

Poetry is humanity

Let's imagine a society without poetry or any art. Maybe not so far away from the one we're heading towards... Everything would have to be immediately useful (=bankable), everything would have to be predictable (=order) everything would have to have as little meaning as possible. What is most human in humans would disappear. And humans would become nothing more than bipeds, some animals like others. Relationships to time would change (even if it has already changed a lot): time would be money. Which is very much below the value of time and its complexity.

During the conference “Les mardis de la Fondation” March 17, 1987, French philosopher Gilles Deleuze explained that our societies were not disciplinary societies anymore but began to become controlling societies. Here we are now! And communication is the weapon which is used to control us. It is a very inner control. What is targeted is nothing less than our intimacy. Social networks not only exhibit and sell our private lives but, and it is even more dangerous and pernicious, have changed our very intimate and complex relationship to language. What is done to and by language is simultaneously a destruction of complexity and a proliferation of information.

Poetry resists two opposite tendencies: simplification and complication. How? by being complex! Which means making living relationships between things, words, people, places and so on. The polysemy of art involves freedom. There is no last word, no unique way to read. Not only because of tolerance (which is not so bad) but because language always escapes, because language made and has been making us. And has no one being its master.

Poetry is in the world. But it needs human hearts and souls to be seen and sung. Poetry is the human ability of perceiving and sharing the beautiful fragility of the living. Poetry is what tries to touch and share something of the truth of our vulnerable human condition. And poetry exists because human women and men, sensitive to beauty and truth, have the desire to try to catch and render it into words so that other human women and men can also partake in it even if they do not see it, savour it even if they are far away from it. That is why poetry definitely has to do with a play between presence and absence whereas communication, like animal codes, only focuses on presence. But a code is not a language. Code is useful. Language is invocatory. Code is pragmatic. Language is poetic.

For this reason, poetry needs poets, and the role of poets could precisely be to have no role, to escape any kind of functionalization. And this is one of the difficulties of this question: the role of -because one is supposed to want to be useful or, at least, to look for a meaning for one's life. Maybe the poet is the one who frees us from this obligation of being meaningful. Maybe the poet is the one who makes room for desire, for emptiness. Maybe poets are those who prefer life to identity because life definitely needs alterity. Because life is alterity.

So why do we still write whereas the world turns without us? Why do we still write in a digital world, in a neoliberal world? Because artists do not want the world to turn! François Tosquelles, a Catalan psychoanalyst, used to say: “if something works, stop it!”. Why? Because as soon as something works it risks becoming mechanical. And humanity, I mean what makes us human and not just bipeds, is dysfunctional and unmechanical.

Writing poetry, or creating art works (paintings, music, sculpture, movies, etc) keeps the world open, opens a space, an in-between. To me, poetry is this in-between. Poetry is what always must invent itself. Creation is creation, not reproduction. Animals reproduce. We, humans, make love. We, humans, have to create ourselves each moment of our life.

It's not just a question of beauty (maybe not at all a question of beauty): it's a question of truth and humanity. There is something of being a human which invents itself each time a human creates something. That's why the endeavor to write, paint and the process of creation are much more important than the result. Paintings can be sold. Sculptures can be part of a market. Music can be a trade. Movies can make money. But creation is something that is not sellable because nobody can catch it during its emergence. And when the artwork is done, creation has gone.

But, if you manage to keep a very tiny part of life between two pages, then you have won a very tiny but crucial battle not only against death but also against all that destroys our humanity, dignity, and happiness. After all, the only thing we are alive for is to be alive.

Maybe, I would say that poetry is the silent part of language, a silent part that nevertheless achieves to be shared a little. Poetry changes the unspeakable into the ineffable which means from something closed to an infinite. Poetry is the play between absence and presence that language offers to humans and that humans give back, as a ritual gift, to language.

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