

Article

Not peer-reviewed version

The Creative Process as Theory of Knowledge an Ontology of the Creative Process and Epistemology of Fluxus Art

José Cosme *

Posted Date: 31 October 2025

doi: 10.20944/preprints202510.2445.v1

Keywords: art epistemology; fluxus; creative process; contemporary art; José Cosme; aesthetic knowledge; contemporary art; metaphysical



Preprints.org is a free multidisciplinary platform providing preprint service that is dedicated to making early versions of research outputs permanently available and citable. Preprints posted at Preprints.org appear in Web of Science, Crossref, Google Scholar, Scilit, Europe PMC.

Copyright: This open access article is published under a Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license, which permit the free download, distribution, and reuse, provided that the author and preprint are cited in any reuse.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions, and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions, or products referred to in the content.

Article

The Creative Process as Theory of Knowledge an Ontology of the Creative Process and Epistemology of Fluxus Art

José Alfonso Cosme Rodríguez (José Cosme)

Multidisciplinary Artist. Director of the Chair of Art and Technology – Catholic University of Valencia; josecosme007@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper explores the creative process as a human form of knowledge from a Fluxian perspective, integrating art, epistemology, and lived experience. Through the analysis of his own expanded art practice and the exhibitions “El Todo y la Nada” (Museum of Contemporary Art of Bogotá) and “Forever” (La Neomudéjar Museum, Madrid), the author proposes an understanding of art as a path of knowledge irreducible to animal instinct or technical rationality. The text interweaves thought and poetics to situate contemporary art as a space of epistemological and metaphysics revelation.

Keywords: art epistemology; fluxus; creative process; contemporary art; José Cosme; aesthetic knowledge; contemporary art

Art, when approached from its inner dimension and not as mere production, becomes a path of knowledge. My research on epistemology and art stems from this conviction: the creative process is a form of knowledge that lives between intuition, the body, and the symbol. This project explores art as a form of knowledge that is free from regulations—experiential and revelatory.

In art, the use of rationality, logic, or scientific methodology is only optional, and the idea is emphasized that there are truths and profound understandings that cannot be fully expressed through logical reason or conventional language. Art, therefore, becomes a legitimate epistemological path: it does not represent the world, it reveals it. In times when artificial intelligence replicates technical processes, art remains the territory where the human reveals itself as an unrepeatable experience.

I have come to understand that art is a living form of knowledge. It is not a metaphor, but a real experience that has accompanied me since my first creative gestures. For me, to create is a way of thinking with the body, with matter, with memory. It is a knowledge that does not pass through logic, but through presence. In art, thought becomes embodied, the idea becomes skin, time is suspended.

Art not only represents but reveals. Each work opens a crack in the world and lets the light of meaning pass through. To create is a way of knowing that occurs on the threshold between the visible and the invisible, where intuition replaces reasoning and matter becomes language¹.

When I paint, assemble, or install a piece, I am not trying to represent a pre-existing idea. Rather, I let the material think with me. I leave the door open to chance elements that may intervene in the form of objet trouvé or material and immaterial ready-mades. I dialogue with the sound of the

¹ Merleau-Ponty, M. (1945). *Phenomenology of Perception*. Paris: Gallimard. (p. 187): “Vision is not a thought that is translated into images, but a presence of the body in the world, where the idea becomes visible and visibility becomes thought.” (Here Merleau-Ponty posits that perception and creation are forms of embodied knowledge, where the body and matter think. This corresponds directly to your idea of the “threshold between the visible and the invisible” and of “matter as language”).

materials, with the resistance of time, with the uncertainty produced by what I still do not know how to name.

I know through doing. the creative process thus becomes a form of living knowledge—not abstract but corporeal, sensitive, in dialogue with the real. Art is not founded or limited in logic or in craftsmanship, but in presence. Unlike rational knowledge, which separates subject and object, artistic knowledge unites them in the same gesture. The artist does not merely observe from the outside: they participate, mingle, transform.

That form of knowing, connatural to the human being, can be called knowledge by connaturality, in dialogue with the Thomistic notion of connaturalitas².

The creative process is, before being a production, a search, an experience, and a revelation. Every work I have made has been a question and an incomplete answer. In *El Todo y la Nada* (2003), I understood that emptiness is not lack, but invisible fullness. In *Forever* (Cosme, 2024), I understood that disappearance can be a form of permanence, according to Zambrano: “There are presences that affirm themselves by disappearing, for only in their flight do they leave the space of revelation”³. Both experiences revealed to me that art, rather than representing the world, knows it from its limit, from its fragility. Heidegger (1950) states that “art does not represent, but allows the being of the entity to appear”⁴.

I have come to think that the creative process is an ontology in motion⁵. Each work inquires into what it means to exist. In that sense, art is not limited to producing objects: it generates ways of being. Every stroke, every installation, every silence shared in an exhibition opens a space where being questions itself. And in that question dwells the epistemology of art: a knowledge that is made while it is lived. According to Beuys, art is not about the mold, but about the flow. What matters is the process that transforms the inner substance. “Sculpture does not refer to the form of something, but to the way in which something becomes form”. (Joseph Beuys, conversation with Willoughby Sharp, 1969)⁶

Sometimes I wonder if art was not the first form of knowledge that the human being possessed. Before words, before science, even before organized religion, there was the gesture: a hand that traces, a stone that strikes the wall, a voice that trembles in the dark. That gesture was not yet language, but already contained an intuition of the world. It was not the will to explain, but the need to reveal. There, I believe, is where the epistemology of art is born: in the act of giving form to the invisible in order to recognize it.

Modern philosophy sought to separate knowing from living, thinking from feeling. Art comes to reunite what had been torn apart. I share with María Zambrano the idea that there exists a poetic reason: a form of wisdom that is not built with concepts but with resonances. That poetic reason does not argue, but illuminates; it does not seek to demonstrate, but to understand.⁷

I have written elsewhere that “art does not explain: it reveals what rational language excludes” (Cosme, personal note, 2019). And I still believe that art is a form of thinking that breathes—not a logical thought, but one that is breathed, embodied, where body, time, and matter collaborate in the creation of meaning.

In my practice, to intuit is to allow truth to approach without forcing it. This resonates strongly with the ideas of three key thinkers: Martin Heidegger, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and María

² The concept of connaturality has its roots in Saint Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae*, II-II, q.45, a.2)

³ Zambrano, M. (1977). *Claros del bosque*. Barcelona. Seix Barral, 1997, p. 92.

⁴ Heidegger, M. (1950). *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* [El origen de la obra de arte]. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, p. 34.

⁵ Beuys, Joseph (1969). An Interview with Joseph Beuys. Interview Willoughby Sharp. *Artforum*, vol. 8, n.º 9, may 1970

⁶ Beuys, Joseph (1969). Id. Pp. 38-47

⁷ Zambrano, M. (1959). *Filosofía y poesía*. México: Fondo de Cultura Económica.

Zambrano—who hold that the artist does not conquer reality, but allows “himself to be inhabited by it”⁸.

In my exhibition “El Todo y la Nada”⁹, the pieces were born from the attempt to represent the frontier between fullness and emptiness: I understood that knowledge is not produced in the affirmation of one or the other, but in their tension. The eight installations I made in the museum were a laboratory of thought: a visual meditation that allowed perceptible reality to be stretched and questioned beyond itself. Each piece confronted us with the question: Where does matter end and consciousness begin?

Meanwhile, in “Forever. The Discard of the Ephemeral”¹⁰ (Cosme, 2024), the question revolved around time: how to know the ephemeral, how to give form to what disappears. I discovered that the transitory also teaches; there is wisdom in loss. Thus I understood that to know is not always to grasp; sometimes, to know is to approach truth with an awakened consciousness. It is a permanent need for both faith and reason, as St. John Paul II says in *Fides et Ratio*.

One of the essential differences between the human being and the animal lies precisely there. The animal acts by instinct; its action responds to necessity. The human being not only has that “animal instinct”; the person can also stop, contemplate, transform urgency into symbol—into a metaphysical encounter. Where instinct repeats, as bees do when building their hive, consciousness creates. And in that creation appears a kind of knowledge impossible to replace by animal intuition, technique, or artificial intelligence.

At times, when facing the creation of works, I make an effort not to contaminate myself with what the art market, critics, or society expect, and I remind myself that every authentic creation (authentic art) requires a state of mental freedom and is born from the encounter between vulnerability and lucidity. The artist knows because he opens himself: it is not about controlling materials or imposing a concept, but about listening to what the materials ask for, what the space reveals, what silence suggests. In that “vital listening,” knowledge is produced that belongs not only to the artist, but to the world and to reality through the artist.

Sometimes I believe that art—or the works—think with us. The works are part of a reality that existed before ideas. Perhaps that is why art moves us: because it speaks from a level prior to language, from a wisdom we never learned, but discovered within ourselves.

With each work, I try to understand a little more the relationship between the visible and the invisible world, reason and intuition, the eternal and the ephemeral, the valuable and the despicable, reality and fiction. It is a way of diving between opposing poles. The epistemology of art does not consist in explaining what is seen, but in revealing what sustains vision.

What is truly known in art is the way in which being manifests itself or confronts reality. That is why each creative process is also an ontological question: What is it that asks to exist through me?. I have come to understand that art is not born only from will, but from availability. Creation occurs when the I ceases to occupy everything and something necessary and unconscious becomes present through oneself. At that moment, knowledge is no longer sought but lived—or revealed. Thought and consciousness merge (or perhaps fuse) with action, and the act seems to be the one that reveals, thinks, or knows. The artist, then, is not so much a producer of works as a witness to the process by which reality comes to know itself, comes to be discovered.

In moments of creative lucidity, I perceive that what is happening gives meaning to what surrounds me—to the union between matter and spirit. The space or the material becomes part of me, as if it were an extension of myself that recognizes itself. That is why my approach is that art does

⁸ Heidegger, M. (1950). *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* [El origen de la obra de arte]. Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann.

⁹ Cosme, José. Exposición “El Todo y la Nada”. Museo de arte Contemporáneo de Bogotá MACBO. Colombia 2018

¹⁰ Cosme, José. Exposición “Forever. El descarte de lo efímero”. Museo La Neomudejar de Madrid 2024.

not invent; rather, it listens or makes reality resonate within us, attempting to give it form, or to express it through an unlimited language. Every surface, every fragment, is a place of revelation.

When I work with fragile or povera materials—papers, pigments, waste, veiled photographs—I experience that knowledge arises from vulnerability and from that which we had not paid attention to. The fragility of the visible reminds me that every form is provisional, and that knowledge, works of art, or language are also provisional and only “serve” within an appropriate context. But that provisionality—that functionality and that value—is not weakness, but an eternal and valuable reality in itself, not for its materiality nor for its “usefulness.” Art teaches precisely this: that knowledge does not consist in possessing truth, but in illuminating its existence.

In that sense, art has taught me more than any treatise of philosophy. It has shown me that deep understanding does not occur in absolute clarity, but in the penumbra where mind and matter touch—in spiritual experience, in a metaphysical action that is felt beyond craftsmanship. Beauty and art, understood in this way, do not propose aesthetic functions or artisanal delight, but a revelation: a mode of knowledge that illuminates reality from within its mystery. Hans Urs von Balthasar develops the *via pulchritudinis*—the path of beauty as a way of knowledge and revelation of the divine—throughout his monumental work *Gloria: Eine theologische Ästhetik* (The Glory. A Theological Aesthetics)¹¹.

Western thought, from Platón to the avant-garde, has tried to fix art into categories: representation, expression, form, content. But the true nature of art cannot be confined: it is flow, becoming, event. In Fluxian practice, I found a mirror of this understanding: art as an “expanded action”, a vital energy that traverses both creator and viewer.

Art and creation are an essential experience common to all human beings; therefore, it is an experience that is shared. As Beuys said: “Every man is an artist”. This means that the creative power of the human being can transform life itself, not just art. —Joseph Beuys¹², 1973.

Regarding Fluxus art, my position is more Beuysian¹³ than strictly Fluxian. I do not identify as much with the formal radicalism of Maciunas’ manifesto¹⁴, but with Beuys’ vision, where art is understood as a vital, transformative, and deeply human process. However, I share with Fluxus one essential intuition: art can resemble play and joy. I believe that play is one of the keys to knowledge. In the child, play is not an evasion, but a way of discovering the world, of relating to it, of thinking with the body.

Through play, childhood knows through experience, not through instruction. In the same way, art in the adult extends that same form of knowing: a ludic epistemology that combines freedom and revelation¹⁵. However, as we grow, the educational and social system ceases to grant play and art the value they possess in the formation of thought. Scientific methodology and historically inherited knowledge occupy the center, relegating imagination and creation to the margins of what is “useful”. It is forgotten that the ability to imagine and create is, in itself, one of the deepest forms of intelligence.

I have lived the creative process as a territory where action and grace intertwine. The gesture not only produces the work: it also transforms the creator. Every authentic creation leaves an inner mark—a form of wisdom that is never forgotten. The work, therefore, is not a result: it is a path.

When I look back at *El Todo y la Nada* or *Forever* (Cosme, 2024), I perceive that both exhibitions were, more than projects, stages of an embodied thought: in the first, emptiness and fullness embraced; in the second, disappearance became memory.

¹¹ Balthasar, H. U. von. (1985). *Glory: A Theological Aesthetic. I: Seeing the Face of God* (trans. by J. M. Valverde). Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro. (Original work published in 1961)

¹² Beuys, J. (1998). *Every man an artist* (trans. M. Cortés). Madrid: Ediciones Síntesis. (Original work published in German as *Jeder Mensch ein Künstler: Gespräche auf der documenta 5 mit Willi Bongard*, 1973)

¹³ Beuys, J. (1985). *Every Man an Artist*. Barcelona: Ediciones Paidós.

¹⁴ Maciunas, G. (1963). *Fluxus Manifesto*. New York: Fluxus Press

¹⁵ Ortega y Gasset, J. (1933). *The Dehumanization of Art*. Madrid: Revista de Occidente.

Today I understand that both series were part of the same reflection: that art is the place where the ephemeral becomes eternal.¹⁶

Faced with the growing mechanization of thought, art preserves mystery. Artificial intelligence can imitate structures, but not their origin; it can recombine images, but not feel their necessity. Artistic knowledge is not generated by algorithms, but by experience—by the friction between consciousness and the world. Perhaps that is why art is more necessary than ever. In a time when knowledge is measured in data, art reminds us that to know is also to listen, to contemplate, to wait. There is no discovery without silence, nor creation without pause. Art restores to knowledge its human dimension.

My epistemology of art is, ultimately, a pedagogy of sensitivity. Art teaches us to feel with intelligence and to think with emotion. It brings us back to the place where knowing and being are not separated. It is, therefore, a form of healing: it reunites what culture and at times the art market has fragmented.

I am convinced that the future of art will not be technological but spiritual—not religious, but an expansion of consciousness. Art will be the space where human beings remember their capacity to create meaning, to find in the sensible a path toward the invisible.

That is, perhaps, the ultimate meaning of art: to reconcile the human being with his mystery. To make visible the beauty that sustains the everyday; to return to the world its sacred dimension, even if it remains unnamed. That is why I continue creating, researching, seeking. Each new work is an open question to knowledge. I do not seek definitive answers, but revelations that come forth to meet me—a way of living with an awakened consciousness. For all these reasons, I consider that art is not my form of expression: it is my way of knowing and understanding.

References

1. Balthasar, H. U. von. (1985). *The Glory. A Theological Aesthetics. I: Seeing the Face of God* (J. M. Valverde, Trans.). Madrid: Ediciones Encuentro. (Original work published in 1961)
2. Beuys, J. (1998). *Every Man an Artist* (M. Cortés, Trans.). Madrid: Ediciones Síntesis. (Original work published in 1973 as *Jeder Mensch ein Künstler: Gespräche auf der documenta 5 mit Willi Bongard*).
3. Beuys, J., & Sharp, W. (1969). *Conversations with Joseph Beuys*. New York: Artforum.
4. Blanchot, M. (1955). *L'espace littéraire*. Paris: Gallimard.
5. Cosme Rodríguez, J. A. (2024). *The Value of the Ephemeral: FOREVER* [Exhibition Catalogue]. Madrid: La Neomudéjar Museum.
6. Gadamer, H.-G. (1960). *Wahrheit und Methode* [Truth and Method]. Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck).
7. Heidegger, M. (1950). *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes* [The Origin of the Work of Art]. Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann.
8. Maritain, J. (1953). *Creative Intuition in Art and Poetry*. New York: Pantheon Books.
9. Merleau-Ponty, M. (1945). *Phénoménologie de la perception*. Paris: Gallimard.
10. Nancy, J.-L. (2001). *La evidencia del filme* (P. Sloterdijk, Trans.). Buenos Aires: Ediciones Manantial.
11. Ortega y Gasset, J. (1933). *The Dehumanization of Art*. Madrid: Revista de Occidente.
12. Zambrano, M. (1959). *Philosophy and Poetry*. Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica.
13. Zambrano, M. (1977). *Clearings in the Forest*. Barcelona: Seix Barral.

¹⁶ Cosme Rodríguez, J. A. (2024). *El valor de lo efímero: FOREVER* [Catálogo de exposición]. Madrid: Museo La Neomudéjar.

Disclaimer/Publisher's Note: The statements, opinions and data contained in all publications are solely those of the individual author(s) and contributor(s) and not of MDPI and/or the editor(s). MDPI and/or the editor(s) disclaim responsibility for any injury to people or property resulting from any ideas, methods, instructions or products referred to in the content.