

Word and Picture

Here we take a closer look at two extremely powerful instruments. Every day we are confronted with them, every day a spirit connected with them tries to penetrate us, every day each individual's own spirit is the target of other spirits' intentions. Among these others, the ones who gain the most influence are those who know best how to control psychological processes induced by words and images.

As a community being, no human being can escape this state of affairs. On the other hand, man's own fundamental capacity for reflection allows him to filter mentally everything that reaches him in terms of information or even sensually perceived messages. What conclusions can we draw from this knowledge?

First of all, the need to self-reflect on one's own mental filtering system is recognised from this, i.e. to become aware of its principles and its calibration. This preoccupation is not only an essential procedure of psychological or psychotherapeutic schools, but is justified by the mystery that makes a human being a human being - that is, by his essence or, as scholars put it: by his hypostasis (Greek) or his substance (Latin). Thus it concerns every human being, whether he wants it or not. The only question here is: Is there also the will to do justice to the human essence and to activate this specific ability? Furthermore, one can ask: Where does an existing will of this kind draw its boundaries?

Since we are all more or less community-oriented, the phenomenon of mass occurs as an effect of influences, as described above. To get an idea of "mass" in its basic meaning, we can think of a bread or cake dough (mass = unshaped material, lumps of consistently equal material, heaps, patties ...). Gustave le Bon (1841-1931) took up the term "mass" in psychology and wrote the classic "The Psychology of Masses". Of course, he was not the only psychologist of his time who dealt with the phenomenon of the masses. Let us

pay attention to the fact that we are talking about a scientific study of the psyche. Well, this word is the Greek name for the soul. Nevertheless, it makes sense today to define a difference between soul and psyche insofar as "psyche" refers to everything that can be systematically and scientifically described as mental phenomena. The soul itself is not comprehensible to others, only its more or less encoded communicative expressions are.

Effects that lead to a mass of people are at the same time effects that inhibit the ability to come to correct conclusions. The human being manipulated into the mass mode is no longer able to deal with or evaluate the issue in question sensibly (rationally) without disconnecting his psyche from the manipulation in question. Emotions have taken over in the masses. In this state, neither the head as the seat of reason nor the heart as the seat of the considered will rules, but the belly, which provides the throne for the emotions. In the psychoanalysis (depth psychology) of Sigmund Freud (1856-1939), the belly represents the id, the human driving forces. The interplay of thinking, feeling and willing results in what is recognisable in the human being, but cannot be comprehensively described.

Gustave le Bon describes a crowd not as a large number of people, such as a vast majority of a people, but a psychologically describable collective state that has occurred in several people through one and the same emotional movement. Accordingly, even a small crowd of people can become a mass. Since a society is also characterised by something in common that connects the people who belong to it, the terms "mass" and "society" are close to each other, except that in the case of the mass, it is precisely the emotional sphere that plays the decisive role, whereas in the case of society, it is rather an objective sphere of interest.

In historical times, masters of rhetoric understood how to create masses from large audiences without electro-technical or even electronic aids. Today, however, there is much more available that can be used for this purpose. Above all, it is the power of the image — be it still or moving images — that lends itself to be used for mass education and psychic mass manipulation. Edward Bernais shows in his book "Propaganda" that large business enterpri-

ses preceded politicians in this matter. Only after they had recognised the great success of economic propaganda did they also adopt this method. When the term "propaganda" began to arouse negatively perceived secondary ideas, it was gradually replaced by the term "public relations". The literal translation of this pair of terms to "public relations" has tended to be avoided in German. Instead, we say "Öffentlichkeitsarbeit" (public work), although the English term actually refers more to the initiation of such an engagement. A more appropriate name for this concept would be "business-effective mass suggestion".

From this perspective, the so-called mass media no longer appear primarily as media for the masses, but as media that form masses. After corresponding masses have been created in this way through conditioning, they may largely be regarded as secured as media consumers in the long run. The business intention behind this process cannot be more obvious. The more the image is used, such as a photo accompanying the text, the more an additional impact factor is added to the message being conveyed — as the saying goes: a picture is worth a thousand words.

Is this statement true? Does a picture really say more than words? We come closer to the matter if we replace "say" with "effect" here. A picture has more effect than a thousand words. It has a stronger effect than a text, especially in terms of building a crowd, because it appeals to the emotions in a direct way. Some time ago I came across a popular science text on this subject. It said that the neural pathways of image perception are different from those of text perception. This makes sense because a picture, unlike a text, does not have to be broken down verbally and grammatically in order to be understood, but arrives directly in the consciousness and is only then, if at all, mentally described and interpreted by the observer in his or her dominant language. The mind is therefore not as involved in the perception of images as it is in the understanding of a text.

With pictures, therefore, emotions are aroused in a shortened way without analytical processing of the incoming information, either pleasant ones with aesthetic correspondence or unpleasant ones through unaesthetic or other-

wise repulsive effects. According to that treatise, if someone reads little for a long time, over a period of years, but takes in a lot of pictorial information, the responsible stimulus conduction system becomes accustomed to the course of the pictorial perception pathway, so that it predominates and words are no longer sufficiently analysed, reflected upon and related to each other. The ability to critically examine absorbed information is significantly reduced in this way, while the onset of mass suggestion and mass education is strongly promoted. Any contradictions in the meaning of the incoming information are no longer recognised.

Without it, excerpts from a context can often be interpreted differently than they are meant to be. This applies to both texts and images. Added to this is the possibility of making changes to both texts and images. The technical tools for editing images have been brought to the highest level, so that almost anything can be made out of them that is desired. There are hardly any limits to the use of emotional image effects for specific purposes, while an ever-increasing, extremely widespread consumption of images has correspondingly fixed the processes of perception in most people that are attuned to them. The result is highly emotionalised societies with limbs whose capacity for self-reflection is largely blocked. The experienced German psychiatrist and psychotherapist Joachim Maaz speaks of a narcissistic society. In good, generally understandable German, this is a self-indulgent society — a society in an absolutely toxic state socially.

Self-reflection presupposes a number of things that are rarely found in such societies. The order of the day is to work on these prerequisites again, because they do not fall into our laps by themselves. We must turn away from moral and social criticism, which sprouts from manipulated emotions and is always destructive, if the decline of reason is to be stopped. Constructive criticism is not emotional, but grounded in logic and reason.

Our term "logic" ultimately goes back to the Greek word "logos" (λογος), to which an extensive field of meaning is assigned, whereby the meaning "word", "speaking", "speech", "message", "communication" is in the foreground. This word is also used in the sense of "reason", which already sug-

gests the close connection between "word" and "reason". We must orient ourselves towards the word and train the neuronal pathways by which the received word is processed. It goes without saying that the consumption of images must be drastically reduced. "Image fasting" is called for in order to withdraw the dominance of the path of image perception and once again grant the perception of words its rightful dominance. We are guided by this necessity here; that is why there are many texts here and only a few pictures. Visitors to our pages can begin this training with them immediately. The results do not come overnight. They demand that one continues on the path thus taken — for life. But then they are also correspondingly inevitable and liberating.

Start today and keep at it tomorrow!

[\(back to the subject area\)](#)