

CREATIVITY VERSUS DROPOUT – *Gilberto Scaramuzzo*

Let me introduce myself by saying that I have devoted many years of my life to the theatre, both performing and educating other people to and through the theatre.

What we must achieve together is reflection, positive, not easy, entailing a great responsibility.

At first sight, the two terms in the title seem to form an incomprehensible mix: creativity and school dropout.

Why do we wish to put these two realities together? What do they have in common?

Let us begin by analysing what creativity implies.

A first simple and immediate reflection allows us to consider creativity as deeply rooted in human nature: "Human beings, even though of humble origin, or simple-minded, always possess this power (e.g. the ability to create) and must, necessarily, make use of it: indeed, human beings do not simply get by, but always live their own histories".¹

Human beings cannot but create something.

Human beings' creative nature has a very specific feature: i.e. the ability to *give meaning*, each in their own fashion, to oneself and the others.

We human beings, as such, always try to find *meaning*.

You too, while listening to me, cannot but do the same: both whether you try to make the things I am saying *meaningful* to you, or are thinking about something else.

Our need for giving *meaning* may be fulfilled in ourselves through two different activities: by endorsing *meanings* that others have produced, or by creating, in ourselves, of our own accord, *meaning*.

A creative act as such is performed when we manage to activate, or switch on, in ourselves our deepest uniqueness, i.e. that originality in which, or through which, we are able to give meaning to something. A very mysterious place indeed.

Creativity is a synonym of life in the highest sense. If life has *meaning*, it resides in our uniqueness. In celebrating our own uniqueness, we celebrate life.

Creativity is the activity par excellence in which we express our uniqueness.

Therefore, if, on the one hand, we cannot prevent ourselves from creating, on the other we cannot but admit that creativity, broadly speaking, is a potential shared by all human beings in every situation and at any time in their lives, and it is a free movement: its expression depends totally on the individual.

But as such, this *potential* may remain, precisely, potential, and rarely be turned into an activity.

After our first years we may use already existing connections, instead of creating new ones.

Indeed, creative act is opposed to repetitive action.

We may plunge into the unknown, confident that we shall find a new *meaning* (as it occurs, for example, in the case of theatrical improvisation); or, establish a connection between what we hear and pathways we are already familiar with.

Creativity, in the broadest sense, may therefore be defined as an action by our own uniqueness aimed at seizing, organising, establishing, producing, identifying relations.

All true expression is a creative act.

All comprehension is a creative act.

Uniqueness = originality = our way of giving meaning = our own speech.

Creativity = a relational action taking place inside the individual, generated by the clash between our uniqueness and the others' otherness.

Creativity is applied to something that already exists in some way or another, but which through us gains a *meaning* (direction, order) which it did not possess before.

Our creativity consists precisely in this, i.e. in making non-being turn into being thanks to meaning rather than mere materiality.

Creativity represents the practical side to the ability of giving meaning, i.e. the gift of speech.

¹ Pirandello, Luigi, *Non parlo di me*, "Occidente", year II - vol. II, Le edizioni d'Italia, January, March 1933, page 14.

Creativity consist in passing from silence to speech.

Creativity consists in giving meaning (direction, order).

The first action to take in order to become creative consists in setting aside reference coordinates in order to produce new ones.

If we consider the realm of known relations (proportions), we cannot perform creative acts in the broadest sense, because it is as if we were wearing latticed glasses, based on which we know, a priori, that we shall be able to identify the coordinates for each new point we shall focus our attention on; we must therefore remove that lattice, and get back to the glass lens.

This means that we must project ourselves onto chaos if we want to produce order, confident that we shall be able to do so.

If life is meaningful, it is in our uniqueness that the meaning of life is contained.

However, it is far From easy to switch the deep dynamics of our uniqueness on.

We head towards a *meaning* because in our deepest nature we are *meaning* creators. Without meaning we pine: it is as if we had no support, as if we could not breathe. We feel at peace when we draw a breath, when our feet are firmly set on the ground.

In order to get in touch with our uniqueness, we need to go through this feeling of emptiness, otherwise we shall only get in touch with the most superficial layers, not with the deepest core of our uniqueness. If we remain on the outer layers of our being we do not perform the vital action par excellence: e.g. getting in touch with an original vital energy.

We may differentiate creativity based on the object it focuses on: we can therefore speak of creativity focusing on non-human subjects, and creativity focusing on human subjects.

Thanks to our ability to give *meaning* we tend towards what is different from ourselves, because we need to give it a *meaning*.

In the case of non-human subjects, the creative act is performed by considering all the possibilities a being has of being: in other words, I must become that object before its *meaning*.

To create means to give *meaning* without resorting to a *meaning* that others, before our time, have generated.

In order to give meaning we must place ourselves in a situation of non-being, as *meaning* creators.

It is much more complex when we carry out this creative act on human subjects, attempting to give meaning to the others. That is, attempting to say who the other is.

This is because the other's being is deeply rooted in his/her ability to give a meaning to him/herself, and to the others. Hence, our need for *stating* who the other person is should force us to consider him/her in his/her countless meanings, deriving from his/her ability to give meaning, to the point of understanding him/her when we encounter that core of uniqueness, in that mysterious place in which a person's ability to give meaning is put into practice, up until the final spiritual meeting with a spirit in spirit.

If life has meaning, in the deepest core of our uniqueness meaning for life can be found.

Creativity is the action in which our uniqueness finds expression.

Following this attempt aimed at identifying the elements typical of creativity, let us consider dropout, and a number of fundamental elements shared by these two phenomena.

When we consider school dropout we must focus two possible expressions of the same: real and de facto school dropout.

Two primeval needs accompany human beings throughout their lives: the need for expressing one's uniqueness, and the need to be put in the position to do so.

When a student is not provided with an adequate opportunity of meeting these requirements, her or she will drop out, in order to find other places where to answer their needs.

Those possessing no social restraints will stop attending classes (thus increasing statistical percentages on school dropout), while those possessing these restraints will dropout while remaining physically in class (the number of these students is, and will, always remain unknown).

School has failed in both cases.

If school was turned into the home of creativity, the causes of school dropout would be eliminated. Stimulating students to adopt a creative approach means to answer his/her deepest needs, to activate and develop a potential precious for the life of the person concerned, and for Life in general. Those who endorse creativity, endorse life itself, and their own too. I cannot imagine anything more beautiful for a teacher than witnessing the cultural growth of his/her pupils, developing through creative appropriation, in other words achieved by calling upon the deepest core of one's uniqueness; likewise, I cannot imagine anything more boring for a teacher than a knowledge growth achieved by pupils repetitive appropriation, in other words achieved by only considering the superficial aspects in a subject.

Some aspects that no teacher who means to turn the classroom in a place of creativity should overlook are the following: Removing judgement favours creative acts.

A great attention should be devoted to the *material* provided to students in order for them to perform this creative act.

Sensitivity in order to identify and value the creative act.

Creativity on the part of the teacher in inventing situations stimulating opportunities for creative acts.

A great attention towards creative acts oriented on people, that is focusing on saying who the student is.

Remembering that understanding the other is a creative act.

In order to understand, one must be open, refraining from forcing the other into a given form, but constantly maintaining a state a tension, always ready to change the *meaning* we have given the other.

Let us not forget that to a certain extent teachers create their students, shaping, whether consciously or not, their own uniqueness.

The others understand when they are understood on their turn.

If creativity is not directed, it may turn into an extremely destructive force.

On the contrary, if it does not find a way to express itself, the need for expression may be so painful for the person concerned that he or she must stifle it, generating depression, addiction, other forms of numbing.

If every phase in school life could become a place of creativity as we have defined it, i.e. as the opportunity for expressing and endorsing the uniqueness of one and all, it is also true that art remains the place of creativity par excellence.

The art lab is the ideal place where to perform creative acts closest to the expression of the uniqueness of one and all.

"In reality, everybody creates their own lives for themselves: however, this act of creation is unfortunately never totally free. Only when real, does art freely create".²

That is because every artistic expression is a creative act, while the other way around is not always true: art, in fact, produces something sensible; art looks for an impact on being, or with its features: goodness, fairness, truth, beauty; artistic creation is a necessary and unconditioned act-totally free (the constraints inherent in being represent the foundation of, and do not act as a restraint to, the freedom of creation, protecting it from pseudo-free aspects, such as arbitrariness or chance).

The creative act represents the only way words to find oneself, in other words to endorse one's uniqueness.

This is the conclusion of Pirandello's play *Trovarsi*, and thus I want to conclude our meeting:

"And this is true... And nothing is true...The only truth is that we must create ourselves, and create everything else! Only then shall we find ourself."

² Pirandello, Luigi, *Scritti sul teatro in Saggi, poesie, scritti vari*, edited by M. Lo Vecchio-Musti, Milan, Mondadori, 1977, page 1021.