

The aesthetics of fear- a propos a conversation with Juan Carlos Cremata- watching the king die.



El Rey se muere (The King dies)

I imagine the relief of the cultural censors, when they discovered they could use, instead of a political justification, aesthetic criteria in order to close a theater performance, eliminate a painting from an exhibit, or shut down a book's printing.

I have experienced the sordid smile of one-eyed bureaucrats on the blind man's land, when, with a judgmental aesthetic phrase, they thought they have given a magisterial strike which would save their job. What great political satisfaction to be able to tell someone, "solving the problem", that their work is poor, instead of having to deal with the artist in everyday political problems (and many times paltry matters). The problem with this much used formula by Cuban officials, in order to prevent another "Affaire Padilla", is that with art you can not impose a single aesthetic criteria; there isn't one single aesthetic criteria; you can't monopolize the public's reaction (though in Cuba they have been able to restrict public conduct) and an artist cannot be denied the complexity of directness.

As much as there is an artistic criteria that is used to censure, there is also a political aesthetic that can be used to invalidate and ignore the censor's arguments. Therefore, I would like to inform the cultural censors, of some of the aesthetic problems in their policy (and I am sharing only those that come faster to my mind):

Repeating always the same pattern while censoring: (we can see the meetings with the Presidents of the Cultural Council, the "good" cultural police; the "bad" cultural police; the official write-up by a specialist in order to eliminate or create doubts about the validity of a censored work; the "hurt" bureaucrat by the treason or intransigence of an artist; negotiations in which the only one to give in is the artist; the "friendly" bureaucrat that "advises" you; spreading rumors (especially if they are political) about the artist and, therefore, make them "toxic" and, thus isolating them from the artist's guild and - in extreme cases- tangling them in some crime, substituting public dialogue of the censored work, by some gossip or other recourse).

Being poor in arguments: being the opportunistic intellectual laziness, the political automatism of the bureaucrat or because it is the best way to hide that they think similarly to the censored artist. Their arguments are poor because they are based on maintaining power and not on everyday reality. Their arguments are poor because they are accustomed to having the majority accept them without being in agreement. Their arguments are poor because they have been used over 50 years to censor art.

Having a limited emotional spectrum: every discussion ends with: clearing up who is in charge, or it isn't the adequate moment, the harm that can be done to the Revolution, etc...

Being lazy: it would be better, though more arduous for the bureaucrat that is the intermediary between the artist and State Security, that they should make the comrade understand that an artist's work does not represent any risk to state security, nor to government stability (though it is an expression of freedom).

Thinking for others: thinking that artists will always be afraid, and threatening them with not being able to show their work to the public. Thinking that all artists can be bought. Thinking that an artist has no principles and that they are just "mad".

Acting for the short term: A censored is an unforgotten work.

The evolution of censorship in Cuba has displaced the moment of its intervention -at least in Fine Arts-. Previously, they had censored works that had been previously exhibited and seen by some public, when they realized the interpretative dangers. Afterwards they censored works that had been already staged before the exhibit was inaugurated; afterwards, they tried to intervene in the production process -with monies or counsel. But, since all of this can be inconvenient (public can find out, it is rumored or ultimately it was known there was censorship and potential scandal) they found a more efficient formula: The exercise of self - censorship (only the author knows what was obviated because of market interests or to not get into trouble). But sometimes the censors surprise us with their interpretations, some of which not even the artist had thought of, and that sometimes they are more subversive than what the artist had allowed themselves to think of. In some cases, (it happened to me), a censor imagines a work before the artist had even thought about it, and takes preventive actions against something that still didn't exist.

I saw the "oeuvre" "El Rey se muere" directed by Juan Carlos Cremata (in its narrated version "après" Ionesco) and it gave me great pleasure to see all of the spectator's masks dropping. And the shame, upon immediately picking them up and replacing them since they were afraid of a potential censor next to them that could "evaluate" this lack of culturo-political discipline. This may have been the most subversive action of the work. Because what is not pardoned in Cuba is that you undress a spectator's soul.

With this work's censorship I realize that this is not a generic problem (theater or performance / classic or contemporary), but rather the opportunity for a public, thru an artwork, to free themselves from a learned habit: Fear.

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