

Appendix: Case-study from the website *Books of Art*. Description and analysis of the class held at L. E. institute of Higher Education in Cremona, involving two classes of students in their second year of studies.

Overview

At this stage of my research I have conducted a pilot study involving 36 students 15-16 y/o attending the second year of study at L. E. high-school in Cremona. Students belong to two different classes: the first class considered (19 students, minus 1 absent) follows the tourist and hospitality address, whereas the second one (20 students, minus 2 absents) specialise in social and healthcare. I held a two-hours class in which I introduced the website and its purposes to students, and used it to explore four selected poems.

This could also be proposed to other schools (by including primary and secondary level too) in order to gather data from students with different background and group-age.

During the class I introduce the subject and the website to students. First, I enable them to reflect on the broad sense of art by proposing examples they are familiar with, such as cinema and music. Then I increase their level of involvement by asking them to "act" a poem, guiding them in the process.

Finally I propose them four selected poems and their related artworks to provide an objective and subjective description. The former refers to formal qualities of paintings and poems, related textual and contextual information in the sense of historical context, understanding of meaning, analysis of linguistic and stylistic aspects (eg paraphrases, figures of speech and style) and identification of the imaginary expressed. The latter refers to participants experience, emotions and feelings.

Through a written structured interview students are asked to indicate their aesthetic and emotional experience, and to evaluate it in their own terms by considering the following questions.

- What work did you prefer? How would you describe the poem and the artwork in terms of aesthetic quality (e.g. surprising, beautiful, boring, ugly, technically advanced, difficult to understand, complex, etc)? What kind of emotions do they convey (joy, peace, freedom, anxiety, sadness, fear, anger, love, etc.)? What kind of reflection do they stimulate? How would you describe the relationship between poem and artwork? To what extent does the artwork represent the poem and facilitate its reading?
- In your opinion, does the website provide an effective way of learning? Have you gained new learning by using the website? Has the website inspired you to look for more information, read new books, visit art exhibitions, etc.?
- How would you rate the website in terms of design, accuracy, accessibility, selection of poems and artworks, engagement, effectiveness and tools? What would you change about the website and the overall experience?

Learning outcomes are seen in terms of:

- knowledge and understanding of the poems and paintings considered, and of the important role that culture plays in our society
- improvement of skills: participants will be better able to critically read poems and understand artworks, and use online information to learn from them by adopting an interdisciplinary perspective
- enjoyment and creativity: students will enjoy some scholastic subjects in a different light and be inspired to read and visit museums or galleries

To evaluate the study I refer to the data collected from the interviews and to observational notes taken during the class, such as level engagement and participation. The analysis shows some pervasive themes. Overall, students' experience was multidimensional and focused on particular moments, such as the reactions of their classmates and some information learned. They all recognise the use of technology as helpful in raising their interest. They have difficulty in expressing the feelings raised by the poems. Their emotions influence the overall experience and the meaning given to the work. Therefore, the learning experience reveals itself as a relationship between the students' interpretation of the work, knowledge gained, their feelings and external factors.

Description of the class

Conventionally, cinema was born in 1895 thanks to the work of the Lumiere brothers, and it is defined as the seventh art. Technically, it is based on the illusion of movement given by the flow of static images, which are however perceived as a moving sequence. The term derives from the Greek *kinema*, which means movement. As it can reach a high number of people, cinema is the first truly popular art. It has its own unique and autonomous language, which however refers to the pictorial and theatrical language.

Following the question *What are the characteristics of the cinema?* and using some videos students have written the key concepts emerged on the blackboard.

At this point I propose a reflection on the relationship between acting, poetry and music through the poem by Mayakovsky *To the beloved myself* [sung by a rock band](#), [recited by Carmelo Bene](#) and [within my interpretation](#).

[Vladimir Majakovskij \(1893-1930\)](#) was a poet, playwright, actor and Russian artist, singer of the October Revolution (1917) and interpreter of the futurist avant-garde. He is considered the poet of the Revolution, aligned to the Soviet regime; he committed suicide in 1930.

The painting: Franz von Stuck, *The hell*, 1908. Oil on canvas, (128.9 × 209.6 cm). Franz von Stuck (1863-1928) was a symbolist painter, and created enigmatic artworks. This painting offers a vision of hell and its damned, picturing an eternal torment. A frightened woman, apparently sick, stands stiffly between the head of a demon and three muscular figures sitting in agony. On the right a large, threatening and hissing snake wildly wraps and crushes two victims. Stuck represents a distressing and grotesque scene.

Based on the videos seen and the reflections emerged, I ask the class to act the poem [A remorse by Gozzano](#). Students are guided in identifying characters and scenarios, choosing roles and mastering their expressiveness, in order to interpret the poem.

[Guido Gozzano \(1883-1916\)](#) was an Italian poet associated with crepuscularism. Here it emerges the cynical smile of the poet, who wants to break his relationship with a woman merely described as a poor blonde thing, and compared to a famous starlette. The woman, who deeply loves him, begs him not to leave her and not to treat her with such detachment, but the poet is already emotionless.

The painting: Louis Abel-Truchet, *Elegants wandering in Paris*, 1915. Oil on canvas. Louis Abel-Truchet (1857-1918) was a French painter, mainly known for his paintings of elegant young Parisian women, landscapes of the city and scenes depicting everyday life in Paris.

Subsequently, I propose to the class the analysis of four selected poems:

Salvatore Quasimodo (1901-1968) was an Italian poet exponent of Hermeticism. He contributed to the translation of several Greek lyrics. *And suddenly it's evening*, part of the homonym collection published in 1942, briefly addresses the issue of the existential condition of solitude and precariousness of life. In fact, the text appears as a motto about an eternal truth, following the hermetic tradition of essentiality and conciseness of words.

The verses are free and based on a careful rhythmicity, also given by numerous alliterations. Quasimodo underlines the condition of existential solitude and tragic incommunicability of humankind, closed in a situation of tragic incommunicability. Every man considers himself to be the center of the world (the metaphor of the *heart of the earth*), but then understands he is just a stranger to it. The ray of sunshine metaphorically represents life and hope, which turns out to be a painful illusion as happiness is short and constantly and suddenly disappears with the evening (*and suddenly it's evening*). The night contrasts with the sunlight as life/death, because darkness plunges man into anguish. Life is an oscillation between pain and hope for happiness.

The painting: George Inness, *Sunset at Etretat*, 1875. Oil on canvas (30x20).

George Inness (1825-1894) was an American painter famous for his landscapes, who died after contemplating a sunset. Inness is considered a figure of transition as it is influenced by the Hudson River and Barbizon School, impressionism and tonalism. He combines earthly and ethereal elements to present the reality of the invisible, by juxtaposing colors, lights and shadows of blurred elements with clear details. In this late canvas the painter depicts the French landscape of Etretat, a very popular subject among the artists of the time. Inness tonally portrays the sunset of this green landscape, with a glimpse on sea. The scene communicates beauty and power of nature. A small figure sitting on the grass increases the sublime impact of the painting.

[Vincenzo Cardarelli \(1887-1959\)](#) was an Italian poet, writer and journalist. Cardarelli's poetic experience straddles the avant-garde and the restoration, as revealed by the two opposite tendencies of his poetics: a transgressive drive and a desire for self-control, which prevails in terms of formal, reasoning and detached composure, with avant-garde elements like linguistic expressionism and fragmentism. His privileged topics are love, travel, adolescence and loss of identity. [The poem *Portrait*](#) well represents his poetry: formal and balanced stylism, noble vocabulary, sentimentally ambiguous.

The verses are free and have a soft rhythm, revealed in the description of the woman's face, which is the subject of poetry. The poem depicts the themes of the woman's face (illustrated by the terms *mouth, face of angelo, teeth, smile*), of light and color, (*clear, pale, pearl, glaring, light event*), and of the mystery (*ambiguous, doubtful, unspeakable*).

Cardarelli uses several figures of speech, including enumeration, anaphora (*exists*), analogy (*sculpted mouth, event of light*), metaphor (*pearl teeth*) and oxymoron (*clear, ambiguous; opulent, pale*). The language is simple but full of suggestive images which depict an angelic and luminous face.

The painting: Jan Vermeer, *Girl with a pearl earring*, 1666. Oil on canvas (44.5 × 39 cm), The Hague.

Jan Vermeer (1632- 1675) was a Dutch Golden Age painter. The painting portrays a half-length young girl, on a dark background; light comes from the left. The girl wears an unusual turban made of a blue band, but the absence of iconographic attributes prevents a real identification. Pearls at the time were very rare and precious, therefore she should belong to a high social class. However, according to some scholars, this kind of pearl does not exist in nature, so it would be jewelry made of glass. The girl shows a mysterious but innocent expression: her red lips are parted, the nose is thin and straight and eyes are big and vivid, whose light recalls the earring.

[Primo Levi \(1919-1987\)](#) is mainly remembered for being a partisan and a writer. In 1943 he was arrested and deported to the concentration camp of Auschwitz. He managed to escape from the lager and adventurously returned to Italy. His most famous novel, *If this is a man*, tells the terrible atrocities seen and suffered. He adheres to Neorealism, which developed towards the end of 1930 and proposed social topics through a simple and popular language. The privileged themes are war, social struggles and the life of humble classes.

[July 12, 1980 is a love poem](#) written for the birthday of his wife, Lucia Morpurgo. The rhythm has merry-like movements in a dry, synthetic and colloquial narrative. He uses dialogical elements and directly addresses to his beloved. He often shows his sardonic smile (*a few scurrous verses*) and there are some figures of speech eg. anaphora (*be patient*), climax (*minced, macerated, skinned*), litotes (*no more time to live alone*) and oxymoron (*patience, my impatient woman*).

The painting: Marc Chagall, *Birthday*, 1915. Oil on cardboard (81x100 cm), MoMA.

Marc Chagall (1887-1985) was a Russian-French artist of Jewish origin. In the contemporary art scene Chagall remains unique, not compatible with particular artistic currents: it is inserted among the artistic avant-gardes, Surrealism, Expressionism, Fauvism and Cubism. His images are decomposed in a dreamlike and fantastic way, out of the rules of traditional perspective, in a magical and childlike vision that gives emphasis to color. This artwork was painted on the day of his twenty-eighth birthday. His wife Bella Rosenfeld was coming home with flowers to celebrate it; he suddenly stops painting, silently kisses her and whispers: "Heaven is calling us". The painting portrays this exact moment. A man lifts up to reach and kiss his surprised beloved; both are suspended in the air, tied by the kiss. The floor is red and a brightly colored blanket on the bed stands out. The room has white walls and curtains; on the table there are a purse, a knife cutting a cake and other everyday objects.

[Charles Baudelaire \(1821-1867\)](#) is considered one of the most important poets of the nineteenth century: key exponent of symbolism, anticipator of decadentism, leads to the birth of the so-called modern poetry and his work *Flowers of Evil* is considered a classic of world literature. Although inspired by Romantic feelings he was able to express them in a new symbolic form. Among the many, Baudelaire directly influences the so-called damned poets (such as Verlaine and Rimbaud) and Italian Scapigliatura. His poetics privileges sensitivity, irrationality and melancholy, and emphasizes an ideal, imaginary and oniric world in which to escape, since the real one is horrible and frightening. Evil is the base for life and poetry. The poet is like a prophet who discovers hidden and mysterious correspondences, but also rationally builds a technical and mathematical verse, clear and pure. The poet is transgressive and damned because he dominates the world of fantasy but is not able to live in the real world; so he is misunderstood and despised by men. The main themes are the anxious search for the ideal, the escape from the monotonous and normal life in the imaginary, human contradictions and vices represented in the feverish city. The term modernity, coined by Baudelaire, referred to the fugacity of life in the city and the particularity of the modern artist, who captures the decadence of the humanity in the metropolis but also a new mysterious kind of beauty.

In [*The laments of an Icarus*](#) Baudelaire evokes the pain of Icarus; the use of the indefinite article in the title allows the reader and the author to identify themselves with Icarus, personally interpreting the myth.

Icarus symbolizes the sin of *hýbris*, or arrogance. To escape from the labyrinth they had built and in which they had been imprisoned, Daedalus and his son Icarus built wings with feathers and attached them with wax. Despite the warnings of his father, Icarus flew too close to the sun; the heat melted the wax, causing him to fall into the sea, where he died.

Baudelaire immediately remarks the opposition between himself and the world (*as for me*); he surrenders to the forbidden desire of lust and shows the consequences of

disobedience as in the story of Icarus: wings will break and he will fall into the sea, without the appreciation of posterity. In fact, the final verses express the sacrifices he makes for a humanity that despises him. The poet utilizes words referring to fire and sky. There are various figures of speech such as metaphor, synaesthesia and synecdoche and simile.

The painting: H. J. Draper, *The Lament for Icarus*, 1898. Oil on canvas (180x150), Tate Britain.

Herbert James Draper (1863-1920) was an English painter, exponent of Classicism and influenced by the Pre-Raphaelites. This painting shows the main themes of the artist: mythology and female portraits. Icarus lies under the nymphs, his wings spread to represent a heroic and majestic end; his body is still intact despite the fall, and the painter emphasizes its beauty in a refined way.

[The painting associated with a fragment of the poem](#): C. Saraceni, *Fall of Icarus*, 1608. Oil on copper (34x54), Museo di Capodimonte.

Carlo Saraceni (1585-1625) was a Venetian painter exponent of the Baroque. This artwork is part of a series of three paintings dedicated to the myth of Icarus. The scene takes place in a seascape: Daedalus is flying forward and turns, seeing Icaro falling while losing his feathers and watching the wax melting down; lower left, two figures in seventeenth-century clothes observe it in astonishment.

Finally, I ask students to reflect on the concept of art.

In its broadest meaning, art refers to creative activities capable of generating emotions and ideas. Such activities based on technique, talent and experience. Art is a language but, as it uses different means and tools, there is no a unique artistic language. Art can represent historical, social, cultural or religious themes.

Etymologically the term derives from the Greek τέχνη, which means technique as the

ability to materially produce something, so it also included craftsmanship. As inspired by the Muses, poetry was considered superior to art.

Arts were later classified into vulgar and liberal, respectively involving physical and intellectual effort. Sculpture and painting are then excluded by vulgar arts, which became subordinated to the liberal arts.

Depending on the classifications, arts are considered seven or ten, to which all the others- called minor arts- are connected. They can also be grouped into visual and performative arts. Visual arts include Painting, Sculpture, Architecture and Poetry, while performative arts include Music, Dance, Theater and Cinema.

Painting consists in applying pigments into a support such as paper, canvas, wood, wall, etc., in order to represent images. Colors can be applied with different techniques and means, also depending on the kind of surface used.

Poetry, on the other hand, consists in choosing and juxtaposing words according to particular metrical laws and means of rhetoric and syntax. Poetry conveys sound and meaning, and communicates concepts and emotions in an evocative and creative way.

The discipline addresses the study of art is called aesthetics, a term that derives from the Greek *αἰσθησις*, which means sensation. Traditionally, Alexander Baumgarten (1714-1762) coined it in 1750. He considers aesthetic perception as a faculty inferior to logic, nonetheless contributing to gnoseology. The goal of aesthetics is "the perfection of sensible cognition as such"; defined as *ars pulchre cogitandi*, it has in beauty its principle of perfection. Aesthetics reflects on art essentially for two reasons: artworks speaks to perception and can bring such perception to perfection. For centuries, scholars and philosophers have questioned the meaning and role of aesthetics, proposing it as a theory of sensitive perception (conceiving art as being part of it), a theory of taste and beauty (focused on critical judgment) or philosophy of art (which focuses on the definition of art).

What is art for?

- Art allows us to know our origins (for example, writing comes from drawing)
- Art helps us to better understand other disciplines and implements our knowledge
- Art can excite us and unleash our creativity
- Art allows us to deeply reflect about ourselves and understand our place in the world

We need Art History to recognize, appreciate and preserve works of art all over the world. For example Italy alone hosts more than 4976 museums and archaeological sites, and the UK about 2500 museums. According to the international definition provided by ICOM (2007), a "museum is a non-profit, permanent institution in the service of society and its development, open to the public, which acquires, conserves, researches, communicates and exhibits the tangible and intangible heritage of humanity and its environment for the purposes of education, study and enjoyment."

Class notes and analysis

Considering observational notes taken during the course of the lesson, such as the level of involvement and participation, and the data collected from the interviews, the analysis shows some pervasive themes. Overall, students' experience was multidimensional and focused on particular moments, such as the reactions of their classmates and some information learned. They all evaluated the acting of Gozzano as engaging and fun. However, the reactions and the level of participation were different, and some students stressed that a personal shyness or insecurity blocked them from actively participating: some asked to play secondary roles, others to observe; nevertheless, they favorably evaluated the experience.

Both classes have shown during the lesson, and confirmed during the interviews that they have propositively accepted the whole class. They spontaneously took notes and asked questions, and were interested in giving a personal contribution. Spontaneously some students wrote the key concepts on the blackboard, others asked to act, others contributed to the analysis of the poems. Most of them asked to describe poems and paintings, and the emotions communicated, even if they had difficulty in expressing their feelings.

The final philosophical reflection about the role of art and aesthetics was quite difficult in the second class considered, while it was easier in the first one, where I held a propedeutic lesson during a guided tour I organized for the exhibition of Genovesino, at Ala Ponzzone museum. Moreover, the two classes do not study Art History and Philosophy, so understandably students are not familiar with certain concepts or artistic movements.

During the interviews, I asked the students to mark the class from 1 to 10, and the majority indicates 9. Then I asked them to answer the questions above, facilitated. When asked *Which artwork did you prefer?* most of the students indicated Quasimodo, while others Baudelaire, followed by Cardarelli and Gozzano. I also asked the students to evaluate how much the artwork represented the poem from 1 to 10, and to what extent it facilitates the reading. Different reflections emerged, some very significant. For example: "I liked Quasimodo because he represents life with its sadness and hope, but it is a painful hope. The picture perfectly depicts the poem, and the seated man contemplating the sunset also expresses solitude ", or " Quasimodo's poem was strange because it gave me a sense of sadness and loneliness, but also of serenity. The colors of the painting were very dark, dark, and communicated me a sad but at the same time very quiet atmosphere. The sunset

framed this calmness "; and again "I loved Gozzano because he is ironic like me", or "Baudelaire is tiredness of his condition, so he identifies with Icarus and passively accepts the fall".

When asked, *Has the class and the website inspired you to look for more information, read new books, visit art exhibitions, etc.?* most of the students answered yes, mainly indicating that they wanted to visit art exhibitions and start an acting course; few expressed the desire to undertake new readings.

Finally I asked the students to give me feedback on the website in terms of design, accuracy, accessibility, selection of poems and works, engagement, effectiveness and tools. In general, they really appreciated it, in particular the graphics and the selection of paintings on the *Home*. They also appreciated the structure and its general accessibility. However, some have criticized the colors used (defined as dark and cold). On the other hand, the massive use of English divided students: some think it makes the website more interesting, professional, modern and international, and some have even proposed to add more languages, such as French and Spanish; others, on the contrary, think that this is quite difficult for an audience that does not speak English, so it could limit the potential of the website and the number of public reached in Italy. Students were more interested in commenting on the Facebook page, probably because it is more familiar to them, and have given a great importance to the number of likes and shares achieved by the individual posts. They also made suggestions on why some posts had more likes than others, and hypothesized how many views correspond to a certain number of likes.

From the interviews it emerged that various factors have influenced the experience of the class and of the website, and the meaning given to the artworks.

Therefore, the learning experience reveals itself as a relationship between the interpretation of the students, the knowledge gained, their feelings and other

external factors. I hope to expand upon and continue the research to proceed with a more detailed analysis, considering also the future interviews proposed for the visitors of *Books of Art*.

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