

Thinking Art—The Art of Thinking: A Turnaround

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*I never made a painting as a work of art,
it's all research.*

—Pablo Picasso

There are countless scenes, experiences and relationships that make me want to come back to EGS again and again—to this inspiring, vibrant, demanding and holding community of outstanding minds—yet one specific scene during my time as a CAGS student stands out.

It became a symbol of my challenge, as researcher, artist and teacher, to bring silent experiences into the expression of their sense.

It was my first summer at EGS. I presented my dissertation theme to a handful of other CAGS students and my future doctoral father, Paolo Knill. On a hot summer day, we were sitting outside the student lounge

in the sun, and I talked for about 20 minutes. I felt confident; I had been teaching and researching the subject for years. After another 20 minutes, my state of mind had changed drastically. To speak in Paolo Knill's terms, I was now "comfortably confused." Whereas the students' questions had helped me realize how far I was away from being understood, Paolo Knill, in his friendly yet incorruptible way, bit by bit subverted my knowledge and frame of thinking with his questions and remarks.

Paolo's discourse was a masterpiece in unlocking and bracketing my conceptual thinking and deconstructing what had seemed to me to be certain. And as all my assumptions were put aside and I was left face to face with what I was trying to understand, it was at the same time an initiation into a phenomenological way of thinking. Left puzzled yet longing, I started my research process again. I built and rebuilt the approach of the dissertation over and over, until it had become appropriate to the phenomenon I was trying to grasp.

But not only was my project transformed. Along with it, in corresponding cycles of yes and no, of attempt and discard, I went through a metamorphosis as well. Rombach¹ describes this as the reorganization of one's whole existence towards a new dimension. This needs a crack to start. The new unfolds and emerges in the empty space. And it only becomes visible in its range when the experience of its otherness is fully lived.

Reflecting on the encounter with Paolo, I also came to realize that the aesthetic educational approach of the expressive arts involves and includes what we call an "art-analogue" attitude in the professional

relationship: aesthetic, artistic and phenomenological attitudes fuse towards the demands of entering into the sensual presence of the moment in all its many dimensions.

Expressive Arts is based on the tradition of phenomenology and the lived experience in the arts. Neither thinking nor art-making are normative nor capable of being learned through recipes that tell what, when and how to work.

Phenomenology and the artistic process are accessible only through their own means; to teach expressive arts requires being able to stand and walk with these two feet—on the changing grounds of the individual dispositions of the students and the demands of the material and content. Teaching expressive arts at EGS is a way of doing aesthetics; it is a participatory, co-creative leading into a discourse that allows old patterns to break and new ones to emerge. I have come to love this continuous personal, intellectual and professional adventure.

1. Heinrich Rombach: *Struktur Anthropologie: "Der menschliche Mensch."* Freiburg/München 1987.



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