Cultural Lag

IDENTIFYING specific sources of resistance to the optimum use of the graphic media in education is the first step toward devising ways of overcoming each resistance. If we can make an accurate diagnosis, perhaps we can prescribe the cure. At present, our main source of knowledge about the resistances is expert opinion, supplemented by some surveys. We need more factual studies pinpointing the factors blocking the best use of graphic communication in education. Some of the most important sources of difficulty and the practical suggestions for remedying them are discussed in the following chapters. First we shall briefly discuss the general factor of cultural lag.

For hundreds of thousands of years, the human voice was the best instrument of instruction. Some 4000 years ago, the manuscript froze the voice for later generations. But manuscripts remained rare and costly, and their precious knowledge could be imparted only to a favored few. Five hundred years ago, the invention of the printing press enormously speeded up the spread of ideas. For these last five centuries, the teacher's voice and the book have dominated learning.

Finally, beginning haltingly 100 years ago, there has been an accelerated rush of new inventions—the photograph, the lantern slide, the filmstrip, the motion picture, and television. The concreteness of the vast visual world is at last available to the student— but only potentially. The development and use of the new techniques requires the change of old habits, habits which have been crystallized and sanctified for centuries.

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It is always hard to get people to change their methods of work. For example, although the introduction of hybrid corn required no new capital investment, no radical change in habit patterns of farming practices, it took almost 20 years before hybrid corn was fully accepted in Iowa. Many farmers did not change over to the new seed even after their neighbors had already done so; first they planted their own experimental plots of hybrid corn. But later, hybrid oats were fully accepted within the short span of three years.

Fitting the new graphic techniques into education is a complicated process. It involves learning new habits, forming new attitudes, changing the system of prestige and reward, making new administrative arrangements, and altering the established pattern of the curriculum. Research must tell us more about how, when, and where to accent the visual. Once a new technique is invented, engineering developments must be pioneered and a market developed. A host of individual and social factors contribute to the lag in social acceptance.

But cultural lags are not inevitable. The same techniques which have been relatively neglected in the educational field—the motion picture and television—have profoundly affected the field of entertainment. Magazines, such as *Life,* have successfully exploited pictorial techniques. What are the specific factors which have contributed to the cultural lag in education, and how may progress be accelerated?