

# Auditory for Visual

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A composite art like theatre by definition includes too many arts as well as sensory experiences in great variety. A true analysis of the theatric compositeness should, ideally speaking, concern itself with the totality of human sensory perception. Whether aspects of Indian dramatic theory or the modernisms of theatre - in the final analysis they depend on the more or less efficient and purposeful exploration of the world of sensory receptivity.

From amoebae to man every being is bombarded by different and innumerable messages broadly and collectively described as stimuli. Those stimuli received by an organism are sensations. Bodily 'doors' used to allow entry to sensations according to their specific nature are sense organs. What we receive through them is enumerated and classified as shown below (with a marked addition to the conventional pentarchy of senses).

*Distance Senses:* Seeing, Hearing

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*Skin Senses:* Pain, Warm, Cold, Taste, Smell, Touch

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*Internal Senses:* Position, Kinesthesia, Equilibrium (Vestibular)

It is generally believed that all senses are not involved, at least in an equal measure, in artistic activity. The elite, the sophisticated arts avowedly rely on the auditory and the visual. The way Indian dramaturgy classified drama as *drishya* and *shravya* amounts to accepting the predominance of the two compared to the other senses. To consider *natya* firstly as *kavya* and then to elevate *drishya* and *shravya* as the sole creators of literature is obviously to limit the sensory palette. Perhaps the heard and the seen were brought together to follow the common-sense rule, 'the more the merrier!' Or was there some other reason for yoking the two? Whatever the case the auditory and the visual can be actually combined in a great number of ways. The question is: What can be the operating principles in this 'merger'?

## **The auditory-visual combination:**

### **governing principles**

Firstly, it is necessary to determine whether the desired experience is to be auditory or visual. The decision is made by the artist and his expression is directed accordingly. The receiver is also 'tested' as he is required to guess correctly whether the expression is mainly intended to be auditory or visual. The connoisseur in the receiver is revealed in his decision.

The second principle can be described as the 'final handshake'. Even though the manifestation is chiefly visual, the intended experience is not complete unless combined with the auditory (in this case secondary) and vice versa. Used singly, the auditory or the visual leads to a lop-sided, incomplete experience – falling short of the experience or artistic realization. The auditory is invariably made whole in the visual and the reverse is also equally true.

The third principle is the dynamic equilibrium of the primary and the secondary modes. The secondary mode is to seek its orientation in the primary. In fact, at certain critical moments/junctures, the secondary has to find its expression in terms of the primary. Thus, both are obliged to examine their own expressions rigorously to locate correspondences often at the subtlest of the junctures. The varying equations struck between the corresponding terms of the primary-secondary modes are to be dynamically realized throughout the creative venture.

Fourthly, there is an unavoidable interchange of authority between the two. Irrespective of the initial ascendancy (intentional) of one or the other mode, intermittent, temporary, short-time and deliberate changes in ascendancy are introduced and accepted. Thus, in an otherwise auditory expression, the visual would be in a driver's seat! (and vice versa.)

If large rhythms of a culture are taken into consideration one more principle would be detected. On account of many historico-cultural reasons, the auditory /visual may enjoy during certain periods a monopolistic hold over the expression as a totality. Under such circumstances experience accrued from one or the other modality is also treated as more valuable! To borrow from Coleridge, I would like to submit that today we are suffering from the 'tyranny of the eye'!

The discussion so far has been of the general principles governing combinations of the auditory and the visual. They may appear to apply even to the day-to-day behaviour, our life-pattern in general. However, the principles operate differently in the present context. In the mundane the auditory and visual channels tend to create rigid and stereo-typed stimulus-response chains on account of their indiscriminate and pervasive use. In the art-context the principles are brought into action to break these ordinary chain-reactions. The stimulus-response chains are natural

because of their biological functions - to generate, preserve and proliferate life etc. On the other hand, all art is artificial as it is man-made. Art depends on perception than sensation. The quartet of principles help us to bring quality in perception. Perception is relative to individuals as well as societies. Thus every culture has its own 'art-culture'. In hastily claiming universality of aesthetic criteria or the pan-Indian validity of art etc. we tend to overlook the multiplicity as well as diversity of art-cultures. Anthropologists in the nineteenth century certainly became aware of the diversity of cultures. However, an insistence on the comparative approach and an irresistible inclination to establish a hierarchy of inferior/superior cultures resulted in their suppression of/ indifference to the true voices of many cultures. Times changed and for a while it was weakly contended that all cultures were equal. Today there is a more or less stabilized agreement that each culture is to be treated as a closely coherent system making it impossible to compare isolated factors. It may be objected that the position is nothing but a postponed or an escapist relativism, but that is a different issue! The conclusion is that art-activity is a tightly woven fabric of many systems of messages and it remains on a plane different from our quotidian life. To facilitate this flight in a separate orbit many kinds of strategies are employed. To forge aesthetic principles governing the auditory-visual relationship constitutes one such attempt. How are the principles formulated?

In brief it could be stated that aesthetic principles concerning the auditory-visual relationship are based on the following considerations:

- a) The dimensional triad of time, space and causality is to be processed to liberate it from the 'daily traffic of the tainted world'.
- b) There is a continued conflict for ascendancy between auditory-visual and other senses in every culture. The prevalent art reflects it.
- c) Frequently temporal or the spatial-arts become dominant and the auditory-visual manifestations are correspondingly affected.
- d) Depending on the more or less developed state of language and literature tensions exist between verbal and non-verbal expressions.
- e) The auditory-visual relationship becomes potent because of synesthetic operations. As is known they form a synesthetic pair.

Such considerations if taken into account are bound to result in a noticeable rise of quality, efficiency as well as variety of theatric messages conveyed.