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## “MUSEUM, ART AND EDUCATION TO NONVIOLENCE”

### Abstract

History of art can be considered as the history of non-violent struggle of humanity, and the apparent “weakness” of art as a strong factor of capacity building and change toward culture of peace. The creation of an artwork can be thought as figure of a process of nonviolent conflict transformation, and a museum through the aesthetic experience can promote reconciliation in a journey from vision and compassion to action. The adoption of nonviolent and maieutic pedagogy (Dolci), of participatory design and curatorial modalities, the involvement of minorities and victims of violence in shared experiences of memories and imagination for the future can liberate also from the cultural violence. Possible strategies of museums of peace at the half of the UN “International Decade for a Culture of peace and Non-violence for the children of the world (2001-2010)”.

Maria Antonietta Malleo (1964) received her arts degree from University of Palermo, a PHD in Design, figurative and applied arts from Politecnico di Milano, and a specialization in History of modern art from University “La Sapienza” of Roma. She specialized also in Aesthetics, poetics and theory of criticism at Napoli. She is temporary chair of History of modern art at University of Palermo and independent curator for Department of Culture and the Civic Gallery of Modern Art of Palermo. Her field of research includes methodology, art criticism and museology, with studies and publications on visual culture, from baroque spatiality to contemporary art and cinema. She served as educator in AGESCI, the Italian Scout association, and since 1991 is involved in active nonviolence as member of MIR, the Italian branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (IFOR). Currently she is representative of IFOR at UNESCO and is committed for the promotion of culture of peace through the involvement of artists and cultural organizations.

In an essay of 1969 Giulio Carlo Argan affirmed:

“Art is...one of the ways with which humanity made history. In every time and every place, with the evident clarity of its signs art meant an exorcism or a spell with which were repulsed...instincts threatening the success of the difficult feat of civilization; and, if certainly, in all his course, history of art is the history of the nonviolent acting, constructive and not destructive one, there have been moments, also very close to us, in which art committed itself in the open struggle against violence and the will of destruction. We don't fight without the risk to die: those whom we call the great masters of art, and that in history of art rise to the heroic greatness, are the ones who played for highest stakes, and faced more closely and resolutely the final risk of the death of art” (La storia dell'arte).

In this sense art is identified with nonviolence, that is assumed as the principle of civilization, according to the truth common to all human beings, that Gandhi called “old like the mountains”, as it would arise from the depth of the earth. According to Argan, we can consider art as crucial in the nonviolent strategy of construction of civilization, that is another way to say “culture of peace”, because it is “criticism, history and judgement, ... moral choice”, “point of contest... not loved by the powers”, and “acting according to a project” that dies when violence prevails, and the artists as those who discuss the world, giving new interpretations for the future through memory and imagination.

I'm giving few examples of how art is in its final meaning freedom from violence: the cycle of Paolo Uccello on the *Battle of S. Romano* (1435-1440) (1), where the rigorous application of perspective rules in the scenes of war, rather than of unification and rationalization of space, has a deconstructive function that expresses in the unreality of nocturne the irrationality and the fictitiousness of the death machine as in joust, the strength of breaking, and the unnaturalness of violence in the deformed human figure. Botticelli *Venus and Mars* (1485-86, ca.) (2) - where a sleeping Mars among the satyrs playing with weapons, figures of wish, is overcome from the strength of the love of a prevailing Venus - tell us about the utopia of the civilization of *humanitas*, that triumphs over war. The Giacomo Manzù *Door of Peace and War* (1965-69) (3) in the Rotterdam Cathedral of Saint Laurens, celebrates in the heart of Europe destroyed by the World War II the elegy of death and the strength of life: below the wrapped forms of despair and fratricide, and the cry of innocence; in the middle a lonely cloth that marks a caesura, a sense of emptying, the fall; in the top, in an ascensional dynamism, the naturalness of existence, the cloth of life and of victory, as in a resurrection.



1- Paolo Uccello, *The battle of S. Romano*, 1435-1440, Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi



2- Sandro Botticelli, *Venus and Mars*, 1485-86, oil on wood, London, National Gallery



3 - Giacomo Manzù, *The Door of Peace and War*, 1965-69, bronze, Rotterdam, Cathedral of Saint Laurens

Therefore we could speak of weakness and power of art: weakness, considering its seeming irrelevance in the immediate determination of changes; power, considering the strength of dream and utopia, in motivating processes of transformation through memory and imagination, in spite of, or as provided by their un-reality. So, through an artwork the pain of the history of Gernika was given by Picasso to the awareness of humankind to become strength for the future; and also as a consequence and thanks to that strength, without any intention of celebration but of proposition, we met in the conference now.

The creation of an artwork itself can be considered figure of the process of nonviolent transformation of a conflict: as, by definition, in the theory of nonviolence a conflict can be an occasion of transformation of opposed parts, also in the composition of a work, we find contrasting elements and the building of an agreement with the research of points of contact and the sacrifice of individualities in a new unity, revealing a harmony, new meanings and semantic values, and the discovering of a new truth. And when also Orson Welles said that “without conflict there is no creativity”, he seemed sustaining the positive value of a way that, through the contradictions, lead to the artistic research. For him that meant, also through the open struggle with commercial interests of the majors and the traditional forms of Hollywood industries, a constant work of experimentation and of extraordinary renewal of the structures of cinema.

Also the nonviolent thought help us in understanding why arts must be considered a crucial element in the educative processes to reconciliation and in the pedagogy of a museum of peace. For Lanza del Vasto (1901-1981), philosopher of Nonviolence and founder of Community of Ark, “the integral formation of human person, without mutilations and disagreements” happens through aesthetic education; arts are “a voice of liberation for everybody, because rebuild the harmony of ‘i’”, “the spiritual unity” and the totality of being, and are experience of the truth that we are “an i with others”, “an i who contains all”, everyone and everything, in a “return to the evidence” that is a journey from the outside to the inside of the truth. Therefore, when he says the members of Ark that “the fest unify you more than the work”, establishing to live in the life of community music, dance and visual arts during the holiday celebration, Lanza emphasizes the constructive and reconciliative value of the artistic action. Through art, in fact, imagination –that “makes present a future aim” and a world “that is further the visibility”- “becomes representation”, where the contents are experienced as a liberating and transforming practice (*Ultimi dialoghi con Lanza del Vasto*).

In the museum of peace and memory therefore not only needs to collect accounts and data to be remembered, but to try and they are understood through mediation of art, the intensity of the aesthetic experience, and of imagination as faculty of knowledge and transformation. (And today technology and society of information are threatening imagination and memory, setting humanity in an alienating dimension of individual and community identities, in a new risk of death of art and of civilization. And even in the museums technologies and didactic tools –computers, audioguides, etc.- are favoured and preferred to the centrality of the aesthetic experience.)

But what kind of an aesthetic experience is possible in a museum of peace? That one of a journey from indifference to compassion, in a way that rehumanizes the conscience and recomposes the rifts of communities, of history, of ourselves through the meeting and the experience of life, pain, feelings, emotion of the other, both oppressed and oppressors. In *Regarding the Pain of Others* (2003) Susan Sontag wonders what is the meaning of those images. They can have different effects: indifference (for defence from pain or for overstimulation and visual saturation); frustration and passivity (we are not able to overcome the evil of the world); attraction (that can turn pornography, like according to me in the film *Passion* of Mel Gibson, where there is an aesthetic exploitation of violence); but also suffering and compassion. Therefore the issue is how to overcome impotence and passivity, using the ethic and moral strength of the images of the “pain of others”, how to wonder about the reasons of that pain, in order to understand for instance, says Sontag, “that the wealthiness of some, may entail the indigence of others” and “what is our relationship with power”. So, how to transform the emotion and compassion, moving from vision to action and using that “initial spark” that painful and moving shots may give? It is not a case that today the live broadcasted images of war are “covered”: of the conflict in Iraq, for instance, we didn’t see cities, inhabitants, suffering of people, but only soldiers and tanks, like in a videogames of war that put us out of the emotion, participation and awareness, that is instead the result of the aesthetic experience. I’m giving three examples. In *Tampoco*, an etching of 1810-1814 from the Goya cycle of *The Disasters of War* (4), chosen also for the cover of Sontag’s book, the horror for the hanging is focused on the detail of clothes slipped on the body, revealing the impotence of victim, and on the obtuseness of the soldier, retained into his indifference. Here the artist came in to redeem the brutality of event, arousing compassion for the victim, but also for the cruel humanity, will of redemption, and catharsis.



4- Francisco Goya, *Tampoco*, 1810-1814, etching, from *The Disasters of War*

Also *Ta'ziye* (2003), the first action of the film director Abbas Kiarostami, is an example of this “regarding the pain of others”, in a journey from indifference to compassion. The work relates to a traditional form of religious theatre of Islam, a rite of mourning and consolation through the redeeming sacrality of pain, similar to *Via Crucis of Christianity*. It tells the martyrdom of Hussein, nephew of Mohammed, during the siege of Karbala, sacred city for Islam, of children dying for hunger and thirst, singing and strewing flowers, among implorations of pity and horses gallop in the crowded circle closed by warriors. And while Hussein is fighting, Archangel Gabriel appears asking him to renounce to fight, accepting martyrdom for love of God: here too we face a pain without answer that is sublimed in compassion and nonviolence. In the Kiarostami version, an installation of cinema and theatre where public and his reaction are part of the fiction, the tale of pain lives again through the fiction in the middle of the stage, but is not limited to the theatre representation: at one side are showed on a big screen the faces of



Iranian spectators, women and men, with their sentiments, emotions and tears, filmed during a record performance of the same show in Iran, while in front the western audience watch the action, too involved in pain and pity, united in finding a common humanity with the Islamic audience, even if in the diversity of reactions (5-6-7). The war in Iraq was just broken out when the show was presented in Italy, and after in New York, and in the so-called climate of “clash of civilizations” the awareness to live an extraordinary experience of unity with the Middle-Eastern spectators grewed in the audiences. For Kiarostami, infact, art is a way to change and transform reality together with the audience through imagination and fiction and in the equal relationship between the director and his public, originating a very interactive communication, where conflict is used in a creative way as part of an inclusive dynamic and an “uncompleted cinema... is finished by the creative spirit of audience”: “If art is able to change things and to propose new ideas, it happens only through the free creativity of...the audience...Art permits to not accept the imposed truths...Art gives to every artist and his spectator the possibility to perceive better the hidden truth behind the pain and passion that common human beings suffer every day”(Kiarostami).



5,6,7 - Abbas Kiarostami, *Ta'ziye*, 2003

Third example, the installation *Lines of violation. Comfort women survivors* (1998) (8), realized by Jonathan Sisson (IFOR representative at United Nations) and Andrew Ward, and supported by the Women Peacemakers Program (WPP) of IFOR in the framework of the campaign at the Geneva UN High Commission for Human Rights for the compensation of the women -from Japan, China, Taiwan, Indonesia, Korea, Burma, Pacific Islands- victims of sexual slavery by the Japanese military in the World War II. It is the result of a participative artistic project, with interviews to 52 survivors, at that time girls or jung married women with children, still waiting for a moral and material compensation. From a curved plexiglass with the outstretched drawings of the hands of women, and a central column of light, you can hear voices (that suggest their presence) telling their stories of violation, but also the experiences of women that are trying to rebuild their dignity. It is an interactive work of strong emotional resonance focused on the meaning of memory and story-telling as a liberating practice that made the victims participant capable to overcome the silence and the self-imposed taboo that render unable to change, transforming the trauma of violence in forgiveness and building of hope. Presented in 1999 to The Hague Appeal for Peace Conference, the artwork has travelled in Europe, Asia, Africa, USA, and showed at the museums of Manila, Cape Town and Durban during the World Conference against Racism, Philadelphia.



8- Jonathan Sisson, Andrew Ward, *Lines of violation. Comfort women survivors*, 1998, installation

Among the examples of participatory art experiences, i like to mention also *Spirit figures: passages of peace in the plaza of fire and light*, the act of William Kelly that opened our conference. It started an empathic communication between we as participants and the inhabitants of Gernika, who were assisting beyond the delimited fence, and spontaneously took part in this performance conceived to receive and spread light and inspiration, creating moments of deep emotion.

If in the '70 Danilo Dolci suggested the educative places as the area where “to try out and check with care the nonviolent action in a still few explored sector”, today we can think museums of peace as the contexts where to adopt nonviolent pedagogic methodologies and cultural means, with curatorial practices based on a participatory and shared planning, Without the imposition and the transmission of models and elaborations and monodirectional ways that cause methodologic violence, cultural and technological oppression and not culture as a “practice of freedom”(Freire). A museum of peace designed as a creative and maieutic structure will born from the work of listening and expression of history, needs and interests of the involved communities, with their participation also in the architectural and display project, and curatorial dynamics mediated by creative nonviolent group in order to build knowledge, awareness, and the humanization of cultural processes. Operating also for the defence of identities, using specific traditional elements of forgiveness and reconciliation. In a social reconciliation through the inclusion of minorities and victims with the restitution of their inexpressed or violated

energies and potentialities: not a museum for weak and oppressed, but with; giving the inexpressed or repressed victim the occasion to express his creativity, and where memory is act of transforming reflection, in a permanent liberation, as in Paulo Freire pedagogy. And using the ability to dream and imagine and the collective utopia as a process of construction of future (Galtung), according also to the very concept of “culture of aspiration” elaborated at UNESCO in the framework of promotion of cultural diversity, where capacity to aspire is “a pre-condition for other capacities” and “the key for the human sustainable development” through those “dimensions of energies, creativity and solidarity... the help human being to participate in designing their future” (*Universal Declaration on Cultural Diversity, A conceptual platform*).

At the half of the “Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the children of the world (2001-2010)” proclaimed by the United Nations (9), besides, museums of peace can share a common strategy in order to achieve some goals:



9- Ileana Alparone, *The war and the peace*, 2003, pastel and china on paper (detail), a contribution to the UN “Decade for a Culture of Peace and Nonviolence for the Children of the World 2001-2010”

- A campaign against visual violence and visual education to violence, against his normalization and his aesthetic exploitation in mass media and in the production of cultural industry; and promotion of the very concept of “culture of peace” as “a set of values, attitudes, traditions and modes of behaviour and ways of life” (as in the UN resolution).
- Participation to the lobby for the introduction of teaching of nonviolence and human rights in the national curricula of the Member States of UN/UNESCO who proclaimed the Decade, with an international agreement at the end of 2010.
- Support to the creation of Nonviolent Peace Forces in conflict areas.
- Promotion of the 21 September as “International Day for Peace” under the auspices of UN/UNESCO, with related public events (concerts, films, readings, etc.) in museums of peace and museum, cultural, educative institutions and organizations linked in partnership, with the aim to spread these goals at a wider level, and with the involvement of artists, personalities of the world of culture, cinema, sport, education, sciences.

In the prefation of 1966 to *Eros and Civilization* Herbert Marcuse wished for the “diffusion of a not controlled and not manipulated knowledge, of awareness and expecially of the refusal to work for the production of material and intellectual tools that today are used against humankind”, in a sort of intellectual and cultural consciencius objection, and spoke about the aesthetic dimension as source of liberation from the repression of technology and the dehumanization of violence. A way to believe, as Dostoevskij said, that “the Beauty will save the world”.

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