

Before I started writing this opening speech I wanted to find an origo, a point of departure, so I downloaded and read The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, I quote:

„The peoples of the United Nations have in the Charter reaffirmed their faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person and in the equal rights of men and women and have determined to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.“

In thirty articles, The Declaration enumerates those rights which, after the incomprehensible and unparalleled destruction of WWII, needed to be defended and reinforced the most, without which *“the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world”* could not have been affirmed. What can I say: while the intention and objectives of the Declaration are elevating, its results and implementation are distressing; it is moderate and evident i.e. radical and subversive. I recommend it from my heart for everyone to read, especially in my homeland where the Declaration has never been as topical since the fall of the communist regime as it is today.

It even occurred to me to read it here: it is not a long text, actually it is surprisingly short, barely more than ten thousand characters.

Ladies and gentlemen, the world and the versions of which a serious documentary film festival showcases, are overwhelmingly uncheerful. How could, indeed, these films be cheerful when what they show is precisely the distortion of these rights, their subtle or brutal denial. This is what documentaries do, and they have a lot to do. As for their influence or reach, I don't know. While giving the diagnosis they set examples. The example, for instance, that anyone carrying a camera, microphone, or laptop is an accomplice of injustice if he/she does not make his/her voice heard.

Yes, talking injustice, deprivation of rights, threats means talking about rights as a striking lack of something, a powerful assertion of what is missing. Or, at least, by involving the viewer in the extreme or everyday, horrible or curious stories, the documentary is making an attempt at making this assertion. It provides the opportunity to think about rights, to be outraged and realize the helplessness and the dire situation of the insulted and humiliated, of those different or even more different – than of the changing minorities.

Ad absurdum, we are universally minorities; any part of any majority can find itself in minority any time and then would badly need those rights they ignored or, in worse cases, dismantled and cleared away to achieve their goals. And then, when they will need them, they will be entitled to these human rights – that is why these rights are universal. Although universal, the majority of mankind cannot fully exercise their rights set out in the Declaration 64 years ago. Not in Hungary where the government amended its own constitution just a few days ago to make it harder for the defenseless to exercise their right to vote; where in the coming winter hundreds or maybe thousands will freeze to death in the streets and in miserable unheated homes; where tens of thousands, or maybe hundreds of thousands starve and are undernourished, including many children for which one can find explanations but no excuse.

At the words “no excuse” I stopped writing because instead of an opening speech I felt the need to speak, once again, about the disregard for the poor and for those at the bottom of society, about our fraying democracy and crumbling rule of law, about my country; and I didn't feel like it.

I didn't feel like being depressed, so instead I watched Planet of Snail, the South Korean documentary you are going to see in a few minutes. Having finished it I just stared in the air, at the monitor and wondered if I would be able to say anything about universal rights, interdependence, optimism, love that would not sound totally hollow compared to the story of these two young people with severe handicaps. Can I say anything, do words serve anything at all, and would not mankind be a little more solidary and human if one would talk to the other with one's hands and fingers on the hands of the other, slowly, patiently. That is, if by miracle, one's vested interest were to pay attention to the other's spiritual and physical salvation, if one's survival, present and future depended on it – and I could go on saying big words.

Yet, like it or not, it does depend on it.

I started with a widely cited document, and ideal and common denominator, "a common standard of achievement for all peoples and all nations"; now let me finish with John Donne's similarly commonly quoted and topical words from the mid 17th century:

No man is an island,
Entire of itself.
Each is a piece of the continent,
A part of the main.
If a clod be washed away by the sea,
Europe is the less.
As well as if a promontory were.
As well as if a manor of thine own
Or of thine friend's were.
Each man's death diminishes me,
For I am involved in mankind.
Therefore, send not to know
For whom the bell tolls,
It tolls for thee.

Lajos Parti Nagy