

# Teaching materials

Analysis of the Artwork

## Broken Time

by

*Alejandra and Amélia Barbier*

Click on the title of the artwork above  
to be directed straight to the online video  
(hyperlink)

### Questions

#### **1. The artistic approach to history**

At school, you are probably more used to exploring topics related to the Second World War and the culture of remembrance mainly through historical sources in textbooks or through testimonies from people who personally experienced that period.

- Do you think there is particular added value in complementing this traditional approach by engaging with history through the artistic work of students your own age – such as Alejandra and Amélia?
- Does Alejandra's and Amélia's presentation, for example, raise awareness of perspectives on history that are often overlooked, but that you consider important for understanding the meaning history can have for our present? Justify your opinion.
- What role can art play in passing on memory when those who lived through these events are no longer here to tell their stories?
- How can a work created today by young people help prevent such forms of violence from happening again?
- What difference do you see between “learning history” and “feeling memory” through an artwork?
- Can you name other artistic works that made you think about history in a different way from history textbooks? Why do you think art can help us see history from another perspective?

#### **2. Creating together: identity, listening, compromise**

Alejandra and Amélia are the only duo in the group who decided to create a work together.

- In your opinion, what changes when creating a work as a pair rather than alone? What advantages, challenges, tensions and discoveries can this involve?
- Describe a collaborative project you have personally experienced. Analyse this experience in terms of its strengths, challenges, possible tensions and the discoveries you made while working with others.
- Imagine that, within an artistic collaboration on a social issue, a deep conflict arises between the participants. What solutions would you suggest to deal with this situation – both during the creation of the work and during its presentation to the group or an audience?
- Describe a concrete example from your own experience where a conflict in teamwork turned out to be a strength rather than an obstacle. What made this positive tension possible – in terms of creativity, understanding or improvement?
- How do you think a balance can be found between your own intuition and that of another person in a

shared creative process? What attitudes or methods help preserve everyone's creativity while developing a shared vision?

### **3. Trusting yourself: the art of listening to your own voice**

At the beginning, Amélia emphasises that it was important for them that each of them could make a personal contribution to the work, since they were working as a duo. One major challenge of working together is being able to hear your own voice despite the presence, ideas and influence of another person.

- What does “listening to yourself” mean to you exactly? Does it mean listening to your emotions, intuitions, body or thoughts? Formulate your own definition.
- In order to listen to yourself, certain external conditions are often necessary. In which places – public or private – do you feel safe, calm or protected enough to notice what is happening inside you? Describe a real or imaginary place that supports your inner listening.
- Conversely, which environments make this self-listening difficult – noise, stress, school pressure, social media, lack of privacy, expectations of others? Analyse why these contexts make it hard to “hear your own thoughts”.
- Inner listening also depends on psychological attitudes: patience, calm, curiosity, freedom from judgement. Which of these seem essential to you for listening to yourself? Which do you already have, and which would you like to develop further?
- Some artists, philosophers or athletes say they need to slow down in order to hear their inner voice. Which practices help you to become quiet and listen to yourself more clearly – walking, writing, drawing, breathing, being alone, listening to music? Analyse why this practice works for you.
- Imagine a school wants to create a space where students can truly “listen to themselves” – a place of calm, reflection and creativity, away from digital noise. What kind of design would you suggest? What objects, rules or atmospheres would encourage this inner listening? Design this space as if you were an architect or designer.
- Do you think listening to yourself is only an individual act, or can it also strengthen the ability to listen to others? Explain how you think these two forms of listening are connected.

### **4. Creating before understanding?**

Alejandra explains that at the beginning of their creative process, they simply wrote words on the cardboard that came to mind, without knowing exactly what would emerge. Similarly, Amélia later emphasises that certain meanings only became clear after they had arranged some objects and looked at the finished work as a whole.

Do you think it is sometimes necessary to create first before understanding? Explain your position using a personal, artistic or philosophical example.

### **5. The human beehive: preserving fragile voices**

Amélia highlights a photograph that particularly impressed them during Phase I of the workshop (metaphor analysis): a bee speaking into a microphone. One of their interpretations was that this image embodies the idea of listening to a “different language”. Today, bees are among the most threatened species – often because we do not pay enough attention to the signals of nature. In our societies too, certain human “voices” – minorities, vulnerable people or simply different voices – risk disappearing or being silenced because they are not heard.

- In nature, an ecosystem collapses when it loses its biodiversity. Do you think there is also a kind of “democratic biodiversity” – a necessary diversity of voices, experiences and sensitivities – without which a society becomes fragile? Justify your opinion.
- Which “types of voices” do you think should absolutely be part of the “voice diversity” of a democratic society? Choose one example of a threatened voice – real, media-based or imaginary – explain why it is at

risk and what we could collectively do to prevent its disappearance.

- The photograph also reminded the two young artists of their visit to Manfort Cemetery with the mass graves of forced labourers. Why do you think seeing bees in the middle of a cemetery affected them so strongly?

## 6. The beehive as a mirror of the world: Maeterlinck, bees and our humanity

The work of Alejandra and Amélia, *Broken Time*, resonates strongly with a publication by the Belgian poet, playwright and essayist Maurice Maeterlinck, winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1911. In 1901, he published *La Vie des abeilles* (*The Life of the Bees*), a work situated between scientific essay, poetic meditation and philosophical reflection. In it, he views the beehive as a mirror of humanity: an organised community; a system in which every action affects others; a fragile, threatened, yet remarkably resilient society. Maeterlinck describes a silent cooperation, an absolute interdependence and a sense of the collective that goes beyond individual interests. For him, the beehive is both a model and a warning: "When one is hurt, the whole hive trembles." The time of the beehive is cyclical: individuals disappear, the hive remains; seasons change, the community renews itself. His central question is: what can the beehive teach us about ourselves?

- To what extent can Maeterlinck's reflections on bees be applied to the collaboration of the duo "Amélia + Alejandra" as a kind of "small beehive", and to the themes of their work *Broken Time*?
- Maeterlinck describes the beehive as a space where every being counts, even the most inconspicuous. Do you think there are also "silent bees" in groups (class, club, group of friends) whose importance is underestimated? Give an example.
- Maeterlinck emphasises that the beehive functions through a "sense of the collective". What do you think is missing in our societies today to rediscover this sense?
- If you see a country, a school or the European Union as a beehive, what forces hold it together – and what threats weaken it?
- Maeterlinck sees the beehive as a model of solidarity, but also as a warning: "Every individual injury affects the collective." Can you connect this idea to a current issue (climate, migration, digital inequalities)?
- In a beehive, every individual serves the whole. Can this be a desirable or a dangerous model for a human society? Why?
- If you were to imagine an ideal "human beehive", what basic rules would need to apply for society to function harmoniously?

## 7. On to podcasts!

Let us resonate even more strongly with the photograph that inspired the two young artists so deeply: the bee speaking into a microphone – an image closely linked to the world of podcasts.

- If you had one week after school to produce your own podcast on a social issue that matters to you, what would it be about? Where would you record it? Who would you like to interview? What sound atmosphere would you choose (music, silence, city sounds, nature)? Develop a complete podcast concept as if you were really going to produce it.
- In what ways does a podcast differ from other contemporary forms of expression – such as social networks, short videos, stories or instant messages? What does a podcast make possible, in your opinion, that these formats do not – and why?
- Do you think speaking publicly (even in a small podcast) can help you get to know yourself better? Describe a situation in which speaking revealed something about yourself to you.
- If you had to create a podcast to bring closer together groups that no longer speak to each other (different neighbourhoods, generations, cultures), what would your first episode look like? Why?
- How can we prevent podcasts from becoming mere "bubbles" where people only listen to those who already think like them? Suggest a strategy to open up dialogue.
- A recorded voice is a trace in time. Do you think a voice can "live on" beyond the person? What is the

difference between a narrated memory and an actually recorded voice?

- If you had a magical microphone that allowed you to interview someone from the past, who would you choose and which three questions would you ask? Justify your choice.

## **8. Mirror shards, fragments of self**

- Let us start with the title of the work: *Broken Time*. What does this metaphor of “broken time” evoke in your own life?
- What do the mirror shards mean in the work of Alejandra and Amélia? First recall their own interpretation, then explain to what extent you agree with it or differ from it.
- Do you think collective memory is fragmented like a broken mirror? Why do certain puzzle pieces get lost?
- When you look at the mirror shards and see your own face in them, what could this experience mean? How does it change your perception of an artistic or memorial message? Describe what it triggers in you to become part of the work.
- In everyday life, we encounter many “mirrors” – shop windows, screens, metallic surfaces, distorting spoons, or famous artworks that play with reflection. What do you think seeing yourself distorted, fragmented or mirrored can reveal about identity or about how we look at the world? Analyse one example.
- The broken mirror can symbolise that no one possesses the “whole” historical truth. How do you think a collective truth emerges? Is it even possible?
- The mirror shards multiply perspectives. Is it conceivable that truth always remains fragmentary and that each person carries only part of a story? Justify your position.
- Can you name a social context (war, migration, injustice, discrimination) in which a community has been “broken”, and explain what might help reconnect the fragments?

## **9. Everyday objects and fractures of the world**

Alongside the mirror, Amélia and Alejandra use other everyday objects to express their ideas:

- A broken cup symbolises the fragility of everyday life in war. Which object would symbolise the fragility of today’s world for you (ecology, peace, social networks, loneliness, work)? Justify your choice.
- The broken light bulb stands for an injured idea. In which areas of today’s society do you observe “broken” or suppressed ideas – politics, climate, equality, social justice?
- The work shows a movement: from the “dead” to the “living”. Which current social phenomenon seems to you to represent the opposite movement, from the living to the destroyed?
- The work speaks of transmission and heritage. Imagine you were a historian in the year 2100: which events, dynamics or changes of our time would you pass on as a “heritage” to future generations? Justify your choice.

## **10. The quiet power of objects**

Many metaphors in the work of Amélia and Alejandra are based on personal objects belonging to the victims of the Ascq massacre (watch, glasses, notebook, pencil), which they discovered in the exhibition.

- Why do you think these objects had such a strong impact on the two students that they decided to integrate them into their work?
- Amélia and Alejandra use ordinary objects to address major questions. Do you think great philosophy can emerge from the everyday? Give an example.
- During the workshop, students had access to an “artistic material buffet” made up of recycled, used or discarded objects, as well as personal items. Do you think this changes the creative process compared to using newly bought materials? What can such materials add to art?
- Among other things, the work uses leaves from the cemetery of Villeneuve-d’Ascq, where the victims of the massacre are buried. Explain how a material object can convey memory differently from a text.
- In your opinion, what distinguishes understanding a historical event from actually feeling it? Describe a

moment when an object, a place or an image made you experience history more intensely than a simple explanation.

### **11. Accessible art for an inclusive society**

Alejandra and Amélia work with raw, simple and accessible materials (cup, light bulb, branches, mirror, book pages). Do you think art needs to remain accessible in order to be a space for social participation? Explain your position and its implications.

### **12. Memory as heritage: what to do with the past?**

In their work, Alejandra and Amélia also show their perspective on how history continues to shape today's young generation.

- Using the structure of the work – the clock at the centre, the lower and the upper part – describe how they express this position.
- What role do you think memory should play in building a shared future?
- Young generations inherit a past they did not personally experience. How can they take responsibility without feeling guilty?
- To what extent do history, its violence, its legacy and its memories still influence the lives of young people today? Give an example where the past continues to shape decisions, behaviours or fears.
- Imagine an object that your class could send to another school in Europe to convey a memory of your neighbourhood, your city or your region. Or personally: which object would you send to an exchange partner to tell the story of your family? Justify your choice.

### **13. Memory and new forms of hate**

Alejandra explains that one source of inspiration for their work was class research on contemporary forms of extremism. Among other things, they researched new forms of violence and discrimination in the digital space, especially online hate speech.

- In what ways do the online messages documented in the video work, in your opinion, draw on very old mechanisms already known from history? Analyse these processes and explain why they are dangerous.
- How do you explain that certain "reflexes of the past" – exclusion, dehumanisation, extremism – are reappearing today? Which social, psychological or digital factors encourage this return?
- How do today's forms of violence and exclusion on social networks differ from those during the Second World War? Consider means, reach and consequences, and explain what this comparison reveals about our time.

### **14. Exploring and classifying forms of digital violence**

Inspired by the work of Alejandra and Amélia, we now examine concretely the manifestations of digital violence:

- Search for screenshots of different forms of digital violence that can be found today on the internet or social networks (names can be anonymised).
- Based on your observations, create your own typology: assign these forms to several categories and explain your choices.
- If you discover additional forms of digital violence that you had not initially considered, add them, name this new category and explain its characteristics.
- Which of these forms seems most common to you today – and why?
- Some artists, athletes or content creators experience waves of hate after a failure or a public stance. Why does visibility make attacks easier – and sometimes more cruel? Analyse a media example.

## 15. Rethinking networks: what if you designed the digital architecture?

If you could completely rethink how a social network functions – as an engineer, artist or architect – which new rules, options or forms of expression would you develop to make exchanges more respectful, more human and more supportive? Describe three innovations and explain why they would genuinely change the user experience.

- Step 1 – Design the name and interface: Invent a name for your platform. It can be serious, poetic, technical or humorous. Design the homepage (logo) and create a slogan that reflects the spirit of the network.
- Step 2 – Define the values: Which values underpin your network? Write an ethical charter explaining its principles (for example: respect, creativity, transparency, solidarity, diversity, slowness, humour).
- Step 3 – Develop new features: Propose at least three innovations, such as tools to prevent insults, reward systems for respectful behaviour, filters that transform aggressive comments, moderated dialogue spaces, avatars that evolve according to behaviour, slow-writing options to encourage reflection, discussion spaces without likes or popularity pressure, artistic or audio expression zones, or a “reflection chamber” where messages can only be sent after a 10-second pause.
- Step 4 – Describe the user experience: Explain what happens when someone logs in, how content is published, how conflicts are handled and how users feel.
- Step 5 – Present your prototype: Present your network as a mini-poster, a diagram, a narrative text or a short performance.

### IMPORTANT

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