

ARTIST AS SACRIFICE

You have to expose yourself before you know what it is you are exposing. You might not like what you find out about yourself or what others see. But what matters is that they do see. If your attention is on your own fear of what is inside you as opposed to a genuine wave of responses to what is outside of you, no one ever sees who you actually are. And that is a spiritual death before the physical one. And when people see who you are, they might see the potential for a prophet king or potential for a complete monster. Or something in between... what does it matter? Now you know. And now you have information to act on. As opposed to going through life with this vague grasp of what it means to be alive, or worse, being exposed for something or someone terrible before you had the means to control the impulses that could lead to actions which cause harm.

Aristotle thought that the purpose of drama was to allow the audience to purge its uncivilized impulses so that the harmonious state may remain unthreatened by them. In a way, an artist is meant to keep everyone from eating each other. The audience can experience the work... laugh, gasp, cry, whatever it is... and afterwards take a quick glimpse into the mirror before heading off to bed a bit more aware of their true nature. And that they and the rest of the world are a little safer from it, and all it took was the price of admission or the forms they had to fill out for their library card. And the benefit is achieved when no one else had to see who they were except themselves. They don't realize this is what is happening but it is what happens by virtue of their being entertained. That is their prerogative as the audience.

But the artist has no mirror. There is nothing out there to tell them who they are before everyone else can see it. But everyone else must see it if the artist is to be of any service. An artist is a sacrifice.

All you're risking is a little bit of embarrassment.

No one is going to cut your head off. Not yet anyway. So don't be so humble, you're not that important. But you are necessary... and if artists stop doing what they do, and doing it honestly, for long enough that they suddenly become "important," that's when we're all in real trouble. Because the sacrifice holds status with the gods, and not with the living. And "importance" is about holding status with the living. Necessity is about holding status with the gods.

We can, and must, aim to place ourselves at the center of events. Aim to be seen. Half our work is about removing barriers between us and our audience. And that entails some imperfect decisions. But it's not our business to line up for medals or awards or grants or a place at the shiny institution. All that stuff is important. It is not necessary. It has no status among the gods. And if we find ourselves to be a generation aiming to be important as opposed to necessary we're going to start seeing a whole lot of our contemporaries cannibalize one another. We might already be seeing it. And when we do see it we'll know all that blood is on our hands. Because we were so greedy for our own blood. That blood that was meant as sacrifice to the gods.

And now the gods are angry.

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