

The Design of Communication

Communicating is a complex endeavor. Communication has always existed but not in the myriad forms that it does today. Everything man creates is designed. All forms we design communicate. How is communication designed? What are the forms of communication? What is ubiquitous communication? Where does mass media fit in?

BASIC COMMUNICATION: WALKING

Interacting with an environment is an active form of communication. Information is not just received when walking or running, something is perceived and comprehended and then action is taken. Placing one foot in front of the other requires knowledge of the ground. This knowledge, and other crucial information, is not implanted in the brain of someone walking. To gain access to the knowledge one must understand the language in which the information is stored. When a dialogue can exist between the ground and the mind and body of the walker, walking can be attempted. Pressure on the walker's feet communicates the hardness of the ground, the consistency of the pressure communicates the variation of the surface. The walker's eyes determine the placement of the next step based on the information disseminated from the ground. The walker's legs determine the feasibility of the next step and enter a dialogue with the eyes and brain and the ground. All parts of the body are in communication with each other and with the environment around them. Parts of the process happen without the walker even knowing communication is taking place. For example, the inner ear communicates the data interpreted from the environment to aid in balance.

With ease a human can receive and broadcast a massive amount of communication, while participating in other more apparent forms, like talking, reading, writing, or thinking. Basic communication has been "developed by the [human] species on the long evolutionary trail from its archaic beginnings" (Meggs 5) and can be interpreted as rather complicated in nature. The intricacies of the most basic forms of communication become part of the design of latter forms, through purposeful human appropriation, and basic instinctive desires.

BASIC COMMUNICATION: THINKING

Thinking is a very common task that individuals participate in on a daily basis. Thinking is communicating with ones self. Many people are in a constant dialogue within their mind; asking questions, demanding understanding, pondering non-trivial statements, repeating their own and others words, and re-reading what they have just written. Sometimes there seems to be no way to stop thinking, at least this inner dialogue part of thinking.

Thoughts in the mind determine how other forms of communication are understood. Some make quick brash decisions based on their personal style of straight forward thinking, others deliberate based on the repetitive, unsure nature of their thinking, and still others can masterfully control a middle ground based on their superior dialectic thinking. Similarities exist in the way humans interpret information, but everyone has individual reasons for communicating the way they do; the mind and its thought process are a major factor in this. People design their own personal form of communication within their mind. Before any given situation expectations are made based on the form of preferred communication. This preferential, predetermined aspect of thinking complicates, obscures, confuses, and distorts communication, as much as any given language, spoken or written. Understanding the way information, of all kinds, is interpreted is crucial to communication.

BASIC COMMUNICATION: LISTENING

Listening is crucial to communication. With out the ability to listen, verbal communication would be nearly impossible. Although listening enables a conversation to deliver information, it isn't always efficient. Listening is interrupted by any number of stimuli including ones self. Rarely does a conversation unfold where nothing is repeated. While communicating, through writing, listening can be a nuisance. focusing on the writing process (thinking) is easily interrupted by outside forces. The stimulation of the mind through aural sensation (or any sense) can quickly alter consciousness; moods

change, perceptions change, feelings change, awareness changes. Listening can be a passive or active form of communication.

listening is a trait that can empower or debilitate communication. Correct interpretation of meaning is not only based on understanding of language but of all things that can be heard. Communication is inefficient with out complete control of the ability to listen. A strength in the design of listening is that it is interactive. Listening can inform, but more importantly listening can create. When a dialogue exists with an active listener information is created in response to the attitude of the listener. This trait of basic communication extends to more complex forms. The information disseminated through television and radio programming is created for the attitude of a specific audience of viewers (listeners).

BASIC COMMUNICATION: SPEAKING

Speaking is a very active form of communication. Speaking is rarely passive. The decision to speak defines a reason for the articulation of thought. This mere decision to speak can say as much as the words spoken. The chosen words are only part of what is communicated. The spoken words are delivered at a certain loudness and speed, emphasis is added strategically - pauses are too. If communicating in person, speech is aided by facial and body expression or emotion, and other complex levels of communication.

The spoken word can be interpreted indefinitely. In the same instance two people may understand two completely different things from the same speech. In two separate instances the same person may understand two completely different things. there are no universals that facilitate swift communication. Although certain people may speak the same language, they don't all apply it the same way. Language is reinvented and personalized by everyone who uses it. Poorly estimating a common understanding in a conversation can be attributed to personalized communication. Efficient communication through speaking requires diligent attention to the audiences understanding of the broadcasted information. The most effective forms of communication test and measure understanding

and approval. Successful forms of communication such as commercial television broadcasts to a well understood audience.

COMPLEX COMMUNICATION: WRITING

“The limitations of speech are the fallibility of human memory and an immediacy of expression that cannot transcend time and place”(Meggs 5). Writing is the design that solves these problems. Communication through writing can be timeless. Meggs calls “Writing the visual counterpart of speech” (Meggs 5). Writing, like speaking is a form of communication that can inspire inner reflection, thinking. Writing empowers both the author and the reader. The author has the power to communicate to its chosen audience who has the power to read.

The comprehension of written language is a demanding skill. “A relation between letters and sounds is not necessarily natural and in the English language the code is made extraordinarily difficult by exceptions and rules that are exceptions to rules”(Whitehurst). Whitehurst also says, “A second problem is that our brains are not really set up to deal with this code. It is not language. We have evolved a neural system to deal with the process for language over the course of the evolution of the human species”. The added complication of personal writing styles and differing grammatical and syntactical choices often makes the design of writing a difficult task. However, the design of writing eloquently empowers the writer with the ability to add ambiguity to the code.

COMPLEX COMMUNICATION: READING

Reading, like writing, language, or code as Dr. Grover (Russ) Whitehurst would prefer is extremely complex communication. “Reading is difficult for several reasons. One is that it’s a code and the code is not transparent”(Whitehurst). “Hangul is one of the most scientific writing systems ever invented [by royal decree in 1446]... fourteen consonants are represented by abstract deceptions of the positions of the mouth and tongue when they are spoken” (Meggs 29). Communication through reading requires an understanding of the design of the alphabet in question, and its relation to the

spoken word. Hangul, Korea's alphabet is designed to be understood easily; Wikipedia's list of countries by literacy says Korea has 99% literacy.

The quality and quantity of communication depends on the literacy of the medium's code. Efficiently designed means of communication equates to efficient communication. Mass literacy is the design responsible for mass communication. The ability to receive communication is equal to or possibly superior to the ability to broadcast communication. Television or radio communication cannot exist if there is no audience to receive television or radio broadcasts.

'For the human species to progress its essential to have the ability to process and receive communications. A current in today's society is that there's too little input demanding the large amount of output spreading out the focus of our progressing society' (4 Rutkowski). Attentive purposeful, communicative 'listening' to media is responded to with media aimed towards that purpose.

The media (means of mass communication) of today, not only streams from all historical forms of graphic design and art, but it rips off from its family tree time after time. Mass media does not demand the creation of original ideas, only the attention of a stimulated audience. Mass media determines an audience's stimulation through its willingness to participate in communication; pay for services. Commercial television effectively understands what stimulates humans, and convinces its audience to communicate for hours every day. Commercialized communication is an absurd spectacle with no substance and mind numbing repercussions, which degrades, disgraces and devalues all other forms of human communication and interaction.

KYTV is an artistic movement which participates in the dialogue with commercial television. A dialogue also exists amongst the audience of television viewers. I created KYTV along with Nate Geare (UCLA Fine Arts) to communicate my ideas about television. KYTV speaks and listens to everything that television communicates. Determining exactly what television communicates is not typically a complex endeavor, although the motivations behind what it communicates can be hidden or encrypted.

Television is commercialized communication. Television is 100% about selling commercial products. Networks exist to make money off of the audience which they have the ability to communicate with. The decision to receive communications about commercial products is all that television networks want from viewers, aside from money. Television demands passive reception of its broadcasted communication. Even though watching television is passive, it is still a two way channel of communication. People pay money to make it known that they desire to receive information through the television which perpetuates the communication of more commercial broadcasting.

KYTV stands for Kill Your Television. Alternative ways to communicate with commercial television are abstinence, abnegation, rejection; severing all dependance. By killing the television an audience becomes empowered with a voice more powerful than that of the broadcasting station, and its role is elevated from audience to participant. The audience that kills the television is refusing to receive commercial broadcasts; with out an audience commercialized communication ceases to exist. That is the goal of KYTV.

Communication is a personalized design choice, it is a tool utilized by the individual for personal goals. Communications personalization makes a ubiquitous form of communication impossible. The usage and design of all forms of communication are in flux, no medium is constant. Influences from previous or simultaneous communications are appropriated and repurposed with increasing regularity. The form of writing I am utilizing can be analyzed to be many different styles, no analysis is more relevant than the next. If one form of communication can be represented in more than one way, and not easily defined it is not ubiquitous, more likely it is personalized.

WHAT CAN AN UNDERSTANDING THE MYRIAD DESIGNS OF COMMUNICATION OFFER US?

A lot is unknown to the individual as to the way they communicate. Thoughts, inner dialogue, and unconscious determinations are uncontrollable at times. Comprehension of spoken or written language is not consistent. Listening cannot be purposely focused. Memory alters perception of received information. The present is based on the distortions of the past. Seemingly controllable

forms of communication like speaking and reading cannot be completely mastered, as language is often misinterpreted or misrepresented. Intuitions make determinations through an alien process. A purpose to communicate is determined by ideas ignorantly conceived. Determination of the efficiency of communicated ideas is bewildering. Communication is coded and commercialized.

Analyzing all the forms of communication in which one participates allows for the potential of better communication. Knowing the intentions behind communication can inform just as the knowledge communicated. Everything designed communicates. What is communicated by a design is not universal, understanding what it is designed to communicate demands and understanding of communication. One who understands the shortcomings of communication should invite its exploration and any non judgmental confrontations, reinterpretations, criticisms, rejections, or uncomfortable situations that arise from communicating.

Works Cited

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3. <http://www.childrenofthecode.org/interviews/whitehurst.htm#AstoundingNeurologicalAchievement>

Dr. Grover (Russ) Whitehurst he 's the Director of the Institute of Education Sciences, and an Assistant Secretary of Education with the U.S. Department of Education. Dr. Whitehurst administers the Institute, including the activities of the National Center for Education Statistics

4. A conversation I had with my friend, the director Jack Rutkowski, required some acknowledgment to his ideas, which were elaborated on by my attentive listening.