

Higher Arts Education today: a major issue

Teaching in Higher Arts Education, as it is at work in the unique model of the art school, is a major issue for today's society. It finds itself located at the intersection of three major currents, which inform both our present time and the times to come.

1. The growing importance of the image, and the sensitive on a wider scale, in contemporary society

It has become commonplace to highlight it: the image and its growing importance in our society. In print, its multiplication on screens, deployed through advertising, the media, cinema and video games, the image shapes our environment and has supplanted writing in our relationship to culture and knowledge. It is the same for sound, and on a wider scale, in every domain of the sensitive, whose importance increases at the same rate that Man develops the tools which allows its shaping and distribution, as is borne witness as much by the development of sensorial design as equipment and devices of simulation.

However, the national educational system is quite behind the times with regards to this evolution. Visual culture is no longer the object of a specific teaching, and the visual arts, both as practice and object of study, are largely underrepresented in primary and higher education, and it is often through personnel and conceptual tools emanating from literary studies that one studies the image. In a wider sense, the sensitive is diminished in an educational system which is modeled entirely on the primacy of the intelligible.

Provided by art and design professionals, teaching, in the context of an art school, places the visual and the sensitive, their knowledge as well as their practice, at the heart of the process. The analysis of the image is perhaps made using tools inherited from the linguistic shift in the humanities, but it is not to be reduced to this. Provided by artists and designers, the teaching of the image, but also that of sound, is inseparable from its practice and its technical aspect. Integrating advances in visual culture, the image is apprehended in all of its historical, social, political and anthropological dimensions.

This visual and sensitive intelligence, particular to art schools, is even more convincing when speaking of research. Bringing together artists, designers and theoreticians, art schools have already proved themselves and their capacity to produce in the domains of original knowledge through the mobilization of innovative teams and methods.

2. The growing importance attributed by the financial sector and more widely by society, to the values and processes emanating from the art world.

There is here the spirit of our times that Boltanski and Chiapello called "the new spirit of capitalism", that has also been qualified as cognitive or aesthetic. It tends to absorb the values and processes of the art world and to make of its creativity its principal source of creation and added value. It is notably characterized by the following operations:

- privileging functioning in a "project" mode and networked organization,
- valuing imagination, freedom, experimentation, independence and learning through experience,
- abolishing the distances and the boundary between work and non-work, by means of devices , empowering agents and the management of personal investment (1)

This movement, so essential to today's world, which relies on a parallel between artistic and entrepreneurial logics, began in the sixties and seventies. It finds its origin, or at the very least one of its more exemplary incarnations, in the interest shown by Phillip Morris for the legendary 1969 Harald Szeeman exhibition, "When attitudes becomes form : live in your head (Works – Concepts – Processes – Situations – Information)". Phillip Morris Europe, a sponsor of the exhibition, expressed in the following terms, taken from the exhibition catalogue, the comparison between artist and entrepreneur : "As the artist is engaged in improving his interpretations and conceptions, the commercial entity looks [...] to improve its services and products, by experimenting with new methods and new materials. [...] As businessmen living in our world of today, we are called upon to support "the new" and "the experimental" everywhere it is to be found." 2

3. The importance of notions of independence, of the project and of professionalization in the field of training

As creativity and innovation have now become primary economic and social levers, an entire segment of the training sector has come to focus its, not entirely disinterested, attention on art schools and their system of teaching based on practice, experimentation and personal projects. Aware of the potential contained in such a situation, art schools themselves intend to benefit from this historic opportunity to contribute to the invention of new forms of practices and new models, approaching this opportunity from their own unique position and their specific nature, that of art, creation and culture.

For the dissemination of these practices and models, art schools can rely on the "removal of barriers between higher education and artistic and cultural education", today at work, and to which a previous minister recently referred when expressing his "wish [...] that the centers of higher education and research open wide their doors to art schools and establishments under the supervision of the Minister for Culture. They have their place, including in the centers and campuses dedicated to scientific studies, like Saclay: this will allow us to open up new horizons and new perspectives for all of our students, on a cultural level of course, but also from the point of view of training. (2)"

The interest of art schools in the training plan is bound to a fundamental characteristic, which allows one to highlight their specific nature within the context of higher education: it is that, when compared to the University, the finality of the teaching which is provided is not to be found in the acquisition of knowledge but in the apprenticeship of knowledge, not in relationship to an object but in the development of the capacities of the subject (3), to put it more precisely, in the development of the capacity of the subject to produce itself.

It is for this reason that art schools, far from lagging behind, are at the forefront when it comes to the professionalization of their students: they have a firm grip on the current mutations that society and the economy are undergoing, which induces a drive towards the indexation of what economists call employability, not so much linked to a level of knowledge and the ability to occupy a pre-existing function but more a mastery of knowledge and the ability to invent one's own employment.

The inquiry launched by the Minister for Culture in 2006, and regularly updated by the office of the General Secretary, is eloquent in this respect as it shows the success enjoyed by higher education art schools in the domain of professionalization and states that 80% of art school graduates find a job in connection with their discipline within three years of leaving school. While 10% become artists, the remaining 90% exercise and make their living from an activity having a direct link to creation. Web designer, Graphic designer, photographer, iconographer, Head of production, Stage manager, Director, Designer, Curator and Art Director are some examples of the professions that they practice. They are also to be found at the heart of local cultural structures in positions of administration,

management and implementation of local policies in the domain of visual arts. In a number of regions, they are the driving force behind important artistic projects: festivals, residencies and exhibition spaces for example. In this way they have made a strong contribution to the professionalization of the visual arts sector throughout the last twenty years.

Furthermore, the diversity of experience and contexts encountered during their training teaches the students to be particularly mobile. Building paths which are not necessarily linear, they often invent trajectories which are nourished by many different and complementary activities, maintained in parallel (art critic, curator, micro press publisher, president of a collective).

The multiplication over the last few years of the modules and systems encouraging professionalization at the heart of curricula and establishments has tended to further reinforce the quality of positions taken on entering the world of work.

The ability of artists and, in a wider sense, art graduates, to invent their own economy and to create networks in a world of networks, is brilliantly illustrated in art collectives such as Artists Run Spaces, collectives which have emerged quite all over the globe (Castillo Corales in Paris, Irma Vep in Reims, Centro Capacete in Rio de Janeiro, Cage in New York, etc...). These are structures which allow artists to organize and control, through the use of collaborative technologies and devices, their production, distribution, commentary, international circulation etc. Existing on the margins of large institutions, these smaller independent structures highlight the power of artists today to intervene in the domains of technology, economy, society and organization. They also show how creative logics are susceptible to nourishing social and economic dynamics and how they contribute to the emergence of new environments, new tools and new forms of citizenship.

Thus the time has come to be conscious that the forces of social transformation are present in art schools, establishments which ask only to be a contributing force in the elaboration of an ever more open world, one in which creation, art and culture are shared values.

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1. Concerning these questions, see Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Verso, 2007; Yann Moulier Boutang, *Cognitive Capitalism*, Polity Press, 2012 ; Olivier Assouly, *Le capitalisme esthétique*, Le Cerf, 2008 ; Pierre-Michel Menger, *Portrait de l'artiste en travailleur. Métamorphoses du capitalisme*, Le Seuil, 2003 and *Le travail créateur. S'accomplir dans l'incertain*, Gallimard/Le Seuil, 2009.

2. Speech made by Valérie Pécresse, October 5th 2010, at Avignon, on the occasion of the publication of the report entitled « Culture et université » (Culture and the University).

3. This distinction, typical in hermeneutics was developed notably by the philosopher André Gorz in *The Immaterial*, University of Chicago Press, 2010.