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## TITLE: HEALTH & AESTHETICS

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"Life itself must be experienced with aesthetics!"<sup>2</sup>

### Abstract:

Otto Rank, one of the pioneers in Prenatal Psychology, has been teaching for almost 100 years now, that our life and Art are closely connected and that our health both somatic but also emotional are associated with our ability as human beings to see life as an Act of Art. And he wasn't the first, of course. The majority of ancient classical philosophers in Greece and everywhere, as well as modern thinkers, speak of the value of the study of the Beautiful and the value of Aesthetics. At the same time, we have known since the era of Wundt that aesthetic pleasure is inherent in complexity. In this paper, we'll attempt to show the connection between our Health and Fine Arts and see how Primordial Health Advancement Programs can greatly benefit from the integration of Fine Arts in their curriculum.

**Keywords:** Fine Arts, Aesthetics, Prenatal Psychology, Health, Unborn child, Primordial Health Advancement Programs, Art, Quality of Life

### Introduction

True life, mine and yours, is the one that needs nothing, not even Art, to feel fulfilled, as it goes beyond it. We experience true life when each of us lives every and each day to the full, discovering beauty and meaning everywhere, through deep existential awareness processes, where everything has its place, just like the artist's palette on which all colors are arranged and on which dark and black ones are just as important as the yellows and the bright, shiny reds and blues. For the artist, even pain and possible limitations inspire a meaningful, life-lasting additions. For him even destruction, catalysis, death becomes the opportunity for the appearance or creation of the new.

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<sup>2</sup> Mentioned in Otto Rank's diary when he was 20 years old

Otto Rank, one of the pioneers in Prenatal Psychology, has been teaching this for exactly 100 years now. And he wasn't the first of course. The majority of ancient classical philosophers in Greece and everywhere, as well as modern thinkers, speak of the value of the study of the Beautiful and the value of Aesthetics. Plato talks about the world of Ideas and the value of the Good, the Beautiful and the Right, Aristotle talks about the 12 Virtues and Kant, among the modern ones, talks about the aesthetic pleasure that is very different from enjoying a good meal, a good love affair or partnership since aesthetic pleasure has no useful or practical purpose. At the same time, we have known since the era of Wundt that aesthetic pleasure is inherent in complexity.

### **The Concept**

When studying the concept of "Art" in antiquity, we will see that the Greek word Τέχνη etymologically derives from the word "τίκτω (pronounced tikto) which means to give birth, to bring to the world, and it describes the ability or the human quality which gives birth to aesthetically sound results based on laws and rules that stem from "organized knowledge and organized processes applied to produce a specific outcome that one has conceived". Thus, the outcome of Art is "the child", the creature that has previously been conceived mentally, has been in gestation and, through organized processes and knowledge, is nurtured by the Artist who applies the specific Art.

### **Benefits**

Today, it is evident that Fine Arts, when used in the Community and in the Health Care field, reduce the physical and psychological discomfort of cancer patients and the unpleasant side effects of medical treatment. Active music listening has a beneficial effect on heart disease and singing provides relief from chronic respiratory problems and cystic fibrosis. Fine Arts have spectacular effects on obesity, diabetes and reducing anxiety disorders as well as depression, and support the population of the seniors by adding quality to their years.

### **But ...**

However, nowadays, what I have been observing for nearly 35 years I have been actively involved in the field of education in Prenatal Psychology, there has been a continuous increase in depression, carcinogenesis is gaining ground, people's relationships are being hampered and the world image is far from manifesting peace and civilization. How come in a time when information is so accessible to us all, that people do not rejoice, do not find meaning and eventually fall ill and die?

We are well aware that the quality of our life, our health and the quality of the relationships we develop both with ourselves and with each other or the world are rooted in our early experience that begins before conception, continues during our gestation and it is affected by the way we were born and the first years of our lives as children. In therapeutic contexts, people's narratives talk about how their prenatal experience is related to their state of somato-psycho-mental health and findings in Epigenetics, Complexity sciences, and, in general, in the Social Sciences and Humanities reveal the connections of interdependence. The attention of researchers and those involved in Knowledge Translation is being turned to the field of Health Promotion, leading to actions, processes, services and products that care for human beings. A healthy prenatal/ perinatal strategy that knows what to do and why to do so can remove those stressors traced in the maternal environment, in the broadest sense<sup>3</sup>, and

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<sup>3</sup> According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Theory, maternal environment does not refer only to the biological mother but includes the father and all members of the nuclear family as well as the

empower the child to have the best prenatal connection with the self, other people and the world. At the same time, it cultivates the conditions so that people can freely choose to cooperate peacefully and express high principles and ideals in their daily lives. It is no coincidence, of course, that the periods in human history associated with civilization have shown a high level of development of the “Letters and the Arts”. And it is no coincidence that all the classical philosophers of antiquity but also the Religious or Spiritual Fathers gave instructions on how to support and educate our children from their prenatal stage of development on.

In modern times, Health Promotion Programs in the field of Prenatal Psychology first appeared with Prenatal University several decades ago and are constantly evolving. The “Welcome” program, conceived, designed, piloted and offered to the community by the writer is a Health Promotion Program based on the Fine Arts and Aesthetics<sup>4</sup> to support the health and well-being of a child from conception to birth. It is the result of a long-standing research into how Fine Arts have an impact on human and community health.

### **Nature, the Great Artist**

Contact with Nature promotes human health. A walk<sup>5</sup> in a natural, friendly environment can reduce stress, lower blood pressure, reduce heart rate to normal, positively affect skin conductance and cortisol secretion<sup>6</sup>. Even a simple view of a natural landscape can produce immediate health results. Nature has helped early humans overcome stress and be ready so they can cope with the next stress challenge. A landscape is not just an image, it is a cultural product that carries values, history, identity and memory into it. It cannot be differentiated from the biological and ecological environment. It contains information and chances of survival and prosperity of every living organism. So, the way we all understand Nature is not just sensorial, but it bears a cultural and biological background. Depending on how we perceive our natural environment we can influence and shape the landscape. Our lives are linked to the landscape.

Knowing this, today, many hospitals are built in a way that provides large openings (windows) overlooking beautiful natural landscapes and include paintings or pictures showing landscapes to decorate walls indoors. They use videos with landscape or Nature content in rooms where people recover and in the corridors. It would be a good idea to incorporate it into the educational environment as well as incorporate such knowledge into the urban landscape.

In the area of Primary Health Promotion, the choice of our living space is recommended, because our living space is a habitat process that involves our body and spirit, it is a relational experience that we create with every thought, decision and behavior or action

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family members of the broader family, the school environment, the work colleagues, the religious/social/ economic/ cultural context at the specific time/space, which makes each one of us responsible for each child born to this world.

<sup>4</sup> Olga Gouni, 2018, ARTfeeding the (un)born Baby, *The International Journal of Prenatal & Life Sciences*

<sup>5</sup> Shanahan, D. F., Fuller, R. A., Bush, R., Lin, B. B., and Gaston, K. J. (2015). The Health Benefits of Urban Nature. How much do we need? *Bioscience* 65, 476–485. doi: 10.1093/biosci/biv032

<sup>6</sup> Ulrich, R. S. (1983). “Aesthetic and affective response to natural environment,” in *Human Behaviour and the Natural Environment*, eds I. Altman and J. F. Wohlwill (New York, NY: Plenum), 85–125.

which shapes it, the world around us, and finally shapes us. Next, it is recommended that the pregnant couple get in contact with Nature as often as possible and that daily visual stimuli, e.g. albums with pictures of Nature, videos of the same subject etc as well as conscious reflection on details that the natural environment brings to the forefront, eg the life cycle as seen in sowing, germination, growth, fruition, decay and death followed by a new cycle. Such an experience is a great teaching for the child yet to be born, and at the same time, unconsciously, impregnates the pre/peri/postnatal environment with cultural, historical information. In the field of education, there is more and more news about green schools where the lesson is in Nature.

### **Music and Sound**

From the years of Fechner<sup>7</sup>, we know that "half of Aesthetics" comes from assimilated relationships. If we look at Aesthetics in its broadest sense, Fechner's statement alone is enough to appreciate the value of the pre/postnatal experience in creating the background of human aesthetic perception. How high the aesthetic perception of each of us is relates to how high the aesthetic perception of the maternal environment was during our conception, pregnancy and birth. In particular, now, in the field of music, lullabies become a field of aesthetics education, firstly because they convey cultural and social values to the child and secondly because, later on, a lullaby brings about a palliative experience associated with love feeling -we hope- between the child and his/her mother. A study of the value messages transmitted through lullabies from the maternal environment to the (un)child shows that these are not necessarily messages of a life with a high index of the Good, the Beautiful and the Right. On the contrary, they are carriers of the expectations of the maternal environment for the child or carriers of fantasy elements, and reflect, to a large extent, the information applicable to each historical stage of childhood development<sup>8</sup>. In Primal Health Promotion programs with pregnant couples, great care is taken to ensure that the maternal environment perceives such possibilities and creates lullabies and songs for their (un)born child that have a high aesthetics index and praise the beauties of the world and the values of respect and love in all relationships, or adopt lullabies and songs of such content.

Also, being aware of the complexity associated with Aesthetics, the maternal environment is encouraged to go beyond the simplified music patterns or songs that we so often find as the hits of the time but choose natural sounds that allow the musical brain to mature later on. Because what we hear and become familiar with is what we later recognize and return to, the maternal environment is encouraged to adopt a classical music repertoire, traditional music, Byzantine music and highly aesthetic music compositions of modern music composers. More specific studies have measured all classical works of music and classified them according to their effects on man and his development. Baroque music and Renaissance music are among the most important music works. Thanks to the work of the French musician Marie-Luise Aucher in the 1960s

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<sup>7</sup> Fechner (1801-1887)

<sup>8</sup> Lloyd deMause: The History of Childhood. <https://psychohistory.com/books/foundations-of-psychohistory/chapter-1-the-evolution-of-childhood/>

we have today Psychophony<sup>9</sup>. Since 1976, Marie-Luise, in collaboration with M. Odent, has been organizing song workshops with pregnant couples at Pitiviers, the Maternity Hospital in France. She teaches that all human beings are very receptive to sound vibrations, especially babies in gestation. And the effects are evident on the body these children are developing, the relationship they have with their mother/ father and the fact that the mother has an easier childbirth.

Finally, sound is another great chapter in our book of health. The unborn child is particularly sensitive to the sounds that come to his or her perception of the inner and outer maternal environment and which affect the development of acoustic pathways, the unborn child's and newborn's brain, and determine sometimes positive and sometimes disastrous life decisions. Many loud noises (eg the center of a bustling city, factory machines, bombing etc) but also psychologically charged sounds (eg fights and clashes, threats and attacks) are responsible for several post-traumatic phenomena after the birth of the child and throughout his childhood / adulthood until healed.

## **Science**

Science is everywhere: in the forms of the fern, in the endless repetitive shapes of cauliflower on the table, in the fractals of the coastline, in the building of the Parthenon, in the starry sky of every starfish ... And the scientist is only the man whose desire is to uncover the Truth, at least the truth available within human limits. This love for the Truth is good to spread through the maternal environment. It embraces the study of sciences such as Physics, Astronomy, Biology, Chemistry, Mathematics, Cosmology, Anthropogony etc but also Architecture, Sculpture and Fine Arts, in general. Volumes are needed to analyze the patterns that allow a Parthenon to stand upright and steady or decode the frescoes and sculptures of Michael Angelo and Da Vinci or of other great artists and to understand Pythagoras's sound patterns. The Golden Ratio is the geometric representation of a universal harmony, it is the divine analogy as called during the Renaissance. It's ubiquitous and present everywhere. In our bodies, in all life kingdoms, even in the proportions of a book. Everything created under this law makes the world beautiful, and Natural Sciences are a path that leads us to recognize this existing pervasive beauty.

And just as Nature's great creator expresses endless creativity based on Universal Laws and Reason, so does Art. It constantly finds creative ways to express harmony as it explores the unknown in search of the underlying meaning of life that naturally unfolds in front of our eyes. The same basic elements of the world are synthesized, decomposed and recombined to create cosmos. Correspondingly, the same basic elements through corresponding processes explore new forms in Fine Arts. Moreover, the aim of Fine Arts and the artist is to bring to the fore and emphasize the beauty that exists in the world. It is not limited to mere representation or imitation of the good that is revealed, though that alone is enough. It delivers abstract concepts, substances, formulas, metaphors, world codes, and bridges the complexity of the unknown with the everyday of the known by speaking to everyone in his own language and revealing to everyone what he can

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<sup>9</sup> <http://www.psychophonie-mla.org/biographie/la-vie-de-marie-louise-aucher.html>

assimilate at any given time.

In Primary Health Promotion programs, such as those mentioned in “Welcome”, Science and Fine Arts are used at the same time to prepare the child to gain an awareness of the world and how it works and at the same time become not a mere follower and a mimic of those who preceded but a creative leader in the journey of life. The maternal environment is encouraged to adopt daily habits of studying or reflecting on scientific research and philosophical issues, and to study the impact of this knowledge on today and on the future, both immediate and distant, in the biosphere of each of us as well as the Sociosphere. To seek out the truth and harmony and discover how it can promote humanity. Then, the maternal environment is empowered to communicate these issues to the unborn child consciously (from Mind to Mind) and after the birth of the child over and over until the child can do it for himself or herself. It is encouraged to find ways how basic scientific knowledge is communicated through the rhythms and musicality of the language. It is encouraged to visit places of aesthetics, museums, art exhibitions, attend scientific lectures or discussions, and meet other seekers of truth and harmony, living or in history, through books, documentaries or other means.

Poetry and literature also become tools that enhance human prenatal / postnatal development. Poetry, with its power of speech, its ability to convey profound meanings without even one unnecessary word, its rhythm and speech patterns is a global phenomenon, part of human civilization from primitive to highly developed societies, a Transformation Tool. William Wordsworth said that "poetry is the spontaneous overflow of very strong emotions and the remembrance of a feeling that gives rise to a new emotion" and Percy Bysshe Shelley said that "poetry is the recording of the most important and the happiest moments of the happiest and best minds" . Having these definitions in mind, it seems very clear why poems are an integral part of Primary Health Promotion Programs. Regardless of whether they tell a story or express the thoughts of the characters, poetry that glorifies the highest manifestation of consciousness and the cosmic experience is an essential part of working with the unborn child and the maternal environment.

Besides, the selection of literary works -using the same criteria- that either manage to reveal the beauty that exists everywhere or raise concerns as to the choices and decisions we make and the impact they may have on space or time is part of the process of preparing our children in gestation. Of course, today there is a plethora of books published by publishers and choosing a healthy title is an important process.

Here, it would be good to make a distinction between Healing through Art. Art therapy, as well as any type of Therapy that is appropriate for the individual – not every therapeutic method is good for each person - is different from the contribution of Aesthetic Education as it appears in the Primary Health Promotion Programs. Certainly, Art Therapy is beneficial for wound healing and the training of educators at least at a basic level in the field of art therapy, drama and play therapy as well as Prenatal Psychology is necessary since they see children who are already born with pre/ perinatal traumas and suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Designing a good Health Promotion Program should address and serve all stakeholders. Indeed, in the Welcome program designed by the writer, participants report that "they become better people themselves, that the couple's relationship is strengthened, and that the relationship they build with their child is very different, in a positive way.

And that is perfectly understandable. The path to reaching an unborn child involves working with the Maternal Environment and working by instilling the light of paedia into the souls and lives of parents, grandparents, relatives and adults in the environment of the unborn child. It is a process working both on a personal, relational and collective level. For many of us, unfortunately, Aesthetics is either unknown or a luxury. But if we consider the benefits, even those that translate into economic figures, we will realize that such an option is an investment in the health and well-being of our children and the children born to them in the future and to all peoples. So, as Aristotle says, a parent motivated by his love to provide the best possible support to his child, he first benefits from all the work. At the same time, through the experiential path, the maternal environment perceives the content of concepts such as respect for the being, the other kingdoms and the self, and manages to perceive the content of co-existence with respect to the identity and essence of their children, free of any expectations they might have from them, in their imagination. They become aware of and sensitive to the primary needs of unborn and born children and learn to respond with interest and care, affection and love. So, slowly, a new understanding is built that works therapeutically for all people involved now and in the future.

It is also important to realize that for a health professional or educator to be able to offer such a program to the community he must be able to perceive its value and operate in a similar way. Otherwise, we will see what is often seen in the children's game of the "broken telephone": he will bring a program to his measures, simplifying and distorting concepts and guiding towards wrong paths due to his own inadequacy to respond to the heights of the program. It is part of our scientific and professional responsibility to take care of excellence in what we do.

It is, also, particularly important to understand that such education is a lifelong experience. The maternal environment must continue to make such choices and behaviors daily and continue to create the conditions for the child to be in aesthetic contexts. The program does not end with childbirth but continues until the child reaches such autonomy that he or she makes such life choices.

Finally, it is important to understand that Aesthetics and Health Promotion Programs must be a constant concern for the State and Policy Makers, who need to realize their responsibility and act accordingly so that present and future generations can benefit. The health of our future humanity begins with the health of the people living today.

## **Epilogue**

Let us remember what Otto Rank says, "Life is the only therapy. Man must learn to live, to live with his splits, with his conflicts, with his doubts, with whatever insists and there is no cure provided, because if that would be possible, he would have done so at the

beginning of life. "

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