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The Cognitive Dimension of Art: Aesthetic and Educational Value

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Abstract: The question of whether art is a source of knowledge is a question of epistemic as well as of aesthetic interest which has significant pedagogical implications as well. This issue, both in its epistemic and aesthetic dimensions, is addressed here under the general perspective of the contemporary cognitivist – anti-cognitivist debate. Consequently, it is asked: a) can art be a means of knowledge and if it does, is knowledge obtained through art of the same kind with scientific knowledge? and b) if we accept that art actually offers some kind of knowledge, is this knowledge relevant to its aesthetic value, does it constitute an essential part of its functioning as art? The paper discusses the plausibility and consistency of the answers given to these questions either from the cognitivist or the anti-cognitivist point of view and argues that the importance and role attributed to art within the educational praxis, as well as its educational value per se, significantly depends on the kind of approach we adopt in regard to these questions.

Keywords: Art, Knowledge, Cognitivism, Anti-Cognitivism, Aesthetic Value, Educational Value of Art

Introduction

What Kind of Knowledge ?

THE WORKS MADE by poets are “three removes from reality, and easy to produce without knowledge of the truth” (Plato, *Republic*, 10.599a), the philosopher declares, to receive the answer that “poetry is something more philosophical and more elevated than history, since poetry relates more of the universal while history relates particulars.” (Aristotle, *Poetics* IX, 1451b 3, 4). After the philosophers the poet comes to praise the eternal beauty of art, uttering enigmatically:

“Beauty is truth, truth beauty,” - that is all
Ye know on earth, and all ye need to know¹

These sayings, bridging twenty-three centuries of Western culture and thought –from classic antiquity to the Romantic era– pose the issue of how art relates to truth and knowledge in the most characteristic way and define, as one may say, the directions taken by relative discussions up to today. From Plato’s refusal of any relation between art with truth and real knowledge, to Aristotle’s affirmation for art’s cognitive character we arrive to the romantic elevation of art as the principal source of truth and knowledge. From being at the third step

¹ These two verses (over which a long critical dispute has developed) are the culmination of the famous “Ode on a Grecian Urn” by John Keats

away from the truth in the beginning, art (considered as the embodiment of beauty) begins to climb up the ladder of knowledge until it identified with truth; with a transcendental truth in fact, superior to the one gained by experience or achieved by science. This romantic conception of art introduces a radical epistemology, as opposed to the Cartesian or empirical conception prevalent at the classical period (one that focuses on reason or experience): the romantic epistemology emphasizes imagination and intuition and suggests a different understanding of the world. Art is separated from knowledge in the narrow sense of scientific propositions based on true belief axioms which are subjected to falsification criteria. From now on, art can claim another approach to knowledge: although it cannot provide justified knowledge, it can offer insights into the world and the variety of humans' perspectives on their world.

What Kind of Learning ?

The issue concerning the relation between art and knowledge is as old as the reflection and the questioning of art. This issue is of epistemological as well as of aesthetic interest –both closely connected with one another– and has an educational dimension from the very start. Whether it is accepted that arts tell the truth or not, whether it is assumed that they offer or don't offer some kind of knowledge, what in all these different versions of the art-knowledge issue is insinuated or explicitly stated is that art performs as learning process, directly or indirectly.

In antiquity the role of art as teacher was commonplace. Art should give pleasure as well as teach: “to teach – to please – comprise the poet's views / Or else at once to profit and amuse”, as Horace poetically had put it, and Young reminds us speaking about the hedonic and cognitive value of art (see Young, 2001: 19; see also Diffey, 1997: 26). Is then something in art making it capable to provide knowledge, to teach us? Can we give it a cognitive dimension and if so which way does it develop? Or, on the other hand, should we accept that art has only aesthetic and no cognitive value? Are there aesthetic truths or is it that truth only falls within the extra-artistic sphere of the great world? (Stolnitz, 1992: 198). Consequently, do we learn anything from art or not, and if we do then what kind of learning is it? Does art provides us with facts and truths; does it have a specific cognitive character? Or is it that art's contribution is limited to the way it affects and impacts upon our emotions, attitudes and perceptions? The answer to these questions defines to a great degree the status and value of art inside culture in general and as an educational instrument more specifically.

In fact, art education, from the time it began as a distinct field of study during the end of the 19th century and in compliance with the then widespread conviction –due to the expansion and dispersion of romantic ideas– that art is primarily connected with emotions, adopts a dissociating reasoning as far as knowledge is concerned, which impacts art's educational role; art is emotional while science is cognitive and therefore: art = *éducation sentimentale*, while, science = transfer of knowledge.

In school practice, this disassociation of art from knowledge turns frequently into a partial loss of art's autonomy as a distinct learning subject: art is stripped from any cognitive character it may possess and is used as a means, suitable for the transfer of extrinsic knowledge coming from other fields of study. In education, when it comes to learning through art, this learning is understood as facilitation of learning in other subjects. In other words, if it is agreed that art has no cognitive value on its own, to justify its use as a constructive learning

subject, then the only thing that can give it educational value and justify its introduction in educational curricula is its use as a vehicle for historical, social, political knowledge or even as the means to provide perceptible form to the meanings, principles and laws of the sciences taught and familiarize students with scientific content in ways that are pleasant and comprehensible.

If we were to accept that art cannot provide knowledge on its own, that it falls out of art's domain to instruct us, to teach us things, then the only way we could justify its presence in a school environment of knowledge and learning is to make it the vehicle of other, extra-artistic knowledge. Thus art is transformed into a teaching instrument the use of which may lead to completely distorted views about what art is and how art functions and consequently, whether and how can art be integrated in extra-artistic teaching practices. Such views have widespread acceptance in educational circles – more so since they are not placed under the scrutiny of examining the thorny issue of whether or not there are various ways to learn and experience, whether art is one of these and if so, whether it can instruct.

These are not simple questions, they have a long history with philosophical background and references, originating – as already mentioned – in antiquity.

The Origins

Plato was the first to mention this relationship, disassociating the two terms completely and refusing any common ground between art and knowledge (true science). Art, as a process of imitation (*μιμησις*) produces images and the main characteristic of images, as per Plato's epistemology, is that they are inferior—and should be inferior—in comparison with their originals for they are just images: “The image must not by any means reproduce all the qualities of that which it imitates, if it is to be an image”, as he says in *Cratylus* (*Cratylus*, 432b). Consequently, images are far from possessing the same qualities as the originals which they imitate (see *Cratylus*, 432d). If an image is perfect then ceases to be an image of something and becomes a duplicate of the same thing (*Cratylus*, 432c). Imitation, according to Plato then, leads to the production of objects that only have the appearance of the objects imitated and thus function as substitutes of the originals. Providing only a viewing aspect of things, art deals with appearances and not with real beings and to this end it deceives people, creating confusion between the real thing and its image. The following dialogue from Plato's *Republic* where Socrates is talking with Glaucon is characteristic of this view.

“Consider, then, this very point. To which is painting directed in every case, to the imitation of reality as it is or of appearance as it appears? Is it an imitation of a phantasm or of the truth?”. “Of a phantasm” he said. “Then the mimetic art is far removed from truth, and this, it seems, is the reason why it can produce everything, because it touches or lays hold of only a small part of the object and that a phantom” (*Republic*, 10.598b).

And since “The creator of the phantom, the imitator... knows nothing of the reality but only the appearance” (*Republic*, 10.601b), art is an activity not at all serious and those employing it don't possess knowledge of the things they imitate –“the imitator knows nothing worth mentioning of the things he imitates”– and for that reason “imitation is a form of play, not to be taken seriously” (*Republic*, 10.602b). Artists do not possess genuine knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*) not even the right belief (*δόξαν ὀρθήν*) of the things they imitate. They produce

without knowledge of the truth. Their art is a mimetic art, which produces a product that is far removed from truth in the accomplishment of its task.

As far as cognitive content is concerned, Plato's art not only lacks real value but is downgraded to the lowest level in the ranking of the four sections of knowledge (*Republic*, 6.511); art corresponds only to picture-thinking or conjecture (*εἰκασία*). It is a step away from material reality (the reality of material things) and two steps away from real nature (*φύσις*) (see *Republic*, 10.597), or else from the Ideas or Forms which are behind material things. As for the artists, they too are "at the third remove from truth and reality in human excellence" (*Republic*, 10.599d). In other words, whereas an artificer in making any material object imitates the eternal idea, an artist only imitates the imitation (*Republic*, 10.595a-598d).

The first response to this downgrading of art and its corresponding disassociation with anything having to do with knowledge, back in antiquity is given by Aristotle. For Aristotle, as was with Plato, art is imitation but from this primary admission, Aristotle arrives at conclusions very different from those of Plato's.

Aristotle does not believe that art deceives people, that it creates confusion between the real object and its imitation; on the contrary, he believes that because art is an imitating process it serves as a source for knowledge and understanding:

"...understanding gives great pleasure not only to philosophers but likewise to others too, though the latter have a smaller share in it. This is why people enjoy looking at images, because through contemplating them it comes about that they understand and infer what each element means, for instance that "that this person is so-and-so" (*Poetics*, IV, 1448b 4,5)

For both Plato and Aristotle art is a representation of an existing reality but Aristotle believes that imitation does not detract from knowledge but leads to it, at least to some form of it. The artist imitates this reality and because the act of it is a process that resembles the childhood learning process we can, through art, savor the pleasure derived by recognition and knowledge (see *Poetics*, IV, 2-5), i.e. by understanding the meaning of the imitated subject. Thus for Aristotle, imitation, and consequently art as a mimetic representation of the real thing, is of high value as a learning process, one that leads to the conception of the universal and the necessary: in other words, to the revelation of general truths, projecting not actual events and things that have happened, but the kind of things that might occur; of things that are possible in terms of probability or necessity.

"Consequently, poetry is something more philosophical and more elevated than history, since poetry relates more of the universal while history relates particulars. "Universal" means the kinds of things which it suits a certain kind of person to say or do in terms of probability or necessity: poetry aims for this, even though attaching names to the agents." (*Poetics*, IX, 1451b 3, 4).

Plato's accusation that artwork, being an imitation, is nothing but a partial case of incomplete copying of an original is thereby rebutted by the argument that artwork has the potential to reveal something about the object being represented, especially when human nature is concerned.

The above ‘dialogue’ between Plato and Aristotle plants the seeds for the entire issue and lays down the course this discussion about the relation between art and knowledge, is going to take from then on. This ‘dialogue’ actually forecasts the current debate between cognitivists and anti- or non-cognitivists, which seems to have rekindled between philosophers who revive this ancient quarrel.

As a result, a genuine philosophical discussion is flourishing within the framework of a philosophy of art, where the status of the latter is related with its ability –or inability– to provide knowledge and sets as one of its principal goals to that end, i.e. to explore the kind of knowledge art can provide, to the degree of course that –within the realm of a certain philosophical theory– art can be accepted as a genuine knowledge provider. It thus sets forth an epistemological question, the answer to which shall define the attitude adopted in regards to the nature, operation, and instructional value of art. This epistemological question is closely tied with another question of aesthetic nature: is or is not art’s capacity to provide knowledge relevant to its function as art, and does it enhance its value as art? (see indicatively: Goodman, 1976; Gaut, 2003; John, 2001; Freeland, 1997; Kieran and McIver Lopes, 2006; Lamarque and Olsen, 1994; Lamarque 2006). Both Plato and Aristotle, who relate art and knowledge closely, would answer ‘yes’ to such a question. Besides, the former contempts while the latter endorses art, on the basis that art is unable to provide knowledge (according to Plato) or that it is able to do so (according to Aristotle). On the other hand, in later and modern aesthetic philosophy, the one following the Kantian direction of disassociating aesthetic judgement from all personal, practical or cognitive interests, and mainly under the formalistic aesthetics of modernism –with the emphasis the latter gives to the independence of the artistic form as well as the complete separation of the aesthetic from all other values– this relationship is frequently weakened and the value of art is separate from its cognitive value². This is connected with the trend of the aesthetic anti- or non-cognitivism, which, however, does not hold the primacy in current discussions about aesthetics. Conversely, the trend in support of the argument that art is not only able to provide knowledge but this ability also adds to its value as art –the trend of aesthetic cognitivism– is gaining more and more ground³.

² Actually, as I have tried to show elsewhere (see Mouriki), this formalistic approach has been based, in the most part, on a misunderstanding; theories about beauty (such as the one from Kant) were erroneously perceived as theories on art, resulting in a reduced perception of what should be expected by our contact with art. This contact was thus assumed to be a disinterested contact with the formal qualities of a work of art. Of course, when Kant analysed the principles used to formulate judgments on beauty wasn’t trying to produce a theory on art and in any case it’s not at all certain that his analysis on beauty leads necessarily to a formalistic aesthetic approach. This approach was probably the result of rather selective and constrained interpretations of Kantian theory on beauty, as the one by Clive Bell. Clive Bell transferred Kant’s perceptions on form and disinterestedness into a theory on art, thus introducing a strict aesthetic formalism which was subsequently connected to artistic modernism. He was a fervent advocate of the autonomy of art, and he concentrated on that which he considered as really aesthetic in art leaving everything else –everything that would connect it to life– aside as irrelevant: “The representative element in a work of art may or may not be harmful; always it is irrelevant. For, to appreciate a work of art we need bring with us nothing from life, no knowledge of its ideas and affairs, no familiarity with its emotions. Art transports us from the world of man’s activity to the world of aesthetic exaltation.” (See Bell, 1958: 26)

³ For further discussion of the cognitivist – anti-cognitivist issues in contemporary aesthetics, see the very informative article on Art and Knowledge by Berys Gaut (2003). See also the article under the same title by Eileen John (2001) and the very enlightening Introduction to the collection of Essays in Aesthetics and Epistemology *Knowing Art* by Mathew Kieran and Dominque McIver Lopes (2006).

New Versions of an Old Quarrel

Let us return to our main query: can art provide knowledge and if yes what kind of knowledge that may be? Is art itself some kind of knowledge and if so how does it relate with other kinds of knowledge? How different cognitive contents integrate into artworks and to what degree these contents relate with their aesthetic value?

Thorough examination of these questions is of primary importance in regards to how we perceive art education and its place and contribution in the educational process. Yet these questions do not seem to have a central place in the discussions for the designing of educational programs and much less in educational practices and procedures. In actual teaching practice, the issue of aesthetics is rather ignored and art is frequently used as a handy tool or as a pleasant way to familiarize students with the content of other learning subjects or the facts and basic principles of various sciences.

However, there is another way to approach this issue, one that is based on prior examination of the possibilities and terms of art instruction's connection with extra-aesthetic targets and which takes into consideration the answers given in the central philosophical question as to whether art can supply knowledge, what kind of knowledge and how. This also means that the question of whether art can teach us something cannot apply in educational praxis without a prior confrontation with other concerns, similarly philosophical, such as: the referentiality or non-referentiality of art on one hand and the character and nature of the knowledge supplied, on the other.

The Reference Issue

Some argue that art has no correlation with extra-artistic subjects –extra-artistic being all these that do not comprise inherent signifying elements (sounds, colors, words etc)– organized in such a way that they form a self-defined and independent structure of internal relations: i.e. a complete and meaningful art form. There is another view though arguing that the meaning of an artwork is not defined by its form but rather by its representational content. These views, in reference to how can art provide knowledge, are interpreted in arguments such as: art can't teach us anything because it relates to nothing outside of it, because it is self-referential or more so –in the spirit of a Derridean deconstructive skepticism– because it is impossible to get out of a text ('text' is used here in a wider context to include all kinds of works). Diffey, for example argues that as far as art is concerned the reference to the real world is suspended for otherwise it would entail a refusal of the aesthetic stance (Diffey, 1997: 30). Or the opposite: art provides knowledge for the real thing, for what really happens (Novitz, 1987: 132), precisely because art can make references to reality and because it is fallacious to believe that the world of art is always an imaginary one. If one does not confront all these contradictory views it is hard to imagine how an educator, one that is responsible to prepare study programs (curricula), can introduce art as an instruction component for other cognitive fields.

The study of various arts and comparison of the ways they relate to reality, as well as the examination of the meaning of art works⁴ could at this point help us realize that neither the referentiality of content nor strict adhesion to form are sufficient approaches for the plethora

⁴ This meaning sometimes correlates with the content represented –as in representative art and realistic literature – and other times with their form.

of meanings mediated as well as the knowledge conveyed through arts. Extra-artistic subjects and knowledge relating with various educational subjects is possible to contribute in defining the meaning of artworks, provided that, in all cases, they comply to a sort of transformation that allows them to function as constituents of an aesthetic meaning (see Reimer, 1991: 201-2). Art, we could say, transcends its referential content through its form, thus producing meanings that do not coincide with those of the contents it incorporates; i.e. aesthetic meanings, which, in accordance at least with the supporters of aesthetic cognitivism, are “deeper and more fundamental” than the meanings of the referential contents of art. Within this context of a transformational process, characteristic of art in its contact with extra-artistic subjects and contents, we can also understand the way knowledge is transferred through art: the knowledge is embedded and conveyed through art as aesthetically relevant. When a piece of art (a novel, for example) offers us some knowledge (historical facts or knowledge of real events or even scientific knowledge) then this knowledge, as content of the artwork, is conveyed to us not independently but directly dependent on the way and the style the author chooses to express him/herself.

From this point of view, the use of art to facilitate easier transfer of extra-artistic knowledge does not mean there is actual relation with knowledge. In this case, art puts itself in the service of interests outside its own domain. The result is that the actual artistic content is eliminated, replaced by that of the cognitive field art is called upon to serve and its form is ignored as irrelevant with the aims it has been called to bring to light. Thus, hetero-defined, art’s educational value grows weaker.

Art’s convergence with other cognitive fields can take place in a meaningful way only when we call upon art’s own expressive ways in order to demonstrate that there are many (frequently intersecting and equally interesting) ways to define our relation with the world and to illustrate ways to comprehend aspects of this world and our relation with it that can’t be defined by the positivist and occasionally manipulative formulations of science (see Merleau-Ponty, 1993b: 121-123).

Instead of committing art to servitude for extra-artistic and extra-aesthetic goals –that would actually work against art’s sake, degrading the uniqueness of its offerings, transforming it into a vehicle, a simple tool– one can turn to the sciences or fields of study where art itself is the scope of study. These are the sciences exploring aspects of the artistic phenomenon, the experiences we gain by our contact with art, its aesthetic value, and the meaning of the world constructed by artworks. History of art, criticism, aesthetic theory and philosophy of art, form a multilayered approach, offering us the opportunity to understand art and artistic experiences better, acting at the same time as foundations of art education as an autonomous and comprehensive learning field. This opens the doors to multiple perspectives for reading and appreciating art and leads to the advancement of art instruction as a distinct educational field, one that possesses its own cognitive value.

Besides, only knowing about art will open the way to understand how there can be knowledge through art, i.e. to comprehend how art can teach us something, in the way Aristotle believed that art could teach something to people: going from the partial to the universal and therefore conveying something that may be of interest to all people. Something that relates with a more substantial understanding of the human condition and the way, or rather, the ways with which humans construct their world and reside in it. This would result in the critical re-examination of the rather restricted way with which we view, not only art, but also knowledge itself, and assess the range of their field.

Furthermore, recognition of art's capacity to be a conduit to knowledge on its own grounds (and not in the service of extra-artistic objectives) can become an opportunity for research; research which would permit us to better understand not only art but knowledge as well (Kieran & McIver Lopes, 2006: xxiv). Moreover, help to that end can be provided by arts-informed research, proposed by Eisner for social sciences (see Eisner, 2006). In this case, art, instead of acting as a vehicle for the transfer of knowledge can become a model for a more comprehensive process for 'knowing'.

The Kind of Knowledge Issue

How then, is something like that possible when art continues to be distrusted as a source of real knowledge by many anti-cognitivists? Adhering to the traditional Platonic train of thought, some believe that art cannot be a source of knowledge, as far as the traditional sense of justified true belief is concerned. They argue that art is unable to set forth propositions of "truth value", and even when it does, it cannot justify them. In any case, as the opponents of cognitivism say, even when art is able to offer some knowledge this is nothing but trivial knowledge (Stolnitz, 1992; Carroll, 2002).

Even so, the knowledge art may provide, as some anti-cognitivists (the modest ones) have convincingly argued, although non-propositional or without axioms of "truth value" type, as in science or philosophy, may nonetheless be a source of insight and awareness. It can help us to see the world in a new or different way constituting thus "a special kind of cognition" (Lamarque & Olsen, 1994: 452).

At opposite ends with anti-cognitivists and in direct confrontation with their views are those who support that not only we can get knowledge through art (more specifically, literature) but that this knowledge has a propositional character and they argue that "fully understanding the general thematic statements and fully appreciating them as part of the literary experience require an evaluation of their possible truth or falsity" (see Kivy, 1997: 135).

That sort of knowledge, others say, is not propositional in a direct way but by invoking modal conceiving; it is modal propositional knowledge (knowledge of or about possibility). Art works, as Stokes claims, enable reliably formed beliefs about modal truths (truths about possibilities) (see Stokes, 2006: 67). The works of art explore counterfactual situations in complex and interesting ways, invoking thus modal conceiving or imagining; suggesting, i.e., possibilities for our consideration. Therefore, "art works, being the sorts of things that sustain cognitive interest, are well-suited to provide us with knowledge" (Stokes, 2006: 81).

For instance, works of visual arts can teach us how to look at the world, discovering overlooked aspects of it or re-discovering some of its familiar aspects under a brand new light. Works of art then become instruments of the spirit as they teach us how to see and give us something to think about as no analytical or other work or common object can (see Merleau-Ponty, 1993b: 114). Consequently, from our encounter with art we learn that there are other ways of seeing the world and our relation with it, apart from the objectifying views of the sciences or the instrumental ones of everydayness and this knowledge is anything but trivial. This could be the answer to all those who maintain that knowledge conveyed by art is prosaic and restricted. Art shows that this is not the case: it is not the knowledge conveyed through art that is restricted; it is the traditional model of propositional knowledge, which

is narrow and inadequate⁵, since it does not include “such things as knowing how to perceive, imagine, and feel aptly, and knowing what a certain experience is like.” (John, 2002: 339).

Not being able to offer scientific understanding doesn't mean that art is unable to offer understanding whatsoever. On the contrary, art is a basic form of human understanding (Smith, 1992). Advancing non-discursive knowledge (according to Suzanne Langer's terminology), art enables us to know about all those things which cannot be grasped in scientific propositions and thus it can significantly contribute to an overall understanding of our world and cultural achievements⁶, as well as ourselves⁷. Besides, one argues, propositional and non-propositional knowledge aren't but two different forms of cognition, which do not necessarily stand in opposition to each other. They both emerge from the same common source (the basic experience originating in perceptual encounters with our world) and reach the same undivided world (Efland, 2002: 171), which we are trying to construe and understand through various forms of cognition (reasoning, imagining, feeling or even acting).

Having accepted that there are multiple ways to know, and more than one way to learn, we can claim that art instructs and that it can do so in ways, which are richer and more varied than those of the empirical sciences. Art can give practical or phenomenal knowledge (see Novitz, 1987); it enhances capacities and skills of imagining and reflection (see Stokes, 2006: 78-80); it stimulates cognitive activity, and as a result of this stimulation, it allows us to acquire fresh knowledge, to refine our beliefs and deepen our understanding about the world (Freeland, 1997: 19).

Contact with artworks boosts those values that help open possibilities for a renewed contact with the world and things and allows people “to see the familiar in an unfamiliar light, and to perceive new connections among things, in light of which we organize and reorganize our experience of reality” (Smith, 1991: 144).

Hence, encounter with art contributes to “the actualization of worthwhile human potential” (Smith, 1991: 144-145) and this is to be taken into serious consideration by curricula designers and pedagogues. This non-trivial knowledge, provided by contact with the arts, is the decisive argument in favor of treating art as an autonomous educational field endowed with its own intrinsic cognitive as well as educational value.

En guise de Conclusion: “It is Cognitive from the Start”

There are certain goals, within the educational process, that can't be obtained with other ways but only through familiarization with artistic expressions and the way these expressions call upon us to redefine the terms governing our relationship and our association with ourselves, other people and the world as a whole: activating, as stated by Kant, our cognitive powers (imagination and understanding). This contact with arts helps to develop and cultivate forms of cognition that allow us to understand that there is an alternative way to live and

⁵ Equating cognition with verbal and symbolic conceptualization is but one way to conceive of cognition. This assumption is so widespread though, that it has become a dominant myth, as Reimer explains (see Reimer, 1992: 27-29).

⁶ Lamarque & Olsen (1994), who reject any connection of the works of art (literary works, in particular) with truth value, recognize all the same that: “Literary works can contribute to the development and understanding of the deepest, most revered of a culture's conceptions without advancing propositions, statements or hypotheses about them” (p. 22).

⁷ Eisner (2002) claims that experiencing art we engage in a process through which the self is remade (p. 12).

think, another way to be in the world from the one of the natural or scientific attitude (see Eisner, 2001). And this alternative way is the way of aesthetic experience, which clearly does not cancel out the cognitive approach. It presupposes the cognitive ability and defines our attitude towards works of art as an effort to understand and to appreciate; by learning to understand and appreciate a work of art aesthetically we are led to a new worldly understanding *and* a changed –more intense and insightful– aesthetic disposition (see Goldie, 2006).

In other words, aesthetic integration and the pleasure we derive from art does not deduct from but quite the opposite, it contributes to knowledge⁸. Art's aesthetic value can enhance its cognitive value (see Friend, 2006), and its cognitive value (as defined earlier in this text) tends to enhance its hedonic value⁹ (Young, 2001: 20). We may say that cognitive and aesthetic values strengthen and support one another; the cognitive value of an artwork is advanced by its aesthetic value, and the cognitive potential facilitates the appreciation of its aesthetic value. In addition, this can happen because, as, appropriately, Efland notes: “the aesthetic is not integrated into the cognitive; the aesthetic is cognitive from the start” (Efland, 2002: 171).

What does that mean in relation to our original questions? In conclusion let us attempt a reply-proposition (open of course to further discussion and examination) that in some way justifies the revival of this old cognitivist – anti-cognitivist quarrel:

- ‘Yes’, art is a source of knowledge and this knowledge is not trivial, but not because it has a character that is discursive or propositional. In art's case the cognitive value does not depend on whether it can afford justified true beliefs. It depends on whether and how it allows access to effective understanding. Consequently, the attempt to associate or even compare it with propositional reasoning – as if this is a way for art's justification since it would classify it in the so called higher forms of cognition– is rather erroneous. What is important in any event is not the ‘propositionality’ but the fact that through the way they present their “embodied meanings” or “aesthetic ideas” (as Kant would say), the works of art open up to an endless procedure of understanding: they tell us more than determinate linguistic expression can tell and they give rise to “more thought” (see Kant: § 49 Ak. 5: 315) than a conceptual elaboration of these meanings could provoke. In other words, they give access to ways of understanding that cannot be expressed in purely conceptual terms.
- In this same sense, it can also be a valuable source of learning: the way with which we engage with the meanings embodied in art works triggers our cognitive powers and enlivens thinking. Works of art can teach how to see and to think in ways that no other work can; they provide us with matrices of ideas (as Merleau-Ponty has put it), whose meaning we never stop developing. They teach how to metamorphose an experience into its meaning, opening thus new dimensions or new frontiers for our experience.

⁸ Nelson Goodman says that an artist's picture “may bring out neglected likenesses and differences, force unaccustomed associations, and in some measure remake our world. And if the point of the picture is not only successfully made but is also well-taken, if the realignments it directly and indirectly effects are interesting and important, the picture –like a crucial experiment – makes a genuine contribution to knowledge.” (Goodman, 1976: 33)

⁹ It should be noted that “hedonic value” is used here in the Aristotelian sense of the world, i.e. the “delight” one gets by immersion into knowledge (see above: section two) and of course not in the sense that art is placed among the types of entertainment with form and content that ought to be adapted to generate pleasant feelings.

Therefore art has a substantial role to play in the educational process, a role that: a. is different but no less important from other learning subjects, b. is connected with art's intrinsic cognitive dimension and c. does not depend on art's ability or inability to become a vehicle for extra-artistic knowledge and information. Being a particular way of engaging with and representing the world, art opens unexpected horizons to experience, unveils not yet seen dimensions and views of a world that continues to offer ever-expanding fields for meaningful explorations.

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