

Nora Turato

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Experiencing a performance by Nora Turato, is one of those moments in life when we are not quite certain what has just happened. We are immediately mesmerised by the shrieking young woman, with conviction we follow her quick and determined confession of a wide array of ready-made truths, from cheap wisdoms of social media to generic logorrhea whisked from the flow of consciousness to dislocated fragments of pop and high culture. Do not get me wrong, this is not your typical experience of love at first sight. While our culture removed the outbursts of “hysterical women” from the public eye long ago, here we encounter a woman who serves this back to us, screaming and grimacing to the unsuspecting audience. What she is saying does not have an presumptively enlightening or emancipatory effect, quite the opposite, even that which we may recognise as fragments of a more serious provenance within this verbosity, is completely contaminated by the most trivial scraps from the cesspits of the Internet. It is obvious therefore that what is in the foreground are not meanings, on the contrary, Nora’s work *sounds* more than it means. Nevertheless, we cannot say that it does not speak to us. Even though it is misleading to decipher her linguistic concoctions as the sum of the meanings of their diverse fragments, there is undoubtedly something in them that impinges on us, that says something about us and acts uncomfortably, perhaps even politically, in doing so.

It seems that Nora Turato’s work does not merely speak about the language of the digital age, but also about language in general. It is undoubtedly true that the specifics of her work derive directly from our everyday life in the post-truth era, in which meanings dissipate through an infinite number of linguistic stimuli and language becomes more of a sensory stimulus than a means of address. This deflation of meaning, the consumption of language in the digital age, is certainly an important but perhaps not the pivotal focus of Turato’s practice. What is the actual result of this random encounter of voices in her performances and videos, the composition of diverse range of sentences and phrases that are not tied together by anything other than the artist? It is the fact that the random encounters of voices give rise to the random encounters of meanings. This a well-known feature of language as a system is exemplified by phenomena such as homonymy, a state of words that coincidentally sound the same but have different meanings. There is no lack of mechanisms that exploit this dimension of language, apparent for example with jokes and word games. Poetry also does this, and it does it in a similar way to Nora Turato. Poetry connects elements into a sequence, not according to the criteria of them being bearers of meaning, but according to something more formal. Like poetry, her performances have more sonic value to them than meaning. However, such an “abstract” manner of creating a sequence, the fact that sentences which sound good together follow each other regardless of what they communicate, does not abstract the meaning, instead it creates an associative chain of a different kind. “My work is a kind of failed abstraction,” Turato says. Failed because creating linguistic sequences using formal means, as opposed to following the criteria for optimally conveying meaning, does not mean evading meaning, but allowing it to say something else, something that is not necessarily our conscious intention.

In the work of Nora Turato, a certain surplus is at work, which is the surplus inscribed in every language. It is this kind of impurity of the structure itself, which allows for something more than

mere communication to be produced from random forming of language. By prioritising accidental formal connections over those of meaning and a logic regulated by seemingly arbitrary correlations rather than based one on a purposeful communicative action, works of Nora Turato voice not the conscious self, but the subject of desire. It is no coincidence then that voices interchange in her performances, that she is furiously confessing her inner state of mind in one moment and reciting generic cultural texts or singing advertising jingles the next. Her works function as notations of the collective unconscious of the digital age, of our traumas and desires. Therefore, the use of visual language of advertising does not come as a surprise in her practice. Monumental and oversized wall paintings, that throb in bright colours and absorb the space, combine fragments of the artist's handwriting and classical typographies of visual communications, which in our collective conscious stand for either command or enticement. Her works on enamel draw from the vintage aesthetics of advertising, visual communication of the first decades of the twentieth century, when advertisements on enamel panels educated the first generations of mass consumerism, or served as the base for urban signage. In Turato's re-articulation, these – with their vivid abstract blocks of colour and framed inscriptions, similar to fatalistic warnings on packs of cigarettes, combine the decontextualized fragments of our linguistic landscape that entertain and charm, even though we are not really sure what they are talking about or referring to.

The work of Nora Turato liberates the sign. From her performances and videos to her murals, and works in enamel and on posters, everywhere signifiers take on a life of their own, conveying unconscious desires. This is why the experience of her work is often similar to the psychoanalytic technique of free association: the elements of the associative chains are held together only by the person of the artist, their "logic" is based on random relationships of proximity in the associative chain which itself is not defined by any comprehensive and universable rule. Nowhere is this more apparent than in her videos where the words, written in white, alternate against a black background, as they are uttered or sung by the artist. Here we are confronted by an almost palpable and unstoppable sliding, the uncontrollability of the associative chain, which, backed by the artist's resolute voice rushes into the unknown, unmanageable, and never really complete. Someone wrote, on the occasion of one of her shows, that the medium in her works, despite her articulate use of a variety of media, is actually Nora. That is indeed the case. Nora Turato becomes the medium to a language that is the actual master: yet this is not the language of the conscious, intentional speaker, but language as surplus, one in which more is always said than the conscious speaker may have wanted. This *language-master* is materialised by Nora Turato in her work, with which she manages to bring to light all the discomforts of our digital age.

That is why non-translation – her works consist of texts in English with an occasional excursion into her native Croatian – is more than just the insistence on use of the trendy *lingua franca* of our time. The linguistic dimension that her work strives for is the untranslatable of every language. It is this aspect that wavers between sound and meaning in Nora's work and stems precisely from the random forming of the signifiers of a particular language, which serve up more than is communicated, in the conventional sense. Not even the peculiar flatness imbued in the scenography of her exhibitions is coincidental: the shiny coloured surfaces scribbled over with various typographies, posters, polished enamel plates. All these point to language as the phenomenon of the surface. The subject of desire that in her work bypasses the conscious speaker is not something hidden in the dark, concealed depths of the primordial. On the contrary, it is always in front of us, always inscribed onto the surface of language, but escapes the logic of a positivist, everyday use of language. This however is not the case in Nora Turato's work, here instead we find that the subject of desire is given a voice.

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