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Art, like everything, is a question of method: not so much in the sense of preparing to get down to work, but rather in the sense of deciding upon an ultimate purpose that, in the case of Juan Castillo, is an attempt to understand something that art theory only takes into consideration every so often, precisely because it is better not to bring these matters up because, after all, who knows what they might lead to.

Every time you turn to theory to answer the question *what is art?*, the response always seems to wind down the path of whatever tangent that works best at the time, almost certainly whatever trend happens to be in vogue when the question is posed, and this, in turn, leaves you as unsatisfied as the next answer you will hear, some time later, the next time the question is posed, with the same desire to create order out of the series of objects, behaviors, constructions, processes or places with which art today surrounds us, so that we may understand art to be no more than the intruder invited into our life so that it may change, so that it may stop being what it is and become something else: it is the intruder that changes your connection to what is real, the intruder that pushes you to abandon your various forms of inertia so that you may embark upon others. This thought expressed in this way is more or less like saying nothing at all, but of course, I am playing with the idea of theory as something that always possesses a remarkable dose of elevation and a total lack of commitment to its object of study, because if there is anything I have learned after all my years of formal education it is that knowledge serves for little more than frightening people, for it has never helped me to understand anything in the world around me—to figure anything out at all I have had to take advantage of the resources that I am afforded by the days I live through every step I take as I walk through the city streets.

Yes, I continue to see the city as that hostile territory where everything manages to survive through processes of linguistic interchange (acknowledging, however, that language is more than just verbal in nature), among which bar conversations stand out as notable examples.

This is because I regard the work of Juan Castillo, renowned conversationalist, as the child of a table well-stocked with drink to which drops and notes of trust with the interlocutor are added in order to extract everything from him that he would never tell his primary care doctor. I see him as the ultimate naturalist, and if Zola replaced the occurrences of the word “doctor” with the word “writer” in the method employed by Dr. Claude Bertrand, in terms of Castillo I would replace the words “doctor’s office,” “surgery,” or “studio” with “streets,” “bars,” and “avenues,” which are the places where things happen and happen to happen, and where you can ask life what the hell it has to do with art, if art is out there wandering around or if it’s hidden away somewhere in the palaces of the official establishment.

The matter is a very simple one, or not: art wants to know what art is, given that from outside nobody has solved the puzzle. In other words, seeing as how theorists love to draw attention to themselves with their usual communicative lassitude through an endless string of sentences that are more or less correct from a grammatical point of

view (in what the logicians would term 'well formed sentences'), why can't they manage to explain what exactly art is, and why can't we make head or tail of anything after reading their meticulous and well-intentioned investigations of the matter? Why, after having been read, do they fail to come even close to the reality of art? Why are their responses always so far away and the objectives that their studies dictate even further removed from the terrain that the man on the street pounds beneath his feet? There are many answers that can fit these questions, but Castillo, tired of all the less-than-satisfactory responses to these matters, embarks upon his own method of investigation and goes down to the street –and not the street in an abstract sense, but rather as many real streets as possible so that he can talk to the populace and let the people give him some kind of idea as to the meaning of that thing that just might be Juan Castillo searches for: art.

His method, in and of itself, is absurd since he will never be able to make contact with all the interlocutors out there, but of course, it wasn't until later that I came to understand this—in reality it is not the exact definition of art that he is after, but rather the reflection that the mere mention of the word effects upon the various people he questions, something that I truly came to understand after witnessing the parade of interviews quite rigorously documented in a series of investigations that have no canonical pretensions –which would not be possible, for going off in search of the definition by extension of all possible cases is an effort that is doomed to fail from the outset.

It took me some time to get there, but I finally realized that what Castillo searches for is the infectious enthusiasm that is produced when we watch other people speak, without hangups, about what they think art might be, because anyone can respond to such a serious question. I would like to remind the reader that the treatise writers who take on this topic do so with a great deal of caution and even more pages that they use to justify their lack of knowledge about this matter, the mention of which tends to make a person feel painted into a corner, not so much because one has read so much about it but because the question always sounds like a rather difficult one—though Castillo in this case employs the trick of freeing us from all responsibility by asking 'What is art for you?', for when the question is presented in this way one feels absolved from the need to pontificate, and the investigation is sustained in accordance with the terms that Castillo has very aptly established, and which are brought to us via conversations in bars and on the street (the very same terms that a hot shot avant-garde researcher will use to refute the responses even though, after all, aren't we trying to come closer to the art that fills our lives, because if life is not in bars or on the street, I can hardly imagine it being present in the doctor's offices and surgeries where one is greeted by people in white robes, for in those places all I see is the intimation of death).

It took me a while to understand that the goal was the transmission of enthusiasm through a kind of bastard knowledge, an infiltration into the territory of theoretical investigation from the perspective of a more streetwise kind of knowledge because I believed, from the point of view of my phobia for the academic processes of researching reality, that Castillo's stance was a method of wandering the streets to

solve the dilemma of the question that nobody was answering. For a long time I was much more interested in the interview process than in the exhibition of its results, and only when I stopped focusing my attention on the succession of interviews, on the endless number of interviewees that Juan gives the opportunity to express themselves, did I finally realize that the truly important thing about all this was the synthesis of the entire process of research, conducted in the form of a documentary projected upon the very same streets in which the interviewees walk around. In other words, that was the moment when I finally understood that the true goal of all this was to bring things that are said on the street back to the street, and that was when I finally saw that the first and last objective of the entire process was the infectiousness of the enthusiasm that draws you in through linguistic proximity and familiarity.

If the person answering these questions walks down the same streets as you, or drinks in the same bars where you are served, then that person speaks the same argot that you do, and almost certainly has a life similar to your own, since cities have us compartmentalized by areas and residents of a particular area are much more similar to one another than we realize, and thus the modes of expression and the references employed will be much more familiar than the lessons handed down by the avant-garde researcher because you recognize the words, you understand them almost like the back of your own hand, and you even respond in the same way some of the time, and then there is the matter of recognizing faces, because knowing who is talking to you helps to understand and sympathize with whatever is being said, all of those things serve to facilitate and, maybe, achieve that infectiousness. In any event what most certainly occurs is that the cumbersome question for which nobody has an answer suddenly becomes quite easy to answer, it is a question for which anyone at all can and does come up with answers and solutions, one that takes the question about what is art and brings it down in the most radical way from the palaces of the official establishment to the streets—no longer is it a matter of an interminable, footnote-filled treatise but rather a typical occurrence with which everyone has both everyday experiences and words with which to speak of it, precisely because of its quotidian nature, and as such it no longer has to be seen as something special and only possible at certain hours of the day and in certain, tailor-made places, because many people have it at home, or know where to go out in search of it, as is revealed by the familiarity with which people use it in their vocabulary, far removed from the palaces of the official establishment (of research on art and its exhibition).

I began this essay by stating that art is a question of method, at least in the case of Castillo, and in the time that has transpired as I have ambled through the work of the artist in question, I have managed –to my own amazement- to prove that Castillo's method is not intended to figure out what art is, something that through personal experience he knows plenty about, nor is his purpose even that of bringing us, through the accumulation of all those responses, the knowledge of what art is for other people; rather, his method consists of extracting the enthusiasm that is found on the street and in bars, and bringing it back to those same places on the days that it seems most far removed. Most certainly, the series of documentary projections about the simple answers to the question of what art is, brought to the very same streets that illuminate it, represents the effort to bring an infectious enthusiasm to the streets that remain

beyond the walls of the palaces of the official establishment and through which art, like life, passes by at every hour of the day and night.