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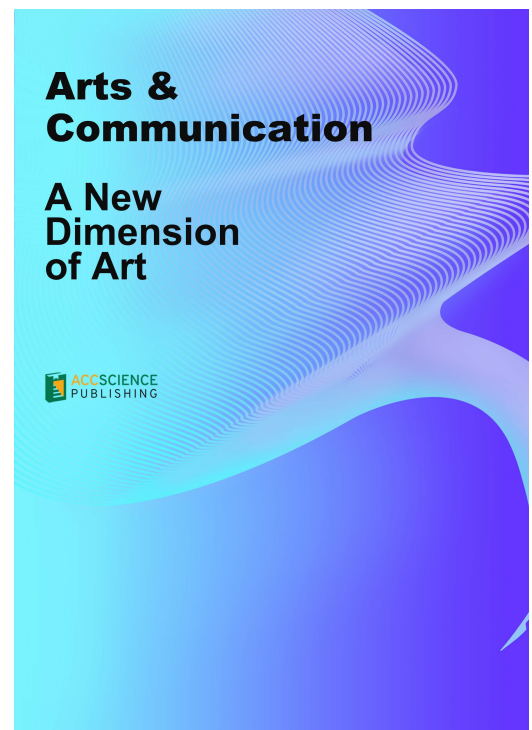
ISSN: 2972-4090 (Online)
Volume 2 · Issue 1
March 2024

Online ISSN: 2972-4090

Arts & Communication

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Volume 2 • Issue 1 • March 2024

ISSN 2972-4090 (online)

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ARTS & COMMUNICATION

ISSN: 2972-4090 (online)

Editorial and Production Credits

Publisher: AccScience Publishing

Managing Editor: Irene Zhao

Production Editor: Sharmila Velapasamy

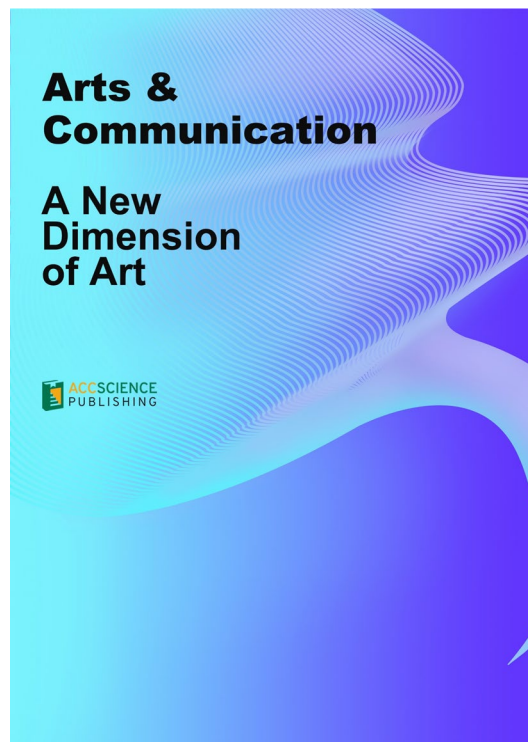
Journal Development Editor: Irene Zhao

Article Layout and Typeset: Sinjore Technologies (India)

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CONTENTS

REVIEW ARTICLE

- 1 Cultural convergence in heritage landscape conservation: A comparative study of Chinese and English traditions**
Johnathan Djabarouti, Youcao Ren

PERSPECTIVE ARTICLES

- 2 Contemporary art from the Global South in the art auction market from 2020 to 2022**
Victoria Mouraux Durand-Ruel, John Zarobell
- 3 To hope all things: A relational response to racism in music education**
Susan Quindag

ARTICLES

- 4 Performance arts, public space, and early childhood**
Suzana Schmidt Viganó
- 5 Cultural connotation and bionic design application of foliage plants in Chinese gardens**
Siqi Lin, Wei Liu
- 6 Art, photography, and museums for senior students**
Ricard Huerta
- 7 *Nebula rasa*: The diaphanous as generative stimulus in architectural design**
Otto Paans
- 8 Chinese esthetics through language in poetry: A comparative study of the Chinese wényán and modern báihuà**
Zhe Feng, Weiyi Wang, Gerald Cupchik
- 9 The use of an interactive whiteboard in solfeggio teaching**
Jasna Šulentić Begić, Monika Sakač-Botički, Amir Begić
- 10 Artists recreating our world with Rachmaninoff as a guide and partner**
Ralph Bathurst

REVIEW ARTICLE

Cultural convergence in heritage landscape conservation: A comparative study of Chinese and English traditions

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Abstract

There are distinct Eastern and Western approaches that shape the conservation and interpretation of cultural heritage landscapes. While existing literature assesses each approach individually, there is limited research exploring potential for cross-cultural exchange and innovation to inform a more holistic conservation of heritage landscape sites. Using Chinese (representative of Eastern) and English (representative of Western) approaches as archetypal cases, and underpinned by a phenomenological ontological perspective, this theoretical contribution firstly establishes key distinctions between Chinese and English approaches toward heritage landscapes by conducting a review of relevant sources. Differences are subsequently synthesized into a comprehensive framework that supports a cultural convergence of approaches toward heritage landscapes. Informed by the literature, six key differences in approach are identified: (i) Philosophical underpinnings; (ii) spiritual and artistic emphasis; (iii) holistic and individual attitudes; (iv) concerns of continuity and evolution; (v) approaches toward community involvement; and (vi) relationship between nature, spirituality, and human-centricity. After reviewing these differences, a holistic framework is proposed that is underpinned by four key elements which have the capacity to overcome the differences identified: (i) harmonizing spirituality and aesthetics; (ii) balancing continuity and evolution; (iii) fostering inclusive stewardship between communities and practitioners; and (iv) cultivating equilibrium between people and nature. The study concludes that this framework – what is termed a “cultural convergence” – can support more effective conservation of landscape sites, by capturing a broader cultural spectrum of heritage principles and concerns. The proposed framework opens avenues for cross-cultural exchange and advancement of more holistic heritage conservation strategies within an increasingly globalized heritage context. Future research should seek to apply this framework to the contemporary conservation of distinct heritage case study sites of interest to further advance research on this topic.

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Citation: Djabarouti J, Ren Y. Cultural convergence in heritage landscape conservation: A comparative study of Chinese and English traditions. *Arts & Communication*. 2024;2(1):1923 <https://doi.org/10.36922/ac.1923>

Received: September 26, 2023**Accepted:** December 4, 2023**Published Online:** February 20, 2024

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Keywords: Conservation; Cultural heritage landscape; Heritage; Heritage landscape; Holistic conservation; Intangible heritage

1. Introduction

Heritage landscapes serve as continuously changing expressions of cultural narratives, historical evolution, and human interactions with the environment.¹⁻³ Predictably, explorations of these landscapes through the lenses of Eastern and Western approaches reveal contrasting philosophies, values, and perceptions, which creates pivotal distinctions that demarcate Eastern and Western perspectives on cultural heritage landscapes. Such distinctions have historically triggered tensions within wider heritage discourses⁴ – particularly in relation to foundational concepts of authenticity, change, and preservation. The theoretical underpinnings of Eastern and Western approaches have far-reaching implications on their conceptualization and conservation ideologies applied to landscapes. For example, Eastern cultures often draw from spiritual traditions, such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, that emphasize harmony with nature, interconnectedness, and the sacredness of the environment;⁵ whereas Western viewpoints often stem from humanist and enlightenment ideals that champion human agency, artistic creativity, and the transformation of nature to serve human needs.³ While Eastern and Western approaches highlight the rich cultural diversity of human societies and their interactions with the environment, it is the understanding of the *differences* in approaches that this article proposes can support their potential integration to enrich heritage landscape conservation practices by transcending cultural boundaries.

There is evidence of research over several decades that capture both Eastern^{6,7} and Western⁸⁻¹⁰ developments toward the conceptualization, maintenance, and conservation of heritage landscapes. However, there is very limited research exploring the interface of these two geographically ingrained approaches – particularly in terms of generating potential cultural exchange or a synthesis of their virtues.¹¹⁻¹⁴ This paper is interested more specifically in the differences between Chinese (representative of Eastern) and English (representative of Western) approaches toward heritage landscapes, with there being limited literature that comparatively distinguishes and characterizes what informs and sustains these approaches (historically, culturally, and sociopolitically). This theoretical contribution seeks to achieve two primary aims. First, it endeavors to establish the key distinctions between Chinese and English approaches to heritage landscapes by conducting a literature review of relevant cultural landscape sources. Second, the aim is to leverage this synthesis of differences to develop a comprehensive framework that supports a cultural convergence of approaches toward heritage landscapes. The research proposes that the concept of “cultural convergence” can support more effective conservation of

World Heritage landscape sites, by capturing a broader spectrum of heritage principles and concerns. This involves adopting a broader and more holistic interpretation of what cultural heritage landscape conservation entails – including recognition of its significant contribution to contemporary society.

To investigate the differences in approaches, the study adopts phenomenology as the ontological perspective. As a philosophical approach that focuses on the subjective experience of individuals, phenomenology can provide a lens through which the nuanced perception and interpretation of heritage landscapes within Eastern and Western cultural frameworks can be comprehensively explored in terms of material, non-material, and spatial processes that constitute the formation of “cultural landscape” in human minds.¹⁵ The review begins with six key distinctions in approaches, which are elicited from the literature: (i) philosophical underpinnings; (ii) spiritual and artistic emphasis; (iii) holistic and individual attitudes; (iv) concerns of continuity and evolution; (v) approaches toward community involvement; and (vi) relationship between nature, spirituality, and human-centricity. Following a review of each element, the study proposes a framework of four distinct opportunities for achieving a cultural convergence for heritage landscapes: (i) harmonizing spirituality and aesthetics; (ii) balancing continuity and evolution; (iii) fostering inclusive stewardship between communities and practitioners; and (iv) cultivating equilibrium between people and nature. It is worth noting here that the notion of landscape is increasingly conceptualized as a cultural process reflecting pluralistic meanings and human values over time.¹⁶ Since the mid-20th century, this has accelerated international exchanges of perspectives which are manifested by, for instance, a range of UNESCO projects that foster east-west dialogues.¹⁷ A nuanced understanding across the east-west divide addressing the common complexities that facilitate heritage discourses is therefore increasing; however, this contribution posits these theoretical and philosophical dialogues are significantly underexplored within the literature.¹¹

2. Mode of inquiry

The adoption of phenomenology as the philosophical approach in this research project offers an opportunity to explore the intricacies of Eastern and Western approaches toward heritage landscapes, by placing emphasis on analyzing the literature from the perspective of how each culture case – Chinese and English – perceives, values, and interacts with their cultural and natural landscapes. Edmund Husserl¹⁸ often noted as the father of phenomenology, explained how phenomenology affords an ontological perspective such as this through its

emphasis on the “essence” of lived experience. For example, Seamon¹⁹ proposes a “phenomenological ecology” that can better capture the lived experiences and relationships between nature and culture. Husserl’s phenomenological lens has particular relevance in the ontological study of heritage landscapes in terms of how it focuses on a “return to things,” and thus a focus on direct subjective encounters with the things of the world – value judgments, emotions, awareness of the passing of time, and so on.²⁰ This perspective aligns with the nature of heritage landscapes, which are often conceptualized as repositories of cultural memory, identity, and historical significance.²¹

The interplay between subjectivity and objectivity that this affords mirrors the intricate nature of heritage landscapes, as they are shaped by historical, cultural, and spiritual dimensions.²² It also reflects the ongoing friction in contemporary heritage studies between heritage as a material commodity and heritage as “cultural capital.”²³ This philosophical perspective enables a deeper exploration of the underlying foundations that shape Eastern and Western approaches towards heritage landscapes. It, therefore, offers the researchers conceptual scope to consider how the common duality between the tangible features of the landscape (historical) and the intangible realm of human experiences and emotions (cultural) can be entangled.²⁴ Phenomenology’s emphasis on subjective perspectives aligns with the intricate nature of heritage landscapes, acknowledging that they are experienced differently by various individuals. This supports the researchers in acknowledging and delving into the diversity of interpretations and experiences within each cultural context (for example, in relation to Chinese history, Liu²⁵ explains how the notion of “self” is a cultural construction which influences how individuals perceive and engage with their world).

3. Literature review

3.1. Philosophical underpinnings

Beginning broadly, the divergence between Chinese and English approaches toward heritage landscapes is deeply rooted in their distinct philosophical foundations, which have shaped the cultural paradigms through which each respective society interacts with their historical and environmental legacies. Eastern cultures, influenced by spiritual traditions such as Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism, emphasize an interconnected and holistic worldview that recognizes the profound harmony between humans and the natural world.²⁶ For example, in China, the essence of Eastern philosophical thought is rooted in the concept of balance, where nature, humanity, and the divine are seen as integral parts of a holistic cosmic

order.⁵ This holistic perspective informs the perception of heritage landscapes (or “fengjing areas”) as embodiments of spiritual energy and natural beauty, resonating with the teachings of these traditions.²⁷ Consequently, Chinese culture can conceptualize heritage landscapes as spaces where the boundaries between the material and spiritual realms blur, resulting in “human-*jing* (landscape) effect.”²⁸

By contrast, Western-European perspectives are shaped by humanist and enlightenment ideals that prioritize human agency and artistic creativity.²⁹ The English philosophical tradition tends to view nature as a resource to be harnessed for human progress and esthetic expressions.³ This anthropocentric outlook has primarily led to the transformation of landscapes to serve human needs, reflecting a Western belief in humanity’s rights over the manipulation of the environment to generate resources.³⁰ Thus, the English appreciation of heritage landscapes is often channeled through artistic and architectural outlooks, where human status and the esthetics of the built environment are preserved through representational means.³¹

These contrasting philosophical underpinnings impose significant differences on heritage landscape conservation and interpretation. Eastern philosophies advocate for coexistence, reverence for the environment, and the preservation of spiritual connections with nature.³² As a result, the conservation strategies in Chinese contexts often seek to prioritize maintaining the balance between human interventions and natural rhythms.^{33,34} English perspectives, driven by “materialistic-historical” ideals,²⁹ tend to endorse the transformation of landscapes to serve utilitarian and esthetic purposes, which is rooted in a Ruskinian understanding of the “esthetic of landscape.”¹⁰

3.2. Spiritual and artistic emphasis

The contrast between Chinese and English approaches toward heritage landscapes is also evident in the divergent emphasis on spirituality and artistic expression. These differences are anchored in the aforementioned cultural perspectives that shape the perception and valuation of heritage landscapes. Eastern cultures tend to draw from spiritual traditions that imbue landscapes with profound spiritual significance.²⁸ Heritage landscapes are therefore often regarded as thresholds to the divine,¹¹ reflecting their subjectively constructed reality.²⁷ The Nara Document³⁵ is one such document that attempts to reinforce and formalize these matters of concern by projecting them to an international heritage audience. Conservation efforts often involve maintaining the landscapes’ natural features and configurations, conceptualizing the landscape as a tangible manifestation of spiritual qualities.³⁶ For example, the

2015 revised Principles for the Conservation of Heritage Sites in China builds on a previous range of attempts to address spiritual values as an important component of heritage conservation.³³ Western perspectives on heritage landscapes are characterized by an art-historic lens, which prioritizes “pictorialism.”^{37,38} In England, this is administered through the evaluation of historic and esthetic “values” that demonstrate evidence of human history and creativity in planned landscapes.³⁹ The result is a robust approach toward landscape conservation that is underpinned by a strong reverence for history – the “historical ground.”⁷⁸ Landscapes in this regard become a tangible layered historical narrative of the site’s history.

3.3. Holistic and individual approaches

A striking difference between Eastern and Western approaches toward heritage landscapes lies in their contrasting perspectives on holistic unity versus the conservation of individual elements. These differences reflect distinct cultural attitudes toward the integration of natural and built environments within the conservation paradigm with regard to the notions of authenticity¹¹ and permanence.⁴⁰ Eastern cultures often perceive heritage landscapes as integrated wholes where nature and culture (such as architecture) coexist harmoniously.⁴⁰ These cultures consider landscapes as living systems where built structures, natural features, and spiritual elements combine to create a sacred unity.⁴¹⁻⁴³ Conservation strategies often prioritize conserving the balance and continuity between human interventions and the surrounding environment, ensuring that landscapes remain in harmony,^{44,45} despite their value often being modified to fit into a modern Western idiom.⁴⁶ For example, the Chinese holistic approach underscores the need for conservation strategies that respect the interconnectedness of nature and culture. Maintaining an ecological balance and spiritual harmony of a heritage landscape is, therefore, often considered paramount.⁴⁷ Conversely, English perspectives typically emphasize the conservation of individual architectural and artistic elements that give sites and places permanence and a recognizable quality.⁴⁸ This, therefore, often involves the meticulous restoration of specific elements back to a previous state.⁴⁹ The focus on individual elements reflects the Western belief in capturing and conveying the products of the past.⁵⁰ The prioritization of preserving elements in their “original” state therefore places logistical and philosophical emphasis on specialized interventions to restore a collective agreement of historical accuracy and esthetic value.

3.4. Concerns of continuity and evolution

While there is some overlap in contemporary attitudes toward concerns over cultural continuity and evolution,

there are still nuanced differences which reflect distinct cultural attitudes toward the concept of authenticity within a broader heritage context¹¹⁻¹⁴ and, therefore, how the adaptation of landscapes can balance the notion of authenticity with changing societal needs. Eastern cultures often emphasize the conservation of continuity through intangible practices,⁴⁰ and the concept of heritage is deeply intertwined with the perpetuation of beliefs, rituals, and lifestyle.^{51,52} This particular emphasis on continuity aligns with the Eastern belief in the intergenerational transmission of wisdom (e.g., traditional skills)⁵³ – reflecting a cultural interest in immaterial manifestations of heritage (or “intangible heritage”).⁵⁴ The Chinese heritage discourse – which has progressed rapidly since the state’s Reform and Opening Up – has increasingly revisited the notion of evolution within heritage landscape conservation and how their transformation can accommodate evolving societal needs.⁵⁵

Western-European perspectives also now typically embrace the notion of evolution within heritage landscapes and value the transformation of landscapes to accommodate evolving societal needs, although this is weighted toward architectural and artistic evolution, reflecting earlier interpretations of nature being the “medium” and culture being the “agent.”¹ For example, in England, this is now formally captured in the contemporary re-evaluation of conservation as “the management of change”³⁹ – which is contextualized within an overarching values-based methodology for identifying the significance of the historic environment (capturing “evidential,” “historic,” “esthetic,” and “communal” values).³⁹ Primary emphasis is placed on values relating directly to physical heritage fabric of sites, which helps to maintain synergy between the physical layering of change and the historical layers of cultural sites.⁵⁶

3.5. Attitudes toward community involvement

There are varying degrees of emphasis between Eastern and Western approaches placed on community involvement in conservation efforts for heritage landscapes. These differences reflect distinct cultural attitudes toward notions of collective stewardship,⁵⁷ local engagement,^{58,59} and the role of communities in shaping the destiny of heritage landscapes.^{44,60} Eastern cultures often prioritize community involvement as an integral part of heritage landscape conservation, with workshops and digital approaches employed to increase engagement¹² – for example, the immersive multimedia tour at the Humble Administrator’s Garden, Suzhou, China.⁶¹ The collective ownership of landscapes is deeply rooted in Eastern culture, where local communities often view themselves as “traditional custodians” of historical and spiritual legacies.⁵³ There are of course specific variances, such as urbanization pressures in China resulting in a more top-down approach

toward participation,¹² and touristic pressures to prioritize materials over community needs – such as at the ancient city of Pingyao, Shanxi, China.³⁶ Community engagement is typically utilized to ensure heritage landscapes remain relevant to the lives and values of local residents by aligning conservation with community aspirations and needs.¹² This helps to foster a sense of ownership and shared responsibility⁶² and preserves the intimate connections between people and place.⁶³

A concern for public ownership of land and the preservation of open spaces was at the birth of the modern Western conservation movement in England, alongside the preservation of historic buildings.¹ Western-European conservation strategies often involve a balance between community engagement and the expertise of conservation professionals. However, in some countries, such as England, this balance is more evident in practice than in supporting policy and guidance documents.⁶⁴ While recognizing the importance of local input, Western societies typically value the specialized knowledge and skills that experts bring to heritage landscape conservation.^{23,65} This reflects the focus on technical proficiencies that seek to achieve “wholeness” and “stability,” which relates to the aforementioned tendency toward restoration and reconstruction of cultural heritage assets.^{2,49} Certainly, the involvement of experts acknowledges the technical and historical intricacies of heritage landscapes while also respecting the cultural and social contexts that shape them. It is therefore the fusion of local perspectives with expert knowledge through varying degrees of consultation that best categorizes the English approach towards community involvement.⁶⁴ While this can ensure appropriate balance between historical accuracy and community aspirations, it does tend to favor the technical preservation of cultural resources over community involvement.⁶⁶

3.6. Nature, spirituality, and human-centricity

An inherent dichotomy between Eastern and Western approaches toward heritage landscapes lies in their distinct perspectives on the relationship between nature, spirituality, and human-centricity. These differences reflect diverse cultural attitudes toward the interconnectedness of humans with the natural world and the prioritization of human needs within heritage landscapes. Chinese perspectives often conceptualize heritage landscapes as sacred spaces that embody the harmonious connection between humans and the natural world.²⁷ The purposeful interconnection of nature and spirituality within approaches underscores the belief that the conservation of landscapes is essential to maintaining spiritual balance and cosmic harmony – supporting the notion of heritage landscapes as places of reverence, contemplation, and

unity with the universe.⁵ Accordingly, an Eastern nature-spirituality perspective manifests in heritage strategies that can prioritize the conservation of landscapes in their natural state.⁶⁷ These strategies aim to maintain the spiritual energy and environmental balance that contribute to perceptions of the landscapes’ sacred significance.⁴⁵ By contrast, English perspectives often emphasize the centrality of human experience and the built environment within conceptions of cultural landscapes, which places an importance on elements of the landscape formed and shaped by people;⁶⁸ and as already alluded to, the value that Western-European cultures place on the transformation and adaptation of landscapes to serve human needs often results in significant alterations to the natural environment. The human-centric approach underscores the Western belief in the mastery of nature for progress, innovation, and the satisfaction of human desires³⁰ – hence why English heritage strategies often involve the manipulation of landscapes to accommodate human activities and modern functionalities.

4. Discussion: Toward a cultural convergence

The elucidation of Eastern and Western approaches toward heritage landscapes formed from the literature across these six key elements has illuminated that contrasting perspectives that provide valuable insights into cultural values, heritage conservation strategies, and the resulting impact these have on the human experience and appreciation of cultural landscapes. Underpinned by these differences, this discussion focuses on synthesizing them into a holistic framework for supporting a cultural convergence of approaches toward heritage landscape conservation. This framework is broken down into four key elements which have the capacity to overcome the differences that have been identified within the literature review (Figure 1). By synthesizing Eastern and Western qualities, methodological space can be made for developing a holistic approach that can amalgamate the strengths of both cultures. It is this notion of “cultural convergence” which this research suggests can support more effective conservation of World Heritage landscape sites, by capturing a broader spectrum of heritage principles and concerns which amalgamate Eastern and Western traditions of practice.

4.1. Harmonizing spirituality and esthetics

The Eastern emphasis on spiritual significance and the Western focus on art and esthetics can be harmonized to create a more immersive visitor experience. By integrating both aspects, heritage landscapes can offer not only esthetic beauty but also a sense of transcendence and connection with the divine. This approach recognizes that spirituality can be evoked through esthetic elements, fostering a

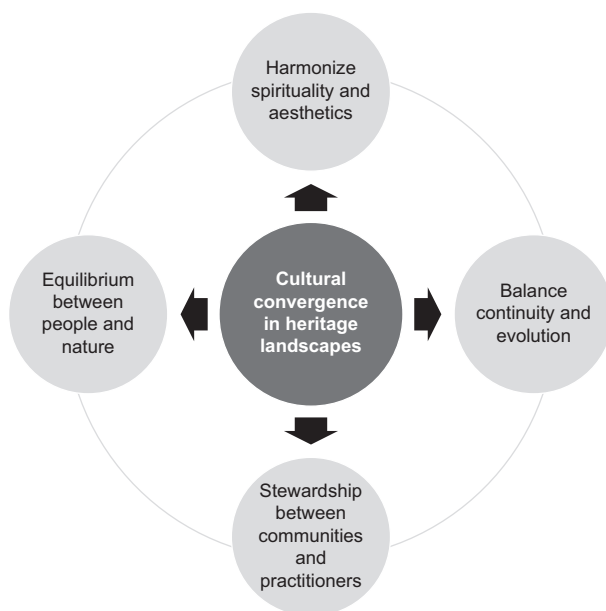


Figure 1. Proposed framework of cultural convergence in cultural heritage landscapes. Schematic by the authors.

deeper and more meaningful engagement for visitors. Interestingly, this approach is utilized at some religious heritage sites⁶⁹ but not expanded for use within secular cultural heritage landscape settings.

4.2. Balancing continuity and evolution

The contrast between Eastern continuity and Western evolution approaches suggests a balanced strategy that ensures relevance without compromising notions of authenticity. By identifying key continuity anchors and allowing adaptive evolution in non-intrusive ways, heritage landscapes can evolve while still maintaining their historical and spiritual essence. A dynamic approach such as this would prioritize respecting the intrinsic values of both perspectives, resulting in a landscape that can accommodate both tradition and contemporary needs – conceptually *overcoming* the friction between continuity and renewal.⁷⁰

4.3. Fostering inclusive stewardship between communities and practitioners

More effectively combining community engagement with expert knowledge can foster a more inclusive and effective conservation approach. Local communities' deep-rooted connections to heritage landscapes can be safeguarded and augmented with professional expertise to ensure cultural landscape conservation aligns with historical accuracy and contemporary societal needs. An integrated approach such as this would respect the collective wisdom of communities while benefiting from advancements in technical proficiency – which would also support cultural

landscape conservation that resonates with notions of tradition and innovation.^{71,72}

4.4. Cultivating equilibrium between people and nature

Amalgamating the dichotomy between Eastern nature-spirituality and Western human-centricity suggests that there is capacity for heritage landscapes to sustain and (re)create the inherent spirituality of human interactions with nature, which would connect contemporary societies back to ancient notions of *anima loci* (place-soul).² This approach acknowledges the importance of nature as a source of inspiration and connection, intertwining human needs with environmental stewardship. By integrating spiritual and utilitarian aspects, heritage landscapes can serve as spaces of reverence while also promoting sustainable sociocultural practices.⁷³

5. Conclusion

Heritage landscapes embody cultural narratives and human-environment interactions, which reveal distinct Eastern and Western perspectives marked by contrasting philosophies and approaches toward heritage landscape valuation and conservation. Recognizing these differences is pivotal for integrating approaches, transcending cultural boundaries, and enriching heritage landscape conservation practices – which can support enhanced evaluations of World Heritage landscape sites by encompassing a broader and more inclusive range of heritage principles and considerations that integrate practices from both Eastern and Western traditions. This research has focused on the key differences between Chinese (representing Eastern) and English (representing Western) approaches toward cultural heritage landscapes, offering insight into the diverse philosophies, perspectives, and attitudes that shape these approaches. An evaluation of key differences has led to the development of a framework comprised of four key elements, which may offer an exploratory path toward a more integrated and culturally sensitive approach to cultural heritage landscape conservation in a global heritage context. The synthesis of spirituality and aesthetics can create a more immersive user experience, where the spiritual significance of heritage landscapes is amplified by the artistic elements they embody. Balancing continuity and evolution is essential for ensuring the relevance of these landscapes, permitting adaptive changes while preserving their historical and spiritual essence. The fusion of community engagement and expert knowledge can result in inclusive and effective conservation strategies that honor both local aspirations and professional standards; and harmonizing nature-spirituality with human-centricity acknowledges the profound connection

between humans and the natural world, which can support responsible stewardship.

These four elements of this framework underscore the transformative potential that integrating Eastern and Western approaches toward cultural heritage landscapes can have on the contemporary conservation of cultural heritage sites. The exchange of knowledge between these traditions seems logical, as each can benefit from the insights and practices of the other. Future research can build on this theoretical contribution by applying its framework as an exploratory methodology to relevant case study sites to further test its viability. The researchers suggest an ideal pilot case study site would be one where both Eastern and Western cultural influences, values, and/or priorities converge, allowing the framework to be tested and evaluated in practice. Such research would contribute to refining these ideas and demonstrating their applicability in enhancing conservation strategies and user experiences of cultural world heritage landscapes. Within an increasingly globalized heritage context, it is anticipated this will facilitate further cross-cultural exchange and advancement of holistic heritage conservation strategies that can transcend traditional geographic approaches.

Acknowledgments

None.

Funding

None.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Author contributions

Conceptualization: All authors

Writing – original draft: All authors

Writing – review & editing: All authors

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data

Not applicable.

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PERSPECTIVE ARTICLE

Contemporary art from the Global South in the art auction market from 2020 to 2022

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Abstract

In recent years, emerging artists from the Global South have garnered substantial attention in the art market. This study seeks to examine the market value and ecosystem evolving around these emerging artists by analyzing the sales results of 51 artists between 2020 and 2022. This research aims to establish patterns linking unprecedented sales results with exhibition history and highlights the essential network required for these artists' commercial success. The study reveals that the emergence of artists in the global art market results from a deliberate effort by a network of stakeholders. Our exhibition database led us to a group of 438 stakeholders who promote this sample of artists. By examining artists' origins, backgrounds, and careers, this study provides context for analyzing the impact of artistic migration on artists' visibility, the importance of being promoted by a variety of specialists, and the surge of African artists in the global art market since 2020. Our findings indicate that the structure of the art world has shifted toward a decentralized global art market characterized by a diverse range of actors and inputs dispersed globally. This diversification has disrupted traditional power structures in the art world, opening up new possibilities for emerging artists from the Global South, thereby contributing to a more equitable and inclusive art market.

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Citation: Durand-Ruel VM, Zarobell J. Contemporary art from the Global South in the art auction market from 2020 to 2022. *Arts & Communication*. 2024;2(1):1608. <https://doi.org/10.36922/ac.1608>

Received: August 16, 2023**Accepted:** September 26, 2023**Published Online:** November 8, 2023

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Publisher's Note: AccScience Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Keywords: Art Market; Global South; Contemporary art; Globalization; Black Lives Matter**1. Introduction**

One of the most remarkable transformations in the world of contemporary visual art over the last generation has been the inclusion of artists from the Global South in art exhibitions, biennials, art fairs, and auctions held in traditional art capitals in Europe and North America. While there are more changes than can be described in a single paper, and many of the larger issues have been addressed in a growing body of literature on art and globalization, the market mechanism responsible for introducing such artists to the Western world has not received sufficient examination. The geography of the art world is rapidly changing, with the number of circuits within the global art market continuing to expand. Yet the global success of artists from countries previously considered marginal is an important manifestation of globalization in the art world. This paper aims to focus on how these artists enter the global market and gain recognition within that system, enabling them to become fixtures in an art world previously dominated by artists from just a handful of countries. So long as there has been an art market, it has been expanding and transforming, but there is a case to be made that the changes of the past generation

have ushered in a new domain that can be described as a globally decentralized market with such a wide range of inputs and actors that it can no longer be considered the same structure as existed before the advent of globalization.

Such developments in the market have been investigated extensively through two collected volumes that have approached these questions from a variety of perspectives^{1,2}. In addition, another collected volume focusing on the Art Market and the Global South has just been released by Brill³. These studies, along with subsequent publications on globalization and the art market, reveal a series of trends that have influenced our approach to this topic. In their contribution to the 2015 volume, Stefano Baia Curioni, Laura Forte, and Ludovica Leone introduce a fundamental dichotomy:

“Multiplicity, variety, inclusion, but also assessment, selection, and exclusion are the most evident — and only apparently contradictory — features of the contemporary international art world... Actually, these two sides of the art system interact in a much more complex, reflexive, and path-dependent way. Economic/market potentials and critical/philosophical evaluations coexist as the customer’s “tastes” interact with a moving, pervasive, hierarchical, and complex regime enacted by commercial and non-commercial gatekeepers who legitimate the traded works as “art” works... It can, moreover, be seen as a competitive process that results in a star system in which prices and social assessments interact along patterns that still wait to be pervasively and empirically observed⁴.”

Central to their description here is a multiplicity of processes that interact within the space of the market, some of which are economic, while others are philosophical. The notion of taste, and the selection process that operates through the purchase of artworks, is the central component. This concept had been developed in previous articles by Olav Velthuis and Noah Horowitz, whose essays in the earlier volume weighed in on this important crux of the market.

In his essay, “Introduction: The Contemporary Art Market between Stasis and Flux,” Velthuis intones: “Many of the new super-wealthy collectors buy works of art when the careers of their makers are already firmly established. They behave more as taste-followers than as taste-makers. The economic power of these collectors may be enormous; their cultural power is limited⁵.” For this author, collectors provide an element of stasis in the market, but Horowitz sees taste as part of the changing dimension of the market, pointing to a “paradigm shift away from conventional forms of connoisseurship and toward more ouverte forms of speculation, trophy hunting, and lifestyle consumption:

the newer and trendier, the better⁶.” The research for this study aims to assess changes in taste by focusing on artists from the Global South whose careers have taken off between 2020 and 2022, as evaluated based on a significant increase in auction values at contemporary auction sales at Christie’s, Sotheby’s, and Phillips auction houses featuring the most contemporary work. The discoveries of this research shed light on changes in taste in this brief period but further aim to anchor these market results in a review of institutional support for the careers of these newly successful artists. By identifying stakeholders who have contributed to the success of these artists at auction, this study aims to provide some of the empirical research that Baia Curioni, Forte, and Leone identify as part of the “competitive process” at work. The artists who are selected by tastemakers for market success are supported by a network, first identified by White and White but later elaborated by Becker and Moulin, among others⁷⁻⁹. Isabelle Graw has observed a recent transformation, however, and updated the construct of the dealer-critic system first elaborated by White and White, replacing it with a perceptible “dealer-collector system” in which the market has achieved dominance over the cultural values provided by art criticism¹⁰. We tend to agree that the market dimension is now dominant. However, we find that external cultural transformations have significant impacts on market desirability and generate demand for novelty, or “multiplicity, variety, and inclusion,” as Baia Curioni, Forte, and Leone would have it.

As Anita Archer has pointed out, “The market value of an artist’s work is underpinned by the strategic activities of gallerists, curators, critics, and institutions in a mutually rewarding ecosystem¹¹.” While there is undoubtedly a significant transformation in a world that holds around 300 art fairs and 250 international biennial art exhibitions annually, it is equally true that specific locations play a central role in diversifying the global art market and incorporating heretofore overlooked participants. Archer concludes her study of three art market nodes — Hong Kong for contemporary Chinese art, Singapore for contemporary Southeast Asian art, and Australia for aboriginal art — by noting:

“These case studies have demonstrated that, in the last two decades, the global footprints of the multinational auction houses and their ability to physically translocate works of art around the world have been critical factors in the expansion of Global South art markets. But only to a certain point¹¹.”

This study takes this idea seriously but aims to delve into a broader development that art auctions are involved in. We seek to ascertain what points of focus, which

actors and networks, are central to the expansion of the art market today, particularly the inclusion of emerging artists from the Global South. We have developed a two-tiered study to shed some light on this important issue. The fundamental question we seek to answer is: how are artists from the Global South brought into the global art market network, and which sites are the most robust in terms of promoting the careers of emerging artists from the Global South? It must be stated that while our project nominally focuses on the market, our goal is to trace a broader transformation in the art world as a whole. Many of the sites we have discovered are not commercial in orientation but demonstrate institutional shifts at the global level. Our goal is to understand how the market facilitates these changes and what processes dovetail with it to generate a more diverse contemporary art world in the 21st century.

2. Materials and methods

As with so many studies of the art market, the first tier of our analysis begins with auction results because the information is public and demonstrates a diversity of interest in contemporary art. Another notable shift in the art market over the last generation is the incredible growth of the contemporary art market above all other sectors, which currently represents 55% of all art auction sales worldwide. New York has remained the most important art auction location, accounting for 38% of global art auction revenue¹². The major auction houses in New York, namely, Christie's, Sotheby's, and Phillips, have recently developed auctions that focus on the most contemporary art available at the market, capitalizing on collectors' fascination with emerging artists and their works. These auctions are variously titled as "New Now," "The Now," or simply "21st Century Sale." They aim to promote the idea of the "contemporary" in contemporary art and thus seek the most desirable, primarily young, artists from around the world. By studying recent auction results (Appendix 1) and identifying works of art that sold for an order of magnitude greater than their estimates, we sought to discover which artists art investors perceive as the most desirable artists. We consider emerging artists to be those who have had their first solo exhibition in a cultural institution within the past 2 years, are under 50 years old, and have recently entered the art market. Concerning the geographical delimitation, the notion of Global South includes countries in Asia, Africa, and South America, excluding China, as this country's art market is considered mature. Artists coming from the Global South are those who were raised until adulthood (age eighteen) in these countries. Some artists have since moved to neighboring countries or Western ones, but we will parse specific complexities below.

To select our sample of artists from the sales database of Sotheby's, Christie's, and Phillips, we use the indicator of growth magnitude to evaluate these artists' commercial success. Applying the indicator of growth magnitude, we consider artists commercially successful when their artworks were sold for at least double their estimated price by auction house experts. This indicator allows us to determine that they garnered greater interest than predicted for their creations and rapidly incorporated into the global market structure. Beginning with an examination of only 2 years' worth of auction data, we identified a group of 51 living artists from the Global South (Appendix 2) whose prices at auctions at least doubled the existing estimates. In certain cases, the results were five, or even ten, times the estimated price provided by auction house experts. We consider these artists as the most successful emerging artists from the Global South in the contemporary market at the moment. To understand how these artists achieved these sales results in a short period of time, we need to examine their professional development in the art world.

The second stage of the research involved collecting extensive exhibition data on these artists to determine where they have been shown and which points of access contributed to their market success. Our stakeholder analysis follows the recent research developed by Baia Curioni, Pierazzini, and Forti¹³. In one sense, the question that we aimed to answer was: are there dealers or exhibition venues that recur in this list and demonstrate a network of actors in the contemporary art market significantly contributing to the promotion of artists from the Global South? How can we map such a network? Furthermore, what will it tell us about the inclusion of new artists in the art world? We ask not only about the drivers of market success but also about the networks accessible to artists from the Global South. Are specific established institutions and dealers heavily involved in this process, or have new structures emerged to facilitate the diversification of the art world and the inclusion of new actors? Through our research, we hope to discover a process for determining the value derived from the integration of market and institutional structures, thus paving the way for alternatives within an existing system that was once closed to artists from most of the world. It is not so much an analysis of how the art world has changed but rather who is effecting change in the art world at present.

To conduct the exhibition analysis, we examined artists' curriculum vitae, websites, and gallery websites to gather precise information about the exhibitions in which they participated. We focused on art galleries,

museums, art fairs, and biennials. We also examine their academic background, any prizes; they might have been awarded, the residency programs they participated in, and whether they migrated to another country. This in-depth analysis led us to identify a network of 438 stakeholders promoting our sample of 51 artists. On average, an emerging artist from the Global South required the support of nine different stakeholders to rapidly integrate into the global art market and achieve commercial success. As we compiled a comprehensive list of these stakeholders, some rose to the top. Categorizing them into four groups: Dealers, Art Fairs, Biennials, and Institutions (Museums), the top stakeholder, the Armory Show in New York, was connected to 14 of the 51 artists. The top four stakeholders were art fairs, followed by the Ross-Sutton Gallery, with a connection to eight of the artists. The top biennial where these artists showed was the Venice Biennale, featuring seven artists. The top institution was the Contemporary Art Museum Houston, which exhibited six of the artists on our list. To provide a sense of perspective, only 25 stakeholders showcased art by five or more of the artists in our sample. Thus, the vast majority of the stakeholders were involved with just a few of these artists or fewer. This makes those organizations at the top of our list worthy of more investigation, but first, we will turn to an analysis of the artists.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Analysis of artists (51 artists in this study)

3.1.1. Geographical distribution and concentration of artists

Figure 1 illustrates the global distribution of the top-performing artists in our sample, with bigger dots representing a higher number of successful artists in each country. Interestingly, the dots are scattered across Africa, Asia, and South America, highlighting the global reach of the art market. Our sample comprises 51 artists from a diverse range of 20 countries, reflecting the increasing globalization of the art world. One of the most important results of our study is that there is a diversity of artists succeeding in the market from the Global South.

However, the African continent stands out as the clear leader, being the region with the highest number of emerging artists succeeding in the global auction market. Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa, in particular, are home to the most top-performing artists in our sample, with six or more artists evident from each of these countries. This follows a trend of growing interest in artworks from the African Diaspora, which has garnered attention at major art fairs, galleries, and auction houses¹⁴⁻¹⁶. The increasing representation of this group of artists in the United States of America (US) and Europe has made a considerable

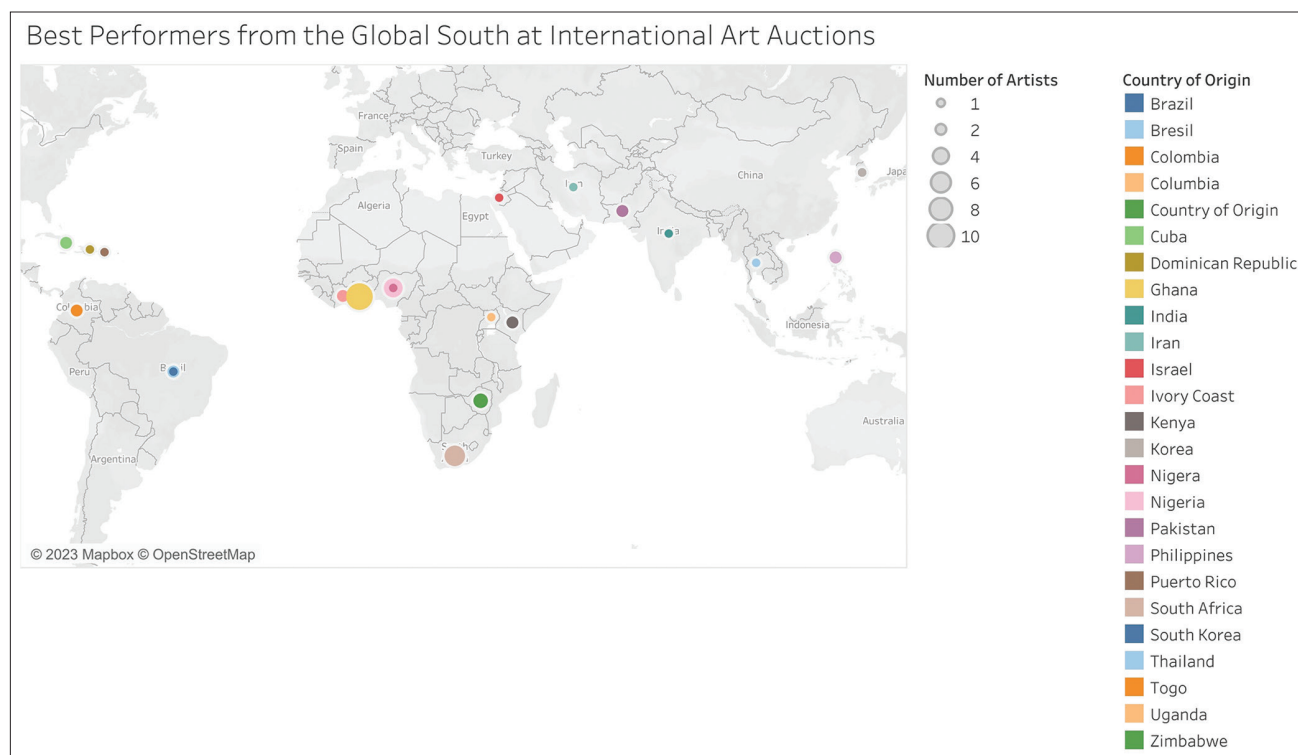


Figure 1. Distribution map of top-performing artists by country of origin.

improvement when considering exhibitions focused on art and artists from the African Diaspora, as will be discussed in more detail below. Despite the challenges posed by the global pandemic, the art world has continued to evolve, with new collectors and buyers emerging from diverse regions. This has created opportunities for artists from historically marginalized communities, leading to greater visibility and recognition.

3.1.2. A review of the top five artists

According to our analysis results, the top five performers between 2020 and 2022 are (not necessarily in this order) Aboudia, Amoako Bofo, Igshaan Adams, Oluwale Omofemi, and Salman Toor (Table 1). We are fascinated that these artists come from five different countries, four in Africa and one in South Asia. These artists, like the others on our list, achieved record prices at auction, but they are exceptional because they had the highest number of auction results that at least doubled their estimated prices between 2020 and 2022, and each one had at least one painting which reached 5 times the estimated price. These impressive results are unique among our data set, so we examine each of these artists briefly.

Aboudia (Abdoulaye Diarrassouba, born in 1983) is a prominent artist originally from Côte d'Ivoire who now resides in Brooklyn. He is widely recognized for his vivid paintings depicting the street culture in his hometown, Abidjan, and his works bear a resemblance to the graffiti-inspired paintings of Jean-Michel Basquiat. His artwork has been profoundly impacted by the trauma of the Ivorian civil war in 2011 and the street art produced in Abidjan¹⁷. While his first European exhibition took place at the Jack Bell Gallery in London in 2011, Galerie Cécile Fakhoury showcased his work in conjunction with the more established Ivorian painter Frédéric Bruly Bouabré's work in their first exhibition in 2012, which paved the way for Aboudia's local and global recognition. Aboudia's latest work continues to address the daily hardships and social inequalities in downtown Abidjan. His pieces have been showcased at several prestigious institutions, including the Benin Biennial 2012, the Nevada Museum of Art, Galleria Continua (Spheres#7, 2014), the Saatchi Gallery (Pangaea: New Art from Africa and Latin America, London, 2014 – 2015), and Art 21 in Lagos (Chap-Chap, 2016). Aboudia is now represented by three main galleries: Galerie Cécile Fakhoury (Abidjan, Paris), Ethan Cohen Gallery (New York), and Jack Bell Gallery (London). These galleries enable him to be exhibited at major art fairs, including Art Miami (2021), Art X Lagos (2021), 1-54 in London (2020), New York (2021), and Marrakech (2018). The fact of being represented by three galleries located on three different continents allows this artist to have both

a local and an international presence and enables him to achieve record prices at auction houses in New York, London, and Hong Kong. In 2021, Christie's New York devoted an online auction to Aboudia, featuring 22 works made while on lockdown in his studio in Ivory Coast; all of them sold, and two went for \$187,500 each, generating a new record for the artist¹⁸.

Amoako Bofo (born in 1984) is a highly acclaimed portrait and figurative painter hailing from Ghana and now residing in Vienna, Austria. Bofo's art is exclusively devoted to portraying individuals from the African diaspora, with a focus on Black subjectivity, diversity, and complexity¹⁹. He challenges representations that objectify and dehumanize Blackness through his use of bold colors and patterns in his portraits, which celebrate his subjects²⁰. Bofo's intimate portraits, painted with his fingers, create a space for Black joy, subjectivity, and self-determination. Bofo's meteoric rise in the art market has been noteworthy, with his works fetching astounding auction prices. Bofo is often considered the first artist to have experienced dramatic second-market excitement in a record time period. In the following section, we will delve into Bofo's impact on the contemporary African art market and the shift in collecting artworks from living African artists in the past 2 years.

Igshaan Adams, who was raised in Bonteheuwel, a previously segregated township in Cape Town, South Africa, draws inspiration from his challenging surroundings in his artwork. He incorporates cultural and religious references with materials that have always been present in his life. His tapestries are stitched together with fragments of locally sourced wood, plastic, beads, shells, string, and rope, all deeply connected to commodity trading and local environs in postcolonial Africa. His work was featured at the 2021 Venice Biennale in "The Milk of Dreams," which focused on the desire lines between the Bonteheuwel train station in Cape Town and Epping, one of the city's industrial neighborhoods²¹. Adams draws from "desire lines," unplanned paths created as a result of erosion from foot traffic, to record other types of movement in some of his tapestries, which were used to connect communities that the government wanted to forcibly separate during the Apartheid era. His work is supported by four main galleries: Stevenson (Cape Town), Casey Kaplan (New York), Blank Projects (Cape Town), and AVA Gallery (Cape Town), which organized his solo exhibition in 2010. In addition, Adams has participated in numerous group shows at the Venice Biennale (2022), the Perez Art Museum Miami (2019), the Minneapolis Institute of Art (2019), the Museum of African Contemporary Art Al Maaden (MACAAL), and the Seattle Art Museum (2018).

Table 1. Top five-performing artists at auction from the Global South, 2020 – 2022

Artist	Nationality	Sale date	Auction house	Sale name	Location	Artwork title	Mid-estimate	Sale result	Growth magnitude
Aboudia	Ivory Coast	April 28, 2022	Philipps	New Now Auction	London	Untitled (Black Love)	£22,500.00	£81,900.00	NA
		September 28, 2021	Philipps	New Now Auction	New York	Joy	\$35,000.00	\$113,400.00	NA
		December 9, 2021	Philipps	New Now Auction	London	Untitled	£25,000.00	£138,600.00	5.5
		May 25, 2021	Christie's	20 th and 21 st Century Art Afternoon Session	Hong Kong	Lady on a Bed	HKD300,000.00	HKD1,500,000.00	5.0
		Jun 28 – Jul 7, 2022	Christie's	20 th – 21 st Century Art Online	Hong Kong	Fruits	HKD400,000.00	HKD1,134,000.00	NA
Amoako Boafo	Ghana	July 15, 2020	Philipps	New Now Auction	London	The Speaker Room	£17,500.00	£112,500.00	6.5
		July 15, 2020	Philipps	New Now Auction	London	How We Lost	£25,000.00	£187,500.00	7.5
		September 30, 2020	Philipps	New Now Auction	New York	Tug end ist, wenn keiner kommt	\$50,000.00	\$325,000.00	6.5
		May 24, 2021	Christie's	20 th and 21 st Century Art Evening Sale	Hong Kong	A Pair of Shell Chairs	HKD1,150,000.00	HKD8,770,000.00	7.6
		March 1, 2022	Christie's	20 th –21 st Century: London Evening Sale	London	SWEAT	£500,000.00	£1,242,000.00	NA
		May 11, 2021	Christie's	21 st Century Evening Sale	New York	The 1919 Revolution	\$250,000.00	\$625,000.00	NA
		May 10, 2022	Christie's	21 st Century Evening Sale	New York	Untitled	\$300,000.00	\$819,000.00	NA
Igshaan Adams	South Africa	March 9, 2022	Philipps	New Now Auction	New York	Collusion	\$12,500.00	\$30,240.00	NA
		March 3, 2021	Philipps	New Now Auction	New York	Untitled (Leaves)	\$15,000.00	\$88,200.00	5.8
		September 28, 2021	Philipps	New Now Auction	New York	Chilling in the Black Jack	\$12,500.00	\$25,200.00	NA
Oluwole Omofemi	Nigeria	March 9, 2022	Philipps	New Now Auction	New York	K is for Kindness	\$12,500.00	\$35,280.00	NA
		September 28, 2022	Philipps	New Now Auction	New York	Untitled	\$15,000.00	\$31,500.00	NA
		December 9, 2021	Philipps	New Now Auction	London	Imaginary morning eclipse	£7,000.00	£100,800.00	14.4

(Cont'd...)

Table 1. (Continued)

Artist	Nationality	Sale date	Auction house	Sale name	Location	Artwork title	Mid-estimate	Sale result	Growth magnitude
Salman Toor	Pakistan	December 15, 2020	Philipps	New Now Auction	London	A Flourishing City Near the Yellow River Source	£50,000.00	£378,000.00	7.5
		September 28, 2021	Philipps	New Now Auction	New York	Purple Air S	\$85,000.00	\$302,400.00	NA
		May 24, 2021	Christie's	20 th and 21 st Century Art Evening Sale	Hong Kong	Adversité Génèreuse	HKD 1,000,000.00	HKD 4,375,000.00	NA
		May 11, 2021	Christie's	21 st Century Evening Sale	New York	Abstraction	\$125,000.00	\$475,000.00	NA
		May 10, 2022	Christie's	21 st Century Evening Sale	New York	Orchid (Vanda)	\$175,000.00	\$882,000.00	5.0

Interestingly, Adams participated in an artist residence program at the Zeitz MOCAA in Cape Town.

Born in 1988 in South Ibadan, Nigeria, Omofemi's artistic talent was recognized at a young age by his community. From the age of eight, he washed cars, scrubbed plates, hawked beer, and toiled in a restaurant²². Despite his humble beginnings, he used the money he earned to buy art supplies for painting portraits. He aimed to capture the transcendent nature of women with different occupations and backgrounds in his artwork, using it to promote African fashion and feminine charm, showcase underprivileged people, and help rediscover Afrocentric pride. Omofemi's success story began when he won representation from Alexis Gallery in Lagos 10 years ago, which has enabled him to become a key figure on the Nigerian art scene. In 2020 and 2021, Omofemi had successful shows at the Signature African Art Gallery in London and Out of Africa Gallery. These exhibitions showcased his exceptional talent and marked his growing influence in the global art market²³. The peak of this artist's career was reached when he received a commission to create a portrait of Queen Elizabeth II for the cover of *Tatler's* Platinum Jubilee issue in 2021. This was a significant milestone for Omofemi, cementing his reputation as a talented and successful artist. Omofemi's artwork consistently outpaced expectations on the secondary market in the past 2 years. In December 2021, his artwork *Imaginary Morning Eclipse*, estimated at £7,000, was sold for £100,800 at Phillips London (for approximately fourteen times the estimated price). This remarkable achievement for Omofemi stands as a testament to his talent and growing influence in the global art market.

Salman Toor, the only artist from South Asia on the list, explores the complexities of identity, sexuality, and immigrant life in his artwork. He moved to the US in 2009 to pursue a Master of Fine Art (MFA) from the Pratt Institute and has since exhibited his work in prestigious institutions and galleries worldwide. Toor's figurative paintings often depict the everyday lives of fictional young, brown, queer men in contemporary cosmopolitan culture. Toor has a unique approach in examining vulnerability within contemporary public and private life and the notion of community in the context of queer diasporic identity²⁴. Some have argued that he intends to paint a world in which Western and Eastern figures would live in harmony together. Toor's success can be attributed to various factors, including his decision to reorient his work toward the personal, his representation by prominent galleries, his participation in international art fairs, and his groundbreaking museum solo exhibition at the Whitney Museum of Art in 2020. In 2013, he began to be represented by Aicon Gallery, which showcased his work at various international art fairs, providing him with exposure and visibility in the global art market. In addition, the Luhring Augustine Gallery organized a solo exhibition for the artist in New York and showcased his work at Art Basel Miami in 2020. That same year, Toor had his first museum solo exhibition, "How Will I Know," at the Whitney Museum of Art, marking a significant milestone in his career. The impressive prices Toor's works have achieved at various auctions further demonstrate his success. The sale of his painting *A Flourishing City Near the Yellow River Source* for £3,780,000 (approximately seven times the estimated price) at Philipps London in 2020, and his painting

“Orchid” sold for \$882,000 (approximately 5 times the estimated price) at Christie’s New York in 2022, confirm his growing reputation in the art market. These results reflect the growing demand for Toor’s work and established him as a major contemporary artist.

These artists’ success stories are unique, but they all share a common thread: the ability to use their experiences and surroundings to create meaningful and impactful works of art. Despite coming from diverse countries and using different techniques, these artists are similar in their mission to advance their own artistic languages through painting. While they have received support from galleries both domestically and abroad, our analysis demonstrates how exhibitions in key art galleries and museums have propelled the value and recognition of their artworks in the international art market. It is worth noting, however, that the fact that they create paintings means their works are easier to integrate into the global art market structure. If they had worked in more specialized or culturally specific media, their work would likely not have found success in this market domain and, as a result, would not be visible in our analysis.

On analyzing the profiles and careers of this group of artists, two observations can be made. First, the numbers indicate that African artists are currently leading the establishment of Global South artists in the art market. The following section will elaborate on how African artists have experienced a surge in demand for their work in the past two years. Second, it is important to note that the top five performers on the list were all men, highlighting the persistent gender disparity in the art world, with men continuing to dominate the market. In Section 3.1.4, we will examine the stories of three women artists who overcame these challenges and established successful careers in the international art scene after migrating to other countries.

3.1.3. The skyrocketing success of African artists in the market

We believe both internal and external reasons explain the explosion of African artists in the global art market. The internal explanation can be summarized by what we refer to as the “Boafo effect.” Amoako Boafo is currently one of the most in-demand artists. A few years ago, Boafo was struggling to sell his artworks for a few hundred cedis (local currency in Ghana) in Accra and decided to move to Austria to advance his career. It was on Instagram that he was discovered by the famous African-American artist Kehinde Wiley, who recommended that his galleries in the US and the United Kingdom (UK) take a look at Boafo’s work²⁵. After a few months of negotiations, Roberts

Projects organized Boafo’s first exhibition in Los Angeles and priced his paintings at around \$10,000. Shortly after, the Marianne Ibrahim Gallery, based in Chicago, Paris, and Mexico City, began promoting Boafo at Art Basel Miami in December 2019, where his colorful portraits were sold for \$50,000 each. The following year, the value of these works multiplied more than ten times. The *Lemon Bathing Suit* (2019) was sold for \$881,500 at his auction debut in February 2020, despite Phillips in London estimating it to sell for only \$40,000 to \$65,000. As stated by Artprice, “Amoako Boafo symbolizes a cosmopolitan art market, capable of taking off in a matter of weeks with nothing more than an online presence²⁶.” This rapid ascension in reputation and prices demonstrates a strong interest from collectors in purchasing his work and has also opened the door for many Ghanaian, along with other African, artists to enter the global art market. After observing Boafo’s meteoric rise, many collectors saw an investment opportunity in acquiring artworks from artists of African origin. As Nate Freeman detailed in an article published on *ArtNet News* in 2020, Boafo’s work became the subject of intense speculation among art world insiders, and various actors in this network, as early as 2020, found ways to profit from the fascination for his work. The challenge of such stories of speculation in the art world is always to understand whether the incredible rise in prices was driven by speculators trying to profit from the increasing value of his work or whether the increasing values of his work were driven by speculative maneuvers themselves. The shocking detail reported by Freeman is that the buyer of the *Lemon Bathing Suit* was the artist himself, but the intermediary who bid on the painting and took possession of it never delivered the work to him²⁵. In this way, it is possible to see that artists whose value rises so quickly are exploited by established actors in the art market, but they are also implicated in these mechanisms very quickly, and any effort by emerging artists to assert control over market mechanisms will likely be trumped by experienced players already in the art market infrastructure. This is not simply a story of another artist and a handful of gallerists giving Boafo an opportunity (though this is what happened); it is also about actors in the market recognizing an opportunity and playing it for maximum gain. Freeman’s story demonstrates an artist coming to terms with these realities, his efforts to manage his market, and, ultimately, his failure to do so. Nevertheless, Boafo has become a significant fixture in the contemporary art market, and his future career will benefit from it as long as he can ride the wave, negotiate with knowledge of his limitations, and be protected by the galleries that represent him.

In addition to the Boafo effect, it can be said that external reasons have facilitated the skyrocketing success

of African artists in the market. The cultural shift that began in May 2020 after the killing of Rodney King in Minneapolis propelled the Black Lives Matter movement — originally founded in the wake of the murder of Florida teenager Trayvon Martin in 2012 — to global prominence. This resulted in a global upsurge in activism against racial discrimination, historical subjugation, and cultural marginalization. New demands were placed on cultural institutions and market structures to provide a more diverse representation of minority artists. Broadly speaking, this movement appears to be an important driver of this market evolution¹⁴. The Black Lives Matter movement has stirred up a tsunami in the art world by denouncing the lack of representation of the Black and African Diaspora artists in art history books, museum exhibitions, and on the market. For a long time, the Western narrative in art history was considered the only narrative, excluding any alternative discourse. The tide has unquestionably changed, and this dynamic has forced curators, scholars, and art experts to include African-American artists in the discussion and promote this formerly marginalized group of cultural producers. There has also been a spillover effect that benefits African artists. This study concurs with the theory of a “Black Renaissance” posited by Artprice, in which Ghanaian, Nigerian, and South African artists have enjoyed a surge in popularity in the global art market over the past 2 years, and we believe that Black Lives Matter has played an instrumental role in this process¹⁴. The creative industries have pivoted toward cultural inclusivity and diversity, reinforcing the crucial role that social movements can play in shaping cultural institutions and promoting positive change in the market. The success of the African Diaspora in the art market serves as a powerful example of how emerging artists from the Global South enter the market and become fixtures of the art world.

3.1.4. Women artists from the Global South and their migration

After observing that out of 51 artists from the Global South featured in our study, only 13 are women, we selected three women artists who overcame this gender gap and established successful careers in the international art scene after migrating to other countries. Beyond our effort to showcase women artists here, these examples underline how artists’ own mobility can also contribute to market success. By examining the academic and professional background of our sample of artists, we observed that many artists from the Global South migrated to the United States, Europe, and neighboring countries for their studies or to participate in residency programs abroad. Artistic migration has been treated in recent literature on contemporary art^{27,28}, but it is a topic not well understood in relation to the art market,

and one of the biggest research challenges is to measure it. While it is clear that many artists have migrated from the Global South to Europe, North America, or Australia, the social process of artistic migration has been explored more in qualitative, and often personal, terms by authors as diverse as Edwidge Dandicat and Edward Said^{29,30}.

In our sample of 51 artists, 22 have relocated to Europe or North America, but almost all circulate through these locations to initiate exhibitions at galleries, participate in art fairs or biennials, and complete artist residencies. Anne Ring Petersen has introduced the concept of artists as migrant workers in a globalized art system, and this concept applies to their works of art even more. Needless to say, the artworks traded at art auctions in New York, London, Paris, or Hong Kong are export goods from the Global South, which are traded in economic centers (though not necessarily ending up there). What’s even more compelling is the notion that artists are laborers in transit. However, they are perhaps more similar to skilled professionals who apply for work visas than to manual laborers (whether formal or informal) who transit from Global South countries to work in Europe or the US. In the US, there is even a special visa available only to artists and cultural producers (the O Visa), and the UK offers the “Global Talent Visa.” However, the EU does not have a special program for artist migration.

Our artist selection in this section aims to represent artists from diverse locations with distinct trajectories, and it includes Maria Taniguchi (Philippines), Firelei Baez (Dominican Republic), and Lisa Brice (South Africa). Taniguchi grew up in the Philippines, where she obtained her Bachelor’s degree in fine arts, and then she moved to London to earn her MFA at Goldsmiths College of Art. She has since returned to live in Manila but is now represented by the well-established French gallery, Perrotin. Similarly, Firelei Baez grew up in the Dominican Republic and then relocated to New York to pursue her art studies. She has been exhibited at James Cohan Gallery in New York, where she now resides. Lisa Brice chose a different strategy, studying in Cape Town and then moving to London temporarily for a residency at Gasworks Gallery. She decided to settle in London (and Trinidad) and is now promoted by Stephen Friedman Gallery.

These three women chose to relocate to Western countries for professional opportunities, either temporarily or permanently. Their sales results suggest that they have been highly successful, and, furthermore, all of them are represented by major galleries and have had exhibitions in Western cultural institutions. To give but one example, Lisa Brice’s painting *No Bare Back, after Embah* (2017) was sold for more than three million dollars, exceeding the

estimated value of \$250,000, at “The Now” Evening Auction at Sotheby’s New York in November 2021, following her “Art Now” solo show at Tate Britain in 2018. Migrating to major art hubs, whether temporarily or permanently, is a strategic move for artists from the Global South to rapidly build their reputation and increase the value of their paintings. This approach has proven to be particularly fruitful for women from the Global South seeking career opportunities abroad.

3.2. Analysis of stakeholders (network effect)

From our database, 438 stakeholders were involved in the promotion of our sample of artists. In the following sections, we will examine the strategies of the top leaders in each category to highlight their tools and marketing strategies for making these artists successful in the global market.

3.2.1. Art galleries

Contemporary art galleries are known for their constant pursuit of new talent that can yield profitable sales for both private and public collections. Even in a decentralized global art market, the approach to marketing new artworks remains consistent: Galleries continue to focus on a small group of artists, aiming to integrate them into the “taste-making machine of the art world⁵.” As stated by Noah Horowitz, art galleries serve as the “glue” of this superstructure, filtering artists from the masses and investing time and capital in facilitating their connections with both public and targeted curators and collectors⁶. Komarova and Velthuis have established that art dealers are central players in the expansion of the art market in the Global South³¹, and Amanda Brandellero has explored this concept in depth in relation to dealers in Brazil³². Depending on the gallery’s specialization, they may focus on young and emerging artists, established ones, or estates. Some galleries may also specialize in representing artists from a particular country or region, while others embrace the diversity of origins. These galleries may have multiple locations across different cities or countries and could have been established decades ago or more recently during the pandemic. As observed by Olav Velthuis, art galleries have significantly contributed to the commercialization of the art world in recent years. They are recognized for their more aggressive approach to marketing their artist’s work and their attempts to “monopolize the art market” on a global scale⁵.

From our analysis of exhibitions, we identified certain art galleries that had been specifically successful in embracing new cultural and market trends in their promotion of African and Global South artists, reflecting the changing demographics of the art worlds as mentioned

earlier in this paper. The four galleries supporting the largest number of artists from our list are Ross Sutton Gallery, Gallery 1957, Perrotin, and Stephen Friedman Gallery. These four galleries distinguish themselves from others thanks to their niche specialization and branding.

Ross Sutton Gallery, located in New York, specializes in exhibiting artworks by artists from the African Diaspora. The gallery is curated and managed by Destinee Ross-Sutton, a young international art curator, advisor, gallerist, artist manager, and advocate based in New York. She has cocurated international group exhibitions at renowned institutions at the Museum of Contemporary African Diasporan Arts (MoCADA) and CFHILL in Stockholm, Sweden, as well as Christie’s “SAY IT LOUD (I’m Black and I’m Proud),” a virtual selling exhibition dedicated to the promotion and empowerment of Black art. Independently, she advises several private institutions, international collectors, and organizations on acquisitions, particularly within the African Diaspora. In addition to featuring works by talented artists, the gallery also provides resources on responsible art collecting. The #BlackVoicesFriendofMyMind initiative, launched by the Ross Sutton Gallery, is aimed at protecting and supporting the work of Black artists in the wake of the Black Lives Matter movement in the US. For decades, the American art world paid little attention to this group of artists, excluding them from both the museum circuit and the market. However, since the pandemic, the discourse and perception of these artists have undergone a complete transformation. They are now in the spotlight and commanding record prices at auction houses. The Ross Sutton Gallery is committed to securing the long-term success of its artists by ensuring their inclusion in public institutions and avoiding any speculative bubbles that could negatively impact their careers. Established in 2020, it could be said that the Ross Sutton Gallery has embraced the African-American cultural revolution. One notable aspect of Ross Sutton Gallery’s branding strategy is the unique format of its website. Unlike traditional gallery websites, it adopts an Instagram-style format that prioritizes images and articles. This innovative branding strategy is particularly noteworthy because it reflects an alternative approach to branding contemporary art galleries. By breaking away from conventional marketing techniques, the gallery sets itself apart and demonstrates its commitment to promoting voices in the art world that were formally marginalized.

Gallery 1957, with locations in Ghana and London, is dedicated to promoting West African artists on a global scale. As indicated on its website, this gallery attempts to “bridge the gap between local and international audiences.” In addition to gallery exhibitions, they have

established a residency program to welcome international artists and arts professionals to Ghana, allowing for a deeper engagement with the country's rich contemporary art scene. In 2021, this gallery launched the Yaa Asantewaa Art Prize, the first-ever dedicated art prize for women artists living and working in Africa. Gallery 1957 is now participating in major art fairs, including Art Dubai, Cape Town Art Fair, Art Genève, 1-54, Art and Lagos, and Art Paris. It serves as an excellent example of an organization that is pushing the boundaries of the art world and demonstrating how African galleries are now influencing the market. It is interesting to note that "Africa, which until recently was the only continent by and large to remain off the radar of the global art market²," is becoming a stronger marketplace for fine arts. Examining this gallery's business strategy provides insights into how a body of expertise and an organizational field are being developed in Africa. The fact that this gallery started in Accra and then expanded to Europe, along with its participation in international art fairs, could be considered an unprecedented business development. The success of Gallery 1957 should be contrasted with Clare McAndrew's 2022 Art Market report, which found that dealers in African markets saw sales increase by just 5% from 2020 to 2021, compared to a global aggregate increase of 18%. In her 2023 report, McAndrew did not even include any African galleries³³. While most African galleries were underperforming in comparison to their peers in other regions, Gallery 1957 is clearly the exception, but their fate is connected to a group of artists whose successful sales results have been captured in our survey.

Perrotin, established in 1990, is a prominent contemporary art gallery with locations in Paris, New York, Hong Kong, Seoul, Tokyo, Shanghai, and Dubai. The gallery represents over 50 artists from Europe, Asia, and South America and has maintained working relationships with some artists for nearly three decades. Perrotin has demonstrated its commitment to gender diversity, with 33% of its represented artists being women. The gallery also participates in over 20 art fairs worldwide, including prestigious events such as Art Basel in Basel, Miami, and Hong Kong, Frieze Art Fair in London and New York, FIAC in Paris, and Art Cologne. Moreover, they participate in regional fairs such as the Dallas Art Fair, Art Stage Jakarta, and Zona Maco, Mexico. Their participation in regional fairs is indicative of their efforts to engage with the local art scene and build relationships with collectors. The correlation between the nationality of the artists represented by the gallery, the fairs they participate in, and the locations of their gallery spaces suggest that Perrotin strategically targets specific markets through a physical presence in those regions and accelerates

transactions through art fairs. Perrotin's global presence and an impressive roster of artists have contributed to its reputation. Perrotin's commitment to gender diversity in their artist representation is also noteworthy in an industry historically dominated by male artists. Overall, Perrotin's strategy of global expansion and emphasis on gender diversity has helped position the gallery as a major player in the contemporary art world.

The Stephen Friedman Gallery, located in London, is renowned for promoting emerging artists hailing from the Global South, with a particular emphasis on South American artists. The gallery's website explicitly highlights the core values of diversity and inclusion, reflecting their commitment to a more inclusive art world. Significantly, the gallery was an early advocate for artists from the Global South. This strategic decision has resulted in the successful representation of several high-profile artists, such as Yinka Shonibare CBE (British Nigerian), Tom Friedman, Jim Hodges, and Kehinde Wiley (African American), Rivane Neuenschwander and Luiz Zerbini (Brazilian), and Kendell Geers (South African/Belgian), among others. These efforts have helped diversify the art world and introduce new voices to the contemporary art scene.

These four examples demonstrate how art galleries promote artists from the Global South and aid in enhancing their reputation, ultimately leading to higher sales prices. Artists from the Global South still constitute a niche market in comparison to the overall market turnover. However, these galleries have taken on artists whose careers have skyrocketed under their stewardship. The dealer's role is to build value for their artists, and our study suggests that these galleries are among the most successful in representing artists from the Global South. Nevertheless, they embody diverse models that challenge conventional thinking about how galleries can build value and whether the norms articulated in art market literature over the past 20 years still hold.

Ross Sutton Gallery is a newcomer, yet it stands as an excellent demonstration of the cultural transition that has taken place since 2020 under the umbrella of the Black Lives Matter movement. A young African-American gallerist has presented a group of emerging artists who have found a willing market among a much wider audience than what earlier African-American dealers, such as the Dales' Brockman Gallery in Los Angeles or Just Above Midtown in New York (founded in 1974 by Linda Goode Bryant), experienced. Ross-Sutton Gallery is the most successful gallery in our data set, having presented eight of the 51 artists in our sample. Gallery 1957 represents an even more radical departure from historical trends. As a Ghanaian gallery that has successfully entered the European

market and regularly participates in art fairs, Gallery 1957 recasts the trends in regional gallery representation originally tracked by Yogev and Ertug in their 2015 article, “The Global and Local Flows in the Contemporary Art Market³⁴.” In their research, they found that the number of African galleries participating in international art fairs was negligible. Perrotin is the most prominent gallery among our successful stakeholder galleries (though Zwirner is not far behind). This demonstrates that larger and more well-financed galleries are increasingly seeking to expand and diversify their artist lists to offer novelty to the most elite class of collectors. Finally, Stephen Friedman Gallery’s position near the top of our list of stakeholder galleries demonstrates that persistence pays off. The Stephen Friedman Gallery has consistently sought to showcase a diverse and transnational group of artists in their London space. While they continue to represent established names such as Yinka Shonibare and Kendall Geers, the gallery continues to invest in emerging newcomers whose values are rapidly on the rise. These gallery stakeholders associated with the most emerging artists from the Global South are highly distinctive businesses, each operating with diverse models. However, they have all found ways to connect with international talent and build value for these emerging artists.

3.2.2. Art fairs

Over the past two decades, art fairs have become a crucial part of the art market, growing both in number and importance, with an increasing share of dealers’ annual sales attributed to these events³⁵. While there are approximately 300 art fairs held worldwide annually, art galleries, artists, and collectors are increasingly becoming loyal supporters of these events. One of the main reasons for the growing importance of art fairs is their ability to match global demand and supply. Collectors from around the world now turn to international art fairs as a convenient way to view a large number of artworks from various regions. In addition, these fairs have opened up opportunities for new participants and visitors from emerging markets. As art fairs continue to gain significance, there is a trend of establishing fairs in emerging art capitals such as Shanghai, New Delhi, Sao Paulo, Moscow, and Abu Dhabi². These new fairs have further contributed to the growth of the art market, providing a platform for artists and galleries from these regions to showcase their work to a wider audience. However, despite the emergence of new art fairs, Art Basel has maintained its position as the most important art fair since 1990². This can be attributed to its ability to constantly evolve and adapt to changing market conditions. Another noteworthy trend in the art fair scene is the increasing number of Global South artists being exhibited for sale.

Among the 300 art fairs organized throughout the year, twenty-one international fairs distinguish themselves by the number of these artists being showcased. This shift toward a more diverse representation of artists reflects the growing interest and appreciation for artwork from these regions. Therefore, it can be said that art fairs serve as a reflection of market trends. Beyond the commercial aspect, art fairs also provide a unique opportunity for artists to connect with a wider audience and gain exposure.

From our sample of twenty-one fairs, the top overall performer was the Armory Show, with fourteen artists from our list having artworks exhibited at this event. This result defied our predictions, as we had anticipated Art Basel to be the top performer, based on general perceptions and academic research. While the Art Basel franchise was the most represented art fair on our list overall, individually, none of the unique fairs outperformed the Armory Show in New York in promoting artists from the Global South. The Armory Show was the first to introduce a significant number of artists from the Global South, with one-third of the artists on their list originating from those regions. The 2022 edition of the Armory Show was labeled an “increasingly global juggernaut” by *The Art Newspaper*³⁶, as a substantial number of galleries came from Africa, mainly from Nigeria, Kenya, Ethiopia, and South Africa. The fair’s programming was specifically centered on artists and galleries from the Global South, as evidenced by the “Curatorial Leadership Summit initiative.” This invitation-only event brought together a hundred international museum directors and curators to advance institutional recognition and understanding of Latin American art¹⁴. This event was led by Mari Carmen Ramírez, the curator of Latin American art at the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, who is considered one of the most influential advocates of this region in the US. The latest edition of the Armory Show is thus in clear correlation with the market trends observable in the US.

Art fairs such as the 1-54 African Art Fair and Cape Town Art Fair have also emerged recently, providing a platform for African galleries and artists to showcase their work and gain visibility on an international scale. The London edition of 1-54 and The Investec Cape Town Art Fair both presented as many artists from our sample (seven) as Art Basel (Basel) did. This demonstrates that up-and-coming fairs, organized in the Global South and exhibiting work in Europe, the US, and Africa, have played an equally important role in promoting the development of artists from the Global South in the global art market. These fairs warrant further investigation. These two art fairs rely on two different business models to promote contemporary African art: 1-54 can be characterized as

a satellite art fair, while Investec, located in South Africa, appears to embrace the Western model of the art fair. Despite both fairs showcasing contemporary African art, the two models involve different dynamics around the same group of artists.

1-54, an international art fair that focuses on contemporary art from Africa and its diaspora, was established in 2013. The fair initially launched in Western countries before expanding to North Africa, with its inaugural fair held in London in 2013, followed by New York in 2015, Morocco in 2018, and a pop-up event in Paris in 2021 in collaboration with Christie's. 1-54's goal is to showcase a wide range of perspectives and features international galleries specializing in contemporary African art, as well as FORUM talks and a Special Projects program³⁷. As a satellite art fair, 1-54's London and New York editions run concurrently with Frieze, making it an auxiliary event that garners a great deal of media attention due to its smaller size and niche focus. In contrast, 1-54 Marrakech, launched in 2018, is the featured event and does not coincide with other fairs. This marks a significant step forward for 1-54, as it not only became a stand-alone fair for the first time but was also located in Africa for the first time. The 1-54 experience in Marrakech elevated the profile of the art scene in the city and heightened awareness and appreciation of the diverse art produced in Africa.

The Investec Cape Town Art Fair, which began as a laid-back event for local audiences in 2013, has recently grown to become the largest art fair in Africa. In 2023, the event opened its doors to both local and international galleries, hosting 106 exhibitors, welcoming 25,000 visitors, and accommodating 6,700 VIPs. This fair has provided an opportunity to showcase Cape Town, its people, and their creative achievements. This event provides a platform to showcase unique works by artists and galleries located in South Africa, on the continent, and around the world, exposing them to new local and international audiences and buyers. As pointed out by the *Art Newspaper*, "major museum exhibitions, auctions, and a new conference are all testament to the impact the fair is having on the local art ecosystem¹⁴." The example of Investec Cape Town Art Fair demonstrates how it empowers its region, creates its own art market, and fosters synergy to attract a wide variety of stakeholders.

African art fairs, such as 1-54 and the Investec Cape Town Art Fair, have emerged as significant players in the global art market, providing a platform for African artists and galleries to showcase their work to a wider audience. These events not only showcase contemporary African art but also contribute to raising the profile of local art scenes

in the cities where they are held. In addition, they promote cultural exchange and dialogue between different regions of the world. The success of these art fairs reflects the growing interest in African art and the potential for the African art market to continue growing and evolving in the future. Art fairs have played a crucial role in the growth of the art market over the past two decades. As the art market continues to evolve, it will be interesting to observe how art fairs adapt and shape the future of the industry.

3.2.3. Biennales

Since the establishment of the Venice Biennial in 1895, biennales have played a significant role in promoting artists from a variety of countries and distancing themselves from the market, even while playing an instrumental role in it. They have become art hubs that bring together artists, curators, collectors, and art enthusiasts from different parts of the world. From our sample of fifty-one artists, only half of them have participated in a biennale. This low participation rate could be explained by two main elements: first, the brief period during which most of these artists have participated in the global art world, and second, the pandemic, which prevented large events from taking place between 2020 and 2022. This external reason limited the participation of these stakeholders in biennales.

Interestingly, only 14 out of the 36 African artists from our list have ever participated in a biennale. Successful emerging African artists have thus participated in fewer biennales than their peers from other regions of the world. Notably, Amoako Bofo had not participated in a biennale through 2022. As the value of creations by emerging African artists has skyrocketed in a period of 2 years since the pandemic, this group of artists did not have the opportunity to be featured in a biennale before their work was sold at auction houses. Since the pandemic prevented any biennales from taking place in this short period of time, these artists had to explore alternative avenues to gain visibility and build their legitimacy. They rapidly entered the market thanks to the support of art galleries, art fairs, and, finally, auction houses. This counter-example demonstrates that biennales were not necessary for this group of artists to achieve global success.

From our list of stakeholders, biennales are the more diversified in terms of location. Twenty biennales exhibited the work of our sample of artists, and they were respectively located in Italy, South Korea, Sydney, Senegal, France, Czech Republic, Germany, South Africa, India, Switzerland, Romania, Paraguay, Thailand, Bangladesh, Congo, Pakistan, UK, Brazil, Turkey, Russia, and Greece. This diversification of locations clearly demonstrates how the art world is now decentralized³⁸. Even though

this observation is promising for the future, the Venice Biennale remains at the top of our list, as it exhibited the highest number of successful artists.

However, it is worth noting that the origins of the artists are not necessarily correlated with the locations of the biennales. For instance, at the Gwangju Biennale, our study found that the five artists exhibited at this event were originally from Pakistan, the Philippines, Brazil, Kenya, and Cuba. This example demonstrates how biennales promote artists from various parts of the world, facilitating a series of global exhibitions. Biennales have undoubtedly transformed the art world by creating opportunities for artists to showcase their work to a global audience, and they continue to be an essential part of the art industry. However, some successful artists, mainly from Africa, have not yet had the opportunity to exhibit at a biennale but have still managed to become incorporated into the global art market.

3.2.4. Cultural institutions

Museums play a key role in promoting and preserving art and culture. Unlike the market, which quickly absorbs new energies, cultural institutions can be slower to change, particularly if they are collecting institutions with historical collections. Other types of museums can pivot more readily and adapt to new influences because their programs are based only on temporary exhibitions (the Kunsthalle model) or because they are private museums that exhibit and develop exhibitions from an active contemporary art collection, which is being developed by collectors with adequate resources to adapt to developing market trends. The top ten cultural institutions from our stakeholder list included three museums from Africa: Zeith MOCAA in Cape Town, The National Gallery of Zimbabwe, and The Iziko South African National Gallery in Capetown. There were also six museums from the US: The Contemporary Arts Museum in Houston, The Pérez Art Museum in Miami, The Museum of the African Diaspora in San Francisco, The FLAG Art Foundation in New York, The Seattle Art Museum, and The Rubell Family Collection in Miami. The last cultural institution in the top ten is the Goethe Institute, which is not a museum but a series of cultural centers established by the German government in large cities around the world. These museums have each established themselves as leaders in presenting contemporary art, with a focus on diverse and underrepresented voices.

While historic art museums are primarily devoted to their collection and promoting established artists, museums started by private individuals who collect contemporary art often prioritize the showcasing of new or emerging talent. It is important to note that four of these top ten institutions are private museums (Zeith, Perez,

FLAG, and Rubell), two of them are national museums, and two are mid-size contemporary art museums that specialize in presenting emerging work from artists who are not well established. The Seattle Art Museum is an outlier in this context because it is an established museum with historic collections that also presents contemporary art. While six of these museums are in the US, there is also a growing number of contemporary museums in the Global South that are dedicated to showcasing the work of local and international artists. All of the museums in the top ten had exhibitions that included at least four of our list of fifty-one artists, but the Contemporary Art Museum, Houston, was the leader because it included six.

It was interesting to discover that the primary museums exhibiting Global South artists from our database are located in the US and Africa. We can thus make a correlation between the explosion of African artists in the global art market and exhibitions in cultural institutions, particularly in the US, but also locally. It has been established that art museums devoted to specific cultural groups, such as the Studio Museum Harlem and Museo del Barrio, have played a role in diversifying the art world through exhibitions that featured artists who were not succeeding in the mainstream art world, which white men had long dominated. This dataset points to another range of diversification connected to international artists.

4. Conclusion

The art world has historically been dominated by Western artists and galleries. However, in recent years, there has been a growing interest in emerging artists from the Global South. These artists, originating from countries in Africa, Asia, and South America, have introduced a fresh perspective to the art world and have contributed to the diversification of the art market.

One of the most significant success stories from the Global South in recent years is the African Diaspora. In recent years, African Diaspora artists have experienced a significant rise in sales and recognition, with their work appearing in major auctions and exhibitions. This recognition is the result of a concerted effort by galleries, curators, and other art world actors to promote these artists and provide them with the exposure they deserve. In our view, it is evident that the market has also been influenced by a major international social movement, such as Black Lives Matter.

One of the challenges facing emerging artists from the Global South is the lack of infrastructure and support for the arts in their home countries. Many of these artists have to migrate to neighboring countries or art hubs to find the support and resources that they need to create and promote

their work. The emergence of new galleries and cultural institutions in the Global South, however, is beginning to change this. These institutions provide a platform for emerging artists to showcase their work and connect with art world professionals. This more diverse range of venues makes the art world ecology more diverse and, in time, will succeed in allowing more artists to find international market success.

The expansion of emerging artists from the Global South is also transforming the global art market. Art fairs and auction houses are incorporating more artists from these regions into their events, giving them greater visibility and helping to diversify the art world. In addition, the growth of the art market in the Global South is creating new opportunities for collectors, curators, and other art world professionals.

As we move forward, it will be important to continue to follow the evolution of these sales results, determining which artists are achieving unprecedented increases in value and analyzing the emerging galleries and art fairs located in the Global South more deeply. The inclusion of emerging artists from the Global South is an ongoing process that requires the support of various stakeholders in the art world. By acknowledging the importance of these artists and their contributions to the global art market, we can help to create a more equitable and diverse cultural landscape.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank the Urban Planning and Real Estate Department of Universitas Tarumanagara, Jakarta, where an early version of this paper was presented in January 2023.

Funding

Funding for research was provided by the Faculty Development Fund of the University of San Francisco.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests. Victoria Mouraux Durand-Ruel did a summer internship at the auction house Philips (New York) in the summer of 2023 after the research and most of the writing for the paper was completed.

Author contributions

Conceptualization: All authors

Writing – original draft: All authors

Writing – review and editing: All authors

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data

Refer to Appendix 1.

Further disclosure

An early version of this paper was previously presented at the conference “Global Transformation: Impact on Cities” held on January 9, 2023, at Universitas Tarumanagara (UNTAR), Jakarta, Indonesia.

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Appendix

Appendix 1. Sales results at auction houses

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Appendix 2. List of 51 artists included in this study

Artist	Date of birth	Nationality
Aboudia	1983	Ivory Coast
Eric Adjei Tawiah	1987	Ghana
Amoako Boafo	1984	Ghana
Angel Otero	1981	Puerto Rico
Aplerh-Doku Borlabi	1987	Ghana
Chiderah Bosah	2000	Nigeria
Christian Rosa	1982	Brazil
Cinga Samson	1986	South Africa
Doron Langberg	1985	Israel
Emmanuel Taku	1986	Ghana
Firelei Báez	1981	Dominican Republic
Foster Sakyamah	1983	Ghana
GaHee Park	1985	South Korea
Gareth Nyandoro	1985	Zimbabwe
Godwin Champs Namuyimba	1989	Uganda
Huma Bhabha	1962	Pakistan
Igshaan Adams	1982	South Africa
Isshaq Ismail	1989	Ghana
John Madu	1983	Nigeria
Kudzanai-Violet Hwami	1993	Zimbabwe
Lisa Brice	1968	South Africa
Lucas Arruda	1983	Brazil
Marcellina Akpojotor	1989	Nigeria
Maria Berrio	1982	Colombia
Maria Taniguchi	1981	Philippines
Michael Armitage	1984	Kenya
Natee Utarit	1970	Thailand
Negyem Adonoo	1987	Ghana
Odinakachi Okoroafor	1989	Nigeria
Oluwole Omofemi	1988	Nigeria
Oscar Murillo	1986	Colombia
Otis Kwame Kye Quaicoe	1988	Ghana
Ouattara Watts	1957	Ivory Coast
Portia Zvavahera	1985	Zimbabwe
Raphael Adjetej Adjei Mayne	1983	Ghana
Raqib Shaw	1974	India
Roberto Fabelo	1951	Cuba
Ronald Ventura	1973	Philippines
Sadikou Oukpedjo	1975	Togo
Salman Toor	1983	Pakistan
Santiago Parra	1986	Columbia
Serge Attukwei Clottey	1985	Ghana
Simphiwe Ndzube	1990	South Africa
Sonia Gomes	1948	Brazil
Tala Madani	1981	Iran
Toyin Ojih Odutola	1985	Nigeria
Wangechi Mutu	1972	Kenya
Wonder Buhle Mbambo	1989	South Africa
Woo Kukwon	1976	Korea
Yoan Capote	1977	Cuba
Zandile Tshabalala	1999	South Africa

PERSPECTIVE ARTICLE

To hope all things: A relational response to racism in music education

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Abstract

Throughout the United States, critical race theory (CRT) has been integrated and implemented in various school districts and higher education institutions to address and combat racism. As a variant theory of Marxism and critical theory, CRT, however, has many problems. One such problem is that it claims that racism is systemic in society and that society must be fundamentally changed or overthrown through activism. However, a systemic change alone will not combat racism because it is fundamentally a relational/spiritual problem and, therefore, should be addressed by a relational response. This paper explores the research question: What is a relational response to racism? To do so, I describe critical theory's historical and theoretical roots and why it is inadequate to address racism. Then, I define the relational mindset as "the beliefs that orient us to understand the world through profound connectedness for growth beyond knowledge and action beyond technique" and expound on the words "connectedness," "growth," and "action." To demonstrate a practical application of the relational mindset in music education, I present three indicators to align the objectives of a lesson plan – communication, empathy, and regard. I then discuss the application of the relational mindset to a music lesson on a spiritual sung by the Gullahs, "The Welcome Table." I conclude the paper with questions to evaluate the veracity of other theories with the relational mindset and a final encouragement for educators when thinking about racism.

Keywords: Music; Education; Racism; Critical Theory; Relational Mindset; Spirituality

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Citation: Quindag S. To hope all things: A relational response to racism in music education. *Arts & Communication*. 2024;2(1):1234
<https://doi.org/10.36922/ac.1234>

Received: July 4, 2023

Accepted: November 10, 2023

Published Online: January 12, 2024

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Publisher's Note: AccScience Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

1. Introduction

I'm gonna sit at the welcome table,

I'm gonna sit at the welcome table one of these days,

Alleluia

I'm gonna sit at the welcome table,

*gonna sit at the welcome table one of these days.*¹

The opening text is from an African–American spiritual sung by the Gullahs – descendants of the enslaved West Africans who were brought to the United States in the 1600s and settled along the East Coast. Although it is a song that emerged from the global human atrocity of slavery, it is a spiritual of encouragement, relationship, and hopefulness to one day be at the "welcome table." For this paper, I would like us

to explore this hope that is possible through a relational response to racism in music education.

Before our exploration, however, I would like to disclose three of my positions. First, my spiritual perspective as an evangelical Christian who embraces the Bible as the foundation of truth informs my beliefs, including my beliefs on racism. Second, I believe that the Creator intentionally designed us for profound and meaningful relationships. Consequently, I hold a relational ontology and view reality by studying relationships from a Christian interpretive framework.^{2,3} I offer, therefore, this operational definition of racism for this paper: Racism is an unreasonable and inflexible assumption that a particular group of people identified by color or ethnicity is morally, intellectually, emotionally, or spiritually inferior and deserves less value than another.⁴⁻⁶ The manifestation of racism can range from simple avoidance, marginalization, unequal treatment, name-calling, and physical harm to even death.⁷⁻⁹ The ultimate goal of racism is to destroy the beauty of the relationships between our Creator and others.^{2,4,10}

Third, I do not want to dishonor or be dismissive toward anyone who has suffered from racism. As a woman of color in the United States growing up in the 1960s and 70s in San Francisco and as a child of immigrants who were from a colonized, impoverished, war-torn country, I experienced racism, personally and generationally, perhaps like some of you. I know these experiences can be etched in our memories for a lifetime. Nevertheless, I am emphatic that pursuing and developing relationships is a hopeful path forward. Therefore, the research question to be answered in this paper is “What is a relational response to racism?”

2. Context of critical theory

In the United States, the current discussion and solutions for racism which are presented in various public school districts and higher education have been founded on critical theory.¹¹⁻¹⁴ This theory’s origins can be traced to the 1800s in the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.¹⁵⁻¹⁷ Their works addressed economic disparities between groups of people and developed into a theory known as Marxism.¹⁸⁻²¹ After the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution in Russia, philosophers including Theodor Adorno, Max Horkheimer, and Herbert Marcuse established the Frankfurt School in Germany as a think tank; one of its goals was to explore the strengths and weaknesses of Marxism and possible variants.^{16,20,22,23} Subsequently, they broadened the scope of Marxism from simply addressing economic disparities to examining other cultural disparities; this variant is called critical theory.^{16,20,22,23} Horkheimer’s 1937 manifesto, “Traditional and Critical Theory,” is one seminal work that articulated the characteristics of this cultural variant of Marxism.^{11,15}

Critical theory then emerged in higher education in the United States.^{11,20,22}

In 1968, Brazilian educator and philosopher Paulo Freire²⁴ published “Pedagogy of the Oppress,” which introduced critical pedagogy into public pre-college and higher education in the 1970s and 1980s.^{13,16,25,26} Also during this time, a form of critical theory, critical legal theory, emerged within the United States legal system through the works of scholars such as Unger²⁷ and Duncan Kennedy.^{11,15,28} Subsequently, critical race theory (CRT) was developed and appeared in public schools and universities in the early 2000s, primarily through the works of academic scholars that include Yosso,²⁵ Ladson-Billings,²⁹ and Kendi. In music education, CRT appeared in the works of social justice advocates such as Thomas A.³⁰ Regelski,³¹ Juliet Hess,^{32,33} and McLaren.³⁴ From CRT, other offshoots such as critical feminist theory, Latina/Latino critical (LatCrit) theory, and Asian critical (AsianCrit) theory formed as well. However, CRT will always fundamentally be the critical theory that developed from the works of Marx and Engels.^{11,22,25,35}

According to Krebs,³⁶ as of February 2022, 14 states have banned CRT from being taught in their K-12 public schools, and other states are also considering its ban. However, despite the proponents who try to eliminate, adjust, or minimize the theory, it is still a guiding framework presented in the schools of education at universities and written about in academic literature.^{8,11-14,29,37} There have also been court cases where teachers argued to include CRT based on their First Amendment right to free speech in pedagogy.³⁶⁻³⁸ Consequently, the theory is in the mindset of educators as a framework to analyze disparities between groups and will likely not be eliminated. Therefore, it is essential to understand the basic tenets of critical theory, respond to its failings, and provide an alternative to combat racism.

3. Advocating for a relational mindset

The current proponents of critical theory or CRT argue that systemic racism is entrenched in our society, that groups of people are classified as either majority/dominant/oppressors/whiteness or minority/marginalized/oppressed/persons of color, and that we must find ways to suppress or overthrow the dominant culture to rebuild a new equitable society.^{8,13,18,22,24,30,39} Consequently, the discourse has focused on changing or overthrowing systems covertly or overtly through activism, especially in schools where students are most impressionable.^{13,24,30,33} To achieve these goals, however, guilt and false dichotomies are often used, and alternative voices are regularly silenced or canceled.^{8,13,26,39,40} Often, subjects or topics considered part

of the majority/dominant/oppressor/whiteness group are considered a form of supremacy and are misrepresented, dismantled, or ignored.^{13,30,39}

Although we live within numerous systems that profoundly affect racism, I contend that a systemic change alone cannot remove racism because it is fundamentally a relational/spiritual problem.^{7,10,41,42} I have many reasons for this belief; however, I would like to offer five relevant to this paper. First, the fact that there is still a global discussion on the problems of racism demonstrates that the myriads of systems developed by humankind have not solved this problem, even in systems that developed primarily from Marxist ideology.^{10,18,20,22,43}

Second, there are numerous individuals who, regardless of the systems they live under, rise above racism to develop meaningful relationships and learn to treat others equally.^{10,9,42-44} Some are even able to extend relational grace – an act of mercy and forgiveness given to another individual who is pathetically undeserving.^{10,45} This act of relational grace was acutely demonstrated in 2015 at the Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in South Carolina, where a deplorable White gunman, Dylann Roof, shot and killed nine members simply because they were Black. The relational grace message communicated to the gunman from the congregants who lost family members was forgiveness and repentance.^{45,46} In contrast to relational grace, however, some individuals, such as Dylann Roof, who live under the freest systems, find reasons to diminish groups of people based on color or ethnicity, resulting in racism or even reverse racism.^{8,9,22} Third, systems, whether political, social, or even religious, are essential but can provide only ethical structures for behavior. They are woefully insufficient in changing or addressing our affective or spiritual nature where racism originates.^{4,10,41,42,47}

Fourth, the greatest advocates and activists who gave their lives to change systems did so not only to fix systems, even though they were able to accomplish that. They fought for systemic changes with an awareness of the importance of relationships and hope to create environments that nurture profound, mutual, lasting relationships among all.¹⁰ Among these advocates include William Wilberforce, a member of the British Parliament in the late 1700s to early 1800s who worked tirelessly to abolish the atrocity of the British global slave trade.⁴⁸ In his 1807 draft titled “A Letter on the Abolition of the Slave Trade,” it was evident that his relationship with God compelled him to fight for the abolishment of slavery. Wilberforce hoped to rid the world of slavery and to unite people despite the economic structure of the day.⁴⁹ Another activist is Martin Luther King, Jr., a Baptist minister who fought for civil rights

in the United States during the 1960s. One excerpt from King’s well-known “I Have a Dream” speech states, “...one day right there in Alabama, little black boys and black girls will be able to join hands with little white boys and white girls as sisters and brothers.”⁵⁰ One other recent example of an individual who advocated for change is Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas, who ruled in 2023 that the practice of Affirmative Action for college admissions was discriminatory and unconstitutional. In his concurring statement for the case “Students for Fair Admissions v. President and Fellows of Harvard College,” Thomas describes the history of discriminatory laws in the United States.⁵¹ However, he argues that all individuals are created equal and that the constitution supports this relationship of equality for all.

My primary argument that systems alone cannot change racism, however, is that our greatest human need is for reconciliation, union, and oneness – for a relationship with God or higher power.^{2,7} This oneness is the fundamental goal of almost every religion, spiritual organization, or premise.^{52,53} The presupposition is that universally, our relationships are broken with God or a higher power; if they are broken with God or a higher power, our relationships will be broken with others and perhaps ourselves.^{2,7} Racism is one result of our brokenness in relationships.^{7,10,41} Consequently, I contend that racism is fundamentally a relational/spiritual problem. Therefore, to begin healing from racism, we should focus on encouraging, developing, and improving relationships, even while teaching music, the arts, or other subjects.⁴¹ Rather than creating a music education environment or any other educational environment through activism rooted in a critical theory that divides people into oppressed and oppressors, we must create an environment where we teach music for excellence while thinking relationally and equally. As a relational response to racism, I would like you to consider developing and using a relational mindset.

4. Relational mindset defined

My definition of a relational mindset is: The beliefs that orient us to understand the world through profound connectedness for growth beyond knowledge and action beyond technique.

Within this definition are three important words. The first important word is “connectedness.” Connectedness is the foundation of a relational ontology in that we view reality and truth through relationships. Furthermore, because of our connectedness, our responses and reactions toward others will reflect on us.^{5,6} In practice, we must find common ground with others, knowing that it will lead to understanding and growth. Because of connectedness, we should be mindful of the results of our decisions and behaviors because they will profoundly affect us. Regarding racism, if we diminish

others because of their race, we also diminish ourselves. If we respect others regardless of their race, we also demonstrate self-respect. Consequently, it is beneficial to treat others the way we would want to be treated.^{5,6}

The second important word is “growth.” This word refers to the progress of whole-being development. When considering growth in relationships and racism, we are generally not “either-or” – racist or not racist. This false dichotomy has often been disseminated in the American media and education.^{20,22,30} Some activists label White individuals as racist because they are the majority race in the United States and have the power to create racist policies and actions. Some activists label non-White individuals as not racist since they are powerless, marginalized, and victims of racist policies and actions.⁸ This structural determinism minimizes individual autonomy, growth, and societal progress that has been gained to combat racism.^{20,22,42} However, with a relational mindset, we must account for autonomy and growth; it is an ongoing process. Depending on our relational growth, we fall somewhere between weak and no relationality and strong relationality.⁶ Individuals who are closer to weak or no relationality will most likely be more racist or racist, and individuals who are closer to strong relationality will most likely be less racist or not racist. Therefore, if we desire to grow toward having strong relationality, we must also grow away from racism. It may be a lifelong process that requires listening, vulnerability, and honesty.^{5,7,10,42}

The third important word is “action.” This word refers to observable behaviors. To clarify this term, I want to present an analogy in music. In the musical realm, some performers develop the right technical facility to play the most complex and physically demanding works. Often, audiences are impressed with these performers’ technique in executing complicated passages of great concertos. However, it is the performer who hears the music beyond the technical demands and creates the soul of the composer’s work to provide us with an unexplainable aesthetic experience that is transcendent.^{54,55} When considering the relational mindset, there are actions that we know are technically appropriate to do. However, beyond our technical behaviors, some behaviors enhance and nurture relationships. They are often based on intangible attributes such as charity, grace, compassion, and hope.^{10,42} For example, teacher candidates at a university may tutor children who struggle academically because they need several hours of practical experience before student teaching. The tutoring activity is a reasonable and appropriate technical practice. However, some teacher candidates may have compassion for these children, see their human potential, and take extra time to develop lessons that encompass their interests and inspire

them to study and even enjoy hard work. These are teacher candidates who demonstrate “action beyond technique.”

5. The relational mindset in music education

To provide a context for the relational mindset, I want to demonstrate how it can be used while teaching the spiritual I referred to at the beginning of the paper, “The Welcome Table.” Although the context of this lesson is music education, the relational mindset can be applied to any educational setting. We will refer to this educational goal: At the end of the unit, learners will perform the spiritual, “The Welcome Table” with an understanding of the text and performance practices. As a reference, the following YouTube link is a contemporary rendition of this spiritual by The Anointed Straughter Sisters.¹

To align the lesson with the relational mindset, I wrote three indicators that can focus our attention on developing a relational mindset along with the students:

- (i) Valuing essential communication for relationships
- (ii) Developing mutuality and empathy for and within relationships
- (iii) Embracing the principle of regard and worthiness in relationships.

For the sake of alignment, I ranked the order of these three indicators; however, they all meld and must work together. For example, the best relational communication occurs when we have regard and know the worth of the other individual.⁵ Empathy, the act of understanding the feelings of another, is best practiced when we listen attentively and try to put ourselves in the other’s situation or at least be in the moment with their feelings.⁵⁶

As music educators, we should develop descriptors that can later be aligned when writing a lesson plan for each indicator. These descriptors are flexible and should be determined before designing objectives. Considering developing a relational response to racism, I wrote two descriptors for each indicator as examples:

- (i) Valuing essential communication for relationships
 - a. Listening intently to the stories and others’ stories surrounding the spiritual
 - b. Using expressive controls to create the aesthetic experience intended by the singers of the spiritual
- (ii) Developing mutuality and empathy for and within relationships
 - a. Honoring the original performance practices while determining a contemporary presentation
 - b. Understanding the historical global atrocities of slavery, yet learning about progress toward growth
- (iii) Embracing the principle of regard and worthiness in relationships

- a. Performing the spiritual with excellence in respect for the original singers
- b. Discussing and assessing the performances to understand the personal meaning of the music for each individual

After developing the indicators, the objectives can be written and aligned. As an example, I wrote two possible objectives with the alignment to the descriptors in parenthesis:

- Learners will identify the meaning of the biblical imagery used in “The Welcome Table” and other spirituals. (1a, 2b)
- Learners will perform the spirituals at an appropriate tempo with dynamics that they decide upon based on the interpretation of the text. (1b, 2a)
- Learners will perform the spiritual as a ring dance with stomping and clapping to empathize with the performances of the enslaved Gullahs. (2a, 2b)
- Learners will write one to two paragraphs about the suffering of the enslaved Gullahs and how it impacted the words and music of “The Welcome Table.” (2b, 1a)
- Learners will video record their performance of “The Welcome Table” and assess the recording to improve the performance. (3a)
- Learners will interpret “The Welcome Table” along with a piece of music of their choice that is similar and share their interpretations in a small group. (3b)

After aligning objectives to the relational mindset descriptors, procedures and activities can be developed to meet both the objectives and the descriptors. While developing the activities, I would like to offer several other ideas for music educators and educators in other fields. First, music, or any subject being taught, must always be the central focus of the lesson. Too often in activist teaching, music becomes secondary to the agenda and ideology being propagated.^{32,33} Students come to us to learn music or any other subject matter, and we shortchange them if they are not learning music. Second, because relationships are contextual, the information and practices of a relational mindset should enhance the musical performance while also challenging the students to think multidimensionally and holistically.⁶ Furthermore, all should strive to perform as best as possible with respect for the music and the people who initially performed the music. To do anything less is to diminish the value of the music and perhaps the people of the music. Third, relationships flourish with freedom but wither under control, which usually appears through guilt or name-calling.^{5,6} Therefore, it is essential to allow time for students to express their opinions in a music classroom yet to listen to and respect others’ stories even if there is profound disagreement. The time will enable the

students to be analytical thinkers and to feel comfortable with discussions in a free market of ideas.⁴⁷ It will also help them develop empathy for others.⁵⁶

Finally, our students deserve the truth on any topic at an age-appropriate level. We have the responsibility to be scholarly and study, to have the correct facts, and to be honest in our presentations.^{4,8,13,20,43} There have been situations where educators withhold information or lie to enhance specific agendas or belief systems. I saw the problem this caused among some of my students who were unaware of fundamental facts on specific topics because they were deemed contrary to what is commonly accepted or politically expedient. It is our responsibility to encourage students to scrutinize and pursue truth constantly.

6. Critical theory and the relational mindset

In 2022, I presented an abbreviation of this paper at the 35th International Society for Music Education World Conference, which was held online due to COVID-19 restrictions in Australia. After the presentation, the moderator asked if there were any questions or comments. Although I knew many attendees were in the virtual room, it was silent. That was a surprise because I anticipated that we would all be able to share our diverse views. (I had friends later tell me that if they had been at my session, they would have been afraid to comment). After several pleas from the moderator, one attendee commented, “I believe you can teach CRT along with the relational mindset.”

“Thank you for commenting,” I replied. “I wanted to offer a different approach than critical theory to address racism. Of course, you are welcome to try teaching both critical theory and a relational mindset, but please consider this – the critical theory is based on power. And, how effective are power struggles when building relationships?” I did not hear a reply from the attendee to my comment, nor could I see the responses in the room. I do remember the moderator saying, “I had never thought about that.” I hope I offered the attendees ideas to ponder and implement in their classrooms.

After the conference, the attendee’s comment caused me to contemplate, “Can critical theory and the relational mindset co-exist as a framework or lens for educators? Are they contradictory or complimentary?” Because there will always be new variants of critical theory, and other theories will be developed, I wanted to offer a means of evaluation. Therefore, I challenge all of us to consider several questions to compare critical theory or any other theory with the relational mindset.

Does the framework (or theory) cause you to see students as groups with like-mindedness based on a single

attribute, or does it cause you to see students as individuals with an unending capacity to grow regardless of what group they happen to be part of? Does the framework intentionally or unintentionally cause a shift of power to one set of students while diminishing another, or does it create an environment of mutuality and respect for each other, even when disagreeing? Does the framework contribute to developing self-focused students, or does it help students develop their capacity to understand and empathize with others? Does the framework create a closed environment of fear and distrust, or does it create an open environment of a learning community with freedom? Does the framework cause students to view the world in one narrow way where everyone needs to conform, or will they see the wonder of a multilayered, complex, interrelated world that needs to be explored? Most importantly, does the framework promote the manipulation, lies, or avoidance of truth, or does it promote truthful and honest exploration so trust in relationships can be developed?

After the conference, I also wanted to return to the origins of critical theory and continue studying Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Subsequently, I learned that both men were racists, anti-Semitic, and chauvinists.^{17,19,57} They probably treated marginalized people with disdain to demonstrate their power.¹⁹ I cannot logically comprehend how racists such as Marx and Engels can offer any viable answer to combat racism. By today's standards, they should have been discredited and canceled along with their related theories and ideas.^{20,30,39,40,58} Although deplorable individuals can have nuggets of workable ideas, at the very least, the veracity of Marx's and Engels' theories in any variant should be challenged and questioned. However, in so doing, alternative theories or ideas should be offered to address combat or prevent racism.

7. Conclusion

Before exploring this topic, I wanted to study other areas of music education. However, many students, colleagues, and friends, regardless of color or ethnicity, were conflicted because of critical theory. I, too, experienced that same conflict at the beginning of studying this theory. I saw that there were elements that I could relate to as a woman of color. As I continued my study of critical theory, however, I saw its purpose and goal – to strip us of our individuality, free will, and power only to give them over to another entity.^{20,17,26,37} Consequently, I asked myself, “How did I overcome and heal from racism, and how did I experience so much success, satisfaction, and joy as an underrepresented woman of color in music education for 40 years?” Without considering my lens of relational ontology, the immediate answer was, “My relationships – first with my God and then with others.”

I know that racism and all the personal wounds associated with it is a serious, sensitive topic to dwell upon, even in music education. However, I offer us a hopeful path forward. I am confident that a relational response to racism anchored in eternal verities is far better than a 160-year-old divisive, failed theory developed by two men who used racist language throughout their writings. Therefore, I want to encourage all of us to practice:

- Dialog over destruction
- Understanding over name-calling
- Forgiveness over fighting
- Relational grace over revenge
- Humility over power
- Healing over wounding
- Truth over falsehood
- Hope over activism and, of course
- Relationship over racism

The title of my paper, “To Hope All Things,” is based on a familiar passage about love from the Bible (NIV) in I Corinthians 13:6-7: “[Love] does not rejoice in iniquity, but rejoices in the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.”

I hope we all have a Welcome Table and a welcome for all.

Acknowledgments

None.

Funding

None.

Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Author contributions

This is a single-authored article.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data

Not applicable.

Further disclosure

Part of the article was presented at the 35th International Society for Music Education (ISME) World Conference in July 2022.

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ARTICLE

Performance arts, public space, and early childhood

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Abstract

This article delves into the role of esthetic experience in multidimensional early childhood development and the revitalization of public spaces as intergenerational convivial experiences. To this end, it examines the artistic action *EmQuanta*, which was carried out in squares and parks in the city of São Paulo, Brazil, after the covid-19 pandemic. Dialogues are established with authors in the fields of esthetics, performance, art education, and public policies to reflect on the contribution of the performing arts to the esthetic experience during early childhood, intergenerational coexistence, and the reinvention of the uses of public space, in contact with the vital power of green spaces within the city. The analysis reveals that the artistic action in question contributes to the implementation of public policies for early childhood in São Paulo by creating leisure spaces dedicated to this demographic, fostering a qualified convivial experience, and contributing to child development through an esthetic experience focused on the unique needs of early childhood.

Keywords: Esthetic experience; Early childhood; Performance arts; Cultural policies; EmQuanta

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Citation: Viganó SS. Performance arts, public space, and early childhood. *Arts & Communication*. 2024;2(1):1668.
<https://doi.org/10.36922/ac.1668>

Received: August 23, 2023

Accepted: October 14, 2023

Published Online: November 15, 2023

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1. Introduction: How we approach art and childhood as an object of research

“The development of artistic creation is something that cannot be experienced in isolation. It is a whole that involves forms, language, play, body, experiments, materials, places, sensations, and even coexistence.”

Anna Marie Holm

Starting with the question: Why should society care about young children? This article reflects on the integration of childhood into the broader societal framework through artistic experiences. To that end, we explored esthetic experiences as a component of multidimensional development and their potential realization through the artistic action by *Núcleo Quanta* in a series of performative actions in squares and parks within the city of São Paulo, Brazil, as part of the revival of public spaces following the social distancing measures implemented during the covid-19 pandemic.

We reflect on how artistic actions can contribute not only to the esthetic experiences of childhood but also to intergenerational coexistence, the expansion of adult modes of cohabitation, the reinvention of public space usage, and the reconnection with the

vital power of green spaces in the city. In doing so, we also focus on public policies designed to assist early childhood in Brazil and how they can play a role in nurturing and improving the lives of young children in big cities like São Paulo.

As for our research materials and methods, we focused on several aspects: first, we analyzed the artistic actions carried out in 2022, known as *EmQuanta*, by *Núcleo Quanta*, within the parks and squares in the city of São Paulo. Second, we examined the group's online presence, including its website, social networks, and reports. Third, we conducted a review of normative documents related to early childhood in Brazil. We, then, proceeded to integrate our analysis into a dialogue with the reference literature in the areas of esthetics, early childhood, art education, art and performativity, artistic action, and cultural action.

Our discussion began by presenting *Núcleo Quanta*, a group of São Paulo artists dedicated to producing and researching artistic experiences in early childhood and intergenerational relations. Following this introduction, we delved into a reflection on the esthetic experiences and being-in-the-world experiences of young children. We also explored how the public policies recently introduced in the city of São Paulo can contribute to the development of young children. In the final section, we conducted an analysis of the artistic action *EmQuanta*, carried out by the project *Sai de Casa, Quanta!* We conclude our analysis by reflecting on how such artistic action can enhance the quality of early childhood experiences, foster intergenerational relationships, influence the use of urban spaces, and promote new ways of cohabiting. These considerations are particularly pertinent as humanity faces the challenge of reviewing its existential paradigms.

2. *Núcleo quanta* and the performing arts as an expanded field

Núcleo Quanta brings together artists and researchers from different languages who focus on investigating artistic and pedagogical processes for early childhood in relation to their families, teachers, and caretakers. *Núcleo Quanta*, with a repertoire of three shows (*Quanta*, *EmQuanta*, and *QuantaJam*) and having received awards and grants (Dance Funding Law/São Paulo, ProAC performance Art Research, Rumos Itaú Cultural Prize, and Art Projects in Multiple Languages Funding), has been active since 2011. It focuses on an audience that is underprivileged in the field of performing and visual arts: Young children.

Born as a research group within the *Minik Momdó* Dance Theater group, *Núcleo Quanta* began its journey

with the *Poeira Project*, exploring the creation of esthetic environments that foster a performative relationship with young children. *Minik Momdó's* work already included a hybridization between the performing arts, music, and visual arts, emphasizing space as an architectural and plastic possibility to configure and re-signify its elements in a performative experience with the spectator. Dance itself played a pivotal role as one of the constituent elements within this installation, inviting the audience to enter the show and become an active part of the scenic space, relating to the work from within, and recreating the senses given by the space and their perception as they walked through it.

Building on its experience with dance installations at *Minik Momdó*, *Núcleo Quanta* began to investigate children's interactions with scenic elements, dancers, and the installed space while adding the unique dimension of childhood to the performance: children's play and performativity. This resulted in experiences that we call "installation-play"¹. With the development of *Núcleo Quanta's* work, the process of hybridizing artistic languages continued, both in the composition of its works and in its artistic and pedagogical actions, inscribing itself within an expanded field of the performing arts¹.

Núcleo Quanta originated in dance theater, evolved through dance installation, and aligns itself with the new creative contexts in the performing arts of the 21st century. Its performances distance themselves from the spectacular, giving rise to an expanded idea of dance. Rather than being centered on choreographic language, they focus on the use of the body (of spectators and dancers) in relation to space and the play that takes place at the moment of the performance. This dynamic creates a temporary community between performers and spectators. As Sílvia Fernandes points out:

"What can be observed is a kind of dynamic territory, without fixed margins, in which various strands of contemporary art friction with each other, making it difficult to detect the lineage to which they belong. In these scenes, the fluid boundaries between process and product, rehearsal and spectacle, life and representation, contextual theater and theater of the real, performance, and situation are difficult to demarcate. Moreover, it is precisely this fluidity that indicates, as in previous cases, the expansion of theatrical experiences outside defined paradigms and pushes the game toward situations of sharing processes and immediate interaction with the spectator"².

The very notion of choreographic installation, which became widespread in the 2000s, combines the work of

dancers, visual artists, and experimental musicians. It forges a relationship between the body, the environment, and the material support. The movement of the body in space, previously understood as the essence of dance, undergoes ruptures in its understanding from the dialogue with performance art, projecting itself out of its purity as an artistic genre, and bringing to the spectator the sensorial experience of the body and the perceptions caused by the three-dimensional space, creating events that involve everyone – both artists and spectators – into the scene.

The performative turn in working with children has been observed since the 1990s. Peters (2017)³ points out that “work for children and young people has always been highly experimental and innovative, an open field for creating hybrids in a high range of influences.” This approach embraces presentification and interactive experiences, especially when working with babies and young children, inscribing itself in the field of English Live Art. Unlike more traditional dance and theater, Live Art enables a more diverse and transdisciplinary approach to performance, bringing together experiences with the body from dance, performative actions, and visual spatiality. It is from this perspective that the work of *Núcleo Quanta* presents itself as part of a contemporary panorama within the performing arts.

Beyond the work of creation, the group, through its artistic and pedagogical actions, seeks to enrich the experiences of participants concerning their bodies, movement, and spatiality. It fosters connections and collective learning, providing cooperation between children and adults, artists and spectators, as well as encouraging artistic collaboration between parents and their children.

3. On esthetic experience and early childhood

Esthetic experience emerged as a philosophical question and was placed in the conceptual field following the recognition of art as an autonomous category in Western culture. Schiller⁴, among others, viewed the esthetic experience as a way of liberating individuals from an essential rationalist upbringing and linked perception and sensitivity to a multidimensional understanding of the human being, broadening our cultural horizons, and diversifying our ways of life. The esthetic attitude is characterized by the subject's stance toward the world, coming into play with artistic events, thereby constituting itself as a field of experience.

In this sense, artistic works and events do not exist merely to be understood or mastered but to be experienced. They represent instances that call subjects

to undergo transformative experiences, an attitude that has been reinforced in the performing arts, especially since the performative turn in the 1960s. Coming into play with artistic events allows the possibility of achieving esthetic experiences, drawing attention to the effects such experiences can generate, and, as a result, expanding the infinite possibilities of existence in the world.

Why not exercise this experience from early childhood? Observing a baby's initial interactions with the environment shows that sensoriality is the main mediator in creating knowledge about the world. Our first experiences with life, while instinctive – through the devices that store and activate the intelligence required for survival – are essentially esthetic, engaging senses, perception, and imagination. When you watch a young child playing around the house, in the park, on the street, or by the beach, you can see their interest in exploring these spaces, in tactile experimentation with materials, and in the bodily relationship established with sound, visual, and sensorial elements.

Scholars such as Herbert Read⁵ and Victor Lowenfeld⁶ have dedicated their studies to children's expression in the visual arts. In the field of performing arts, pioneers such as Jacques Coupeau, Suzanne Bing⁷, and Peter Slade⁸ have contributed to the theory and practice of theater with children. More recently, many artists have dedicated themselves to practicing with children from the earliest years, most notably the Danish visual artist Anna Marie Holm⁹ and the performance artist Peters, as previously mentioned in the European context. In addition, artistic expression is a reference point in early childhood education, from John Dewey's¹⁰ pragmatism to the centrality of the atelier in education within Loris Malaguzzi's approach in Reggio Emilia¹¹.

In Brazil, the influence of the New Education Movement in the 1920s marked the presence of this field in education,¹ and in the past 10 years, significant advancements have been made in relation to artistic practices with early childhood. These developments have entailed the fusion of informal education and esthetic experience. Notable researchers such as Marina Marcondes Machado¹², with

¹ The New Education Movement, or New School, was a movement to renew education at the beginning of the 20th century, reaching Europe, America, and Brazil. It advocated the leading role of children in the educational process, universal and democratic education, and respect for diversity. Influenced by Dewey's pragmatism, the New School was guided by the life-experience axis, respecting the individuality of subjects and seeking their insertion into society. One of the movement's more representatives in Brazil was the Bahian educator Anísio Teixeira.

her concept of the “performer-child,” and artists such as *Núcleo Quanta*, have made progress in fostering the relationship between art and childhood. They have done so by adopting an immersive approach that blurs the lines between the work, the spectator, and the city.

When investigating artworks *with* children and not simply *for* children, some fundamental questions arise: How does art speak to childhood? How does the artistic experience express a young child’s being in the world? How does contemporary performance art connect to children’s potency? By considering intelligence from multifaceted perspectives, artistic expression and the expansion of the imagination participate in the development of the child’s identity. They engage a child’s sensory intelligence and enhance their capacities for observation, communication, and perception. In addition, this involvement fosters cognitive development based on experiences with spatial qualities, weight, volumes, textures, sounds, light, and colors.

In the Common National Curriculum Bases (BNCC)¹³ for Brazilian education, children’s rights to learning and development include interaction, play, participation, exploration, self-expression, and getting to know each other. These elements are widely present in the artistic experience. The BNCC’s structuring axes stipulate actions and play among peers and with adults that enable learning, development, and socialization. Deepening bodily, sensory, expressive, social, and cognitive experiences, which in early childhood involve exploring gestures, sounds, shapes, textures, colors, words, objects, stories, and play, are indicated as a broad learning path and as a right recognized in the specificity of early childhood as a social group and participant in society.

A young child’s development and learning necessarily involve the five senses, which are responsible for reading the world around them and for enhancing and perfecting bodily, cognitive, and socioemotional skills. A young child’s interaction with the world is determined by the way their body moves, occupies space and interacts with objects, the environment, and the sensory qualities of both sound and physical properties. In this sense, an attentive look at a child’s body structure and proprioception, the appropriate stimulus for their movement, interactions with environments, and actions that challenge their sensory-motor perception, as well as the interaction with performative actions that stimulate playful and exploratory responses from children’s senses, are collaborations that art and esthetic experience can provide.

Art is thus understood, from early childhood onwards, as an experience that not only provides cognitive development but also autonomy, expressive freedom, and

communication. Contact with the artistic experience from the earliest years enables the development of symbolic, creative, and communication skills, which accumulate in the body as perceptive sensoriality and sensitive intelligence. These contributions lead to an approach to working with children that opens them up to a more sensitive and cooperative world, open to the changes needed at this planetary moment of paradigm revision. In this sense, esthetic experiences intertwine with informal education, establishing a play that breaks through the walls of the school and involves children, their parents and caretakers, and artists who are willing to share these experiences.

4. It takes a whole village to raise a child²

While the well-known proverb gives us the understanding that in traditional, indigenous, and African societies, children are an integral part of the community, participating in its different instances as a collective responsibility, the understanding of the uniqueness of childhood and its participation in Western society has presented different contours throughout history. Concern for children’s education, as a good that permeates society and on which its future depends, gained significant prominence from the 18th century onward, coinciding with the universalization of education and its focus on preparing children for life.

Notable ideas, such as Rousseau’s¹⁴, which emphasized the right to education, the uniqueness of each child, and their development as virtuous individuals for life in a free and democratic society, became popular. This highlighted the importance of sensory development and community ethics. However, it was only in the 20th century that children were recognized as a matter of public order, becoming subjects of rights and the protagonist of a set of laws and regulations aimed at safeguarding their lives and full growth.

Different political and legal proposals have emerged to defend children as subjects of special rights around the world, with the Universal Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and the World Conference on Children (1990). In Brazil, this agenda has gained more ground since the Federal Constitution (1988) and the Statute of the Child and Adolescent (1990). The focus on early childhood, however, only became a political issue in the 21st century when the Legal Framework for Early Childhood was approved (Law 13.257/2016), which establishes the conditions and guidelines for the preparation

² African proverb in the public domain.

of intersectoral plans within the scope of municipalities, aimed at early childhood, with extended listening to the population and the definition of goals by the responsible bodies¹⁵.

The emphasis on safeguarding childhood, particularly early childhood, remains incipient in all social, educational, and cultural actions in Brazil despite the existence of legislation. Indicators are brought into the discussion to give priority to the construction of these actions in Brazilian public policies, such as questions about the development of cognitive, social, physical, and emotional skills guaranteed in the early years.

Studies in the field of neuroscience and pedagogy indicate that between the ages of zero and six, the human brain is at its most advanced stage of development, a process significantly enhanced by the stimulation children receive from their interactions with people and their environment. The Municipal Plan for Early Childhood, promulgated by the São Paulo City Council as recently as 2018, points out that “the annual loss of income in adulthood for those who, as children, were unable to achieve full development is approximately 24%” and that “investment in early childhood is a highly effective and efficient socioeconomic measure whose need to be prioritized is indisputable”¹⁶.

In this way, creating a city that serves as a home for young children, where they can live, explore, and enjoy their surroundings, is an essential part of shaping public policies aimed at this age group. This involves transforming the city environment itself, including its squares, streets, and public facilities, into more welcoming and child-friendly spaces. The appreciation of nature, the use of colors, maintaining urban cleanliness, ensuring safety and accessibility on public roads, establishing and maintaining both public and private play spaces, and fostering intergenerational coexistence, are some factors that guarantee the conditions of public care for early childhood. Concerns about the quality of early childhood education and the involvement of families and society in valuing the care of young children indicate the need for cultural and social actions that stimulate awareness of their integral development. This is crucial because the exclusion and invisibility of young children can cause social problems.

We, thus, understand that public spaces serve as places for learning and interaction, recognizing the importance of the surroundings and the city itself in the life of urban societies. Expanding the universe of experiences, knowledge, and socialization for young children in public spaces is also in the interest of the arts. It is part of a social learning process that values sensitivity, cooperation, diversity, and the inclusion of children in spaces where affection, recognition, and discoveries are nurtured.

Culture is an active and constitutive dimension of the city itself, and artistic action has contributed to participation in public life. It also encourages people to face the challenges of personal and collective life, stimulating the formation of community environments favorable to cultural insertion and artistic expression. When reflecting on the relationship between art, the city, and public life, we bring up the idea of a permanent process that considers not only the spaces of cities and their populations but also the dynamics that govern them, creating their uses and symbolizations, segregations, and inequalities. In this way, artistic action has the potential to transform the spaces and relationships that are part of public life. Why not also consider the participation of young children in this construction?

5. Inhabiting and enriching public spaces with children: *EmQuanta's* experience as an artistic action in public squares and parks in the city of São Paulo

In 2022, the project *Sai de Casa, Quanta!* by *Núcleo Quanta* was awarded a grant from the São Paulo Municipal Department of Culture³. The initiative aimed to restart the group's artistic and educational activities (performances, research seminars, and mentoring for artistic and educational projects) in the city of São Paulo after the two long years of social distancing imposed by the covid-19 pandemic. During this delicate moment of reencounter, it was decided to adapt the show *EmQuanta: Dance for Young Children and Their Parents* (that you can see in [Figure 1](#) below) into an artistic action that would occupy municipal parks in different areas of the city, spread across its four regions (north, central-west, south, and east). This was necessary due to the period of readaptation to social life and the need to continue adopting some sanitary measures to prevent the disease.

The sites targeted for the partnership were in regions of high social vulnerability and lacked social programming, especially programs aimed at early childhood. The aim of

³ With the support of the Call for Proposals for Decentralized Artistic and Cultural Projects in Multiple Languages, the project *Sai de Casa, Quanta!* carried out ten free artistic actions in city squares and parks, covering all four administrative and territorial regions of the city. It also hosted the 1st Art and Early Childhood Seminar, bringing together specialist teachers and researchers in the areas of art and early childhood education. Additionally, the project mentored six projects by artists and educators focusing on this age group through the Art and Early Childhood Project Incubator. The project's activities can be viewed on the *Núcleo Quanta* website at www.nucleoquanta.com and on its social networks @nucleoquanta.

this action was to offer options for parents and children to come together and experience art, connecting families with the city, and collaborating directly with municipal regulations for early childhood. This collaboration aimed to provide playful and welcoming spaces for children and enable families to enjoy cultural activities.

However, at the beginning of the project, the municipal parks were not yet open to scheduling artistic and cultural activities. This led to a slight adaptation of the project, with activities taking place in the gardens and squares adjacent to municipal public libraries. Subsequently, Aclimação Park also joined the project. As a result, we performed ten *EmQuanta* presentations in five public facilities across the five regions of the city of São Paulo: Monteiro Lobato Children's Library (center), Hans Christian Andersen Library (east), Álvares de Azevedo Library (north), Álvaro Guerra Library (west), and Aclimação Park (south). In [Figure 2](#), below, we can see the adaptation of the show to the garden of Álvares de Azevedo Public Library.



Figure 1. *EmQuanta*, dança para crianças pequenas e seus pais (dance for young children and parents). Itaú Cultural, 2013. Photo by Cris Glass.



Figure 2. *EmQuanta*: artistic action in the garden of Álvares de Azevedo Public Library, July 02 2022. Photo by Wilson Julião.

The action in the parks and gardens aimed to promote the artistic and convivial revitalization of the city's spaces. The field of culture and artistic practices has been one of the most affected by the covid-19 pandemic due to the very nature of its actions, which traditionally require encounter and presence. As far as young children are concerned, the period of social distancing has created gaps that we are still trying to fill, both in the social and educational fields.

During the coronavirus pandemic, adults in their homes were unprepared for children to be around their families 24 h a day. Many appeared to be unaware of their young children's need to play freely. It seems that play, at least in big cities, has ended up being officially recognized as a "school activity" rather than a cultural action that is characteristic of being a child, of their corporality, of their ways of existing, researching themselves, others, and the shared world¹⁷.

In 2022, many of *Núcleo Quanta's* spectators were born during the pandemic and had limited contact with people or children other than their own families. Others had their interactions interrupted at a very early age, which affected the development of certain cognitive, linguistic, and social skills. The open space of urban squares now broke the everyday life of the apartments, thus broadening the children's experiences in using their bodies in interaction with the performances, the landscape, and other families.

Interaction is extremely important for children's development. The National Curriculum Guidelines for Early Childhood Education (DCNEI) present the concept of the child as a historical subject with rights, who, through interactions, relationships, and daily practices they experience, builds their personal and collective identity. [...] through interaction with others and the world, children understand the elements that surround them, elaborating meanings and significations about the environment and culture, and, in this way, constructing their learning¹⁸.

Beyond reinventing ways of creating and living together and resisting the processes of annihilation of survival caused by the virus or a government often indifferent to the suffering of millions of Brazilians during the pandemic, we analyze the experience of creating art with children in parks in 2022. We do so with questions in mind: What have we learned from this experience? How have artists and spectators broken their isolation and touched on their constitutions as subjects of culture and inhabitants of the city? How do collective artistic events mobilize encounters and enrich the public spaces?

6. Rediscovering the landscape

Late morning. The sun peeks through the trees, gradually warming the room. In the middle of the garden, colorful overlapping rugs mark the meeting place. In the background, a musician coordinates the soundscape. Two dancers stretch, and suddenly, a child runs. From that moment on, a new game takes place, from the perception of the environment to the permissiveness of the action. A little boy crawls, two sisters pretend to be butterflies, and others follow the movements of ballerinas while a little boy snuggles up to suckle on his mother's lap. An actor appears, waving white plastic clouds, and children and adults alike experience the movement in the air. The wind sways the leaves, which fall over the scene, and the light traces mosaics of shadow over the carpets.

By constructing the scenic space, *Núcleo Quanta* reveals an environment in which children's potency is realized through play while at the same time stimulating the relationship between all the participants in the scene (artists and spectators), as we are in [Figure 3](#), above. To achieve this, it reflects on the systemic relationship between inhabitants of the same environment and weaves the scenic space as a dwelling place within an ecosystemic relationship, in which all the elements are in a dynamic relationship: Light, materialities, constructions, sounds, visualities, movements, and performances, forming a scenic ecosystem.

When investigating his concept of environmental art, Hélio Oiticica¹⁹ sought a work that would be achieved by expanding the sensations evoked by bodily experimentation in environments that would allow spectators to actively participate. The environment would, thus, act, much like



Figure 3. *EmQuanta*: artistic action in the garden of Alvaro Guerra Public Library, June 25, 2022. Photo by Wilson Julião.

an ecosystem, as a set of situations and a field of forces. Oiticica observed this as the passage from architectural space to experience within architectural space.

In the same way, the inhabitable and performable space proposed by *Núcleo Quanta* encourages the free participation of spectators (children and adults) who become entangled in a play in which multiple relationships can be created within a performative system. In this system, all the parts present are equivalent to the enjoyment and invention of the scene. The artistic action contaminates the spectator, who, in turn, contaminates the artistic action, much like an organism.

Integrating the play space with the garden landscape adds another element to this scenic ecosystem, expanding the spatial dimension and the possibilities of sensorial experience for the participants in the scene:

Landscape is between space and site; it is the subject's experience of the world that they experience, reconstruct, and re-signify. (...) It concerns the experience of the senses, of thought, and of esthetic reception in play with materiality, with the terrain²⁰.

EmQuanta takes place as a phenomenon that is linked to the audience's body, to the play in the scene, and to the space occupied in a relational way. Its surroundings welcome the subjects and the relationships that take place with its natural materialities: Wind, light and shadows, textures, aromas, and temperatures. This gives rise to a poetics that integrates humans and nature, represented by the space of a garden, as we are in [Figure 4](#) below.

This experience of the senses can be seen in the bodies that are willing to encounter the landscape scene, shy at first, but who allow themselves to be bathed in the sun,



Figure 4. *EmQuanta*: artistic action in Aclimação Park, June 05, 2022. Photo by Wilson Julião.

enveloped by the music, surprised, and shouted at by soap bubbles, wrapped up in the codpiece tubes, and dressed in the big toy. Sunlight progresses throughout the experience, providing designs and sparkles that blend in with the space. Dogs sit to watch the children, ladies continue their stroll while observing the scene, and young people play soccer beside them. The garden is re-signified by the scenic action, playing in the park is re-signified by the scenic play, and family relationships are re-signified by the experience with the artwork.

Encountering the park is also about building a place where children can enjoy their freedom: to touch, walk around, be surprised, explore, run, jump, and make-believe. It also creates a break in the frenetic urban temporality, getting away from the noise of machines and the urban agglomeration. It is getting out of the apartments and rediscovering the open, public, and convivial space.

7. Rediscovering others and meeting the adult performers

The circular space in a square in the center of the city of São Paulo welcomes artists, children, and adults who come together in a scenic action. The adults initially watch, with the exception of a few mothers and fathers who are more inclined to dance. The children run around with the plastic bags in the air, gather lots of bags, make a giant ball, and lie down on it, use the plastic bag as a jumper, let themselves be enveloped by the soap bubbles, try to grab them with their fingers, shout with excitement when surrounded by the bubbles. They also observe the musician's actions and play the instruments. They wrap themselves up in the fabrics, play hide-and-peek with their mothers, and use the fabrics to make hammocks, boats, oceans they swim in, rivers they jump across, lie down and look at the sky. By now, mothers, fathers, and other adults are sharing the play, dancing together, listening attentively to the poetry, and singing Escravos de Jó. A big toy appears, and the children want to touch its parts to see if it makes a sound, if it stands out from the body, and if they can put it on. Artists, children, and adults find the places of their corporalities and let art live in themselves, among everyone, with the world.

The Covid-19 pandemic kept many families in isolation for 2 years in the city of São Paulo. The beginning of 2022 was also a time of liberation: with the arrival of vaccines, we could once again meet those others who had been separated from us for so long – parents, grandparents, cousins, friends, teachers, and so many others we did not

know, occupying the public space once again, as we are in Figure 5 above.

Jorge Dubatti (2007)²¹ observes that performing art is a convivial event that presupposes sharing an experience with others. *EmQuanta* is a performative act that takes place within relationships between adults and children, inhabiting the artistic sphere together, and sharing the world in a moment of discovery. Thus, meeting the children and allowing them to be freely and playfully in the space produces, as Dubatti says, a poetic bodily event in conviviality.

When we can once again inhabit our bodies in a playful and artistic relationship in the amplitude of a public square, we begin to recognize the possibilities of living together, of perceiving the environment, of approaching the other without fear and then establishing a dialogue between what is happening in ourselves, with the others, and with the inhabited space. In this way, when performing *EmQuanta*, we try to observe how the children's bodies are affected by the scenic action and how they affect the adults in coexistence. How is everyone affected by the open space of the park? How is the body transformed from the isolation of apartments and private vehicles to the collective space, from the car seats and mothers' laps to the place of performance? And how do adults also become performers? How do they act *with* children?

By recognizing the uniqueness of each conviviality of each child who sets out to experiment in the space, we open ourselves up to the unpredictability of art that is made there, live, in play. The Mundukuru indigenous people teach their children to learn about life as it presents itself. In the same way, scenic action, movement, and performativity are revealed from the children's bodily explorations, stimulated by contact with the space and its plasticity and by the interference of the artists, who observe them and act to enrich the play, the movement, or the relationship between them. As Marina Machado says: "If it is in movement that the young child thinks, lives, is



Figure 5. *EmQuanta*: artistic action in the park of Monteiro Lobato Public Library, May 21, 2022. Photo by Tadzio Veiga.

silent, it will be in movement that they will tell us about themselves: about being a child, their joys, their anxieties, their research into the form-content of their *poiesis*²².

In early childhood, we find a conviviality that is based on experience and perception. Body knowledge, improvisation, unpredictability, time, energy, and impulse are seen by artists, children, and adults as unique ways of being in the world. Based on the perception of the body and the writing of that body in movement, there is a dialogue between action, presentation, and observation. Children and adults find themselves as performers in the scenic action and can even interfere, destroy, and reconstruct the elements at play. The focus is no longer on the artist as the conductor of the performance but on the experience of the body in space, making human interventions an active immersion in the scene, as we are in Figure 6 below.

Children and adults relate to each other, mediated by play and experimentation with the landscape, the objects in the scene, the sounds, and external interferences of the park. They reveal and hide parts of their bodies; they put themselves in unusual positions and movements; they explore the materials with sound; they create a body-home relationship with the objects; they move around the installation by coupling their bodies to the material; they cross the space quickly playing tag; and so many other possibilities for play and manipulation are discovered by the children in the scene, which are shared with the adults.

The work thus places the participants in a position of intimacy. There is contact with the other through the occupation of space and the manipulation of objects, which generates movement. On the other hand, there is immersion in intrapersonal contact through the playful state that the material, space, and sound provide. The spectator's position shifts from passive contemplation to immersion in the action and in the relationship with the scene and the other participants, be they children or adults. *EmQuanta*, then, allows us to break with the isolation experienced during the pandemic, bringing countless possibilities of what can be known from a conviviality, and producing singular poetics in each of its encounters with others, with space, and with the shared world.

8. A city that is also for children

By proposing artistic action involving young children in the public space, *Núcleo Quanta* aims to contribute to the defense of children's rights in their existential and social specificity, to their development, and to the creation of a network of families, teachers, artists, and caretakers who can, with due knowledge and care, multiply the esthetic and artistic experiences in early childhood. We can have a sense of this in Figure 7 above.

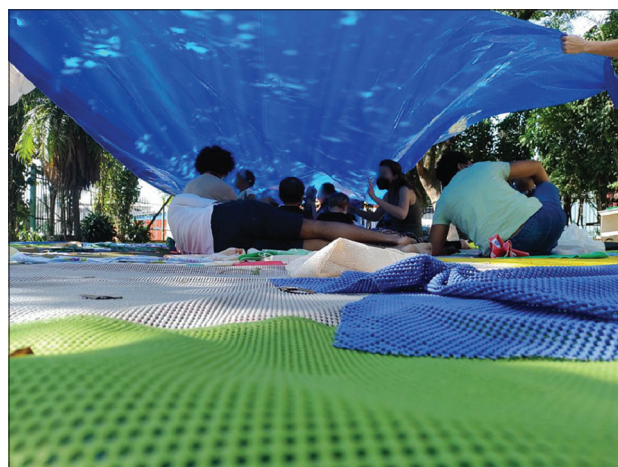


Figure 6. *EmQuanta*: Artistic action in the garden of Álvares de Azevedo Public Library, July 02, 2022. Photo by Wilson Julião.



Figure 7. *EmQuanta*: Artistic action in Aclimação Park, June 05, 2022. Photo by Leandro Goulart.

Through the circulation of *EmQuanta* as an artistic action for young children and their parents in the squares and parks of the city of São Paulo, the emphasis is on occupying these spaces in a way that makes them more welcoming for children, expanding the availability of playful and accessible spaces. This considers the unique needs of early childhood, stimulates their revitalization, and encourages intergenerational coexistence. Furthermore, it encourages play, the exploration of children's physicality, and their integral development through art while facilitating interaction with adults and raising awareness of the importance of early childhood care.

As we resume conviviality in public spaces, we also ask ourselves what we have learned from the experience of the pandemic. How did we get through this moment with the children, and how can we collaborate to rebuild a world in which the presence of children is qualified, considered,

and cohabited? By observing other convivial experiences between adults and children, we can reflect on the extent to which our current social forms contribute to a new understanding of human relationships and the sense of community:

Indigenous childhood, Mundukuru childhood, is very free. We went around to all the houses, and it is common, since we were children, to understand that the whole community is responsible for our education. Hence, we do not have just one father and one mother; we have several, as all those who have children are parents of the other children, too. Hence, we grew up without fear, without barriers. It is a bit of this circular thinking, where everything goes well when everyone takes responsibility for how things go²³.

Daniel also points out: “And where do we get closer? We create this bridge in childhood.” The survival of the world today, and, above all, of humanity in the world today, depends on the creation of alternatives for the occupation of space, the capture and use of natural resources, a new understanding of human relations, and a sense of community. To do this, we see the need to strengthen common experiences, which should be more qualitative than quantitative, including children and offering a new way of perceiving things. Together, we can face the challenges of contemporary barbarism.

The esthetic experience in *EmQuanta* creates a specific perception in the spectator, providing a way of coexisting that creates a temporary community around a playful action, of which the children are a structural part. New relationships, new perspectives, new movements, as well as new affections are created as they inhabit the event. As Erika Fischer-Lichte points out: “It is the esthetic experience, that is, the liminal experience as such, that organizes the non-esthetic liminal experiences and eventually integrates them”²⁴.

From this experience of an artwork that is performed live between artists, children, and adults, we become experiencers of the city space itself, welcoming the relationships that are formed around play, the corporealities that intersect in artistic action, and the use of space as an esthetic territory. By interfering in the city’s spaces and harnessing the potential power of the landscape of gardens and parks, we seek the enjoyment of an urban space that formulates new notions of a city, which can have a direct impact on its repertoires and dynamics of use.

Considering that inequalities in cities directly influence the raising and development of children and that a welcoming city is a better city for everyone, we can also

reflect on what cultural policies for early childhood might encompass. When it comes to public policies for this segment, in addition to being recent in Brazilian history, they focus on issues directly linked to the physical space of coexistence, services, education, health, protection, and security. Artistic and cultural issues emerge transversally and can be inserted into larger strategic axes, which concern education, accessible use of space, the right to free play, intergenerational coexistence, and participation in activities (in general) that stimulate and favor integral human development.

We, therefore, emphasize the need for a more pronounced positivization of the artistic experience in childhood and its relationship with adults, in the city’s public facilities, in its open spaces and gardens, in schools, and at the heart of family life. Beyond merely offering specific cultural agendas and physical and leisure activities, we advocate for the cultivation of the esthetic experience in childhood as a structuring axis, not only for cognitive and social development but also as a philosophical attitude toward life – a pursuit of *Buen Vivir*.⁴ This pursuit aims to seek a new way of organizing our lives in the world, privileging sensitive perception, the experience of the body, the relationship with space and the environment, and the exploration of gestures, sounds, shapes, textures, colors, words, and emotions, thereby reviewing our relationship with others and the world.

What many scientists have not dared to admit or think about for a long time, and which many still dispute, has been felt intuitively by artists who have been approaching their art accordingly for decades. Through their actions, performances, installations, and other spectacles, they made it possible for themselves and the spectators to experience and live the recognition of the mysterious non-dispositionality. Here, both groups were able to experience and live the world as enchanted, and this means thinking of themselves in a process of transformation, as beings in transition²⁵.

In this delicate moment that we are going through as humanity, it is essential that we bring actions and reflections that can contribute to building more cooperative, less developmental, more diverse, and less colonized societies. In this way, children, as bearers of novelty in the world,

⁴ *Buen Vivir* is a concept developed by Ecuadorian Alberto Acosta, which reflects on sustainable economic development. It opposes the idea of perpetual accumulation and seeks harmony with nature, reciprocity, and solidarity between individuals and communities. This concept is based on the cultural experiences of South American indigenous people.

deserve the care of an entire community. This collective effort is necessary to enable them to collaborate as active and creative participants in society, contributing to the creation of new non-predatory cultures that can reposition the human being as a member of the fabric of life.

Acknowledgments

None.

Funding

Funding for research was provided by the Municipal Department of Culture, São Paulo, Brazil.

Conflict of interest

The author has no conflicts of interest to declare.

Author contributions

This is a single-authored article.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data

Not applicable.

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ARTICLE

Cultural connotation and bionic design
application of foliage plants in Chinese gardensSiqi Lin^{1,2} and Wei Liu^{2*}¹Department of Design Studies, School of Art, Soochow University, Suzhou, China²Department of Industrial Design, College of Furnishings and Industrial Design, Nanjing Forestry University, Nanjing, China

Abstract

Since the dawn of time, foliage plants have been the primary plant material used in the design of Chinese landscape gardens, and their rich cultural and historical heritage can serve as inspiration for design improvement and innovation. This study categorizes the decorative traits of foliage plants into three categories, aiming to explore their cultural characteristics and design applications. Special attention is given to the folkloric, cultural, religious, and totemic meanings of foliage plants. The various forms of bionic design based on the application of foliage plants are categorized and illustrated with specific cases. This exploration includes perspectives of morphology, texture, function, and imagery, all rooted in the theory of bionic design. The beauty of natural art, the humanistic attitude, and the advancement of function, material, and technology in product design can all be reflected in foliage plants as design elements.

Keywords: Natural artistic esthetics; Traditional oriental culture; Case studies; Humanistic feature

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Citation: Lin S, Liu W. Cultural connotation and bionic design application of foliage plants in Chinese gardens. *Arts & Communication*. 2024;2(1):1854
<https://doi.org/10.36922/ac.1854>

Received: September 18, 2023**Accepted:** November 3, 2023**Published Online:** February 8, 2024

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1. Introduction

China has developed a unique Chinese gardening system since the Yin and Shang dynasties. Foliage plants, as one of the primary components of garden plants, not only provide a vibrant natural environment but are also associated with many cultural connotations and emotional factors.¹ With diverse shapes, seasonal color changes, and strong vitality, foliage plants inspire humans to attribute various symbolic meanings or personality traits to them. The cultivation of leafy plants has evolved with human culture. At the same time, having foliage plants at home can provide people with a sense of health, comfort, and ecological healing. They offer advantages in form, function, and culture when applied to bionic design. Furthermore, they can provide new ideas for optimizing products in terms of modeling, structure, texture, materials, technology, and other aspects to break through the traditional design pattern.

Given the wide application of foliage plants, current studies mainly focus on the fields of ecological performance, planting management, and greening application. Although foliage plants have been used since ancient times in areas such as painting and textile design, their usage as an inspiration for contemporary product design has not received much attention. Simultaneously at the same time, the definition of various types of bionic design with regard to foliage plants has not yet been clarified.

2. Overview of foliage plants

2.1. Definition of foliage plants

Foliage plants refer to the plants that attract viewers mainly through their vibrant leaf colors or unusual leaf shapes. They have a longer display season compared to general plants and include all types of trees, shrubs, and grasses. They can fulfill people’s indoor and outdoor plant needs and are often used in gardening and landscaping. Broadly speaking, foliage plants include cacti, bamboo, agaves, palms, pines, cypresses, asparagus, and ferns.²

2.2. Ornamental features of foliage plants

2.2.1. Leaf color

The human eye is more sensitive to color, so the most intuitive observation of foliage plants is color viewing. As shown in Table 1, leaves can be divided into green leaves and colored leaves according to their color properties. Green-leaved plants most commonly depicted by the ancients are pine, bamboo, banana, and lotus, and their depictions are usually associated with the character and sentiment of the garden owner. For instance, the writer Zhang Yu, who lived at the beginning of the Ming dynasty, used the phrase “dark green and beautiful jade” to describe the sight of the bamboo in the snow and sunshine in *A Memoir of the Deep Bamboo Pavilion*.³














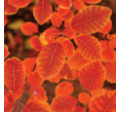
Colored foliage plants can be categorized into spring-colored leaf plants, autumn-colored leaf plants, and winter-colored leaf plants based on their seasonal characteristics.⁴ Most of the common-colored foliage plants are spring-colored foliage plants and autumn-colored foliage plants. Willows are typical of spring-colored foliage plants, as Bai Juyi wrote in the “Song of Willow Branch:” “A tree of million branches sways in breeze of spring; More tender, softer than golden silk string by string.”⁵ Autumn-colored foliage plants have attracted attention since ancient times due to their slow rates of color change, such as red maple, ginkgo, yellow bilberry, *Zelkova*, *sebiferum*, and common smoke tree. Maple viewing is an activity that has a long history in China, as described in the poem “Song of a Pipa Player” by Bai Juyi: “One night by riverside I bade a friend goodbye; In maple leaves and rushes autumn seemed to sigh.”⁶

2.2.2. Leaf shape

From a biological point of view, the leaf shape of foliage plants is roughly oval, heart-shaped, palm-shaped, fan-shaped, rhombus, ovate, round, triangular, and so on.⁷ Table 2 illustrate the classification of leaf shapes.

From the perspective of plant culture, “moving bamboo as a window” is an important landscape technique in

Table 1. Color classification of foliage plants¹

Color properties	Common plants	Color extraction
Green leaves	 Conifers	
	 Plantain	
	 Bamboo	
	 Lotus leaf	
Colored leaves	 Photinia	
	 Zelkova	
	 Willow	
	 Chinese pistache	
	 Maple	
	 <i>Sebiferum</i>	
	 Ginkgo	 Common Smoketree





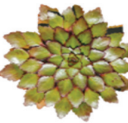







traditional Chinese gardens, emphasizing the slender and elegant bamboo leaves as well as the serene and beautifully refined artistic conception. However, the ancients were more concerned with the overall beauty of the leaves and the importance of personification. In addition to a few representative plants, there are few records on the details of the leaf shape of other plants.

2.2.3. Leaf sound

Appreciating the distinctive sound that leaves make when exposed to weather conditions such as rain or wind is an essential component of leaf-watching. Bai Juyi wrote in “Night Rain:” “I know the night rain through the window, but the sound of the plantain comes first,”

¹ Photo reference: <https://image.baidu.com/> [Last accessed: 18 October 2023]

Table 2. Classification of common shapes of foliage plants²

Features	Leaf shape											
	Elliptic	Cordate	Palmate	Flabellate	Lozenge	Triangle	Lanceolate	Ovate	Circular	Scale	Spatulate	Linear
Indicative plants	 Rubber tree	 Morning glory	 Chinese parasol	 Ginkgo	 Ludwigia sedioides	 Buckwheat	 Bamboo	 Peanut	 Nasturtium	 Arborvitae	 Echeveria 'Black Prince'	 Spider plant
Description	It is widest in the middle, rounded at the tip and base.	The base is broad, rounded, and slightly concave, and the apex is tapered.	The leaves have three or five lobes, and are shaped like the palm of a hand.	It is broad and rounded at the top, tapering toward the base.	It has equilateral blades.	The base is broad and flat, and the lengths of the three sides are nearly equal.	The leaf base is wider, apex is tapered.	The lower part is round and wide, and the upper part is slightly narrow.	It is shaped like a disk. The length and width are nearly equal.	There are obvious petioles between the leaves.	The apex is rounded, tapering toward the base.	The leaf is flat and narrow. Its length is about 5 times the width, and the edges on both sides are nearly parallel.

which demonstrates the classic imagery of “night rain on plantain,” an important theme in classic Chinese literature. Lotus, bamboo, and pine are also representatives of foliage plants that create soundscapes. “Listening to the Rain Pavilion” of Humble Administrator’s Garden in Suzhou is named after Tang Lizhong’s “Listening to the rain on the autumn bamboo,” and “The place for listening to the pine wind” is taken from the biography of Tao Hongjing: “I have a deep love for the pine wind; the courtyard is planted with pines, and every time I hear its sound, I am so delighted.”⁸

3. Cultural connotations of foliage plants

3.1. Totemism

The plant totemism that emerged in ancient times was essentially the culture of plant worship of our ancestors, which originated from the primitive ancestors’ reverence for plants. At that time, plants were the main source of food and medicine, and they also possessed great vitality and an eternal existence, which aroused people’s curiosity and led to their adoration. Thus, a particular plant was worshiped as the protector and spiritual pillar of an ethnic group. The hope of receiving the blessing and shelter of the worshiped plant is to be well provided with food and to produce offspring.

The common totem images of foliage plants include pine trees, maple trees, bamboo, and so on. In the Central Plains of China, the acacia tree is honored as a sacred tree, and ethnic minorities have their own plant totem worship, such as vanilla, banyan, bamboo, pine, and cypress in the Yi ethnic group; trees, tung wood, and bamboo in the Miao ethnic group; willow branches in the Manchu ethnic group; and thatch in the Zhuang ethnic group.

3.2. Religious culture

In the process of understanding and relying on nature, the ancients gradually developed a belief in plants, combined it with religion, and deified certain plants for auspicious meaning.

One representative foliage plant that has its roots in religious culture is the lotus flower, which symbolizes the pure and untainted mind of Bodhi. According to legend, when the Buddha was born, a golden lotus would bloom beneath his feet each time he stepped on the ground. There is also a saying that “the sky is falling, and the Earth is flooded with golden lotuses” which describes the scene of the Buddha preaching the scriptures brilliantly.⁹ The

² Photo reference: <https://image.baidu.com/> [Last accessed: 18 October 2023]

Chinese crinum is also a representative plant of Buddhism. People believe that it is the embodiment of *Manjushri Bodhisattva*'s wisdom on earth, symbolizing the teaching and guidance of people.

In Taoist legend, lotus and cypress are common foliage plants that correspond to the religious symbols of goodness and longevity, respectively.¹⁰ In addition, pine, cypress, ginkgo, lotus, and bamboo are often planted in temples to express a quiet and noble religious esthetic atmosphere.

3.3. Folk culture

As a great country with a history spanning more than 5,000 years, China has no shortage of festivals and ceremonies, and foliage plants also play an important role in various folk cultures.

Calamus is the traditional symbol of the Dragon Boat Festival. As shown in [Figure 1](#), after the 5th month of the lunar calendar, the ancients hung calamus and wormwood and drank calamus wine to avoid mosquito harassment and drive away evil spirits.

To celebrate the beginning of spring, the ancients often used *Angelica dahurica*, an herb that is boiled in water for bathing, to drive away the cold, and for ceremonial purposes. *Angelica dahurica* is one of the most common plants in *The Songs of Chu*, written by the great poet Qu Yuan.¹¹ It grows in dark forests or streamside environments. It can dispel wind and relieve pain, and it is often used as a common material for making anti-epidemic-scented sachets.

In other traditional Chinese customs, blessings for newlyweds are often given in the form of *Reineckea* and evergreens, whereas calla lilies and cypress branches are commonly used as a sign of respect at occasions of mourning such as burials and grave-sweeping.



Figure 1. The custom of hanging calamus and wormwood on the Dragon Boat Festival.³

³ Photo reference: <https://www.163.com/dy/article/I6AS29TF0552LSYM.html> [Last accessed: 18 October 2023]

4. Application of foliage plants to bionic design

4.1. Morphological bionics

In foliage plants, the term “morphological bionics” refers to the application of realistic approaches to convey the symbolic meaning of plant components. The product is given a formal beauty by accurately replicating the leaf or plant form.

The modeling of ancient artifacts demonstrates the use of bionic design for foliage plants. According to author Qian Handong, “Under the general environment of Song Dynasty porcelain, pottery lotus incense burner, with rich cultural connotations, can be said to be unique.”¹² For example, the Ruyao, a rare variety of chinaware from the Song Dynasty, imitates nature in shape, structure, and style and shows the esthetic style of skillful elegance and quietness. As shown in [Figure 2](#), the lotus-style wine warmer that Ruyao possesses is smooth and vibrant, giving people a feeling of gentleness and elegance as well as simplicity and dignity.

There are two types of lotus lamps imitating the shape of the lotus flower in modern design. [Figure 3](#) presents a type of lotus lamp that absorbs the production process of traditional lanterns and adopts memory alloy material. It can remember two shapes when the material is heated and cooled, and the petals gradually unfold when the bulb glows and becomes hot to mimic the subtle movements in nature. Furthermore, essential oils can be added to emit a fragrance that will help the user relax and reconnect with nature.

4.2. Texture bionics

The texture of leaves is the essential expression of the original characteristics of nature, reflecting the beauty of texture that



Figure 2. Lotus-style warm bowl.⁴

⁴ Photo reference: <https://auction.artron.net/paimai-art5051470643> [Last accessed: 18 October 2023]



Figure 3. The lotus lamp infuses both traditional craft and technology.⁵

is either delicate or rough, soft or hard. The texture bionics of foliage plants refers to the comprehensive use of leaf tissue, color, texture, and structure for design. It incorporates physical and visual elements to encourage the production of material goods and spiritual ideas during interaction.

In modern times, engineers have drawn inspiration from leaf texture to build a range of bionic structural systems, such as applying the mesh texture in leaf veins to the fan-shaped vault as a supporting structure in architecture.¹³ The master of spatial structure, Santiago Calatrava, adopted the structure of intertwined leaf veins for the Prince Felipe Science Museum designed for the City of Arts and Sciences in Valencia. As illustrated in Figure 4, he gives the building an orderly texture full of vitality.

Japanese ceramicist Hitomi Hosono specializes in incorporating the beauty and textural details of leaves into her work. She uses ceramics to mimic the texture of plants, layering white leaves in relief on the pottery, giving nature a more profound and transcendent spiritual core. As shown in Figure 5, although the visitor can see the surface of the ceramics, the lush, overlapping greenery inspires imagination and makes them wonder about the work's latent energy.

4.3. Functional bionics

Functional bionics of foliage plants mainly refers to the methodology of researching the functional principles existing in leaves and then effectively applying them in design, such as energy conversion and information transfer. It promotes the innovation and development of product function and material technology and creates the conditions for designing products with convenient and

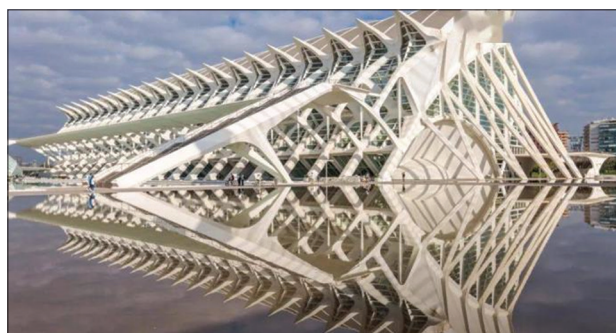


Figure 4. Prince Felipe Science Museum.⁶



Figure 5. Pottery made by Hitomi Hosono and its texture detail.⁷

human-oriented functions. Ancient ancestors were able to utilize the function of plants for bionic design. Classic examples include the Yellow Emperor being inspired to build the wheel after seeing a flying fleabane and Luban's invention of a simpler saw for cutting wood inspired by sawtooth grass that scratched his arm.

There have been many cases where the functional bionics of foliage plants have been applied to design. For example, scientists mimicked the photosynthesis of leaves to create a solar battery that simulated the incomplete photosynthesizer of cyanobacteria to design a bionic photolysis water device that can obtain a large amount of hydrogen.¹⁴ Scientific research has also found that the study of photosynthesis will provide a new way of developing medication for the extension of human life and the cure of ailments.¹⁵

Similarly, modern people have also conducted bionic studies on the functional aspects of the leaf surface. By observing the phenomenon of dumplings wrapped in

⁵ Photo reference: https://www.sohu.com/a/555711347_121124036 [Last accessed: 18 October 2023]

⁶ Photo reference: https://www.sohu.com/a/618658886_347478 [Last accessed: 18 October 2023]

⁷ Photo reference: http://www.333cn.com/shejizixun/202144/43495_432808.html [Last accessed: 18 October 2023]

bamboo leaves and rice wrapped in lotus leaves when the leaf surface is not sticky, scientists have selected several representative leaves for experiments and discovered the non-smooth structure and hydrophobicity of the leaf surface.¹⁵ Inspired by this, people have used nanomaterials to design a kind of hydrophobic paint that gives buildings the ability to self-clean. As depicted in Figure 6, Leaf Republic, a company from Germany, utilizes the natural degradation characteristics of leaves to design tableware made only of leaves. It is made from wild vines in Asia and South America without any chemical additives, oils, or glues and can be naturally degraded 28 days after use, turning into nutrients for other plants.

4.4. Imagery bionics

Imagery bionics of foliage plants refers to the indirect transmission of cultural and emotional information through the subjective treatment of plant morphological features or attributes under the premise of fitting the connotation of plants to make people physiologically and psychologically realize the interaction and resonance with the imagery form. This type of biomimicry involves the subjective processing of the biomimetic thing's spiritual core, including its cultural and social features, rather than only the embodiment of the look of the biomimetic object.

In the field of architectural decoration, plant image symbols comprehensively contain nature worship, totem worship, clan worship, and social cognition. Different plant ornamental patterns utilized at various architectural levels express multiple political and ideological ideas as well as distinct class perspectives. They can also reflect the national religion, art, esthetics, and other spiritual aspects of public consciousness.¹⁶ It is typical to observe foliage plant topics such as lotus, Chinese parasols, pines, and



Figure 6. Leaf Republic's tableware.⁸

⁸ Photo reference: <https://www.businessinsider.com/leaf-republic-disposable-tableware-plates-fresh-green-leaves-reduce-plastic-waste-2016-12> [Last accessed: 18 October 2023]

bamboo on the shadow walls and flower walls of Chinese gardens to communicate the ideal aspirations of the literati and to depict the noble character of the gentleman.

Independent designer Tan Zhipeng specializes in the use of the traditional casting process, “lost wax casting,” to design and produce a variety of avant-garde contemporary furniture.¹⁷ As exhibited in Figure 7, he has been inspired by the law of plant growth and the cellular structure of leaves and used the organic form of natural plants to create the “Bio-muscle” series of furniture, which simulates the imagery of the plant growth process and combines the themes of plants and human beings.

4.5. Original design: bionic design based on an integrated perspective

As technology evolves, through the integration of disciplines, foliage plant bionic design can empower products in more diverse forms. An HTML (hypertext markup language)-based art pattern processing program has been developed through the principles of computer graphics as a derivative of foliage plant bionics. As presented in Figure 8, the principle is to use a geometric template to capture a part of the image in the illustration of foliage plants and then use symmetry, repetition, and other planar composition processing techniques on this piece of image to generate dynamically variable abstract art patterns that can be applied to the development of cultural and creative products.

5. Discussion

The common foliage plants found in traditional Chinese gardens serve as the focus of this study, which is conducted in the context of the present need to broaden the cognitive capacity of inventive thinking in product design. The research first analyzes the significance of foliage plants in Chinese history and culture before classifying and



Figure 7. Bio-muscle series of furniture.⁹

⁹ Photo reference: <https://www.zcool.com.cn/work/ZMjA5NjgxMjg=.html> [Last accessed: 18 October 2023]

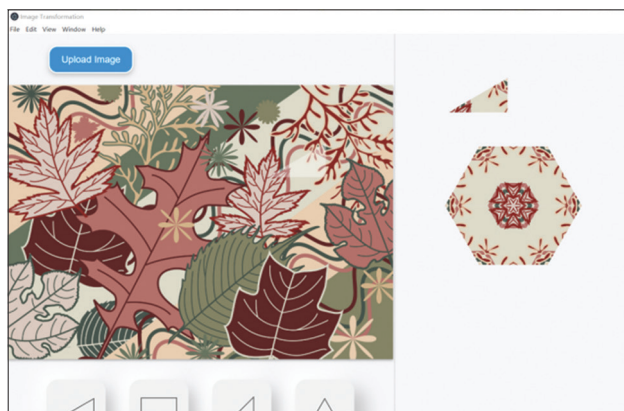


Figure 8. Bionic pattern processing program.

summarizing the different principles and characteristics of bionic foliage plant design, ranging from figurative to abstract, which may be applied to direct design practice.

A previous study demonstrated that bionic design mainly utilizes the methodology of combining art and science.¹⁸ This report is consistent with our finding that, in terms of esthetics, the bionic design of foliage plants is rich in visual features and esthetic value; in terms of humanization, this kind of design pursues the fusion of tradition and modernity and the integration of nature and human beings. This collection of bionic design theories is an enhancement and addition to the current industrial design system. It may be used to direct novel ideas during the product design process and to broaden designers' perspectives.

Unfortunately, given the breadth and rich content of bionic design research, this study does not examine the impact of other disciplines, including psychology and sociology, on bionic foliage plant design, which has certain limitations. Despite its preliminary character, it is evident that the theory of bionic foliage plant design may offer more guidance to designers on the properties of biomimetic items, approaches to dealing with biomimicry, and the material, structure, and technology of products.

6. Conclusion

Chinese traditional culture and the history of foliage plants share a tight relationship, and foliage plants can serve as sources of creative inspiration for bionic product design. Foliage plants not only occupy an important position in garden art but are also a common decorative element in home spaces. The cultural genes such as historical sentiment, philosophical thinking, and humanistic spirit behind them can bring many inspirations for exploring more forms of bionic design applications. Appreciation of the foliage plants behind the cultural heritage can not

only contribute to the development of the inheritance of traditional Chinese culture and spirit but also promote the output of more reliable and ingenious design ideas and methods. With the continuous updating and iteration of technology as well as industry, the bionic application of foliage plants in the future will gradually get away from simple imitation and become more flexible, intelligent, and innovative.

Acknowledgments

None.

Funding

None.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare they have no competing interests.

Author contributions

Conceptualization: Siqi Lin
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Writing – review & editing: Wei Liu

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data

Not applicable.

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ARTICLE

Art, photography, and museums for senior students

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Abstract

The present research approaches the need to bring art closer to adult students, analyzing the process and the results of a course in a university program for the public over 55 years old. The interest of these students in art is given in most cases because they would have wanted to study art in their youth. Beyond the usual focus either on art history or artistic workshops, this program generates a multidisciplinary experience, introducing concepts and practices such as urban derive or performance. Aspects such as visual culture or digital technologies and art education are also integrated. This study adopted a research methodology of mixed nature, combining case study with arts-based research. The photographs acquire an important value as a result of the research. The benefits of lifelong learning were evaluated based on the participatory practices taking into account the previous experience of students and their knowledge in this regard. The information collected through individual surveys and focus groups highlighted a positive and rewarding result, according to the students.

Keywords: Education; Lifelong learning; Photography; Museums; Heritage education; Sustainability

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Citation: Huerta R. Art, photography and museums for senior students. *Arts & Communication*. 2024;2(1):1740. <https://doi.org/10.36922/ac.1740>

Received: August 31, 2023**Accepted:** November 23, 2023**Published Online:** February 13, 2024

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Publisher's Note: AccScience Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

1. Introduction

Some Spanish universities, mostly public, have implemented academic programs designed for senior citizens. Several interconnected factors that lead to the implementation of these programs are follows: (i) it is considered necessary to meet the demand of certain students who no longer study for work or initial training purposes since they are retired or choose to retire early, after having worked for decades. (ii) With this type of face-to-face program, public universities can maximize the potential of teaching staff to cater to a social demand while teaching actual students. (iii) Many people developed abilities during their lives out of imperative necessity, having always postponed their desire to study humanities subjects, such as art, history, or philosophy, something they have always wanted to learn.

University training programs for older people are usually created by connecting with conventional subject areas and courses, so that they can share learning experiences with much younger students. In addition, complementary programs are also offered, usually made up of workshops or subjects of a more practical nature. In 2022, a complementary program called "Photographing the city's museums" was developed at the University of Valencia. The present study was conceptualized based on the experience derived

from this innovative training, through which each step of the process carried out was observed, to examine the important moments and the creative potential manifested during the sessions.¹

The course investigates the students' creative possibilities, attending to innovative pedagogical approaches that contain a critical social load, and observing aspects related to differences and inequalities.² The content of this course lies in photography learning while visiting and getting to know different museums in the city, thus turning the practice into an authentic performance – a promenade – and at the same time, an artistic urban drift.³ What is truly complex is taking advantage of this academic environment to turn the experience into a space that generates creative images.⁴ This is possible thanks to the attitude of all the people involved (students, teachers, and museum mediators), since the experience accumulated by these senior students in a relaxed academic environment, can achieve a high degree of creative maturity.⁵ It is a very appealing photography workshop, which increased creative and visual capacities and skills, thus influencing visual culture, as defended by Paul Duncum.⁶

The project offers the possibility of getting to know the city itself better, enjoying the spectacle of its museums and other urban heritage elements.⁷ To achieve this, a device set in urban derive is elaborated, organizing actions of various types that involve walking and derive through the city, emulating the figure of the *flâneur*, who links with the tradition of art that leads us reviewing Charles Baudelaire.⁸

This research highlights the value of museums as spaces of cultural intensity, places full of educational possibilities,⁹ something that is linked to the importance of heritage education. According to the latest definition approved by ICOM on August 24, 2022, at its General Assembly held in Prague, “museum is a non-profit, permanent institution at the service of society, which investigates, collects, preserves, interprets, and exhibits tangible and intangible heritage. Open to the public, accessible, and inclusive, museums foster diversity and sustainability. With the participation of communities, museums operate and communicate ethically and professionally, offering varied experiences for education, enjoyment, reflection, and the exchange of knowledge.” It is clear, therefore, that museums promote citizens' education, and it is from this intention that we promote creative thinking,¹⁰ with strategies for creative and critical teaching perspective.¹¹

In a group of people over 55 years old, we especially value maturity and acquired knowledge, encouraging their concerns and desires. As instructors at the university, we encourage them to experiment, while strengthening their skills and expertise with the camera and encouraging

them to capture images and to reflect on the power of photography¹² and post-photography, as well as interpret the meaning of images.¹³ The empirical part of this project is fundamental, as theoretical classes foster their creativity. Photographs will be analyzed in the classroom.

There were 17 members, consisting of 6 men and 11 women, in the group. These members are dentists, administrative workers, businessmen, designers, and chemists, with the majority being teachers although some of the participants have opted for early retirement or have already retired. Their photographs express a great sense of composition, demonstrating their expertise, aptitude, and ability to generate images, sometimes with virtuosity and mastery. Their works manifest the integration of their knowledge and experiences with creativity; the combination of which, as shown through this innovative pedagogical approach, increases their self-esteem and capacities, nurturing healthy habits among these senior students. In their feedback during classes and also in the questionnaires given at the end of the course, they rated the course as being able to elevate their self-esteem and nurture healthy habits.

2. Methodology

The methodology applied in this study is of a mixed nature, combining case study¹⁴ with arts-based research.¹⁵ As teachers, during the process, we assumed the role of participating observer. When inquiring into teaching with senior students (over 55 years old), we opted to create spaces for participation, both from reflection (dialogue, debate) and from artistic creation, taking photographs that are used in the classroom as elements of analysis, favoring learning from their creations. The creation of images and the analysis of these images is one of the defining characteristics of the arts-based research methodology, which encompasses a range of research approaches and strategies that utilize arts in investigation. The richness of the opportunities created by the utilization of arts in conducting research brings collateral challenges. Thus, we offer a space for the construction of knowledge, prioritizing problems, through the study of factors offered by the images themselves, both in their formal aspect and in the construction of content. This qualitative study applied participatory action to research design, giving the participants dual roles, namely researcher and study subject. This study used techniques such as brainstorming, museum visits, urban *derive* (drift), image creation, or critical reflection.

The experience studied combines a theoretical part with a series of practical sessions.¹⁶ This combination serves to adequately train students, both in the creation of

images and artistic education, as well as in the knowledge of museum spaces and art galleries. Contemporary art and other artistic expressions, including museums of different types, were approached. Combining theoretical and practical elements, and incorporating derive as an element that enhances creativity,¹⁷ participants were trained to create photographs with a communicative intention to establish and legitimize spaces that combine debate and training. Guy Debord defines the derive as a mode of experimental behavior linked to the conditions of urban society. Derive literally means drifting, referring to wandering through an urban area in small groups of people.

We offer the possibility of learning about museum processes from a broad cultural vision, with the intention of promoting flexible areas of participation, thus bringing them closer to the mechanics of art and images from a current perspective. We also promote a model of workshops among adult audiences to train them when it comes to creating photographs and facing the challenges of the future of museums as spaces for dialog.

We encourage students to observe and create images, establishing a schedule of sessions with original titles in each of them:

- Session 1. *Identity* (presentation of participants and explanation of the course, dynamics, and intentions of each planned activity)
- Session 2. *Territories* (visiting the websites of the city's museums)
- Session 3. *Voluptuousness* (first visits with practical photography workshop)
- Session 4. *Privacy* (visits with photography workshop)
- Session 5. *Memory* (theoretical class on the creative possibilities of photography, based on the work that the students are doing)
- Session 6. *Collecting* (visits and discussion groups, analyzing images created by participants)
- Session 7. *Derive/Drifts* (students are organized in pairs or teams and they are assigned museums to visit)
- Session 8. *Practice* (new drift and preparation of the final work, *i.e.*, a group video)
- Session 9. *Vanity* (theoretical class with issues related to the current situation of digital museums)
- Session 10. *Memories* (last session to review and comment on the students' work).

The main objective of the pedagogical activity analyzed is to promote an approach to learning art and images in museums and other heritage environments in an enjoyable mood. Among the subsidiary objectives, we highlight the following: (i) Approaching the main concepts of photography, and applying the theoretical basis to the possibilities of creating images in exhibition

spaces; (ii) understanding the importance of museums from the perspective of cultural transmission; (iii) designing and creating images coherently through lived experience; (iv) encouraging personal artistic practice in the workshops that are given during classes and visits; (v) addressing the city's museums as a key element of visual culture; (vi) walking around the city as an esthetic practice; (vii) creating images, and photographing details, elements, objects, interiors, landscapes and exteriors; (viii) revisiting the city as a typographic museum, and detecting the esthetics of urban letters; and (ix) observing the lights and shadows of the city, and appreciating the magic of the liminal zones.

We emphasize the use of arts-based research in creating images and encouraging observation.¹⁸ A paradigm shift is proposed to change the focus from the interpretation of images toward a transformation of reality that promotes their use, through a performative approach, exploiting their pedagogical possibilities. Issues of gender and diversity are also incorporated during the explanations and debates in class, using a virtual museum, which the students can consult both on their mobile phones and through the projected presentations.

The study used a mixed research methodology, combining a descriptive-exploratory qualitative one and an artistic methodology, and adopted a socioeducational approach, taking into account incidence factors such as students' age and teacher involvement. An ethnographic perspective of the research was adopted, focusing on teaching innovation to promote educational change. As the research takes place at the same time during teaching, awareness of the interactions that take place in the group as a whole that constitutes the educational event and the people involved can be made.¹⁹ Data were collected while teaching was ongoing, and in an inductive way that a participant's observation of the critical moments of learning, both the difficulties and the benefits, is developed during an educational activity or a tutoring session. The responses of the participants, their expressions, and narratives are collected in the teaching-learning processes.²⁰

The research data were collected mainly by means of analyzing the images created by the students and critically reviewing them in different teaching work sessions. The information collected is classified into two main aspects: (i) the artistic results of what has been learned and (ii) the artistic results of the didactic activities as an observed environment. For the study sample, the teaching experience itself, as well as the past materials prepared by the students, was taken as a reference. Through learning and participation in artistic activities, healthy habits are promoted, favoring interaction with senior students.

We propose drifting for museum visits to students, as conceived by Guy Debord, as an act of subversion, very political, linked to the action of walking through varied environments with a playful-constructive behavior. Francesco Careri emphasizes his theory of walkscapes or esthetic walks. Walking a territory with no other previous plan than following those impulses, stimulus, and given conditions prompts us with the first triggered experiences of an arts-based work method named after the late 60s situationist practice of the *derive*. This type of *derive* is raised with awareness of the psychogeographic effects it generates, effects that the activity has on the person who performs it, and therefore with notions different from those of the trip or walk. Numerous artistic collectives have practiced drifting since the beginning of the 20th century, such as the Dadaists, later in the wanderings of the Surrealists, similar to the urban explorations of Walter Benjamin, or in the psychogeography of Letrist and Situationist artists, as well as in the “wanderings” of Land Art, or the experimental practices of groups like the Italian Stalkers in the 1990s.

The city is the perfect place to practice drifting. Urban environments are full of spaces that stimulate the development of learning experiences, thus becoming places where each artist acts as an archeologist of the city itself to investigate elements extracted from urban life with an artistic perspective. In this way, we break certain prejudices that we have regarding places where we can express ourselves without coercion,²¹ since these students are not familiar with art production. Museums are urban spaces suitable for drifting, especially when the students leave the classroom and walk to the indicated site in a group, although each participant can establish his/her own particular itinerary, with complete freedom and autonomy, occupying their own space of power to transform the educational experience.²² Based on artistic experiences, it is essential to define new methods that can be used to develop innovative research approaches, from broad and diverse conceptual frameworks.

3. Results and discussion

The drifting (*derive*) and photography are the two artistic discourses that methodologically frame the educational experience that was investigated, leading to the formulation of a teaching approach intended for promoting creativity in image generation. Both written documents and records of the students' opinions, along with images created by the students, constitute the results of this study. During the course, the group visited different museums in Valencia (Museum of Fine Arts, IVAM, MuVIM, Casa Museo Benlliure, Ceramics Museum, Fallero Museum, Silk Museum, Museu de Prehistòria, L'Etno, Museu de l'Arròs, Museu de les Ciències, L'Íber,

MHV), as well as some heritage spaces (l'Almoina, Ciutat de les Arts i les Ciències, La Nau, San Nicolás, El Patriarca, Centre del Carme, Las Naves, Center d'Artesania, Palau de les Arts, Grau Cemetery). The participants took thousands of photographs, using their smartphones,²³ or using their digital SLR cameras. Each student must choose a photograph (only one) of all those taken in each museum.

The most intense and rewarding part of the process is choosing a single photograph, forcing students to question many aspects of their own creations. Selecting a photograph (only one) means making a decision, which has an impact on the importance that the image acquires, thus recalling the concept of *punctum* developed by Roland Barthes.²⁴ The number of photographs uploaded (17 per museum) allows for an explanation in the classroom, with enough time to analyze each image, encouraging the teacher to initiate debate among the students, and promoting interdisciplinarity in training practices.²⁵ It is from their images that we address formal issues, content, semiotics, and symbol. For example, in the case of the images of Arcadi Cotolí (Figure 1), the importance of geometry in the creations of this mathematics teacher was commented. In addition, we take advantage of some elements of each photograph to talk about artists who use photography as a means of expression.

The art teacher María José Tamarit uses an expressive resource for her photograph of a detail from the Calatrava's building in the Valencian City of the Arts and Sciences (Figure 2), accentuating the intensity. This decision allows us to reflect in class on the use of filters and effects in photography. This analysis is based on demonstrating the pedagogical capacity that this type of research practice has in students in the construction of their personal identity,



Figure 1. Photograph of the Valencia Ceramic Museum. Author: Arcadi Cotolí Melià.

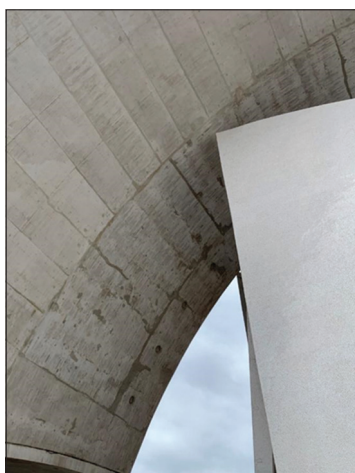


Figure 2. Photograph of a piece from the Valencian City of Arts and Sciences. Author: María José Tamarit Moradillo.

as well as in understanding the identities of their cultural reality, thus promoting a global understanding of the social environment from proposals for active and participatory methodologies.²⁶

The work develops an analysis of the value of the photographs taken during the drift, as a means to investigate the social environment from the lived experience.²⁷ It is investigated from an ethnographic, narrative, and artistic perspective, involving all the research agents in the construction of an active story that is complemented and built in different phases: search, analysis and selection of images, discussion, analysis, and joint reflection with the group.²⁸

The analysis of images is carried out through educational research actions with senior students, where the artistic gaze plays a priority role in their practice, with a process consisting of: image search through inquiry; selection, compilation, and analysis of these images;²⁹ elaboration of a personal proposal from the images; collective exhibition and analysis through discussion groups of the results of the images; and finally systematization and joint debate of the result of the discussion groups on the images.³⁰ In some cases, images offered us details and close-up captures of any pieces exhibited in the museum, as reflected in the work by Miguel Marín (Figure 3).

Capturing photographs taken at the exhibitions in museums allows us to prepare detailed reports on the discussion processes, based on the analysis of the photographs presented by the students. It is convenient to influence this process as one of the keys of the investigation since it generates a pedagogical practice in which the result is a conscious learning process, based on an autoethnographic visual story. The use of digital

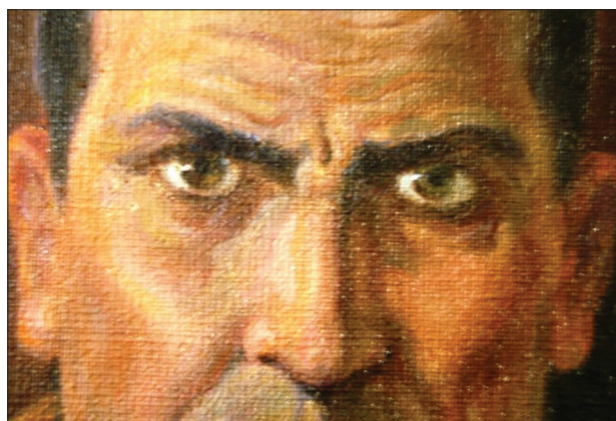


Figure 3. "Familiar tragedy" (1937) by Ángel Tévar Orozco. Painting detail in the permanent exhibition of the Valencian Museum of Fine Arts. Author: Miguel Marín Jiménez.

technology to take the images and share them with the group promotes an exchange of mutual knowledge.³¹ It is advisable to adapt our educational practices, bringing them closer to the possibilities offered by the digital universe.³²

To promote the development of critical and creative thinking, it is important to give students spaces and moments for debates that promote analysis, synthesis, interpretation, inference, and the issuance of judgments, mostly when the students are back in the classroom and the group discusses the photographs. In this way, a more daring and disobedient education is promoted, through innovative experiences that allow them to express their ideas, formulating ethical and esthetic questions.³³ Creative skills that contribute to looking at current challenges with different perspectives are also required, especially for senior students, who come to the classroom with an important baggage, due to their accumulated life experience. A process of creative reflection must be included in the activities, inside and outside the classroom, to give students the ability to propose innovative solutions to specific problems.

Critical thinking is the ability to analyze and reflect on facts objectively, to form a judgment or opinion, solve problems systematically, and understand the logical connections between ideas, values, and beliefs that are based in society. The necessary data must be collected to analyze and understand situations, reaching logical conclusions. When people have the ability to use critical reflection, they are not easily manipulated. The psychologist Joy Paul Guilford points out sensitivity to problems, fluidity, flexibility, novelty and originality, elaboration, analytical and synthesis capacity, reorganization or redefinition, complexity, and evaluation as proper aptitudes for success in the development of creative thinking.³⁴ Both in the classroom and during the drifts in museums, the students have been able to experience these skills by

incorporating said baggage into their creations, developing an artistic discourse through images, and reflecting on said narratives. When commenting in class on the images taken during the visit to the Anna Boghiguian exhibition at the IVAM, the majority highlighted the motivation that caused them to be able to “enter” the works of this octogenarian artist. Themes like climate change are commonplace in exhibition museum, as the fish with plastics remind us the Sustainability Development Goals. Since these works directly communicate ecological and political messages, it seems over-claiming to argue that photographing them involved the development of critical thinking (Figure 4).

We observe how the images that are part of this research connect us with the human, which has implications in the conceptual and pedagogical approach to these images. Photographs bring us closer to the forms of life, their behaviors and roles, and their relationship with others and with the world, allowing us to investigate this research process from personal and lived experiences. The personal experience forms part of the collective experience of the society, showing us the symbolic visualization of what we know, and from it emerge stories and discoveries that tell us about social relations, how we observe the city, the way we live in it. In educational research, it is convenient to establish and connect with educational practices, since these same practices, based on ethnographic and artistic visual research, are articulated in turn in the double axis of research, teaching, and the improvement of their own, integrating practices in their environment. Observing the public in the visits, documenting the fact of museum visitors does not, in itself, imply learning critical visual or cognitive skills (Figure 5).

In addition to the details of art works, exhibition rooms, pieces on display, and other elements typical of museums, another facet that is reflected in the students’ photographs of urban landscape is the environment of museums visited.

Engaging in arts-based research offers adult students the enormous possibilities of a research methodology as a pedagogical construction process through which they learn about themselves and the society of which they are a part. In addition, it allows them to inquire about the creativity generated by their own history and collectively reflect on burning issues that include the city, museums, collective heritage, and knowledge of art from artistic practice.³⁵ Using drift as an activating element turns them into flâneurs, observant walkers aware of the esthetic capacity generated by the urban environment. The results are, finally, esthetic, since reflection allows them to obtain surprising and attractive images, beyond the document that certifies their visit to the museum, as portrayed in the photograph presented by Miquel Valls after his visit to the History Museum of Valencia (Figure 6). It is not a work



Figure 4. “Karma. Marine Debris” (2021) by Nayra López and Vinz Feel Free, in the exhibition “Emergency on Planet Earth”, Centre del Carme, Valencia. A big fish with plastics explains the ecological problems, evidencing the senior student’s interests. Author: Maria Alonso.



Figure 5. People observing the photography exhibition by Zanele Muholo in the IVAM Valencian Institute of Modern Art. Author: Gemma Pla.

exhibited in the museum, but the compositional game that light generates with the exhibited pieces, objects, and artifacts in context.

By creating a visual discourse from their own images, students can offer topics that are dealt with in the classroom, incorporating issues that really interest them, or that emerge from the images. In this way, knowledge is born directly from the photographs they have created, and also from their embodied memory of taking these photographs, images linked to the environment visited, which tell us about the museum as an institution, which responds to specific sociocultural and personal conditions. We detected that there is an artistic intention in these images, an esthetic element that is articulated in this case as an ally of the research process, as we have remarked in the description of the methodology, facilitating and allowing a



Figure 6. Image that becomes an assembly between objects and ancient photograph, created by Miquel Valls Marco taking advantage of the gloomy lighting of the Museu de Prehistòria de València.

greater depth in some of the aspects that each person who intervenes wants to stand out above others. By analyzing the results of the focused groups, several issues can be determined in relation to the comments from the sessions for viewing the photographs, reinforcing the conclusions of the research process. The impact caused by the images themselves affects the analysis prepared by the participants in the discussion groups, since these are photographs taken by the group of students, allowing them to deepen and learn about issues related to the history of photography, the characters that generated it, and their own involvement in the process.

The great diversity of the museums visited also makes it possible to understand the potential of these institutions, since beyond their collections, their architecture, or the distinction that may emanate from the image they offer, what matters in this case is that the senior students enjoy, learn, and above all create, practicing an exercise in artistic production that empowers them as inspired designers.

A case that we consider interesting to highlight is the visit to the Benlliure House Museum, because it is the place where the brothers Mariano and José, sculptor and painter, respectively, lived and worked. These artists are an important benchmark of Valencian art, but the most attractive thing about visiting this house-museum is that it is a space that preserves the workshop where José Benlliure painted. Walking through the artist's studio means having within reach both the large window (facing north) through which light entered the workshop, as well as numerous materials that the artist used to paint, highlighting elements of costumes and props with which he dressed their models. It is also worthwhile as a space to photograph the cemetery, a place where memory is very present (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Image taken during session 4 "Privacy", in the garden of the Benlliure Museum. Author: Maite Rabena Pérez.

According to Alessandro Luigini, the ability to use graphic skills, and in general the ability to integrate the use of the visual, the mind and the hand (perception, thought, representation) to solve problems and create effective products, facilitates the acquisition of new knowledge³⁶ (Luigini, 2020: 89). The Italian author also reminds us, referring to the advice of Edgar Morin, his definition of art as the human capacity to create works, shapes, colors, and sounds give or should offer esthetic emotions. For Edgar Morin, esthetic emotion is the mirror of creative emotion. The artist, to create, appeals to unconscious (inspiration) and conscious (corrections) forces. In the same way, the esthetic emotion that seizes us in front of a work is both rational and irrational, since it appeals to both feeling and intelligence. And is this esthetic emotion useful? Echoing Aristotle's poetic catharsis, the author demonstrates how, in these times of crisis that we are going through, beauty is a formidable antidote against fear, horror, anguish, and death.³⁷

Based on the debates in the classroom, and the answers to questionnaires, a synthesis of the results of the analysis of the work sessions has been prepared, systematizing the issues based on the theme. Some issues prevail in their observations, and therefore in their learning, which helps us understand how interests are involved in the making of one type of image or another (Figure 8). This revealed several realities. First, how the images themselves built a series of meanings, with narratives that were implicit in the photographs on a recurring basis. This remarkable facet allows us to make generalizations and reach consensus based on the experience arising from the images themselves and not only through the institutional discourse in which we usually engage, thereby reinforcing our perspective and our conviction about certain social, cultural situations,



Figure 8. Interior of the Museum of Patriarch in Valencia. Author: Vicente Zaragoza Dolz.

political, and economic of our environment, marked by the very image of the museums visited.

The students expressed their preferences in relation to artists, commenting and reflecting on the works and experiences of great photographers such as Ramon Masats, Robert Capa, Dorothea Lange, Ron Galella, Cindy Sherman, Del LaGrace Volcano, Francesc Jarque, Sebastiao Salgado, Chema Madoz, Spencer Tunick, David Hamilton, Brassai, Man Ray, Ouka Lele, Sally Mann, Henri Cartier Bresson, and Luis Calvente. We see a great variety of styles and origins, which configure an eclectic value to the whole, allowing greater freedom in teaching, and reinforcing the opinions during debates. It is important to know the students' preferences. At the same time, they know the work of great photographers.

The students' interests stated in the questionnaires were examined. To the first question in the questionnaire (why did you choose this course), most responded that the program that combines photography and museum visits appeals to them, although three persons, who were the most experienced students in photography, thought that it would extend beyond a conventional course of photography (Figure 9). To the second question (what has the course given you), six answered that the course led them to discover museums that they did not know existing, two cases considered photography learning interesting, while the rest indicated that they have discovered their creative and artistic facet. To the third question (what would you highlight on a positive level from what you have experienced during the course), all respondents agreed that the experience as a whole was both rewarding in terms of learning and enjoying.

To the fourth question (what aspects could be improved or changed), six people indicated that the afternoon

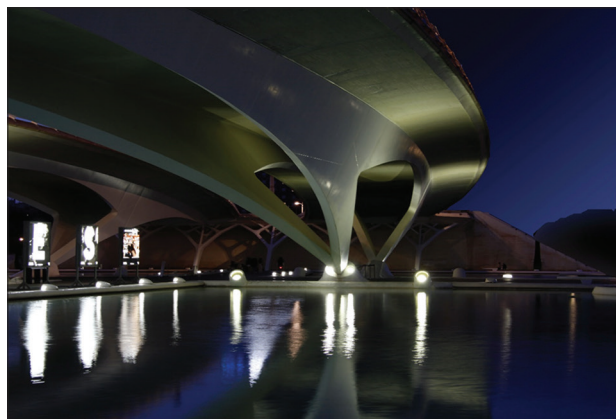


Figure 9. Photograph of a bridge in the Valencian Science Museum. Author: Dolores Enrique.

schedules did not allow them to visit the museums more thoroughly, because of a lack of time; four indicated that the theoretical part of photography and the history of photography should be expanded; while the rest highlighted the need to extend the hours of the course. Question 5 pertains to finding out the museums that they were not aware of and discovered as a result of the course: most of them were unaware of the Casa Museo Benlliure, the Centre d'Artesania, the Grau Cemetery, and the Museu de l'Arròs, but all agreed that they rediscovered some that they had already visited, such as the Fallero Museum, the Silk Museum, the Museu de Prehistòria, L'Etno, and the Museu d'Història de València MHV. In the case of the L'Íber museum, which is a museum of miniatures (tin soldiers), they were surprised by the novel idea of the program. When asked about the aspects of photography teaching that they found interesting (question 6), they especially value the aspects of composition and the technical possibilities offered by cameras, even those of their mobile phones. Regarding their feedback on the visits with the group (question 7), they stated that sharing these experiences is one of the most positive elements of the experience. For a group of senior adults, a pleasant chat on a terrace or in a cafeteria organized spontaneously after the visits is very common. Question 8 is an open question that explores the respondents' views on the role of museums and photography in their life, leaving us with a true life story of each participant, something that teachers would value extremely. Question 9 is about whether there is any aspect that they would like to highlight; the students expressed agreement, again, that assessing experience is an example of participatory teaching that provides artistic results and enhances the creativity of those who have experienced it.

A notable aspect of the results obtained is that the participating senior students have developed their capacity for observation, something that we consider especially

important, considering the value that we currently place, and how we take advantage of it (or not) by being so impregnated by the presence of digital devices. For Byung-Chul Han, among the practices that require time, being careful and meticulous observation stands out to be the important one since “the perception attached to the information excludes long and slow observation.” The philosopher continues arguing that “the careful contemplation of things, attention without intention, which would be a formula for happiness, recedes before the hunt for information”³⁸ Recovering the concepts of *studium* and *punctum* elaborated by Roland Barthes²⁴ when reflecting on photography, Han insists that greater attention to things goes hand in hand with forgetting and losing oneself. When the ego weakens, it becomes receptive to that silent language of things, say Han. In fact, “things allow us to see the world. They create visibilities, while non-things destroy them”³⁸ The students derive, and their museums re-read using images, allowing them to activate new sensations and sensitive learning.³⁹

4. Conclusions

Some issues should be highlighted as a conclusion and final balance of the investigation. Senior students have shown their creative ability to generate speeches through images, creating photographs from lived experiences. These photographs tell us about their interests and their way of understanding life, something that fits with the long-life experience that characterizes them, which fits with their desire to materialize this acquired knowledge. They had never had notions of photography before (except in one case, that of a student who is a graphic designer and has practiced as such for decades), but this has not prevented the results from being optimal. They were able to re-explore their city through museum visits, with the images made during a series of drifts to different urban spaces, especially museums.

Combining different people offers us an interesting result that we can approach from different perspectives. We detect particular ways of deciphering social rituals, depending on the perspective taken, something that is revealed especially in identity aspects, both through personal and collective reasons. It is also clear that this type of research, carried out based on teaching experiences, allows for innovation in education, demonstrating the theoretical and practical foundation it contains, and incorporating a certain margin of risk, always necessary, as it is an artistic subject. The emotional impact multiplies the educational effect of the action, and this is made possible by the visits to museums, some of which are more well-known, together with people unknown to the students. The senior participants

prefer very intense and enriching reflections, which take into account their life experience and their desire to share ideas in the debates. The images that they have created and shared constitute a great element to better understand the interests of these students.

This study investigates the critical and creative thinking among senior students, who had no knowledge of the practice of the arts. The students developed artistic and creative skills for different points of view from a critical position. To achieve this, visits to different museums, as part of the course, allow the students to take photographs. The museums serve as a starting point to work on the different situations and themes, as they did not possess broad knowledge of what critical thinking and creativity mean and characterize. This participatory action research took into account the time, participation, means, dedication, and responsibility of the students, who have known how to take advantage of each planned and lived experience. Arts-based research methodology is a potential transformer of a concrete reality, involving observation, reflection, and creation from the role of the actors in the research, offering new visions of learning. This research addressed that incipient knowledge about creativity stems from the perspective of the experience carried out among senior students.

Acknowledgments

None.

Funding

Knowledge generation project (DECHADOS) inclusive creativity in secondary school through the relationship between schools and museums (Ref. PID2021-123007OB-I00) from the Ministry of Science and Innovation, Government of Spain.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no competing interests or conflicts with any institutes, organizations, or agencies that might influence the integrity of results or objective interpretation of submitted work.

Author contributions

This is a single-authored article.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data

Not applicable.

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ARTICLE

Nebula rasa: The diaphanous as generative stimulus in architectural design

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Abstract

What visual characteristic makes architectural sketches such effective tools in creative processes or developing spatial ideas? In this article, I suggest that it is the visual characteristic of diaphaneity or the realm of the diaphanous – a *nebula rasa* – more generally. First, the history of the concept, as well as its relevance to creativity and design theory, is summarily discussed. This is followed by an exposition of how post-war design theory largely developed in a cognitivist direction, largely at the expense of lived experience. Invoking selected accounts from creativity theory and the so-called “phenomenological approach” in architectural thought as well as the work of sinologist and philosopher François Jullien, I shift the focus toward a new, agentic paradigm to re-orient current thinking on creativity and architectural design. Within this new conceptual framework, I develop the argument that the indistinct, suggestive, and allusive dimension of the diaphanous renders sketches effective. I argue that the *nebula rasa* drives the creative process and is instrumental in generating new ideas. The diaphanous regimen of visibility is inherently dynamic, continuously bringing new options in play and keeping drawings effective. In conclusion, I suggest how the concept of the diaphanous may benefit designing in a time of digital heuristics and increasing complexity. Moreover, I suggest that letting ideas rest may also be nurtured as a skill by engaging with the diaphanous.

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Citation: Paans O. *Nebula rasa*: The diaphanous as generative stimulus in architectural design. *Arts & Communication*. 2024;2(1):1922
<https://doi.org/10.36922/ac.1922>

Received: September 26, 2023**Accepted:** November 27, 2023**Published Online:** February 13, 2024

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Publisher's Note: AccScience Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Keywords: Architectural design; Design thinking; Diaphanous; Creativity; Visual representation; Sketching

1. Introduction

Not every design idea starts with a flash of insight or a clear-cut idea. Often, articulating an idea is painstaking work, subject to many dead ends and frustrating episodes of stagnation. Discarded sketches and scribbles – often on top of one another on a single sheet of paper – can be found in design studios throughout the world. So much so, this feature has generated considerable academic attention within design theory literature. Correspondingly, the so-called “image sciences” (*Bildwissenschaften*) have steadily developed, signaling a philosophical shift away from text and toward visual media.¹⁻³ In particular, image sciences elucidate (a) the generative role of esthetic experience in creative processes and (b) identify relationships between various modes of representation, media, and creative pathways.

Against the background of that context, I would like to raise two suggestions regarding the phenomenology of images, in particular those that play generative roles in architectural design processes.

- (i) My first suggestion is that the generative agency of these images derives from their *diaphaneity*. Diaphaneity is the visual characteristic of being indistinct, blurry, nebulous, open, vague, or ambiguous (Figure 1). I will suggest that diaphanous images possess a dimensionality that extends well beyond them actually being two- or three-dimensional images and that turns them into effective creative operators.
- (ii) My second suggestion advances one step further and examines the diaphanous as a *generative stimulus* in its own right and not just as a particular property of an image. Ito formulates this as a statement: to achieve progress in a creative design process, a degree of diaphaneity is essential to their generative efficacy.

Therefore, I explore the diaphanous as a *nebula rasa* – a nebulous realm of open and suggestive representation that is not reducible to either axiomatic understanding or Cartesian geometry or to two-dimensional representation on a neutral plane – the *tabula rasa*.¹ I aim to qualify the claim that in the *diaphanous* as visual characteristic (point 1) and as generative stimulus (point 2) resides an underexplored theoretical concept that accounts for creative development and that we have to understand it on its own terms.

1.1. Methodological note

This article provides a *theoretical perspective* on the diaphanous as generative stimulus. It does so in an

¹ Aristotle discussed the concept of the *tabula rasa* (“empty plane”) in *De Anima*, just like the concept of the diaphanous. While this discussion takes place in the context of formulating a theory of mind—or, more precisely, the mind as an empty surface to be inscribed—it would later be interpreted as the plane on which ideas are inscribed by reason (*logos*).

exploratory and synoptic manner, discussing selected sources on architectural sketching and illustrating the influence of the diaphanous in architectural design. The generative characteristics of the diaphanous as driver of architectural design are explored by engaging with architectural theory (notably the phenomenological approach), recent and classic accounts of creativity, and selected works of the French sinologist and philosopher François Jullien on the concepts of the “effective present” and “propensity.” The examples shown and discussed here should therefore be understood as thematic examples rather than targeted research results that would allow for generalizing the conclusions of this article across the entire domain of sketch-driven architectural design. This article provides the preliminary (theoretical) foundations for further investigating the diaphanous with precision, so a relatively well-circumscribed initial definition is required. To that end, this article features a concise historical overview of how the notion came into being and relates this notion to architectural theory. The concluding section provides suggestions on how the role and influence of the diaphanous could be investigated in a systematic study and outlines some repercussions of the diaphanous on architectural design.

First, I discuss some historical background of the notion of the diaphanous, even if this account is meant only to introduce a key distinction between *cognitivist* and *agentive* paradigms that I use throughout this paper, and which I introduce in the third section.

Following this distinction, I turn to the role of the diaphanous as visual characteristic in architectural design processes. This exposition is followed by a discussion of Jullien’s concept of the “effective present,” leading to a consideration of the diaphanous as generative stimulus.

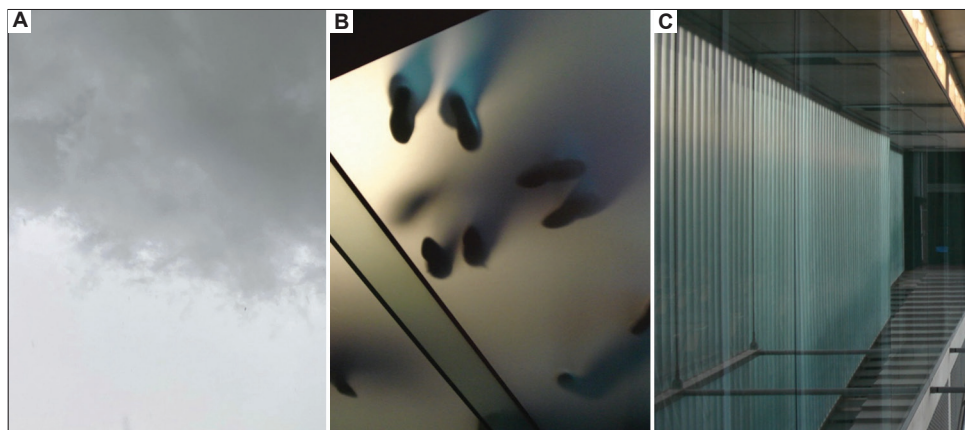


Figure 1. Three examples of the visual characteristic of diaphaneity. (A) The indistinct, blurry line of two cloud formations; (B) the translucence of the glass partially obfuscates the figures behind it; (C) the reflection of the window replicates the view, visually overlaying it on the surface and suggesting additional depth.

Source: Photographs by the author.

2. Historical background

The notion of the diaphanous derived initially from Aristotle, although it is mentioned already in an embryonic form in Plato's *Timaeus*. In *De Anima*, Aristotle describes it as a phenomenon that renders objects visible. The word *diaphanēs* comprises the Greek “*dia*” (through) and “*phainein*” (to show). Importantly, Aristotle draws an explicit parallel between “light,” the diaphanous and actuality:

“Light is as it were the proper colour of what is transparent, and exists whenever the potentially transparent is excited to actuality by the influence of fire or something resembling ‘the uppermost body’; for fire too contains something which is one and the same with the substance in question.”⁴

The link between potentiality, actualization, and an object or phenomenon that becomes visible can be discerned in the wording: the excitation of the “potentially transparent” into something actual is rendered as “*phôs de estin hê toutou energeia, tou diaphanous hê diaphanês.*” The word “*energeia*” does not just mean “energy” in the way we commonly use it. It connotes activity or an active operational principle. Anca Vasiliu notes that this way of framing the diaphanous stages is an “impossible ontological encounter”: it conjoins the (i) subject's sense of sight, (ii) an external object to which the gaze is directed, (iii) the medium that ensures visibility or at least tangibility, and (iv) a principle of actualization.⁵ Neither a body nor a body's property, the diaphanous participates in the visibility of everything, without being part of anything. It is a phenomenal attribute that suffuses the visual realm and that structures and stages its accessibility.

When classical Aristotelian philosophy was transmitted to Medieval Europe through the Islamic world, the word was rendered in Latin as *diaphanum*, leading ultimately to the introduction of the neologism *transparens* and later on becoming synonymous with the Latin *perlucida*, which both connote visual transparency in the way that we commonly use the term.

Some of the properly *operative* nature of the original Greek concept was retained in the Eastern Christian theological context, whereby the presence of God was equated with the character of light or so-called “noetic illumination.” This development can be traced back to Plato's treatment of knowledge as illumination, using light as a metaphor for achieving insight. Still, we can see the influence of the Aristotelian concept, for instance in the thought of St. Gregory Palamas, who held that everyone participates in God's energies – using the Greek word *energeia* again.⁶ God is immanently present throughout creation, and in the moment of noetic illumination, one

fully experiences the creative force of the Divine.⁷ God's energies are not special powers, but they are akin to divine potentials that can be experienced rather than talked about.² This approach was derived from so-called *apophatic* (or negative) theology. The idea is that certain phenomena (like noetic light) cannot be described in determinate, clear concepts. All one can do is try to say what they are *not* by tracing a silhouette that negatively demarcates them. There is a certain parallel with creative processes here: often, it is hard to tell what defines a good idea or what influence contributed to its (final) form. Often, the (artistic) concepts to define an idea clearly are lacking or have still to be invented, yet the creative impetus that shapes ideas is undeniably present.

Due to semantic changes that occurred during translation and the scattered usage of the concept in Medieval Europe, the notion of diaphanous became almost synonymous with visual translucence or partial opaqueness. While this usage is not explicitly ruled out by the original Greek concept, it is worth remembering that Aristotle's usage is certainly broader and closely related to the phenomenal structure of perception, instead of being narrowly focused on the visual character of an image. In its modern, narrow usage, we easily equate diaphaneity with the visual characteristic of being vague, ambiguous, nebulous, veiled, translucent, opaque, blurry, or indistinct.

Although this interpretation of the diaphanous represents it as a visual characteristic, it also invokes a creative, visual dimension due to the fact that it visually stages the “impossible ontological encounter” in the perceptual field. This generative aspect of the original Aristotelian concept becomes obfuscated if we focus only on the diaphanous as a visual characteristic. Notably in architectural design processes, such seemingly impossible encounters are essential for developing ideas and design concepts alike.

² Pseudo-Dionysius provides allegorical descriptions of the creative, dynamic force of the Divine. In this passage (1987: 184), we can see how he introduces the ceaseless play of creativity by comparing it to fire, a theme that François Jullien would take up while discussing Chinese thought: “It lights up everything and remains hidden at the same time. In itself it is undetectable and becomes evident only through its own workings on matter. It is unstoppable. It cannot be looked upon. Yet it is master of everything. Wherever it is, it changes things towards its own activity. It bestows itself upon all who draw near. (...) It makes distinctions and is nevertheless unchanging. It rises up and penetrates deeply. It is exalted and never brought low. It is ever on the move, moving itself and others. It extends in all directions and is hemmed in nowhere.” Note how all this applies to the characteristics of both diaphaneity and the concept of *shi* (efficacy).

3. Cognitivism and creativity: A concise overview

To understand why modern design theory has not spent much attention on the diaphanous, we introduce a sharp distinction between two scientific paradigms. During the decades following the Second World War, Western design theory adopted a broadly *cognitivist* approach to creativity. Following the cultural influence of both positivism and the rise of the mechanist worldview, designing was framed as a kind of rational problem-solving or heuristic search.⁸⁻¹⁰ Correspondingly, the designer was viewed as a rational, economical optimizer.³ Again, corresponding to *that* idea, creativity was viewed as a kind of heuristic selection of the best possible solution for a relatively well-defined problem. Especially the first generation of design theorists during the 1960s and 1970s postulated rather than argued for this notion, although many of their core concepts remain firmly entrenched in the design literature. During the 1980s, the thematic focus shifted toward the sociological aspects of designing, but the core of the approach always retained – in some form or the other – its cognitivist inheritance.

Cognitivism champions the idea that designing is a specialized form of deliberative reasoning. Admittedly, this form of reasoning may be less structured and more open-ended than philosophical reasoning, legal reasoning, or bounded rationality, but it is nevertheless concerned fundamentally with the development of theories or micro-theories about a given design idea. There is certainly a deep kinship with the idea of *logos* or human rational capacities here. The operation of the creative mind was often quickly subordinated to the capacity for logical reasoning, either in the inductive or deductive sense.^{11,12}

The cognitivist orientation had its roots in the post-war work on cybernetics. This can be seen in how visual representations were viewed: they were regarded as carriers of informational contents. Following Norbert Wiener's and Marshall McLuhan's cybernetics theories, such representations were deemed successful if their contents could be unambiguously interpreted. Consequently, the designer was viewed as a rational agent who made sketches to aid effective decision-making, recording options, or communicating ideas to others. The design drawing was regarded as a decision-theoretic, heuristic, or communicative tool. It became the physical transcript of

reasoning processes, giving rise to the so-called “protocol studies,” in which participants sketched and verbalized their thinking processes. It should be emphasized that such studies were useful in understanding the “reasoning of designers.”¹³ That does not mean, however, that the *entire* design process is understood; it entails merely that its *reasoning* is clarified. However – and this has been a recurring question – the cognitivist paradigm always had problems in locating the site of creativity or the properly generative potential within a design process. If designing is just reasoning, where does the creativity reside? Why are designers not just engineers then?

Certainly, there have been attempts to address these questions. For instance, the work of Teresa Amabile on creative processes can be read as an attempt to address that gap in the cognitivist paradigm.¹⁴ Amabile closely followed the procedure-like models of the first generation but added that “creativity-relevant skills” are required to advance from mere problem-solving to reaching truly creative solutions. Amabile concluded that creativity and personal traits are closely linked. An open, experimental, flexible, and explorative mindset seems being conducive to creativity. Moreover, the creative mind experiments with new cognitive pathways to broaden the range of strategies to break through cemented habits and patterns that shape thoughts and ways of approaching problems.¹⁵ Amabile builds on an earlier conception of the creative personality developed by Donald McKinnon,¹⁶ who held that creative persons tended to more expressive, thereby affording themselves easier access to the richness of the subjective experience. This coincides with the finding by McCrae that a defining characteristic of creative personalities is openness to new experiences.¹⁷ In addition to dealing with new experiences, the creative process is also distributed in time. McKinnon¹⁸ held that often, there are phases of engagement, disengagement, withdrawal, insight, and evaluation. While it is tempting to frame these phases as neatly delineated, in reality, they seamlessly revert into one another. In an additional refinement of this picture, Harvey and Berry have argued that we might distinguish between various forms of creativity, some of which are concerned with novelty in the narrow sense, while others are focused on integration.¹⁹ This insight was already present in design theories from Alexander (1965) to the so-called Systematic Design Models, which distinguished between phases of divergence and integration.²⁰⁻²³

The layered and variegated nature of the creative process was also recognized by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi in his seminal study of “flow states.”²⁴ On the one hand, flow states are “autotelic” – that is, they become ends in themselves. They invite involvement, play, and enjoyment. They also provide a cognitive advantage, as

³ Horst Rittel explicitly made the point that spatial planning is a process of variety creation and reduction in his 1970 article *Der Planungsprozess als iterativer Vorgang von Varietätserzeugung und Varietätseinschränkung* [*The Planning Process as Iterative Progression of Variety Generation and Variety Reduction*], highlighting the core idea that heuristic reasoning forms the basis of design activity.

they fuse action and awareness, joining both capacities to reach high levels of achievement.²⁵ One of the advantages of this fusion is that it becomes easier to focus one's energy toward the external world, thereby aiding a deep involvement with the surrounding environment and highlighting the capacity to "see" new possibilities. Indeed, as David Bohm has argued in his work on creativity, the capacity to perceive the new into the existing order of things is what underlies creativity as such – the novelty that is produced lies not only in making new objects or plans but also in conceptualizing relationships that were "hidden in plain sight."²⁶

In architectural theory, this line of thinking has been developed in the so-called "phenomenological approach."²⁷ Put concisely, this tradition focuses on first-person, lived experience and engaged forms of knowing to account for design creativity. In particular, the work of Peter Zumthor is relevant here.²⁸ Zumthor held that drawings require a degree of openness so that they can be "inhabited" by the imagination.²⁹ Some sixty years earlier, Michael Polanyi formulated a similar idea by advancing a notion that he termed "indwelling."³⁰ The idea is that only intimate knowledge leads to insights that are truly creative. Without denying the use of heuristic reasoning, both Zumthor and Polanyi supplement it with an aspect of deep familiarization and immersion. Instead of just focusing on the reasoning of designers, the phenomenological approach stresses the subjective and embodied experiences of designers while working out their ideas. Zumthor emphasizes this point and states that the perception must "take the drawing in possession." That is, only an engaging attitude and willingness to be influenced by what is present allows one to drive the design process onward.

Recently, the work of Juhani Pallasmaa applied the insights of personal experience, hand drawing, and embodiment theory to architectural design. For Pallasmaa, working out an idea consists of keeping all loose ends close by as a way to "dwell in the plasticity and multiplicity of an idea."³¹ Indeed, the architectural image is seen as an "organizing image." We use this organizing image as a representation of our most fundamental categories of thinking and experiencing.³² By analogy, the architectural drawing becomes a microcosm in which one can experience what the space-to-be will become. In emphasizing this lived aspect, Pallasmaa builds on McKinnon's insight that creation thrives on the willingness to experience new impressions. The architectural image becomes not just the site of reasoning, but the site of experimentation with a range of (spatial) experiences. It follows that the designer must therefore grow accustomed to a degree of uncertainty or indefiniteness. One must as it were "learn to love" the

process of exploring deferring decisions and lacking direction.³³

In the phenomenological approach, the image itself is imbued with a kind of agency. As Albena Yaneva has shown, this insight easily extends into the thought that the designer, the design tools, and the image are joined in a network.³⁴ Drawing on Bruno Latour's version of Actor-Network Theory (ANT), the designer is seen as one of the many actors in a meshwork of (social and instrumental) interactions and relations. The designer is no longer the sole process agent, and design cognition becomes one among many factors that shape thoughts and ideas.

Over against the cognitivist paradigm, we can position an alternative, which we can describe as the *agentive* paradigm. Extending the insights of ANT, the core idea is that images or visual media more generally possess an inherent propensity to effectuate, drive, direct, illuminate, and actualize thinking processes that include deliberative reasoning but also include other forms of thought. These thought forms can be emotive or affective, but at any rate, they are non-conceptual and non-propositional. That is, they cannot be framed as neat, determinate statements about a design concept or idea. There have been moves toward a so-called "esthetic epistemology"³⁵ or architectural image theories³⁶ to emphasize the agency that images exert. Building on this foundation, we turn to the work of François Jullien, who provides an alternative way of conceptualizing this agency, and whose insights allow us to understand why diaphaneity is a generative stimulus in design.

4. From cognitivism to propensity

Diaphaneity subverts the cognitivist idea that drawings are primarily carriers of information. If an image drawn up during a design process is about clear communication, why do vague and indeterminate images stimulate such powerful creative thinking? Partially, the answer lies in the structure of its semantic content. That is, the image contains contents about which assertions can be made and which in turn spur reflection-in-action or associative thinking.³⁷ Yet, there seems to be a surplus of openness. Diaphanous images invite indwelling, exploration, or "taking-in-possession." They set a kind of immersive movement in motion and refuse to close. They are more like spaces to inhabit than flat visual representations.

The first thing to notice about the diaphanous in creative processes is the fact that it is moving, dynamic, and layered. Initially, we may regard it as a figure-ground phenomenon.³⁸ That is, it is structured in a relatively stable background and an emergent, dynamic foreground. This foreground-background relation causes dynamic relations to emerge. For instance, as per the classic *Gestalt* test, when

we encounter a simple line figure of four vertical lines on a homogeneous background, we inadvertently read them as lanes or columns. Our perception engages in sense-making by applying structural metaphors or visual schemata to the represented content, a skill known as “seeing-as.”³⁹ “Seeing-as” has long been recognized as a design skill that helps in creating various interpretations of a single figure or visual constellation. For example, here is a response by a designer who participated in a protocol study, describing his interactions with sketches:

“I can’t get very far with just thinking about it without drawing something...I tend to overlay when I use pencil... they [overlays] are usually pretty similar...these drawings are usually worthless as products so I am not very attached to them. I also do a lot of erasing. I like to erase because I like to have a lot of lines on the page. I like fuzzy stuff. I can see things in it more than I can in harder-lined things. So, sometimes I just get a lot of lines out and start to see things in it. A lot of times I pick up things I think are important. I put down potentials and erase down to them.”⁴⁰

However, no matter how useful adding layers and erasing are, this is but a single part of the entire creative process. As Pallasmaa noted, the idea is “plastic” and layered and shapes thinking through visual suggestion and allusion.

The diaphanous constitutes a visual, generative stimulus that introduces a new creative dynamic in designing. This dynamic goes well beyond reading various interpretations into a sketch or visual representation. It is important to remember that “putting down potentials” is an accurate way of describing the explorative phase of designing. The goal is not to work out ideas, but to experience which potentials emerge, and where novelty appears.

We can see this by turning our attention toward the common design practice of making multiple tracings on semi-transparent sketching paper. By overlaying multiple sketches, the former foreground becomes background and visually fades in relation to a new overlay. As the former foreground starts to play the role of a non-homogeneous background, it becomes part of the new sketch, both as background and as tentatively established point of departure:

“The [sketch] paper is not transparent in the same way glass is, but makes the underlying image somewhat foggy and unfocused. By tracing the map, its information is reduced to a play of lines, a graphic pattern that reveals compositional proportions (...). It opens the map to new interpretations. As more transparent sheets are superimposed, the image of the background (the initial drawing) becomes more blurred. The previous drawing or design still shines through, but becomes less and less compelling. This strengthens and stimulates the process of choosing, omitting and highlighting. As the uncertainty of what lies beneath grows, so does the freedom of interpretation.”⁴¹

The old design shines through – it is present in a translucent manner, suggesting itself at the edge of perception, but nevertheless, it exerts a certain influence. But as it is not forcefully present anymore, it invokes a play, a re-interpretation, or a reconstruction of its compositional elements (Figure 2).

The previous sketches submerge within the visual and cognitive background without disappearing completely. From the point of view of architectural creation, this is essential. Especially when working on a complex, layered topic, the parameters that structure the architectural



Figure 2. Overlaying on semi-transparent sketch paper during architectural sketching. (A) Visual exploration of patterns; (B) blurring the background and exaggerating remarkable features; (C) formalizing the initial idea into a spatial configuration; (D) abstracted configuration without background. Panels (A–C) show how the original drawing becomes increasingly indistinct.

problems and questions must be kept on-hand, as it were. They must be cognitively and affectively present in a way that is accessible, yet not dominant. Their influence must be felt, but the creative gesture of designing or thinking further must not be hampered by them. Pallasmaa described how he likes to “dwell” in the “plasticity of the idea” and therefore works with layered drawings that bear traces of the past. The presence of multiple layers makes the plasticity of an idea tangible and accessible. All the phases of the creative process (conception, insight, evaluation) are as they were present in the drawing.

Acutely, architectural theorist Marco Frascari described architectural thought as “sedimentation.”⁴² The many topics involved in developing an architectural idea require time to settle and must be gradually organized in a coherent order. This process is slow and more akin to distillation and precipitation than it is to ceaseless creation. Diaphanous representation allows for multiple layers of an idea to be diffusely present, slowly and dynamically enriching the appearances through which an idea appears. Within the diaphanous, an architectural idea never appears as either monolithic, diagrammatic, one-dimensional, or closed. Instead, it appears as a suggestion, hint, semblance, allusion, and even as a playful and gradual unfolding.

To understand the interplay between foreground and background, we introduce an additional notion, developed by the Czech literary theorist Jan Mukařovský. He argued that repeated representation of an object (let’s say a single word or a visual image) foregrounds it, wresting it loose from its context until it acquires an ontologically autonomous status.⁴³ Due to its detachment, such an object becomes strange, uprooted, and fascinating, even alien in its own right. Once this happens, it appears not as an ordinary object anymore, but it acquires once again individuality, fascination, and a phenomenological “depth” that was not accessible when it was submerged in its surroundings. Foregrounding an object played a major role in the artistic strategy of *ostranenie*, or “making strange.”⁴ That is, creating an esthetic effect that due to its deliberate strangeness catches the attention and causes an instability or perceptual shift.⁴⁴

The diaphanous space of representation seamlessly allows for collapsing foreground into the background and the other way around. In this subtle shifting, the image (*i.e.*, the representational content that appears) and what is depicted (it’s broadly Fregean sense) merge into one another. When this happens, any clear form of

interpretation becomes unstable and fluid. If we follow Mukařovský’s thinking to the end, we see that any element in a drawing can be foregrounded or may collapse the entire configuration of foreground and background. Diaphaneity as a visual characteristic enables each element in the drawing to acquire added depth and to submerge and emerge from the texture of the drawing, allowing for a seamless foregrounding of elements. Its blurriness and indistinction suggest potentials and ideas, yet in a way that becomes never fully determined, keeping the creative play active and moving. All this, as Pallasmaa already noted has a thoroughly material dimension:

*“The pure expression of ink may be found in the energetic splash, while gypsum’s truth lingers in the formless mass. Like the silhouettes and patterns of mountains, clouds and stars, the plastic results are most often irregular and amorphous.”*⁴⁵

Forms and silhouettes materially express themselves. A few random blots, vague outlines, or indistinct traces suddenly may acquire a possible meaning, emerging from the depth of the surface, becoming form in the process. In diaphanous representations, we encounter a dialectic of becoming-form (*Formwerden*) and form-fading (*Formvergehen*). It cannot be emphasized enough that this process is inherently occurrent. It subverts the neat idea of a static foreground and background, or a static figure-ground order, as well as the idea that drawings are mere carriers of information. Conversely, diaphanous drawings are inherently open-ended toward a non-conceptual domain.⁴⁴

5. The work at work, or, the effective present

Apart from the concepts discussed previously, how can we think of diaphaneity as a generative stimulus in its own right? I propose that we turn to the work of the French sinologist and philosopher François Jullien, who compared Western (Greek) and Eastern (Chinese) thinking and acutely analyzed the “blind spots” of Western thinking in conceptualizing the notion of transformation. One of the topics that Jullien analyzed at length is the theme of “efficacy,” or “inherent activity” implied throughout various areas of Chinese thought.

Let’s start with an idea that does not fit into the cognitivist paradigm: the dialectic interplay between “springing up” and “settling.” As Frascari emphasized, architectural ideas have to settle gradually, thereby “sedimenting” themselves. Jullien provides an alternative formulation of this idea. Visual representations that are open and seemingly unfinished are not determined completely. Not every element in them is finished, unambiguous, or clearly demarcated. As such, the representation remains “at work.” In doing so, it invites new

⁴ *Ostranenie* (lit. “making-strange”) as literary technique was first explicitly described in Victor Shklovsky’s 1917 essay *Art as Technique*. Mukařovský expands on that notion in his discussion of poetic language, which introduces a new dynamic in the text.

readings and stimulates thinking. As Jullien argues, new elements “spring up” out of the drawing. Those elements that “settle” are determined for the time being:

“[T]his fundamental fact—that the determination (any determination) grasps what is settled and not the springing up; that the definition is situated downstream rather than upstream, in a state of flatness that is sterile and not fecund.”⁴⁶

Hence, (Greek) *logos* or deliberative reason can only grasp what is determined. In cognitivist terms: it reads representational content as informational contents. However, many representations are not just vehicles for transmitting information. By definition, information is already settled – it is circumscribed and determined. Once it is determined a flatness enters – the suggested depth disappears, and its stimulating potential fades.

Instead, many representations in architectural design processes are best understood in a *generative* sense.⁴⁷ They constitute an “effective present.” That is, their presence renders creative thought effective in the here and now (Figure 3). Rather than transmitting informational contents, such architectural drawings drive the development of an idea. Their generative characteristic is because of elements that “spring up” and that evade the determinations of *logos*.

This explains why some architectural sketches have such an expressive and creative appeal: their unfinishedness keeps them effective. They keep exerting tangible generative effects, allowing the designer to dwell on the ideas that they suggest. But the more one finishes and refines, the more

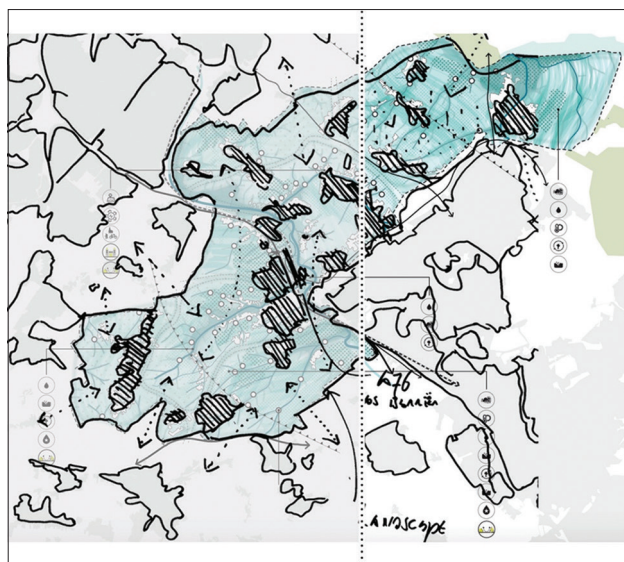


Figure 3. Visual filtering effect of sketch paper in the diaphanous effect of semi-transparent paper (left of the dotted line), combined with black lining and the original image (right of the dotted line). The play of elements and suggested “depth” creates an “effective present.”

the sketch becomes settled, losing the critical edge of its generative power.⁴⁸ Its incompleteness causes its efficacy:

“In revealing to us the power of incompleteness (or by revealing that plenitude is not completion), the sketch makes us feel the infinite richness of the indefinite, or the fecundity of the beyond and of possibility—in short, what we ordinarily understand as the powers of the virtual.”⁴⁹

The “indefinite” is the operative realm of the diaphanous – the domain of (visual) suggestion and springing up as opposed to the domain of settling down and defining. Every sketch that is an “effective present” is suffused with diaphaneity. Its openness forms an integral part of its visual texture. While the cognitivist paradigm viewed representations as the endpoint of a determinative process, Jullien emphasizes the fact that “availability” or space for development is the most effective moment in the creative process.⁵⁰ Only once a designer realizes how much can still be changed and accomplished and how many possibilities are still waiting to be worked out, can the creative process unfold and open up again.

Through diaphaneity, visual elements such as texture, border, and volume coalesce into new configurations – worlds of fluidity and availability rather than fixation and definition. In this openness, half-visible in the margin of suggestion resides its developmental potential. The diaphanous is the opposite of definition – it is *nichtfestgelegtheit* (not-being-defined) as a constitutive condition.^{51,52} The diaphanous opens out into new esthetic domains staging the “impossible ontological encounter” previously mentioned. The fact that not every element is determined, or that multiple readings are possible, creates opportunities to revisit familiar ideas in a new setting – making them literally strange and novel again.

That brings us to the issue of form. What then, should be drawn? Should we make only vague drawings that suggest ideas rather than representations meant to develop them? This question is justified, but also deeply cognitivist – it wishes to return to the process of determination, as it fears insecurity and ambiguity. As Jullien notes, the Aristotelian tradition saw form as the end result of a developmental process (*telos*). The Chinese line of thinking turns this thought upside down. It views the sketch as a locus of forces and vectors, rather than a depiction or illustration. If a sketch is viewed in this manner, it follows that the dots, lines, planes, and scribbles possess a certain *propensity*, or agency of their own – indeed, that is what renders them effective.⁵³ The sketch is no longer a neutral surface, but an in-between space of openness and architectural creation.⁵⁴

The art of sketching centers around evolving from one property of the drawing to the other – to freely navigate the new, diaphanous space that emerges between the

elements. Jullien speaks here of a “divergence that is provoked” within the work. Each new line extends the play of forces and the architectural design process in its entirety.⁵⁵ The diaphanous creates divergencies in the form of new possibilities, foregrounding certain elements while blurring others out.

The skill of organizing this process constitutes the craftsmanship of architectural design. Jullien emphasizes the importance of *shi* (efficacy) in this process. Not every scribble or sketch drives the design process forward or creates fruitful thinking. Discipline and exercise are required to draw well and to imbue sketches with an affective force that makes them truly come alive:

“[I]t is shi that ‘gives life’ and that makes the slightest dot or stroke vibrate, as if we were reliving the moment of its execution. Shi always enhances what would be mere empty representation without it, for shi gives depth to a representation and exceeds its concrete limitations by revealing within the actualized static form, a dimension of perpetual, soaring flight.”⁵⁶

Once more, the Chinese line of thinking subverts the cognitivist paradigm and simultaneously extends and supplements the phenomenological approach. If drawings are seen as static carriers of information, their empirical content is what makes them useful or valid. Conversely, if drawings are regarded as active catalysts in a thinking process, their “concrete limitations” are not important – instead, it is far more important how they unleash the process of “perpetual soaring flight” or intense creativity. The property of *nichtfestgelegtheit* is that which urges on forward, inviting growth and change.

To create an “effective present,” a drawing needs to be shot through with diaphaneity, that nebulous property which stimulates the creative dynamic which Immanuel Kant so aptly called the “free play of the imagination.”⁵⁷

6. The diaphanous as generative stimulus

In summary, in the diaphanous, relations and ideas spring up. They seemingly foreground themselves as the eye roves over the surface. Even in the moment when the pen touches the paper, the new already emerges. Between the body and the efficacy of the drawing occur an active entanglement that touches on the potentials residing in an idea. But even if the eye repeatedly scans the drawing surface, the image and eye are not the same as on the first occasion. Freed from the process of ceaseless determination (and therefore fixing) by the *logos*, the diaphanous literally renders new ideas and associations visible.

The movement of springing up is not the same as the Derridean notion of *différance*, whereby the ultimate

meaning of a drawing is ultimately postponed and closure never arrives.^{58,59} Instead, there are multiple openings-up and settlings-down at work, and the issue of closure or ultimate meaning is once again an attempt to determine and fix the generative process that occurs in a drawing. A better way of thinking about such processes is to embrace the instability and experiential richness of the diaphanous, accepting the occurrence of singular events, unexpected combinations, and unforeseen turns in the road.

Creation in design processes requires indeterminacy. In the diaphanous, we witness a process of becoming-form (*Formwerden*) and form-fading (*Formvergehen*) that continuously unfolds. When Palmboom discussed forms that “shine through,” he did not just state a fact about the visual properties of architectural drawings but indicated what makes the effective present truly effective. These are the relations and elements that present themselves in the diaphanous zone between determinacy and indeterminacy, causing the movements of “settling and springing-up,” as well as foregrounding and gradually unfolding.

To unfold, then, means to be involved in a process of becoming-form and form-fading in which non-determinacy is utilized in ways that are not merely differential or divergent. We are not speaking of unconstrained elation, but of a developmental, sedimental process in which some elements and relations “sink” and others “float.” The creative process organizes its contents without the pressing need to freeze, to fix, and to determine. Taking the freedom to let things run their course, it lets them sediment into coherent and surprising structures.

This requires a regimen of openness, a *nebula rasa*. Openness is not just the absence of constraints, but a visual organization in which alternatives spring up, ideas crystallize, and relations settle down. In the *nebula rasa*, the designer engages in a fine-grained, ever-shifting geography of creative possibilities. It is constituted by temporal stabilities, modalities of being-present, such as foregrounding, self-presenting, and self-suggesting, or even being-promising. By engaging with the diaphanous space in all its concreteness, and by fully embracing this shifting presence on “face value,” *logos* loosens its determinative hold, and the representational contents acquire an agency of their own.

We can now rework the Aristotelian notion with which we started. The diaphanous enables indeed a form of visibility, not just because it is a visual characteristic, but because it is a *generative stimulus* that directs its own development. As Aristoteles argued, the diaphanous is a mediating phenomenon: it is not a void, nor is it ossified in determinations and fixed, rigid notions and concepts. It is the medium through which representations are viewed, while it suffuses them – without being an entity

itself. Because the propensity so characteristic of the diaphanous is typically present in drawings, it resides there as an esthetic potential that drives architectural design processes. The virtual space afforded by the diaphanous represents a domain in which (half-formed) concepts and notions shade into the foreground or fade into the background, mingling with non-conceptual contents and effects to produce a range of esthetic effects that surpass deliberative reasoning but that stimulate concept-blending and emotive, associative thought.^{60,61} All this is discussed by Jullien under the heading of *shi* – the presence of efficacy.

The generative impetus resides in the fact that it avoids all-too-quick determinations and categorizations, creating material-perceptual conditions under which new relations can be perceived. The diaphanous is a visual environment in which fuzziness, vagueness and blurriness, the oblique, the opaque, the nebulous, and the suggestion of an additional dimensionality productively conspire. By suggesting a different (hypothetical) order of things – an order made visible without being fully determined – the diaphanous drawing creates an effective regimen of visibility that inspires and generates new options and configurations.

Such visual representations are continuously in play, both content-wise and through the medium in which they present themselves. As Emmanuel Alloa argues, the medium contains an inherent instability:

*“[T]he irreconcilability of the image-carrier and image-appearance—in covering each other, the two can never coincide—expresses, once more the lack of a specific place granted to images within a traditional ontology of objects. (...) Images are singular because of their intrinsic tension between facticity and unreality, which does not resolve in a unity and always already veer from a classical logic of identity.”*⁶²

In this medial surplus resides the potential for efficacy. The surface of the drawing is no longer a neutral surface on which marks or traces are inscribed but becomes a figure-ground play, a *topos* in which relations dynamically form, settle, and spring up. Greek *logos* framed the drawing surface as a *tabula rasa* or empty surface on which marks are made to determine and fix a creative concept or idea.⁵ Conversely, Chinese thought and recent phenomenology

conceive of the surface as a *nebula rasa* – a representational space of diaphanous indistinction in which a creative play unfolds. In this space, the diaphanous exerts its generative impetus, turning the *nebula rasa* into a non-geographical, layered space in which relations, possibilities, and constellations emerge, morph and fade.

The differential and sedimentary play of visual properties and allusions makes the present continually effective. That is, it constitutes its inner life that – as Jullien puts it – represents “perpetual, soaring flight.”

7. Conclusion

The cognitivist paradigm leans in many cases too heavily on the visual representation as a carrier of information. Conversely, if we combine insights from the phenomenological approach and the agentive paradigm, the notion of the diaphanous suggests a different account of architectural drawing. This does not imply that all drawings in an architectural design process should be diaphanous. Indeed, there is a case to be made that precise, technical drawings tap into a very different aspect of our creative capabilities.⁶³ With this in mind, we should raise the question of how to utilize the potential of different types of drawing throughout architectural design processes. These processes could take place in a professional as well as an educational context.

One suggestion is to foster *visual literacy*, in the sense that practitioners should actively practice producing drawings that cover the full range of architectural expression, from the precise to the allusive. Especially in a time where digital technology affords the possibility to rapidly create countless variations, the phenomenological side of the design process becomes extremely important. The idea that technical competence can replace the existential, lived side of architectural design is prevalent, but learning to “love uncertainty” may balance these digital designing and lived experience.

As discussed, drawing is not just a skill to communicate ideas or information. It is also a fully developed way of thinking-through-making that is unique for many design disciplines. As such, acquiring a degree of visual literacy is a prerequisite for learning to think well through visual representation. As the heuristic side of design processes can be relatively easily digitized, the skill to critically discern which design options make sense, which potentials are worth developing further and which questions are addressed can all be trained through engaging with diaphanous representations.

The hypothesis that could be raised here is that practitioners who grow accustomed to work with diaphanous media will be more at ease and more attuned to the ceaseless play of options, and correspondingly more

⁵ In image theory—following up on the linguistic work on iterativity and tracing by Jacques Derrida—the idea of tracing has been worked out in different directions to blend the conceptual frameworks of linguistics and visual arts, for instance by Hans-Jörg Rheinberger in his philosophy of science and in Sybille Krämer’s work on tracing and performativity. However, as discussed, the origin of this philosophical approach can readily be traced back to the Greek *logos*.

comfortable with the absence of clear, settled information. Moreover, an auxiliary hypothesis that could be raised is that training the skill to work with the diaphanous activates the recognition of different patterns and relationships. The sense of openness that permeates all creative endeavors becomes the standard *modus operandi* in the diaphanous. Therefore, it would be quite easy to test whether a group of participants working with conventional media and a group working with diaphanous media actually develop different styles of cognition, association and perception, and ultimately designing.

A concluding suggestion concerns the notion of “sedimentation.” As both Frascari and McKinnon remarked, the creative process is distributed in time. There are episodes of creation and novelty, as well as episodes of detachment and revisiting old ideas. Put differently, things “spring up” and “settle.” The visual realm of the diaphanous can be revisited again and again – it can be “taken into possession” once the need for (further) exploring ideas makes itself felt. Time and “letting things settle” are prerequisites for deepening and developing design ideas. Like producing ideas, letting them rest can also be thought of as a skill, and can also be taught as such. Learning to revisit the diaphanous and letting the “effective present” exert its formative influence on design thinking is part of developing visual literacy and effective creative thinking alike. What is needed is to embrace the efficacy of the drawing, navigating its openness and fostering the willingness to be changed by it.

Acknowledgments

None.

Funding

None.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no competing interests.

Author contributions

This is a single-authored article.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data

Not applicable.

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ARTICLE

Chinese esthetics through language in poetry: A comparative study of the Chinese wényán and modern báihuà

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Abstract

China was greatly transformed in its encounters with the imperial West in the 19th and 20th centuries, where its ways and traditions that were authoritative for thousands of years were challenged and pushed to evolve toward modernity. Among things that were made to change, the classical written Chinese – wényán – was replaced by the modern báihuà, prioritizing efficient information transformation over the expression of semantic and esthetic depth. However, classical Chinese esthetics continued to inspire modern Chinese literati, in their exploration and discovery of means to express their Chineseness in a modern reality. Through examining the literary form of poetry, this study investigated the differential characteristics of the classical and modern Chinese esthetics through the appreciation of classical and contemporary Chinese poems, as mediated by the written languages: wényán and modern báihuà. Presented with four comparable pairs of classical and contemporary poems, 48 participants indicated their preference and rated their poem-reading experience based on language esthetics, imaginativeness, precision, complexity of imageries, profundity of meaning, and the intensity of emotions and resonance elicited. Compared to contemporary poems, classical poems were perceived as significantly more beautiful in their language, more imaginative, more precise, more complex in their imagery, more profound in their meanings, and more effective in eliciting emotions and resonance. Reasons for poem type preference suggested that classical and contemporary poems were both appreciated for their differential expressions of the highest Chinese esthetic standard – the White Bì (贲), through effortless precision or purity.

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Citation: Feng Z, Wang W, Cupchik G. Chinese esthetics through language in poetry: A comparative study of the Chinese wényán and modern báihuà. *Arts & Communication*. 2024;2(1):1825.
<https://doi.org/10.36922/ac.1825>

Received: September 13, 2023**Accepted:** November 28, 2023**Published Online:** February 15, 2024

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Keywords: Chinese poetry; Poetry appreciation; Chinese language; Esthetics

1. Introduction

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica,¹ poetry is “literature that evokes a concentrated imaginative awareness of experience or a specific emotional response through language chosen and arranged for its meaning, sound, and rhythm.” Central to the creation and appreciation of poetry, language is a tool that evolves. It unifies and diverges, reflecting and responding to the demands of its users at a given time. As deftly put by Cooper, “we have to move from style to style or from variety to variety to suit our communicative

context. ...Because the style or variety we employ is itself part of the meaning we convey, we cannot restrict ourselves to a single style without restricting our ability to implement our communicating content.”² This begs the question: what are the characteristics associated with different styles, and how do people appreciate and select between styles? This paper attempts to answer these questions with an empirical investigation comparing Chinese poetry written in two styles of Chinese written languages: Wényán and modern báihuà, each with unique esthetic characteristics.

The Chinese language is believed to be one of the oldest writing systems and perhaps the only one that has seen continuous use for over 3000 years.³ It changes over time, responding to the development of the Chinese society over millennia. Since the earliest scripts of the pictorial graphs, Chinese has always been a morphemic and mostly monosyllabic language, where a graph or Chinese character is the smallest meaning and grammatical unit.⁴ In response to increasingly complex and wide-spread usage of the language, Chinese characters acquired greater linearity and regularity of form.⁴ The great imperial consolidation of the Qin dynasty (221 – 206 BC) unified the diverse demotic transformations across geographic regions in the country, to a standardized and mandatory form of script, the *lishū* (隶书, “clerical/regular script”), which prioritized convenience over the pictorial nature and served as the ancestor for all subsequent development in Chinese writing.⁴ Conventionally, the literary language used during the Spring and Autumn period (771 – 476 BC) to the end of Han dynasty (202 BC – 220) is referred to as classical Chinese, which was modeled after by writers in the following millennium till the end of feudalism rule.⁴ From the Tang dynasty (618 – 907 AD) to early twentieth century, there has been little change to the form of the official script⁴ or the writing system: wényán.³ Despite influence from the popular and rapidly changing vernacular Chinese, also called the “traditional báihuà (白话)” in contrast to “modern báihuà,”³ wényán (文言) or classical written Chinese was largely preserved and held reverent with elements from the vernacular peeking through only occasionally in formal correspondence.⁴

In early 20th century, the Chinese written language received a second major formal reformation. The Opium War (1840 – 1842) marked the beginning of a series of traumatic encounters of China with Western culture.⁴ The writing system of classical literary Chinese, due to its difficulty and complexity, was found to be inadequate in meeting the demands of the sociohistorical situations of the 20th century, and required simplification for mass education and modernization.³ During the May Fourth Movement (1919), wényán was fully replaced by modern

báihuà, which is a written adaptation of modern vernacular Chinese based on the Northern dialect.⁴ This transition was initiated by concerned intellectuals of the New Culture Movement (1910s – 1920s), impeded by the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937 – 1945), and took momentum after the founding of the nation in 1949 such that all official correspondence was done in modern báihuà which, since then, has been the sole form of written Chinese in China.⁴ Thousands of simplified Chinese characters were promulgated, first by the Nationalist government then the Communist government of China, since 1935.⁴ The latest editions of the authoritative *Xīnhuà Zìdiǎn* (12th ed.) and *Xiàndài Hànyǔ Cídiǎn* (7th ed.) each contain over 13,000 characters from which an average Chinese person knows 3,500 – 6,500¹. Along with the introduction of new ideas, foreign languages contributed significantly to the evolution of the grammatical norms of báihuà.³ Sentences in modern báihuà, for example, are comparatively much longer than those in wényán, partly due to the addition of lengthy and complicated pronominal modifiers prevalent in texts of English, French, and Russian, enhancing precision and explicitness.³ However, wényán continues to exist and assert its influence on modern báihuà, such that the contemporary written Chinese consists of a mixture of classical Chinese and Northern vernacular Chinese on different proportions depending on context.³ A contemporary Chinese person recognizes a substantial amount of Chinese characters written in the clerical script and its more recent forms, though as exposure to wényán decreases, they may not fully comprehend their meaning in classical texts.

Classical written Chinese (wényán) enjoyed extraordinarily flexible grammatical rules. Although Chinese typically follows a “subject + verb + object” structure, the presence of a verb is not necessary, and it is possible to have a verbless sentence.⁷ It possesses an adaptable word classification system, where word class distinction is context-dependent, and atypical syntactic functions (e.g., nouns functioning as verbs, and adjectives as adverbs) are common.⁴ There is a virtual absence of morphology and as a result syntactic position and semantic context play important roles in interpretation.⁴ The interpretation of Chinese texts must take into consideration the surface meaning of the characters or

¹ The nine-year compulsory education system ensures a Chinese citizen knows at least 3,500 Chinese characters by the time he/she finishes Grade 9.⁵ According to The Table of General Standard Chinese Characters published and promulgated by the Ministry of Education in 2013, 6,500 characters were designated as satisfying common usage in publications, the compilation of dictionaries, and general information processing.⁶

words used, their relative position and purpose in the sentence which have implications for their underlying meanings, and the linguistic and social contexts. Wényán is capable of conveying more information and more complex meaning in a more compact space,³ often described as “言简而意繁 (expressing complex meaning in simple words; transliterated as *yanjian er yifan*).” Texts can often be constructed to contain several layers of meanings at the same time, all of which are intended for appreciation.

Modern báihuà enjoys similarly flexible grammar³ but to a lesser extent compared to wényán. The popularization of báihuà, where wényán incorporated the characteristics of vernacular Chinese, made more use of, among other things, prepositions, pronouns, and conjunctions, to meet the demand in everyday application to specify time, position, and logical relations. However, compared to Indo-European languages, modern báihuà retained many features that value flexibility over rigidity, ambiguity over explicitness. It remains an aspect rather than tense language which does not plot events on the axis of time but relies on telling whether actions are completed or in progress.⁴ Its verbs do not have temporal tenses, and the expression of completion or progression relies on the use of auxiliary words such as 着, 了, and 过, or semantic contexts. Similarly, the expression of plurality relies on pronoun suffix such as “们”, quantifiers such as “个”, and context. Nouns and verbs do not transform depending on plurality or singularity. Word class overlap is still prevalent in modern báihuà, especially in creative literature. Expedited by its morphemic nature, new vocabularies can be conveniently created using existing Chinese characters and words to express novel concepts or a combination of several existing concepts.

As the basic building blocks of literature, the unique characteristics of the written Chinese language – wényán and modern báihuà – significantly contribute to the esthetics qualities of its literary creations, such as poetry. According to renowned Chinese painter Shi Hu (石虎, 1942-2023), Chinese characters are fundamental to Chinese poetry and Chinese culture since “Dao exists in Chinese characters, characters give birth to strokes, strokes give birth to sounds and meanings, and all things and all beings exist in the complicated strokes”.⁸ However, this is not the whole story. Since the classical period, Chinese poetry has evolved its own standards of expression and appreciation.

As evident in the Chinese expression *wén yǐ zài dào* (文以载道), traditional Chinese poetics considers poetry as the vehicle of the “way.”⁹ Remarking on the functions and purposes of poetry, Confucius commented, “Young men, why do you not study poetry? It can be used to inspire (*xīng*, 兴), to observe (*guān*, 观), to make you fit for

company (*qún*, 群), to express grievances (*yuàn*, 怨) : near at hand, (it will teach you how) to serve your father, and (looking) further, (how) to serve your sovereign.”¹⁰ “Poetry” here, as referred to by Confucius, is more strictly that of A Book of Songs (*Shījīng*, 诗经) from which classical Chinese poetry evolved to The Songs of the South (*Chǔcí*, 楚辞) and culminated in Tang poetry (*Tángshī*, 唐诗).¹⁰ For classical Chinese poets and critics, “poetry is meant to express one’s elusive thoughts and feelings through concrete and tangible reality in the physical world,”¹¹ the highest esthetic ideal of which is *xiángqiē* (详切), that is, to meticulously and precisely depict the artistic object in its unity.¹² In composing a classical Chinese poem, the poet first responds to the object (*yīngwù*, 应物), then embodies the object (*tǐ wù*, 体物), and finally achieving a state of *chèn wù* (称物), where what is expressed precisely matches what is intended for the object.¹² Therefore, to fully appreciate a classical Chinese poem, one closely examines the union between *qíng* (情, feeling) and *jǐng* (景, scene) – the poet’s thoughts, feelings, memories, and imaginations, and their contexts – which is crucial for bringing forth its subtlety and the “living sensuousness.”¹¹ The strokes in the ideogrammic wényán greatly aid a poet of classical Chinese poetry to achieve *xiángqiē*, through three kinds of iconicities: lexical, syntactical, and textual iconicities.⁸ More specifically, the monosyllabic characters in wényán exhibit imagic, syntactical, and diagrammatic similarities with the object, where the rendering of characters in a poem visually resemble the object, closely align with a narrative or descriptive sequence, and spatially represent the relationship of events to be depicted.⁸

As the Chinese written language evolved toward modern báihuà, the modernization of Chinese poetry also took place. The “poetry revolution (诗界革命),” a term first used by Liang Qichao (梁启超, 1873 – 1929) and was later recognized as a literary revolution that took place between 1894 and 1897, played an important role in transforming the Chinese poetic language from the classical to the vernacular,¹³ directly contributing to the realist May Fourth movement which regarded classical Chinese poetry as an obstacle to China’s development toward modernity.¹⁴ Utilitarian and populist, its reformers experimented with modern literary forms to serve their nationalist political agenda, aiming to rescue China through “awaken[ing] patriotism and forg[ing] a new national soul” in the face of foreign imperial threats.¹³ They sought liberation in the use of language and themes, and not to be restricted by traditional stylistic canons.¹³ Characterized by “wanting to express the self, to express wildly, to express directly, using a bold and urgent style as a model,”¹⁵ a realist literary style gained popularity among Chinese intellectuals who, while praising its modernity, gradually became dissatisfied by its crudeness and sought

remedy in symbolism.¹⁵ Between classical Chinese poetry – represented by works written in the mode of late Tang poets Li Shangyin (李商隐, c. 813 – 858) and Wen Tingyun (温庭筠, 812 – 870) – and Western poetry composed using the symbolist methods of Paul Verlaine, symbolist poets led by Li Jinfa (李金发, 1900 – 1976) saw strong affinities including thought, spirit, vision, and content, and sought to “have Western poetry and Chinese ancient poetry communicate and come to an accord.”¹⁵

The development of Chinese modern poetry was then halted by the Second Sino-Japanese War (1937 – 1945), the Chinese Civil War (1945 – 1949), and the economic and political instabilities in mainland China before the economic reform (also known as Reform and Opening-up, 改革开放), commencing in 1978. Regaining literary freedom from the strict socialist realism of the Maoist era, in the five or so years following the Chinese economic reform, Chinese writers once again developed renewed interest in modernist styles from the West.¹⁶ Obscure poetry (朦胧诗), as one of the key poetic styles of this time, aroused nationwide controversy with its seemingly “unfamiliar, strange, and incomprehensible” style¹⁷ and was criticized by skeptics as bourgeois for its unrestrained expression of narrow private feelings.⁹ However, a closer examination of the “I”-speaker of these poems reveals a self-expression that is consistent with traditional Chinese poetics, where, like the revered patriotic and tragic-heroic poet Qu Yuan (屈原, 339 – 278 BC), the “I”-persona was a voice of the collective “we” who were suffering from and protesting against political and ideological coercion, serving as “an instrumental tool for political aspirations as well as a fundamental outlet for emotions.”⁹

Following the introduction of the postmodern discourse in Chinese literature – beginning with a series of lectures by Fredric Jameson in Beijing in the mid-1980s – in the final decades of the 20th century and into the 21st century, Chinese poetry saw a continuation of modernist strategies alongside postmodern challenges,¹⁶ giving way to contemporary Chinese poetry, where “hybrid voices, styles, and poetics coexist and collide.”⁹ While postmodern Chinese poetry, exemplified by “Nay Nay-ism (非非主义)” and the compositions of Han Dong (韩栋, 1961–), “exhibited the trend of moving toward the text itself, and away from “external” concepts such as society, nation, or individual personality,”¹⁸ it also possesses an “in-betweenness” of paradigm, where the poetics hovers between a deconstructed and meaningless existence and a concrete connection with the society, culture, and history.⁹ Despite the postmodernist efforts to liberate from its “umbilical culture,” contemporary Chinese poetry continues to concern itself with immediate reality, historical memories,

and sociopolitical commitment, while trying to find a distinctive voice for experience, imagination, and artistic aspiration.⁹

Considered by many as a marker for good literature, the diminutive format of poetry, while facilitates the distilment of essences and inspires unanticipated instances of brilliance, is conducive for empirical examinations, which often require the presentation of many experimental stimuli one after another, each followed by a series of experimental tasks. To what extent are laypeople capable of appreciating the literary esthetics embedded in the Chinese written languages – wényán and modern báihuà – in which classical and contemporary Chinese poetry was composed? How do laypeople make sense of the poetic differences between classical Chinese poems and those composed in more recent times? Taking a closer look at the appreciation experience of classical and contemporary Chinese poems, we present an empirical investigation of the classical and modern Chinese esthetics as mediated by the written languages: wényán and modern báihuà.

2. Data and methods

2.1. Participants

Participants were recruited through the Experimental Participation System (SONA)¹⁹ at University of Toronto Scarborough Campus (UTSC) in 2017. Researchers posted the study information on the SONA platform, and interested students who were enrolled in Introductory Psychology: Part II signed up for available timeslots to participate. Participants were granted one course credit for their participation. Half a course credit was taken off from the SONA account of those who did not show up and had no reasonable excuses, per regulation of SONA. Forty-eight students (34 females and 14 males) whose mother tongue was Mandarin enrolled in the study through the SONA platform, many of whom were members of the Green Path program,²⁰ the purpose of which was facilitating Chinese international students completing undergraduate education at the University of Toronto in their adjustment to lives in North America. Students who came to Canada through this program have completed 12 years of formal education in mainland China, have lived in mainland China for the most part during those years, were able to read, write and speak Mandarin and Simplified Chinese fluently, and have some basic knowledge about classical and modern Chinese literature obtained as part the requirements for their formal education.

2.2. Materials

For an empirical investigation of the differential characteristics of wényán and modern báihuà, the whole

poem is preferred compared to individual lines, as the poet, having deliberately chosen and arranged the most appropriate language for their semantic, emotional, and esthetic purposes, intended for the whole poem to be appreciated as a single unit.²¹ The extraction of individual lines removes necessary semantic, imagistic, melodic, and rhythmic contexts, which are closely relevant to the examination of the esthetic characteristics of wényán and modern báihuà. Looking for classical and contemporary Chinese poems, researchers consulted two online Chinese poetry databases: 古诗文网 (Ancient Poetry: www.gushiwen.cn) and 中国诗歌库 (Chinese Poetry Database: www.shigeku.org). One classical poem and one contemporary poem of the same topic and containing similar imageries made up one pair of poems. Twelve classical poems and 12 contemporary poems were selected from the two websites, making up 12 pairs of poems. Contemporary Chinese poems are typically much longer than classical Chinese poems, while classical Chinese poems followed a stricter format and structure. To control for the effect of difference in poem length, researchers eliminated five pairs of poems due to substantial length difference between the two poems in a pair, where the contemporary poems were always disproportionately long compared to their classical counterparts. Seven pairs of poems were retained to be tested with a pilot sample of five for ease of comprehension and familiarity (on 7-point Likert scales). Four pairs of poems, on the topics of “Autumn,” “breakup,” “farewell,” and “homesickness” (see Appendix), were kept, rated by pilot participants as relatively unfamiliar but easy to understand.

2.3. Procedure

Pairs of poems on the same topic were presented to the participants in a randomized order. In each pair, one poem, classical or contemporary, was presented first. The participants, given ample time to read the poem, were asked to identify the keywords and explain the central meaning of the poem presented, which were questions designed to ensure participants study the poems carefully. Afterward, participants were asked to rate the poems on a series of 7-point self-report Likert scales measuring seven aspects of their poem-reading experience, including (i) language esthetics (“言辞优美”), (ii) imaginativeness (“有想象力”), (iii) precision of language (“精辟”), (iv) complexity of imageries (“意象复杂”), (v) profundity of meaning (“意义深远”), and intensity of (vi) emotions (“情感”), and (vii) resonance (“共鸣”) elicited, where higher scores indicated greater extent.

Following the completion of these scales, the other poem in the same pair was presented and participants were led through the same procedures. Finally, both poems of

this pair were presented to the participants side by side, and participants were instructed to compare them, one classical and the other contemporary, and pick one poem they preferred and explain the reasons for their choice with reference to specific examples from the poems.

A pre-test was carried out with five pilot participants to improve the study procedures, and minor adjustments were made. Each participant read all four pairs of poems, completed the same seven poem appreciation scales for a total of eight times, and compared the classical and contemporary poems in each pair for a choice of preference. The study took approximately 1 h to complete. At the end of the study, the researcher debriefed participants and answered any questions they might have. This study was approved by the Office of Research Ethics at the University of Toronto.

3. Results

The effect of poem type (classical vs. contemporary), poem topic, and their interaction on participants' ratings of the poems' familiarity and difficulty, as well as the seven aspects of the poem-reading experience (beauty of language, imaginativeness, precision of language, complexity of imagery, profundity in meaning, emotion, and resonance) were examined using repeated measure mixed ANOVA.

Poem type main effects were significant on all poem appreciation measures. Compared to contemporary poems, classical poems were perceived as significantly more beautiful in their language, more imaginative, more precise, more complex in their imagery, more profound in their meanings, more effective in eliciting emotions and resonance, more familiar, and more difficult to understand. Despite our efforts in poem selection, participants' appreciation experience differed significantly by topic, over the beauty of language, imaginativeness, complexity of imagery, resonance, familiarity, and difficulty. Results are shown in Figure 1 and Table 1.

3.1. Preference

Overall, classical poems were more popular than contemporary poems (Figure 2). To investigate the consistency of an individual participant's choice of preference across the four pairs of poems, the Wilcoxon signed-ranks test was performed, where poem preference was transformed into the likelihood of preference (e.g., preferring 4 out of 4 classical poems would result in a likelihood of 100%, and 1 out of 4 would be 25%). Results suggested that poem type has a significant effect on the likelihood of preference, $Z = 3.734$ ($P < 0.001$). Twenty-six participants (54.17%) had higher likelihood of preferring

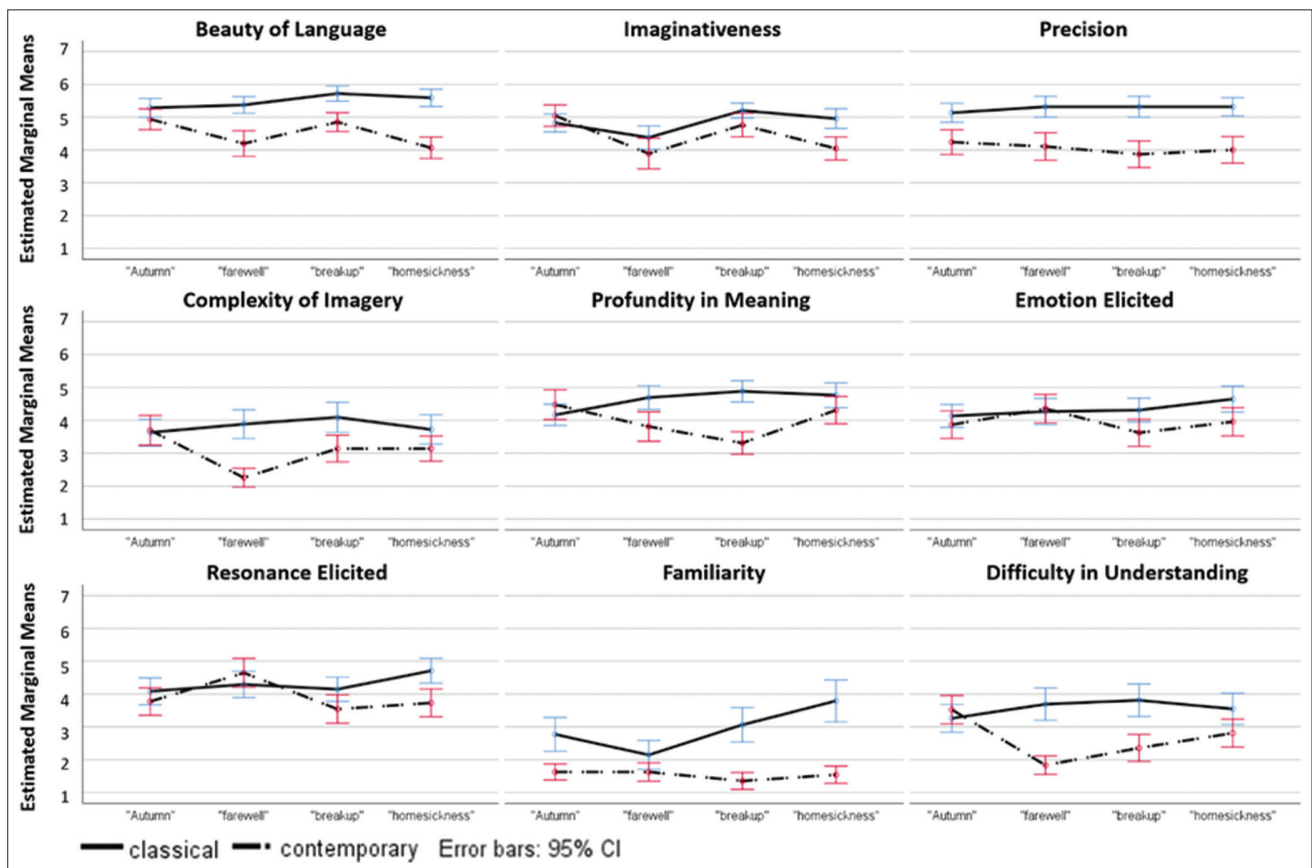


Figure 1. Repeated measure mixed ANOVA on reading experience by poem types and topics.

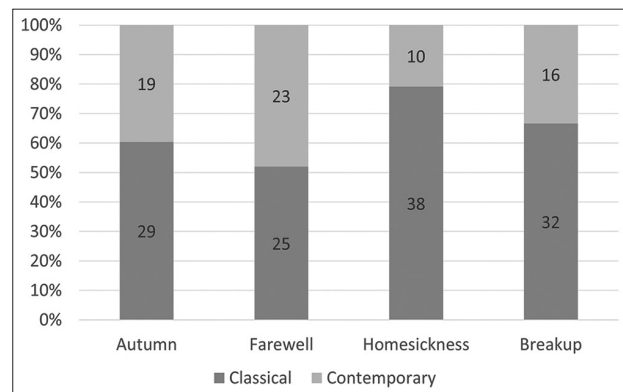


Figure 2. Poem preference counts by poem topics.

the classical poems, six participants (12.5%) had higher likelihood of preferring the contemporary poems, and 16 participants (33.33%) were indifferent.

Taking a further look at the differential characteristics of classical and contemporary poems, participants’ explanations of their preference were examined using content analysis. Two trained coders extracted 17 *in vivo* codes (Table 2). By asking participants to submit

their choices of preference, they made a decision of on which ones they liked better. Rather than giving a comparative analysis of the classical and contemporary poems in each pair, explanations of preference were largely limited to the preferred poem (i.e., “I like the classical poem for its complex imageries.”), producing a series of descriptors describing where and why classical or contemporary poems were likeable. An index was created indicating the prevalence of the descriptors when used to justify and explain preferences of the classical or the contemporary poems (Figure 3). The sequence the descriptors are presented in is arranged to better showcase the differences between classical and contemporary poems. Top reasons for participants to be drawn to a poem, classical or contemporary, were its effective use of imageries (“意象”), the profundity in meaning (“意义深远”), and the ability to effectively express emotions (“情感表达”) and elicit resonance (“引发共鸣”). Classical poems were appreciated for their ability to precisely (“精辟”) and effortlessly (“简洁”) deliver their messages while being beautiful (“优美”) and poetically (“诗意”) elusive (“含蓄”). Contemporary poems, on the other

Table 1. Repeated measure mixed ANOVA on reading experience by poem types and topics

	<i>SS</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η^2
Beauty of language						
Poem type	88.04	(1,45)	88.04	76.26	0.000	0.63
Poem topic	15.57	(3,135)	5.19	5.89	0.001	0.12
Poem type*Poem topic*	17.09	(2.52,113.54)	5.70	8.02	0.000	0.15
Imaginativeness						
Poem type	14.80	(1,44)	14.80	15.12	0.000	0.26
Poem topic	42.88	(3,132)	14.29	11.28	0.000	0.20
Poem type*Poem topic	14.81	(3,132)	4.94	5.63	0.001	0.11
Precision						
Poem type	112.58	(1,37)	112.58	70.25	0.000	0.66
Poem topic	0.59	(3,111)	0.20	0.19	0.901	0.01
Poem type*Poem topic	3.17	(3,111)	1.06	1.33	0.270	0.04
Complexity of imagery						
Poem type	51.42	(1,42)	51.42	32.75	0.000	0.44
Poem topic	18.73	(3,126)	6.24	3.19	0.026	0.07
Poem type*Poem topic	32.47	(3, 126)	10.83	9.50	0.000	0.18
Profundity in meaning						
Poem type	35.36	(1,41)	35.36	27.35	0.000	0.40
Poem topic	8.44	(3,123)	2.81	2.46	0.066	0.06
Poem type*Poem topic	39.10	(2.10,86.00)	18.64	12.43	0.000	0.23
Emotion elicited						
Poem type	13.61	(1,44)	13.61	7.54	0.009	0.15
Poem topic	9.40	(2.61,114.73)	3.61	2.48	0.073	0.05
Poem type*Poem topic	9.52	(3,132)	3.17	2.60	0.055	0.06
Resonance elicited						
Poem type	14.26	(1,47)	14.26	6.62	0.013	0.12
Poem topic	23.50	(3,141)	7.83	5.52	0.001	0.11
Poem type*Poem topic	22.87	(3,141)	7.62	5.13	0.002	0.10
Familiarity						
Poem type	189.84	(1,47)	189.84	53.70	0.000	0.53
Poem topic	29.81	(3,141)	9.94	6.85	0.000	0.13
Poem type*Poem topic	39.72	(3,141)	13.24	12.26	0.000	0.21
Difficulty in understanding						
Poem type	75.24	(1,41)	75.24	26.00	0.000	0.39
Poem topic	17.34	(3,123)	5.78	3.41	0.020	0.08
Poem type*Poem topic	54.37	(3,123)	18.12	13.41	0.000	0.25

Note: *Greenhouse–Geisser correction for sphericity.

hand, were enjoyed for their unadorned plain language (“直白”) which, while making them easy to understand (“通俗易懂”) and resonate with (“引发共鸣”), created a sense of purity (“质朴”) that was profound in meaning (“意义深远”).

4. Discussion

Essentially, we collected data on poem appreciation experiences by asking participants to provide subjective ratings (quantitative data) and textual explanations (qualitative data). We analyzed these data and the

Table 2. Descriptors illustrating reasons for enjoying classical or contemporary poems

Aspects of poem-reading experience	Descriptors	Examples from Chinese responses
Familiarity	Familiar	熟悉
	Plain and easy to understand	通俗易懂
Ease of understanding	Elusive, oblique	含蓄, 委婉, 隐晦
	Unadorned, pure	直白, 质朴
	Effortlessly to-the-point	简洁, 简明扼要, 言简意赅
Precision	Precise and ingenious	精辟, 巧妙
	Use of rhetoric and structure	修辞, 结构
Beauty of language	Rhyming, rhythmic	押韵, 节奏, 朗朗上口
	Poetic, charming, beautiful	语言优美, 有韵致, 诗意
	Visually vivid	画面感, 生动形象
Complexity of imagery	Effective use of imageries	意象的使用产生了更好的效果
	Atmospheric	意境, 氛围
Imaginativeness	Elicit imagination	引发想象、联想
Emotions	Effective expression of emotion	情感表达更充分
Resonance	Resonance	共鸣, 代入感
	Agree with the spirit or emotion expressed in the poem	对诗中表达的精神、情感本身的好恶
Profoundness in meaning	Profound meaning	有深意, 有内涵, 意义深远

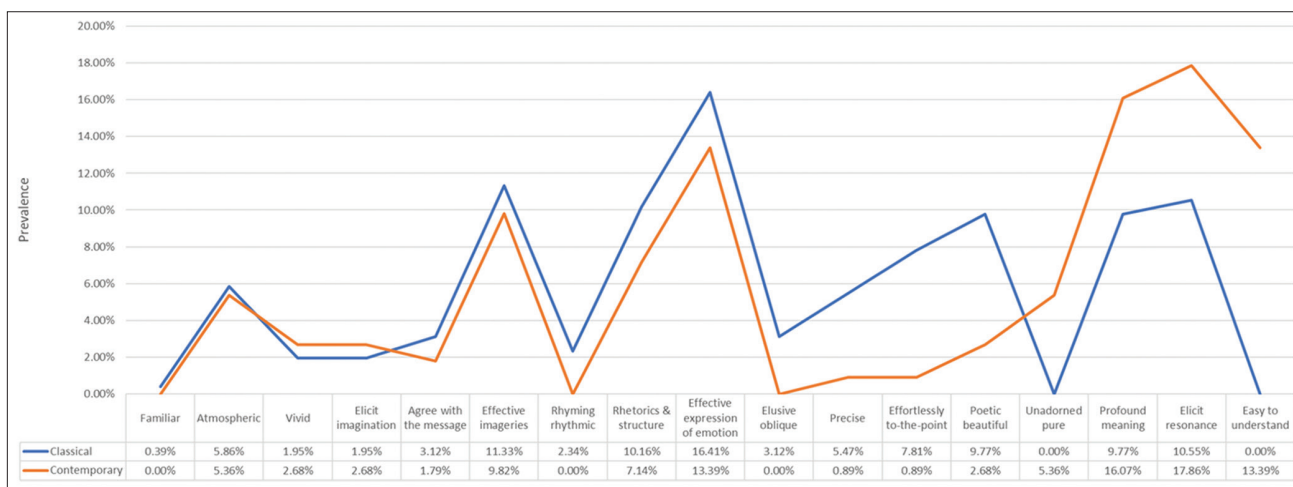


Figure 3. Prevalence of descriptors illustrating reasons for enjoying classical or contemporary poems.

results from them converged (i.e., pointed to the same/similar conclusions). The most prominent features of classical and contemporary Chinese poems stood in drastic contrast in their linguistic and stylistic qualities. While contemporary poems were appreciated for their unadorned plain language which makes them easy to understand and profound for its purity, classical poems exhibit a harmonic tension between being effortlessly precise and poetically elusive, which makes them beautiful and charming. From their contrast, we observe

two different expressions of the highest Chinese esthetic standard – the White Bi (贲).

Bi (贲) is a hexagram from the Confucian classics *Zhouyi*, meaning “ornament, decoration.” Its six lines discussed different approaches to decoration, which progressed from primitive to extravagant to the simplicity in the “unpolished gem (璞)” and “pure white (素白).” On “the White Bi,” the text reads, “One with white as his (only) ornament. There will be no error.”²² Confucian annotations (*Xiangzhuan*) of this line further delineated that “with

no ornament but the (simple white), shows how he has attained his aim.”²² The development inherent in the lines of *Bi* suggested a shift of focus from the outer excessive expressions to the emphasis on the inner essences. Further, the progression in the quantity of decoration is accompanied by the deepening in one’s understanding of the subject, till the recognition of “the simple white” as the essence of its true beauty and meaning, attaining his/her “aim” in the course of self-cultivation. As *Xiangzhuan* advocated in the interpretation of the hexagram *Jiārén* (家人), “the superior man, in accordance with this [hexagram], orders his words according to (the truth of) things, and his conduct so that it is uniformly consistent.”²² Therefore, language, according to the classical Chinese tradition, is subordinate to the meaning making process, where a meaning must exist before a word is written. And when it is written, it must efficiently, effectively, and accurately depict the true essence of one’s subject and being. As the essence is distilled, words used to illustrate that it should naturally be effortlessly precise (简洁精辟).

Our results from participants’ appreciation of classical Chinese poems clearly echo this line of esthetic interpretation, where classical poems were appreciated for their effortless precision and poetic elusiveness (简洁精辟而含蓄). In classical Chinese, a precise and accurate depiction is necessarily elusive when first perceived, reflecting the intrinsic difficulty of language as delineated in the Daoist epistemology:

As my random talk conforms to nature, it will spread far and wide and lives out its natural span. When I talk without words, I am at one with nature, for words are not nature and nature is not at one with the words. Therefore, it is said, “Do not talk with words.” If I talk without words, I have been talking all my life but have not used any words, while I have been using words all my life but I have not talked^{2, 23}

Harmonization with nature was held as the ultimate standard for the application of words such that their use must be selective. It was also implied that a true conformity to nature was shown through one’s actions and explicit declarations with words on one’s purposes and means were not necessary or even superfluous without true grasping of the essence of the Heavenly elements.

The flexibility in manipulation of classical written Chinese, *wényán*, also contributes to the perceived elusiveness of classical Chinese poetry, through facilitating

the establishment of a liberated relationship between the reader and the language.⁷ The activity of interpretation of *wényán* texts maintains a state of precariousness and uncertainty (若即若离), where the reader floats in a position of pre-signification,⁷ entering the meanings of a text from various angles at the same time and receiving different kinds of esthetic experiences.

This principle can be found in many forms of artistic and literary expressions in China. Artists of classical Chinese paintings lived in the mountains for months and years on end, until the representation of the mountains is as familiar to the painter as his/her dearest friend and family. Its image is then displayed in a single painting where multiple perspectives are presented at the same time so that the viewer is invited to enter the illusional representation and wander in the mountain ranges.⁷ The essence of the mountains is thus shown (“会意”) rather than described (“申说”), just as the meanings of a poem and the purpose of the poet are carried in an assemblage of multifold imageries that are carefully selected. The ability of the classical Chinese language, painting, and poetry to express profound meaning using few and simple words is enabled by acute observation, precise and accurate manipulation of imageries and concepts, and carefully and liberally dropped instances of negative space, which, together, created an intriguing and captivating complexity.

According to participants, contemporary Chinese poems’ beauty lies in purity (*pǔ*, 朴) which is also developed from the White *Bi*. While the beauty appreciated from classical Chinese poems emphasizes the importance of meaning and truth, it appears that when appreciating contemporary poems, participants’ enjoyment of their purity is an emphasis of *Bi*’s “natural and without ornament” aspect. Discussing the beauty in the rudimentary and pure (*pǔzhūō*, 朴拙), Chinese scholar Wang Luxiang (王鲁湘, 1956-), pointed to three important dialectic relations: loss versus growth (损益), ingenious versus obtuse (巧拙), and new versus aged (老生),²⁴ embodying the concept of return (*fù*, 复) in *Zhouyi*. During the process of growth in one’s artistic cultivation, it is necessary to intentionally seek “loss” to return to the original and innocent (*fùchū*, 复初). Similarly, one often experiences self-dissatisfaction for being obtuse as a novice and overindulges in seemingly ingenious and extravagant designs and creations after acquiring some skills, thus moving away from true beauty. To return, one must realize that the greatest ingeniousness often appears to be rudimentary and crude (大巧若拙). Finally, the beauty of *pǔ* is a unity of the new and the aged, where, for instance, an experienced painter may enter into a state of creation when it feels as if they have returned to the moment when they first learned to draw, and their

² 卮言日出，和以天倪，因以曼衍，所以穷年。不言则齐，齐与言不齐，言与齐不齐也，故曰无言。言无言，终身言，未尝言；终身不言，未尝不言。《庄子·寓言》

brush touched the paper for the first time. In this state, their art exhibits both the skillfulness of their experience as well as the delightful freshness of discovery and wonder of the novice. Compared to the profundity and intricacy of classical Chinese poetry, the beauty of contemporary poetry is therefore a return to the natural and pure, where, through a language that is plain and vernacular, emotions and ideas are expressed directly and evidently, in a way conducive to understanding and resonance.

5. Limitations

The present study did not consider the phonological differences between classical and modern Chinese because the phonology of classical literary Chinese underwent much change over the millennia and it is now hard to determine, basing on archeological evidence, how wényán produced in different historical periods should be pronounced.⁴ Although historical attempts of standardization were made, regional dialects continued to significantly influence how materials in wényán were read out loud during their composition and appreciation.⁴ While literary materials in wényán are taught in classrooms as part of the mandatory education in Chinese schools,³ they are pronounced in *pǔtōnghuà* which is the official national standard of spoken Chinese based on the Beijing dialect.⁴ An average Chinese person nowadays has little to no knowledge of the phonology of classical literary Chinese. In addition, as classical Chinese evolved to modern Chinese, a large number of characters used in classical texts now have the same pronunciation due to phonetic attrition, making it difficult to determine which character is being referred to when listening to classical texts,³ which further impairs comprehension.

The present study also did not discuss vernacular Chinese *per se* or examine the differences across regional dialects. The vernacular Chinese used in post-Qin and Han dynasties, and during the Tang and Song dynasties (by Ming and Qing dynasties, at least) may not be as different from modern vernacular Chinese as observed between written classical and modern Chinese. A study of the development of vernacular Chinese might be a better approach to elucidate cultural and social change and the corresponding psychological implications, but records of vernacular Chinese before Ming and Qing dynasties are few and far between. And since classical literary Chinese has always been kept as the official language for government and clerical functions, and revered and preserved by the literary elite class,⁴ it might be fair to say that while social demands pushed vernacular Chinese to change, classical literary Chinese preserved the philosophical and cultural heritage that can be dated back to pre-Han periods, thus serving as a reminder, carrier, and keeper of the classical

traditions. Therefore, a comparison between the written classical and modern Chinese, wényán and modern báihuà in effect, potentially maximizes the contrast between the classical and modern Chinese culture.

Finally, it is possible that some people are inherently drawn to classical poems while others consistently prefer modern poems. Only about a third of the participants were indifferent about the classical and modern poems presented, which implies a willingness and ability to appreciate the esthetics of classical and contemporary poems equally and for what they are. However, interpretation is limited by the small number of poems and the sample size in the present study for any generalizing conclusions. Future research could sample a larger number of classical and contemporary poems with a bigger sample size to investigate people's esthetic preference in reading Chinese poems.

6. Conclusion

Following an overview of the transition from classical written Chinese wényán to modern báihuà, and from classical to contemporary Chinese poetry, this paper presents an empirical investigation of the differential characteristics of the classical and modern Chinese esthetics through the appreciation of classical and contemporary Chinese poetry, as mediated by the written languages: wényán and modern báihuà. While classical poems, compared to their contemporary counterparts, were perceived as more beautiful, imaginative, precise, complex, and profound, and more effective in eliciting emotions and resonance, reasons for poem type preference suggested that people possess a more nuanced understanding of the classical and modern Chinese esthetics reflecting two different interpretations of the highest Chinese esthetic standard – the White *Bi*. While the modern esthetics, represented by contemporary poems, used unadorned plain language to embody purity, the classical esthetics emphasize a harmonic tension between effortless precision and elusiveness. The empirical method is an effective tool for elucidating laypeople's implicit understandings of the nuances in Chinese esthetic.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to acknowledge the contribution of Yuxiu Sun who is a doctoral student at the School of International Studies at Zhejiang University, Zhejiang, China, for providing insight into the linguistic characteristics of the Chinese language.

Funding

None.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Author contributions

Conceptualization: All authors

Investigation: Zhe Feng, Weiyi Wang

Methodology: Zhe Feng, Weiyi Wang

Formal analysis: Zhe Feng

Writing – original draft: Zhe Feng

Writing – review & editing: Zhe Feng

Ethics approval and consent to participate

This study received ethics approval from the Research Ethics Board of University of Toronto, as required by University of Toronto Scarborough's SONA platform through which participant recruitment took place. Written informed consent was obtained from each participant in the study.

Consent for publication

Written informed consent was obtained for the publication of each participant's data.

Availability of data

Data are available from the corresponding author on reasonable request.

Further disclosure

Part of the findings has been presented as a talk at the International Association of Empirical esthetics (IAEA) in 2018 and as a poster at the Canadian Psychological Association (CPA) in 2020.

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Appendix

Homesickness 思乡

长相思·山一程
(清) 纳兰性德

山一程，水一程，身向榆关那畔行，夜深千帐灯。
风一更，雪一更，聒碎乡心梦不成，故园无此声。

故乡

阿九 (1966-)

我常在蓝天碧水边，
做一个回家的人。
无论走到哪里，我都来自外省。
没有一寸月光养我做她的儿子，
没有一间屋宇
情愿当我的故乡，
因我的背包里尽是思想的灰烬。
虽然我的父母自有他们的来历，
我却从来没有真的找到
他们所说的那里：
对祖先，那是伤心之地，
对儿孙，那是乌有之乡。
但是，我必须有一个故乡。
是的我必须有的！
这是我能喊出的
最伟大的词语，是我的最强音。

Breakup 失恋

清平乐·红笺小字

((北宋) 晏殊

红笺小字，说尽平生意。鸿雁在云鱼在水，惆怅此情难寄！
斜阳独倚西楼，遥山恰对帘钩。人面不知何处，绿波依旧东流。

失恋

刘春 (1974-)

那些秋天的接近干涸的池塘

那些在风中翻飞的黄叶

那些老人脸上的深深皱纹

那些不远不近在楼顶盘旋的鸟儿

那些在睡梦中喊出的忧伤话语

那些闪着淡淡泪光的粉红信笺

那些阴沉沉的山脉那些云

那些被无形之手拨动的烟尘

那些雨远远地落在另一块田地

那些不解风情的意念那些温度

那些笑那些痛

那些渐行渐远的脚印你遥不可及

那些天那些年

你感到身体里有条大河逆流而上

从不争气的眼角流出

Farewell 送别

别薛华
(唐) 王勃

送送多穷路，遑遑独问津。
悲凉千里道，凄断百年身。
心事同漂泊，生涯共苦辛。
无论去与住，俱是梦中人。

送别
于洛生 (?)
当你将远行时我有些心痛
想不到送别时是飘雨的天空
我们都将踏上渺茫的前程
也做好准备去度过风雨人生

我会给你写信的

不会问你路上
天空响不响雷
身旁刮不刮风
只问你旅程
手中有没有伞
天上有没有虹

Autumn 秋

长相思·一重山

(南唐) 李煜

一重山，两重山，山远水高烟水寒，相思枫叶丹。
菊花开，菊花残，塞雁高飞人未还，一帘风月闲。

暮秋

雯子 (?)

一夜醒来菊花已经凋零
仿佛音乐中死去的人
无处寻觅它们的灵魂
秋天最后的日子果实已经成熟

飞鸟开始隐遁留下的鸣叫经久不绝

谁能体谅

叶尽后的树花落后的枝
这些根啊无言的深藏
仿佛一支歌在吟唱

ARTICLE

The use of an interactive whiteboard in solfeggio teaching

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Abstract

This paper explores the application of digital technology, that is, interactive whiteboards, in solfeggio lessons. Digital technology, such as computers and interactive whiteboards, is gradually becoming part of the classroom, both in general education and music schools. In addition to traditional teaching tools (blackboard, chalk/markers, piano, and printed textbooks), computer programs and web applications can be beneficial complements to solfeggio lessons. The music classroom for teaching solfeggio is a great place where interactive whiteboards can be integrated. However, to effectively implement any form of digital technology in solfeggio, the teacher must be competent, IT-literate, know basic musical terms in English, and be receptive to the modern possibilities offered by technology. The aim of this paper is to demonstrate the possibility of using an interactive whiteboard in solfeggio teaching. Employing a descriptive methodology, the study entailed the application of the interactive whiteboard for certain classroom activities while covering topics in solfeggio such as intonation, music dictation, and theoretical musical concepts. The research revealed that the interactive whiteboard can primarily function as a conventional whiteboard without its multimedia capabilities, allowing the written content to be preserved. In addition, interactive whiteboards have numerous advantages when utilized for singing musical examples, writing musical dictations, and practicing theoretical musical content.

Keywords: Solfeggio teaching; Digital technology; Interactive board; Education

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Citation: Šulentić Begić J, Sakač-Botički M, Begić A. The use of an interactive whiteboard in solfeggio teaching. *Arts & Communication*. 2024;2(1):2163
<https://doi.org/10.36922/ac.2163>

Received: November 2, 2023

Accepted: January 5, 2024

Published Online: March 4, 2024

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Publisher's Note: AccScience Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

1. Introduction

Solfeggio is an indispensable part of musician education in Croatia and around the world. In addition to teaching the instrument, solfeggio serves to develop musical hearing, melodic-rhythmic skills in reading and singing music, and the ability to learn and recognize musical-theoretical concepts. The foundations of solfeggio, as they are known today, were laid down in the middle ages by Guido from Arezzo¹. To a greater or

¹ Guido d'Arezzo is an Italian medieval music theorist. In the Antiphony (around 1025), he presented the epoch-making invention of the notation system (notes, clefs), with which the determination of absolute and relative pitch was achieved without prior knowledge of the melody.

lesser extent, its roots can be found in all of today's working methods on the subject of solfeggio. Guido introduced a system of lines and spaces, movable keys, and new tone names: solmization syllables (*ut, re, mi, fa, sol, and la*). In addition, the name solfeggio has not been retained everywhere in the world, so in English, it can be found under the name *ear training* or *aural training*; in German, it is *Gehörbildung*, and in France, it is *sofège*.¹ Solfeggio is also described as a musical language, that is, as learning a musical language, that is, as a process of acquiring musical literacy.¹ Modern technology should find a place in the teaching of solfeggio and supplement the existing traditional work methods used by teachers because such methods are often outdated and less interesting for students of the 21st century. The method of obtaining information in the modern world is instantaneous, always available through the Internet, and occurs through a technological device. Today's children are surrounded by technology every day in the form of mobile phones, computers, or tablets. Therefore, the teaching of solfeggio can and should be enriched with digital technology, especially computers and interactive boards. Therefore, the aim of this paper is to demonstrate the possibility of using an interactive board in the teaching of solfeggio.

2. Digital technology in solfeggio teaching

People's lives have become unimaginable without portable devices such as personal computers, tablets, and smartphones that can easily fit in their pockets. Today's students have grown up surrounded by technology and think and process information in a significantly different way than their predecessors; therefore, the question is no longer whether and when digital technology should be introduced into education.² By introducing digital technology into the teaching process, students are offered an interactive and innovative way of acquiring content that is visually and auditorily attractive.³ Digital technology can create interactive and collaborative environments in which students can work on projects, share ideas, and receive feedback from their peers and teachers.⁴ In addition, one of the advantages of digital technology in schools is the possibility of distance teaching if physical teaching is impossible. This advantage came to the fore in 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic, when schools worldwide had to close their doors.²

In solfeggio, the basic teaching tools are blackboards, chalk (a marker pen), and textbooks. However, the most important tool is the piano. Without a piano, it is impossible to imagine a solfeggio class in a music school, which is indispensable for almost all the content and activities of the class.⁵ The computer used in solfeggio lessons can be a valuable teaching tool in various subject areas. With the

help of various programs, games, and web applications intended for practicing hearing and musical literacy, teachers can supplement solfeggio classes with quality. The interactive climate in the classroom will certainly contribute to greater attention and interest among students in the 21st century. Many computer programs, games, and applications have been reduced to learning and checking concepts from music theory and auditory training to recognize notes, intervals, chords, and short melodic and rhythmic phrases.⁶ *Earbeater*⁷ is a web application created for music students to practice their listening skills. It offers over 200 exercises that involve listening to intervals, chords, and scales. The application can be used on the web or on iOS devices (iPhones or iPads). The *Goodear*⁸ web application is also intended for auditory training, similar to the previous application. With this application, in addition to listening exercises for intervals and chords, one can practice listening to cadences, jazz chords, note positions (on the scale), and absolute pitch (within the range of the C major scale). *Meludia*⁹ is a French program, a brain-training application based on auditory musical tasks. *Meludia* offers a different type of listening exercise than the previously described applications. The *Meludia* program offers four modules or exercise levels: basic (discovery), intermediate (intermediate), advanced (advanced), and expert (expert). Each module offers different exercise levels. *Musictheory.net*¹⁰ is a website or program that, in addition to exercises for listening and music theory, offers lessons and tools in the form of calculators for answering music-theoretical concepts. An interesting thing about *Musictheory.net* is that there are lessons in which you can read everything from the basics of musical literacy to the construction and composition of various chords, and scales. *Tonesavvy*¹¹ is a computer program with theoretical, musical, and listening exercises. The main difference between *Tonesavvy* and the previously described programs is their ability to create profiles of teachers and students. In addition to similar tasks, as in other programs, *Tonesavvy* offers rhythmic and melodic dictation tasks. However, this is not a concrete dictation, as is heard on solfeggio in traditional ways of working, but short two-measure phrases are recognized here as rhythmic dictation and a few tones of the scale as melodic dictation. *TonPoTon*¹² was originally a Croatian platform for computer games to practice musical literacy. This platform offers musical literacy training in various computer games, through which you can practice reading notes in violin, bass, and alt keys; practice rhythmic patterns; and recognize scales, intervals, and chords. This platform can be used on mobile phones, tablets, and computers.

Traditional solfeggio learning methods do not foresee the use of digital technology. Printed traditional textbooks

are still frequently used in solfeggio. However, the lives of 21st-century students include a constant connection to the digital world, which includes mobile phones, the Internet, Google, and social networks such as Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok. Their access to information is instantaneous, continuous, always available, and almost free. The 21st-century student walks into a traditional classroom anytime, anywhere, with virtual expectations that their information will be instantaneous and immediately available. Therefore, students can be provided with varied and enriched teaching content by combining digital tools with traditional solfeggio learning methods. Digital technology should be adapted for students and used as a support, but not as a substitute for traditional quality work methods.¹³ The advantage of digital technology in solfeggio is its immediate feedback.¹⁴ Given that digital technology has been used in solfeggio teaching practice for some time, research examining its effectiveness and the possibility of its application has been conducted. Ouyang¹⁵ conducted a study in which the *ChordIQ* mobile application was used to learn solfeggio. The outcomes revealed that the academic success of students in solfeggio was improved, and the application enabled them to learn music in an exciting and interactive manner. The study by Goncharova and Gorbunova¹⁶ demonstrated the effectiveness of interactive creative exercises based on mobile technology in teaching music. Interactive exercises have been shown to activate auditory attention, stimulate musical memory and hearing development, and develop musical taste, observation, and emotional thinking. Specifically, the use of mobile devices makes it possible to search for necessary information, learn, repeat, and practice the content of music theory, solfeggio, harmony, analysis of musical forms, and listening to music. Shi¹⁷ conducted a study that also stated that the application of solfeggio software can have a positive role as long as it is used correctly and certain principles are followed. In his research, he used the computer program *Ear Master*, which, due to its design and quality, has great potential for application in solfeggio lessons. Although solfeggio lessons traditionally take place with the use of the piano, he believes that with the advancement of computer technology, we should also consider the use of computers. Schüler¹⁸ conducted a study that examined the application of *SmartMusic*, *SingSnap*, and *EarTrainer (MusicDictation.app)* in the initial teaching of solfeggio. The research revealed that the use of the aforementioned applications led to several significant improvements in comparison to traditional teaching methods: (i) students were much more motivated to practice listening; (ii) students mastered exercises of the same difficulty more quickly; (iii) students displayed enhanced performance abilities; and (iv) students showed a substantial increase in their

sofeggio skills. Debevc *et al.*¹⁴ examined the effectiveness of the interactive mobile application *mySolfeggio* for learning solfeggio. The study involved using a mobile device to access visual, auditory, and tactile modalities to recognize notation as well as to practice and learn musical notation, rhythm, and melody, for which the mobile application provided them with corrective feedback. The research showed better results in terms of musical intervals and rhythmic accuracy. The application was user-friendly for the students, and they employed it as a tool to create and practice homework. Many music teachers and students use mobile music applications to improve their skills.¹⁹ Music teachers should prioritize the simplicity and clarity of the software to enable students to utilize it effectively.²⁰

2.1. Interactive board in the areas of solfeggio: Application from teaching practice

Recently, interactive or so-called smart panels have enabled the development of different multimedia content displays. They can be used in various software programs and websites intended for solfeggio or music theory courses.¹³ Interactive smart boards operate on digital light processing (DLP) technology, creating a highly responsive and touch-sensitive surface. These boards enable users to write on the screen using an interactive pen that leaves a digital trace in any color. The pen also allows control over the computer's mouse, the computer itself, and all installed applications. In addition, users can write on the board using their fingers. The interactive whiteboard is used as a replacement for traditional school boards and video/multimedia accessories. It meets most of the visual needs of students by turning the traditional school board into an interactive teaching and presentation device. Some of the most common ways of using an interactive whiteboard are showing presentation content, using animations, interactive material, and the Google search engine, sharing and sending teaching materials to students through e-mail or another online platform, educational games, and video lectures.²¹

In continuation of this paper, the application of an interactive board in solfeggio lessons will be presented. Descriptive methodology was used, that is, the application of the interactive board in some activities and the contents of the solfeggio class were described, such as intonation, music dictation, and music-theoretical concepts. An interactive board can primarily be used without its multimedia capabilities, as with an ordinary board. By choosing a music track and an interactive pen, the interactive whiteboard becomes nothing more than a traditional board (Figure 1). Similar to a green or white board, it can be utilized to write and display content for

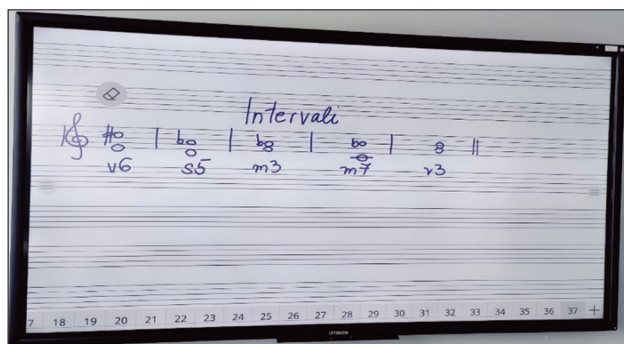


Figure 1. Interactive whiteboard with traditional use (writing and practicing intervals)².

students. One of the advantages of using an interactive whiteboard is the ability to preserve the foreground of the board and the convenience of adding new content with a single click.

In addition to the interactive whiteboard's primary function as a traditional whiteboard, it can be used to enhance the subject areas covered in the solfeggio lessons. Given that the panel is connected to a computer and the Internet, the possible addition of digital content to a lesson is much faster and simpler. However, the inclusion of digital content in every solfeggio class activity requires extensive preparation by the teacher.

2.1.1. Musical intonation

The musical intonation in solfeggio involves singing melodic and rhythmic examples. In the more conventional approach to learning, students use printed textbooks that provide various melodic and rhythmic examples that align with the content's processing method in the plan and program. If the examples exist in digital form (pdf or e-textbook), they can be projected onto the board to allow students to follow them (Figure 2). In this way, following the example on the board, the teacher can effectively show a specific problem in the example being sung and highlight places that require additional attention. Although students still occasionally used printed textbooks, the intonation of the example from the interactive board showed greater attention and concentration on the example itself. These procedures are also possible in classrooms where there are screens and projectors, but the interactive whiteboard speeds up the process of switching the blackboard from an ordinary blackboard into a type of projector. An example can be prepared in advance on the computer, and at the moment of the lesson, when singing is planned, the interactive board becomes a projector with two clicks.



Figure 2. Musical intonation of an example projected on the interactive whiteboard.

2.1.2. Melodic dictation

The teaching area of dictation in solfeggio extends from the first grade of elementary music school to the academy. Dictation can be rhythmic or melodic (one-part, two-part, three-part, etc.). The process of listening and recognizing intervals and chords can also be included in the dictations. Although the conventional approach of teaching (playing dictation on the piano) is still primary, the use of an interactive board can greatly expand this approach. If the teacher has digital recordings, they can be played on the computer instead of dictating. In such situations, a smart board is actually a transmitter of sound and images. There are numerous websites on the Internet through which one can practice recognizing intervals and chords, as well as smaller melodic-rhythmic phrases and shorter rhythmic patterns. They can also be used through computers, and the interactive panel is, again, a transmitter of sound. Melodic-rhythmic and rhythmic dictation are the most common ways of working on dictation, and here, the interactive panel can help to check it faster. After written dictation, in traditional teaching, it is usually written exactly on the board so that students can check their writing. With the help of an interactive board, this process can be accelerated by projecting dictation onto the screen. This type of dictation check implies a previously saved record of the same in digital form (Figure 3).

2.1.3. Musical-theoretical terms

Music theory, musical-theoretical concepts, or just concepts, as called in the curriculum for secondary music schools, occupy an equally significant part of the work in solfeggio. Along with singing and listening, it is also necessary to process and learn various theoretical concepts. In this area, it is still the most conventional form of work, and the interactive board is primarily used as a board on which the most important things are written and marked.

² The authors of the paper took the photos.

If there are materials for these contents in digital form, they can help with processing them in class. The primary function of digital content is to reduce writing time. The interactive board is also very useful for repeating and determining the various contents of the musical-theoretical field. The previously mentioned possibilities of the website, where one can practice aural examples, also feature various tasks for testing and practicing theoretical concepts such as intervals, chords, tone positions, and keys. Despite the fact that these exercises are mostly in English, students are able to learn the English names of musical terms within a short period of time. In this case, it is crucial for the teacher to be familiar with these terms to effectively communicate them to the students. It is evident that students prefer this method to practice tasks over traditional writing or copying because it transforms learning into a game and encourages interaction with the surrounding media world. The benefit of these tasks is that they are all randomly selected from the curriculum and not subject to the teacher's ideas. The feedback is immediate, and any errors are addressed by the teacher or sometimes the entire class during a discussion (Figure 4).

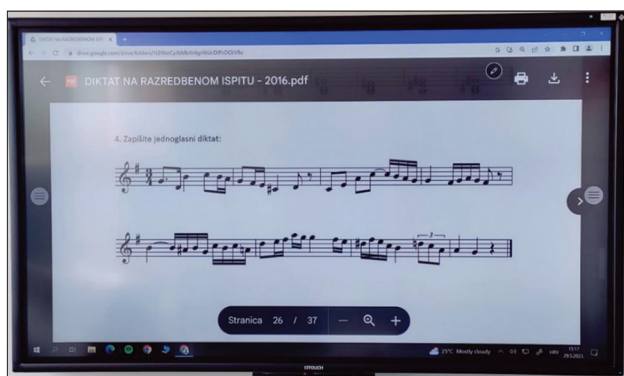


Figure 3. The testing of the recorded melodic-rhythmic dictation.

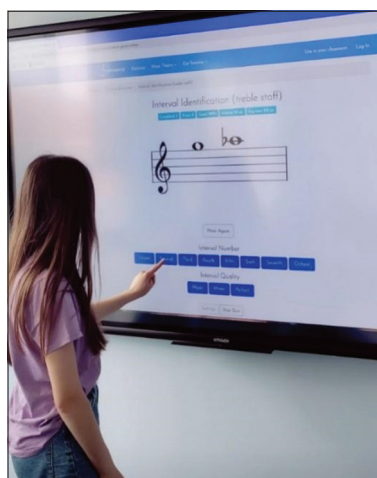


Figure 4. Interval and chord recognition exercises at the *ToneSavvy* site.

Educational games and quizzes can be used to process musical-theoretical concepts. Today, there are several online quiz platforms, such as *Kahoot* and *Wordwall*. Considering the specificity of solfeggio as a subject, if a quiz or game for a certain topic does not already exist in online or digital form, it is possible to independently design and create it on most quiz platforms. Playing an educational game, such as a quiz, always improves the dynamics in class. In educational quizzes and games, it is a great advantage that the teacher immediately sees feedback on the average accuracy of students' answers. For educational games and quizzes, the smart board serves as a projector, but the most important aspect here is the speed of switching from the traditional way of working on the board to multimedia activity. For instance, the teacher can write several tasks in the traditional manner, followed by two clicks to transition to a *Kahoot* quiz for further practice. Typically, students accept this kind of transition from conventional to modern digital learning, often requesting its repetition to practice the lesson through an educational game or quiz.

3. Conclusion

The aim of this work was to demonstrate the possibility of using an interactive board in the teaching of solfeggio. The results of the research showed that the interactive whiteboard can primarily be used without its multimedia capabilities, that is, as the most ordinary whiteboard. The advantage of such use is that the written content can be preserved. Regarding the singing of musical examples, the advantage of an interactive board is that the teacher can effectively show the students the problem areas that require more attention while singing. As for dictation, instead of the teacher playing the dictation, the example can be played from the computer, and after writing the dictation, it is possible to project the example on the screen using the interactive board to check the accuracy of what was written. An interactive board can also be used to repeat and determine musical-theoretical content, as numerous websites offer examples for checking and practicing intervals, chords, septachords, tone positions, and keys.

The implementation of digital technologies in solfeggio and other educational processes is still in the preliminary stages of research, with the aim of determining its feasibility in the classroom. Digital technologies are developing faster than education, and it is necessary to use them to complement traditional work methods. Students of the 21st century are accustomed to using digital technology from a young age, as they are frequently exposed to screens from mobile phones, computers, tablets, and televisions. They have access to a variety of information instantly, thanks to devices that are always online around them. One of the problems of integrating digital technologies into

solfege teaching is teachers' insufficient competence. Teachers and music pedagogues often refuse to work with digital technology because they are not sufficiently trained. To integrate modern educational principles into solfeggio instruction, educators must proactively explore innovative teaching methodologies, particularly those that include digital technology in nearly every class, catering to the needs of 21st-century learners. Simultaneously, the use of digital technology, particularly computers and interactive whiteboards, should supplement and refresh traditional, high-quality work methods in solfeggio lessons rather than replace them. The equipment of the school, that is, the classroom for teaching solfeggio, also plays a key role in the use of digital technology. If the classroom is equipped with a computer, a projector, and, in the best option, an interactive whiteboard, digital technology becomes available in every solfeggio lesson. Teachers will always plan the use of digital technology according to the needs and possible achievements of the class. This research did not examine students' attitudes regarding the use of the interactive board in solfeggio lessons, which could be the goal of future studies. In addition, solfeggio teachers could be inquired about their usage of an interactive board, and if so, their experiences with it could be sought. In any case, the use of digital technology in solfeggio is not the future but the present.

Acknowledgments

None.

Funding

None.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data

Not applicable.

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ARTICLE

Artists recreating our world with Rachmaninoff as a guide and partner

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Abstract

This paper proposes that artists be at the forefront of community recovery in our post-COVID-19 world. To achieve this proposition, it delves into the early professional life of the renowned Russian composer and pianist Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943), notably focusing on his sense of failure after the premiere of his first symphony and his subsequent recovery. It examines the importance of mentors who support professionals through early career mistakes, the significance of learning the limits of risk-taking, and the value of failure as guidance for development. Rachmaninoff's contribution to humanity is profound, as evidenced by the enduring performance of his music in concert halls around the globe, making him an appropriate guide and partner in fulfilling the recovery agenda.

Keywords: Career development; Diplomacy; Failure; Leadership; Music; Political skill

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Citation: Bathurst R. Artists recreating our world with Rachmaninoff as a guide and partner. *Arts & Communication*. 2024;2(1):2126
<https://doi.org/10.36922/ac.2126>

Received: October 27, 2023**Accepted:** December 20, 2023**Published Online:** March 4, 2024

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Publisher's Note: AccScience Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

1. Introduction

“[In the third piano concerto] it gets harder, even in the slow movement. In the slow movement, you've got time to breathe, for like 30 s, and then it's even harder than the first movement, and it doesn't stop. I would see the things he would ask you to do with the octaves and the speed and the accuracy. People who can do things like that – it should be illegal! It's inhuman!”

James Rhodes, pianist (33:49)¹

“There is a moment in the first movement, in the solo bit, the cadenza, Rachmaninoff writes an alternative, a so-called ossia, and it is one of those moments where he's asking his interpreters, ‘Are you Rach-man-enough?’”

Tom Service, commentator (34:24)¹

In a world where success is measured in financial terms and where the business of business is to increase profits, artists are considered outsiders. Although a few stars achieve global fame, capturing our collective imagination, in the main, artists live in obscurity and seem to contribute little to economic prosperity. What, though, if that world was turned on its head and artists were considered as central to our wellbeing? In this paper, I explore this possibility, recruiting Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943) as both guide and partner in this quest, noting in particular his recovery from depression after the first performance of his Symphony No. 1 in D minor, Op 13, as we collectively seek to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic.

COVID-19 has imposed a time of self-reflection, giving us an opportunity to imagine the kind of world we want to inhabit. Although we can return to life as we know it, the pandemic also offers the gift of time and space to reflect and change course. Questions about the future revolve around the financial survival of families and businesses, with economic considerations driving discussions. What, though, of the arts?

Assessing the place of artists in society has become a compelling agenda during and post the COVID-19 pandemic. Community shutdowns across the globe placed an unwelcome full stop on public activities of all kinds. The arts sector suffered as much, if not more, than others because artists already work under tight financial constraints. The prospect of no work for several years sent shockwaves through the industry, and this occurred in most jurisdictions. For example, Caust² notes that in her Australian experience, even though the arts are central to collective well-being and identity, the federal government was unable or unwilling to support the sector already suffering from inadequate investment during COVID-19. Notwithstanding this paucity, Lee *et al.*³ observed that across the globe, disabled artists found ways of using digital platforms to express their creativity, while Bell⁴ explored how musicians used enforced isolation to experiment on digital platforms. Jacobs *et al.*⁵ go further and advocate for a social revolution in a post-pandemic world, led by artists.

Fomenting revolution is a major agenda, and in straightened times, when money is tight, the arts take a back seat. This is especially the case with live performances, where, notwithstanding the health risks of large crowds gathering in enclosed spaces, funds from audience members barely cover costs. In the case of symphony orchestras, funding can be divided into three roughly equal segments: local and State governments, sponsorships and donations, and box office receipts. Although during lockdowns across the globe, many orchestras live-streamed concerts, some without charge,⁶ the lack of paying public placed these companies at risk.

Given the sum of economic factors and the limited discretionary money available to families, are the arts in general, and live music performances in particular, necessary? Can they be kept in the shadows until prosperity returns and societies are on a more stable financial footing?

2. The foundational role of the arts

Taking the gift of time and space that the pandemic offered, we might rethink the place of the arts in the new post-COVID-19 world, we choose to create. Rather than being optional, frivolous add-ons to busy lives, the arts are crucial to our collective sense of well-being, and this

became most obvious when art galleries were closed and live performances were canceled.

Convery⁷ reported a sense of frustration at not being able to attend the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra's canceled concert featuring Rimsky-Korsakov's *Scheherazade* in March 2020. She also reported being deeply affected as she watched the live-streamed performance, noting the "moment of beauty and relief [offered] to anyone who needed it." Convery's testimonial reflects the sense of loss we feel when art is removed and the ability of artists to fill that gap by available means.

The COVID-19 pandemic has affirmed the centrality of the arts in human affairs. To be sure, this is not a new discovery; they have always been focal, despite preoccupations with financial concerns. Several historical events confirm this stance.

Young,⁸ in his movie *The Art of Recovery*, explores the role artists played in reviving a barren landscape after the 2011 disastrous earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand. Citizens found ways to sing, dance, make visual art, and grow vegetables amidst the destruction. These activities became essential morale boosters and provided the social glue necessary to ensure community solidarity when all else was uncertain.

A further example of the sense of consolation that the arts bring is in Ernst Gordon's⁹ first-hand account of working as a prisoner of war on the infamous Death Railway from Burma to Thailand during World War II. The story that Gordon recounts is of men exhausted from marching, suffering from dysentery and starvation, looking forward to their ration of rice. A makeshift orchestra was playing Schubert's Unfinished Symphony, and as they heard the sounds, they stopped and sat down to listen. "The rice could wait," Gordon wrote. He summed up the extraordinary experience:

"While they listened, their faces came to life. When the music had ended, they rose reluctantly, one by one. I heard a little skeleton of a man say to his companion with feeling, 'God, that was lovely – bloody lovely!'" (p. 143)⁹

Himself a prisoner, Gordon understood the importance of this encounter music amidst death and squalor. He reflected that "there are two kinds of food – one for the body and one for the soul," noting that the "latter is more satisfying." (p. 143)⁹

It is not surprising, then, that when communities shut down during the COVID-19 pandemic, people turned to internet streaming services to access music performances. Denk *et al.*¹⁰ explored live and streamed music performances in the German context before and

during the pandemic. Their data showed a surprising preference for premium services provided by platforms such as Spotify, Apple Music, and Amazon Music (p. 17)¹⁰ over free offerings. People were prepared to pay for this essential service!

The digital age in which we live provided an unforeseen opportunity for artists to collaborate and communicate in innovative ways. For example, Reason¹¹ reported growth in online engagement, a factor especially salient for disabled people. He noted that software applications like Creative Doodle Book helped broker creative expression helped both to manage the immediate crisis from imposed lockdown and to discover new ways of interacting within these constraints.

The Artwork Archive¹² website noted paradoxically that “social distancing actually forced us to get closer, virtually,” while Drake *et al.*¹³ observed that people gravitated to the arts, particularly listening to music, as a way of coping with the emotional stressors during the pandemic. Of all the arts available, Bradbury *et al.*¹⁴ reported that listening to music was a crucial factor in dealing with the emotional rollercoaster of the pandemic.

The arts console, but they also cajole. Beyond the solace that they bring, the arts also have an important political function, playing a necessary part in alerting society to key problems and prescribing possible solutions. Theall¹⁵ makes this assessment in his summations of Marshall McLuhan’s influence as a communicator. McLuhan, Theall described, habitually made sense of popular memes by reframing them. He notes,

“[McLuhan’s] poetic ability that allowed him to appropriate phrases from others, such as the term linearity from Dorothy Lee, and turn them into his own multi-faceted probes or to convert Ezra Pound’s aphorism ‘Artists are the antennae of the race’ (Pound n.d., 81) into his description of the poet as an ‘early warning system,’ alluding to the then-topical Dew Line that used radar to provide early alerts of air or missile attacks.” (p. 29)¹⁵

Such claims place artists at the center of our world, relocated from galleries, museums, and concert chambers to town squares and piazzas, rehabilitated from the margins to the warp and woof of political, social, and business affairs. Unlike business leaders, whom McLuhan assessed as planning through a rear-view mirror, artists warn and advise, scoping possibilities for life ahead.

If the arts are so necessary for personal and social well-being and provide cues for change, perhaps they should be center stage of the world we choose to create. Ibbotson¹⁶ goes further, arguing that artists should rule the

world. This is not because artists are superior characters but rather because they understand the process. He writes, “the arts represent a body of knowledge that is profoundly useful to society, not only in the content of finished works but also in the skills, practices, and disciplines of artists themselves.” (p. 129) Notwithstanding the totalitarian gesture of Ibbotson’s claim and one which artists would reject, he reveals an important step in how we might remake our world. As artists move from the fringes and work in community with businesses and other social groups, together, we can remake our world in an egalitarian spirit of shared inquiry and action.

Artists carry a heavy burden, and such an agenda assumes that artists are themselves emotionally well, as Whitley *et al.*¹⁷ argue. This strikes at the heart of this paper’s purpose of seeking an exemplar who may be both a guide and partner in recrafting our world. Other artists have trudged a weary path through disillusionment, depression, and hardship, emerging to become significant voices for others to gain inspiration and encouragement. Russian composer and performer Sergei Rachmaninoff (1873 – 1943) is an example of a man who suffered a failure, a debilitating mental health breakdown, and recovery to become the most well-known pianist of his generation. Rachmaninoff is a useful model due to the many struggles and privations he experienced throughout his life. Learnings from his story can help us chart a course ahead at this time.

Sergei Rachmaninoff’s early professional life as a composer was prolific until the first performance of Symphony No. 1 in D minor, Op 13, which he completed in 1895 as a 22 years old and which was first performed in St Petersburg on March 28, 1897. Lasting for almost 1 h, writing it and then preparing for its first performance was a major undertaking, and it was Rachmaninoff’s first foray into the daunting world of symphonic writing, requiring a deft touch in handling the large variety of hues and colors of the late Romantic orchestra. Success in this medium could enable him to make his mark as a composer of repute.

What began with such promise turned out to be a disaster, the orchestra was poorly prepared by the conductor for its premiere, and the performance was riddled with mistakes. As a result, it was panned by the critics, sending Rachmaninoff into a potentially career-ending slump. This failure, depression, and recovery is the story of an artist who learned to make bold music statements along with the necessary skills to deal with the harsh world of organizational politics with its patch-protections and petty jealousies.

Rachmaninoff is also an apt exemplar for this study because he worked his way through his crisis of confidence, made peace with his multiple motivations, and found a

way of making his unique contribution to humanity. His is a story of a man who worked hard to achieve a high level of personal skill, of discovering the necessary diplomatic skills to deal with ornery colleagues, and of reconciling himself to his personal circumstances to lead a satisfying life as a teacher, composer, and performer. Through an archaeology of Rachmaninoff's sense of failure, there are lessons that artists today can learn and, in turn, lead society toward wellness in the post-pandemic environment.

3. Anatomy of failure and success

Rachmaninoff is exemplary in the way he handled near-career-ending failure and his process of recovery. His is an important story due to his ability to marshal internal resources while drawing on support from mentors to become an artist whose works resonate with audiences today. He is both the consoler and antennae of our race.

The first symphony carries many of the harmonic and tonal features that became hallmarks of Rachmaninoff's mature style. In this symphony, he finds his voice, making bold declamations, stretching the orchestral resources, and placing advanced technical demands on all musicians. It builds on, and indeed breaks with the works of his role model, Tchaikovsky¹⁸, and gives hints to the classical traditions championed by Beethoven. Yet the first performance was a disaster, causing Rachmaninoff to retreat into himself. For 2 years, Rachmaninoff suffered from what we might today call "writer's block."

What should have been a celebration of this young man's creativity, the performance of the first symphony, instead became the target of scorn. The notable and somewhat caustic critic of the day, César Cui, wrote:

"If there is a Conservatory in Hell, and one of the gifted pupils should be given the problem of writing a programmatic symphony on the Seven Plagues of Egypt, and if he should write a symphony resembling Mr. Rachmaninoff's symphony – his problem would have been carried out brilliantly, and he would enchant all the inmates of Hell." (p. 71–72)¹⁹

Such a crushing assessment, on top of the unexpected deaths of his mentor Tchaikovsky and teacher Zverev, sent Rachmaninoff into paralyzing depression. A profound apathy descended on Rachmaninoff, rendering him unable to compose forcing him to seek therapeutic help. Regular sessions of hypnotherapy with Dr. Nikolay Dahl and teaching and conducting contracts gave Rachmaninoff the impetus to return to composing. As a direct result of Dahl's interventions, which included simple repetitions of the intention to write music again, he began composing his second piano concerto, completing the first two

movements in 1900, with a first performance of the entire work in 1901. Rachmaninoff had expressed to Dahl his desire to write another piano concerto, recollecting:

"Dahl had asked what manner of composition they desired and had received the answer, 'A Concerto for pianoforte,' for this I had promised to the people in London and had given it up in despair. Consequently, I heard the same hypnotic formula repeated day after day while I lay half asleep in an armchair in Dahl's study. 'You will begin to write your Concerto... You will work with great facility... The Concerto will be of an excellent quality...' It was always the same, without interruption. Although it may sound incredible, this cure really helped me." (p. 112)²⁰

The treatment was so effective that Rachmaninoff began to feel the once familiar creative urges reawakening within him. He reported that "the material grew in bulk, and new musical ideas began to stir within me," (p. 112)²⁰ writing what is perhaps one of his most popular works today – his second piano concerto. It is not surprising that Rachmaninoff dedicated the concerto to Dahl and his interventions.

This raises several questions about how people develop resources to cope with crises while at the same time keeping faith with their life purpose. Certainly, Rachmaninoff formed a visceral and abiding distaste for his first symphony, which developed when attending rehearsals, and on hearing the first performance while hiding on the fire escape outside the St Petersburg theater. He had poured himself into this work, focusing solely on completing it at the expense of other projects, and he had, perhaps mistakenly, decided that public reaction to its first performance would confirm for him his life's direction. One of Rachmaninoff's composition teachers at the Moscow Conservatory, Sergei Ivanovich Taneyev, had seen the almost finished score and, although he was aware of "several instances of harmonic pretentiousness," he considered the work was "unquestionably a talented one." (p. 70)¹⁹ This affirmation had spurred Rachmaninoff on, giving him the impetus to complete it.

But what began as a ground-breaking creative work became a source of horror to the point where Rachmaninoff refused to have it performed again during his lifetime, and in his will, he requested that manuscripts be destroyed. Indeed, it only exists now in the orchestral repertoire because the individual instrumental parts survived his executor's furnace.

For sure, Rachmaninoff had considerable self-belief in the symphony when the written score was complete. While he recognized there were some compositional failings, he also thought that it was the performance of it was

inadequate. He wrote to his friend Zatayevich: “either, like some composers, I am unduly partial to this composition, or this composition was poorly performed. And this is what really happened.” (p. 73)¹⁹ This blunt personal assessment provides the raw materials which might guide artists today; namely, to maintain a healthy separation from the composition and an ability to deal graciously with those who will perform the work.

Perhaps he was too vested in his composition to have any sense of objective assessment of it. Moreover, this is not surprising because creative works must necessarily come from intense and prolonged concentrated effort. However, there were signs in the work that could have accounted for Rachmaninoff’s sense of failure. There is no doubt that it formed a turning point and set Rachmaninoff on a path of performer rather than composer. As Findeisen, a more generous music critic of the time, wrote:

“Rachmaninoff’s symphony is the product of a composer who has not yet fully found himself. At this point, he could become either a musical crackpot or Brahms.” (p. 72)¹⁹

What he did to “find himself” and recruit the resources necessary to keep his career alive is the focus of what follows. To explore this, several issues are salient, namely, the role of mentors, the risks of making bold statements, and how to move beyond a profound and debilitating sense of failure.

4. Mentors

While art-making relies to some degree on individual talent, creativity is nurtured in the community. Indeed, as Sampson²¹ argues, although the individual self is formed and functions independent from society, “individuals are [also] constituted by their communities.” (p. 919) Herein is the paradox of the artist: freedom to experiment alone with ideas is enhanced by peers, supporters, and those who differ. Creativity is both an individual and communal pursuit.

Johansson²² presents a compelling case for this creativity paradox. Drawing on the image of the Florentine House of Medici in 15th-century Italy, the Medici name symbolizes the burst of innovation that occurs when people of difference work together. Johansson writes of this as intersectional thinking, as ideas traverse beyond discipline boundaries to welcome sometimes contradictory insights.

As the developing artist tries out different processes and practices, mentors help by supporting expressions of what Ibarra²³ calls the “provisional self,” identities that begin as “makeshift, until they have been rehearsed and refined with experience.” (p. 767) In the process of developing a distinctive artistic practice, mentors support

by offering advice and by helping create space for these experimentations to occur.²⁴ That means that mentors play a significant role in affirming, pushing, critiquing, and supporting artists as they take tentative steps toward their formation.

Mentoring differs from the college or tertiary training environment, where instructors expose students to a wide range of ideas and competencies, involving them in “taster” activities that allow the student to find their unique pathways. Where education is general, and educationalists explore many diverse areas with students, mentors fulfill a support role within the world where the protégé is functioning.²⁵ Mentors work in specific areas of competence, and although the relationship is significant and important, contact is perhaps much less than with teachers from the past.

With the support of his mentors, Rachmaninoff took the risk that all artists must take to make his work public. As Maisel²⁶ advises, artists must have a degree of confidence in their work when they expose it to the public, and their sense of self-belief “safeguards [them] from the dangers of receiving [harsh] responses.” (p. 215) Mentors strengthen this necessary self-assurance, for without it, artists lack the ego strength to combat inner doubt and outer naysayers.

A mentor prompts and even goads from the wings off-stage, providing political skills necessary to survive, all the while helping their protégé avoid the traps of an arrogant self-belief. They offer “privileged information [that] is provided only to the chosen ‘insiders’ and withheld from the ‘outsiders,’” (p. 6)²⁷ grounding protégés in the political and cultural realities of their world, beyond the somewhat idealistic training received from educational institutions.

Rachmaninoff’s story demonstrates the important shift from the influence of the teacher, Zverev, in his case, to that of a mentor, Tchaikovsky. It was Zverev who imposed disciplines, and who gave him the necessary technical skills for him to make music his profession. However, their relationship became fractious, and eventually, Rachmaninoff renounced his tutelage and, in 1889, left Zverev’s house, moving in with a fellow student. They eventually reconciled and 1892 when Zverev acknowledged that Rachmaninoff, indeed, was an excellent composer.

Tchaikovsky, on the other hand, encouraged Rachmaninoff to continue to stretch his compositional boundaries, even though Tchaikovsky was not particularly pleased with Rachmaninoff’s early work. For example, in 1890, Rachmaninoff had accepted a commission to transcribe Tchaikovsky’s *The Sleeping Beauty* for piano, yet Tchaikovsky was appalled at Rachmaninoff’s “unimaginative efforts.” (p. 8)²⁸ The young composer wrote

to his friend Natalya Skalon, “Tchaikovsky criticizes me terribly for the transcription, quite reasonably and justly. Of all transcriptions, mine is undoubtedly the worst.” (p. 8)²⁸ Tchaikovsky had written of his profound disappointment at Rachmaninoff’s transcription, declaring, “In general, inexperience and lack of boldness can be sensed at every step.” (p. 35)¹⁹ Later revisions appeased Tchaikovsky, and yet, interestingly, Rachmaninoff was not crushed by this brutal assessment of his mentor.

Tchaikovsky taught Rachmaninoff important diplomatic skills, especially when speaking to conductors. A composer can be sensitive about their work, and equally, a conductor, when preparing that work for performance, may be defensive about his or her role as artist-in-chief. In 1893, the two composers, Tchaikovsky and Rachmaninoff, attended rehearsals of *Aleko*, which was to be performed at the Moscow Grand Theater under the baton of Ippolit Altani. Rachmaninoff recalled:

“I cannot describe how thrilled I was at the orchestral sound of my own music. I was in the seventh heaven. Tchaikovsky attended the last three rehearsals. We sat together in a corner of the darkened house. Altani’s conception of some parts did not please me. I remember the following dialogue between Tchaikovsky and myself:

Tchaikovsky: ‘Do you like this tempo?’

Myself: ‘No.’

Tchaikovsky: ‘Why don’t you tell them?’

Myself: ‘I am afraid.’

However, Tchaikovsky could not stand it for long, and during an interval, he cleared his throat and said: ‘Mr. Rachmaninoff and I think that the tempo here might be taken a little quicker.’

He was always scrupulously polite in making such suggestions.” (p. 86–87)²⁰

Further, Rachmaninoff reported how much he valued Tchaikovsky’s affirmation. In 1893, his opera *Aleko* was to be performed. Remembering back on that period, Rachmaninoff wrote:

“I think success depended not so much on the quality of the opera as much as on Tchaikovsky’s attitude toward it, for he liked it very much. By the way, at one of the rehearsals, Tchaikovsky said to me, ‘I have just finished a two-act [sic] opera *Iolanta*, which is not long enough to take up a whole evening. Would you object to its being performed with your opera?’ He literally said: ‘Would you object...?’ He was 53, a famous composer, but I was a novice of 20! Tchaikovsky, of course, attended the premiere of *Aleko*, and at his insistence, the director of the Imperial Theaters Vsevolozhsky came from St Petersburg. At the end

of the opera, Tchaikovsky, leaning out of the box, applauded with all his might, realizing how this would help a new composer.” (p. 18)²⁸

What clues, then, does Rachmaninoff’s relationship with Tchaikovsky offer about how artists receive support early on in their careers? Mentors are not necessarily enamored of their protégé. There are times when mentors call their mentees to account and challenge some of their prevailing logic. Thus, this relationship must be marked by high levels of trust,²⁹ for without this underpinning, those stark realities may inhibit rather than encourage. Further, an environment of reciprocity is established where both parties give and receive.³⁰ The mentoring relationship, then, is one that is fecund and can be mutually supportive and productive for both parties.

This was the case with another of Rachmaninoff’s mentors, Rimsky-Korsakov. The young musician had studied Rimsky-Korsakov’s compositions and had even contemplated leaving Moscow and returning to St Petersburg to study with him. Rimsky-Korsakov had taken an interest in Rachmaninoff’s career and attended rehearsals of the first symphony. His assessment, though diplomatic, was blunt. As Rachmaninoff later wrote:

“The work made a very bad impression on the St Petersburg musicians who were present. ‘Forgive me, but I do not find this music at all agreeable,’ said Rimsky-Korsakov to me in his dry and unsparing manner at a rehearsal.” (p. 98)²⁰

Yet, as Garcia³¹ records, Rachmaninoff was able to “shake off his former prejudices and become rather close friends with Rimsky-Korsakov.” (p. 22) This change in attitude represented a new openness on Rachmaninoff’s part, in that he set aside “all my Muscovite prejudice against the great St Petersburg composer” (p. 127);³¹ an openness that is a necessary forerunner to becoming a successful artist.

Rachmaninoff did not have such a productive relationship with Galzunov, however. In 1896, the music publisher Mitrofan Belyayev had agreed to a performance of the first symphony, and because Galzunov had conducted a performance of *The Rock* in that year, Rachmaninoff wrote to him requesting that he conduct the symphony at the proposed 1897 Russian Symphony Concert funded by Belyayev. Galzunov agreed but was cavalier in his attitude. Rachmaninoff was rightly aggrieved. Galzunov was “drunk on the podium” (p. 23)²⁸ and in a letter to his composer friend, Alexander Zatayevich, some 5 weeks after the performance, complained,

“I am amazed how such a highly talented man as Glazunov can conduct so badly. I am not speaking now of his conducting technique (one cannot ask that

of him) but about his musicianship. He feels nothing when he conducts. It is as if he understands nothing.” (p. 23)²⁸

Certainly, Rachmaninoff had approached Glazunov in good faith, expecting that the conductor would give his best in preparing the orchestra for the first performance. What, then, would account for Glazunov’s apparent dismissal of the symphony? Was it professional jealousy? Or was Glazunov trying to communicate something to Rachmaninoff, although in a very clumsy and inappropriate manner? Here is evidence that it can all go horribly wrong when mentors are too “frank and willing to challenge,” (p. 95)³² and unable to couch their criticisms in a constructive manner.

Perhaps Glazunov understood only too well Rachmaninoff’s compositional intentions and considered it an impoverished work from the outset. Although this is mere speculation, there are clues within the music itself that could explain Glazunov’s lack of enthusiasm for the symphony. There is evidence within the symphony that Rachmaninoff was prepared to take risks with his orchestration and tonalities, but perhaps they were ill-considered.

5. Risk-taking and its limits

The first symphony came on the back of a fertile period for Rachmaninoff. In 1892, he received the highest accolade for composition in his final year at the Moscow Conservatoire, the much-coveted Great Gold Medal for his one-act opera *Aleko*. He, then, went on and wrote a fantasy for two pianos, an orchestral fantasy, *The Rock*, inspired by Chekhov’s short story *Na puti* (On the Way), and several other works. His fecundity was even noted by Tchaikovsky, who said:

“Well, Sergei, what do I hear? You have already started to write ‘masterpieces’! Congratulations, congratulations! [Then], he wrung his hands in mock despair and exclaimed: ‘And I, miserable wretch, have only written one Symphony!’ He was referring to the ‘Pathétique’ his last composition.” (p. 20)³¹

However, Rachmaninoff had yet to write something on the scale of a symphony. Thus, when he embarked on his first foray into this grand world, it was a bold step in his career at such an early age.

The symphony is set in D Minor and begins with a dramatic declamation. It opens with a three-note flourish in the woodwind section, then a unison note, D, played by the woodwinds and brass, followed by a descending melody, again in unison, played by the strings with the instruction that they play all the notes with down bows, thus making

for a heavy texture. The tempo marking is slow, *Grave*, with the instruction to play an extremely loud *fff*.

This is not a subtle suggestion of ideas but rather a bold statement of intent. Conductors would instruct the musicians to play *molto vibrato* to cover for the intonation difficulties of unison playing and to produce a rich romantic sound. An orchestra not on its metal could easily produce an irritating scratchy sound, making Rachmaninoff seem more like a rabble-rouser than an artiste.

The figure that opens the symphony is retained by Rachmaninoff through all four movements. While changes in orchestral timbre and dynamics allow it to be refreshed, there is little development of this central idea. Whereas Beethoven would take a small figure, like the “Fate Motif” of the 5th Symphony,³³ and work it thoroughly from its initial statement, Rachmaninoff seemed unable to give any further life to this opening statement.

Rachmaninoff became overcommitted to a single idea, something that artists (and business leaders) need to be wary of. While a new concept might emerge that might be innovative and intriguing, if that idea does not develop and morph over time, its inherent potential can be thwarted. Over-commitment can blind us to alternative conceptions.

The coda of the last movement finishes the symphony as it began, with the entire orchestra in full voice playing *fff*. Rachmaninoff demonstrates his facility with the Western harmonic tradition and two great forces within the orchestra working against each other in contrary motion with a rising bass and descending upper line. In Western music, parallel lines are considered “weak,” whereas contrary motion is a concept drilled into composition students from the outset of their studies due to the perceived strength of these opposing forces.

Like at the opening of the symphony, there is nothing subtle here. The crossing lines conclude with a loud clash of the gong, reminiscent of Tchaikovsky’s second symphony (*The Little Russian* [1872]). Tchaikovsky, in his second symphony, toward the end of the final movement, increases the dramatic intensity, bringing the work to a complete halt with loud-sounding chords in the brass and woodwind, culminating with one strike of the gong followed by a pause (measures 647 – 651). This draws the listeners’ attention to the richness of the gong’s tonalities, and Tchaikovsky gives time for its impact to be heard. It is a subtle statement, and by pausing, Tchaikovsky allows the gong to enhance the richness of the texture. The work then picks up again at full speed, concluding with a coda.

Where Tchaikovsky uses the gong as a condiment, adding a little seasoning, Rachmaninoff over-spices the dish. Where our appetite may have been satiated with one

strike from the instrument, he adds further strikes at the beginning of each chord as if to reinforce that the end is coming. Where listeners might enjoy sonic subtleties, the effect Rachmaninoff achieves is bloating. What may have seemed like a good idea during the conceptualization of the work becomes a distraction in its realization. For Tchaikovsky, the gong is a comma in the musical line, whereas for Rachmaninoff, it is a repeated exclamation mark!

It is in these final chords that Rachmaninoff ultimately loses his courage. He finishes the work on 11 repeated D notes prepared by a semi-tone figure C[#]-D-E^b-D-B. However, instead of leaving us with the tonal mysteries and ambiguities inherent in this figure, he reconciles and resolves all questions with a final tripartite repetition of the tonic, dominant relationship D-A, thereby reinforcing a D tonality.

I think that, ultimately, it was this ending (Figure 1) that finally sent Rachmaninoff running out into the anonymity of the evening streets as he sought relief from his acute sense of failure.

6. After failure...falling forward

Success is a very poor tutor, and her influences are sometimes blinding;³² whereas failure, although painful at the time, is by far the better teacher. We so hate failure that we have all but eliminated the idea from our contemporary rhetoric. ‘Success’ is the mantra of business along with

“growth” and “efficiency;” it has become the purpose of business leaders. However, the hubris attached to notions of success inures us against the rich learning that failure can bring. As McGrath³⁴ observes about entrepreneurs learning their craft,

“One reason why failure offers benefits is because it is often easier to pinpoint why a failure has occurred than to explain a success, making failure analysis a powerful mechanism for resolving uncertainty.” (p. 28)³⁴

The learning for Rachmaninoff was in the power of suggestion. Overstatement can eventually cause listeners to disengage and ignore what they can come to perceive as a nagging voice. Rachmaninoff had to learn to open space, to leave blanks in his texts, and to invite perceivers to creatively invest in engaging with his work. Furthermore, Rachmaninoff was intent on separating himself from his mentor and father figure, Tchaikovsky, as Garcia³¹ claims and the repeated gong was a bold statement of his individuation. However, he failed to pull it off.

As a student, Rachmaninoff had learned intellectually how to deal with the orchestra’s sonorities; now, as a practitioner early in his career, he discovered esthetically the powerful resources that were under his command. Through his failure, he learned the power of understatement, and this is revealed in his second symphony of 1907.

Comparing the openings of both symphonies reveals considerable learning on Rachmaninoff’s part. Where in the first, he is bold and declamatory; in the second



Figure 1. The comparison of the closing page of Symphonies 1 and 2.

(E minor, Op. 27), the opening is muted and suggestive, beginning with a small breath-like figure in the cellos and basses.

Both are set at similar speeds, but in the first, his intention is to elevate the consciousness of the listener to the solemnity of the music with the *Grave* tempo and the repeated down strokes of the string instruments. The second symphony is set in *Largo*, which is suggestive of a less rigorous statement of intent. The slurring marks require the performers to group their notes in longbows, sustaining the energy throughout but very softly. Figure 2 compares the first pages of the two orchestral scores.

The codas of both symphonies are quite different, too. In the final movement of the second symphony, Rachmaninoff explores the “breath” motif by developing it, elongating and inverting it, deploying it throughout the orchestra texture but without overstating it. The final statements of the symphonies, then, reveal two quite different scenarios. Where the first symphony all but blasts the listener with the repeated triplet figure closing with two very loud and “forced” chords, the second symphony ends with the two outer lines moving in opposite directions in contrary motion – the bass and cello lines descending while the violins and woodwind ascend; a much more elegant and perhaps more dramatic closure.

Rachmaninoff’s failure taught him invaluable lessons, probably the most important being that as a performer or composer, it is all about the audience – the perceiving

public who responds to an artist’s promptings. No matter how gifted the musician or how talented the artist, the perceivers are those who concretize and bring the work into existence.

Rachmaninoff learned how to communicate his art effectively and elegantly. As a performer, recordings of his piano playing reveal a man who, according to Norris,³⁵ was one of the best pianists that has graced concert halls across the globe. Certainly, he was the finest pianist of his era in Russia. However, it was not only his advanced technique that singled him out; he also knew how to connect emotionally with audiences. In 1915, he was touring Russia, and in his first Moscow concert, during the interval, he was found by his writer and poet friend, Marietta Shaginyan, in a very dark mood. He exclaimed: “Didn’t you notice that I missed the point? Don’t you understand – I let the point slip!” (p. 195)¹⁹ The display of his advanced technique was not his purpose. He wanted to communicate with his audiences, and while he acknowledged that composers craft their music with a sense of climax, Rachmaninoff understood that the performer also must attend to the narrative arc of the music. Thus,

“On a later occasion, he explained that each piece he plays is shaped around its culminating point: the whole mass of sounds must be so measured, the depth and power of each sound must be given with such purity and gradation that this peak point is achieved with an appearance of the greatest naturalness, though actually, its accomplishment is the highest art. This



Figure 2. The comparison of the opening page of Symphonies 1 and 2.

moment must arrive with the sound and sparkle of a ribbon snapped at the end of a race – it must seem a liberation from the last material obstacle, the last barrier between truth and its expression.” (p. 195)¹⁹

Audience adulation was not his measure of success. Rather, it was that he had conveyed a sense of meaning and achieved an emotional connection with audiences through his performance. Here, he reveals an ability to reflect *in* and *on* his own practice,³⁶ and to make changes necessary to retain the integrity of his work. While he wanted to communicate profoundly to audiences, he was not swayed by their admiration, continually trying to refine his performance to meet his own expectations. Indeed, “At one of his concerts, while the audience was wild with enthusiasm, he was backstage tearing his hair because the point had slipped.” (p. 195)¹⁹

This despair was not debilitating, however. For, another result of the failure of his first symphony and the support he gained from his mentors throughout his early life meant that he had the inner resources necessary to reflect on his performance. Although knowing that he had not met his own expectations, he was still able to carry on without being incapacitated.

7. From dependence to independence

Rachmaninoff’s experiences of failure, depression, and recovery were important for his long-term professional career. The disaster of his first symphony was a crucible experience, which, as Bennis and Thomas³⁷ note, is transformative, providing the developing leader with an “adaptive capacity” (p. 45) born out of trauma. Rachmaninoff would not realize at the time the significance of his ability to come back from a potentially career-ending slump, and under normal circumstances, he would have been able to look forward to a long career as a composer and musician in his homeland. However, political events were to overtake him and his family with the onset of the Bolshevik revolution and the accompanying social upheavals in 1917. Finding himself on the wrong side of the political divide at the time, he rejected what he saw as the “vague Utopian illusions” of the revolutionaries and reported that:

“the anarchy around me, the brutal uprooting of all the foundations of art, the senseless destruction of all means for its encouragement, left no hope of a normal life in Russia. I tried in vain to find an escape from this ‘witches’ Sabbath for myself and my family.” (p. 185–186)²⁰

He left with his family for Sweden on December 24, 1917, never to return to his mother country. His life as an émigré would pose new challenges, and the resilience he had developed as a young man would provide him with the strategies necessary to protect his family.

Although he kept composing, it was to the concert platform as a pianist and conductor that he turned for his future success. At age 44, having lost his estates and financial resources in Russia and needing to re-establish his life, he essentially began his career again to secure the financial resources necessary to settle in his new country. He would no longer be the prolific composer that Tchaikovsky applauded some 20 years prior, but instead offered audiences deeply spiritual encounters. As one critic wrote after a 1932 concert, “the imperishable beauty of this music is added to the spiritual wealth of the world, solace, a joy to treasure always in grateful memory.” (p. 283)¹⁹

8. Rachmaninoff as post-pandemic guide and partner

As artists take a more central role, what of this world that we seek to create? Certainly, if we are to make a new world, we need to artistic imagination to envisage that world, says Burns.³⁸ If past pandemics are a guide, notably the Spanish Flu that swept the globe 1918 – 1920 is any guide, Monteiro³⁹ notes that new, provocative art forms are bound to emerge in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. For the performing arts, bringing subscribing audiences back to concert halls is proving a challenge,⁴⁰ but also presents an opportunity to educate and develop younger attendees, says Farber.

The National Arts Council of Singapore notes in their pandemic report⁴¹ that the arts are crucial in creating social action and raising awareness, for example, of the Black Lives Matter movement. The visual arts provide a vehicle for people to advocate for social change through ease of sharing, says the report, and this has been made easier through the growth of digital arts.

One of the unexpected impacts of the pandemic was the absence of motor vehicles on city streets. This had the effect of reducing carbon emissions but also of giving space for artists to reimagine city life without cars, as Camille Walala has done in her revision of a busy London street.⁴² Further, as Drymer⁴³ reports, galleries and museums have become more inclusive of alternative forms, including street and public art. This has the effect, she says, of keeping the “spirit of communal art alive” (p. 6) and of helping develop innovative solutions and social initiatives.

In the United States of America, the American Rescue Plan Act, signed by President Jo Biden in March 2021 to stimulate post-pandemic recovery, presented an open invitation to and funds for artists to collaborate with local developments. For example, Zabel⁴⁴ reports on artists’ involvement in the light rail transit construction in Minnesota, making local culture more visible. The presence of artists supports engineers as they work through design challenges by understanding the creative process.

Making the arts central to social and business activities in the post-pandemic world creates a virtuous circle where artists reflect on their practice, morphing and changing in the process,⁴⁵ while adding value to non-arts activities such as constructing roads, bridges, railways, and buildings. Fulfilling this agenda is a major undertaking, and Rachmaninoff provides resources for us to draw on to realize our ambitions.

Rachmaninoff died over 70 years ago; yet, his legacy lives on in concert halls around the globe. Any orchestra that performs the second or third piano concertos will guarantee full houses. In particular, the third piano concerto (D minor, Op. 30) makes demands on soloists that seem almost super-human, as shown in the epigraphs that open this paper. In this concerto, he demonstrated that he had recovered from the debilitating depression that nearly ended his composing career and went on to create a work of dazzling brilliance. This is not just due to the display of technical wizardry that a soloist may show on stage. Indeed, it is that the music itself offers a sense of consolation to audience members.

Rachmaninoff has made a profound contribution to humanity, and his ability to connect with us even beyond the grave through his compositions continues to stir our imaginations and move our hearts. His compositions are not radical harmonically or structurally, but they lead listeners to emotional encounters that are deeply felt. This ability to move people emotionally developed out of the rich collegial environment in which he grew up and his period of depression.

Artists do not work in isolation but in the community. Although Rachmaninoff possessed advanced talents, he learned his craft through long hours of practice and oftentimes severe supervision, and as he developed as a composer, those around him played an important role in his formation. His love affairs, seen in the dedication of his song Op 4, “Oh, no, I beg you, don’t forsake me” to “AL” Anna Lodyzhenskya, the Gypsy wife of Pyotr Lodyzhensky reveals “a hopeless infatuation,” (p. 65)¹⁹ a “passionate and powerful [nature] over which he struggled to maintain control throughout his life.” (p. 24)¹⁸

The professional friendships he developed and the mentors who worked with him were all crucial to his learning. These helped to navigate the treacherous politics of his world, skills that enabled him to live well in a new country while maintaining a lifelong emotional connection with the spirit of his homeland. In effect, Rachmaninoff learned to develop his own network of relationships and to “strategically navigate” (p. 389)⁴⁶ his way through the plethora of competing interests within those networks.

He learned very quickly that some people may be supportive and trustworthy, as were Dr Dahl and Rimsky-Korsakov. He also recognized that some men could not be trusted despite their talents and reputation, as with Glazunov.

Obstructive and jealous colleagues may potentially thwart our development as we seek to express the voice that we have developed over time. Therefore, it is important to figure out those who are trustworthy, those who seek us harm, and those whom we imagined may have been opposed to us but who were instead only trying to help. Recovering from the kind of devastating sense of failure that Rachmaninoff experienced cannot usually be done alone. It requires sympathetic and supportive companions who understand the impacts on confidence levels and who have the kinds of skills necessary to help us through the dark periods of crippling self-doubt.⁴⁷ Moreover, it requires courage on our part to seek help from mentors, especially when we feel a loss of face that comes with public failure.

Certainly, sustaining a career as an artist involves continuous struggle, and the temptation to settle for an easier way is ever-present. Yet, the inner drive to create continually nags and presses for attention. Rachmaninoff was not the prolific composer in his later years that he was in his youth. Yet, his compositions are still performed, and they continue to engage audiences. The 1996 movie *Shine* celebrates the profundity of his compositions and the extreme difficulties performers have in learning his works. David Helfgott’s story in that movie demonstrates the hues and complexities of Rachmaninoff’s life. They both suffered from a sense of failure, and both make sense of that failure in their own unique ways.

Rachmaninoff’s backstory to his celebrated works is in-and-of-itself interesting. However, his story has much to offer us today as we contemplate living in our post-pandemic world. We have choices to make.

There will be social, business, and political pressures to return to the past and to carry on as when we left off in January 2020. Yet, the pandemic has offered humanity a collective pause, time to reassess and reset how we want to live in the future.

Rachmaninoff may act as our guide as we tackle the residual mental and physical health issues that COVID-19 has brought in its wake. His treatment from Dr Dahl and mentoring from experienced seniors are examples of how we might recover. To be sure, we cannot recover alone, and as we recreate our communities, we can, together help share the burdens and joys of recovery.

Rachmaninoff’s works continue to inspire, entertain, challenge, and console, all features that reinforce the

importance of the arts in our post-COVID-19 world. As Ibbotson¹⁶ claims, “being an artist is a physical experience” (p. 129). Whether it is painted canvas, carved stone, or performed sound waves, art is physical, embodied in both the creator and perceiver.

Rachmaninoff also acts as a partner in our collective ambitions to create works that move people emotionally and physically. Such movement may not just come from pleasant art and often results from experiences of ugliness and dissonance. Artists are confronters who cajole, rebuke, and warn humanity, disturbing our comfortable ease with uncomfortable truths.

Making the connections between art and politics and acting as humanity’s antennae is difficult to achieve. A clue might be found in the opening sequence of Rachmaninoff’s second piano concerto (C minor, Op 18), the work he penned after his treatment with Dr Dahl. It stands out in the repertoire in that the piano begins before the orchestra.

The opening of the second piano concerto breaks with the tradition of the orchestra first establishing the themes, followed by the piano reiterating them. There were only several instances of this occurring before Rachmaninoff wrote the concerto. Beethoven began his 4th piano concerto (G major, Op 58) with the soloist playing the main theme with a radical twist. The piano begins in the home key and moves towards the dominant. The orchestra then plays the same theme, but in B major, a chromatic alteration that would have startled audiences.

Rachmaninoff’s soloist opens with increasingly dissonant chord clusters moving from very soft to very loud, based on the subdominant F minor. There is a hint of the dominant on the last note in the left hand of the 8th bar before the resolution to the tonic in bar 9 and the orchestra entry at bar 11. The opening is notable in several ways. First, it places big demands on the soloist to control the gradual increase of volume while clustering the chords. Second, Rachmaninoff shows the strength of his recovery by mimicking the most radical of all composers: Beethoven.

The opening of the second piano concerto is not in any way modest, and this places Rachmaninoff at the forefront of our need to reconstruct our world post-COVID-19. He demonstrates that it is possible to be radical and revolutionary without being destructive or nihilistic. We can remake our world and achieve lasting change through beauty.⁴⁸ However, this cannot be achieved by artists alone, and where beauty is the guiding objective, we can work together in a spirit of goodness and goodwill, processes with which artists are familiar. This is the leadership required and which artists offer to achieve community renewal.

Rachmaninoff, as guide and partner, therefore, offers both inspiration and instruction. The artist’s work is crucial as we conceive of a world that eschews measures of success based on growth and economic worth. His first symphony, though rarely performed, is masterful in its own way. He grew as a composer and performer from that first disastrous performance and is today a model of the artist’s central place in our post-pandemic world.

Acknowledgments

None.

Funding

None.

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

Author contributions

This is a single-authored article.

Ethics approval and consent to participate

Not applicable.

Consent for publication

Not applicable.

Availability of data

Not applicable.

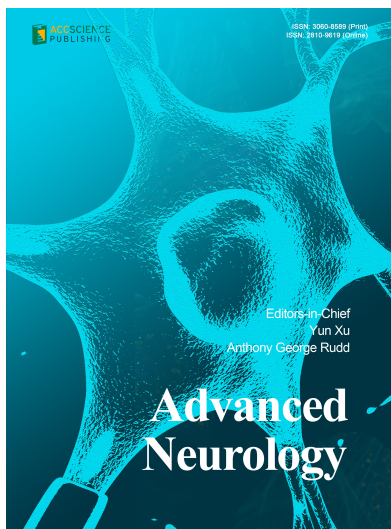
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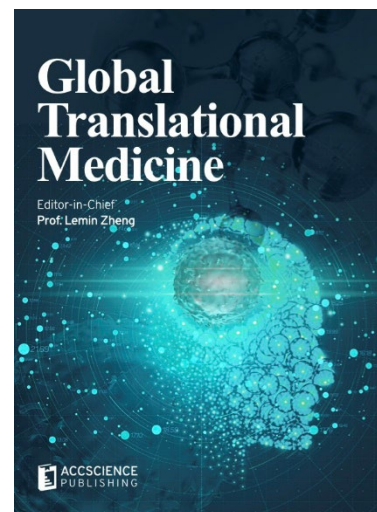
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