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The Effectiveness of Images in Visual Discourse and Their Influence on the Viewer - A Semiotic Approach –

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Abstract

The roots of the image and imagery date back to the Roman era, known as the era of idolatry. At that time, they referred to the masks of the dead, which served as substitutes; they also included sculpture and were associated with fear, thus fulfilling a symbolic function during this period. It then shifted from representation, imagination, and distortion to the capture of reality through the camera, thereby transforming the concept of the image in the modern era. It came to denote a visual representation of a landscape, an object, or a being. Thus, it became a simulation of the external world through a camera, a drawing, or a sculpture, and at this stage, the image belongs to the sensory world. In this era—the digital age, also known as the visual age, in which images are divided into two types: artistic images and those serving a communicative or informational role—the role of the image has shifted from mere viewing to playing a significant role in marketing and other services, thus taking on a utilitarian function.

Keywords: Imagery; Visual Representation; Digital Age; Visual Communication.

Introduction

Images and imagery have accompanied humanity since its earliest existence, from cave and rock paintings to the creation of figures and sculptures for expression, communication, illustration, and eventually the documentation of human life; thus, humans were familiar with them long before the invention of writing. Images have continued to evolve and change with technological advancements—from static printed images to moving images in film and television, and on to their latest forms in digital technology, where they are manipulated with motion and visual effects in the virtual world. As a result, images are no longer a foreign element in people's surroundings or daily lives. We now belong, more than ever before, to an era of visual representation in all its forms.

Today, the image is the medium itself; it requires no language to express itself, and there is no media without images. In today's media—and here we refer specifically to television—the written word has diminished and been replaced by the visual or the image, thanks to the astonishing developments brought about by digitization, whether in revealing or distorting the truth. News today is conveyed through visuals more than through the written word, especially regarding the reality of wars and what occurs within them.

This leads us to pose the following question: How has the visual image evolved to the point where it now either mirrors reality or goes beyond it to distort facts and mislead?

What is the role of the image in today's media? Does it document facts and help reveal them? Does it influence political decisions, foster solidarity among peoples, and unite ranks, or does it merely expose and perpetuate grief and disappointment?

In other words, do they have a greater impact than print media and lend it strength and credibility, or are they merely entertainment and spectacle that cause the audience to accept them and become accustomed to viewing them?

- ✓ This research paper is therefore divided into the following sections:
- ✓ The First Theme: The Formation of the Image: Language and Image, Image and art

- ✓ Theme 2: The Place of the Image in Contemporary Art
- ✓ Theme 3: The Image and the Screen
- ✓ The Fourth Theme: , Communication Culture, and the Cultural Industry
- ✓ The Fifth Theme: The Impact of Visual Discourse on the Viewer

1) The Formation of the Image: Language and the Image, the Image and Art

1-1 The Concept of the Image

As is well known, early humans expressed their feelings and needs and documented their lives through carvings and paintings on cave walls. These earliest representations are what have led us to understand the lives of early humans and chronicle the stages of history, as they are the sole and most ideal testimony to these successive civilizations. Hence, the image is considered to predate writing and to be more deeply rooted in the human unconscious, which has made it a powerful emotional force.

However, the term “image,” in its original forms in both the Arabic and French dictionaries, does not contain explicit references to what is visibly present before the eye and perceived by consciousness as a “mass” of material entities existing outside all forms of mediation carried out by abstract concepts. In the Arab tradition, the image sometimes refers to creation through the act of giving forms to existence: “God is the Creator of Images; He is the One who created all beings and arranged them, giving each a unique image and distinct form by which it is distinguished amid their diversity and multitude”⁽¹⁾, and at other times it refers to shape and form; for “sura” refers to the forms through which things are present in the mind.

In Arabic discourse, it may refer to the outward appearance of a thing, to its true nature, to its form, or to its attributes; thus, one says, “The image of the action is such-and-such,” meaning its form, and “The image of such-and-such,” meaning its attribute. Consequently, it is primarily associated with the face; therefore, it is not advisable to “mark the image”—that is, to make a mark or feature on the face. However, it also refers to what resembles illusions and deceptive visions; “So I imagined the thing, I conjured its image, and it appeared to me; and ‘tasaawir’ are statues”⁽²⁾. Here, the meaning of “image” is distinguished between what the individual imagines in terms of illusions and fantasies and what hands craft in the form of shapes and statues; that is, between what is imagined and what is tangibly perceptible, between what is mental and what is material.

“Based on this, we can speak of the simulacrum (simulacre); it concerns an ambiguous appearance detached from reality, yet one that claims to refer back to it at the same time. It is the source of all forms of illusion, distortion, shadow, fantasy, and all ambiguous images that stray from the truth by feigning the representation of something”³. Here, it moves away from the image, the drawing, and everything tangible; it does not refer to reality, but rather projects this tangible element onto reality through its imagination or resemblance.

As for the French term **image**, it is derived from the Latin word **imago**, which means “that which takes the place of something else.” In Roman times, it referred to “masks of the dead,” as encyclopedias note, and the material used for these masks was wax; they would apply a substance to the face of the deceased to preserve its features, creating a visual counterpart that would serve as a reminder of “the one who was and has vanished from existence”⁴: that is, it signifies a substitute for a form or an object that compensates for and takes the place of it. Thus, the image signifies the absence of the object, not its presence.

To what extent, then, can we speak of silent or symbolic communication? For millions of years, the image has drawn humanity into a system of symbolic communication that brings together two contradictory things. “The image possesses this relational function; it creates a connection between things that are unrelated or even opposed.” The dead have always been conceived as the opposite of the living, and yet the image has linked them together. The Romans used the mask as a sign or a silent symbolic language, one that does not open up to any specific meaning but is referred back to a single reference point: the persona of the deceased; Spoken discourse or elegy alone is incapable of making this glory present and effective; without a mask, the funeral elegy would—without a doubt—be directed solely at a specific recipient.”⁵. Here we are speaking of the image’s symbolic, antithetical meaning; for the mask signifies the deceased, and grief and weeping alone are not enough to convey the bitterness of loss. Spoken words are in dire need of silent words—the words of the image—in order to fully encompass the framework of the funeral rites.

For this reason, and for a long time, portraiture and transformation remained a single process. This reservoir of power inherent in the ancient portrait—and the grandeur it bestowed upon the individual for so long, since the portrait preserves

¹) Ibn Manzur, **Lisan al-Arab**,

²) Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*,

³) Saeed Benkrad, *Manifestations of the Image: The Semiotics of Visual Patterns*, Cultural Center for Books, Casablanca, Morocco, 1st ed., 2019, p. 23

⁴) *Ibid.*, p. 24

⁵) Souad Alami, “The Concept of the Image According to Régis Debray,” **East Africa**, Morocco, Beirut, Lebanon, 2004, p. 35

itself for a long time—is what made portraiture and depiction both a social privilege and a public danger. “The honor of being portrayed could not be bestowed arbitrarily, for a portrait carries its own implications, repercussions, and consequences. In Rome, until the collapse of the Empire, the public display of portraits remained limited and subject to scrutiny, as it constituted a very serious demonstration of authority. Those who had the right to own a funerary statue were deceased dignitaries, because by their very nature they possessed influence and authority; next came the great men among the living, and women had absolutely no such right. Portraits and busts of women in Rome did not appear until much later than those of men, as for the right to a portrait for ordinary citizens—which had been the exclusive privilege of deceased nobles—it did not appear until the end of the Republican era ⁶. Thus, during this era (), a portrait was extremely valuable and was considered a treasure or a mark of honor. We can see from this that sculpture, photography, and painting were linked to fear; for to represent and depict means to make the absent present and standing before us. It is not merely a matter of evocation but of substitution, as if the role of the image were to fill a void or alleviate a particular grief.

This is not the only symbolic function of the image, nor is it its sole function; however, it is considered the primary function of “mediology” (*), “which has served as a sociology of the media.” Here, radio or television stations do not necessarily take the lead in conveying meanings, nor can language or writing alone do so; for humans can receive and transmit in various ways: through the body, through movements, through a glance or a touch, through shouting or dancing, through all the physiological organs that serve as tools for transmission”⁷ Transmission has shifted from written or spoken language to transmission through images—from verbal to nonverbal transmission. Whenever writing is absent, this method proves effective in conveying the message.

The concept and role of the image have evolved to the point where, in the modern era, it is understood to mean a visual representation of a natural scene, an object, or a being; it is, at least on the surface, an attempt to simulate an external world through a camera, or through drawing, sculpture, caricature, or a fine art painting.” In all these cases, the artist merely transfers what the eye sees onto a new medium, within which the represented object acquires an added presence that derives its meanings from itself rather than from the representational material. From this perspective, then, the image belongs to the sensible world; it draws the eye to the things and beings of the universe, thereby placing the sensuous in the self in a direct relationship with its surroundings.”⁸ The image has moved from representation, imagination, distortion, and symbolic function to the transmission of reality through the camera or drawing; thus, the image has become sensory, with a reference to which it refers.

Based on this nature, “it presents to the viewer a representation or representations that serve as the means to generate another series of images that are not necessarily linked to a referential reference; for the image is a trace—a trace left by human hands on walls, canvases, or objects; they are traces left by people or are represented objects, and traces of the individual or collective imagination. In this sense, the image manifests a presence and forms part of humanity’s memory”⁹. If language provides the mind with abstract worlds based on concepts, the eye supplies it with images that are the visual equivalents of these concepts. “The image then becomes a source of sensations, emotions, imagination, and reason all at once”¹⁰. In all these endeavors, the process involves a cognitive activity that relies solely on sight as a tool for crafting texts based on analogy or imitation. This includes: portraits, identity photos, photography, films, caricatures, drawings, monuments, and all visual representations used by advertising as a tool for communication, guidance, and product promotion; this category also includes everything produced by the new wave of photography known as “the selfie” with all its derivatives; for in the present day, there is no value in what is classified as “reality,” since only images of objects and beings are worthy of circulation.

This leads us to conclude that the image stems from deep human needs—the need to represent oneself or one’s innermost depths, and to depict both the visible and invisible worlds; the image is the means by which these representations are revealed “In doing so, it creates a universe that multiplies and splits, thereby forming a parallel existence to the original universe, with the aim of controlling it, purifying it, celebrating it, and affirming its unique existence”¹¹. The image is not a mirror of a

⁶) Régis Debray, **The Life and Death of the Image**—trans. Farid Al-Zahi, **East Africa**, Casablanca, Morocco, 2nd ed., 2013, pp. 19–20

⁷) Mediology: a compound of “media” and “logy,” the latter meaning “science,” while the former refers to the set of technically and socially defined means of transmission and circulation of symbols—a set that coordinates and transcends the field of contemporary media, whether print or electronic, which are considered mass media (press, radio, television, advertising...)

R. Debray, **Cours de Medialogie Générale**, Galimand, Paris, 1991, p. 15

⁸) Saïd Benkrad, *Manifestations of the Image – Semiotics of Visual Schemas* –, p. 34

⁹) Ibid., p. 19

⁹) Ibid., p. 20

¹⁰) Ibid., same page.

¹¹) Saeed Benkrad, *Manifestations of the Image: The Semiotics of Visual Schemas*, pp. 26–27

world that exists in and of itself; rather, it is a window through which we glimpse what concepts have obscured. For this reason, the image must not replace things; rather, it must reveal how these things unfold before us and how we enter into them.

In this age—the visual age—which encompasses all the images produced by humanity in the twentieth century, the sheer volume of which exceeded all imagination, to the point that the image has become a tool for conveying direct messages pertaining to every utilitarian aspect of people's lives—what is referred to as the “video era” or the “visual age.” “In this era, the image is content to sell goods, ideas, and services, and through all of this, it refers to states of “sensory indulgence”—that is, the mere depiction of a series of frenzied emotions that operate without any purpose other than marketing and consumption. Products are no longer the source of temptation; rather, their images are what capture the eye”¹². Here, the role of the image has shifted from merely being viewed for pleasure or to convey reality to playing a significant role as a tool for shopping—from mere spectacle to a utilitarian function.

1-2 The Image and Language: Between the Verbal and the Visual

If we consider how the image exists and how it functions, it is not produced by replicating the surrounding world, nor does it reproduce what the eye sees; “Rather, it is an attempt to express something through a visual medium that replaces, evokes, or suggests it—which means that the image contains an expressive intent or a semantic purpose, making it an expressive tool similar to all tools of human expression, foremost among them language. It is an end in itself, not a passageway to an external world devoid of meaning.”¹³. Here lies another value and meaning of the image: it is not an exact replica of something, nor is it mute and devoid of reference; rather, it is a language parallel to speech, possessing a communicative intent that can be interpreted and read in multiple ways.

And it is this very purpose that raises many questions regarding the nature of thought and its relationship to the media that convey it: “For the abstract manifests itself and takes form in concepts, not through direct ‘representations’ derived solely from the senses.” This is another way of saying, ‘—that the only world capable of penetrating the mind is the world described by language’ (¹⁴). Thus, its boundaries, phenomena, dimensions, and entities are defined within language, not outside it, based on the way language structures perception. This means that concepts correspond to the sensible, and that what takes root in thought are the concepts of these sensible objects.

This is because the eye sees and captures everything that falls within its field of vision, “but in order to ‘see’—that is, to comprehend what it sees beyond its sensory perception—it must be guided by the concepts it receives, for these concepts help it organize its experience and define its place within temporal and spatial parameters. Therefore, there is no direct link between the seeing eye and its objects; it may possess the capacity for vision—which is its primary function—but in the absence of these concepts, it will be unable to diversify its presence in the world it represents” (¹⁵). This means that in every act, there is not only vision, but also a prior segmentation of the perceived object based on the semantic content that distinguishes one visual act from another.

Therefore, visual perception cannot be confused with what thought reformulates in an abstract manner. “Perception is momentary, sensory, and direct, whereas conceptualization is an abstract process based on generalization; as such, it follows encounters with the external world, and this is the channel through which language seeps in to serve as a mediator between the sensory existence of beings and things and their existence in meaning, and as Kant says, concepts are abstract entities used to reduce the manifold to a form of unity”¹⁶. At the outset of this argument, we find a contrast between visual perception and conceptualization: perception is the primary signifier of the visually perceived object, whereas the interpretation of what is seen varies from person to person, though they share a general interpretation of the visual. Thus, language is indispensable for reading and interpreting what is non-linguistic.

We see this clearly in our era—the age of the image, with all its dazzling visuals, videos, television, and cinema. These media may encapsulate and condense numerous texts and convey interpretations more powerful than writing, yet they require language to decipher their codes.

Thus, language is the means of discerning the truth of the image: “Through it, visual representation moves from states of mere reproduction to an entity bearing a meaning that transcends it; This does not mean that language leads to the capture of the image's total content based on a “word” that is its complete equivalent; rather, it enables the image to shed its mimetic nature, so that it becomes an independent communicative entity in its own right. In other words, we grasp the world through a pre-existing apparatus that encompasses all possible communicative codes, including beings, objects, and phenomena, and which also points to its ability to describe emotional states that are sometimes beyond the reach of verbal representation”¹⁷.

¹²) Ibid., p. 30

¹³) Ibid., p. 59

¹⁴) Ibid., pp. 59–60

¹⁵) Saeed Benkrad, *Manifestations of the Image: The Semiotics of Visual Patterns*, p. 60

¹⁶) Ibid., p. 60

¹⁷) Ibid., p. 66

From this, it becomes clear to us that the visual (the image) reads, and the verbal perceives. Without language, we cannot understand the image, its meanings, and its expressiveness.

A. The Nature of the Visual Sign and Its Components

If we return to the works of de Saussure and his intellectual project—in which he reexamined linguistics in terms of subject matter, methodology, and structure—we find that linguistics is the foundation and starting point of everything; it is the model upon which all other systems are built, “and it is the only system that interprets itself, the universe, and all systems that rely on materials other than sounds; it is the sole interpreter of all these systems”¹⁸. We cannot understand, interpret, or determine the meanings of nonverbal systems except by relying on the concepts provided by language. The linguistic system is the most sophisticated of all systems.

The most important aspect of de Saussure’s linguistics is the concept of the linguistic sign and its distribution; the linguistic sign does not naturally link phonetic symbols to actual entities. “The signifier is not something that directly substitutes for something else, but rather a symbolic form; that is, a cognitive process that leads the subject to condense actual experience and retain from it what constitutes a ‘general image’ capable of being circulated independently of physical reference”¹⁹. The linguistic sign, as defined by de Saussure, refers to a signified by linking a sound sequence that manifests as an auditory image captured by the ear and, by virtue of its placement, refers to a mental image that constitutes a general conception of something that actually exists in the external world; and the sign, in this conception, is arbitrary in nature.

In contrast to De Saussure’s linguistic theory stood Peirce’s interpretive semiotics, which holds that “human experience consists of the symbols left behind by humans as they search the memory of things for meanings that strip them of their utilitarian aspects and imbue them with meanings that attest to the fact that humans deal in signs, not in the things those signs denote”²⁰. In accordance with this general view of symbolic representation in human life and drawing on a philosophical foundation, S. Sandres Bourceau presented another conception of the sign with a three-part structure: “consisting of a signifier, a signified, and an interpreter; that is, what serves as the instrument of representation alone, what the signifier can refer to, and what guarantees the permanence of the link between the signifier and the signified—what he calls the interpreter, the instrument of necessary mediation”²¹. And the sign, as defined by Peirce, “is something that stands in place of something else for someone in some way and in some respect. It is directed toward another person in order to create in that person a parallel sign or a more developed sign”²². Peirce shifted the concept of the sign from the linguistic to the symbolic; it is not a material thing, for humans exchange signs, not tangible material objects, and in his triadic theory of the sign, the most important element is the interpreter, who is responsible for the validity of the sign.

Burs viewed this experience as the foundation of meaning and the basis of thought production—the foundation through which we perceive the universe and speak of it independently of its entities. He termed this “semiotics”—that is, the process through which something functions as a sign. “Meaning does not lie in the reference to a thing, but in our ability to represent it symbolically in our language and in all the tools we use. This also applies to the image: it is not a direct representation of a perceived object, but rather, first and foremost, a gaze that reformulates the represented object according to the eye’s will, not based on its reality in the external world”²³. Meaning is not produced by linking the sign to the physical object to which it refers; rather, meaning exists in our minds through reference to our language.

Burs presented a detailed classification of the types of signs and the relationships between them; here we mention some elements related to the visual sign and the way it appears to the eye and the mind. In this study, we focus on clarifying the classification of the object sign, as it encompasses the concept of the visual: “The object is an icon; it is a sign based on the resemblance between the representational medium and the object it represents. In Peirce’s view, an iconic sign is one that possesses some of the characteristics of the represented object, and we find this in all the images we exchange with one another. Its primary characteristic may also be contiguity, as it is based on a hypothetical link. The subject can also be a symbol—that is, an affirmation of a relationship between two things for which there is no direct link, such as the scales of justice, the crescent for Islam, and the cross for Christianity. “It is a matter of an arbitrary relationship”⁽²⁴⁾. It is custom alone that has led people to associate the two things. Based on this, the definition of the visual sign is explicitly or implicitly inspired by this classification, particularly as it relates to the icon, where the sign encompasses both the means of representation and the represented subject at once. This means, for example, that a photograph is an icon and an image of a person; thus, it resembles the person it represents. The evidence for this lies in the fact that it is a sign that indicates a certain event to us; therefore, Bours’s categorization of the sign applies to the nature of the image.

¹⁸) See Saeed Benkrad, *Manifestations of the Image: The Semiotics of Visual Patterns*, p. 90

¹⁹) *Ibid.*, p. 91

²⁰) *Ibid.*, pp. 91–92

²¹) C. S. Peirce, **Ecrits sur le signe**, Seuil, 1978, p. 122

²²) *Ibid.*, p. 121

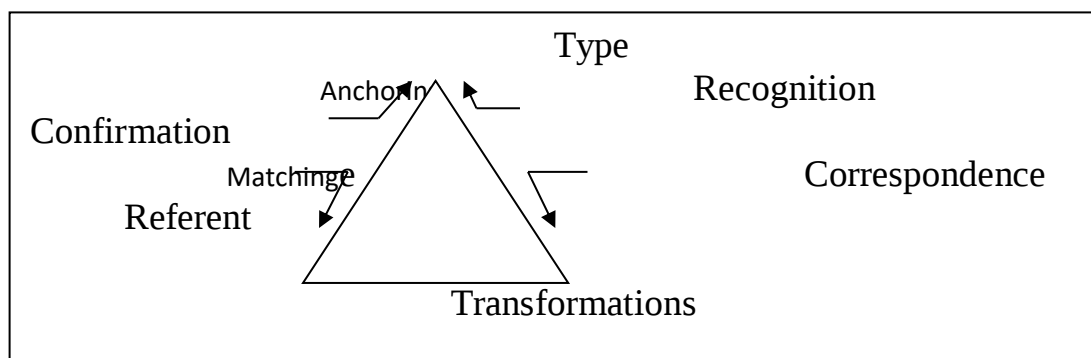
²³) Saeed Benkrad, *Manifestations of the Image: The Semiotics of Visual Patterns*, pp. 97–98

²⁴) *Ibid.*, pp. 98–99

Furthermore, the photograph does not differ in its symbolic function from the way language operates; it, too, is shaped by the additions introduced by the gaze through framing, the choice of shot, and poses, as well as the subsequent composition, color, and form. “For this reason, early semioticians applied the binary model presented by Saussure through the linguistic sign to the visual model. In their view, the image is also a signifier—that is, a series of visual stimuli that the eye coordinates to convey a signified composed of the meanings these stimuli evoke in the viewer”²⁵. The image does not convey the subject literally but adds much to it through the choice of shot and the composition; therefore, photography varies from one photographer to another. Thus, a photograph of a landscape or a person, for example, is a signifier that the recipient relates to its signified.

Roland Barthes was the first to formulate this theory, which projected language onto the image, resulting in a view that regards the visual world as merely subordinate to the world of language. He believed that linguistics is broader than semiotics, and that the latter is merely a part of this science, on the grounds that all non-linguistic systems can only be interpreted through language.

The “Mo” group then presented a new conception of how the visual sign functions, drawing—in its components and implications—on the definition of the sign as articulated by Bors. According to the “Mo” group, the visual sign is a triadic entity consisting of a “visual signifier,” a “referent,” and a “type,” as represented by the following formula²⁶:



This symbolic representation of the world is separate from real-world experience.

The Mo group posits that there are three relationships among the constituent elements of the visual sign²⁷.

- On the axis connecting the signifier and the signified, there is a relationship of transformation, which leads from the signifier to the object and from the object to the signifier.
- On the axis connecting the referent and the genus, there is a process that the group calls “fixation”; this means that the general characteristics that the eye attributes to a particular referent are embedded in the genus.
- As for the third axis—that is, the relationship between the genus and the signifier—the “Mo” group points to the necessity of a relationship that is also based on correspondence: namely, correspondence between the genus (the name—a set of characteristics) and the signifier (visual stimuli).

Based on this new visual awareness, Umberto Eco presented a new conception of the way in which the process of reference to an external world takes place—one that does not stem from the idea of “reproduction,” “but rather through the schemas that the mind constructs, which determine the recognition of what the image represents. For it is shared experience alone that pays no heed to the mechanisms of perception; in this sense, it is innate in human beings and requires no mediator other than what is provided by the nervous system responsible for vision, which is common to all people”²⁸. This implies that we experience our perceptions in all their aspects outside of any media, except the sensory channels. In fact, perceptual experience is a process in which sight serves merely as the neurological driver, which is physiological in nature.

In other words, the link between the signifier and the signified is not a natural one based on a definite resemblance between them. “For every act of recognizing a visual sign requires prior knowledge, which Eco sometimes calls ‘the laws of recognition’ and at other times ‘a cognitive structure’ or ‘iconic laws’; these are all formulations relied upon in every attempt we make to link the visual sign to the experience represented in the image. In his view, therefore, one cannot speak of true perception—whether within the realm of iconic signs or otherwise—except on the basis of prior knowledge that enables us to interpret this or that element according to its affiliation with one cultural sphere or another. “That is the defining characteristic

²⁵) Ibid., p. 101

²⁶) Groupe U, *Treatise on the Visual Sign*, Seuil, 1992, p. 136

²⁷) Ibid., pp. 138, 139, 140

²⁸) Umberto Eco, *The Absent Structure*, Mercure de France, 1972, p. 176

of all drawings” (29). In other words, when we look at an image or a drawing, we can only recognize it if we have prior knowledge of the depicted object—whether from our a priori knowledge of that representation or from our cultural background.

In short, the visual sign is not a natural representation of things, nor is it a reproduction of a material world that reveals itself spontaneously. “It always requires prior knowledge, which determines the degree of resemblance between it and what it represents; this sign may not be arbitrary to the same extent as arbitrariness in the linguistic field, but it requires a cultural framework that alone can guide the eye and direct it toward evoking a cognitive structure—which is its only means of linking this signifier to this signified”³⁰. The visual sign is not a reproduction; it requires prior knowledge to establish a connection between it and what it represents.

This means that we do not simply see the object before our eyes, “but rather, in the process of perception, we constantly strive to evoke the model to which it belongs; if this model is absent, the eye will turn away from it. Symbolic mediation is a prerequisite for the construction of meaning in both words and images”³¹. Symbolic mediation is what links the word to its meaning and the image to what it represents.

Understanding this nature is of the utmost importance in the study of the image; for whoever is unable to identify the contexts that govern the mechanisms by which the image functions will be unable to grasp the language through which the image reveals its meanings. This nature may well be the source of the cultural diversity of the act of seeing itself. For sight in the eye is nothing more than a simple function—a silent window that conveys only what comes from nature.

1-3 The Image and Art

In discussing art—one of whose pillars is the image—Dubry explains how it emerged and evolved alongside technological advancements, from the printing press to cinema and television, culminating in the digital image. From this, he argues that the age of art is unique to Westerners and no one else, “and that the age of idolatry is shared by a group of civilizations; we see that both eras—the age of art and the age of idolatry—distinguish humanity, such that each specific civilization has sought to elevate humanity to the level of immortalizing it and establishing a unique connection, through the image, with all possible worlds and existing civilizations”³². The development of technology has aided the development of art, for it is one of its pillars.”

He argues that “fear is the mother of humanity, and is therefore the driving force behind creativity; out of fear of nature, humans turned to the image—the idol—for protection against the evil of death and, consequently, the evil of annihilation.”³³. The foundation of creativity is fear; peoples turned to art to seek an outlet for their repressed emotions and fears and to embark on a journey into the realm of contemplation.

As Dubry states, the spread of Christianity in its early days enabled “the triumph of intuitive fascination over argumentative certainty, and thus of subjectivity over objectivity”³⁴; This signifies the triumph of the oral over the written. The structure of any religious discourse—its narrative framework—and the control and ignorance imposed by clergy on vulnerable populations, coupled with Christianity’s exploitation of this vacuum, led to the exploitation of people and their shackling with the chains of deprivation, illiteracy, and ignorance.

Following the technological shift, “we find that fear of authority and of the Church plays a major role in the creation of humanistic art that stands in resistance to the authority of the clergy”³⁵. Thanks to science and technological advancement, people were freed from their fear and, consequently, from their subservience to the clergy, and thus flourished in diverse artistic forms.

A. The Image Is a Weapon More Powerful Than Words

Because the evocative image draws its power from internal sources that erupt subtly; it requires no supervision yet accomplishes its purpose and conveys its message effectively.

The transformation that took place in art was on a technical level: “The transition from the idol to the work of art parallels the transition from the handmade to the printed, between the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; however, both the age of idolatry and the age of art are eras that reject and remain ignorant of intellectual constructs and technical projects”³⁶. These two centuries were an era of church domination and ignorance, far removed from the exercise of reason. Then came the Industrial Revolution, which changed everything with the invention of the printing press, followed by the computer and the internet, leading up to digitization.

²⁹) Saïd Benkrad, *Manifestations of the Image: The Semiotics of Visual Schemas*, pp. 97–98

³⁰) *Ibid.*, p. 120

³¹) *Ibid.*, p. 121

³²) See Régis Debray, **The Life and Death of the Image**, p. 224

³³) Souad Alami, “The Concept of the Image According to Régis Debray,” p. 49

³⁴) *Ibid.*, p. 51

³⁵) *Ibid.*, p. 49

³⁶) Debray, **Régresse, Vie et Mort de l’image**, NRF, Gallimard, 1992, p. 244

From this, we can speak of an overlap between the eras; for there is no break between them, but rather an evolutionary continuity: “The beginning was not Western, but the actual forms of the Age of Art became known through the Westerners in the fifteenth century, and credit for this goes to **Gutenberg** and his invention of the printing press”³⁷ “According to Dubry, the image emerged chronologically during the nineteenth century, not during the fourteenth, as many researchers believed. Every new technique creates a new subject by renewing its materials. The Renaissance image changed our perception of space and brought humanity’s conception of the image down from the heavens to the earth.”³⁸ This means that art’s function is no longer to express a specific religious or moral purpose, but rather to express a purely subjective experience without concern for objective content.

From all that we have presented, we find that images fall into two categories: artistic images and images that serve a communicative or informational purpose. However, in both cases, their role is to appeal to the eye—in the first instance, to delight and entertain the viewer, and in the second, to entice the viewer toward consumption. What justifies this combination of these two systems of imagery is that the reader and viewer should, first, recognize the difference between them in terms of their respective characteristics, and second, understand precisely that the visual is a defining feature of our era, whether it pertains to artistic creation or to communication and media.

B. The Impact of Technology on the Image:

The advent of the printing press played a major role in accelerating the pace of the world and in dispelling the prevailing belief that reading and writing were the exclusive domain of certain people. Manuscript copying was replaced by the massive spread of books, and written means of communication evolved with the emergence of newspapers throughout Europe; however, this did not diminish silent communication—communication through the image. The image, in and of itself, is a language spoken by all the world’s inhabitants, each in their own local dialect, and each according to their culture and their economic, social, and political circumstances.

The presence of the image is powerful, and through this presence, words become ingrained in our subconscious, thereby increasing the image’s power and resilience. For understanding and perception of a thing are nothing but an image we form by arranging the words we hear or read.

For this reason, language “can develop the image, and the visual takes place within the written” (³⁹). We explain the image through language, and we can only grasp all the interpretations of the visual by writing about it in language.

Thus, the relationship between the word and the image is a strong one; yet despite this strength, the interactions between the image and the word are not of the same nature nor do they move in the same direction. “Words propel us forward, whereas the image propels us backward”⁴⁰. This means that to grasp meanings and interpret what is written, we follow a linear sequence of sentences, paragraphs, and texts until we arrive at an interpretation; in contrast, we perceive an image all at once and seek its interpretation within our cultural and intellectual reservoir by drawing on our prior experiences.

As Dubray says, the rhetoric of the image is nothing more than a reflection of literary rhetoric. Therefore, the image can be studied—just as with a linguistic message—through the functions performed by language.

Jacobson’s model is considered the ideal framework for analyzing the image, namely communication through the image: the sender sends a message to the receiver; this message refers to something or to a referent. For it to be effective, a relationship must be established between the sender and the receiver. Therefore, the study of any image requires a substantial linguistic foundation to describe and analyze it.

However, the relationship between the image and the referent is a thorny and complex one, and perhaps this is where the secret of the image’s power and durability lies. She concludes that all interpretations of works of art and images are mere interpretations, making it impossible to match the image exactly with the referent. “This lack of correspondence stems from the fact that it is an immortal entity—indeed, the only entity that endures and persists in this world; it is preserved and endures in and of itself.”⁴¹ The image does not correspond to the referent, no matter how skillfully crafted it may be

2- The Place of the Image in Contemporary Art

Long ago, with the advent of printing technology, the book remained for eight centuries the foundation of Western institutions; today, however, social reality has left behind the dogma of the book, as the book is no longer the center of educational and other institutions. “The screen, the press, and communication have replaced the page, literature, and reading, and the transition has been made from the readable to the visible—Du lisible au visible. The visible has replaced the readable. If Hegel said that reason governs the world, then the filmmaker or television producer says that the gaze enchants the world.”⁴² All aspects of people’s lives—whether scientific, recreational, or creative—have moved into the digital age.

³⁷) Souad Alami, *The Concept of the Image in Régis Debray*, p. 50

³⁸) *Ibid.*, p. 222

³⁹) Régis Debray, **The Life and Death of the Image**, trans. Farid al-Zahi, p. 51

⁴⁰) *Ibid.*, p. 119

⁴¹) Souad Alami, “The Concept of the Image in Régis Debray,” p. 56

⁴²) Régis Debray, *The Life and Death of the Image*, trans. Farid Al-Zahi, p. 332

A. Art and Modern Technologies

If we trace the history of the image, we find that it has never ceased to evolve over the ages, and interest in it has grown alongside technological advancements. There is a close and causal relationship between the image and technology: as technologies advance, so does the image, and the connection to it deepens; there is a natural union between art and new technologies. “This concerns an ontological shift and a metaphysical dimension of technology. And if we draw on Heidegger’s approach to examine contemporary technology, we will see that the latter is more than an arsenal of machines and devices; rather, it is a mode of the disclosure of Being—it is a summons for Being to come into being and a call for presence to be present. This summoning and this call take place in a different way than they did in all previous eras of the world, particularly the Greek and medieval eras: “It is no longer a matter of production in the sense of revealing the hidden or uncovering the veiled, but rather of inciting nature and existence in general to yield what lies within it, and to make it available at a moment’s notice whenever the need arises.”⁴³ . The age of digitization and the internet has helped art and its practitioners to develop it and bring out all its splendor and manipulation of colors and movements through dazzling presentations.

What is evident in the contemporary world is the unprecedented sweep of electronic and information technologies across the realm of artistic and creative practice. What demands our attention is the unprecedented visual flood resulting from the development—if not a massive leap—in visual technologies, including the emergence of the photograph, followed by cinema or the moving image, then live television, followed by the on-demand image—by which we mean video—and finally, the digital image made available by the computer. This technological boom has been accompanied by the widespread dissemination and, consequently, consumption of images on a massive scale, thanks to advances in television broadcasting and satellite transmission technologies.

3- The Image and the Screen

Dubray distinguished three eras in the development of the image, each with its own characteristics and features, moving from the era of the “logosphere” to the era of the “graphosphere” and finally to the era of the “videosphere,” “The latter did not emerge until 1968, during a period of transformation in the social structures of French society, parallel to the technological shift brought about by the advent of color television and, consequently, the emergence of an image carrying new connotations in which reality dissolves through computer technology; Therefore, cinema belongs chronologically to the era of the graphosphere, but it was discussed in the dissertation in the context of the era of the videosphere”⁴⁴ , because with the current cinematic image, we can also speak of the actual death of reality.

A. Cinema

It emerged in the modern era, precisely with the triumph of the bourgeoisie and the development of art. From its inception, it was considered an art form, as it naturally took the path of the “arts of directing,” “and thus, in its production, it remains a collective of artisans, where there is a special bond between the producer and the screenwriter, similar to that which links the publisher and the writer”⁴⁵ . Furthermore, cinema is an industry—and thus a technology—that will continue to drive humans to expel their own selves: self-production, self-occupation, “Here we find the trap of modernity that imprisons people within their own images; and as a way of thinking and of constructing the world, cinema as a technology regulates the external world, isolating and alienating it; for the cinema enthusiast is a wanderer and unmonitored”⁴⁶ . The image has incorporated everything within it through the evolution of the art of filmmaking, relying on modern technology such as computers and the internet.

We are faced with technologies—and thus with forms of cinema—that transform the cinematic image into a game in the hands of protagonists who use it to attempt to control nature and humanity. Jean Mitry says of humanity: “Nature controls it unceasingly, and it will not be rid of its anxiety except by controlling nature in turn through representations. “Because he organizes these images according to his will in this way, he possesses an imagination and comes to know himself in the world, even if he is unaware of it” (⁴⁷). We manipulate the image through cinematic direction so that humanity may free itself from its fascination with nature and attempt to represent it through images.

B. Television:

Both cinema and television are similar in that they are both means of communication and creativity; however, television is not a miniature version of cinema, as some believe. While cinema has the power to shape history, television “does not, because it is momentary, just like a newspaper; it presents the hour, not the year. As for production, television is an extension of cinematic technology.”

Just as we find ourselves faced with movie theaters, we also find ourselves faced with television stations, since “the dynamism of some television stations is at a certain level compared to others, for justifiable sociocultural reasons, while some

⁴³) Abdelaziz Maazouz, *The Philosophy of the Image—The Image Between Art and Communication—East Africa*, Casablanca, Morocco, 2014, p. 23

⁴⁴) Souad Alami, “The Concept of the Image in Riheis Donri,” p. 69

⁴⁵) Ibid., p. 69

⁴⁶) Ibid., p. 70

⁴⁷) Mitry, J., **Aesthetics and Psychology of Cinema**. P.V.F., Paris, 1963, Vol. I, p. 15

television stations are in crisis”⁴⁸. If the world’s thinking is expressed on television today through words and images, then in some countries those words are censored and the images may disappear; the issue here is not a crisis of images or words, but a political crisis, “for the image is revelation, and revelation is forbidden in certain mindsets and beliefs because it seduces and thus exposes the eyes; therefore, as Dubry asserts, politicians are compelled to love television and to be wary of it”⁴⁹. The equation of the age of vision is manifested in the fact that the visible equals the real, and the latter refers to truth, which varies from one television channel to another, and from one era to another, in terms of its forms. “The image influences, while the visible convinces; look no further, do not waste your time going far—everything is within the frame”⁵⁰. This is very clear: the still image affects us when we see and interpret it, and the moving image on television speaks for itself, presenting news and events that we accept and believe.

4. Communication Culture and the Cultural Industry

4-1 Communication and Interaction

This section is divided into two parts: the first deals with means of communication as technological media that are constantly evolving and undergoing one breakthrough after another thanks to the technological revolution, and the second deals with the culture of communication, which we might call technological culture, mass culture, or the cultural industry. When we speak of these means of communication, the French thinker Régis Debray refers to them as “mediology”—a field concerned with the study of the unconscious aspects of communication, broadcasting, and symbolic promotion.” The French root “médio” refers to anything suitable for conveying an idea, information, or news. However, in the contemporary world, driven by technological development, electronic and visual means of communication have emerged that were previously unknown to humanity.”⁵¹. It studies the technically defined material set of media, transmitters, and carriers, but what is a “medium”? “Everything is a medium (tout est médium), or everything is a medium. It is a contemporary and current field of study, especially with the development of modern communication technologies”⁵². Technological media are tools for the mass culture industry or the cultural industry.

Media and communication institutions have become the instruments of power within societies; detention centers, prisons, and military institutions are no longer the primary instruments of power. Régis Debray states in this regard: “The goals and excesses of power must be examined through a technical study of the power of the media, and it is precisely the power of the media that gives content and ideas their strength”⁵³.

4-2 The Medium Is the Message

The first point to note is that what the media convey is neither truth nor falsehood, nor honesty nor lies, but rather effectiveness and efficiency. The criterion by which the media operate is the power to influence the recipient and persuade them to believe the content they convey, regardless of whether it is true or false. Dubray says: “How is the recipient led to believe when information is conveyed or signals are broadcast? When we realize that our relationship with things is mediated by people, and that our relationship with people is mediated by things, we understand the importance of the media”⁵⁴. In the present era, the media instill belief in ideology, as well as in entertainment and recreation; what matters is how these messages are conveyed and how they exert influence and power. “Mediology is concerned with thinking about the medium not in terms of it being a statement, but in terms of it being a message, because the content of a statement conveys truth or certainty (certum), such as scientific issues and statements (two plus two equals four), whereas the purpose of a message is to instill a belief and to act in accordance with that belief”⁵⁵, such as the noble verse: “Obey Allah and the Messenger and those in authority among you.”

McLuhan argues that the message is the linchpin of modern communication systems because these systems do not convey content or facts; rather, they transmit messages and work to reinforce and entrench them in people’s minds and consciousness. “There is no message on one side and a carrier or transmitter on the other; rather, they exist together and are inseparable.” The sole purpose of communication media is to influence and persuade, not to convey any truth whatsoever. McLuhan classifies communication media into two categories: hot and cold. The “hot” ones are those that allow for feedback, while the “cold” ones do not allow for feedback”⁵⁶. To illustrate this, we find that television is a “cold” medium of communication because the viewer is a passive recipient who does not participate in constructing what they see.

⁴⁸) Souad Alami, “The Concept of the Image in Régis Dounry,” p. 74

⁴⁹) Régis Debray, *The Life and Death of the Image*, trans. Farid al-Zahi, p. 357

⁵⁰) Ibid., p. 325

⁵¹) Abdelaziz Maazouz, *The Philosophy of the Image: The Image Between Art and Communication*, p. 134

⁵²) Ibid., p. 134

⁵³) Régis Debray, General Course on Mediology, p. 34

⁵⁴) Ibid., p. 34

⁵⁵) Abdelaziz Maazouz, The Philosophy of the Image: The Image Between Art and Communication, p. 136

⁵⁶) Abdelaziz Maazouz, The Philosophy of the Image: The Image Between Art and Communication, p. 136

Media includes visual, written, audio, and audiovisual forms. In our present age and in our contemporary societies, this era can be described as the age of communication machines due to technological advancement. This era is characterized by the dominance, prevalence, and imperialism of the image.

The type of image referred to in this context “is the produced and constructed image, not the natural or artistic image; or, to put it another way, it is the artificial or fabricated image, as manifested in the photograph, in television or cinematic images, and today in the digital image connected to the virtual world and the Internet”⁵⁷. Dubray disagrees with Lohan’s assertion because he believes the matter is more complex than this tendency toward simplification.

Communication culture, based on the field of mediology from a critical perspective, “focuses on the unconscious intellectual foundations of communication culture. It critiques the mechanisms and media of communication and uncovers their theoretical backgrounds and unconscious foundations”⁵⁸. What matters most in this field is critical reflection on the dominance of the virtual world over the real world, which has various dimensions and implications.

4-3 Virtual Reality: The concept of reality itself has undergone a transformation. While reality was once posited as the opposite of imagination, today—in the wake of the technological revolution—it has become associated with a virtual dimension. “In modern communication technology and thanks to the digital revolution, reality has become a ‘hyper-reality’ that transcends the realm of reality; reality has become digital data that is organized and reorganized according to our requirements”⁵⁹.

First, it is an interactive reality—a shared experience in which no single entity dominates or prevails. Furthermore, it is a reality that can be endlessly constructed. We can change whatever we wish within it by altering the digital parameters. The defining characteristic of this virtual reality is that it is immaterial—in the sense that it has no physical extension, no distances, and no boundaries. Furthermore, it is a reality that can be created on a computer.

The most important medium in mass communication is the image, which is present in every field. It is considered the most powerful and widespread medium in the contemporary world due to the endless possibilities it offers for communication and publicity, as well as the unlimited means it provides for influencing public opinion—especially given the technological advancements it has achieved, foremost among which is the digital revolution.

5. The Impact of Visual Discourse on the Recipient

As images have swept through the visual world and come to dominate technological advancements, they have come to rival or, in many cases, surpass the written word. Images impose themselves, generate their own meanings, and capture the viewer’s attention more effectively than words. What, then, are the philosophical implications of this era marked by this visual deluge—particularly for the recipient?

The first of these implications is the dominance of the present, the future, the temporal, and the momentary over the realm of perception; the past and the future appear only to reinforce a present that neither passes nor ends. The present is constantly present, as if it had no predecessor and no successor. “The result is, ultimately, the development of a mode of perception that is aimless and transient, devoid of memory, and doomed to be trapped in a perpetual present”⁶⁰.

- The second of these consequences is the dominance of immediacy over the viewer’s consciousness, to the extent that the viewer is led to believe they are at the very heart of the event and in the thick of what is happening. Live coverage and on-air broadcasts are often cited as evidence of a media scoop, the credibility of the news material, and the truth, immediacy, and intensity of the news. “This excess of immediacy leads to a loss of direct connection with things and events, in that it trivializes what is happening on the one hand and replaces direct relationships with people, things, and events with a fictitious relationship with images”⁶¹. As Adorno states: “Immediacy becomes a substitute or replacement for the direct social relationship from which human beings have been deprived.”⁶²

- The third of these implications is “the shift from real reality to virtual reality, from things to signs, and from the originals of things to their repeated copies—which heralds the emergence of the world of simulacra, meaning that to the extent we pursue reality through colors... and from one technical mastery to the next, the reality of the world deepens”⁶³.

In this world of simulacra, the image is both signifier and signified, constantly referring back to itself. And when it refers to the world, this is merely a means of returning to itself once again. We are faced with semblances of things, not things themselves; with semblances of subjects, not subjects themselves, where reality is sacrificed in the name of a higher reality in which there is no clear distinction between the real and the false, but only the semblance or the similar.

⁵⁷) Ibid., p. 136

⁵⁸) Ibid., p. 137

⁵⁹) Ibid., same page

⁶⁰) Yves Michaux, *Crisis of Contemporary Art*, p. 70

⁶¹) Abdelaziz Maazouz, *The Philosophy of the Image: The Image Between Art and Communication*, p. 25

⁶²) T. Adorno, *Critical Models*, Columbia University Press, 1998

⁶³) Jean Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society*, Ed. Gallimard, Paris, p. 188

Conclusion/

The image is a language no less important than written language; it has its own rhetoric and interpretations. It emerged in the modern era some time after the invention of the printing press and evolved alongside technological advancements driven by modern technologies; consequently, media diversified, and the image entered the realm of enchantment through the virtual world.

In dictionaries, the meaning of “image” is distinguished between the illusions and fantasies imagined by the individual and the forms and sculptures created by human hands—between what is imagined and what is tangibly perceptible.

Among the symbolic functions of the image:

- In Roman times, the term “image” referred to the masks of the dead, which were made of wax. This mask signifies a substitute; the image represents the likeness of a thing, not its presence.
- The image serves a relational function that brings together two contradictory things; in Rome, until the fall of the empire, the image was precious and held a high status reserved only for those in power.
- Sculpture, photography, and painting were associated with fear.
- Communication shifted from the written or spoken word to communication through images.
- The concept of the image changed in the modern era and came to denote a visual representation of a landscape, an object, or a being.
- An image is a simulation of the external world through a camera, drawing, or sculpture; at this stage, the image belongs to the sensory world.
- The image has shifted from representation, imagination, distortion, and symbolic function to conveying reality through the camera or drawing, thus becoming a sensory experience with a reference point to which it refers.
- The image is not a mirror of a world that exists in and of itself; rather, it is a window through which we look upon what concepts have obscured.
- In this era—the age of digitization, also known as the visual age—the role of the image has shifted from mere viewing to playing a significant role in marketing, evolving from a purely aesthetic function to a utilitarian one.
- An image is not a reproduction of reality; it is an attempt to express something through a visual medium, for an image carries a communicative intent.
- The eye perceives and captures everything within its field of vision, guided by the concepts it receives.
- There is a difference between visual perception and what the mind reinterprets in an abstract way; there is the perception of the seer and the interpretation of the seer.
- The visual reads, and the verbal sees.
- Peirce proposed a tripartite division of the sign, which he defined as symbolic; the object sign is the one related to the visual sign, where the object is either iconic, indexical, or symbolic. Semioticians relied on the connection between the signifier and the signified to determine the meanings of the image.
- Roland Barthes viewed the visual world as merely subordinate to the verbal world; it was he who projected the verbal onto the image.
- The “Mo” group presented a conception of the visual sign as a triadic entity consisting of a visual signifier, a referent, and a type.
- The visual sign is not a natural representation of objects, nor is it a reproduction of the physical world.
- The origin of art lies in fear; humans turned to art to find an outlet for their repressed emotions and fears.
- The revolution in art occurred on a technical level with the advent of the printing press, followed by the computer and the internet.
- Images fall into two categories: artistic images and those that serve a communicative or informational purpose.
- Language can develop the image, and the visual takes place within the written.
- The interactions between the image and the word are not of the same nature nor do they move in the same direction; words propel us forward, while images propel us backward.
- As technology advances, so does the image, and our connection to it deepens; there is a natural alliance between art and new technologies.
- With the advent of color television, images emerged that carry different connotations, and reality dissolves through computer technology. The foundation of the film industry is the image based on direction.
- Television and cinema are two means of communication and creativity, and they differ in their impact on the audience.
- Technological media are tools for the mass culture industry, or the cultural industry.
- Communication media exert a powerful influence on the audience.
- One of the most significant effects of the visual on the audience is the dominance of the present, the immediate, the temporal, and the momentary over the realm of perception.

- The immediacy of the broadcast immerses the viewer in the event, often leading them to believe they are right in the thick of it; live coverage and on-air broadcasts are frequently taken as evidence of a media scoop and the credibility of the news content.

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