

ARTISTIC LANGUAGE IN NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: *This article deals only theoretically with a possible reading of non-verbal language through artistic language items, covering the field of teacher's self-image guidance. An adaptation of the hexadic model of analyzing a static image was tried to analyze a dynamic image (the visual artistic composition being the human body involved in communication).*

Key words: *nonverbal communication, artistic language, reading the body image.*

1. The Communication through Image and Non-Verbal Communication

When communicating non-verbally, one uses not only mimics and gestures, but also the posture, clothes, colours and accessories, make-up, or hair styling. Being aware of this aspect, image counsellors transferred the elements of plastic language in the transformation of their clients' appearance, following the principles of plastic composition with the purpose of transmitting specific messages. Our attempt of transferring the hexadic model of lecturing a plastic image to the reading of the human body image involved in communication, even though only at a theoretical level, aimed to improve the techniques of decoding non-verbal messages.

Throughout this article I intend to outline general issues that are found in construction of various images that help in reading and understanding them; to show some characteristics of the visual-artistic composition and to transfer theoretical issues of structural-systemic composition to the possible points of view for analyzing *non-verbal messages*; to propose a model

for reading body image in non-verbal communication through artistic language elements.

Relations between teachers and students are particularly important for the educational process to run optimally, but in most cases, their complexity makes difficult the didactic communication. Concerns for the study of teachers-students relationship [11] have emerged from the need to find viable solutions to improve communication. In addition to noises (of internal and external nature) that distort the messages transmitted between the participants in the didactic communication, there is also recorded a deficit in the area of intersection between the teacher's repertoire and the student's, both at language level and in the context of the taught subject [7], [13] and at non-verbal level (information we receive in the nonverbal communication have a higher share than those from the area of verbal communication in achieving the overall significance of the act of communication) [6], [9].

We are in contact with the outside world through various senses - visual, auditory,

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olfactory, gustatory, tactile. All these channels transmit sensations from the environment which we come in contact with, process them and integrate them into information which is translated and expressed in different languages - verbal, non-verbal, visual, mathematical, musical, artistic. We get most of the information about the world through sight. In this century we are talking more and more about the power of image (induced by audio-visual means alongside with the news papers and magazines) which imposed the cultural power. There is now a real invasion of the visual throughout our lives, through magazines, newspapers, cinema, photos, video, television, cartoons, comics, dance, advertisements, shop windows, electronic games, etc. The importance of visual elements, mental images, imagination, fantasy, visual architecture in general can be found in numerous references, in the treaties of philosophy, psychology, physics (optics), theology, anthropology, pedagogy.

Although it may be believed that non-verbal language, among the variety of languages through which we communicate, is first manifested in human life when human beings need to communicate with their fellow, it would not be possible only through the primary image [12].

Daily, in our visual field, there are n images - from natural to processed or virtual ones. Their perceptual (visual) exploration involves exploratory, search, analysis, comparison actions. Perceptual experience [3] of the individual tends to organize itself in integrated assemblies according to a series of laws: the proximity law (the closest elements are perceived as belonging to the same form), the similarity law (objects similar in size, shape or color tend to form the same configuration or gestalt); the continuity law (elements facing the same direction tend to be organized in the same form), the symmetry

law (figures that have one or two symmetrical axes are perceived more easily), the closure law (visual perception avoids as much as possible equivocal interpretations leading to incomplete routes, it tends to be trapped in a closed configuration, well defined; an incomplete figure strives to resemble a well-known one). Perception has not only an informational role, but also a role of guidance and regulation of human beings' actions [14, p.142]

Modern life has brought along with social, economic and cultural transformations in several means of communication - based on image processing: posters, photographs, illustrations, comics, movies. Communication through such images has a one-way direction. A great importance of this form of communication is given by linguistic message, message accompanying the image, completing or explaining it. Context has a great importance too, because it is involved in validating the significance of the image. Multiplicity and omnipresence of communication through the processed images is considered by some authors as representing a real phenomenon of "cultural regression" of this century [4], [10]. It is considered that this phenomenon would hinder the development of other forms of communication, for certain categories of population, the taste for reading, for perceiving musical works, for performing artistic activities (sculpture, painting).

Voluntarily or involuntarily, we use non-verbal language (coded images), replacing, enhancing, repeating, contradicting verbal message. Non-verbal communication is done through gestures, mimics, space or territory, image. The image means not only the visual exposure of the human body (clothing, hair style, accessories), but also its perception (self-image, the image perceived by others) [9].

2. The Human Body - as an Artistic Image

Why do we like some people even when they transmit the most undesirable messages? Image stylists and advisers know the answer to this question, because they are the ones who analyze/read the natural artistic image of the human body in order to change some elements of composition, so as to create an illusion. In didactic communication this aspect does not interest us, but the reading/analysis of the artistic image of the human body.

This reading could be accessible to children, too, as from an early age they communicate through artistic language, giving expression - through drawings - to their emotions, states, feelings, ideas... Treating the body as an artistic composition in motion, it can be used as a teaching tool in the teaching-learning.

The elements of artistic language identified in the body image would be:

- *Line* - shown in this context as the intersection of two surfaces (clothing lines, lines obtained by joining two spots of color) or the trajectory of the human body (lines drawn by the hands, feet, head, lines set up by gestures, succession of movements). The general meaning of straight lines (accuracy, steadiness, strictness, severity, aggression, masculinity) and curves (dynamism, elasticity, malleability, gentleness, warmth, femininity) is specified according to modulation and context.
- *Type* (aesthetically capitalization of the body conformation).
- *Surface, colour* (colours used in clothing).
- „Eclerage” or lighting, composition (the organization of a certain number of elements identifiable by sight). The „eclerage” or lighting of the human body’s image in the process of non-verbal communication is an external

factor that can be manipulated. The interlocutor’s look can be deliberately led by moving the center of interest using the game of lights and shadows (light areas attract eyes instantly). In addition, light can become plasticizing, by channeling its direction and effects of volume, of shape, of making more beautiful, of deployment from the background etc. are also achieved - in order not only to influence the reception of the message, but also to make it aesthetic.

- *Centers of strength or interest* (they are mandatory stops required by eyes examining the image).
- *The point of view* (the angle from which the image is viewed) - has a particular role in reading the image because the angle from which a three-dimensional image is viewed matters very much - its perception depends on the area covered by visual field. An object can be seen and represented from its front, from one side (left, right), top down, bottom-up, totally, partially, close or very close, from a distance, etc. - always being achieved a different image. In non-verbal communication, the interlocutor’s point of view is often frontal and from a short distance, maintaining contact mostly in the area of eyes without offering an overview on the composition of the visual image involved in sent message. For a good reading of the non-verbal image is recommended the *subject’s point of view*, the distance being given by the sum of the intimate distances, which permits the whole human body’s image to be included in the visual field. The view *from behind* should be avoided, as it makes the non-verbal message undecipherable. Sometimes the views can turn into gestures (e.g., the view from the top down has as correspondent the gesture of looking down on

somebody, with a negative connotation, expressing superiority, dominance, pursuit of power).

- The linear perspective (which is based on optical illusion, used to blur defects).

3. Reading and Analysis of Images

Because our main concern was to find a possible way of reading the image of the human body during non-verbal communication, we transfer the hexadic model of reading artistic work in this area [5], [10]. The hexadic model presents the landmarks of reading:

- **L** (lecturer or lecture agent - passive, active, dilettante, grown; he is the one the image addresses to, and is under the influence of the context in which the image is located);
- **A** (the interlocutor's image of the author's image with stable elements and variable elements according to the context);
- **S** (purpose of reading the image; rarely clearly defined, often reading/ decoding the visual messages of the communication is done unintentionally or at an unconscious level);
- **F** (forms, methods, techniques and styles of analyzing the image – to take a distance, to cooperate, to adapt, to assimilate, to analyze, to synthesize, etc.);
- **R** (semantic restorative ways - through attendance, anticipation, approximation, etc.). It means understanding the image and the operationalization of decoding the image, here we have degrees of understanding an image: 1. Explicit understanding where lecturer only records the significance of forms, color and composition of the composition; 2. Implicit understanding, lecturer managing to see beyond the image itself and to capture the possible connotations of the composition; 3. Referential understanding, which involves lecturer's previous access to the code of symbols and meanings used in

communication, as well as a wide range of information from the interlocutor's former experience);

- **I** (instauration of semantic means - leading to the restructuring of semantic image matrix, imposing the meanings by unusual permutation, combination and arrangement of multiple elements from the image, from the group of pictures or from other groups of images, respectively personal lecturer's contributions, what we call subjective interpretation. **I** is the focal point in an image and place of convergence or divergence between the author's and lecturer's image - indicating that in the act of communication, the author becomes the lecturer and the lecturer becomes the author, the roles of transmitter and receiver being in a continuous dynamism).

The proposed model, called hexadic contextual-situational brings more additional information in reading the image than the hexadic simple model, noted above, since it takes into account several factors. In reading the guidelines of lecture listed above, there can be added:

- **PE** - the physical environment (external or internal architecture of the building, furnishing, arrangement of objects in ambient, temperature, humidity, brightness, chromatics).
- **PSE** – the psychosocial environment (the formal or informal frame, the interlocutors' status, their roles, the emotional atmosphere).
- **CE** – the cultural environment (national culture, general culture, etc.).
- **SR** – the sensible reality, that is the reality perceived by senses (i.e., the smell of the environment may influence the visual reception of the message).
- **AR** – the abstract reality (consisting in words, ideas, concepts, categories, laws, principles, theories, concepts, opinions, dogma, mental representations, prejudices, etc.).

- Sp - space (closed, open)
- T - time (objective and subjective).
- L - language (volume, codes, symbols, a certain syntax - issues of composition, a certain semantic - meaning, meanings, etc.).
- V - the subjective value (the investment of effort in transmitting or receptioning a non-verbal message gives subjective value to non-verbal communication, quantified in the presence or absence of interest)
- EC – the capacity of assessment and decoding received messages.

4. Visual-Artistic Composition of the Human Body and Reading its Image

Aspects of visual artistic composition are numerous, complex, but important to establish image and to read it. For not conveying the wrong message of the image, another one than what the author intends to be decoded correctly and to be harmonious, the composition must compile a unit, being organized in a structure, based on some principles and the meanings of symbols must be correctly used.

Visual-artistic composition of the human body must have a form and content; these are made by lines, colors and accessories. The image involves the following structural-constructive aspects [2], which group together and organize expressively the artistic language, for transmitting meanings: composition, pressure, construction, proportion, movement, rhythm, and harmony.

Composition (the internal organization of image) is an entire item in which there are intersected lines and surfaces, active areas with passive areas. The elements are in a relationship of support, completing each other (e.g., fashion style with straight lines and sharp angles are part of a harmonious composition when the person involved has vigorous gestures, rough movement, with the right trajectory).

In terms of space [1], visual-artistic component of the human body embodies a *centric system* (where the space is ordered by *curved roof framing*, and the network of vectors faces inwards) or *an eccentric system* (where space is ordered by *roof framing straight*, and the network of drivers is oriented outwards). The two systems always coexist, but the one which imposes itself in the field of visual forces prevails.

The visual-artistic composition of an image, in general - regardless the type of image, implies the observation of certain conditions aimed at combining elements of plastic language:

- The existence of a form, chromatic or linear dominant. The dominance should be emphasized through modulation, accents and details.
- The existence of a type of relation between the parts of a whole (analog or contrast *report* or, disagreeing report, disonantic or accidental by quantity).
- The existence of a sense of the whole organization – towards inwards (closed composition, communication barriers) or outwards (open composition, stimulating communication). The direction is outlined by the lines of force (tensional axis), centers of interest, rhythm.
- The existence of a biunivoque interconditioning between elements.

Tension is created by the centers of interest, their arrangement by drawing an imaginary line that links them (a person who uses in the non-verbal message, a single center of interest will bore the interlocutor, creating the feeling of fatigue). Centers may also be specifically marked or indirectly created by perceptual induction.

Construction (the hidden structure of the composition) consists developing the parts of composition – letting us not forget that the body image in non-verbal communication is

a dynamic one, the art being the distribution of breaks, the use of space and time, sequence of movements etc.

Proportion (the quantitative aspect of the artistic elements of language) and rhythm (movement, changing gestures) give the didactic speech harmony. Movement (sometimes suggested by colors, clothing lines or trajectories of gestures) is designed to conquer the audience, and to actively involve the audience in communication.

Movement – suggested by the shifting (sinuous, sharp, flabby, feline, quick, nervous) from the immobility state, can be vertical or horizontal.

Rhythm – the succession or diverse or balanced grouping of the signs: alternative, successive, asymmetrical

Harmony – internal organization of the image, in accordance with the structural logic and based on sustaining reports.

5. Instead of Conclusions

We aim at practical application of these ideas, the experimental plan having already been developed.

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