

Rosa Martínez
What To Think

‘The sweetest life comes when one senses nothing.’¹
Sophocles, *Ajax*

‘He who understands has wings.’²
Pancanvimsha Brahmana (XIV, 1, 13)

According to quantum physics, observation and thought create reality; the universe exists when it is perceived. If we are to create a more beautiful and fairer life, if that is what we imagine to be desirable, we must first clarify our ideas about ourselves and about the world.

The awareness of time and of death lies at the base of thought. He who buries his dead and surrounds his pain with signs, messages, gestures or rituals exerts a symbolic function, i.e., he thinks. Perhaps he expects another life in the hereafter; perhaps he believes in the transmigration of the souls, or is convinced that we are only the matter of the body we inhabit and that we disappear along with it.

Thinking isn't a free, disinterested activity or a function exclusive to philosophers. Thought is always linked to the economic and political conditions of each moment, and to the social environment in which one is born. Science regards thought as the result of an accelerated neuronal interconnection, the flows of which are driven by the circumstances the subject strives to confront or adjust to. To think historically means to date, to analyse causes, to compare, to be aware of time and to grant meaning to the events that unfold in time. Past and present are not antinomies. History is an instrument with which to interpret the present.

To think artistically implies to build artefacts and strategies by means of which history and existence can be sensed, understood and even invented. To create is a way of transcending death. According to historian Mircea Eliade, true creative hermeneutics, like scientific or technical findings, reveals meanings that had gone unnoticed or had been misunderstood, or else denotes them so intensely that once they have been assumed man can no longer go back to thinking as he did before.³

‘That we still do not think is the most thought-provoking in our thought-provoking world,’ said German philosopher Martin Heidegger.⁴ In other words, we haven't learnt to think. The fear of death and of poverty is used by established powers—be they the religious elites or the financial oligarchies that dominate the world—is used to weaken the development of critical thought. We live under the dictates of the economy of fear, for which war as a torture of the masses, systematic plundering, ‘reconstruction’ after devastation and the organisation of ‘security’ have become flourishing industries. Canadian journalist and writer Naomi Klein says that in the age of ‘disaster capitalism’, the confusion produced by shocks reduces our capacity of resistance and that the best way of remaining centred is to be informed, to be aware of what is happening to us and why.⁵ To think, therefore, requires plural and engaged information, which is precisely what attempts to avoid the hegemonic discourse of the mass media.

Some forms of knowledge are conveyed through information and discourse. Others are supported by myths and symbols. In both cases the danger lies in the pride of thinking we are dealing with absolute truths when our evolution depends on our assuming and overcoming the relative truths that are within our reach. Today we are aware of the fact that universalist reason has been used ethnocentrically, for and by Western subjects. The questioning and deconstruction of the instrumental use of that reason are needed to make the ideals of freedom, equality and solidarity that must inspire life on a planetary scale feasible. Vertical thought must meet forms of horizontal understanding. The ethics of care and respect must prevail before the ecological risks and the moral perils that threaten life on Earth.

Starting from these reflections, the exhibition entitled *What To Think* revolves around three basic issues: contemporary hubris, the ‘misfortune’ of history and the consolation and consciousness that art can provide.

On the one hand, we recognise excessive arrogance, will to power and pride in people, companies, nations and empires. On the other hand, as we recall individual confrontations and collective massacres and wars, we wonder what kind of thinking justifies oppression, in the name of what truth, what drives and what interests have the humiliations and cruelties of universal history been committed.

From Buddhism to Marxism, numerous theories have tried to explain the meaning of life, to justify the inevitability of human suffering or to rebel against it. Could calamities be a form of 'divine punishment', as we learn from Catholicism? Are social tragedies a 'historical necessity', as Hegel tells us? To wonder whether disasters have moral meaning or are simply the result of the arbitrariness of fate and greed is relevant when we revisit history and see how crimes, deportations, terrorist attacks and acts of injustice often committed in the name of 'progress' still take place, without man seeming to have learnt from the past.

We are living in times of unrest and need new hermeneutics to help us understand the meaning of our being in the world. Now more than ever before we need to analyse how knowledge is built into an instrument of control and into a means of emancipation, how the psychic and political economy that supports power is formulated and how the institutions and means that control knowledge operate.

Art, that is representation, is an exercise in knowledge and power. Art works display, analyse and reveal the world, and the temporary exhibitions that assemble them are privileged spaces for symbolic exchanges between works and viewers, spaces that generate critical discourse and new political dialogue as well as aesthetic enjoyment.

Modernism fought for the autonomy of the art work and fell into a hermetic form of absolutism. At the same time, the desire to blur the frontiers that separated art from life gave rise to other forms of action in which the work of art was conceived as a means, a bridge, a text that only took on meaning when interpreted by the viewer. In this intertextual connection lies the possibility of shared creativity as a way of understanding and transforming the world in which we live. As French poet Antonin Artaud declared likening the theatre to the plague, if the powers liberated by plays are black it is not the theatre but life that is to blame. In *Psychology and Alchemy* (1944), Carl Justav Jung suggested that only by integrating Evil, by accepting it and bringing it to consciousness would it be possible to heal individuals and the world. The pessimism of intelligence knows that through critical thought, the optimism of will, true art, humility and compassion are healing and emancipation possible.

² Nanaimo, British Columbia. The Spanish excerpt quoted in Francisco Jarauta, *Cuadernos 9. Pensar – Componer / Construir – Habitar*, Arteleku, Diputación Foral de Gipuzkoa, San Sebastian, 1994. Pancanvimsha Brahmana (xiv, 1, 13). Quoted by Mircea Eliade in *Yoga*, Bolingen Foundation Incorporated New York, 1958, p. 329.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, 'Was heisst-Denken'. Translated from the German as 'What Is Called Thinking,' Harper & Row, New York, 1968, and subsequently as 'What Calls for Thinking?,' in D. Krell (Ed.), *Martin Heidegger. Basic Writings*, Harper & Row, London and New York, 1977, pp. 341–386.

⁵ Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, Penguin Press, London, 2008.

¹ Sophocles, *Ajax*. Translated into English by Ian Johnston, e-text, line 660, Malaspina University College,