

SOUND, VOICE AND SINGING IN ART

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I would like to start from “sound” as an inner dimension; not what is heard through the auditory system, but what, at birth, emerges from the body and which will then become the matrix of singing, music and articulated language.

While image keeps the undisputed core both in art and in the development of identity, the “sound that cannot be heard” – as Massimo Fagioli defines it – is an invisible expressive reality deeply linked to the body. It is so complex that, in order to be understood, it requires juxtaposition with more familiar aspects such as sensation, sensitivity, feeling and perceiving

While sound, understood as “hearing”, is linked to the physiological and anatomical dimensions of the human being about nature (the wind, the sea, the rain), sound understood as “feeling”, refers to the non-physical reality, to the non-consciousness, to self-awareness, and to the relationship with others. This dimension, this kind of inner sound includes “sensitivity”, how we sense what happens around us, whether it is something positive or negative, affective or adverse, even if vaguely felt. It is the sensitivity that drives us to make choices instinctively.

Fagioli states in the article entitled “The sound of life is sensitivity” (Left 2014): “The sound, that the ear cannot hear, is not just a movement that the eye does not see but it is transformation. It is the prodigy of human life that is born from the union between the inanimate reality of light and biological reality”.

And just as “sound”, the matrix of creativity, is present in the individual from the beginning of life, it must have emerged at the dawn of the human species as the first artistic act, not linked to utility or survival. Let us imagine being inside a prehistoric cave, by the light of the fire, protected from external dangers. Here we can discover, by deduction and imagination, that the first perceptive sound, the first concrete expression of the “sound that cannot be heard”, is the voice, specifically, a woman’s voice. She begins to modulate the sounds, in the semi-dark cave, differentiating them from the scream of the hunter man who, outside, scares beasts and enemies. She began to sing as a “playful reaction to the vitality of the newborn”.

Referring to the hypothesis that the sound of the voice precedes the image, we can consider the scientific findings of anthropologist Igor Reznikoff, who discovered that cave paintings were more numerous the richer the resonance of the cave. This means, to simplify, that humans chose the space where to live depending on the resonance of the space, their safety, to promote interpersonal communication and to ensure their well-being.

Following the research hypothesis that assumes that ontogenesis corresponds to phylogeny (the evolution of a species), the voice-sound precedes the image, in individual development. Massimo Fagioli confirms this with the “twenty-one words” sequence, with which he defines the birth and the first year of life. The “image” comes after the “sound” when, based on the “capability to imagine”, it turns into “fantasy”. The “sound” - the eleventh word - linked to biology, appears after the “force” and the “movement” and before the “memory”, the memory-fantasy of the experience one has lived, the one that makes the original image.

The “sound” is born with the same dynamics for everyone, it turns into the cry and then it changes (through recreation) into the set of elements and nuances that make up the voice of every human being.

Singing is an artistic form in which the body is a real musical instrument and the voice itself comes out as a sound product. The voice tells emotions, thoughts and the identity of the singer.

Although sound has been widely studied in the field of vocal physiology and the physical aspects that compose the vocal tract, there is less research on the biological, anthropological and philosophical origins of the voice.

Philosopher A. Cavarero has studied the causes of this reticence. Through her research, she explains how philosophy has always depersonalized the concept of voice eliminating it from any research on the human. Plato was the first to set up an approach based on human voice, relegating it to an abstract and anonymous concept. The problem of philosophy - states Cavarero - has to do with “the philosophical affinity for an abstract and bodiless universality, and for the domain of a word that does not come out of any throat of flesh”.

On the contrary, we affirm that both voice and singing are a property of all human beings; they emerge from biology, and involve the skin and the whole body, they are expressed in interpersonal relationships, and they encourage sociality through the capability to “make both the singer and the listener feel good”.

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