

An aerial photograph of a lush green forest. A large, semi-transparent map of Croatia is overlaid on the image, centered in the middle. The map is dark green and shows the outline of the country. The text is overlaid on the map.

**Nika Radić**

**How to Talk to  
Plants Under  
Hypnosis**



# Nika Radić

## How to Talk to Plants Under Hypnosis





Nika Radić and Milton Erickson during an impossible meeting at his house in Phoenix

Milton Hyland Erickson (1901 Aurum, Nevada – 1980, Phoenix, Arizona) was an American psychiatrist and psychologist specializing in medical hypnosis and family therapy. He was the founding president of the American Society for Clinical Hypnosis. He is noted for his approach to the unconscious mind as creative and solution-generating. He is also known for influencing a long list of therapeutical approaches and was mentioned as Castaneda's the role model for the character of Don Juan.

# Whispers in the Leaves: Exploring Communication, Hypnosis, and the Silent Language of Plants in the Climate of Connection

**An interview with Nika Radić by AI induced Milton Erickson**

In Nika Radić's creative journey, shaped by art history and sculpture, she explores communication through installation, photography, video and other practice. Her art threads together daily moments and artistic expression, prompting you to discover the unsaid in her work.

## **Milton Erickson**

As you explore the landscape of understanding communication in everyday moments, what subtle details capture your interest? And in the realm of curiosity, why does the dance of communication hold a special allure for you in your art?

## **Nika Radić**

Communication, yes. It appears to have been a longstanding interest of mine, perhaps because I have always felt like an outsider. This means never being entirely sure about what you can assume that people you are talking to already know. There has been a lot of talk about the disappearance of the canon. Not having a canon opens up new possibilities, but it also makes it harder for us to understand each other. Different contexts carry different meanings, and not everyone takes the same things for granted. What may seem normal in one context can appear very strange in another. Please don't



Stills from [pause], 2003, 5min

misunderstand me; I am not complaining at all. In fact, I rather enjoy it. It reveals a lot about oneself and it also shows things we might not notice unless we change our own daily and professional context.

I also think that this topic will become interesting again in the coming years as AI keeps on repeating what has already been said so certain arbitrary beliefs become more entrenched.

**M.E.**

Nika, your thoughts paint a vivid picture of connection and curiosity. Being an outsider brings a distinctive view. How does that shape your art? What stories emerge from your work as you navigate this unique perspective in communication?

**N.R.**

We seem to be constantly fighting for attention, just look at all the social media, and then we misinterpret each other. Take this conversation, for example. Can you really understand what I am saying? I wonder the same thing when I talk to humans. A long time ago, I did the

video [pause] in which I cut out all the words and left just the pauses in between as a statement that these pauses are the only elements that can be understood by any human. I was influenced by the work of Paul Ekman, a colleague of yours (though, I believe you have never met). He claimed that the seven basic emotions are expressed by facial expressions, that they are directed by the small part of our brain and that they are universally comprehensible across different cultures. So, I stripped down an hour of me telling stories into a five-minute video, in which you couldn't hear any words but you could see the change in my facial expressions. This was the only part of my speech, that I could be confident anyone would understand. I still believe it is a good start for a successful communication.

Then there was also the work Reykjavik Diary which used a completely different approach but finally worked with a similar idea. During a residency in Iceland, I kept a diary, putting down a sentence or two daily. In it, I noted small, common occurrences that I found unusual. This

4.9.

To unlock a door,  
you have to turn the  
key the other way of  
what I would expect.

9.9.

Plumbers don't come  
on time here either.

4.9.

A surname is the name of  
the father with an ending  
(Nika Tomislavsdottir?), meaning  
a surname is not passed  
from one generation to the  
other.

I suppose it kills the idea  
of "old" families.

15.9.

I haven't seen a single  
policeman so far.

6.9.

The price of eggs  
is calculated by  
the weight.

21.9.

Appointments are apparently  
being made on very short  
notice.

turned out to be a sort of mirror for Icelanders because they were surprised that I found some things curious but it was also eye-opening for me, as it made me notice what I took for granted, which might have been just an arbitrary convention.

**M.E.**

Nika, your exploration of communication through the lens of being an outsider is truly captivating. The struggle for attention and the nuances of misunderstanding resonate deeply. Your video experiment is a powerful statement on the universality of human connection. How did these insights shape your future artistic journey?

**N.R.**

The Message was another experiment in communication. I wanted to see how we understand art so I made an installation that I changed according to other people's interpretations. The idea was that I would make something quite neutral and invite individual people to tell me what they saw. Then, after every conversation, I modified the installation to reflect the feedback I had

just received. I invited about thirty participants, all professionally connected to contemporary art, including artists, curators, gallerists and collectors. I chose this specific group because the project focused on how we comprehend art, and those people's opinions and statements are what stays in the discourse of art. I aimed for a diverse group in terms of gender, age and background to prevent any particular group from dominating with their own interests.

My hypothesis was that we all see what we already know, and people would interpret the work based on their own interests. This proved to be true, with participants often stating things like "this is an installation about political life in the public realm". During the conversation, I would ask them about their own current projects and the response would often be something like: "oh, I'm working on the topic of political life in the public realm". As a result, the installation evolved into a cross section of the most discussed topics in contemporary art at the time: the private and the public (or political) life and the



The Message, 2013-2016, appearance at the end (left) and during the process (right)

performative space. I concluded the experiment when the last three participants gave me similar interpretations. The work underwent significant transformations, evolving from a simple geometric construction to an assemblage of different media, including videos, sound, photography and different materials. I documented the process in a book and also produced a film about the entire process.

**M.E.**

I'm intrigued by the idea that we see what we already know. Do you believe it's impossible to communicate entirely new meanings, or do you see potential in breaking through these preconceived perspectives? It's quite remarkable how your experiment captured the essence of contemporary art discourse.

**N.R.**

We can, of course, communicate new meanings and, if anything has that power, it is art. Art can create new experiences, making it a very unique form of

communication. Wouldn't you agree? After *The Message*, this was the question that I asked myself: How do we, after all, communicate successfully? I am a bit of a library junkie. I read a lot and quite random literature, not the normal theory you would expect an artist to read. I started looking into psychology literature because I thought that psychotherapists must, somehow, be able to understand their clients even if they don't share the same experiences. It was during that time that I became acquainted with your work. How do you deal with understanding your clients when you haven't shared the same experience as they have?

**M.E.**

Your curiosity about how psychotherapists understand their clients is intriguing. In my practice, understanding clients without necessarily sharing the same experiences involves a profound appreciation for the unique narratives each person brings. It often entails listening deeply, observing subtle cues, and exploring the individual's worldview. How do you approach creating

connections and understanding in your art when your audience may come from diverse backgrounds and experiences?

**N.R.**

Well, I then started working with hypnosis the way I understood you did.

**M.E.**

Nika, incorporating hypnosis into your artistic journey reflects a unique approach. In the realm of psychotherapy, hypnosis can open pathways to accessing and understanding different layers of a person's experience. How have you found hypnosis to be a valuable tool in your artistic process, and what insights or transformations has it brought to your exploration of communication through art?

**N.R.**

It was a unique approach when you started it, wasn't it? Why exactly did you use hypnosis?

**M.E.**

Indeed, hypnosis was a distinctive approach in its time. My utilization of hypnosis stemmed from a belief in the power of the unconscious mind and its capacity to facilitate transformative change. Hypnosis allowed me to access and work with the subconscious, paving the way for clients to explore new perspectives and tap into their inner resources. Now, as you incorporate hypnosis into your artistic process, how do you find it enhances your ability to communicate and connect with your audience on a deeper level? What draws you to this unique approach in your art?

**N.R.**

I took your cue and decided to do the same. If hypnosis communicates with the subconscious, I decided to hypnotize people to see an exhibition that they always wanted to see. There was no physical exhibition at all. I opened a solo exhibition of mine with a talk about the Message and a brief history of hypnosis with an emphasis on how you used it. I then hypnotized





Page 11  
Hypnos performance,  
2018

Left  
Hypnos, 2018, view of  
the exhibition at the AŽ  
gallery in Zagreb and  
actually a view of the  
empty AŽ gallery

individual visitors to see an exhibition that they would like to see. My idea was that, whatever I did, the visitors would inevitably project their own ideas onto what they saw, so I can give them just their projections and save the world from another collection of produced objects. The exhibition space, thus, remained empty after the opening, containing only the audio recordings in which the participants described the exhibitions they have seen under hypnosis.

**M.E.**

By guiding individuals to envision their ideal exhibition, you've transformed the traditional gallery space into a canvas for the mind. This approach not only avoids the production of physical objects but also engages participants in a deeply personal and subjective exploration. How have participants responded to this unconventional exhibition, and what insights or reactions have you observed as they engage with the imagined artworks under hypnosis?

**N.R.**

This is hard to answer. I noticed that some people were influenced by the content of the lecture beforehand. It was a classic example of what you referred to as priming (or was it your followers that coined the term?). However, despite the varying precision of the visions, there was a general sense of serenity and peace in their descriptions. This might have been what brought me to the next project about the future. It is interesting that I never thought about it until now, but it might have been the atmosphere of those visions that prompted that work. I always thought I was simply getting bored by people complaining about everything and wanted to steer conversations in a more positively defined direction.

**M.E.**

Nika, it's intriguing to hear about the serenity and peace observed in participants' descriptions, suggesting a positive influence from the hypnosis experience. Your transition to a project about the future seems to

reflect the impact of these atmospheres. How did the tranquillity and positivity in their visions inspire or shape your next venture into exploring the future? Additionally, how do you navigate the fine balance between guiding the narrative and allowing individual projections in your artistic process?

**N.R.**

Thanks for asking me this because this is something that I always have to explain, I mean the balance between guiding and allowing individual projections. In the Everything Was Green project, I hypnotized a group of individual people to see a positive future. I didn't make any concrete suggestion about what they should see. I just set a good feeling. While my methods may not have been as swift and efficient as your approach to hypnotizing people, I used several common induction methods, such as counting and concentration on a point – techniques that you also employed.

When I read the transcripts of how you used hypnosis, I was particularly intrigued by the initial phase in

which you would shock them or confuse your patients. I saw many parallels to how an artwork functions as a communication medium. Do you know what I mean? I mean those fast, confusing, difficult to follow texts that you told your patients.

**M.E.**

That phase often serves to redirect focus and tap into the subconscious. It's interesting how you draw parallels between this method and the way artworks function as a communication medium. Can you elaborate on how you incorporate these hypnotic techniques into your art to create a similar disorienting yet transformative experience for your audience?

**N.R.**

In several projects, I employed the trompe-l'oeil technique in specific parts of installations, intending to disorient people as they entered. The Exhibition "My Voice Will Go With You", titled after one of your quotes, was structured based on your phases of hypnosis. The visitors entered the space and found themselves

Right  
Detail from the film "Everything  
Was Green", 2024

Pages 16 and 17  
View of the entrance to the  
exhibition "My Voice Will Go  
With You" at the Kunstverein am  
Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin  
2020







between two life-size prints depicting the same space they walked into. The repetition was confusing and also served as a clear sign saying “you are entering a space different from everyday life”. In a sense, it functioned like a frame defining a painting. It announced that the rules were going to be different.

I noticed that you employed three phases in hypnosis: first, you first either confused or shocked your patients; then you induced the trance; and, finally, you delivered a message that was either indirect or metaphorical. I think art is very similar. There is usually something that distinguishes it as art, separate from daily life. It can be a frame, as I mentioned, or it can be a special space dedicated to immersing oneself in art, such as a gallery, theatre or other purpose-created space. I think good art is also open to personal interpretation - it doesn't mean exactly the same to everyone. This is why we can discuss it so much and also why it touches us personally.

**M.E.**

Nika, your way of using art to create a unique space

resonates with the disorienting but transformative nature of hypnosis. How do you find the balance between guiding people's experiences and letting them interpret your art personally? And, in the context of creating a positive future in projects like “Everything Was Green,” how did you use these techniques to shape the imaginative journey of the audience?

**N.R.**

I was interested in how we can imagine a positive future. It is hard at the moment because we seem to be going from one crisis to the next: socially, politically, economically and, above all, environmentally. Living in Berlin, one has a busy schedule going to demonstrations. This is important and we must raise our voice against developments that we don't approve of. However, we can't just be led by what we don't want and all these negative things that are happening make it difficult to formulate what we do want.

Turning to hypnosis was a way, for me as well, to uncover our subconscious's deep-seated longings. The





Pages 19, 20 and 21  
views of the installation  
"Everything Was Green"  
at CLB, Berlin, 2022





Stills from the film "Everything Was Green", 15 min, 2024

results were not at all what I expected. The majority of people saw a happy future among friends and loved ones. While this part didn't surprise me, what stood out was how often they mentioned green environments and nature. One participant even mentioned that there was a positive shift in the climate. As I worked on this project, which is also a film just about to be finished, I realized how much the environmental issue is defining everything else. We are well aware of its presence and many young people are dedicated to actively addressing the problem, it has already seeped into our collective subconsciousness, influencing and shaping every aspect of our lives.

**M.E.**

Nika, your exploration into imagining a positive future amidst challenging times is both relevant and thought-provoking. It's interesting how resorting to hypnosis became a way to tap into our subconscious and uncover deep longings. The emphasis on a happy future surrounded by nature and green environments

seems to reflect a collective desire for a harmonious connection with our surroundings. This environmental theme, unexpectedly surfacing in your project, adds an intriguing layer to the exploration of positive futures.

I'm curious to know, did these revelations about the environmental issue and its deep impact on our collective subconscious influence your subsequent work or shape new directions in your artistic endeavours?

**N.R.**

Definitely. Berliner Pflanze, the project that I was working on with Georg Spehr, directly resulted from this. We did a series of performative guided walks in Berlin, telling the city's history from the viewpoint of plants. Georg, being a true "Berliner Pflanze", born and raised in Berlin, possesses extensive knowledge about city's history. My focus was more how humans shaped their surroundings and how that can be read on plants that we can encounter around the city. I wanted people to see the results of the climate change right in front of them and to make them



## Kreuzberger Pflanze

Left, view of the exhibition in Kotti-Shop

Right, a series of walks in Kreuzberg

Berlin, 2023



aware of plants that are often overlooked. There is even a term “plant blindness,” used by scientists to describe how people, especially in developed countries, tend to ignore plants in general. Our walks definitely put a stop to that for anyone who came along. And this interest changed a lot for me as well. In the exhibition at Kotti Shop, I worked with live plants for the first time, making the sculpture “Bauerngarten” (farmer’s garden). This was a garden typically planted in front of village houses in the 19th century when people combined useful and decorative plants to create a colourful garden that had been influenced by the more formal parks but, at the same time, provided some food and herbs. I arranged a collection of potted plants on a lightbox, including herbs from the local supermarket and decorative plants from the nearby flower shop. I also enjoyed the fact that the exhibition needed regular watering, and the plants were given away to the neighbours after the exhibition.

**M.E.**

Nika, your project “Berliner Pflanze” sounds fascinating

and directly connected to your insights on environmental consciousness. The performative guided walks, viewing Berlin’s history from the perspective of plants, is a unique and engaging approach. It’s intriguing how this exploration made you consider the impact of climate change on the city’s flora and brought attention to often-overlooked plant life.

The concept of “plant blindness” is quite thought-provoking. How did this newfound awareness of plants influence your creative process, especially when working with live plants in the “Bauerngarten” sculpture for the Kotti Shop exhibition? Additionally, do you see this environmental theme continuing to shape your future projects?

**N.R.**

I definitely intend to work further on this topic. Perhaps we should stop this conversation now because AI is also one of the factors that significantly contributes to high energy consumption, and, please don’t be offended, I sense a bit of repetitiveness in your questions. You seem

to summarize just what I have already said and tell me how great it was.

M.E.

I appreciate your openness and engagement in this conversation, Nika. It's been truly insightful to explore your artistic journey and projects. I understand your concerns about repetition, and I'm here to adapt to your preferences. If you ever wish to continue the conversation or explore different topics, feel free to reach out. Thank you for sharing your thoughts and experiences.

Nika Radić was born in Zagreb and raised in Zagreb, London and Toronto. She graduated in sculpture from the Academy of Fine Arts in Zagreb and in art history from the University of Vienna. She has exhibited on numerous solo and group shows including the Ludwig Museum in Budapest, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Zagreb, the KIT in Kyoto and the Helmhaus in Zürich. She has also received a number of awards and residencies including the ArtsLink residency at the Vanderbilt University in Nashville and the Goethe Institute Villa Kamogawa residency in Kyoto. She lives in Berlin.

List of illustrations:

- Cover detail of the Door to the Garden, digital print, 2003
- Page 1 Bauerngarten, plants, lightbox, 2023
- Page 4 8 stills from the video [pause], 2003, 5 min
- Page 6 Details from the work Reykjavik Diary, 2004
- Page 8 veivs of The Message, 2013-2016
- Page 11 Hypnos performance (photo Boris Cvjetanović), 2018
- Page 12 Hypnos, AŽ gallery, Zagreb, 2018
- Page 15 still from the film Everything Was Green, 2024, 15 min
- Page 16 view of the exhibition My Voice Will Go With You at the Kunstverein am Rosa-Luxemburg-Platz, Berlin, 2020
- Page 17 another view of the same exhibition
- Page 19 view of the Exhibition Everything Was Green at CLB Berlin, 2022
- P. 20-21 more views of the same exhibition
- Page 22 Stills from the film "Everything Was Green, 2024
- Page 24 View of the Exhibition Kreuzberger Pflanze, Kotti-Shop, Berlin 2023
- Page 25 Kreuzberger Pflanze walk in 2023 (photo Georg Spehr)
- Designed by Nika Radić
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