



## FEAR AND BODY. ART AND MEDIA PROJECTS FOR TEACHER TRAINING

Ricard Huerta

**Abstract:** Media and contemporary art is important for teacher training. Art educators could link art experience with their own reality, and media evidences. Creativity deals with social, political and cultural issues. From an innovative perspective, we propose strategies for art educators. We introduce topics in the school setting, linked to the emotions, needs and students' life. Concepts such as "fear" or "body" allow us to investigate current problems. We approach the concepts from the work of Spanish artists Carmen Calvo and Anna Ruiz Sospedra. Methodology used mixed, combining Arts-Based Educational Research and Artography. We highlight the great acceptance by students of this process.

**Key words:** Media, Art Education, Teacher Training, Contemporary Art, Body.

### 1. Introduction

In my experience as a professor involved in the training teachers, I have verified the effectiveness of the use of contemporary art in the classroom. Talking about current art in the classroom allows students to approach the world of artistic creation and art education from a perspective close to their interests (Hamlin & Fusaro, 2018). In the current international panorama of art, the role of women artists becomes very important. We propose to vindicate the role of women in art developing projects from attractive and innovative themes based on concepts such as fear or body.

### 2. Media, contemporary art, art education and teacher training

Art is present in the media, in galleries and museums as well as in the actions of contemporary artists in the urban space in collaboration with communities. The new emergencies of art allow us to deal with issues close to students. The use of topics close to their interests helps them to reflect on current problems that also have a historical path, such as Human Rights (Krahe, 2017). Some concepts are constant in the art of our time and in the art of all times: life and death, love, hatred, power, education, or the body. We can review what has happened in the history of art but beginning with what is happening nowadays. If we talk about the human body, or identity, we can start with the photos of Cindy Sherman. From the present, we recover other previous artists such as Rembrandt, Caravaggio, Frida Kahlo, Ribera, Louise Bourgeois or Michelangelo. We work with visual motives, understanding images as a trajectory of the gaze. We link with the interests of the students, so that they can express their opinions, participate actively and introduce their own ideas.

Almost all of my students are women. We refer to future teachers who are not going to dedicate themselves to art production or to trade with art works. The participation of the K-12 teachers in the artistic creation is far from the art market, but they can turn art into a tool to generate great pedagogical satisfactions. I encourage use the possibilities of art as an educational argument, as a force capable of revolutionizing society, as a breath that inspires changes and social improvements (Huerta, 2016).

We can use devices from the field of art to think about school, dialoguing in the field of experiences and possible relationships between art and education, defending participatory art, involving many people, connecting them in cultural mediation networks. We review the lesson of Paulo Freire, who

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points towards critical pedagogy, proposing a rupture of the traditional hierarchy between teachers and students (Freire, 1998).

### 3. Art produced by women uses themes such as fear or body

In my teaching experiences, I have always incorporated the art made by women. When we talk about contemporary art, we refer to the art that made in this moment we are talking about living artists, people we can meet personally. If we talk about women artists, we incorporate a gender element that makes this reality visible. I consider it essential that my students, future teachers, know women who make art and defend their proposals in galleries, museums and community spaces. To get students to know the art made by women, we invite women artists to our classes to tell us about their work.

Our active methodology based on Project Work. With the groups of "Media, Arts and Humanities" we propose open projects, with suggestive titles such as "identities", "fear", "the body", "the city", or "personal narratives". Each project begins by reviewing the work of an artist, woman, and living. Some of these artists are Barbara Kruger, Chiharu Shiota, Gillian Wearing, Jenny Holzer, Rebecca Horn, Maribel Domenech, Ana Navarrete, Carmen Calvo or Anna Ruiz Sospedra. When knowing the work of these artists we went on to elaborate a discourse of their own, both artistic and pedagogical. When we proposed the project on the theme "Fear", we explained the work of Carmen Calvo (see Figure 1), a woman who generates a lot of tension in her works.



**Figure 1.** *Algún que otro tributo. Tapándose (Any other tribute. Covering himself).*  
Work of the artist Carmen Calvo.

We have turned this workshop into an educational innovation project entitled "Geographies of fear". We approach fear from art, an aspect so important for our lives. The topic not treated in the curriculum, but it is a vital aspect that should be analyze, especially when it is part of the punishment (Foucault, 1995). Fear as a form of personal and social communication is something that is very important for students and teachers. Fears constitute sensations and emotions, moods and behaviors that affect and transform us. Assuming fears and developing a combative discourse in front of them can be rewarding if it becomes a motivating element for our art classes. Fears affect us all, and is convenient to talk openly about it, and at the same time carry out collaborative artistic actions that help us understand the fears that invade us as teachers.

In the proposal "The Body", we use the idea of the body as a cultural construction (Butler, 2004). In schools, we learn about our body from a physiological perspective. The teachers speak to the students of their bodies as if they were not really. Truth is that: our body accompanies us always. The repression of a religious, medical or political nature has had an impact on one's own body full of prejudices and taboos. That is why we dare to overcome traditional tyrannies to claim a body beyond its social function, breaking with obsessions for the color of the skin, or for the fact of being taller,

shorter, fat or skinny, ugly or Handsome, masculine or feminine (Winterson, 2012). Diversity is a source of wealth, and respect for diversity is the first step towards a more just and equitable society. To talk about diverse bodies we use the work of the young artist Anna Ruiz Sospedra. Her sculptures (in many cases ephemeral works, especially "fallas") present us bodies from an open and transgressive perspective (see Figure 2).

We propose the atelier of the body as a project of educational innovation, and we approach the question from the art, speaking about artists of all times (Lord & Meyer, 2013). The body is our basic form by communication, with ourselves and other people. Body is our primary geography. We manifest from our bodies, and this reflection goes beyond that for which our bodies had thought by the social and cultural structure. When they approach the vision of the body transmitted by the works of Anna Ruiz Sospedra, future teachers can rethink the image of masculine and feminine, eliminating racial, social or religious prejudices, creating new possibilities to represent bodies.



**Figure 2.** *Falla Lepanto-Guillem de Castro 2017.* Work of the artist Anna Ruiz Sospedra.

#### **4. Encouraging teacher training students to interpret fear and body through media and artistic installations**

If contemporary art should provide an experience, the installations and performances do so clearly and in a more radical way, involving the participation of the body, the artist and the spectator. The body involved leads us to reflect on sensitive knowledge. This approach helps us to recognize in our classroom experiences a meaningful process that aims, to involve university students who will be the future K-12 art educators (Rolling, 2017). We propose a workshop in which the future teachers reflect on their fears, and at the same time perform an artistic installation. Each team exhibits an idea, and for three weeks, the proposal elaborated. In the classroom, we talked about the possibilities of interpreting the work of Carmen Calvo, also about other artists who have managed to capture fear in their creations: Laura Stevens, Artemisia Gentileschi, Maruja Mallo, Cristina Iglesias, Esther Ferrer and Ana Mendieta.



**Figure 3.** Installation that analyzes fear from suffering due to homophobic bullying.

In the Figure 3, we see how the students want to represent the fears of those who assaulted by harassment. A doll hanged by the feet reflected in a mirror on the floor. Along with the doll, there are several written testimonies of real cases in which suicide children explain their desperation for the violence of their peers and the fear they suffered from homophobic bullying. The precipice suggested by the mirror and the hypodermic needles cover the body of the doll as a symbols of homophobic violence towards boys and girls who suffer bullying (Tellie & Dracup, 2016).

We ask the students what their fears are. They tell us that they fear: "loneliness", "speaking in public", "losing a loved one", "not overcoming challenges", "not finding a job when they finish university studies". Sometimes they fear "telling the truth out of fear of reprisals." A dialogue established between students' ideas and the work of Carmen Calvo. This artist introduces everyday elements in their assemblies, as dolls, fabrics, furniture, bricks. Students must assume that art can made with simple objects (Chung & Li, 2017). It is about finding the poetics of the object, transiting through the line of visual poetry. From here, the workshop begins so that each team builds an artistic installation expressing their reflections on fears.

During the workshop, we elaborated aspects such as the selection of materials, the union of constructive elements, or the aesthetic game of colors and textures. At the same time, the conceptual aspects of each work specified, producing a discourse in images that will exposed to the public. The chosen place to install the piece can favor fertile readings, for which we establish a criterion of the pieces location in the faculty spaces.



**Figure 4.** Media processure. Interview with Carmen Calvo in a workshop installation about fear.

The installation we see in figure 4 represents the fear of speaking in public. A series of dolls observe the person who interacts from the center. In this case, is the artist Carmen Calvo who interacts with the work of the students. The seated dolls are observing, something impossible since their faces covered with objects that prevent them from seeing. The sensation that created is suffocating, and really produces "fear". This installation is about the fear of children when they have to speak in public.

When the workshop ended and we could see the excellent results of the work, the artist Carmen Calvo agreed to come and visit the exhibition. She felt very excited because she was passionate about the future teachers who worked from her works. This type of actions is usual in fine arts studies, but not in teacher training. The readings of the work of Carmen Calvo must take into account some features that characterize it: fetishism and its predilection for fetish objects, relational poetics, representations of violence and sexuality from the accounts of power and everyday violence, the pain in childhood, the struggle for freedom, and the domain of horror. They are injustices that we all know and against which we rebel. Education professionals must reflect on these problems, to act decisively, and this is where art offers us more possibilities.

Poetics is present in the artistic look we throw towards objects, to express them through language, both verbal and iconic. A good example of this is the work of Giorgio Morandi. John Berger says that the objects that Morandi painted cannot be bought in a street market. They are not objects. They are places where small things are born (Berger, 2002). In this way, the objects acquire a conceptual character that turns them into manifestations of meaning. The objects represented by Morandi are no longer the piece itself, they have become a poetic of the relationship of that object with everything that surrounds it. With the project about "The body" we analyze in the classroom the ways in which the body is treated in the K-12 curriculum. We realize that the looks towards the body are full of prejudices.



**Figure 5.** This installation denounces the pressures that exerted on women's bodies.

In figure 5 we see mannequins that represent different forms of pressure on women's bodies: the obsession with a "perfect" body, which leads to obsessing over measures and weight; aggressive diets; the effort to hide the hair of the armpits or the blood as if they were "ugly or dirty" things. The body is the most sophisticated and debated cultural concept, especially when we think of young children. We believe that teachers can analyze the body as a cultural construction. In the moment in which the subjects are educated to know themselves inserted historically, it makes sense to talk about the history of the body and its narrative. Bodies, can they narrated? Sculptures, installations and performances transmit new views towards the body.

Figure 6 represents a performance to reflect on the use of the woman's body as an artistic model. The future teachers narrate their visions of the body from the perspective of art. The installations made speak of expectations, interests, desires, knowledge, communication, media spaces, all from the poetics of expressiveness. They have worked as a team to make an artistic piece. The spirit of cooperation has been present throughout the project. Ideas have contributed, opinions have contrasted, and joint decisions have made. We want to promote a collaborative model that allows to stimulate consensus and that accentuates the expressive and communicative possibilities of future art educators. As a site specific, we make use of the facilities of the Faculty so that all the people who transit can enjoy the students' works, exhibited in curious and peculiar places.

As Nicoleta-Laura Popa and Teodor Cozma says, "education is a real vehicle of change, underlining this powerful principle: intercultural, feminist and critical pedagogy". Although choices of concepts, suggested educational approaches or classroom strategies may seem to illustrate different points of view. "Education is primarily a tool of changing society through empowerment, respecting diversity of personal experiences, building community, and privileging individual voices." Intercultural, feminist and critical pedagogy challenge in specific ways traditional pedagogical notions, conceived as roads to the inclusive movement in education. "Boundaries of inclusive education go beyond the simple adjustment of school provisions to the special needs of the disabled, becoming a rather largely shared educational ideology, covering all educational approaches addressing specific target groups" (Popa & Cozma, 2009: 3).



**Figure 6.** This performance of the students explains the abuses towards the body through masks and dramatization.

### 5. Showing the students' productions in the spaces of the faculty

We generate a motivation factor for the students when we exhibit their productions in the faculty spaces. During the project's implementation phase, the idea of being able to publicly showing its facilities increases the interest in being innovative and daring. Using the spaces of the center as an exhibition environment, we turn the faculty into a small museum of pieces made by the students, which exhibited in unexpected places.



**Figure 7.** The artist Carmen Calvo observes the installation in the faculty's toilets.

In figure 7, we see an installation of the project "Fear" mounted on the faculty's toilets. When the mirror covered with a black cloth, the sensation is very strange. Our image disappears, and we disappear in the reflection of the mirror. The effect of loneliness is surprising. This was one of the fears that students referred the fear of loneliness.

"Fear" and "The body" are taboo topics in the school curriculum, and are not usual topics in teacher training. By raising these issues from art and art and media education, we generate an effective stimulus among students, who feel involved from the beginning of each project, with cinema and television reflections (Huerta, 2011). During the process of realizing the installations, doubts, questions, suggestions, changes arise, finally achieving very interesting results, which speak of very human aspects from the art and media. It is important to recognize the role that these practices can have in teacher training on topics such as inclusion, media and intercultural education (Marchis, Ciascai & Costa, 2008).



**Figure 8.** A student explains her installation about "The body" created with photographs and objects in the faculty's toilets to the artist Anna Ruiz Sospedra.

The occupation of space by students is an example of organization, especially when it comes to places of passage and common use. When we prepare the interventions, we must ask for permission, committing ourselves not to damage any installation and leaving the environments used in perfect conditions. This coordination effort is a good way to transmit respect towards public spaces. The surprise effect arises when the rest of the students verify that they have been intervened places "unusual for art exhibitions", such as corridors, toilets, stairs or elevators (see Figure 8). With these actions, we demand a greater use of the equipment, thus converting a corridor or a classroom into artistic and mediatic exhibition environments. In that sense, in reference to the media eloquences, Alexander Fedorov indicates: "There is no doubt, that the analytical skills can provide good educational results cultivating a certain immunity to unprovedness, omissions and falsehood" (Fedorov, 2010: 58).

The elevator is a place of passage, a small and stifling space. The elevator mirror enlarges the visual space of a small cabin, but it can also become an element of reflection if we "empower" it. With these "site specific" we get to generate interest in art among the students and other users of the faculty. The use of spaces is an element widely used by "artography" (Irwin & O'Donoghue, 2012).





**Figure 9.** Artistic intervention of the project "The body" in an elevator of the faculty.

## 6. Conclusion

Through artistic and media installations students show their ideas analyzing their fears and their bodies, generating meanings with the use of everyday objects and public space. The students have been empowered by the intense look of art, and have been able to concretize their ideas through visual poetics. Most students had told this: "they were not good" for artistic or media creation. When they finish their work, they prove that they are capable of transmitting their ideas through the arts. Now they are aware of their possibilities, having overcome their traumas. They have overcome fears and have reflected on representations and cultural uses of the body.

The fight against bullying is one of the aspects that we promote in the projects "Fear" and "The body". Children who suffer bullying must be helped, and we must be aware of the problem with courage. With these projects, we go through a series of stages of preparation and execution, to elaborate ideas and to realize artistic installations. We have the participation of women artists such as Carmen Calvo and Anna Ruiz Sospedra, two art professionals who encouraged and advised the students. To establish contacts between art, media and education, it is very appropriate to have the support of artists to carry out an approach to artistic and media education based on emotions and good practices.

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Letters and Alphabets are the most relevant question for his performances as Huerta’s visual artist and media worker. Typography, printing, photo, video and painting are processes for personal art exhibitions: *Alfabet del Tirant*, *Alfabet de Jesucrist*, *Alfabet d’Alexandre* and *Alfabet de les Ciutats*. He develops the photography project *Letters of Cities* and continues with the exhibitions of the Art Based Research *Women Teacher*, a sample that have seen in Brussels (European Parliament), Santiago de Chile (Museo Artequin), Montevideo (Cultural Center Al Pie de la Muralla), Lima (Casa O’Higgins de Lima), Medellin (MUUA) and several Spanish and European cities.