

Joke Meets Problem... .

Relevant and Irrelevant Surprises

Good stories work because the narrator usually does everything to entertain his or her readers with well-aimed surprises. However, in today's world it has become increasingly difficult for storytellers to fabricate good surprises with perceptible ease. In previous times we let ourselves be surprised, today we know how to construct surprises artificially. A joke is a surprise for a momentary mind flash – but what exactly is a surprise? A kind of observation that directs the focus on the specific way in which it is observed? Or maybe a gift which creates a hiatus in the course of events?

Something is surprising if it does not only get our attention at the first moment, but also appeals to us at a second glance. How do surprises work? Anyone able to provide a precise answer should consider himself or herself to be truly lucky – after all, successful marketing needs surprising ideas and presentations. However, the medium of surprise would quickly dissolve into nothing in the face of a precise explanation. Luckily there are enough media nowadays, social networks for instance, which generate and offer all kinds of visual, contextual and semantic surprises. The best thing is to be surprised by one's own surprises, and to see how one fared during the process.

The surprising solution of a problem is very much determined by the subjective feeling regarding the context in which everything – also surprising things – can happen. Let us risk a hasty definition: a surprise is a kind of emotional awareness combined with a shot of unawareness (or maybe vice versa).

It is not necessarily the novelties themselves that are surprising (in a sense, everything is new – because everything new becomes old as soon as it appears), but rather the combination of something familiar with something else which makes new things seem surprising. Interestingly enough, surprises have no way of showing whether they are authentic, feigned, staged or orchestrated in some way. They surprise – or they do not. Today the other side of surprise is relevance. While a surprise seems sudden, shimmering and colourful, relevance is characterised by grey ambiguity. A situation is surprising when other perspectives than those anticipated become apparent. Relevance, on the other hand, merely implies probability, a limited area in which only a few realities are significant and valid. This could be formalised as follows: a surprise is the factor of a variable value, while relevance expresses a degree of its likeliness.

Intelligence becomes perceptible when the way in which surprises are usually experienced does not preclude further surprises which profit from increased “curiosity”. The unexpected reversal of a statement, for instance, not only leads to unforeseen options, but also to an awareness of overtones and encounters which had not seemed possible before.

A surprise is a form in which and with which a kind of open knowledge gains relevance. Above all, it includes and does not exclude the opposite. Ultimately, the surprise lies in the realisation that we are able to construct everything in such a way that it makes sense – because it is expressed in an open context in which relevance is not lacking. The main thing is to connect as many loose ends as possible with one another – or as in this case: surprises with relevance.

In the end a joke meets a problem and says: Hey, I've got a solution. The problem replies: okay, am I supposed to laugh or what?

No joke without a surprise!

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