

Performing Arts, Education, Industry and Crafts



Fernando Sáenz de Ugarte

Board Member of ESKENA, Basque Association of Stage Producers

Japan's most important Shinto shrine, the Ise-Daijingu¹, is located in the city of Ise. Although it was founded in the 4th century BC, the sanctuary has been dismantled and completely rebuilt every twenty years for the past thirteen centuries, and is currently in its 63rd reconstruction.

It has a unique architectural style, and not a single nail is used in the structures that are built using wood joints. Several trades come together to build the shrine, ranging from forest management and care, wood cutting and transport, to carpentry and assembly. But there are also numerous trades

related to the transcendental and ceremonial aspects of the temple: ceremonial leaders, dressmakers, shoemakers, and cobblers. These are crafts and knowledge that are passed from hand to hand, organically, keeping a tangible part of Japan's heritage alive, but more importantly, an intangible one, in a society as advanced and technological as the Japanese one.

There is a deep connection between the what, the how, the why and the what for; between the material and the symbolic, in the connection between past, present and future. All these elements coexist in an ecosystem that gives meaning to each of its parts, and can answer to one another. A magnificent "shrine" of riverside carpentry and of the ancestral wisdom applied to create it can be found just a few kilometres from my office: Albaola Itsas Kultur Faktoria², in Pasaia (Gipuzkoa).

This powerful image should serve to inspire a range of questions and answers to the challenge of writing about how the Performing Arts should become a central and transversal vector in Education, focusing on this post-pandemic and digitalised society. Furthermore, what questions we should ask ourselves when planning education

for current and future professionals of the Creative and Cultural Industries (CCIs).

Performing Arts as Human Crafts (hand/body and mind)

Performing arts represent a fundamental link between physical skills and intellectual capacity. Richard Sennett, in his book *The Craftsman*³, illustrates craft as the conjunction of skill, commitment and judgement, highlighting the close relationship between the hand (the body) and the mind. This dialogue between a specific practice and thought translates into habits that shape the craftsman's creative and problem-solving process, establishing a rhythm between problem solving and discovery.

Performing arts, by their very nature, embody this dialogue between hand and brain, merging body and mind in a holistic process of personal development. The craftsmanship of the body in performance and singing, and that of memory, creation and composition, are disciplines that encompass a full spectrum of practices that nurture both the physical and intellectual aspects of people. Conscious repetition is a fundamental tool in this process.

¹ <https://www.isejingu.or.jp/>

² <https://albaola.org/>

³ Sennett, R. *El Artesano*. Barcelona: Alianza; 2009.

Each repetition is a unique and unrepeatable moment, a new step in the continuous development of the crafted material we work with, representing the improvement and evolution of the art.

By connecting ancestral knowledge and practices with contemporary techniques and research, performing arts act as a bridge between the past and the present. Theatre, dance, circus and music continue to draw on age-old traditions, constantly updating them through dialogue with contemporary society. This connection to history and culture lends a unique depth and richness to artistic expression.

In the post-pandemic society, the need to integrate body and mind has become more pressing than ever. The performing arts emerge as indispensable tools to cultivate holistic well-being, fostering the connection between people and their environment through artisanal practices. These disciplines offer an avenue for self-awareness, creativity, social participation and the development of interpersonal skills. While these aspects are increasingly valued in the educational and social sphere, they are paradoxically less present.

The UNESCO Framework for Culture and Arts Education⁴ underlines the importance of integrating the arts in education as a means of promoting the comprehensive development of individuals. In this sense, performing arts play a crucial role in providing a space for exploration,

expression and reflection, essential elements for truly enriching and culturally relevant education.

Performing arts: space and time. Attention and empathy

Performing arts, or Arts in Vivo, must take us to the stage: unique and unrepeatable physical and temporal spaces (like every present moment), generated to be inhabited and shared, that invite us to be fully present and engaged with the moment in which we live. **In a world dominated by technology and virtuality, where we find ourselves on stages made up of screens of various sizes, these disciplines offer us the opportunity to reconnect our attention and our ability to be in the here and now.** Creating and developing the stage thus becomes a space for empathy and understanding, where we can experience alternative realities and develop our emotional intelligence. A space for dialogue, as opposed to spaces of overlapping monologues.

The interaction on a stage context between the performer and the audience creates a unique bond, based on mutual respect and reciprocity. This dialectical exchange between the communicator and the person listening/feeling/receiving the exchange fosters an atmosphere of civility and collaboration, enriching both the creator and the audiences. Moreover, the multiplicity of possible interpretations enriches the artistic experience, offering audiences the freedom to generate their own reading and meaning.

The stage gives us the opportunity to explore different facets of our being, transporting us to different realities, options and bodies, whether these are real or imaginary. This process is an exceptional exercise in empathy and emotional intelligence. In a world marked by individualism and the constant pressure to define our unique identity and “our brand”, the stage offers a valuable alternative. It allows us to be multiple selves, that are complex and contradictory, reflecting the richness and diversity inherent in the human experience.

If we delve into the exhibition of performing arts, we inevitably plunge into the universe of the Theatre⁵, one of the most sophisticated and technologically advanced venues in existence, from the stage to the seats. Over the centuries, the combination of architecture, science and engineering has converged to create the optimal conditions under which artists and audiences can connect at their best. In this space, a tacit contract is established between those who wish to transmit something and those who long to receive it and be moved by it.

⁴ UNESCO, Marco de la UNESCO para la Educación Cultural y Artística, Abu Dabi 2024.

⁵ The stage is not only found in a theatre, but also in a classroom, on the street, in a square, a temple... We take the notion of theatre as a highly technological stage building to host the stage event, the encounter between stage creation and its audiences.

An exchange of expressions and emotions arises, where the desire to communicate is intertwined with the willingness to listen and experiment. This exchange is governed by rules of civility, which promote respect and active attention in a bidirectional manner, generating essential feedback to nurture both the artistic process and the audiences' experience.

It is important to emphasise that in the performing arts, it is the audience that directs its gaze and forms its personal interpretation of the event. Each person in the audience, as well as on stage, brings a unique and diverse perspective, enriching the collective experience. This capacity for unbound and multiple interpretation contrasts with the reality mediated by screens, where direction and focus are predefined, limiting the variety of interpretations.

The theatre is not only a space to exhibit the performing arts, but also an educational environment in its own right. Classrooms can move into this iconic venue, where theatrical experiences become powerful pedagogical tools. In this context, **learning goes beyond books and whiteboards. Students are allowed to immerse themselves in a world of creativity, expression and reflection, where each performance is a living, tangible lesson.**

In short, the theatre is much more than a stage for artistic performances; it is a living space where technology meets tradition to create unforgettable experiences. From the communion between artists and audiences, with varying ways to participate, to

multiple potential interpretations, theatre continues to be the stronghold of creativity, learning and human encounter in an increasingly digitalised and virtual world.

Performing arts: innovation and lineage.

Juan Luis Moraza⁶ provides a striking reflection on the phenomenon of creative inertia, which drives us to constantly seek the best, the possible, and the optimum, relegating the good, the useful and the beneficial to oblivion. In his analysis, Moraza points out how this relentless pursuit of innovation can become a never-ending cycle, where each breakthrough is soon superseded and rejected in favour of the latest novelty. This dynamic, according to Moraza, plunges us into a loop of constant dissatisfaction, where programmed obsolescence justifies the indiscriminate destruction of traditions, conventions and even past innovations.

The performing arts sector has not escaped the maelstrom of entrepreneurship at all costs and the desperate search for viable business models in the midst of the global crisis. **We face challenges that are common to many sectors: production that exceeds the capacity of the markets to accommodate it, and the imperative need to adapt to an ever-changing economic and social landscape.**

In our experience accompanying entrepreneurship processes in performing arts together with local development agencies, we have

detected a profound gap between the reality of the professionals in our sector and the tools used by the different support, mentoring and accompaniment programmes for such entrepreneurship processes. The incubation period is longer, largely because of the need for both worlds to get to know each other so they can re-acquaint themselves with each other and start a common journey.

⁶ Moraza, J.L. Art in the age of cognitive capitalism. ASRI. Arte y Sociedad (Art and Society). Research Journal, (15), 81-112. 2018

In these experiences, we see how both parties feed off each other and reformulate formats and tools in a process that is still at an early stage. This process will need more time and attention to generate crafts that accompany our entrepreneurial processes. The performing arts and its wisdom would thereby be able to permeate and enrich processes of other CCIs, because we maintain the firm conviction that the diverse expertise inherent in performing arts can be a fundamental tool to find solutions in a collaborative and multidisciplinary way. With a comprehensive and shared vision, we are confident that we can contribute to the well-being and development of society as a whole.

In conclusion, performing arts represent much more than mere forms of entertainment; they are vehicles for personal and social transformation. Their artisanal approach, the focus on the integration of body and mind, their ability to generate empathy, and their connection to cultural tradition make them powerful tools for human development and the promotion of diversity and inclusion.

In an increasingly technological, digitalised and globalised world, ancient lessons taught by the performing arts take on even greater relevance, reminding us of the importance of cultivating creativity, responsibility and human connection in all facets of our lives and societies.

Eskena

Basque Association of Stage Production Companies

Eskena was founded in 1990 to support the world of entertainment and facilitate optimal conditions for the development of the Basque stage sector. Eskena has been working side by side with the different Basque stage producers for 34 years, with the aim of giving a voice, space and opportunities to the different companies in the Basque theatre sector and the performing arts in general.

Its objectives are:

- To promote the Performing Arts and encourage business development in the sector.
- To foster a continuous relationship between institutions and agents in the sector.
- To guarantee the representation, support and promotion of the interests of its members.
- To promote solidarity and networking internally and externally.

This article is part of the series **“Education in the Cultural and Creative Industries”** created by KSIgune - Higher Education and Research Cluster for CCIs in the Basque Country, in the framework of the Creativity World Forum 2024. The experts, authors of the articles, have participated in the thematic area “Education in CCIs” coordinated by KSIgune.

The complete series is available at www.ksigune.eus