

ART WITHOUT FEAR OR THEME (Excerpt)

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At a certain point, I realized that I had become dissatisfied with the terms used in modern artistic discourse, based on the idea of progress and rooted in competitive and accusatory stances. Were we not losing the ultimate meaning of existence? What Walter Gropius (1883 – 1969) described as '...to seek and understand the deeper potentiality of life'¹. I asked myself why it should be that one who was attracted to dreams, for example, needed to oppose the validity of another who liked creating geometric structures; why one who was devoted to pantomime felt a duty to imply that painting had run its course and that only ephemeral actions were of any worth.

Looking back, I see how I rebelled against this competitive attitude and its no-holds-barred hostility to others, perpetuated by groups or individuals who systematically delegitimize any approach that does not fit in with their dictates. I understood that I was interested in an inclusive rather than an exclusive approach. Later, I found parallels to my practice in some ideas by Gregory Bateson (1904-1980) and his "Ecology of Mind" (1972). If I was attracted by the meditative moments of my sensitivity, precisely because I had engaged myself there, I saw that immediately afterwards I could be drawn instead to sounding the turmoil that coexists within my preconscious. Whereas I might be intensely moved by a self-referential aniconic gesture in a painting, the very next day I could be equally touched by a recognizably iconic image, precisely because it interacted with the former. Such discoveries led me to understand that it would be quite unlikely for me to rest on my laurels, complacently repeating a sterile repertoire. Using doubt as a fundamental resource, I keep myself on my toes.

To carry such intuitions through, I realized my artistic practice could be divided into three distinct phases. An initial analytical phase lists the starting premises for any project on which I intend to embark. This becomes a platform prompting the second phase, where I launch intuitively into the creation of something. The third phase consists of a descriptive observation of work done, an analytical response to the first phase. It is important for me not to become weighed down by judgements in this third phase; I

¹ Walter Gropius 'The Scope of Total Architecture' 1953. *'Diversity is, after all, the very source of democracy. But factors of expediency like high-pressure salesmanship, organizational oversimplification and moneymaking as an end in itself have surely impaired the individual's capacity to seek and understand the deeper potentiality of life'*.

need to be concerned with description alone. Judgement in art is a deeply unsettled issue in my opinion. In the past, every society provided standards for judgement based on widely accepted beliefs within that society. Today, however, as art is not founded on collective conventions, no guidelines of any sort are available.

These three phases are certainly nothing new: they can be identified, more or less, in artistic processes down through the history of art. However, while in pre-modern times, there were fundamentals that were shared by the members of each society, premises on which artistic practices could be based, these no longer exist today because art is not focused on commonly agreed objectives. Whether in the animist, Buddhist or Christian age, the analytical phase was provided by the very society in which the artist operated. Even when undertaking the second phase, the methodological tools used in intuitive flights were corroborated by the community, and in the third phase judgement was no mere description resulting in today's autonomous individual opinions, it was based on coordinates supported by prior consensus.

The models on offer today are usually well-reasoned opinions, based, however, on foundations that lack general accord. Still, we believe that we can somehow recognise quality when we see it, more or less. We know we cannot rely on the criteria presented, they are untrustworthy because they lack consensus; nevertheless, we judge, confiding in our simple individual intuition, backing it up with temporary support from a few acquaintances. We oppose unjustifiable orthodoxies by sustaining personal taste. Philosophers have written a lot about these issues, but I do not remember ever reading any adequate answers. It is better to trust the uncertain flows of artistic doing than arguments which convey the illusion of certainty but turn out to be sterile. As far as I am concerned, I prefer issues related to free will than those related to rules. Between the two illnesses – an obsessive psychosis that strives to perfect definitive conclusions and ultimately produces paralysis, due to the impossibility of following them through, and a schizoid neurosis that tends to seek a growing multiplicity of options and ends up paralysed because of the inability to select the best – I prefer the latter. However, I do hope not to fall victim of either. Putting my faith in an articulated structure like *The Inventory Game*, I hope to avoid both of these prisons into which so many artists fall.

Around 1965, to put these observations into practice, I invented a grid listing the elements that could be mixed together in the artworks I make, something like Mendeleieff's table. I called it *The Inventory Game*. But, whereas Mendeleieff numbered a closed list of the objective elements of nature, as art lacks objectivity, I felt

free to include anything in my inventory. Almost haphazardly, I shoved all sorts of things into it, every sort of idea, technique and material, even absurd ones, whatever happened to come into sight. My interest was not so much in the actual ingredients themselves, as in the idea that the artwork might be created and viewed in a context of the most varied ecology of artistic research – in hindsight I define it as such – and not in the shadow of restrictive theories. The artwork is a cocktail of ingredients. I had moved from authoritarian generalizations such as personal style, novelty or product recognizability, to a manner of conceiving art which I realized was, following William James, truly pluralistic and egalitarian.

The Inventory Game obliges one not to fall into routine, not to take any guarantee of artistic practice for granted. Instead, each time and in each specific project, we must demonstrate the maximum intellectual and emotional commitment, from the micro to the macro level, from a single nail to an entire building, a region, a planet. It compels us be aware of every moment of the creative process. It is not that sort of pedantic awareness which is gratified by merely cataloguing the contents and forms used, it is a concentrated raising of consciousness of ourselves, of culture, of nature, relentlessly fresh, profound and curious, onto which passion can be grafted and also all the various ideas implied therein. *The Inventory Game* is my philosopher's stone, allowing me to translate and transform with open coherence. It recalls Giulio Camillo's *Theatre of Memory*. The difference between those ancient instruments and my *Game* lies in the fact that while they were aimed at a precise objective, mine is unfettered, its paradigm is the absence of a paradigm and it is aimed at something elusive, which has not been defined by any consensus and is in continuous evolution. Trusting in intuitive acts, each time I hope to achieve the elusive through my art, that which cannot be explained with words, though I know well it is unreachable.

I have been accused of solipsism, but I think that critical focus on my personal universe cannot but include my relationship with society. It is absurd to believe that the individual practice of my art does not reflect collective factors encountered in the cultural community. Understanding of the world passes through the awareness of the self. In parallel, my spectators are invited to project their universe into my works rather than try to understand mine. I am also accused of the risk that the *Game* could provide opportunities for malicious applications. My answer is that it is an instrument, and as such it cannot be blamed for the manner in which artists use it. We need to realize that a sickle may be used both to reap wheat that will provide bread, and to kill.

The Inventory Game was conceived as a secular model to demystify orthodoxies and false myths. It is a tool that nourishes a critical and creative receptiveness rooted in reality.

The *Game's* implications are too numerous to list here, but it is worth while examining a little more in depth a few that come to mind. Except for purely discursive reasons, artworks are no longer distinguished according to classes such as painting, sculpture, drawing, performance, installation, figurative or abstract etc. where the implication would be that each one is subject to given rules: instead they are called situations. Each situation is a cocktail composed (com-posed indeed means to put together, to combine) of the ingredients that were mixed together when it was made. Different dosages of ingredients produce different situations, even when the ingredients are the same. The ingredients and their combinations come with their specific histories, but this is not a restriction for us as it was in the past, because we no longer have a commonly-held agreement on the objective of art. It is now infinitely open in the artist's intention and in the spectator's interpretation. It is also worth noting that the creative and critical artist uses the analytical phase merely as a point of departure and does not necessarily feel obliged to stick with his/her first choice of ingredients. In the process of doing, these can weaken, even disappear completely, or be transformed or substituted by other ingredients.

Through *The Inventory Game*, I understood that caution would hold me back, that analysis gives me a base to start from but does not guarantee anything, that starting out from it I need to take risks fearlessly and to have faith in the impulse that occurs to me, because that impulse is inevitably a stratified reflection, rooted in the moment in which it occurs, both of me and of my culture. Furthermore, I have also understood that to commit myself to one specific, preordained theme would reduce the discoveries that await me at the threshold of doing.

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floating	small	contraction	wind	disruption	sleep	removal	wood	chance
time interval	close color values	exotic	stationary	audience participation	close up	utilitarian	one and unique	grid
folding	availability	pattern	progression	containers	symbol	free hand	brick	loud
free hands		deceleration	high contrast	shooting pouring	relief	stone	wire	reflection
transmission	shoes	paper	relocate	translation	interference	texture	nostalgia	felt
long duration	improvising canvas	wall	popularizing	personal memories	color on surface	imitation	metal	addition
Receiver's movements	video	peripheral falling	directed by touch	ripping	public	diagonal	sex	low contrast
	big	liquid	smell	sleeping	geometric	dislocate	force of gravity	grouping
automotive	gas	political comment	masonite	transformation	flat hot	hand-made	illusionistic	wire
expansion	cold	thickness	disintegration	pills	mathematical	opaque	cut	erotic
directed to: taste sight	static face	substitution utopian	machine-made	bullets horizontal	glue steel		pollen	rhythm allusive
hearing	programming	intesection	parallel	absorbent	words private	photography	skin	series
fantastic	grease	camouflage	electric	wings soil	centralized	laser	symmetry	narrative
fine	weaving	acceleration	tactility	generic	moving	sentence	sunset	satiric
		newsprint	Randomness	vegetal			speed	
decentralized	dust	organic	shiny	numerals	clothes	mirror	sand	thread
microscopic	dull color	conversion	down	to be walked around of	vertical	slow	collaboration	doll
still water	candy	transparent	measure	mass produced	scattered	free hand	arrow	feet
	blood	scrapping	Recognizable		tear	feather	tea	imprint

Inventory Game Redux

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