

A PYGMALION ADVENTURE

THE MUTATION OF THE MEANS OF PRESENTATION, OF DIFFUSION
OR REPRODUCTION AND ITS CONSEQUENCES FOR THE STUDY OF
ARTISTIC EXPRESSIONS.

Nature and education are close to each other.
For education transforms man, but by this
transformation it gives him a second nature.

DEMOCRITUS

It is not on the level of ideas and concepts
that technology has its effects; it is the
relations of the senses and the patterns of percep-
tion that it changes little by little and without
meeting any resistance.

MARSHALL McLUHAN

Broadly speaking, the situation that preceded ours can be summed up as follows: formed by tradition artists worked for a rich or fairly rich clientele, or for the State who commissioned them; their works were periodically made the object of official exhibitions (salons presided over by a committee or inspired by

Translated by M. D. F.

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amateurs or connoisseurs), or in the form of private shows, both indeed appealing to the same "élite"—on whom Proust has left us some exemplary pages. The rest of the public was composed for the most part of people who had no access to art, who never entered a museum or a gallery, much less a salon, still less the studio of an artist; in short, for whom art had no existence except some names—Rembrandt, Raphael, Michelangelo—who remained names. Between the "élite" and the no-man's-land, a "fringe" public, made up of those who wanted to have, for reasons of taste, of curiosity, or for other motives, an initiation to art, to have some idea of it, and who went periodically to museums, to exhibitions, or who gathered information by reading. It is noteworthy that school hardly played any part: artistic teaching being most often reduced to "drawing lessons" where one learnt to copy Egyptian or Roman plaster casts, engravings, pictures, in short, *to copy a design*. As for books, they became confused with the same grisaille of printing and line-drawings, which, indeed, reappeared in the windows of bookshops and even in the town...

In a quarter of a century the situation has changed completely. The techniques of reproduction are industrialised. A new form of art books has seen the light of day which, in putting the accent on the reproductions in colour, on the one hand, aims at "covering" the art of the whole world and all periods, on the other, in creating collections spread by a network of international distribution has created a "reception" until then unknown.

It is not merely wrapping paper, prospectuses, books of matches, that welcome the dancers of Degas, the geishas of Utamaro. Every available surface becomes a potential site for reproductions in colour.

In this process, the mass media plays an ever-increasing role, the vast press entertains its readers periodically, not only with exhibitions which it describes, but also with the statements and confidences that the artist formerly reserved for his cronies, or his private diary, and which are voiced on the radio even to the timbre, and the hesitations of speech. The cinema is not behind either; films on art can be counted in their thousands. But it is no doubt television that plays the decisive part. When the camera decides to go to a museum, to open the door of a gallery,

to cross the threshold of a studio, to question an artist, or to see him close up, nothing can resist. And colour, which is in its beginnings, transforms the interest of the spectator to fascination.

From this brief examination, however summary, however incomplete, one can if not judge, at least have an idea of the importance of the changes that have been brought about in these few decades. Formerly "reserved territory," artistic expression is now a matter of universal interest, the more so since we are mobile and the works are too, so that the possibilities of contact are multiplied; the more so since reproductions, bought commercially or made personally with a camera, open wide the access to the works of the past and to those of our own period; the more so, again, since through the mass media, television in particular, artistic expressions arrive at our door without our even needing to be forewarned in order to have the idea or the wish to see them (the programme follows...). In a few decades art, the perquisite of the "élite," and to which the ill-prepared, ill-equipped and misdirected public only had access with difficulty (without counting those who knew nothing at all) art has become the affair of all.

It is here that we must be careful of the trap. Nothing is more tempting, once a series of phenomena has been revealed—in this case those which correspond to changes in means of presentation, of reproduction, of distribution of manifestations of the plastic arts—than to establish their "factual" basis, then to set them up as "reasons" whence one can deduce, following a process whose very facility should put us on our guard, "facts" capable of being converted into "consequences." Giving way to the temptation is to forget that the process is linear only for the mind that establishes it. In reality, the changes that one observes affect the whole of the structure and it is always on the inside of new conditions of experience that the consequences show themselves, as one says. It is on this point that the reflexion, more preoccupied with logic, stumbles, omitting to take into account the operational process which leads from cause to effect. To each of the factors already expressed there should then be attached an operational analysis that exceeds by a long way the scope of this article. It seemed therefore preferable to sketch it in with reference to a few examples only.

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THE PHENOMENON OF REPRODUCTION AND SOME OF ITS CONSEQUENCES

At first sight reproductions of the *Gioconda* have this in common, that whatever their differences—reproductions in black and white or in colour, de luxe or cheap, large or postage stamp size—whether printed on paper, film, fabric or metal; whether they figure in an art book, on the grocer's tray or in the window of a bookshop, in a fashion boutique, or at the post officer counter, all "focus" on the work of Leonardo da Vinci kept in the Louvre. Whether they are counted by dozens, or hundreds, or thousands, or by hundreds of thousands (postage stamps or post cards) or by millions (as in magazines or on television) their function rests the same, to focus on the original and draw our attention to it, a function that I call "vectorial."

In announcing that "the plastic arts have invented their own printing," Malraux had already insisted on the transformation brought about by the reproduction, in particular on the fact that with it were obliterated the traditional frontiers between Fine Art and minor art, and that framing, lighting, angle of view, changes of scale, and enlargements created "fictitious or suggestive arts." Although they have been relevant for twenty years, and seem self-evident nowadays, these considerations are worth remembering, for "studies" do not really take them into account: many are the "specialists" who still believe that the "imaginary museum" is a vision of the poet! But it may be that the vision is already short of reality.

In the preface of *L'art religieux du XIII^e siècle en France*, Emile Mâle, having indicated the materials that were used for his study: anthologies, books, reviews, summaries, etc., ranked as important the museum of moulds of the Trocadero and "Three big collections of photographs or of prints that have been most useful," adding, "So we have been able to have almost constantly under our eyes the statues and the bas-reliefs scattered throughout the whole of France," with this remark that is of great significance today: "It has not been possible to do the same with stained-glass windows that have scarcely hitherto been reproduced in photographs. Happily, P. Cahier has given in his *Vitraux de Bourges* a real *Corpus* of the principal windows of

the XIIIth century. M. F. de Lasteyrie in his *Histoire de la peinture sur verre* has reproduced others... etc.”

Emile Mâle’s book appeared for the first time in 1898. Considered as a classic it has just been published in 1969 by the *Livre de Poche*, following the eighth edition produced by Armand Colin in 1948. Lastly, several publishers announced, under the aegis of “Masterpieces of Art” an important series presenting “The great moments of ornamental art of all time. Sumptuous review in full colour, illustrated with 30 plates, of which the central double page opens out to more than a metre long.” The numbers are on sale “at your usual bookstall,” price nine francs, No. 1: *Les vitraux de Chartres*; N. 2: *Les tapisseries de l’Apocalypse à Angers*; No. 3: *Tombeau de la Vallée des Rois en Egypte*, etc. “Each number is devoted to an ornamental work of which the power, the setting, the size and the quality of reproduction offer the reader the best conditions to create an emotion near to that produced by the original; a reminder for those who know, temptation for those who discover them,” according to one of the commentaries.

From there the question that should be asked, and that one always forgets to ask, amounts to this: setting aside all hypotheses, the conditions of acquisition, of transmission, of reproduction, of distribution, and of the reception of artistic expression (but also of all knowledge) are they not constitutive of these forms of expression and thus of knowledge itself? Only fifty years ago stained-glass windows—except in the case of a privileged few with time and money at their disposal—existed in black and white in the form of photographs and were hardly accessible except to certain professionals who consulted them in special libraries. Also is it not astonishing that the iconography, the description and classification of the subjects, that is to say the *mental substratum* had at first held the enthusiasm of the erudite? Through the stained-glass windows, it is not colours that one sees, or the quivering of the light, but, as Emile Mâle says, it is all the Christian iconography of the Middle Ages, above all a *handwriting*, an *arithmetic*, a *symbolism* of which the *Mirrors of Vincent de Beauvais* are at once the sum and the key. *The Mirror of Nature*, *The Mirror of Science*, *The Moral Mirror*, *The Historical Mirror* constitute the encyclopaedia of the XIIIth

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century, but if the “enigma of God, of man and of the world is completely resolved there” as Emile Mâle affirms, it is in favour of a conceptual reality that derives in its turn from a mode of conceptual explanation. Today, however, when the reproduction brings stained-glass windows to life in all the splendour of their colours, today when they are divorced both from their respective settings and from specialized libraries, to be diffused by the most popular means, that of newspapers; when television brings to our home the cathedrals in the glow of the early morning it seems difficult to be able to be content with an intellectual interpretation, whatever interest this presents. On ceasing to be “communicated” by means of words or of black and white photographs, the windows become again colours and light, calling for a new approach to which “study,” even scientific, cannot remain stranger. Consequently one understands better the affirmation of Malraux, often disputed, that if the reproduction puts at our disposal “for the first time the heritage of all history,” and thus of the entire world, that must not be understood, he insists, as an integral resurrection. The reproduction is never the transposition into photographic form of material that the scholar had put on slips of paper: “The works that compose this heritage have undergone a singularly complex metamorphosis.” This is not saying enough, the metamorphosis continues...

REPRODUCTION = PRODUCTION

In the word “reproduction”—and in the object that we manipulate under this name—the prefix “re” puts in relief the idea of repetition; re-produce, that is to produce another time in the image of the original, as if it had the power of its own accord to issue “doubles,” as if it was in the nature of these, in spite of all the differences of every kind, to “participate” in the model. Platonist conception and attitude, that the reproduction, above all since it became industrial, puts in question.

In constituting a new ensemble that has its own laws and which involves practically everything since the mass media transform objects, things, ideas, events—something one omits to see when one is concerned only with the technique of printing—in information, that is to say in “reproduction massively distri-

buted," it changes both our conception and our attitude, hence our entire behaviour.

In its number of December 2nd, 1968, *Le Monde* (circulation half a million copies) associated the *Young Girl in a Turban* of Vermeer, not with Vermeer, but with *Perspex* "which is only one example of the innumerable products made by the International Chemical Industries. We have also discovered the polyethylene 'Alkathene,' the reactive colourants 'Procion' and the weed-killers *bipyridyles...*". What is the connection between the work of the Dutch Master so dear to Proust and I.C.I. (International Chemical Industries)? Nothing. But the *reproduction of the work* created one in new functions that emanate from a system of which the principal is no longer the original but the "something which has been, or can be, mass-produced." By virtue of which a work of art like the *Young Girl in a Turban* by Vermeer, and the publicity of any firm or product become compatible, since the one and the other are part of the same system. And one is no longer astonished at the incarnations of the *Gioconda*, on scarves, hoardings, stamps, puzzles, targets, fins, bottoms of aquariums...

There is no simple substitution. The work of mass production entails a breaking down and a building up. On the one hand, the world of the original and the world of the reproductions tend to remain parallel, to maintain their autonomy; on the other their frontiers become smaller, the worlds interfere, they impinge on each other, they overlap. Everything that is based on allegiance to the original collapses; distinctions become elastic, forms are menaced by a permanent metamorphosis. Even the best established classifications waver; such as the distinction between painting and sculpture, or the distinction, as we shall see, between art and non-art. Our strongest ideas lose their hold. Reproduction is no longer simply—one begins to suspect—a phenomenon of repetition, as the belief would have it, which draws its tenets from etymology or habit; it corresponds to a group of operations as numerous and complex as the techniques which it uses, the ends that it pursues, the functions that it sets up and which make it a *production*, which engenders in its turn modalities as numerous and complex as these techniques (of manufacture, of distribution, of consumption), these ends, these functions.

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It is thus, to take a single example, that is born the "multiple" of which the importance is, not only that it does not refer to an original but also that it abolishes the very idea that such an original can exist, each example including, in its singularity, a reference to the other examples, uniqueness and multiplicity ceasing to oppose each other, just as "creation" and "reproduction" cease to be antinomic. The alternative original/reproduction is not exclusive; it is transformed into a dialectical ambiguity whose terms operate by successive stage in progressively creating a new operational field.

CONTACT, SHORT-CIRCUIT, CONTACT

Where art is concerned, the ever-increasing practice of reproduction has considerable effects. On the one hand, it produces an *adjustment* to which one pays no attention, but which exists, when one passes from the reproduction to the original; on the other, it produces a new adjustment, but in an opposite direction, when, having left the original, after one has stopped considering it, one regards afresh the reproduction and then one realizes the difference. It would, however, be wrong to believe in a simple neutralisation of operations modelled on retinal adaptation. Experience shows, on the contrary, that very often it is the first fixation that carries the day, that of the reproduction. The question is then not of a rectification or adjustment, but of an operation by means of which the reproduction builds, at least partially, the image that we make of the works and of art in general.

But, for a long time, contact had taken place between the originals, relatively few in number, that one saw, and the recollection that one had of them, either in the memory, or by means of oral and written descriptions, of engravings and sketches. Nowadays it is not that the verbal intermediary has disappeared, but it is outstripped by that of the reproduction that can take infinitely varied forms: outlines, reproductions in colour, photographs, transparencies, television programmes, etc. The work passes to the spectator through a series of stages, which were chiefly verbal for a long time, and later increasingly visual

stages which create communication, but which, even as they create it, disturb it. Whatever it be, the intermediary carries always a kind of "noise," even—one realises now—the verbal intermediary. But in a world which makes of the plastic reproduction an ever-increasing phenomenon, the "noise" implied by this means of communication tends less and less to be considered as a perturbation; it tends more and more, in imitation of that which is produced for verbal communication, to be an integral part of the meaning. Thus it is less astonishing on reflection that the study of artistic expressions—we have incidentally made this remark à propos of Emile Mâle—had put the accent for so long on the "mental approach," the verbal technique operating by means of concepts that prove to be particularly suited to this approach. All technique then implies a mode of apprehension which is proper to it and which constructs its object at the same time that it operates.

In our day lines of communication are multiplied. Ceasing to resort to the sole verbal intermediary, they become responsible for messages that, in the form of reproductions, elaborate, jointly with verbal communication, a collection of new connections: the assassination of Robert Kennedy was not only an affair of words, it was equally made of little black and white dots that make the web of the press photo (if they are expanded, the picture dissolves), just as, on the television, it was the Brownian movement of millions of tiny dots: "...one believes that recording methods serve above all to conserve, to imprint, to perpetuate 'high Fidelity,'" writes Pierre Schaeffer. "The real importance of electro-acoustics is that it permits one to *make* sounds or again to fix natural sounds, to *repeat* them, to *perpetuate* and to *transform* them." And he adds: "It is by dint of accumulating noises in the studio, seeking dramatic effects, that I became conscious that they exceeded the texts they were supposed to illustrate. They began to speak of music." It is the same thing for the techniques of recording plastic arts, although very few people have realized this. But the Cubist collages, the Dada assemblages, the "Merz" of Schwitters, and the art of today, so often disconcerting, makes it an urgent task to reflect on the integration of the "noises" of the new techniques of knowledge which work out beyond the traditional processes of oral or written language.

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A NEW PERCEPTION

In transforming our ways of perceiving and communicating the reproduction transforms our consciousness and our idea of existence. In front of the reproduction of the *Gioconda* I know that I am concerned with an *indirect* perception since the original at which it is aimed is elsewhere. But, simultaneously, I cannot deny that I am concerned with a *direct* perception, since I hold this between my hands. According to the attitude I take I notice then that, at times, the vectorial function has the upper hand (its effect is to break up the reproduction as such and to replace it by the mental picture of the original), while at others the reproduction becomes a material thing between my hands, paper, cardboard, fabric, that I can cut up, crumple, pin up on the wall, use as packing... (and whose effect is to dissipate, at least to some extent, the "aim" of the original).

My sentiment of the time becomes modified in its turn. When I listen to a record or look at a reproduction, a film or a television programme, I put myself in a *delayed* perception. But when I say that it is delayed I am placing the relationship between reproduction and original in a privileged position; as far as the reproduction itself is concerned, the experience is *immediate*. The framework of temporal reference changes then according to the attitude I adopt. It is the same with the space. Each original work occupies—this is a truism—a special place: the pictures of Vermeer are, some in Holland, others in England, more in France, still others in the United States etc. To obtain first-hand experience of the originals I must undertake a series of successive journeys. To which the reproductions oppose the fact, today banal, that *All Vermeer* (to take again a title that Malraux has given to the school), but also *All Giotto*, *All Masaccio* can be put under the eyes of anyone whomsoever, at a relatively moderate price, and can be found on a shelf in the library.

A world that until recently was still based on the one hand on the perception of things, on their direct presence, on their peculiar contact, on the other, on the pre-eminence of the concept that assures an organised distribution of objects, ideas, categories, is giving way increasingly to a field of permanent exchanges of which

industrial reproduction doesn't cease multiplying the forms, from the magazine to the television image: "The logical or illogical connection between one thing and another no longer constitute a satisfying subject for the artist... (he) is part of a close and uncontrolled continuity that has neither beginning nor end, depending on a decision or an action on his part," declares the American painter Rauschenberg whose "combine-paintings" mix aerographs, photographs, drawings, collages, bits of things or complete objects (cock, chair, cushion). Whoever wants to study the artistic expressions is embarking on what can be called, without playing with words, a "combine-study."

A NEW FORM OF METHODOLOGICAL DOUBT: THE JOURNEY.

Reduced to its simplest form, understanding establishes itself when a communication passes between a broadcaster and a receiver, a preliminary condition being that the second must be governed by the first. On the scale of society the system includes a variable number of broadcasters-receivers (we are all at once one and the other), the messages circulating according to the itineraries worked out as networks that allow the group to take notice of, to find out about, to undertake, to accumulate and to organise a culture that is, according to Ralph Linton "An organised ensemble of learned behaviour and results of behaviour, whose components are shared and transmitted by the members of a particular society."

Summarily the organisation of behaviour is achieved by means of signals that the child learns to handle at school and that adults elaborate into codes to meet their needs. Thus the linguistic code established concepts (each of which corresponds to a carving out), or judgments (that are chains of ideas governed by logic), a complex and delicate apparatus which enables the members of a group, of a society, to communicate their experiences, analysing and articulating their thought, explaining their attitudes, their choices, on the scale of values that one meets in all the cultures of which the implantation assures and demonstrates at the same time stability, homogeneity and continuity.

Today the journey offers a permanent challenge to this since it

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has become possible to travel from one end of the planet to the other, since the lowering of air fares brings an ever higher number of travellers (to which are joined, thanks to tariffs applied to groups "with common interests," an unlimited number). Eight to ten million passengers annually at Orly! At first the phenomenon of air travel seems to form part of a chain of evolution from the litter to the horse, from there to the carriage, to the train, to the aeroplane with propellers, from there to the jet aircraft... A specious idea insofar as we are invited to imagine that, irrespective of the mode of locomotion and speed, it is the same man who travels, the same nature he sees. For though voyages began in times of great antiquity it is somewhat distressing to note that most of the travellers showed signs of an ethnocentricity that is amusingly illustrated by the story told by Jean-Paul Roux: "In 670 the Frankish bishop Arculf saw a pillar in Jerusalem that gave no shadow: he might have deduced that it was midday. Far from it. He found confirmation of something that he knew—a proof that the Holy City was the centre of the earth." With rare exceptions, and even in our day, it is by function of *his* culture, *his* judgment, of *his* surroundings that the traveller reasons (and with the idea that he has formed of *reason*); in his luggage the traveller carries first of all his cultural equipment.

In our day—such is the change—a journey is no longer the privilege of isolated individuals, or occasionally grouped, using means which, even brought to perfection, remain subject to relatively difficult and expensive conditions; it has become a collective enterprise, on a planetary scale, organised for massive movements according to itineraries always more numerous and that weave round the globe a permanent network in which is established for the first time an uninterrupted circulation of "broadcaster-receivers." Beside communications founded on tradition and conforming to established structures, the modern journey favours unexpected meetings, uncertain contacts that, multiplying subtle irregularities, alter transmission and make us aware at the same time of the conventional character of our culture and of the firm establishment of others. It is thus that it seems to us when we experience chance and sometimes tiny events, that our language, our habits, our ways of thinking and of acting, rest on postulates, on attitudes, inclinations that have

nothing absolute and that include a number of *presuppositions* (truth itself can be one of them, a simple guarantee provided by a system that has previously taken the precaution to ensure its closure...). Our knowledge establishes itself on the basis of a “pre-fabricated” view that “tele-guides” our understanding: “Columns and walls were decorated with reliefs and frescoes...” one reads, for example, à propos of Egyptian tombs. But for those who go to Egypt and visit the Valley of the Kings—annually a trip for thousands of tourists, it becomes evident that the term “decorated” is wrong, that it is a fallacious concept which, tied to *our idea* of decoration, to that of accessories that one can have in a dwelling, a room or a piece of furniture to make it prettier or more agreeable brings us to a completely bourgeois situation without any connection with that of Egypt where the funeral painting plays a role intimately tied to the survival of the dead. For the first time “classic” understanding, our understanding, is invited to refuse its titles and its presuppositions, to make use of the tools, to uncover the conceptual apparatus that assures the function of a culture. Here one is invited to doubt the terminology that is employed, to question the value-judgments on which it rests and which, because they are self-evident under certain cultural conditions, at least because they are almost unanimously agreed, escape examination.

But for those who descended the tomb of Menes or Ramses, and for those for whom the idea of “decor” has become, *from experience*, an impropriety, it is impossible to subscribe without examination to the excellence so often affirmed, of the painting of the New Empire: “...a concept and a translation *more perfect* and *taken further* of the beauty of the human form. To the lengthening of the form already pointed out, that gives *more elegance* to the silhouette, is added the search for the *most beautiful* anatomic form, the *most harmonious* muscles and at the same time *well covered* and *fuller* of which one sees the freedom in spite of the refinement of the delineation.”¹ In creating conditions of new experience, travel helps us to discover that most

¹ The italics are mine. It is necessary to specify that I bear no personal grudge against the author of these lines. It is the fashion of judging which this text demonstrates that I dispute, an attitude that one finds commonly in many histories of art.

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value-judgments are less *en rapport* with that which they designate than with him who uses them, or rather with the cultural whole that serves as reference.

We are therefore invited to start by revising the verbal instrument of which the conceptual culture has made, in our western civilization, its instrument of choice. Speech, the organisation of the control of speech into definite disciplines, results from "economic" needs to give account of an experience, to condense it in order to preserve and transmit it. We are still concerned with a strategic construction that allows, by the play of symbolic representations, numerous and complex operations to be effected which, without this technique, require long and costly manoeuvres (how many gestures and mimes are required simply to say that it rained the day before).

The linguistic economy that has ruled for thousands of years, and which, since the invention of writing, still more since the invention of printing, is at the root of all forms of study, is not guaranteed complete effectiveness, nor definite output as a result. Though symbolisation, once established, saves time and trouble, its constitution involves a laborious process that concerns both the structure of speech and that of the group. The process is "economically" feasible so long as the "cultural ground" remains relatively stable. But as soon as the means of transport are increased one begins to ask oneself whether the trouble and the time required for the journey is not inferior to those required for traditional speech. This suggests that one of the surest advantages of speech is today threatened or at least under competition. The "best" communication is no longer necessarily the privilege of the "best language". Modern travel has revealed, on the one hand, that traditional knowledge is based on presuppositions, on the other, that the efficiency and the "rentability" of this counts above all for the sedentary; lastly that the other means of communication, and consequently of knowledge, are involved of today.

Photographic apparatus, for example, with which so many tourists are equipped as a portable instrument, and of which all declare—publicity echoes this—that it responds to their need to conserve the memory of interesting things, or those that they like. With reason; but is there not, beyond these documentary and

sentimental functions, the fact that the camera in capturing pictures that have not yet been symbolized by speech, or that can't be symbolized, and which, by their "wildness," produce in the tourist a kind of stress, is capable of restoring the balance in favour of the activity that goes with the "photographic ritual." A regulating function the more necessary since air travel that carries us in a few hours across oceans, and in a few days from one continent to another, appears once more as an initiatory itinerary and regenerates communication along the route of which it is at once the place and the inspiration.

INFORMATION, A CONDITION OF ARTISTIC "PRODUCTION"

The "broadcasting stations of artistic expression" are today legion. Devoted once upon a time only to the preservation of the past, museums now present regularly exhibitions of old and modern works. National and international circuits are formed. Certain institutions make a speciality of "export" (such as the Museum of Modern Art of New York). Others, like the Smithsonian Foundation organise real circuits. The *circulation of works of art* has become an unprecedented phenomenon "activated" by periodical confrontations such as *Biennales* of Venice, of Sao Paulo, the *Biennale* of Youth in Paris, or those that have a particular bias: the *Biennale* of Printing at Ljubljana, of Posters at Warsaw, of Tapestry at Lausanne... Certain museums even play the role of promoters, especially the *Stedelijk* Museum in Amsterdam which aims at a permanent presentation through numerous exhibitions.

In this way a complex web is organised involving transport companies, insurance firms, and printers; in turn the art galleries take part, more particularly the "pilot galleries."²

² Very numerous, the galleries can be distinguished diagrammatically between:

(1) The "resale galleries" that, with differing worth, concentrate on the sale of known works, old and new.

(2) The "garage-galleries", according to the expression of Raymonde Moulin, who rent their walls, sometimes very expensively, to artists wishing to show, and who are too often managed by profiteers.

(3) The "pilot-galleries", as I suggested they should be called at the time of creation in 1963 at Lausanne of the "First International Salon of Pilot Galleries."

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“Op” art was not born one fine morning from the will of some solitary genius, nor by some sovereign decree, still less by collective illumination; it was born of the efforts of the first constructivist artists, and the equally sustained effort of certain galleries that took the risk of specialising (In France the first place was the Denise René Gallery). Equally, the American “pop” that imbues our environment so strongly, has certain definite places of origin, the galleries of Sidney Janis and Castelli in New York, and the Sonnabend Gallery in Paris. By its work of research, by the discoveries it has made and the faithfulness of its orientation, the “pilot gallery” arouses the interest of the critics, gets hold of collectors on whom, though one tends to forget this fact, the advent of a form of artistic expression largely depends; in short, it creates a movement in which is constituted the “art-that-is-being-created.” He who is concerned with the study of art, be he a historian, trained in the so-called scientific disciplines, has no longer the right to ignore how a new expression “emerges,” how it gains reputation, by what complex roads it becomes that which can be called a “historic reality.” It is a phenomenon that is too often overlooked, and of which it is impossible to analyse all the factors. However, there is one that plays a decisive role today and that one can express as follows: every artistic manifestation is hung on news that one wants to increase more and more, more and more urgently, which is more and more pregnant and which cannot be ignored. It is a factor that it would be wrong to confuse with publicity, even if this arises from it. News in the sense that we use it here, is devoted to the diffusion of “happenings” which, although they have a commercial side, offer a “cultural” character sufficient to take on the most importance.³

The news is conveyed by different means: invitation cards, a varnishing (with or without cocktails), sudden impulse, rumor, gossip, first showing for which one organises a press show (accounts of exhibitions, notes or critical articles) who take photo-

³ It would be appropriate to study this problem to see the connection between the socio-economic-aesthetic enterprise like the art gallery and the means of information, official, semi-official and private, the result being that however uncertain or disturbing a work of art may be, it cannot be confused with a commercialised product even in the most expensive salerooms.

graphs (portraits of the artist, reports, interviews), the cinema circuit when it is a question of a star (Picasso, Dali, Buffet...), or an isolated happening (Mathieu loosed on a canvas at the opening of the exhibition); the radio circuits (interviews, round table forums, debates), and television (news flashes, reportings, meetings with the artist, etc.); the publishers' circuit (catalogues, monographs, sets of books, entries in dictionaries, chapters in histories of art). The "artistic enterprise" (this is really the word of which we have need to express the interaction between the creation, the presentation and the spreading of art) is thus organically linked to news. And it must be repeated that victims as we are of conceptual habits, that information is not "one," that it passes, not only through different circuits, by also by different channels: written speeches for the press, sound for the radio, pictures and sound for television, for the cinema; that each of these channels has a different coverage, narrow for art reviews, wide, even very wide for the mass media; of which the *period and degrees of impregnation* are often in inverse ratio to the surfaces covered, that the *speed of news* varies; radio and television can act directly; the newspaper needs 24 hours or less to publish an account, on condition that topical news doesn't change the make-up of the pages; a review article requires several months; the impact differs also according to whether one is looking at a still (news photograph, flash, with or without caption, caricature), or a television programme that has need of continuous animation, or of an essay that is addressed purely to the reflexions of the reader... Whatever one thinks of McLuhan, his famous axiom "The medium is the message", is verified every day; the news is never reduced to a transmission pure and simple; the newspaper, the magazine, the radio, the cinema, the television each construct a different image of reality—indeed different news—each medium having at the same time an organisation, a means and an activity of its own.

Like the cyclotrons that accelerate particles to come to the end of the most resistant atomic nucleus, the mass media accelerate messages and we are submitted to a "news bombardment" (if I may use this expression) which, even if it wasn't their intention, puts to the proof the most stable cultural structures. For a long time, a "time lag" was thought to be a

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necessary condition of reflexion (this is still the case). As a result, the historian has long guarded against venturing into the present—it was an affair of dignity as much as of reason—. But today when news appears less an extension than a reorganisation of acquired fact, today when dissemination puts into question not only the contents, but the principles; today when balance sheets give place more and more to readjustments and periodical statistics; today it is the parameters, ever more numerous, that require new techniques, such as those of polls and enquiries as well as ordinator, it seems difficult to maintain the “objectivity”, called scientific, within the limits of the past. That is why teaching, traditional instrument of the elaboration and the transmission of knowledge, appears to us under a new guise, in particular as a *slow system of diffusion* that the parallel existence of multiple circuits of information, fast and massive often show up as inadequate. The short-circuits, the break-downs from which the “didactic machine” suffers today show that it is designed for a relatively stable environment, but badly adapted for modern communication. In the field of experience that forms itself gradually as the information is established and *vice versa*, the objects of study change in the same way as our ways of thinking and acting. Even the structure of knowledge is transformed.

How can one not see that certain cities today play a “hot” role in the world: New York, Paris, London. It is not that they have necessarily the most artist creators, nor the best (in spite of the greater numbers); it is that the artistic creation is increasingly inseparable from the channels that bring it to notice, broadcast it and give it standing (press, radio, television, etc.,) and of which it must be seen that today they are an integral part of the “happening”. Indeed, everything takes place as if the public conscience was “activated” in certain places characterized by their wealth of “creation-information.” But the energy that is produced there tends to flow away the faster in that the field of information is wide and that the transmissions are quicker, the entropy, if one can say it, using new forms the more quickly in that they are more widely propagated. Thus the “news quantity”, which is the least probable measure, and which denotes then the unforeseeable, tends to become a factor of the creation

and the artistic appreciation: it is the more unexpected forms that "valorize" themselves under our eyes, as is "valorized" the search for something new, unseen. Common sense objects in vain, the movement does not know delay and the cries of alarm of the holders of tradition: "there is no more, art is being distorted..." are swept along with the tide. The art "that is being distorted" may well be art that is changing its nature.

Anyone who has been a member of an international committee cannot fail to reflect on this, although the phenomenon is so insidious that it is less suited to reflection than to a kind of impulse to which the most critical spirits yield as to an infection. Finally, it comes to this: on the one hand the committee, whether they want to or not, whether they acknowledge it or not, take into account the factor of novelty, hence the "amount of information"; on the other, they continue to maintain and to judge—their deliberations bear witness to this and there can be no doubt of their good faith—that quality, aesthetic value alone are decisive. Ambiguous behaviour that brings to light the fact that today quality and value no longer detach themselves only on a basis of art stabilised by an accepted aesthetic, but that they participate in the course of an experience. The artistic expressions count and thus exist not only by function of the intrinsic virtue that they are supposed to have, but in connection with the field of information in which the act of "creativity" appreciates according to its degree of probability or unpredictability. Whether one deplors this situation or not, it is ours. Its ambiguity is not resolved by reason, it requires that one faces it by adopting a new attitude.

A GLANCE AT SOME CONSEQUENCES

The first consequence is the difficulty of employing the concept of art because it is always necessary to have a word to describe a common group of preoccupations, an *object*, one must conclude that we have arrived at the point where, behind the word art, today we cease to see the same things. All study that holds to the concept courts the risk of being still-born, just as every definition of the ontological type that pretends to arrive at the "essence" of the picture, the sculpture, etc. is always inadequate.

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Indeed, it seems more and more obvious that the *body* of the works on which one exercises reflection cannot without difficulty establish itself outside the concept of art “in the process of being created, the means of presentation, of reproduction, of distribution; it follows that the *body* not only remains open, but that it can always be called in question and then that every attempt to reduce it to a norm is revealed as equally inappropriate.

These remarks about the word *art* can be applied by extension to the terms of aesthetics and criticism which, it is increasingly clear, are constituted in the field established by tradition and teaching. All terminology is a group of concepts, of constructions linked, not only to a predetermined historic structure, but to a particular attitude. Nowadays, branches of study which neglect or fail to review the tools of their trade, come to grief at this point. As Bridgman observes, our attitude in regard to the concept has changed. “In general a concept means nothing more than an *ensemble of operations*, the concept is synonymous with the *ensemble of its corresponding operations*.” Controlled for a long time by tradition and teaching in a relatively stable and unitarian form used chiefly by philosophy and history of art, terminology today tends to be less satisfied with definitions than determined to establish a connection between the operations implied by the terms and the definite situations to which they apply.

In our day the “art object” has become multidimensional, from where the proliferation of ways of approaching them: beside history of art, sociology, aesthetics, historical or scientific, iconography duplicated by iconology, criticism, or rather criticisms of which the one is inspired by classical models, the other by models which, apparently without connection with art, without connection one must add with the art that one studied previously—reveals itself particularly fruitful, such as that taken from linguistics, psychoanalysis, ethnology, cybernetics and by means of which are produced the phenomena of freedom and of regroupment in a new orientation. Analysis of the symbolic type, which seemed definitely established finds itself today in competition with, or at the very least accompanied by a formal analysis. At the point at which we have arrived one can imagine that various other possibilities are imminent, some already on

the way to be realised... "The complexity of a system is in no way the function of the number of the constituent elements... but of the number of circumstances that the system can apprehend which amounts to the quantity of information in the system". To the extent that this point of view, put forward by Robert van Egten, is true, one can ask oneself if the "art system", or that which we call by this name, is not named thus to show us progressively the number of unknown circumstances, or at least unsuspected, like those about to come into existence in the field of experience generalised by the mass media. The time is perhaps not so far off where our children, visiting a museum, will have the feeling that the pictures are a sort of television screen of which the image is fixed, a feeling on which they will construct a knowledge of which our "pre-TV" generation cannot have any idea. An extravagant assumption! But what should we think of a man of the Middle Ages or the Renaissance, or even of the 18th century who would see us entering a church with the Blue Guide in place of the Missal, to admire the works of art, as if the art had no connection with the intended function of the place, the "visit" replacing the Mass, the stars of the Guide ousting those of God?

Be that as it may, henceforward it seems impossible to keep aloof from mass information and above all to remain apart from this. It is that which the word "study", with all that is associated with it in our minds, in our behaviours, in our social habits, still hides too often. One imagines in effect that knowledge works itself out and transmits itself according to an "academic style" that leads us in three steps from primary school to secondary and from there to senior school, then to higher education, where the Scholars reign. This is to forget that all study, however pure, basic, disinterested it may be, always implies, besides the theoretical aspect that we propose or envisage, another aspect, or rather a world in which live, suffer, collaborate, fight, join together authors, inventors, publishers, "Masters of thought", "Master-broadcasters", "pupil-listeners"... A world where the institutions (schools, examinations, diplomas) are themselves part of the social, economic and political system. Insofar as one reduces the changes of the means of presentation, of reproduction, of distribution of art to an academic problem, to

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the "aspect" that is ordinarily envisaged and remembered, one advances towards a conclusion that consists of establishing, once the causes have been isolated, that such consequences result: the revision of cutting out, of methods and of principles for example. But the step that we have taken leads us to consider that the knowledge or the study is in fact an *enterprise* that puts into action simultaneously ideas, means, men, things, institutions. In the same way examination of new circuits of information (reproductions, travel, mass media, to limit ourselves to the three that we have already discussed) makes us see that the other channels exist as well as those of tradition; it shows us also that the general field of information is an enterprise (all information represents a price, and, as well as theoretical problems and techniques, involves considerations of people, of prestige, of politics...). As long as a relatively stable system prevailed, "study" hardly brought into question the system that itself furnished its own means of regulation even as changes took place. The changes that happen today (and that happen before our eyes) break this balance: official knowledge is no longer indistinguishable from knowledge alone; the authority of the State is questioned as is that of the élite: in creating a field of general information our age substitutes for the "forum" and the "salon" the "laboratory of public communication." The "student", master, pupil, research worker, cannot be a pure intellectual any more, he cannot be disassociated any more from the elaboration and the diffusion of knowledge. Whether he wants to or not, *he participates in the business*, he becomes an impresario, for want of which he is dedicated to secret societies. All analysis of knowledge today carries an ethical dimension. It remains to prepare a new law of study that must be applied, of study considered as action under modern conditions of experience. It is impossible here to deal with the problem: we ought, for example, to examine the way in which study is to be modified to take into account the formation of people to be responsible for the mass media; those responsible for traditional study hardly interest themselves in them or even notice them. There must be a *desire to change* very different from the habitual "conclusion" that one expects. Let us now outline it.

It is true one can object that tradition has never been absolute; it has always been subject to changes, in short, it evolves. But what does the term evolution signify? On the one hand that transformations operate in a relatively stable direction; on the other, that they operate gradually, by little variations that do not modify the general course. The use of this concept is tied culturally to an attitude; the object of study remains relatively stable so that the study itself, its principles, its methods, can keep up subject to some modifications as changes occur. At the beginning of the century one could and did claim, that art was evolving: after Impressionism that broke up forms there was the reaction of Cubism that reinstated them... the pattern of the evolution involved explanatory sub-sections, like that of action-reaction.

But today art does not suggest simply a change of subject-matter (the gibes provoked by Courbet's *Stone-Breakers* is a long time ago!), the subject has ceased to be a decisive element. Abstraction has transformed specific modalities, the use of tested techniques, the respect for an apprenticeship provided by a school, or a master, in short, the general material and social conditions in which one achieves the rank of artist, these very conditions are questioned, sometimes denied, to such an extent that the title of "painter", for example, figures as a suspect together with that of "The School of Fine Arts" (not to mention the now defunct *Prix de Rome*)! Artists are no longer content with a clientele; even if they continue to sell their works, and remain attached to collectors, they try to emancipate themselves from the aesthetic-economic (or economic-aesthetic) system to establish new connections with society. Again, new publics are born, still confused, lacking cohesion, often ephemeral—or at least as such we judge them by our traditional criteria—but to which mass communications do not cease to give impulses, feelings, the outlines of structures.⁴

How can one not now understand that the basis of study

⁴ It behoves students to study just this stage, provided that they have first of all learnt that the problem poses itself, and how and where it poses itself.

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must be revised? To judge is no longer equivalent to applying criteria, such as the beautiful or the ugly, which allowed one to judge between art and non-art. The alternative reveals itself as invalid. The very idea of criterion is put in question, as are the principles of judgment. This is not exercised superlatively any more on completed works, or which are in the tradition of completed works, that is to say which correspond to established aesthetic and critical systems; this is exercised more and more on the "works" (one is obliged to use the quotation marks) which are in the process of creation. "Experimental art" which is at once denial of all value, myth, idea, image belonging to the cultural system (which is effectively illustrated by the term contestation), and desire, will, intention to demonstrate "something" in accord with our expectation: "To find a language," wrote Rimbaud, "...if what it brings from *beyond* has form, it gives form; if it is formless it gives formlessness". The cry of the solitary visionary is today the general clamour. Whether it be the question of old masters or modern propositions, one cannot longer fail to see that they are intimately tied to a system of distribution of the mass media, and thus that the new dimensions of experience transform *at once* the object and the manner of knowledge.

"Experimental art" on the one hand, "experimental conditions" of the acquisition and the diffusion of knowledge on the other invite us to establish a judgment itself experimental. It is this that we need to get to the bottom of residual behaviour, by which must be understood the attitude-diagrams that go beyond the historical conditions in which they were valid.

It is this which provides the necessary opening to accept that, once the hierarchy of traditional styles has been abandoned, the distinction of the arts called in question, posters, publicity, magazines, strip cartoons, radio, cinema, television, travel pamphlets, leisure activities, fashion, at once suggest objects, techniques, structures that, apparently without any connection with either art or its study, in fact reveal both to be global socio-cultural events. Like the test pilot on his flight we must learn to guide ourselves taking into account both our movements and the movements that mass culture imposes on our environment today.