



## **Long live the incomprehensible!**

Aged people speak slowly. I'm listening to an old woman from Turkey and it gives me reason to think about our cultural attitudes towards time. Listening is a prerequisite for taking part in a dialogue. I want to understand her. I ponder the democratic process and conclude that time-consuming is what it is. Why? Because we were talking about the difference between our political systems and the way decision-making is faster in a dictatorship. Have our democracies failed?

A few years now, I entertain a cow as my companion in life; a very civilized cow with strong opinions, particularly about art and politics, but also more philosophical subjects. For instance, I talk to her about the way our Western society relates to time,

efficiency and profitability, but also the question of what constitutes a meaningful life, what gives life a meaning.

So much in society is organized in different systems meant to control us and our activities. Art challenges these systems and puts in question conventions that have become manifest truths. Art stimulates the critical thought process that is needed to avoid being charmed by political populism. My cow is in total agreement. She maintains that innovative art must not conform; it must make us think the unthinkable and do the impossible. I argue that today artists are silenced in many countries, just because art gives a voice to that which is otherwise not spoken. We know that this is true for Turkey, but I contend that these tendencies exist also in our West European countries.

Contrary to the entertainment industry, art wants to do more than just rub an audience the right way. Sticky, mucky or edgy; loud, soft or in its own unique frequency; incredibly beautiful or horribly ugly. We can still be seduced by it, or just feel acknowledged. The important thing is to understand that artistic expressions have ambitions to reach beyond entertainment. It deals with our ability to take action, communicate and to be a part of society's progress; it's about taking time, a prerequisite for democracy.

Today in many European countries, government subsidies for innovative art disappear without any discussion about what it means to close down the contemporary creativity that will make history tomorrow. What is not created today, what type of roadblocks are put up against participation and inclusion - that will also be a part of history tomorrow. Cuts in the cultural sector hit mostly against innovative art forms and the efforts among the younger generations to seek alternative models for production and presentation of art. This generates more stress in relation to time. Many artists manage to develop new forms for dialogue and interaction, turning their backs on traditional institutions, but strong conventions block the development of new formats, relevant also for a non-traditional audience. Who is given a voice and a

chance to express himself or herself through art? Whom do we have time to listen to? At the end of the day this is a question of freedom of expression.

Conducting this dialogue with a cow, gives you a different perspective. One reason is that the cow ruminates, at least seven times a day. Often lying down on a soft bed of grass. I tend to eat much too fast. Since that also makes me eat too much, I get a bad conscience and make an effort to exert myself just after the meal. Which causes indigestion. That's when my cow reminds me that her behaviour is much more rational. That may be so. She gives herself time to think. And her attitude does have an effect on me. Not that I suddenly seek up a soft bed and eat slowly, but enough to give me a perspective on the questions for which art may hold the answer.

Different models for financing offer different conditions – not just for production and organization; also for presentation and interaction. Institutions financed by the taxpayer have a higher degree of innovative, experimental activities. They can take more risks than a privately funded or completely commercial institution. Cultural policies decide whether art will be regarded as a commodity on the market or a cultural right for every citizen, regardless of income, geographic location or cultural sphere. This is, again, a question of language and who will have the right to make his or her voice heard.

(...upon which follows a discussion when the cow and I are in disagreement; it's rather boring and revolves around the questions of animal rights and equality...)

It's easy to say that democracy is based on every person's right to a voice (or a vote) – but who is actually heard? Who owns the right to define and formulate our reality? And how do we acquire the linguistic sense to understand also the unspoken? I still know too little about Denmark, but in Sweden we acknowledge the Swedish language, five minority languages and the sign language. They are our official languages, but on a daily basis about 200 languages are in use, plus all the other linguistic modes of communication.

My cow says: “*We must practice our ability to listen, make time for positive and constructive thinking.*” She has never been more right. An ability to see the positive in all the filth is not the same as being naive. To see our differences (different cultures, different languages) as assets is a part of this. We must take note of the person, who is not like ourselves and make room for the incomprehensible. That is what it means to live a creative, innovative and worthy life. “*We are in the world to be at home somewhere*”, says Áren Tamasí. To be at home demands participation and a chance to be a party to the dialogue. Maybe we need to remember a time not much more than a hundred years ago, when 2,4 % of all Swedes were forced to leave their country. What was the figure for Denmark?

I practice every day to maintain my ability to listen, react and act with empathy. I train the techniques of listening to maintain the dignity I have acquired from a long life in art, and I work hard to improve my patience...

Aged people speak slowly, children speak fast. I listen to a Swedish girl about five years old and again think about our different relations to time. Listening is a prerequisite for entering into a dialogue. I want to understand what she is saying and I think about how democratic processes really demand time. This time because the dialogue is about her new cat. She has a need to talk in great detail about something

that has altered her life. She is going to grow up in a safe, well-organized democratic welfare society that gives me a chance to sit down and listen. When she has finished I start singing. After that it's time to follow my cow into the green pastures...

Enjoy summer!

## **Efva**

And an exercise:

Exercise 80.

Seek up a political debate. Stand up when everyone else is sitting. When they ask you why, reply with a dance.

Do it.