

Knowledge production and politics – A Journeyman's Talk: August 2014

The art of printmaking & printed pictures distribute visions, stories & testimonies. It is language, communication. Looking back in history, we can see that through our cultural heritages we have formed a readiness to communicate in images. And in its multiplication, the printed image has a strong force. The vast commercial use of printed images that surround us today is not a random coincidence.

But imagery has many faces and its terms in art differ from the commercial. In art the communication is questingly complex where commercial image-communication wants to convince a buyer. Its concern is to make the first impulse from a visual message urge our desire. No more, end of story, mission completed, on their part. And we all get that first impulse looking at an image. Because the visual is connected to our inherent, natural language ability.

A complex art communication, like any other complicated human activity, does not offer effortless understanding. The first impulse from an image is just the beginning. To get passed it you need training. Just as you need training to learn how to read and write.

In the western language situation, the visual part is one of heavy weight, but in a very contradictory way, it is constantly treated as insignificant because it is not recognized as part of our language abilities. It has an inherent interactive capability, but is often assumed to call for but a passive reception, as something we can use in a leisurely way or disregard all together and consequently, our elementary schools are not committed to make us "literate" in reading & writing images. Therefore most people have great difficulties when it comes to visual interpretation. And yet, due to our inherited readiness for this communication; and given a chance, it doesn't take much to understand the principles and from there you can devote the rest of your life to develop & deepen the possibilities that open before us in this artmaking.

So, when we deal with visual art in the artefactual art tradition, that printmaking is a part of, we deal with both an immediate availability and great complexity. As printmakers in art we work in the knowledge system of Practical Artefactual Artmaking. We use our hands, we use different materials, tools, methods and techniques to create or process artefacts/prints to have them carry meaning that can communicate aside from verbal language. We do not need to be aware of the theories that try to explain and understand this work to be able to participate in the artmaking itself. What we do need is a context, adequate acting spaces, some encouragement and response to our communicative attempts, which is no more than we need to develop any language.

If we leave the actual making, however, to try to describe, analyse and understand why and how we do it, how it relates to the rest of the world etc, then, theories, concepts and explanations are very useful. Then, we cannot do without them. But we don't need to theorize to be able to make great art.

Before the conceptual breakthrough in art, verbal articulation of the artistic experience was not called for in the artefactual artmaking. This is not to be seen as an insufficiency in the actual artmaking, but it can be experienced or met as an insufficiency in relation to the dominant over-confidence that our time has developed in theoretical analysis and textual understanding of both life and art.

Though the time we live in is over-occupied with text & analytic reflection, the creation of meaning is not. Never has been. It has many different ways to explore what this life is about. And: "this life cannot be all there is to know about it"
(poet Ragnar Strömberg)

Therefore we can state that a theoretical interest in the practice can be both useful and rewarding, but it is not the precondition for the practice itself. But to make space for the actual making of art is difficult today. To get hold of education or necessary co-funding for the practical work, you have to present it in text since practical knowledge is subordinated and has no self-evident position in the contemporary textuality. And higher art education has long left an unjustifiable big part of material based artistic knowledge production aside, in favor of text as the main material to create meaning.

Without being the least bit hostile to textual creating of meaning as such, quite the opposite, I still oppose this prevailing hegemony & criticize it for being too undemocratic: It supports an Occidental scopic regime in art, it is oversized, biased & narrow-minded. I advocate a pluralistic attitude that acknowledges the whole spectrum of what is really going on in the arts & also reaches outside of the arts. "We are simultaneously both products and producers of the culture we live in. But we seldom regard the value or function of our labour."

(artist Sarah Charlesworth)

Art should not be held in a professionalized isolation the way we see today, where it more and more becomes the concern for a disconnected "cultural sector" separated from the rest of our daily lives.

Artmaking in what is often said to be a "knowledge society", must house all kinds of artistic knowledge production. And it is when printmakers have "their hands in the ink" that they shape and develop the preconditions for printmaking and in that work lies its contribution to the communicative pluralism which is a necessity for a reasonable and democratic society.

Freedom of expression, freedom of speech, a free press, free art. These are all connected to printmaking and they are all language issues as well as issues of great political importance. Especially today when we see fascism re-mobilize, given the possibility to exploit the justified frustration that globalized neo-liberal politics have generated during the last 40 years.

It is from this understanding that I see our Journey Man Walk project develop. Art and language. Availability and complexity. The knowledge production, the practice based work and the political importance.

The core is of course the practice based work: from the different techniques, tools, methods & materials employed from centuries back to their nutritious contemporary cooperation with the latest digital possibilities. The profound knowledge, that the workshops involved master, is the founding base for a mobile education system that will acknowledge and offer access to advanced knowledge production in printmaking in the multi-cross-fertilized realm of artefactual artmaking & communication.

We need not be shy. What we do has to do with the significance that a free art has for democracy and the significance that democracy has for a free art.

