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**Art is a path for creating
an inclusive society where we all
experience the sense of Oneness**



TOOLKIT

ART IS A
MEETING
POINT WHERE
NO ONE LIVES
FORGOTTEN
AND ALONE

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The present Toolkit has been created in **the framework of the European Creative Europe project “No One Forgotten”**. The project aims to promote cooperation between people with specific needs and skills and people without disabilities in different artistic disciplines by improving the well-being of both parties as well as the improvement of their mental health and human connection. The method used is the “Art of Connection” - interacting with vulnerable groups through art, which aims to enhance inner qualities such as acceptance, patience, compassion, access to our vulnerability and the ability to co-create.

The project “No One Forgotten” based on the present Toolkit, is organising trainings addressed to artists with or without disabilities in all partner countries and is also creating inclusive performances in 4 different arts (theatre, painting, dance and music/soundscaping).

The project consortium consists of 5 partners in 4 European countries. The coordinator is the **Academy of Fine Arts** in Naples (Italy) while the expert organization that is transferring the method “Art of Connection” to the partnership is **Hopeart** from Greece, in straight collaboration with the cultural and multi-disciplinary association **Vo’Arte** from Portugal, the **Locative Media Supercluster** NGO organization from Belgium and the training organisation **Action Synergy** from Greece.

More information about the project can be found in the website: www.nooneforgotten.eu

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Introduction

In order to start talking about connecting, we first need to find the common term of this wide open and precious word that is hidden deep inside every human being and in a way describes the mechanism that we all are made from.

What is the meaning of connection for you?

Connection has to do with something invisible in our eyes, but perceivable in our souls. In this study we will examine the connection between 2 human beings and specifically between different kind of artists (actors, musicians, dancers, painters) without or with special “abilities” with the main goal to build an artistic social innovative ACT. Let’s remember that everyone has his/her unique “special” abilities anyway.

To succeed the connection between 2 human beings we suggest the following sequence:

Connection

with nature ---> connection

with ourselves ---> connection

with every being

According to the connection between two human beings, we will explore the conditions under which this invisible space between two people can become more “visible” and perceptible to our senses. Based on the skills method “The Art of Connection” by Angeliki Ariadni Voulgari, we will attempt to create an innovative toolkit of practices, exercises, “rituals” and suggestions that will help artists to meet in a common space of coexistence and creativity.

“The way we exist and interact is printed on the way we create” — Angeliki Voulgari

We will meet the 4 skills—the inner state—of the “Art of Connection” approach and develop practices and exercises for each skill in each different art form. Theatre, Dance, Music in the sense of Sound and Painting.

This toolkit can be useful for every artist, educator, facilitator or artistic director who wants to be able to create artistic results from people with or without disabilities. But honestly, it’s not about art, it’s about being present or being the “present” in the society we want to create. As French Fluxus artist from the 60s Robert Filliou said, “Art is what makes Life more interesting than Art”.

ART IS WHAT
MAKES LIFE MORE
INTERESTING
THAN ART

Robert Filliou

1. The story behind the “Art of Connection”

The “Art of Connection” was created by Angeliki A. Voulgari in 2019-2021 and it is a collection of communication tools based on psychological, spiritual and artistic principles which actually extends to a useful manual of empowerment, self improvement and realization.

As an actress she has worked for more than a decade in demanding healthcare environments providing artistic and educational intervention for vulnerable groups of people. Mrs Voulgari was participating herself in theatrical performances in children’s hospitals at first, and subsequently she was implementing inspiring artistic programs adapted to the needs of the elderly and conducting “therapeutic” artistic visits to rooms of children’s oncology units.

In the following years, she was involved both as an actress and a writer in theatrical performances adapted to people with different characteristics, such as children with down syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy, children with visual or hearing impairments, while, at the same time, she designed and implemented social skills artistic programs in psychiatric clinics for minors and child protection institutions.

So during that time she has been collecting the special characteristics of the tools she has been using herself to create deeper connection experiences with people who are going through a difficult time or who are being tested. Everything manifested through practice and repetition. Experiences that overcame the classical duo “viewer-actor” and actually became a deeper understanding of human nature in terms of communication and bonding. From this kind of action Angeliki Voulgari managed to discover all the delicate meanings of the things that were already there but in disguise because of several social conditions and fixed perception —or simple innocent ignorance.

So, this is a helpful guide to become more conscious concerning matters of communication, connection and life skills that can be applied everywhere and to everyone creating a safe and interesting passage to empowerment.

The four main skills of the “Art of Connection” are empathy, generosity, vulnerability and expression. In this toolkit we will work with the three of the four skills and specifically with empathy, generosity and our ability to enter into our vulnerable territory. Since we are referring to artists, therefore the skill of expression is already active.

2. Connecting with nature - Connecting with yourself and others

2.1. Connecting with nature

Sometimes the language we use to describe nature as the environment is putting us in a position of an observer, external to the landscape. If we shift our point of view from a bird’s-eye perspective, we can see that we are part of nature and there is continuity between our body, spirit, soul and the nature around us. The reason is that because we are Nature, we are part of the evolution of life on Earth and the Universe, inheriting our anatomy and our sensory organs from so many species. We are made of Nature and this deep and beautiful reality is an opportunity to get to know better who we are by getting to know the Earth in an intimate way. As a mirror, nature reflects on us as we reflect on nature. It’s our opportunity to learn from its intelligence. Opening our senses and our heart and feeling connected to nature is a powerful energy to better connect with ourselves but also with other people, because we are all nature. Establishing a connection with someone else through our awareness, love and gratitude for nature is an invitation for other life forms to be part of the conversation, giving a voice to the Earth through our connections with human beings. More than a mesmerizing experience it is an absolute necessity if we want to contribute to stop the destruction of the planet, by cultivating a sense of belonging.

So the human connection to the earth is there, it exists anyway, we just need to retrain ourselves to experience it. As John Young says:

We build threads with all the beings around us the birds the animals the trees and over time with the stars with the moon with each other as human beings with our ancestors and with the unborn and those threads grow thicker and thicker with every interaction with every observation with every question with every story we tell to each other about what we’ve seen, what we’ve learned, what we’ve experienced and eventually those threads grow thicker and thicker until they become ropes and you know that’s what we’re hardwired for, all of us, these people are related to the collective ancestors of all of us. We are all designed for strings to become ropes and you all know what

the gift of connection feels like with your pet or with your best friend or with the person that you love the most but could you imagine if you had it with all aspects of nature?

Spending time in nature can teach us overwhelming feelings. It is not only each individual of each species who can teach us, but also the interconnection between species along the cycle of the day and the seasons. We could call it the intelligence of the ecosystems.

For example the night birds call and sing in the dark. It may take a long time to see them. Maybe in the beginning we will just listen to the sound and be able to see only a dark sky. Their call is so loud in the night that it seems unreal not to see them! It is about looking at the ground from a higher location from the fields where we can finally spot their bright yellow eyes at sunset. Training ourselves in the senses, we will reach a point where we will realize that looking at birds can be done with our ears.

It is for sure a deeper quality we can awaken inside us, to train and shift our senses to perceive with the whole body. In this point we embody the essence of connection. Through nature, to the space inside us.

2.2. Connecting with yourself. A deeper look inside the human being

But what about the inside of a human being? What will happen, if we allow nature to teach us the natural way? Every human being has as a physical educator, the creation that surrounds them and of which they are a part, it is enough to give a specific attention to this omnipresent and discreet educator, in order to become the most eloquent teacher they could ever have. Tapping into this knowledge is not about working but about being vulnerable and letting Nature penetrate our senses, to let nature work on us. Let's put a magnifying glass to see the invisible part inside us, and some things that will help to establish the primary "connection" inside every human.

If we accept that, in order to truly connect with whatever seems separated from our bodies, we need first to bring into harmonious internal connection the basic principles that constitute a human being, then it is interesting to trace, in the light of spirituality and philosophy, which are these primary principles that compose a human being¹. Several ancient Greek philosophers, most prominently Aristotle, spoke about

the soul, while the concept of spirit is found both in the Christian tradition and in Eastern religions and traditions. But what is this connection finally and how can we achieve it.

First we need to see the materials we are all made from, whether we are artists or not, people with "disabilities" or not. Because above all, we are all people with different characteristics. In our approach there aren't people with and without disabilities but human beings with different characteristics. In the boundless and borderless panorama of artistic creativity, there are no barriers between people, nor disabilities to distinguish. Each of us is a human being, woven with our unique characteristics. In the artistic world, it is peculiarity that emerges as the centerpiece, distinguishing the artists in their creative expression and in their ability to communicate through a sensitivity, whether shaped by physical or psychological challenges. This unique, particular sensitivity gives life to art, reflecting the soul in a dance of colors and emotions on the canvas of existence.

Every human being is made up of 3 basic principles: Body, Soul and Spirit, and in order to find out how to "turn on" this in-between space, we must first see these 3 inseparable and interpenetrating principles. We have chosen the simple and understandable definitions (among the many that exist) of the triptych "Body, Soul, Spirit" by the Austrian philosopher and social reformer, Rudolf Steiner, because it serves us best to use a common verbal code from now on.

By "Body" is meant that through which the things in a person's environment reveal themselves to that individual.

By "Soul" is meant that through which the individual associates things with their own being, through which they experience pleasure and displeasure, desire and aversion, joy and sorrow in connection with them.

By "Spirit" is meant that which becomes manifest in them when, as Goethe put it, they look at things as a kind of "divine being".

So the first connection that we suggest to examine is the one our soul creates. We can say that our soul is the vehicle through which the spirit comes into communication (connection), on the one hand with the body, on the other hand with the external world, and exactly that is the reason that we don't suggest different methods for artists with different characteristics. Because the real "way" to succeed human connection is mainly through the soul and not the body. When the body is struggling, we simply need to find a way to adjust our intention to connect to this specific condition.

1. Voulgari, Angeliki-Ariadni, The Art of Connection. iWrite 2022

Based on the above definitions, we will try to talk about connecting two people in a more essential way. In essence, every time we come into contact with a human being, we use all three of our sectors, since they are interpenetrating and inseparable principles, we just do it automatically. When the process becomes more conscious, more meaningful results are likely to emerge from the connections we make. Maybe then we can talk about “holistic experiences of connection”.

3. Art, Psychology & Spirituality and their importance in human connections

“Everything exists in relation to...

Everything starts with a connection”—*Angeliki Voulgari*

If we attempt to study what is the common space of these fields, we may end up in 3 different ways that a human can choose, to know themselves. In other words to reconnect with the true self, this divine self which is unique and unrepeatable, the individual spirit.

We can say that psychology is a science that helps people to deal in a more conscious way with their feelings, learn how to recognize them better, deal with them and overcome possible traumatic experiences that make their relationships dysfunctional. In other words it is a path to find a true connection with yourself through the understanding and the balance of our feelings.

And from this point of view somebody can attempt to connect more authentically with another human being.

Art and its expressions such as painting, music in terms of the sound, dance, theater, are also ways leading to self-knowledge. Of course art can constitute in the first stages, a sense of relief for everybody. Also art can be therapeutic for people with emotional problems, elderly people with severe disabilities and mental disorders (Wald, 1993). The creative process encourages a human being to expand and discover aspects of themselves that are not accessible to awareness. In this case the investigative or artistic activity is a reflection of the self and helps to expose conscious or unconscious aspects.² The above process leads to

a better view of oneself and on a second level to the connection with who we really are and from there begins any connection with any other human being.

As far as spirituality is concerned, we can say that it is a door that leads to a new path that drives us from the “perceptible” that does not exist, in the “not perceptible” from our senses to what really exists.³ And that is our individual spirit.

So in a way, spirituality is the 3rd path that leads to this internal connection with our immortal element, our divine part. Also from this point we are able to experience in a holistic way as body, soul and spirit, the invisible network that keeps us connected with nature and with every other being around us. And this network will be revealed through ecumenical coexistence with nature and all people regardless of race, economic state, national religious differences, physical or mental diversity.

The practices proposed in this manual are based on skills that arise from the above three fields, (art, psychology and spirituality). We suggest a new perspective on the way the artistic process happens. A perspective that stands beyond the difficulties that may arise from possible disabilities and physical or mental differentiations, as the basis of our proposal is internal qualities, skills and inner states, to which we all have access without exception.

4. Introducing the skills: Empathy, Generosity, Vulnerability and Expression

4.1. Empathy

Empathy, the ability to understand and share the feelings of others, is a fundamental quality that holds immense significance in various aspects of our lives. This holds particularly true for professionals supporting vulnerable groups, because of its role in creating a therapeutic relationship with these groups. This type of relationship is also fundamental for professionals who aim to increase diversity awareness, to promote inclusion, or to inspire the creative process. By cultivating empathy, we gain a deeper understanding

2. Τσέργας, Νικόλαος, *Θεραπευτικές προσεγγίσεις μέσω Τέχνης* [Therapeutic Approaches through Art], Αθήνα (ΤΟΠΟΣ), 2014 (σελ. 99)

3. Δανέζης, Μάνος, *Σπάζοντας τον Καθρέφτη. Για μια Νέα Φυσική Φιλοσοφία της Σύγχρονης επιστημονικής Γνώσης* [Breaking the Mirror. For a New Philosophy of Modern Scientific Knowledge], ΔΙΑΥΛΟΣ 2023 (σελ. 143)

of others' experiences, develop connections across diverse backgrounds, and tap into the wellspring of inspiration that fuels our creative endeavors. In this section, we will explore the profound impact of empathy in these three realms, uncovering the transformative power it holds in promoting understanding, inclusivity, and innovation. From supporting those in need to embracing diverse perspectives and unlocking the boundless realms of creativity, empathy emerges as a catalyst for positive change, fostering a world where empathy becomes the guiding force that connects and enriches us all.

Empathy and vulnerable groups

Empathy plays a significant role in supporting vulnerable groups within society. These groups, often marginalized due to factors such as age, gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or disability, face numerous barriers and disadvantages. Discrimination, prejudice, and limited access to resources and opportunities are just a few of the challenges they encounter.

Empathy allows individuals to understand and share the feelings and perspectives of vulnerable groups. By cultivating empathy, we can develop a deeper comprehension of their experiences, difficulties, and needs. This understanding, in turn, raises awareness about the issues these groups face and fosters a more inclusive society.

Empathy goes beyond understanding; it spurs individuals to become advocates for vulnerable groups. It ignites a sense of justice and motivates action, inspiring individuals to challenge discriminatory practices, support policy reforms, and work towards social change. By standing up for these groups, empathetic individuals can amplify their voices and promote equality and inclusivity.

Creating supportive environments is another vital aspect of empathy. When individuals demonstrate empathy, they help establish safe and welcoming spaces for vulnerable groups (Deligianni et al., 2017). By fostering understanding, acceptance, and respect, empathy reduces stigma, encourages positive interactions, and allows vulnerable individuals to feel valued and supported.

Furthermore, empathy facilitates personal connections and relationships. It enables individuals to form genuine bonds with members of vulnerable groups, fostering trust and bridging gaps between different communities (Stanley & Sethuramalingam, 2015).

Through these connections, people can build alliances and collaborate to address the specific needs and challenges faced by vulnerable groups.

Empathy also plays a crucial role in policy and program development. By empathizing with the experiences of vulnerable groups, policymakers and program developers gain insight into their unique struggles and can design initiatives that provide effective support. Including the voices of vulnerable groups in decision-making processes ensures a more empathetic approach to policy development, better reflecting their needs and aspirations.

However, it is important to note that empathy alone is not enough to address the systemic issues faced by vulnerable groups. It must be coupled with concrete actions, such as advocating for equal rights, supporting social programs, and challenging discriminatory practices. Empathy serves as a foundation for understanding and motivating change, but true progress requires dedicated efforts to create a more equitable and inclusive society for all.

Empathy and Diversity

Empathy plays a vital role in fostering understanding and inclusivity within diverse communities. When we cultivate empathy, we develop the ability to understand and share the feelings, perspectives, and experiences of individuals from different backgrounds, cultures, and identities. This allows us to bridge gaps, break down stereotypes, and build connections based on mutual respect and appreciation.

In diverse societies, empathy helps create a sense of belonging and acceptance. By empathizing with individuals who have different racial, ethnic, religious, or cultural backgrounds, we can foster an environment where everyone feels valued and understood (Toosie, 2006). Empathy encourages us to recognize and celebrate diversity as a strength, rather than seeing it as a barrier or source of division.

Empathy also promotes effective communication and collaboration across diverse groups (Esen, 2005). When we seek to understand others' experiences and emotions, we can engage in meaningful dialogue, resolve conflicts, and work together towards common goals. By embracing diverse perspectives and engaging in empathetic conversations, we can uncover new insights, innovative solutions, and foster a more harmonious and inclusive society.

Furthermore, empathy is crucial for dismantling biases and prejudice. When we empathize with those

who have experienced discrimination or marginalization due to their gender, sexual orientation, or any other aspect of their identity, we develop a deeper understanding of the challenges they face (Batson et al, 1997). This understanding prompts us to challenge our own biases, confront prejudice, and advocate for equal rights and opportunities for all.

Empathy is not about erasing differences or assimilating diverse individuals into a single mold. Instead, it enables us to appreciate the richness and uniqueness that diversity brings to our communities. It encourages us to embrace and learn from our differences, fostering a culture of inclusion, respect, and appreciation for the mosaic of identities and perspectives that exist within our society.

In summary, empathy and diversity go hand in hand. By cultivating empathy, we can create environments where diversity is celebrated, where individuals feel heard and understood, and where collaboration and mutual respect flourish. Through empathy, we can break down barriers, build bridges, and foster a society that embraces and thrives on its diversity.

Empathy and Creativity

Empathy and creativity have a powerful and interconnected relationship. Empathy enables us to understand and share the emotions, experiences, and perspectives of others, while creativity involves thinking and expressing ourselves in original and innovative ways. When these two qualities come together, they enhance and enrich our creative processes and outcomes.

Empathy fuels creativity by providing a deep well of inspiration. When we empathize with others, we tap into a vast array of diverse experiences and emotions. This understanding of different perspectives and backgrounds opens our minds to new ideas, enabling us to explore alternative viewpoints and imagine unique possibilities. Empathy sparks our imagination, allowing us to see the world through different lenses and create meaningful, thought-provoking work.

Furthermore, empathy helps us connect with our audience or intended recipients. By understanding their emotions, needs, and desires, we can create art, stories, or products that resonate on a profound level. Empathetic creators have a keen ability to capture universal human experiences, evoking emotions and fostering a sense of connection. This connection enhances the impact and relevance of our creative endeavors, making them more relatable and meaningful to others.

Empathy also plays a crucial role in collaboration and teamwork, which are often essential in creative endeavors (Cross & Woodruff, 2009). By empathizing with our fellow collaborators, we can better understand their perspectives, strengths, and limitations. This understanding fosters effective communication, trust, and a sense of psychological safety within creative teams. It allows for the synthesis of diverse ideas and perspectives, leading to innovative and dynamic creative outcomes.

Moreover, empathy nurtures an environment of support and encouragement. When we empathize with others, we create spaces where individuals feel valued, heard, and respected. This psychological safety encourages risk-taking and the exploration of unconventional ideas, especially if the goal is shared (Cross, 2006; Kirschner & Tomasello, 2009). Empathy helps us provide constructive feedback, recognizing the efforts and vulnerabilities of others while fostering a culture of growth and experimentation.

At the same time, creativity enhances empathy by providing expressive outlets for understanding and conveying emotions. Through creative endeavors such as art, music, or storytelling, we can capture the nuances of human experiences and communicate them in impactful ways (Tomasello et al, 2005). Creativity allows us to transcend language and cultural barriers, connecting with others on a deeply emotional level.

In summary, empathy and creativity are intertwined forces that fuel and inspire one another. Empathy provides the foundation for understanding and connecting with others, while creativity allows us to transform that understanding into original and impactful expressions. Together, empathy and creativity foster innovation, connection, and meaning in our creative endeavors, enriching both the creators and the recipients of creative work.

In this particular approach we use empathy as the main skill for two people to begin to create a more meaningful interaction. The basic condition is a “dual observation” that the artists should develop, in order to be able to function empathetically. The artist needs to have an internal opening and at the same time to know when to “shut down” their boundaries. To become wide open and at the next moment, to be able to return to themselves without losing the connection. To learn how to receive and offer, receive information and signs and at the same time send personal “messages”. But a message can be sent in different ways using another “vehicle.”

Speech

We can talk, interact, communicate and connect in many ways:

a. Using Speech formulated with words

Of course the ability to use speech with words is a great development of humanity that led to cultural evolution, philosophy, poetry, literature, scientific development and much more. We could say that it is a gift to the human species with dominant effect, our ability to communicate deeper meanings and make meaningful connections with other human beings.

But,

Connection is not only mental exchange (intellect), connection is not only transfer of information, belief and knowledge.— Angeliki Voulgari

Connection involves the soul and physical interaction. Speech or vocal language may be a recent evolution in humanity, although a topic of discussion for paleontologists. Even in our time, most of our “oral” communication is not with words but with symbols, signs, gestures of hands and the whole body, in delicate and in more expressive ways. Sometimes it seems that words are only an illustration in the larger panorama of symbolical communication we have with others, including non-humans. More than human language it shows the bigger picture of what communication stands for, in essence connection. Humans still use manual and facial gestures when they speak, especially when people who meet have no common language. There is also a great number of sign languages, commonly associated with Deaf communities. These sign languages are equal in complexity, sophistication, and expressive power, to any oral language. The cognitive function is similar and the parts of the brain used are similar. The main difference is that the “phonemes” are produced on the outside of the body, articulated with hands, body, and facial expression, rather than inside the body articulated with tongue, teeth, lips, and breathing.

b. Using Speech formulated with Sounds

Mainly in European mythology, the origin of speech and language comes from the animal and spirit world, in the form of the language of the birds. Birds were seen in many early cultures around the world as messengers, bringing knowledge, even up until now.

If we want to appreciate the diversity of languages

and sounds, let’s celebrate with no doubt the more than ten thousand species of birds who developed their own calls and songs during millions of years. Being aware of the songs of this natural orchestra brings great joy and the ability for deep listening. Some species like the starlings are able to imitate other birds and the black bird will elaborate a very unique song during its life. Always available outdoors, they can be our great teachers to master the listening and the talking. They tell us for example that the time of silence between 2 sentences is meaningful and it’s also about body language and motion. Some birds do make sounds literally by the motion of their wings during the flight. We are the children of birds, probably inspired by their songs for the creation of our first music and singing. A new trend is parkours in nature, with (young) people running, climbing, swinging through wild environment becoming one with the world around them, part of the nature. Or the way communication with horses is curing mental problems, feeling understood and soothed beyond words by touching the animals and feeling yourself accepted through their big eyes.

c. Using Speech formulated with Bodies

Speech is a multifaceted realm, extending beyond the confines of words alone. It encompasses the entire spectrum of human expression, including the world of dance and movement. These non-verbal forms of communication possess a unique power, offering a diverse approach to our thoughts, feelings, and stories.

Through dance and movement, communication takes on a new dimension, emphasizing the richness of human expression. It reminds us that speech transcends mere words, becoming akin to a dance—a rhythmic and expressive form of movement, interwoven by threads of connection and meaning.

We can recognize that communication extends far beyond the boundaries of linguistic articulation.

In the realm of dance and movement, we encounter a unique mode of expression, one that bypasses words yet communicates a vivid tapestry of emotions, intentions, and narratives. Dance, as an art form, possesses the remarkable ability to convey abstract ideas, narrate stories, and evoke powerful emotions without uttering a single word.

The concept of connection through dance or movement underscores the significance of human connection in communication. Our capacity to connect with others, to comprehend and be understood, is the driving force behind effective communication. This connection forms the rhythm and melody that

underlie our communicative dance, urging us to acknowledge the intricate choreography of words, gestures, and connections shaping our interactions.

d. Using Speech formulated with Colors

While words have the power to paint mental images, it is the signs that are more subtle, hatched and marked and the colors with a thousand shades that connect our soul to the outside world and to our fellow men.

Nature itself offers us an inexhaustible source of inspiration, an eternal symphony of shapes and shades that capture the deepest essence of our existence.

In natural landscapes, mountain lines and the sinuous curves of a river tell ancient stories. The mountain ranges appear as reflections of the traces of our existence, with the peaks symbolizing victories and the dark gorges representing the challenges encountered. This depiction illustrates how the lines, far from being simple and fluid, are rather imbued with movement and directions, similar to the path of a river catching the light of the sunset.

The colors of nature, from the soft tones of dawn to the lively reflections of sunset, constitute the palette from which we can draw inspiration. In the landscape of our inner world, delicate shades outline the contours of our fears, while chromatic explosions are bright points of joy. Each color, in this context, becomes a symbol, a key to interpret our internal narrative. Every shade of green, every shade of blue, tells a story of balance and harmony, representing our changing state of mind. Green embodies hope and serenity, blue coldness, calm and silence, yellow energy and optimism, red determination, strength and courage.

We imagine the intense blue as the reverberation of a moment of weakness, where the blue represents the delicacy of the soul, the pink could tell the story of a weakness accepted with grace, similar to the petals of a flower, while the emerging strength manifests itself through the burning red of determination.

We reflect on this fragility that translates into bold brushstrokes and vibrant shades, transforming the canvas of our experience into a masterpiece imbued with emotions, a work of art in which the internal landscape merges with the external one.

In this silent dialogue between palette and canvas, we discover that vulnerability is the key to connecting not only with our world, but also with ourselves and others. Natural shapes, from the fluid curves of flowers to the rigid lines of rocks, create a visual dialogue that expresses the complexity of life.

THE KEY IS TO
ALLOW YOURSELF
TO RECEIVE

Angeliki Voulgari

Boundaries

To be able to work with the more receptive and the more energetic part simultaneously and balanced, someone needs to be able to act as a “wholeness”. In the present moment, in the here and now.

Carl Rogers, a leading American psychologist of the 20th century, gives us the following definition that helps us most as far as we are referring to artists:

The state of empathy, or being empathic, is to perceive the internal frame of reference of another with accuracy and with the emotional components and meanings which pertain there as if one were the person, but without ever losing the “as if” condition.

It is known that artists tend to have very wide boundaries, something that can often work at the expense of one’s mental balance. So, it’s extremely important for an artist to work on empathy more consciously and give the required attention so as not to lose the “as if condition”.

4.2. Generosity

What do we need to do in order to become more generous? How can we gain access to this area within ourselves? And why can this skill become useful to an artist?

There are some misconceptions about what generosity means. We usually tend to think that generosity has to do with giving money or offering charity to people in need. But if this perspective was true, that would mean that only a few people, those with financial abundance would be able to become generous.

Of course this is not true, because generosity is a virtue that every human being can experience, and from this point of view, we suggest generosity as a skill. Because it’s not an ability that some are born with, and others not, it is an inner state that can be developed with specific training and conscious decision.

Generosity is an inner state and the level of generosity is connected with the amount of fulfillment we experience. We dare to say that only from the part that we feel complete, in a state of inner abundance, can we prioritize the other person. There is a hidden alliance between generosity and human connection. Generosity leads to deeper connections.

“The key is to allow yourself to receive”.

And now maybe this question arises. Receive what? Again the sequence goes like this:

- Observe nature’s generosity
- Acknowledge the greatness and value of oneself
- Offer yourself generously to others and enjoy the benefits of deep connection experiences.

Generosity is part of the process of sharing. Dancing for example with able and disable bodies is dancing with a body, mentioning the all being.

Before we see disability, we see individuals with strengths and weaknesses, identity and potential. Art is fruitful, there is room for everyone to intervene in transdisciplinary contemporary creation. This relational process, like all, must be adapted to the capabilities of each person, regarding difference as an integral and transformative piece.

Generosity and Nature

If we are alive on this planet, it’s because of the generosity of the Earth, offering fresh water and food in every place where life is flourishing. Every tree, every flower, every bee is creating the organic substance we ingest and are made of.

Generosity is an expression of life itself and is not possible without it. We are immersed in an ongoing network of exchange and that’s why it is so important to be generous to give back to the Earth and to other people to contribute to this life force for today and for the future generations.

“Generosity in ourselves and towards another human being” — Angeliki Voulgari

Then we need to be able to understand our inner greatness, no matter the gender, the color or diverse characteristics. But maybe we don’t know how to do it. We don’t see our talents, our value, our special dynamics. Maybe most of us are connected with an inner space where there is deficiency. And that’s why we need more. Need to earn more, succeed more, study more to fulfill the gap inside.

But generosity is related with how we see ourselves, how efficient we feel within ourselves. The more generous we are to ourselves, the more generous we can be to others.

But in order to be generous with ourselves, we first need to “see” ourselves deeply. Our unique dynamics, our very precise qualities, our capabilities, our true value. And all these are based on our spirit, not in our bodies, not even in our souls. This deep observation

will help us to move from the state of fear - which is the basic reason for lack of generosity in a human being, to the establishment of love.

When people dare to interact and relate in a more generous way, miracles are happening. Feelings of euphoria, happiness and a sense of belonging are starting to animate us and this can affect our mental health but also our physical health. Generosity in order to happen, requires an internal transcendence. But like any transcendence to happen we need to have a clear goal. When the goal is to connect with someone else through art, we know that despite the diversity on a physical and mental level, there is a field where we all meet. When art is made in this direction, something bigger takes place. Then we realize that it is not only about us, it is bigger than us. Then the one who offers generously and the one who receives are entangled. And art can lead to this magical human “osmosis”.

*“The higher purpose of art is spiritual”
- Kandinsky⁴*

Generosity can be applied in many different ways:

- Taking action
- Using appropriate speech in all the forms of “speech”
- Managing consciously and with “presence” the time we spend in a place, with ourselves, with others
- Managing our belongings (objects, money, ...)

Speech. Considering speech formulated with words is helpful to try to find opportunities to empower your colleagues, co artists with your words. Words have great power, it is important to use them for helping people express their best version of themselves. This is a great way to open the path to a deeper and more meaningful interaction.

Time. Generosity has to do mainly with time. Specifically the time that we decide to spend with another person and be in the moment. Not in the past nor in the future, but simply in the present moment, available and with curiosity to discover another being. In order to be in the present moment we need to be centered and with our senses aware.

Things/objects/money. When we shift our inner state, from the place where something is missing (not good enough, not important enough, not talented enough, not rich enough, not smart enough...) to the place of our abundance area, then we also change the way we are attached to material.

Then we understand that nothing really belongs to us, we don't own anything, and everything is given to us just to manage it as good as we can. We manage our time on earth, we manage our money, we manage our words, we manage ourselves by choosing in a more conscious way every sense, even our glance or the way we touch somebody.

This procedure helps us to shift from fear condition, to joy of sharing condition.

Generosity and artistic procedure

Art is by nature a procedure that helps someone improve his life and gain access to better aspects of himself. Not only in the representative arts, but also in visual arts this inner state is a very useful quality. In theater, dance and music from the aspect of sound, where people need to interact and connect in order to co create as a team, it is important to clear this channel's insight and let this current flow from one person to another without obstacles. These subtle actions are not at all details in the artistic procedure. On the contrary, they turn the artistic result into a “transformative initiative experience”, because of the connection of the artistic team with the audience. On the other hand, visual arts. Every painting, sculpture, video art, etc. includes the hope of a “shared experience”. An experience that will not stay only in the imagination of the artist, but it will be sped to the world in order to be beneficiary for everybody. An artistic piece can function as a sensitization tool, a self-knowledge guide or a mental balance factor and the artist longs to offer with generosity all these gifts.

4.3. Vulnerability

We are by nature vulnerable beings, depending on how all senses together are making us a big ear to perceive details and echoes in the large worldscape that seems to overwhelm us. We navigate the big through the fragile and small, through what is hidden within, through what reveals itself slowly, in a near silence, or as Japanese call it “Ma”, a resonating space of possibilities. It is in silence that we hear the loudest, and when we become what surrounds us. We are only in name (and wrongly called) the dominating species. We are only as strong as the weakest link in nature. It is in becoming sound that our nature's

4. Kandinsky, Wassily, Concerning the Spiritual in Art, Dover 1977

VULNERABILITY ... A CATALYST OF STRENGTH AND UNIQUENESS

fragility is unfolded, because it asks for deep listening to perceive it in its full spectrum. African writer and Nobel Prize winner Wole Soyinka tells about his time as political prisoner, when he was “silenced” for his ideas. He and his co-cellmates agreed each day at 5 pm to start singing from inside their isolation cells, creating a choir of freedom, listening to each other. In this fragile singing the act of creating sound together set them all free, as Wole Soyinka told “We were free”. This shows that by opening ourselves, by embracing vulnerability, we become a delicate strength, a fragile force, a togetherness of kindness. As the artist takes courage in revealing his unique vision, through the imperfections of the brushstroke, free to define the subject with uncertain strokes, and to explore new perspectives and experience the beauty of art beyond conventional forms, so also those who approach his own fragility, he must find the courage to open up and sincerely reveal every aspect of himself, even the most hidden ones, transforming his vulnerability into a uniquely powerful force, a force that unites people in an authentic way, creating bonds in mutual understanding.

In this way, fragility is no longer a limit to hide, but rather a good excuse for personal growth and human connection. The recognition of one’s weakness becomes an act of extraordinary strength, transforming it into distinctive traits of a unique and powerful identity. Just as uncertain brushstrokes give shape to a work of art, weakness, accepted with courage, shapes our personal narrative, enriching it with authenticity and depth.

Through this metamorphosis, vulnerability becomes an essential element in creating meaningful and true bonds. Relationships, based on sincerity and mutual understanding, become collective works of art, where everyone is a continuously evolving protagonist. Sharing one’s challenges and weaknesses creates an authentic connection, as people recognize them in each other, overcoming emotional barriers and building empathetic bonds.

Thus, vulnerability is not only an element of sharing, but also becomes a catalyst of strength and uniqueness, in a context where everyone can present themselves as a precious and unrepeatable work of art and fragility becomes a tool for transmitting a message of connection and shared growth.

Most of the time, feeling the landscape is better achieved by listening than looking because it gives us the ability to “see” the hidden and even beyond the horizon. This buzzing on the left tells us of the presence of the bees and flowers, the song of the robin in

front of us tells us that there are probably some wild fruits to eat in the thicket. The barking of the dog indicates that there is certainly a road and a house at short distance. The sound of thunder tells us that it is raining already on the other side of the mountain. Natural sounds and the sounds of our civilization can help us to “draw” a precise map of the location in our mind. But to be a good drawer we have to listen carefully and that requires to become vulnerable and let the sounds enter our ears and our brain. And the more vulnerable we become the more we can listen and figure out where we are and also who we are in relation to the place.

As far as our interaction with another human being, we tend to give a negative connotation to the word “vulnerable”. Synonyms like “weak”, “difficult”, “special”, “excluded” sound inside us. And, indeed, sometimes when we are vulnerable, we may struggle, we may feel lonely or excluded, but that does not mean that vulnerability is not something healthy and legitimate. We would venture to say that the ability to show our vulnerable part is perhaps a basic condition for relating to another living system.⁵



5. Voulgari, Angeliki-Ariadni, *The Art of Connection*, iWrite 2022 (p.43)

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