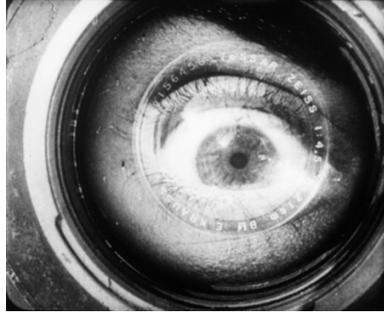


Seeing is Not Believing
Post-Truth or the Time of Lie?



Already in 1989 Arthur Asa Berger in his book *Seeing is believing: An introduction to visual communication*² argued that visual communication constitutes a powerful form of interaction that significantly influence human behaviour and values, thereby requiring a critical analytical approach within visual communication studies.³

In a mishmash of fake news, global political scandals and loss of values, and the increasing implementation of AI in the media sphere (where it is ever more difficult to believe what one's eyes see) Berger's argument is more than necessary for scholars. The global media landscape has become increasingly paradoxical and counterproductive, undermining its original purpose, turning into a global performative spectacle, a skit of Python's style "confuse the cat"⁴, by prioritising confusion and distraction over clarity and meaning. The time of 'post-truth' – it is time to say it – turns out to be actually the 'time of lies.'

In a media landscape where affairs of epic proportions shake the world, it is easy to manipulate the facts, as the facts remain in the hands of powerful global elites who thanks to the AI and loss of values can produce fake news or claim to be the victims of fake news. Media outlets dose the daily horror, relativise crime and gradually normalise it. While media can manipulate the common sense of citizens, they can also abuse the victims time and again in the game in which perpetrators become victims, just because they can. Half-truths and falsehood, and unresolved affairs of the powerful, penetrated and increasingly generated by AI for the purposes of producing general confusion have become global phenomena signalling the loss of values. From the top down the prevailing message appears to be one

¹ *Man with a Movie Camera* (Dziga Vertov, USSR, 1929):

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Man_with_a_movie_camera_1929_2.png

² Arthur Berger: *Seeing is believing: An introduction to visual communication*, Mountain View, Calif: Mayfield Publishing, 1989.

³ Paraphrased: Ibid.

⁴ *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, Confuse the Cat: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1tsIxNci_dE

of permissiveness: give up on the truth and act as you wish, as accountability may no longer apply. It is true that an optimist might use one's own free will and isolate oneself from the fabricated explanation of the real-life global scandals by retreating into the motto: "this" has been happening throughout history. However, this error in thinking would signal withdrawal and isolation rather than free will but it would signal something else as well – that sin is repetitive and performative. There is nothing new about evil indeed then, only technological progression. Here, politically and not only socially and economically we are standing on slippery and dangerous ground, a ground imagined as quicksand for the masses who are to be easily manipulated and divided. There is a saying – "A word that is too strong kills." In our time, it is the image that kills by taking away not only the weight of words but also their meaning and significance. In academia, where AI is also implemented, it bears the risk of killing the process of thinking (in speeding up access to research information or translating) that "silent dialogue with oneself"⁵ as a unique human capacity.

In film studies it was possible to analyse visible mechanical and creative techniques. However, with the introduction of AI the visible becomes invisible because of the generative and automatic intervention. While some might find entertaining to watch Tom Hanks in *Here* (Robert Zemeckis, 2024) performing the whole life span of a man, from youthhood to old age, the AI implementation is more than entertainment. We are at the historical threshold:

With the implementation of AI, no matter how exciting it may sound, reality and objective reality are subverted. Dziga Vertov's concept of the mechanical eye, where cinematic technology represents the means of revealing objective reality through relationship of image and reality, passing the limitation of the human eye, is dismissed as the AI visual system more and more generates than records images. By replacing the relationship between image and reality with algorithm, AI undermines Vertov's mechanical eye's claim to truth. Furthermore, AI's obscure data-driven processes advance hidden ideological and cultural agendas thus contradicting Vertov's belief in technological transparency and its emancipatory dimension. The result is contemporary AI visual culture that produces crisis of visual credibility time and again, in which seeing no longer means believing. If "seeing is believing" was true for photography, early film and cinema in general, then in our era this ceases to be true. Theologically speaking if seeing meant believing for the Apostle Thomas, seeing is no longer enough, humanity will need much more than that – that is trust. In public sphere trust has been lost because of those who have squandered it and discerning truth from lies are smoking mirrors. For believers trust (discernment likewise) is a gift, however trust refers here only to trust in God. Perhaps for humanity in the times where the wheel of history stops and turns ominously creaking like a tool for torture rather than enlightenment, and reality is easily traded for illusionism – this trust is its last chance.

⁵ Hannah Arendt: *The Life of the Mind*, San Diego: Harcourt, 1977-1978.