

Reflections IX · X

Reflexiones desde la educación y las artes en la era COVID-19 |
Reflexões da Educação e das Artes na Era da COVID-19 | Reflections
from Education and the Arts in the COVID-19 Era

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Abstract:

Reflection IX is a text developed by Kerry Freedman, Professor and researcher at Northern Illinois University (USA). Dr Freedman is an international reference for contemporary art education and visual culture pedagogy. Carlos Escaño, Associate Professor of art education at the University of Seville with interests in digital culture and critical thinking, develops *Reflection X*, which enters into conversation with some of the issues proposed in *Reflection IX*.

Keywords: COVID19. Arts. USA. Visual culture. Spain. Neoliberalism

Resumen:

La *Reflexión IX* es un texto desarrollado por Kerry Freedman, profesora e investigadora de la Northern Illinois University (EE.UU.). La Dr. Freedman es una referencia internacional para la educación artística contemporánea y la pedagogía de la cultura visual. Carlos Escaño, profesor de educación artística de la Universidad de Sevilla, con intereses en la cultura digital y el pensamiento crítico, desarrolla la *Reflexión X*, que entra en conversación con algunos de los temas propuestos en la *Reflexión IX*.

Palabras claves: COVID19. Artes. EEUU. Cultura Visual. España. Neoliberalismo

Resumo:

Reflexão IX é um texto desenvolvido por Kerry Freedman, professora e pesquisadora da Northern Illinois University em Illinois (EUA). Dr. Freedman é uma referência internacional em educação artística contemporânea e pedagogia da cultura visual. Carlos Escaño, professor de educação artística da Universidade de Sevilla com interesses na cultura digital e pensamento crítico, desenvolve o *Reflexão X*, que entra em conversa com algumas das questões propostas no *Reflexão IX*.

Palavras-chave: COVID19. Artes. EUA. Cultura visual. Espanha. Neoliberalismo.



Reflection IX (Art Education in Desperate Times: What Will Change and What Will Not?)

We live in desperate times. The current pandemic has killed thousands of people and damaged many more physically, emotionally, and financially. It has revealed the weaknesses of national leaders and caused the “closure” of regions, states, and countries. And, it has closed schools, museums, and art centers. Is art education closed, too?

Certainly not. Art education has merely shifted ground. Unlike activities in the physical spaces of public institutions, art education does not stop when doors are shut. Quite the contrary, it continues through alternate forms of mediation, such as digital, which enable social distancing at home.

One of the major changes in art education in the last twenty years is the broadening of the professional field to encompass more than traditional fine art objects, creators, and practices. Art education includes other forms of visual culture, such as the various types of design, popular visual arts, mass media, and so on. It even includes medical mask art. The analyses and assessments of the range of visual culture forms, skills, and concepts have become educationally relevant, are part of contemporary art curriculum, and can be learned to some extent, informally at home.

Informal art instruction is easy to find. Art museums have long included, as part of their educational programming, websites connected to their collections and exhibitions. Art and design educators have established undergraduate and graduate level degree programs offered remotely, and K-12 art teachers are increasingly using flipped classroom curriculum strategies where basic art studio processes are taught through videos before students come to class.

A large variety of visual culture production processes are taught online. For example, it is easy to find instruction in studio painting, ceramics, and sculpture, as well as quilting, photography, and fashion design. The visual qualities of art lend themselves to visual technologies. Artistic production learning is tacit and didactic, relying heavily on demonstrations, which can be seen. Even art learning not specific to making can be taught digitally at a certain level.

What can be less easily replaced by online instruction is the essential quality of expert guidance and mentorship. Home schooling in art tends to be guided by adults who may not have art expertise. Students who are hungry for mentorship in the visual arts often end up having to guide themselves and their peers, using whatever materials are available to them.

The situation in which we find ourselves demonstrates why a visual culture approach is essential for art education. We are now immersed in an art education that reveals why emphasis on the range of visual arts skills, concepts, and materials is essential. It challenges us to more completely appreciate the possibilities of digital learning, and yet, more deliberately articulate the benefits of face-to-face guidance based on expertise.

Some of the most powerful art in the world has been made in response to a crisis, and art education has often been particularly valued in response to a crisis. Regardless of natural disasters, social devastation, or medical terrors, art will continue to be taught. However, reflecting on the ways COVID-19 has influenced art education should change the way art is taught in the future.

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Reflection X (Mirror or hammer —arts and post-COVID19 education—)

Adaptation to the context is the Darwinian slogan used by the most extreme currents of economic liberalism to impose –in short– their political and social theses. It is generally used by those who are in the superstructure, over the economic infrastructure. This idea of adaptation to the context implies a social vision that understands that nature has provided a natural order in which survival depends on those who are capable of adapting to the incidents and accidents of fierce nature which –under this approach– remains as a passive and external subject to the hand of human beings and their technology. In this way, competition is interpreted as the natural life attitude in every species, including but not limited to the human being. Competition among all and among equals. The acolytes of Friedrich Von Hayek and Milton Friedman strongly defend this approach. They support it even in times when a pandemic strikes the whole of society. They try to impose their conceptual framework and their (shock) doctrine in the most disconcerting, unstable and compromising social situations. In fact, that is what it is all about: imposing their political-social narrative and economic thesis. Even when a community is plunged into the fear and panic of a depressive valley (caused by war, natural disaster... or a pandemic) and when its members are concerned with the most basic and urgent issues (such as health and safety). Thus, the successors of the Chicago Boys land to try to apply their privatizations, decentralizations and deregulations and the most dangerous ambition: to attack social rights and achievements. This is what they did during previous years, as Naomi Klein described to us –from a pandemic point of view– a precedent was set with the global HIV epidemic as a clear example of social attack, discrimination and stigmatisation of the gay community based on the Reaganist-Thatcherist morals of that time. Nowadays, such kind of theses by and large take advantage of the weaknesses within social community system. However, neo-liberal (privatizing and deregulating) political is part and parcel of the society and try to enhance the framework of competition rather than to encourage a systemic transition to a framework of cooperation in solidarity. As an example of the strategy, we can see the attempt to accelerate and intensify the overall digital control that violate rights and overwhelms an administration and citizenship that is poorly trained in digital contexts (including education). A citizenry saturated with technophiles and technophobes with little digital skills who announce or denounce digital friends or enemies. Some with well-meaning but misguided compliments, and others with irate babbling against everything digital. The most prudent strategy would be to study, analyze and train within a post-digital approach that would benefit analysis, deep understanding and the consequent transformation of that context. The post-digital perspective places the focus on the reflection

of the digital, beyond the spatial-temporal and instrumental character, and this is located in the criticism of a digital rationality that crosses the entire system. The digital not as something external, but as a condition that encompasses what is inside and outside the network, because simply in the network-society there is no such inside and outside.

In this context, culture and the arts, as well as their education, have much to develop and enhance. They are in the same position as any discipline of knowledge, but their tradition challenges them: to adapt or transform the context. That is, to follow the neoliberal slogan or to develop Brechtian thinking that places art not as a mirror in which to reflect ourselves as reality, but as a hammer to shape it. The arts in our pandemic situation, and also in the subsequent historical journey that we already have on the horizon, must be a transforming avant-garde, as so many other times it was. We, educators in the arts and visual culture, now as before, have the task of positioning ourselves in education as a tool for social change, promoting cooperation over competition, understanding and ensuring that nature and society maintain a character of solidarity.

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