

1. Introduction

Synopsis

This module introduces communication, outlines theoretical ideas and aspects of Visual Communication with selected examples.

Lectures

- 1.1 An Introduction to Communication
- 1.2 On Languages and Grammar
- 1.3 Visual Communication



Fig. 1.1.00

1.1 An Introduction to Communication

Plants, animals, and human beings are creations of nature and one of the theories of evolution suggests that life forms began simply and then became more complex. Such a theory proposes that human beings are possibly a highly evolved creation with the ability to understand the mysteries and mechanisms of nature.

Unlike plants and animals who appear to be at the mercy of natural forces, human beings learnt to study natural forces. This allowed them to make umbrellas and sun-glasses for protecting them from

the hot sun; it allowed them to build planes that were heavier than air, but could fly; and it allowed them to develop languages that helped them communicate and transfer their understanding to other human beings.

While there is much to be said for such a theory, it would be somewhat arrogant to place human beings at the top of the evolutionary ladder, for a tiny microbe, invisible to the human eye, can be a very dangerous organism. One may also observe that there are fishes at the bottom of the ocean that can withstand the enormous pressure below, that no human can and one may observe that many animals can sense the world in a manner that humans cannot.

It is possible that too great a love for our own species – a quality that is suggested by a word such as narcissism or anthropomorphic point of view – leads us to draw such an erroneous conclusion. This said, one must marvel at the possibilities opened up languages to share our ideas and to celebrate creativity.

From the naughty wink of an eye to some elaborate musical composition played by an orchestra, the range of human communication is truly remarkable. Our senses allow us to communicate – through sight, through speech, through touch, through smell and through listening with our ears. What is beyond the senses we refer to as the sixth sense – that possibly works through silences, In this course we shall seek to engage briefly with several forms of communication and our focus shall be on visual communication.



Fig. 1.1.01

Drawings from pre-historic caves at Bhimbetka, Madhya Pradesh suggest that the urge to express our experiences visually, is an innate language that resides in us.



Fig. 1.1.02

'Long before mouths could speak, the eyes had a language all their own' shows a page from a silly tale that speaks of the tussle between the spoken word and the visual image. We learn to see before we learn to speak, though the grammar of visual languages is not as commonly understood as the grammar of spoken languages,



Fig. 1.1.03

From drawing on the walls of caves we have moved a long way. Hundreds of television channels provide a constant supply of visual images of news, sports, entertainment and educational programmes. Television seeks to substitute reality by simulating it on the screen, and this flat-screen-reality occupies millions of viewers worldwide. What effect does such a television culture have on the collective consciousness of a society?

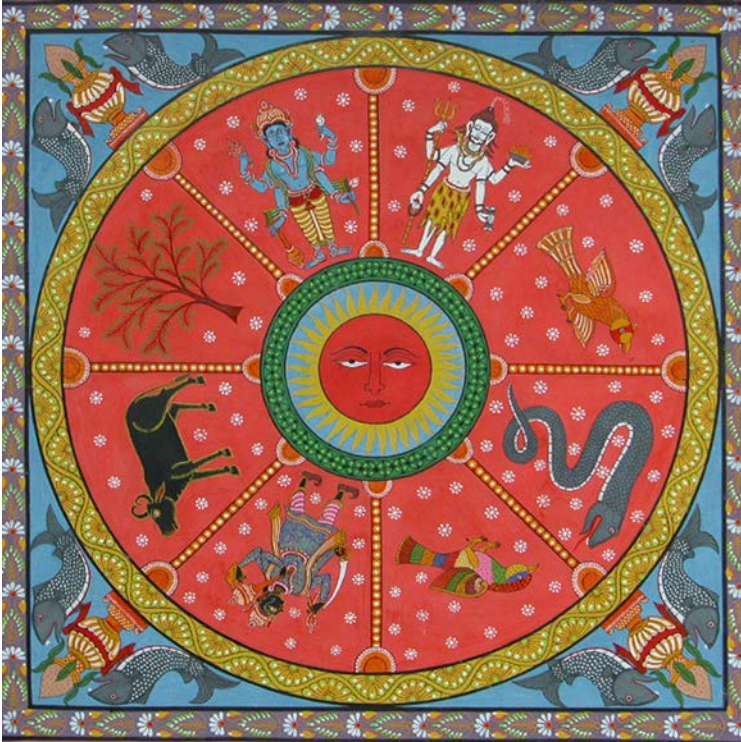


Fig. 1.1.04

Very different from the moving image of television and cinema, is the stillness of a painted image. With moving images, meaning is constructed by mentally stitching together the images that follow one another, often in quick succession. Do you think that a still image can invite our viewing for a longer length of time and make us interpret its meaning with a sense of leisure? What could be the meaning of the image above?



Fig. 1.1.05

Art galleries often attempt to create a space that is much quieter than the busy streets around. On its walls there are paintings and photographs. Viewers walk through the gallery and look at the display, occasionally stopping before some particular image that speaks a little more eloquently than the other. The visual language of paintings

is less direct than that of advertisements. Many of them are suggestive and can have several interpretations all of which may be valid. What are the advantages and shortcomings of suggestive visual communication over direct and unambiguous visual communication?



Fig. 1.1.06

Theatre relies on the powerful emotive possibility of the human body. Through appropriate lighting and imaginative props, it is the forerunner of modern forms of storytelling through films. Unlike a film, a theatre performance allows for a more intimate contact between audience and performers. Centuries ago, a remarkable treatise called the 'Natyashastra' formulated some very insightful observations about the creative process.



Fig. 1.1.07

A poster contains information and is meant to draw attention through some appropriate visual imagery. The above poster serves as an announcement for a theatre festival and takes its visual cues from the leather puppets of Turkey.



Fig. 1.1.08

There are many water-based colours used by artists and illustrators. The one above is done using 'photo-colours' that were used to 'touch-up' (correct blemishes) colour-photo-prints. Illustrations can be like paintings, but unlike paintings that are not compelled to communicate something particular, illustrations seek to talk about some specific idea. The illustration above is from a book on roses that start fighting because each of them proclaims to be the best. The images are accompanied by a verse that communicates the story.

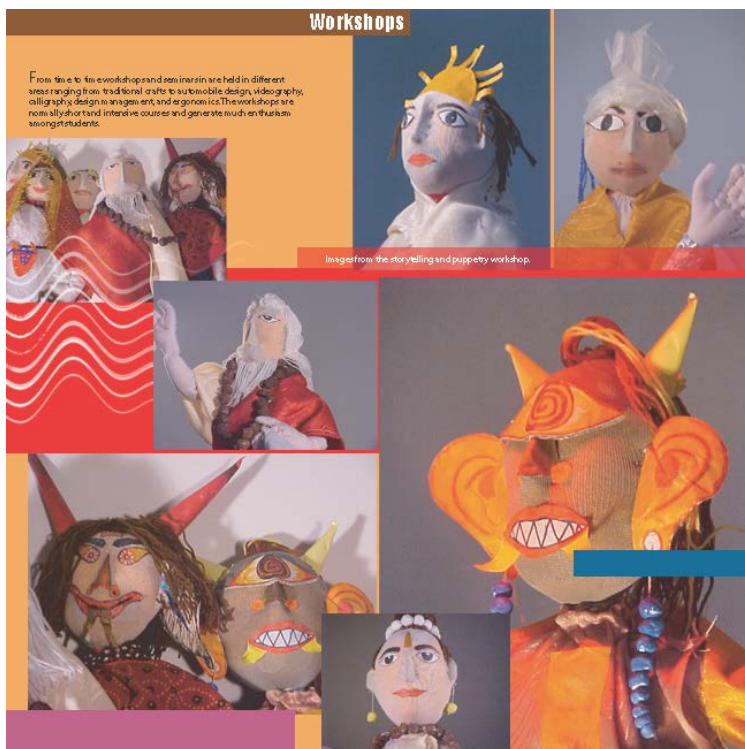


Fig. 1.1.09

There are many kinds of puppets and a puppetry performance can be an enjoyable experience. The puppets shown

above are called 'glove-puppets'. They can be worn on fingers and animated by moving the fingers. Stick puppets are manipulated with sticks and string puppets with the help of strings.



Fig. 1.1.10

Public spaces in our times are dominated by gigantic visual images of advertisements. The all pervading logic of the market and economics permeates the thinking patterns of people who are sought to be influenced to consume the products and services on display. An army of visual communicators create brand identities, theme-based visual interiors, plot-with-a-twist-based Cineplex movies designed to serve the logic of the market. Security cameras keep a record of movements to guard against theft or keep an eye on the unwelcome visitor of our times – the terrorist. What possibly escapes most people is the more subtle forms of power-play that are concealed within the supposedly free and fair market.



Fig. 1.1.11

Art installations, such as the one above, often use the discarded debris of our times to draw attention to wasteful and environmentally unfriendly practices.