

5. THE PRACTICE OF SLOW WALKING APPLIED TO ECOLOGICAL AWARENESS AND ARTISTIC RESEARCH

María Dolores Esparza Sánchez²⁷⁰

Abstract: *Quite often one of the questions that young researchers face with difficulty is the differentiation between methods, methodologies, processes and procedures. Immersed in the development of my doctoral thesis, this question has occupied a fundamental part of my work so far because the process, that distance that separates the inputs from the outputs or the first actions from the results, takes on a more than remarkable importance in my approach. In my approach, the process is like an essence that is replicated and tinges on the whole of the research. The application of the slow walking technique, linked to detailed study, drawing, dimensioning and measuring, affects the development of all my research. This presentation focuses on the description of the process in my doctoral research, understood as a line on which I walk, the line that I inhabit and that inhabits me. Green intelligence, vegetal displacements and ecological awareness will be the main connected points of this approach.*

Key words: *process, vegetal displacement, drawing, green intelligence, rhythm*

1. Introduction - Walking to count slowly. Walking to feel space

I affirm that by walking through natural space, we recover our intimate relationship with the landscape, we feel we belong, which is the original cosmic state, the point at which ‘magic arises’. By drawing, the brain and heart are in harmony, in balance; as we move, we write history.

Among the subjects I will address throughout this text, I would like to highlight the following:

1. Methods, methodologies, processes and procedures: interrelationships. Where I will deal with the idea of rhythm in the creation and practice of drawing, supported by the senses and perception.
2. The process as an essence that promotes narratives. How to weave them from the process as an essential vehicle of artistic production.
3. The perception of time. Analogies with plant temporalities. Response and anticipation. Diving into the symbiosis that may exist between these concepts and practices and the change of paradigm to which scientific and philosophical studies on Plant Intelligence appeal to us. In this slow walking, I will establish connections with vegetal displacements, with green intelligence and grafts (Marder, 2018), generating tracings, connections that are drawn and discover to us the life of lines.

2. Methods, methodologies, processes and procedures: interrelationships

‘Minds and lives are not self-enclosed entities, which can be enumerated and added up, but open-ended processes whose most outstanding characteristic is that they continue, and in this continuing, they intertwine, like the strands of a rope. A whole is made up of individual parts in a totality in which everything is articulated or joined together’. Tim Ingold (2018, p.32). I will start by describing the process because it is the ‘whole’ in which the events of a particular artistic practice unfold.

²⁷⁰ Candidate Doctoral, University, Murcia, Spain, email: mes29847@um.es, ID ORCID <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8321-1908>

The way of unravelling the process is called procedure, the steps that are designed in a more concrete way to approach the aforementioned practice. As for methodology and method, the latter, linked to science, could be defined as the way of applying something; it would be in charge of studying the 'how to proceed'. And methodologies encompass the method and the procedures, they encompass the set of tools to carry out the development of the process.

As a socially committed artist who is also involved in ecology, I think of an artistic practice that helps to sensitise other people so that, although it may seem the most improbable, we can put in place solutions that not only improve the situation but also resolve some of the internal conflicts that this global acceleration is producing in our society. I consider that one of the possible ways of action has a direct connection with slowing down, with the subversion of the tempo set by the prevailing system. That is why I try to apply to my way of relating to the world and to other living beings slowly enough not to miss out on any of the riches and benefits of simply being and existing as part of the planet.

It is necessary to foster a consciousness that looks at the biosphere as a whole and it is important to recognise our belonging to this cosmic interrelationship. We must look at diversity with an attitude of respect. Spanish ecofeminist philosopher Marta Tafalla talks about the aesthetics of Nature in her work *ECOANIMAL: A multi-sensorial, ecological and animalistic aesthetics* (2019). She proposes to recover the connection with Nature through the aesthetic experience, that connection with natural environments where we will find the seed of ethical commitment. Opening the door to astonishment and admiration and thus bringing us closer to the knowledge of the interrelationship that exists between human beings and the biodiversity that surrounds us.

In connection with the idea of wonder, I would mention Rachel Carson (1956) and quote her describing the sense of wonder: 'To keep a child's innate sense of wonder alive...requires the company of at least one adult with whom to share it, rediscovering with them the joy, wonder and mystery of the world in which we live' (p.28). This capacity for wonder is latent in early childhood and is being lost. It is necessary and very important to encourage it, to recover it and to achieve motivation. It can be a walk on the beach, a stroll through the park in your neighbourhood or a trip to the nearest mountain.

This will awaken the curiosity that is essential to cultivate the concerns that lead us to approach and want to get to know other species, both animal and plant. This experience helps us to understand ourselves, to locate ourselves within the space of coexistence that is the Earth and to discover the relationship that exists between human beings and the other forms of life with which we cohabit. My research and artistic practice point to the process, and on the tempo of it, that is where it looks. In slow work as a mode of creation, as a way of being and conceiving my practice. A slow (way of) being, to observe and retune.

It is a proposal that pays attention to the 'slowly' and the 'while', rhythm and process, as a form of resistance. In slow walking, paths are generated, we are drawing with the body and in this illustration, many things happen. In this walking through natural spaces, connective lines are created that draw and blur paths, giving rise to the activation of certain attitudes that aspire to a better world, a planet in

balance. In this respect, Tim Ingold (2018) states: 'Nothing gets a hold on anything unless it throws out a line that can intertwine with others. When everything intertwines it results in something I call 'mesh' or interconnectedness... every living thing is a line, or better yet, a bundle of lines' (p. 23).

Creating these interconnections I propose the cultivation, the conquest and the value of the small and the everyday, and from there to make an exercise of humility, as Tafalla (2019) proposes, he tells us that if we learn 'to appreciate nature seriously and profoundly, it will gift us with enriching experiences, will inspire our artistic creations and will show us all that we gain when we live in peace with ecosystems and species' (p.188). I want to clarify that when, in my work methodology, I propose slow walking, I am not referring to an exaggeratedly slow pace like *Slow Walking*, which pays special attention to slowing down the pace in a very conscious way. Nor do I mean the proposal made by *Chiwalking*, which pays a lot of attention to the position and movement of the body. In my case it is about a fluid walking in which I find my own rhythm. That's why I do it in natural spaces so that there is a kind of connection where that slow pace is born, which is not exaggerated.

There is an idea of a leisurely rhythm and to illustrate it I rely on a text by Gloria Luque Moya (2018) where she analyses this aspect in the book entitled *Art as Experience* (2008) written by John Dewey. She says that there is a vital concept in the process of creation which is rhythm. She writes about 'the aesthetics of the everyday', about the validity and capacity of objects and different actions, which we usually do, and that with it we can generate an aesthetic experience. I favour a leisurely walk in a natural space as a methodology. In this action, lines and traces are created that converge to generate ideas. In this sense, Dr Luque clarifies that 'any human activity is the result of the interaction between the living organism and its environment, between that experiencing (undergoing) and doing (doing)' (p. 368). Despite the character of spirituality that has been given to the fine arts, we can say that they grow from the same support, which is that of ordinary, everyday experience. Dewey said 'The living being alternately loses and re-establishes equilibrium with its environment, and the moment of transition from disturbance to harmony is that of the most intense life' (p. 375).

In Luque's analysis of Dewey's work, he recounts the multitude of occasions in which the author alludes to the close relationship that exists between human beings and nature, which is provided with its great rhythms, encompassing these in a principal and primordial one such as the circadian rhythm. In his reflection, he specifies that for Dewey 'natural rhythms are models for creating new forms of interaction' (p.371). According to Dewey, the concept of *techné* linked, for the Greeks, the rhythms of the body to the creations, which would later give rise, in short, to the fine arts. We can consider rhythm as a guide that helps us to reach equilibrium and thus the intercommunication with the space that surrounds us occurs in harmony, opening a place for new meanings. We experience the world in 'the immediacy of situations' (p.372), it is there where there is an organisation of energies that gives way to new imaginaries that come from experiences in another time. In rhythm there is a continuous renewal, one could speak of a process that is not closed, that is changeable, constituting an intrinsic necessity to the human condition. In his article, Luque makes it clear that experiences always come with

something new; when they are lived, one does not go back to the starting point.

3. The process as a narrative-promoting essence

In art there is a constant influence exerted by environmental awareness. It has always been linked to the present, art merges with the moment in which it lives, which is why the issue of the climate emergency and crisis is so latent now. It is imperative to take a look at sustainability, understood as the necessary balance to guarantee the coverage of present needs and to look to the future for generations to come. In her dictionary of Spanish usage, María Moliner (1997) defined the word ecology as ‘the study of organisms concerning the environment’. It is necessary to cultivate this important link for the benefit of all.

Art as a way of thinking and with the capacity to interpret its surroundings is capable of offering solutions and approaches that generate new ways of approaching and relating to nature. We must know that we are the same (part of nature) and therefore what exists is a relationship of continuity and dependence, that is to say, what is damaged has a direct effect on our detriment. The artist, through her/his discourse, can adopt an intelligent vision in which to address the response to situations that arise. There is a latent exercise, in art, of experimentation for the activation of environmental awareness. It has the power to open up a range of possibilities that invite an approach to this form of awareness.

These possible formulas can be given on a didactic, artistic or experimental level, among others, to achieve this objective. Art has the ability to connect elements that at first glance may seem disparate, but when combined they generate the spark that opens the way to reflection. Therefore art, rhythm and process go hand in hand to illustrate a way of working that invites care and respect for natural environments through the appeal ‘to our senses of proprioception, kinaesthesia and balance’ (Tafalla, 2019, p. 308).

Looking, observing, stopping and pacing, would be a true learning of resistance. We are immersed in an accelerated society that is the trigger, among other things, of the serious climate crisis in which we find ourselves. In this reflection on the relationship between art and ecology, Professor Verónica Perales states that ‘it is essential to integrate an ecological analysis in artistic production, or better still, to consider art as a tool and agent towards change. It has never been as necessary as it is right now and we have never had such a powerful technological device.

Technology must be an ally of the planet, or what is the same, of the possibility of life; It has to help us see, hear, and ultimately “feel” better’ (p. 163). A work that moves through a slow tempo speaks of a form of resistance to a model of society immersed in haste and immediacy. It is important to be aware of rhythms because from there, in slowness, possibilities open up to create spaces for care. They are important for oneself, for others and the environment. The planet needs conscious and active care because we are part of it and because the balance of life on Earth depends on this work. It is important to facilitate the approach to the importance of a rooted and sustainable attitude.

Therefore, I propose a slow and accurate drawing where we find a common compass that leads us to the idea of **inter-kingdoms** proposed by Michael Marder, in which each one finds its natural rhythms and thus tunes into a process of empathy

and care. There is the presence of natural rhythms to make them a referent or model. We can also affirm that this presence can ‘induce order where it does not exist’ (Luque, 2018, p. 372) because we are individuals trying to seek order, wanting to ‘organise energy and configure it rhythmically’ (Luque, 2018, p.372). Through rhythm and perception, we recover our most essential being with the help of Nature, through mutual care, thus achieving a re-harmonisation in the relationship we maintain with her, becoming aware of our belonging.

4. The perception of time. Analogies with the temporalities of plants: response and anticipation

Part of the process of my artistic practice takes place in slow walking, that is where creation and reflection take place. This slow movement takes place on the beaches of the Galician coast, where I collect seaweed that will later be the object of observation. In this previous displacement, in which the action of observing and collecting takes place, we participate in the drawing in a series of strokes given by the movement. It is about the generation of lines that open a space of connection and reflection with the environment. I inhabit the line, the drawing and the space I walk through. We inhabit ourselves by opening lines of care and connection. Here I would like to emphasise the importance of the role of the senses, which are of the utmost importance in this action.

Focusing on proprioception, defined as that sensory capacity that allows the body to perform everyday functions and activities in an unconscious way. We can affirm that it helps us to detect how some parts of our body establish relationships with others. They are narratives in the form of internal plots, which record the slow movement. It is a movement within a space, which opens up a place for dialogue. These lines, or networks, inhabit us and extend to the outside, establishing a flow (pumping) of external and internal information. There is a pulsing of lines that favour points of connection in the form of neuronal connections. And in this movement of expansion and contraction, these lines lead us to feel part of a whole, they offer us the capacity to become aware of being cosmic.

Proprioception is a conditioning factor when it comes to relating to the space around us or to other creatures, be they from the animal or plant kingdom. In this sense, professor Michael Marder (2019) talks about ‘plant friendship’ and the synchronicity that we would need, especially at the temporal level, to be able to befriend a plant, which could be described as ‘the willingness to share a world (which is not the same thing as the environment or the universe) through unavoidable differences of perspective between me and the other’ (p. 32). Whatever asynchronies we may have with the plant kingdom, and even with ourselves, in plants we can observe that the ‘distinction between self and other...is even more thorny than in human subjectivity’ (p. 33).

If we were to observe one of the ways in which plants communicate, or relate to each other and their surroundings, we would discover reactions such as the thickening or fragility of their roots. Depending on the type of situation they perceive around them. So, in developing our capacity to appreciate other types of intelligence, we can begin to open our minds, to find clues to this paradigm shift in our relationship with Nature. This has traditionally been hierarchised, leaving the

plant kingdom in third place, without taking into account that it is an indispensable element for the survival of human beings on the planet.

Brienne Donaldson, cited by Marder in his book *Injertos*, reflects that ‘plant friendship can refer at the same time to friendship with vegetation or to friendship marked by plant qualities...all friendships are plant friendships...they imply a resonance of multiplicities’ (p. 35). I think that it is these resonances that we are intoning as we walk, that we are drawing lines of meaning that prolong us and create bonds. When we walk through a natural space, recovering our intimate relationship with the landscape, we feel we belong, which is the original cosmic state, brilliantly described by Professor Marder who says that ‘we vibrate to a phase of mutant attention where vision is synergy with the other perceptive matrices and we access life-giving states that somehow connect us with the ancestral narrative of the prodigy’ (p. 15).

We recover those lines of connection and links begin to be established, the senses relax and this allows them to enter another state, another rhythm and another tempo. That is where they are allowed to activate the ability to establish conceptual relationships that are apparently not coherent, we could say that ‘magic happens’. Elements or ideas that come from different spheres, shake hands and re-signify each other. As inspiration for this moving slowly as a proposal for creation, I propose to look at the philosophical and scientific field that deals with Plant Intelligence, of which I mentioned an example earlier.

Authors such as Michael Marder or Paco Calvo invite us to open our minds. They propose a paradigm shift in the observation, knowledge and relationship that has historically been proposed to us for/with the plant kingdom. To deal with the idea of rhythm in the process, I would like to rescue the words of Stéfano Mancuso who relates that plants ‘have developed the possibility of moving through growth, which is a sign of their extraordinary plasticity’ (Mancuso, 2017), here I would like to highlight this possibility of drawing slow lines and the human incapacity to perceive this movement that Professor Mancuso speaks of. This puts us before a reality that we cannot perceive.

5. Conclusions

Let us ask ourselves the question of having to rely on our imagination. Of course, we can resort to a time-lapse recording so that it can be visible to the human eye, but let us take up Monica Gagliano's proposal. Let imagination serve as a key ‘to free those solutions that we so desperately seek and cannot see’ (Gagliano, 2019). Michael Marder speaks of the synchronicity we would need, mainly on a temporal level, to be able to befriend a plant that could be described as ‘the willingness to share a world (which is not the same thing as the environment or the universe) through inevitable differences of perspective between me and the other’ (Marder, 2018).

Through rhythm and perception we recover our most essential being with the help of Nature, through mutual care, thus achieving a re-harmonisation of our relationship with her, becoming aware of our belonging. I conclude by referring to the three points proposed in which, firstly, the way and manner in which I approach artistic practice has been addressed. Secondly, I put the emphasis on the process,

which is the space in which I trust to carry out my research. And finally to open the door to plant intelligences, feeling that plants are the teachers that can inspire and shed light on a paradigm shift that is urgent and necessary.

References

1. Arenas, L., Del Castillo, R., Faerna, A. M., (2018), *John Dewey, Una estética de este mundo* (primera edición), Prensas de la Universidad de Zaragoza, Zaragoza
2. Bioners, (2024-05-28), *Nature's Intelligence: Interviewing the Vegetable Mind* | Robin Kimmerer & Monica Gagliano. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5v1aFJuuq5c>
3. Calvo, P., (2023), *Planta Sapiens. Descubre la inteligencia secreta de las plantas*, primera edición, Seix Barral, Barcelona
4. Carlson, R., (2012), *El sentido del asombro*, tercera edición, Ediciones Encuentro, Madrid
5. Carreri, F., (2014), *Walkscapes. El andar como práctica estética*. Barcelona: Editorial GG.
6. Ingold, T., (2018), *La vida de las líneas*, primera edición, Ediciones Universidad Alberto Hurtado, Santiago de Chile
7. Mancuso, S., (2023), *Sensibilidad e inteligencia en el mundo vegetal*, decimocuarta edición, Galaxia Gutenberg, Barcelona
8. Marder, M., (2019), *Injertos, escritos sobre plantas*, primera edición, Ediciones Nefoé
9. Perales Blanco, V., (2022), *Art, Technology and Environmental Commitment in Education*, "Review of Artistic Education", N° 24, March 2022, 163-173
10. Puleo, A. H., (2011), *Ecofeminismo para otro mundo posible*, primera edición, Ediciones Cátedra (Grupo Anaya), Madrid
11. Tafalla, M., (2019), *Ecoanimal. Una estética plurisensorial ecologista y animalista*, primera edición. Plaza y Valdés Editores, Madrid
12. Raquejo, T., Perales, V., (2022), *Arte Ecosocial. Otras maneras de pensar, hacer y sentir*, primera edición, Plaza y Valdés S.L., Madrid
13. Tafalla, M., (2022), *Filosofía ante la crisis ecológica*, primera edición, Plaza y Valdés S.L., Madrid