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8 **Konstantin Guz**

Sense of humor and a set of circumstances

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' **Gerrit**
1 **Rietveld**
4 **Academie**

INTRODUCTION

Why do people smile looking at my work? I'm not telling anecdotes and not showing obviously funny pictures. Most of the times you see situations with objects and strange coincidence in my photographs. What attracts viewer? I'm interested to investigate that question and be able to answer it.

What makes a joke to be a very good joke? — pronounced on certain time and certain place, and of course it should fit in the context of conversation. What basic characteristic has photograph? — picture taken on certain time in certain space/place. So humor has something in common with the essence of photography.

Looking at my working process, selecting images and precisely analyzing them I'm trying to understand how I approach my works. What important to mention is that spontaneity plays very big role in my practice but at the same time when I encounter interesting details which strike me I start to be self-collected and use all of my concentration to capture this moment. The moment of taking image in certain situation reminds me release of energy. The same moment when joke makes people laugh.

WHAT IS HUMOR?

It takes you breath when unexpected set of circumstances lead you to understanding that all in our world are interconnected. Looking for little things and details? —They can also find you. Art of noticing and recognizing in details is something regular and reflecting our reality. Ability to see what other people usually don't notice is quiet interesting side of my character. Capturing the coincidence of circumstances is the most interesting subject for me. Unpredictability of situations. Post analysis of those situations give us space to think about how and why it happened. In what certain period of time and under which circumstances the most important moment happened where coincidences were predefined. As possible explanation could be hidden under definition of situational thinking - essential form of thinking which connected with unsystematic using of knowledge "for luck" depending every time on certain situation. We use wealth of our memory when thought jumping from one memory to another and trying to find necessary relations.

It makes me think about circulation of energy and getting it to the point in certain period of reality. Can we control these processes and would it make sense if we were aware of future.

Often coincidence cause a smile and surprise. Not expected...Not corresponding to

reality, putting attention on not standard situation, conflict of situation and intension. H. Spencer also was sure that mismatch is the reason for laugh but this mismatch should be degressive. In other words when we expect something bigger in funny situation but discover it small.

Humor notices insignificant and small in serious and great. As photographer you have unlimited choice of capturing our environment and I'm approaching my works by looking into small details, using non-standard point of view on objects, pay attention for situations that we usually overlook in our daily life. Most of the time simplicity of absurd situation becomes the reason to express our feelings and let us smile. It's all how you see things.

Humor is the state of conscious and tendency that give human ability to see hidden meaning and relation between emotions and ideas and capability to transform them into social and free forms.

Humor allows looking more free on the subject and "playing" with ideas and image.

Kant said that laugh is emotion coming from unexpected transformation of tense expectation into nothing. Good joke should contain something that we take as truth then mislead us and next moment is getting into nothing. I can suggest that he meant absurdity as nothing. But this absurdity should be presented in certain way to evoke a smile. He first mentioned that certain structure of thought (play of ideas) could evoke laugh.

As inspiration and analyzing base of my thesis I took DADA movement where coincidence and collage (playing with objects and material) were playing a big role. Dada rejected reason and logic, prizing nonsense, irrationality and intuition. I assume all these criteria are well fitted into essence of humor. Another movement I would like to point out is Fluxus where there were no limits and spontaneity is very important to mention; artists presented daily life objects and usual behavior in new context to show new perspective on things.

To analyze the matter of my Thesis I would like to take Sigurdur Gudmundsson, an Icelandic artist and Roman Signer, Swiss artist as examples and try to extract and investigate their ideas and motivation in order to make parallels and distinction with my work.

CASE STUDY—ROMAN SIGNER AND SIGURDUR GUDMUNDSSON

Adopting and following the rules of DADA artistic practice I'm trying seriously to take my task

to write about humor. I found this contradiction very interesting and promising for further analyzing. I'm digging into core of my mind to bring up back some thoughts about what actually humor is. Especially interested in situations with objects I discard the appearance of people as main topic in the image. If something causes a laugh or smile in most of the cases undoubtedly it includes people in the image/story and they become the most interesting subject to discuss. Why inanimate things sometimes make us smile as well? Unusual order of things and objects better to say. Surrounded us every day life objects are the product of our activity. Every object has a function and purpose of use. If by any occasion these objects are placed or used in inappropriate way it gives us smile. As human being we are trying to reflect our "object life" into our perception. And if it faces contradiction it gives us feeling of wonder.

In *Wasserstiefel (Water boots)*, 1986, Roman Signer (Switzerland) is playing with substitution. We see water boots and the title don't want to hide anything from us. There is a splash of water rising from these boots very reminding shape of the body wearing raincoat. What makes this image interesting? I believe there is something in it that catches your attention. The ground around boots is completely dry and all water that supposed to be there is missing. Signer turns idea of using water boots upside down, made the tension in the image. It seems like wet figure is afraid to be dry. Artist is playing with simple idea of contradiction. It makes sense to understand that in seconds water will be again on the ground, boots will be wet and everything going to be on its own place. It is just moment in-between, before and after splash, captured with a help of photo camera. In some ways, the step from sculpture to time-sculpture is indeed beautifully simple: elementary, to borrow a word the artist himself has often associated with his work. Time-sculpture investigates the transformation of materials through time, focusing the viewer's attention on the experience of the event, the changes wrought, and the forces involved. These carefully taken and selected photograph bring me feeling of precisely using humor in right way in order to underline non standard situation. Analyzing Roman Signer's works I see very simple gestures he uses to surprise the viewer. I can just assume how many shots Signer did to achieve right documentation of the moment. The decision to choose exactly this photograph gives intension of showing high peak of water sculpture. Still looking at image I wonder what kind of explosion material he used and why splashes from left and right



boots not symmetrical and not synchronized. But I think it is impossible to control this and even making no sense to take these noticed facts into consideration because final image gives us feeling of unpredictability and unique moment.

Preparing and constructing installation for presentation and then give it some freedom and interpretation is also part of Signer's work. Installation "Zimmer mit Weihnachtsbaum" (Room with Christmas Tree), 2010, is catching an eye with funny accident. Entering the room you see rotating Christmas tree and flew down broken toys. Again we encounter with unusual situation where contradiction plays important role.

In real kids and their parents traditionally going around it but here Christmas tree is moving itself! And as if the caprice it is throwing around its toys. Broken toys are spreading and filling up the space of the room. Actual tree is not so interesting for me as what's happening in the room especially looking to the documentation of installation. Photograph gives me frozen moment of rotation and turn my attention away from tree. I'm concentrated more on broken fragile toys and questions "what the speed of rotation?" and "is it constantly moving?" pop up in my head. But I will never answer them but it is not so necessary to do so. More interesting to see how one constant movement of rotation gives such variety of placing these toys around the room. Various combining three-dimensional objects, live action and still photography, Signer's time-sculptures frame episodes of the containment and release of energy — always with ingenuity, often with captivating, epigrammatic swiftness and irresistible humor.

Working on the subject like humor in visual art I can't not to mention Sigurdur Gudmundsson (Iceland) as example of genius using it in his works. His art has been based on a non-hierarchical flow between photo works, sculptures, performances and "visual poems". Gudmundsson's photo works construct a certain poetic and philosophical vision and depict human existence in a humorous and pointed way as part of nature. In that time when he finished art school and started his career in 1960's, Fluxus movement happened to be one of the meaningful stream in Europe. In Gudmundsson's work one can find many parallels and familiar fundamental Fluxus ideas. Guided by an existential interest in the unknown, Sigurdur Gudmundsson generates work of abundant wit and verve that questions the way that vernacular culture and art relates to nature. Depicting everyday circumstances with absurdist tweaks, his work Situations read as



visual poems that explore the essence of human existence and tend toward the comical while retaining philosophical gravity. Every day is a series of situations, moments of truly relating to objects and people, even to nature itself, in which we suddenly find ourselves - sometimes by chance, but often as a result of forces beyond our control.

Every new situation requires a decision allowing us to go on in our lives, and each decision sets up a new situation in which we are constantly, endlessly trying to regain balance and control. To intentionally put oneself in a situation without understanding the potential implications or consequences is therefore to challenge one's very existence. This is precisely what Sigurdur Gudmundsson does in his photographic work. Some of his staged Situations illustrate philosophical or artistic statements, but most of them are intuitive and not just visualizations of verbal expressions. Some are picture puzzles, as in Magritte's paintings, others are quotations from Saussure, Eco or another structuralist...but they are never imposing, never single-minded, always open-ended, convincing the viewer that there is more than just one answer, more than just one solution...

What's happening here? One mirror-two different images. Simplicity of decision to photograph one object in front opposite background strikes me but keeping my attention. Earth is in heaven and sky is on the ground. Intention of two pictures is to look through the mirror and imagine other side of the globe. Three of most powerful nature elements are represented on photographs. On right picture, reflection of the skies looks like lake or water surface.

Avoiding being in the picture Gudmundsson slightly shifted the mirror and gave an angle of reflection. Obviously he just had changed his hands holding mirror but it gives the impression of stereo effect. Two photographs standing together notice me two eyes looking in two different directions-impossible skill for human. Working on my projects I'm also trying to extract as much as I can from one situation, object, action by looking differently on the subject and applying variety of perspectives. Often most simple and effective solution is hidden near by. You just have to free your mind and give intuition more attention.

In this work Gudmundsson again is playing with simple gesture placing comma in the photograph. He adds human being presence to complete the image. But this interruption by the object looks pretty natural and gives the start to the story of the photograph. I chose it because



of its simplicity and smartness in the same time. Unexpectedness of seeing comma as object is immediately transforming to understanding of situations. Picture brings us feeling of narrative story, which everyone is able to understand. Comma as we know connect/split words, meanings in sentences or sentences in text, it continues telling the story not like the dot which stop the thought and let new line begin. Earth, water, heaven, human, life: that is my associative row while looking at this image.

CONCLUSION

During my research and reading many sources dedicated to humor I understood that it is quite complex question even we may assume that humor is simple subject. Many philosophers from ancient time to nowadays tried to define what the humor is but unfortunately they didn't come up with one certain solution. Unexpectedness is the core of the humor-this you can find as base of all theories. As humans we cannot predict future we have just feelings and expectations and when it contradict with reality it gives us reason to smile. Humor always connects with intellect and feelings. As Dostoevsky said humor is wittiness of deep feeling. Everyone feels differently and sense of humor varies from one person to another. It's not possible to find one joke that makes laugh all people. It made my research even more complicated and arise the problem of impossibility to unify the rules why people smile. But it gives me an opportunity to combine different ideas and make attempt to create my definition.

As important part of my thesis I paid attention to coincidence-main inspiration and starting point. Of course everyone knows this situations when for example you meet your friend in unusual place or you forget about your glasses on top of your head and after some searching find it. We cannot control and be aware of future coincidence but when under some circumstances clash of situations happens-it gives us smile and switch on our memory and we trying to connect them.

I was fascinating how so easy sometimes to make people laugh. But to create "simple to get" joke is very difficult question. Especially dealing with visual language and in my case using object and situations through which you transform humor and presented it to the viewer. Short and compact joke are always best and it relates also how artists translate humor into visual content. Briefness is the soul of wittiness Shakespeare said and I share this idea with him. It connects with my obsession to see small details or simplify my work but trying to keep it complex at



the same time. Humor helps me to make a choice and start mechanism of my thoughts.

As a possible conclusion I define humor as complex mixture of unpredictability, coincidence and intelligence based on previous experience, education and mentality. Its ability to unexpectedly compare mismatch, notice important overlooked details and capability to give a smile with simple gesture.