



## Articles

# Teaching art and historical-critical pedagogy: fundamentals and challenges for humanizing education

## Ensino de arte e pedagogia histórico-crítica: fundamentos e desafios para uma formação humanizadora

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### Abstract

In this article we analyze art teaching using as a reference the work of Lukács who conceives art as a type of reflection of reality. From this perspective, it is understood that the peculiarities of the aesthetic reflex have historically originated as consequences of the activity of transforming nature, labor. Aesthetic sensitivity, understood as specific ways of capturing reality, developed historically and socially. This philosophical reference is used to analyze issues relating to visual arts in the curriculum of Brazilian Basic Education and the teaching of this specific type of school content. Adopting Historical-Critical Pedagogy as an educational reference, we argue in favor of a critical humanizing and transformative approach to school educational work with visual arts. We present the theoretical foundations and didactic challenges of this proposal, seeking to contribute to the reflection and practice of art teachers and the artistic training of students.

**Keywords:** art teaching; historical-critical pedagogy; critical education; humanizing education; art and society.

### Resumo

Neste artigo buscamos uma forma de pensar o ensino de Arte adotando como referência a reflexão filosófica de Lukács que concebe a arte como um tipo de reflexo da realidade. Nessa perspectiva entende-se que as peculiaridades do reflexo estético tenham se originado historicamente como desdobramentos da atividade de transformação da natureza, o trabalho. A partir do solo originário da vida cotidiana, desenvolveu-se histórica e socialmente a sensibilidade estética, entendida como formas específicas de captação da realidade. Empregamos essa referência filosófica para analisarmos questões referentes às artes visuais no currículo da Educação Básica e ao ensino desse conteúdo escolar. Adotando como referência educacional a Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica, argumentamos em favor de uma abordagem crítica, humanizadora e transformadora do ensino escolar das artes visuais. Apresentamos os fundamentos teóricos e os desafios didáticos dessa proposta, buscando contribuir para a reflexão e a prática dos professores de Arte e para a formação artística dos alunos.

**Palavras-chave:** ensino de arte; pedagogia histórico-crítica; educação crítica; formação humanizadora; arte e sociedade.

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## INTRODUCTION<sup>1</sup>

Not long ago, I went on a very interesting expedition; I was in a mine for six hours. In one of the oldest and most dangerous mines in the region, called Marcasse.

This mine has a very bad reputation, because many people die in it, either on the way down or on the way up, by asphyxiation or gas explosions, or by water in the ground, or due to the collapse of obsolete shafts and so on. It's a dark place, and at first glance there's something deadly and unpleasant about it. The workers there are mostly emaciated and pale with fever, and they look exhausted and haggard, battered by time and prematurely aged; the women generally have discoloured, dry skin. Around the mine are the miners' houses with a few dead trees entirely black with smoke and thorny hedges, puddles of manure and piles of ash, mountains of unusable coal. Maris<sup>2</sup> would do a magnificent painting.

Soon I'll try to make a sketch to give you an idea<sup>3</sup>. (Van Gogh, 2023, p. 75).

According to Lukács (2023, p. 162), art<sup>4</sup> is "a peculiar mode of manifesting the reflection of reality, a mode which, in turn, is only one of the subtypes of man's universal reflexive relations with reality". The Hungarian philosopher analyses the main differences between three types of reflection of reality: that produced in everyday activities, scientific reflection and artistic reflection. Lukács, however, repeatedly argues that reflected reality is one and that the differences between these three types of reflection are nothing more than the ways in which human beings relate to objective reality. In the case of art, reality is always reflected as a human world, resulting from social practice in its totality as human history. However, as Lukács (2023, p. 386) emphasises, it is the artistic reflection of this world transformed by human action:

[...] one must never lose immediate contact with the sensitive perception of the world if one wants to remain aesthetic; generalisations take place in the realm of human sensitivity and we will see that they must in a certain way lead to an intensification of sensitive immediacy in order to successfully perform the process of generalisation.

Art in school education, in turn, is a field of knowledge that enables students to develop an attitude of appreciation, sensitisation and aesthetic production, contributing to the formation of a more intense awareness of reality and, therefore, potentially emancipatory in individual and collective aspects. In this sense, it plays a fundamental role in Basic Education, being indispensable to the formation of individuals by broadening their possibilities for understanding and intervening in the world.

However, the teaching of art in Brazilian education has historically faced a number of challenges. As compulsory curricular content, there have been historical tensions for it to remain a compulsory subject at all stages of Basic Education. Nowadays, with the profound devaluation of the school, precarious working conditions and the downgrading of subjects in the curriculum, the superficiality of methodological approaches, the disconnection from social and historical reality and the disdain for the formation of the aesthetic dimension have intensified. These are the challenges facing educators confronted by a hegemonic education project committed to the interests of capitalism, which seeks to reproduce alienation, class domination and the extreme dehumanisation of workers.

Faced with this scenario, we need to rely on theoretical perspectives that can guide the teaching of Art towards a critical, humanising and transformative education, which means defending

<sup>1</sup> The article contains some non-identical excerpts from the main author's Master's dissertation. LEITÃO, Juliana Oliveira. *A especificidade do ensino de Arte na perspectiva da Pedagogia Histórico-Crítica*. (The specificity of Art teaching from the perspective of Historical-Critical Pedagogy) Dissertation (Master's in School Education) — Universidade Estadual Paulista "Júlio de Mesquita Filho", Faculty of Arts and Sciences (Campus Araraquara), 2019 93 f.

<sup>2</sup> It's not clear which of the Maris brothers Van Gogh is referring to. For the editor of the translation, it is likely to be Jacob Maris, but in an earlier letter, Van Gogh mentions Mattjis Maris.

<sup>3</sup> Here he hadn't yet become an artist, but he thought he'd give his brother a sketch of the scene to show how he saw it. It's enough to note from the descriptions in the previous paragraphs that Van Gogh writes like a painter, given his keen eye and sense of image (Van Gogh, 2023, p. 75).

<sup>4</sup> We will use art/arts when referring to the field of knowledge and Art when referring to the school subject.

Art as a field of knowledge. In the educational field, the most developed perspective of school knowledge is that of Historical-Critical Pedagogy, which is based on historical-dialectical materialism and argues that education must guarantee the processes of socialisation of the scientific, artistic and philosophical knowledge produced by humanity. This knowledge is necessary for understanding reality as a totality and building paths that seek to overcome the capitalist mode of production.

The aim of this article is to present the foundations and challenges of teaching Art from the perspective of Historical-Critical Pedagogy, in a bid to contribute to the work of teachers working in this area. To this end, the article is structured in four parts: in the first, we discuss the historical materialist and dialectical conception of art; in the second, we discuss art as a way of intensifying the relationship with reality; in the third, we discuss the role of mediation in pedagogical work; in the fourth, we analyse the relationship between the teaching of Art and a humanising education.

We hope that this article can contribute to strengthening this field of knowledge as a compulsory subject in the curriculum, taught by specialists, and to advancing discussions around the characteristics necessary for school education in the context of capitalism.

## **ARTISTIC REFLECTION AS AN UNFOLDING OF LABOUR**

In the conception of historical-dialectical materialism, labour is considered the basic activity in the constitution of the social existence of human beings who relate to the rest of nature through the mediation of the activity that produces use-values.

As a creator of use-values, as useful labour, work is thus a condition of man's existence, independent of all social forms, an eternal natural necessity for mediating the metabolism between man and nature and, therefore, human life. (Marx, 2013, p. 120).

But, as is well known, Marx didn't limit himself to analysing work in terms of its universal characteristics, which are independent of the concrete forms of society. His analysis of capitalism showed that in this society, labour is subjugated to the processes of capital reproduction, in other words, it takes on the characteristics of alienated activity. It might seem, at first glance, from a superficial reading, that there is an incoherence in Marx's thinking between the characterisation of work as a fundamental creative activity without which human life does not exist and the analysis of the alienation of work in capitalist society. But this apparent incoherence is undone when we understand the role of the dialectical category of contradiction in Marx's analyses of labour as an activity that is indispensable to the historical development of humanity and, at the same time, an activity that can be intensely alienated in certain social contexts.

Understood in this way, the concept of work that we take as a reference in this section shows itself to be an activity specific to the human species, or an activity through which human beings create the tools they use to act on nature in order to satisfy their survival needs, as well as the communicative mediations necessary for collective action. In this process of creating the material and immaterial means used in activities aimed at satisfying needs, needs are also created in new ways and on new levels that rise above the level of the struggle for survival. The first forms of pre-artistic objectification began to emerge historically from this original soil of labour activity and slowly, contradictorily and heterogeneously differentiated themselves. As Lukács (2023) insists, art was not always a part of some universal, eternal and immutable human nature; it emerged little by little, not necessarily consciously for human beings themselves. It took thousands of years for a sphere of human objectification to emerge with peculiar characteristics that set it apart from both everyday objectification and scientific objectification.

Artistic objects mobilise thoughts, feelings and emotions in the processes of knowing reality and are not limited to space-time determinations or everyday utilitarianism. As such, there is no transcendental aesthetic essence in nature and objects, or a predisposition of certain subjects to aesthetic appreciation and experience. Both the activities of artistic production

and the products of these activities, as well as the enjoyment of works of art, have been formed, differentiated and transformed throughout history. This objective socio-cultural existence of art is a precondition for the formation in each individual of the need for art and the aesthetic attitude.

Lukács (2023) analyses the dialectic between objectivity and subjectivity in everyday life (with an emphasis on work), science and art. In the case of everyday life, the tendency towards an immediate unity between thinking and acting predominates, since everyday activities are usually aimed at immediate practical results. This sets limits on the objectivity of everyday thinking, since knowledge of reality is only necessary when it interferes with the success or failure of the action. This is why, in everyday thinking, objective explanations of causalities that actually exist in reality can coexist more or less peacefully with purely fanciful beliefs in transcendent beings and forces. In this everyday worldview, in which pragmatic objectivity and a fetishism that manifests itself in many different ways coexist, it is difficult for the individual to subject the universalisation of the teleological action model, namely anthropomorphism, to critical analysis. A classic example of this is the creation myths of the universe, of life and of the human species itself. Simpler versions of this universalisation of teleology are present in individuals' attitudes towards everyday issues, such as when a person interprets an illness as a just punishment or as an incomprehensible injustice.

It so happens that the need for success in actions aimed at transforming external reality, with a view to satisfying individual or collective needs, has required the broadening and deepening of objective knowledge, which has led to the creation of increasingly indirect and abstract means of understanding the world through thought. This is how human beings developed the sciences aimed at understanding nature and the sciences focused on understanding the human world. Although there are differences between these two large groups of sciences, in both cases it is a question of objective knowledge of phenomena, processes, legalities and contradictions whose existence does not depend on the degree to which human beings are aware of them. Lukács (2023, p. 368) discusses this unity of identity and difference in the objectivity of scientific knowledge of nature and society as follows:

The scientific knowledge of society also has an object of social origin [as does art], but once it emerges, it has an in-itself character, like the objects of nature. However distinct its objective structure may be, however distinct the legalities of its action may be from those of nature, its scientific reflection also follows the path that leads directly from in-itself to for-us. Nothing essential changes in this situation, even though it is much more difficult to achieve a pure form of objectivity and any deviation from this is also determined by social development. (Our insertion in square brackets).

To formulate this principle of the objectivity of knowledge in materialist philosophical terms, it is the idea that a being can exist without the consciousness of that existence. Lukács, in the preface to his *Aesthetics*, expresses this idea unequivocally: "[...] there is being without consciousness, but there is no consciousness without being" (Lukács, 2023, p. 161). Thus, when science seeks to know being, it must seek to explain its objective existence:

The mission of our concrete arguments will be to show that the scientific reflection of reality seeks to free itself from all anthropological determinations, both sensitive and intellectual, and that it endeavours to portray objects and their relationships as they are in themselves, independently of consciousness. (Lukács, 2023, p. 166).

From the perspective of Lukácsian aesthetics, one of the characteristics that differentiates art from science is that in art the relationship between objectivity and subjectivity is different from that in science. The artistic object exists objectively, but its artistic existence is, on the one hand, the objectification of an artist, in other words, it bears the marks of an individual's activity and, on the other hand, the existence of the artistic object is justified by the fact that it is destined to produce aesthetic effects in other individuals. Therefore, objectivity and subjectivity are not separated in the artistic object.

[...] the interrelations between objectivity and subjectivity are part of the objective essence of works of art. What matters is not the effect on X or Y, but the objective structure of the work of art that acts in this or that way. What in any other field of human life would be philosophical idealism – namely, that no object can exist without a subject – is an essential feature of its specific objectivity. (Naturally, the block of marble processed in the sculpture exists, as a piece of marble, as independently of all consciousness as it does of its crafting) – like any object in nature or society. The subject-object relationship we have indicated, which we will deal with at length below, only exists thanks to the sculptor's work and exclusively in relation to it). (Lukács, 2023, p. 369).

The historical development of the natural sciences, although it has taken place and continues to do so in a contradictory and heterogeneous manner, with advances and setbacks, struggles, conquests and losses, contains a tendency to influence the worldview in the direction of superseding explanations of natural events as the result of transcendent wills and forces, or powers from beyond. In other words, the aim is to understand the movement of reality as something produced by the dynamic forces and contradictions immanent in that reality. This applies to both nature and society. Of course, explanations based on transcendence are of idealist philosophical inspiration, while those based on immanence are of materialist philosophical inspiration. However, as in other aspects, there are also important differences between non-dialectical and non-historical materialism and dialectical and historical materialism, as Lukács (2023, p. 168) explains:

At this point, we should only briefly note that the old materialism – from Democritus to Feuerbach – was only able to expose the immanence of the world's structure in a mechanistic way, which is why, on the one hand, the world could still be conceived of as the mechanism of a clock that needs external – transcendent – intervention to set itself in motion; on the other hand, in this type of worldview, man could only appear as the product and necessary object of immanent-ceterior legalities [*immanent-diesseitigen*], whereby these did not explain his subjectivity or his practice. The Hegel-Marx theory of man's self-creation through his own labour – which Gordon Childe condensed into the excellent formula "*man makes himself*" – consummates for the first time the immanence of the world image, lays the ideological foundation for an immanent ethics, the spirit of which was already very much alive in the brilliant conceptions of Aristotle and Epicurus, Spinoza and Goethe.

Art, in its peculiar dialectic between objectivity and subjectivity, also shows this historical tendency to develop an immanentist worldview, representing the human world as the work of human beings themselves, for better or worse. Lukács argues that the work of art carries with it an immanentist worldview even when it uses transcendent themes, that is, religious ones. This is related to the fact that art is aware of its fictional character, unlike religious representations that create transcendent beings and worlds and relate to these representations as if they were reality itself. This issue is explained by Lukács (2023, p. 385-386) as follows:

[...] we must point out the following issue: the immanence of the principle of art, its essential, axiological, earthly-human character. Naturally, this is thought of in the sense of objectivity, as an objective sense of aesthetically configured reality. Subjectively, the creator may even have a transcendence in mind and the receiver may even accept it in those terms, and it's perfectly possible that the artist's objective sense – grounded in the human-social essence of art – will only be imposed centuries or even millennia later. The artistic image's renunciation of being reality objectively implies a rejection of transcendence, of the beyond; it creates specific forms of the elaborate reflection of reality, forms that originate from reality and actively return to it. [...] Art is therefore as immanent as science; it constitutes the reflection of the same reality as the scientific reflection.

The essential function of art, therefore, is to expand and enrich the reality already humanised by work with its creations (Vázquez, 1968, p. 47). Because of this, it is configured as a sensitive capturing of each era's reality, exerting an action on people's consciousness through aesthetic sensitivity, since its process results from the dynamic relationships between the artist's

subjectivity and socio-cultural objectivity. These relationships mean that the work of art is an objectification of the artist's subjectivity, but in this process of artistic objectification, this subjectivity surpasses itself, rising to a richer and more complex level of human existence.

## **ART AS A WAY OF INTENSIFYING THE RELATIONSHIP WITH REALITY**

Both art and science reflect reality in a way that goes beyond the immediacy of everyday life. But while in science this everyday immediacy is overcome by highly mediated forms of thought, in the case of works of art a new immediacy is produced in which the relationships between phenomena, trends and contradictions that move history are intensified and made more visible, always in a concrete, living, dialectical way. The work of art leads both the artist and the recipient to a process of overcoming their everyday individuality:

We have already referred to the fact that the creative personality that is important for the emergence of the work of art is not immediately and simply identified with the creator's everyday individuality, that creation requires him to universalise himself, to rise from his merely particular singularity to aesthetic particularity. We also see that the effectiveness of works of value brings with it, to an extent all the more surprising the further away in time and space or the stranger from the point of view of the nation or class the content represented is, a broadening and deepening, an elevation of the immediate everyday individuality. Precisely in this enrichment of the self lies, in the first place, the meaningful experience that is provided by truly great art. (Lukács, 1978, p. 269).

Because reality is the starting point and the destination to which it returns with transformative possibilities, it is captured by the artist not as an act of reducing reality to the plane of apparent phenomena, but as an endeavour to capture the dialectic between the phenomenon (appearance) and the essence. In Heller (2016, p. 46) we see that, although art has its own dynamics and relative autonomy because it is a type of knowledge that implies the subjectivity of an individual, it is at the same time rooted in a specific historical context. This condition of the production of artistic knowledge determines how the artist relates to reality, translating their emotions and feelings in relation to what they experience as a unique being, but as part of a society which, in turn, is a result of history.

As such, individualisation and universalisation in art are processes that compose a unity. Creativity, therefore, is also realised in the processes of appropriating what has already been created, as it can only be conceived in a general and unitary social process through which man appropriates the world through his consciousness (Lukács, 2010, p. 13), expressing the dialectical aspect that resides in work and which highlights the activity of the species as activity of the individual. In every authentic work of art, individual and collective aspects are combined in a recreated unity that overcomes everyday fragmentation. The value of the aesthetic experience for individuals lies in the fact that they distance themselves from their own lives in order to unite their individuality with that of other individuals, other cultures and other historical periods; by reconnecting themselves as unique individuals, their intellect is sensitively mobilised, fuller, broader and therefore more human and collective. The artist's work is centred on this ability to condense many persons of a given epoch into one person; even if, in certain contexts, they grasp partial aspects of reality, they are not separated from the totality of social practice and the characteristics of their time. This creative property of a species that has forged its own nature is what allows us to sensitively experience human conditions from a past to which we will never return. The permanent fascination that makes us admire works that are so distant chronologically lies in the moment of humanisation in which the singular characteristics of an individual are transformed when they relate to the singularity of other human beings.

The characteristic of the artistic way of appropriating reality shows us that there is no such thing as purely singular individuality and spontaneous creativity, because singularity is simultaneously universality and, as universality, it relates to the set of singularities. The more the individual accesses the universal characteristics of human beings the greater the possibilities of realising their singularity due to the quantitative and qualitative appropriation

they make of what humanity has historically achieved, a process that takes place through education.

## MEDIATION IN THE TEACHING OF ART

So far, we've been referring more directly to the characteristics of art as a particular form of reflection of reality. In this sense, the work of art is a mediation between human beings and reality. In the case of the artist who creates the work of art, this work is an objectification of his artistic activity and, like any objectification, it is part of social practice, integrating itself into activities carried out by other people. In this section of the article, we will deal with another form of mediation, that of educational activity aimed at teaching art. In fact, educational activity is made up of a complex set of mediations between the student and the human reality of which they are a part. One of these mediations is school knowledge, namely the curriculum, the development of which involves disputes between different visions of the world, culture, knowledge and education. In turn, the implementation of the curriculum in the teaching practices of school content requires the distribution of the various school subjects and the different contents of each subject into daily, weekly, monthly and annual school hours. Finally, the pedagogical work carried out by the teacher will give greater or lesser emphasis to certain contents, topics, concepts, works, etc. But we must not lose sight of the fact that all these moments need to be geared towards the goal of establishing ever richer and deeper relationships between the student and human reality.

In the teaching of Art, the focus is on the relationship between the creative activity contained in the artist's work and the student's study activity. For the artist, the new is created in the objectification of the work (the subject creates the object); in school pedagogical relations, this movement involves a reverse path: the work of art is the object that transforms the subject, the student, through the mediation of the action of another subject, the teacher. The artist as the creating subject discovers the content in reality. The student as the receiving subject discovers reality in the content of the work. In both situations, both the subject and the object are susceptible to transformations, which can be peaceful or conflictual.

This density of knowledge contained in a work of art can only be grasped by students through the work of the teacher and results in potentially transformative intellectual activities. In Historical-Critical Pedagogy, the core of these rich relationships lies in the category of mediation, due to the fact that education, as conceptualised by Saviani (2008, p. 59) is "[...] *a mediating activity within global social practice*" and, in this activity, the teacher and the students "[...] *are at different levels of understanding (knowledge and experience) of social practice*" (Saviani, 2008, p. 56). The teacher is responsible for selecting, organising and systematising artistic content in such a way as to make it accessible and meaningful to students. The student is the subject of learning, understood as a result of the teaching carried out by the teacher who produces in the students the need to appropriate knowledge that goes far beyond the pragmatic limits of everyday life.

The process of appropriating the specific codes of art (theme, style, composition, technique, formal elements, artistic historical context, relationships with other works, etc.) expands the complexity of human thought by requiring mediations to organise didactically, enabling an understanding of the work of art. In this process, spontaneity is temporarily suspended and then incorporated again in a richer form, with learnt elements. This movement of learning is inherent to the school and one of its aims is to form awareness of reality.

Learning at school is a prerequisite for mastering abstractions and mainly involves the systematisation of content and teaching work so that it is effectively accessible to everyone. The importance of the teaching activity carried out by the teacher's teacher lies in ensuring development efficiently and within the short school period, if we compare this time period with all the knowledge produced by humanity. However, it is not just a question of efficiency and making the most of time, although time is undoubtedly a very important aspect of the materiality of educational work (Saviani, 2011). The need for direction on the part of the teacher arises mainly from the teacher's clarity about the educational objectives of school work.

Mediation entails the movement of introducing the artist's singularity, reflected in the representation achieved as a human generalisation, in the opposite way, in which the human generalisation is incorporated into the individuality of the students. This means that the abstractions of human thought that are revealed in artistic concreteness require knowledge that allows students to have this experience. To this end, we start from the assumption that, like the visual arts,

[...] Looking is not the same as seeing, just as hearing is not the same as listening. Seeing only involves the effort of opening your eyes; looking means opening your mind and using your intellect. Looking at a painting is like going on a journey – a journey with many possibilities, including the thrill of sharing the conceptions of another era. As with any journey, the better the preparations, the more satisfying it should be. (Cumming, 2010, p. 6).

This necessary treatment for understanding art derives not only from learning about the creative process undertaken by the artist, but also from learning related to factors such as: definitions of works of art from different theoretical perspectives; conventional and non-conventional art spaces; the public that will – or will not – have access to art; stylistic and historical characteristics; artistic movements or groups/collectives of artists; type of funding; the political role of the artist in their time, etc. In addition to the complexity that a field of knowledge requires, in order for it to be learnt we have to consider the contradictions resulting from the historical contexts in which the production of works takes place, their dissemination and their reception. For example, there's the conflicting relationship in capitalist society between the artistic value of works and the insertion of the artist's activity into the logic of the market. Also important are questions relating to the history of artistic genres, the clashes between stylistic currents, the historically situated conflicts between art and certain worldviews, etc. Organising teaching processes on the basis of the intellectual demands of the field of art is a necessary attitude if students are to approach artistic appreciation in a way that truly enriches their individuality.

The quality of the teacher's mediation that we extract from the aforementioned relationships makes us return to the following reflection: if the universal character of human activity lies in the fact that man produces despite being free from physical necessity (Marx, 2015), his crafting of the objective world cannot be taken as natural, a divine gift or the work of chance. The process of humanisation involves the appropriation of cultural objects in all their characteristics. Despite containing apparently immutable characteristics, cultural objects and individuals are prone to transformation, because in both artistic production and reception, every learning process concerns the assimilation of social relations contained in the artistic object as a means of understanding reality. This means that art comprises a reference and repertoire of specifically human aptitudes that condense the content of humanity's sensitive memory. Embracing this characteristic requires the teacher to take the pedagogical approach of extracting human meaning from the students' relationship with works of art and the conditions for understanding what this type of reflection communicates and how it communicates, harnessing it to its full potential.

These conditions are concentrated in theoretical work and cannot be separated from the technical proposition as a path to artistic learning. Likewise, the transformation of the student in the teaching of Art cannot be separated from the content mediated by the systematised and conscious work of the teacher as the one who masters the appropriate forms of knowledge of the works and artistic learning. Without proper mediation, the relationship with objects that have resulted from human experience, understood as objects of direct relationship, is limited to their partial characteristics. If in art there are contradictory relationships with everyday life, it requires organised work through which the intention is to lead students to the appropriation of content, with the potential to result in qualitative leaps in subjectivity in order to produce in individuals a universality for themselves.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP WITH ART AT SCHOOL: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES**

Saviani (2011, p. 13), after presenting his definition of educational work as “[...] the act of directly and intentionally producing, in each individual, the humanity that is historically and



collectively produced by all men”, states that one of the aspects of educational work is “[...] identifying the cultural elements that need to be assimilated by individuals of the human species in order for them to become human” (Saviani, 2011, p. 13). As far as the teaching of Art in Brazilian schools is concerned, this identification is a major challenge, since it involves choosing works and artists with the goal of ensuring that existing artistic wealth produces in students the development of both artistic reception and artistic creation, bearing in mind the relationship between art and human historical reality.

The reduced curriculum time compounds this challenge when it comes to awakening attitudes in students that favour their aesthetic and critical education. In order to achieve as much as possible within our school reality, it is necessary to reflect on which artists and works we are going to prioritise, taking into account their relevance to the different educational stages, types of school and groups of students, because the choice of works can influence the qualitative transformation of students' subjectivity by mobilising intellectuality steered by sensitivity.

Because the artistic reflection unfolds in a field of knowledge that contributes to the development of the senses, intensifying the relationship with reality, it is necessary to safeguard learning conditions that overcome the limits of spontaneous appreciation and irrationalist subjectivism, which is a very strong trend in the arts. We understand that there is a human need to express ourselves, to establish a movement for the aesthetic externalisation of who we are and how reality affects us, and art is a field of knowledge with possibilities for richer and more satisfying forms of this. Obviously, it requires a certain amount of spontaneity, but we must emphasise that this is not the spontaneity of the ways of thinking, feeling and acting in everyday life, but rather a spontaneity acquired through educational processes that, from the outset, are anything but spontaneous.

Creative paths in school education are provided by the teacher and their results are of collective interest, allowing students to express other dimensions of themselves, among their peers, through languages other than speech and writing. In the visual arts, this individual expressive clash takes place with materials, requires a repertoire and is not limited to formal image reading descriptions.

School art activities call for us to identify what is in the work of art from references that enable us to understand the context, intentions and clashes in the artist's work processes, in which there is a logic to be grasped by the student, often in the form of reproduction. The genre, the use of shapes, textures, colours, lights, shadows, style, theme, etc. all have an intention that does not arise in a field without conflicts and contradictions within individuals, even when reproduced technically. This learning can lead to problematisations about processes of alienation because artistic activity expresses the *feeling* in the *doing*.

The appropriation of basic concepts to achieve learning and benefit from artistic knowledge in its humanising potential, dependent on the teacher's educational work, is necessary because access to the knowledge accumulated in the work of art is not only revealed through visual contact, limited to its form. Revealing the content of a work of art requires understanding that this content is both explicit and hidden and that, therefore, the logic of the formal elements in the work transforms what is social into what is individual in the artist's interpretation. This is because art is materialised through its

[...] maximum scope in capturing life in its all-encompassing totality. True art, therefore, always delves deeper in search of those most essential moments that are hidden beneath the surface of phenomena, but it does not represent these essential moments in an abstract way, that is by suppressing phenomena or contrasting them with essence. On the other hand, these singular moments not only contain in themselves a dialectical movement, which leads them to continually surpass each other, but they find themselves in relation to each other in a permanent mutual action and reaction, constituting moments of a process that reproduces itself without interruption. (Lukács, 2010, p. 26).

The progressive development of human creative capacity, from which art has emerged as a field of knowledge, enables levels of abstraction invaluable to school processes of conscious development of the senses, namely humanisation.

Just as it takes time to appreciate the meaning of a text after the initial literacy period, in the visual arts it takes time to extract the meaning of works of art more spontaneously. The teaching and learning of visual arts should be established as a process of literacy for the gaze. This process aims to transform and enrich students' senses, one of the school's functions that can only be guaranteed if Art fulfils its role of deepening the relationship with reality through the sensitive path of individualities.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The school is an irreplaceable institution when it comes to developing the individual's recognition of themselves as a human being inserted in the dialectical process of continuity, development and transformation of culture. Achieving this recognition is essential for developing the awareness that we can intervene in reality by creating objective and subjective conditions that develop and preserve the humanity of individuals.

It is at school that students come into contact with content that expresses the contradictions between social classes, the achievements and aspirations of humanity throughout history, a perspective that Historical-Critical Pedagogy envisages through the process of humanising students so that they understand and transform the social reality in which they live, confronting the historical condition of alienation and the reproduction of the capitalist system.

Art, as a school subject and field of knowledge, contributes to humanisation in school education, as it mobilises sensitivity as a specific way of reflecting reality, if its specificities and complexities are respected. To do this, it is necessary to establish a relationship between the social practice that gave rise to artistic knowledge historically and the student's life. It's about seeking an understanding of the totality of works of art, relating them to the dialectical concreteness of life and to the particularities of school reality, so that they can resonate with the singularities of students' intellectual development. One criterion that guides this process is the human meaning that can be extracted from works of art that contain rich content. This complex work of intellectual development by sensitively capturing the reality contained in art is undertaken by the teacher.

The teacher is responsible for didactically organising the conditions in advance that enable students to overcome the limits of spontaneous appreciation and irrationalist subjectivism. By providing a deeper understanding of artistic content, the teacher gives students the opportunity to appreciate, analyse and interpret works of art, encouraging them to produce from repertoires that favour individual expression. These are processes in which students develop and broaden their self-awareness, an indispensable condition for transformational paths of individuality and collectivity.

We hope that this article can contribute to the reflection and practice of teachers who work in this area and who have an affinity with Historical-Critical Pedagogy and for those who have never had contact with this pedagogy and are seeking transformative horizons, however great our difficulties in the realities of schools may be.

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#### **Authors contribution**

JOL: The author of the manuscript, Prof., took part in the construction and formation of this study and assumes public responsibility for its content. Her contribution was to structure the preliminary project and write the basic text of the article. ND: The co-author, worked in partnership on the analyses presented in the article and on the final revision of both the theoretical and conceptual aspects, as well as the writing and grammar. We also state that we are aware of the fact that if this work has been submitted to the Ethics Committee, the journal may request a Certificate of Submission for Ethical Appraisal – CAAE from us.

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