


APATHEIA AND TRANSGRESSION IN VISUAL ARTS: CULTURAL IMPLICATIONS

 <https://doi.org/10.56238/rcsv15n2-006>

Date of submission: 14/01/2025

Date of approval: 14/02/2025

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ABSTRACT

The concept of transgression, referring to disobedience to the law, has gradually extended until including all types of deviation from correct or communally accepted behaviours; with time, it has expanded as any breaking of individual or collective limits. In fact, etymologically, to transgress means to “go beyond”, “pass”, although it should be established that its connotations have always been negative: illegal, prohibited, and licentious. (Julius, 2003)

Within the implications of transgression there are four primordial senses: denial of truths conceived as doctrines; violation of beliefs, conditions, or censured or labelled situations such as taboos; offences against people, either against them physically, their property or their engagement, and exclusion of physical or conceptual limits; within the latter, there are anarchic conditions, not so much in the political sense as in the condition of disconcerting or incoherent attitudes.

Paul Valéry, in his text on the principles of anarchy, speaks of the littleness that an individual can reach as he self-destructs as a person under the pressure of joining and binding to society’s needs, conventions and obligations, generating for himself effects of hypocrisy, stupidity, and rapine around the limited demonstrations of acceptance of thought and expression of sensitivity.

Keywords: Art. Transgression. Apatheia. Visuality. Culture

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INTRODUCTION

In art, the intellect and its abstract ways, not exempt from the mentioned phenomena and opposed to sensitivity, have proceeded contrary to it, contributing the support of thought to the different aesthetics that, considering art as a problem of knowledge, have attempted to reduce it to models that lie in stereotypes and come from conventionalisms derived from institutionalism, also contributing empty proposals with the scarce funds that culture tends to receive in the niche of courting styles derived from neoliberal and pseudo liberal ideologies. (Valéry, 2018, pp. 199.100)

Rilke already warned that in these games where human beings who blindly abuse what they have seen and reject by principle what they have never experienced are distracted among the masses disarticulating them, fragmenting and decontextualizing any possibility of an opening to the result of valid expressive arguments, hides the capacity to comprehend the creative spirit that does not choose nor scorns any existing thing. (Rilke, 2017, pp. 45-52)

Among the ancient Greek, *catharsis* meant inner transformation incited by a deep, vital experience that allowed to spontaneously expel from the conscience all that is harmful. The explanation that Jauss (2002) carried out from the aesthetics point of view of this characterization within the spectrum of interaction that corresponds to the three visual arts, supposes the reflection of the perceiving conscience and its liberation to achieve individual action.

Kandinsky acknowledged that setting aside completely rigid, strict and closed forms allowed stepping towards freedom of the spirit that is in charge of all that is spontaneous and indeterminate. (Juanes, 2010, pp. 14-17) Thus, the artist recites the directions that block the access of this intimate character into the *praxis* of art: conforming with the coarse presence of things, previous materializations of ideas that are already stagnant, depending on routines from daily life, confusing the quantitative with the qualitative, subordinating oneself to efficacy and tools as dominions of man over nature, and thus the transcendence of space and time is found, materializing that which is sensitive; what is visible and what is not visible are, metaphorically, mirrors of identity that flow formally and remain fixed as aspects and manners of knowledge in which personal and social expressive experiences converge.

DEVELOPMENT

The transgression of precepts and rules is a different gesture, an alternative to participating in the game against stereotypes, against static things, against what is considered definitely explained. In his theory of multiple intelligences, Dr. Howard Gardner, director of Project Zero at Harvard University, maintains that at least 10 types of intelligence are completely identified, among which he recites spatial intelligence, naturalist intelligence and spiritual intelligence; the importance of their effect on contemporary pedagogic proposals lies in that it is acknowledged that not everyone has the same type of mind, and education is strengthened and achieves alternative thoughts and creations if these differences are considered instead of being denied or ignored.

These practices are not alien to the condition of the human being who has evolved through relationships of transgression against nature, fining himself in each act of loss or rupture. The canon, the prescription, frames and dominates transgression under different error signs. The transgressive spirit does not attack rules, it simply follows a different path, a path that is his own, which he considers based on a marginal argumentation that sustains it. The process is of estrangement because the worldview is expanded going beyond other processes, such as the exhaustion of forms or the amplification of the technical vision, that tend to transform the artist into an academic, or just another artist, standardized and undifferentiated. The estrangement is manifested as confrontation with the imagination, the forms and the environment “in order to intervene appropriately, contributing to the inhibition” (Silva, 2024, p. 970) of all the prejudice forms.

When meanings are not renewed, they stiffen, moving away from their original sense and become generalized cancelling the marks that made them extraordinary. Epictetus argued that freedom is established in the capacity to control one’s own passions so as not to succumb to life’s misfortunes, proposing self-control and self-submission, this way achieving *apatheia* or insensibility; everything indicates that slavery motivated in Epictetus stoicism as a form of relief, and at the same time, conformism. When sense and transgression do not return to their first phase, they are in danger of this insensitivity, of adhering to behaviours that are established without comprehension and to obeying any order whatsoever. Hannah Arendt affirmed that the only way of fighting conformism and indifference is through thought, which, emulating Penélope, is weaved and unweaved until intervening with the world.

Transgressive art is *critical* and reduces all the thoughtless manifestations that want to be dominated in the same manner; as all thought, it is born out of experience, but it only

brings together its sense through thought; by thinking, we search for the sense of things starting with the *opening* and it is made evident in the presence and manifestation of the ordinary world, it is a projection and, therefore, a prevision, and anybody who seeks to understand something about the world in order to reinterpret it through art has to be willing to, in principle, let the world speak to him/her.

The departure from equilibrium holds surprises for us. We realise that we cannot continue what we have learned in a state of equilibrium. We discover new situations, sometimes more organised than when there is equilibrium: these are what I call bifurcation points, solutions to non-linear equations. A non-linear equation often admits several solutions: equilibrium or proximity to equilibrium constitutes a solution to that equation, but it is not the only solution. (Prigogine, 2016, p. 3)

Visual arts, in particular, turn into alternatives of knowledge and forms of reasoning in which transgression predominates as a result of questioning and a refutation of rules and commonly accepted conventions. Gombrich (1999) exemplifies this with the case of Thomas Gainsborough's challenging of the formulas of Reynolds, who has taught his pupils of the *Royal Academy* that blue should never be placed in the foreground: *The Blue Boy*, in 1770, was a demonstration that these principles had no substance or academic validity.

Stylistics have shown the transgression capacity, understood as the overstepping of established limits, Kooning said "once in a while, a painter must destroy the painting," Cézanne and Picasso did it. Art dies to be born again.

But this does not mean that everything is possible and at all times, a limit must not be confused with a horizon. Anthony Julius proposes a taxonomy of transgression, warning that none of the categories is purist, actually, there are mixtures of the following levels of transgression:

- *innovative*, in which art limits cross each other providing different rules.
- *interrogative*, which is reflexive and emerges from curiosity, raising and answering questions, playing with the rules.
- *subversive*, which adds premises, redefines categories and attributes and instead of works proposes perturbing interventions.
- *detractive*, which infringes or breaks prohibitions or taboos.
- *altering*, which interrupts or violates the nature state of things.
- *associative*, which shows the links between the artistic and the political.
- *antiartistic or self-destructive*, formed by all the postures that look for the annihilation of art; *ironic*, originating in reflections on the difference between art and not art.

- *ephemeral*, which condemns the commercialization and merchandizing of art in the creation of temporary, non-objectual works, and *aversive*, which imposes itself on social forms preserved in the spheres of the intimate, the identity, and the scrupulous. (Julius, 2003, pp. 100-185).

Another category must be added to this taxonomy: *open cultural strategy*, in which conventions are substituted by the search for all that is possible, in the abandonment of rules and academic canons. Therefore, artistic drawing is referred to, as the most important transgression, because it breaks, filters and purifies the laws of nature based on phenomenological transitions. Rafael, Tintoretto and Rembrandt are some examples of transgressors of the canons of perspective.

CONCLUSION

In the history of ideas, drawing means the first transgressive action because it *represents* nature and intervenes in its conception, as a determinant proof of the human's capacity to free himself in spite of any vicissitude. Before expressing himself in writing, the human being did it through drawing, sculpture and music. (Gómez Molina, J. J.; Cabezas, L.; Bordes, J., 2005) Evolution-wise, the parts of the brain where feelings and emotions are located are developed before the area of rational functions. Feelings and emotions lack internal propositional structure and are therefore capable of going too far. This original transgression is liberating because it does not offend or imply hostility, it does not cause contempt, it only constitutes a set of traces of moods, of ways of being, of intentions by form and losses in time. It is interpreted as a provoking praxis in times in which there were more important needs to solve and, instead of that, humans give way to the irresistible impulse of overstepping the limits of indispensable social practices, they go beyond shelter, food, protection and survival.

We are familiar with a set of practices, generally known by the term inverted or reversed perspective, and sometimes by the term distorted or false perspective. But inverted perspective does not exhaust the diversity of the particularities of the utility of drawing and chiaroscuro in icons. One of the most widespread practices of inverted perspective is the representation of multiple centres: in these cases the drawing behaves as if the eye were changing position to observe different parts of the same object [...] the school rules of perspective are challenged with such force and courage, the perpetuated transgression is so underlined, that the icon reveals to the intuition of artistic taste so much of its nature, purity and pictorial values that there is no doubt: those "incorrect" and mutually contradictory details of the drawing actually represent a complex artistic calculation, which could perhaps be called bold, but certainly not naive. (Florenski, 2006, p. 25)

Artistic drawing as an *open cultural strategy* determines the coexistence of different meanings whose limits are neither imposed nor predisposed, it is a manner of expression of man situated in the world using elements as symbols to bring the notion of totality, “this instantaneity constitutes its highest peculiarity by offering us a condensation of time and space” (Pellegrini, 1965, p. 14), therefore, it is displayed as an interpretation of the world in which a manner of projection of the human being toward others is formed, as Kandinsky affirmed, by drawing, we create worlds giving way to what is yet to be, revealing what has been reserved, going beyond established conventions with expressions that cannot be explained with words, because the convergence of three circumstantial states is achieved: the self of the being, the self of the context, and the self of visual arts.

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