

## **Prologue**

Metring is the script of a film that is not filmed. **It is seen.**

Metring is the script of a film that is not projected. **It is remembered.**

Metring is the script of a film **for one spectator.**

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# Looking for Intimacy

## A Polish Pianist

It began in 1991. My school had invited a Polish pianist to give a “didactic” recital. All students were required to attend and to write an essay describing their impressions. The essay could be no more than two pages, drawings were not permitted; you could not eat during the recital. The event generated great excitement among students; no one had ever been to a recital and most were very curious about it. I was nine years old and hated novelty. I did not want to miss my math class. Plus, I didn’t understand what kind of an “essay” could come out from hearing a recital.

But there I had no choice. At that age (and also many other ages) one does as told if one doesn’t want any trouble. They sat us in the second row, where I waited, dreading the entrance of Piotr (that was our star’s name). Sometimes, I still wish that he had never entered.

Back to the concert: it was a perfect program for the occasion. Basic “hits” of Bach, Beethoven, Mozart and Chopin, little lectures between pieces, and a repertory of gestures that dazzled the grateful audience. “The music invaded us,” in the words of the goody-two-shoes of the class.

## The Invasion

And she was right. From that day I traded my science books for records, my collection of inventions for antique metronomes, my Newton poster for Beethoven and my calculus classes for music lessons. Music had visited me and I had succumbed to her charms. A common story, a typical story that would not have opened this narrative if it did not have something more to offer.

Back to the concert, invasions never happen alone, and that day was no exception. The Pole awakened an illusion that the class refutes, an unconscious refutation, yes, but strong enough to change a life. A refutation I was unable to understand at the time, but which I now recognize as the cause of my artistic anguish and the driving force of Metring.

### **The Essay**

It was perfectly natural, the students would write a brief essay describing what they had felt during the recital: a general description of the experience. Obviously, I felt very differently about the essay assignment after the recital than I had before, I was thrilled by the challenge. I went home and spent nearly two hours trying to describe my particular revelation. I slept very little that night. I was nervous and impatient to talk about my first important artistic experience.

The day dawned strange. One of those days that is not yours, one of those days in which you feel even less transcendent than usual. My walk to school was not what I had anticipated and all my enthusiasm was gone before I entered the classroom. Without knowing, I was preparing to face the enemy, a familiar enemy whom I was yet unable to identify: everybody else.

Many believe that maturity begins at the moment when a child becomes aware of his social self, in the moment that he understands he is part of a whole and learns to coexist with his surroundings. Perhaps it is true, but maturing was never a priority for me; I was always careful to protect my childhood obsessions.

Our teacher complimented us on our behaviour during the recital and we moved on to the essay reading. From this point on the story is quite normal, but my reaction is not. That is, what could have been a step toward maturity became the first clash in a battle that would not end: the beginning of one of those trips everyone advises against.

It was not hard to understand why this day was different than the day before, why I felt tiny in a world that no longer belonged to me. I was about to undergo the worst possible invasion, an invasion that had nothing to do with what the teacher's pet was describing.

Her opinion mercilessly drilled my ears. What had happened? My classmates were not talking about the same concert, they were not talking in any way about what I had heard, not about the same pieces. It was as if they had been somewhere else, someplace where everything sounded hollow, a world where words were grouped without meaning. What was wrong? I had lived for ten years in society, I had friends, and I was not a difficult child. Why could I not bear these words now? Why did they wound me this way?

The answer was a long time in coming. It isn't easy to answer a question that you do not understand and solve a problem you can't see.

### **Asking Silly Questions**

They say time heals all wounds, but there are some that refuse to close. Years passed and the spectre grew. My musical vocation developed among doubts and fears, always in the company of unknown. The problem came and went, but the symptoms were consistent. Any shared artistic experience was a cause for terror and suffering. A strange claustrophobia invaded every piece I listened to, every book I read and every painting I saw. Art abused me and I was too weak to fight back.

When I turned seventeen, my parents recommended that I go talk to a psychologist. It was an uncommon thing to do in our milieu, but I accepted, being aware that my situation was not a happy one. The first sessions were a routine: self-esteem testing, questions about family life, about my ambitions, about my fears.

“I can’t find the problem,” the doctor said.

My mind was healthy. There was no evidence of pathologic or mental illnesses. The problem was something else, something more hidden, so we decided to dig deeper until we found it. The strategy was to identify everything that hurt me and figure out how they were related. We would try to isolate the symptoms and study them. I knew nothing about psychology, but this seemed like a fair strategy.

The first step was to catalogue my sensations in response to a work of art. The resulting list was evocative, tragic and incoherent. This was not very peculiar, given that a work of art does, or should provoke various and contradictory responses.

The next step was to figure out the role of other people in my relationship with art. We analyzed my friendships from a peculiar vantage, creating a “ranking” of them. We classified the people in my life by asking, “With whom would you share a work of art?” We looked for correspondences. It was not long before the list led us to the key to the origin of the problem. The names that stood out had something in common: they were people of few words.

Seven years after the piano recital, my memory rescued an episode obscured by pain and fear, a memory that I had never understood and had buried almost beyond retrieval. “The Pole,” I shouted. The doctor’s face lit up, he knew I had said something important. “Please elaborate.”

I told him. I told him as I had never told anything, without shame, with a calm that came from not fearing being judged, with the feeling that I was doing the right thing. The story sounded strange in the telling; a mixture of equal parts of insight and childish foolishness. The doctor said nothing until I had finished.

“We have found the source, but there is a lot of work left to do.” I needed to figure out why I had felt that invasion and how I protected myself against it.

“What do you remember of the concert?” He asked. It was easy to describe my first musical experience, probably the purest artistic experience I had ever had.

“Freedom and a great feeling of power: power in the sense of individual self-awareness, emotional power, a space in which I felt more transcendent.” Exhilarated as never before, I vomited felt words on that man, the words of the essay I had never been able to read aloud.

“Why do you think all that left you?” He asked. That was a much more difficult question. In its answer was the solution, but I had a long way left before I would find it. “I don’t know.”

The doctor concluded that I had a type of “artistic claustrophobia.” It was an unusual manifestation of claustrophobia, but possible. We needed to define the parameters of the space that oppressed me.

“What bothered you about your classmates’ opinions?”

“Nothing, it was the fact that they had any opinions at all: they invaded my intimacy.”

“But the recital was public. The Pole did not only play for you. Why couldn’t people talk about it?”

I was seventeen and I began to feel ridiculous. His questions were logical and I could not answer them. The doctor looked at me with tenderness, as one might watch a chick breaking through its shell. I did not answer; I could not betray what my anguish did not understand, nor could I defy my common sense.

“Until next week, then,” I said, knowing that I would never see the doctor again.

# Instructions

**Place:** Madrid Metro (subway).

**Length:** 90 minutes.

The time must be measured with a stopwatch equipped with an alarm.

The spectator has freedom of frames when changing train lines (odd bars) and obligatory frames during the trips (even bars).

Key:

**Plano** (Visual frame):

General: From the far front of the first wagon, the spectator will maintain a general view of the interior of the wagon.

Puerta (Door): The scene unfolds at one of the doors. The spectator must decide which door and maintain it within the frame. The position is unspecified.

Barra (Support bar): The spectator will choose one bar and will maintain it within the frame.

Suelo (Floor): The film is on the floor. The spectator must not raise his/her gaze. The position is unspecified.

Pared (Wall): From the far front of the first wagon, the spectator will look at the wall, with his/her back to the wagon.

For the General and Wall frames, the spectator must position him/herself and the beginning of the walkway.

**Numero de paradas** (number of stops): Specifies the number of stops to travel.

**Linea / direccion** (Line / direction): Specifies which line and in what direction the spectator must travel.

**Transbordos** (Line changes): Specifies where there is a change of subway lines.

***About interpretation:***

Metring must be understood from memory. The spectator is permitted to reread the script only during the line changes (I advise against rereading it too much). The frames should be maintained as rigorously as possible, since it is in the frames that the film comes to life. Freedom of frames does not mean freedom of action; the changes of line have one end: to reach the next walkway. The film begins at the turnstile of Gran Via and ends when the alarm sounds. The spectator then leaves the Metro.