

## TOPIC 4

*The image gives, by itself, almost no intelligibility. The image must be explained; and the explanation given about it on television is insufficient. If in the future there were television that explained better (much better), then the discourse on a positive integration between homo sapiens and homo videns could be resumed. But for the moment, it is true that there is no integration, but subtraction and that, therefore, the act of seeing is atrophying the ability to understand.*

### I. Introduction

With the evolve of technology the evolve of man, and the ways of his contact with the world follow suit. A world where knowledge and information is passed primarily through text or discourse has been overtaken by a man of seeing – homo videns, as Giovanni Sartori defines. The seeing man is to him, no longer the understanding man. Sartori considers the fluidity of image as the reason for this - a consumed image is never explained, and is futile and passing, the very concept of the sight becomes adjacent to the man that consumes it. In my essay, I would like to delve into the man of the image, and what it means to perceive through imagery, making it the primary source of perceiving the world, and discuss the method by which modern man is, and if the seeing can also ever be the knowing.

### II. Method

To approach the problem that imagery presents us with, we can make a few conclusions from the presented quote to guide our method of doing so:

a) To approach the implications of what image means, we need to do so in the terms of explaining, since the purpose of information is to create understanding.

It is important to understand why the change between textual discourse to imagery is so incredibly relevant to us. Humans live in a world that is built upon sharing – meaning the foundation of all everything we are, all we become, is built from something that has been passed down - the context to the world and its perceiving that our culture provides to us, and the habits, knowledge that guides us through our being that we gain from our interacting with the other. Umberto Eco put it as standing on the shoulders of giants, and while he meant a slightly different thing than I do, this is an appropriate way to approach the context of human being. We have been born in the context of all that has been before us, and there is no possibility to ever know everything that has been thought, written, or sung. We can never know all that we came from.

This is why the sharing of knowledge is so important to us – on a large scale, we are humanity evolving and adding onto that which we have known, refining and polishing that which is our grandiose explanation of our own selves and our conditions. But on a smaller scale, the evolve of humanity is but steps of individual man that adds to the collective of our knowledge. It is through being lifted by the giants of our collective community that humanity progresses. That is why the means of this sharing ought to be effective, and the human mind valued as capable of understanding this knowledge in order for humanity to not remain stagnant.

b) Imagery alters the passage of information and is insufficient to create a base for knowledge.

This creates the premises for the problem we ultimately need to break down – the presentation of image being ultimately static and being invalid for the curation of a true understanding based on its lack of receptiveness and its one-sidedness.

From these conclusions I can define the further path of this essay – I will address the pursuit of knowledge and understanding and the different ways this can be sought after, then discuss our focus – the presentation of images, arguing how perceiving imagery is unfulfilling because it is stagnant in its meaning and resolve, and following with the perception of the seeing man which is only guided by images.

### **III. Sense as a means of discourse**

We have created the guidelines which we should follow to address the contrast between sense and image. The sensing man is a man of discourse. The example of discourse with another person is an obvious one – Plato's Socrates pursued philosophy through dialogue and that is not without reason – throughout multiple dialogues Socrates' responses consist of commenting the other person's arguments, retelling them and at times even strengthening them, applying them in a variety of examples, and only then tackling it by noticing the inconsistencies or fallacies. While talking to another person and conveying that which one believes through words is also a multifaceted journey – primarily due to the limitations of speech and particularly the fact our own ideas are our own – means to a certain point they become objective to our following perceptions (the approach of a new idea begins with the reconsideration of it through what we believe and measuring its alignment). Or at the very least they gain a sense of tacit security while remaining in their fluidity (that is due to the subjectiveness of our own minds and the fact our own minds are everchanging with what we experience and perceive).

The essence of discourse, and the very most important side of it is the expression of these ideas. That is what fuels discourse – the ability to both give and get something in return, creating a continuity of a concept. Since we already mentioned the method Socrates used, where a stagnant definition was never present and the arguments always questioned, the result of discourse can be simply illustrated by how the definition of justice turns fluid and everchanging throughout the dialogue in Plato's Republic, changing to adjust both the concepts of necessity, value, will and judgement. However, it is not enough to simply define discourse as the changing of ideas. This is because discourse is not necessarily sparked between two present people, and other options must be considered. At the beginning of this part of my essay I stated that the sensing man is a man of discourse. Therefore, the following point I would like to approach is sensibility and its value and experience, especially when creating understanding.

The perceiving of an object that presents itself in front of us is also by no means unresponsive. I would like to view the very act of perception as an act of exchange. We oftentimes approach an object with an impression of its quality, appearance (in an ontological sense), and in turn – capability. We consider before experienced happenings or objects, such as sunsets or cups of coffee, with the associations and our own acknowledgements of our previous experience of said object. This guides an impression of our following experience through which we approached a foreignity which we have categorised to fall under a certain singularity, such as we might expect a certain reaction to a certain event. Thus, our experiences create an almost pavlovian sense of reaction – our world becomes infinitely easier definable when we know how to glide through it with these predetermined possibilities of outcomes. Hume, for example, argues a very similar thing, stating that science is only a means for man to argue life for himself, a guide for his scepticism. This can be related to my previous argument, these impressions of our perception are very well a personal science of ours, in the literal sense.

Keeping in mind this context of our experience, we can approach the exchange with the sensible. The object reveals itself to us in our sensuality of it, in the way we approach it, and we are able to

have returning contact by choosing our means of experiencing it – we can assume, test its capability or observe its behaviour or appearance by interacting with this object. After all, every thing that has ever existed is unlike any other thing – *everything flows*. Allowing ourselves to realise and embrace that allows us to create discourse with the object, though it is realised, undoubtedly, only through ourselves, the object guides us with its actual presence. That is why the presentation of quality is an ever relevant problem in philosophical discourse – there are many ways we can limit or expand our conceptual ability to experience qualities individually. This all adds to our understanding and the curation of it – understanding here is but the cultivation of the meanings we can assign to a concept.

#### **IV. Image as a take on being**

This brings us to how we experience quality through imagery, and the path of assigning meaning in such a situation. We have already established how discourse can happen both through expressing ourselves through language and through experiencing events first hand, letting ourselves approach them with ways that allow us to provide explanations. Now, let's consider how one interacts with a presented imagery, and how images, as a modern man's tools for expression, guide our path of understanding.

Image like Sartori discusses is a depiction of a happening (one to usually experience through sense), presented in an isolation from interpretation. This argues, that imagery is presented with a certain intent, a concept behind the appearance. It is a perception presented in within some boundaries of the creator's intent. While one can argue that intent is as fluid as the perception of such intent, for example how phenomenologist Sezemann argued that intent belies the image and while is tangible by the observer, can never be understood completely, we don't need complete understanding of an artist's or creator's intent, but only the observation of it, which can too be more subconscious than intentional (we might not realise we are seeing an object through the lens of another's eyes as well as our own). Here, the very presence of intent opposite the authentic experience of the object itself denies the depicted object any true being. This can be considered in a couple different contexts, the primary of which being art. Here, the inexistence of an authentic/self-made experience of the observer can work to understanding's benefit, and the authenticity arises in the observer's experience of the artist's experience. It is a multi-layered sensing of both the artist and one's own self, since one experiences both the work of art, and their own interpretation of it, the two dependant on one another when we consider it from our consciousness' perspective.

However, the imagery that is truly problematic to our understanding is not one that comes from art. This is because art does not aim at objective understanding, and more often aims at contemplation than a conclusion. Imagery becomes problematic when it is presented with an aim to depict an experience. This is crucial when it comes to understanding a variety of social and political problems, for example, the reason for why political insensitivity or apathy for war is a very apparent problem in our world nowadays. Seeing war on the television does not come remotely close to even feeling the threat of war for one's own country, since the very presentation of the imagery (that is even if the imagery presented were graphic, for instance) on news anchors or social medias remains only a fragment, and formatted without the possibility of actual perception and is formatted with knowledge of the fact. A man of seeing but not discourse, can therefore not be truly considering of such event – he will, like in any other image, see not the true depicted thing, but his own associations (which may be completely inaccurate), and only an at best façade of the depicted object.

One might consider that the same thing can also be applied to textual media too – for example, one is likely to not fully comprehend when reading about casualties only depicted by numbers, reading

about it in a news source. However, textual resources do not inherently carry the intent to depict an experience of their content – language brought together to a text remains a hint, or description of an event, by no means a contender to the actual event (again, with the rare exception of art, though that remains another case, for which another consideration would be required), because the weight words carry are, as we established with the discussion about sensing, subjective to one's own mind, like any other concept. Image, however, inherently has the aim to depict in a much more experience simulating way than text. Sight is the façade of all things, through sight most people first hand come to perceive the world, therefore sight and imagery aims at our senses and a certain simulacrum of the event depicted, while text aims at our reason and comprehension, since we process text intentionally, and guides us to an understanding that is tacit to the one who has experienced the described event.

## **V. Conclusion**

In his quote, Giovanni Sartori highlights that the act of seeing hinders understanding, and while I agree with him on some level, we have discussed the presence of imagery when it is accompanied with intent. There is a double standing here, which depends on that, which image aims at. Image can, simply put, never provide understanding about an experience that compares to experiencing it, and in that way never provide understanding that is objective, but certainly can provide, or at least hint at a different type of understanding, one that can reveal more about our own selves than the depicted object.

In this essay I approached the consumption of imagery as a false experience, discussing that image can only suggest at that, which it is showing, and discussed how senses and discourse are crucial elements to building understanding, and how without them a true comprehension of an event is not possible, and can only be hinted at. I took a phenomenology oriented stance, addressing the differences between the experience of images and discourse (whether that be with another person or through experiencing), and the multifaceted experience of images which are too subjective to contribute to our understanding of a true experience of said depiction. I concluded on an open note – there is not only one way to understand something, and any experience can therefore show us something about either the world or ourselves which we had not yet known.