

About the uses of art as a medium for human growth.

Part I

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Abstract

In this paper, divided in three parts, we will show how art has been used as a tool for adaptation in human development and also for human growth and interaction with the world and other people.

In a second part we will show how artists have used the process of art for social purposes and personal relief and how the artistic process can be used as a medium for social interaction.

In a third part we will show how art processes can enable facilitators, artists and art therapists to improve psychosocial conditions for migrants, offering them tools for observation and assessment.

Keywords

Art. Growth. Human development. Migrants. Social inclusion.

1. Toward a diagnosis of Art in Education

One of the basic aspects that have emerged from the discussions taken in recent years on art education has been the return to the fundamentals of education and art, rethinking the answers to the following questions concerning areas of an ontological and epistemological character:

what is art?

what is art for?

why art is practiced, in every country, in every period?

what is the relationship art- life?

What is the relationship art –education?

who is an artist, why and what for?

Each of these questions would cover several pages of reflections, and would probably help clarify some of the ramblings of this field. It seems useful to approach two fundamental lines:

one that includes the followers who have opted, within some trends closer to art as a language, for visual education as a tool to analyze reality, in some cases close to visual culture,

and that the line closer to art as creation, metaphor and expression of the reality of the creator, which goes back to some ideas of education as expression or as self-expression.

Many of the studies that have been developed in both of these fields have to do with both positions. These two trends can be clearly detected in any of the recent international conferences that have taken place: in INSEA, the predominance of the analysis and visual impact of reality, and the UNESCO, with a more humanist tendency, that underlies the emphasis on the capacity for transformation and innovation of art, in its innovative and regenerative capabilities.

However, without resigning to this need of critical observation of the culture inherent to

Art education, and starting from the knowledge of the emerging field that is art as transformation and therapy, there is something really specific in Art i.e., the ability to bring into play, beyond space and time, and through the operations of the creative psyche, new ways of seeing. These operations work on us as an act of transformation of us, of the perspective we have on the world, on others and our relation to them.

As Rudolf Arnheim says: "Art is the quality which state the difference between being mere spectators or do things and be affected by them, touched by them, as amended by the forces inherent in everything that we give or receive" (Arnheim, 1980).

2. The values of Art.

Art, creation, music, dance and theatre remain, regardless of educational systems to support or eliminate them. Societies, whether encouraged or educated or not, continue to produce art, and individuals, since they are beginning to first see their mark on the ground, their shadow on the wall, their bodies in space, begin to be creators, dreaming of possible and impossible futures or inventing strategies of resistance to their present.

All aspects that we noted below are evident for persons like us who dedicate ourselves to creation and education through art, but usually they need to be explained to the majority of professionals of other areas of Education who do not see in creation, in many cases, more than a trivial entertainment which does not provide competences or skills for the future life and work.

2.1. Relation with objective reality

Reality is rarely observed for so long as when we are drawing it. The sketch made with pen, pencil or any material enables to put attention to detail and requires attention, detailed observation, and a slow and delicate treatment of reality.

Drawing involves listening to the environment, knowing its rules, acknowledging them,

understanding its structures and sharing them through the actions of hand and fingers. Reality, through a process of respectful and careful observation, impinges upon us, through our eyes and our body, our memory and our cognition.

All memories assimilated and accommodated about reality emerge and are reactualized; the learned schemas combine or fade with this reality that unique reality, in space and time, in front of our eyes. As the writer John Berger said, after having drawn a meadow, this never returns to be the same for the creator: it becomes part of a life experience, of knowledge and attention. Drawing from nature, is an act of knowledge and respect for reality.

2. 2. Relation with subjective reality

On the other hand, to draw a fact or an experience is to make appear, from inside our body, traits that bear testimony to it. To draw is to give shape to a fact that has become an experience within us. To draw a past experience, rooted in our memory, is an act of evocation and reincarnation, and at the same time, an externalisation of the past and a well-being because we have the product in front of our eyes, and we are able, somehow, to see it again.

Watching the result of our memory, our past perception and of our emotions is somehow to understand the experience, to understand ourselves, to understand ourselves within it. It involves an ability of making a humble mixture of synthesis and forgiveness, of reconciliation with ourselves and our lives.

Children's drawings during the Spanish Civil War, serve, among many other things, to let out the blow that reality had forced on them to assume. To throw it out, slowly and under their own personal styles suppose to give an order to the disorder of life, trauma, separation and loss. The fact of doing it again on a sheet, by a hand/mind that recalls, fits and orders in a new space, adding and/or deleting, helps to give meaning to the past, to see it outside, to share it, to watch it again and to be able, finally, to live with it, to forgive it and forgive adults.

2. 3. Tolerance and enjoyment of ambiguity

Art, poetry, theatre, are the spaces of paradox. Having being educated to live and act coherently, without cracks and contradictions, art opens avenues where everything and anything is possible at the same time, where the contradictory feelings are harmonized or are allowed to live together at their extremes.

Art allows for the expression of the being that wakefulness prevents, the incomprehensible unfathomable pain, the feeling of fullness and nonsense at the same time. Art allows for the contradiction and the paradox, the excess, and makes possible human being's self-comprehension.

The space of creation allows hate and forgiveness, rage and grief, the understanding, in short, of our passions. Art space is a symbolic place, where life tries again and again, and allows testing the pleasure and pain in a safe space. It allows from creation as well as from contemplation, forgetting the certainties, inquiring into polysemy of images and strokes, venturing meanings which can be at the same time, diverse, and in addition, never known as definitive. Art, creation, does not offer definitive meanings and therefore it makes us to get used to doubt and more important, to enjoy the ambiguity that produces not knowing for sure, what we are doing, what we are seeing.

In a society of closed meanings, art is a space where the limitations of a closed life get open, unfolding in a multitude of possible meanings. That is therefore a symbolic field where the possible, open and ambiguous a constant and a vital feature.

2. 4. The body

Art renovates the space of playing. In it, our body, our hand flows trying to adapt to the environment, trusting and establishing a dialogue among us, space and others. From the theorists of the drama in school we can point out how through the main games, personal game and projective game, boys and girls vested his body or what they projected onto society, in culture.

Through the personal game, children transformed their body into airplanes, superheroes, monstrous, small animals, or machines that sail the space of their home and their

neighbourhood, now transformed into universe, in cave or in unexplored space. The movement whereby the body runs, stops, collects, opens, displays..., involves all modes of being in the world, with the pleasure and the risk that this implies. See how children play in an autumnal Park, with the fallen leaves, watch them leaving the senses of the smells of dry leaves, to the sounds of their crackling, to the dances of their legs and hands, their body away, collecting, piling, by throwing their selves on the ground... is participate of a multitude of symbolic movements that bind them with life and its processes.

Pedagogy of Reggio Emilia, developed by Loris Malaguzzi, immediately recognized the importance of the body of the child in the education for life, providing the time and space to experiment in it, all latent possibilities. La danza, como el teatro, convoca nuestro cuerpo en el espacio transformando en relación todos nuestros movimientos. Dance, like theater, recalls our body in space transforming all our movements in relationship. Jerome Bruner, when he visited schools in Reggio Emilia described as "a special kind of place, in which the young human beings are invited to grow in mind, sensitivity and belonging to a wider community". A space where the "mine, yours, ours," and the community as "a learning community where shared mind and sensitivity" is combined. A place to learn together in the real world, but also of the worlds of imagination. "It must be a place where the young woman and man discovers the use of the mind, imagination, materials and learn the power of working with all of this together" (quoted by Abbot, I., 14).

The projective play makes that our being projects to an object all our wishes or fears we want to express or fight against. The heuristic game of discovery and experimentation through objects makes that we project them all the necessities and characteristics that we wish/need. The object, built or found, ceases to be a lost object in the crowd to be what we want it to be: a cone becomes a Spyglass, an amplifier, a Horn, a weapon or a protection.

A ring is a wheel, a safe space, a Crown, a deadly weapon..., through the projective game we are indirectly, everything and nothing at the same time. The Visual Arts, heirs of the

projective play, invite us as well to be everything and nothing, to try possibilities in the safety of the creative space.

2. 5. Coping conflict. New adaptative strategies.

All anthropologists agree that the creation of instruments and tools by humans meant the possible survival of the human species in a hostile environment. The condition to make instruments is, first, imaging them. The creative process is a part, as we say in the previous heading, of the projective game: we are not only interested in what a stick in the ground is, or a natural fiber, or a stone, but what can be, what is for us.

The capacity of making strange the common, which involves creation, together with the ability to think on other uses, futures and options, makes us think that the imagination is not merely a place to escape from reality, but on the contrary, a necessity for survival and a highly adaptive need. If humans would not had imagined a safer and warmer world, they would have not created objects and environments that allowed it.

Since the fact of being born with unprotected feet, of walking barefoot and suffering pain after long walks by the Woods and sandstone, up to thinking about the idea of joining vegetable fibres to a surface where we can put the foot and make a shoe, not only plenty of decisions to exclude, include, or review have taken place, but, since the beginning, there has been present an imagination able to think about a foot without injury and able to connect elements which, in principle, had no apparent relation. This imagination requires attention, observation and willingness to change. And a creative action that made that possible through the transformation of a vegetable matter.

From the space made in a leaf that allows human being to drink, to containers of ceramic to store liquids, has taken place a knowledge and understanding with the matter, the mud. And there has been a process of natural observation which has developed the materialized idea, which from wet malleable matter can be transformed in dry and hard material through the fire. The art and science are connected.

Imagination connects present and future, check out the present, invents future. Creation adds possibility to the present, so that it becomes a real future. Psychologist Fernando Cembranos noted how creativity has a social dimension and how all people have invented ways of survival in difficult life situations. The ways in which different peoples have escaped from the disease and misery are examples of creative strategies, alternative ways of dealing with the harshness of life.

2. 6. Standing before the conflict

There is a type of creation linked with the repetition that has been criticized by the theory of creativity and the basics of the creation in modernity. However, the repetition is a constant in our life cycle and helps us to sustain ourselves in our continuous existence. From the identification by repetition of children, that make us adults to tell the same story with the same words over and over again, to repetitive chants that hold us or signs as rituals that anchor us in life, repetition is a motor that gives us a sense of safety.

The recovery of the homeostatic balance through ritual and repetition insert us in a safe time, and at the same time makes us to equilibrate a changing, fragmented and troubled reality. The rhythm, the patterned repetition gives the feeling of story, of continuity, that there is a thread of our live, and gives us direction and holds us.

Many of the stories about difficult and harsh circumstances tell us about how people through the repetition of names, numbers, exact memorizations, managed to glide to a stadium where it was possible to bear the unbearable. The art of the thread, through the fabric, the stitching or embroidery; the gestures of the Potter, of one that repeats an action in order to create something, compensates the external imbalance by imposing a pace and an order to life and offers as a result creation in front of destruction.

At the same time, the repetitive dances move to another state, another level of existence which helps to resist the life we are living. On the other hand, the art, through its ability to imagine future is capable of creating parallel lives, desires that compensate the lack of desire of everyday life. As Herbert Marcuse pointed out, art open us the eyes of our reality

because it indicates the possible existence of other much more interesting living.

Like the delirium of the mentally ill who argue an explanation to explain the inexplicable chaos in which they live, art has the ability to move to other bodies, other environments, other experiences. It is somehow the Aristotelian catharsis that offers us, for a time, the illusion of living another world that is worth living, or the passion of who did not live it ever,... or the pain of who has never suffered.

Art allows us to participate in emotions and feelings by pointing out ways to envision a future among the ruins or to withstand that present among the ruins. As the Celts bards with the rod of Cedar, making a circle around themselves, art allows the temporary suspension of the penalty, pain, sadness. Art helps the recovery of the soul, in case it exists.

2.7. Tolerance to frustration

Working with art materials confronts us to the qualities of matter and to our own limits. Used to a society based on consumption, where the acquisition implies immediate satisfaction, to address a dialogue and understanding with matter (be stone, wood, clay or any other) is to recognize not only the rules of the game, but our capacities, to adjust our rhythm to the rhythm of the matter and to know from the very beginning that this is a game where not only the human being makes the rules.

Facing our inability can be, at times, a great moment of humility in learning, and can make us know more about ourselves on how to tackle difficulties, limits, or our clumsiness. It can help us to raise new strategies, and, above all, to tolerate us as humans and give us time through patience.

2. 8. Learning how to chose

Very few activities offer us the possibility to choose so many times and in such a short time as artistic creation: material, support, technique, internal or external reality, how to translate it, when to start, stop, reflect, to terminate. These are all actions that depend on oneself if performed individually, or requiring the achievement of consensus continuously

if performed collectively. Learning to make decisions, is at the same time the need to take responsibility for the consequences of these decisions in the artistic project, and paradoxically, losing the fear of the consequences of our choices, having the chance to test them.

2.9. Learning to make mistakes.

Assuming the mistakes made in the symbolic and fertile space of creation, help us to recognize ourselves mortals, vulnerable and fragile. The ability to admit mistakes in this area helps to mitigate these errors, to minorize the severity of real life, and helps us to assume the "force for life" needed to correct them, and to correct us again and again. It makes us to separate the action and ourselves. Somehow the errors made on an artistic object helps us to separate ourselves from the errors and understand them as rectifiable. It helps to separate subject and object and at the same time, to see their ties and relations.

2. 10. Learning how to plan.

The sculptor and teacher Angel Ferrant wrote on the walls of his workshop in the *Auxiliary Association of the Child*, created in 1935 where he taught until it was closed in 1939:

"The work to be done here will be like a game.

You will succeed if you get done well what you proposed to do.

The reckless one who thinks that it is no necessary to reflect will lose or fail.

To win in this game you are interested in, you must know in advance the following:

1. What do you want to do.

2. What materials do you need to make it.

3. Before you make the artwork it is convenient to do the study with drawings, patterns or cuts of cardboard, which can help you to avoid possible mistakes.

In this workshop everyone can build what comes to mind.

Here there is no master, but anyone may ask whatever does not know

It is forbidden to destroy anything, unless you need to build something that's worth more than what it will be destroyed"

With few and wise words summarizes Ferrant a portion of the values of art. It implies the autonomy and responsibility of the child or the adult in the process of creating. And involves something very important: the ability to plan, to sketch, to try a thousand times, thinking to choose and taking responsibility for the own creation.

2. 11. Another conception of time.

The process of creating transforms the rhythms of the work, the kingdom of *homo faber*, makes them different. Creation, creative thinking implies not only active thought (*vita activa*) but also contemplative thought (*vita contemplativa*). Thinking solutions requires to feel alien to the process, to externalize the set, to see it again and these implicate a time of no action, out of the process, an incubation process in which humans allow themselves to be permeated by external and new elements.

Therefore the time of creation is different from the mechanical working time, imposed by a productive-oriented society. The creative process is an event, a transformative time, an action that links humans with themselves and with the medium, with the others, weaving past and present, present and future. It involves a suspended time where anything and everything happens simultaneously.

2.12. Another conception of space.

Creative space immerses us in a space out of everyday space. Art has the ability to mark, in the manner of the Celtic bards, as Robert Graves told in *the White Goddess*, a circle that leads us to a new type of relationship and transformation. Space becomes a potential space, as noted by Winnicott, full of possibilities, an area of security and freedom. Pedagogy of Reggio Emilia, commented before, focuses its attention on space as a place

where children are prepared for life: the game, central in childhood, inaugurates the creation and art.

2. 13. Another conception of the feeling.

A friend, after being operated of a cancer, pointed me out talking about the real possibility of death on one of the things that she suddenly was aware and that costs her to resign: the aesthetic contemplation. She told me how she had left a dance representation, full of tears, terrified and thinking that perhaps she may not be able to see that ever again. The sense of elevation, of transcendence of daily life, the feeling of being a participant of beauty are aspects that renews our ability to fly over on the petty, superfluous and banal and renews in us the hope that life is worth to live.

2. 14. Capacity of habituation.

As a result of all ideas mentioned above, art makes common the unexpected and on the other hand, art makes the unexpected common. To build a story of a painful fact is to learn how to integrate it into our lives, shredding to rebuild after it, new forms of coexistence. One of the basic psychological functions of the act of photographing is, without any doubt, trying to introject external reality, when it is often difficult to assimilate: make it ours to see it then, sieved and objetualized by our own vision.

2. 15. Capacity of de-habitation.

Similarly, art and its processes enable us to see reality with new eyes. Film director Nestor Almendros quoted that directors of photography should be always foreigners to the place where they should film, because that will provide them the vision of one who is able to appreciate the luminous nuances that a native wouldn't ever be able to do. The estrangement of the vision does recognize in the same sight, in the same landscape, different qualities, unpublished functions, unexpected possibilities.

This ability of de-habitation has been key in the adaptive capacity of human beings. Through it the human has seen a shoe in a natural fiber, an instrument in a piece of

branch, a home in the cavity of a rock. The artists are an example of this capacity of re-adaptation that however children are prone in their endless games with an object: in a few minutes a box goes from being a vehicle to a house or a building block.

This capability allows to tackle conflicts from diverse points of view when the olds are not possible anymore, and this not only re-starts a new relationship with the world, but renews the relationship with each other when old modes are exhausted and allows us to see, again, new qualities in ourselves and in others, which had been overlooked previously.

2. 16. Creating as a union of the individual and the common.

With the creation, we call upon the other human being. Contemplating a work of art, is participating in the privacy of its creator, through the aesthetic empathy. Indeed, the more intimate the process is, the greater call capacity involves in many cases. Artwork derived from devastating economic or political regimes, as the missing people in Spanish Civil War, Chile's or Argentina's dictatorships, have led to tremendous and very beautiful artworks that emerged from the pain of irreplaceable loss. These individual feelings call, at the same time, the common sense of loss, the share intimacy and the pain felt in solitude, again.

In turn, artistic expressions like theater, dance or music as mediums involving bodies and minds, imply the feeling of a common project, of responsibility and interdependence, ítems that have been lost as objectives in productive-oriented education. The ability to get involved when we are part of a theatrical, musical or dance project, involves the fact of knowing each other as part of the group and how is the group which sets the identity, against the prevailing individuality of our society and contemporary creation.

The artistic group teach us to be humble, to share the common project, in responsibility and accountability, and beyond that, in the experience and pleasure of the shared

process, the exhibition of a product made by a community towards the community. In all these processes we learn to recognize errors in front of others, to exchange critics, to support and sustain, to contain the group, and we learn how to let us be helped and how to maintain individual levels that form together a whole.

2. 17. *Creating is to bet for life.*

Creating binds us to the instincts of living, is *eros* betting for the vitality of the human being. Viktor Ullman, a musician killed in Auschwitz, who worked tirelessly with other creators in the ghetto of Terezin, noted that "the ability to create is similar to the ability to survive". Creating, in its broadest sense, is to bet for being in the world, with others, making this an event through the inclusion of the beautiful, which confers our existence, a hallmark of "something special", as Ellen Dissanayake quoted.

Recognizing oneself in the mirror every morning, combing, washing one's face is to renew the body every morning for something special, and all of these has to do with creation. Setting a table with a special tablecloth - previously embroidered with tenderness - placing cups of breakfast, bowls and spoons purchased with aesthetic intent, setting napkins,... are acts of everyday creation that renews every day life. At the opposite extreme, the abandonment of oneself, begins by abandoning the concept of aesthetic event.

Primo Levy and Liana Milu, both survivors of concentration camps, quoted recalling their stay in them, that it was easy to know the ones who had been dispossessed of the impulse of life, who had left *eros*: their figures decay, their scruffy appearance showed that they had ceased to opt for life, they were the *untermensch*, that left themselves close to death.

Creating summons us to life, to feel the life project, to make it walk. Creation involves body, cognition, emotion, in our individuality always crossed by others and the world. This complex network that is life, manifests itself through art renewing thoughts, affects and cultural and social trends.

Art is therefore an excellent way to deal with change, with the capability of rethinking identity, personal and interpersonal trends and new forms of comprehension of the World and human being. Artistic activity is part of growth, of human development. Artists have used this capability to symbolize, to think and feel the World and to imagine new worlds. Art is then an area of possibilities and freedom.

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