VILÉM FLUSSER Two Approaches to the Phenomenon "Television"

For: "Open Circuits: The Future of Television"

The purpose of the present paper is to submit to discussion some of the possibilities now open to theoreticians of communication, critics and philo sophers to influence the future of Television. The premisses of this paper are as follows: (a) TV is a decisive factor in our cultural situation, and it tends to become even more so in the future. (b) TV, as we now know it, is not like it should be according to its original project. (c) Most of the virtualities dormant in the TV project have not yet been realized, let alone put into practice. (d) Like with most other instruments, there is a process of reification and mythification going on with TV which does not allow us to see the project underlying it clearly. (e) A good method to re-descover the project is to apply to TV what is called the "phenomenological vision". (f) Once that project is redescovered, it is possible, though difficult, to ma- nipulate the phenomenon TV as we now know it, so that it might become more like it should be.

The thesis of this paper is that "phenomenological vision" will reveal the original project behind TV to have been to provide men with a new type of window to look through at the world and to talk through to others. There fore two approaches to the phenomenon offer themselves: TV as a window to look through, and TV as a window to talk through. These two approaches will be discussed theoretically in this paper. Illustrations for how the results of such a theoretical discussion may be put into practice will be offered after the reading of this paper. One will be an illustration how TV can be used as a window to look at Tsai's work. The other will be an illustration of how TV was used as a window to talk through to others during an experiment at C.N.R.O at Hyère in August 73 by Fred Forest and Jean-Philippe Butaud, at which the author was present. The theoretical discussion and the practical illustrations are not meant to be exhaustive ahalyses or instructyions for use, but first sketches and experimental suggestions.

A: Description: The most common form under which TV presents itself at present is as follows: There is a box which stands among the furniture of a private dwelling. This box has a screen on which movie-like pictures appear, and radio-like sounds issue from it, if it is appropriately manipul ated. The manipulation is simple, but the reasons why it works are complex. (The box is, to speak with Moles, a structurally complex but functionally simple system.) In order to see the pictures and hear the sounds the dweller of the room sit around the box in semi-circles. (This is an important form of family structure at present.) The pictures and sounds thus received have a meaning for those who receive them, and so has the box itself. It is

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known to the receivers of those meanings that these messages do not originate in the box, but the true origin of them is not clearly known. The receivers know vaguely that the box is somehow connected through some sort of channel with a place where the messages are being manipulated and broadcast. They know vaguely that this is an expensive process, and that therefore those who finance it must have some sort of interest in it, an interes that must reflect itself in the messages the receivers are getting. But this vague knowledge is suspended during the reception of the messages, and an attitude is assumed by the receivers as if the pictures and sounds issuing from the box were messages from "his world". And this is the meaning of the box for the receivers: it means communication of messages from the world in the direction of private dwellings.

The receivers will distinguish between two types of messages: those that present events of the world, and those that represent events of the world. The first type consists of pictures and sounds that issue more or less directly from the events themselves, and in that sense "mean" those events for the receivers. (This is the case of newsreels and speeches by politicians.) The second type consists of pictures and sounds that issue from phenomena that represent events of the world, and in this second degre sense "mean" those events for the receivers. (This is the case of TV plays and films.) The first type of messages is taken by the receivers to be "true", the second to be "fictitious". But this distinction between presentation and representation is not very clear, nor is it very important, for the following reasons: (a) The pictures and sounds themselves do not allow the distinction, and it is only made by a comment on the message which is itself a TV message. (For instance: The picture of an athlete and of an actor representing an athlete look alike and can be distinguished only through the comment of an announcer who may himself be an actor representing an announcer.) (b) The pictures and sounds have an "artificial" and therefore "fictional" character, whether they present or represent e-vents of the world. (For instance: to watch the landing on the Moon is like watching science fiction, as far as the pictures and sounds are concerned.) (c) The vague knowledge that all messages have been manipulated confers a fictional character to those pictures and sounds that profess to present events of the world. (For instance: a newsreel is vaguely felt to be a film that represents the events it is showing.) (d) The pictures and sounds that obviously represent events are often more perfect than those which present them and therefore look "truer". (For instance: an actor representing a politician often looks "truer" than the politician himself

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on television.) The result is that for the receiver of TV messages the distinction between reality and fiction becomes both difficult and unim portant. The criteria of distinction between messages tend to become e ver less ontological, ("true" or "fictitious"), and ever more esthetic, ("sensational" or "boring").

The pictures and sounds that issue from the box do not betray, either trough their quality or through their message, that they serve a purpose which is in the interest of those who finance their reception, with the exception of commercials. The result is that the receivers are lead,to believe that there are two types of messages: "subjective" ones which aim at provoking a specific type of behavior in the receivers,(as do the commercials), and "objective" ones which seem to aim at inform- ing the receivers or at providing them with esthetic experience, (as do plays and newsreels). Although the believe in the "objectivity" of some of the messages is denied by the vague knowledge of the manipulation of all messages, it is still widely held by the receivers, because it is be ing re-inforced constantly by the pictures and sounds issuing from the box. The fact that all messages provide information and esthetic exper iences only as a means to provoke behavior patterns that are in the in- terest of those who finance them, and that the difference between commer cials and other messages is one of degree, not of kind, tends therefore to be forgotten. One consequence is that the receivers become more or less unconscious tools of those who pay those who manipulate the sounds and the pictures. Another consequence is that the receivers tend to for get the existence of those who pay the manipulaters, and to some extend even the existence of the manipulators, and tend to accept the box itself to be the source of the messages they are receiving. The box thus gains a magic quality, and the messages that issue from it become myth-like.

The box has buttons which allow the receivers a choice of var ious channels, and also to interrupt the flux of the message. This cre- ates the impression of control over the box and of a sort of mechanical freedom. In fact, the choice is highly illusionary, because all avail- able channels serve the same kind of interest, and the possibility to in terrupt the flux is somehow illusionary, because it means to interrupt one of the very few available communications between man and the world. This illusion of control and freedom contributes to the manipulability of the receivers by those who are interested in it.

The box emits messages but does not receive any. Although some of the messages emitted seem to be open to replies by the receivers

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through other channels, (mail, telephone and so forth), such sporadic feed-back does not influence the flux of messages in any decisive way. Therefore the receivers are conditioned to what amounts to passive reception. The result is a passive attitude to the events of the world, accompanied by an illusionary impression of participation, which is due to the constant flow of messages from the box. In fact, this is one of the purposes of the messages: to create the illusion of participation, while guaranteeing passive reception.

There is a great amount of boxes distributed throughout society, and all of them emit the same information. The result is that private dwellings become linked closely to the public sphere and lose their priv acy. On the other hand the public sphere becomes closely linked to priv ate dwellings through millions of univocal channels and loses its dialogical, ("political"), character. (The public man is present in millions of private dwellings, talks to them, but cannot be talked to.) The consequence of the invasion of the private realm by the public, and of the elimination of universal dialogue from the public, is the abolition of the distinction between the private and the public. Since this distinction is the basis of politics, it means de-politisation.

Although this description is incomplete and sketchy, it still permits the follwoing conclusion: (1) The TV box occupied a specific place in private dwellings and provokes a new family structure. (2) It means communication with the world. (3) It makes the distinction between fiction and reality uninteresting, and is thus a powerful instrument for alienation. (4) It provides esthetic criteria of a specific type. (5) It emits models of behavior which are in the interest of those who finance it, either openly or covertly, and the receivers are more or less subject to them. (6) It provides a false sense of freedom. (7) It has a magic character. (8) It does not allow effective feed-back and condit ions the receivers for passivity, while creating the illusion of particip ation. (9) It abolishes the border between private and public, thus tends to eliminate politics and establish totalitarianism.

TV shares many of these characteristics with other mass media, and some are specific to it. But almost none of them were intended by those who projected it as a means of communication. Which means that they are not "necessary", and that TV could become a different sort of means of com munication in the future. This paper will now discuss two of the virtualit ies inherent in the original TV projett, which are covered up by its present form.

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B: <u>To look through TV</u>: The box in the private dwelling just described
emits radio-like sounds and movie-like pictures. This is why it is felt to
be a successor of the radio and the film theater. Of course, there are dif_
ferences which do not allow the TV box to be considered a true synthesis be_
tween radio and film. As a radio, TV offers much less choice and a far more
restricted range of geographic extension. As a film theatre, TV offers far
less perfect pictures. This is why it does not "overcome" its parents, as a
true synthesis should. Nonetheless, some sort of synthesis seems to exist,
and it can be stated as follows: TV distributes films the way radio distrib_
utes its programs, and it is therefore a movie theatre made private. And,
in fact, this is how TV is being as a rule considered by the receivers of
its messages, and handled by those who own it and manipulate it. But this
is not its true essence, if by "essence of a tool" we mean the purpose for
which it was projected.

If we look closely at the box, we can see that its screen is not some
kind of wall, (as it is in movie theatres), but a kind of eye or of window.
It was not meant to be looked at and to provide a spectacle or show, but to
be looked through and to provide a view and a vision. This is an essential
aspect of the box, and it appears in the above description, when it was said
that the box "means" communication with the world. Now this "window essence"
of Tv has not, so far, been duly put into practice, because it was covered
up, deliberatley or not, by the image of the "movie theatre made private".
It is necessary to discuss more closely what is meant by "window essence",
if one wants to try and begin to put it into practice.

A window is, of course, a hole in a wall, but so is a door, and it is
obvious that the two types of hole do not serve the same purpose. The pur-
pose of the wall is to create a private space cut out from the open public
one, what the ancients called a "templum". Thus the wall, (or, more exact-
ly, the four walls), provide man with a shelter in which he may become him-
self again, after having committed himself to the world. But Hegel says that
to find oneself means to lose the world. The door is a hole in the wall the
purpose of which it is to permit a rhythmic human motion: a diastolic phase
in which man leaves himself to commit himself to the world, and a systolic
one in which he comes to himself again without totally losing the world. The
window, however, is a hole in the wall the purpose of which it is to provide
man with a vision of the world which may serve as a map when he will leave
the door to commit himself to the world. Thus the purpose of the window is
linked with the purpose of the door, and that link has a dialectical aspect.
Were it not for the window, the door would lead into chaos, and leaving it

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would be stupid. Were it not for the door, the window would provide a "pure" vision with no practical purpose. The two tools, door and window, must be coordinated. The door is a tool which allows man to transform window visions into practice. The window is a tool which allows man to give his door commitments a meaning. To speak with Kant, the door is a tool of practical reason and the window of theoretical reason, and their coordination is what gives reason its meaning. This is the essence of door and window.

But this is not the whole story. Walls do not only have holes of the type "door" and "window", but also blank surfaces which may be painted over or covered with pictures. And against which libraries can be put up. The paintings and pictures represent window visions and projects for door commitments. So do the books in the library, only in a different sort of codification. The movie theatre is a late development of wall painting. This is its essence, and there are its theoretical and practical problems. The TV was projected to be a new type of window. It was meant to provide men with maps of the world to be used in subsequent commitments. This is what the word "television" means: a better vision than is provided by conventional windows. To use TV as a kind of wall painting is to abuse it.

Let us ask how TV may become an improvement on conventional windows. The obvious answer is that it allows a wider vision. One can see more things of the world through it. Not only things that are too far for conventional windows, but also things that are too small, or too ephemerous, or whose motion is too slow for conventional windows. This is an important improvement, and if it were put fully into practice it would certainly change profoundly man's vision of the world, and in consequence his practice. But this obvious answer does not touch the truly radical aspect of that improvement. TV is a window that may be handled in a way conventional windows can not. This point demands a somwhat more careful discussion.

The conventional window is a fixed hole by which the stream of events flows by, and it allows man to view that segment of the flux that corresponds to the shape of the window. That shape cannot be manipulated. It is, to speak with Kant, given "a priori". It forces all events "categorically" into itself, and the vision that results from conventional windows is one of a world that flows through the shape of a window. TV, on the other hand, althou the shape of its screen be just as fixed as the shape of conventional windows, has a suppleness which allows it to approach events, step back from them, look at them from various angles, and accompany them in their motion. Obviously this is an improvement, and TV vision of the world is "categorically" different from conventional window vision. It is a new sort of "theoretical reason"

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But here lies the true problem. The basic techniques of manipulating TV were not developped within TV itself, but taken over from films. And in films the same techniques have a different purpose. There they serve, not as categories of perception of events, (as they should do in TV), but as categories of representation of events on a wall. In order to understand this difference, we must first try to show why films are improvements on wall paintings.

Wall paintings are stabilized representations of one single fleeting view from the conventional window. (Although that window may open on the transcendent, like in Byzantine paintings, or the uncosncious, like in surealist paintings). This is what is meant by "image": a scene taken out of its temporal context, made timeless. But paintings are also spaceless, in the sense that they translate a vision which was felt to have three dimensions onto a plane surface. And this is also what is menat by "image": a scene taken out of its spacial context. Images are representations of the world in the sense that they substitute a space-time reality through timeless and sapeceless symbols, namely through fixed two-dimensional symbols.

For thousands of years there existed another method to represent space-time reality through symbols, namely writing. One of the differences between the two methods is in the organisation of the symbols. Images show their meaning instantly, but letters only if one follows their lianar sequence. Which means that the reading of images involves a compact and circular time, and the reading of letters a diachronical sequence. But there is another important difference between the two methods. Images translate the time-space reality they mean on surfaces of walls. Which is to say that they intend always to represent it. Writing may do the same, and is then called "fictional writing". But it may also symbolize time-space reality as a kind of map, and it is then an empoverished transcription of window vision. It is then called "scientific and so on" writing. Therefore books can be either pictures or windows.

Now films are improvements on paintings in the sense that they organize images in sequences similar to sequences of letters. Which means that their reading involves and synthesizes both image-lke and book-like time forms. They are a synthesis of paintings and books of fiction. Therefore they represent events "better" than do either paintings or books of fiction. The techniques mentioned above are the result of this synthesis, they are a kind of "picture writing". They are techniques of representation. Tnaks to them fiction has become more effective, richer and it offers more openings for esthetic realisations. The film is essentially a new art form.

The same techniques, if applied to TV, should however have a different purpose. Here too books should be absorbed into image, but not the painting-like books of fiction. The window-like books of conception should be absorbed

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into the window-like TV images of perception. The same techniques that in films serve to synthetize surface and line for the representation of the world, shoukd serve in TV to synthetize surface and line for the presentation of the world. They should not provide men, (as they do in films), with new categories of ethetic experience, but with new categories of understanding. TV was projected to be, primarily, not a new art form, but a new form of seeing and understanding the world.

Two things must be stated immediately, to avoid a misunderstanding of the position of this paper. One is that there is no intention to deny the close and obvious link between representation and presentation, between art and knowledge. One cannot exist, obviously, without the other, and every art has obviously an epistemological dimension, and every science an esthetic dimension. The other thing to be said immediately is that there is no inten tion to deny the close link between film and television. TV ows much to the movies, and there are newsreels shown in movie theatres as there are movies shown in TV programs. This is as it should be. Also: good films, to be works of art, must increase our knowledge of the world, and good TV vision, if it comes about in the future, must provide esthetic experiences to its viewers. The point this paper tries to drive is this: At the present stage of its de- velopment TV must try to free itself from film influence, if it is ever to become what it should be. At this stage to stress the fundamental differences between the two seems to be more to the point than to stress the obvious simi larities that unite them. In short: TV must be seen as a window through which one may look, among other things, at paintings, but not as a painting. This is important, because in its present stage it tends to transform everything it looks at into a painting, and thus becomes a second-hand and bad quality movie theatre which provides false esthetic experience and false knowledge.

Let us re-state the problem. TV is potentially an improvement on traditional windows, not only because it allows us to see through it more things and different types of things, but also, and chiefly, because it pro- vides us with new categories to see them. These categories can be achieved through techniques that were elaborated in film making, but are different from the categories that apply in film making. They have to do with the syn thesis of line and surface, (like in films), but they should serve a new kind of seeing and understanding the world. Let us now try and see how they may achieve this purpose.

We have, at present, two means, (or, as one now says, "media"), to look at the events of the world. Traditional windows and printed letters. The vision through traditional windows is growing ever less important for

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its narrowness, which is a pity. Because windows usually have doors close by, so that window vision is easily followed by door commitment. Not so with printed letters. These window-like media, (like the press, magazines and books), which provide a far wider vision than do traditional windows, do not make it easy to find any doors through which readers might commit themselves to the world. Also, they provide a different sort of vision. Traditional window vision is felt to be immediate, (although on analysis it can be shown to be the result of complex mediation by the senses and so forth). The vision provided by printed letters is being obviously mediated by those letters. This is obvious, because we must learn how to decypher them before we can use them, but need do nothing of that sort when looking through a traditional window. The result of this double vision of the event we have can be stated as follows:

The immediate vision of the events provided by traditional windows can be called "perception". It has the structure of windows, which means the structure of a surface. There fore to perceive events is to be able to imagine them, and what we see thus is an imaginable world. The vision of the events provided through the mediation of letters can be called "con ception". It has the structure of writing, which means of lines that follow each other. Therefore to conceive events is to be able to order them in sequences, and what we see thus is a logically ordered world. There is a growing abyss between perception and conception. The number of perceived events remains more or less constant, (given the narrowness of traditional windows), but the number of conceived events grows constantly, (given the linear and "discoursive" character of writing). Therefore the world we live in becomes ever less imaginable. Since, however, imagination is felt to be the form of immediate vision, the world we live in becomes ever more abstract. This is the reason why the events as they appear through printed letters do not seem to concern us as much as they do if they can be imagined, and why newspapers for instance do not lead easily to doors for commitment. They provide maps of the world which are felt to be too abstract.

This the media of printed letters try to overcome by inserting illus trations into their texts, island of bi-dimensionality in a flow of lienar sequence. A photograph of a street scene in a newspaper, or a sketch of a molecular structure in a book on biology is intended to allow the reader to imagine what he is conceiving through reading letters. But these two examples show a fundamental difference. The photograph invites the reader to recall that the letters of the newspaper are transcriptions of traditio nal window vision. The sketch however shows the reader that written discourse has exceeded traditional widow vision, and that it now conceives of

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events that can no longer be seen through traditional windows. This differ ence means that some written texts can fall back on traditional imagination, and others have to take recourse to a new sort of imagination.

But be it traditional or new, it does not work well through illustrat ions inserted in written texts, because there is no integration of line and surface. The text so to speak flows around the pictures, and the reader still has a double vision of the world. He cannot fully relate the picture to the text, and this has a structural reason. The text consists of symbols which are point-like and form lines, and it is thus that it "conceives" of the world. The illustrations represent space-time events as timeless and flat surfaces, and are therefore not really window-like, but more like wall paintings. As a result the text shows the events as conceived processes, and the illustrations represent them as fictions. Instead of making the vision more concrete through imagination, (as they pretend to do), the illus trations confer on the texts a fictional character, which is an important aspect of mass media like magazines and posters. In short: newspapers, ma- gazines and posters are unsatisfactory windows, because structurally, (and for many other reasons), they tend toward fiction. And so are the so-call ed "serious" publications, because they cannot succeed to make the events they have conceived imaginable to the reador for lack of integration bet- ween text and illustration. On the one hand, therefore, (on the hand of printed mass media), imagination tends to become fictitious, and on the other hand, (the hand of the media for "serious" learning about the world), con- ception tends to become divorced from imagination. All windows toward the world seem to be closing, and we seem to be heading toward a situation where everything is either imagined fancy or abstract concept. And where there- fore there is no room for a commitment to change the world.

This is where TV should step in, if it were properly handled. It has a structure which allows it to present events both to imagination and conceptual thinking. To imagination because its screen is a surface, and to conceptual thinking because its messages flow like texts on that surface. This does not only mean that it can allow its readers to imagine events and at the same time conceive them. It means also that it can allow its readers to conceive images and imagine concepts. Now written texts also conceive images, and this is what they were made for,. But no medium so far was in- vented for the imagination of concepts. (Sketches of molekule structures are examples for failures in this direction). In this sense TV may become a tool for a new type of reason, a radical improvement on windows.

TV as a tool to perceive concepts and thus be able to imagine

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them sounds like a structuralist's dream or like a Platonic vision. But there is nonetheless nothing fantastic about it. The invention of TV is very much like the invention of writing was, only on a different level. Writing is a technique of transcribing image to line, and it therefore per mits the conception of imagination. TV is a technique of manipulating imag es in lines, and it therefore permits the imagination of concepts. Writing introduced a new, and previously fantastic, human situation: the historical civilisations. TV will introduce, if it is learned how to handle it proper ly, an equally new situation. A situation in which men do not only use models for the understanding of events and think about those models, but in which they also perceive those models and their dynamics. Writing was a step back from imagination, and therefore the use of imagination on behalf of conceptial thinking. The result was historical civilisation, including politics, science and the arts as we know them. TV is a step back from con ceptual thinking, and therefore the use of concepts on behalf of imagination. The results cannot yet be imagined, in view of the present lack of a correct use of TV for that purpose.

One thing seems, however, to be clear already now: the proper use of TV demands a change in the attitude of the receiver. He must come to understand that the box in his room was not meant to be a traditional window, but one that he can handle. The messages that issue from it are not neccesarily ready-made products to be "consumed, but raw material to be manipulated. This is the fundamental differen ce between the cinema and TV: that similar techniques serve a different purpose. The TV receiver must learn that he stands outside the program he is receiving, that he can re-arrange it, introduce himself into it, and control the flux of events both in velocity and direction. (Minkoff's experiences in Geneva, for instance, point in this direction.) The receiver must learn that he is in part responsible for his categories of the perception of the world, and that TV was meant to provide him with a tool to assume this. Unless this change of attitude comes about, TV will never become as it should be. And, admittedly, it is difficult to imagine how such a change could be brought about in the present situation of passive consumption.

Let me give you, however, one example of how this could be done, I shall show you a videotape on Tsai's work. Now this work can be looked at in an exhibition, that is: throu a traditional window. It can be read about and seen in illustrations in catalogues and magazines of art. And it can be filmed and registered on a video-tape as here. Now Tsai's work are cybernetic models. They propose how artificial life might look like.

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If we look at those works in an exhibition, we perceive them as things, not as models. If we read about them in art magazines, we conceive them to be models. If we look passively at them through video-tapes we percieve them as representations of things, although these representations capture their motion and are therefore good representations. But if we were able to manipulate the video-tape in such a way that we could control the appearance of the work, have their motion stopped or accelerated, re-arrange the sequence and so forth, we could perceive their being models. We could use them as models for our understanding of them, and for our understanding of their future use in art and culture. In fact: such a manipulation of the videotape would amount to a new sort of critique, no longer conceptual, but imaginative. It would amount to that critical "step back" of which I was talking. The techniques for such a manipulation of tapes are available at present. What is lacking is the change of attitude in the receiver, who is conditioned to see his box as a cinema made private.

It goes without saying that if the change of attitude were to come about, the video-tape itself would be different from what it is now. It would have been made with a view to manipulation by the receiver. In fact: the critique of Tsai's work would be a joint effort of those who make the tapes and those who manipulate their reception. Thus Tsai's work would really have become what it was meant to be: a model widely dialogued a- bout and used as such. I think this example shows well one of the esthet- ic functions of future television: not so much to provide esthetic exper- ience, as to provide the means to criticize it and interfere in its pro- cess. Art would be something different from what it is in our present situation. And so would, of course, be politics and science.

This example intends to show that television, if used properly, would change the basic attitude of what is called "mass man" and the "so- ciety of consumption". And other examples of very different types could easily be given. In short: TV, as it is used now, has a potent influence on progressive massification and passive consumption. But if used as it was intended to, it might have an oppsite function. To some extend it depends on us how it is going to be used in the future. Although, of course, our power of decision is very limited, but to change this fact would require much more than just thinking about television. We should therefore try to act within the parameter of decision that is open to us. I believe this is the reason why we are here together.

C: <u>To look through TV on others</u>: The box in the private dwelling that emits movie-like pictures and radio-like sounds/looks like a sort of radio, but, if we look closer at it, it shows some telephone-like characteristics as well. Like the telephonn, and unlike the radio, it

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it demands our attention while it is working, and its name "television"
suggests that it is a member of the telephone family rather than of that
family the radio belongs to. The fact that television demands more atten
tion than the radio does is of course due to its appeal to two instead of
only one of our senses, while the fact that the telephone demands more at-
tention than the radio does is due to its appeal to our response to its
message. There seems therefore to be no similarity between the two appeals,
peals, and TV seems to be an intensified radio, not a telephone with ra-
dio-like aspects. But the similarity is there, because to provoke atten
tion means to provoke response, which is what the telephone was made for.
The fact is that TV is a telephone-like tool which is being used at present
almost exclusively in its radio-like characteristics. (As if we were to
use the telephone almost exclusively for calling information.)

Now the suggestion that television was projected to be a telepho-
nevision demands that one analyses the telephone as a tool, which would ex
ceed the scope of the present paper. Let it therefore suffice to say that
the telephone is a tool for the amplification of the geographic parameter
of spoken linguistic communication, as far as its dialogical structure is
concerned. On the other hand the radio is a tool for the amplification of
the geographic parameter of various types of auditive communications, in-
cluding spoken linguistic ones, as far as their discoursive structure is
concerned. Although the repertoire of the radio is wider than of the tele
phone, (it includes, for instance, musical messages), the two tools together
represent a geographic amplification of spoken linguistic communication in
both its structures. One of the theses of this paper is that television
was meant to inject the visual aspects of communication into both the tele-
phone and the radio systems, and thus achieve a richer tool for both dia-
logical and discoursive communication. In other words: that TV was meant
to be a synthesis of telephone and radio with a visual dimension, instaed
of being, as it is now, a synthesis of radio and cinema, (and a bad one at
that). It becomes necessary to discuss the difference between dialogical
and discoursive communication a little more closely.

At the limit the process of communication is structured by one of
two systems, by a network system or a broadcasting system. Although, in
fact, in most communication processes there is some overlapping of the two
structures. In the network structure the channels of communication cross
on many points, and these points are where the participants in the process
are located. They are therefore alternatively emittors and receptors of
messages, and this is called "dialogical communication". In the broadcast

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ing structure the channels of communication irradiate from one central point
toward many peripherical ones, the central point being the place of emissi
on of the messages, and the peripherical ones the places of its reception.
This is called "discoursive communication". This structural difference has
of course an important influence of the content of the messages communicat
ed. In the dialogical structure messages are exchanged between the partic
ipants with a view to an elaboration of information. (In other words: each
of the participants disposes of a partial information which is being inte-
grated into a more complete information during the dialogical process.)
In the discoursive structure messages are emitted from a participant who
holds an information toward participants who do not own it. (In other
words: the discoursive process serves the distribution of pre-existing in
formation.) As a whole, human communication can be seen as a dialectical
process in which information is elaborated through dialogue, distributed
through discourse, re-elaborated through dialogue and so forth. This is the
reason why it is a negatively entropic process. Through dialogue it pro-
duces information, through discourse it multiplies it and also conserves
it in the memories of the receivers.

But there is also an existential aspect the the difference be-
tween the two dialectical structures. In the dialogical structure there
is a sense of active participation in the elaboration of information by
all the participants of the process. In the discoursive structure there
is a sense of passive consumption of information by all the participants
of the process except the emmittor. In other words: in discourse public
information is communicated to the private person, and in dialogue private
information is made public. (Even and especially in the Greek sense of
"public" and "private": "politikós" and "idiotes".) In consequence dia-
logue is closely linked with democracy, (radical politisation), and dis-
course with totalitarianism, (radical invasion of the private by the public)
Of course, those are extremes, and normally the two communication structures
are linked dialectically. But there are times when one of the two struc-
tures prevails, (like now the discoursive structure, due also to the present
use of television). In such a time as ours there is a danger of a totali-
tarian society in the making, one that is poor in elaboration of informat-
ion and strong in its distribution. This is why telephones seem to be more
important than radios at present.

At this point it must be asked what is meant bu "Open Circuits
and Closed Circuits". If applied to the present use of TV, "Open Circuits"
means a discoursive broadcasting structure open to an increasing number

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of receivers, and "Close Circuits" means a somewhat dialogical network structure restricted to a relatively small number of participants in the ppocess. In other words: as TV is being used now, its telephone-like aspects are closed structures, and its radio-like aspects are open structures. But of course this is not necessarily so, nor is it in accordance with the original TV project. Conference rooms are examples of closed discoursive broadcasting systems, and the telephone network is an example for open dialogical networks. In fact: one of the problems of future TV is how to open presently closed dialogical networks. I believe that this is one of the reasons for the title of our present meeting.

Let us suppose for a moment that present closed circuits can be rendered even more dialogical then they are now and then opened to include all those millions of participants that make part of the present open systems. How would TV work in such a situation? To understand the impact of this question, let us go back to the basic idea of this paper that TV was projected to be an improved window. I said, when discussing the window "essence", that it is a means to percieve the world. But it is, of course, more than this: it is also a means to meet others without touching them. One may talk out of the window and speak to a crowd, (like Mussolini did at Piazza Venezia), or one may lean out of the window and talk to a neighbor, (like the village women did before cars entered the streets of the village). The Mussolini example shows that the radio is a development of the discoursive aspect of the window, and the woman example shows that TV was meant to be a development of both the dialogical and the discoursive aspects of windows. If I understand McLuhan correctly, he believes that TV will transform society into a cosmic village. This consideration shows that it will do so only if present closed circuits are improved on and then opened. (It is important to recall in the present context that "village" menas "polis", and "cosmic village" means "universal politisation".)

The important thing to keep in mind, if one considers talking out of the window to others, is the fact that there is no physical contact between the partners. It is a case of "telecommunication". One sees and heats the partner without touching him "concretely". What one sees is the "Gestalt" of the partner in its context, and his gestures which aim at transmitting some message. What one hears is the words the partner formulates, and the intonation through which he is formulating them. It is an "audio-visual telecommunication". Now the analysis offered in paragraph B of this paper becomes useful. But it must be reformulated to suit this problem.

While looking out of the window toward the other person one

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"percieves" his message, in the sense that one sees images, and thus can imagine what he is emitting. While listening through the window to what he is saying one "conceives" his message, in the sense that one receives verbal symbols which obey a similar structure to the one written letters follow. Now here comes a point which has been intentionally ommitted from the paragraph B discussion. Written letters are transcriptions from window vision onto a line in the sense that they "represent" the sounds of a spoken language. The spoken language itself is a transcription of window vision onto a time flux. Therefore while listening to a person through the window I am receiving a conceptual commentary to what I am seeing if looking at him. And it is in this sense that written texts are an improvement on windows: they permit to listen to more speech than traditional windows do, and to do so with more attention. This is the reason also why books and newspapers are not true "visual" media, and why their messages cannot be imagined. They are essentially "auditive" media, in the sense that they are being re-translated into sounds through loud or silent reading. In short: while looking at somebody through a window and listening to him, I percieve his message "immediately", and I conceive it through the medium of linguistic symbols which I must learn in order to be able to read them.

Books, newspapers, magazines and other printed media are developments of the discoursáve aspects of sound communications through windows. So is the radio. The Post office is a development of the dialogical aspect of sound communication through windows, and so is the telephone system. The TV is, to some extend, a development of the discoursive aspect of visual communication through windows, although it is a bad development, because it confuses perception with fiction. But there is so far no development of the dialogical aspect of visual communication through windows. If TV were to become as it should be according to its project, it would work like an improvement on both the discoursive and the dialogical aspects of both the visual and the auditive communications through traditional windows. It would become an audiovisual communication medium in the full sense of the term, in the sense that it would allow its users to perceive and to conceive reality, to perceive and conceive the messages of others, and to respond to those messages with a view to elaborating new information. No doubt, such a tool would change our situation profoundly.

The difference between auditive and audiovsual dialogue is difficult to grasp, because we know how an auditive dialogue works in advanced techniques, but not how a visual one would be working. We have letters and the telephone, which are advanced means for auditive dialogue, but we have no

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more advanced methods of visual dialogue than are traditional windows. The
TV, if properly used, would jump this stage of development and provide an
audiovisual dialogue method. But even if it is difficultt to say how such
a dialogue would work, we can be sure that it would achieve the same synthes
sis between line and surface, between imagination and concept, of which I
spoke in paragraph B of this paper. Only in that paragraph I discussed the
synthesis as a new sort of "understanding the world", and in the present pa
ragraph the synthesis must be seen as a new sort of "recognition of the other
person". This must be considered more closely.

It is a common place to speak of the loneliness of the mass man, of
his impossibility of "communicating" (which means in fact "dialoguing") with
others. Now this lack of dialogue may have a great number of reasons, and
some of them very profound ones, but one obvious and not very profound reas
on is that mass man has no means to dialogue with others. What he can do,
in fact, is either shout at them through traditional windows, talk to them
over the phone, or write them letters. The first method is archaic, and
does not work well in the present situation full of "noise", (in every sense
of that term, including the one given it by theory of information). The te-
lephone is not a very good method, because it was projected to be a tool of
conceptual dialogue, not of an existential one, because it does not trans-
mit images, ("Gestalten" and gestures of the other person). But in his des
peration the mass man, (and woman), abuses the telephone to try and force it
to become a tool for existential dialogue, which is one of the reasons why
the telephone network is no longer working efficiently. Writing letters is
not a very good method, because it is almost as conceptual as the telephone
is, and because it is a slow process and therefore correspondence does not
have the rhythm of traditional dialogue through windows. In short: we live
lonely in a lonely mass, because our tools tend to separate us from each o-
ther, and we have no good tool to unite us.

TV, if used dialogically in open circuits, might become just such a
tool, for the following reason: it would allow us to "recognize" the other
person, in the sense of percieving and conceiving his message, and it would
allow the other person to "recognize" ourselves in the same way. A dialogue
through such a medium would permit an inter-subjective relationship which has
both an "intelectual" and an "existential" dimension. Which means that the
participants would be linked to each other both intelectually and existential
ly, woudl form a true "polis", and would no longer be lonely. To put it more
technically: such a tool would allow all of us to elaborate new epistemologi-
cal, ethical and esthetic information. Which means that our society would
acquire the structure of a cosmic village.

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No further comment is necessary to prove that a future use of TV as an audio-visual window for discoursive communication with the world and dialogical communication with the other person would change our situation, by providing us with a new type of reason and a new type of social structure. The problem is not a technical one, because TV was projected to work in that way and therefore can be manipulated that way, if we learn to see it as "televisio", and not as "cinema made private". The problem is the resistence which both the owners and the users of TV oppose to such a use of television. It must be admitted that it is not easy to see how this resistence may be broken. But I shall show you, after the reading of this paper, a few video-tapes which were made in a home for the aged at the Côte d'Azur last summer. They were made by the aged persons themselves under the guidance of a social scientist, Jean-Philippe Butaud, and an artist, Fred Forest, and those of you who are interested in the details may consult the theoretical discussion of the experiment by Butaud. As you will see, TV was being consciously used as a medium for dialogue, with a view of braking loneliness and achieve what may be called "esthetic information". Of course, you may object not only to the results, (that would not be a fundamental objection), but to the fact that this is the result not of an open, but of a closed circuit. But then consider that the home there the experiment was made is part of a chain belonging to a syndicate, and that therefore the circuit can be gradually opened. Possibly it is experiments like these that can be used as starting points for a progressive opening of closed circuits and a progressive manipulation of TV in the sense here suggested. Not a very impressive starting point, but an interesting one, because it starts from a situation where loneliness is very characteristic. I suggest that we discuss its inherent possibilities during this meeting. Possibly, what we can do within our limited parameter of decisions, is to promote and improve such sort of experiments all over the various levels of society, with a view to elaborating all sort of information.

D: Conclusion: TV was projected to be an improved window. Which means to be a medium for understanding the world and dialoguing with others. If it were used that way it would radically change our situation. It is not used that way at present, because it is covered up with the myth" cinema made private". Such a myth suits well the purposes of those who own it, and it is accepted without resistence by its users, because it liberates them from responsabilities and allows them to lead a life of consumption of messages and of the goods those messages propagate. The result of such a use of TV is a tendency toward a totalitarian society, in which man becomes a lonely tool manipulated by those who hold the powers of decision. We might contribute th a better use of **TV**.