

# Talking to Strangers

Adrian Kosmaczewski

2014-01-10

I'm not the kind of guy that enjoys talking to strangers. It's something quite common and appreciated in Latin cultures, for example to smalltalk about the weather or other inane subject with the person next to you on the bus, or a neighbor, or anything. When I travel alone I prefer single seats, nobody around me, traveling in peace, music, book, writing, thinking. When I walk I prefer silence or music in my ears. When I work I prefer silence. And the respect of this sphere is another of the things that I appreciate in Germanic and Scandinavian cultures, as a matter of fact.

Let's be clear about the fact that I have nothing against human interactions in general, and those who know me agree that I tend to be a rather empathic and friendly person; heck, I'm even a conference speaker and I regularly teach. But I personally don't look for spontaneous meetings, so even if I do not shy away from someone talking to me, I won't usually be the starter of an interaction out of the cold.

And so it happened one day, on my way home from work, I was waiting the train while listening to a Piazzolla track, if I'm not mistaken I think it was "Jeanne and Paul," one of my preferred songs. And what happens with me and Piazzolla is that, whenever I'm in a deserted place with nobody around me (this was an empty train platform in the evening,) I start whistling the song I'm hearing through my earbuds. I can't help it. Particularly with Piazzolla; I like the challenge of the dissonant phrases, the seemingly irrational chords, the sequences that never end, mixing both pain and pleasure to the mix. I just love to whistle Piazzolla tunes. It's relaxing, it's complex and it makes me travel far away.

As my train was entering the station, I cancelled my whistling session as two or three people approached me on the platform, among them an old lady who, just before getting onto the train, spontaneously congratulated me for my whistling. I truly think that I do not whistle properly, and that's why I do this all alone. I know I am often out of tune and time, but I like whistling anyway. I just don't want to impose this to anyone else. So that's why I was surprised, and even more so, because in general I would have expected this to happen in the French or Italian parts of Switzerland, not in the Germanic section.

So I thanked the lady, surprised and smiling, and next thing I knew we were talking about Switzerland, the weather, the trains, her family and many other of those inane subjects I mentioned earlier.

We arrived in Zürich Hauptbahnhof 40 minutes later, talking and enjoying the moment.

And that's it.

---

If you were expecting an analysis, a morale or some kind of afterthought surrounding this story, well, you're out of luck as there's none. Although I liked talking to this lady, I still do not start these conversations myself, I still enjoy being left alone, and I still whistle when listening to Piazzolla all alone.