

MEDIA

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Keywords: Communication, medium, images, script, sound, narration, cave-paintings, writing, alphabet, book, newspaper, printing, photograph, film, television, sound recording, CD, multimedia, computer, digital revolution

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Summary

There is no communication without a medium. Not even a communication with ourselves. Image, sound, and script may be seen as the basic media that are carriers of significance. Nearly anything in the physical world can become a "medium" of expression. Media with a relative permanence (books, films, statues) develop a life of their own, they outlast the individual ability to remember, and they have their own histories (literary history, history of architecture) in which their meaning is continually reshaped. That meaning becomes independent of the meaning of the original producer, and is constantly recreated by a process of "handing on tradition" which in fact is a process of constantly adapting this meaning to the present cultural context. The invention of printing changed the nature of books much more than we tend to believe.

The invention of new media is not something which is external to a culture or which allows a culture to continue as before, just adding trains and telephones, computers and satellites to the traditional culture which in itself remains the same. Just as the Neolithic revolution has once and for all times changed human culture, just as the invention of such fundamental technologies as metal working has had a profound impact on all cultures which used these techniques, just so the scientific and technological revolution from the 18th to the 20th century have fundamentally changed what we understand by culture.

1. Introduction

There is no communication without a medium. Not even a communication with ourselves. The Latin word *medium* means: "means, mediator, mediating agent". We need a body which can take on a certain posture and bodyfluids like tears to communicate that we are sad. And we need words or other media to communicate to ourselves and others what we feel and experience.

Nearly anything in the physical world can become a "medium" of expression: any object can become the medium to express what we think and feel. Our body can become the medium to "mime" or to "dance" our meaning, our hands can „talk“ to deaf people, our voice can produce speech and song, but we can also use an "instrument", an object like a drum or a snare to vibrate in consonance with the emotions we want to express. We can use a blank surface to scratch, paint or write, we can use light or electrons to make our ideas visible, we can use stones, wood, glass, synthetic materials and cloth to make a habitable space (a house, a room) which expresses our personality.

All media have a greater or lesser persistence: they can disappear a moment after the performance (as in music, dance, theatre) or they can preserve a meaning in a more permanent medium (stone, script, sound recording, film). Media with a relative permanence (books, films, statues) develop a life of their own, they outlast the individual ability to remember, and they have their own histories (literary history, history of architecture) in which their meaning is continually reshaped. That meaning becomes independent of the meaning of the original producer, and is constantly recreated by a process of "handing on tradition" which in fact is a process of constantly adapting this meaning to the present cultural context.

2. Basic Media

Image, sound, and script may be seen as the basic media that are carriers of significance. They also serve as media of artistic works. Images serve as impressions and expressions that appeal to the visual sense. A number of scripts were developed out of images. Script and image allow the preservation of thoughts and viewpoints, and thus the trading of information over time. Sound is used in oral and literal cultures alike. It was the first medium to carry language, but also has served and still serves as medium for all expressions that can be heard, like music. (see *Tone*) Combinations of sound and image may be found in different kinds of artistic work, like theatre, film, or video-art. Combinations of image and script are widely used in books, but also in paintings and in electronic media. The latter opened the possibility for multimedia art, a form of art that combines the three basic media image, sound, and script. (see *Script, Image, Tone*)

3. History of the Media

3.1 Primary or Human Media

Humankind always has used media to communicate. Dance was one of the earliest media, a medium of body language. Out of sacral origins dance developed to today's artistic forms of reflection, show and entertainment. Oral culture was transferred by

human media as well. The roles of actors and the public - founded on complementary expectations of behaviour - may be seen as symbolic interactions. Theatre and dance have played an important role in many cultures of the world.

In dance the body is used most beautifully as a medium of communication to express the various moods and emotions most effectively. The *Natya Shastra*, written by Bharatha between second century BC and second century AD, is the source of all forms of Indian classical dance. It is regarded as the fifth Veda. Bharatha Natyam is the oldest of the classical dance forms, and its origins can be traced to Bharatha's *Natya Shastra*. It is a highly traditional and stylized dance form. Kathak finds its roots in *katha*- story. A band of storytellers, attached to temples in Northern India, narrated stories from epics. Kathakali is one of the most refined and most scientific dance forms of Kerala. It is not more than 300 years old in its present form. This art demands complete control over practically every fibre of the body. Kathakali draws heavily from drama and is danced with elaborate masks and costumes.

Various forms of oral performance, such as the praise poems, have been recorded amongst the earliest Sumerian documents, others still function in societies which are believed to have retained certain prehistoric forms of ritual dance, music, poetry, and drama. (see *Memorists*) Story telling and oral forms of the epic are probably predating such written forms as the *Gilgamesh* Epos of the Euphrates valley, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, or the stories in the *Old Testament*.

In the European Antiquity the oral art of performing epic narration evolved since before the 8th century B.C., recitators travelled through the countries and performed their texts at festivities. For the 6th century B.C. the performance of the tragedies of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides are confirmed, based on the cult of the goddess Dionysus, and the use of masks. In ancient Greece singers and entertainers played an important role as distributors of culture at weddings, at triumphal processions, at harvest festivals and at the feasts of Saturn in winter. In Rome, around the year 0, nonverbal media like the play of gladiators and pantomimes served as forms of spectacle and entertainment. In the European middle age singers and court jesters served the feudal class to mediate news and myths. Their literature and entertainment stabilised the hierarchic system. Storytellers in villages or at marketplaces had an important role in entertaining and informing people. Passion plays and comedies staged at marketplaces may be seen as early forms of theatre.

Another medium that humans started using world-wide more than 30 000 years ago, were the walls of caves. The cave-paintings may be seen as the first media for written/painted mass and individual communication. Script as "an image of voice" has enabled people to express and exchange thoughts over time and space. Script was engraved in stone, written on wood or parchment. The first marks which can be interpreted as a kind of writing are dated between 4000 and 3500 B.C. in Mesopotamia and Chuzistan, and about that time Egyptians used "paper" made from Papyrus. Round about 3500 Egyptians developed hieroglyphics, a form of writing where each image represented a word. The important simplification came in Egypt and in Mesopotamia in the 30th century B.C. with the invention of logograms, and 300 years later with the invention of signs for sounds. In 2630 B.C. both Egyptians and Chinese invented Indian

ink, which was insoluble on papyrus. At first writing and reading was limited to temples and government offices. It was used to record contributions or to document military victories or to transmit laws like the Codex Hammurabi (20th century B.C.) But soon writing was also used to document myths, stories and poetry. (see *Script*)

The writing with a limited alphabet developed between the 16th and the 14th century B.C., and the Greeks adapted this, writing both consonants and vowels, which in turn was the basis of the Roman alphabet (7th century B.C.) The development of writing was probably the most innovative and useful invention of a medium of early history. It delivered messages of the contemporary rulers, reminded of historical events, was used to store administrative and educational information. Though the script and image systems play an important role in the preservation and the transfer of thoughts and ideas over time and space, spoken language remains an important medium of communication in all societies until today. (see *Script*)

Paper reached Europe round about 900 A.D. and the first German paper mill in Ravensburg dates from 1190 A.D. Documents like the first books were produced in a network of libraries, "scriptoria", schools, and the economic part of the monastery culture. In the middle age the material for the book changed from papyrus to parchment, later to paper.

Classical antiquity and the middle ages were epochs of the book. Erudition was the knowledge of books, be it the Book of Books, the Qur'an, the works of Aristotle or the writings of Confucius. Up to the time of scholasticism the book reigned sovereign: their authority rested finally in the authority of a revered Master, or of God, who had given human beings two books: the book of revelation and the book of nature which had been deciphered by Aristotle. To Francis Bacon, who stood at the beginning of another age, students in the traditional schools and universities seemed to be like prisoners of the writings of certain authors. To the scholastics scientists like Bacon or Galileo, who attempted to learn new things about nature, while God had told us everything already, seemed to be sacrilegious? The new scientists in turn despised the belief in books. To escape from books meant to escape from an eternal tutelage of the past. Progress was made visible by the number of books which had been refuted. Believers in books appeared to them like veritable Don Quixotes: fools who took a make-believe world to be the real world.

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Biographical Sketches

Peter Horn studied German and English at the University of the Witwatersrand. In 1971 he graduated Ph.D. from the University of the Witwatersrand with a thesis on "Rhythm and structure in the poetry of Paul Celan", and was offered the chair of German at the University of Cape Town in 1974. From 1987 to 1990 he was Dean of the Faculty of Arts, and from 1993-1994 Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor of the University. He was president South African Association of German Studies (1989-1997), president of the Institute for Research into Austrian and International Literary Processes (Vienna) (2001-), on the executive committee of the Elias-Canetti-Gesellschaft, the National Executive of the Congress of South African Writers (COSAW) (1991 - 1992), the National Executive of the South African Writers' Association. Besides he was Honorary Vice President of the National Union of South African Students (1977-1981), Trustee of the South African Prisoners' Educational Trust Fund (1980-1985), and a member of the Interim Committee of the Unemployed Workers' Movement (1984/5). In 1974 he received the Pringle Prize of the South African English Academy for an essay to the concrete poetry, in 1992 he received the Noma Award for Publishing in Africa (Honourable Mention for *Poems 1964-1989*), and in 1993 the Alex La Guma/Bessie Head Award and in 2000 the Herman Charles Bosman Prize for the short story collection *My Voice is under Control now*. In 1994 the University of Cape Town granted him a Honorary Fellowship for life. Two of his volumes of poetry and numerous other publications by him were banned for possession during the Apartheid regime. His poems are anthologised in most major anthologies of South African poetry, and more than 100 have been published in journals. He has published numerous contributions to academic books, learned journals, and reviews and review articles.

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