

VISUAL COMMUNICATION

Visual communication is always coded. It seems transparent only because we know the code already, at least implicitly – but without knowing what it is we know, without having the means for talking about what it is we do when we read an image. A glance at the ‘stylized’ arts of other cultures should teach us that the myth of transparency is indeed a myth. We may experience these arts as ‘decorative’, ‘exotic’, ‘mysterious’ or ‘beautiful’, but we cannot understand them as communication, as forms of ‘writing’ unless we are, or become, members of these cultures.

Societies tend to develop explicit ways for talking only about those semiotic resources which they value most highly, and which play the most important role in controlling the common understandings they need in order to function. Until now, language, especially written language, has been the most highly valued, the most frequently analysed, the most prescriptively taught and the most meticulously policed mode in our society. If this is now changing in favour of more multiple means of representation, with a strong emphasis on the visual, then educationalists need to rethink what will need to be included in the curricula of ‘literacy’, what should be taught under its heading in schools, and consider the new and still changing place of writing as a mode within these new arrangements.

Work

- 1/ Read the text carefully and try to find 10 of the most important words / concepts that summarize it.
- 2/ Using a dictionary, try to find the correct meanings of these words/ concepts.
- 3/ Why are arts of other cultures not considered as communication to us?
- 4/ Why is written language the most highly valued mode in “our” society?
- 5/ What does the sentence “Visual communication is always coded” mean?
- 6/ Translate into Arabic the sentence: “Societies tend to develop explicit ways for talking only about those semiotic resources which they value most highly, and which play the most important role in controlling the common understandings they need in order to function”.