Verbalize Visuality and Visualize the Verbal

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Flusser does not start with the spoken language but with cave paintings. From his viewpoint, this is the first step of alienation from the world. The caveman does not perceive the world as it is but a mystical world that is based on simultaneousness. In a picture everything appears at once. And the eye perceives it by circling around its surface.

The second kind of alienation comes into play with the invention of the alphabet. The alphabet merges the two dimensions of the image into one and, thereby, forces the eye to follow a line: ‘Two friends go out for a walk on a sunny day’. In order to make yourself a picture of this phrase, you have to read it, starting with the first word and ending with the last. Whereas the perception of pictures starts and ends with an arbitrary point in the eye’s circle.

Connected to this way of perceiving texts, a new, analytical mode of thinking was introduced that remained within in the philosophy and later, in the Middle Ages, was a privilege of the church. Paradoxically, in the 19th century when everybody became able to read, the texts lost their significance of dominantly presenting the world because too many, partly contradictive texts appeared on the market.

Fortunately, a new code was invented and presented in photography, digital tables and images, movies, traffic signs, etc. But, unfortunately, these images are mostly perceived of as if they represented the world directly, even better than the good old cave paintings. But their ontological status is different. These ‘techno-images’ stand for texts, and texts mean images that present the world. Accordingly, techno-images are not a step back to directly perceiving the world but a step further in the process of alienation from it.

A film codifies a script that codifies an image that codifies the world. You have to be aware of this distinction and be able to switch between the alphabetic mode of thinking and the digital one if you want to control what you are writing in your script. When you ‘imagine’ a scene or sequence, it is based on texts. Try to read your perception that is already codified verbally, and you will discover that its textual side is not the outcome of nowadays’ visuality but its base.

You just have to copy the texts that underlie your perception if you want to project your ideas on the big screen. Discover the verbal stereotypes hidden in your way of seeing the world!