

Arts and Thought: a Round-trip Ticket*

lecture by

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An experience like the IP project features all the premises of being pleasant and multifaceted. A time not only to work and learn, but also to laugh, chat, make friends, is supposed to be a nice time. But there is something more, strictly connected with the very reason that this initiative exists. The aim of this lecture is to introduce to the discovery of this “something”. Let’s take our first steps by focusing on a phenomenon that everyone experiences every day, in different degrees of intensity, both passively and actively: I’m talking of *prejudice*. Everyone has an intuitive knowledge of what a prejudice is. For example, let’s take into account the following statement:

"women are emotional, men are rational"

which is a widespread prejudice, though we have tons of evidence that males can be awfully emotional and females plainly rational. Nonetheless, there is no doubt that males and females deal differently with their emotions, particularly in the way the latter are integrated in thought, language and generally in expressive behaviour. It is clear that, like political propaganda, a prejudice tends to draw some elements from a whole and complex reality, simplify the way these elements are connected and unduly exalt the result of this operation to the state of “universal truth”.

It is necessary to remark that prejudices in themselves are unavoidable and, *to some extent*, even useful. Our mind is in the perennial need of simplifying the vast field of reality in order to make concrete operations, achieve goals, and explore new directions. Obviously everything changes whether we are aware, or not, that *we are* producing and using prejudices. When we are aware of that, we

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can always be able, through dialogue, curiosity and intelligence, to put into perspective, modify or drop our prejudices.

Let's now focus on a pair of prejudices that concern artists – or, better: the *social identity* of artists - much more closely. The first is:

artists, while performing, are mainly executors and are particularly skilled in raising the emotions of the public

This prejudice is deeply-seated in a superficial knowledge of what artists really do as well as in a widespread misunderstandings about the nature of intelligence. There is no doubt that in performing an art, whatever it is, one is called to achieve a high degree of practical, even mechanical abilities. Always there is a sort of “artisan amount” in any artistic performance. There is no doubt as well that every form of art is connected with emoting and artists are able to reach effectively the emotional sides of persons – both one's own and those of others. But the prejudice arises when these features, that are elements of the whole artistic identity, are mistaken for the whole and for the finality of the arts. Ultimately, the above prejudice rests on the following prejudice, which is of a more general nature:

Thought is, in its nature, separated from other human activities, like practical or emotional ones.

As usual, the prejudice is based on a part of actual reality. That is, some human activities (for example, writing a philosophical essay) request a larger amount of thought than others (for example, hammering a nail). But what about your fingers? Would you try to hammer a nail without thinking about what you are doing? And how could you write a philosophical essay without mastering the tools like pens, sheets of paper or a word-processor? Everyone likes to eat tasty, home-made bread. How much thought has been necessary in learning to bake a fragrant, crunchy loaf? Not only “thought”, but *many kinds of thought are present in all human activities, like speaking, working, playing a musical instrument, making a video, studying, building, destroying, loving, hating, emoting and so on.* No matter what we are doing, we are thinking and we “got thought” in turn, because we are using thought that other people have “embedded” into this or that action before. No matter what we are doing, we are applying, and learning through repetition, a thinking style, even though in most of the cases we are

absolutely unaware of this. So actually and incessantly we get shaped by the thoughts of many other people around and before us.

Since the way loaves are baked in Cuneo is different from the way they are made in Riga or Danzig or Lubeck; since *everything* is different: the way homes are built, languages spoken, meals prepared and eaten. So it's implied that the thoughts embedded in all these activities are different. Thus we *have been* and *we are presently* thought as being different, we are thinking differently, we *are* different.

Since one of the aims of the IP Project is that you may be able to get in touch with one another for real, we would like to invite to be curious and sensitive, not only to cheering similarities, but to *differences* as well. We expect that following the trails of differences, you'll get in touch with those deeper and subtle orders of reality where mankind is really as one, despite different backgrounds, mentalities, cultures and so on.

Since it is characteristic of artistic thought to be capable of connecting people, both as individuals and as a community, to those deep and subtle orders of reality as mentioned above, where mankind appears to be as one, we are now going to dwell on some specific features of thought implied in the sharing of artistic experiences.

1. *Motion*. Artists are sensitive to motion much more than the majority of people. So we invite you to rely on the effectiveness of this motion. Let the situation gently change your habitual mind. If conflicts arise, inside one's self or amongst you as a group, just accept them. Don't try too hard to resolve them. People can walk side by side even though they don't agree or get on well in many aspects.

2. *Tradition*. Other than with motion, tradition is the more "fixed" part of a reality. Don't be afraid of drawing copiously from your own traditions; feel free to play with them, like great artists and composers have always done.

3. *Time*. The word is one, but times are many. The clock's time is just one and it's necessary to put separate elements together (for example: you and your plane, if you want to fly; you and your mates in the orchestra, if you want to play together). But the intuitive awareness of time or, further, time as a

dimension of being, these are a completely different kettle of fish. Thus, be punctual in order to respect your undertakings and the others, but don't hurry. Get in time with the pace of your own group.

4. *Silence and pauses.* Artists give value to silence and pauses, in order to let new creative patterns emerge. Do the same in your relationships during this experience.

5. *Sincerity.* A widespread prejudice claims that artists, to be genuine and real, can't help but lose control and be indiscriminately spontaneous. You know instead that you have studied for years - and it is going to last - to get in control of your hands, bodies, minds, tools, instruments and materials so to be able to express exactly (that is, universally) what you mean in your commitment to the arts. Let's do the same in your relationships. Get used to calmly asking yourselves (and others...) about the effects of your communication and behaviour.

6. *Pain.* Though you are here in a merry circumstance, and certainly you all will do your best to keep a good mood, where humanity is there are also pain and suffering. Keep room for sadness and grief if they come, both your own and those of others, because they are fine human feelings of which no one should be ashamed. Imagine that you have a guest room for these feelings. Perhaps the room won't receive anyone, maybe it will. Anyway, keep this room prepared and comfortable if you want to be real (and let pain go away in its own time).

7. *Honesty.* If someone hurts you, the first reaction is to think "*he, or she, hurts me*". That's normal, but try to go beyond it and put it in a more appropriate perspective which is "*I am hurt by him or her*". If you find someone or something repulsive, don't say "*It is (or he is or she is) repulsive*" but "*I am repelled by him, or her*". Obviously, the opposite is also valid. If something or someone for you is fantastic, say "*I find it (or him or her) fantastic*".

We believe that you'll get many benefits from the IP Project experience, both as persons and as artists. My own wish is that, once you're back home, you will realize that through this experience you have become stronger in your personal identity and more aware of your unique potential. And, in the meantime, that you will have gotten a strong feeling and a precise awareness of yourselves as being part of a whole reality that in its genuine nature is one.

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