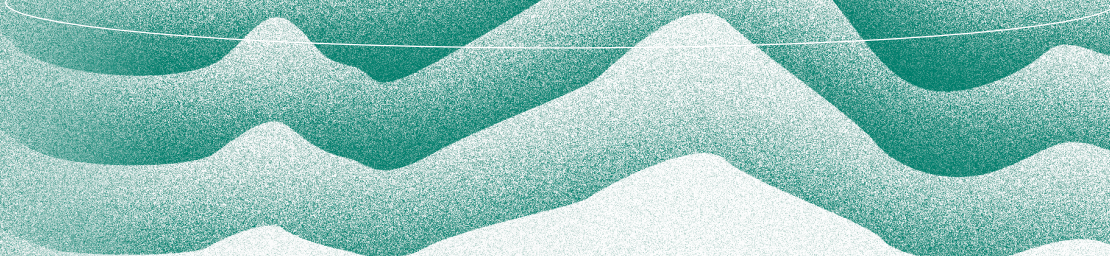




Horizons of Interest



**Adéla Machová
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(eds.)**





HORIZONS OF INTEREST

Edited by: Adéla Machová & Rosita Deluigi





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EDITORIAL PREFACE — POINTS TO THE HORIZONS OF INTEREST

Adéla Machová & Rosita Deluigi

“All our knowledge has its origin in our perceptions.”

Leonardo da Vinci¹

The monograph *Horizons of Interest* comprises the topics of visual literacy, approaches to education, and the mediation of art through a variety of perspectives. This publication is intended as theoretical material for a deeper understanding of visual imagination and art creation; an educational tool in an interdisciplinary field connected to the dialogue surrounding visuality. The second important connection is intercultural communication and deeper consideration of culture.

The texts presented in this publication put into context the educational aspects of art and culture, and the artistic approach to informal education as discovered during the international TICASS (Technologies of Imaging in Communication, Art and Social Sciences) throughout 2017 to 2021. This TICASS project involved interdisciplinary research, and prepared two platforms in the form of conferences for common dialogues about visuality and education approaches. The authors of the texts in this collection of monographs were a part of said conferences and discovered a common goal in the form of an interest in education in, and with, art.

The first international conference, titled “P.Art.icipA©tion: Education, Visual Languages and Intercultural Strategies”, covered topics including the mediation of art, learning processes, social communication, and multigenerational reading of art, urban space, and cultural identity. Attention was placed on tangible and intangible cultural heritage, with a focus on European and African contexts in connection with the interreligious dialogue.

After the first conference, which took place in Macerata (Italy, 2019), we felt the need to organise the second conference to focus on educational approaches and good practice with development of visual literacy. Widespread interest led to the online conference “Perspective – Educational Aspects of Technologies of

1

The Notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci. XIX Philosophical Maxims. Morals. Polemics and Speculations. Paragraph 1147. In: Richter, J. P., Richter, I. A., Bell, R. C. (eds.) (1939). *The literary works of Leonardo da Vinci.* New York: Oxford University Press.

Imaging in the Perspective of Visual Literacy” which was managed from the city of Ústí nad Labem (Czech Republic, 2020). The theoretical frame of this second conference was concerned with modes of visual communication, creative thinking and educational aspects focused on visual literacy. An open environment for sharing ideas was cultivated at both conferences, and here began the idea to prepare a monograph exploring the contemporary relationship between education and visual communication.

The authors of the texts herein work in the fields of arts, humanities and social studies, and reflect on the area of visual literacy, on education in connection with contemporary technologies, and on strategies of imaging. It offers a platform for sharing ideas, experience and skills in the fields of visual communication and intercultural dialogue.

The book presents several research paradigms which cross heterogeneous contexts and use multiple languages and methods of investigation in the fields of both art and education.

The dialogue between the authors foresees a continuous interchange between the theoretical dimension and a plurality of practices in specific areas of interest of art education and visual communication. In this way, the research field becomes a critical horizon in which reflections are developed and projects are aimed at promoting participation.

The interdisciplinarity of the texts allows the addressing of intercultural issues supporting the idea of being an active part of the interpretation of artistic languages. The possibility of declining numerous narratives through communicative mediators becomes concrete in community places (such as museums, schools, territories, research institutions, etc.) where different identities enter into relationships and build creative dialogues.

EDUCATIONAL ICONOGRAPHY: A FIELD OF RESEARCH

Roberto Farné

“Educational iconography” refers to the study and interpretation of figurative repertoires in different media relating to school and other forms of education. These are repertoires of images aiming to communicate information and cultural content, or aiming to facilitate the learning of certain knowledge, make a historical topic and scientific concepts interesting, or – more simply – show and recognise something in order to name and describe it (Farné 2002). Last but not least, they represent the theme of a board game. Some historical points of reference define the profile of this topic. The *first* refers to the progressive legitimization of the use of images in early Christianity; only after the Council of Nicaea in 787 were images officially accepted as an instrument of catechesis addressed to illiterate people. “Bibliae pauperum” (fig. 1a, 1b, 1c) the great iconographic works with paintings and bas-reliefs in cathedrals, bear witness to this.

The *second* aspect is that the circulation of iconographic repertoires increased with the development of printing techniques, aiming to disseminate scientific knowledge (non-fiction) and illustrate stories and tales (fiction). Modern pedagogic theories promoted the birth of a “market” dedicated to children: images for play, abecedaries, illustrated books, trading cards, etc (fig. 2a, 2b).

The *third* historical point of reference concerns the school; starting from the 17th century, when Comenius published *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (1658, fig. 3a, 3b) the first illustrated schoolbook for children, we can speak of educational word-image synergy. Images were to become formidable didactic catalysts, for those disciplinary fields predisposed for visual repertoires. From the invention of printing onwards, every new communication technology was to be pedagogically stressed to express its educational potential.

Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) was the first to perform a rigorous critical analysis of the cultural and pedagogic value of children’s books, books that he collected and preserved with all the care of a collector. An observer and attentive critic of children’s culture, able to treat a toy or an abecedary with the same philological rigour he used to review a literary or theatrical work, Benjamin expressed a sophisticated and meticulous skill in analysing materials ignored by official pedagogy. In his analyses, Benjamin created associations and references between apparently distant fields (for example, the relationship between *Biedermeier* aesthetics and illustrations for children), and combined the recovery of an evocative childhood memory with the categories of a severe critique.

Starting with Comenius

Before his time, books and illustrations for children, toys, performances, and everything related specifically to childhood was viewed with general indifference by the adult world, willing to indulge children’s playful pleasure, their need to “look at pictures” but without considering the material culture that fuelled these

experiences as part of an important educational process. Benjamin realised that those books and their pictures had a much stronger impact on children than any other book they would read subsequently, because they contributed to their learning and their vision of the world. First and foremost, it is the children who are aware of this, because, as Benjamin wrote:

"The child asks the adult for a clear and comprehensible, but not childish, representation (...). As the child also has a precise sensitivity for what is serious and difficult, provided it is sincere and comes from the heart" (Benjamin 1972, pp. 12–22). His criticism of most of the publications and illustrations for children is ruthless: the prevailing tone is *"edifying, moralistic and represents a variant of catechism (...). Their aridity, indeed their lack of interest for the child is undeniable"* (Benjamin 1972, pp. 12–22).

Benjamin states that three works paved the way for a completely new sensitivity towards educational books, works characterised by a fundamental role of imagery: these are *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* by Amos Comenius (1668), the *Elementary Book* (Elementarwerk) by Johann Bernhard Basedow (fig. 4a, 4b), magnificently illustrated by the engravings of Daniel Chodowiecki (1774), and *Bilderbuch fur Kinder* by Friedrich Justin Bertuch, the first great illustrated children's encyclopaedia (fig. 5a, 5b): 12 books (over 2000 pages), published in Weimar between 1792 and 1830; a monumental work for those times, considering above all of their intended audience. Benjamin wrote in 1924: *"With its accurate execution, this children's encyclopaedia demonstrates the devotion with which one worked for children at that time. Today the majority of parents would be horrified by the idea of placing such a precious work in the hands of children. In his preface, Bertuch most naturally invites the illustrations to be cut out"* (Benjamin 1972, pp. 12–22).

Benjamin pays surprising attention to illustrated abecedaries, the first educational materials used to help children learn to recognise the letters of the alphabet and compose their first words: *"The nostalgia that the abecedary arouses in me shows how much it was an intrinsic part of my childhood. That is what in fact I seek: my whole childhood condensed into the gesture of the hand inserting the letters into the grooves to align them. The hand can still dream it, but never retrieve it, never repeat it with the same truth. In the same way, we can dream how we learned to walk. Yet in vane. Now we know how to walk, we can no longer learn to do it again"* (Benjamin 2006, p. 65).

Benjamin observes the long process that, from Comenius onwards, led the syllabary to become an illustrated text for children, rich in decorative graphic elements, to the point in which the letters of the alphabet, in certain cases, became nothing more than "skeletons" (fig. 6a, 6b) dressed up in "decorations on decorations, to make them more attractive", in other cases pretexts for "gathering around them a whole court of objects", in others again subjected to an exasperated biomorphism aiming to identify the shape of each letter within the outline of a real object. The conclusion is that all this responded more to an adult's pleasure and figurative research, rather than an educational clarity functional to the child's learning.

In the best cases, the syllabary became an authentic field of figurative and educational research and experimentation, aiming to identify entertaining ideas to place the child in the condition to actively set out on the journey of apprentice reader. Here, Benjamin not only defines the innovative characters that have made this type of book increasingly rich and enjoyable, but also poses an important pedagogic and educational issue. This is the tendency to include increasingly more

experiences and materials in education in reading (but not only) that make explicit reference to the sphere of pleasure and play, more than that of effort, which has always connoted the authentic initiation into the labours of school work. This issue was also raised by Bruno Bettelheim (1976; Bettelheim, Zelan 1982), a firm supporter of the pedagogic and therapeutic power of the word, and a strong critic of the redundancy of images decorating children's books.

Illustrate and explain

I began with these reflections on the figure of Walter Benjamin in order to broaden my focus to the more general issue of the role images have played – and increasingly play – in children's education. This feature is one that specifically characterises Western culture: the assertion of the centrality of images in the educational processes and widespread culture was a progressive achievement, filled with social and religious conflicts (Farné 2006). Our culture has assigned a huge power to images and the media that produce them, which has also progressively defined a pedagogy of the image. A power that, while on one hand frees extraordinary educational and communicative resources supplying new energy to teaching and learning processes, on the other hand expropriates forms of control and guidance from education: the image is fast, the word is slow. At least apparently, images do not require mediation processes, while formal education is based on initiation processes guided by adult figures.

I thus wondered if, in the field of iconography, images devoted to childhood and education constitute a specific field of study and research. I believe so; I focused on that which I defined “educational iconography” (Farné 2002), seeking to define its historical roots, languages and techniques, as well as the pedagogic intentions and practices, as we are referring to media, i.e. catalysts of relations and, in this specific case, relations oriented to education.

All the repertoires of children's and educational iconography in the modern age, referring to illustrations, games, trading cards and even cartoons, derive from the production and development of popular prints between the 17th and 18th centuries. Popular prints are a complex product in social and aesthetic terms (fig. 7a, 7b). It would be a mistake to define popular prints in a simplistic manner, as a sort of “b-product” compared with those we consider as artistic images, produced also using engraving techniques. References between one and the other field of figurative expression exist, but popular prints define their own identity in production and distribution contexts oriented to a specific - popular - audience, which also included children.

Figures linked to religious or secular fields, illustrated tales and chronicles, images of distant lands, exotic animals and humans, and popular prints induce us to look at that great theatre of the streets and squares, where the humours, sentiments and actions of a “human comedy” (fig. 8) could be expressed as they might appear before the eyes of an observer ready to describe it to the very audience that it interprets, in the form of printed or reproduced images.

The great printing houses that produced and disseminated popular images in Europe defined and consolidated their own style over time, their own catalogue of figures, the reproduction and sale of which was guaranteed by a substantial figurative stability which was permitted only minor variations on a theme. In this iconography, we can often recognise elements and compositions from the high figurative arts, reproduced in simplified and serialised forms.

Benjamin stated that so-called popular art is often only an asset of the dominating class which has dropped to a lower level, where it is welcomed and renewed by a broader collective. That which is normally defined as “popular taste” in figurative terms would therefore consist of a set of representation criteria, characters and topics which, with minimum variations, are repeated in the same way over time, impressing with their exotic or coarse spectacularity, constituting objects of collective cultural recognition. In the 19th century, the great season of children’s and educational iconography developed in the furrow of this iconography apparently closed within a sacred and profane imaginary with unalterable features, and the media used to embody and adapt its repertoires was that of the illustrations of popular and children’s books and journals, trading cards and board games, as well as comics.

This process underwent a significant development specifically through printed games in which a certain scheme of play (with cards, bingo, or board games) could be based on a figurative and thematic repertoire with an explicit (or implicit) educational content (Seville 2019). Among the products that best represent educational progress in the modern age, we must consider the widespread production of educational games, in many cases based on the transformation/adaptation of existing games, characterised by visual supports oriented to learning notions and precepts (fig. 9). A moralistic orientation, the result also of the Counter-Reformation, blended well with the more modern educational theories expressed (and disputed) in the Catholic world by François Fénelon.

The principle was that of leveraging the child’s natural interest for images and play, in order to pleasantly lead them towards the knowledge of notions and arguments, moral principles, or the acquisition of specific logic and linguistic abilities. In psychological terms, it was a matter of enhancing aspects such as the child’s motivation and interest towards learning, in contrast to the widespread constrictive or punitive models, producing play instruments that could act as *educational catalysts*.

We are used to thinking of “education” as a rhetoric register of educational communication, which makes a given object or topic boring, unattractive, and in some way “anaesthetic”. This is what we think when, commonly, we use the term educational as an adjective; for example, referring to an educational film, an educational television programme, an educational toy, etc. In these cases, it is as if the product has suffered a kind of qualitative impoverishment that is necessary for the purpose of education. Generally, but however linked to this, the neo-idealistic culture and its pedagogy have always denied that a visual or narrative product for children can be recognised as “artistic”, as the fact of being “for children” would lessen its creative quality. This prejudice began to wane only from the second half of the last century, and authorship in different fields of children’s culture (literature, illustration, theatre, cinema, etc.) was finally recognised and enhanced within their own categories.

A prerogative of education is to explain. The Italian “spiegare” literally means to “unfold”, and therefore to open and reveal, make a subject or concept more comprehensible. The same applies to the term “illustrate”, so illustration is no more than a device that illuminates, gives light and therefore makes visible (and understandable) something that the text describes but does not show, something it alludes to but hides. Pictures in books, above all educational and children’s books, have always aimed not only to make the book itself more attractive and enjoyable, but also to enhance its educational function.

Trading cards

Born in Paris in the second half of the 19th century, in a society where scientific progress can be emblematically represented by the Exposition Universelle, the *trading card* was an advertising gift astutely combined with some products and targeting children to lead adult customers to purchase the goods or return to the same shop (fig. 10a, 10b). Very soon, many manufacturers of meat extract, chocolate, cigarettes, etc. used these small advertising images, inaugurating a competition in which the *gadget* played a role that was no less important than that of the product it came with (Basile 2014).

Due to its contents and communication style, the trading card is perhaps the object that, more than any other, represents the educational concept of positivism in the field of cultural and educational dissemination. Compared with the few poor-quality illustrations children found in school books and educational posters hanging on classroom walls, many trading card series based on historical, geographical, or scientific topics were of thrilling visual value. The graphic precision and attention to colour in these tiny formats was completely lacking in normal children's illustrated publishing. From the mid-20th century onwards, the trading card depended no longer on the commercial products it was a gadget of, but became an autonomous medium, a product of the children's culture thanks to the invention of the pack of trading cards by the editor Panini from Modena (fig. 11).

The pedagogic interest for trading cards is closely linked to their educational versatility, expressed not only in a didactic but also a ludic register. The visual and tactile experience overlap, generating a sensory synergy that is a source of pleasure for the child. Overlapping the visual and ludic registers is an intrinsic feature of the trading card, which not by chance is often treated as an actual "toy". Trading card albums are a kind of irreversible construction set, like models or puzzles composed of many pieces, each of which must be assembled or fitted exactly into its own space in order to complete the final object or image. Here, the child does not act by assembling the pieces in a more or less ephemeral manner, in order to build a construction and then enjoy dismantling or destroying it, but tends to keep the object as the result of a long and patient work-game. Completing a trading card album is not only a challenge but at times also a *mission impossible*.

To conclude: educational iconography aims to study, on the one hand, the different repertoires of images that activate a direct relationship with children in their leisure time, and on the other, the visual repertoires whose didactic dimension is also characterised by the mediations with which they are managed. It is a huge production, with a future full of technological expectations even though, as "didactic" images, they have always suffered from cultural devaluation, like everything else related to the "educational" character (film, children's literature, illustrations...), and from an "aesthetic prejudice". The words of Roberto Rossellini come to mind: in 1962, during an interview with *Cahiers du Cinéma*, he said: "*We must have the courage to be 'didactic'. But when one is at the cinema, one is immediately accused of imbecility. And yet, the need for education is an absolute requirement*" (Rossellini 1987, p. 271).



Fig. 1a.
Biblia Pauperum, facsimile and Edition by Avril
Henry, Cornell Univ. Press, 1987 (or. XV century).



Fig 1b.
Wiligelmo, Adam and Eve,
ow relief, Cathedral of Modena
(XII century).



Fig. 1c.
Giotto, Scrovegni Chapel,
Padova, XIV century.

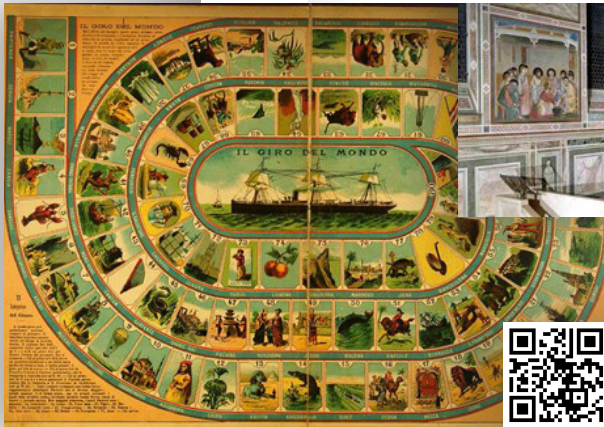


Fig.2a.
Il giro del mondo (Around the
world), educational board game,
Italy, about 1890.



Fig. 2b.
Images d'Épinal, Don Quichotte,
English edition, about 1880.



Fig. 3a.
Jan Amos Komensky (Comenius), Orbis Sensualium Pictus, 1658.



Fig. 3b.
Jan Amos Komensky (Comenius), Orbis Sensualium Pictus, 1658.



Fig. 4a,
Johann Bernard Basedow,
Elementarwerk, illustrated by
Daniel Chodowiecki, 1774.

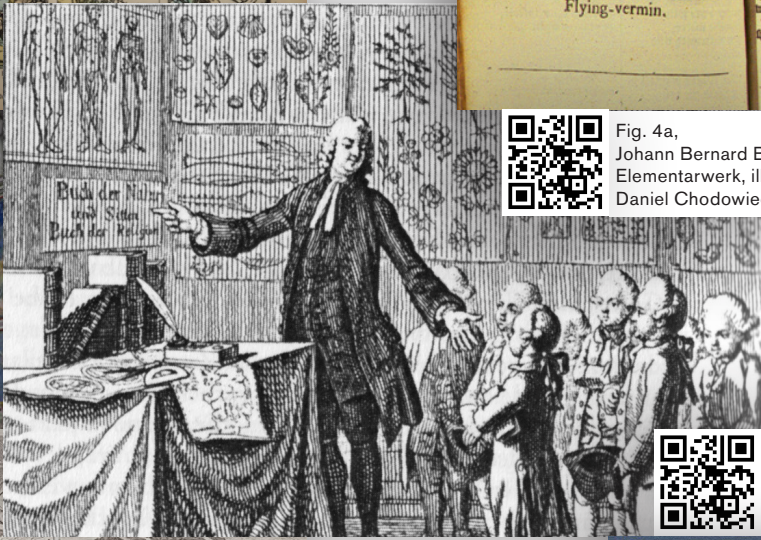


Fig. 5a.
Cover of book.

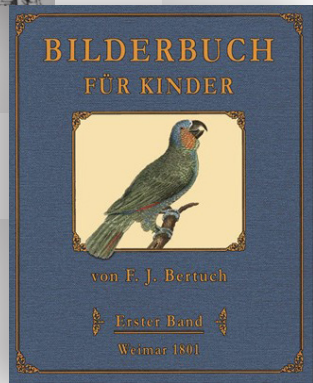


Fig. 4b.
Johann Bernard Basedow,
Elementarwerk, illustrated by
Daniel Chodowiecki, 1774.



Fig. 5b.
F. J. Bertuch, Bilderbuch für Kinder, 1801.



Fig. 6a.
Walter Crane, The Baby's own Alphabet, John Lane the Bodely Head, London, 1874.



Fig. 6b.
Alphabet de Bécassine, illustrated by J. P. Pinchon, Gautier-Languereau, Paris, 1921.



Fig. 7a.
Giuseppe Maria Mitelli, The print seller, 1684..





Fig. 7b.
The World Upside Down,
popular print, Pellerin, Epinal,
about 1880.



Fig. 8.
Giandomenico Tiepolo, Mondo
nuovo (The New World), Venezia,
Ca' Rezzonico.

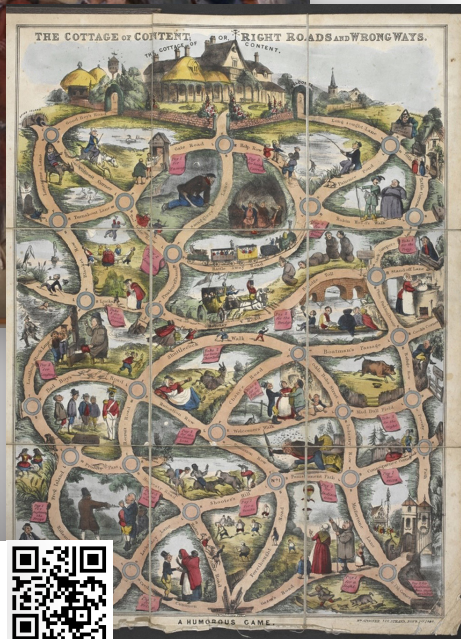


Fig. 9.
The Cottage of Content, Board
game, 1848.



Fig. 10b.
Venomous snakes (Italian edition), trading cards, Liebig, 1903.



Fig. 11.
La Terra, il pianeta sul quale viviamo (The Land is the Planet We Live on), Educational trading cards, Panini, Modena, 1966.
Photo: Archive of Author.

Fig. 10a.
Ancient Ships, trading cards, Stollwerk chocolate, 1902.
Photo: Archive of Author.

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Photo Source:

- Fig. 1a. Source: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Biblia_pauperum,_Nordisk_familjebok.png
- Fig. 1b. Source: <https://it-it.facebook.com/601406263289996/photos/a.604991339598155.1073741836.601406263289996/61557166608239/>
- Fig. 1c. Source: <https://www.foliamagazine.it/viaggio-in-italia-la-cappella-degli-scrovegni-a-padova/>
- Fig. 2a. Source: <http://www.giochidelloca.it/scheda.php?id=362>
- Fig. 2b. Source: <https://www.alamy.it/francais-imagerie-d-epinal-don-quichotte-don-chisciotte-questo-file-e-privo-di-informazioni-sull-autore-192-epinal-quichote-immagine-image188107094.html>
- Fig. 3a. Source: <https://www.pinterest.it/pin/226798531211821418/>
- Fig. 3b. Source: https://it.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Orbis_Sensualium_Pictus.png
- Fig. 4a. Source: https://www.wikiwand.com/de/Johann_Bernhard_Basedow
- Fig. 4b. Source: <https://grafiteria.pl/en/produkt/ilustration-for-elementarwerk-by-j-b-basedow-tab-xcii/?recommended=2&kolor=95854&papier=5&ramka=96090&szyba=zwykla>
- Fig. 5a. Source: <https://fines-mundi.de/bertuch-bilderbuch-fuer-kinder-band-1>
- Fig. 5b. Source: <https://www.pinterest.it/pin/410672059761426137/>
- Fig. 6a. Source: <https://www.artofthepicturebook.com/osborne-collection>
- Fig. 6b. Source: <https://www.ricardo.ch/fr/a/alphabet-de-becassine-1176729484/> (or other similar of the same book)
- Fig. 7a. Source: https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/P_1852-1009-1041
- Fig. 7b. Source: <https://philamuseum.org/collection/object/226585>
- Fig. 8. Source: <https://www.arte.it/notizie/venezia/il-mondo-nuovo-di-giandomenico-tiepolo-l-eva-sione-e-la-speranza-in-tempi-di-incertezza-16941>
- Fig. 9. Source: <https://earthlymission.com/the-cottage-of-content-a-humorous-game/>
- Fig. 10b. Source: <https://filateliasimoni.com/prodotto/1903-italia-italy-figurine-liebig-italiane-serpenti-velenosi-n-750/>

VISUAL MULTI-LITERACY AND EDUCATION

Flavia Stara

Introduction

In a world abundant in visual messages, young generations are mostly skilled technology users but not instructed readers of images and visual information. Getting acquainted with visual expressions requires to learn and share a metalanguage, a specific domain of information. Familiarisation with visual metalanguage enables to analyse visual expressions, in the same way that mastering a language grammar system enables to produce meaningful written and spoken texts. This kind of literacy is often exerted by identifying, comparing, and discussing visual semiotic choices addressed to convey particular meanings.

Visual literacy is an interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and multidimensional area of knowledge. Different kinds of visuals may be applied in almost all subject matter areas and through different media. One should rather talk about visual multi-literacy. Diagrammatic literacy, digital visual literacy, graphical literacy, and visual literacy are all terms representing concepts concerned with the ability to understand and work with visual representations.

Visual language is not universal because messages are not self-explanatory, so it expects verbal intermediation. Images often function as information, but they are also aesthetic and creative objects requiring additional levels of interpretation and analysis. Visual materials are largely and freely used on social networks, although their sharing and reproduction often raise ethical and legal considerations about their appropriateness. Visual literacy challenges the educational process to design methodologies and strategies to enhance visual communication and interpretation, along with the use of technology and digital media.

Text

The large number of visual languages in action within the social space generates a load of visual information able to process all kind of actions, solutions, and needs. Hence a transdisciplinary competence to interpret and master visual communication may improve social interactions. Visual literacy allows a fruitful interaction with all kinds of codes, texts and hypertexts and strengthens connections with multicultural contexts. Present educational approaches recognise how the time of complexity asks for developing visual literacy skills as much as verbal skills. Therefore, visual literacy empowers individuals with specific tools to access and manage knowledge in a much broader scope.

Any visual experience placed into an educational situation plays a crucial role when it comes to students' participation and motivation. In this sense, images and, more generally, visual art in educational spaces can be considered tools par excellence of transmission, communication, and deepening of skills and knowhow, often contributing to the definition of vocational tracks. School contexts should always include, along with knowledge processing, workshops dedicated to the

analysis and generation of symbolic meanings. These educational innovations contribute to stressing the activation of cognitive, emotional, and practical skills. No learner is an uncritical consumer of knowledge, but rather a prosumer placed in a specific historical circumstance. Training experiences conducted through the study of visual languages highlight the transition from a stage of decoded reading of meanings, already given and defined, to meaning-creating interpretative stage, based on the recognition and aggregation of multiple legacies. It thus becomes essential to become conversant with cultural alphabets of symbolisations so as to develop personal and collective levels of comprehension. In this sense, one can talk of an image generative grammar it allows the reworking of meanings in an original way and in connection with the experienced space and time. Training experiences conducted through the study of visual languages highlight the transition from a stage of decoded reading of meanings, already given and defined, to a meaning-creating interpretative stage, based on the recognition and aggregation of multiple legacies. It thus becomes essential to become conversant with cultural alphabets of symbolisations so as to develop personal and collective levels of comprehension. In this sense, one can talk of an image generative grammar which allows the reworking of meanings in an original way and in connection with the experienced space and time.

The nature of today's communication is overwhelmingly visual. Images, as modes of interaction/dialogue, play a dominant role in daily routines and are especially prominent in youngsters' lifestyles. Contemporary students are born in image-saturated environments: the era of the Internet, digital technologies, and touchscreens. Their interactions are mediated visually by making use of photo and video, video chat, emoticons, GIFs, and emojis. However, contemporary generations – millennial and post-millennial – although usually technologically savvy, often ignore the multilayered framework grounding visual messages. Education, in order to foster confident and creative individuals as well inclusive and responsible citizens, should expose students to comprehending, interpreting, and extrapolating information presented in a wide variety of formats and fashions. As technology advances imposing brain super-activity, education can counteract this phenomenon supporting a different awareness of the visual multiverse. It is paramount to help learners to read or decode visuals within interdisciplinary references, along with promoting in learner mindfulness to write or encode visuals as correct tools for private and public communication.

Specifically, in the process of cognitive acquisition and re-elaboration of meanings, the visual recalls the possibility of stimulating and activating adequate precognition of the learning objects and of developing the ability to problematise the proposed contents in relation to complex contexts. From a multimedia and multimodal perspective, digital technology has also amplified and introduced new approaches oriented to visual thinking, based on which learning becomes more meaningful when ideas, words, and concepts are associated with images. In this sense, the images represent a motivating mediator; particularly effective in stimulating and improving social awareness. With reference to the theory of multiple intelligences (Gardner 1983), visual intelligence is precisely defined as the cognitive abilities linked to the imagination and the ability to “think in images”; that is, to mentally represent concepts even before verbalising them, allowing a more effective experience of reality. The production/use of an image promotes motivation by enabling cognitive and exploratory processes of categorisation, memory,

prediction, understanding, as well as empathy. Some scholars (Clark, Lyons 2010) identify among the benefits of using images those relating to improvement of attention, minimisation of cognitive load and support for motivation. Therefore, if images can exercise a function of anticipation and modelling with respect to knowledge (Rivoltella 2012), the processes of acquiring and re-elaborating knowledge are linked not only to the vision of images of the world, but also to representation of the world through images. The image is thus understood both as a product that presupposes an activity of reading, understanding, interpretation, and reworking of meanings, and as a process in reference to the construction and dissemination of new semantic content. As part of a self-regulated and motivating learning model, students actively generate and use images by building new networks of meaning (Rivoltella, Rossi 2019). Therefore, in a meaningful learning process it is necessary for visual intelligence and knowledge construction to be interconnected.

Visual literacy involves identifying and deciphering a given socio-cultural message. It is a research process which generates interest, curiosity, and passion over elements that are hidden at first sight in the visual creation/work of art. Visual literacy helps to discover the substance behind a visual product, by approaching what is not written, but presented using signs, symbols, shapes, and colours. By questioning the visual creation one can appreciate and re-enact what the intended purpose of the creation was from the standpoint of the maker (Lester 2011).

Referring to the perception of a visual creation, it seems appropriate to recall the point of view of John Dewey (1934) as expressed in *Art as Experience*. According to Dewey, the appreciation of a work of art is not a theoretical act, but a practical one. The work of art is not simply an object, because the ability to create a relationship with the viewer, becomes experience for the observer themselves. Dewey underlines as the distinction between the aesthetic and the artistic, as well as between perception and enjoyment derived from the act of production, is exceeded since the work of art is a whole of experience of doing and enjoying in progress.

The artist as they work embodies the attitude of the perceiver, so the aesthetic experience is closely linked to the experience of creating. The process of artistic production is organically connected to the aesthetic perception. The artist continues to shape until they are satisfied with the projectual perception of such a process. At each stage there is an anticipation of what is about to occur: the construction ends only when the product is experienced as good, and this experience comes through a kind of direct perception. Similarly, for the observer, contemplation is not passive receptivity. It is a process consisting of a series of reagents acts which accumulate in the direction of an objective contentment; otherwise, there is no perception but only recognition. In recognition there is the application of some preformed scheme, while perception is a reconstructive act. In the perception of the object, the viewer is filled with emotion and in this way they feel to create their own experience according to their point of view and interest.

On the part of the perceiver, as of the artist, there is an action. The work of art involves the viewer because it generates in them a feeling, but as long as they do not believe in what is being sensed, there is no true act of expression. The work of art is not a neutral object, but an object that creates a belief. The approach to the work of art, then, must be not only theoretical but also practical; experiential. The user is not only an observer, but being attracted toward the visual production becomes an actor of the work itself. It follows that the cultivation of aesthetic

faculties requires to be performed within spaces and times where the consumer can engage their skills in acquiring knowledge. Such a (per)formative process may occur through the experience.

In this respect, visual literacy may facilitate art fruition as well as of the multifold artefacts produced in a globalised world. Visual literacy helps to decipher content shared on the network and/or distributed through any other format of visual media. Visual literacy creates an interconnection with nonverbal messages and encourages analytical interpretations of what is conveyed: it is an interdisciplinary competence that can overcome barriers of socio-cultural understanding. This educational process can enhance individual potentials, encouraging introspective attitude and re-educating the bewildered gaze in the midst of intermittent images and intrusive messages. The dynamic role of the observer appears to be clearly outlined: knowing how to observe carefully, knowing how to decode, ask pertinent questions, knowing how to decentralise oneself, opening up to diversity; and again: detecting, comparing, and appreciating.

It is, therefore, a matter of guiding the subject to navigate the visual, to responsibly recognise it, to relate to it in a given situation with one's own feelings, with one's own pre-understandings, and letting oneself be amazed (Mitchell 2018). For example, the appreciation of a statue, a monument, or a building requires real "physical walking" of the observer – around it and inside it – as if to take possession of its volumes and forms; almost to inhabit its spaces and structures. It is necessary to elaborate a first stage of meaning: the result of one's own psycho-physical and temporal circumstances. Subsequently, it is necessary to connect all the elements through which the subject verifies whether their own sketch of meaning is adequate or not; and it will be the consequent analysis of what has been observed to say whether or not the first outcome is correct. If the interpretation proves to be in contrast with what the visual product intends to communicate, then the subject has to elaborate a further proposal which they will subsequently submit for feedback. To infinity: precisely because the process of reading-interpretation is infinite.

Visual experiences not only activate cognitive processes, but urge the individual to establish a closer relationship between themselves and the objective reality of knowledge. The elaboration of visuality does not involve only the perceptive and rational processes, that preside over a formulation of a hierarchy of judgments and evaluations ("this is beautiful, I like it"; "that is not beautiful, I reject it"), but also activates dynamics of inclusion and sharing of meaning. At the first level of elaboration one overcomes what is immediately perceived, while at the second and more reflective level the message induces the question of socio-cultural projections. In this direction, education should transmit not only content but "open wide" the complexity of the real in the eyes of young people. Education should also transfer to them meta-knowledge through critical exchange and discussions on the richness of cultural languages. By formulating opinions on aesthetic matters it is possible to acknowledge new existential paths and face reality from a perspective of continuous creativity.

Provisional projections

We have seen the two components of visual literacy most often discussed: the ability to interpret messages delivered visually as images or multimodal texts (decoding), and the knowledge and skills needed to present ideas in an effective manner (encoding). The latter calls on our knowledge of basic design and presentation

principles and requires an understanding of human perception and cultural differences. Yet, there is a third aspect to visual literacy that we can term “visual thinking”. It refers to utilising whole-brain thinking and exercising the ability to express ideas visually via different tools. Doodles, sketches, and drawings, used to “show” another’s thoughts, can often be a more effective means of relation than verbal explanation. Visual thinking allows the concrete capture of one’s own thoughts, and delivers them externally for targeted purposes (Mitchell 2005).

Visual literacy can sensitise human beings towards perceptual, imaginative, fantastic, intellectual and emotional connection, so that they feel deeply integrated into a harmoniously structured complexity (selection and organisation of feelings, impressions, reasonings and intuitions referring the wholeness of the human experience). This experience of awareness is a refinement of the ability to observe and to dialogue; that is, to strive for a higher value and at the same time, with some immediate evidence, perceive it differently from those experienced in precedence: it is the nourishment for a stimulus to an endless understanding. The aesthetic experience is preserved as central, promoting the raising of a wider contextual consciousness within a personal and collective growth process (Fleming, Lukaszewicz 2018). A new awareness in terms of perspective involves and requires forms of thought that can decentre themselves so as to grasp the plurality of issues deriving from the coexistence of different ethnicities and cultures: a multiverse expressing voices and creativity. The concept of visual perspective and its problematic conceptual application to historical realities, confirms how complexity can no longer be read according to a unique, homogeneous canon. We need hybrid, intertwined readings fit to interpret hyper-visual symbolisations of reality.

Through the experiences linked to different heritages and symbolic traditions, to representations of present knowledge and experience, to memory and imagination, a bond among the aesthetic, noetic, and poietic is realised. This bond highlights that thought is not different from experience, but constitutes a whole with experience in its expressive form (Panofsky 1991). Therefore, the human aesthetic dimension speaks out through a visive Logos, which reveals itself in the form of conscience and of reflective awareness: the experience of an immediate reflexivity, in which thinking dwells in perception.

In this sense, creativity is structured as a form of graphic-visual and emotional intelligence that gradually adapts to the experience, materialising itself through the creation of visual artefacts/messages. Training to the realisation of a visual product, indeed, allows learners to establish a dialogue with the world; enabling them to build bridges between different levels of knowledge and experience, between formal and informal contexts, between real and digital spaces. Visual literacy also promotes school curricula in visual communication/design or visual expression/fine arts, which enrich the supply and demand of national job markets. Granting a diploma in these fields of study to a larger and larger young population can strengthen international exchanges and cooperation. Curricula for visual literacy, delivered according to different methodologies, are well suited to specific geo-cultural settings and meeting different social demands.

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VISUAL LITERACY, CULTURAL DIFFERENCES, POSTCOLONIAL APPROACH. READING AFRICAN CONTEMPORARY ART BETWEEN ITALY AND KENYA

Giuseppe Capriotti

An autobiographical introduction

During my secondments in Kenya, between 2018 and 2021, I had the chance to lecture art history at Pwani University in Kilifi and Kenyatta University in Nairobi. For my courses, addressed to students with a very different background of studies (some not being from the field of humanities), I prepared some dialogued lectures during which I asked them to discuss images mostly coming from the Italian and European Renaissance and Baroque, sometimes adding some deviations toward Antiquity and contemporary art. As an iconologist I intentionally selected works of art full of meaningful details, symbols, and personifications, some of them representing scenes from Greek mythology or the Bible. Because I was lecturing in Africa, I added specific images representing black characters, sometimes represented in a positive or negative way, to stimulate discussion about the European perception of “ethnic otherness” which can be read through the images of the past.

After proposing and explaining some controversial works of art, according to my European point of view, I decided to reverse the “game” by offering students images from their own culture, that is, works of art produced by contemporary artists from Kenya, and proposing them to read and explain to me the images according to their point of view. On this occasion I realised that my African students were able to see and grasp many more explicit or hidden meanings than I was able to interpret in paintings conceived by Kenyan artists. If at the beginning I thought that my African students would have a hard time understanding Renaissance and European art, on the contrary, I later discovered that my comprehension of Kenyan contemporary art was really poor, scarcely going beyond the stereotypes of exoticism, Orientalism, and “nostalgia for Africa”. Thanks to this didactic experience, I decided to undertake specific field research on the relationship between “visual literacy” and “cultural differences”, following a “postcolonial” approach. In this article I shall present the provisional results of the still ongoing research.

Visual literacy, cultural differences, postcolonial approach

Without explicitly speaking about “visual literacy”, in *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy* Michael Baxandall (1972) introduced the concept of “period eye”, arguing that even though the biological apparatus of a fifteenth-century human and that of a contemporary human are identical, their visual skills are deeply

different. Such visual skills develop thanks to the beholder's daily experience in the various fields of social, religious, and commercial life. For Baxandall, a work of art should be read and interpreted with the specific mental equipment of a particular period, which can be reconstructed by thorough work of historical contextualisation. Reading an image of the past, art historians should enter a culture through as many sources as possible and interrogate the works of art by using the same interpretative categories known by the beholder of a specific historical period. Many close correspondences can be found between such an approach and the *interpretative anthropology* developed by Clifford Geertz, who was a very good friend of Baxandall. In his book *The Interpretation of Cultures*, published in 1973, in a chapter dealing with the interpretation of the artistic productions of natives, Geertz largely focuses on the methodology defined by Baxandall. To interpret a culture, it is necessary to consider the native's point of view and the categories they use to reflect upon their culture.²

If reading a European image of the past full of symbolic details requires a specific cultural equipment, that is, a specific "visual literacy", the problem of visual competencies is equally crucial when a European iconologist decides to start reading contemporary works of art produced in a very distant country.

For "visual literacy" we intend the ability to decode, interpret, and give meaning to the images for their value of information or message.³ Between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the development of visual skills was started to be considered as fundamental for the human learning (Avgerinou, Ericson 1997; Vezzoli 2017). In effect, visual competencies make people able to scrutinise and discern the meaning of objects, symbols, gestures, and expressions that are in the images, comprehending advertisements and works of art (Elkins 2010). Nowadays these visual skills are considered highly important because of the centrality of the images and the visual media in the contemporary world. Nevertheless, we also need to have these competences to read an image produced according to a different code in a different context, in a non-Western culture. The knowledge of the social and historical context is in effect the first step to correctly read each image and visual message from the past to the present, also when we deal with non-Western visual cultures.

2 It deals with the difference between the 'emic' and the 'etic' viewpoints singled out by anthropologists. The term 'emic', as opposed to 'etic', was coined by linguist Kenneth Pike in the 1950s, based on the terms 'phonemic' and 'phonetic', used in anthropology, always together with its opposite, to oppose the observer's description and interpretation of the experience of reality to that of the observed person. Emic analysis emphasises the meanings shared by a native social group, the viewpoints of the community being studied. Etic analysis points out the data produced by an interpretive system built according to the anthropologists' theoretical models and categories (Olivier De Sardan 1998).

3 The language we use to express this concept is meaningful, because it denounces a gap: we use "literacy", a word connected to literature and the ability to read texts and written documentation, after having learned the alphabet, the morphology and the syntax of a language, that is, the grammar; at the same time we use the verb "to read" to express the intention of decoding an image, because the verb "to see" or "to look at" the image does not have the same meaning of decrypting the style and content of a visual message. For this reason, Paul Martin Lester (2011) wrote a handbook for students, explicitly delivering a grammar by which "to read" visual communication with images.

As with many other African countries, at present Kenya is characterised by numerous tribes with different cultures and languages,⁴ even if nowadays people are mixing due to the movement of population from a tribe's land to another, from centres to peripheries, from upland to coast, and vice versa. Likewise, in Kenya, we have to consider the impact of British colonisation, which was preceded by the Arabic and the Portuguese. For this reason, analysing the contemporary artistic production in Kenya, the issue of “visual literacy” is inevitably linked to the post-colonial one.

First of all, in fact, we should avoid looking at African artistic production exclusively with European eyes, projecting our world onto it, and giving it value on the basis of categories developed to analyse European art, considering in addition that the way of making art history is a Western narrative and construct (Enwezor 2003; Valente 2021). As a matter of fact, in dealing with non-Western art production, we should also go beyond our concept of modernity (as running to the progress and overcoming of the existing), which is connected to the Western historical tradition and to an art history based on victories, successes, and revolutions.⁵ More generally, the post-colonial approach has restored dignity to colonised cultures, not only recognising their existence, but also giving them the dignity of becoming an object of study. At the same time, however, postcolonial studies also propose an overcoming of epistemological Eurocentrism, deconstructing colonial interpretative categories and their value hierarchies. One of the possible perspectives is focus on examining non-Western historical and cultural processes in the light of the interpretations given by the natives, analysing the readings coming from within, from the same culture.

However, specifically concerning present-day Kenya, this approach should be pursued considering that the official languages in Kenya are Ki-Swahili and English, the language of the colonisers, and that the Kenyan school system has been modelled on the British one: as stated by Ngūgi wa Thiong'o (1986), through the imposition of the language as a “cultural bomb”, colonisers imposed a mental and symbolic universe and a way of perceiving the world. Likewise, the artistic education given at Kenyan colleges and universities follows the educational model of European academies and schools of art.⁶ In addition, globalisation and the use of technology – in particular smartphones – is creating a strong circulation of Western models and, in some cases, a homologation of the artistic production, which is particularly visible in the very complex phenomenon of tourist art (Mahoney 2012).

4 On the difficult problem of the identification of tribes in Kenya see Balaton-Chrimes 2021. Ngūgi wa Thiong'o (2009) claims that the differentiation in tribes of Kenyan people was underlined by the colonial power to create disagreement among people and better dominate the colonies.

5 A debate for a more inclusive Art history appeared some years ago in the journal “The Art Bulletin” (Pollock 2014; Mattos 2014; Mukherji 2014; Okediji 2015; Capistrano-Baker 2015; Martínez-Ruiz 2016).

6 The foundation of School of Art or Academy of Art, based on European model and often connected to the action of missionaries, is a phenomenon which started in all Africa at the beginning of 20th century (Vansina 1999). In present Kenya, for example, Buruburu Institute of Fine Arts (BIFA) and the Department of Fine Art & Design of Kenyatta University, both in Nairobi, offer an art education that is very similar to the one given in European academies and schools of art. More in general on the impact of colonialism in contemporary African art cf. Clemens 2017.

The tool of the focus group between Italy and Kenya

To conduct this research, I used the *focus group* technique, defined as a non-standardised and in-depth group interview or as a planned and informal discussion: a moderator, in the presence of an observer, proposes some conversation topics to a relatively small group of people, usually constituted on the basis of the specific objectives of the research (Smithson 2000). Compared to other survey methods, the *focus group* allows us to: bring together groups that are not necessarily central to the research topic (Krueger 1994); promote, in a more informal and more confidential atmosphere, a freer explanation of the participants' opinions (Beck, Trombetta, Share 1986); obtain, through face-to-face interaction and discussion, an in-depth study of some issues that would remain on the surface in a questionnaire or interview; and, therefore, bring out information that would not be able to be acquired through traditional tools (Kamberelis, Dimitriadis 2005). The interaction between the participants, a distinctive element of the *focus group*, makes it possible to immediately compare the ideas expressed and make it easier to identify similarities and differences between opinions, favouring the emergence of the strengths and weaknesses of each position (Kitzinger 1999).

The *focus group* tool was in this case particularly suitable for the two objectives of the research: to understand how much the belonging to a culture affects the ability to correctly read an image; and experiment in reading and understanding Kenyan contemporary art starting from the point of view of the local observer, from the point of view of the native.

To start I carried out a *focus group* in Italy with a selected group of eight students of cultural heritage at the University of Macerata, that is, with people having a specific university knowledge in art history. The same was impossible in Kenya, where no such similar degree exists. Using the same paintings, I held two *focus groups* at Pwani University in Kilifi, with small groups of four to six students coming from different degrees. Some of these students practice arts as young artists. In both cases I personally acted as moderator, but in Kenya I also used a local mediator, who in some cases facilitated the communication. In all focus groups I distributed some Post-its, asking the participants to freely write three keywords (which came to their minds while looking at the paintings), and then we discussed the paintings starting from the words they had written.

First of all, I have to highlight a gap: despite having worked in both cases with contemporary works of art (therefore with images close "in time"), for Italian students they were also images distant "in space", while for the Kenyan students they were theoretically familiar works, in that they belonged to their culture.

Reading contemporary Kenyan art

In the rich production of contemporary art in Kenya, I selected some paintings conceived by artists based in Nairobi, in Lamu, and in Kilifi, trying also to compare the differences between the artistic production of a political and cultural capital, the city of Nairobi (Swigert-Gacheru 2013), and the art produced along the coast (in Lamu and Kilifi), by painters in contact with Western tourism (Capriotti 2020). In any case I chose paintings based on the traditional cultures of Kenya, in particular (but not exclusively) on the Swahili culture.

The first work presented at the focus group is *Men at the End of Ramadan* by Wanjoi (fig. 1), a painter of Lamu, who is also the owner of a shop for tourists in the main street of the town. His works are also sold by other art galleries in Shela,

a tourist area with beaches in Lamu. Italian students underlined the regularity of the composition, the geometry, and the symmetry in the positioning of contrasting colours, but also the presence of the important theme of the “man seen from behind”, which is a core expedient of Western art to indicate the point of view of the observer⁷. According to some of them, men going towards the same direction indicates something connected with a pilgrimage or a religious meeting. Proposing a comparison with the *Turcate* by the Italian artist Aldo Mondino (1938–2005), only one student directly argued a link with Islam. For Kenyan students this painting is indubitably a depiction of Islam: the dress code indicates that they are Muslims, the *kanzu* (the specific Swahili dress) and the *kufi* (the traditional Islamic hat) are clearly recognisable; there is equality among men, but the authority in Islam is only masculine: in the paintings there are only men; the painter presents the religious life of the Swahili coast in a creative manner, indicating through different colours that Islam is not a monolithic religion, that there are divisions and different beliefs also inside the Mosque, and that there are many ways to celebrate the end of Ramadan.

Remaining in coastal atmospheres, I then proposed a comparison between two paintings focusing on the image of a donkey, the first by Adams Mussa (fig. 2), a painter of Lamu, and the second by Fred Abuga (fig. 3), who is part of the Nairobi artistic mainstream and works in the Kuona Trust Collective.⁸ The interest of the Italian students was more focused on the first painting. They underlined the theme of the dignity of the hard work of the animal (or the oppression that it pushed on the donkey), and again the issue of the identification (of the observer) with the “man seen from behind”, the general problem of the connection with European Orientalism.

The Kenyan students immediately recognised the coastal set up, quoting Lamu as the city where donkeys are the only means of transport in the narrow corridors of the downtown. As humble and perseverant animals, donkeys are unfairly overloaded by men, because they are strong enough to resist the difficult conditions of the very hot coastal life; there is a sense of religious observance in their walking, like a long path for a desired redemption. One student proposed a deep comparison: the first painter made a more detailed work, he knows the life of Lamu, its narrow streets and the dresses of Swahili people, he is a painter from Lamu; the second artist works in a schematic way, he does not know coastal life firsthand, he represents something he has only heard of. This is an incredible comment, because in effect Adams Mussa lives in Lamu and Fred Abuga (now based in Nairobi, but coming from the upland, half *kisii* and half *luhya* tribes) uses photographs of coastal life as an inspirational source for his donkeys.

The third proposal is a comparison between two seascapes by Fred Abuga (fig. 4, 5). Beyond the sensation of peace and serenity, the Italian students found many interesting comparisons: the two paintings seem to express the transient life, the flow of life, that is, two moments of the same boat like in an impressionist

7 Students made references to the Romantic tradition, but also to Magritte. On the theme of the men seen from behind cf. Lee Rubin 2018.

8 Fred Abuga is included in the book *Visual Voices*, which compiles the artists of the Kenyan mainstream (Wakhungu-Githuku 2017, pp. 195–201).

series (with a specific reference to Claude Monet); the human figures of the first paintings look like African or Alberto Giacometti's sculptures; the loneliness of the boat in the second painting reminds one of a Romantic wreck (*The Sea of Ice* by Caspar David Friedrich); the brush strokes of the painter also remind one of Egyptian painting souvenirs, painted on slices of papyrus. One Italian student noticed a very curious aspect: we would expect that the painter builds the horizon line with horizontal brushstrokes, on the contrary he suggests the horizon with vertical brushstrokes. For the African students the two paintings express a strong difference: the first boat is driven by human beings, the second by the wind as we can grasp by the mast; this detail expresses an advancement in technology, thanks to the ability of using the natural energy of the wind. In the first painting two characters are fishing with nets, while the third one, seated on the canoe, is supervising the work of the others. They look like a family and their travel seems to be an exploration, a metaphor for the hard African life, of the struggle for survival. The second painting could also express the negligence of people who abandoned the boat on the sea. A Kenyan student proposed a very interesting reading: the brush strokes seem reminiscent of the keys of a piano; the piano is decomposing, and the keys are invading the surface of the canvas, giving us the sensation of the musicality of the sea, the sound of the waves as sweet music.

The following proposal is two *Slums* by Mudibo (fig. 6, 7), a painter from the *luhya* tribe, based in Nairobi and coordinator of Kivuli Art Centre, a polyvalent workshop of artists (painters and engravers) who produce different kinds of artefacts for both the local and international market. The Italian students immediately perceived the social difference between the two parts of the paintings, painted in a naïf style: in the background there are rich buildings, in the foreground the small houses of poor people; despite that, in the foreground we can breathe in a sensation of vivid happiness and authenticity in poverty, backwardness, and tradition.

The Kenyan students recognised this place: they immediately named the slums of Kibera, Runda, and Madare, in Nairobi. After having noticed the difference between the two kinds of houses, they underlined that the slum is represented as a place of joy, where people are interacting, having fun, relaxing, dancing, and socialising more than in the buildings in the background: the painter seems to show the advantages of poverty and the disadvantages of richness. One student in particular showed his dismay: in the slum you expect to find miserable people, pain, ugliness, and loneliness, instead the painter represents happiness, the opposite of each expectation; the rich people who live in the buildings represented in the background do not have common spaces for socialising, the poor people live outdoors or in small houses, but they are happier because they can share moments of authentic joy. This last student especially grasped the intentional aim of the artist. Mudibo lived in a slum and, as the painter of the slum, he wants to deliver another image of the slum, his own slum, which is very peculiar and, in a sense, unique. Therefore, from within the slum, he deliberately gives artistic expression to his social group, giving his version: as rich Westerners we expect to see a dirty, dangerous, and sad area, but on the contrary, he offers us another point of view coming from the slum. In his ability to provide artistic expression to the vision of the world he comes from, we can define Mudibo as an "organic intellectual", using a category introduced by Antonio Gramsci (Crehan 2016, pp. 28–30). He does not let Kibera be as everyone would expect, but he proposes his slum with its elements of vitality.

After that I presented a series of three elephants by Yegonizer (fig. 8, 9, 10), a painter based in Nairobi and working at GoDown Art Collective. The Italian students underlined the power of the colours, applied to the canvas with a spatula, and the connection with the style of Vincent van Gogh, who is in effect an artist that Yegonizer considers very important for his activity. According to the Kenyan students the paintings represent the fatigue and the sorrow of the elephants, through different facial expressions which communicate their sentiments. Although elephants move in herds, in the pictures the animal is always alone, and this is the reason for its frustration. The first one is suffering and escaping from danger (the red colour on the right), passing through a dry area and looking for water; in the foreground a dry branch is displayed. The second one is escaping as well, maybe because its large tusks has been noticed by humans. In effect the last one has its tusks severed, but it has finally reached a safe and peaceful place, green and full of vegetation. According to a student, this series is a metaphor for someone over-coming suffering: the colours and the facial expressions of the elephant say that its situation has changed; on its path it lost its tusks, but now it is safe and happy.

The last painting I proposed is the *Maasai Triptych* (2018) by Castro (fig. 11), a polyvalent painter coming from the luhya tribe, but now based in Kilifi, and working for local and international clients in the Kilifi County (Capriotti 2020). According to the Italian students the triptych represents three women; or a man in the centre, and two women at the sides. The main feelings communicated by the paintings are: a romantic loneliness (painted following the style of Salvador Dalí, an important inspiration for Castro⁹); the suspension, the stalemate, and the wait for something; the will of observing something very far, with the mysticism of a hermit. For the Kenyan students the three characters are without any doubt Maasai warriors, with spears or rungu (the Maasai stick): the first one is walking; the second is crossing his legs to confuse wild animals and to avoid their approach, but he is also gazing at a danger that can come from far away; he is carrying an enrolled skin on his spear, to use as a rug in case of rest; the third seems to jump, but in truth this hop is part of a ritual dance, a motivational dance, in which men show how to be proud warriors and hunters, ready for a mature life.

According to a student some tribes, like the Maasai, have maintained their traditions only because of tourism; only because tourists are still visiting their villages to see their dances and rituals.

Provisional conclusions

In many cases, the remarks on the paintings were similar between the Italian and Kenyan focus groups. Therefore, some images have the power to communicate a message or a feeling that can be still understood in spite of cultural differences. In most cases, however, the survey revealed that visual abilities and the skills to identify problems posed by images strictly depends on the observer's culture of origin. For their specific background of studies, Italian students have often discovered connections with styles or themes of European painting, using it as a natural

9 Castro is starting his career along the Kenyan coast doing portraits and imitating the style of many European artists, such as Salvador Dalí. A rich collection of his early works is owned by Lezlie Rampinelli in Kilifi.

yardstick for assessments: this is the “visual literacy” in which they have been educated. On the contrary, Kenyan students have a different cultural code which allows them to immediately recognise settings, contexts, and details, providing in some cases profound interpretations. For instance, it seems incredible that a Kenyan student grasped the different areas of provenance of two painters by the different way in which they represent the same subject (the donkey of Lamu). At the same time, it is astonishing that another Kenyan student clearly read the real intention of the painter in the depiction of Mudibo’s slum: the perception of the student and the purpose of the artist are exactly coincident. In this specific case, I think, we can really talk about a reading of a painting through the point of view of the native, the artist, and the local observer, who expressed the same idea.

We do not always have this coincidence of reading, but in some other cases the interpretation of a student was still very effective in revealing the “intention of the picture”, that is, the real power of the images. The seascapes by Fred Abuga evoked in the mind of a Kenyan student the poetic image of a piano’s keys and of the music of the water, without any connection to the purpose of the painter, who uses this technique in all his paintings.

The series with the elephants by Yegonizer became in the mind of another Kenyan student a story that metaphorically expresses the way out of suffering, against each intention of the artist who produced these paintings without thinking of a series or a story.¹⁰ As stated by Michael Baxandall (1985) and then by William J. T. Mitchell (1996, 2005), some works of art have the power to raise effects regardless of their original function and regardless of the intentions of the artist (and the commissioner) who generated them: this is the “intention of the picture”. The power to cause emotional reading and responses is always vital in a work of art, and it is strictly connected to the culture of the observer. It survives the author and the epoch in which it was generated, and it bursts out differently, in unexpected and ever-new ways across time (Ferretti 2009, pp. 81–112). In my specific case, as a Western art historian, I do not care that the reading given by the local observer has no relationship with the intentional purposes of the artist. Instead, I am interested in the unprecedented way of proceeding in seeking the meanings of the painting through an accumulation of profound observations, aimed at making sense of every little detail that a Western eye fails to notice.

This is the reason why, in my opinion, the reactions of the local observer, their readings of a work of art, and their interpretative proposals, collected with the focus group tool, seem to be a useful cultural key to better enter the world of contemporary Kenyan art production, avoiding an exclusive Eurocentric perspective and learning from the point of view of the natives.

10 When asked which painting they would like to have at home, the Kenyan students all replied “Yegonizer’s elephants”.

Fig. 1.
Wanjoi – Men at the End of Ramadan. Photo:
Archive of author.



Fig. 2.
Adams Mussa. Photo: Archive of author.
Fig. 3-5.
Fred Abuga. Photo: Archive of author.



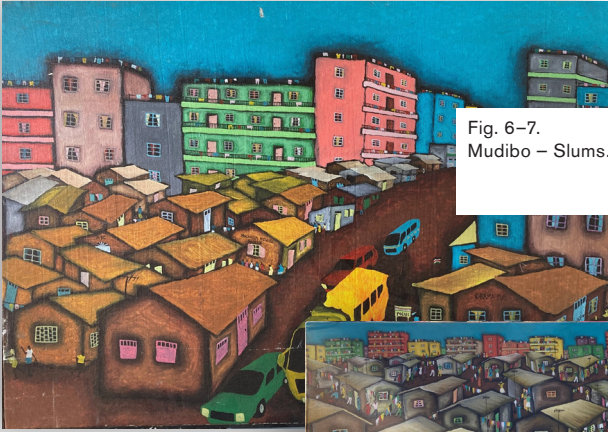


Fig. 6-7.
Mudibo – Slums. Photo: Archive of author.



Fig. 8-10.
Yegonizer. Photo: Archive of author.



Fig. 11.
Castro – Maasai Triptych.
Photo: Archive of author.



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PARTICIPATION AS A PART OF ART CURATORIAL WORK

Adéla Machová

Introduction

Fine arts curating currently includes many various approaches, and we can talk about a wide range of participatory moments the curator can meet. This text focuses mainly on the creation of a participatory environment and the phenomenon of active viewer participation from the perspective of curatorial work.

Interactive visual works and participatory art projects often require a special format of exhibition that focuses on the viewer as a partner completing an artwork and its message. A curatorial strategy called “educational-interactive approach” is a type of curatorial grasp where art education and experience are combined. The aim is to engage the audience and create the conditions to attract their minds. The educational-interactive curatorial approach focuses primarily on the viewer – in the context of our, a visitor of an exhibition. And we are aware that not every viewer of an exhibition will be an active perceiver and eager collaborator. But we (as curators) could open the door for possible active participation.

Curator Juliana Engberg described her own curatorial practice as an unceasing interest: “...being concerned with triple A: Art, Artists and Audience” (Hoare 2016, p. 8). These three elements are common for each curatorial work related to contemporary visual art, with the exhibition as the resulting output. Considering who and what will be exhibited in order to articulate the idea through the final form of the exhibition presented to the audience is one of the initial moments of the specific curatorial strategy. We can find a different scope of participation within these processes: sometimes deeper, sometimes less significant; however, let us have a closer look at the participative connection between three elements – the curator with artists, artwork, and the audience.

The Opening of the Curatorial Approach

A curatorial work in the artistic field has experienced significant changes because of an increasing tendency to interpret art in a well-founded and mindful manner. A traditional perception of the curator’s position as a caretaker of artefacts and of their values in museums and galleries is insufficient today. The main characteristic of curators currently working with contemporary visual art is flexibility.

The art curator’s role, but also their position in the art scene in the process of mediating a work of art, is naturally and dynamically changing along with the development of the society and art in the second half of the 20th century. That is why contemporary art curators can nowadays be categorised into two basic groups. There are curators as art mediators (curator – creator of an exhibition) and curators of collections in art museums (curator of a professional department). The anticipated “limitation of the creative work” of the museum curator is based on the traditional institutional understanding of art care from a defined art-historical point of view, where the curator of the museum collection specialises in a certain area

and perceives it through the lens of an art historian (e.g. caring for a Japanese historical art collection). A curator of a collection can participate in the establishment of art history or historical data. On the contrary, a curator working with contemporary art reflects the present, and completes the material for the future history of art. This classification of two basic types of curatorial work does not limit curators of museum collections in their creative approach to the exhibition.

Defining curators of contemporary art in general today, we come to a broad definition of skills and competencies. The curator is the caregiver and active mediator of the art, as described by Harald Szeemann (Obrist 2012, p. 90). The curator of contemporary art becomes one of the key figures in defining the direction of contemporary art development. The typical aims of curatorial work are to discover a mechanism of art, communicate with artists, and search for an innovative overlap in the exhibition.

At the end of the 1960s, a certain creative curatorial intention is established within the curatorial work, when the curator builds their selection on a chosen topic and at the same time creates a new perception context of selected artworks through the exhibition presentation. For example, since the mid-1960s, we have become more likely to encounter the mediation of art in the public space in the American environment, thanks to the genre of public art. Established art presentation in the interior of art institutions has shifted outside of the white cube. The work of art moves closer to the audience, meeting specific conditions.

In the 1970s, social contact and audience turnover were on the rise in the art world. At the same time, gallery institutions dedicated directly to current fine art are developing. Specific centres for the presentation of contemporary art were created. Their purpose was a focus on direct presentation and opening the dialogue of art with other societal paradigms.

Within the institutions, exhibition projects have appeared that focus on current topics in society or new trends both in artistic creation and in the presentation of the artwork. Many curatorial projects have helped to anchor new creative approaches in art, such as conceptual art or sound art.

In the following years, we could also notice a gradual expansion of art into unusual specific areas and broader artistic research into other fields, which primarily enabled the development of postmodern thinking. This mutual interdisciplinary cooperation has appeared in curatorial work since the 1980s, and it continues to this day.

The 1990s brought stronger emphasis on the aspect of cooperation, not only based on multidisciplinary but between people as well. Many participatory art projects co-realised directly by the audience were created, and the viewer became an active element in the very process of artistic creation. We can talk about the so-called direct turn to the viewer, including involvement in creative processes and cooperation with artists.

Direct Turn to the Audience

Between 1997 and 2000, there was a project realized at the Brazilian Center for the Defense and Protection of Children in Salvador named *Quiet in the Land: Everyday Life, Contemporary Art, and Projecto Axé*, which brought together various programmes and activities to connect artists with their local community (mostly children, but also the general public). In addition to artistic expression and perception, the project also focused on the development of education and social and

cultural background in the local community. Nineteen artists worked mainly with children and lecturers from *Projecto Axé* (Wade 2000, p. 165).

The artists lived with their families in Salvador during their art residencies and the local community had the opportunity to see how they worked together, making art a part of everyday life. Each artist received a working group of participants, including experts in pedagogy and social education, so that they could fully concentrate on their artistic work. From the beginning, the task of the artists was not to educate children and locals, but to show the means of self-perception, as well as how to perceive art as a tool for cultural identity and world exploration.

For example, the artist Leonardo Drew decided to create an installation of the large network, which he sewed discarded objects into; objects that he and the children had found on the streets or in courtyards. His project calculated with the possibility of constant choice, making decisions about what we really need and what is not that necessary and how we behave. The process of creating the net was preceded by discussions with the children about consumer culture and the environment, because it was mostly waste from the street that was used, but also questions about why they had brought a particular object, where they had found it, and what it meant to them. These were various materials showing a time after being used, but at the same time we could feel a certain irony comparing this to archaeological finds captured in the time network.

The artist Cai Guo-Qiang prepared a performance called Salute with a local community. The aim was accenting the tradition of inviting guests to show them the cultural traditions and being hospitable. Many works were co-created by the people of the local community, whether by sharing their own worldview, using materials that are part of their daily lives or co-creating some other elements of the artwork.

One of the outputs of *The Quiet in the Land* project was an exhibition of the same name held in June 2000 at the Museo de Arte Moderna da Bahia in Salvador (The Quiet in the Land 2015, online). Mutual experience, emphasis on tradition and reflection on the environment was the main concept of the exhibition, which semantically referred to the cultural heritage and awareness of the identity of the local society. The curatorial exhibition project did not depict missionary activity in the local slum, but highlighted the person, their life, and the right to imagine a better future, which is completed primarily by one's own will and diligence.

Curator as a Creator of Exhibitions

For a basic orientation in curatorial work, it is important to have a certain overview and definition of common characteristics, which generally describe the various curatorial approaches used in the individual curatorial strategy. In order to capture the specific focus of curatorial approaches, we will try to distinguish them into more general units: thematic approach, salon approach, educational-interactive approach, and archival-documentation approach, which are commonly used in my own curatorial work and defined by a certain degree of implementation within the followed motive of participation. However, there is another possible division and supplementation to this taxonomy of curatorial approaches, such as art historical, media based, or the approach related to curatorial work in public spaces, etc.

The naming of the thematic curatorial approach is based on a common denominator – a topic in which the curator further narrows their object of interest and makes a profile of any social issues or events for the chosen exhibition concept.

On the contrary, the salon curatorial approach is characterised by the motive of preparing an overview of various diversity or given characteristics of artistic creation, where, however, the production (or managerial) level exceeds the creative curatorial focus of the exhibition.

The educational-interactive curatorial approach focuses primarily on the viewer, who is there to be captivated. It is important to create conditions for activating the viewer's intellect as the title itself implies. The fourth, archival-documentation curatorial approach definition lays in using specific selection criteria (technique, genre, artistic tendency, artist's personality, historical classification) and the creation of documentation or an archive of contemporary art. This approach refers most to the searching for and mapping of creative attitudes in contemporary art.

This classification of curatorial approaches helps with orientation between exhibition projects focused conceptually and those that target the viewer. There is always an assumed theoretical framework of curatorial projects and the natural connection to the history of art and to the contemporary artistic tendencies which are shaping the current art scene (cultural and professional context).

Of course, the curatorial approach can be influenced, for example, by the spatial conditions of the exhibition or it can be shaped by the personal and institutional background for possible active mediation of contemporary art using various interpretive tools (accompanying programmes and activities with viewers). These moments shift the curatorial approach to the overall curatorial strategy of the presentation in the process of complex art mediation.

We assume that the exhibition works primarily as a platform for experience, perception and understanding. *"An exhibition should not be a 'book on the wall'... and artists sometimes respond adversely to being corralled into a concept. You need to strike a balance, satisfy the audience and earn the respect of artists."* (George 2015, p. 32) Whatever approach the contemporary art curator chooses or formulates as an individual strategy, they mustn't forget the aspect of being a mediator between the artist and the audience, creating space for the mediation of an idea and to link the work of art to the viewer (perceiver). We rely on Wittgenstein's philosophical considerations, where by changing the point of view, the meaning of the object changes (Wittgenstein 1993, pp. 245–247). At the same time, we also assume that the curator becomes, in a way, an independently responsible creator who works with ready made materials (works of art), which they put in a context.

Curatorial Focus and Experience

For my own curatorial position, there is typically an effort to adapt the exhibition space to the audience's perception and to prepare a certain communication platform, space for dialogue between art and viewer. This turnover to the viewer lays, among other things, in the selection and preparation of accompanying programs, which follow the potential of creating suitable environments for broader or more culturally rooted interpretation of displayed art. Despite this viewer-friendly layer, the exhibition projects themselves are built on a theoretical background and the works of art are contextualised by knowledge of art history, current art scene events, and today's societal issues. The basis of my curatorial strategy is to show the images of the contemporary world captured in a work of art, to make it readable, to reconnect it with a viewer, and to create a new meaning through context.

We can talk about the turn to the viewer based on the choice and preparation of selected accompanying tools (e.g. text or activities) to support intersubjective interpretation of art. The curated accompanying programme plays a role in the exhibition, however, it is not aimed to attract all visitors. It is more of a support tool in the process of mediating art and its interpretation. We need to realise that the accompanying programme itself does not want to be a direct interpretation of the exhibition or individual works. On the contrary, it is intended to serve as a gateway to the world of fine arts and to refine the viewer's experience. The individual steps – taking a stand on the artwork, perception, interpretation and understanding – must be performed by the viewer himself.

As we can assume, the viewer often does not want to read the curatorial texts, so we offer a guided tour through the exhibition. As curators, we should not only tell stories about art, but also prepare questions (from active to cognitive), and ask the audience about their "sight". That is how we create the platform for a discussion on selected works of art and on the exhibition, which connects individual art pieces into one unit.

Most often, the curatorial practice takes place in the traditional format of the gallery space; the so-called "white cube". This gallery space, typified by four white walls, is then conceived as a place for dialogue. Within the framework of open cooperation with partial actors in the process of mediating art, the curator strives to create a communication environment and connect art with the public as a mediator.

The Educational-Interactive Curatorial Approach

The seemingly unusual "educational-interactive" connection refers to two trends in contemporary art accentuated by curators – art education (the ability to understand metaphors, ethical transcendence, sharing cultural values) and experience. We often come across special exhibition formats working with contemporary participatory or interactive art, which focus on the viewer as a partner completing the final result of the work's artistic message.

The educational aspect reflects a tendency of encouraging curiosity and sensitivity. It is a form of activating the viewer (visitor of the exhibition) on the basis of their previous experience, which they further refine or extend.

In the artistic environment, we can notice an increase in interactive works which encourage the viewer to engage with the artwork. Based on the principle of contact, there is an interaction between two factors – in this case the work and the viewer. During contact, there is a certain way of discovering the functions of the object, for example in a "playfull" form or through demasking the cause of movement, etc.

One of the ways to grasp educational-interactive phenomena in an artistic environment is the curatorial work itself, with a contemporary artist realising interactive works. As we know, such an interactive work is completed by the viewer (gallery visitor) by grasping the exhibited artistic situation, which they are experiencing at the same time, without expecting to be the active element of the work.

The Carsten Höller's exhibition *Experience*, for example, which took place at the New Museum in New York (New Museum 2012, online) and its main motif was experiencing. The exhibited interactive works were adapted to the gallery space and directly calculated both with the presence of the viewer and with their

interest through the undemanding playful entertainment commonly required by the major society today. At the same time, the exhibition encouraged open perceptions and reactions to the given content structures of works (for example, a large slide over three floors of the gallery, which allowed adult visitors to once again experience children's joy and freedom; or a relaxing bath for some individuals causing psychotic states, etc.).

When the visitor "only" walked through this exhibition and did not participate in the individual spatial installations, they gained only a one-sided visual experience, but were still able to decipher the content of the exhibition project and its significance. They had the opportunity to observe the interactivity of the exhibited works in confrontation (which formed a certain context of the exhibition) with another visitor. Although the degree of the exhibited works fulfilment by Carsten Höller lay in the audience and its participation, the accompanying curatorial text on the gallery walls and the observation of situations in the gallery (contacts of other visitors with works) created conditions for the exhibition visitor's perception.

Together with the exhibition organisation, the circumstances taking place completed the necessary environment for understanding the significance of the exhibition. The visitor felt that they had found themselves in a laboratory of experience, in an experimental space where human nature, its transformation and the possibilities of thought influence or direction were examined. Semantically, the exhibition pointed to an incredible tool, such as the brain processing human experience, and at the same time played with the viewer's mind, attacked it, and led to the possible experience of both new things and already known ones.

The educational-interactive approach therefore focuses on creating an exhibition as a tool for the inner and outer human world recognition. We can notice that the goal is to refine the human experience, using both tools based on the viewer's experience and educational programs that complete the space (background) for the perception and interpretation of art during the exhibition.

Curatorial Statement I. – The exhibition “OBJEKTIVNĚ”

The exhibition project *OBJEKTIVNĚ*¹¹ focused on current spatial artistic creation, especially objects that generate a certain experience. The hidden play on words in the title of the exhibition referred to the activation of perception and thinking, but mainly to the fact that we do not have to look for works of art only in the gallery, but simple encounters with art can become part of our everyday lives.

Within the theoretical framework, the exhibition moved in the field of contemporary sculpture and spatial creation and represented a small fraction of current sculptural work using a certain interactivity with the viewer, as well as with the author's experience. The main element of the exhibition became the object in the installation or event and its disturbed static nature, either through the artistic intention or through the interest of the viewer. The curatorial selection of works focused on creating an open space for experience, play and reflection of the world and its cognition.

11 The title of exhibition is playing ambiguously with the meaning of the Czech words hidden inside – OBJECTalsoOUT versus OBJECTively. The exhibition was realised by Adéla Machová (born Hrušková) for the Emil Filla Gallery in Ústí nad Labem that took place from September 13 to November 10, 2012.

The exhibiting authors presented visually diverse, yet very similar works, as they focused on experience, personal perception and forms of recording: “*The most significant link between the works is the interest in reinterpretation and partial deformation of the existing reality – whether it is a landscape or a natural motif and their transmission in the form of installation (Jan Krůčka, Jan Prošek), video (Jan Prošek), object (Libor Novotný, Robert Vlasák) or physics play (Robert Vlasák).*” (Zikmundová, In: Hrušková 2012, p. 73) The technique and the materials used in the artwork evoked surprise or inspiration to discover the world hidden in the detail of the artwork.

The exhibition was conceived by the curator as a blank sheet, on which the discovered detail of the surrounding world is to be inscribed (for example, the landscape character revealed in the audio installation *A Trip* by Jan Prošek and Jan Krůčka, where the authors tell about their journey) and in which a trace of the viewer’s activity remains (for example, Robert Vlasák’s *Sypart* installation, where the track of constantly pouring sand was captured on the floor and shaped plinths, and visitors imprinted their mark with a drawing, treading, writing, or the interruption of loose sand). As the individual works existed during the exhibition and “met” the visitors, the clean sheet was gradually being filled, materialising.

The curator’s intention was to create enough space for selected works where they would meet a diverse audience. Therefore, the installation of the exhibition was based on the spatial concept and distribution of works without mutual interference in the spirit of the “white-cube” presentation and there was an accompanying text used when entering the gallery to interconnect the context.

The classic format of the exhibition, which preserves a clean and spacious environment, did not disturb the viewer calling for a proactive approach, but allowed the viewer to take their own position for perceiving the work and the entire exhibition. The transmission of messages, also called the communication bridge, worked within the usual process of perception – seeing, as individual works of art spoke “for themselves” in connection with the previous experience of the exhibition visitor. At the moment of possible confusion of the viewer, they were directed by the aforementioned curatorial text accompanying the exhibition in the form of a large-format print placed on the wall at the entrance to the exhibition or in printed paper form.

The curatorial intention of the exhibition was, among other things, to draw attention to the fact that we should be able to look around in order to experience and understand things better. A flat perception of reality without context allows us to observe, but no longer mentally process the content and meaning of things around us. So how to prepare and alert the viewer to this fact? The curatorial preparation, subsequent production, and realisation of the exhibition did not end with the final presentation to the public. An accompanying programme for selected target groups was prepared for the *OBJEKTIVNĚ* exhibition, by which the curator intended to create suitable conditions for specific perception, experience and understanding of the exhibited works.

The creative workshop called *Object – Space – Installation* became an interesting experience, made as a combination of guided tours with the curator and a creative moment that brings the visitor a direct personal experience with artistic creation. The activities of this programme enabled the viewer to use their previous experience, but also to learn seeing the contents of works of art and grasp their meanings. The topic of the workshop, consisting in viewing the object as

a materially given, focused mainly on perception, interpretation and understanding.

After a short introductory guided tour through the exhibition, three tasks were set for visitors. The tasks focused on personal interaction with the exhibited objects, restricted in order not to destroy or change the artwork, maintaining the well-known rules of appropriate behaviour in the gallery and to the work of art. The first task refined the initial subjective perceptions of the viewer – workshop participant. Participants were given pre-printed stickers with various sentences, fragments of ideas, texts associated with the exhibited works. Through intersubjective interpretation and metaphorical references arising during the dialogue with the works of art, the sentences were assigned to the displayed artworks.

The second follow-up task encouraged their own inner thinking, when each participating individual wrote an intersubjective interpretation formulated in a report (text) on a yellow sticker. This activity subsequently developed into a debate about the meaning and content of each exhibited work of art.

The third, more open task focused on the experience of creation and developed the existing skills of the participants. With the help of simple materials (paper, sand, textiles, metal components) they created their own object or installation in the gallery space, while the result was to reflect the surrounding world and evoke an experience. There were small installations in the window, dreamy objects of new shapes or defined spaces for preserving the present moment.

The format of the workshop created an open platform for subjective perceptions for participants (ages 17–35), which was anchored to a more objective perspective through common dialogue and sharing views and ideas about the exhibited works. By initiating the internal activity of the viewer and passing on new experience in the field of fine arts, the educational-interactive curatorial approach was fulfilled.

At the *OBJEKTIVNĚ* exhibition, we can identify a curatorial strategy intensively oriented towards the viewer, focused mainly on the future dialogue between the recipient (viewer) and the work of art. That is why, within the taxonomy of curatorial approaches, we classify this exhibition as an educational-interactive approach characterised by a certain interactivity of works of art and the subsequent possibility to use the artworks as “material to learn” or a source of a certain experience.

Curatorial statement II. – Exhibition “ACTION_REACTION”

Interaction, variability, playfulness and provocative activation of the viewer captured the group exhibition titled *ACTION_REACTION*¹². The centre of curatorial attention was the action and its quality of a certain movement or process, both the action depicted by the author and the action required by the work of art, known as the interactivity of the work. The exhibition was approached primarily from an archival-documentary point of view, as the curatorial attention was focused on capturing selected trends in contemporary art.

12 The exhibition took a place in the ARTATAK Gallery in v Horní Počernice – Prague, from January 16 to February 4, 2015 (Curators: Adéla Machová in collaboration with Markéta Souhradová). The exhibition featured works using various media – installation (P. Antczak, J. Krtička), video installation (T. Fišerová, P. Mrkus), video frame (J. Prošek), drawing (D. Böhm & J. Franta), interactive objects (A. Chmiel, A. Symonová), action (B. Kirchner, P. Pufler).

The curatorial intention was to show works of art working with activity in different ways and at the same time to show a wide scale of media used – from kinetic objects through performances, video art to interventions aimed directly at the viewer. The exhibited works required a certain amount of viewer's attention, whether it was their keen eye or even movement.

There was no general guide for the viewer on how to approach individual works of art. On the one hand, it would deny their motive for action evoking a reaction, and on the other hand, it would not leave room for intersubjective interpretation. However, the viewer could rely on the accompanying curatorial text for the exhibition¹³, which offered a clue in a way, as well as capturing the title of the exhibition. In fact, these verbal tools the visitor did not have to use immediately, they were not forced on them, but they served the more inquisitive to complete the information about the work and its author. The viewer could therefore decide for themselves how to start processing visual information, whether to let the works themselves "speak out" or to get further familiar with the concept of the exhibition.

The exhibition was not built as an experiential workshop, but as a presentation of contemporary art dealing with interactivity or action and reaction. At first glance, the gallery's space was tempting to discover by play, because it was occupied and connected by a magnificent procedural installation called *Serendipita* by the author duo David Böhm and Jiří Franta. The authors worked with the generous space and drawing motif. Using poppies, they created a drawing on the floor of the gallery, which the visitors either respected and surrounded with their presence, or completed with their own interventions. But some visitors also interrupted it with their unfocused walking through, blurring some of the drawing lines, until the whole drawing was procedurally transformed into another more abstract form.

Other works of art at the exhibition led the viewer to various types of active contact (*Expedition Prague – Horní Počernice* by Blanka Kirchner encouraging the visitor to travel to explore the surrounding area) or offered possibilities of touching the exhibited objects and moving them or regrouping components to create a new visual image (*Magneto* by Patrik Antczak).

With the resulting presentation in the gallery, the curators of the exhibition primarily aimed to capture the emerging artistic tendency in the current art scene – the diversity of interactive art. Therefore, we should not be surprised that from the cultural entertainment point of view, the *ACTION_REACTION* exhibition did not fulfil the expected uniqueness for the audience. As Tereza Havlínková writes: "*Unlike Petr Nikl's PLAY project, the exhibition is not so educational that schools come to take part in it, and unfortunately not so beneficial as to exceed the border of Saturday's trip with children towards a unique cultural event*" (Havlínková 2015, online). Although the exhibition may have seemed to appeal to the audience through an action and reaction topic, it was never intended to create an entertaining cultural event. The exhibition tried to capture the recent growing trend of interactivity in the works.

13 In this case, it was a text supplemented by medallions of the authors and a description of the exhibited works. The viewer found the text on a hung printed banner at the entrance to the exhibition and also in the form of a smaller guide to the exhibition, if they were interested in expanding their new experience with more information.

The prepared traditional accompanying programme in the form of guided tours through the exhibition also testified to the non-creation of a cultural adventure event, but an exhibition in the classical format of mediating contemporary art. On the other hand, it is true that despite showing the interactivity and educational potential of some of the exhibited works, their educational-interactive motif was not purposefully developed. The action and reaction motif was mapped in the spread of artistic representation and was viewed in an artistic way, from the point of view of art history.

If we look back at the exhibition, we can think about the possibility of developing educational potential and using artworks as tools for gaining new knowledge. However, this would suppress not only the curatorial intention and its theoretical and artistic anchoring, but also the work of art itself, which was not primarily created for this purpose. The given work described as a certain contact with the viewer (interactivity) is not intended for education in any area, which means that the works of art are not tools of education. The possible interactivity of some works helped to create more natural bridge of communication between the work and its perceiver. We are aware that this theoretical context of the exhibition supposes a viewer at least partially familiar with the art world, with certain equipment and knowledge of contemporary art or a viewer willing to learn the ropes in this area.

Summary – Open Access to Viewer

The exhibition presentation is perceived as a communication platform, where a space for dialogue between art and the spectator is opened. The main curatorial attention is paid directly to the work of art, which can resonate as the structure built by its author and the selected context allows it. The curatorial position oscillates between the theoretical background (contextualisation of the work of art in relation to the history of art and the contemporary art scene) and the necessary communication with the viewer and the artist themselves.

The passive viewer will also see the artistic message but using a different context. The educational turn in the curatorial work is seen in an incentive to inquisitive perception and seeing. It is a form of activation of the viewer based on their previous experience. And the curator needs to create the exhibition as a tool for exploring the inner and outer world of humanity.

The curator can use the approach based on the experience of the viewer or some educational programs – both to create the special space in the exhibition, it is a kind of background for the perception, reception, and interpretation of art. The exhibition must multiply the ways we look at the world, read it, interpret it, write about it, and represent it.



Fig. 1.
View to exposition - installation Serendipita by Jiří Franta & David Böhm, 2015, ARTATAK Gallery in v Horní Počernice, Prague. Photo: Archive of curator.

Fig. 2.
View to exposition - participative artwork Expedition by Blanka Kirchner, 2015, ARTATAK Gallery in v Horní Počernice, Prague. Photo: Archive of curator.



Fig. 3.
View to exposition after the workshop - installation Bright Shape by Jan Prošek, 2012, Emil Filla Gallery in Ústí nad Labem. Photo: Radek Jandera.



Fig. 4.
View to exposition - sound installation Trip by Jan Krτίčka & Jan Prošek, 2011, Emil Filla Gallery in Ústí nad Labem. Photo: Radek Jandera.

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BRINGING THE STARS CLOSER. “IMAGINOPOLIS”: THE CONSTELLATION, FROM AN IMAGE OF WONDER TO AN EMBLEM OF CLOSENESS.

Michele Gentili

“The sky teeming with stars is the consolation of the lonely and vagabonds. The constellations point the way to those groping in the dark.”

(Mazzucco 2017, p. 175)

We can only imagine the disorientation and sense of helplessness brought about by a moment that suddenly changes your life; and a starry sky, the overwhelming beauty of nature, is not enough to bring relief to those who have lost everything. Six years have already passed since the first violent earthquake that profoundly impacted the lives of people in central Italy¹⁴. An astrological period if placed in the context of a life. Little and nothing seems to have changed during these years: bureaucratic delays, alternating governments, unfulfilled promises, and even today very few have left the small – and often ramshackle – emergency homes. Historic centres that have finally reopened to the public are rare, while those who have decided to do business and set up shop here are few and far between. Even before the earthquake, this area of the Apennines suffered from heavy depopulation, economic interests shifting towards cities and the coast and the consequent loss of public services, and today it is tested still further by the effects of a global pandemic that is profoundly affecting social dynamics worldwide.

Seeking to provide a vision of artistic projects integrated into their local

14 This refers to the long series of seismic events recorded in Central Italy between August 2016 and January 2017, which affected a vast area covering four regions and ten provinces. This set of events resulted in around 41,000 people displaced, 388 injured, and 303 dead.

context, back in 2017 the McZee cultural association¹⁵ was already interested in a reflection on the earthquake's consequences with the project *On_the_spot/ Anomalie*, in which ten young artists created temporary installations in the park of the former Santa Croce asylum in Macerata. This complex had been converted over the years into a health district following the closure of psychiatric hospitals, but was rendered unusable by the earthquake of October 2016 and had since then remained in a state of neglect. The exhibition brought together the history of the psychiatric institution and the human experiences of its residents with the contemporary dynamics generated by the earthquake (see Gentili 2018). Two years later in summer 2019, McZee's new project *Imaginopolis. La città che non cade (The City That Does Not Fall)* returned to address the issue, using typical methodologies of relational art as a tool for reflecting on the meaning of living and the value of the community. The project was aimed at the children of Visso, a small town in the Marche Apennines once known for the beauty of its historic centre and now, sadly, as a place symbolic of the earthquake (fig. 1).

The City That Does Not Fall

Previously, between spring and summer 2016, another urban education project also named *Imaginopolis* involved a group of children from Montecassiano (Macerata), who were offered a few days of workshops to discover their town through creative activities, games, and walks. On the last day, after some time spent experiencing the town, the children had the opportunity to meet a group of young architects and designers. Together they developed phantasmagorical projects for their ideal town, which then became the heart of the exhibition *Imaginopolis. I nostri luoghi con i loro occhi (Our Places Through Their Eyes)*. Intended mainly for adults, this event aimed to provide alternative ways of living and thinking about shared spaces, considering the town as a place of memory, a space for everyday life and, above all, a field of action for future utopias (see Gentili 2017).

In Visso, on the other hand, the interest in urban planning and designing hypothetical future places gave way to a more significant and preeminent reflection on what actually remained of the destroyed town. Even before the disaster, the depopulation of inland areas placed small mountain communities at risk of disintegrating and losing that sense of community which has always characterised the life of small towns. The 2016–2017 earthquake suddenly accelerated a phenomenon that had already existed for some time. Those who decided to stay here after the earthquake had to call on their strength and determination to face not only the usual difficulties, but also to make their way through the rubble, hoping for a possible future for themselves and their community. This second edition of *Imaginopolis* could only be dedicated to the “City That Does Not Fall”, to the residents of Visso and their relationships, to resistance against all adversity.

15 The McZee cultural association is a non-profit organisation founded in Macerata in 2017 by young art historians and artists joining forces to promote art and culture through design to support emerging creativity, artistic research, and heritage education events.

The Constellation

“Since long before our electronic devices, picture books like this one, and even cave walls awaiting the artist’s brush, the night sky has been a medium filled with countless points of light that beckon gazers to connect the dots. Recognizing and naming patterns in the sky gradually became more than just a casual affair: it grew to be part of a deliberate recall of imagery that possessed religious or mythic significance, a reminder of the glory of the gods we praise for creating the world, or of the power of the ruler who proclaimed descent from them.” (Aveni 2019, p. 2) The starry sky has always been the subject of contemplation by humanity. The distant stars have generated fascination, a sense of the sublime, and a series of values that people have attributed to them over time. By coming up with the constellations, people tried to make sense of the indefinite and orient themselves in an unknown universe infinitely larger than themselves.

For *Imaginopolis. The City That Does Not Fall*, we took inspiration from the stars, bright and lonely in the distance, then joined together for something more evident and meaningful: the constellation as a design to unite with others and orient ourselves in chaos.

We imagined Visso as a celestial vault and each member of its community as a star, each relationship with another as an imaginary trail in the inhabited space. During the workshops with the children, we asked them which were the symbolic places of the town or the spaces most full of shared meanings and memories. The kids oriented us in the town’s physical and emotional geography, telling us anecdotes, introducing us to members of the community, guiding us in getting to know the place and its inhabitants (fig. 2). After identifying which points of the town to select and creating an imaginary constellation of spaces, we made flags together from night-blue fabric and sewed a golden star in the middle. Each flag was then hung in the places we had chosen together (fig. 3).

On the Night of San Lorenzo on 10 August, it is traditional (in Italy, at least) to observe the phenomenon of shooting stars or meteors, celestial bodies that disintegrate upon entering the earth’s atmosphere and produce a luminous trail. This phenomenon seems to be particularly visible on that date in August, and it is customary to make a wish whenever you spot a rapid trail in the sky. On the night of 10 August 2019, with the children we symbolically hung our flags in the town damaged by the earthquake: stars which, unlike the real ones, would not fall that night but would be raised to the sky. A collective intervention on urban space to highlight the relationships with inhabited places, a small ephemeral monument to the tenacity of the inhabitants (fig. 4, 5).

On the same day, the children asked their fellow townsfolk to express a wish for their town on small star-shaped sheets, which we used to decorate the branches of a young willow we had planted together in the park in Visso. As it grew, the tree would bear the stars towards the sky with the wishes that the community entrusted to them on the Day of San Lorenzo (fig. 6).

The project, conceived by the writer for the McZee Cultural Association, took place with collaboration from the Municipality and the Pro Loco (local promotional organisation) of Visso. A short documentary by Simone Pianesi and Sonia Petrocelli (Associazione Culturale McZee 2019, online) and a catalogue with photographs by Alisia Cruciani were drawn from the experience (Cruciani 2019).

Fig. 1.
The flag of Imaginopolis at the entrance to the red zone, Visso. Photo: Alisia Cruciani, 2019.



Fig. 2.
One of the creative workshops, Visso. Photo: Alisia Cruciani, 2019.



Fig. 3.
One of the children of Visso with his flag. Photo: Alisia Cruciani, 2019.



Fig. 4.
The flag of Imaginopolis in the square of Visso, inaccessible to residents. Photo: Alisia Cruciani, 2019.





Fig. 5.
A star on the Night of San Lorenzo, Visso.
Photo: Alisia Cruciani, 2019.



Fig. 6.
Some children collect the wishes of the community,
Visso. Photo: Alisia Cruciani, 2019.

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“IMAGES OF CHRISTIANITY” IN AFRICA AND EUROPE: A COMPARATIVE DIALOGUE ON THE FUTURE OF CHRISTIANITY

Stephen Muoki Joshua

Introduction

About three decades ago, the late John Mbiti, a renowned Kenyan scholar of religion, argued that efforts towards Christianising Africa had superseded those of Africanising Christianity (Mbiti 1969). Similarly, David Neff (2009) contended the lack of decolonisation and de-Westernisation of African Christianity. A majority of recent scholars, most notably Dirk van der Merwe (2016), have entered the debate from a dialectic and pro-contextualisation perspective.

However, a key underlying concern is the role of Africa in shaping the future of Christianity. Kwame Bediako does not shy in pointing out the surprise turn of events where Africa became a significant continent in shaping the course of Christianity at the turn of the 20th century, when many, including Samuel Huntington (2000), had dismissed the continent's significance in the new post-cold war world order (Bediako 2000). Indeed, it was the proliferation of faith and converts in Africa paralleled by a sharp decline in numbers of professing Christians in modern Western culture, an enlightenment inspired by moral relativism, that enhanced the place of Africa and of religion as a social force in human affairs (Bediako 2000). My participation in a European Union funded project under the Marie Curie Fellowship entitled Technologies in Communication of Art in Social Sciences (TICASS) became a motivation to reflect on the continuities and discontinuities of Christianity within the broader European and African societies. My secondment visits to partner institutions in Europe, the rapprochement with art and spirituality in these contexts were phenomenal.

This article is about three contemporary scholars, from three different continents, writing about three decades ago, from three very distinct disciplines (international relations, art history, and theology), who postulated on the future of Christianity in modern society. The first is Hans Belting, a German art historian and image theorist on medieval, Renaissance, and contemporary art, whose popular *Bildwissenschaft* (image-science) publications proposed a new anthropological way of reading the relation between Christianity and its art images. He “*examined images used in religious contexts in order to identify the original non-artistic functions of images today considered art objects, and argued that ‘art’ was a unit of analysis emerged in the 16th century that obstructed corporeal engagements with images*” (Wikipedia – Hans Belting, In: Rampley 2012, online).

The second is an American political scientist by the name Samuel Huntington, who in 1993 published one of the most cited articles in international relations literature, *The Clash of Civilizations?* contending that a clash between the West and the “Muslim world” would be the key foreign policy issue after the 1991

breakup of the Soviet Union. Set against globalisation and divergent values, the Christian and Islamic worlds would not unite to defeat humanities myriad problems such as gender inequality, climate change, and poverty.

The third is Kwame Bediako, a renowned African theologian from Ghana. In 1995, he published *Christianity in Africa: The Renewal of a Non-Western Religion*, and argued that Western Christian theology had failed in Africa in the face of an expansive Christian faith movement on the continent (Bediako 1992). Through his widely read publications as well as a theological training institute, he envisioned a new religious order in Africa that offered a complete departure from Western Christian thought (Walls 2008). In this article, I am inspired by Belting, Huntington, and Bediako to ask the question: Is Christianity shifting or dying? Narrowing down to Europe and Africa, even further to selected representative countries (Great Britain, Italy, Poland, and the Czech Republic; Kenya and South Africa), I ask, what is the future of Christianity in Europe and Africa given these opposite trajectories? I use art pictures, symbols, and statues from the two continents as well as interviews to reconstruct an image of what Christianity has become in these regions. I argue that whereas in Europe Christianity is a past experience memorised by artists and art historians, in Africa, it is a present affair, an entirely different experience reborn through African culture and practices.

My focus in this article is neither on how interfaith efforts have attempted to solve contemporary social problems nor is to document a pilgrimage of African theology. On the contrary, the article is a reflection on perceptions of Christianity in Europe and Africa through image, both as an artistic and an anthropological product.

Christianity in Imagery

It is hard for any visitor not to notice religious images and symbols in Africa. In Kenya, for instance, posters of traditional healers and Christian evangelists are extremely common on roads connecting airports and cities (Joshua, 2022). Indeed, a recent study of religious images and messages collected in Kenya's northern coastal towns indicated that there is increasing competition between religions for attention through images portrayed in public spaces (Joshua, 2022). Pictures of Christianity in Africa have portrayed an increasing influence of the religion on the social-political and economic lifestyle of the people.

One of the most popular Christian monuments in Mombasa is 'the bell' in Kengeleni (the location of the bell in Kiswahili). It is the actual belfry used by Christian missionaries to warn locals of invading ships that were associated with capturing slaves. The missing (stolen) bell is a poignant reminder of the contention that enclaves the narratives depicting slavery, Christianity, Islam, and the colonial past. About two kilometres away stands another monument dating to 1844 related to the first western missionary, Dr. Ludwin Krapf, being the actual burial sites of his wife and child who died of Malaria immediately after his arrival. Krapf's monument has become a national museum preservation site that depicts an early evangelisation chapter in African Christianity. Such monuments are noticeable in various early missionary establishments of East Africa. Nineteenth century pictures taken by missionaries were used to report back to Europe on their early efforts in Christianising Africa. These depict tombs of missionary families, rural African converts, and small congregations in traditionally structured church buildings.

The present image of Christianity in East Africa, almost two centuries since

the Church Missionary Society first set foot in Rabai in 1844, is quite different. Populated church buildings in both urban and rural settings thrive, influencing all spheres of public and private life. Indeed, mega-churches have become synonymous with 'emerging Christianity' in Africa (Adogame & Shankar 2012). Mega-churches have largely been inspired by the 'prosperity gospel' which promised better material life for all followers upon financial giving in exchange for prayers and blessings. In effect, company-like wealthy church organisations have mushroomed in African cities. Aerial pictures of these churches have depicted fleets of buses, large tents and buildings, as well as impressive parking spaces with large numbers of cars and choppers. This is duplicated in the entire sub-saharan Africa region (Adogame 2016).

The TICASS project team took 500 pictures using a purposive sampling method, 100 in each of the partner countries (Kenya, Poland, the United Kingdom, Italy, and the Czech Republic). It is noteworthy that the number of pictures with religious images was significantly higher in Kenya (14) as compared to Italy (10), Poland (6), Czech Republic (4), and United Kingdom (2) (Joshua 2022). A more striking difference in the pictures taken in Europe regards the content. Contrary to rarely decorated and full to capacity church buildings in Africa, Europe had highly decorated large churches with very few or no worshippers at all. One can never miss the artworks hanging on the walls of the church buildings, especially inside. Evidently, this was increasingly the case in the Roman Catholic tradition, prominent in Macerata (Italy) and Szczecin (Poland) as compared to the Eastern Orthodox tradition of Ústí nad Labem (the Czech Republic), and the Protestantism of London (the United Kingdom). Arguably, the difference may be due to the various perspectives to the doctrine on use of images in worship. Nevertheless, art work and art meditation has become the new form of religion and spirituality in Europe.

Giuseppe Capriotti, a contemporary Italian-based religious art historian, is in agreement that the works of art by minorities and "national churches" has become "an extremely important subject of study" as it "allows us to investigate the voice of "others", more specifically of non-religious, but ethnic or "national" otherness, an explanation for "the promotion of the cult and iconography of specific saints that are sometimes imported from the home country or, in other cases, re-purposed with new functions" (Capriotti 2020). Art works in European churches are presently not a worship tool, as they were in medieval times, but more essentially a window through which we can re-live and feel the moments of medieval communities and identities. Pictures and monuments in European Christianity have become the new religious texts, with artists in effect becoming the new evangelists. Just like St. Luke, Matthew, Mark, or John rearranged the narrative of Jesus in order to deliver a unique message to an intended audience, so do the artists in Europe communicate religious content through art, albeit in some unorthodox Christian teachings.

The artists inspire their audience on contemporary social issues by using biblical icons such as the Madonna and angels merged with foreign mystic beliefs. Churches are not always frequented by worshippers as they are in Africa. On the contrary, churches are open to visitors attracted by the artistic impressions on the walls and pulpits. An interview with one of the street artists in Loreto, Italy, locally rendered as Madonnari, showcased how his "deposition of Christ" installation, a religious image on the floor of the cathedral central square, connected with the mystic story of Nazarene Holy House (*Laswell Card on Holy Nazarene House in Loreto, 2019*). It was a reproduction of a masterpiece.

Prospective Outlook on Christianity

The 21st century context has certainly turned out to be very different from that envisioned by Belting, Bediako, and Huntington. Whereas COVID-19 reminded us just how humanity has become globally interdependent, the Russian invasion of Ukraine has brought back the Cold War in proxy, emphasising the “clash of civilizations” (Stara 2022). Jeremy Hynes is correct in asserting that the terrorist attacks of September 2001 and the aftermath events have amplified the question of the religious “other” in modern society (Haynes 2018). However, contrary to Huntington’s prophecy, Muslims and Christians have demonstrated an increased capacity to co-exist on the basis of mutual respect (Haynes 2018).

It is the thoughts of Belting, however, that have come to characterise Christianity in Europe, and to a large extent its future. Christianity has become more a culture than a confessed faith in Europe. As a matter of fact, Christianity has been reborn through art, imaging a completely new religion. The predominant religion in Europe, I contest, is far different from the first century Judeo-religion, but more an art religion inspired by a medieval iconography. That images are given meaning by humans as an anthropological construct, as argued by Belting, is very relevant to what has happened to Christianity in Europe, it has shifted from faith to art. Rather than pictures evoking spirituality by connecting with Christian rituals embodied in various media such as painting, sculpture, or photography, consumers have linked the pictures to new meanings and mental images,

Christianity in Africa is evidently more evolutionary. Bediako argued for a repeat in Africa of the way the Judeo-Greco Christianity of the first three centuries transformed itself in Europe to produce Western Christianity that was eventually handed down to Africans (Walls 2008). In a similar pattern and more precisely, I see a parallel between the Romanising of Christianity in the fourth century following the conversion of Emperor Constantine to the Africanising of Christianity following the sweeping conversion of sub-saharan African kingdoms since colonialism. An African Christianity, borrowing heavily from African Indigenous Religion, is evidently forming fast. This is nothing new. It is similar to how Christianity borrowed from Roman religion to form the present Roman Catholicism.

Conclusion

Therefore, is Christianity shifting or dying? Church history is affirmative that Christianity has demonstrated a phenomenal capacity to adjust to new socio-cultural contexts. Certainly, the centre of Christianity is shifting southwards where Africa has lots of prospects. The more difficult question, however, is whether the new art religion of Europe and the new African religion have anything admirable or cognizant to orthodox Christianity. Orthodoxy itself is a shifting pendulum, where new religious movements in America such as Jehovah’s Witnesses and Adventism have now been accepted as mainstream Christianity. However, one thing is sure – religion is firmly back as a key factor in determining the social fabric of public and private life in the 21st century.

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SPACES, TIMES, AND LANGUAGES OF EDUCATIONAL ACTION—RESEARCH. THE VISUAL TICASS WORKSHOP EXPERIENCE

Rosita Deluigi

Pedagogical research can use a participatory approach, such as action research, to analyse several aspects of the educational relationship between children and researchers (Stringer 2007). Furthermore, it is also important to use different languages, including visual techniques, in order to construct and share individual and collective narratives.

Internationally, the term arts-based research indicates the systematic use of an artistic process, and the realisation of artistic expressions in all its different forms, as a primary way of understanding and analysing the experience of both the researcher and the people who are implicated in the studies (McNiff 1998).

Starting from these assumptions, we developed various artistic workshops in an Italian kindergarten and some Kenyan primary schools (s.y. 2018–2019) to implement the reflection on the use of images and imagery with children. To enhance the key points of the research, we adapted and used photo-elicitation, a qualitative method developed in the field of anthropology and visual sociology (Harper 2002), to collect and produce a different kind of information, thanks to the use of meaningful images.

The research group focused on five items: the exploration of materials (colours and tools); shared workspaces and materials; the cooperative dynamics which happen in the workshops; encroachments experienced with the use of paint; informal exhibitions held at the end of the workshops. This path has allowed researchers to highlight some useful aspects for the design and management of educational experiences and, at the same time, has allowed us to deal with multiple languages and to share different nuances and perspectives of a participative experience of art and education.

1

Arts-based research in action

The model of action research (AR) in education provides for the direct involvement of all subjects in a perspective of multidisciplinary participation that requires adequate space and time to develop creative processes of knowledge, interpretation, and communication. This approach allows us to build problematising and reflective paradigms and, at the same time, to experiment with actions that generate an impact in the contexts of life and experience. AR is systematic inquiry conducted by teachers-educators-researchers that allows and supports the exploration of teaching experience to realise *“clarity and understanding of events and activities and use those extended understandings to construct effective solutions to the problem(s)”* (Stringer 2007, p. 20).

The identification of new collective practices is promoted by the activation of social actors, by the urgency they feel and by the motivation that supports them to engage in such a path. Since the approach is highly reflection oriented, it can improve, the researchers' professionals' skills and knowledge in their particular educational settings, how they teach, and how well their students learn (Mills 2003). *“In action research, professional development is accompanied by the production of new awareness and new knowledge that are not only related to didactic-educational strategies, but which also affect the contents of the educational intervention, the quality of relations within the class and the dynamics relationships, the organization of the school”* (Losito, Pozzo 2005, p. 214).

Educational contexts have thus become real laboratories of democratic social planning, in which the creative drive comes from the intensity of the social and professional ties that characterise the operational proposals. Sharing reflection and practices opens up to dialogue, providing a methodology rigorously open to change.

The production of knowledge is placed in the intertwining of scientific interests and the need for concrete answers in the face of solicitation of real problems. Paying attention to emerging priorities, participatory research starts from the assumption that knowledge is never an object separate from the person, but on the contrary is inscribed in one's relationship with the person and their immediate experience, and the circumstances in which this relationship exists. Participants and researchers, then, are considered “competent subjects who are not only ‘others’, but others who are autonomous and responsible” (Kemmis, McTaggart 2005). AR is a process in which a person assumes *“inquiry as stance’ as a grounded theory of action that positions the role of practitioners and practitioner knowledge as central to the goal of transforming teaching, learning, leading, and schooling”* (Cochran-Smith, Lytle 2009, p. 119).

Change, a fundamental objective in action research, is pursued not with research on people, but with people (Cadei, Deluigi, Pourtois 2016), producing practical knowledge useful for increasing the quality of life of the participants (Reason, Bradbury 2001). Participatory research, therefore, is a process of democratisation of knowledge (of the way of constructing and using it). The researchers in the situation are the bearers of various knowledge and skills at the service of the community, not to be considered as a “foreign object” of research but as a real breeding ground for the elaboration of ideas and systemic paths.

AR is a critical and self-critical process aimed at animating these transformations through individual and collective self-transformation: *“transformation of our practices, transformation of the way we understand our practices, and transformation of the conditions that enable and constrain our practice. Transforming our practices means transforming what we do; transforming our understandings means transforming what we think and say; and transforming the conditions of practice means transforming the ways we relate to others and to things and circumstances around us”* (Kemmis 2009, p. 463).

The various transformations that AR can solicit, in fact, require the will and the ability to place oneself in situations of transition, in which, together, new paths of educational, social and relational work are built. The identification of a practical focus becomes the strength to promote collaboration, dynamic process – of spiralling back and forth among reflection, data collection, and action – and paths of sharing research.

Listening to the contexts, territories, communities with which the research is built starts with careful observation, the identification of needs, and the development of interventions that allow freedom of expression and creativity. The use of artistic processes and the development of creative paths in the project presented concerns surrounding both the structuring of pedagogical research and the implementation of educational interventions. This allows the research participants to reflect in situations with different tools and languages.

In the experience conducted in the Visual TICASS and Visual TICASS 2.0 workshops, the activation of participatory processes was conveyed by an interdisciplinary reflection between educational objectives and artistic methodologies, creating interesting mergers of meanings and subjective and group expression. Approaching reality with a critical spirit is a first step to starting creative practices in which the goal is to design relevant experiences for co-constructed knowledge in collective learning environments: research questions find provisional answers in the experience that opens pluralised possibilities of reflection and definition of dynamic paradigms.

The dialogue between participatory modalities and creative languages has found confirmation in Arts Based Research (ABS) that, internationally, indicates the systematic use of an artistic process and the realisation of artistic expressions in all its different forms, as a primary way of understanding and analysing the experience of both the researcher and the people who are implicated in the studies (McNiff 1998).

Arts-based research represents *“an unfolding and expanding orientation to qualitative social science that draws inspiration, concepts, processes, and representation from the arts (...)”* (Knowles & Cole 2008, p. XI). This approach can be defined as *“the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies”* (Knowles & Cole 2008, p. 29).

Pedagogical research can use a participatory approach to analyse several aspects of the educational relation that takes place in schools between kids and researchers. Furthermore, it is also important to use different languages, including visual techniques, in order to construct and share individual and collective narratives. In the ABS approach the qualitative method is focused on the organic perspectives experimented in the experiential paths in which researchers and

subjects have a personal connection. In the research process, the researcher spends consistent time with subjects doing arts-related activities and this work informs researcher's understanding of subjects' experience. Due to the practical activities, the process of co-creation takes place and the researcher gains embodied insight into the subjects' experience and can draw on artefacts from the process and subjects to create an arts-informed scholarly output (Rabak, Hammershaimb 2014). The artistic language (in our case, the visual communication) is not just a tool for recording, analysing or interpreting data, but it has become a tool for creating data (Cahnmann-Taylor, Siegesmund 2008).

The way of designing an ABR is the first step towards understanding which kind of interpretative logic is associated to the actions, because it can raise questions and perspectives usually left unasked without the purpose of getting only one single answer. According to Leavy (Leavy 2017),

- 1 Arts practice offers unique insights and access to new knowledge that may not be easily accessible by more traditional research methods – this requires an open mind to explore new educational and creative aspects, starting from the solicitations of the context. To conduct research with children and teenagers, it is very important to take participants into consideration through the use of plural languages, overcoming the evaluation approaches of performance.
- 2 Arts practice takes a non-linear path in a similar way to social interactions. It is a methodology that may be best suited to studying our social lives – a highly rational approach fails to accommodate and sustain the countless dynamics and unforeseen events generated in heterogeneous social contexts. It is necessary to refer to paradigms of complexity and of the construction of knowledge in an ecological perspective (Morin 2001; 2007).
- 3 The ability of art to connect us to ourselves and to others allows arts-based research to inquire into specific, small-scale interactions and the larger contexts that we are situated in – the community dynamics that can be generated thanks to ABR highlight the networks of relationships that characterise micro-pedagogical interventions (Demetrio 2020) and the development of shared intercultural and transcultural creative processes, between local and global belonging, references, and deviations.
- 4 Arts-based research is accessible in a way that traditional academic research is not. The participants and the audiences for art work situate ABR into more accessible places, force the use of accessible language, and require ABR to be immediately and widely relevant – accessibility becomes an essential element of inclusive participation, in which designing and carrying out shared artistic experiences opens up mutual discovery, the enhancement of personal and group resources, and the training of critical subjects in the context.

The interdisciplinary dialogue between the RA and ABR models is extremely generative if the researchers assume a posture, a habitus, of continuous experimentation, capable of diverging from trajectories already drawn and ready to dialogue with contexts, considering them as bearers of interests and needs, and able to generate and promote innovative and collective solutions. We can therefore speak of arts-based action research (ABAR) by identifying some key points that orient

the reflection-intervention, starting from an interpretative theoretical framework linked to hermeneutics that describes the subjects as protagonists of artistic and relational experiences in which different interpretations and self-reflections emerge. Furthermore, the research and experimentation of educational and artistic best practices derives directly from the contexts involved that become subjects of the research: *“in art-based action research, the experiences of the community or research topic are not intended to be studied from a third-party perspective. It is more the opposite in the sense that experiences are often intended to influence and be influenced as part of the research process”* (Jokela, Huhmarniemi 2018, p. 12).

2

The Visual TICASS Experiences

The theoretical framework of TICASS (Fleming, Lukaszewicz 2018) made it possible to plan research and action aimed at enhancing the use of creativity and images as a focus of interest and a media for interpretation of the experiences conducted. Starting from these assumptions, in the school year 2018–2019, we developed various artistic workshops in an Italian kindergarten – Visual TICASS 2.0 – and some Kenyan primary schools – Visual TICASS¹⁶ – and we designed a pedagogical research process to implement the reflection on the use of images and imagery with children and adults.

This paper focuses more on the Italian experience, focusing on some of the research themes that emerged in the team, in dialogue with the laboratories conducted in Kenya. In Visual TICASS 2.0. to enhance the key points of the research, the researchers (a pedagogist, a psychologist and five UNIMC educators and students) adapted and used photo-elicitation, a qualitative method developed in the field of anthropology and visual sociology (Harper 2002), to collect and produce a different kind of information, thanks to the use of meaningful images.

The visual methodologies offer a further interpretative key to educational and social research and allow you to give voice in a dynamic way to the meanings inherent in the object of investigation. It is a clear invitation to use creativity, even by the researcher who, too often, becomes a technical designer or a mere observer. It is certainly a demanding technique, which opens up reflection on the strategies adopted and on the possibility of working with mixed qualitative methods. Research itself becomes a process and a creative product, capable of soliciting pedagogical knowledge that arises from experience rather than from theoretical speculation.

16 Shoos, Associations and Daily Care Centers involved in the activities: Pre-primary School “G. Rodari” – Comprehensive School “E. Mestica” (Macerata, Italy); “Ocean of Wonders” – Pre-primary and primary School (Mnarani, Kilifi, Kenya); “Kilimo Primary School” – Pre-primary and Primary School (Kilifi, Kenya); “Nazarene Church Academy” – Pre-primary and Primary School (Mnarani, Kilifi, Kenya); “Upendo – Orphanage, Daily Care Center” – Primary School (Kilifi, Kenya); “Kilifi Junior School” – Pre-primary and Primary School (Kilifi, Kenya).

The alternative language of the image can “*increase the researcher’s awareness of his research action (...) It follows that it can continuously produce meanings, which, on the one hand, can answer the research question, on the other, concern the researcher in action, the moves it has adopted and opens up a margin of reflexivity to modify the methodological structure of the investigation even in a substantial way. As we have seen, the visual tool requires a clear practice for its use, but is capable at the same time of renewing and restructuring the research design when it is activated in empirical work. This excess of meaning, this ‘unspoken’ constitutive of his being (and which allows for new interpretations), becomes a real opportunity for the researcher to reflect with respect to his role. (...) It is a question of educating oneself in research starting from what is apparently elusive but acts and conditions the posture and actions of the researcher, who is required to be firmly positioned on a theoretical level aimed at materializing in empirical practice; only procedural and theoretical clarity makes a second level reflection on the research itself possible*” (Landonio 2016, p. 2).

In the project Visual TICASS 2.0, the use of the photography has provided a starting point for making pedagogical reflections explicit. The images were used during the reflection and evaluation meetings of the workshops, in the drafting of papers and public presentations of the project, and as documentation to be shared with teachers and families at the end of the work. The shots intentionally taken during the workshops conducted with the children were intended to represent significant moments of the experience to reflect on afterwards. The photo-narration of the work dynamics, observed and documented by several observers in the field, has highlighted multiple meanings of the research experience. The creativity of the researchers was expressed during the photo-elicitation process, as well as in supporting the artistic experiences of children. The critical thinking process has been developed on several levels: from the interdisciplinary structure of the research, to the conducting of activities in the field, up to the dissemination and documentation of the results achieved.

The children involved, on the other hand, had the opportunity to experiment themselves as creative subjects through the use and discovery of primary colours in experiences that gradually involved different senses and languages (Cuccu 2021; Deluigi 2019, 2021).

The research group focused on five items presented to the community during TI.M.E. – TICASS Museum Experience, an exhibition held in Macerata on 13–26/11/2019 at the Macerata Musei Palazzo Buonaccorsi (TICASS 2019). The acronym TI.M.E. embodies the European project TICASS declined with children, the Museum, as a place of fruition but also of artistic production and Experience as a way of shared learning and co-construction of meanings. Furthermore, TI.M.E. is an invitation to take time to cross over into creative environments, in the public spaces and in “infinite worlds” in a divergent way.

2.1

The exploration of materials (colours and tools)

“The Visual TICASS experimentations featured children and their fantastic worlds as undisputed protagonists. The narrative stimuli, the spaces and the available materials were the tools for small to medium groups to invent and discover new creative spaces. The use of fingers and hands was initially a novelty and, at times, an obstacle for the young painters who were intimidated by the idea of getting dirty and being able to paint without rules and do whatever they wanted. Before long, their hands became a natural and immediate way to explore the materials: a common thread in all the encounters. Brushes and sponges interfaced with the idea of finger painting. Initially, the reactions in Italy and in Kenya were different but, at some point, in both situations, the paints were mixed with bare hands, providing a pleasant feeling. Thanks to the creative “potato families”, the children told stories of dragons, turtles, superheroes, and sea animals with rainbows and storms represented by the blending of all the colours. The decorative element of the banana leaf, applied on paper and fabric, however, generated natural and harmonious shapes that interacted with fanciful inaccuracies. Playing with the imagination amplified a world of colours in which to build networks of relationships and moments of sharing. Countless multiform and multicoloured paintings were gradually enriched with white, grey, green, orange, purple, brown, and black... in all their shades and tones, where creativity, experimentation, and freedom took their first steps or prevailed” (Jessica Canestrari & Elisa Gambelli – tutors in the Visual TICASS 2.0 project; Figs. 1–2 The exploration of materials).

2.2

Shared work spaces and materials

“Can a blank sheet of paper be part of a sharing experience? If it is large enough to explore new ways and worlds of art together, the answer is yes. Having the same space to be filled by six, seven, or eight kindergarten children, as well as for larger primary school groups, can be a real challenge. Their fingers, hands, and arms – along with the curiosity to begin, the irrepressible desire to get dirty, and the deep concentration of painting – are side by side, intersect, adjust themselves to manage the new distance-closeness on this spacious surface. They move from one colourful plate to another, or around the “working table” in search of new perspectives. Here, the materials are not only the means of artistic production but also of relationships and creative play: sponges brandished like swords traveling along improvised race tracks, potato stamps passed from hand to hand to roll – each waiting for their turn! – or to meet together in unexpected trails of yellow, green, and blue... to the discovery of multiple shades appropriately commented on by the little artists. Additionally, imprints of banana leaves and passion fruit peels appear on the blank paper and fabric. And while some ‘trespass’ with coloured handprints, others quietly paint by themselves: the differences in expression and personality can be seen in new colours and shapes, sometimes almost

impossible to distinguish when, layer upon layer, they become a single choral work. And the blank sheet of paper remains just a memory” (Miriam Cuccu – tutor in the Visual TICASS 2.0 project; Figs. 3–4 Shared work spaces and materials).

2.3

The cooperative dynamics which occur in the workshops

“When an atelier becomes a moment of encounter and of shared spaces, tools and paints, you get a wonderful artistic and pictorial production. An approach focused on spontaneously nurturing imagination and creativity allowed the kids to venture to discover new colours, shades, and shapes. Thanks to the dynamics created within the small to medium groups, the children had the experience of sharing a single sheet of paper, the more or less welcome acceptance of painting alongside one another and the opportunity to even paint some parts of the body (hands, arms, face) communicating engaging, enthralling emotions and states of mind to others (younger and older). The involvement of adults – University of Macerata teachers, educators, lecturers, and tutors – was only necessary to explain the sequence and the order of things achieved in the time available. In this way, we witnessed different forms of organisation and management of autonomy, with younger children helped and supported by the older ones and with dense peer interaction. Possible conflicts between the children were “resolved on paper”, on the sheet of paper they had at their disposal and sometimes on their uniforms, through the search for space to be painted and ‘stolen’ from one another, very politely at times, a little less so at other times. Along the way and at the same time there was an opening for dialogue/discussion and for the acceptance of stories and characters of their own imagination and those of others: so, together is better!” (Morena Muzi – researcher in the Visual Ticass 2.0 project; Figs. 5–6 The cooperative dynamics).

2.4

Encroachments experienced with the use of paint

“Hey, this is my space!” This is what some children said at the first workshop, as they began to draw monochrome circles and signs in that corner created with difficulty on a single sheet of paper for ten children. But the discovery of colour quickly led these circles to grow and meet other brushes, colours and actors; and by moving, and by leaving “my space” and accepting others in “my space”, they gave rise to new colours and shapes. There were some who began to discover the encounter between two colours starting from two distinct spaces, others who discovered it with their neighbour, others by overlapping lines until, instead of the colour boundaries they created infinite shades, and others who also marked little steps on the paper with their fingers until they met with other exploratory fingers. There were others who went across the sheet to get to the hands and blend colours by “giving five” or shaking their friends’ hands and then leaving a handprint

on the paper to see how it overlapped the rest of the paint. In short, the size of the shared sheet of paper, along with the discovery of mixing diverse colours, created encounters; the desire to explore and involve moments. Moving around and moving colours opened the experience to the dimension of play and fantasy, and the sheet soon became a backdrop for cars, meteors, and fireworks involving all participants. In this constant movement, the artistic achievement has taken shape, continually changing and passing from chromatic and graphic singularity, to endless mergers and nuances that, maintaining the imprint of the individual artists, merged into a single artistic work. The different experiences of the workshops have shown a growing process in the speed of conceiving the sheet of paper as a tool and exclusive space in which to create movement, to experiment and discover, bringing and blending their own traits in a cooperative way” (Francesca Mondin – tutor in the Visual TICASS 2.0 project; Figs. 7–8 Encroachments experienced).

2.5

Informal exhibitions held at the end of the workshops

“After hours of workshops in which countless resources and creative energies have been released, it was time to give room to the outcome of the encounter of increasingly restless hands, of increasingly divergent looks and of ever wider imaginations. With uniforms which became a bit colourful and with amazement still in their eyes, we put together temporary exhibitions for the pleasure of reviewing together shapes and colours drying in the sun. Every place can become a generative space for sharing creativity. That’s how the school courtyards and compounds become more alive, thanks to a string which is put up in order to hang the works. The whole school is able to see a festive movement of primary colours thanks to the release of the children’s imaginations. The “creative laundry” hangs in the sun or rests at the foot of a mango tree under which the children have cooperated. Everyone can take a closer look, recognising themselves in the drawings and sharing with friends, teachers, and parents, the results of an unfamiliar approach. Even a church becomes a place to make room for creativity and to let the children move freely. The windows of the classroom itself are interesting potential thresholds, in which to try out new spaces of curiosity and the desire to experiment. Storytelling in community spaces makes it possible to interact, to leave traces, to create memories and imagine new creative approaches and processes” (Rosita Deluigi – Italian regional coordinator of the TICASS project and researcher in the Visual TICASS 2.0 and in the Visual TICASS2 projects; Figs. 9–10 Informal exhibitions).

Conclusions

Visual techniques bring the adults closer to the children, thanks to a mutual collaboration aimed at the enhancement of the learning environment (cooperative thinking and learning). This path has allowed researchers to highlight some useful aspects for the design and management of educational experiences and, at the same time, has allowed us to deal with multiple languages and to share different nuances and perspectives of a participative experience of art and education.

The privilege of supporting children in the discovery of their imaginations strongly refers to the pedagogical and educational responsibility placed in open, dialogic, and action research approaches. Grasping the hypotheses and insights that children share with words, gestures, and images is a precious gift for those who want to immerse themselves in plural and heterogeneous relational contexts. Designing and implementing creative research paths, considering the various aspects dealt with so far, requires the courage to take the risk of educational fatigue. An effort that has an individual and community transformative and generative power.

In learning situations, in laboratory experiments, in active teaching, in participatory interactions, we can find and rediscover an intentionality capable of re-reading itself in the light of one's own trajectories and in the shadow of the logic encountered in the situation.

Thus, in the dim light, under a mango tree or in a room dedicated to artistic activities, the promises of a humanity are released which, overcoming terrestrial longitudes and latitudes, grow together.



Fig. 1-2.
The exploration of materials.
Photo: Rosita Deluigi.



Fig. 3-4.
Shared work spaces and
materials. Photo: Rosita Deluigi.





Fig. 5-6.
The cooperative dynamics.
Photo: Rosita Deluigi.



Fig. 7-8.
Encroachments experienced. Photo: Rosita Deluigi.
Fig. 9-10.
Informal exhibitions. Photo: Rosita Deluigi.



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A FEW NOTES ON DISCURSIVITY AND THE CURRENT DIGITAL SHIFT IN CONTEMPORARY ART

János Szoboszlai

Introduction

The question of the psychologist in this meme (fig. 1) expresses his disbelief about the reality of NFTs. Therefore, he thinks that his patient lying on the couch in the psychoanalytic situation has misconceptions about reality. Well, in the 1990s – not so long ago – I carried in my pockets a heavy third-generation mobile phone, a compact film-camera, a cassette-dictaphone, a thick A6 notebook, a season ticket for public transport, a wallet for cash, and some pencils. I desperately needed, but did not believe I would have in the near future, an easy and all-in-one solution for all the functions provided by these objects – and now I have a smartphone. What is an everyday solution to my children was a science-fiction utopia to me some years ago. I do not praise technical development here, but it is clear how fundamentally technology transforms our life. And how significantly it challenges art making; the way we see, interpret, consume, and discuss art. Blockchain currency and NFTs are not things I celebrate either – I just have to understand the technological, aesthetic, commercial, and legal context of NFTs (sometimes introduced as artworks) in order to include this knowledge into my teaching activities. My job is to transfer knowledge through the curriculum to art students in an art college. There are basic and unavoidable questions regarding this current digital shift: Why is it art? Who are the artists? What are ownership and copyright? How is value assessed, and how should prices be set? Where is the original idea, what is the real concept of these artworks? Is it money for nothing? What are the criteria for art now?

When exploring NFTs, two fields of interest appear, both of which require intellectual consideration, scientific research, and development of updated educational methods for art colleges in the coming years. One is the current radical transformation of the art world, in terms of every aspect art has been defined from during previous centuries. The second one is that the discourse on the process about de-materialisation and re-materialisation in art from the beginning of 20th century already exists and provides very useful references and vocabulary for the evaluation of this transformation. In this short lecture I am making an open and loose attempt to explain why.

Where is art?

The real things, the genuine, or, the original “visual art” works are seen in exhibitions at museum, galleries, and public spaces. In case of non-material works, visual and textual, and other medialized information is archived in art collections. The reproductions of the visual works, and copies of information-formats are found in printed publications (catalogues, albums, scientific volumes of art history), and multimedia, online, virtual, and other databases and edited materials. Nevertheless,

the knowledge of artworks in society is fundamentally based on media and not on visiting museums. To see the “real thing” is a must only for art lovers (they are few, but they pay attention, and wish to touch upon the “aura” of the masterpieces), and global tourists (who are many, but dedicate little time when visiting the temples and sanctuaries of original artworks).

The overall result of knowledge production about art is a generic knowledge of society, which comes from the medialised forms of artworks and does not pay much attention to what Walter Benjamin referred to as the “aura” (Benjamin 2003). However, even though I have never visited Spiral Jetty¹⁷, I am always deeply touched by its idea and grandiosity when I see a photograph, or a film about it. (I have the very same feeling every time I see a photo on a bottle rack, a black square on a white field, or a white text on a black field quoted from Wittgenstein.) Many similar examples could be mentioned from land art, public art, intermedia art, online art, art as activism, politically and socially engaged art, or “Instagramism”, which are accessible only through media.

Most of the artworks – even to me, a trained art historian and self-taught curator – are known from media and art-related texts. (It is the very same in cases of world heritage, whether natural or artificial.) However, even though the medialised image is much poorer than the real one in terms of size, colour, material, surface, texture, and proportion, I am not alienated from the real one – that I have never seen. The discourse on art and its history permanently perpetuates the historical context, influence, and consequences of the works. The significance of Spiral Jetty is unquestionable.

Experiencing art and gaining knowledge

Actually, the medialised information is significantly poorer. There is no perfect substitution for the real thing. Especially when size, colour, material, surface, texture, and proportion really matter in certain cases.

These aspects are mainly lost, but as we live in a medialised life, the human mind is able to fill in the media-image with information from previous experiences from our lives. I have never walked into or around Serra’s Clara-Clara, but I can imagine it. Or, I want to believe I can imagine it. When viewing the photograph, I have no real spatial experience. The work could be perceived perfectly only if I saw it from different angles while walking around it. Seeing this photo, I have no chance to construct the whole object due to the lack of spatial perception. However, while I do not lose my intention to visit it, I am quite satisfied: I am not alienated totally from experiencing a virtual space-time constellation, and the significance of the piece, as I am making an imaginary walk into and around the piece.

Google Art and Culture makes accessible to the masses the medialised image and the related discourse in a form of virtual monographic, or thematic, online exhibitions. The difference between Google Art and Culture and printed catalogues or white cube displays is that it is (almost) free, and offers an enormous quantity of information. In spite of the fact that the image I click on is lacking in



17 Robert Smithson’s Spiral Jetty (1970, Rozel Point, Great Salt Lake, Utah, US) is one of the most discussed land art pieces.

terms of size, colour, material, surface, texture, and proportion, I nevertheless gain knowledge. I also have a chance to learn about the facts and fictions: scientific arguments, claims and conclusion about its significance, historical context and contemporary influence. The knowledge I gain is a construction, that is built by the *discursivity* of art. Art historians, curators, scholars, and critics contribute to this discourse, while experts, who gain knowledge *dominantly* from media (previously from books and albums in library), produce new knowledge through media.

Furthermore, thanks to the discourse about Malevich's suprematism, I know exactly that some of the visual features as fissures and cracks on the ageing surface of the Black Square are not intentional, nor significant. The knowledge, the facts and fictions, and the discursivity of this piece is unavoidable to assess its significance, therefore the historical context and the story of the work are the fundamental parts of the knowledge I gained from Google, where the black surface looks almost monochrome. (Or, previously, from only the narratives of art history, that included the reproduction – a medialised version – of the Black Square.) Therefore, even if I had no spatial experience about Serra's installation, and if I had not seen the original Malevich painting, I have certain knowledge about them, and I am able to assess their historical relevancy and consequences. Furthermore, although the information I perceive is medialised and virtual, I gain aesthetic experience as well. This experience is as deep as watching a movie on the screen of a laptop or smartphone, as opposed to watching it in a cinema.

In spite of having scholarly knowledge about it, to gain real experience in space and time – especially in educational situations – may be as important as the knowledge of facts and fictions. I teach FLUXUS for photographers and curatorial students. I lecture about FLUXUS events, I show photographs and videos on FLUXUS Concerts, and other works, e.g. the Zyklus by Tomas Schmit. It is a well-known piece of FLUXUS partitura¹⁸ – anyone can perform it. Instead of lecturing and talking about the piece, I decided to do; to perform it together with my students. As the FLUXUS partitura functions as open-source software, or a recipe for cooking, or as sheet music per se, there is no problem with copyright. We do it without an audience, but we strictly follow the instructions of the author.

What we have is an experience in space and time. By pouring the water into the next jar until the water disappears, the participants automatically develop a unique, new time-frame. As they focus on the decreasing quantity of water, in this special time-frame the group leaves the classroom situation, leaves the art college and the studios, and leaves behind many aspects of their everyday life. Performing the Zyklus every time¹⁹ becomes a meditative activity that lasts for 120–180 minutes. Students reported every time that they gradually understood the artistic intention, the concept, and the structure of the work. Even students who first refused to participate and joined in at half time spoke of the same experience. FLUXUS for these students is not only a group of childish destroyers of pianos, but subversive pioneers of creativity. What made it possible was the real experience in space and time.



18 Partitura is the instructions of the composer; a written musical score that includes the melody and the rhythm of every instrument and singer in a coherent system. The sheet music makes it possible to perform the piece.

19 At FAD UJEP I performed it three times with three different generations of students.

The perception of the medialised artworks is different to the Zyklus experience. It is very similar in literature and music. Reading poetry silently instead of listening to the recitation (which was the only way of consuming literature in ancient times) leads to a loss of the rhythm and acoustic components of the work. Listening to records instead of attending a live music performance leads to losing the unique experience, and the relevant but accidental components of live performance. The possibility, the desire, and the intention to see originals is being radically weakened by medialised images and the increasingly dominant online accessibility of visual art works.

Quarantine in 2020 and later

The unprecedented quarantine during the first half of 2020 not only forced public and private art organisations to go online, but led to a number of shifts in the methodology and operation of museums, exhibition spaces, galleries, art fairs, the art press and art education. Some established methods become more fashionable (e.g. online gallery tours; Fig. 2–3), some new mediums emerged (e.g. online exhibitions and viewing rooms, VIP viewing rooms; Fig. 4), and new avenues for selling art were introduced (new platforms for artists to sell art and support one another during the post-pandemic recovery period). As a result of the pandemic, the media became the primary channel by which to access art and its discourse. Museums lost a huge percentage of their visitors.

Discursivity

In recent decades, the exhibition medium was affected and enhanced in many ways; for example, by the emergence of new museology, curatorial and educational turns, participatory and collaborative practices in contemporary art, new technologies that support interpretation, and interdisciplinary approaches in curatorial practice. As Paul O'Neill explains: *"contemporary curating is marked by a turn to education. Educational formats, methods, programmes, models, terms, processes and procedures have become pervasive in the praxes of both curating and the production of contemporary art and in their attendant critical frameworks. (...) Since the late 1980s, the group exhibition has become the primary site for curatorial experimentation and, as such, has generated a new discursive space around artistic practice."* (more: O'Neill, Wilson 2007, O'Neil 2011) To create appropriate spaces and occasions for contextualisation, interpretation, and education, and according to these turns and shifts, curators supply exhibitions with additional mediums and instruments of discourse: round tables, gallery talks, symposia, workshops, lectures, upstream and downstream events, publications in various formats, content for a range of target groups, etc. These discursive formations are compulsory components of a curatorial project.

Digital technology, mainly the Internet and Web 2.0 (social media), have sped up and broadened this shift in discursivity. The exhibition as a medium of communication has become a complex medium of the discourse. However, due to the pandemic, and the emergence of Generations Y and Z, in recent years communication has moved from the white cube dominantly to social media.

The term discursivity emerged from discussion about the institutional mechanisms of knowledge production in art. As Eszter Lazar explains, discursivity is "an expansion of various discussions around contemporary art and its social function". This is also referred to as the discursive turn in contemporary art. Discursive

practices reflect on the meaning(s) of art, the function and social responsibility of the museums, or the social position and status of the artist. Discourse is a form of knowledge production, in which language is understood as a system of representation. (Lazar 2022)

The contextualisation and interpretation of the medialised work is supported and enriched by the intensifying discursivity. However, the result is a huge quantity of texts, references, and educational programmes, which appear on the information superhighway. It pushes the audience to practice the intellectual activity of a scholar – who is meant to be an insider, educated, actor of the discourse.

NFT²⁰

The basic and unavoidable questions regarding this current digital shift (Why are NFTs art? Who are the artists? What are ownership and copyright? How is value assessed, and how should prices be set? Where is the original idea, what is the real concept of these artworks? Is it money for nothing? What are the criteria for art now?, etc.) can be answered when one understands that the shift and transformation is not radical, and concept art has already done the job of expansion and explanation. In the 1910s, in a world where the previous standards of social, political, cultural, religious, and sexual (etc.) life lost their validity, or simply ceased, the similarly radical shift in art (avant-gardism) was more than predictable and logical. Following readymade, suprematism, and Bauhaus, after 1945 the definition of art radically weakened, and the spectrum for new propositions (Kosuth 1969) became radically broad. NFTs represent a current newcomer in this spectrum.

An NFT has no material original; even the first file in the blockchain is a photo or a digital reproduction of a visual work from a different medium. In the case of NFTs, the original idea is what matters; not its physical and/or visual appearance. The existence of an NFT is legitimised only if enough makers, contributors, and institutions acknowledge this existence. A consensus is needed, the same way a readymade is considered and assessed as an artwork. No original copy matters, but rather the medialisation, or more precisely, the par excellence virtual nature of an NFT. While uncountable files and prints can be produced, the ownership of the artwork is clear: whoever paid for it possesses the NFT. The price is defined by references: by whom and when it was produced, who the first (second, third, etc.) buyer was, and how much they paid for it. These references function in the very same way as the chapters of a visual artist in the curriculum vitae. And why are NFTs art? Simply, because they are part of a public or private collection, regardless of the fact that NFTs do not require physical storage space. Or, alternatively, because someone *calls* them art. (Lippard, Chandler 1968)

The legitimisation of the existence and acknowledgement of NFTs as artworks is supported by the discursivity of their very nature. No spatial, visual, or even medialised experience is needed to look at NFTs as a new proposition in the gradually and radically broadening spectrum of “art”. An NFT is pure idea. Its visual appearance is inconsequential.

20 NFT means non-fungible token.

Concept art: legacy

Lawrence Wiener, prominent concept artist, died in 2021; the year of the NFT. A short text entitled “Declaration of Intent” from 1968 reads: 1. The artist may construct the piece., 2. The piece may be fabricated., 3. The piece need not be built. Each being equal and consistent with the intent of the artist the decision as to condition rests with the receiver upon the occasion of receivership. (See more: Pahr 1968)

My point is not that “there is nothing new under the Sun”. The point is that the acceptance of NFTs fundamentally lies in the very same relation between producer and receiver, and the occasion provided by an institutional frame. In the case of NFTs it is the Internet, blockchain technology, the network of global banking, and the new definitions of artistic copyright.

As “Work = Documentation of Imagination” suggests, the NFT is a documentation of an idea, supported by a certain technological, cultural, economic, and legal environment. If claimed to be an art piece, an NFT in these terms is (simply a new) proposition for art.²¹ As the propositions for art are supported by their discursivity, NFTs cannot exist without discourse which *supports*, or even *ensures* the satisfactory quantity of makers, receivers, buyers, and collectors.

In memory of László Beke (1944–2022)

In 1971, Laszlo Beke – a renowned Hungarian art historian and curator – asked 28 artists to submit their reaction to the concept “WORK = THE DOCUMENTATION OF THE IMAGINATION/IDEA” on A4 sheets. Beke arranged and preserved the contributions in folders, which have been available for viewing over the last 30 years only in his apartment, which has become a centre of archival research for artists interested in conceptual art. Imre Bak’s proposal for the project on a museum card from 2. 11. 1971, which is a description of an artwork that was once realised in physical form in a real space, and which was then destroyed. The work is still a subject of art history, in the discussion of modern art (much like the Fountain of M. Duchamp, lost after it was exhibited in 1917). The discursivity of the work is significant, even if it no longer exists in its physical form.

21 Of course, not every NFT is an artwork, but the intention of the maker/producer can make it art.

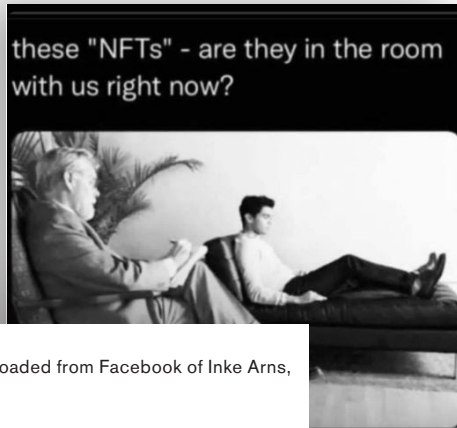


Fig. 1.
A meme (Downloaded from Facebook of Inke Arns, 18. 12. 2021).



Fig. 2–3.
Virtual gallery tour
(Ludwig Museum 2022).

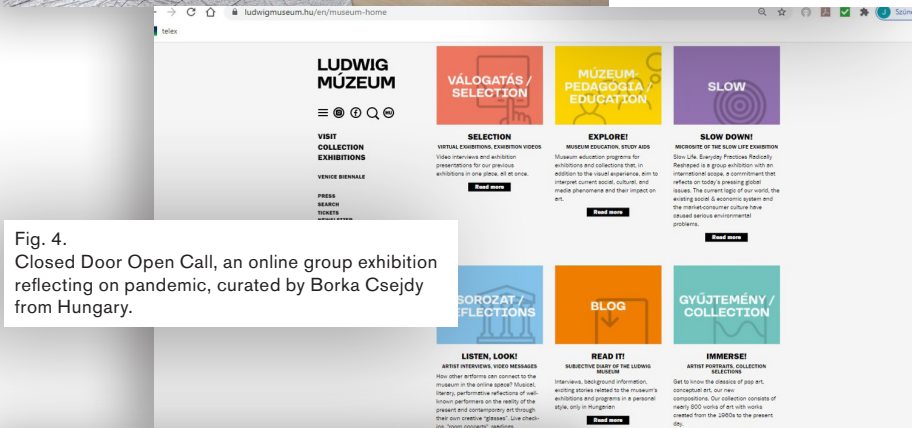
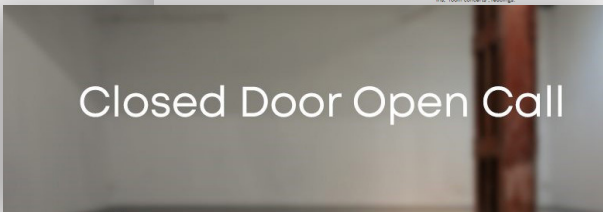


Fig. 4.
Closed Door Open Call, an online group exhibition reflecting on pandemic, curated by Borka Csejdy from Hungary.



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ART EXHIBITION AS AN ENVIRONMENT FOR COMMUNICATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

Dagmar Myšáková

Presentation of an Artwork as a Method for Creating an Informal Learning Environment

When we consider the several roles that art museums and galleries play today, we usually take their educational role for granted. Awareness of this role can also be seen in our own exhibition practice. An example of this are the results of research carried out at the Department of Art and Education, Faculty of Education, UJEP in Ústí nad Labem, focusing on accompanying and educational programs in galleries and art museums in the Ústí Region (Czech Republic). The quantitative part of the research shows that 43 % of the total number of programmes implemented by the surveyed institutions (24 institutions) in 2015–2020, are educational programs for schools and interest groups.²² The interest in the viewer, their experience and the experience that a visit to a gallery or museum conveys to them is an increasingly frequent topic in the field theory as well. The focal point of interest has shifted towards *visitor studies*, which focus both on the visitor experience of museums, as well as other institutions offering a variety of leisure activities, and on the characteristics of their visitors.

The mediation of a certain kind of experience that takes place in the exhibition environment was also the focus of a research study carried out from 2015 to 2018, partial outputs of which will be presented in this text.²³ In the study, we viewed the encounter with an artwork as a specific kind of experience that is influenced not only by the work itself, but also by the way it is presented. Although there is no unified view on this topic, we identify with the idea that we always draw on our prior knowledge and experience and apply our own “preunderstandings” when perceiving and interpreting a work of art. “*The Kantian dictum echoes here: the innocent eye is blind and the virgin mind empty*” (Goodman 1968, p. 8). The artwork itself, by its very form, “calls up” the information from our minds on the basis of which we attribute a certain meaning to the work. The Czech art historian

22 Data was drawn from annual reports, websites, and social media of the institutions. Project No.: UJEP-SGS-2021-43-004-2 was supported by a grant within the student grant competition at UJEP.

23 The research was part of the author's dissertation thesis entitled *Instalace uměleckého díla jako forma edukace* (Installation of an Artwork as a Form of Education), defended in 2018 at the Department of Art and Education, Faculty of Education, UJEP in Ústí nad Labem. The research results are presented in detail in the publication *Myslet na diváka: Výstava jako prostředí informálního učení* (Thinking of the Viewer: Exhibition as an Environment of Informal Learning, 2019).

L. Daniel (Daniel 2008, p. 184) states that even before seeing a work of art, our minds and eyes are prepared in advance by our knowledge and previous impressions. Thus, if our previous experience is decisive for the perception of a work of art, then when encountering a work of art, it is equally important what works the viewer has already encountered and how they have interpreted them earlier in life.

At the same time, we build on the assumption that interpreting a work of art is a skill that can be learned to some extent. Another Czech theorist and curator, L. Kesner (Kesner 2000, p. 169), compares “good perception” of an artwork to good skiing. Some of us are better predisposed to this activity than others, but it is nonetheless a skill that can be developed.

With this in mind, our research looked at how curators communicate with the viewer through the exhibition, which strategies they employ in presenting the work, and what constitutes the environment of the exhibition. All of the above contribute significantly both to the way in which the artwork is interpreted by the viewer, and to building an experience the viewer can utilise when encountering another artwork. We refer to the process of acquiring this experience as informal learning. In general, informal learning is defined as a lifelong acquisition of knowledge and skills that “*results from daily activities related to work, family or leisure*” (Recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning for VET teachers and trainers in the EU member states, 2007).

Research Methodology and Data Presentation

Within the research, the topic outlined above was narrowed down to a research problem: *How does the way artworks are presented shape an exhibition into an environment for informal learning?* This was further developed into several sub-research questions:

- What is the concept of the exhibition and how is it reflected in the way the artworks are presented?
- How is the artwork installed and what constitutes the environment of the exhibition?
- What communication tools are included in the exhibition and what is their role?
- What information is conveyed to the viewer through the communication tools?
- What context is the work of art placed in by the installation and the environment of the exhibition?
- What is the role of the viewer in the exhibition?

A multi-case study was chosen as the research strategy. The research sample included four exhibitions and one permanent exhibition realised during the research period in the Czech Republic. These were exhibition projects focused on the presentation of modern and contemporary art.

In line with the design of the case study, multiple methods of data collection and information sources were used: interviews with curators, observation of exhibitions (photo documentation, field notes), content analysis of accompanying materials, texts, and other information sources that accompanied or were part of the exhibition.

The data is analysed using the so-called open coding method. The output was a number of categories and subcategories, which became the basis and

framework for the subsequent interpretation of the data. The multi-case study data is presented in two ways: first in the form of the so-called individual case stories, then in the form of a compact picture of the stories using cross-case analysis, where the research findings are generalised and placed in a broader context. The cross-case analysis resulted in five categories that we consider to be relevant criteria for evaluating an exhibition as an informal learning environment: (1) *the influence of the exhibition space*, (2) *the installation of the artwork and its location in the space*, (3) *the tools of communication*, (4) *the context*, and (5) *the engagement and role of the viewer*. In the next part of the text, we will present the examined exhibition projects with regard to the categories of *context*, *tools of communication*, and *engagement and role of the viewer*. The individual findings will be placed in a broader context through references to other exhibition projects around the world.

Context and communication tools

We start from the assumption that a work of art is a carrier of content that needs to be understood in order to interpret the meaning of the work. At the same time, the content of a work of art is context dependent. Each exhibition highlights certain aspects of the work, while neglecting others, and at the same time suggests to the viewer the context in which they should or could perceive the artwork. The exhibition can be understood figuratively as a means of “weighting”: “*Some relevant kinds of the one world, rather than being absent from the other, are present as irrelevant kinds*” (Goodman 1978, p. 11).

Everything that is part of the exhibition environment, including accompanying texts and other tools of communication, participates in the creation of the context. Czech theorist of gallery pedagogy R. Horáček (Horáček 1998, pp. 45–46) lists three sources of information from which we should draw when interpreting a work of art: (1) the work of art itself, its contemporary context and the personality of the artist, (2) the results of existing research and the opinions of historians, and (3) our own experience and perception of the work. In the exhibitions we examined, we looked at what tools of communication curators choose, what of the above information they convey, and how the viewer’s own experience and perception of the work is facilitated.

The exhibition *Jiří Černický: Wild Dreams* (Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague, January 27 – April 10, 2016; Figs. 1–2) was created in collaboration with the artist and curator David Korecký. Its concept was based on about fifty drawings of utopian project proposals by Jiří Černický, which were part of the exhibition and served as the basis for creating the individual artworks. Each of the exhibition rooms focused on its own **theme (one of the aspects of the artist’s work), which also placed the artwork in the context in which the viewer perceived it**. The collaboration between the artist and the curator resulted not only in the concept, but also in the environment and the exhibition design.

The installation of individual artworks largely used inventory and material from previous exhibitions as well as discarded furniture from gallery. The exhibition design was therefore inspired by Jiří Černický’s creative principle – the use of existing materials, objects, visuals, etc. In addition to the context of the individual themes, the viewer perceived the works of art **in the context of the unified principle of the author’s work**. Jiří Černický’s **drawings** were the main communication tool. However, they were not created as accompanying material, but as

independent works of art. At the same time, however, they had an important communication value. They conveyed the **artist's point of view**, his reflections on his work, his initial inspirations and the background of some of his artworks. Because of the number of these drawings, only a small number of other texts appeared in the exhibition. Only works that might have been completely misunderstood without this information were provided with **accompanying texts**.

The concept of the exhibition *Zbyněk Sekal: Things Are Moving Forward Slowly* (Olomouc Museum of Art, September 10, 2015 – February 14, 2016; Figs. 3–4) evolved in the context of the creation of Zbyněk Sekal's monograph. Its author, Marie Klimešová, collaborated with the museum's curator, Olga Staníková. Just like the monograph, the exhibition was conceived in the spirit of the author's oeuvre – as a collage of the disciplines that he has devoted himself to throughout his life. This concept was reflected in the structuring of the exhibition, where the works were not arranged chronologically, but across time, according to individual disciplines. The context in which the viewer was to perceive the artworks was primarily the **context of the artist's entire oeuvre and personality**. This intention was also matched by a multitude of diverse communication tools, which provided the viewer with **a variety of information from different sources**. Before entering the exhibition space, there was a large-scale photograph of the artist, a list of important dates from his life and work, and an introductory text. Each of the presented areas of the artist's oeuvre was introduced by an accompanying text that conveyed an **expert's perspective**. On the other hand, the **artist's view** and his reflections on his work were conveyed by quotations from Sekal's diaries presented both as wall texts and as sound installations with readings from the diaries. The audio recordings were not overly loud, and were triggered by a motion sensor. The viewer was supposed to pay attention primarily to the artworks.

The concept of the exhibition *Flaesh* (Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague, October 1, 2015 – January 3, 2016; Figs. 5–6), curated by Petr Nedoma, was defined by the character of the exhibition space – five rooms in which the work of five international female artists was presented: Louise Bourgeois, Kiki Smith, Marleen Dumas, Tracy Emin, and Berlinde De Bruyckere. At the same time, it was based on the chosen theme: figure and the depiction of the human body in contemporary art. The concept of the exhibition therefore determined the **context** for the perception of individual works. The macro scale was **shaped by the theme of the exhibition**. On a micro scale (within each room), it was the context of the **artist's work and personality**, which was co-created through **video interviews**. These videos, which were part of the exhibition environment, primarily conveyed the **perspective of the artists**, the way they worked and thought about their work, the wider context of their work, other works and in some cases the context of their lives. Apart from labels, no other communication tool was included in the exhibition environment. Further information was conveyed to the viewer outside the exhibition environment, through the exhibition brochure and catalogue, as well as catalogues from other exhibitions by the artists, placed outside the entrance to the exhibition space. The curator's intention was to stimulate the viewer to seek further information on their own.

These three examined exhibitions emphasised the mediation of the artist's personality and perspective. The artwork was presented as a creative result of the empirical author. The term empirical author was coined by U. Eco alongside the term model author, and although he was referring to written text, these concepts

can also be applied in relation to visual art. An *empirical author* is a specific person existing at a specific time who is the author of a piece of text. The *model author*, on the other hand, is more of a textual strategy – a voice that speaks to us through the instructions left in the text by the *empirical author*. The *model author* hypothesis is constructed by the reader in the process of reading the text (Eco 1979, 1994); in our case, by the viewer in the process of perceiving and interpreting an artwork. Knowing the intention with which a work of art was created is certainly important to its interpretation, but as Eco states, the reader “*finds and attributes to the model author what the empirical author might have discovered by pure serendipity*” (Eco 1994, p. 44). We agree with the view that the meaning the empirical author “puts” into the work may certainly not be the only possible meaning.

The works in the other examined exhibitions were presented in a different context. The exhibition *Instructions for Use* (Emil Filla Gallery, Ústí nad Labem, February 8 – 23, 2017; Figs. 7–8) was conceived by curator Eva Mráziková as an experiment to reveal how a work of art can be grasped in an exhibition space and how it can activate the viewer. The exhibition mostly included works by artists who deliberately work with the viewer or use participatory strategies in their work. The exhibition concept included **worksheets** as a communication tool. Each work was accompanied by its own worksheet, which **conveyed the information about the work and its author, the broader context, or an interpretation of the work from the perspective of an expert**. The worksheets also included simple tasks, some of which led “only” to self-reflection or to a longer “being with the work”, while others encouraged participation that was already part of the work or added their own task, often using similar strategies to those used by the artist. The viewer had the opportunity to become a co-creator of the work, but above all a co-author of the exhibition environment, where some tasks called for leaving a certain trace (a note with a message, one’s own painting). As a result of these factors, the viewer perceived the works in a context **in which the artwork becomes a thing to be utilised**, and the viewer is its co-creator.

The only permanent exhibition included in the research was the exhibition *States of Mind / Beyond the Image* (Gallery of the Central Bohemian Region, Kutná Hora, 2014 – 2017; Figs. 9–10). Curator Richard Drury deliberately avoided chronological ordering of the artworks and their art-historical categorisation. Twenty-one pairs of seemingly contradictory states of the human mind (e.g. solitude/friendship, tenderness/cruelty, hope/scepticism, confinement/freedom, etc.) became the key to the exhibition’s conception. These are categories that can be understood by all viewers, regardless of their age or nationality. The viewers are not to be limited by their previous experience and knowledge, and perceive the artwork **not in an artistic but rather in a generally human context**. The exhibition environment included “**aphorisms**” – short quotations and verbal thoughts from literature, philosophy, music, film, etc. They did not function as explanatory or accompanying texts, but had the same expressive value as the artworks. The only additional text was a **introductory text before entering the exhibition**, which introduced the viewer to the basic idea and concept. The aim was to create an environment that allowed maximum attention to the works of art, and not to precondition the viewer’s gaze with a piece of text.

The attempt to avoid the art-historical structuring of permanent exhibitions is increasingly common in art museums. One very ambitious example is the concept of the Tate Modern’s permanent exhibition in London, which is divided into

“thematic” units – Media Network, In the Studio, Artist and Society, Materials and Objects, Start Display, Living Cities, Performer and Participant – that retain an ahistorical approach to the presentation of the collection, while still presenting the works in an artistic context. A different example was the exhibition *We Pioneers* at MUMOK in Vienna (figs. 11–12), which presented artworks from the collections of two important collectors, Viktor Matějka and Werner Hofmann. In one part of the exhibition, the works were presented on monumental wire constructions simulating the museum’s storage space and arranged chronologically according to the date of their purchase. This method of installation, among other things, placed the works in the context of the art collection as an object of interest to collectors and the art market.

Engagement and the role of the spectator

One of the important criteria for evaluating an exhibition as an informal learning environment is the degree; of interactivity, activation, and engagement of the viewer. The degree of interactivity and interaction with the viewer is mentioned by Šobáňová (2014) as one of the criteria for assessing a museum exhibition as an educational medium. More and more often we encounter so-called **active zones** in galleries and art museums. Active zones also appeared in two of the cases we studied. In the case of *Jiří Černický’s* exhibition, it was located in a separate room accessible from the exhibition to which it was thematically linked. The viewer was invited to create a “*Model of the World’s Largest Autodrome*” as a tribute to Vladimir Tatlin, whose work was an inspiration to Černický in some of the cases. In the second case, at *Zbyněk Sekal’s* exhibition, the active zone was placed directly in the exhibition environment. It included a “creative workshop” in the form of a work-bench with a variety of materials and an invitation to interaction: “*Assemble your own assembled picture*”. This format, where active zones appear directly in the exhibition space together with the exhibits, has been increasingly common in museum practice. An example is Helsinki’s Ateneum Art Museum, where the permanent exhibition *Stories of Finnish Art* (figs. 13–14) includes several thematic stops containing both art exhibits and didactic elements conveying the wider context of the exhibited works or interactive exhibits on a hands-on basis.

Worksheets are another way to activate the viewer. In one of the cases we examined (*Instructions for Use*), the worksheets were an integral part of the exhibition environment. This principle can also be encountered elsewhere, especially in international institutions, where these elements are designed especially for children. For example, we have such an experience from the Museum of Contemporary Art Kiasma in Helsinki, where in various parts of the *ARS17* exhibition the so-called *Kiasma Monster route* (figs. 15–16) was prepared in the form of several wall-mounted boards containing accompanying texts and hidden tasks encouraging reflection of thoughts, or simple activities.

Each of the examined exhibitions worked with the motif of activating the viewer differently and to a different extent. In the case of the *Flaesh* exhibition, the **viewer was activated rather minimally** and mainly outside the exhibition environment (choosing from the offered sources of information outside the exhibition). Similarly, in the case of the permanent exhibition *States of Mind*, the **viewer was activated on a more cognitive level** through the dynamic arrangement of works and aphorisms that created an imaginary collage. Furthermore, through a “dialogue” between the different states of mind, between the works themselves and

between the visual expression (the work) and the written word (the aphorism). In the case of *Zbyněk Sekal's* exhibition, **the motif of interaction was present in parts of the exhibition** – in the aforementioned active zone, sound installations, and in the way books and book covers were presented. For these, an unconventional way of installation in transparent covers suspended in space was chosen. The viewers could take the books in their hands and view them from both sides.

A specific case is the exhibition by *Jiří Černický*, where the **element of interactivity was present in some of the artworks** in addition to the active zone. The **concept of the exhibition *Instructions for Use* was directly based on activation and interaction**. As much as this motif of the viewers' participation in the work can bring a unique experience and lead them to stay more attentive or longer with the work, we believe that it may not necessarily guarantee understanding.

In this respect, the exhibition *Jean Tinguely: Super, Meta, Maxi*, organised by the Kunstpalast in Düsseldorf in 2016, is worthy of note. Here, the viewer could move some of the artist's kinetic sculptures with a button. A monumental kinetic installation that the visitor could enter was a unique experience. As with *Jiří Černický's* exhibition, however, this was not a case of interactivity added to facilitate understanding, but rather to enable the work to be perceived in the form intended by the empirical author.

Interactive elements (active zones) in art exhibitions are often based on the work of the presented artists, leading the viewer to create in the same spirit "as the artist works". This was also the case in the cases we examined. This approach can be beneficial to the extent that it offers the opportunity to experience that which is otherwise very difficult to convey. At the same time, however, it is problematic when considering the degree of creativity involved in these practices. According to Dytrtová an assignment of this type does not increase the viewers' attentiveness, but only reproduces what the viewers are able to perceive on their own (Dytrtová 2015, p. 45). We believe that the motive of activation, interactivity, and participation in itself does not necessarily guarantee the creation of a suitable environment for informal learning, where it is very important what experience is conveyed to the viewer in this way.

Conclusion

The text presented partial results of research focused on the role of the art exhibition environment in the process of enriching the viewer's experience. We focused on three of the five relevant criteria for evaluating an exhibition as an informal learning environment: (1) *context*, (2) *tools of communication*, (3) *engagement and the role of the viewer*.

Within the exhibitions we examined, we encountered both a purely artistic context and one that deliberately forgoes the artistic categories. In the case of the permanent exhibition *States of Mind*, the work was placed in a "generally human" context, independent of (art) history and the viewer's knowledge of it. The question arises, however, as to whether in this case, too, it is only one of several possible perspectives on the artwork.

We believe that an exhibition as an informal learning environment should offer a more comprehensive view of an artwork and offer open possibilities rather than a single point of view. In terms of the diversity of information, *Zbyněk Sekal's* exhibition came closest to this model, offering information from the perspective of both the artist (diaries) and the expert in his work (accompanying texts),

engaging multiple senses and sources of experience. At the same time, however, it should be noted that the large number of elements supplied can simultaneously make it difficult to experience the artwork undisturbed, since a focused and attentive perception is required to understand and experience it. Interviews suggest that curators themselves are aware of this issue.

Certainly none of the exhibitions included in the research can be seen as a guide to how to approach/not approach an exhibition as an informal learning environment. Different exhibitions offer different perspectives on different approaches to the presentation of an artwork, and therefore on different conceptions of the exhibition as an opportunity to build the viewer's experience. Instead, the research findings illuminate and name the criteria, while opening up questions that must be positively taken into account if we are to consider the exhibition environment in the context of informal learning.

Fig. 1–2.
 Jiří Černický: Wild Dreams, January 27 – April 10, 2016, Galerie Rudolfinum, Prague, curator: David Korecký (right: the drawing for the artwork Anatomical Study of a Monster, 2009). Photo: Archive of author.





Fig. 3–4.
 Zbyněk Sekal: Things Are Moving Forward Slowly, September 10, 2015 – February 14, 2016, Olomouc Museum of Art, author of exhibition: Marie Klimešová, curator: Olga Staníková (right: the creative workshop with a photograph of Sekal's studio in Vienna, Dagmar Hochová, 1998). Photo: Archive of author.



Fig. 5–6.
 Flaesh, October 1, 2015 – January 3, 2016, Galerie Rudolfinum, Praha, curator: Petr Nedoma (up: Tracy Emin, Dead Sea, 2012 /installation/; down: Berlinde De Bruyckere, J. L., 2006). Photo: Archive of author.



Fig. 7–8.

Instructions for Use, February 8 – February 23, 2017, Emil Filla Gallery, Ústí nad Labem, curator: Eva Mrázíková (up: Jiří Bartoš, Horizons, 2006; down: the worksheets for Zdena Kolečková's work). Photo: Archive of author.

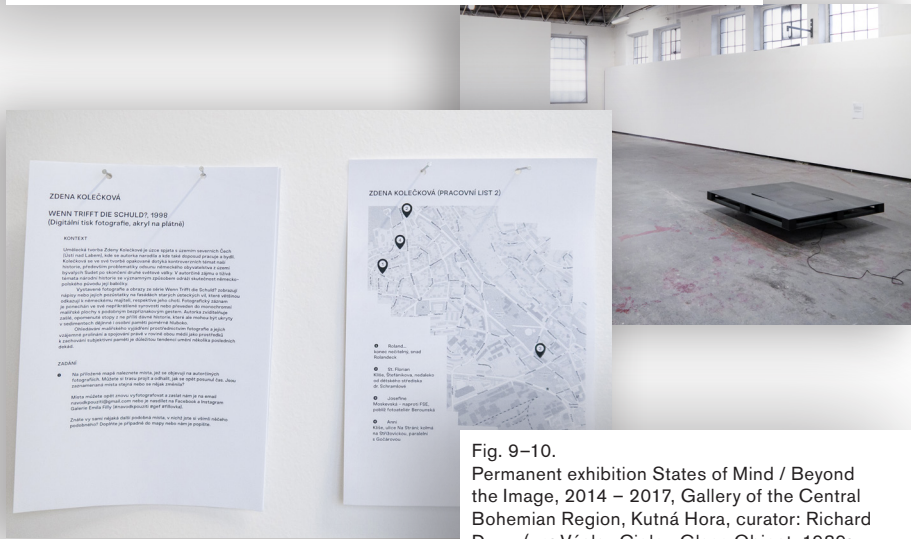
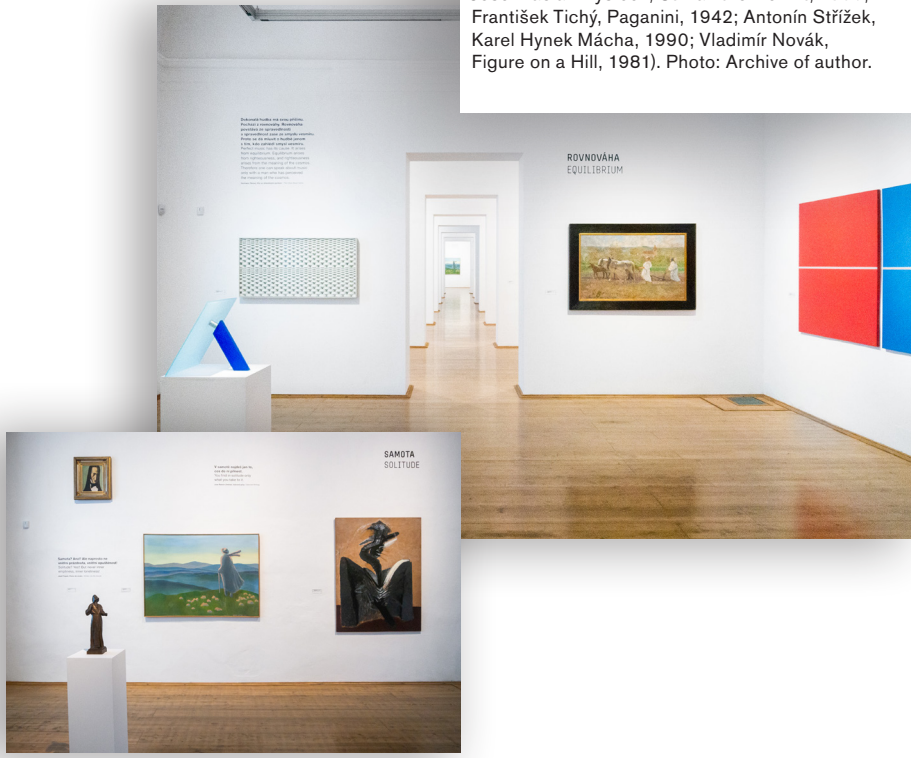


Fig. 9–10.

Permanent exhibition States of Mind / Beyond the Image, 2014 – 2017, Gallery of the Central Bohemian Region, Kutná Hora, curator: Richard Drury (up: Václav Cigler, Glass Object, 1989; Jiří Hilmar, Optical Relief, 1974; Joža Uprka, Legend /In the Field/, c. 1900; Jan Kubíček, Elemental Division into Squares, 1968; down: Josef Václav Myslbek, St Ivan the Hermit, 1895; František Tichý, Paganini, 1942; Antonín Strážek, Karel Hynek Mácha, 1990; Vladimír Novák, Figure on a Hill, 1981). Photo: Archive of author.



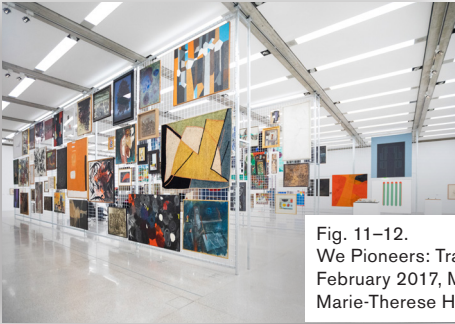


Fig. 11–12.
We Pioneers: Trailblazers of Postwar Modernism, May 2016 – February 2017, MUMOK, Vienna, curators: Susanne Neuburger, Marie-Therese Hochwarter. Photo: Archive of author.



Fig. 13–14.
Permanent exhibition Stories of Finnish Art, Ateneum Art Museum, Finnish National Gallery, Helsinki (up: Yrjö Saarinne, Self-Portrait, 1940; down: Akseli Gallen-Kallela, The Giant Pike, 1904 /painting in the middle/). Photo: Archive of author.

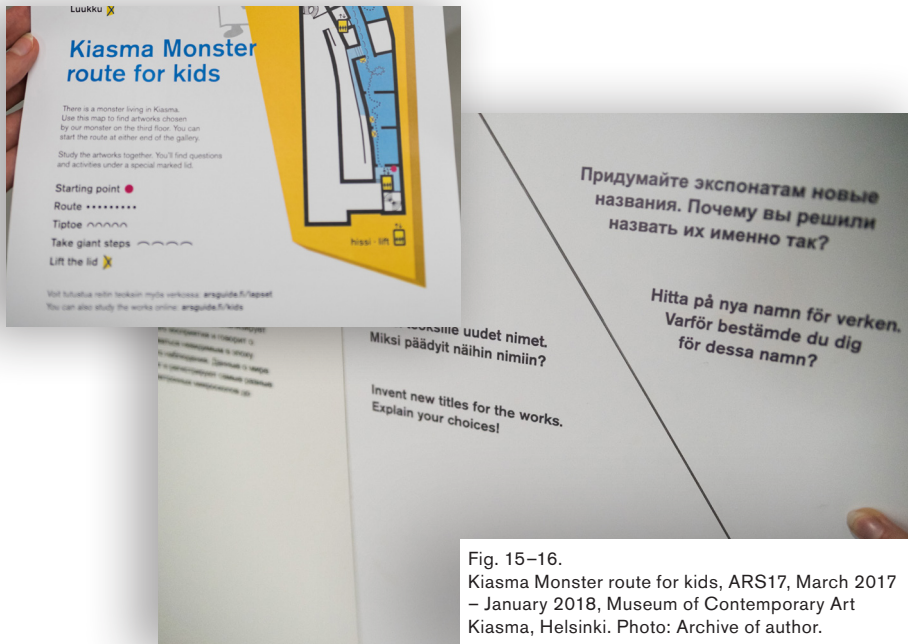


Fig. 15–16.
Kiasma Monster route for kids, ARS17, March 2017
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Kiasma, Helsinki. Photo: Archive of author.

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MUSEUMS AND SOCIAL PARTICIPATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF THE CIVIC MUSEUM OF PALAZZO BUONACCORSI

Giuliana Pascucci

Introduction

In a constantly evolving society, the role of the museum is formulated according to the needs of the cultural, social, and economic context to which it belongs. Today, museums present themselves as cultural connectors capable of interacting with the territory and with the community. This facilitates the visitors' interpretation, and strengthens the relationship between the museum and the public in terms of physical and cognitive accessibility, participation, mediation and empowerment.

This contribution aims to narrate the experience of the Civic Museums of Palazzo Buonaccorsi in showing greater attention to the subjects, activities, and services, and using a narrative-educational approach to enhance their collections, promote the territory, and fulfil their social function. For this reason, the Museums have chosen to engage in intercultural dialogue and the construction of new cultural identities by supporting participation and integration through experimentation with creative workshops.

Museums in progress

In the era of globalisation and disorientation of an army of consumers marked by a hedonistic and individualistic culture (Bauman 2016), institutions are committed to opening up to the world by responding to the needs of the community. The museums of the third millennium are open to social change; they also deal with the tangible and intangible heritage widespread in the territory that surrounds them, they engage in intercultural dialogue and the construction of new identities, they promote participation and integration, and they help citizens and communities to open up to the new and the different (Brown, Mairesse 2018).

Sectoral studies have dated the start of the debate on the social functions of the museum back to the 1930s. The nineteenth-century museum institution begins a path that winds through various phases: after becoming aware of the importance of the organisation and display of collections, travelling exhibitions, teaching, and services to the public, in the seventies it assumed awareness of one's role in society in relation to man and his context (Dragoni 2015).

It is in the participation of the community or in the cultural identity that Franco Russoli identifies the museum as "*a place where one goes to feed one's knowledge problems, rather than to undergo alienating and coercive lessons*" (Russoli 1972, p. 82), as a place where "*every thing or work, every document of nature,*

history, science, and art, allows and demands the most diverse forms of approach, reading and interpretation" (Russoli 1972, p. 82). In fact, the concepts of community participation and cultural identity are affirmed and expanded while the role of the museum in society is theorised, in relation to man and his context.

Today, in harmony with the European Convention of Faro, signed by Italy in 2013, museums are committed to creating "heritage communities" and to involving public institutions, citizens and associations in the enhancement of cultural heritage and landscapes (Council of Europe in 2005). The Convention is based on the concept that the knowledge and use of inherited heritage is one of the rights of the individual, and calls upon the population to play an active role in recognising its value. Article 2 defines a heritage community as "*people who value specific aspects of cultural heritage which they wish, within the framework of public action, to sustain and transmit to future generations*" (COE 2005, online). Therefore, the museum sees participation as the key to raising awareness of the value of cultural heritage and its contribution to well-being and quality of life.

The interpretation of the social role of the museum is reinforced by the *Recommendation on the protection and promotion of museums and collections*, their diversity and their role in society, approved by the 38th General Conference of UNESCO on November 17, 2015. Museums, according to UNESCO, must be considered an engine of development, have a relationship with economy, tourism, social inclusion, and quality of life. From the point of view of their social role, public spaces that appeal to the whole of society are vital and therefore can play an important role in the development of bonds and social cohesion, in the construction of citizenship and in the reflection on collective identities (UNESCO Recommendation 2015). The International Council of Museums (ICOM) has supported and reaffirmed the social role of the museum through its own code of ethics, conferences, recommendations, and events.

Over the years, the city of Macerata has oriented the activities of its institutes, libraries, and museums on these principles; making accessibility, both physical and cognitive, one of the cornerstones of its mission, offering a series of services and activities to support full inclusion of people with disabilities (Pascucci, Petrini 2018).

The experience of Macerata Museums

In Macerata, the Museums are distinguished by having chosen an inclusive communication method ranging from information to entertainment, from a conscious use of technologies to a skilful preparation. The entire apparatus, making use of multiple media, contributes to renewing communication starting from a new way of experiencing heritage. "Macerata Musei", the institution that represents the network of the public museums and monuments in Macerata, takes care of the culture of its area. It was born with the creation of a city cultural centre: a municipal organisation that includes the Civic Museums of Palazzo Buonaccorsi, the Arena Sferisterio, the Civic Tower, the Lauro Rossi Theatre, the Mozzi-Borgetti Municipal Public Library, the Natural History Museum, the Archeological Area Helvia Ricina, and the Ecomuseum of clay houses "Villa Ficana". This project began in 2009, with the new set-up of the Civic Museums of Palazzo Buonaccorsi.

The team that worked on this new project soon had to face the generic stereotypes of and prejudices towards the museum, in particular its general interpretation as an old, dusty, culturally and physically inaccessible place where it is not

allowed to touch, talk, take photos, or have fun. But they also noticed the disaffection and the indifference towards the civic collections, as they were not considered interesting, attractive, or famous enough. Moreover, the rumours about the low value of the local collections and the uselessness of a new museum pushed the team to think about its social function and its relationship with the community. The implications of this vision are not simply theoretical; in fact, they impact as much on the identity and social role of the institute as on the daily and concrete aspects of its cultural management, in the preparation of its contents and experiences for the communication and promotion of its heritage (Pascucci 2019).

In order to respect the historical identity of this place, a welcoming space was created, accessible from a cognitive and physical point of view with a narrative approach in the preparation of its three exhibition sections. In addition to multilingual explanatory devices, multimedia content, tactile paths, and technologies for friendly assisted access, services were also created such as guided tours, exhibitions, educational activities, creative and socialising workshops, family rooms with a welcoming point for breastfeeding, but also parties, meetings, events, conferences and dinners. This approach has been strengthened since 2015 thanks to the project “Il Museo di tutti e per tutti”, promoted by the Marche Region in collaboration with the Museo Tattile Statale Omero of Ancona. In order to support the inclusion of people with disabilities, the Museums have established a series of relationships and collaborations with organisations and associations (AFAM – Alzheimer’s Family Association Macerata – Italian Union of the Blind and Visually Impaired, IRCR – Joint Care and Rest Institutions, ANFFAS – National Association of Families of People with Intellectual and/or Relational Disabilities, Listening and Initial Care Centre, schools, and various city service clubs) to design services and activities such as: explanatory material in Braille, tactile models, guided tours, audio descriptions, and a tablet with easy access.

This philosophy has also included some projects aimed at maximising the museum contribution to social inclusion and well-being. The collaboration between the Social Services and the Ecomuseum of Villa Ficana has created a creative artistic project focusing on the disabled people who attend the “Family Centre”. Qualified operators realised workshop activities during which the disabled manipulated raw earth and used recycled material to reproduce houses and simple models of carriages. Each workshop was followed by a visit to the Museums, and an end-of-course party where all the works made were proudly exhibited.

The “Museo dell’altro” and the “Mani che parlano” projects were born from the desire to transform the initial agreement between the Museum and the Listening and First Reception Centre in Macerata into an experience of a “good cultural neighbourhood” as a form of authentic self-knowledge.

“Mani che parlano”: a narrative project that makes people express through doing

This project was conceived by an Italian language teacher for the Listening and First Reception Centre. Its design identified the Museum as a suitable place to experiment with new ways of conceiving hospitality. Everything happened through the observation and free description of the works of art that are part of the museum collections.

By providing all the basic elements of the Italian language and some technical terms, the foreign students were then invited to express their emotions and feelings, also by using the linguistic and relational skills acquired.

From the “Museo dell’altro” a new project came out: “Mani che parlano”, that uses the artistic language (in this specific case a sculpture class) as an educational and functional means to welcome and integrate foreign language students. With this clear idea in mind, the “Mani che parlano” project was born and has reached its second edition, conceived in the 2017–2018 school year thanks to the collaboration between the Listening and First Reception Centre, the Giulio Cantalamessa Art School, and the Civic Museums in Macerata. Unaccompanied foreign minors in the community education for minors of the Piombini-Sensini Onlus Association were involved in this experience. They were monitored by the Macerata Social Services within the “Colour Families” project.

The project, aimed at encouraging the integration and dialogue between culturally different realities, chose to use plastic art as a common language. That is a model of intervention in terms of social integration addressed to the young migrants in the Macerata area. Supported by the teachers, all the students were involved in the project. The students of the art upper secondary school in Macerata together with some children with disabilities, the guests of the Listening and First Reception Centre, and the unaccompanied foreign minors worked in pairs for the realisation of ten sculptures.

Despite their ethnic, social, and cultural distance, the constant comparison helped them to overcome obstacles and preconceived opinions. The project involved the following phases:

- 1 Presentation of the participants,
- 2 Visit to the Museum in the form of a treasure hunt,
- 3 Drawing lessons for the design of the sculptures,
- 4 Sculpture lessons on *ytong* blocks,
- 5 Finishing the work,
- 6 Presentation of the work via an exhibition in Macerata museums.

In their artistic works memories, emotions, lives, and above all dreams and hopes for a new life are evident and shine through. The impressions of the students who participated in this project were recorded by the students of the multimedia course attending the School Art, and are visible at the following link: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNZ-0kSejAE & t=305s](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JNZ-0kSejAE&t=305s).

Conclusion

The pedagogical intuition of this project is represented by the belief that the human lines of development also pass-through beauty education by stimulating emotional intelligence and a variety of skills which are necessary for today’s student and tomorrow’s citizen.

I would like to conclude by stressing the fact that nowadays the Museum, proposing itself as a connector of cultural services, responds more and more to the requests of the cultural context it belongs to. While answering to local needs, it opens up to more subjects and encourages their participation, thus facilitating the sharing of social values and attitudes. This vision is reinforced when the museum becomes part of a wider system of social design and development that promotes interaction between local stakeholders and the creation of spaces of inclusion, health, and well-being.

Fig. 1.
Drawing lessons for the design of the sculptures.
Photo: Archive of Museum.

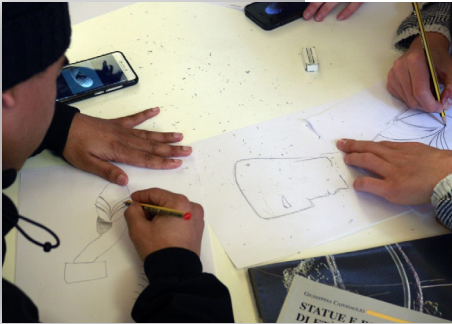


Fig. 2.
Sculpture lessons on *ytong* blocks.
Photo: Archive of Museum.



Fig. 3.
The works created by the participants in the
sculpture workshop. Photo: Archive of Museum.

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QUALITY ISSUES OF SELECTED ONLINE EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMMES OF CZECH GALLERIES DURING THE STATE OF EMERGENCY FROM MARCH TO MAY 2020

Tereza Havlovicová

Introduction

I chose the topic of the paper in relation to my experience in gallery lecturing practice during the emergency pandemic situation we found ourselves in during the spring of 2020. I had been involved in lecturing in exhibition institutions and the concept of educational gallery programmes for the public for seven years at the time of the conference. My interest has long been focused on the issue of quality in conveying the content of artworks to the public within exhibition institutions and the programmes they offer to visitors of different age groups.

I focus on their conceptual analysis with reference to Nelson Goodman and work with the concepts of exemplification, denotation, expression, alteration, visual literacy, etc. As I am a trained curator and art educator, I am very interested in how the content and the concept of the artist changes with the subsequent work of the curator and the lecturer. The state of emergency and the whole period of the pandemic, the closing of exhibition institutions and the limitation of their activities, the efforts of the staff to adapt to the new situation and still communicate with their visitors, to move to the online space, and with each successive period of closure to improve this communication and to navigate the possibilities offered by the online connection and to use them in the most productive way, has brought again a new perspective and new questions about the quality of the mediation of artworks to the public by exhibition institutions.

In my contribution, I will focus on the characteristics of a quality gallery education programme, present some selected programmes that have been published in the Czech environment in the online space, and focus on problematic areas of their quality in terms of future use of the online space by education departments. I will also briefly pause on the development of access to online programmes during the pandemic – my contribution to the conference focused on the period of spring 2020 and the necessity of a quick response to the situation that had arisen, but which is still ongoing in different parts of the world in varying intensity, so we have longer experience with the online environment and functioning in it. In conclusion, I will summarise the most problematic moments that relate to the transition of lecturing activities to the online space and which we in education departments must

pay attention to in the future if we want to offer and produce programmes of high quality and beneficial content for visitors.

Gallery education programmes, the question of their quality, and the need to move to the online space

I decided to introduce my contribution with a quote by Marie Fulková (Fulková 2012, p. 14): *“The current state of gallery and museum education offers different levels of quality of execution, from erudite programmes to art or drama workshops, which sometimes miss the content component, the link to the contents of the exhibition or the cultural artefacts to be worked with, and the emphasis is on the process of any kind of creation, but without the proper context; as if ‘unleashing’ creativity, emotions and experiences were enough to build knowledge and cultural competences. However, we must remember that we are not competing with experiential tours.”* It is this superficial work with content that I consider to be a major problem that education departments should try to avoid as much as possible when preparing programmes.

So, what conditions should a quality programme meet? I will list here the five basic conditions that I personally consider the most important.

- 1 We work with the original or with good quality documentation of the artwork. However, we cannot leave out the originals on which specific education department programmes are based, because it is appropriate to work with the original that develops visual literacy. Since cognition is socially and culturally situated, we speak of a double mediation. The relationship to the world and to people is mediated, firstly by the cultural artefact and secondly by the other person (Slavík, Chrz, Štech 2013, p. 29).
- 2 The programme should be based on the didactic transformation method, i.e. the use of discovery-based action learning. In line with pedagogical constructivism, pupils construct meanings themselves when they actively work with facts and information (Slavík, Chrz, Štech 2013, p. 321). The experience is essential. It contains a meaning component (what is expressed), a constructive component (how it is expressed), and an empathic component (who communicates through the work) – (Slavík, Chrz, Štech 2013, p. 322). It includes both subjective and objective and inter-subjective components; we understand experience as a multi-level cultural performance of the creator and the perceiver, a trans-objective active and creative performance. We distinguish the concept of experience, which encompasses my personal, private experience (Dytrtová 2019, p. 52–53).
- 3 The participant must grasp the content in their own way, it must not be a mere reproduction of what they have seen (Slavík, Chrz, Štech 2013, p. 16). The creation must be accompanied by dialogue. Therefore, we need to design didactic approaches that capture the creative potential of the content in question through cognitively activating tasks. Visitors can then explore the content with real understanding through their own creation (Slavík, Chrz, Štech 2013, p. 494–496).
- 4 The programme should develop the competences of visual literacy – perceptual sensitivity, cultural habitus, critical thinking, aesthetic openness, visual eloquence. *“Visual literacy (...) as the ability to recognize metaphorical modes based on expression, not just to recognize denotation!”* (Dytrtová 2019, p. 98)

- 5 The quality of the accompanying programme can be measured by the degree of understanding of the meaning of the work (concept) and the degree of accuracy of perception at the level of the perceiver (Dytrtová, Raudenský 2015, p. 36).

This comes to light during the joint final discussion on the progress of the programme. Of course, this is not possible with online programmes that are in video, text or any other “instruction” format without two-way communication, as we are deprived of sharing answers. However, online programmes could at least include questions that are important to ask at the end (we can try the programme at home, on a few people – even online with feedback – and check if it works; there is nothing else we can do). Or we can ask for answers on social media, of course.

Very briefly, we should focus on the content component, which comes from the work in the exhibition space. The basis of quality programmes is therefore working with the original and careful conception of the introductory, theoretical, creative, and reflective parts of the programme, as we try to transfer new knowledge and cultural competences to the participants.

Since the beginning of 2020, the world has been hit by the spread of the COVID-19 coronavirus. The pandemic has brought isolation and fear to society, the need to learn to live and function in an emergency that no one knew when it would end. People were not allowed to meet even within the family, and exhibition institutions were closed.

In the Czech Republic, for the first time, a state of emergency was declared between 12 March and 17 May 2020. The activities of education departments suddenly had to move online in March, and no one was prepared for this. There was not enough time to familiarise ourselves with the online programmes and applications that offer various options for presentations, etc., and learn how to use and promote them quickly. At the same time, due to the competition between exhibition institutions, there was naturally a lot of pressure to be seen, to be noticed: “We won’t let you down either”. In this part of the text, it is necessary to stress that in the context of this paper we view the emergency and the activities of the educations’ departments as a very difficult situation that we all had to cope with. We view the issue of the transition of tutoring activities to the online space with the knowledge that these were the first steps in a time when the main message was “We are here for you, together we can handle this difficult situation, let’s help each other.” It is important to understand that the goal of the programmes at the time of the first crisis was primarily to help others; the question of quality was pushed aside. It is therefore understandable that sharing came first, and quality programmes were replaced by more leisurely, soothing programmes at this time; for pleasure and relaxation, as help to parents who had their children at home or for anyone who was interested in the programme.

However, in helping in this way we have learned and tried many new things in the context of working in the online space and the starting point of my text is the belief that what we have learned we will continue to use. The programmes that I will present here are therefore examples of the first steps in a new direction, which I view from the point of view of the future use of the principle used, i.e. at a time when the question of quality is again in the first place and the visitor is to become an “active researcher in cultural events” (Fulková 2012, p. 19).

Specific examples of the first programmes of selected education departments of Czech exhibition institutions during the first state of emergency in 2020

Based on my research of the online programmes of modern and contemporary art galleries and museums, I found recurring moments in their activities that are of great interest to the field in the future. It is important to clarify that I did not focus on guided tours, for example, but only on programmes that combine the mediation of the work through words and creation, i.e. animations and workshops that enable the perception of the artwork through my own active creation and reflection on the work I see and the work I create.

Institutions offered video workshops, online workshops, video studio visits with commissioned work directly from the artist, downloadable worksheets, online quizzes, or shared links to online tutoring programmes from other (foreign) institutions or online programmes on demand, where a school or group subscribes and participants join – these programmes are not publicly available and were very rare during the first lockdown, and only became more common in the Czech environment during subsequent waves of the epidemic, so I do not focus on them in this text.

Video tutorials, workshops, studio visits

In this part of the text, I will pause at the online programmes that the Museum of Art and Design Benešov (MUD) has put online. In an emergency mode, a channel, a series of videos, called GOOD MOD has been created here – all of these videos can be found on YouTube, among other places. I would like to preface that this institution was really very active, and it is very sympathetic how much the lecturer tried to be active, to come up with new ideas, to bring suggestions for creation, she even went to the artist's studio. This institution really reminded its visitors and friends that it was there for them.

Online video workshops with tutors

Within this channel, several videos have been produced, focused on conveying the purpose and operation of the gallery institution itself, what it is for, who works in it, and how to create an exhibition. The children had to build a model of their own gallery, display the artworks, then de-install the exhibition, etc. Here, in working with the content of the artwork, which should normally be the focus of the whole programme, I found myself shifting my attention completely away from it. When we get to the point of getting the artworks – so that the children have to create them – nothing is said about the concept of the artist, or how the curator thinks.

The approach is illustrated by this sentence: “I like painting landscapes best because I've been missing them a lot lately. You can paint anything yourself – and that's the most fun thing about creating.” Thus, there is a very clear shift away from content work and towards the previously mentioned relaxing leisure activities. Here the leisure and emotional component is superior to the content and cognitive component, which, given the situation, is understandable. If the programme had been created in a normal mode, to convey to the audience that the most fun thing about art is that we can do anything is very dangerous and I believe that a similar programme would not have been created. It is these missteps that can be more damaging in the online form of industry programmes than when they are held in front of a small, closed group. For here they are presented to the general public

from the position of an expert, a lecturer backed by an exhibition institution, and the record of them is accessible for a long period of time.

Therefore, after the period of emergency and pandemic, if institutions continue their activities in the online space, it will be necessary to publish quality programmes, with a noticeable difference in pedagogical intention during and after the pandemic. In this case, for example, we should include working with the original, information about artists not painting anything, the importance of concept, and how to curate an exhibition. The example of the MUD programmes is only a model situation, the absence of work with content was repeated in many programmes that were created in various Czech exhibition institutions during this period.

Online video workshops with artists

In addition to artistic assignments in the form of videos in which the lecturer performs, videos have also been published in which the artist themselves formulate the assignment and its presentation. This was again the case, for example, in the Museum of Art and Design Benešov (MUD) or in the online activities of the Galerie Rudolfinum in Prague.

In the case of MUD, the lecturer went to shoot a video in the studio of the artist Lukáš Musil, who explained to the audience how he thinks about his work and came up with the assignment – to paint an animal using the same technique he uses – an animal that may not even look like an animal, it may look like a mummy, like something that does not exist, whatever. This way of working with an online programme, where we let the artist himself explain how he thinks, how he works, and he has thought up the assignment and created the work himself with the viewer of the programme, is usually very beneficial, especially because the figure of the artist is still somehow inaccessible to the general public and shrouded in mystery; here it is revealed.

In the context of working with content, here again we encounter the same problem as in the first example, i.e. being commissioned to paint basically anything in any way. In the post-COVID era, documentation of some artwork would need to be added by the education department so that what the artist communicates in the introduction is also seen, and the assignment would need to be modified so that the thought manipulation of the content in the creation is not leaked.

In the case of Galerie Rudolfinum, a video workshop with artist Veronika Drahotová was published. The viewer learns, which is great, what the artist works with, how she uses stencils, what inspires her, how she works with colours. However, the stimulus to think about the content that we receive back from the visual, i.e. the basic focus of attention on a specific artwork and its concept, is again missing here, and in the future we know which aspect of similar activities to expand from an educational point of view. It is also worth mentioning that Galerie Rudolfinum also published on its website links to education programmes of other (foreign) institutions, which is another dimension of helping parents and children in times of emergency.

Homework worksheets and text assignments

In the context of online programmes in the form of worksheets, I will pause on Museum Kampa in Prague. It has gradually started to add tutorials on its website that use works of art as a source of inspiration, more specifically from artists represented in the institution's collection. Although the programme was created in a state of

emergency, I am pleased to note that the education department in Museum Kampa is sticking to the basic criteria of a quality programme even as it transitions to the online space. There is a work of art, used and presented as a source of inspiration. We learn some information about the themes the artists were interested in and the concept of the works. The artistic techniques are not just copying the technique that the artist used, but are shifted so that there is a mental manipulation of the content.

For example, this is how the assignment involving Eva Kmentová's work was created, as illustrated by the sentences: "Since Eva Kmentová was mainly interested in her hands, which she drew and modelled a lot, we come out of them as well." Or: "Slowly squeeze the material so that your fingers and the structure of your palm remain imprinted in it." Furthermore, given the situation, I consider it positive that the introduction of the author's work and the assignment are presented here in a short form, in a few sentences, and thus will not discourage parents who do not want anything complicated. We do not know what impact the length of the text has on a potential participant – so we will bet on the shorter version, as it has a better chance of being read. The only thing that could be criticised is the size of the pictures of the works we are asked to look at to find the principles stated in the description. These are small, and have the logo of Museum Kampa embedded in them.

Online quiz

Museum Kampa came up with a click-through programme on its website. It is basically a quiz in the form of a game. One was called *On the Wave of Abstraction* and the other was called *Suitcase from France*. Both were dedicated to the artist František Kupka, a large part of whose works the Museum Kampa, thanks to Meda Mládková, owns. This format is very attractive; the quiz-game format allows us to work with both text and pictures. We click, read, and answer questions or complete tasks that let us go further. However, these "trial" programmes of Museum Kampa are mainly focused on facts about the life of František Kupka.

The questions concern what he did in Vienna, who he lived with, whether he had friends, how he studied, how he took care of his body, how he reacted to the war, etc.; in the case of the *Suitcase from France*, the questions focus on what the artist might have used the items in the suitcase from France for, or what the items are used for. The content of his works, the ideological background, is relegated in the same way as in the case of the MUD programmes. Again, however, this is understandable given the situation and the fact that this is the first work with this format by the institution. This format certainly has potential for the future. Through it, the viewer could be actively led to 'debate' – by answering the questions that are asked. Through questions and images, which can also be inserted in good quality and resolution, a thorough understanding of the artwork can take place.

My own experience with online programmes

Now I will focus on the problems I encountered while creating my own online video programmes, which I created in March for Jiří David's exhibition *I am here*. The result was a four-part series.

Although I had the freedom to choose the exhibition for which the programme would run, there was essentially no choice but to select Jiří David's *I am here* exhibition. Most of the exhibition spaces were empty because they were

between exhibitions. The next exhibition I could have chosen was Galegion: Utopian City. This was, of course, architecturally focused, and as we had recently had a major exhibition of the architect Eva Jiříčková at DOX, architectural themes were consistently explored with workshop visitors in the previous period. That is why the exhibition by Jiří David was chosen.

I studied the exhibition, watched a video tour with the artist and thought about what themes to focus on in each piece. I decided to proceed as follows: according to the main contents of the exhibited works by Jiří David, each part focused on a different theme. The first focused on man's relationship with nature, the second on a portrait from behind, the third on creating a spiritual landscape and working with colour, and the fourth on a sudden situation we are dealing with. The basic idea was to enable a comprehensive understanding of specific artworks and their contents, and a crucial part of the video was focused on getting to know the source of inspiration. Entire artworks and individual details were captured on video.

I also tried here and there to focus on the wider world of art and come up with another example of an artist who worked in a similar way, for example I brought in the context of Caspar David Friedrich's 1818 work *Pilgrim over a Sea of Fog*, but due to the length of the video this part with the wider context also ended up being cut out according to the wishes of the head of the education department.

After an initial introduction to the source of inspiration and the theme, I always gave the children the opportunity to play a game that related to the content of the works. This was followed by an art assignment, a demonstration of how to work with the art technique, and finally I listed questions to ask and answer after creating.

An overview of the basic structure of my video workshops:

I present this only very briefly, because what is crucial for this text is which problems the experience with the creation and implementation of online video programmes reveals.

- Part 1 *Man's relationship to nature: A game – guess my favourite place in nature and the story of our house plant. Main activity – using examples from the Internet of how the atmosphere of a landscape can be changeable, e.g. mysterious, gentle or dark, we try to paint a landscape ourselves with a particular effect. We answer questions that allow us to recapitulate and internally grasp everything more strongly.*
- Part 2 *What does a portrait of a character from behind tell us? A game – focus on your loved one, friend, sibling, parents etc. and try to tell what they like, what their plans are, what qualities they have etc. Main activity – we paint a portrait of ourselves or someone we know from behind, but with the restriction that only half of the body is shown, not the whole figure. We will choose a setting for the character that is typical of them or in which they would feel most comfortable. We answer questions that allow us to review and internally grasp everything more strongly.*
- Part 3 *Spiritual landscape and unusual work with paint: A game – we think about where my soul would go if it could detach from its body and draw the place. Main activity – we take pictures of places indoors and outdoors and then invert the colours. In the resulting photographs, we look for interesting moments that resemble a supernatural and disembodied “spiritual”*

landscape. We take inspiration and draw such landscapes in pastel. We answer questions that allow us to repeat everything and grasp it more strongly from within.

Part 4 *Surprising intervention in our lives. A game* – Inspired by *The Wave*, let's try to name some situations that we can't control. Let's try to imagine how we would feel and how the situation would best be resolved. Main activity – we represent something good in our lives that has come and hit the landscape of our lives like a big tidal wave. We answer questions that allow us to rehearse and internally grasp everything more strongly.

Conclusion – Problems related to the production of video workshops

My own experience with the preparation and implementation of these video workshops revealed a number of challenges that must be overcome when creating online video programmes. The most important ones are here.

If you are working with a cameraman filming you, the lecturer does not know how to move in front of the camera, where to put their hands, where to look, etc. If the cameraman does not give instructions, it can have a major impact on the resultant professional or unprofessional look of the video.

The nervousness of the "immortal" mistake. Knowing that the footage will take on a life of its own does not add to the quality of the presentation.

Every lecturer knows that every programme gets better with more and more performance. Here is the programme recorded in "first time" form.

Hindsight and the impossibility of correction. For example, in my opinion, in retrospect, there was not as much space as I would have liked to have been given in my videos to the assignment of the work and the demonstration of the art technique. There was always a very quick demonstration of how to work. It can of course be taken as a positive that the video is not instructional and too long, but I know from experience that some children would have appreciated having a few examples "at hand".

The cameraman's time is an expense – you are short of time.

Editing can affect your idea of the outcome and you have no control over it.

Of course, there is the impossibility of reflecting on the resulting work, which is one of the key components of gallery practice programmes, allowing us to check what educational goals have been achieved and what needs to be improved for next time.

These problems are not only related to working with the content of the artwork and trying to convey it well, we are used to such problems in the lecturing activity, these problems are mainly related to the fact that the lecturer is forced by circumstances to work in a different way, in a "foreign" medium, without contact with the visitors, on the contrary in cooperation with someone who videotapes it and whom the lecturer may never have met before, as it was in my case. But this is now fundamental – COVID has forced us to move into the online space, and this change brings new problems that need to be defined. Above I have summarised the problems associated with creating videos. At the end of this text, it is important to reflect on what obstacles also arise from the other mentioned online forms of programmes used during Spring 2020.

Basic problematic points in terms of future use in normal mode

- 1 The desire to “be seen and support each other”, even at the cost of publishing leisure activities with leaked content, must be replaced by a demand for quality work with and knowledge of the artwork. Programmes need to focus on developing visual literacy through working with the content of the work and using it to create.
- 2 We should always work with at least a good documentation of the source of inspiration – i.e. the artwork – if we cannot stand with visitors in front of the original artwork in the gallery.
- 3 We should overcome embarrassment and fear in the creation of online video programmes – especially the fear of “immortal” footage. This is especially, but not only, true for the older generation, who are not as comfortable with smartphones, apps, and social media as the younger generation.
- 4 Learning about new programmes and applications should be seen as a natural part of the job, and gallery education departments should train their staff in this regard.
- 5 Length of online programmes – going forward we will need to find out how programmes of a given length are received and what we might understand as an appropriate length of online programmes.
- 6 The final reflection of the programme should be included at least to a minimum extent in online programmes.
- 7 Target group – for whom are online programmes created? For “everyone”. The fact that the online programmes are free and available to everyone – on Facebook, Instagram or the website – means that anyone can take part in the online programme. The bottom line is that online programmes are thus easily accessible, especially to those who are interested in them and can be assumed to already have some experience and idea of what is a good programme and what is not. I am referring primarily to teachers or parents who are thinking about what content is to be delivered to their children through the programme they are using and who are used to visiting the institution and have therefore also found its online activities and decided to use them. Of course, the fact that the programmes are online and accessible to everyone also offers the possibility that someone who does not normally go to the galleries to see the programmes, and therefore the content of the programmes is hidden from them, might try to use it. In this case, I see a particularly big problem if the emphasis on publishing quality content in an appropriate form is weakened. If it is an art instruction manual without a link to the original artworks and to the stories that the gallery offers to experience through the art, it becomes just another example of making instead of creation, of which there are millions on the internet – and the gallery loses the potential to attract attention to itself and, by its uniqueness, to attract new visitors who will go in to see the art story.

Two years have passed since the spring of 2020, during which several more waves of pandemics and closures of exhibition institutions have taken place. As a result, many of them have improved their activities in the online space, while many have suspended their activities altogether. I am fortunate that as a lecturer at the DOX

Centre for Contemporary Art, I was able to actively participate in activities using online communication platforms and working with various applications that allowed me to interact with entire groups of online visitors and to make an online visit an unusual and enriching experience that can allow a collective that is separated due to quarantine (or any other reason) to bond.

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VISUAL SOCIOLOGY AND INTERCULTURAL RESEARCH: THEORY AND PRACTICE IN SOCIAL AND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXTS

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Visual methodology and the importance of images in research contexts

Visual methodology consists of research methods for gathering visual data, and conceptual tools with which to interpret these materials (Mitchell 2011; Spencer 2011; Rose 2014; Pauwels 2010, 2015). This branch of qualitative sociology considers the study of the iconic as an important technique and method in social research, and identifies the primary role of visual experience in cognitive processes through the visual data itself.

The duality of word and image has influenced social sciences. The movement which developed in response to increased production of images in “high” (late) modernity has been defined as the “visual turn” (Bartmanski 2014). Social scientists undermined the strict division between the two concepts, and began searching for the theoretical footing in visual studies and researching with the visual.

By emphasising the key role played by the “picture” in theory, the researchers laid the ground for the “pictorial turn” (Mitchell 1995), while through the underlying logic of pictorial representations and by framing them in terms of “visual hermeneutics”, the authors paved the way for the “iconic turn” (Boehm 2001) in the studies of the visual. The researchers did not place the visual study on an equal footing with the study of images, but considered it a study of how social reality was observed. They aimed to include visuality into the master categories of sociological analysis of reality and created an integrative framework to overcome word/image dualism.

The images produced may remain an intermediate product in the course of sociological research, or may constitute the final product. Images can be considered instruments of observation themselves, not only as products; the visual analysis of which enables the understanding of social reality. An example is the analysis of children’s drawings in studying possible familial problems. Images can also be considered a research tool; for example, in a focus group by showing previously taken photographs which can stimulate a conversation. Finally, they can also be the final product of field research, the observation of which enables different forms of reflection. In this case, the results of the study are disseminated in two different ways: to the scientific community, remaining faithful to the specific language (visual sociological essay); to a broader public, with a language that, starting from the data collected, can stimulate and involve its attention (exhibitions, social networks,

public meetings). Besides, visual research methods involving the production of images could be used to elicit an answer to a research question that may have little to do with the visual per se (such as inclusion, racism, migration process, cultural studies, etc.).

Visual methods and video have interesting potentialities in research because they allow the application of the most traditional qualitative research tools (Jupp 2006; Harper 2012; Frisina 2013, 2016a), thus strengthening some peculiarities (reflexivity across cultural perspective, relevance to others' point of view).

Many scholars (Erickson 2011; Rafiee et al. 2021) have claimed that the use of audio-visual instruments is still a sort of frontier worth investigating, and effectively not much progress has been made in recent years. Instead, moving within a visual and iconic society, the image that the research video proposes allows us to generate a change, to trigger a deconstruction of prejudices and stereotypes to which we are often accustomed and that we reproduce unconsciously; it is possible, in Mitchell's words, to use "visual methods for a social change" (Mitchell 2011, p. 8).

Visual methods and intercultural research: Beyond traditional qualitative research tools

As we live in a digital and symbolic age full of images and representation possibilities, it is somewhat unexpected that only a few types of research and study systematically use visual products (photographs, films, videos, drawings, etc.) in the construction of academic knowledge about intercultural and inclusion processes. Considering the barely explored or utilised potential of visual methodology in intercultural situations, it is clear that it needs to be developed further. It is unnecessary to substitute other research methods to produce sociological films or photographic reports. It would be useful to discuss what can possibly be gained from different uses of images in the research process, and in making our results public.

Let us analyse most of the research on intercultural contexts produced in recent years. We can see that the use of visuals is rarely practised or contemplated among the methodological choices, except in cases of anthropological and ethnographic studies where, historically, the use of photography and video are more used and recognised (Pink 2011; Knoblauch 2012; Krase 2016; Sebag et al. 2018). Although the scientific literature still shows some reluctance in accepting the requirements of validity and reliability of the video as a qualitative research tool, we can consider it advantageous in intercultural contexts if used thoughtfully in technical-operational procedures and thanks to the researcher's reflexivity²⁴ (Sorrel Penn 2012).

The use of these methods and approaches in the intercultural context, in particular, has interesting advantages and potentialities because it allows the

24 Reflexivity is a key term in the dramatic and rapid changes confronted by the human sciences (especially sociology) during the last four decades. In general, reflexivity was comprehensively defined by George Herbert Mead as "*the turning back of the experience of the individual upon [her or himself]*" (Mead 1934, p. 134). It still constitutes a rather ubiquitous sociological and epistemological problem. In particular, the radical reflexive awareness of the mutual dependency of sociological categories (e. g. risk, citizenship, space, time, modernity, morality) and social practice has been increasingly brought right at the forefront of hot academic/epistemological debates.

application of the most traditional qualitative research tools (Jupp 2006; Spencer 2011; Harper 2012; Frisina 2013, 2016a), strengthening some peculiarities, such as reflexivity across cultural perspective and relevance to other points of view.

In this sense, the use of the visual methodology in an intercultural context seems more useful and practical than ever (Ball, Gilligan 2010; Sirkeci et al. 2019; Vaughan 2020) to contrast the hegemonic, stereotyped and negative representation of the concept of “others”. Nothing can be more powerful and incisive than the use of other images produced in or by different people from different cultures, which tell another narrative and provide another representation.

The meaning of images in visual studies facing multicultural contexts includes the need for awareness of the multiplication of visual culture(s), understood as a set of different images, united by being produced and reproduced socially, and the visual relevance. Ways of seeing always accompany vision because they inevitably contribute to visual culture production, which is inscribed in it and are suggested and reproduced through it. It is essential to pay attention to what significance images take on within different cultures and the function that an image can play within a society at a specific historical moment and in a specific culture, i.e. its capacity to act within the socio-cultural context that welcomes it.

Knowledge and learning about others’ subjective culture – temporarily looking at the world through other eyes – is the backbone of the development of migration research in a reflexive perspective. Therefore, a new capacity for observation integrated into the everyday culture will lead us to the change of attitude we expect. This perspective also applies to contact between cultures, which inevitably leaves traces in each one (Knoblauch 2012; Vaughan 2020).

This chapter focuses on the potential advantages of using the visual methodology in researching intercultural processes and inclusion, introducing two cases in which documentary was used as a specific technique to investigate intercultural elements: the documentaries “Italians in Belgium” and “Who I am”. Studying particular aspects of relationships among people belonging to different cultures and backgrounds through a qualitative and visual approach allows creating a relationship of trust between researchers and research actors, investigating personal and sensitive issues, and bringing the researcher “to enter the world” of social actors.

In particular, the proposed studies dwelt on some aspects that are extremely interesting and decisive for the analysis: to conduct an investigation that takes into account the different (two or more) contexts of life in which the interviewees move; to conceive migration as a total social fact that involves the subject in his whole being, before and after the migration, and then to look for an approach that involves the here and there, keeping these multiple references intertwined; give importance to the phase of the presentation of the research results, also as a key moment concerning the possibility of giving voice to those who often cannot speak for themselves or cannot do so in specific situations.

Italians in Belgium: Emigration explored through “frames”

This paragraph discusses a particular case study in which visual methodology was applied to social research. The documentary “Italians in Belgium”²⁵ was designed to explore the migration phenomenon from a unique point of view: Italians living abroad. It is relevant to investigate a different perspective on migration, the ones of Italians as foreigners and migrants, often set aside, even if the most recent statistics reveal that new Italian emigration is constantly growing (McAuliffe, Khadria 2019; Fondazione Caritas Migrantes 2021). The study “Italians in Belgium” (Crespi, Scocco 2018) analyses the existing relations within Italian communities abroad, where different migrants arrived in the country in different years, and their descendants today live together. From a cultural point of view, the socialisation processes and renegotiation practices between the various generations involved in the migration routes are of particular interest (Schmoll et al. 2017). Also, for this reason, the research was carried out in Belgium, where the Italian presence is among the most relevant and rooted in the territory: from the mineworkers who emigrated just after the Second World War (Tintori, Colucci 2015) to more current flows (Fondazione Caritas Migrantes 2019, 2021; Martiniello et al. 2017).

Considering visual potentialities in migration research and intercultural studies, including the relevance for a different point of view (Jupp 2006; Mitchell 2011; Harper 2012; Frisina 2013, 2016a, 2016b; Martiniello 2017; Vecchio et al. 2017), but also taking into account the topic and the main aim of the project in itself, this research involved the use of a visual technique.²⁶ In particular, thanks to the support of the *SeaMedia* partner, each semi-structured interview was also video recorded (Creswell, Poth 2018).

Filming was found to be a good methodology in this study for several reasons: firstly, the use of video-documentary appeared to be most valuable, as mentioned above, in the society of images to engage a deconstruction of prejudices and stereotypes about migration (Lagomarsino 2015). Secondly, this technique seemed appropriate for comparing and representing the heterogeneity within the Italian communities (Frisina 2013). Moreover, considering the participants involved in the project, especially those Italians who emigrated to Belgium just after the Second World War, it seemed helpful, to collect a visual testimony of Italian emigration’s history.

Thanks to the collaboration of Italian cultural associations in the country and migrants’ local organisations, from September to November 2014, 14 semi-structured interviews were carried out (Creswell, Poth 2018). The respondents who took part in the research were selected based on two main characteristics: 1) their residence in the country (at least 12 months); 2) the migration project.

Although the questions and interview structure were the same for each participant, videotaping tried to capture each respondent’s unique, cultural, and

25 More information about the research project Italians in Belgium is available on the website: italiansinbelgium.wordpress.com. The full version of the documentary is available at the website: <https://studio28.tv/italians-in-belgium/>.

26 In 2014 the European project Perypezye Urbane, the Seamedia project in collaboration with Howest University College and the University of Macerata produced this documentary about the Italian communities in Belgium. The video was then also sponsored by the Marche Region.

relational context involved in the research (Bauer, Gaskell 2007). Therefore, footage was filmed not only in the interview setting, but also in different places belonging to everyday life and considered relevant by the participants. From the interviewees' point of view, this allows more opportunities to continue their narration about migration experience. From the researcher point of view, this allowed, during the final editing phase, to analyse more visual material and has different frames that "show" the interviewees' words.

In the "Italians in Belgium" project, the video could be considered *de facto* as a complementary methodology. Using a camera was possible for the researcher to generate first and then analyse a different and powerful typology of data (specifically the visual one), related to cultural and human behaviour. As already highlighted in the literature discussed (Frisina 2016a, 2016b), video can offer the researcher the opportunity to investigate a more profound social and cultural complexity that moves around the interviewees and deepens the analysis of each interview.

The use of video was crucial, for example, to observe non-verbal aspects (gestures, expressions, etc.). In this specific project, during the interviews, participants used various forms of dialects or Italian language mixed with the local one, more prevalent in their common use. For the researcher, linguistic comprehension was not always immediate. This condition was general, especially considering the migrants arrived in the country just after the Second World War and their descendants. Therefore, filming more details related to non-verbal communication allows the researcher more data with which to compare and provide a visual interpretation as complete as possible on the investigated dimensions.

In this regard, it is essential to specify that in this study the researcher was part of the entire visual process, acting in each phase of the video production (pre-production, filming, editing, post-production). Video editing was not co-participated, nor influenced by the respondents involved in the research. The documentary "Italians in Belgium" represents a visual product that belongs fully to the researcher, built and thought through the whole research experience.

From a cultural point of view, it certainly provides an opportunity to remember and at the same time re-discover a migration that belongs to Italian history. Its narrative thread follows the same structure used during the interviews and shows through frames the different views expressed by emigrants and their descendants (Bauer, Gaskell 2007).

Compared to other research products, video turned out to be a powerful research methodology, but at the same time, a powerful dissemination tool. Between 2015–2016 the documentary was officially presented in various screenings organised between Italy and Belgium to share the research project realised²⁷. The use of visual methodology allows reaching different and "non-expert" public, with a more immediate communication that crosses the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge and cultural background (Pauwels 2010). From this perspective, the potential of the documentary as a dynamic tool in many educational and activist settings is confirmed.

27 On 18th April 2015, the video was awarded by the Regional Museum of Emigration "P.Conti" in Gualdo Tadino – Perugia in the competition "Memorie Migranti 2015".

“Who I am”: A look at a multicultural educational context

The video documentary “Who I am” (filmed between May and June 2019) is a documentation project of three after-school services in Florence.²⁸ These services were born from the collaboration of three social promotion organisations: Anelli Mancanti, Iparticipate and Giovani Musulmani d'Italia. The planning of these after-school activities by volunteers, linguistic mediators, and educators (September 2018) aimed to build a point of reference for families and children in a central district of Florence, characterised by a high rate of immigration and housing emergency (Primi et al. 2006). These activities are conceived as an aid to study for children aged 6 to 11 years, a space for intercultural encounters, a supportive network for social services through neighbourhood contacts.

The documentary filmed interactions between volunteer operators and children during lessons and playtime and moments of dialogue with parents and educators in after-school settings. To bring out the different reflections, by those who use the service and those who manage it, about the needs, weaknesses and potentials of the extracurricular educational context, we also conducted ten semi-structured interviews with families of foreign origin and Italian educators. Only through the expression of both points of view is it possible to enhance the “educational pact” (Miur 2017), an agreement between educators and families that is indispensable for the support and educational growth of the young student.

Concerning the analysis of intercultural educational dynamics, the use of video as a documentation tool made it possible to crystallise, through recording, moments of relationships between all the people involved. The possibility of re-observing these dynamics on video helped the operators and volunteers understand where the moment prevented it and the potentialities, weaknesses, and critical situations in this multicultural environment. The observation of the video can also serve as visual training for educators to better understand in a more complex way the context they organise and manage.

The documentary also allowed the involvement of people not included in these services to break down cultural boundaries (Pauwels 2010): it has been presented in various associations located in Florence, open to the public, as a cue to reflect on the ethnic and religious heterogeneity of the school and extracurricular services, such as after-school. Starting from this aspect, the use of the video was helpful in face a discussion led by the operators on the instances and challenges about contemporary educational context: in what way do the intercultural dynamics of after-school activities represent the daily social reality? What are the tools to build a relationship of enrichment and respect between families of foreign origin and the educators of Italian institutions? What are the premises for building dialogue and forming an “educating community”? As mentioned by Mitchell (Mitchell 2011), in the group reflection and discussion, the use of visuals was useful to stimulate a social change.

In order to be able to reflect on these issues, it was useful to use the visual tool of the video in the final return of the documentation project, given the immediacy of images and sounds compared to audio-only tools, such as recorded

interviews or writing tools, such as an essay. These can be limiting in the overall understanding of the context. The visual and audio richness of the recording helped people who were uninformed or not very knowledgeable about these contexts to define a mental image adhering to the reality of the facts and to build a group reflection on the challenges and potential of a “communicating” network between social promotion organisations, schools and families.

For those who work as researchers and intervene as educators in an intercultural context, video recordings also support the avoidance of misunderstanding the “contextual and personal meaning or simply, but not trivially, risking not considering it” (Crespi et al. 2021). For example, interpretative difficulties may also be due to linguistic gaps of foreign-born persons, which may emerge during interviews. When communication is not clear, recording allows the watching of the video again and filling language gaps. As in our case, the fragmented audio interview with a Nigerian mother was made more evident in the listening phase.

Some studies have also shown to what extent the visual medium can bring out the possible contradictions between the discourse and people’s attitudes (Pinheiro et al. 2005). For example, we were unable to interview some Muslim mothers of different foreign origins because, as we came to understand at a later stage, being registered would have put a strain on their intimate rule of modesty. This confirmed to us that this reticence was not due to their lack of interest or hostility towards our project: on the contrary, they showed great appreciation for the kind of context offered to their children, although using a video camera and microphone could generate suspicion, mistrust, apprehension, and loss of confidence (Sorrel Penn 2004; Garcez et al. 2011). Being filmed can influence the spontaneity of being invisible; i.e. the condition of disinhibition and security one feels in remaining anonymous (Suler 2004). In particular, research in the intercultural context generally needs further reflection on the issue of trust on the part of people of foreign origin in exposing themselves and participating in a study project. Due to their economic and cultural condition, they might avoid exposing themselves for various reasons: a lack of trust in Italian institutions, discrimination already suffered, forms of social isolation, etc.

On the other hand, as we have noted, the use of a videocamera by families with mobile phones in their daily lives stimulated the curiosity of some fathers and their children. The videocamera can indeed be used as a tool for play, creativity, and interaction between people of different cultures. Without the visual medium, simple observation would only consider what the gaze can manage to grasp (Wang, Lien 2013), whereas, as in our case, we were able to reread the complexity and simultaneity of cultural factors in the different relational dynamics. From a technical and methodological point of view, the researcher may have time after the data collection phase to visualise the work done and analyse any procedural and methodological difficulties of the interview due to language gaps, for example, also with the help of specialised collaborators, or to forms of mistrust caused by different ethnic backgrounds.

Finally, visual methods research applied in cross-cultural contexts can be considered a valid and useful approach, despite our noted limitations. Video grants the researcher the opportunity to analyse the cultural complexity that moves around a context. Through videotaping, the researcher can discover during analysis the relational dynamics between people from different cultures that may be difficult to understand at the time of data collection.

Some considerations when using visuals to analyse multicultural experiences

The reflection in this essay allows us to underline some significant aspects of researching multicultural situations using visual methods. It suggests how and why to use visual methodologies to improve and implement some practices during research in multicultural environments related to social and educational processes.

First of all, the extent to which visual methods can explain cultural and social differences are analysed, which are not easily obtainable through other more traditional methods. Specifically, the documentaries discussed in this contribution relocate the image of others' experiences into their most general context, and allow the documentation of certain social activities which require observation of in-place actions to be better observed and explained by the researcher.

Moreover, they enable the analysis of multicultural relationships and interactions over time, involving visual images and audio. In practice, in our research design, the visual instrument (camera) acted as a mediator between people belonging to different cultures, a participatory tool and a facilitator of reflexivity among both parties. It expanded on the context of the situation and activities and, in doing so, also provoked participants of different backgrounds to refute and highlight what was important to them. From the methodological point of view, reflexivity included the positionality of researchers and an open process of discussion about the technologies, the choice of filming and its rationale, and decisions about which footage to retain or reject.

Secondly, such methods allowed us to explore the potential of truly interdisciplinary work that synthesises empirical and methodological insights from the social sciences and visual culture.

Finally, it contributes to providing (through case studies) useful tips and suggestions to visual methodologies for those who are unfamiliar with them, yet work in social and educational contexts where different cultures live together.

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DRAWING AS A TOOL OF NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Lenka Sýkorová

Introduction

This essay is an example of good practice that deepens the educational component of social issues through workshops held at fine arts universities. It also shows the role of contemporary drawing in the context of visual literacy and visual communication, and presents current research methods in drawing as a tool of nonverbal communication and the application of these methods in the international project Virtual Biennale Prague which is based on the principles of nonverbal and intercultural communication. The project is a good example of including an educational aspect in artistic practice through the confrontation and exhibition of actual artworks.

The cultivation of seeing. A theoretical and practical point of departure

To demonstrate good practice, it is necessary to first explain the basic research framework. I focus on two directions that blend together and influence each other in both my publishing and curatorial activities and are also reflected in my pedagogical practice. These directions include exhibitions in terms of artist-curator, artist-run spaces and curating as well as contemporary drawing both in fine art and creative graphics.

“No day without a single line” comes from the Latin phrase “Nulla dies sine linea”, which is mentioned in Pliny the Elder’s work and refers to the Greek painter Apelles, who did not go a day without drawing at least one line. Just like me, there is not a single day where I would not write down some text or draw some idea for an exhibition. To me, writing and drawing express an idea by verbalisation or visualisation. The cultivation of seeing is a process where visual artists, designers, art theorists, art historians, curators etc. feel tension every day, exercise the perception of art and learn to respect art with humility toward drawing as a study tool, toward art history as a cultural heritage, and toward writing as a space for thinking. The cultivation of seeing is part of visual practice. I wondered for a long time how to professionally reconcile art history with the creative method of curating, only to finally realise that it is precisely the constant cultivation of seeing that does it. It also happens in my pedagogical activity by passing on my knowledge to the next generations of artists, designers and curators.

My creative/curatorial activities are a balance between curating as a scientific discipline of art history and curating as creative work, where curatorial intentions can be actively developed on the current artistic scene. I see a gallery space as a challenge for experiments. And I often prefer independent galleries or galleries with specific exhibiting conditions. I have curated a number of exhibitions in collection-creating galleries as well as in galleries without collections in the Czech Republic and abroad.

However, the Altán Klamovka Gallery in Prague, the programme of which I have curated since 2004, is specific. I run it with the aim of creating an autonomous exhibition space for visual artists. The gallery has helped artists in the Czech Republic to grow professionally. This is where I have recently hosted foreign artists with an emphasis on artistic research and site-specific art. The Altán Klamovka Gallery has become well-established in the local artistic scene and international visual communication projects.

Since 2010, the gallery has been transformed into an experimental laboratory for creative experiments. I have consciously created a space similar to a studio where art is made. This was a direct response to the ongoing trend of opening independent artist-run galleries in the Czech Republic. My curatorial research focuses on “contemporary drawing with overlaps” and “independent curating” and follows up on the publications *Post-Conceptual Overlaps in Czech Drawing* (2015), *Independent Curating as a Leisure Activity* (2016), and *Drawing as a Nonverbal Communication Tool* (2020). In my work I use three methods:

- a An art history method applied to contemporary art, mostly New Art History;
- b An experiment in curating, where I constantly create new challenges for myself in terms of exhibitions and drawing; experiment
- c Cooperation with the artistic scene and kindling artistic ideas by exhibiting, organising workshops, publishing and presenting the outcome of lectures, accompanying programmes, conferences, etc.

Drawing as a tool of nonverbal communication

Artists have sketched their ideas since time immemorial. By using our minds and with the help of our eyes and hands, we can capture the world around and inside us. It is the thinking hand (Pallasmaa 2009, pp. 95–100) that stretches out our senses and is able to metaphorically depict both uncertainty and the joy of everyday life. I explore contemporary drawing and, as a curator, I consciously prefer drawing with various overlaps into the intermediate form on the Czech artistic scene and abroad. To me, the pause and concentration that drawing brings is a thinking process. At the same time, I focus on the immediacy and variability of drawing, which helps us to explore and interpret the world around us. I also see the connection between thinking and drawing in the intentions of the book *Speculative Drawing*, which is a collective work of the philosopher Armen Avanessian and the artist Andreas Töpfer.

Contemporary drawing enlightened by conceptual and post-conceptual art continues to reunite what we see with its internal intention. Internal drawing can be considered a footprint of the Platonic “idea” in us, and external drawing a visible footprint of this internal drawing. And it is this “purity” that makes drawing still relevant, both in discussions about the death of the author in postmodern art and in the context of new digital media. Drawing is an authentic footprint of human creative activity, which can be a line expanding into space through matter in the case of an installation or object, a footprint of a creative gesture in the case of a performance or a digital footprint in a virtual environment. Drawing is a motoric activity just like, for example, dance and calligraphy, combined with philosophy. Drawing can also anticipate the future, as defined by Armen Avanessian, while contemplating about hasty thinking in the context of Derrida's distinction exemplified by a blind man whose hand precedes his head to create a space and protection for his head. This

is why, when drawing Armen's thoughts, Andreas Töpfer first uses the hand and often precedes Armen's thoughts. It is the power of drawing that brings together what we seek to understand and share (Avanessian, Töpfer 2020, pp. 13–18).

The digital environment in the 21st century democratised drawing. As a result of digital technologies, drawing has undergone a dramatic development, especially in art sharing. Social networks present us with an inexhaustible quantity of visual materials. We are returning to images through which we begin to perceive and get to know the world again. Nicholas Mirzoeff defines visual thinking as a visual culture which is a combination of critical thinking and visual literacy (Mirzoeff 2015). It is a process that invites us to engage where “we see with our brains, not with our eyes.”

Many visual artists and graphic designers are starting to take on the role of self-curators. Every day they share their artworks on social networks. They also initiate a number of projects and visual appeals. At the same time, images are being devaluated by their mass overuse due to the availability of various technological tools. However, it is important to realise that the visual culture, despite this overproduction and overload of textual and visual information, has the potential to change the future. Topics such as the climate crisis, social correctness, and post-colonialism lead to artists' and graphic designers' ever-increasing responsibility, as they directly influence both the physical and virtual public space (Rock 2009, pp. 108–114).

Virtual Biennale Prague

I also fulfil the aforesaid framework of my research in the international project Virtual Biennale Prague, founded in 2007. It is a platform for an international show that has already presented several global topics (e.g. the Global Crisis, Discrimination, Corruption, the Information War, Fake News, Wake Up Call, etc.). The project (2007–2021) was initiated by the Department of Visual Communication of the Faculty of Art and Design at Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem (prof. Karel Mišek and Jakub Konupka), and the Altán Klamovka Gallery in Prague (Lenka Sýkorová) was the main organiser.

The project ideas are as follows:

- a We see drawing as a tool of nonverbal communication across continents and nations that is omnipresent thanks to the Internet;
- b We emphasise the educational aspect; we invite, with a new topic, graphic design students as well as professional graphic designers from all over the world to provide their visual representations, which leads to an inter-generational confrontation;
- c This non-profit project is sustainable and environment-friendly because it reduces usual costs (it minimises printing and travel expenses);
- d The project is based on D.I.Y. principles without the influence of large institutions, and focuses on a new form of artistic visual communication without borders between nations;
- e Posters are evaluated online by professional graphic designers and thus it is easy to reach people outside the EU (Mexico, China, USA, etc.).

We are thus developing a visual communication show in the current conditions of a dual environment, i.e. a real and virtual environment. Graphic design is a dynamic process of visual communication. It is an activity that goes across the visual culture and affects the visibility of a public space, while reflecting, and holding a mirror

to, society. As part of post-Internet aesthetics (Connor 2014, pp. 56–64), it also influences and moves into the area of fine art. It specifically leaves the virtual environment and moves into a physical gallery space. The virtual (unreal) world created by computers by making information (both visual and textual) accessible through the Internet has become real because it closely relates to our experience, thinking, and social relationships in particular. This is also why art in the last decade has so often mentioned its positive and negative aspects and works with it as part of reality expansion.

Graphic design and poster presentations bring artworks from the real world to isolated exhibition spaces, both physical and virtual. Graphic design thus loses its cultural, commercial, and historical context. However, the graphic design of an author poster is appropriate for a gallery. Since the artwork is initiated by the artist, graphic design becomes professionalised in a gallery environment. In the case of graphic design, I highlight the fact that the poster is considered author artwork. An idea that awaits its materialisation with the help of the thinking hand is at the origin of the artwork of both designers and freelance artists, because drawing is a universal tool in all art media.

The 10th Virtual Biennale Prague 2018: Fake News and National Identity workshops in China

As an example of good practice, I would like to mention the 10th international author poster show Virtual Biennale Prague 2018: Fake News, which brought together 232 artists (142 professionals and 90 students) from 35 countries around the globe. The biggest number of artists came from the following countries: 87 from China, 40 from Poland, 18 from the Czech Republic, 10 from Mexico, 9 from the USA and 7 from the Russian Federation). The project presented artworks in two categories: professionals and art-school students. A total of 49 students participated.

The submitted posters reflected the situation in 2018, where we began to fully realise that society is on the threshold of a subjectivity crisis that increasingly promotes individualism, responsibility, and independence. Disinformation became a topical issue focusing on the freedom of expression, social networks' role and the spread of information, the acceleration of time, and the excessive pressure and stress of today's lifestyle. At the same time, the Fake News virtual gallery, which is still available online, proves that the author poster is still an active and effective call to action and opens up social topics because it is part of visual communication. Posters connect us with the past, while opening up the future. They are a window to the world. They also have a cultivated aesthetic aspect with the visual power to address poignant societal issues.

The confrontation between emerging and professional artists – graphic designers – is one of the key moments of the project. It creates a virtual gallery where artworks of graphic designers from around the world are exhibited and confronted intergenerationally and professionally. The project is thus a good example of incorporating an educational aspect into artistic practice based on the confrontation and exhibition of artworks. Collaborating academies of fine arts from all over the world are regularly invited by e-mail to collaborate on a given topic, and the submitted posters are judged by an international jury made up of fellow graphic designers who are often leading educators in the field of visual communication, active curators or organisers of graphic design shows.

The jury for the 2018 Virtual Biennale Prague: Fake News comprised of Dušan Junek (Slovakia, chairman), Eduardo Barrera Arambarri (Mexico), Pekka Loiri (Finland), Li Xu (People's Republic of China) and Laze Tripkov (Macedonia). For instance, Eduardo Barrera Arambarri was the coordinator of the BICM – Bienal Internacional del Cartel en México, Pekka Loiri taught at the University of Art and Design in Helsinki (now Aalto University) and is the president of the International Poster Triennial in Lahti, Laze Tripkov is a teacher at the International Balkan University and the founder of the Skopje Creative Festival, which organises a number of student competitions and graphic design shows, and Li Xu gives graphic design lessons at the Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication and is the founder of the international platform of professional designers and students C-IDEA (C-IDEA 2022). Thanks to this prestigious cooperation and the participation of professionals from all over the world, the submitted posters are evaluated at the highest possible level, and a number of artists who won in the student section in previous years have already become professional graphic designers.

Another important strategy of the project is to link theory and practice through workshops which enhance the educational aspect described above. The organising committee also plays an important role; it is responsible for selecting a topic that resonates with the global development of society and is thus more attractive to emerging designers, because their artwork is posted on the Internet in the interesting context of the given biennale.

The 10th Virtual Biennale Prague 2018: Fake News also included its presentation and workshops on national identity in China in the autumn of 2018. The workshops were conducted in cooperation with Chinese colleague Li Xu at the Beijing Institute of Graphic Communication, Beijing, on 3 November 2018, at the Shandong University of Arts & Design, Jinan, on 1 – 6 November 2018, at the Hebei Academy of Fine Arts, Hebei, on 11 – 24 November 2018 and at the Academy of Fine Arts of Shanxi University, Taiyuan, on 30 November – 8 December 2018. As a visiting professor, I focused on connecting theory and practice in the intentions of my research of drawing described above. I raised the issue of national identity in today's globalised society, which is becoming increasingly topical. Under my guidance, the workshop participants focused on the Chinese national identity in comparison to the EU and Czech identity.

We worked with the concept of national pride, cultural heritage, and Chinese cultural identity, which is often unique in the historical context. We also reflected on the current development of new technologies and the virtual environment because the Internet has become a natural environment of the new generation of artists, although with certain limitations in some places. The topics we discussed in these universities and academies included the architectural identity of ancient Chinese palaces and temples, folk art and rituals, the uniqueness of the Peking Opera, Chinese ceramic patterns and, of course, Chinese calligraphy.

Based on these workshops, I have come to the conclusion that Chinese students are proud of their Chinese identity because it is the basis of the educational concept and the One China concept. As the generation of emerging graphic designers, they feel the need to carry their national identity. They are more aware of the Western influence on China than of the European identity. They also feel a local identity within Chinese regions. They explored the author poster and nonverbal communication through drawing and strong communication with the same involvement, creative enthusiasm, and understanding as students in the Czech Republic.

Their posters were exhibited at the 10th Virtual Biennale Prague 2018: Fake News at the Pingyao Modern Engineering Technology School Gallery, Pingyao, on 12 December 2018 – 12 January 2019 and then at the Altán Klamovka Gallery in Prague in November 2019, which fulfilled the mission of presenting students' artworks as part of the international project.

Evaluation

When travel restrictions were put in place a year ago and we were locked down in our homes, we saw the virtual environment rapidly open up and we discovered the benefits of the Internet. We could not travel, but communication platforms globally connected us in an unprecedented way. In this new situation, I further developed the long-term international project Virtual Biennale Prague, which deepens the educational component of social topics through workshops conducted at fine arts universities. One of the key outputs of the project was the publication *Drawing as a Nonverbal Communication Tool*, posted online and released in print in 2020, in which my colleagues and I reflected on the position of the author poster presented at international shows and competitions.

Through a nonverbal, visual language, I continue to develop the Virtual Biennale Prague, where we can see the influence of digital technologies, the omnipresent Internet, and constantly available visual materials. These irreversible changes make it possible to see the artist's testimony in the form of drawing and typography as proof of cultural heritage, national identity, and diversity.

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THE ARTIST AS A TEACHER. PEDAGOGIC CONCEPTS OF ARTISTS – EXPERTS IN THE FIELD OF VISUAL ART

Patricie Pleyerová & Jitka Géringová

Introduction

The essay presents the development and current form of a project focused on artists, in the role of a teacher, which was the result of a three-year project called “Intuitive Pedagogic Conceptions of Experts in the Field of Fine Arts”, which took place at the Department of Fine Arts, Faculty of Education at Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem.²⁹ The final output is a monograph entitled *Act, to Put Obstacles, to Meet* (Géringová, Mladičová 2016). The aim of this work was to provide an interesting insight into the pedagogic work of art experts.

The source of inspiration was interviews conducted with the sculptor, Professor Aleš Veselý, an experienced pedagogue who worked at the Academy of Fine Arts, where he founded the Studio of Monumental Creation and in the last years of his life, he worked at the Department of Fine Arts of Faculty of Education at Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem. The topic of these interviews was pedagogic work in the field of art, and the approach to leading specific students.

Aleš Veselý commented on his pedagogic practice many times, not only in dialogue with colleagues at the university, but also, for example, in very personal interviews with Michal Schonberg (2006), in which he evaluates teaching as an enriching way of life. These interviews supported the view that teaching artists who had not undergone a systematic pedagogic education had developed their own specific and distinctive way of teaching, how to convey values, how to express content, how to achieve goals when working with students, i.e., their own intuitive pedagogic concept, which springs from the rich life experience, personal philosophy, and values that artists recognise. It is necessary to emphasise that Aleš Veselý was not only the initiator of the project, but as one of the important Czech artists he helped to establish contact with other personalities (16 in total) who participated in the project. These were important Czech artists who had or still have pedagogic experience at art colleges, and at the same time their expertise is confirmed by the title of associate professor or professor and by an undeniable place in the art scene. In the final section of the paper, the current second phase of the long-term project will be presented, in which the recorded video interviews, their transcription, and the published publication are subjected to a qualitative analysis within the dissertation of Patricia Pleyerová.

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Initial research surveys – global and Czech context

Within the context of this research, it is necessary to introduce at least briefly the system of art education in the Czech Republic. We have two traditional trends in the education of young people interested in the arts. One trend is run by the Academy and independent art schools or art faculties that care for those who want to be artists or participate in the activity of the arts. The second trend creates a network of faculties of education, which at the departments of art education provide education to those who want to be teachers of art education and educate others, mostly children, but also other age groups i.e. in art, culture, and expressing thoughts.

Within the global context, the role and education of those who educate in the arts are very disunited. The terms teaching artist and art teacher, also called an approved educator, appear. While the teaching artist is often referred to as a practicing artist who is also a teacher at an art school, the term art teacher is associated with the person of a teacher of art education, i.e. a graduate of pedagogic education in the field of art education, for whom creation is more of marginal interest. The need to distinguish between a teaching artist and an art educator results from different educational concepts around the world. In some countries, including the Czech Republic and, for example, Finland or Japan, the field of art education has a long tradition with a clear historical focus on the specifics of children's artistic expression. There is no such field in other countries, or only as a kind of further education or short pedagogic courses.

Examining the teacher's person in a global context revealed a relatively wide field of professional texts presenting research from different countries, but also the existence of journals, conferences, and associations with this topic. The topic of the artist as a teacher is scientifically researched mainly from two important perspectives, which, however, complement each other. One perspective is to examine the influence of artists on teaching in their involvement directly in the school education of children and juveniles (e.g. Imms, Jeanneret, Stevens-Ballenger 2011; Hoekstra 2015). Researchers are interested in what influence practicing artists have on teaching in general, on pupils and their attitudes towards the curriculum, what competencies they develop with pupils and on the contrary, what they do not develop, and how they manage to meet curricular goals. The second perspective is the view of the teaching artist themselves, who finds themselves in a dual identity. Numerous research works deal with a detailed analysis and compatibility of both roles / identities, such as the researchers Wesley Imms and Pumima Ruanglertbutr (2012).

Imms, Jeanneret, and Stevens-Ballenger published the results of research on the long-term educational project Arts Victoria in the state of Victoria in Australia, in which professional artists of all arts disciplines collaborated with primary and secondary school pupils for at least 20 days (Imms, Jeanneret, Stevens-Ballenger 2011). Between 2005 and 2009, the study involved 380 students, 50 teachers and administrators, and 34 artists who took part in many forms of art education – drama, music, singing and art education. The results indicate that professional artists are constantly improving students' performance relevant to their curriculum. This includes increased student engagement, characterised by participation in the learning process, perseverance and pride in work, a willingness to accept challenges, and manifestations of a positive approach to learning. However, the evaluation also contains evidence that artists have difficulty achieving the results required by the curriculum, which, in turn, can be handled by art teachers. The

Arts Victoria evaluation (Imms, Jeanneret, Stevens-Ballenger 2011) emphasises that the first goals are well-realised by artists, the latter by teachers, and points out that this dual role affects pupils in model art classes.

Marika Hoekstra who researched artists working in the Dutch project of democratic education, also provides a very comprehensive insight into this topic – *Toeval gezocht* (Hoekstra 2015). These types of educators work with young children, preschoolers, and younger school age. In the *Toeval gezocht* project, they decided to collaborate with guest artists who combine artistic qualities with pedagogic qualities. Artists were not selected based on official qualifications, such as degrees or diplomas, but based on their portfolio, previous experience, and interviewed thematic motivation to work with young children.

Selected artists worked in small teams consisting of an artist, a group teacher, and two or three interns. They accompanied the children and carefully documented as many of their creative products and processes as possible. They also discussed the acquired documentation material about their interpretations of children's work processes and possible new interventions. The results of the research confirmed the expectation that the study of artists in action shows how their teaching is directly related to their artistic practice, and how it distinguishes visiting artists and teaching artists from teachers without this dual professional role. The teaching artist concept that has been reflected in the project is too flexible and dynamic; it lacks a solid theoretical foundation and moves between conflicting paradigms (Hoekstra 2015).

Marika Hoekstra's findings form a link with the second group of research focus on this topic, which is the study of two roles – teacher and artist in one person. The so-called “conflict paradigm” of two roles emerges, which is confirmed by some authors, and others are looking for a way to interconnect them. In their project, Wesley Imms and Pumima Ruanglertburt (2012) focused on the perception of the identity of young artists who became teachers. The authors conclude that the artistic identity of recent graduates' changes over time, mainly from the artist who teaches to the role of teacher, which creates a certain natural tension between the identity of the artist and the teacher and the effort to preserve both identities. Another example of research focused on the role of the artist as an educator and the principle of mastering both roles, the influence of art teaching on one's own artistic creation, professional identity, and self-concept of the artist / teacher is the project of Harrigan McMahon Bowman (2012). As part of the research, Bowman conducted interviews with four selected artists who have gained recognition both in the field of liberal arts and as art educators, and both of these roles are equally important to them, which, as Bowman describes, is not entirely common.

In our environment, the conflict paradigm is developed by Jan Slavík who describes the historically contradictory setting “between innovation and normativity”, in which art education finds itself. In its deeper essence, it is the polarity of “Noesis and Aisthesis” (Slavík 2005, 2013).³⁰

Jan Slavík presents, for further understanding of the polarities of the work

30 Noesis – referring to understanding and intellect, perception of the mind. Aisthesis – perception coming from the senses, feelings, hearing and seeing, and intellect, i.e. two types of knowledge and perception.

that is to become the subject of learning, the terms *aretés* and *techne* (Slavík 2005).³¹The pedagogic approach, which is based on the development of *aretés*, leads to an emphasis on originality. It leads to student autonomy, divergent thinking, authentic expression, and critical thinking. However, it contrasts with the tendencies of area measurement and evaluation of student performance through national and international tests, which seek to homogenise education and standardise educational outcomes (Slavík, Chrz, Štech 2013). However, the completeness of the educational process in art education also includes the task of placing the emerging work in a cultural context with a requirement of cognition and understanding (Slavík 2005).

Project of intuitive pedagogic concepts of visual artists

The previous section highlighted the issue of teaching art in the Czech and global context, and also outlined aspects of the double role of the artist-teacher, who we also dealt with in our project. As already mentioned, the starting point for its implementation were interviews conducted with the sculptor, Professor Aleš Veselý, which led to the belief that in the mind of an artist who does not have continuous pedagogic training and yet works pedagogically, there must be some special concept of how to teach.

Twenty important Czech artists were selected for the project, who had a significant impact on the art scene and at the same time worked or still work in the role of teacher. The sample included personalities without previous methodical pedagogic education, although most of them completed the so-called pedagogic minimum when studying art school. The research sample consisted mainly of creators of the older generation with the degrees of professor or associate professor, due to their proven and already established experience in education and artistic activity and due to preservation of evidence of their specific opinions. The characteristic feature of the selected artists is also their unique experience with the study and subsequent artistic activity in totalitarian Czechoslovakia, which was reflected in their artistic direction and limited exhibition activities.

Project participants

As part of the research survey, video interviews were conducted with the following artists: prof. Aleš Veselý, prof. Stanislav Kolíbal, prof. Jitka Svobodová, prof. Adéla Matasová, prof. Miloš Šejn, prof. Milan Knížák, prof. Martin Mainer, prof. Jindřich Zeithamml, prof. Vladimír Kokolia, prof. Michal Gabriel, prof. Kurt Gebauer, prof. Magdalena Jetelová, doc. Margita Titlová-Ylovsky, doc. Jiří Kovanda, doc. Jiří David, doc. Milena Dopitová, and Federico Diaz. As mentioned, these leading names of the Czech art scene also act as educators, although they have not undergone a systematic pedagogic education (except for Miloš Šejn). Only Federico Díaz, who was a student of K. Malich, A. Veselý, and S. Kolíbal, did not meet the criterion of the education attained, i.e. the degree of associate professor or professor. Being a student of the above mentioned, he was also included in the sample. It

31 Areté represents an uneducable aspect of creation, or tacit, unconscious knowledge. Techne is a teachable reproduced skill or conscious knowledge.

is important to emphasise that the life role of an artist is highly specific for these personalities. They have been on their own throughout their lives and they are the masters of their decisions. For the teaching process, specific internal integrity of the artist, i.e. his individuality, autonomy, and independence, is very essential. All these aspects were considered in the research and subjected to closer study.

Research process

Video interviews with the above-mentioned artists were recorded over a period of two years, which in most cases took place in the studios or apartments of the artists, or in the premises of the art schools where they work. The questions asked are divided into several sub-areas closely related to the issues examined: 1st area - Personal history, experience of being a student. 2nd area – Attitude to the role of the teacher. 3rd area – Working with students, teaching art. 4th area – Own creative attitude. Other: opinions on the situation of art schools in the Czech Republic.

In addition to the perception of the role of the art teacher and their own attitude to teaching, the artist's own experience from the time of their studies were also important. The questioning was aimed both at art educators, whose teaching influenced the formation of the artistic expression of the given personalities and possibly also the way of teaching, as well as at artistic authorities in general, and whether it is somehow reflected in their own way of teaching.

1st area: The first series of questions focused on the experience and memories of selected artists in their own role as a pupil/student, on the influence of teachers, but also on general artistic authorities forming both their own work and individual methods of teaching. We were interested in how the artist evaluates the teaching method they went through as a student and how this method of teaching influenced their own educational methods and how they evaluate it over time. Already in this initial phase, a specific, cultural-political, and contemporary feature of the common experience of almost all selected artists/educators was noticeable, namely studying in totalitarian Czechoslovakia, which significantly affects the experience related to school authorities. This feature is also a contemporary testimony to the normalisation of education.

2nd area: The second thematic area focused on the artist's attitude to their own role as a teacher. The questions were therefore aimed at how the selected artists approach the profession of art teachers, what is interesting and beneficial for them, and what they consider to be the key factor in their role as teachers. The very way of teaching is important, whether it is possible to define it at all, and whether this approach has changed over time.

3rd area: The third series of questions, in which the methods of teaching and working with students were examined in greater detail, the artist's experience with the management of the studio followed. Among other things, the criteria according to which students are accepted into the studio were the subject of interest. This is also related to the way of leading specific types of students and individual approach. The survey was directed at examples of students who surprised the given artist with something during their studies, or at reasons for exclusion. Likewise, the issues of evaluation of artistic expression are also a problem in regional art education. Many art teachers at primary and secondary schools have great difficulty

in evaluating pupils' artistic expression, where the important question is not only how to evaluate, but also what to evaluate. We were interested in how artists/educators draw out the students whose work does not reach the appropriate quality, or what values they pass on to students, what they place the most emphasis on in teaching, or what they consider most important in their influence and what they generally consider important in the education of future artists. Equally important was the question of talent – its recognition and manifestations. The degree of influence on how the artist/pedagogue influences their students culturally, whether they recommend professional literature to students, discuss current events (not only) in culture, or visit current exhibitions together with students. This was also significant. The conversation emphasised a still topical issue – a situation where students imitate their teacher. How is it possible to avoid this situation and how can one continue working with such a student? Likewise, the subject of interest was the influence of teaching art on the artists' own artistic activity, which most often repeats the model that this teaching diverts the teacher from their artistic activity, especially in terms of time, but can also be an inspiring and enriching moment.

4st area: At the end of the interview, attention was focused on the personal creative attitudes of the selected artist/pedagogue through questions.

Supplementary

The conclusion of the survey was enriched by the opinions of artists/educators on the current problem of a large increase in the number of art colleges in our country.

The interviews were conducted in a manner closest to the so-called semi-structured interview.

The questions were given and sent to the artists in advance, but the conversation always turned in the direction determined by their personality. The nature of individual video interviews seldom allowed the questions to be asked as prepared. Sometimes the question was answered earlier, even before it was asked. Often the artist answered the question in a completely unexpected way and took the issue in a different direction. At the same time, additional and supplementary questions were asked, which broadened and clarified the specific topic.

Project outputs

The main output of the project is a monograph by Jitka Géringová and Iva Mladičová which contains authorised transcripts of 16 recorded video interviews and is thus a testimony to the specific views of these artists not only on teaching art (Géringová, Mladičová 2016). The mentioned publication and transcripts of video interviews are currently followed by pedagogic research within the dissertation, which analyses the obtained data in more detail together with the artistic context of the mentioned authors.

Follow-up research – Artist as a teacher. The phenomenon of the artist – pedagogue in the contemporary Czech context

The dissertation is based on the above-mentioned sources and aims to define the intuitive pedagogical concepts of these visual artists. With reference to the presented world context, it is clear that this is a very topical phenomenon that can enrich the subject discourse. The results of the research can not only serve as

a source of inspiration for art education, but also as a comprehensive presentation of the integrity of the artist/teacher. The fact that these are people without pedagogic education who are also engaged in pedagogic activities is essential for understanding their way of teaching. Equally important is the context of life and creation. The research survey examines all these aspects, which should result in a description of intuitive teaching methods.

Methodology

From the beginning, the ongoing research project is conceived as qualitatively focused. Although research questions were set in the initial phase of the research, considering the partial pedagogical approaches, inspirational starting points, and the development of an intuitive way of teaching, it can already be said that given the nature of the collected material they are likely to be reformulated. From the beginning of the research, the basic research question aims to determine: What are the individual intuitive pedagogical concepts of the mentioned artists? The partial research questions then uncover: What emphasis is placed on the individuality of the student in the process of teaching visual artists? What is the educational goal of the artist as an educator? What are the common characteristics of teaching directions for individual artists? What are the inspiration resources for compiling the teaching processes of these artists?

From the above-mentioned qualitative approach, biographical design was chosen for this research, as we focus on the internal qualities of the individual, interaction in the social environment, and life experience (Švaříček, Šedová 2014, p. 208). As already mentioned, the research material consists of transcripts of interviews from the publication, as well as biographical materials, biographical publications, and interviews with graduates. These additional interviews will be conducted only with a selected sample of Aleš Veselý's seminar graduates at Faculty of Education in Ústí nad Labem, as the author of the research is one of them.

At the same time, it was Aleš Veselý who gave the initial impulse for the implementation of the research. The dissertation therefore devotes a detailed analysis to his intuitive pedagogical concept, in the context of life and art. An open categorisation of data obtained based on coding of transcripts of interviews is currently being implemented, together with a study of autobiographical publications of artists, interviews, and their artistic activity. Following the example of Aleš Veselý, the data from the transcripts of interviews within the said publication were segmented into two main categories: teaching requirements and student requirements. Within the categorisation it is necessary to consider how the exposed artist/teacher emphasises the teaching process, background, communication, evaluation, approach (included in the category of teaching requirements), and in what proportion and with what emphasis considers the student's personality framework, i.e. character, thinking, furthermore, the effort to develop the student (in skills and knowledge), their self-reflection, internal motivation and, last but not least, knowledge and skills (student requirements).

It is clear from the results that the highest level of attention is paid to the teacher's personal approach to students (see results). The pedagogic approach is understood here in terms of the concept of teaching, its organisation and management. The role of the teacher in relation to the students is crucial here. In order to better understand the motives for teaching, i.e. the life and artistic context, it is necessary to become acquainted with the personality of A. Veselý. Materials

reflecting the work and life of the artist are used for this purpose. The premise of the research is that due to the profiling and especially the limitation of creation in the period of normalisation, internal motives, ethics, and moral principles will be influenced by this experience.

In the case of A. Veselý, however, the way of life is much more complicated. To understand the internal motives, it is necessary to emphasise especially his personal experience with the Holocaust (transport of father and sister to Terezín). There is no need to specify the artist's curriculum vitae; however, for the complexity of the data and the creation of teaching approaches, it is necessary to define and figure out all the essential moments that have or could affect the teaching process. Because the intuitive pedagogical concept of artists is presented here, artistic creation cannot be neglected either. In this particular example, one can see the expression of the Holocaust and the Jewish origin in the fine art of A. Veselý (Drda 2021). This reference to Jewish themes can be demonstrated in *The Gate to the Irreversible (Brána do nenávratna)*³². In order to be able to effectively compile individual intuitive learning styles, all the above sources are included in the research material. The choice of selected material is justified by a narrative biography (Švaříček, Šedová 2016, p. 126), whose certain specifics are adjacent to the research examination of the given phenomenon.

Findings

Based on a study of transcripts of interviews in this publication, open coding and subsequent categorisation of data was performed. As outlined in the text above, in order to determine the dominant elements in teaching it was necessary to divide the approach into two categories, namely teaching requirements and student requirements.

The first category further includes subcategories such as assessment, attitude, and communication. These are the key moments on which the artist relies in the interview, or explains the personal approach to them and the genesis for their formation. In all these parts, the emphasis is on moral aspects and ethical principles. It is strongly represented, especially in the teacher's relationship with students, as he states: *"It's important to me that it is the education of independent personalities. The basic ethical principle is very important"* (Géringová, Mladičová 2016, p. 38). If we look at the subcategory of evaluation, there are also inherent moral values. The results show that evaluation is a very sensitive issue, especially for student development. Speaking about Aleš Veselý, ethical principles can be divided into two categories, i.e. ethical principles (in connection with the requirements for students, their basic moral values) and at the same time the ethical internal and external coexistence of the author himself.

In terms of attitude to teaching, the data obtained suggests that this type of relationship between ethics and artistic leadership is concentrated mostly in the category of attitude to teaching, where the emphasis is based on mutual trust, education of independent personalities and listening and mutual confrontation. In

32 The sculpture is in the form of a part of an erected railway yard, which goes to the sky and is supposed to evoke the transportation of Jews to concentration camps. The trains left the Bubny station, where the sculpture is located.

connection with the material concerning the life and work of the said artist, we did not assume that the inner moral setting of the artist would be ambivalent in relation to the requirements or expectations from students. In order to compile a typology of intuitive approach, there are other important specifics, which we can briefly summarise as the overall interest of the student in the inner and outer world, art and especially the interest in knowledge. The above-mentioned data present answers to individual research questions, especially in relation to the learning objective (which can be defined as moral awareness), evaluation (emphasis on ethical behaviour in the dialogue on the outcome of work) and inspirational starting points (emphasis on moral and ethical principles in the life of artist, in connection with the unethical historical and life milestones of the author).

Conclusion

The current results show that the emphasis on ethics is a significant part of the characteristics of Aleš Veselý's intuitive pedagogical concept. The sub-components of the individual categories, which determine the key approaches in teaching, show the degree of influence of moral principles. We consider it essential to take this element into account when describing A. Veselý's teaching style. It will be further compared with empirically proven means to achieve a teaching goal in art education and its code of ethics. In order to be able to consider the conclusions as legitimate, it will be necessary to subject the findings to a comparison with other materials mapping the inspiration for the creation, and therefore teaching, together with interviews with graduates. Only a comprehensive source describing the internal perspectives of the individual can guarantee the complexity of individual concepts. This part of the research represents the initial coding and segmentation of data, so it can be assumed that partial pedagogic approaches will be enriched with other internal motives of the teaching artist. Given that interviews with visual artists were conducted from the beginning with the vision of further research, which would provide a comprehensive insight into the phenomenon of polarity of the artist/teacher, we consider the current research to be beneficial to enriching the discourse.

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SUMMARY

The publication *Horizons of Interest* is conceived as a theoretical material for deeper understanding of visual imagination and art creation. The monograph opens the interdisciplinary dialogue not only about the image and its related visuality, but also technical processing and educational processes both in art and with art. The aim is to explore the contemporary relationship between education and visual communication in contexts which emphasise intercultural strategies and promote active citizenship. The publication combines the theoretical frame from the field of art, philosophy, sociology, education, and the positive practice in art museums and intercultural studies. The interdisciplinary feature of the texts allows us to address intercultural issues supporting the idea of being an active part of the interpretation of artistic languages. The use of diversified languages and media allows the broadening of interdisciplinary channels and modes of dialogue, provided that there is effective accessibility (both physical and cultural) to the various types of visual-artistic communication.

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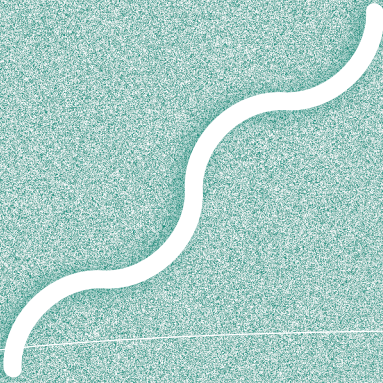
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