

ART GALLERY
ANTWERPEN

DE WAEL 15

LEOPOLD DE WAELSTRAAT 15 / 2000 ANTWERPEN

GREET BILLET

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"Hij 'vertaalt' niet. Hij registreert datgene wat hem raakt, zoals het hem raakt. Hij spreekt de waarheid op een onmenselijke manier, zoals eenieder weet die - tegenover de spiegel - elke illusie over zijn jeugd verliest. De hersenen interpreteren de gegevens van het netvlies, de spiegel interpreteert de objecten niet."*

**Umberto Eco, Wat spiegels betreft, Umberto Eco, Bakker Amsterdam 1991, p.17.*







GREET BILLET



'We usually know how to use mirrors correctly. This means that we have introjected the rules of catoptric interaction. It means also that we have to speak of a pragmatics of the mirror. It is no use arguing that, since pragmatics is a branch of semiotics, we cannot speak of it before defining semiotic phenomena. I have already said that we must get into the circle from somewhere. On the other hand, in this connection we may as well use the term 'pragmatics' in a rather broad sense, to cover also perceptive interaction. The problem is that, in order to use a mirror correctly, we should first know that we are facing a mirror (which is an essential condition also in Lacan's study, for the mirror not to be a sheer illusion or a hallucinatory experience.)

Once we have acknowledged that what we perceive is a mirror image, we always begin from the principle that the mirror 'tells the truth'. And it is so true that it does not even bother to reverse the image (as a printed photograph does to give us an illusion of reality). The mirror does not even allow us this tiny advantage that would make our perception or our judgement easier. A mirror does not 'translate'; it records what struck it just as it is struck. It tells the truth to an inhuman extent, as it is well known by those who – facing a mirror – cannot any longer deceive themselves about their freshness. Our brain interprets retinal data; a mirror does not interpret an object.

But it is just this Olympian, animal, inhuman nature of mirrors that allows us to trust them. We trust mirrors just as, under normal conditions, we trust our organs of perception. Now it is clear why I spoke of pragmatics: with mirrors, we can apply some of the rules which, by social convention and very relatively, are applied to conversational interactions, although in conversation lies are reckoned as breaches. It is not so with mirrors.'

From: Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language, Umberto Eco, Indiana University Press 1984, pp. 207-8.





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