

THE ORIGIN OF TELEVISION AS CIVILIZATIONAL EXPRESSION

Eric Mark Kramer
The University of Oklahoma

Television as Image Builder

Reification of television images is facilitated by the western bias of logocentrism which itself is an attitude born of the modern mental-rational, perspectival consciousness structure. Before proceeding further it is useful to clarify what is meant by "logocentrism", and "perspectival consciousness". This paper proceeds in three stages; first an investigation into logocentrism, second a clarifying of what Jean Gebser (1949) means by perspectival consciousness, and finally an expansion on the claim just made, a claim that is crucial to the understanding of the civilizational expression known as television.

First, logocentrism, as defined by Derrida (1967: 12), is the western "metaphysics of presence", itself defined as the immediate presence of consciousness to itself resulting in a simple, irreducible foundation of apodictic knowledge. There have been a variety of "isms" which have claimed the status of transcendental ground to which all dis-courses can be reduced. These include psychologism, biolog-ism, materialism, and of course historicism. For instance, Marxist historicism is revealed by Nietzsche's deconstruction to be, "convinced of its power to escape the figurality of language and achieve a perspective atop all the figurality of meaning" (Norris 1982: 86). By contrast, the literature that is called "history", by Nietzsche's standard of mortality, involves a surrender of the privileged claim to knowledge once entertained by the sovereign consciousness. Following the Nietzschean suspicion of transcendental consciousness manifest as method, Foucault argues that it is no longer, "... a question of judging the past in the name of truth which only we can possess in the present (rather the question is one of) ... risking the deconstruction of the subject who seeks knowledge in the endless deployment of the will to knowledge" (Foucault 1977: 164). We find similar analyses of history as rhetorical strategies in the struggle for interpretive power and domination in the works of Edward Said (*Orientalism*) and Jeffrey Mehlman (*Revolution and Repetition*).

The issue here is of course the degeneration of knowledge to power, that is the narrowing of the idea of knowledge to mere instrumentality. This definition of knowledge as power is foregrounded by the realization that various canons (or discourses if one prefer), and the cosmologies they promote, exist in various degrees of conflict. This can be traced, in the occident, to the initial fragmentation of the oral logos with the eruption into the Greek consciousness about 500 B.C. of space manifest as syllogistic logic, classical architecture and perspective, and the phonetic alphabet, among other artifacts. For instance, with the phonetic, as contrasted with the pictographic, form of writing, space is manifest as line and meter.

This fragmentation from a zero dimensionality into 2 and 3 dimensions of awareness was initially consolidated by the Stoics into their three-fold logos which eventually evolved into the "three roads" of the medieval trivium; the logic, grammar, and rhetoric. As is well known, this discursive organization became the core of the *septem artes liberales*, the essential training for solving, as Karl-Otto Apel calls it, the problem of understanding meaning (1972). As the trivium became the formalized pedagogical template for perpetuating cultural traditions and cosmologies, it split into two warring factions. The struggle, which was of vital importance to the sacral (church) and secular (state) apparatuses, concerned which polarized discourse would have the supreme power, the hermeneutic (ultimately ideological) priority, regarding the assertion of truth about textual interrogation. In other words, nothing short of which cosmology would emerge as dominant was at stake.

The grammarians and the rhetoricians each maintained the power, the originating foundational explanation of the other. Meanwhile the dialecticians tended to remain in a marginal orbit, at least until Peter Ramus. However, before this juncture in discursive politics was solidified, the Stoics had already consolidated a three-fold logos from the debris of the eruption into consciousness of space.

The Stoic system is comprised of the *logos hendi thetos*, the *logos prophorikos*, and the *logos spermatikos*. The *logos hendi thetos* is an inner word prior to or without speech. This is abstraction of the figure from the ground, the formalization of absolutes in logical terms and transcendental philosophy. The Stoic *logos prophorikos* is the word as sonorous aspiration. This corresponds to the later trivium's rhetorical modality which posits words as sails animated with the vitality of meaning/breath; the mythical power to make and move audiences, indeed worlds, with speech.

Logos spermatikos is the magical power of utterance to propagate and flourish. This third part is the logos as seeds embedded in things, both sentient and not, which constitutes the potential of how they are to be and become—growth. This involves a rudimentary tensing of the temporal dimension as potency—potential worlds in the making, projective will interpreted and articulated with visual metaphors by Renaissance rational perspectival mentalism as "vision", "enlightenment", as the universal mode of being or attitude. One must also note the first rational measurement/constitution of mechanical time with the erection of the first public clock in the courtyard of Westminster Palace in 1283.

Clearly, the rudimentary manifestation of these world *views* (a concept which itself is purely mental-rational—perspectival and relativistic) are prior to the Cartesian dualism manifest as a solidified subject ego in confrontation with the sense of spatial expansion and the deployment therein of the object world. The new awareness of subject/object separation is premised upon the modern sense of space, both logical (as

in Wittgenstein's sense) and material. Of course, separation is also the key to modern diacritics.

However, the Cartesian dualism could not have emerged when it did without the convergence of the magical proclivity to make worlds out of nothing with the perspectival emphasis on visual investigation and evidence. Descartes' reflexivity exhibited, for the first time (1637) since the ancients, the freedom of autonomous individualism which is the prerequisite for conscious world building (vision expressed in classical discourse as Minerva's owl). Hence rigorous, meaning honest/ logical, description (seeing) of what *is*, combined with the vision of what *should be*, to generate the modern sense of positive science so clearly espoused as an ethical duty by Saint-Simon and Auguste Comte (1822) when they *invented* (articulated, that is *called* into being, or for) the project of modern social science, *defined* by them as the application of enlightenment reason to the problem of human suffering.

Vision is integrally related to the modern sense of evidence and reasons but not only in the cannon of social science, but also in the ethnographic sense of folk evidence. Individualism erupts in all fields of experience with, for instance: monetary exchange, personal salvation, perspectival painting, civil liberties in law, psychology, etc. For example, it is during the Renaissance that the revolutionary notion of "making money" emerges with the nondeterministic idea of personal responsibility in the field of commerce (the self-made man). Here the first book is the book of nature including human nature . . . all literature is simultaneously descriptive and prescriptive cosmology.

Though derived from it, it is already the Stoic *logos spermatikos* (the root of grammar, derived from the Greek and rendered as the Latinate word "literature") which obviously subsumes scientific discourse. The main concern of this logos is the exegesis of nature including etymological investigations. This logos constitutes the grounding search for structure and roots from which spring all science as later formalized into the quadrivium of music, arithmetic, geometry, and astronomy. This civilizational construct manifest the first glimmerings of a primal ego separated from nature as observer/manipulator. The effect of this logos is more than mere naming however. The process of articulation generates worlds via various modal emphases, i.e., scientific as compared with poetic language.

The battle between the "moderns" and the "ancients" continues to this day as a struggle over whether or not to allow context as an explanatory value. As will be seen later, the pervasive ontological power of language, including the rhetoric of mathematics, necessitates investigation of root words in order to illuminate their ever-present influence on sense making activity.

Now the perspectival consciousness structure, which currently dominates the world of propositional knowledge (to the exclusion of all alternatives as "challenges" to the very definition of reality), ironically expresses itself in such transcendental arrogance, an arrogance science shares in, and which, as demonstrated by Nietzsche, is ultimately self-destructing. The expression of perspectivity is ironic precisely because it harbors an unquestioned presumption (a Peircean prejudice) that is expressed by the tendency that as the sectorization of awareness (regional ontologization) increases so too does the claim for universal epistemic force. There is a fundamental "law" at work here that may be stated thus: *As the sense of reality is sectorially narrowed, the claim to immutable truth and intolerance is proportionally enhanced*. For instance, a narrow position, such as religious dogmatism, has been

expressed this way: "Christianity is not a religion. It is *the truth*." Likewise, materialistic science would allow no value to statements that do not directly reduce all of experience to biochemistry with the result that all other scholarly endeavors should "in reality" (metaphysical bias) be reduced to the field of physics, or remain fundamentally senseless (precisely Lévi-Strauss' final position).

Television, and other electrically mediated machines, draw their validity from and, at the same time, propagate a logocentric arrogance throughout our epoch. Television, like mathematics, both describes (re-cords) and creates worlds. The distinction between world view and world is rejected as speculative metaphysics. Since prehistory humankind has wished for the magical power to be able to escape the bondage of space and time. Now, with television, we may *appear* to be present while we are absent from the spatial/temporal coordinates of an event. This electronic "presencing" proves to be both an extension, and self-fulfilling prophecy, of the western (and westernizing) will-power-drive to explore space visually, to see for ourselves—logocentrism—the exhibition of evidence.

We must attend to the issue of the will-power-drive, for if this process is not understood, television, as a civilizational expression of modern perspectivity, cannot be understood. Broadcasting is a civilizational expression of the magic impulse in humankind. Gebser (1949: 46) analyzes a word group which correlates several contemporary words including, "make", "mechanism", "machine", and "might". All of these words share a common Indo-European root *mag(h)*. The word "magic" is a Greek borrowing of Persian origin which belongs to the same linguistic field and shares the common root. The fact that we have forgotten this relationship only means that we are now unconscious, and therefore susceptible to the original, and still effectual power of these phenomena.

Magic is a behavior and attitude (or modality) which manifests the first glimmerings of ego-consciousness. As humans became increasingly self-aware, nature became increasingly other. Magic in the form of totem, taboo, sorcery, and witchcraft, are among humanities' first efforts to systematically control the alienation of nature as other. This primordial relationship with nature is increasingly characterized by the emerging ego-sphere as objectified, alienated. This attitude generates a mode of being that is intolerant, insecure, and behaviorally manifest as nothing less than a struggle for survival. Paradoxically, as such defensive efforts increase they precipitate greater alienation from nature which, in turn, increases a greater sense of insecurity, thus compelling an unchecked drive for greater defenses. The presumption is that more technology (material magic) will solve the problems it has created. This may be called a global spiral of alienation which presupposes a transcendental managerial attitude for all sectors of being.

Out of fear for self-preservation, the ego-sphere increasingly assumes a confrontational mode of being in relation to the expanding awareness of space. The compulsion to exorcise nature emerges with the will-power-drive that is identical with the ego. It must be made clear that "ego" here does not mean the Freudian system of emotive energy. Freud's definition is itself a mental-rational (modern perspectival) effort to reduce the "will" out of existence. "Ego" here is meant as identical with human will-power-drive, and as modern psychology states, it has many defenses.

Technology is machine magic (to some extent a redundant statement). Its raison d'être is the same as Medieval alchemy. What makes modern technology different is the attitude of modern perspectival mental-rationality manifest as, a conjoining (in

Seventeenth Century Europe) of mathematics (pure ideation) with materialism and the values of efficiency/economy. Its cultural and civilizational function is precisely the same as non-material magic. Technology is the materialistic constitution of artificial environments on the basis of a priori "vision". It is not ideologically or environmentally neutral. It is not discovered, but as invention, it constitutes the will to resist biological adaptation (which presupposes the failure of certain biological configurations) in favor of manipulation, which presupposes a transcendental posture that abstracts type from token, category from case, law from observation. This is inherently perspectival, mental-rational, logocentric. It is will-to-power. Because we can see for ourselves, and because of an intense prejudice in favor of the visual in perspectival humans, we can be easily deluded by our "seeing".

Television, as a machine, was invented because of a great drive to achieve the power of telepathy—distance seeing—the making present of that which is absent. It expresses the drive to overcome space in the interest of time. The western obsession with space is concordant with the reemergence of rationality in Europe, with all its implications. It is no "mere" coincidence that while Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) was formalizing perspective in the visual arts and technical drafting, Michelangelo (1475-1564) was (following Donatello, 1386?-1466) perfecting free standing sculpture, Brunelleschi (1377?-1446) was creating nondirectional virtual space with the dome of the cathedral of Florence, the Age of (spatial) Exploration (Christopher Columbus 1451-1506) was commencing, landscape painting was invented by Ambrogio Lorenzetti (1300?-1348) and Giotto (1276?-1337), Descartes (1596-1650) was segregating the introspective subject world from the spatial object world (in the process defining the former as a fiction and the later as real), Kepler (1571-1630) and Newton (1642-1727) were formalizing virtual space, while Galileo (1564-1642) was peering into the depths of space to locate our planet on the basis of visual evidence that supported the conceptual *revolution* launched by Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543). After nearly one thousand five hundred years after the brief glimmerings of perspectival mental-rational consciousness expressed in ancient Greece by such thinkers as Socrates (470?-399 B.C.) and Archimedes (287?-12 B.C.), suddenly the perspectival mutation erupted with man the measure of all things.

The drive for visual (logocentric) evidence, what I choose to call the "show me" mentality, presupposes a notion of facts that is confused with truth, and which has not slowed since. For instance, in television commercials it is a fact that Sybil Shepard appears in frame with a bottle of hair detergent and says "It costs a little more but I'm worth it." But what manner of "truth" is suggested here via formal apposition and the consequent pre-rational magical identification? As meaning is transferred by the audience member from a "star" system to a product system, thus generating an image for the product, truth is not an issue. As Mircea Eliade (1963) notes about myth, it is not appropriate to ask whether or not it is true but whether or not it is *alive* for the audience. Rationality does not enter into the functioning of pre-rational mythic consciousness.

Television creates a virtual space and time. It also manifest the universal polarity between the modern individual subject and the premodern collective, which Gebser traces. Formally, television is consumed by individuals in private psychic and physical spaces, such as living rooms. Since both the form of the technology and its contents are civilizational expressions of the same perspectival consciousness structure, each dimension emphasizes individualism. So in terms of contents, Newcomb (1974),

Arlen (1981), and others have noted that commercials and shows *formally* speak to individuals about individualism. But this is not true individualism. This is to confuse the map with the terrain. If the audience members reacted as rational individuals, the *myth* of individualism would not work on such a mass attunement.

Individualism, as propagated via television is a myth that exists prior to rational critique—suspicion. The nature of the television audience, as it is created by mass media, is that of an atomized group. At the same time the audience is atomized, the audience is surveyed as a collective in order to help image producers create routinized, normalizing symbols. Once symbols become formally habituated, then they shift in their most fundamental function to become signals activating prereflexive emotional (unperspectival emotive) responses (Durkheim's work concerning national symbols is instructive here).

Routinization leads to intolerant normalization on a mass scale. International images are often shared and totally pre-rational. Symbols for the mass mentality of *das man*, take on a signficant function which means that the agent degenerates from the posture of a reflexive being, to a state of nonthinking stimulus/responsive behavior. An example is the nearly involuntary emotional response to a national anthem or flag. Another example is the subconscious awareness that a commercial break is immanent when sports announcers give the score of the game being broadcast. Routinization is also the process by which commercial repetition conditions audience members so that such television grammar as a fade to black has a different audience response than a sudden cut. This is also evident as producers use slow zooms in order to intensify the emotional reaction in the audience, or use an establishing shot of an anonymous building followed by a cut-to interior action in order to establish the milieu of the story. These few examples illustrate the subconscious quality of pre-rational modes of thinking triggered by calculated measures film and video produces commonly exploit. Repetitive viewing routinizes this grammar of the visual arts so that they are both symbolic and signficant at once.

Because they are generally doxic in nature, that is, prereflexive, signficant signs are often constituted by repetition which begins at a very early age. Hence, highly organized youth movements are commonly found in fascist social systems from Stalin's to Hitler's states. Magical ritual is also often present in such prereflexive conditions. Strictly speaking, *this is not communication, but rather conditioning*. Flags, national anthems, totemic animals, etc. elicit emotional responses on a mythic level. Television fosters this process of shifting the sign from being symbolic to being signficant via repetition and false presence, pseudo nature/truth. This is what the anthropologist Jules Henry (1963) calls the "pecuniary truth" of commercial broadcasting. What is true is what sells.

The images held by a collectivity, or atomized audience (as opposed to a genuine community), are routinized. This is a process of sedimentation via video traces that gain status conferral due to mass exposure. Thus television presents a seamless flowing of images that enhances permanence. *Permanence enhancement is a key consequence of television*. Although the contents of television change at ever-increasing rates, television itself, like the notion of progress, has become a permanent expression of the modern mentality. The same consciousness structure that is manifest by the logical positivism of Ernst Mach and Auguste Comte, is manifest in the logocentric, metaphysical bias that is reflected in poll after poll, survey after survey that indicate people are ascribing greater credibility to television news than print media. Younger

audiences are abandoning newspapers in alarming numbers which is forcing their editors, in a competitive market, to make newspapers more *visually appealing* with *graphic* "gingerbread" and colors (Bagdikian 1990). This encourages nonlinear, prelogical magic and mythic modes of consciousness—tribalism (Postman 1985).

Technologically, television's pre-constituted images do not lead to the onto- and philogenesis of multiple realities as Alfred Schutz (1932) might suggest. Rather television offers a shared reality that leads to homogenization in the sense suggested by Paul Feyerabend (1987), Francois Jacob (1982), Donald Heyneman (1984), Jean-Francois Lyotard (1984), and George Gerbner, et al. (1986).

Reactionary punitive sanctions are legitimated via the authoritarian process of definition. Difference, in such a restrictive discourse, becomes social deviance. At best, it is merely tolerated. The power to define, (as for example, the word "liberal" in the 1988 United States Presidential election) proves globally (from ontogenetic origin) restrictive. Fascism, which is predominated by magical and mythic modes of consciousness, abhors ambiguity. Consequently, it sets sanctionable limits on the accepted sense of the world.

The state of predetermination is a consequence of prereflexive prejudices. It is the realm of belief in the certitude of the appearing—doxa. Reification is permanence enhancing. The doxic is characterized as a process that is always already complete; as a state of, rather than a process of reification. This gives imagistic beliefs, which have no spatial aspect, and which are ironically also atemporal, the sense of the essential. Herein lies their power to be beyond doubt. This is the power of the "real", the blinding inertia of ontological "truth".

This power legitimizes signalic violence that is characterized by a shifting from symbol, which requires reflexive attention, to signal, which is behaviorally, prereflexively subliminal, and belligerent in illocutionary force. The former requires active interpretation, and encourages attention to intentions. The latter stimulates reaction, and cuts short any investigation of intentionality as a so-called subjective state—a fallacy. The status of signalic claims for the reactionary are therefore, indubitable. Telepathic preconstituted images present a primitive *Weltanschauung* characterized by being pre-logical (Levy-Bruhl 1922), totemic social (Lévi-Strauss 1962), animated (Mauss 1950), with the philogenetic priority going to the animated universe (Scheler 1928).

Via the simultaneous processes of interpellation and appellation (see Althusser, 1971), television creates a fragmented collectivity of isolated individuals by the way it, as a technological form, communicates to them. Meanwhile, commercial contents, along with the technology itself, express hyper-perspectivity by teaching the aggregated audience members that they, as individual consumers, *deserve* to possess everything.

Television's mode of communication is characterized by the stasis of *mitwelt* (contemporaneous yet absent world). This is in opposition to the *umwelt* which is characterized by Buber (1937), Schutz, and Litt (1919) as the realm of mutual thou orientation, the authentic social world of mutual recognition manifest as the reciprocity of perspectives between two human beings. In short, televisual communication lacks such a reciprocity since one party is a human and the other is a machine. Therefore, there does not exist any social bond. Contrary to McLuhan's optimism about the global village, the atomized televisual audience is a collectivity, not a human community. The images it propagates are reifications, and routinized

signals which function on a prereflexive doxic level. Such images, including those on news programs, maintain perspectival biases along local, state, and nationalistic sentiments, each of which manifestly promotes, on various levels of allegiance, the oppositional in-group, out-group perspectival modality. In this way, security and insecurity as a fundamental perspectival polarity, is manifest as "vital interest" worthy of the title "news" (often promoted with an appeal to logocentric certainty by reference to a title such as "See It Now" or the generic "Eye Witness News", and logos like the CBS eyeball).

Mechanical telepathy is entertaining but neither profound, nor reciprocal. It is a case of a causal relationship, which is unidirectionally dominant. Consequently, the machine/viewer relationship is one of *Ich und Sach* (I and it), as opposed to the world of human motivation, the *Ich und Du* (I and you) world of reciprocity and recognition. Where there is dialog there is intelligence. Neither computers nor televisions can be said to communicate, to dialogically reflect, interpret, act. Consequently, images propagated through passive mechanical means are not available for dialogue, for question. The text is simply given, and ambiguity is limited by the combination of a logocentric audience and a logocentric technology, with its iconic visual emphasis.

Even when viewing is characterized by "resistance", it remains an intolerant, and for some, intolerable experience. It simply is the case that very few people choose to watch specific programs. Rather, people watch television, incessantly seeking, via remote control, the least objectionable content when "nothing is on". People simply do not normally choose to turn it off. As Paul Klein (1971) has observed, people tend to stay not only with the medium but even with a specific station until they are driven away by an objectionable program.

Given the predominance of logocentric perspectivity, little is left to the imagination or to debate. In its power of artificial presentation, its permanence enhancement, and creation of virtual (transcendental) space and time, television is a technological expression of logocentrism. Herein lies its deceptive power to confer the status of an essential truth onto the images it creates. Mimetic realism, as Lukács (1955) and others have demonstrated time and again, is a form of *fiction*. Herein lies television's role in image formation and maintenance. In so far as images are doxic in nature, they are part and parcel of the natural attitude. Television is a taken-for-granted weaver of a prereflexive state of affairs which posits images with powerful ontological predicates that can be stated thus: television, *because of its visual emphasis*, propagates images that present themselves fundamentally as *being objective, being truthful, being real, being self-evident*, etc The senses of these modes of givenness make of television the most persuasive and dangerous medium yet devised by perspectival man.

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