

AUDIO-VISUAL COMMUNICATION— AN EDITORIAL

The potential media of communication have multiplied in the last half century. All of them come into an arena dominated for centuries by the verbal communication media. All of them, to a very large extent, are dominated by individuals versed and trained primarily in the verbal media.

As the first locomotives were called iron horses and the first automobiles were called the horseless carriages, we must recognize that most of the modern media are still being produced in the image of more ancient media. Our educational television programs drag behind them the tradition of radio, our educational films are still largely pictured textbooks, and our books seldom recognize the existence of other media.

The personnel of the field reflect these traditions. Few if any individuals are trained in the quiet and balanced examination of all media to ascertain what messages, what objectives, what audience each particular media can serve most effectively and most efficiently.

The availability of materials of instruction is a large factor in the determination of functional curricula. The differences between materials intended to be used by a group and those intended for use by individuals are very real and of far-reaching significance. The differences between materials based on conceptual media and those based on perceptual media are sharp and should be of immediate concern to all individuals concerned with instruction and information.

It is well to remember that every media exists because it says something that could not be said at all, or else could not be said so well through any other media. John Dewey has pointed out that: "The needs of daily life have

given superior, practical importance to one mode of communication, that of speech. This fact has unfortunately given rise to a popular impression that the meanings expressed in architecture, sculpture, painting, and music can be translated into words with little if any loss."

We still do not know or understand the role of pictorial symbols in the development of attitudes; nor the role of the perceptual media in the manipulation of experience; nor why it is that some forms of motion pictures develop one kind of discussion, while other forms develop others. We know a good deal of the end results, but our understanding of the "why" of these results must await a far greater body of research than is now available.

Until our research is carried much further, we must depend on our own observation and experience. There is no real competition between the media. It is not an "either-or" proposition but rather one of "which and in what combination with others." The salvation of communication, is not going to lie in any one media, but rather in the balanced and effective use of all.

Few if any people are trained in this at the present. In spite of our own narrow experiences, each needs to see as objectively as he can the total problem in terms of all the media. Thus, there may come a clearer recognition of the problems involved and sharper and more fundamental research. Thus, also, will come the increase of efficiency in communication. An increase of a single iota may make a difference in the Wellsian race between education and catastrophe.

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