

Education through Local Artistic Heritage

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Abstract

Since the very beginning of the human kind, art is a language, a way to speak out loud without words, to represent its own reality, to set cultural milestones, and, last but not least, an ancient type of education.

Being aware of its own culture is a step to knowledge. Art deals with creating and communicating symbols, hence education through art should emphasize the importance and the meaning of the reference points each culture created in time. Statues, buildings, traditions, costumes are all human understanding and serve as vehicles of conception for all human knowledge. The artefacts human populations created in order to share knowledge help us to understand the world we live in, and set the basis on which we make our own judgments.

Students get information through their senses and the school is about to make sense of these accumulations from the very first grades. It is crucial to focus on local art heritage not only on universal culture – to the end of high school, all the information, together with perception and all the cortical interpretation, have to be revised and reloaded, if it's needed, in a more comprehensive form. The quality of being, the joy of belonging, and the joy of knowledge, as well, are the final accomplishment. The fresh graduated can 'read' the message of a local statue, building, costume, traditions, being open to and aware of other culture's reference points. The aim is to create a person who is aware of local art-heritage, who is 'enough' art-literate to understand, enjoy and promote the street happenings, the theatre and concert-halls, the museums and collections, as well. The school should help its students to get and to understand the information they gathered through senses, to select the authentic, to be open to beauty in all its forms, to 'read' this beauty formulated in the terms of art at the community level, otherwise the sense of real value could be irremediably affected – I see, and I know I see; if not, all the art manifestations are invisible.

We live in a time of deep changing, our responsibility as teachers is greater and the need for reference points has to be satisfied by means of good quality – of education and communication as well – and by emphasizing the specific messages of each community. The local / specific artistic heritage is the closest cultural milestone to get into consideration, in order to create the basis for further, universal interpretations.

Introduction

Human beings are complex systems – they are made of different parts which interact and give rise to a collective behavior. But, “the whole is other than the sum of its parts”, says Kurt Koffka, a well known gestaltist. The human being as a whole is not only the sum of its parts, but the result of the interactions inside and outside it.

Art is a language, a way to express itself in terms which are easier to understand by the others. Most of the human needs rely on art to get expressed and fulfilled. In this paper I use the term “art” to synthesize the capacity of using specific elements of language and symbols in order to communicate. Since the very first days of getting awareness / consciousness, humans used symbols to find the meaning of the world. Storytelling is as ancient as the humankind, and I dare to affirm that decoration is that form of art that lost its meanings. Analyzing it may help us rediscover the very first thought that generated it.

Cultural Heritage

Any complex system becomes, at a certain moment, chaotic. Chaos is sometimes viewed as extremely complicated information, rather than as an absence of order [1]. Any complex system tends to become ordered – in terms of a healthy human being, the order appears when the needs are fulfilled.

One of the human needs is identity, and this can be achieved by culture. Being aware of its own culture is a step to knowledge. One of the reasons the former communist countries are now in chaos is that their culture

was destroyed or mocked up. People don't know what to rely on, which is the truth or the lie, what is real or fake value. Mocking up other people culture symbols is an ancient habit – see the Egyptian obelisk cut out and removed to Justinian hippodrome, or the Medusa heads of an ancient Greek temple placed under the columns of Constantinople Basilica Cistern. Not to mention the low relief Ramses commissioned in order to describe his victory against the Hittites at Kadesh... a victory that never happened, as recently discovered, because Ramses was actually defeated (at least he didn't use other people monuments).

Culture is a word that comes from Cicero's concept of *cultura animi* (cultivation of the soul), and it may be viewed as a capacity of understanding yourself, the others and the world (or the Universe).

One of the ways to achieve culture is by learning to become "literate" in art. Greenaway considers that in a world of image, we are visually illiterate. Actually, we forgot to decipher the messages encrypted in symbol. Sometimes, the symbols bear messages which are hidden from the eye of the ignorant – see Michelangelo's statue of Moses. Just compare the Sigmund Freud essay *The Moses of Michelangelo*, [2] and the view of Forcellino (who considers that Michelangelo was involved with a clandestine fellowship trying to reform the Church). Who's right? How important is to understand the real message encrypted in a work of art?

A sharp debate takes place on the origins of the European populations. The land where is now Romania was inhabited, thousands years ago, by humans described by Herodotus. Few symbols and messages from these populations have been discovered, mainly due to the lack of investments in archaeological projects. We are, still, lucky with the highways projects – thanks to digging, ancient ruins have been discovered and a faint image of our ancestors starts to depict.

In order to find who we are, we have to examine the cultural heritage – artifacts, architecture, statues, buildings, traditions, costumes bear human encrypted messages and serve as concepts for all human knowledge. The artifacts human populations created in order to share knowledge help us to understand the world we live in, and set the basis on which we make our own judgments.

Local Artistic Heritage as Beauty and Knowledge

Art could be viewed as a quest for beauty, a feature that helps us feel good or fulfilled. Beauty is associated with Nature, or with wisdom, but to be aware of both, we have to learn to perceive it – through all our senses. This is why education needs art, this is why we need to get the knowledge from the archives our local and universal cultural heritage contain.

We are surrounded by aesthetic stimuli and most of us don't perceive them. We live in a world we don't actually "see" – our own town or neighborhood. In order to get the messages around us, we have to read them first – a grammar of the art, or an instruction manual is necessary to set a scale of aesthetic values. I see what I want to see, and art becomes art if only I perceive it.

To fully develop, human being has to use all its capacities. Education should take into account that the need for identity, freedom, creation is fulfilled only using all senses, and processing the associated inputs. A strong personal development is possible by having access to the history of aesthetics, to personal contact with cultural goods, and by "consuming" and processing those goods as a food for thought in deeper approaches that concern philosophy, ethics, science, and social behavior.

The aesthetic approach of education unleashes the joy of being, of intellectual and emotional sharing with other beings. One says that the joy of aesthetics is reserved to humans, but there are still surprises in nature and the time when we will pass information (at the wave level) to other creatures, and transfer pure knowledge bi-directionally, is closer. Aesthetics may be translated by means of mathematics in the language of frequencies, sharing involves resonance and socializing at deep levels may create the basis for a society that may find peace on this host-planet.

Art helps us to decipher ourselves. Trying to see and to understand the images and symbols our ancestors left to us, trying to understand the messages encrypted in a painting, statue, building we pass by, activate our native heritage to develop those personal traits that define us as persons and individuals. So, the spare time becomes a valuable source of self improvement, especially in modern times, when the need to communicate and to share valuable experiences is rising.

One of the high qualities of art is its capacity to snap-shot the sublime. Humans need to be reassured about the good and the beauty inside them, about the never-ending story of their life, they need to feel they have a contribution to the big picture of the Universe, no matter that our existence is so short compared to cosmic

level. The idea of an immortal spirit that expresses itself through art satisfies the need to be one of the characters in the great story of life.

Kids express themselves and look for their personalities since the first years using colours, forms, materials embedded in messages sometimes hard to translate. Later on, somehow, education prunes the creativity branches. If a child is lucky enough to be left alone in expressing itself, it may find a world to thrive in, or creates a world where we will be lucky to be accepted in... This is one of the problems of education and in order to avoid smashing the gift of a child we better concentrate on sharing the aesthetic experiences and the philosophy of traditions in the world they live.

Art could help in setting landmarks on the road of personal development. Connecting with creators by means of their works may switch on our own mechanisms of getting harmony and balance. Art becomes more than a copy of reality and the reality – the one human chooses freely – becomes an expression of art, filtered by everyone's mindset.

Conclusions

There is a real need for aesthetic education and for implementing in the curricula those activities that allow a balanced development and the access to beauty and harmony. There is a real need for interdisciplinary study – history can get valuable help from the study of artistic styles and costumes, mathematics finds an application in the concept of beauty, physics may support the theory of colours and music. The chemistry of well being, of identity, and the science of joy and the coherence of the world we live in is transmitted and explained through works of art. But we need to be guided to become sense-literate, to unwrap the gift of meaning and to find our place and purpose in the Universe.

The European Reference Framework sets out eight key competencies:

- Communication in the mother tongue
- Communication in foreign languages
- Mathematical competence and basic competencies in science and technology
- Digital competence
- Learning to learn
- Social and civic competencies
- Initiative and entrepreneurship
- Cultural awareness and expression

I'd like to add that communication in any language involves the art of writing – as literature or as calligraphy, – the social and civic competencies involve the sense of identity and the art of conversation, that may be developed only on cultural basis.

All these may only be achieved when humans are aware of them as parts of a whole – which is the Universe and its laws – and this is only possible by high quality and well balanced education.

References

- [1] Hayles, N. K. (1991). *Chaos Bound: Orderly Disorder in Contemporary Literature and Science*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, NY.
- [2] "We may now, I believe, permit ourselves to reap the fruits of our endeavours. We have seen how many of those who have felt the influence of this statue have been impelled to interpret it as representing Moses agitated by the spectacle of his people fallen from grace and dancing round an idol. But this interpretation had to be given up, for it made us expect to see him spring up in the next moment, break the Tables and accomplish the work of vengeance. (...) What we see before us is not the inception of a violent action but the remains of a movement that has already taken place. In his first transport of fury, Moses desired to act, to spring up and take vengeance and forget the Tables; but he has overcome the temptation, and he will now remain seated and still, in his frozen wrath and in his pain mingled with contempt. Nor will he throw away the Tables so that they will break on the stones, for it is on their especial account that he has controlled his anger; it was to preserve them that he kept his passion in check. In giving way to his rage and indignation, he had to neglect the Tables, and the hand which upheld them was withdrawn. They began to slide down and were in danger of being broken. This brought him to himself. He remembered his mission and for its sake renounced an indulgence of his feelings. His hand



returned and saved the unsupported Tables before they had actually fallen to the ground. In this attitude he remained immobilized, and in this attitude Michelangelo has portrayed him as the guardian of the tomb. As our eyes travel down it the figure exhibits three distinct emotional strata. The lines of the face reflect the feelings which have won the ascendancy; the middle of the figure shows the traces of suppressed movement; and the foot still retains the attitude of the projected action. It is as though the controlling influence had proceeded downwards from above. No mention has been made so far of the left arm, and it seems to claim a share in our interpretation. The hand is laid in the lap in a mild gesture and holds as though in a caress the end of the flowing beard. It seems as if it is meant to counteract the violence with which the other hand had misused the beard a few moments ago” (<http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/burt/filmphilology/FreudMoses.pdf>)

[3] <http://www.pbs.org/wnet/secrets/episodes/michelangelo-revealed/watch-the-full-episode/226/>

“Key Competencies for Lifelong Learning – A European Reference Framework” – annex of a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of December 18, 2006, ec.europa.eu/dgs/education_culture/publ/pdf/ll-learning/key_comp_en.pdf