

Visual Communication

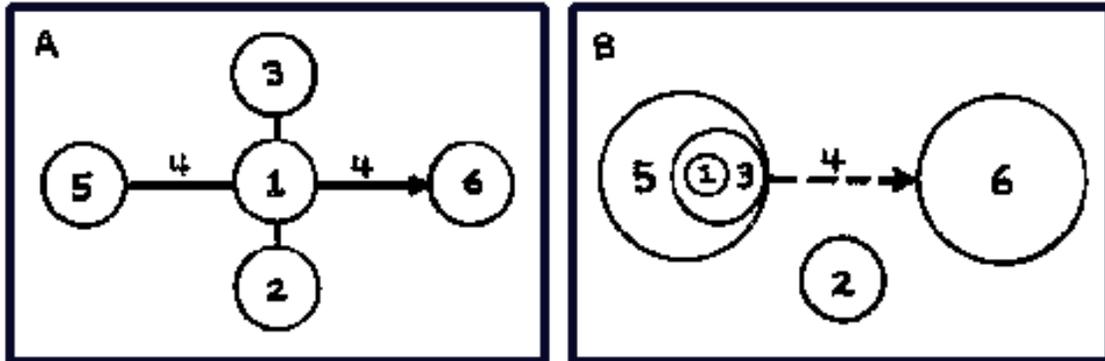


Diagram A is borrowed from a theory of communication, used in the study of Semiotics, in which signs are used to communicate a MESSAGE (1). The object or thing spoken about is a REFERENT (2). The signs are part of a CODE (3) and are used as a means of transmission in a particular MEDIUM (4). This process transfers information from an EMITTER (5) to a RECEIVER (6).

Unfortunately, regardless of the written theory, the people who designed the diagram were not artists and did not study visual semiotics. As a result, there are three basic errors of "VISUAL GRAMMAR" in the diagram. Compare it with diagram B, as the changes are explained:

First, if a LINE is to be used to symbolize something (MEDIUM) it is confusing to use other lines as mere connectors (from MESSAGE to CODE and REFERENT, symbolizing nothing).

Secondly, a directional arrowhead is used on the MEDIUM line, which gives the impression that a MEDIUM has left an EMITTER, gone to a MESSAGE, and then proceeded from that MESSAGE to a RECEIVER.

A more accurate symbolization is a MESSAGE WITHIN a CODE WITHIN an EMITTER, which is transferring the code in a particular MEDIUM (a dashed line to indicate movement) to a RECEIVER.

This configuration also corrects the third error in diagram A, which is the placement of the CODE (3) in equality with the REFERENT, EMITTER and RECEIVER.

Characterization of Communication

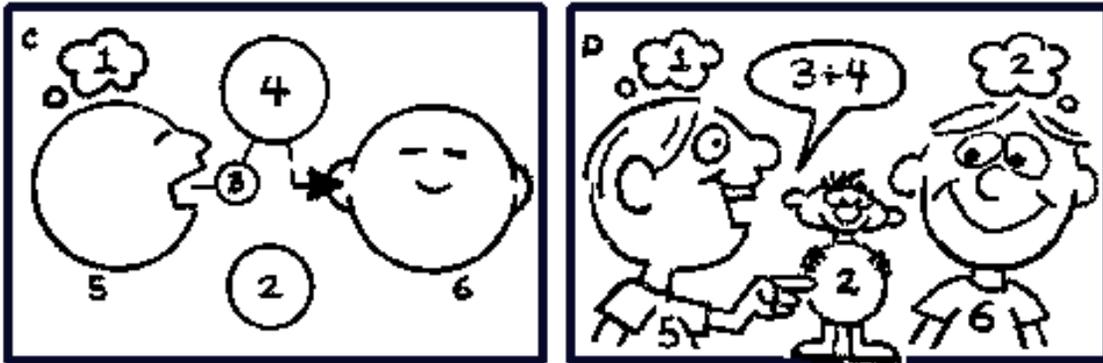


Diagram C personifies these changes for added clarity: Person 5 is emitting message 1 in code 3, medium 4, to person 6 about referent 2.

Diagram D takes this concept one step further, indicating that the receiver (6) has decoded the message and perceived that it concerns referent (2). The visual symbols also suggest that the CODE (3) and the MEDIUM (4) are inseparable and act to combine the MESSAGE (1) with the REFERENT (2).

I use this example, written 25 years ago, to point out the significant problem of translating words and concepts into visuals. By so doing, however, it often becomes clear that the underlying logical structure of the thoughts are flawed, and even devoid of any possibility of rational comprehension, at least by those of us who are visual learners.

With 6900 languages in the world, which have come to be written only in the last 2500 years, and of which, in this country, only one has been learned by 60% and read by 15% of the population, I find myself unavoidably questioning the ethics of using such a poorly designed and unpopular medium for the transference of knowledge. Further I have begun to question why those of us with an Artademic perspective should continue to adapt our skills and work for people who are uninterested in visualizing anything, and are clueless about the problems with the language that they continue to use while studying such supposedly profound subjects as meta-ethics. This is like being hired to serve marshmallows to a group of tourists, sitting around a campfire, casually discussing the intellectual potential of the flames that are consuming their paralyzed legs.

Since this concern has not arisen amongst the worldwide purveyors of higher education, it occurred to me that those in lower education might have a different perspective, and perhaps even some useful information, of a more normative nature, about the subject. And there are no greater experts in that field than stand-up comedians.



These are a few caricatures I drew of the comedians in the Chicago Hysterical Society, while learning to visualize behaviors and personalities for use in cartoons and comics.

Based on behavior, the group could be divided into two ethical categories:
those that would steal jokes and those that would not.

Fools and Clowns – The Ethics of Humor

In 1970 I began an eight-year investigation of humor by hanging out in the Chicago comedy underground. This is how I learned to create humorous situations and write jokes for comic strips. It was multi-modal learning because the same thought can seldom be delivered on stage in the same words or manner as presented in a comic strip. The humor can also fail if the wrong character delivers the line. Many performers have said that the toughest thing to do is comedy. I learned that they weren't kidding.

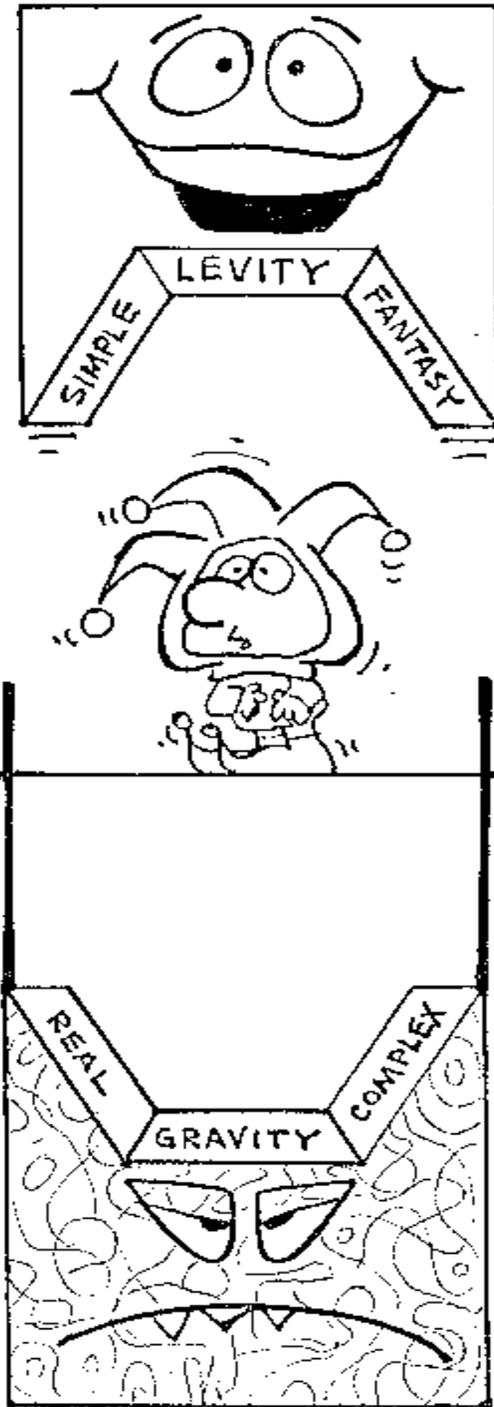
The most subtle and powerful skill a comedian can develop is the ability to deliver a line as though you've never said it before. It gives the impression that you're extremely intelligent and are just having a casual conversation. In order to pull this off, you have to make the audience feel at ease. This is accomplished by making them laugh. To accomplish this, you have to connect new information with something the audience already knows. In Semiotics Theory, a field connected to Linguistics and Psychology, that something is called the "Symbol." The new thing is called the "Referent." And the thing that the comedian needs to create for connecting the two is the "Interpretent." It is unlikely that I ever met a comedian that had heard of Semiotics. But what comedians do intuitively can be described and understood with this terminology.

A successful comedian has a mixed bag of standard warm-up jokes. These are used to determine the knowledge and mood of the audience. Humor results from an intricate blend of language, personality, and audience participation. Ultimately, it is a live sociological analysis with the comedian being a group therapist, trying desperately to survive his own therapy. S/he has no authority that is not created moment by moment. The stage is a high wire and the act must be in perfect balance, step by step. The comedian teeters and sways between awesome success and total personality annihilation. It's a war zone:

“Did ya kill ‘em, kid?”

“No, I bombed.”

Survival depends on knowing the audience. Generally, you get what you advertise for. The reality of a young comedian is that some unfunny bar owner uses him as a gimmick to entice a number of people to spend a lot of money depleting his liquor stock. If the comedian is successful in warming their hearts, they may go into the dining room to spend more money filling their bellies. So the comedian is in a manipulative environment. Humor is not an end in itself, but a means to some other ends. S/he must come to grips with this and determine why s/he's really there. Is it to achieve personal success by rising above the masses, or to communicate something for the common good? This is the primary ethical question that every performer must ponder, and a comedian must ask the additional question: why do I want to do either by being funny?



THE COMEDY LINE

It is a fine line between Comedy and Tragedy: the twist of a word, the sparkle of an eye. A cartoonist must juxtapose words and images for the purpose of amusement. An educator must do the same to promote mental growth. To connect these environments I have delineated the underlying verbal structures of humor and the geometric building blocks of drawing with a character called the "UniFarsal Fool," who lives on a tightrope between the low, heavy world of the "Real Gravity Complex" and its mirror image, the lofty, light-hearted world of the "Simple Levity Fantasy."

To successfully walk this line of the mind, a cartoonist must not only learn to write and draw, but also evaluate different writing and drawing styles, transfer information from one context to another, determine the value structures and vocabularies of a given audience, synthesize abstract concepts and symbolize real-life dilemmas. A comedian must do it in real time.



Steve Allen's
STANDARD HUMOR FORMULAS

THE PUN – Linking two or more concepts to one sound or symbol, or substituting one for another, such as: “I’m writing this jest for the pun of it” instead of “I’m writing this just for the fun of it.”

THE LITERALIZATION - Forcing someone to picture idiomatic expressions or clichés, such as a person on a tightrope holding a large fat monster, with the caption: “Balancing A Budget.”

THE REVERSE TWIST – Creating an unexpected ending or setting up a situation in which the underdog wins. The entire series of “Rocky” films is based on this simple principle.

THE EXAGGERATION - Expanding a situation to the point of absurdity, such as the technique, used by Johnny Carson, when he said something like “It was SO cold last night...” the audience responded with “How cold was it?” and Carson would say something like “The Eskimos moved South for the Winter.”

THE STING - Using a known weakness of a character in combination with a lie, to make the person look or feel foolish, such as Lucy's annual promise to Charlie Brown that she won't pull the football away.



Martha Wolfenstein's

CHILDHOOD MOTIVATIONS FOR HUMOR:

TRANSFORMATION

An Attempt to extract pleasure from unfulfilled wishes or painful experiences. This often results from envying the size and behavior of adults.

AMBIGUITY

This initially occurs in confusing word symbols with real things, especially in the use of names. This is further complicated when our own names are used in many different emotional situations.

SMARTNESS & DUMBNESS

Upon entering school, we go through a phase of using riddles to test levels of ignorance. This activity continues through life in more subtle forms.

MIMICRY

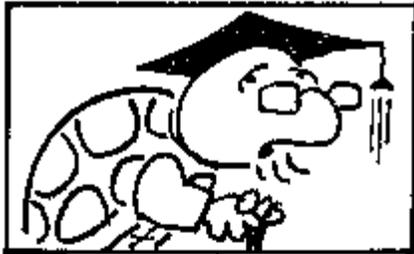
By the age of eleven, we learn to mimic the idiosyncrasies of other people, as well as the characters presented to us by way of television and films.

BEHAVIORAL FACADES

Reaching adulthood means that we have formed complex patterns of thought, using wordplay and other devices to pass blame to others, and to disguise what we think, say and do in various situations involving "forbidden" activities.

BASIC THEORIES OF HUMOR

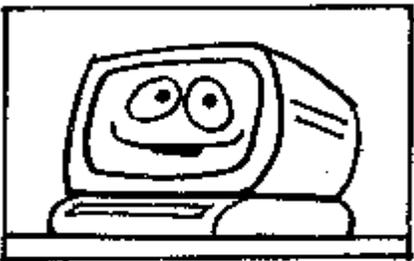
The foundations of the study of Humor come from Philosophy and Psychology. Through different methods of organizing humor and joke categories, almost any verbal or visual expression of Humor can be adapted to specific educational areas.



SLIGHTLY RIDICULOUS THEORY

"Humor results from silly incongruities that are neither dangerous nor painful." -

ArisTurtle



GRATEFOOLAF THEORY

"The misfortune of others brings on the pleasure of knowing that you are not in the same situation."

– PlayTo



UNIFARSAL FARMS THEORY

"Jokes are remembered, not learned. Laughter is the harvest from the Funny Farm of your own mind." – SoccerTease



UNCONSCIENCE THEORY

"The euphoria of jokes is a return to the psychic habitat of childhood, where humor was not needed to feel happy." - Sikmun Fraught

Based on his own research, Sigmund Freud wrote about humor and theorized its relationship to subconscious thoughts in 1905. It was translated three times into English between 1916 and 2003, each time bringing concerns about the words that convey appropriate meaning between the original German and English, but also in regards to his Jewish heritage.

The only other work of equal notoriety, concerning the subject of humor, came from Gershon Legman in 1968. He collected and documented jokes and their meanings from around the world for thirty years. Following are the methods by which the two men organized the subject:

Freud's categories of
JOKE TECHNIQUES:

CONDENSATION

Composite Word
Modifications

MULTIPLE USAGE

Whole and Parts
Different Order

MULTIPLE MEANINGS

Name and Thing
Metaphorical and Literal
Word Play

Legman's
COMMON JOKE SUBJECTS:

Children
Fools
Animals
The Male Approach
The Sadistic Concept
Women
Sex
Marriage
Adultery
Homosexuality
Prostitution
Disease & Disgust
Castration
Cursing & Insults
Scatology

If people with psychological problems could reveal them through humor, I wondered what behavioral connections might be found in criminal subcultures. Would their humor show a different ethical structure? It turns out that there are some similarities in the structure of humor and the construction of lies. According to Paul Ekman, famous for research in methods of deceit, there are nine Reasons for Lying: to avoid being punished, to obtain a reward, to protect another person, to protect oneself, to win admiration, to get out of an awkward situation, to avoid embarrassment, to maintain privacy, and to exercise power over others. These manifest themselves in various types of con-games.

Types of Con-Games

Pigeon Drop - Criminal offers to share “found” money with you on the condition that you withdraw "good faith" money from your bank. Criminal takes money and provides phony address where you are to collect your share. You never see them again.

Bank Examiner - A phony bank examiner contacts you and asks for help in catching a dishonest bank employee. You are asked to withdraw cash from your account to trace serial numbers. After giving your money to the examiner, you never hear from him again.

Door-to-Door Sales - Many door-to-door sales people are not legitimate. Many communities have laws to protect you against door-to-door sales for this reason.

Consumer “Contest” Frauds - Beware of contests that require you to put up money to win, even if there is a guarantee that you will be a winner.

Chain Referral “Pyramid” Schemes - These offer a commission for buying an item and selling others to friends. The products are usually overpriced and difficult to sell.

Retirement Estates - Any retirement estate offered at conspicuously low prices to "lucky" individuals are usually fraudulent and should be avoided.

Business Opportunities - Business opportunities and work-at-home schemes, which promise high profits after an investment or registration fee, are often fraudulent.

Medical Frauds - Fake laboratory tests, miracle cures, and mail order clinics, are frauds. These are now online. Deal with legitimate doctors and hospitals.

Telemarketing Schemes - Free gifts are promised. The victim is pressured to give up credit card numbers and personal information over the phone, to "verify identity."

Home Improvement Schemes - Crews of migrant roofers, painters, and pavers victimize older adults by performing "repair" work quickly, poorly, and at higher cost.

Equity Skimming and Real Estate Schemes - Criminals target homeowners who are behind on payments and need to sell homes quickly to avoid foreclosure. The "skimmer" promises to take over the payments, but once the deed to the home is signed over, he usually rents the home, never assumes the loan nor makes payments.

The "Funeral Chaser" - Shortly after a relative dies, someone delivers to your door a product, like a Bible, that the deceased allegedly ordered before his death. You may even get a bill be requested to make the final payments. This scammer uses the newspaper obituaries to prey on the bereaved families.