To Anyone with Eyes in Their Head

Elena Ippoliti

The illusion of perfect communication

A professor is delivering a lecture in a university classroom. It is an 'intermediate' lecture for an 'intermediate' year of study. The students are already familiar with the academic path, the subject matter –having learned most of the technical terminology– and with the professor himself. Though the lesson is technical in nature, it does not introduce particularly advanced content.
The communicative situation appears clear. It is a traditional lecture format with no disruptive noise, lighting, or other disturbances. Both professor and students share the same native language.
All the elements for effective communication are seemingly present: an expert sender (the professor), a well-prepared audience (students with a solid foundation), content that is not overly complex, and a well-established communication channel (a frontal lecture). One would thus expect the transmission of the message to occur smoothly and the content to be received by the students as the professor intended. However, experience shows that even in apparently structured and favorable contexts, communication can be partial, distorted, or ineffective.
This reminds us that communication is both complex and fragile. It does not resolve itself in the passive transmission of information, but rather in the negotiation of meaning. This negotiation depends on many factors: cognitive and emotional context, level of attention, motivation, prior knowledge, and more. Even before that,

211

communication presupposes the existence of a shared medium between sender and receiver: language. For the content to be truly 'shared', the language must be internalized by both parties.

Simplified, language is a communication system aimed at establishing interactive relationships within a socio-cultural group. This system is based on the adoption and sharing of a common code –a set of signs and rules– for encoding and decoding messages. This theoretically ensures a correlation between the plane of expression (signifier) and the plane of content (signified) in communication.

The assumption of substantial homogeneity is a feature common to all theories of language and all methods of linguistic analysis, ideally assuming that both speaker and listener use the same code to formulate and understand discourse [Rosiello 1979, p. 335].

But in practice, even when the code is supposedly shared and established, communication is always subject to ambiguity. Every act of communication involves subjective interpretation, both when constructing the statement and when reconstructing the message, based on one's experiences and prior knowledge. This results in an inevitable misalignment between the sender's code and the receiver's [1] (fig. 1).

Ambiguity is an intrinsic feature of all languages that involve human interaction, as these do not presuppose univocal associations between sign and meaning [2]. This also applies to natural language, which is subject to lexical, functional, morphological, syntactic ambiguities etc., as well as ambiguity in the sound-to-meaning projection [Aissen, Hankamer 1977]. Ambiguity is a direct consequence of the linguistic system's complexity: "If the sentences of a natural language were simple sequences of words without syntagmatic structure, there would be no ambiguity" [Aissen, Hankamer 1977, p. 16]. It is precisely this complexity that makes language so rich and nuanced. For certain types of discourse, ambiguity is even a structuring element –as in persuasive, poetic, or playful language. Conversely, "if every ambiguity, disturbance, or deviation were eliminated, there would probably be no choice: voice would be lost; the surprises of art, as well as the wonders of riddles and puns, would come to an end" [Baratta 1979, p. 334].

The illusion of perfect communication is thus confronted by the dual nature of language: on one hand, a tool for clarity and precision; on the other, a vehicle

Fig. 1. The ambiguity of verbal communication brilliantly demonstrated by the surreal dialogue between Totò and Hon. Trombetta (Antonio De Curtis and Mario Castellani) in the film Totò a colori (Steno 1952).

for expressive depth and extension. In this dialectic, understanding is always the result of negotiation between codes, contexts, and subjectivities, whether it's a verbal (natural) language or a polysemic one such as the visual language.

Telling (almost) nothing

What happens to sense when the form of the narrative changes? To reflect on this question, Raymond Queneau's work *Exercises in Style* is exemplary [3].

In the *Introduction* to the 1963 edition [4], Queneau recounts how the idea came to him in the 1930s while attending a performance of *The Art of Fugue* by Johann Sebastian Bach [5] with his friend Michel Leiris. He was struck by how a seemingly simple musical theme could generate infinite variations through the contrapuntal technique of the canon [6]. Inspired by Bach's work, Queneau –novelist, poet, essayist, journalist, translator, and mathematics enthusiast– decided to "do something similar on a literary level" [Queneau 1963, p. 9]. Not to showcase linguistic virtuosity, but with the intention of renewing French language, observing that there were by then "two distinct languages": one, that of the 15th century, poorly taught in schools, and the other, the spoken language (neo-French) [Queneau 1965, p. 66].

He therefore equipped himself with a very short story, or rather a 'non-story' –*Notations* [7]–, and then established a set of rules, keeping "an eye out also for the pleasure of the ear" [Eco 2002, p. 229] [8]. With these sole ingredients, he embarked on an exploration of the French language through 98 exercises of intralinguistic rewriting [Jakobson 1959, p. 233] [9], i.e., 98 stylistic variations, but always remaining within the linguistic constraints –historical and cultural– of the French language. An exploratory research through language, animated by a generative and combinatory logic [10]. A game for which Quenau "laid down the rules as he went about playing it, splendidly, in 1947" [Eco 2002, p. 238], inviting the reader to play their own match in discovering the rules underlying the *Exercises* [11].

As said, the story is always the same, yet each *Exercise* represents a *unicum* and offers a distinct narrative perspective. So, what changed in the 98 rewritings of *Notations*? The style, demonstrating that style itself partakes in the production of sense. Not a mere formal virtuosity, but a theoretical demonstration in action: sense does not lie in the story, but in the form of its enunciation. A 'simple' lesson on language.

Queneau's experiment inspired other authors, even in different expressive fields, such as comics.

A first significant experiment applied to graphic narrative is due to Stefano Disegni and Massimo Caviglia. Again, a 'non-story' –a man looks at a watch, waits for a woman who is late, then she finally arrives and they kiss– repeated over 103 strips. Each strip reinterprets the same event (he, she, and love), rigorously maintaining the same narrative development –introduction, development, twist, conclusion– and almost unchanged authorial graphic signs.

However, each variation changes the narrative register, essentially shifting the tone –romantic, surreal, ironic, dreamlike, abstract, etc.– and consequently adapting rhythm and stroke. Thus, the narrative moves seamlessly from a romantic strip –with soft lines and syrupy dialogues– to a cinematic one –with close-ups, visual cuts, camera movements– introducing an endless procession of the most varied post-punk inhabitants of an urban condition: the Chav (*il Tamarro*), the Thug (*il Cattivo*), the Nose picker (*lo Scaccolone*), the Giant, the two Viruses, the Distracted, the Fool, the Zen, the Limpet (*la Cozza*), and so on.

A second experiment is Matt Madden's *99 Ways to Tell a Story* [12]. Again, it starts from a 'non-story' (this time visualized in the template of a page): two characters in an apartment engaged in daily activities, a brief exchange of lines. Then, like Queneau, Madden attempts to challenge the limits of the comic language by proposing the same 'non-story' through 98 variations. He alters handwriting, signs, colors; genre (photo-comic, manga, horror, etc.); the point of view from which the story is narrated (first one character, then the other, a subjective shot, from outside the apartment etc.); the time sequence (a time that expands to a life story, a time meticulously described in thirty frames, a time that dissolves into a geographical map, a time compressed into three panels, a time diluted in a single image, and more).

The experiences of Disegni & Caviglia and Madden show that intralinguistic translation –or more precisely, rewriting– is also possible in the visual domain, provided one 'plays' while respecting the rules underlying the language of the aesthetic text put into play, in this case that of comics.

Strict adherence to a specific set of norms has ensured the recognizability of styles and the coherence of the narrative in a 'time' –demonstrating the causality of the chain of narrated events– and in a 'space' –equipped with characteristics to make it identifiable and recognizable. These are summative formative modes that, while progressing through "combinations of figural fragments", ultimately lead to a "unitary *gestalt*" where "the result is something absolutely unitary, indistinguishable, inseparable" [Anceschi 1992, p. 57].

More broadly, in the experiments by Queneau, Disegni & Caviglia, and Madden, we are essentially witnessing a demystification of narrative. They show that meaning does not depend on the story (or 'non-story') –that is, the content– but rather on the discourse, and even more so on the manner, the process by which it is produced, that is, on the form of enunciation. In all these experiments, the authors operated on signs and rules –that is, on the code– through systematic variation, each within the specific framework of their linguistic system: French –therefore producing a verbal text– or comics – thus producing an aesthetic text.

And in an aesthetic text, that is, a text that offers an experience through images, the form of enunciation is even more compelling, as it defines the "aesthetic contract" established between author and reader and determines what the reader should consider relevant and what not [Barbieri 1992, p. 256].
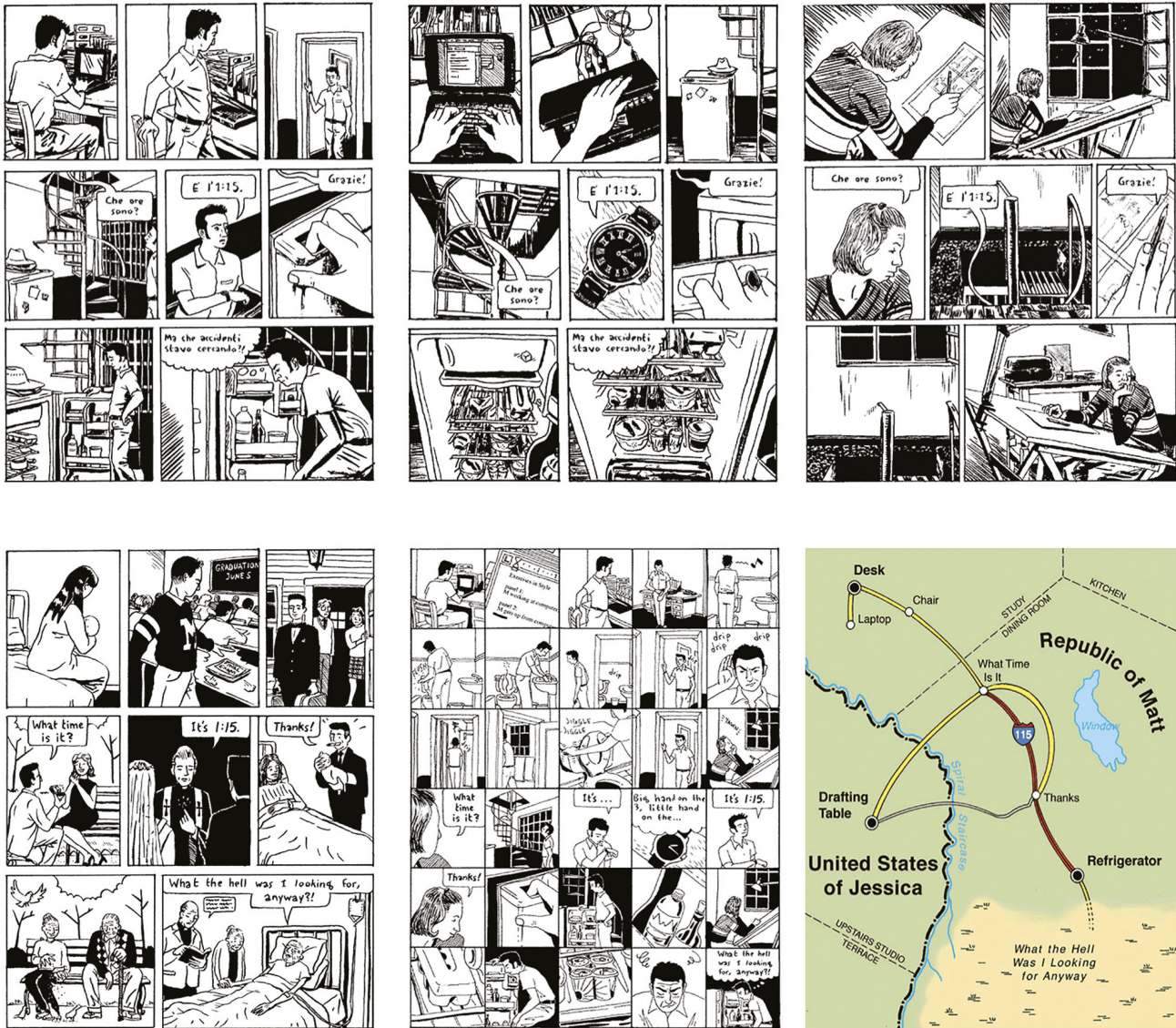
Figg. 2, 3. Some of Madden's style exercises. While the paranarrative elements remain constant, the point of view from which the story is told varies (fig. 2) or the time of the story varies (fig. 3) [Madden 2005, pp. 3, 7, 9, 95, 141, 63].

What has been argued so far is enough to demonstrate that the visual language possesses a structure and a code sufficient to be considered an autonomous communication system – that is, a language. Or not yet?

How do you recognize a dog? Or on the aspiration for a perfect language

It is with Roland Barthes' famous 1964 essay on the analysis of the Panzani advertisement –a photograph prominently displaying a mesh shopping bag, half open on a table, overflowing with Panzani products, mainly spaghetti packs, surrounded by tomatoes, peppers, onions, etc. (fig. 4)– that visual semiotics is considered to have been born [Barthes 1964]. For the first time, thanks to Barthes, images become an autonomous object of research: systems of signification are examined, and the critical analysis of the visual language structure is addressed.

However, for Barthes himself, it is only in the words of the headline *Pâtes Tomate Sauce, à l'italienne de luxe* that one finds the code that allows the image's ambiguity to be limited and that therefore guides its interpretation: because the image, by itself, is 'a message without a code'. It is the verbal text –title, caption, brand– that limits the "floating of meaning", playing the essential role of "anchoring" the conveyed meaning [Barthes 1964, p. 40].

On closer inspection, albeit simplifying greatly, the image is once again treated based on the meanings it conveys through its relationship with the referent, that is, only as an icon. According to this perspective, "the interpreter must fill a 'code gap' by appealing to a potentially boundless encyclopedia" [Eco 1997, p. 48]. Interpretative ambiguity can therefore be resolved by verbal language which, being able to stabilize meaning "by forcing the object into a system of discrete units, it drastically reduces this interpretative oscillation" [Eco 1984, p. 109].

Thus, by remaining confined within the domain of representational realism –that is, the relationship with the referent– the question arises whether we can truly speak of language in the visual domain, given that "images, in themselves, are just pictures, and pictures do not correspond to anything: we have them correspond to something" [Marconi 2021, p. 12].

Fig. 4. The Panzani advertisement image analyzed by Roland Barthes in his 1964 essay [Barthes 1964, s.n.p.].

Once again, the issue is the problematic relationship between image and word, between the concreteness of the icon and the abstraction of the concept, the disjunction between visual and verbal languages, and the consequent subordination of the former to the latter, a condition considered by some to be necessary to limit the ambiguity of the former, given its polysemic nature [13].

A fundamentally irresolvable question because it is indeterminate. Indeed, it is possible to affirm that "that a concept's application conditions cannot be implemented by an image, because every image is exceeded in generality by the corresponding concept" [Marconi 2021, p. 12]; but, conversely, it is also possible to "demonstrate that the image exceeds the concept" [Ferraris 2021, p. 16] because "a given image is valid for a whole class" of objects but is also a sign of an idea, that is, a symbol of an abstract idea [Ferraris 2021, p. 16]. On one hand, the ontological primacy of verbal language is affirmed, whereby being manifests itself always and only in (verbal) language and signs are expressions of consciousness; on the other hand, being is said to manifest itself as form, as sensible or intelligible presence, where every sign, by itself and originally, refers to something else that precedes and grounds both consciousness and language.

It is the 'dog' problem already raised by Immanuel Kant: we cannot know things in themselves, but only our representations of them. "The concept of a dog signifies a rule according to which my imagination can delineate the figure of a four-footed animal in a general manner, without being restricted to any specific representation given to me by experience or to any concrete image that I can picture" [Kant 2005, p. 383].

But what happens when we are faced with something for which we have no (visible) experience and the rule and image break down? And so, "how can you recognize a dog (any dog, therefore a dog in general) if you have never seen one?" [Eco, Ferraris, Marconi 2021, p. 11]. How do consciousness and language function in the face of something new, like what happened to European explorers when they encountered the platypus in Australia? [Eco 1997].

Probably similar to what happened to Albrecht Dürer, who managed to depict, in his famous 1515 engraving, a rhinoceros –an animal he had never seen and until then unknown in Europe– based solely on a

Fig. 5. Preparatory study by Albrecht Dürer for the famous 1515 woodcut depicting a rhinoceros. Pen and brown ink on paper (27.4 × 42 cm).

textual description [14] (fig. 5). He probably succeeded by working simultaneously through formal comparisons and conceptual contiguities, drawing on vicarious experiences and descriptions.

Returning, then, to the dog: how is it that we are able to construct a mental schema of 'dog' that allows us to distinguish a Labrador from a Greyhound? [Eco 2021, p. 30] (figs. 6, 7).

We probably can only proceed by both ostension and definition, just as Dürer did: even though he had never seen a rhinoceros, he managed to imagine and represent it, giving it form through that combinatory process of memories and emotions that is intrinsic to the nature of images, which "associate with one another, not because they previously occurred together, nor because we perceive relationships of similarity, but because they share a common affective tone" [Vygotsky 2010, p. 3]. Through this combinatory mechanism, Dürer not only represents the rhinoceros (with errors and inaccuracies, of course), but also gives form to the entire imaginary that had developed around the appearance of this exotic animal.

Just beyond the fence enclosing us in the mistaken assumption that there always exists a relationship linking object/word/representation, as René Magritte already taught us, we discover that 'the pipe is not a pipe' (fig. 8). Overturning "the affirmative discourse on which

Fig. 6. Mimetic representation. Plates XXV-XXXIV, XXXVIII and XLIII-XLV from the chapter describing the dog in Leclerc Buffon [Leclerc Buffon 1755].

Fig. 7. *Logical-conceptual representation. The Table de l'Ordre des Chiens from Leclerc Buffon [Leclerc Buffon 1755, between p. 228 and p. 229]..*

Fig. 8. *Between image and word: the disjunction of visual and verbal languages. Banksy, This is a Pipe, 2011.*
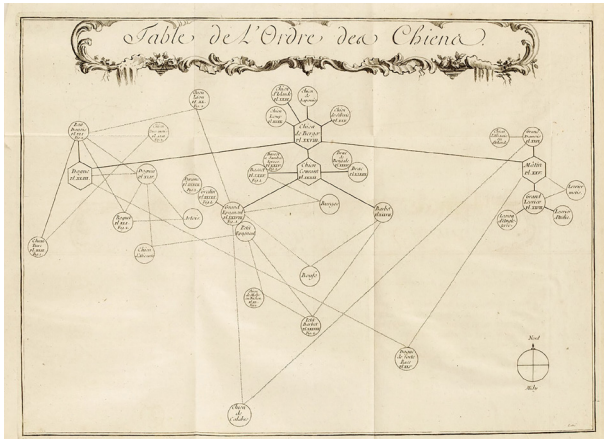
the comfort of resemblance rested" [Foucault 1980, p. 53], in a depiction it is always necessary to distinguish between visible and invisible, between resemblance which pertains to thought– and similitude – which pertains to aspects of the visible world [Magritte 2005, pp. 122, 123]. Thus, in Magritte's paintings, verbal language often functions as a misleading clue and "something exactly like an egg is called *l'acacia*, a shoe *la lune*, a bowler hat *la niege*, a candle *le plafond*" [Foucault 1980, p. 35] (fig. 9).

More broadly, all the figurative arts of the twentieth century have moved toward the interweaving of languages [15] and toward the dismantling of the equivalence "between the fact of resemblance and the affirmation of a representative bond" [Foucault 1980, p. 34]. The new abstract-plastic expressiveness affirms the artist's freedom from the constraint of mimetic representation, giving rise to non-figurative compositions. Geometric shapes, colors, letters of the alphabet, and punctuation marks etc., are combined to propose a new reality no less significant than the supposed natural objectivity.

Visual configurations from which sense effects derive not by virtue of the mimetic relations that are established with reality, but by "making their way to the brain through the eyes" [Lisitskij-Küppers 1992, 352], through perceptual analysis that first isolates a 'field' from the indistinct, then investigates textures, shapes, colors; then examines positions, directions, occupancies, and then evaluates distribution, balance, hierarchy, dynamism, tension, etc. (fig. 10).

However, even after having gone beyond the narrow confines of referential illusion, we cannot ignore how a combination of geometric forms, even when intentionally abstract and devoid of mimetic references, evokes in us an experience of 'figure'. That is, we are led to recognize something, to search within those marks for an order –a sense– that we trace by examining the composition, the arrangement of elements in the 'field', their mutual positions, spatial relationships among individual elements and groups of elements, associating what appears homogeneous and distinguishing what seems dissimilar, linking and unlinking etc.

As Massironi teaches, we can thus recognize a face in the tracing of four identical segments, but only if certain rules are respected: a placement according to specific spatial relations and a distance between the segments within a given interval [Massironi 2002, p. 44]. Under

these conditions, we will recognize the schematic representation of a face –that is, we will perceive the four identical segments as an organized whole endowed with sense, a figuration (fig. 11).

It is the double nature of the image, characterized by an ontological oscillation between abstraction and sensory experience, between concept and percept. On one hand, the image is impossible to place "like other entities such as trees, chairs, mountains, animals, and people"; on the other hand, in being a copy –"an image of itself as an image of something"– it expresses the overflow of the very principle of reality [Desideri 2015, p. 3]. So then? It's the beauty of the image! And there's nothing we can do about it! [16].

Thinking without knowing: the experience of beauty

Let us imagine observing *The Ascent of Jesus Christ to Calvary*, attributed to the final phase of Hieronymus Bosch's production and today housed in the Museum voor Schone Kunsten in Ghent (thus to be distinguished from another work of the same title kept in the Kunsthistorisches Museum in Vienna). In the painting, an oil on panel of nearly square shape, the entire scene takes place in a single foreground, almost completely hiding the dense darkness barely visible in the background, which deprives the representation of any contextual reference. In the foreground, the grotesque and unsettling faces of a deformed humanity crowd tightly around Christ and his cross: evil gazes and diabolical sneers, toothless snarling mouths, crooked and hooked noses.

It is a work of art that stages the ugly and therefore would seem to contradict the sensitive experience of beauty, which underlies aesthetics and art.

Where is the beauty in this artwork, in this image? It is certainly not in the features of the faces of the humanity portrayed by Bosch. For already from the observation –or rather, the experience– of the pre-Lombrosian anatomy of these faces, we would recognize the deformed, a re-cognition that emerges by comparison: because in those disproportionate, altered, counterfeit faces, we identify, by contrast, what is 'in-form', 'without' form – in short, the de-formed. We recognize in them ugliness because, as Plato taught, the essence of beauty is the embodiment of measure, commensurability, and distribution according to rules and
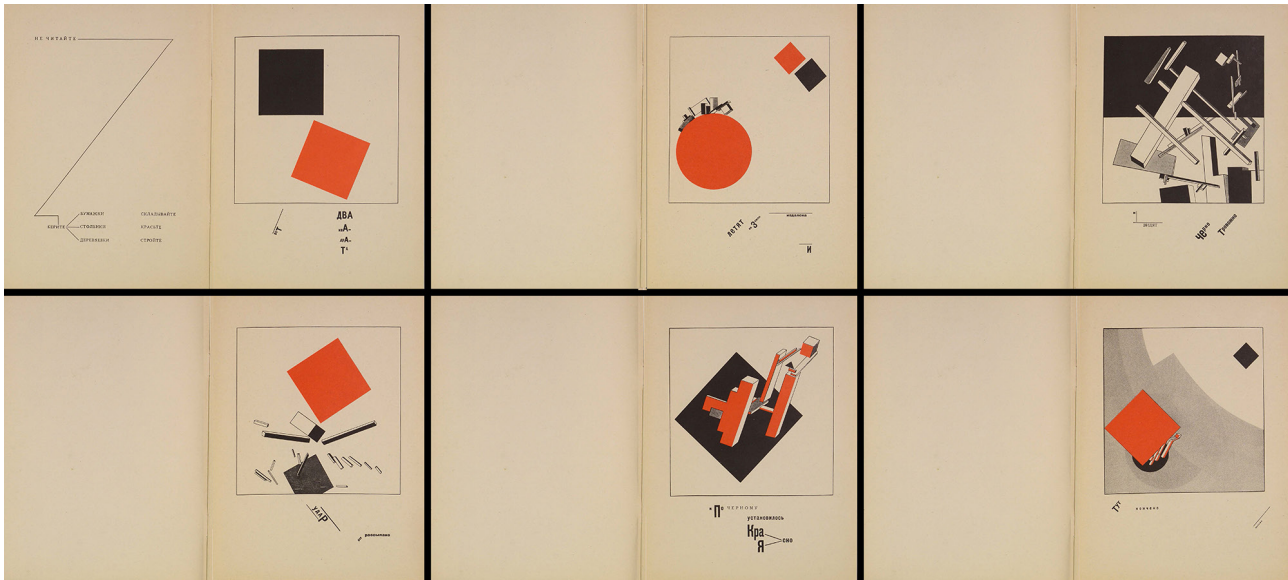
Fig. 10. Basic geometric shapes and chromatic and compositional contrasts suggest a sequence of actions: telling a story without words [Lissitzky 1922].

relationships, while, conversely, the essence of ugliness is the lack of measure.

But the process underlying the experience of an image, and therefore also the process that guides aesthetic appreciation and ultimately leads to the formulation of an aesthetic judgment, does not settle for so little, does not stop at such a preliminary analysis. This kind of process is in fact much more complex –or rather, refined– advancing through perceptual analysis, emotional reaction, cognitive analysis, and attribution of meaning [Mastandrea 2011].

Thus, from the very first stage, of the colors, textures, lines etc., present in the image, we analyze how they are distributed and organized in the pictorial space, their mutual relationships, and their relationships with the field – in other words, the composition.

In this way, we will notice that the formless and deformed crowd surrounding Christ and his cross, as well as Christ and the cross itself, are arranged within the pictorial space 'with measure', according to rules –in this case, simple rules of elementary geometry: the diagonal from left to right– highlighted by the bare cross –and the diagonal from right to left– underscored by the axis of the positive faces, the good thief and Veronica –that intersect in the face of Christ, the geometric center of the composition. Or in the four corners of the panel, where are positioned, from top left proceeding clockwise, the recognizable faces of those who were with Christ at Calvary: Simon of Cyrene, the good thief, the bad thief, and Veronica with the Shroud (fig. 12).

Therefore, it is in the composition, in the spatial arrangement of the elements, that we are able to appreciate beauty: because, even without wanting it, we derive pleasure from tracing in the image the logic of a rule-based arrangement –an organization, that is, an order, and thus a sense [17].

In the composition we will find –without knowing [18] we were looking for it– the structure of sense of the image. Well before assigning it a meaning derived from the interpretation of what is represented in the image (that is, the analysis of its content), an 'instinct' will push us, through perceptual analysis, to an active exploration of the image to understand it purely in visual terms. Among the redundancy of signals that our gaze can
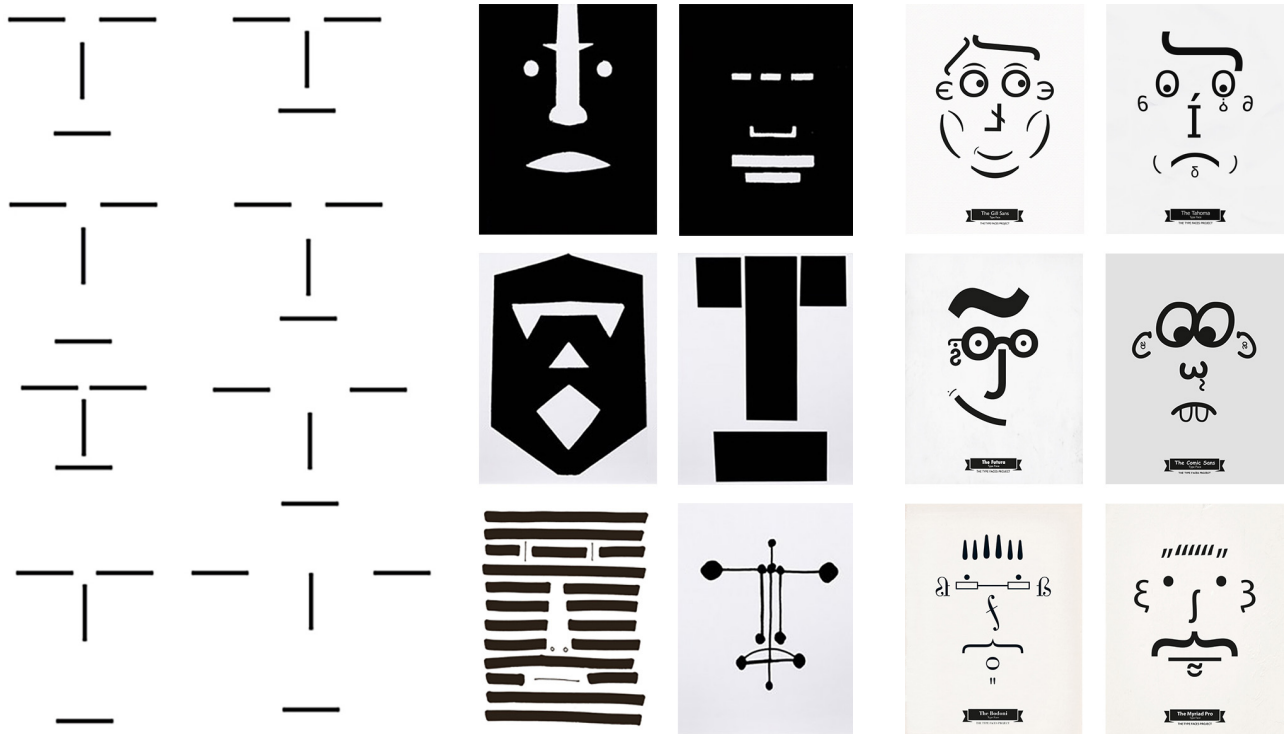
Fig. 11. Faces. Left: variation in arrangement [Massironi 2002]. Center: variation in signs [Munari 1992]. Right: variation in font [Pinto 2011].

capture, for our brain to make sense of that image, a perceptual support will guide us in selecting and understanding, identifying a rule-based arrangement, an organization, an order [Casale 2023].

We will recognize beauty in the order we are able to find in a set of elements, in that rule capable of transforming an incoherent cluster into a coherent collection, because this is the specific nature of beauty, and also its very motivation.

There is, therefore, a natural predisposition to recognize beauty in structures of order, which science explains as foundational to the interpretation of the organization of the natural world. As in chaos theory, which demonstrates the beauty of mathematical writings able to recognize an organization that governs disorder –that is, able to endow chaotic systems with well-defined and at the same time variable structures of order.

So far, the appreciation of Bosch's painting has moved within the confined context of finding sense in what our gaze has captured –an act of recognition/interpretation of the expressive level of the image that still belongs entirely to its visual properties, and is therefore still unrelated to assigning a meaning to the artwork in cultural terms.

Then, only then –and again without wanting to– from the signs, forms, figures, and composition, from the 'coherent units' we have distinguished in the image, we will derive a complex of emotions and reflections to which we will attribute meanings that go beyond what is 'objectively' represented there.

Faced with this image –which does not demand an active response to a visual stimulus from the outside (i.e. a utilitarian response such as crossing the street without being hit by a car)– we will enter a state of contemplative meditation and from it derive, as a reward mechanism, a feeling of pleasure, with an intensity that varies depending on who we are and what we know, that is, on our experience, personality, and knowledge.

From the deformed humanity depicted by Hieronymus Bosch, most of us viewers will likely derive emotions, more or less intense, leading to reflections –also more or less intense– on human wickedness (because, no more and no less than in Plato's time, even today in the de-formed, in the formless, we recognize the ugly, and associate the ugly with the wicked). Some will further derive meaning in relation to the episode of Christ's passion; others will draw emotions and reflections from

comparing this ascent to Calvary with other works on the same subject, between Bosch's visionary style expressive of Northern European culture and the vastly different Italian Humanism, and so on.

A set of emotions and reflections, affective and cognitive meanings, that –especially when visual experience qualifies as an aesthetic experience– are related not only to the properties of the aesthetic object (bottom-up aesthetics) but also to the characteristics of the subject/viewer (top-down aesthetics), that is, they are undoubtedly influenced by socio-cultural factors [Consoli 2017].

It is a refined process always underlying the experience of an image, which is always an aesthetic experience, and which, as already stated, advances through perceptual analysis, emotional reaction, cognitive analysis, and –only lastly– attribution of meaning. A process in which aesthetic appreciation depends both on the properties of the object and on the characteristics of the perceiver/viewer. A process structured in different moments that not only integrate but also influence one another, as taught by the recent and numerous experimental studies in cognitive science devoted to perception and aesthetic evaluation, confirming what was already intuited at least since *Gestalt* theories [Consoli 2017, p. 69]: the stable and dynamic mechanisms of the intelligence of perception, and more broadly of visual intelligence, in the aesthetic experience – that is, in the experience of the 'beautiful' [Zeki, Lamb 1994].

It therefore seems necessary to reaffirm the aesthetic value of a configuration, of an aesthetics of visual forms –that is, of an intrinsic beauty (or ugliness) of images– and hence the need to reassert the original mission of those dealing with Drawing: to understand, and educate in understanding, in order to govern images, which are essential nourishment for our mind and body.

To contribute to the formation of that specific intelligence which is proper to visual thinking (Arnheim 1974) – a type of thinking that unfolds in its writing, for it is in this figuration that thought takes shape and is formulated. But also a type of thinking that must be nurtured, as it is built up over time through progressive deposits and archival of visual memories [Cervellini 2012].

Therefore, to reaffirm –and certainly renew– the practices of the discipline as essential for both 'making' and 'using' images encompassing under the same heading images, imagination, and the imaginary, and holding

together, in the context of the social and cultural specific, plural and singular, form and matter, production and reception, image and gaze [19].

A mission that is essential today more than ever, in a historical moment characterized by the overproduction of images [20], where such an excess of redundancy –as with all cognitive process– can turn data into noise rather than information, making us increasingly unable to distinguish and select, that is, to choose. And at the same time, we also know that such exposure to the noise generated by this whirlwind of visual experiences contributes to developing 'familiarity' (one of the elements at the base of cognitive analysis and meaning attribution) with the noise itself, and, who knows, perhaps, sooner or later, it will make us unable to distinguish the little faces of an emoticon from the solemn faces of the Arnolfini spouses [Voltolini 2016, pp. 2, 3].

Credits

The title is borrowed from a famous quote by Viktor Šklovskij (1893-1984), one of the leading exponents of Russian formalism: "To anyone with eyes in their head it is perfectly clear that art does not strive for synthesis but for decomposition, for it does not march to the beat of music, but is rather a dance and a stroll perceived – or better yet, a movement created solely so that we might feel it" [Šklovskij 1966, p. 43].

Notes

[1] On this point, we should recall the linguistic variety unique to an individual speaker defined by the term idiolect, meaning "each individual's use of language, their personal language or 'style', regardless of the group or community to which the individual belongs" [Marchese 1991, p. 140].

[2] In artificial languages, typical of science, ambiguity is reduced in favor of logical coherence to ensure univocality and rigor. In natural languages, ambiguity is instead tolerated and sometimes sought for expressive, persuasive, or poetic purposes.

[3] Compared to the previous example (the university lecture), the content of communication here is virtually null.

[4] Published by Gallimard in 1947, an updated edition was released in 1963 accompanied by figurative 'style exercises' –typographic, painted, drawn, sculpted etc.

[5] *The Art of Fugue* is recognized as one of the most complex and articulated works ever written and is universally considered one of the highest achievements of contrapuntal polyphony in the entire history of music.

[6] In a simple canon, the melody is repeated by another voice shortly after its initial statement (as in the popular Frère Jacques); in a perpetual canon, it restarts in the next key, continuing endlessly; in a retrograde canon, finally, once the melody reaches its end, it resumes, but this time in reverse, allowing it to begin again, and so on.

[7] In short, the plot is: during rush hour on a bus, one 'guy' notices a second 'guy' who starts arguing with a third 'guy', accusing him of pushing him on purpose; two hours later, the first 'guy' sees the second again in front of a train station with a friend as they talk about a misplaced button.

[8] In the introduction, Eco returns to the question: "In any case, Queneau has opted not only for grammatical variation on the musical theme but also for a variation in the listening conditions" [Eco 2002, p. 233].

[9] "Three means of interpreting a verbal sign can be distinguished. This can be translated into other signs in the same language, another language, or another, non-verbal symbol of symbols. These three types of translation must be classified differently: 1. Intra-linguistic translation, or rewriting, is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs in the same language. 2. Inter-linguistic translation, or actual translation, is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of another language. 3. Inter-semiotic translation, or transmutation, is an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs in non-verbal sign systems" [Jakobson 1959, p. 233].

[10] Among Raymond Queneau's passions was also mathematics, as mentioned; he was even a member of the Académie Goncourt.

[11] "the reader […] soon realizes that there is little to make sense of […] and, so, just sits back and admires the skill of the author. This admiration entails understanding the rule but Queneau trusts his readers to find it for themselves and, no doubt, contemplated this element of puzzle in the game" [Eco 2002, p. 225].

[12] The reference to Raymond Queneau is made explicit by the author in the *Preface* [Madden 2005, p. 1].

[13] In fact, "Ambiguity is an inherent property of natural language; there is no natural language that is free from ambiguity in its meaning-to-sound projection" [Aissen, Hankamer 1977, p. 16].

[14] On June 3, 1515, printer Valentin Fernandes attended a public spectacle in Lisbon featuring a fight between a rhinoceros, sent as a gift from India, and an elephant. Fernandes sent a letter to a friend in Nuremberg describing the marvels of this extraordinary animal. This was likely one of Dürer's sources.

[15] For example, Paul Klee said: "writing and image, writing and depicting, are fundamentally one and the same" [Klee 2011, p. 17].

[16] The phrase is clearly an adaptation of the famous line "That's the press, baby! And there's nothing you can do about it!" spoken by Humphrey Bogart in the film *Deadline – U.S.A.* directed by Richard Brooks in 1952.

[18] By its nature, representation is primarily a topical device: by assigning a position, giving it "a meaningful place", it confers order, because "knowledge without a place seems to be evanescent" [Anceschi 1992, p. 103].

[17] "All perceiving is also thinking, all reasoning is also intuition, all observation is also invention" [Arnheim 1974, p. 5].

[19] This approach to images has for many years represented a broad field of convergence for different disciplines which, with their own methods and specificities, engage in dialogue across disciplinary boundaries to hold together the components of visual experience: images, devices (from traditional optics to visual media), and the gazes directed at images [Cometa 2020].

[20] Some data on image overproduction: regarding daily photos taken, estimates indicate around 4.38 billion in 2023 and 5.3 billion in 2024. Archived photos on hard drives and other formats in 2023 are estimated to be around 9 trillion (considering only

so-called 'unique' images), while including backups the figure approaches 16 trillion. For AI-generated images: since the launch of 'text-to-image' models through August 2023, over 15 billion; during 2022-2023, about 34 million per day. Finally, 90% of all digital images (including video, AI, photos, scans) were produced in the last two years.

Author

Elena Ippoliti, Department of History, Representation and Restoration of Architecture, Sapienza Università di Roma, elena.ippoliti@uniroma1.it

Reference List

Aissen, J., Hankamer, J. (1977). Entry Ambiguità. In *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, vol. VIII. Torino: Einaudi, pp. 417-449.

Anceschi, G. (1992). *L'oggetto della raffigurazione*. Milano: Etas Libri.

Arnheim, R. (1979). *Arte e percezione visiva*. Milano: Feltrinelli (first ed. *Art and Visual Perception*, 1954, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press; eng. ed. Art and Visual Perception: A Psychology of the Creative Eye (New Version). 1974, Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press. <https://monoskop.org/File:Arnheim_Rudolf_Art_and_Visual_Perception_1974.pdf>, accessed June 21, 2025).

Baratta, G. (1979). Entry Linguaggio. In *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, vol. VIII. Torino: Einaudi, pp. 331-340.

Barbieri, D. (1992). *Tempo, immagine, ritmo e racconto. Per una semiotica della temporalità nel testo a fumetti*. Doctoral thesis. Università degli Studi di Bologna.

Barthes, R. (1964). Rhétorique de l'image. In *Communications*, n. 4. *Recherches sémiologiques*, pp. 40-51. <https://www.persee.fr/doc/comm_0588-8018_1964_num_4_1_1027> (accessed June 21, 2025).

Casale, A. (2018). *Forme della percezione. Dal pensiero all'immagine*. Milano: Franco Angeli.

Cervellini, F. (2012). *Il disegno officina della forma*. Roma: Aracne editrice.

Cometa, M. (2020). *Cultura visuale. Una genealogia*. Milano: Raffaello Cortina.

Consoli, G. (2017). La percezione estetica in circolo. Quando le scienze cognitive incontrano l'ermeneutica. In *Lebenswelt: Aesthetics and Philosophy of Experience*, n. 10, pp. 69-80.

Desideri, F. (2015). Il disegno dell'immagine. Relazione presentata al Convegno *Estetica fra saperi e sapori*, Società Italiana d'Estetica, Milano, 27-28 marzo 2015, pp. 1-3. <https://www.siestetica.it/testi_utili> (accessed June 21, 2025).

Disegni, S., Caviglia, M. (1994). *Esercizi di stile*. Milano: Mondadori.

Eco, U. (1983). Tradurre "Exercices de style" di Queneau. In *Francofonia*, n. 5, pp. 3-19. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43015493> (eng. ed. On Translating Queneau's Exercices de style into Italian. M.L. Wardle, trans. by. In *The Translator*, n 8/2, 2002, pp. 221-239. <https://www.academia.edu/83804510/On_Translating_Queneau_s_Exercices_de_style_into_Italian>, accessed June 21, 2025).

Eco, U. (1984). *Semiotica e filosofia del linguaggio*. Torino: Einaudi.

Eco, U. (1997). *Kant e l'ornitorinco*. Milano: Bompiani.

Eco, U. (2017). Cani e spaghetti di mare. In *RIFL - Rivista Italiana di Filosofia del Linguaggio*, vol. 11, n. 1, pp. 19-28 (eng. ed. Dogs and Sea Spaghetti. S. De Sanctis, trans. by. In *Rivista di Estetica*, No. 61, 2021, pp. 25-36. <https://journals.openedition.org/estetica/7660>, accessed June 21, 2025).

Eco, U., Ferraris, M., Marconi, D. (2017). Lo schema del cane. In *RIFL - Rivista Italiana di Filosofia del Linguaggio*, vol. 11, n. 1, pp. 6-29 (già in *Rivista di Estetica*, n. 8, 1998, pp. 3-29; eng. ed. The Dog Schema. S. De Sanctis, trans. by. In *Rivista di Estetica*, No. 61, 2021, pp. 10-39. <https://journals.openedition.org/estetica/7660>, accessed June 21, 2025).

Ferraris, M. (2017). Raddrizzare le gambe ai cani. In *RIFL - Rivista Italiana di Filosofia del Linguaggio*, vol. 11, n. 1, pp. 10-18 (eng. ed. Straightening Dogs' Legs. S. De Sanctis, trans. by. In *Rivista di Estetica*, No. 61, 2021, pp. 15-24. <https://journals.openedition.org/estetica/7660>, accessed June 21, 2025).

Foucault, M. (1980). *Questa non è una pipa*. Milano: Serra e Riva (eng. ed. *This Is Not a Pipe*. J. Harkness, Ed. and trans. by, 1983. Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press).

Jakobson, R. (1959). On linguistic aspects of translation. In A.B. Reuben (Ed.). *On translation*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, pp. 232-239.

Kant, I. (2005). *Critica della ragion pura*. Bari: Laterza (orig. ed. *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, 1781, second reviewed ed. 1787).

Klee, P. (2011). *Teoria della forma e della figurazione*. Milano-Udine: Mimesis (First ed. Milano: Feltrinelli 1959).

Leclerc Buffon, G.L. (1755). *Histoire naturelle, générale et particuliére avec la description du Cabinet du roy*. Tome 5. Paris: L'Imprimerie Royale.

Lissitzky, El (1922). *Pro dva Kvadrata*. Berlino: Sycthian Press.

Lissitzky-Küppers, S. (a cura di) (1992). *El Lisitskij. Pittore, architetto, tipografo, fotografo. Ricordi, lettere, scritti*. Roma: Editori riuniti.

Madden, M. (2005). *99 ways to Tell a Story. Exercises in Style*. New York: Penguin Random House.

Magritte, R. (2005). La somiglianza. In *Scritti*. Vol. II. Milano: Abscondita, pp. 493-496.

Marchese, A. (1991). *Dizionario di retorica e di stilistica*. Milano: Mondadori.

Marconi, D. (2017). La scatola nera. In *RIFL - Rivista Italiana di Filosofia del Linguaggio*, vol. 1, n. 1, pp. 7-10 (eng. ed. The Black Box. S. De Sanctis, trans. by. In *Rivista di Estetica*, No. 61, pp. 11-15, 2021. <https://journals.openedition.org/estetica/7660>, accessed June 21, 2025).

Massironi, M. (2002). *The Psychology of Graphic Images. Seeing, Drawing, Communicating*. Mahwah, New Jersey London: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.

Mastandrea, S. (2011). Il ruolo delle emozioni nell'esperienza estetica. In *Rivista di estetica*, n. 48, pp. 95-111.

Munari, B. (1992). *Alla faccia!*. Mantova: Corraini.

Pinto, T. (2011). *Type Faces*. <https://tiagopintoferreira.cargo.site/The-Type-Faces-Project-1> (accessed June 21, 2025).

Queneau, R. (1947). *Exercices de style*. Paris: Gallimard.

Queneau, R. (1963). *Exercices de style accompagnés de 99 Exercices de style typographiques de Robert Massin et de 45 Exercices de style parallèles peints, dessinés ou sculptés de Jacques Carelman*. Paris: Gallimard.

Queneau, R. (1965). *Bâtons, chiffres et lettres*. Paris: Gallimard.

Rosiello, L. (1979). Entry Lingua. In *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, vol. VIII. Torino: Einaudi, pp. 287-339.

Šklovskij, V. (1966). *Una teoria della prosa*. Bari: De Donato.

Voltolini, A. (2016). Percezione di immagine e apprezzamento estetico. Relazione presentata al Convegno *Estetica: figure, retoriche*. Società Italiana d'Estetica, Modena, 29-30 april 2016. <https://www.siestetica.it/testi_utili> (accessed June 21, 2025).

Vygotskij, L. (2010). *Immaginazione e creatività nell'età infantile*. Roma: Editori Riuniti Univ. Press.

Zeki, S., Lamb, M. (1994). The neurology of kinetic art. In *Brain: A Journal of Neurology*, n. 117/3, pp. 607-636.