

I was standing in front of the Pompeii main entrance, waiting for the father of my friends from Naples to show up. After a while, I noticed him approaching by car. When he came quite close, he stopped on the other side of the street, opened the window, nodded and, with a stretched arm, his palm facing downwards, waved his hand a couple of times. I was just about to start walking towards the car when I realized, that I obviously had to wait for some reason, so I stopped. We looked at each other and waited. I didn't understand why I had to wait and he was, as we later found out, wondering why I am not getting into the car.

When I write about my work, a problem arises that is, in fact, the same problem that follows every single work of mine as well. If I tell somebody we do not understand each other, I am entering an aporic situation that makes such a statement meaningless. It assumes there is something we do understand, i.e. that we don't understand each other. Luhman claims that every message should contain an element of surprise¹. It seems that a larger part of any message repeats what both sides of the communication already know. Only then is a part, unknown to whoever receives the message, added.

Margaret Thatcher came victoriously back from the Falklands. She landed in Britain and when she was getting off the plane, in front of the journalist, she raised her hand with two stretched fingers. Her second and middle finger were shaped as a letter V, so it is probable that she wanted to say "victory". The trouble was that the other fingers were not facing outwards but were turned towards her. She has shown the back of her hand with two raised fingers, a gesture that a lot of English would interpret as "fuck off". For years, tourists could buy punk postcards with this image.

To claim that art and language are similar is nothing new. Both phenomena are forms of communication and, in order to function, require knowledge of some rules. The context determines these rules so a group of people will find something to be good art because of the associations with other things they know. The communication between different works that make their context is important so the same work can be without meaning in a different context. Today, however, we are free to choose our context as we like and so, I suppose, also the meanings we attach to things surrounding us.

A few years since we last spoke, I met two dear people from the Czech Republic. We always tried to speak in a mixture of Czech and Croatian. I told them that I have been to the Czech Republic not so long ago, about a year ("godina" in Croatian) and was mildly surprised at their astonishment. Afterwards, I realized "hodina" in Czech means an "hour".

If the content of an art work is its reception, the work itself (an object, installation or whatever physical form it may have) has no meaning on its own. It is the people who finish it with their movement, the physical transformation of the work, with their reactions and the work consciously surrenders one more element of its existence to the viewer. It consciously puts itself in a position of a shell, a frame for subsequent communication and gives up the need to tell a story on its own, just like abstract art has given up the need to mimetically represent the appearance of its surroundings.

In the house next to mine in Vienna, a family lives in the ground floor apartment. They don't have curtains and every time I pass, I cannot resist the temptation to look what they are doing. Faye was appalled by my behavior and the only thing that

¹ N Luhman, Meaning as Basic Concept, in Essays on Self-Reference, New York, 1990.

made me feel a bit better is when I found out that all the people I know in the neighborhood do the same. Some have even invented names for the three children that can most often be seen.

If people in baroque could have given movement to the trompe l'oeil painting, they would have probably done so. They would certainly have painted a fixed architectural frame because it is needed to make the shift in the other reality plausible. But afterwards, the space beyond would allow other methods too. The question still remains why do we want to look into the other space and what is it we can see there. It seems we can recognize only things we already know. If we know a gesture from our own daily life, we will associate it with meanings we know and so the whole sequence of movements gets a meaning based on our own previous experience.

The United States police used the research of a Californian scientist Paul Ekman's in order to help policemen make a better assessment of people they meet. Ekman claims that, for example, frightened people, even if they are smiling, will show an expression of fear for a fraction of a second². He says that expressions of basic emotions are the same for everyone in human kind, that they are controlled involuntarily and can be easily recognized.

When we talk, we use much more than just spoken words to make communication successful. A large part of the world will use hands but everybody uses the rhythm and the expression of the face to modify the meaning of what has been said. I don't trust language very much and think of de Saussure with his lack of coinciding sign systems between speakers. The only reliable language we are left with is the common part of communication that doesn't depend on culture: the expression of the face and the rhythm of speech.

The first time I came to the Roman Pantheon, I decided it was the most beautiful space in the world and I wanted to live there (I didn't even give up when my mother, the architect, told me it was stupid because it is not architecture meant to be lived in and where would I put the toilet). I was sitting there watching around me for a very long time. Then I started to observe the people and realized something fascinating: the first thing everybody, really everybody, that walks in does is to look up into the round light hole in the dome.

It seems that people in a space, a given architecture, move in the same way. They turn towards the light, towards the bigger part of the space, keep their backs to the wall. How close they will come to other people depends on their habits. It seems as if people coming from densely populated countries are less disturbed by physical proximity of others. But, even for them, it is possible to predict quite accurately how they will move in a given space thus allowing us to set things up for them in places where they will stay longer.

When I was learning German at school I learnt that pancakes that I called "palačinke" at home were called "Pfannkuchen". Afterwards, in Austria I found out they call the same thing "Palatschinken" so I guessed it was probably in Germany that people call them "Pfannkuchen". Then I came to Dessau and learned that they call the cake "Eierkuchen" and "Pfannkuchen" means the same thing that the Viennese call "Krapfen" which in other parts of Germany is called "Berliner".

² P. Ekman, J. Campos, R.J. Davidson, F. De Waals, Emotions Inside Out, Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences, Volume 1000, New York, 2003.

Although we have lived through post-modernism and are wondering how to call the time afterwards, we still often come across, and not only in the widest possible circles, a notion of art as a special language for communicating emotion. I cannot agree with that just as I cannot agree with an art as a source of pleasure... which doesn't mean I have anything against art as a source of amusement.