

ACADEMIA | Letters

The Venus of our anxiety. The first art was visceral.

Paulo Tiago Cabeça

This work continues the investigation published¹ and aims to demonstrate the phenomenon of artistic *creativity* in clay as a process of the *conscious* and *subconscious*. To this end we will analyze aspects of this Art from its manifestations in the Paleolithic to the present day. Why did the paleolithic man elaborate so many “Venus” female figures in stone, bone and clay? What is the secret of the Paleolithic Venus?

Clay as a material of expression

As a behavioral psychologist, who uses clay as a therapeutic material with his patients, João Luis Bucho² refers precisely to this characteristic of the material and our relationship with it³. He states that through clay, matter and creator establish a *Zone of Near Development*, according to Vygotskian (1987), which stimulates functions such as perception, attention, cognition, sensation and stimulation of the symbolic and imaginary. Clay acts as the “transitional object” between the world of fantasy and reality. “The expressions in clay...represent the manifestation of thoughts, feelings, conflicts, anxieties, questions (...) and establish the

¹Cabeça, Paulo, et al. 2020. Antologia de Ensaios LABORATORIO COLABORATIVO: Dinâmicas Urbanas, Património, Artes. VI Seminário de Investigação, Ensino e Difusão. Publisher: DINÂMIA'CET-ISCTE. Pp. 295

²Psychologist. Expressive therapist. Master in creativity and innovation. Consulted on December 29, 2018. Available in <https://www.joaoluisbucho.com/>

³Bucho, João Luis. *Expressive therapies and clay: vehicle of self-knowledge, creativity and expression*. Institutional Repository of The Fernando Pessoa University. Master's dissertations. 2011. Consulted on 29 December 2018. Available in: <https://bdigital.ufp.pt/handle/10284/2260>

dialogue between the conscious and the unconscious.”⁴. Bucho says that mastering clay is an achievement. Especially for those who have never done it before. Transposition, which often occurs unconsciously, to the molded object of interior images allows us, rather than mastering matter even rudimentarily, to dominate emotions, sensations, traumas or anxieties. Thus appeasing, with a therapeutic effect also, the human mind.

We often come across this *appeasing* effect in artists and curious people who mold clay. Often starting a work of art is an imperative *craving* for *the artist*, a *necessity*, almost as eating or drinking. When the work is finally completed and sees the light of day comes then this *appeasement and tranquility*, this feeling of embodiment that settles in the artist.

What is Creativity

Kampylis & Valtanen, (2010) state that exist more than 40 definitions for creativity.

According to the authors this list of definitions some concepts intersect. Namely those in the specialty literature are usually referred to as the four Ps of creativity (Richards, 1999): Person, Process, Pressure and Product. Thus, it can be considered that some of the authors agree, even partially, in their definitions. The common concepts are as follows:

1. Creativity is a key skill of individuals.
2. Creativity assumes an intentional activity or process.
3. The creative process occurs in a specific context or environment.
4. The creative process originates a product, tangible or intangible. The creative product must be new, original, unconventional, and appropriate, useful. At least from the perspective of the creative person.

Therefore, these characteristics of human creativity apparently repeat themselves, according to the various experts. Creativity exists in people and happens by intention in a specific environment necessarily giving rise to a result.

Stating that anyone can be a creative person Sternberg and Lubart (1991, 1993, 1995, 1996) expanded the model considering six distinct but interrelated factors, which were considered indispensable resources for creative expression: *Intelligence, intellectual styles, knowledge, personality, motivation, environmental context*. The one they called the *Investment*

⁴Ditto

Theory will have some elements in common with⁵ other theories, namely Amabile (1983), Csikszentmihalyi (1988a, 1988b, 1988c).

Creativity, Sternberg says, is largely a decision. Being a decision, it is therefore conscious, aware, rational. And this suggests to Sternberg that creativity can be developed. To be creative one will have to *decide* to have new ideas. A person may have analytical, synthetic or practical valences, but not apply them to problems involving creativity. Consequently, will not become a creative person.

Concept limitations

Artistic expression were often more than a rational or conscious choice - as defined by these theories - rather something instinctive and subconscious. Pollock, Van Gog, Munch, and many others, appear to be conscious, analytical and rational manifestations? Or rather emotional, anxious and *visceral* expressions? Those definitions described the most *conscious* part of the phenomenon of creativity in art. Everything indicated that there was another less rational facet involved. A facet of creativity from the subconscious. Animals also demonstrate creativity. Kaufman A.B., Butt A.B., Colbert-White E.N. & Kaufman J.C. (2011) establish as the premise of their work around the neurobiology of animal creativity, the definition of creativity according to humans from Plucker & Beghetto, (2004). In the same text and referring to animals, they ensure that “the whole theory of creativity in humans is applied point by point to animal creativity (...) eliminating the parts that do not apply.” Parrots know how to count, understand the concepts of equal or different, acquire language without direct training; In National Geographic (Ark Photo. Chimpanzee. 2015) we find chimpanzees that use basic tools such as sticks to catch ants; From Lindblad Expeditions (National Geographic. 2018) orcas that develop hunting and predation techniques, using fluid dynamics to hunt seals, or also from National Geographic (How orcas hunt great whites fascinates biologists. 2020) tonic immobility to hunt sharks. These observations reinforce that creativity can be a biological phenomenon transversal to many species

Survival and continuity

Art is, in fact, an *expression*. And an expression is a *necessity*.

⁵Sternberg, Robert J. 2006. The Nature of Creativity. Creativity Research Journal. Tufts University. Massachusetts. Vol. 18, No. 1, 87–9. Consulted on 15 January 2019. Available in https://www.cc.gatech.edu/classes/AY2013/cs7601_spring/papers/Sternberg_Nature-of-creativity.pdf

Those who express themselves necessarily need to do so. It is as fundamental as breathing, eating, drinking, sheltering from the cold.

Animals express themselves too. They communicate by sounds, movements, rituals. The human learned to do it in a more complex way, through the language, the writing, but also the Art. Creativity in Art mirrors this complexity. If we also consider human existence reduced to its essentials, and we strip our expression of subtlety, we will have at the root of everything the most basic anxieties: *survival* and *continuity*. Not only in humans.

The first art represented precisely these two major anxieties: *the animal* and the *woman*. The *survival* in the animals that were food or feed on us, and the *continuity* of the species was represented by the woman that gives birth. The paleolithic human did not rationalize the images. He just expressed them. In the figure of the woman – the so-called Paleolithic *Venus* – also the attributes of the female of the life-generating creature were particularly emphasized: the voluminous breasts, the prominent hips, the rather explicit sex. As opposed the head or extremities (feet, hands) were always represented with less relevance. Long-distance interactions and cultural sharing may be one of the reasons for the similarity between shapes and designs of images. In particular, the profuse female representation. Even if we consider displacements of thousands of kilometers to the first modern humans among adverse geographies, monstrous predators, diseases, and accidents of the whole species. There may also be a similarity of expression because if creativity is considered a *conscious* phenomenon but also by chance subconscious, then we could be faced with a response at least in the *biological part* common in all human beings.

Thus the first artistic creativity was apparently *visceral* and originated in the *subconscious*. Everything that questions our existence causes us greater anxiety and that must be expressed. The appeasement, in the materialization of these anxieties, in the physical manipulation of them is revealing of this urgency and absolute need. The expression brings us reassurance. It's not a choice. It's imperative. It is, as João Bucho points out, the possibility of bringing from the subconscious to the real world these images and events, which we can not otherwise control, but like so we manipulate, transform, dominate.

Conclusion

Survival and *continuity* are the first and visceral constraints of any biological or social being. The human hunter gatherer was the only animal that was able to express himself by *Art*. He represented *animals* and *women*. The *animals* that guarantee the survival, and the *woman* - the paleolithic *Venus* - that guarantees the *continuity* of the species. The first *Art*, its first creativity, may be thus demonstrably *visceral*. An expression of two first and ancestral anxieties. An

action that appeases us. Fundamental. The Venus representation may be the expression of our anxiety for genetic survivance.

References

- Absolon, K. (1949). The Diluvial Anthropomorphic Statuettes and Drawings, Especially the So-Called Venus Statuettes, Discovered in Moravia: A Comparative Study. *Artibus Asiae*, 12(3), 201-220. doi:10.2307/3248385
- Alencar E.S., Fleith D.S. (2003). *Contribuições Teóricas Recentes ao Estudo da Criatividade. Psicologia: Teoria e pesquisa*, Universidade de Brasília. Vol. 19 n. 1, pp. 001-008.
- Aragão, Soraya Rodrigues. 2015. *A Arte como expressão de sentimentos e catarse emocional nos processos terapêuticos*. Psicologia.pt. Consultado a 14 março de 2019. Disponível em http://www.psicologia.pt/artigos/ver_opiniao.php?codigo=AOP0370
- Bucho, João Luis S.M. Cruz. 2011. *As terapias expressivas e o barro: veículo de autoconhecimento, criatividade e expressão*. Trabalho de Mestrado. Universidade Fernando Pessoa. Porto
- Budja, Mihael. 2016. *Ceramics among Eurasian hunter-gatherers> 32000 years of ceramic technology use and the perception of containment*. Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana, SI
- Budja, Mihael (2007). *The Dawn of Ceramics*. Narodni muzej Slovenije, Ljubljana
- Budja, Mihael (2006). *The transition to farming and the ceramic trajectories in Western Eurasia - from ceramic figurines to vessels*. Department of Archaeology, Faculty of Arts, University of Ljubljana. Consultado a 19 fevereiro 2019. Disponível em http://www.academia.edu/2375716/The_transition_to_farming_and_the_ceramic_trajectories_in_Western_Eurasia_from_ceramic_figurines_to_vessels
- Cabeça, Paulo. Rodrigues, Paulo. Carrolo, Mariana. 2020. *Antologia de Ensaios LABORATORIO COLABORATIVO: Dinâmicas Urbanas, Património, Artes. VI Seminário de Investigação, Ensino e Difusão*. Publisher: DINÂMIA'CET-ISCTE. Pp. 295
- Cabeça, Paulo Tiago (2018). *Uma nova abordagem à barrística portuguesa. A influencia do projeto Aldeia da Terra na conceção de uma nova linguagem artística*. Universidade de Évora

- Gleitman H., Fridlund A., Reisberg D. 2014. *Psicologia*. 10ª Edição. Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian. Lisboa.
- Lindblad Expeditions-National Geographic. 2018. Wave Hunting: Prey Orcas on Seal. Antarctica Consulted on May 4, 2020. Available in <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K16lZU0agbg>
- Miroslav Kralik, Vladimir Novotny, Martins Oliva. 2002. *Fingerprint on the Venus of Dolni Vestonice I*. *Anthropologie*. XL/2. Pp 107-113
- Nathional Geographic. How orcas hunt great whites fascinates biologists. 2020. Retrieved 4 May 2020. Available in <https://video.nationalgeographic.com/video/animals-source/0000016b-f723-d5f3-a1fb-f7ff14210000>
- Nathional Geographic. Ark Photo. Chimpanzee. 2015. Retrieved May 4, 2020. Available <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/mammals/c/chimpanzee/>
- Nusbaum, Emily & Beaty, Roger & Silvia, Paul. (2014). Ruminating about mental illness and creativity. 10.1017/CBO9781139128902.025.
- O. Soffer, J. M. Adovasio, and D. C. Hyland. 2000. The “Venus” Figurines. Textiles, Basketry, Gender, and Status in the Upper Paleolithic. *Current Anthropology* Volume 41, Number 4
- Pamela B., Vandiver, Olga, Soffer, Bohuslav Klima, Jiri Svoboda. 1989. The Origins of Ceramic Technology at Dolni Věstonice, Czechoslovakia. Consultado em 8 de Janeiro de 2018. Disponível em <http://science.sciencemag.org/content/246/4933/1002>
- Kaufman A.B., Butt A.B., Colbert-White E.N. & Kaufman J.C. Towards a neurobiological model of creativity in nonhuman animals. *Journal of Comparative Psychology*, 2011, vol. 125, pp. 255— 272
- Kaufman J.C., Kaufman A.B. Capacity, potential, and ability: integrating different approaches to studying animal vs human creative processes. *RUDN Journal of Psychology and Pedagogics*. 2016. 4, 29—36. Consulted on 31 July 2020. Available in https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327564565_CAPACITY_POTENTIAL_AND_ABILITY_INTEGRATING_DIFFERENT_APPROACHES_TO_STUDYING_ANIMAL_VS_HUMAN_CREATIVE_PROCESSES
- Sternberg, Robert J. 2006. *The Nature of Creativity*. *Creativity Research Journal*. Tufts University. Massachusetts. Vol. 18, No. 1, 87–9. Consultado a 15 Janeiro 2019. Disponível em https://www.cc.gatech.edu/classes/AY2013/cs7601_spring/papers/Sternberg_Nature-

of-creativity.pdf

Svoboda, Jiří. 2008. *Upper Paleolithic female figurines of Northern Eurasia*. In: ed., PETRKOVICE. The Dolní Věstonice Studies 15, Brno. 193-223

Wittkover, Margot & Rudolf. 1963. *Born under Saturn*. The new York Review of books. Reedição de 2006.