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Poeticising life. Art and art education as forms of resistance and elaboration of the logic of hate

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Abstract

This article analyses the role of art and art education as practices of poeticising existence capable of countering the logic of hate and violence in contexts marked by alienation, trauma and social disharmony. Drawing on the theoretical contribution of Michèle Petit, in dialogue with Gaston Bachelard's poetics of *rêverie* and Hartmut Rosa's sociology of resonance, the article interprets hate as an expression of a silent and discordant relationship with the world and with others. In this context, art is taken as a device of resonance, capable of reactivating speech, imagination and the ability to attribute meaning to experience. From a methodological point of view, the research adopts a theoretical-interpretative approach integrated with case studies, identifying and analysing artistic and educational practices operating as forms of prevention, cultural resistance and therapy. The cases discussed – from the pedagogical atelier, artivism and street art, to artistic practices of trauma processing in war contexts – show how art can transform wounded objects, places and materials into symbolic spaces of reconciliation and healing. Importance is given to the role of the artist and art educator as *a passeur*: a cultural mediator who does not transmit predefined contents but creates the conditions for a symbolic transition towards forms of subjectivation, emancipation and the construction of bonds. The article concludes by arguing that the poeticization of existence today represents a fundamental educational and cultural resource for imagining and practising a culture of peace.

KEYWORDS: Poeticization of Existence, Art Education, Resonance, Hate and Violence Contrast, Culture of Peace.

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1. Introduction. Hate and violence as a language of disharmony and alienation

Michèle Petit is an anthropologist who collaborates with the Laboratoire Dynamiques Sociales et Recomposition des Espaces (LADYSS) of the CNRS in Paris. In her work, she has often focused on the relationship between the possibility of speech, appropriation of the world and traumatic experiences of hate and violence, which deny the practicability of this relationship.

Petit cites several examples from her research. One such example is Irene Vasco, who has been working for years in Colombia in suburbs that are prey to drug trafficking, or in communities of exodati (Colombia has almost eight million internally displaced persons). Another example is that of Catherine Meurisse, who survived the attack on the Charlie Hebdo editorial office. On 7 January 2015, Catherine left home very late and when she arrived outside the editorial office, the terrorist commando was already at work: together with her colleague Luz, she heard the shots from the Kalashnikovs and witnessed from outside a massacre in which she could have been a victim; in the following days, she found herself in a state of dissociation, traumatised and consumed by guilt for not having died too.

Michèle Petit also reinterprets Mira Rothenberg's (1979) account of a group of Jewish children from Eastern Europe who survived the Holocaust and found themselves in the United States after the war, in a foreign country, without their families, struggling with

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a new language. Rothenberg's book is emblematically titled "Des enfants au regard de pierre" (Children with Stone Eyes), because the gaze of these 32 children was "stone-like", unable even to verbalise anything: words had become uninhabitable for them, language had been expropriated from them. Rothenberg thus began to tell the children the story of the American Indians, how they too had been dispossessed of their country, and she played the children some poems composed by Native American poets. The children became fascinated. They cleared the classroom of desks and chairs, set up tepees, and drew a river and vegetation on the floor. Art, in the form of poetry and painting, allowed these children to understand what they had been through and unlocked their thoughts and words, which had been blocked by the traumas they had suffered.

This is where our proposal comes from. We are all experiencing an increasingly silent world – a world that, at best, does not respond to us and, at worst, turns against us, as demonstrated by the climate chaos of recent years – and others who are increasingly self-centred, disenchanted, alienated, if not aggressive, hostile and violent. The question – and the working hypothesis we formulate – is whether art can function in this context as an opportunity for contrast and redemption. As an opportunity for contrast: because the logic of hate and violence can be disarmed through art. As an opportunity for redemption: because it is not enough to counter hate, we need to build peace.

We will proceed in three steps.

In the first part (§2), we will explain the methodological approach we used, consisting of theoretical research and case studies. In this first step, we formulate our hypothesis, borrowing from the reflections of Hartmut Rosa (2010; 2019). It consists in believing that our society is characterised by the experience of alienation, or rather by a relationship with the world and with others in which they remain silent. This experience can be rendered, using a musical metaphor, by saying that the world and others no longer resonate: the result is a discordant relationship, a loss of harmony; we are no longer in tune with the world and with others. This situation of alienation can only be countered by (re)activating one or more axes of resonance. One of these axes is certainly art. In the experience of resonance, the world and others respond to us: harmony is restored, and a vibration in unison occurs.

The second step (§3) will consist of identifying some case studies that can confirm the hypothesis we have suggested. Identifying them will allow us to complete our theoretical proposal by suggesting three main ways in which art can counter hate and violence by restoring a resonant relationship with the world and with others. These are: (1) the atelier as a pedagogical device for preventing violent acts by building correct civic behaviour; (2) artivism, in particular street art, as a form of resistance and cultural transmission to promote a logic of respect instead of hate; (3) the use of art as a form of therapy, both in cases where the target is victims of hate and in cases where, thanks to art, the aim is the redemption of violent individuals.

The third and final step (§4) is the discussion of the results of the case studies. Their analysis – the outcome of which is the first hint of a phenomenology of forms of art-intervention to combat hate and violence – will lead us to question their distinctive features and propose. The final outcome will be, as a provisional conclusion, a focus on the art-educator as a key figure in a new social pedagogy.

2. Materials and methods. Re-harmonising the world through art

2.1. Time of crisis and the search for a harmonious composition with life

From a methodological point of view, this article opts for a theoretical research approach – proposing an interpretative hypothesis that in the future can guide empirical research – and tests its validity through comparison with practices by means of some case studies.

Theoretical – or speculative, or nomothetic (Van der Maren, 2003) – research is a mode of investigation whose primary object is the elaboration, analysis and conceptual clarification of theories, categories and interpretative frameworks, rather than the direct collection of empirical data (Babbie, 2020). It is based on methodologically controlled procedures such as critical analysis, argumentative reconstruction, comparison of theoretical models and, sometimes, genealogy of concepts, with the aim of highlighting implicit assumptions, internal consistencies, epistemological limitations and heuristic potentialities of the theories examined. From this perspective, theoretical research is therefore not a form of free speculative reflection, but secondary scientific work that produces knowledge through the organisation, interpretation and synthesis of already available theoretical contributions (Flick, 2018). The validity of theoretical research does not depend on immediate empirical verifiability, but on the transparency of the criteria for selecting sources, the coherence of the argument, the explicitness of analytical choices and, above all, the ability to generate conceptual models useful for guiding empirical research and professional action (Bryman, 2016). In the educational and social fields – as is the case with this work – theoretical research plays a foundational and guiding role, clarifying the constructs, languages and epistemological frameworks within which empirical studies are situated (Van der Maren, 2003).

In this regard, our research focused on a family of multidisciplinary theories having in common the awareness that our times are times of crisis marked by

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acceleration, depersonalisation and fear, and by the idea that this crisis can be countered by the ability to live life harmoniously. These theories include: the idea of "moments of happiness despite everything" (Augé, 2018), the economy of sufficiency (Sachs, 1998, 2023; Bailly, 2015), the revival of the contemplative dimension of life (Han, 2023), positive psychology and in particular the concepts of flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990) and "moments of light" (Shaeffer, 2015), the revival of the concept of wonder (Chirico & Gaggioli, 2018) and the issue of the sublime and catharsis (Blumemberg, 1997), finally aesthetic, neuroscientific and social reflection on the concept of resonance (Petit, 2023; Vessel, Star & Rubin, 2013; Cheng, 2006). Critical analysis of this literature has led us to isolate in particular the concept of resonance as focused on by German sociologist Hartmut Rosa (2010; 2019): starting from this concept, we will try to show how art can function as a device of resonance to re-establish man's relationship with the world and with others, previously compromised by the logic of hate and violence.

2.2. A phenomenology of forms of art-intervention

The case study is a qualitative research strategy aimed at the in-depth and contextualised analysis of a complex phenomenon, considered in its specificity and natural environment (Yin, 2018). Rather than aiming at statistical generalisation, this method aims at an intensive understanding of the processes, dynamics and meanings that characterise a single case or a limited number of cases, understood as systems delimited in time and space (Stake, 1995). The researcher collects data through multiple sources – such as interviews, observations, documents, artefacts and digital traces – adopting a triangulation logic that reinforces the credibility of the analysis. The case study – which may have exploratory, descriptive or explanatory purposes – is particularly suited to the investigation of emerging phenomena, educational innovations or professional practices, where the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly separable (Merriam, 1998). Validity does not lie in the representativeness of the sample, but in the analytical richness, consistency of the research design and transparency of the interpretative procedures, which allow the reader to assess the transferability of the results to other similar contexts (Creswell, 2013).

In our research, the identification of cases to be explored in depth is the result of a three-pronged exploratory investigation: firstly, a review of the literature to map the ways in which artivism (Trione, 2022) and media artivism (Medrado & Rega, 2023) have addressed the problem of hate and violence in order to defuse it; secondly, analysis of the web in search of emblematic experiences worthy of being translated into cases to support our thesis; thirdly, the analysis of creative materials available in the MOdE (Museo Officina dell'Educazione), a virtual museum that is part of the University of Bologna's Museum System and which has already become a laboratory for the creation of workshops designed according the perspective adopted in this article.

3. Results. The ways in which art defuses the logic of hate and creates spaces for resonance

3.1. "Don't stop the music!". Re-tuning with nature and with others

From the analysis of the above-mentioned literature (§ 2.1), art constitutes a privileged space of resonance, in the sense that Hartmut Rosa attributes to the term: a non-instrumental, non-appropriative relationship, capable of responding to and transforming those who experience it. The metaphor of resonating, of being in tune, also recurs in other contributions. Michèle Petit (2023, p. 28) observes that

> *what we find in literature and in contact with works of art from an early age is perhaps, first and foremost, at least for a short period, the possibility of feeling in harmony, in the musical sense of the term, with our surroundings', responding to a deep need for harmony between the external world and the inner world. 'From an early age, children [...] need to experience harmony, to feel in tune with their surroundings and, at the same time, with their inner world (Petit, 2023, p. 52).*

[*From now on, all the quotations from non-English written sources, are translated in English by the authors*].

This insight is reflected both in neuroscience – think of Vessel, Starr and Rubin (2013, p. 2), who observe how beauty promotes the fact that "our brain registers a certain "harmony" between the external world and our inner representation of ourselves" – and in developmental psychology: Daniel Stern, for example, describes the "primary affective attunement" between mother and newborn by comparing the gestures that promote it to the moment when musicians in an orchestra tune their instruments.

Art thus appears as a practice of re-tuning the relationship, a movement that opposes the logic of exploitation and waste in order to become, as Bailly says (2015, p. 201), "a movement towards things that is no longer one of exploitation, profit and waste, but one of gaze, respect, wonder, the idea of attention, of vigilant, sensitive listening". In this direction, Gaudin's idea of inhabiting also refers to a work of reabsorbing the discord and strangeness that separate us from the world, restoring a space of closeness to things: inhabiting means

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> *weaving all sorts of things around us to make them friends, to feel less indifference towards them. Inhabiting means giving things a place in a space of closeness. To reabsorb the sense of strangeness that distances us from what is outside ourselves. To try to escape the mental disorientation caused by a feeling of discord that we identify with the outside world (Gaudin, 1996, p. 22).*

Shaeffer (2015, p. 310) is on the same wavelength:

> *In every culture, human beings have been able to draw on a set of mental resources whose origins date back to the roots of life, in order to process (discontinuous) experiences that give rise to moments of light, in which everything seems to realign itself with simplicity and naturalness, leaving no room, for a few moments, for problems or anxieties. It is access to these moments of happy immanence that we in the West have been accustomed to identifying (for three centuries now) with the name "aesthetics".*

It is precisely in these moments that what Cheng calls "resonating" takes place: with oneself, with others, with living beings, according to a law of the soul that coincides with not impeding music.

> *Resonating, that is the right word. Resonating within oneself, resonating with the "basso continuo" of another, or with that of the living universe – this is what makes it possible to be immortal. "To sing is to be", writes Rilke. Is there another law for the soul outside of this: "Do not stop the music"? (Cheng, 2006, p. 49).*

From this perspective, only art seems capable of remedying our discordant relationship with the world and with others, because only art opens a space of resonance in which the world is no longer mute or passively available, but capable of responding to us.

The fruitfulness of this interpretative hypothesis will be tested in the next paragraph of this article through some case studies.

3.2. The *atelier*: pedagogical art as a form of prevention/redemption

A pedagogical interpretation of the meaning of spaces as tools for interpretation can help us understand how an atelier can contribute to countering the logic of hate. Specifically, we refer to the pedagogical atelier as an intentionally designed, dynamic, and transformable environment, oriented towards observation, experimentation, and the reworking of experience through a plurality of expressive languages (Panciroli, 2016). In line with this perspective, the educational space cannot be reduced to a purely functional dimension but rather takes the form of an "existential context" with a strong symbolic and relational value (Iori, 1996).

If we want to identify some educational characteristics of the atelier, we can first highlight a symbolic and interpretative dimension, also considering the most recent contributions on the cultural function of art and aesthetic devices. The atelier space can, in fact, be understood as a complex semiotic environment (Panciroli, 2023) acting as a device to produce meaning, in which artistic languages operate as cognitive and emotional mediators (Panciroli, 2016). In this regard, Mirzoeff (2015) emphasizes how contemporary visual culture is never neutral but constitutes a field of forces in which processes of power, inclusion, and exclusion are played out. By offering the possibility of deconstructing and reconstructing images, the studio allows us to think to visuality not in terms of immediacy and simplification, but as the subject of critical interpretation. Similarly, Mitchell (2017) highlights how images should not be understood only as representations, but as "acts" that produce effects in reality: the atelier thus becomes a space in which these visual acts can be questioned, transformed, and re-signified, countering the symbolic rigidity that fuels the logic of hate.

A second dimension is the experiential and aesthetic one, which can be understood through the contributions of scholars who have highlighted the role of aesthetic experience in transformative learning processes. Illeris (2018) points out that deep learning occurs when the cognitive, emotional, and social dimensions are integrated into a meaningful experience. The atelier, as a space for sensitive and embodied experimentation, promotes this integration, allowing individuals to learn through body, emotions, and imagination. This perspective refers to a teaching method valuing aesthetic experience as a form of knowledge that cannot be reduced to measurable outcomes but is essential for the formation of critical thinking. In this sense, the atelier teaches us to suspend immediate judgment and to slow down, which is also necessary for the symbolic processing of conflict.

A further dimension of the atelier is the relational and social one: Wenger-Trayner & Wenger-Trayner (2020) describe social environments as spaces for negotiating meanings in which communities are built through shared practices (Rivoltella & Panciroli, 2019). The atelier, as a non-hierarchical and open space, encourages such practices, promoting forms of participation that value the plurality of viewpoints. According to Biesta (2021), authentic education is not limited to the transmission of skills but concerns the possibility for individuals to "come into the world" as responsible beings in relation to others. The atelier, therefore, precisely because it is based on processes of co-construction and comparison, becomes a space in

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which the educational experience is expressed as a practice of symbolic coexistence, capable of counteracting the dynamics of exclusion and polarization.

Finally, the ethical-political dimension of the atelier as a space of cultural resistance can be further explored considering contemporary reflections on the educational role of art in contexts marked by conflict and symbolic violence. Nussbaum (2018) emphasizes how the arts play a crucial role in the development of moral imagination, understood as the ability to recognize the humanity of others.

Similarly, Butler (2020) highlights how cultural practices can open spaces of shared vulnerability, opposing the logic of dehumanization. In this perspective, the atelier is not only a place of expression, but also a political device in a pedagogical sense, educating people to take responsibility for and care for the common world. The atelier, as an intentional pedagogical space, embodies this possibility: a place where artistic experience becomes an exercise in humanization, capable of countering the symbolic impoverishment that fuels hatred and opening spaces of resonance, care, and shared responsibility.

In terms of size, the artistic-pedagogical atelier is configured as a symbolic and relational space capable of bringing about a real suspension of the logic of hate, acting according to two perspectives: preventive and reparative/redemptive. In "Nous sommes des animaux poétiques", Petit (2021) argues that human beings, even before being rational or social subjects, are narrative and poetic subjects who construct meaning through images, metaphors, stories, and symbolic gestures. It is precisely this poetic dimension that, when denied or impoverished, leaves room for forms of identity rigidity, emotional closure, and violence. The atelier, understood not simply as a place of artistic production but as an educational and cultural device, reactivates this dimension, offering a protected environment in which aesthetic experience allows complex emotions, inner conflicts, and experiences of exclusion to be processed without resorting to the language of aggression. In this context, art in the atelier can take on two distinct functions.

In a preventive sense, pedagogical art acts on individuals who have not committed acts of violence, but who may be exposed to dynamics of hate, radicalization, or dehumanization of the other. Through artistic creation, imagination is trained as an ethical faculty: the possibility of imagining other worlds, different points of view, and alternative narratives interrupts the simplifying mechanisms of hatred, which is based on reducing the other to a stereotype or enemy. As Petit points out, engaging with poetic experiences allows us to "inhabit nuances" (Petit, 2021, p. 104), to tolerate ambiguity and to recognize our own vulnerability, which are essential elements for non-violent coexistence.

From a redemptive perspective, the workshop takes on a reparative function for those who have already committed violence. In these contexts, art does not operate as a moralizing or corrective tool, but as an opportunity for self-renarration. The artistic gesture becomes an act of symbolization that allows the destructive experience to be transformed into expressive material, giving the subject the opportunity to recognize themselves as an author and not just as a culprit. According to Petit, it is precisely the poetic word – understood in a broad sense, as a symbolic form – that allows a distance from the violent gesture and reopens a space for humanization, in which the subject can return to thinking of themselves in relation to others. In both perspectives, preventive and redemptive, the atelier is therefore configured as a space of resonance: a place where individual experiences find an echo in shared forms, where art defuses the binary logic of hate and promotes processes of mutual recognition. In this sense, the poeticization of life does not represent an escape from reality, but an educational practice of cultural resistance, capable of countering the symbolic impoverishment that fuels violence and restoring a deeply humanizing function to education.

In this way, the pedagogical atelier becomes a device of resonance through which individuals can reconnect with themselves and with others, transforming experiences of closure, aggression and symbolic violence into possibilities for dialogue, recognition and peaceful coexistence.

3.3. Artivism: street art as a form of cultural resistance

If the atelier represents an intentional pedagogical space in which the "poeticization of experience" allows conflict to be processed and the logic of hate to be defused, artivism – and street art in particular – constitutes the extension of this educational stance into the public space. As Trione (2022) points out, artivism cannot be understood as a simple militant expression of art, but as a heterogeneous constellation of practices that bring art "back into the dynamics of history", removing it from pure contemplation and transforming it into a critical exercise of the gaze. In this perspective, street art takes the form of visual counter-information capable of intervening directly in everyday places, re-semantising urban spaces and turning them into "gyms of thought and images" (Bonfante, 2022).

The value of artivism lies in its ability to break the apparent neutrality of public space, making conflicts, inequalities, and symbolic removals visible. As Trione (2022) points out, street artists do not merely bear witness, but "intervene concretely in reality", making visibility a political act that provokes reactions, tensions, and stances. In this sense, street art acts as a practice of cultural resistance to the logic of hatred, as it interrupts narrative simplification and restores

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complexity to reality, forcing passersby to confront images that destabilize, question, and sometimes disturb. This function is particularly evident when street art is incorporated into educational and museum settings capable of enhancing its interpretative dimension.

This is the case of MOdE, the Museum Workshop of Education at the University of Bologna, which has integrated the language of street art into cultural and educational mediation programs. In particular, the use of murals and anamorphic illusions has made it possible to reflect on the relationship between perception, space, and meaning: the image, when viewed from a privileged point of view, recomposes itself, revealing a recognizable form, while from other angles it appears fragmented or indecipherable.



Figure 1 - A pedagogical atelier in MOdE.

This visual device becomes a powerful educational metaphor for social and cultural complexity, showing how meaning is never given once and for all, but depends on the gaze, position, and experience of the observer. In this sense, the experience offered by MOdE is fully in line with artivism as a pedagogical practice: anamorphic illusions and murals do not communicate unambiguous messages, but activate processes of interpretation, inviting subjects to question their own point of view and dominant narratives. Street art thus becomes an educational tool capable of countering the logic of hatred, which is based precisely on the rigidity of the gaze and the impossibility of recognizing the plurality of points of view.

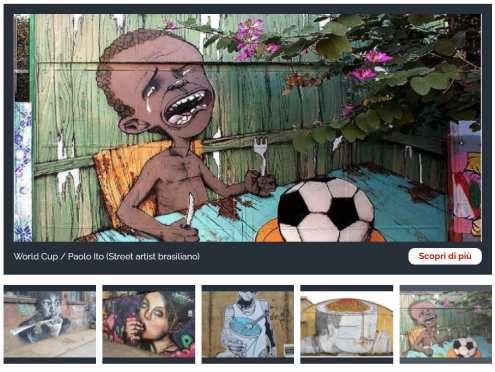


Figure 2 - Street art workshops in MOdE.

The connection to the meaning of the pedagogical atelier is obvious: like the atelier, artivism also poeticizes public space, transforming walls, facades, and urban surfaces into places of symbolic resonance. However, while the atelier works mainly on a protected and reflective level, street art exposes the poetic gesture to the risk of conflict, making it visible and shared. This exposure is where its educational power lies: art does not shy away from reality, but traverses it, offering symbolic forms that allow violence to be processed without reproducing it. Artivism, understood in this way, takes the form of a practice of cultural resistance which, through image and space, restores to the collective experience the possibility of thinking, feeling, and inhabiting the world outside the logic of hatred. Alongside the recognition of the transformative potential of artivism, it is nevertheless necessary to take a critical look at the risks inherent in politically engaged artistic practices, as explicitly pointed out by Trione himself (2022). One of the main dangers is moralism, or the tendency to produce works based on ethical assumptions that are apparently acceptable to everyone, but which end up reducing the complexity of reality to a simplified opposition between good and evil. In such cases, the work risks becoming a *prescriptive pedagogical* device, closer to the rhetoric of indignation than to an authentic critical exercise of the gaze.

A second, closely related risk concerns the aestheticization of conflict and suffering. Some artivist practices can fall into forms of spectacularization of pain, producing powerful images that, instead of activating processes of understanding and elaboration, end up numbing the viewer's sensitivity. This dynamic, already denounced by Susan Sontag in relation to images of war, leads to an immediate and consumable emotional experience, in which trauma becomes an aesthetic object and conflict loses its historical and political dimension. Bonfante (2022) emphasizes how this shift can transform artivism into a "ready-to-wear" practice, easily absorbed by the art system and the cultural market, neutralizing its subversive scope.

A further critical element concerns the ambiguous relationship between artivism and the art system. Many street artists and politically engaged artists, while declaring themselves antagonists, operate within the institutional and media circuits they intend to criticize. This "apocalyptic and integrated" condition, to use a formula made famous by Umberto Eco, raises questions about the real capacity of artivism to produce change and not just symbolic consensus. The risk is that the work will merely confirm the convictions of an already sensitized public, reinforcing a homogeneous moral community without affecting the deep structures that generate exclusion, violence, and hate. These critical issues take on decisive pedagogical significance. If artivism wants to establish itself as a form of cultural resistance to the logic of hatred, it must

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avoid replacing the latter with a new symbolic rigidity based on indignation or unilateral denunciation. The most effective artistic practices are not those that "drag politics into art", but those that look at politics through the lens of art, maintaining a critical distance that allows the work to remain open, ambiguous, and questioning. It is in this openness that artivism can retain an authentic poetic and pedagogical quality: not as an instrument of moral persuasion, but as a device of thought capable of generating questions, undermining certainties, and making thinkable again what the logic of hate tends to simplify and close off.

By re-signifying public spaces and activating critical and emotional participation, artivism restores forms of collective resonance capable of interrupting the symbolic simplifications on which hate and exclusion are based.

3.4. Art as a form of therapy

A final way in which the logic of hate can be countered is using art as a form of therapy, in at least two senses. In the first sense, as Picasso suggested, "art shakes the dust of everyday life from the soul": awakening and catharsis at the same time, the possibility of emancipation from a conformist and anaesthetised passivity. The second sense is suggested by the President of the *Videoinsight* Foundation, Rebecca Russo**,** collector, psychotherapist and patron: "Art causes insight, awareness, inner vision, intuition, solution. Art is revolution. It belongs to human nature, expresses primary needs, is profound, urgent. It is circular, immortal, universal". It is not only an opportunity to look at things differently, but also a way to change them: this is the case of the collective exhibition *Hater*, hosted in Turin in 2023 by the *Videoinsight* Foundation, which invited 23 artists to exhibit their works aimed at countering the logic of online verbal violence through art; or that of the Künstlerhaus, Halle für Kunst & Medien (KM-) in Graz, which in 2019 brought together a group of sixteen international artists in the collective exhibition *Hate Speech: Aggression and Intimacy*, curated by Sandro Droschl.

The case we have chosen to highlight to demonstrate the therapeutic value of art in relation to hate and violence is that of some Israeli and Palestinian artists. Their work is born out of close contact with the experience of war and aims to help process grief and suffering.

Seagal Hagege is an American Jew who decided to make *aliyah* and move to Israel after COVID. Here she dedicates herself to providing psychological support to reservists, shocked by war and what they had seen, done and suffered during it. It is in this context that the *Helmets 4 Chayalim* project was born, in which Seagal asks artists to create works of art from old soldiers' helmets. *Dr. H*, an artist known for his urban graffiti style, paints lemons on the helmet (Figure 3): "It's the lemon tree in my mother's garden. The one that kept me grounded every time I had to go to war. Home, family, security".



Figure 3 - DrH: *Helmet with lemons*.

Another artist, Ayala, covers her helmet with rose petals (Figure 4) made from letters written by soldiers to their families in 1960. The idea is to use art as a storytelling tool to process the experience of war from the perspective of personal feelings and experiences.



Figure 4 - Ayala: *Helmet with rose petals*.

Tomer Peretz is an Israeli artist who lives and works in California, after serving in the Israeli army. Directly linked to the experience of war is his collection War Is Over: unique garments made from discarded military jackets enriched with multimedia elements (Figure 5).



Figure 5 - Tomer Peretz: a jacket of *War is over* collection.

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Each jacket carries a chip that tells the true story of the person who wore it: the wearer can use their smartphone to access the information contained in the jacket by listening to audio files, reconstructing the history of the jacket and looking at photographs. It is a conscious and powerful fashion project that aims to transform the uniform – a symbol of conflict – into a testimony of change, identity and peace.

Jonathan Kis-Lev, born to parents who immigrated to Israel from the former Soviet Union, is a young street artist who uses art as a symbolic healing practice for places wounded by conflict. With his coloured spray cans, he transforms the walls of Bethlehem and the occupied territories into spaces for emotional reworking and reconciliation, veritable canvases of peace. The *Naïve Series*, painted with his left hand to evoke childlike spontaneity, gives shape to smiles, animals and gestures of affection: simple images that act as therapeutic devices, capable of reactivating empathy, imagination and trust (Figure 6).



Figure 6 - Jonathan Kis-Lev: *Naïves series*.

It is an art that reminds us how drawing, like play, can become an act of non-violent resistance and an exercise in possible futures. Kis-Lev's collaboration with Palestinian artists in the West Bank reinforces this perspective, showing how shared creativity can open spaces for dialogue and healing where politics struggles to reach, contributing to the construction of a culture of peace based on encounter and mutual recognition.

Assaf al Kherty recovers scrap metal, abandoned tools and war debris scattered in the fields, transforming what was once an instrument of destruction into a material for healing and symbolic recomposition (Figure 7). His powerful and essential sculptures act as collective therapeutic devices: everyday objects – a suitcase, a drill bit, a school backpack – are removed from the logic of war and returned to a human narrative, capable of giving shape to the lives, wounds and hopes of young people in the Strip. In this process of creative reuse, scrap metal becomes the supporting structure of new stories and a vehicle for resilience, allowing trauma to be processed and a different future to be imagined. Al Kherty's works thus take the form of small monuments to a possible peace: signs of a culture that, even in a territory marked by blockade, poverty and destruction, entrusts art with the task of rebuilding bonds, meaning and hope.



Figure 7 - Assaf al Kherty at work.

Through these artistic practices, objects, bodies and places marked by war and hate are transformed into spaces of resonance, where trauma can be symbolically elaborated and the possibility of empathy, reconciliation and non-violent coexistence can emerge again.

4. Discussion and conclusion. The artist and art educator as *passeur*

The materials and cases discussed in this article clearly show how art and art education can be understood as practices of poeticising existence (Petit, 2023), capable of countering the logic of hate and violence not only on a symbolic level, but also on a relational and therapeutic one. In contexts marked by alienation, trauma and loss of resonance with the world, art reactivates what Bachelard (1971) defines as *rêverie*: a psychic and cultural space in which experience becomes habitable, narratable and transformable once again. The cases analysed – from the pedagogical atelier to street art, to artistic practices for processing trauma in war contexts – show how artistic creation makes it possible to restore speech where violence has rendered it impracticable, to re-establish the relationship between the inner and the outside world, to transform objects, places and wounded memories into devices of resonance. In this sense, art does not function as a simple representation of pain, but as a gesture of care and resistance, capable of producing bonds, empathy and mutual recognition: an educational, cultural and therapeutic response to the disenchantment of the world.

The artist and art educator then take on the role of *passeur*, of ferrymen, accompanying individuals and communities towards spaces where it is possible to inhabit the world poetically, give shape to emotions, process trauma and imagine alternatives to the present.

The figure of *the passeur*, as it emerges in the thinking of Michèle Petit (2023), designates people who does not transmit content or impose meanings, but creates the conditions for the other to cross a threshold: towards symbolic language, imagination and poetic speech. The *passeur* does not guide from above, but accompanies, making accessible a space where everyone can

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reconfigure their experience and reclaim their voice. In this perspective, the *passeur* is the one who guards and opens, rather than the one who explains.

This role finds an important resonance in the thinking of the French philosopher Jacques Rancière (1991), particularly in the figure of *the maître ignorant*, who breaks down the hierarchy between those who know and those who do not, basing the act of education on the principle of the equality of intelligences. For Rancière, too, emancipation does not come about through explanation, but through the activation of an autonomous movement of thought. The *passeur* shares this logic: he does not lead towards predefined knowledge but makes possible an experience of crossing in which the individual becomes the subject of his own learning and transformation. In this sense, the *passeur* operates a politics of sensitivity, redistributing the "partage du sensible" and opening up spaces in which art and words can escape the logic of domination to become instruments of care: a slow and profound work on the imagination, capable of rebuilding bonds, generating empathy and reactivating hope, even - and above all - in contexts marked by fracture, violence and loss.

Authors'contribution

Chiara Panciroli and Pier Cesare Rivoltella: Data curation, Original draft preparation, Reviewing, Writing (§ 4). Chiara Panciroli: Writing (§§ 3.2, 3.3). Pier Cesare Rivoltella: Conceptualisation, Methodology, Writing (§§ 1, 2, 3.1, 3.4).

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