

## ROCIO BARCELLONA • MEANINGLESS WORDS

In our everyday life we attach labels to things, adjectives, and emotions in order to address them. The words we use for emotions are known to be too broad. This appears to be the same when referring to adjectives. We, however, take for granted our certainty and clarity when referring to things such as a “chair” or a “piece of art.” We fail to realize that we have never actually defined a word; we have merely associated an arrangement of letters to a nameless inanimate object and then created many other words in an attempt to explain what each of those words that we have used mean. Inaccuracy leads to misunderstandings and yet, instead of learning about the things we are surrounded by, we are taught ignorance and approximations. It is by the very way we are taught to speak that we learn associations rather than meanings.

Part of the process of growing up involves learning to speak. This is an ongoing process that normally begins early in a child’s life. Parents or guardians try to teach a language to a child in the simplest way: they show the child an object and assign a word to it. When the child, then, hears a certain word his or her memory retrieves what his or her senses have collected about what that *one* object that goes by that word, looks like; meaning that when the child hears the word “chair” he or she might think of a thing with four legs, a seat, and back support. Oversimplification is what leads to an inability to deal with complexity. Oversimplification leads to confusion.

Love and hate, such opposite feelings, do not only go together but may also turn into each other. There is no way to measure words like those, or to even know what someone means by them; we can only estimate. Emotions are too complex, too relative, and too arbitrary to be accurately described; the true feeling goes beyond words and cannot be captured in a simple combination of letters.

Adjectives, in the same way, do not really exist in them-

selves; they are instead determined and dictated by many different circumstances such as culture, time period, and personal preferences. What is beautiful to someone may be hideous to another. In fact, beauty is just a concept, an idea, something far from being a tangible thing. It is because of the lack of international standards that people strive to use words that are flexible enough to embrace all the things that could possibly be meant by it. In the attempt to do so people deprive every single word of a true meaning, leaving behind a word so vague that it means not too many things, but nothing at all.

Human beings have always relied on that which can be assured to them by their senses. In an effort to dominate their surroundings, they are eager to assign labels to things. Doing so seems to be easier than defining a feeling, since an object can only be itself and nothing more. It is then that things stop being things and become “chairs,” “tables,” and “pieces of art”. Conflicts erupt as people realize how inexact definitions are. Some definitions, although debatable, do not have a great relevance in everyday life. Though it is true that there is no clear definition of what a “chair” is, and there is no exact agreement on whether or not a stool, a bean-bag chair, or a car seat can really be considered chairs, it really would not make a difference either way.

Some other definitions, however, do matter. Marcel Duchamp, a French artist, was someone who pushed the definition of “art”. He then redefined the meaning of that word while being rejected by it. He created a controversial “piece of art” known as “The Fountain,” which was merely a urinal turned upside down signed with the pseudonym: R. Mutt 1917. He was, then, denied admission to an art museum, which claimed to be open for anyone to submit their artwork, on the grounds that it was not art. Just like almost everything else, people can see art and they can touch it, but they are unable to define it.

It is for the sake of simplification that things end up being

more complicated than they need to be. People tend to believe that it is easier to understand what something means if an example is given; however, that example can only represent so much of what is being explained. One thing, although it cannot stand for every single possibility, may very well define the way in which a person thinks of something. As people wander through life, assigning labels to objects, meaning is lost. Learning to speak is a process that few people really go through. Before people can start giving definitions instead of descriptions, before they can mean something instead of relating concepts, we need to realize that everything varies from country to country, town to town, person to person. We must agree that everything we face brings a storm of possibilities into our lives; how we think of each one of those possibilities will make all the difference. We need to forget the dictionary and the picture books. It is time to start giving life some real meaning.

