

A blonde woman in her fifties stands behind a wooden speaker's desk. Wreaths of flowers to her sides. She quotes a facebook post: "If you're not outraged, you're not paying attention" it says. "She paid attention. She made everyone pay attention", the mother continues. "Oh my gosh – dinner with her – we knew it was going to be an ordeal of listening and conversation and perhaps disagreement. But it was gonna happen anyway". The woman speaking is Heather Heyer's mother, quoting the famous status update at her daughter's funeral.¹

Communication is not about what we share. Communication is about what we lack. True meaning often is hidden within the silences of a conversation. The moments of waiting, processing, of reading and reacting to the other. A conversation is a process of self-identification through the other. Between the desire of the other and one's own individualism lies a commonly perceived void of one's own singularity. An all too familiar, contemporary notion of solitude and emptiness. Ironically situated within times of constant communication.

"The most meaningful way for individuals to partake in the tremendous waste that is the passing of time, are the moments that emerge from simply being together."²

When he listened, he leaned in. The way you know a body moving closer to your own. He crossed his legs and put his elbow on his knee. Sometimes he raised his right eyebrow, tipping twice on his cigarette, the ashes falling, blowing out smoke past her naked shoulder. Words, a question, an undefinite answer, silence. The unspoken notion of non-temporal intimacy.

In contrast, meaninglessness might be the nihilism of our times. Nothing matters anymore. Hidden behind an ironic curtain and the ubiquitous supply of amusement and adventure, we usually avoid conflict.

But when communication is not about what we have in common, meaning often manifests itself within argumentation. The self in conflict with the other. In today's society, what does it mean to communicate with someone you don't share anything with?

One of the fat guys throws his shaved, white head thrust his neck and howls like a sledge dog into the sky — "owooo!".

One of the fat guys that howls "owooo!" like a sledge dog into the sky holds a torch.

One of the fat guys that howls "owooo!" like a sledge dog into the sky holds a mother-fucking-Home-Depot-Kauai-Bamboo-Tiki-torch.

One of the fat guys that howls "owooo!" like a sledge dog into the sky holds a mmother-fucking-Home-Depot-Kauai-Bamboo-Tiki-torch — like actually.⁴

(...)

The self as fiction. The self as manipulation. Through the surplus of (fake) information, the flood of visual and verbal images of violence, tragedy and crisis, from on- and offline hate speech, to a grotesque deep web kind-of humour, we alienate ourselves and others. Information, words, the conversation as violence.

Footnotes:

1. Based on: Full Remarks of Heather Heyer's Mother at Charlottesville Memorial Service, Democracy Now!, www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gor5Bo5DYCY

2. Paul Chan, "The Unthinkable Community", in E-Flux Journal "What's Love (or Care, Intimacy, Warmth, Affection) Got to Do with it?", Sternberg Press, 2017

4. Based on: VICE News "Charlottesville: Race and Terror", www.news.vice.com/story/vice-news-tonight-full-episode-charlottesville-race-and-terror,