#53 PAPER 72 - VISUAL COMMUNICATION & „FORMA MENTIS”

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Abstract
An image could be closely connected to a certain spiritual and moral model. Interchanging positive and negative models in the advertising industry, everything becomes related to „positive” purposes. The fact that mass-media presents mainly negative events is a marketing trend and this receipt was brought into the educational area by the electronic means. Suggestion is powerful in the educational actions like theater for children and puppet show. In this article we compare the effects of fictional characters on children and their preference for “real” subjects and suggestions in the puppet show stage design, versus modern „digital disguised” backgrounds as mechanical prints or virtual reality.

Keywords: parental environmental attitude / negative or positive creation / subliminal message / unique/serial images / fictional hero.

1. INTRODUCTION
Visual communication is one of the most important psychological channels for the mind shaping of the children together with the sound and the other stimuli. We will present here the results of our inquiry about theater aesthetics and visual environmental influences on children (6-14) and parents, with or without an attitude toward certain positive or negative environments. We will name this „environmental attitude”.

As we know the early childhood is very important for the later evolution of the adult. Aggressiveness learned from exterior stimuli would surprise quiet and peaceful parents and vice versa. There will always be the question if genetic codes are stronger than the cultural environment. The research we made is concentrated on the behavior of the children regarding theater and puppet show. The children demonstrated a preference for „authentic” old classical visual design and were not enchanted at all by „artificial” modern puppet show stage design. They assume quickly the positive characters and fight together with them against the negative ones. They enter the story and participate inside the play, the same way as many adults live as „real” the motion pictures.

2. „REAL” AND „ARTIFICIAL”
Hand painted canvas is remarkably enjoyed by the children, any other digital print or projection being rejected. This happens nowadays in a digital technology era. The children had the most sincere and rapid reactions and our study revealed this surprisingly way of understanding the decorations conceived by the stage designers. The fight against negative is generally the main subject of the play. The natural evolution is evolving from simple to complex, from ugly to beautiful, from inferior to superior. We dare to say this observing the „forma mentis” of the children who show us through their elections that „ugly” characters were genetically denied by mankind. Everything that not fits to the „normal”, to the recognizable, is not good. Do children grown in ugly environments become negative characters? Should parents avoid „ugliness” – especially images and sounds – and promote beautiful things? Can they shape future positive and strong characters? The Nature has its own signs to indicate „danger”: plants, butterflies, birds, have certain colors, shapes or even „images”, either to attract or frighten the prey, the partner, the predators. The butterflies have „eyes” that frighten the birds. Specific odors or sounds are frightening for some animals and attractive for others. The natural environment seems to be well organized and very clear.

“Real” background of the stage is not what an adult would think, but the suggestion of the painter, the idea of the apple and not the apple itself. „Artificial” image of an object that becomes essential in the stage design,
due to the role in the play, is no more artificial in front of the children because is hand crafted and not mechanical. It is a fantastic world received by the children as being more “real” than the reality itself.

Our inquiry demonstrated that more than 300 children reacted very well to the puppets and their stage design when painted in a “beautiful” manner. The child is one of the most “dangerous” spectators. The quick expression of the feelings and their outburst can shortly decide for the destiny of the play. It is a very interesting reaction regarding “authenticity”, separating “real” and “artificial” in the children mind. A long experience of the actors, the kind of music and sounds played during the show, receive different reactions depending to the whole design of the stage and puppets figures. The old painted canvas is also adequately “constructed” with pieces of architecture in volume that everybody could see that is only the idea of the castle but children accept easier this kind of design than “artificial” photographed ones. The heroes of the story have to be always “authentic”, in the sense that they have to be “real” puppets and not disguised actors (children or not), nothing “disguised” being accepted. Any “false” attitude can be compared here with the wrong attitude of the parents regarding various artificial environments spiritually or materially created for their children. The natural way of reacting to questions, of managing and solving banal problems or conflicts, the implication of the child in a various range of problems determine if the “play” is “authentic”.

3. THE MORAL LAW

The human context creates the moral problem. The Natural Law enters in contradiction with the Moral Law. What do parents should tell their children about this? Here we talk about different subjects with the same background: from the fishes which take the color of the coral reef to save their lives up to human (political) lying. Does greed serve as a good reason to survival? Do we lie sometimes to survive? How many lies can we afford daily? In fact the capacity to lie of the child develops from the early childhood. Taking into account that aggressiveness is a path to success in the economic battle, we can teach our children that profit oriented mentality is one of the Natural Laws and is followed by the majority of the people, but in the same time the Moral Law gives us permission to think unselfish, altruist.

„Thus Gandhi did not sign the Proclamation of Rights. Instead, his moral philosophy stands for a proclamation of human duties. (…) Gandhi considered non-violence the means of realizing Natural Law. Real justice cannot be secured by evil means, the means must be morally pure.” (Mahatma Gandhi – 125 Years, 1995)

The ethics of the “real” theater that shows what is good and what is wrong, educate children and create for them the later life and “environmental attitude”. One of the greatest satisfactions of the staff that worked for the play is to see the success of the show, not only in terms of applause but in terms of moral and soul relieving. And the most sincere attitude receives the most sincere reactions.

4. EROS AND THANATOS

Does visual intimidation in Nature have the same impact as visual intimidation between humans? Behind the so called „real”, „objective” and „politically correct” situations stay controversial ideologies. A good actor, a perfect liar in politics, has to prove that he is trustworthy through the most powerful communication weapon at hand: the image. That is why there is a certain battle for „image” in the contemporary world, considering that Internet and Television are already normal communication channels for the most isolated places on Earth (Perry K.D., 2002). There is a tendency to sell negative news and even transfer this receipt in literature, movies, Internet stories, games and heroes, designing many characters with a certain attraction for “Eros and Thanatos”.

Nowadays theater directors and play writers think that applying this receipt they will have success to the public. Normally the children have in their age specific literature small signs given by the author indicating recognizable positive and negative qualities of the characters. Generally in puppet shows stories things are very clear and easy to discern. The problem with the „right” perception of the „real” world by the child, and later by the young is finally the matter of the parents as „authors” of the play. The dangers are indicated by examples as the cat and the fox cheating Pinocchio, thus teaching the old saying of the parents not to talk with strangers, eat sweets or even take „legal drugs”. Intimidation and fear have an important role of induction used by strangers on Internet, as „heroes” who „are good guys” and „cannot harm little girls”. Business „old friends” or acquaintances can disappoint or steal – after a sufficient time of trustworthy relations. Here lays the very important balance between educating a frightened child and a scared adult in comparison to a person that manage all kind of situations. The professors that intimidated the students in the sixties were banned as „barons” in the 1968 revolution. This moral uncertainty pushed young people in political quarrels to fight against doubtfully moral values and social ethics.
The problem of the “false heroes” that combine the above mentioned “qualities” is increasingly aggressive on various visual communication channels, specially designed for children but apparently for general access, wearing the mask of the “friendly” fox and cat. This is one of the most complicated contemporary problems of the human rights. Do people that put a wrong directed content on Internet have an intentionally wrong attitude or do they put there the personal obsessions and nobody is meant to follow their creations? It is the same question with television and mass-media in general which are not compulsory educational. The right to free expression is guaranteed by democracy and there are only a few governmental and nongovernmental foundations that are preoccupied by the visual content of various communication channels.

Being aware of the threats of the contemporary world we brought here the children universe that is the future of mankind. One of the most important things to do for them is to try to understand first what is our “environmental attitude”. The need for visual education tends to leave us in a huge unknown area of infinite possibilities that we and our children have to observe if “authentic” or not. The impression that we immediately understand any kind of image is false because only long time educated persons in this direction could have a professional opinion. Even persons who work with a big amount of images are not always in measure to say whether they are aesthetically well constructed or morally adequate. The long life aesthetic education is a better understanding of our environmental need and makes us create a better environment for the “forma mentis”.

5. HOW TO INFLUENCE „FORMA MENTIS”

Normally “forma mentis” changes in time if there is a certain spiritual evolution. The children are open to new things on condition to show them a work that has a sincere output.

The mind of the human being is formatted through the five senses stimuli. The close environment of the baby imprint images, sounds, odors, etc. on the short memory. The general atmosphere of love surrounds the child. There is a perfect space of safety. We do seek the same atmosphere for the rest of our lives. Images are the main mean for this end. Those children grown up in a block of flats will remind their infancy observing a similar architecture. Or those near a gas station will remind the smell of gasoline. This belongs to their „forma mentis”. Could we transform a poor child into a wise and noble king? A hundred years ago the most eastern theories would say yes, the most western not. Genetics is today the answer, especially the father’s code. Architecture, music, theater, movies, stories, everything given by the environmental space are the most impressive elements though the child is not „observing” them, not being attracted by the “large environment”. It is well known that buildings that were almost daily in the sight of the child were not remembered later. There is a good experiment on the human perception due to the communist architecture were everything is similar – from the streets to the furniture in the apartment. It is obvious that the brain development of the child grown in a block of flats has a different “forma mentis” than that one grown in a small house in the middle of the hills. Each of these two could be compensated by the “environmental attitude” of the parents. If the parents in the hills are motorcyclists and rock-music oriented it is less probable to raise a child with a strong taste for classical music, but this could though be possible due to the genetic heritage of the child.

In this respect many theories about „artificial” image are wrong. Everybody would think that the digital image era enhance the preference of the children for the mechanical reproduction of a certain landscape in stage design or elsewhere. But the serial object does not fulfill the expectations anymore and digital electronics become as obsolete as the small compact radio receiver of the fifties. People and especially children proved not at ease when the director tried „modern” solutions such as digital image / video projections / printed photographs – even if these were already common in the modern show. The „vintage” trend represents in fact the need for „real”, „authentic”, the original puppets cost between two hundred and one thousand euro each one (even more). It is the „rare”, the „unique” that wins the battle. The need for unicity against multiplicity, the fact that we are „special” spectators, customers, consumers that have the privilege to see and hear a „special” show is not only a marketing trick of the psychology of perception but the long dreamed impression that „you are the one”. The „original” Pinocchio puppet indicates us the „real” Pinocchio, that one we all find inside us.

Is it possible to influence „forma mentis” through the “environmental attitude”? Children with border line disorder can change their forma mentis through environmental change – and here comes the lesson of the puppet show and theater for children.

6. CONCLUSIONS

The role of the “artificial” image in the “forma mentis” semiotics (Leeds-Hurwitz W.,1993) is decided by the preference of the human being for gestures and signs that reproduce the human trace. The human
“traceability” is denied by the digital automatic era, except by the case of the mechanical reproduction of the human unique gesture.

“The fairy tale, which to this day is the first tutor of children because it was once the first tutor of mankind, secretly lives on in the story. The first true storyteller is, and will continue to be, the teller of fairy tales. Whenever good counsel was at a premium, the fairy tale had it, and where the need was greatest, its aid was nearest. This need was created by myth. The fairy tale tells us of the earliest arrangements that mankind made to shake off the nightmare which myth had placed upon its chest.” (Walter Benjamin – 1968)

The teacher (the parent) and the education system have the main role in deciding what a young person can choose from the visual possibilities Internet gives us and format our brain. We left away other communication channels because they are obsolete. Essential elements of visual communication used by video and computer games, fictional heroes, movies for teenagers, are sometimes disturbing and wrong directed. The lack of aesthetic education even in the families with financial possibilities is due to the non-educational role of the mass-media channels that became “organizers” of the child’s life. “Environmental education and aesthetic attitude” or vice versa is a permanent need for a developed society which has to be performed from the early childhood up to mature ages. It has the same importance either for professionals (musicians, visual artists, writers, dancers, actors, architects etc.) than for non-professionals. This “must have” of the contemporary society was very well induced by tradition in the ancient peasant society, but lost by the “evolved post-industrial” world. Therefore we insist on the positive visual education and on the interest we have for the five senses stimuli our children enter in contact. The spiritual environment is more important than the material environment for the psychological evolution of a person and the “environmental attitude” is important exactly in this respect, being attentive to the “milieu” independently of the material or financial resources.

The difference between kitsch and good quality either in visual or musical environments can be detected by the children and even by an average number of adults, provided that they have more environments to compare. Statistically proved, the visitors of the museums ask more and more for prints that reproduce human gestures, unique creations of the human being. The wish for a “personal” environment, for unicity, is not contradictory with the mechanical reproduction as long as this one repeats a genial human creation, instead of a banal one. We do not blame “realistic” photography or “natural” sound recordings, but their effect on the human brain is less creative than images or sounds created by humans. A photography created as an artistic object has the “mechanical right” to be reproduced either in a home of a poor family or in the home of a rich one. In fact we find useful the high quality handcrafted or mechanical reproduced piece of various arts and crafts, as alternative to the kitsch industry that sells a lot of substitutes. The beautiful proportions of the human body were copied by the romans from the Greek sculpture, put into public spaces or private residencies, bringing the ideal “forma mentis” of the Greeks into the roman aesthetic environment (Vitruvius). Thus the people were “democratically” educated and even the Renaissance theories of the public space culminated with examples as “Ospedale degli Innocenti” in Florence. We are certainly against the bad taste, aware about the souvenir industry and attentive to the objects around the child, seen at home and especially in the space he spends most of the time that remains for the whole life in the memory.

7. REFERENCES


