

Alexander Kang

Reflecting on a Meeting

Just yesterday, two of my good friends and I met and had our weekly discussion regarding theatre and film. The discussion kept me thinking ceaselessly even after its end and I had to write this down, for I now realize that I simply do not agree on one of the statements that came up – or perhaps I have not come to re-cognize it yet.

The discussion was based on the issue of point of view. *How can we judge which art is good and which art is bad when we are so driven by our own biased points of view?* This question was tackled by one of my friends. She used two color pens to illustrate her thought – blue one and a red one. She said, “one might look at a blue pen and say that it is actually black. However, because majority of us consider that pen to be blue, it would be nothing but self-satisfying statement for that person to push that a ‘blue’ pen is black.” Applying her illustration to cinema, she continued and said that “art filmmakers” are like that person who claims and pushes his biased point of view that a “blue pen” is black, and that filmmakers are obligated to create films that emotionally connect most of their audience through the manifestation of something innate.

After thinking over (but I already knew, just needed time to re-cognize), I must say I completely disagree on such point. First, there is no such thing as “art film.” Such label is a manufactured label to distinguish films that seem to be different compared to those that are common. The term “art film” exists because the art of cinema has become intensely commercialized and those who invest a lot of money on film need to weed out styles that are “threatening” to the convention that is guaranteed to generate profit. An “art film” is as artful as a “commercial film,” and similarly an “art film” is as shitty as a “commercial film” – for all films are art. Every film is art as every theatre play is art as every painting, sculpture, poetry, novel, etc. is art. We don't separate painting into “commercial painting” and “art painting” because we know very well that every painting is art. Do we separate theatre into “commercial theatre” and “art theatre”? Is Broadway “less artistic” than Butoh? Theatre has so many different forms and they are all art. So why must we divide film into such black and white categorization?

Second, if an artist believes that a “blue pen” is black, then he is obligated, through his art, to manifest his belief. An artist should not compromise and say that a “blue pen” is blue for the sake of his audience even though he does not believe so. *Artists do not work for their audience.* It must be accepted that to be an artist is to be selfish and arrogant. But we are all already arrogant, so what's the difference? Difference? *Trying* not to be arrogant by *trying* to create something comfortable for most people is even more arrogant than simply being arrogant. Artists should not try to make art. Art should just come, and it does. We all have experience in doing something without thinking – writing, acting, singing, etc. That's art. Don't think. Just do. What do you want at this very moment? Act. Move. Where is your drive? Thinking about what *kind* of art to make – *that's* looking for self-satisfaction.

Artists have to push their singular vision. A work of art is inevitably driven by a single point of view. If an artist wants to contain more than one point of view in his art,

then not only his art loses style but also he is being greedy. If you re-cognize something and you want to manifest it, then do so as you please. Do not feel obligated to comfort everyone by satisfying the audience's expectation regarding your art. Your art? Art is a thing in itself – your intentions and your biographical past are useless after your art has been produced.

If we keep on making works of art that are comforting to the audience, then we are perpetuating the collective singular point of view on how art and nature should behave. This is why advertisements work and capitalism is the dominant ideology. Advertisements live off of our comfort. They are first comforting to watch, and make us realize that the comfort that they portray are obtained due to the product that they are selling. If there is any obligation to be taken by artists, it is to produce works of art that are *not* comforting. Works of art that are *not* comforting take us out of our structural order of comfort that we use daily to construct our collective ideology. Language is unreliable, for it is nothing but structural logic placed to structurally categorize nature. Only art has the power to break down structure and for a very brief moment give our spirits back to nature until they return to structure of our society. Didn't we all agree one day that we prefer tragedy over other modes of storytelling? Are tragedies ever comforting?

A work of art does not have to satisfy the majority. Say, there are ten audience members who have just finished watching three different films by three different filmmakers. First film satisfied only three audience members; second satisfied four; and the third one also satisfied three. None of them satisfied the majority, but *together* they satisfied ten audience members. Works of art gain momentum and disseminate little by little, and together they form a community. A work of art cannot satisfy all of its audience. If an artist tries to satisfy the "majority" of his audience, then he is not only compromising his vision but also being arrogant. Works of art belong to a community, and such creative collective community satisfies all.

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