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“WHAT IS ART?
HORIZONS OF THE CREATOR
AND THE RECIPIENT”

I recall a quiet evening twenty-or-so years ago; the teenager I was back then was mesmerized by the piercing blue eyes of a young Don Quixote whispering through his lips a heart-felt monologue: “When life itself seems lunatic, who knows where madness lies? Perhaps to be too practical is madness. To surrender dreams — this may be madness. Too much sanity may be madness — and maddest of all: to see life as it is, and not as it should be!” That voice, that intonation, that humanity which struck with so much power with every consonant stuck to my memory. I too, as a Quixote, infuriated by platitudes, stereotypes, ignorance, hypocrisy, bored with canons and small thoughts formulated in such a way as to resemble greatness, ashamed of my own superficial — at times narrow — views, burst into the same adapted soliloquy: The maddest of all — to ask what art is and not what it should be.

Aside from the play upon words, such a question asked nowadays may raise eyebrows and make shoulders shrug. Is it an act of sincere introspection, is it a necessary gesture, is it moral, is it fair? As it would always have been, as legitimate as any. But who are the ones who truly search for the answer? And for whom? Who does really want to know? The artists, the public, the critics, the sponsors, the governments? Apart from its very academic well defined perimeter, leaving aside the research studies that run in circles around intellectual subjects for centuries—truly, honestly: who are the ones who deal with this matter at their own will. This would be the question to which I would very much like to find an answer.

I am a recipient. I am sure of that. Being a theatre critic I like to consider myself a professional spectator. I often jokingly introduce myself as such. And I

feel privileged because I have the opportunity to have this dream job. Thus, in that light, art is both my profession and my hobby. That being said, I am no longer capable of formulating an objective answer. I am too much involved in the artistic process in order to detach myself from it and formulate a theory based on documentation and research.

Staying truthful to my position, I can only state what I experience. I would like to begin with the horizon of expectations. Which in my case is the most complex concept I use as a theatre critic. The most valuable quality one needs in my profession is that of being able to erase any kind of prior knowledge, personal writings and any kind of parasitic thoughts about the performance one is going to see. One becomes this cleaned perfect sponge that collects all the information offered by a performance and only after it ends one can reactivate one's palace of memory and start adding pieces of knowledge that may add up to a complex understanding of the work. In that respect, the performance, the piece of art, is a starting point for an elaborate receiving act that ends with a judgement of value. Thoughts are articulated around a very well contemplated structure of arguments formulated to explain one's personal viewpoint. As long as one does not stretch the art itself in order to fill one's intellectual needs of displaying one's knowledge and expressing one's high intellectual skills, one is on the safe side. As long as one sees the art as a means to sending a message and oneself as the translator of that message— aesthetic, cultural, political, social, no matter what kind of message that is— for a brief moment, one may become an artist themselves, when expressing in a literary form authentic and thoughts and ideas.

Then there is art that one does not necessary experience as part of one's profession. Even though I know I am not going to review a museum or an art gallery, or a music festival, or a concert, I still gladly attend such events and explore them. As a culture vulture I find peace and beauty in paintings, sculptures, architecture or music suited to the atmosphere of a particular space and time. A violent war photograph may be beautiful just as a heavy metal concert may be peaceful. It all depends on the receiver and their needs at that precise moment in time. I often found myself admiring the inside of a church and finding cultural benefits of the serenity and wisdom shared there by its religious representatives. And many times I burst in tears of gratitude in front of a painting or a sculpture. Or some random music reminded me of one precise emotional moment of my life. In this respect, art is nothing but a tool that soothes our troubled minds and souls. What makes all forms of art work in this respect and move this or that individual is the humanity residing in every art form, their honesty. As long as a specific piece = weather it is a segment of performing arts, a sample of plastic arts, a building or even a natural landscape frozen in a snapshot

– holds its truthfulness to the artist’s own form of expression of an inner credo, art could be a therapeutic gesture; a cleansing that is much needed every now and then, or a gesture of faith, or one of sanity. A tear that drops on the cheek in front of a sculpture or a sigh of admiration during a superb dance might be the signs of our shared humanity that we address to one another more freely in an artistic environment.

For me, art as it is, or as it should be, symbolizes a bridge between consciousness and emotion. It is a string that connects kindred spirits or just a simple path to one’s inner self.