

On the More-than-One-Dimensional Flows of Information

Derek de Solla Price, Yale

"Books are not only read line by line but they are stacked in linear rows in bookstacks although modern indexing theory based on the success of citation mapping shows they could all be grouped in subject matter much better by piling them up in heaps spread over a two dimensional floor."

"Visual, two-dimensional information is not only much more complex relationally than any one-dimensional flow in words or music or electronic pulses, it also is much more dense in informational bits per second and so richer in value."

"...we can fake pictures out of one-dimensional information by the familiar process of scanning that is used in television. The eye and the visual integrative thinking in our brain appears not to work like this, but take in the elements of a picture all in one go, so that the information must be described as 'essentially' two-dimensional at any given instant..."

"Few scholars outside the ranks of highly specialized historians of mathematics realize that the evolution of human intelligence from the one-dimensional auditory style of integrative action to the essentially two-dimensional visual style is a rather recent phenomenon. Certainly the old Babylonians were not blind, but insofar as we can comprehend their thought it does not involve images and 'imagination.' It has often been remarked by the Code of Hammurabi, like Mosaic Law is entirely prescriptive and computerizable without the sort of relational thinking and integration implicated in Roman Law. In art too, the Mesopotamian pictures, like the Mayan glyphs and some Hindu art has to be read like a complicated comic strip, utterly different from the visual sweep of the later Greek art as in the Parthenon."