Ways of Doing

The research program implied by a mediological perspective can be divided into two branches. One side favors diachrony, asking by which networks of transmission and forms of organization a given cultural legacy was constituted. How were founding ideas themselves founded? Across which material and mental walks of life did they have to make their way? How did they negotiate and compromise with these various environments? The question can be addressed equally to great historical religions and secular ideologies, to sweeping spheres of influence and to local coteries.

On the other side, with more importance given the synchronic crosscut, the question is how the appearance of a new system or equipment modifies an institution, an established theory, or precodified practice. How does a novel technological object dislodge a traditional domain? For instance, how have successive generations of recorded imagery—at first photographic, next filmic, and finally digital—affected the adducing and administering of proof in the sciences? When the material basis of inscription, transcription, and recorded data changes, what are the repercussions for the very definition of an art? (What changes have the vinyl record and compact disc brought to music, photography to painting and to literature, etc.?) On the one hand, then, there is the geomorphology of a cultural landscape; on the other, its geodynamics.

In short, whether one surveys, so to speak, the meteor craters resulting from an unexpected object’s impact on a mental planet or reconstitutes the fluidities of magma behind forming eruptive rock, it is the shock of heterogeneous elements that will interest the observer. The Catholic Church was not made to encounter the cathode ray tube and televised religion, nor were schools created for the computer, but their paths could not help crossing. As it stands, how must they make themselves over so as not to be undone by the meteorite? Culture and technology move together and cannot do without
one another: the two enemy sisters do not get along but must come to a working compromise. Such compromises pass through a series of decompositions and recompositions that mark a cultural crisis, or crisis of exponential growth. And this remains the case even when it finally proves necessary to refuse the postulates and above all the melancholy attendant on these changes. (Among such refusals can be counted Plato's derisive juxtaposition of copy to original, the nostalgia for a lost mythic authenticity, and the superstition of artistic aura.) Benjamin's "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (1936) uncontestably opened the way and established a profile for this line of inquiry. There is also his "Small History of Photography" (1931). The latter calls for numerous as-yet-uncomposed complements or pendants, for example, "A Small History of the Automobile" that chronicles forms of collective consciousness in the era of individual transport as a driving force.

I recognize that my speculative profligacies and large-scale forecasts have no way of covering over the minimalist character of this proposed approach. With obstinacy and indifference to raised eyebrows, the latter places the great turning points face to face with trivial realities: a minuscule technological cause; a great civilizational impact, to use Daniel Bougnoux's juxtaposition. Minimus curat mediologus. Indifferent to the impregnable point of view of a global conception, the angle of attack prioritizes a diminutive mediology, one that covers concrete landscapes (which are already littered with humble forgotten artifacts: the bicycle, the road, paper and pens, the candle, and the reading lamp) and case studies. Mediology's expectations turn away from the founding of a school with its garrisoned disciplinary turf and its issuing titles of nobility, its walls with arrow slits, its officer staffs, and its acknowledgments. (A university corporation has its professional interests to defend. Though hardly satisfied with disciplines that are already inscribed hic Rhodus hic salta at the foot of the wall. "So where, at long last," I may be asked, "is your mediology? If it is something serious, surely it has inherited from a past that will not stay passed (including the habits of thought it has fostered in the social sciences, where one would have least expected it to persist). This code stipulates stark bifurcations between nature and technology, spiritualism and materialism, form and substance, symbolic and material. Such antinomies can be facile and sticky; against them is set an analytical style of mixed breed, uncoercively trinitarian (that is, tirelessly seeking out the excluded third term, the medium that makes it possible to put ideas across, the carrier that makes the first term of each aforementioned antimony pass over to the second and back). Out of negative protestation there can arise a positive mutation (as every new object that is made intelligible transforms the frames of intelligence itself).

Sometimes the moment of truth is demanded of us, as by whoever inscribed hic Rhodus hic salta at the foot of the wall. "Where, at long last," I may be asked, "is your mediology? If it is something serious, surely it has its method, does it not?" It is often typical of bodies of knowledge less certain about their foundations to fetishize methodology: they are taken up (perhaps to reassure themselves) with putting the cart before the horse. The less distinct the terrain, the harder the method: no surprise, then, that the sciences of culture and society obsess about this question more than the others do. Must I respond to the question by remarking that although studying the facts of transmission does not (yet) resort to numerical data or statistical instruments and although it cannot count on a whole century of erudite legitimations already under its belt, it sees itself poised at about the same epistemological starting place as sociology in its infancy, despite its still eccentric marginality? Like sociology, it is neither experimental nor hypothetico-deductive. And so in its turn shall it not be satisfied with establishing concrete causal connections (Weber) via a method of concomitant
variations (Durkheim)? One might prefer to defend mediology as a science humaine by embroidering on the vast spectrum of scientific regimens already out there or wrapping oneself in a cloud of references and authorizations like the cuttlefish in its own ink. Some words of Roland Barthes might help us resist this temptation: "Sterility threatens any work that never stops proclaiming its will to method." Let it simply be enough for me to outline, in what follows, a way of going about cultivating the merest kind of skill, or knack, for mediologic practice. Three gestures in this direction—because they actually comprise a single gesture—fall unpremeditatedly into line: decentering, materializing, and dynamizing.

DECENTERING

A Chinese proverb says, "When the wise man points to the moon, the foolish one looks at the pointing finger." The mediologist shall be a fool, meticulously, and his method, a carefully argued, foolish concentration on the unexpected or the taken-for-granted. He will look thoughtfully up, down, or behind to the information's addressing system, all the more camouflaged as it is embodied. This camouflage can be found in the etymology itself of material bases and substrata: the Greek upokeimenon (versus the phenomenon itself), "not to show itself," "to be sub-beneath the flotation line (like the boat's submerged keel). Hauling up to the light of day the logistics of circulation; it determined the industrialization of the press (the daily newspaper costing one sou) and brought massive influxes of money onto the intellectual scene. This shift in emphasis, from the better-known to the lesser-known, can be called the mediological indexation of a phenomenon. It puts what appears marginal at the very center. It shines a light into the dead and dusty corners of literary history and the panorama of ideas. It vacates textual space or the universe of forms to take a look at contexts of carrying, makes a detour around the outside to reach the inside. This indexation proposes a reversal of the best habits picked up during one's early years at school. It inverts them by targeting atmosphere, by playing its billiards with bank shots off the cushions, and by closing in on the periphery's details as if they were the big picture.

Faced with a doctrine that is already constituted and presents itself as an autonomous whole, attention must be redirected from literal meaning-content to the frameworks that administer belief in that content. To do this, utterances must be subordinated to manners of utterance and enunciatory instantiations. What institution gave rise to the indoctrination and put it across? How was its doctrine propagated, inculcated, and reproduced? Which models of conformity did it follow? Like the jewel in a ring's setting or the rider atop his ride, a system of theses or ideas will have been placed in the mount of its form of collective organization. The latter will be seen to have functioned as something subject to veridical enunciation, and this enunciation in its turn to have functioned within a certain mnemotechnological complex. This complex in its turn served to set down, store, and circulate traces in a manner characteristic of a given, historically determined
mediosphere: the logosphere, or age of orality and its first inscriptions in writing; the graphosphere, or age of print; and the videosphere of recorded images and sound, digitized and pixellated sign-pictures, and unimedia.

Consider the example of the Christian religion. To index Christianity mediologically as a fait accompli of global transmission, one would have to articulate, in relation to one another: (1) a theological corpus, that is, a set of dogmas and mysteries; (2) a sacerdotal institution, that is, the pyramid of hierarchical ministries; and (3) original procedures for proclaiming, catechizing, and identifying, that is, such things as reading aloud the sacred text followed by an unscripted homily, a form called "scriptural proclamation" inherited from Hebraic synagogical practice. These latter rituals are carriers of the faith, veritable tools the community has manufactured, incorporating expertises originally derived from technologies of oral and lettered memory in the logosphere. Each of these three staggered stages of Christian transmission has been, though so far only separately (with a few rare exceptions), the object of research. The doctrinal expression of the sacred is formulated as theology; cultic expression as liturgy; and institutional expression as ecclesiology. By recombining these units differently, one catches a glimpse of how much the second and third levels have acted on the first (i.e., the techniques of worship on politics and politics on symbols). The approach cuts across the methodological distributions of labor as much as the proverbial disdain of generals for the supply corps. While the contents of Christian pronouncements were shaped by the vectors and contexts of issuance, there are now countless contemporary interpretations of the Gospel's message that give little prominence to its historical process of construction and propagation.

The mediological indexation of a political ideology such as socialism rearticulates doctrines in their juncture with institutions (schools, parties, and Internationals) and these latter in their juncture with tools (the genetic helix of school, newspaper, and book). These vertical joinings, from ideas down to materials, relativize horizontally secondary oppositions between tendencies in the mediosphere (libertarian, scientific, utopian), bringing to light the cultural technostructure that supports them all. Fratricidal quarrels can be recognized as familial, by virtue of a common rootedness in technologies of representation now extinct. To the eyes of the warring factions, the confrontations of ideas, apparatuses, and persons among different branches of the so-called worker's movement served as a kind of screen (a properly ideological one) between the actors and the global ecosystem of their action, an ecosystem that was, starkly put, movable lead type printing technology. Typologues, intellectuals, and pedagogues: here were the three pillars of transmission in the universe of the proletarians. They were the flowerings of a precisely definable age in the history of media that began with Marinoni's rotary press (1850–1860), flourished especially with the Linotype typesetting machine, and came to a close with videotypesetting (1970–1980). It thus lasted approximately a century. Some estimates are that half the species that have ever lived have become extinct since the first appearance of life on earth. A good number of ideological species encounter a similar fate, at the hands of their surroundings' selective pressures (technological Darwinism is pitiless).
AGAINST THE STREAM

The aspect of every age goes through cycles, and the age that we seem to be entering portends contrariness in the face of such impertinent pertinences. It is the right time to persuade ourselves that mediologic materialism without stoicism can only mean the shipwreck of the soul. Yesterday, following the avant-gardes of researchers and littérauteurs (via Saussure and, especially for us French, structuralism), the City of Culture as a whole tuned its instruments to the paradigm of Language. Having passed out of fashion, the latter is yielding pride of place, via the cognitive sciences, to a new philosophy of mind. Yet from the linguistic turn to the cognitivist one, the road's surface has hardly altered, and even the cargo is very similar. We can detect this in the same suppleness of the stringing together of arguments, in the ease of reconversions. As far as can be judged by humors and murmurs, the future does not promise, for the type of inquiries whose profiles have been awkwardly sketched here, better academic, mediatic, and social fortune than has the immediate past.

"How the waves of Language swell high," that felicitous early prophet Wittgenstein, exclaimed once upon a time. Indeed, and even though Lévi-Strauss, from within the field that concerned him, repeatedly recommended to the servants of the Signifier that they immerse themselves in the everyday reality of tools and techniques (so that they might get to know that about which things were being said), the rising crest of the linguistic model contributed in no small measure to consigning the materialities of culture to the subordinate far reaches. The unconscious, political economy, play, fashion, love, history, and nature itself were structured "like a language." The reduction of Homo sapiens to Homo loquens found epistemological authorization in advances that had been made in the sciences of language and publicly in the unprecedented immersion of the human species in a gigantic ocean of words and phrases (Hagège). Hence the credibility, from above and below, of a world in which everything was reduced to its sign.

And that was how the rejection of the established order by the pioneers of a new analytical model took on the force of orthodoxy in the space of about thirty years. While groundbreaking study of prehistoric man was discovering the crucial correlation of facial and manual polarities in the development of hominids and, more vastly, the bidimensionality of saying and doing, those whose job it became to enlighten opinion on the matter were giving to language an autocratic autonomy. In the era of omnipresent signifiers, the human organism most in prominence dwindled to his apparatus of phonation. Knowledge was reduced to plays of language; history to a sequence of grand narratives; philosophy to a hermeneutics; and our most humble practices all became languages or grammars. Human action itself was labeled "communicational." And when public space had been upgraded to a norm and reference with the new democrats, it was understood as the space in which an ideal language situation (Habermas) makes possible the universalization of interests. In the examination of logics of action by those paradoxically most audaciously hostile to intellectualism, legitimacy and its principles shunted such questions as material efficacy and its constraints to the margins. At the same moment that the most meritorious sociology was dematerializing relations of force and mechanisms of domination, the best
literary criticism was immolating the uses of things in their “signification,” typewriters in “the space of the text,” and the book’s bookhood as object and commodity in “intertextuality.” Leading-edge political science was turning its interest to symbolic violence and not real war or the historical evolutions of armaments, to exam booklets more than to the operation of police commissions, to hierarchies of symbols more than of, say, university degrees, military rank, orders, or legal jurisdiction. All this time, reflection about religion was producing a New Testament without a church, while the logic of economic theory was substituting services for material production.

In a word, the day was won not for culture’s epidermises, skeletons, and underpinnings but for thinking about thought. “And for a very good reason,” the Marxist will retort, “if in fact Big Science has become a productive force, if companies cling to their ‘incorporeal assets,’ if financial immaterialism is winning out over the totality of economic acts. Nothing truly important takes place out of step with the times; it is the very course of things and history that has accredited and spread the new logocracy.” One understands how, amid the general artificial levitation, imprisoning spirit in signs should have seemed like a widening of intellectual possibilities. It is fathomable too that semiological reductionism went to the point of making signs divert one from meaning and as if giving attention to material (and neomaterial) things would divert one from meaning and as if adding actual performances to significations made for a zero-sum game.

At the same time, the inflation of language as a growing denial of our increasing technological embeddedness permitted a flourishing sociology whose analysis of the everyday was subjective, aestheticizing, and full of stylistic sparkle and neologism. It cultivated these qualities at the expense of experimental patience, the establishment of facts, and the correlations that joined them together. When it did confront what it took to be the irresistible or ineluctable, it enthroned some idlenesses that were more or less poorly thought through. There was the exorcistic use of Heideggerian Gestell (whereby technology’s bill of health was declared to be poor), a sacramental formula relieving one of the need to make actual inquiries into historical matters. This was not only due to elitism of the speculative theorists or to the literary learned’s aristocratic condescension. Nor was it simply the price paid for running counter to the sensus communis (there being no more economical ploy to gain public approval than by denouncing technology’s dictatorship and taking up the religious discourse of the Fall in the name of nature, soul, lived experience, and lost origins or human will). More than all this, with the denegation of material mediations we are paying for a long ancestral heritage of neglect. It goes back, as far as we inheritors of Greek habits of thinking are concerned, to a primordial partition by now so well absorbed into the very substance of our thought that it seems natural and self-evident. Must I recall, after so many others, the genealogy of this grand initial mental block, overdetermined as it was by such an extraordinary confluence of reasons internal to system? One reason was of course economic, stemming from the slave system and overabundance of available labor. Another was social, having to do with the antinomy of manual labor and studious leisure, the servile versus the contemplative life. A third reason was theological, given that physis as primal motive power was looked on as sacred, which made techne an impious counterfeiting of the divine. And a fourth was scientific, a result of the epistemological impossibility of the noble mind’s ever reflecting on the sublunary world’s nonmathematicizable approximations, making unthinkable such things as glasses, telescopes, or precise chronometers. Aristotlean vitalism put the finishing touches on this restrictive consistency by separating living beings, who contain within them the principle of their own movement, from inanimate objects deprived of all dynamism proper. Against matter is thus set spirit, as against the slave the citizen and against the mechanical arts the liberal arts, regardless of water clocks, sundials, and catapults.

Heavy and insistent is the suppression that weighs on our spontaneous technophobia. We must relearn every day to jettison its ballast if we want to
reclaim the great wide open of heterogeneous nonhuman things outside ourselves, to get away from the mind’s chez-soi. We need to extend the freedom of the anthropological city to those nonhuman things (so much have we, since the time of the Greeks, ranked technological fact habitually beneath political right). This would be one way of resisting an inculpatory philosophical terrorism that consists in putting the onus of proof on an area of inquiry deemed a priori incapable of using the very terms and values by which it has been prejudged since Plato. It is today taken for granted, with all the force of authoritative argument lending its weight, that it is no longer up to speculative philosophy to account for its own blindness to technological instrumentation but rather up to technology to exonerate itself daily of philosophy’s charges. As to those who judge it the most pressing issue of our day to reflect on thought’s unthought materialities, much of contemporary philosophy would have them go take a draught of their own shame.

So the difficulty should not be underestimated. Studying transmissions as an object unto itself creates a problem of disciplinary classification that, given the ratio studiorum currently in force, has no solution in the short term. (And in the long term we’re all dead.) It is characteristic of research that proceeds “diagonally” (as Roger Caillois terms it), or what we presently refer to as interdisciplines, to disrupt what the established order of study has taken so much trouble to order conveniently. One hundred years from now, the blueprints of a twenty-first-century museum of science and technology might show some stray corner devoted to a virtual and perfected mediology, with spaces allotted here for the cognitive sciences, or sciences of mind, elsewhere for the objective (experimental or exact) sciences, and finally one for the accreditive sciences that would be those of society (history, economics, sociology, and religious and political sciences). Phenomena of belief, on which collective life rests, are the least understood of all. And if we already know very little about how we know, we know still less about how we believe. Bringing to light the industries of believing and inculcating belief, through an examination of the processes that constitute authority and the infrastructures of credibility, might contribute in the future to consolidating this less-explored third encyclopedic sector. Its objects would be marked out in conjunction with, and behind, other fully accredited and licensed undertakings.

As things stand now, these transversal defectors will be accused of fishing in unquiet or turgid waters, and with reason: disturbed orders are their very object. There is disturbance when one body alters something of another body. Owing to the fact that interiority intermingles and interacts with material and mechanized exteriority (Dagognet), machines and entities are unflaggingly parasitical on one another. The person seeking to make these fruitful pollutions intelligible will inevitably be seized with a professional or disciplinary disquiet. (Still taken with purism and even more so devoted to its own security, the immemorial idealism continues to dissociate spirit from things.) When standard repertories are infiltrated, traditional domains intermixed, the “sublime” knocked down a peg or two by the “trivial,” such catastrophes destabilize intellectual categories, insular comforts, and turfs. The impure hodgepodge of interests and ways of seeing condemns one to a dual exile. Techies will send the dreamer to the likes of philosophers, who will in turn refer this sort of intellectual plumber to the other proles of Mind. Mediologic ambition is a bit too earthy and historical to cajole a philosophia perennis devoted to the empirico-transcendental division of mental labor (try talking about papyrus and codices to an exegete of Plotinus and Descartes or puckishly asking a Lacanian what to do with the “mirror stage” before mirrors were invented). Mediologic ambition is also too fervent about religion, art, and the immobilization of time to call on information and communication sciences so disdainful of the antique (bring up the subject of angels to a sociologist of reception or the myth of Thoth to a specialist of cable plans). Mediology refrains from pledging fealty to one or the other academic compartmentalization, from identifying with one or the other political ideology. And it lacks a beautiful moral cause to defend (other than getting at the truth of the matter, an inadequate hook) or social grievance to redress (other than an interest in knowledge without immediate ulterior interests). As such, it stands to undergo a rather long purgatory, between a lost home in the university and an improbable refuge.

All this is but par for the course: every Long March begins with a banishment. Dwellers at the border and migrants might even profit from their period in NFA (“No Fixed Abode”) status, which after all has its leisures, to assess carefully the epistemological obstacles thrown up every time one upsets established customs elevated to certitudes. The mediological undertaking would indeed seem a megalomaniac’s whim, rather than an attempt at gaining reflexive knowledge, were it not for its relentless interrogation of its own weaknesses, rendering modesty obligatory (though it has that anyway). Instructed in the ways and phenomena of authorization, exclusion, social grievance to redress (other than an interest in knowledge without immediate ulterior interests). As such, it stands to undergo a rather long purgatory, between a lost home in the university and an improbable refuge.

It pays to appreciate, in their full force, both the best and the worst rea-
sons the prevailing canons will have to belittle or banalize this anti-discipline. Among the better reasons is the understandably disliked raid on professional gains by the oblivious and hurried philistine. The guardians of the established human sciences do indeed have something to resent, because they know all too well what requisites and laborious delays inhere in the creation of autonomous fields of expertise. Chief among these rules of method figures the indispensable break with the uncritical notions of common consciousness, notions that continue to swell up on the periphery and rise to assail the abstractions that have been won through noble warfare by the entrenched institution. Among the worst reasons should be counted a too categorical defensive of niche or turf or of corporativist interests that are by nature precarious and under threat (accreditations, awards committees, readerships and audiences, echoes, and other honors). Hence the hypersensitivity of the most well-established networks of Reason to everything that makes forays into the surrounding area of the security perimeter, as any prowler may be a potential predator or seducer.

Let me add for the record the self-regard of intellectual bosses who, having let their names and renown be identified with a given, officially recognized position, have a certain tendency to liken the controversy of arguments and theories to a conflict of people, that is, a struggle over places and influence between people. These and so many other inevitable or justified grievances can be made. But I do not wish to cry foul: the milieu's mean-spiritedness is consubstantial with it. It is a fact of Nature and of mediological nature. Thus has operated transmission, within the universe of knowledge as in the others, ever since there has been doctrine, with the same inextricable interarticulation of professional ethical concerns and sudden bursts of zoological evolution. It is here one perceives the limits of the metaphor of assigning things their proper place, confined as it is to the notion of having and to ordered slots, whereas the spread of ideas has to do with causes and territories, that is, with the very being of knowledge.

These, then, are necessary sidestreet excursions that can be foreseen and are even semireassuring. They obviously will not impede anyone, on a quite cantonal scale, from deriving some manic encouragement from the young Hegel's conclusion that if reality is inconceivable, we must forge inconceivable concepts. The work of disenchantment is endless, fortunately. An eternal power, tutelary and deified, our Mother Nature long ago found herself segmented, at the time of and after the profaners of the Renaissance, into the disjointed series of physico-mathematical phenomena. Next, in place of the humors, forces and mysterious designs that since antiquity had fetishized life, experimental biology came to substitute matter, particles, and laws (François Jacob). How are we not to doubt that a day will come when Culture, with its terrifying capital letter and stepmotherly smothering, will be supplanted by some incongruous methods of analysis putting in her place technology, environmental/social contexts, and functional needs? If the laborers in mediology, with their rudimentary tools and meager means, hasten on that day, however little, they will not have lived and sought to transmit in vain.
It was an early version of arguments reworked into the text of this second part of the chapter.—Trans.


7. WAYS OF DOING


2. For a list of decisive insignificances of methodological interest, see particularly my Cours de médiologie générale (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), p. 35.


4. [Scholars whose early training was in literary theory (for example, structuralist) and in literary history have nevertheless recently taken a more mediological path. Four noteworthy contributions in their respective areas are Maurice Couturier’s Textual Communication: A Print-Based Theory of the Novel (London: Routledge, 1991); Martyn Lyons’s Le Triomphe du livre: Une histoire sociologique de la lecture dans la France du XIXe siècle (Paris: Promodis, 1987) (though the title page of this rich work notes “traduit de l’anglais,” no original version in English seems to have been published); Lenard J. Davis’s Factual Fictions: The Origins of the English Novel (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996); and Adrian Johns, The Nature of the Book: Print and Knowledge in the Making (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998.—Trans.]


7. I allude here to the noteworthy works of Maurice Sachot on Christian antiquity. See particularly Les chrétiens et leurs doctrines: Manuel de théologie (Strasbourg: Centre d’Etudes et de Recherches Interdisciplinaires en Théologie [CERIT, Descélé], 1987).


9. [Debray borrows his notion of the “pointing” “indexical fragment,” or “index” (indice) from the U.S. philosopher Charles S. Peirce’s writings on semiotics. In a paper Peirce delivered to the American Academy of Arts and Sciences in 1867, he defined three kinds of representations: “symbols,” “likenesses” or “icons,” and “indices.” “Those [representations],” Peirce declared, “the ground of whose relation to their objects is an imputed character, which are the same as general signs, . . . may be termed Symbols . . . Those whose relation to their object is a mere community in some quality . . . may be termed Likenesses . . . Those whose relation to their objects consists in a correspondence in fact . . . may be termed Indices” (“On a New List of Categories,” Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition, ed. Edward C. Moore, Max H. Fisch, Christian J. W. Kloesel, Don D. Roberts, and Lynn A. Ziegler, vol. 2, 1867–1871 [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1982], p. 56). Later refinements of these insights led to understanding the index as some remaining fragment of the object or contiguity with it causally, such that the part points toward, and is taken for, the whole, as in the case of relic for saint, footprint for traveler, or smoke for fire. The icon, or likeness, resembled the object but was not strictly speaking of it, except by the less direct analogy of proportion or form, as in a picture (an artistic work). The symbol’s relation to the object was an imputed character, which are the same as general signs. . . . Those whose relation to their objects consists in a correspondence in fact . . . may be termed Indices.”]
or pixelated based on photography or some kind of camera technology that digitizes the trace of the real object imaged.

This monotonous reliance on video-documented realia, though it itself has its conventions, editings, and doctorings, produces in modern consciousness a priority on the immediate, the factually positive, the reportable, and the graphic. Paradoxically, however, because of its equation with the real itself, we as viewers are more familiar with the most prestigiously prominent relations of exchange than with everyday exchanges, with high-profile ritual performances than with banal exchanges, with the circulation of dowry wealth than with the circulation of vegetables—in short, we know the thought of societies much better than their 'body.'—Trans.


19. A detailed development of these consequences for the historical evolution of the French intelligentsia (1868–1979) can be found in my Teachers, Writers, Celebrities.

20. [Debray is alluding to his Vie et mort de l'image. Chapter 8 has been translated into English as "The Three Ages of Looking" (see n. 6, above). Parts of chapter 2 appeared in English as "The Image vs. Language: Transmitting Symbols," trans. Eric Rauth, Common Knowledge 4, no. 2 (fall 1995), pp. 51–69. A translation of parts of chs. 5 and 9 was published under the title "The Myth of Art" in ViceVersa, no. 49 (July–September 1995): 30–34.—Trans.]

21. [For Debray's foray in political mediology, see especially L'état séducteur; Critique of Political Reason, trans. David Macey (London: Verso, 1985); and Le Scribe. The mediological history of images (of which Art makes up a relatively short phase) can be found in Vie et mort de l'image and "The Three Ages of Looking." A treatment of Christianity's bases in media of transmission and their theology appears in "Le mystère de l'incarnation" and "L'expérimentation chrétienne" in Cours de médioogie générale, pp. 89–192. And a reexamination of theatrical and spectacular representation and their historical transformations is the subject of articles in "La querelle du spectacle" in Les Cahiers de médiologie.—Trans.]


23. It should be pointed out that our most illustrious students of technology were not trained to the specifications of the great alma mater of liberal higher education. In France, only heterodox thinkers from other professions seem to make their mark
in those climes of academe (Haudricourt the Agronomist, Leroi-Gourhan the Autodidact, Dagognet the Doctor). Such are the heavy costs of producing actual field knowledge independently of the prior prescriptive epistemologies or ample methodological considerations so fostered by the faculties of humanities and human sciences.


26. Many objective environmental pressures influence cultural selection. Among them must be counted the differences of notoriety, at a given place and moment, among the putative founding fathers of spheres of influence who share the same habitat. To locate oneself, however wrongly or misguidedly, somewhere on the intellectual family tree of Leroi-Gourhan rather than that of Lévi-Strauss is indisputably a comparative handicap in the jockeyings for consideration. Invoking tutelarily the latter figure (fully deserving of the admiration he is accorded) will arouse the interest of knowledgeable publics from New York to Tokyo to Moscow to Buenos Aires. References to the former, who is unclassifiable (Bergsonian or Marxist? Spiritualist or materialist?) and not well-known (translated belatedly, if hardly at all) will fall into a sort of black hole before those same audiences, a real perplexity for whoever wants to take credit for being influenced by his work. Yet Leroi-Gourhan and Lévi-Strauss were contemporaries, colleagues, and friends. The fact that the thought of the one has not spread while that of the other has met with worldwide success constitutes a notable mediological case in itself. It is almost as worthy of examination, mutatis mutandis, as the comparable fates one hundred years ago of the systems of Auguste Comte and Karl Marx.