs to somebody, and is there- fore being used for the purposes of its owner. Such an attitude transfer the problem from science into mythology, and McLuhan's aphorism "The med- ium is the message" is an example. But inspite of such idolatry, and in- spite of many serious communicological, sociological, psychological and philosophical analyses of the problem, it is still true that very little interdisciplinary discussion of TV has taken place so far.

   This is the reason why the iniciative by the Rockefeller Foundation and the State of New York to organize a round table about "The Future of TV" at the Museum of Modern Art last January was important. The TV and video technicians and "artists", the critics, communicologists, psycholo- gists, sociologists and philosophers present did not, to be sure, "solve" the problem, but the width of its ramifications and the depth of its roots became clearly patent.

   This writer participated in the round table. His contribution aimed at the application of the phenomenological method to the problem. Not so much to the overall structure of TV, (that complex which includes senders transmittors and receivers and goes beyond them), but to the TV box itsel as it presents itself to receivers. Its purpose was to surprize the "ei- dos" of TV from the point of view of the receiver. To be sure: it will reveal different aspects from the points of view of senders and transmit- ers. But this is a task for the future.

   The phenomenological method is basically a specific way of looking at things, in order to see what may be hidden to common vision. If app- lied to our surrounding, it allows the distinction between three types

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of things: (a) those that hide a human project, ("instruments", the totalit
of which is "culture"). (b) those that do not reveal any such project, ("nd
ta", the totality of which is "nature"). (c) those in which the observer
recognizes himself, ("others", the totality of which is "society"). The TV
box reveals, if thus observed, a human project, which is its "essence", and
the task of the observer is to show this project clearly. Not only in orde
to understand the box better, but mostly in order to use it better. There-
fore: the TV box is shown to be an "instrument", and the tendency to idol-
ize it is shown to be a projection of the observer into the box, ("alterifi
cation"). It is a wrong view and should be abandoned.

To antecipate the result of the vision: Present TV use does not cor-
respond to its project. TV is being abused. If it were used according to
its "essence", its function would be different, (but not less decisive than
it is at present). This needs clarification. To use a hammer, not for fix
ing nails in walls, but to shatter skulls, is in some way a good use. Ham-
mers work well for such a purpose. But it is still an abuse of the hammer.
Because human projects have aims, (an ethical dimension), and the project
of hammers does not aim at shattering skulls. The present use of TV is an
ethical, not a functional, abuse.

Its present use is this: to condition the receptors of its message
for a specific behavior pattern, namely the consumption of the material and
ideal goods in which its owners are interested. This use seems to be inde-
pendent on the economic, social and political context within which it goes
on. TV works in the United States, in Western Europe, in the socialist
countries, (with the possible exeption of China), and in the third world
in more or less the same way. The question why the present use of TV seems
to be independent on the "ideology" of its owners is open. The answer that
such a use is implied by the "essence" of TV is wrong, and this paper will
try to show this.

The project of TV aims at producing a new type of window to look at
the world and speak through with others. This can be seen, if the TV box i
observed ander the phenomenological method. This paper wants to show it an
thus contribute to a radically new use. Its purpose is therefore "revolut
ionary", ("if "revolution" is a process through which man changes himself).
Because a new use of TV would allow the receiver of its message, (i.e. man
"tout court"), to change himself and assume a new "being-in-the- world".

B: Description: There is a box standing amid the furniture of a room, and it
has several buttons, a radio-like loudspeaker and a glass which reminds one
of a window. If the buttons are appropriately manipulated, radiolike
sounds and cinemalike images issue from the box. The manipulation is simp

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but the reasons why it works are complex. The theory of games disting-
ishes between four types of systems: (a)functionally and structurally simple
ones, (like table tennis and levers). (b) functionally and structurally com-
plex ones, (like national economies and living organisms). (c) structurally
simple and functionally complex ones, (like arithmetics and card games). (d)
structurally complex and functionally simple ones, (like TV and motor cars).
(NB: Let "structure" be the sum of rules that order elements within a sys-
tem, and "function" be the sum of rules that order the "strategy" appropriat
to a system.) In the type (d) systems, ("games"), the player seems to maste
forces which he ignores, and they are "magic" games in this sense. It is
characteristic of such games that the relationship "player - game" may be in
verted. The magical character of TV is due to the complex structure and sim
le manipulation of the box.

The room dwellers form a semicircle around the box, in order to re-
ceive the images and sounds that issue from it. The semicircle, ("Theatron"
is a structure opposed to the circle, for instance the traditional family
circle, ("Amphitheatron"). In the center of "Theatron" there is a "skene"
on which an actor, ("drontes"), performs an act, ("drama"), and those sitt-
ing around it watch it, ("Theoria"). Within "Amphitheatron" there is an
empty space, ("agora", "arena"), wherein those who sit around it exchange
somethings, for instance opinions, ("doxai"). Therefore: the view held by
some psychologists that TV substitutes the mother of the traditional family
circle is based on a structural error. The box projects a new family struct
ure, with altogether new functions.

The images and sounds that issue from the box have a "meaning" for
their receiver. They form a code, (let "code" be a system of symbols). The
receiver can decodify the images and sounds and thus read a message. The TV
code is a new one. Western civilisation disposes basically of two types of
codes: surface ones and linear ones. (Three-dimensional codes like sculp-
ture and dance will not be considered.) Surface codes consist of images
which depict their meanings. (F.i. paintings and maps.) Linear codes con-
sist of point-like elements forming a line, and they scan their meaning.
(F.i. spoken language, alphabets and arithmetics.) Surface codes are read
through "imagination", linear ones through "conceptualisation". TV, (and
film), has a code in which surfaces follow a linear structure. They can be
read two ways. Like surfaces, (through "imagination"), and like lines in
which the point-like elements are surfaces, (through "conceptualisation of
images" and "imagination of concepts"). The first way of reading is the on
ly one permitted by the present use of TV, and is, in a sense, a return to
analphabetism. (See my article "Line and Surface", in MAIN CURRENTS Jan.73)

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If thus decodified, the images and sounds form a message. But only if the receiver "forgets" some previous knowledge. For instance the knowledge that the box is linked to the meaning of its message through a complex chain, the first link of which being a "channel". That this "channel" leads to a place, where the images and sounds are being manipulated. That this is a costly process, and that somebody has to pay for it. And that therefore the result of the process, (the message received), must reflect in some way the interest of those who pay for it. Such "forgetting" is made easy by the magical characte of the box and by other factors that will be mentioned. Once this knowledge i forgotten, the message of the images and sounds means events in the outside world. The box is then a "medium" between receiver and the world.

Under analysis it can be shown that the message is "directed":

(a) Ontologically: It pretends to go on on two levels: of "presentatio and of "representation". The first level includes programs like news, speec es of politicians, live shots and so forth. The second one programs like films, TV plays and so forth.

The theory of communication distinguishes between "presentation" and "r presentation" this way: Phenomena arpresented by their symptoms, and repre- sented by conventionalized symbols. For instance: the sign "a" is a symptom of this typewriter and presents it. It has been conventionalized to be a sy bol of a specific sound and represents it. Symptoms are connected to their phenomena they point at through the chain of cause and effect. Both are on the same ontological level. Symbols are connected to their meanings by con- vention. They are on different ontological levels. Which means that one ca deduce from a symptom what it points at, but not from a symbol what it mea (the sign "a" may mean a sound, an arithmetic or a logical concept, and so forth).

In codes like alphabets this is no problem. Their symptomatic dimensio may be ignored, because their elements are always also symbols. (It does no matter whether the sign "a" is the symptom of a typewriter, a printing machi or a pen: the question is what convention it is aprt of as a symbol.) But i the TV code this is not so. There are images in that code which are only symptoms, and not symbols. They only "present" something, and "represent" nothing. This is the ontological problem of television.

Aesthetically all TV images seem to be symbols. They seem to be "fic- ticious", "representative", not "presentations of something real". This is due to two factors. One is the light in which they appear, the other is the fact that they have been manipulated. But there are commentaries within the TV messages itself which affirm of some of the images that they are merely symptoms. For instance:?This image is a live shot from the Moon", or "This

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image is of Mr. So-and-So speaking". Two things must be said about this.
(a) The image itself does not allow a clear constatation of its lack of sym
bolic dimensions. The image from the Moon may be "science fiction", and the
image of Mr. So-and-So may the image of an actor who represents him. (b)
The commentary itself may be fictitious. The speaker making it may be an
actor who represents, (in a play or so), the speaker. In other words: the
key to the decodification of the TV code is supplied by the code itself.

The result is that the receiver must abandon the distinction between
"presentation" and "representation", (between "reality" and "fiction") to
the message itself. In fact: he becomes uninterested in such distinction.
Now this is a sign of radical alienation.

(b) Epistemologically: The message pretends to be either "subjective"
or "objective". The first is the case of "sponsored" programs, the second
of all other programs.

The theory of communication distinguishes between three types of messag
es: (a) Imperative ones, (models of behavior, "normai"). (b) Indicative one
(models of knowledge, "epistemata"). (c) Implicative ones, (models of exper
ience, "aistheta"). All forms of messages may be reduced formally to one of
these three types. An even superficial analysis of TV messages will show
that they all belong to the imperative type. They all transmit models of
behavior, ("normai"). Some, (like newsreels), seem to supply models of
knowledge, ("epistemata"), and others, (like TV plays), seem to supply mode:
of experience, ("aistheta"), but they do so only in function of an underly-
ing "norma". Which falsifies the "epistemata" and the "aistheta", because
the underlying normative character denies them.

The result is that the message of TV, "events in the outside world",
is an imperative message. The receiver receives the events of the outside
world in the form of a series of imperatives, some of them explicitly, and
some under cover, and thus perceives the world in an imperative form. This
is a well-known form of perception. It is called the "magico-mythical" form
of perception. Kelsen calls it the "retributive" form of perception. But
with this qualification: In the pre-historical world perception the imperat
ives "transcend" the world and are in this sense "objective". In TV world
perception the imperatives are in the interest of the owners of the TV sys-
tems, and are in this sense "subjective". Which means that through TV world
perception receivers can be manipulated by TV owners.

(c) Ethically: The message pretends to supply the receiver with a
freedom of choice. He can switch the box on and off, and chose between va-
rious "channels". (This is not the place to discuss whether "freedom of
choice" is true freedom, nor whether freedom can be "supplied" instead of

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having to be assumed actively.) The box, in fact, does not even supply
true freedom of choice, for two reasons. The choice to swith it on and
off is not free in a situation, in which TV is supplanting many traditi
onal media, (like the family, neighborhood, cinma and so forth), because
to interrupt TV message means to interrupt one of the few remaining media
between the individual and his world. It is the equivalent of interrupt-
ing newspaper reading or going to school, as far as freedom is concerned.
And the cpice of channels is not free, because although each channel may
communicate a different program of apparent models of knowledge and exper
ience, they all have the same message: the same model of behavior, the
same "norma". To change channels is therefore an illusion of freedom: the
receiver is being normalized by any channel the same way.

The fact is that the box does not supply freedom, but conditions
the receiver, and does so more efficiently by supplying him with an illus
ion of freedom. And this is, of course, inherent in the structure of the
box, (and many other instruments if advanced technology): the only effic
ient tyrrany is the one that supplies an illusion of freedom.

(d) <u>Politically</u>: The message acts as a de-politizing factor. Po-
litical life is structurally a rhythmic advance from the private space,
"oiké", into the public one, "polis". "Politics" pressupposes "economics",
"res publica" pressupposes "res privatae", because the public space is an
empty one to be filled by individual private spaces. It is a "forum",and
is surrounded by "domus" out of which the "domini" dominate it. In sum:
"Politics" is publication of what was private.

TV is an inversion of politics: it advances from the public space
into the private ones, and thus makes,private what was previously public.
For example: The image of a public man penetrates millions of private homes
without having been invited, and thus becomes the image of a curiously de-
fective private person. His private aspects, (f.i. his face), are communi
cated, but his public aspects disappear for two reasons: (a) he cannot be
talked back to, and (b) he cannot be talked about between private dwellings
These two reasons for depolitisation have to do with the fact that TV boxes
are connected with central senders in a way that allows no feed-back, and
are unconnected with each other.

The result is loneliness of the crowd, (isolation = depolitisat-
ion), and total invasion of the private space by the public one, (totalit-
arism).

(e) <u>Aesthetically</u>: The message provides a series of models of
experience, ("aistheta"), which push each other violently and try to "over
come' each other, while covering up one single unalterablec"norm". Thus

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the receiver is conditioned to "enjoy" a great amount of fictitious exper
ience, in which each new experience is "better" than the last one. Such
sensationalistic aesthetics transforms the receiver into an ideal consum-
er, because he becomes insatiable. Since all the "aistheta" provided by
TV message cover up the same "norma", (consumer behavior model), the re-
ceiver is transformed into an instrument of the owners of TV systems.

(f) This "directing" of TV messages is possible, because the box
is built to emit messages, but not to receive any. This is the basic fac
tor. The box is an instrument for passivity in the receiver. This is a
well-known form of life, and is called "bíos theoretikós" by the ancients.
But in TV it appears in a radically new climate. Around the box a new type
of contemplation, admiration and adoration is in the making, and a new type
of religiosity is crystallizing.

Such is the present use of the TV box if it is viewed through the
phenomenological method.

C: TV as a window to look at the world: The "essential" part of the box is
a cathode tube which reminds one of a window. In fact: if one looks at
it phenomenologically, it shows its "window project". It was meant to be
an improved window. With this qualification, (as René Berger reminds us):
the cathodic light is one of the few lights on Earth which do not emanate
even indirectly from the Sun, and therefore have an "unearthy", (cold), as
pect. To understand the "window project", traditional windows must be con
sidered, and why it was necessary to improve on them.

Windows are holes in walls. Walls are tools to protect one from
the outside world. One of the functions of windows is to provide a vision
of the outside world. There is another type of hole in walls: doors. The:
function is to allow advances into and retreats from the outside world. The
three tools must work synchronically in order to work well: orientation
through windows, oriented commitment to the world through doors, return to
oneself through doors, self-identification between the four walls. This
synchronisation is the rhythm of life, and the satisfactory performance of
the three tools is vital. But they no longer perform that way.

Walls are anterior to windows, but there is a feed back between
them. Walls are naked and can be covered with paintings. Wall paintings
are artificial windows. They "represent" what windows "present", or what
they "should present", or what they "could present". Cinemas are advanced
wall paintings, because in them images move and talk. But they are still
"representations". The film is an art form.

This is the basis for an understanding of TV "essence". Nobody
will mistake a wall painting for a window, but many look at TV as if it

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were a sort of "cinema made private". There are two reasons for this confus
ion: Film and TV have the same code, (lineary structured images); and the
technique of TV has been taken over from films. But this confusion of the
two media is fatal. It inhibits the correct use of television.

Windows are tools to look at the outside world. Unsatisfactory
tools at present for various reasons. They do not allow to see phenomena
which are too small or too big, or which move too quickly. And their rigid
frame specifies and limits the structure of vision. In Kantian terms the
first defect of traditional windows may be called a "phenomenal limitation",
and the second defect may be called a "categorical limitation". TV is essen
tially a tool to increase the parametre of phenomena seen through tradition-
al windows, and to allow the manipulation of the categories of traditional
windows. TV is essentially meant to be an improved window. Therefore <u>TV is
meant to be a form of perception, not an art form.</u>

To understand this Kant's analysis of perception is useful but no
sufficient. Kant's model for perception is the traditional window, of which
TV was meant to free us. In this way: (a) It allows the perception of very
big phenomena, very small ones, and of phenomena which move very quickly and
very slowly. (b) It allows the perception of phenomena which are hidden to
traditional window vision, (because they are too far, or because, like the
processes within living organisms, they cannot be approached). (c) It allow
the perception of phenomena from various points of view, (they can be focal-
ized through close-ups, surrounded through travelling, and so forth). (d)It
permits the visualisation of models, (one can perceive statistical motions,
the dynamics of molecular models, the rotations of arithmetic equations and
so forth). (e) It permits a dynamic perception, (both the phenomenon per-
ceived and the camera perceiving it are moving). And so forth. To speak
with Kant: <u>TV is a deliberate manipulation of perception,</u> therefore a new
type of "pure reason", (practical transcendence).

Such a revolution in human perception is made possible by the TV
code: a linear structure with surfaces for elements. Let it be repeated:
The repertoire of TV code are images, (and sounds), its structure is a linea
sequence. (Let "repertoire" be the sum of elements in a system, and "struc-
ture" be the sum of rules which order the elements within the system.) Now
the decodification of images is made through "imagination", and of linear
structures through "conception". (A discussion of these two "reading pro-
cesses" would explode the limits imposed on the present paper.) TV code per
mits two simultaneous "readings", a situation without paralel in the history
of civilisation. (a) The perception of concepts through imagination, and (b
the perception of images through conception. If imaginative perception be

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called the "pre-historical" one, (the world perceived as scenery), and if conceptual perception be called the "historical" one, (the world perceived as a process), then the wordd perception through TV may be called the "post-historical" one, (with scenes diachronized into processes, and processes synchronized into scenes on the level of perception).

As a matter of course such new type of "reading" the world as perceived through the TV window will pose difficult problems in the future. Let only one be mentioned as an example: the relationship between sound an image. The TV image is a surface which is composed of lines, (and, very characteristically, there is no convention yet as to the number of lines between the US and Europe). But the sounds have obviously three dimensions (We are bathed in the sound, whilst we face the image.) Now the method of "electronic intermix" makes it possible to see sounds and hear images. (The experiments of Woody Vasulka's in Buffalo and Montes Bacquer's in Cologne are examples of this. Bacquer works on the thesis that the "eye hears".) And there are other equally complex problems.

By the way: everywhere, and especially in the United States, experiments go on with a view to utilizing TV as a form of perception. Not only within some sciences, (f.i. nuclear physics, molecular biology, sociological documentation and so forth), but also within the TV system itself, (manipulation of videotapes, of the TV image, of the electronics of that image). But still it is true: one cannot manipulate a tool well before understanding clearly its purpose, (its "essence"). As long as TV is not liberated from the "cinema-at-home" prejudice, it will not work fully as an instrument of perception.

Here is the proof: those who experiment with TV for perception consider themselves to be "artists". And this has a limiting effect on what they are doing. Consider some examples. Nam Paik, on a breathtaking videotape, makes coincide the left hand with the right one, thus piercing so to speak the third dimension. But he does so in a theatrical way. Otth translates time into space by manipulating shadows cast by objects at different hours during the same day. But he wants this to be "beautiful". Minkoff uses monitors as time-mirrors, (what is "later" on one becomes "nearer" on the other). But he makes a "program" of it. Vasulka makes images out of electronic waves, but he does so as if he was painting. Here the task of phenomenology becomes clear: to show that the same techniques which in film serve "art", should serve, in TV, "perception", and that they therefore should advance in a different direction from the one they take in film Because TV should not provide us with "experience", but with "perception" of the world. "Epistemata", not "aistheta", is what TV should aim at.

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At this point the following qualification is overdue: It must be admitted that in real life experience and perception cannot be separated, indeed should not be separated. Art is a powerful method to perceive reality, and there is no perception of reality without an aesthetic dimension. Still: the aim of ontological research is, inspite of this fact, the distinction between reality and fiction. In the case of the "film - TV" problem this means the distinction between a medium for the communication of experience from one for the communication of perception. In other words: although films may also communicate perception and should do so, and although TV may also commununciate experience and shoudd do so, these are not the essential aspects of those two media, but are marginal aspects. It is at present necessary to stress what distinguishes them from each other rather than stressing what they have in common, if one is to free TV from a film domination which covers up its "window essence".

Let this be illustrated by an example with reference to "art": if TV were used consciously as a tool to perceive art, (not as an art form), it would provide us with a powerfull instrument for art criticism. A dynamical art "videothèque" would not only mean an "imaginary museum" in a more radical sense than Malraux speaks of, but also a "conceptual museum" with nothing to equal it at present. The International Association of Art Critics proposes a computerized catalogue of the arts: a videothèque such as the one here suggested would be an even more powerful instrument for art criticism. It would not only catalogue art, but comment it dynamically.

Let us go back to the problem. Once the "window essence" of TV is grasped, there seem to be at present no basic obstacles to its use as an instrument of perception from the points of view of costs involved and of technique required. But there is a different sort of obstacle which must be considered. TV as a tool for perception would provide the receiver of its message with a vision of the outside world without paralel in the past as far as broadth and depth are concerned. This would mean a challenge to change the world. In other words: if TV became a window for us to see the world, we should look for a door through which to commit ourselves to the world. Such doors do not exist at present, but we do not perceive this lack of doors for the lack of windows. Should the TV window open itself, we would try to break through the walls that surround us. But this would conflict with the interests of those who own the present systems, (including the TV system). They would oppose it, and are in fact doing so already. Let one single example illustrate this.

The American video underground makes tapes of the everyday surround

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ings in towns and cities, for instance commonplace street scenes. The metho
they use, mostly without knowing it, is phenomenological vision. One differ
ence between video and film is the fact that video can be projected immediat
ly after having been made, and no "editing" is required. Another difference
is that he who projects video is in partial control of it, and may, through
various techniques, even include himself in the projection. Thus the scenes
shown in thse tapes are, both due to their immediaty and to their "opennness
invitations to participate, and therefore have a politizing effect. The own
ers of the TV system react to this in a characteristic way: they show the
tapes on "official"" TV programs. By thus absorbing them they change their
nature: they become "edited" and closed to participation by the receiver.
Examples of such an efficient incorporation of all attemps to change the sys
tem into the very system will no doubt become more frequent, as experiments
to use TV as a tool for perception will progress further.

This sort of obstacle to a correct use of TV poses a problem which
goes beyond TV itself, but is not "political" in a strict sense. The fact
that the present use of TV independs on the "ideology" of its owners has al
ready been mentioned. Obviously, such a problem can only be hinted at in
this paper. Equally obviously, the solution or not of the problem will in
fluence the way we shall live in the future.

But even if the problem were solved, and even if TV were used as a
tool for perception instead of alienation, it would still be an unsatisfact
ory window. Because the basic fact that the box emits but does not receive
messages would persist, (with the exception of some video manipulation). In
other words: the receiver would still be passive, and the manipulation of
perception would been done for him by others. In order to really change TV
into the window it was projected to be, a further modification of its use
is necessary, one that involves a modification of the box itself.

D: TV as a window to talk through with others: The TV box looks like a radio
with a cathod tube attached to it, but its name, "television", points in a
different direction. It points to the fact that TV was not meant to be an
improved radio, but a new kind of "telephone with vision". The box does not
look like it should according to such a project. In order to see the differ
ence between radio and telephone, one may either look at both phenomenologic
ally, or take recourse to theoretical considerations. Since the second meth
od is less strenuous, (though less penetrating), this paper will make use of
it, and thus stay within acceptable limits in the number of pages.

Theory of communication distinguishes structurally between two sys-
tems of communication: broadcasting systems and networks. In broadcasting
a number of peripherical receivers is linked to a central sender through

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one-way channels, and the process within such a system is called "discourse
In networks several participants are linked to each other through multi-way
channels, and the process within such a system is called "dialogue". The
purpose of the first system is to distribute and conserve existing informat
ion. The purpose of the second one is to elaborate new information through
synthesis of existing partial informations. The negatively entropic charac
ter of human communication is the result of a synchronisation of the two
systems: networks elaborate and broadcasting systems preserve information.
Examples of networks are the mail and the telephone system, of broadcasting
systems the press and the radio. The difference in structure implies a dif
ference in climate. Networks provoke responsability, (possibility to reply
to messages), and activity, (elaboration of information). Broadcasting sys
tems create an authority, (the sender is an "author of information"), and
a passive attitude, (storing and digesting information). In Western histo-
ry the predominance of either system alternates: Medieval Church and Absol
utism has a broadcasting structure, liberalism and the Soviets have a net
structure, (to quote a few examples). Broadcasting predominates all over
at present, although there is an important network level of communication.

Theory of games distinguishes functionally between two types of
"games": open ones and closed ones. Games are open if a modification of
their repertoire does not imply necessarily a modification of their struct
ure. They are closed if any change in repertoire requires a change in stru
ture. (For a definition of "repertoire" and "structure" see above in this
paper.) (Page 8 last paragraph). For example: The English language is an
open game because a modification of its "lexicon", (repertoire), does not
imply a modification of itsv"grammar", (strucutre). Chess is a closed game
because any modification of chessmen, (repertoire), implies a change of
rules, (strucutre). This functunal distinction is important for theory of
communication, because it permits communication systems to be manipulated
like games, their "function" being the strategy appliable to them.

The structural and functional criteria may be unified by the fol
lowing hypothesis: broadcasting systems are open games, and networks are
closed ones. Broadcasting systems permit the inclusion of a growing numbe
of receivers without implying any change of structure. Networks require
changes in structure if the number of participants increases. This hypoth
sis is aesthetically attractive: it unifies the theory of games with the
theory of communication. And it is ideologically attractive: it justifies
the present division between mass culture, (open broadcast), and élite
culture, (several closed networks). The present cultural situation, (scien
tific, artistic, political dialogue in closed networks) and and mass con-
sumption of information thus elaborated and distributed through broadcast)

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thus becomes theoretically necessary, and no "strategy" with regard to TV
can change this. But the hypothesis is wrong: the mail and the telephone
systems show that networks may be open. It is therefore wrong to say that
an open dialogue, ("democracy"), is theoretically impossible, although it
may be practically impossible at present for lack of appropriate networks.

Therefore strategies can be found with a view to using TV as an
open network. By the way: the defenders of the hypothesis are usually in
consistent. On the one hand they claim that dialogue is always closed, an
becomes "diluted" when it is opened. On the other hand they claim that pr
ent use of TV has dialogical openings toward other channels, (for instance
phone calls to "stations", political elections and so forth), and that TV
is therefore a "democratic institution". But they cannot have it both
ways. If dialogue is theoretically closed, then such openings are ruses
to hide this fact from the masses, (and, indeed, they function as ruses in
the present context). If dialogue may be theoretically opened, then TV is
being abused and should be transformed into a network.

Its project aims at a network for the following reason: Traditio
al windows are instruments to talk through with others. But they no longe
work well for such a purpose. They can do so only in villages and small
towns. Industrial revolution has destroyed their function, because there
is too much "noise", (in the informatic and common sense of the term) in i
dustrial surroundings. Thus industrial revolution has deprived man of a
powerful medium for dialogue, (dialogue with one's neighbor). The result
is the famous "lonely crowd", namely substitution of dialogue by massifyin
discourse. This is, in fact, the result of the industrial revolution from
the point of view of communication: distruction of dialogical "popular cul
ure" and creation of discoursive "mass culture" on the one hand, and the
fragmentation of élite dialogues in highly specialized networks with highly
specialized codes for each network on the other.

Nineteenth century has projected two open networks to counter su
a tendency toward "two cultures", (far more pernicious then Snow's two cult-
ures): the mail and the telephone system. The first was made possible by
the diffusion of the alphabet through the school broadcasting system. The
second was made possible by technological advance. Both failed for the fol
lowing reason: Although the mail is a visual medium, (alphabet), and the te
lephone an auditive one, (spoken language), both have the same linear code
structure. Therefore, even if both systems are open to millions of partici-
pants, they cannot do away with the loneliness of the crowd and the isolati
on of the élite from its basis. This needs some explanation.

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In traditional windows, (as far as their dialogical function is concern
ed), two codes run paralel: the surface code of mutual vision and the linear
code of mutual talking. Through the linear code the partners "understand"
each other, and through the surface code they "recognize" each other. (Ther
isunfortunately no room in this paper to discuss this. It is obvious that
"mutual recognition" is the basis of human communication. To some extend sp
en language does provide this, because it has "aethetical" dimensions. But
this diemnsion is usually insufficient for an "existential recognition of th
other".) The mail and the telephone lack the surface code of traditional wi
ows, and therefore serve only "mutual understanding", not "recognition of
each other". He who writes long letters or talks through the phone for hour
still remains lonely, and the fact that both systems are at present overburd
ened shows how desperately people try to force them into a function they can
never have: instruments against the solitude of the masses. (Again: there i
unfortunately no room in this paper to discuss the question of communication
as a means against solitude and its limitation by the fundamental solitude
toward death, which no communication, not even love, can conquer.)

Twentieth century made it technically possible to project a network
just as open as the telephone system, but with a surface code accompanying
the linear one almost like in traditional windows. But the TV code can do
even more: it can synthetize the two codes in a way traditional windows can
not, (and this paper has discussed this). It can therefore be a tool for
dialogue which not only substitutes traditional windows, but improves on the
It could transform the structure of society into a cosmic neiborhood with all
the windows open for everybody toward everybody. A "cosmic village" opposed
to the one McLuhan imagines: not a cosmic discoursive Sparta, but a cosmic d
alogical Athens. Rousseau believes that no town can have more then twenty
thousand inhabitants without becoming unhuman. He knows only traditional wi
aws, not television. Such a cosmopolitisation did not come about, because t
TV box is being used like a radio, (broadcast), not like a telephone, (netwo

How should the box look like if it were used within a network? Some
answers to this question are already available at present. Like a telephone
with a tube attached to it. Not a very good answer, because it fails to
grasp the TV "essence", (just like the first "horseless carriages" failed to
grasp the motor car "essence"). Like in "programmed teaching": typewriters
with tubes linked to computers in feed-back. Like in feed-back cable syst-
ems. Like the boxes now in use for exchange and mutual manipulation of vide
tapes. But those are only very provisional answers. Most of the dialogical
virtualities dormant in TV have not yet been discovered.

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The reason for this lack of understanding is in the TV code which makes it possible to dialogue in a way without paralel in the past: not only can one dialogue with many more about many more things, but one can do it with far greater choice of methods. Therefore although the instrument is already within our possession, to speak about its dialogical use is almost an equivalent of science fiction.

No doubt: many technical difficulties would have to be solved before a really radical dialogical use of TV became po ssible, and many financial dif ficulties as well. But this is not the true reason for our ignorance as far as this aspect of TV is concerned. Although the dialogical use of TV is tech nically and financially more difficult that its perceptional use, the same fundamental obstacle prevents both these uses: the resistence offered to such a change of the present use by the owners of the systems. Inspite of the fact that present efforts to use TV dialogically are very modest, such a res istence is already in operation. Let one single example suffice: the ex periments with cable TV are being restricted, through "official" intervention to so-called "closed circuits", (according to the "closed game" hypothesis mentioned), in most countries; and even in Canada, where such experiments are the most daring, there seems to be now an "official" reaction. There are rumors, it is true, that some cable circuits exist in the form of open net works in some Chinese villages, but all information from China is doubtful. In short: the holders of decision have no interest whatsoever to permit TV to be used as a means of universal dialogue, therefore as a means to trans form present passive consumers into responsible actors.

Let it be admitted: the transformation of post-industrial society into an "open society" with total politisation, (publication by everybody), is an utopy not for technical or economic, but for "political" reasons. It may be questioned whether such an utopy is desirable, and such a question is valid. The dominace of dialogue would be a danger to discourse, which means that to tal politisation would be a danger to the solitude necessary for true exist ance. But such a question is premature to say the least: not the lack of discourse, but of dialogue, is our problem. And the utopy is, anyhow, very problematic as far as its coming about is concerned. The fact is this: we have the tool for it, but we lack the power of decision to use it.

E:Conclusion: Phenomenological vision of the TV box shows that it was projected to provide us with a vision of the world outside and to be a means to talk with others. It is being used instead as a tool to manipulate lonely and alienated masses. Can something be done so that it be used more in accordance with its project?