

Peter Ablinger:

The object of the 21st century

Once upon a time there was a man named Hans, and he owned a fancy new electric car of which he was very proud. One day as he was getting out of the car, another man approached him, admired the car and asked Hans if he wouldn't like to trade it in for a smartphone. Hans agreed and was very pleased, because the range of a smartphone was so much greater than that of an electric car. Happy, he walked the streets, surfing and texting for all he was worth. Finally, he ended up in a bar and sat down at the counter. The bartender offered him a glass of his very best whiskey in exchange for the smartphone. Hans agreed and was overjoyed with the deal, having now traded the confusing distraction of the virtual worlds for something truly focused, the combination of spirit and sensuality. Hans asked if he could also take the glass, he didn't want to finish the special whysky right away, which was granted. So he moved on, carrying the whysky before him like the Holy Grail. Then he met a man who also had a glass, but with water in it. The man wanted to exchange, Hans agreed, and was very satisfied to have escaped a possible headache or even hangover by the now gained, transparent and pure elixir. A few steps further on, he stumbled over a stone, the glass fell from him and broke, the water was spilled. But Hans was joyful about it, because now he was finally free from having to take so much care of the water glass. Pleased and relieved, he went his way.

The object that can represent the 21st century is the object that can be replaced. Or more precisely, it is what remains after the exchange has been made. Or more precisely, the 'remaining' should not be taken too literally; there is no duration or constancy here, but only that which connects the exchanged objects, that which has no price.

If there is a concrete symbolization for this at all, then perhaps it is the refugee boat.

But perhaps even this image, the image of a "Hans in Luck" as a "Homo Sacer", is only a bland "humanistic" self-deception, and even still the drowning refugee is worth a lot of money, after all it fills the gazettes and news broadcasts, makes all the art and intellectual people rotate and the printing presses and event houses go into high gear. The object of the 21st century would then be the refugee opera.

(Created in 2017 at the request of the Mexican magazine "La Tempestad". The brief was "to meditate about the objects that are able to synthesize the characteristics of the 21st century, in a political, social and aesthetic level.")

(english un-edited)