

SOURCES

"O wonder!

How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is!

O brave new world

That hath such people in't!"

The Tempest, Act V, Scene I Miranda's speech

William Shakespeare

My contribution to the exhibition of Icon@BraveNewWorld at the Prague Mánes gallery, 2008, could be twisted into the context of Aldous Huxley's famous 1932 book, Brave New World, but with a tone of hesitation. I try to emulate the inertia between two themes, the nominal umbrella for the exhibition and my work, or, rather create a link between Huxley's ironic dystopia and my artistic endeavor. This is, as is standard, tried out in the theoretical sphere of interpretation if not in aesthetic *ekhprasis*. This attempt would be the usual option, trying to decipher the content of image and text and musing on the whys and wherefores of textual form. This is a possibility, in my opinion, but to do so you need collateral experience, so, be patient.

In a modern work of art, no collateral knowledge is supposedly needed. Only an appreciation of color, lines and planes – while at the same time, of course, a fair amount of contextual familiarity, was and is necessary in order to pass some serious time in the art gallery. Contemporary art does not want to play around that much, at least, not to indulge in implicitness. On the contrary, direct messages are favored like those on the street, where the demand for collateral experience of the rules of the game is obligatory.

Probably some readers might ask why the artist chooses to reproduce this philosopher and not another one? Furthermore, why not some other topic or issue? This reaction is the result of the fact that the text, being a direct reproduction without any distortion, could, supposedly, contain a specific viewpoint towards what should be target of deconstruction, irony, comment, and whatever else. If nothing has been changed, one might think that the artist must be trying to propose his message in complete accord with Peirce. That is, the artwork presents the philosophical fragments of this particular thinker for a reason. The artist functions as a medium for a philosophical discussion but this cannot be the case since the work, as such, is not a discussion in itself.

Artwork can be a starting point or aid-memoire for such a discussion, however, the responsibility of a discussion on philosophy is given over to the viewer. This responsibility, actually, does not differ from the one given over to the viewer of any other kind of work of art. The discussion does not belong to the artwork. It may cause one, without itself being anything else than, here, an icon of Peircean thought and a possible interpretation of something seemingly pictorial.

Famous for his ever- growing standing as one of the founders of modern semiotics, besides a number of other things (geodesy, logic, mathematics, pragmatism), Peirce does not appear an ironic person. Anyway, to find such modes you need to be a real scholar. As for other visual forms shown, an image does by itself not mean anything unless somebody interprets it in some respect. Where's the dystopia and who calls Brave New World a dystopia?

Before I go into (one of my) preferred areas of interpretation, something that is on par with the title of the work given by the artist, I will share with you my gratitude towards an interpretation of Peirce's philosophy out of which the texts in my images are excerpt citations, surrounded by inspiring and clarifying comments. This exegetic and readily accessible feat completed by the Finnish Peirce scholar, Mats Bergman, whose work: *Fields of Signification, Explorations in Charles S. Peirce's Theory of Signs* (Vantaa, Philosophical Studies from the University of Helsinki 6, 2004) forms the milieu of the Peirce texts. He applies a context of communication to the corpus of Peirce's thinking and raises an interest in the hypothesis that "*Peirce's conception of sign and sign action is intrinsically communicative; that his often obscure and abstract reflections on sign and sign action can beneficially approached from the point of view of communicative relations....I intend to show that there is a pertinent sense in which Peirce's basic sign-theoretical concepts can be said to be abstractions from ordinary communicative practices (cf Colapietro, 1995, 25).*

My work should be accepted as an intuitive icon of that sphere, where Bergman's context sets off the area of rhetoric communication of art as icons. An icon, by itself, is a degenerate sign in Peirce's theory. In order to fulfill their function in a complete sign-relation, icons must be surrounded by other signs and elements of interpretation. Interpretative processes must surround art as pieces of furniture in an art space. This is a necessity of art in order for it to be art. As such, art is never just mere iconographic figures and pieces of the world, but communicative praxis within a shared set of habits of action in visual culture.

In the **Sources** works, I combine Peircean phenomenological proposals with the utopian and thoroughly modern visual formalities of non-figurative imagery. The discrepancy between a scholarly perspective and the context of modernity seen through Huxley's interpolations and artistic modernism, will be an iconic adventure. The following writing will try to travel that distance, a completely virtual, potential and hypothetical area – an irony if there ever was any since we do not have a complete trust of philosophers as in older days of Hegel, or the hubris of artists like Joseph Kosuth for that matter. To the advantage of Charles S. Peirce, he did not trust philosophers either. Peirce (1839-1914) believed that the experience of the diversities of life is the starting point of philosophic enquiry.

The concepts of communication and meaning were deeply questioned within modernist art, some of the results of which were motivated by and committed to both utopian and subversive symbolism (say Malevitch, Mondrian, and Beckett, for example). Others entrenched in utopian modernity, as poets and

scientists, like Roman Jakobson, Claude Levi- Strauss or Samuel Beckett, tried structuralism and eventually ended in deconstruction, defusing old notions in art as in science. Either a positive endeavor, like Jakobson, searching for the units and polyphony of *parole* against systems of langue, or a negative one, like Barthes and Derrida, in deconstruction and demythologizing semiology. To create a system, another one, preferably the “old system”, must be defused.

I will not separate existential and absurd deconstruction, or even theosophical idealism from each other. The deluge of industrial and political revolt, urban disorder and capital management, made both artistic and social utopias and dystopias into convincing icons, were accompanied by both pessimistic and optimistic reactions which took place in relation to the changes in the modern societies of 19th and 20th centuries.

I have another, more personal image, if you will, of Peirce, related to my thesis work (*Seitsemän maalauksen katsominen/Maalaus maailman osana*, Helsinki LIKE 2005). Therein, I introduced a possibility in Peircean sign theory, beginning from the phenomenological perspective behind the theory, concurring with what Bergman introduces in his work on Peirce’s ideas forwarding a theory of communication (in 2004). In retrospect, since I presented my thesis work in 2005, I will finally take my potential clues from Bergman (potential because my view still seems altogether preliminary), and propose that Peircean phenomenology (and his semiotics) could be helpful in designing a view on artistic praxis as a sign process. This is not the context of my artwork, though. Artwork do not make research, artists may. The research is done in the discourse upon, say, artwork.

My proposal to connect a theoretical perspective such as Peirce ‘s with an usually aesthetic-oriented undertaking, such as the artistic praxis, did not explicate the distance between these two “habits of action”, the practical and the theoretical. Initially, the invitation to take a look at the conglomerate of semiotic pragmatism represented by its founder Peirce, was given to me in a short but intensive tutoring session by Finnish philosopher Pentti Määttänen (Määttänen 1993). Advantageous for me was, as well, was the synthetic view of the Finnish sociologist Risto Heiskala (Heiskala 1997) in trying out an inclusive framework of discussing and linking macro- and micro- level semiotics with structural framing theory of social semiosis. Määttänen and Heiskala favor a hybrid structure of the viewpoints created to discuss phenomena of aesthesis, semiosis and power related interpretation in culture. With Määttänen, his naturalist view combines the spatial and embodied interaction with the environment together with construction of relations between percept/perception in perceptual judgments, that is, as a semiotic process of interpretation on several levels of action/cognition.

As an artist constantly in need for manipulation of the environment, small or big, a hybrid and inclusive set of theories must be adopted to discuss and describe the event of artistic planning – exactly as other human activities in societal context. In this respect, art is never outside society, but inside it and partaking in the

changes of society and its surfaces/meanings. Is meaning then, superficial? Yes, convincingly so since meaning is a social condition, not anything tied to the particular individual. The themes of Brave New World deal with the embodied beings in context, in society and in interaction with each other. The crucial subtheme, for any utopia/dystopia, consists of the state of the art of those technological constraints and possibilities we encounter – to create and destroy, create the new by destroying the old. It's a very binary metaphor, utopia/dystopia. Things have gone wrong and may go, but often seen gone wrong only in hindsight. That is why we need dystopian scenarios.

My series of Peirce texts are from the outset easily seen as a dichotomy between text and image, something interpretable by reading and something less understandable but visual, firing at our synapses. They are, as usually art works are compared to life events, much less sublime, but more beautiful, and will be found wanting in life size experience. The art experience, contrary to many testimonies, feels diluted from the life experience. The main reason for this must be the lesser scale and lack of repetition available in white cube environments compared to other environments.

Both parts in the works of the Sources-series, the text and the image, form their particular abstract, hence, less an iconic result than an iconic starting point. The finish will always play out in the symbolic, as suggestion for conventional interpretation. But the starting point can be iconic possibility. Not lesser potential will be offered by the texts. But, however, only a thorough acquaintance with Peircean thinking will reveal their fuller meaning. The elliptic content is exactly what creates meaning. That is the theme of the Peirce citations. But before this stage of understanding is reached, if ever, both sides of the diptych express a modern dichotomy between text and image. In my opinion, they have still much in common, initially and eventually, when we start to mediate our contemplation into conceptual and critical thought.

A basic and poetic notion tied to the idea of the Brave New World, or utopia/dystopia, is its binary determination. Irony and horror must turn either towards light or into darkness. The black/white mode of both image and text is not without its association to the dichotomy of utopian dreams. The second notion is tied to the general abstractedness or abstraction of both image and text. If we could have a key to the deciphering of the images – to what they depict – and, on the other hand, if we had a deeper knowledge of Peircean interests and terminology, then the pictorial and theoretical perspective could be complemented with understanding, of meaning in its diverse sense – or grades, which Peirce discusses in his writing. Meaning is suspended, eventually, until further experience shapes and helps us to understand what we have felt and undergone in life. This applies to theory as well.

A more complicated association, which arrives while the artist runs his agenda and gives in to interpretation, is the cultural fact of the distinction between modern art (modernism) and contemporary art. The series of images/texts include a possibility to reflect on what seems different between these two discourses or habits

of thinking and doing. In my opinion, modernist art is mainly interested in itself, its own forms, its own media. Modernists experiments seem to end in deconstruction, transgression and poetic irony and abstraction which is resolved only in a conceptual sphere, like in conceptual art, which allows for constant change of media and form within a general and abstract theme. In modernism, this theme was art itself.

Contemporary art strategies abstain from the modern deconstructivist strategy – well exemplified by, say, concretism, abstract art and minimalism - regardless of the manifested attitudes of the artists. Situationism and conceptualism form a kind of transition area or a threshold where modernist deconstruction moves into its last phase, by their respective interests of politics and philosophy, in a shared expression of transgressing the border art/life – a sincere step of any modern avant-garde. Contemporary interests in political and personal affairs or the publishing of opinions on the political/personal in art, taken as a space of power and discursiveness – which it is, promotes the development of art as a discourse on important issues. This development might have already started on the basis of the modernist disruption of art disclaiming its own autonomy. The results of, for example, the contemporary sculpture as what happened with the so called Young British movement in the beginning of the 90's, driven as it was by Saatchi & Saatchi sponsorship and a sense of street credibility, scale and volume based realism, not irony, subtlety or deconstruction (with perhaps one exception, Rachel Whiteread), we might arrive at the conclusion that contemporary directness of speech, albeit through rhetorical methods, is a result of the deconstructive drive itself! In any case, the return to textual and overtly communicative intents entails completely new demands on what and how art should move around in society.

Modernist reflections on the formal features and media of art, and its deconstruction, transforms into narratives of contemporary art, admittedly, with a large repertoire of ways of presentation and representation. If an artist trained in modern methods of mise-en-scene wants to state a clear question – or a clear answer – he/she is in trouble. Modernist deconstruction as a tool for political or personal narratives does not make for clearness. In practice, we have to give in to a long tradition within visual culture, its established means of presentation. Thus, no small aesthetic fee is paid to modernist history and its aesthetic tradition whatever the contemporary issue at hand. Here, I stress the dichotomy between modern and contemporary. Modernist schemes serve as practices of presentation also for contemporary attitudes, which makes for trouble, unless we settle to accept ourselves as modernists, albeit with a postmodern and emancipated view on each and everything.

My small contribution to the evanescent distinction between modern and contemporary is, simply, the fact that there is no added modernist deconstructing additions or flavors manipulating the Peirce texts. It is the real, unreconstructed form, exactly as Peirce wrote it. This is probably my version of the "educational turn". When I started my first mix of drawings and diagrams in 2000, I had no idea of any educational turn. *Oratio recta* was, in my mind, no way for art. Art is about *oratio obliqua* and still is, but things are changing. No

playing with words, syllables, forms, here, just direct speech, demonstrations and pitching thrusts of manifestoes and comments to us viewers/readers.

The question is left open if the text in “as it is” form can be treated as part and parcel of an artwork and thus legitimately reproduced without permission from the publishers. My preliminary opinion is that the text is part of the artwork physically and contextually thus, free to be read as any text in an art work. Is this replica of Peirce, both art and philosophy? I would answer yes, both and. There are, since it is surely possible, in-between modes of hesitation and ambivalence. With the Peirce texts, the space of art is turned into a scholarly place, a spot where discussions can be made, not deconstructions of meaning but construction of meaning. If such an opportunity for a discussion will take place, is wholly another question.

That is why our immediate, intuitive encounter with the visual, regardless of symbolic possibilities of meaning, is more or less the same toward image as text. It depends on collateral knowledge and familiarity with the symbolic meaning. The immediate encounter with the moment of aesthesis, or percepts drenched in iconic beauty, carry not one definite meaning by themselves and require collateral, symbolic and conventional knowledge to be judged useful and interpretable. Admittedly, we usually start looking for familiar clues, for an icon of some sort. But the habits connected to textual form and typography does not give rise to an exception of such immediacy. The requirements of contextual knowledge to pin down the lines of a text, say, Peirce in exegesis, does mean that a text cannot be deciphered by itself. It demands other texts and collateral knowledge in order to be useful. Here, then, is the last link between image and text. The formal history of the topological order in text and image respectively, differs, but is of the same category, a visual form that conveys meaning if other contextual aspects are fulfilled.

This makes for a final point. Interpretation of both would-be images and texts are mediations of communication, which always implies a community. Communication per definition is engagement within a social context of speech and action. Modernist art and culture partakes in the deconstruction of communication, many times driven by critical, utopian, or political interests. To harass ways of communication, to break down elements used in communication in order to find the universal unit of inner and outer realities has deeply influenced the forms and surfaces of modern society as icons of modern thinking. To destroy conventions and look at the matter of contemporary society, we seem to need both modern irony and contemporary pathos, as legitimate heirs of new brave worlds of experience. You will find my dichotomy unsuccessful and temporarily out of order, something never happens in the brave new world. Looking back, I tend to see the pioneers of modernism less ironic than what I would like them to be. The more it is nearer to my own awareness and history the stronger the feeling of irony gets. So be it, let's believe that Peirce was as un-ironic as was Kandinsky or Malevitch, or Jakobson, not to mention Mukarovsky or Trubetskoy, on the occasion of this exhibition in Prague, which gave its name to one of the most famous schools of semiotics. In their commitment that sign theory arises from the applied functions

within communication, they advanced the concept of art as a special rhetoric of communication – something useful to our understanding of contemporary art discourse, if not modernist rhetoric of non-communication (which is a great irony, of course).

Reading sources

Those sources on art, semiotics and aesthetics, which clearly should be mentioned here, are not mentioned due to the low grade of academic ambition in my writing. I will focus only on noting the Peirce sources. Otherwise, I just write to remember what to return to if needed.

Bergman, Mats, *Fields of Signification, Explorations in Charles S. Peirce's Theory of Signs*, Vantaa, Philosophical Studies of Helsinki University 6, 2004

Heiskala, Risto, *Society as Semiosis, Neostructuralist Theory of Culture and Society*, Helsinki, University of Helsinki 1997

Määttänen, Pentti, *Action and Experience*, Helsinki, Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, 1993

Huxley, Aldous, *Brave New World*, London, Chatto and Windus 1932

Orwell, George, *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, London, Secker and Warburg 1949

Sources of excerpts from Peirce as in Bergman, 2004

Charles Sanders Peirce texts are indicated by abbreviations, following Bergman (2004):

CP v:p refers to The Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce; v indicates volume number, p paragraph number.

EP v:p refers to The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings; v indicates volume number, p pager number

MS m:p refers to an original manuscript, see Bergman, 2004, 7.

W v:p refers to Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition; v indicates volume number, p page number

SS p refers to Semiotic and Significs: The Correspondence between Charles S. Peirce and Victoria Lady Welby; p indicates page number.

Peirce bibliography mentioned above:

Collected Papers of Charles S. Peirce (1931-58).. 8 vols. Ed. By C. Hartshorne & P. Weiss (vols 1-6), & A. Burks (vols 7-8). Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

The Essential Peirce: Selected Philosophical Writings. (1992-8). 2 vols. Ed. By N. Houser & C. Kloesel (vol1), & The Peirce Edition Project (vol.2). Bloomington: Indiana University Press

Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition. (1982-). 6 vols. to date. Ed. by The Peirce Edition Project.

Bloomington: Indiana University Press. Semiotics and Significs: The Correspondence between Charles S. Peirce and Victoria Lady Welby. (1977). Ed. by C.S. Hardwick. Bloomington, Indiana University Press

Texts sources mentioned and reproduced in art works:

Jan Kenneth Weckman: 1. "*Three grades*", pigment print on paper, 50 x 70,5 cm, 2008 MS 649: 1-3 - 1910

Jan Kenneth Weckman: 2. "*Essay on Pragmatism*", pigment print on paper, 50 x 70,5 cm, 2008 text source EP 2:256 - 1903; cf SS 159 -1903

Jan Kenneth Weckman: 3. "*...unless the Phaneron*", pigment print on paper, 50 x 70,5 cm, 2008 text source, EP 2:363-364 – c. 1905

Jan Kenneth Weckman: 4. "*Directly experiencing*", pigment print on paper, 50 x 70,5 cm, 2008 text source CP 1.349 – 1903; MS 462:84-86 – 1903

Jan Kenneth Weckman: 5. "*Consider that*", pigment print on paper, 50 x 70,5 cm, 2008 text source MS 1135:2 - 1897

Jan Kenneth Weckman: 6. "*Just as the first*", pigment print on paper, 50 x 70,5 cm, 2008 text source W 6:171

Jan Kenneth Weckman: 7. "*Let us say*", pigment print on paper, 50 x 70,5 cm, 2008 text source CP 7.619 – c. 1903; CP 7.643 – c. 1903

Jan Kenneth Weckman: 8. "Phenomenon", pigment print on paper, 50 x 70,5 cm, 2008 text source CP 2.197 – c. 1902; MS 337s:10

Jan Kenneth Weckman: 9. "The idea of the absolutely first", pigment print on paper, 50 x 70,5 cm, 2008 text source W 6:170-171

Jan Kenneth Weckman: 10. "Terms" pigment print on paper, 50 x 70,5 cm, 2008 text source W 2:50-51 - 1867

Jan Kenneth Weckman: 11. "Phaneroscopy" pigment print on paper, 50 x 70,5 cm, 2008 text source CP 1.286-287 - 1904

Jan Kenneth Weckman: 12. " Looking at the matter", pigment print on paper, 50 x 70,5 cm, 2008 text source MS 805:19-20;cf MS 804:22; CP 8.368n23 cf. MS 1135:7-8 – c. 1897 CP 2.357 – 1902; MS 797:10