

Talk to me pretty

No. The ape looks up, very slowly. We are sitting inside a movie theater and are staring into these gigantic eyes. Dark eyes with a damp glow and the head raises and the mouth closes and then it opens again and a sound emerges. Not a sound, a word, a human word. This ape talks and I push my body deeper into the theater chair. And the ape says no, he is yelling it out – filled with hate. No! And the word spreads its wings, is flying through the room, fully absorbs it and dies away.

One cannot communicate. This is the headline of a text in a college yearbook. All of us have to open this yearbook. Autocorrect has deleted the second 'not'. Because you cannot not communicate. Says Paul Watzlawick. He is a communications scientist. He ought to know. Because every communication is supposedly behavior, and just as one cannot not behave, one cannot not communicate. Wisenheimer. We have to add the second 'not' manually. Even though it is wrong, of course. We cannot communicate. Neither with our parents nor with our teachers and hardly with each other.

It's 1994. We don't always have telephones on us and we have never been on the internet and the idea of a cyber highway with a dataglove sounds much more plausible than Facebook or Instagram or Whatsapp or Snapchat ever would have.

We cannot communicate. We still cannot. We send and send and receive and receive, but the process is decoupled. It slips out of our hands. Facetime doesn't work and the conversation that has started interrupts another conversation that just has started. And of course a much better conversation could be next door. Has he read the message? The check marks are blue. But does he understand it? Does he understand me? And: Where are you? Can you hear me? We got lost in a sign system, meta levels are piling up, tilting, old memes, codes, flickering GIFs are clogging the cracks. Ugly emojis with wide open mouths are riding through our echo chambers. We call and call because it reverberates so beautifully.

And we talk and talk. With machines. And with things. With the remote control, with the phone, with the flower vase, the car, the bunch of keys. We talk but we do not communicate. We demand, inquire, issue a command, want to know. But we do not listen.

Dear picture do you like yourself, asks Jonathan Meese in a meandering monologue one can watch on Youtube. Wait a minute. Good idea. Hello image. How are you? What do you want and what have you been up to all this time?

Right now, a human-build space capsule is flying through interstellar space. Billions of kilometers away from Earth. On-board is a gold-coated data disk with greetings for aliens. Best regards to all – in 55 languages. In addition to that there are drawings of our anatomy, our sexual organs, of ovules and nursing mothers. How are you? What do you want? And what have you been up to all this time? Somewhere in Iowa, a 36-year old bonobo is sitting in his cage. His name is Kanzi, he is cracking nuts with a tool that he has built himself, he roasts marshmallows, watches videos, plays pac-man and is able to communicate via an artificial sign system.

And exactly this is the way out of the infinite echo chambers, all these endless monologues and dialogues that are missing their point by a hair's breadth. With other signs, in different sizes, with all these conversational partners. Hey walls: Hello. Hey sculptures: Hello. Hello floor. Hello art. Hey animals: Hello. And you humans: Hello. How are you? What do you want? And what have you been up to all this time?