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# A Primordial Sense of Art

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GUILLERMO MARINI

Let us imagine that a man loses his keys one night and starts looking for them under the light of a street lamp. When people join him to help him search, they ask where it was that he thinks he might have let them fall; with a frustrated look on his face, he then points into the dark distance and says, by way of explanation, "I am looking under the lamppost because this is where the light is!" This story, introduced by Janice Ross, provides us with a metaphorical description of an ongoing situation in arts education advocacy<sup>1</sup>: Certainly, I can only look for the arts in education where there is something about them that can be seen. Yet there may be aspects of them concealed beyond the reach of the vision instruments I have been using thus far.

This paper will affirm the possibility of approaching art in a way that assists in revealing these "invisible" qualities. I will begin by portraying the type of lights that mainstream art education is framed by. Second, I will show how the reduction of the arts into transferable skills can be both illuminated and surpassed by an inquiry into the practice of art. Then, I will characterize some of the distinct attributes of practicing science and making art as a means to distill further what a primordial sense of art may be actually modeled after. Finally, I will propose to recuperate a primordial sense of art, a perspective framed by a making-knowing disposition.

What can I begin to suggest about a way of seeing something that, as described in the example above, remains in the shadows? No doubt, this is an "obscure" way of seeing. But a thing can be obscure in two ways. On the one hand, it can lack the capacity to reveal what it is, to "show its colors"; thus, I judge it as nonsense, arcane, or uncertain—as expressed in the Latin etymology of *obscurus*.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, while resisting the usual forms

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of comprehension, it may still invite us to linger with it, this implicit invitation being the first sign that its obscurity may correspond to an intensity of meaning that I am not used to perceiving. This is the sense in which Aristotle says, "The eyes of owls are to the radiance of daylight like our mind is to reality."<sup>3</sup>

The meaning of this image lies in the fact that there is more to be seen than what meets the eye or, in other words, in my usual ways of seeing. This is not to say that my cognitive powers are defective in any way but rather to acknowledge that some aspects of reality will not simply adapt to me and thus will challenge me to leave the "eyes" of my mind ajar. It is precisely due to those "objects" that are invisible that the owl will develop an enhanced vision as the night falls. Put differently, not being able to look at the sun directly is an opportunity to learn how to see in the shadows.

In this line, one of the most obscure aspects we are forced to deal with in the arts is the fact that we appeal to them to say, paradoxically, what words can never say.<sup>4</sup> Consider how we all seem to share a plethora of experiences in which we turn to the arts for an expression of what impacts us most deeply: the bonding of two lovers, the entrance into the different stages of life, the eulogy given over a casket, even the celebration of everyday joys. Think of those artworks we most cherish and keep throughout our lives as an expression of who we are: that portrait, an amulet, this tune. In and of themselves, these artworks have meanings that evade explicit explanations, yet they seem to offer an alternative view of the spectrum of human life that would remain otherwise hidden. Consider how our life would look without them!

However, public debates about the role of the arts in education are framed by the preeminent variables of policy, budget, and accountability. In this environment, we listen to questions: What is the purpose of the arts in education? What do they teach? What problems do they solve? How can they be assessed? How much will they cost? While there appears to be an implicit consensus that the arts have an educational role or that they at least embody aspects of a liberal arts education, pervasive throughout the contemporary debate is the question of what a credible justification would look like. Perhaps in pursuing the quest for intrinsic justifications, I may be better able to understand how the obscurity surrounding the arts may actually shed some light on education today.

Before continuing, it is worth clarifying what I mean by an "intrinsic justification." If a justification aims at showing something to be right or reasonable, I understand an intrinsic justification to do so by exhibiting the value of core qualities rather than outcomes that can be verified against external criteria. In other words, an intrinsic justification would reflect the qualities that live in the practice and inquiry of art rather than expose only the evaluation of how the arts impact other areas of life. The following two sections will help spell out this point.

### The Shrinking of the Arts into Transferable Skills

As vastly documented across different literature, the majority of fieldwork research and philosophical inquiry devoted to justifying the presence of the arts in education has done so in terms of the arts' instrumental contributions to nonartist results<sup>5</sup>: fundamentally, the arts' hypothetical potential to trigger cognition within the school setting and their supposed ability to incite a democratic sensibility in society at large. From a cognitive point of view, this means that visual arts could have the potential to improve reading proficiency, music to enhance the understanding of mathematics, drama to increase verbal skills, and all the arts to augment emotional intelligence. Likewise, the arts are considered agents of democratic socialization, for they appear to teach students how to creatively address society's challenges, stimulating various forms of collaborative work while respecting people's differences.<sup>6</sup> As a combination of both sets of benefits, there has lately been a renewed effort to frame "creativity" and "innovation" as qualities that emerge from the arts and may expand into the whole of the work force.<sup>7</sup>

However, as Richmond indicates, although these perspectives do not lack internal logic once accepted, it is important to realize that they ultimately depend on the emphasis being on transferable artistic skills that supposedly benefit other school subjects, rather than the practice and inquiry of art *per se*.<sup>8</sup> These instrumentalist views do promise to teach some skill through the use of the arts, and they succeed even at the cost of distorting art in the process. An archetypical example will help clarify the point.

In the latest document from the Presidential Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, "Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America's Future through Creative Schools," we can find the following argument: Three arts-integration-focused schools (AIMS) in Montgomery County, Maryland, have

substantially reduced the achievement gap between high-poverty minority students and other students. The AIMS school with the highest percentage of minority and low-income students reduced the reading gap by 14 percentage points and the math gap by 26 percentage points over a three year period. In the comparison schools, the number of proficient students actually decreased by 4.5% over the same time period.<sup>9</sup>

It seems to me that this line of thought actually works against the otherwise legitimate attempt to defend the educational value of the arts. The reason is twofold. First of all, the logic behind these arguments is problematic because it follows the pattern of an "after this, therefore, because of this" fallacy<sup>10</sup> that makes me read something like the following:

Fact A: A group of students scored high in their reading and math tests.

Fact B: The same students attend an arts-integration-focused school.

Conclusion: A group of students scored high in their reading and math tests because they attend an arts-integration-focused school.

As observed, the fallacy lies on the *before-because* relationship. The fact that a group of students who scored high on their exam attend an arts-integration-focused school is no sufficient reason to demonstrate that arts integration improved in any way the exam result. The propensity to look for causal relationships is significant here, for it predetermines the type of artistic outcomes we are willing to legitimize as educational. As Ellen Winner and Monica Cooper declare in one of the most extensive investigations on this issue, there is “no evidence (yet) for a causal link between art study and academic achievement.”<sup>11</sup> Ultimately, it looks as if the main argument for the arts in education is to seek for a proof that they contain some sorts of capabilities that can be put to use for a more traditional and practical subject.

### Expanding the Arts to Be More Than Skill Training

Let us now imagine that the same students who have reduced their math gaps had previously decided to learn music in school. What would that learning music look like?

There is no real discussion about the fact that Western musical notation has historically relied on fractions, for example, as a means of expressing some of the inherent relationships between rhythm and melody. This is why musicians talk about the whole note (1) as the reference value in any given measure, and it is precisely in relation to that whole note that they play halves ( $1/2$ ), quarters ( $1/4$ ), eighths ( $1/8$ ), sixteenths ( $1/16$ ), thirty-seconds ( $1/32$ ), and sixty-fourths ( $1/64$ ). Likewise, the relationship between pitches has been noted in fractions since the pre-Socratics started researching the basic sounds that can be produced out of a single string by changing its length. Tradition has it that, when Pythagoras first divided a string in one-half, he wrote down this sound as one octave higher, or  $2/1$ , compared to the sound produced by the whole string.<sup>12</sup> One could fairly well conclude, then, that mathematical fractions constitute one of the tools every musician in the Western world acquires, implicitly or explicitly, while learning music.

The question still remains, however, as to whether there is *anything else* in learning music beyond gaining the ability to deal with fraction-like relationships. Let us consider the musical dynamic terms for a moment. Words like *adagio*, *diminuendo*, *forte* constitute more than an indication of the speed and intensity of sound or the stylistic way to carry the music throughout the performance. In learning to play music, these terms invite both teachers and students to make a decision about *how* to play a given phrase. In other words, the actual rendition of their musical act becomes an interpretative exercise of the dynamic terms indicated in the musical score.

Let us imagine a music class where teacher and students are rehearsing the second part of Beethoven's Fifth Piano Concerto, the *adagio* movement. I am going to assume that the conductor, musicians, and occasional spectators know the music by heart; it is a widely recognized "classic." It is very likely that all involved have heard a number of performances of the same movement, so they have a large set of common elements with which to compare and complement their rehearsal. They even know that *adagio* means "at ease" in Italian, and, as a technical musical term, it means that the piece should have roughly sixty to seventy rhythmical beats per minute, just like the human heart at rest.

Now we arrive at the moment of actually playing music during the rehearsal. The musicians tune their instruments, the conductor stares at them, he breathes, the room fills with silent anticipation, and then the baton comes down, firing the first beat. Gently, each instrument blends in, preparing the stage for the piano just as a farmer plows the soil, preparing the seedbed.

However, as the piano enters the scene, there is a disruption, uneasiness—something does not seem to work. So, the conductor stops the rehearsal and opens a brief dialogue with the pianist. They both know well enough what *adagio* means: there is no need for the metronome to count beats or the dictionary to explain words. What is at stake here is not a matter of technical knowledge but of genuine musical inquiry.

In my example, conductor, pianist, and orchestra members inquire about the "intention of the phrase," "the appropriate emphasis with which to approach it," "its texture." Then, they direct their attention to the written music and the orchestral measure that anticipates the piano and wonder about the "space" that the chords are granting the piano: "How will we play this?" After a short exchange, the pianist promptly rehearses a couple of starts on the keyboard, nods to the conductor, and waits for him to summon the whole group once again. This time, the piano gracefully joins in, and Beethoven's *adagio* continues to be rehearsed once again.

What happens, then, is a demonstration of what Suzanne Langer calls "studio metaphors."<sup>13</sup> Artists in general, musicians in this case, are conscious of knowing certain qualities of their art that they are nonetheless unable to put down in words. Obviously, they know the necessary technical expressions that rule their art; they have grown and become artists with them, but, still, they daily find themselves in situations where that knowledge is not sufficient to sustain their art's expressiveness. Thus, for a lack of adequate terms, they tend to create metaphors that account for this tacit knowledge, an exercise that enriches their overall practice and helps it evolve.<sup>14</sup>

The conductor, pianist, and orchestra musicians can now account for an educational opportunity that was virtually present in the score but needed an exercised inquiry of its music to become alive. One could argue that the

participants have acquired a wider sense of appreciation for the multiple musical features that are intertwined in this piece; they have demonstrated the ability to speak to and about tacitly known aspects of their art; they have dealt with the challenge of offering an alternative meaningful interpretation of an already known piece; ultimately, they made music while also playing Beethoven.

Not to overromanticize art, it is worth noting with Nicholas Burbules that “simply because the knowledge at stake may be inexpressible [in the sense of not being explicit all the time], the strategies for fostering it are not random or happenstance.”<sup>15</sup> The example above is perhaps an everyday situation in rehearsal practice, but it does not come into existence out of a void. Consider how the musicians know at least the fundamental elements of their art that enable them to hold their instruments and read the score. Without this preexistent knowledge, they would not be able to move into what remains to be played in Beethoven. Put differently, some of the crucial features in playing music depend on a previous and ongoing commitment to art as a condition to be able to make music beyond the written rhythms and pitches.

Going back to the AIMS school example, I want to argue further that, although musicians use fractions to express some aspects of the language of Western music, this does not reduce the reality of music to its mathematical qualities only. In music, as in every art, tools are necessary for the building of the work, but they do not constitute the work of art in itself. The tool is always organic to the development of the craft, and it naturally serves it by aiding in the material concretion of the work. In this sense, a tool is always instrumental, as fractions are to music, because it may be isolated from the whole of the work and serve some other purpose—like empowering mathematical awareness—without rendering the original artwork meaningless. In other words, one could argue that the tool is necessary in the making of the work but not sufficient to make sense of it.

I would also argue that an overemphasis on the instrumental, transferable skills of the arts tends to reduce them into mere servants of other school subjects, instead of opening up an inquiry on the qualities they themselves specifically have to offer to education. If the strongest possible justification for the arts in education lies in their being some type of matrix for abilities that actually belong to another subject but are more easily acquired through art, how do we know if other activities, like stargazing or ping-pong, will not prove more effective teachers in the future and thus downgrade the arts even further? As Constantijn Koopman states,

As long as we rely only on instrumental values . . . our justification remains vulnerable; for it can always be questioned whether the benefits are really significant and durable, and whether the arts are the most efficient way of bringing about the results.<sup>16</sup>

By now, I have already examined how both looking for causality between the arts and academic performance and searching for transferrable skill seem to render an instrumental version of the arts where there will be little or no room to appreciate the value of music's dynamic terms interpretation, for example. As a matter of fact, if I search for strong relationships between the arts and achievement, I may eventually find some correlations in the same way that, if we seek to identify the most productive musical skills to transfer into the school curriculum, we may agree on some. Regardless of *what* or *if* I find something—I may be actually self-fulfilling my own prophecy—in following this path, I give the impression to be teaching the mathematics in music rather than the music in playing Beethoven.

### Seeing the Arts on the Model of the Sciences

Moving on, there is a deeper tension that runs through the relationship between art and education based on the contemporary understanding of what constitutes mainstream education in general. Following Catherine Elgin, we need to realize that the arts in education are framed today by a monolithic way of understanding education that subsumes most forms of knowledge under the model of the scientific disciplines.<sup>17</sup> Thus, it seems that art education has either to adapt to the current scientific standards of how education should look or surrender the claim of being educational at all.

Not to fall into exaggerating, I want to emphasize that the sciences and arts are related and share common elements; after all, they are both human inventions. And this relationship certainly is a fact from the point of view of a human being from whom both scientific and artistic makings emerge as a continuation of her vital activity. However, when it comes to considering the education of this same person, the main artistic qualities allowed into the threshold of the "educational" seem to be those that can demonstrate progress, be quantified, systematized, analyzed, and explained: the scientific in the artistic, so to speak. As Elliot Eisner points out, the arts appear to seek legitimacy by looking more like their academic peers, emulating criteria and standards that populate academic subjects.<sup>18</sup>

In this section, I wish to resist the caricature of the differences between arts and sciences: the arts are creative, whereas the sciences are composed of dispassionate formulas and other such reductive statements. Instead, I will try to furnish a characterization of the distinct attributes involved in doing science and producing art as a means to expose the types of challenges and contributions that I believe art has to offer to education. For the sake of clarity, I will focus on Newton's law of universal gravitation and Picasso's *Guernica* as archetypes of how making science and art look like.

Let us first compare the movement of Newton's and Picasso's activities. Science advances step by step, like a man going up a ladder whose journey



physically depends on each of the previous steps that his field and he have taken in the past. Once he has moved on, there is no need for revisiting what has happened already, since each new step leaves the previous ones behind either by correcting or expanding them into an ever-richer complexity. In this sense, science literally *pro-gresses*: it “moves forth,” it “improves” as it gets further away from its primitive origins into the unveiling of what is still unknown.<sup>19</sup>

Without doubt, Sir Isaac Newton acknowledged his past tradition, but he was set on what was yet to be found. He knew well enough that Kepler’s description of the orbits of the planets made sense but did not fully explain why they actually moved in ellipses. It was only after continuous investigations that he was able to find a new and—temporarily—definitive formula to fill in the gap in his contemporary’s theory. And it was thanks to Newton’s own inconsistencies that Einstein would later advance gravitational physics. And it was thanks to Einstein’s gaps that . . . In general, it is the solution to challenges that truly moves science on.

Art seems to move in a different manner. More than following a centrifugal vector, art revisits its themes, materials, and techniques in a way that resembles the flux and reflux of a tide. It is perhaps in this sense that Maurice Merleau-Ponty suggests that no matter the evolution of artistic instruments, visiting the prehistoric paintings of Lascaux still astounds us. It is as if, within those underground chambers, those strangely familiar fingerprints and animal hunting scenes somehow contain the whole of art history.<sup>20</sup>

After visiting Lascaux for the first time, Pablo Picasso is reported to have said, “They have invented everything.”<sup>21</sup> In the voice of one of the most progressive artists of his time, this statement on one of the most ancient of arts calls forth the fact that art does not have to progress incrementally in order to advance; it does not require the newness of a breakthrough to be seen as original. For example, Picasso’s *Guernica* surely consists of bulls and horses and men like those on the prehistoric walls, but Picasso does not give the impression to be correcting or expanding those paintings; it rather looks as if he was renewing a common theme from his own viewpoint.

Going back to the movement of science through the years, it seems to me that we get a sense of its inevitable evolution not only by comparing yesterday’s technical accomplishments like the first zeppelin with today’s satellites orbiting around the earth but specifically by weighing the amount of data we presently have at our fingertips. These discrete pieces of information that reflect quantifiable phenomena constitute the most solid ground from which to take new steps into the further advancement of scientific knowledge. What is more, this information is as accurate as can be produced by a human being, for it purposely leaves aside all nuanced particularities, favoring a standardization of individual qualities that is easy to subsume under general rules.

Consider Newton's achievement in arriving at the definitive formula of the acceleration at which an object falls, the famous 9.8 meter/second<sup>2</sup>, which signifies that, with every second, the object increases its fall speed by 9.8 meters. To get to this number Newton recorded the acceleration of different objects falling from a tower. Some fell closer to 10m/s<sup>2</sup>, some closer to 9m/s<sup>2</sup>, the difference mainly being due to buoyancy and air resistance. After a long succession of experiments, he was able to dissolve those subtle differences into a general formula. In other words, each of his tests gained meaning inasmuch as they approached the conclusive general rule.

Likewise, the tide-like movement characteristic of the arts is not only perceived by comparing Lascaux's prehistoric figures with *Guernica* but in alternating between taking a close-up and a distant perspective of the work as a whole as well as of its elements. This movement allows for the possibility of realizing how the different elements of the work are actually composed, in such a way that every single detail makes a difference to the whole work. And it is precisely such unity that demands that no detail be standardized, omitted, or blended but alternatively recognized and appreciated from the different perspectives from which the work is approached.

Let us take a look at Picasso's different studies on the figure of the horse for *Guernica*—what we may call sketches or trials. This exercise of reformulating the same theme or figure has unique implications for the work of art as a whole. Consider how Picasso finally introduces the horse in its proper place within the larger canvas; its former qualities as a series of attempts are not discarded or neglected but rather united into the entire work in such a way that, if they were missing, *Guernica* would become a different work. In fact, it is superficial to speak about the horse as "an element" of *Guernica*. Who would dare to ask where the horse begins and *Guernica* ends?

Moving on, we also know art and science depend on different ways of experimentation. The work of science takes shape in an experiment whose conditions and results ought to be as precise and concrete as possible, clearly defining the boundary between what the scientist knows and what he hypothesizes. It is an experiment brought forth by the identification of an original problem, whose solution is conjectured and tested, and remains a problem until it is finally solved. In this setting, ambiguities are antiscientific, for they interfere with the clear visualization of the problem, its thorough experimentation, and systematic generalization.

The work of art is an experiment of another kind, for it opens up such a degree of possibility that its necessary material constraints are oftentimes supplemented or completed by whoever is observing the work. It is perhaps in this sense that artists in the twentieth century talked about the viewer's capacity to resolve the chord that remains dissonant or complete the line that has not been drawn.<sup>22</sup> In engaging with art, it seems we tend to perceive the unclear and assume or complete its meaning in an effort to make sense

of the whole work. This creative act provides a feeling of fresh opportunities without quite defining the work. In this sense, ambiguities are an inherent element of art, for they encompass and even amplify the layers of possible meanings in the work.

Finally, I want to stress that those different ways of experimentation impact the way the scientist and artist relate with their work. The scientific method poses characteristic demands on the scientist, for it is a disciplinary given that the technical conditions of his experiments and the ultimate expression of his findings must be detached from his individual circumstances. This does not mean that the scientist should not feel his quest as a personal obsession; on the contrary, without this passion, he would never commit to pursuing his scientific experiments. What is decisive here is that those passions should never contaminate the environment of his experiments and the logic of his procedures: the scientist puts the world in question, but not himself.<sup>23</sup>

In reading Newton's notes on gravitation, it is easy to find how his disciplinary scheme ends up reinforcing the distinction between subject and object and seeing them as real and independent entities. Newton was looking for a definitive solution to the problem of gravitation. The only good scientific answer had to be a proposition of timeless truth, a universal law independent of all human circumstances. His efforts were directed toward the discovery of a principle that rules the universe from the very origins of all beings yet rests completely detached from them. And he did succeed: gravitation is a fact explained by Newton's law.

Art challenges the artist completely. Its processes and products cannot but be embedded, soaked in her person. Far from reducing the idea of art to a whimsical outpouring of self-expression, I think art should instead be seen as encompassing the qualities of its maker like a seal of which only the edges are visible. It is perhaps in this sense that Jorge Luis Borges used to say that "every poem is autobiographical," as opposed to autobiography, because the artist is the first reference in a work of her own making that both includes and questions her, and still resonates beyond her reach and comprehension.

*Guernica* is Picasso's work. But can it be an independent object in the style of Newton's law? We have to acknowledge that it includes the combination of preexisting materials into a piece of craftsmanship and, under certain conditions, it may be called "a thing." But while I can apply the gravitational formula only when following Newton's rules, in engaging with *Guernica*, I need to add an active collaboration on my side. This is to say that my relationship with the work of art is not one of reproduction or utilization but of personal participation. There are aspects of my bond with *Guernica* that I cannot translate into universal objective concepts that people would understand univocally. The artwork may be done as "a thing," but its meaning,

its intimate taste, cannot be alluded to without giving way to a personal interpretation.

### **The Unfolding of a Primordial Sense of Art**

Far from trying to portray the sciences as cold laboratory work and the arts as humanizing enjoyment, I hope instead that the comparison above has been able to draw attention to the problematic situation that the arts in education faces. For, if education is framed today within scientific parameters, then art's intrinsic qualities seem to be condemned to be viewed as second-class versions of bad science and definitively poor contributions to mainstream education.

Alternatively, it could be tempting to suggest here that the arts are a somewhat necessary complement to the sciences, almost as if the arts produced the opposite picture of reality from the sciences, thus creating a balance between them and thereby enhancing the educational benefits of both. I believe that David Graves, explains this compleitive effect of art in the following passage:

Art may be an endlessly variable attempt to gain a unique perspective on the mismatch [between the interacting object and subject] by creating artifacts that embody just that sort of dialectic. . . . Art investigates and hones the ability to figure out if, when, how, and why the analytical and the intuitive, the objective and subjective, the distinct and the confused, the said and the felt, all mesh together into an appropriate meaning.<sup>24</sup>

If I am reading Graves correctly, in the best-case scenario, the arts may actually connect the analytical with the intuitive, the objective with the subjective, the said with the felt, and eventually suggest a more complete and accurate meaning. This proposal certainly sounds appealing. But when I think of parents, teachers, and policymakers, I cannot help but hear the lingering questions: Will you be able to provide for an educational discipline of the intuitive and subjective? Or, what does this completion and fulfillment of meaning have to offer to students' education?

Along this same line of thought, I think that Graves's explanation of the arts helps identify another risk that goes even beyond instrumentalization: that is, the metamorphosis of the arts into a discipline. This is a subtle peril, perhaps based on some forms of aestheticism. From this point of view, the arts would become the domain of the intuitive, the sensitive, and the subjective: its own distinct discipline called "the arts." The key problem is that restricting the arts to these categories—that is, in the event I was indeed able to isolate them—would eventually reinforce their fracture with the sciences and other ways of dealing with human activity. What is more, if the arts

become the discipline of the intuitive *et alia*, then I revert to the conundrum of how to teach them as school courses while respecting their core values, for what would a standard of the subjective and intuitive look like?

In the current situation, I believe we need to try to recuperate a primordial sense of art. What this means, first of all, is to attempt the employment of both an imaginative and philosophical exercise that will express the meaning of art before the rupture between “science-based education” and the arts conceived of simply as a set of differing skills and/or disciplines.<sup>25</sup> Plain and simple, I want to propose that art embodies the original unity between making and knowing expressed in the production of a work. In other words, the acknowledgment that art is at the base not only of some ways of cognition and production but at the heart of the human capacity of knowing and making. This is not a claim of chronological importance but rather the suggestion that, from a philosophical standpoint, art supposes a knowing-making disposition rather than the split consideration of either the production of things or knowledge.

In calling art “a knowing-making disposition,” I am considering “disposition” in the etymological sense of *dis-pono*, that is, “setting in order.”<sup>26</sup> From this point of view, I believe there is an intimate relationship between “the capacity to know” and “the capacity to make”—a mutual and intertwined “setting in order” that becomes manifest in art. Consider how, in coming to produce any sort of work, we often find ourselves deepening our knowledge of this very process and work. Conversely, we likewise find ourselves actually building mental or physical images of what it is that we are coming to know.

We need to acknowledge, though, that nothing can insure that this ordering will come close to realization. It may indefinitely remain in a latent condition, obscured by automatic reproductions of works or absentminded labeling of understandings. Still, we can reasonably expect that the realization of this vision of the arts will be well worth the effort. For, at the end of the day, what is at stake here is not only the place or role of “the arts” in “science-based education” but arts’ inherent relationship with human beings as art-capable and art-in-need beings: in other words, art as evidence of the cohesion of human capacities.

Let us consider, for example, the crafts of those prehistoric cave dwellers that Picasso judged as having invented everything. What is it that these people found inside the earth some forty thousand years ago? Did they discover the disciplines of the fine arts or the sciences somewhere in the dark? No, they had no light to see those things. They lacked the “maturity” to distinguish art from science. The truth is that disciplinary distinctions were irrelevant back then (in fact, they did not exist at all).

Let us imagine how their living conditions felt. They were immersed in the gelid environment of the earth’s last glacial period. Resources were

abundant, although they came with a cost. Sometimes, the errant spark turned into wild fire, sometimes the hunting expedition, catastrophe. The fight for the very basics of life consumed most of the work of their minds and bodies.

Still, our ancestors lived a human life, and they showed so. We cannot tell where it came from or how it started; maybe from the blood of the same prey that the clan ate together or from the crushed fruit of the wild bush, perhaps made of ashes or liquid mineral. What is certain is that one day a cave dweller soaked her hands in pigment and stamped her print on the wall, creating one of the first signs of humanity ever.

The one quality of this activity that is decisive for us—and was obvious for our ancestors—is that, in painting Lascaux's caves, they were deprived of the ability to abstract that differentiates between the elements of making and the process of making *per se*. Skills, technique, and materials meant nothing beyond the exercise of stamping handprints on the wall. Positively stated, they used reality to make their art, not heuristics.

What we can see today on these cave walls are the painted drawings of bulls, deer, horses, and people emerging from the floor and apparently engulfing everything from the high dome. It feels impossible to be in the cave, watch these figures from a distance, and assume a detached perspective. They seem to be everywhere at once, all around me; more precisely, they appear to be with me as I am watching. A primordial sense of art supposes, then, an activity in the process of being developed by human beings, using their own materials and tools: a process that unifies all elements in the same activity.<sup>27</sup>

A primordial sense of art also supposes a peculiar form of knowing that is beyond the distinction between intuitive and discursive. It may be the case that Lascaux's artists first intuited and then reflected or vice versa—or even interchangeably. This is not important for us now, for the painted walls give the impression that knowing meant something closer to wondering than aiming at an explanation. Along these lines, let us bear in mind two aspects of wonder: on the one hand, how wonder moves us back to that point in the relationship with our own works where we and all those attending the work are newly amazed by its fresh meaning; On the other, how wonder, having placed us in that original venue, incites us to circulate around the work, as the cave artist did in her multilayered renditions of animals and people and as the viewer cannot help to do while walking in the underground chambers.

Put differently, approaching knowing as wonder means revisiting the same work every time as if it was the first time. It supposes the possibility of seeing how an alternative way of meaning emerges before us, one that becomes opaque when I try to conceal it in definitive terms but reveals in its fullest when I retreat, giving way to its peculiar splendor.

Recently, Jeff Malpas reminded us how Martin Heidegger brilliantly insinuates this double dimension of wonder:

Wonder displaces man into and before beings as such. . . . Wonder is the basic disposition that primordially disposes man into the beginning of thinking, because, before all else, it displaces man into that essence whereby he then finds himself caught up in the midst of beings as such and as a whole and finds himself caught up in them.<sup>28</sup>

Let us focus on those handprints on the wall, artworks that manifest how the work of an individual can echo across all figures and colors and still look always human. It is no surprise that most cave visitors are visibly struck by the strange familiarity of those hands. It seems easy to name *what* they look like. But *how* do they look that way? If anyone dares put his own hand on top of those on the wall, then those prints become a literal expression of continuity across time and through the expansion of civilization. They become a “fact” of humanity, yet speechless, dataless, primordial.

I think we can begin to see this in the way that Lascaux’s painters provided no contextualization for their works beyond the very works; the handprint seems to conceal its method and overall purpose. Perhaps the fact that these people spent millennia drawing the same images on the walls again and again is even more indicative of a concealment of meaning; for, there is no need to return to the same work if it is already complete or fully understood. It is as if those images allowed people to slowly taste some intimate vision, but only within a chiaroscuro and removed from what was clear under the light of the sun.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I introduced the idea of a primordial sense of art as a window into the arts’ “invisible” educational qualities. First, I attempted to surpass the mainstream tendency to frame the arts in education as a set of transferrable skills by highlighting the qualities that emerge from an inquired practice with art. Along these lines, I presented music’s dynamic terms as an example of artistic qualities that may yield unique educational potential when illuminated by daily rehearsal.

Second, I tried to distill how these types of qualities allow us to see the arts as more than sciences, disciplines, or forms of aesthetics. In particular, I paid special attention to the arts’ proper traits in comparison to those of the sciences to make a case for the challenges that art education faces today, for, if mainstream education seems to be modeled on a scientific conception, then the arts have to adapt to that framework or rediscover their genuine place.

In the third place, I proposed to recuperate a primordial sense of art, a perspective framed by a making-knowing disposition where making supposes

the unification of all productive elements and where knowing is closer to wonder conceived as rediscovering the work with amazement and circulating around it to meet alternative ways of meaning.

## Notes

1. Janice Ross, "Lighting the Way: Contrasting Arguments for the Arts in Education," *Journal of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain* 41, no. 2 (2007): 271.
2. Charlton Lewis and Charles Short, eds., *A Latin Dictionary* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).
3. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, in *Works of Aristotle*, ed. W. D. Ross (New York: Oxford University Press, 1957), 511.
4. Elliot Eisner, "What Can Education Learn from the Arts about the Practice of Education?," John Dewey Lecture, Stanford University, 2002. Also published in *Journal of Curriculum and Supervision* 18, no. 1 (2002): 4–16; an essay of the same name was also published in *International Journal of Education and the Arts* 5, no. 4 (2004): 1–14.
5. Elliot Eisner, "What Education Can Learn from the Arts?," *Art Education* 62, no. 2 (2009): 6–9; Constantijn Koopman, "Art as Fulfillment: On the Justification of Education in the Arts," *Journal of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain* 39, no. 1 (2005): 85–97; Ellen Winner and Monica Cooper, "Mute Those Claims: No Evidence (Yet) for a Causal Link between Arts Study and Academic Achievement," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 34, no. 3/4 (2000): 11–76.
6. Dorit Barchana-Lorand and Efrat Galnoor, "Philosophy of Art Education in the Visual Culture: Aesthetics for Art Teachers," *Journal of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain* 43, no. 1 (2009): 134 and 145.
7. Christine Doddington, "Mimesis and Experience Revisited: Can Philosophy Revive the Practice of Arts Education?," *Journal of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain* 44, no. 4 (2010): 579.
8. Stuart Richmond, "In Praise of Practice: A Defense of Art Making in Education," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 32, no. 2 (1998): 12–13.
9. President's Committee on the Arts and the Humanities, *Reinvesting in Arts Education: Winning America's Future through Creative Schools* (Washington, D.C., 2011), 21.
10. The so-called "Post hoc ergo propter hoc" fallacy.
11. Winner and Cooper, "Mute Those Claims," 11.
12. Geoffrey Stephen Kirk et al., *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 233–35.
13. Suzanne Langer, "Building and Weaving: Esthetic and Technical Metaphors as an Index to the Essential Unity of the Arts," *Journal of Philosophy* 39, no. 25 (1942): 677–78.
14. Certainly, Polanyi has taken this idea of tacit knowing to a new level by stressing its relevance for scientific inquiry. See, for example, Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).
15. Nicholas Burbules, "Tacit Teaching," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 40, no. 5 (2008): 673.
16. Koopman, "Art as Fulfillment," 96; I am reminded here of an idea from Ludwig Wittgenstein's, *Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief* (Oxford, UK: Atheneum Press, 2007), 18. It goes along the line of the following thought experiment: If we could achieve the same results that art does by way of an injection, would we prefer the injection to art? This argument complements Koopman's, for, if the emphasis is placed on what the arts generate as



effects, then their value remains conditioned to the evaluation of outcomes, and nothing can assure us that they will not be replaced by something else in the near future. Still, outside the scope of this essay, it seems Wittgenstein could have wondered about these same issues when he declared "an aesthetic explanation is not a casual explanation."

17. Catherine Z. Elgin, "Art in the Advancement of Understanding," *American Philosophical Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (2002): 1–2.
18. Elliot Eisner, "Introduction," in *The Arts and the Creation of Mind* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2002).
19. Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*.
20. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "Eye and Mind," in *Maurice Merleau-Ponty: Basic Writings*, ed. Thomas Baldwin (New York: Routledge, 2004), 296.
21. Judith Thurman, "First Impressions," *New Yorker*, June 23, 2008, 60.
22. Igor Stravinsky, *Poetics of Music* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975), 34–54.
23. I owe this idea to David Hansen, professor of philosophy and education at Teachers College.
24. David Graves, "Art as a Rational Activity," *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 36, no. 4 (2002): 13.
25. By proposing this attempt, I am not denying that the sciences have actually become the privileged way of conceiving of education. But I believe that especially those of us who are teachers need to realize that the journey through each individual disciplinary study can only take us so far into contact with reality. I hope that recuperating such a primordial perspective of art will allow us to surpass this division.
26. Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*.
27. See my discussion of *poiesis* in Guillermo Marini, "Aristotelic Learning through the Arts," *Studies in Philosophy and Education* 33, no. 2 (2014): 171–84.
28. Jeff Malpas, "Beginning in Wonder," in *Philosophical Romanticism*, ed. Nikolas Kompridis (New York: Routledge, 2006), 295.