Nursing as an Art
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Abstract: It is more important now than ever to define the goals of nursing by using an aesthetic approach. In every day practice the nurse must explore and adopt these functions, which constitute the essence of nursing as an art. The aim of this paper is to firstly explore the notion of nursing as an art, underpinned by the philosophy of art and to secondly discuss the hidden connections and the criteria for nursing seen or thought to be an art. In this paper, the aesthetic values have been used to depict and to expose the invisible qualities of nursing. Through the written text the attempt to explore the nature of nursing by an aesthetic approach, reveals that the essence of nursing is constituted by the same origins, which define the essence of art.

This exploration of the literature led to the recognition of the quality of imitation as an attempt of the artist to awaken individuals to understand what a piece of art represents. Respectively, a nurse by represents a picture of wholeness for the health, attempt to stimulate patient to move forwards regaining control and achieving the state of well-being. The search of the expression as one of the sources of the aesthetic values has brought to the surface that nursing is expressed as a whole of unique functions containing love, advocacy, calmness, care and empathy. The exploration of the combination of the elements, their articulation or their structure exposes the beauty itself. The beauty of a statue as Venus of Milo as well as, in terms of nursing, the beauty of caring as the heart of nursing. However it is difficult to capture the totality of nursing in this paper, which attempts more to portray this beauty of nursing rather than to seek for a clear answer of what nursing is.

Key Words: Art, Nursing history, Nursing Theory, Aesthetic Nursing, Philosophy of Nursing.
Throughout the years many great men have said that art is unique but mainly controversial and different from man to man and culture to culture. Taking into consideration theories that have been put forth, one can only wonders what art actually is.

Related to nursing, Nightingale (1859), wrote in detail about the concept of the aesthetic and seemed to realise the relationship of certain qualities as health and beauty. She suggested that: "Nursing is an art, and if it is to be made an art, it requires as exclusive a devotion, as hard a preparation, as any painter’s or sculptor’s work, for what is having to do with the living body - the temple of God’s spirit? It is one of the fine Arts; I had almost said, the finest of the fine Arts". (cited in Donahue 1996:501). However the notion of nursing and its exploration in terms of art presupposes a clear definition of what exactly is art that makes a craft or skill into art?

Many theorists have reached some basic common characteristics such as; imitation, form and expression that constitute a theoretical framework for a better approach to this dilemma. Although it is not the only philosophical pathway to explore the concept of art, it seems to be the most secure way to explore nursing as an art.

In the Concise Oxford Dictionary (1996) art is defined as: "both a human creative skill or its application". And like Plato once asserted many years ago: "Art is the things which are acquired or produced craft or skill". (cited in :Rose P. & Parker D. 1994 :1004). Yet a definition of art should supply an answer to someone who asks, whether a particular object is art and such a definition simply does not exist.

Kennick (1958:321) rejected any definition of art as he comments: "If anyone is able to use the word 'art' correctly, in all sorts of contexts and on the right sort of occasions, he knows 'what art is' and no formula in the world can make him wiser".

Historically a variety of aesthetics theories developed different approaches trying to illuminate and identify the concept of art. Words as feeling, apparition, sight, intuition, beauty, creation, imagination, transmission, representation, and so forth reappear constantly searching for an explanation to what art is.

According to Sheppard (1986:2): "the distinguishing feature of art has been held to be either imitation, or expression, or form". Although she has also claimed that only the quality of beauty is the fundamental characteristic of art.

Related to nursing a constant debate has arisen about the nature of nursing as an art or science or a combination of both of them. This kind of exploration is not an exclusive characteristic of nursing. Sciences such as dentistry, statistics and other seeking to explain their contents by exploring theories of art or by discovering the core of art in every day practice. This persistent effort to explain their contents in
terms of art, arised from the wide and rapid development of high technology. As this boom of technology has dehumanised and has kept man away from basic components which have constituted to his satisfaction in the work force.

In nursing the attempt to recognise itself, as an art is a result of the sense that its humanitarian nature is in danger. Nurses focus on the unique nature of human as an interactive whole of needs, knowledge, wills, emotions and feelings. Thus the fundamental concept of nursing is to meet these needs of individuals.

Accordingly, it is more important now than ever to define the goals of nursing by using an aesthetic approach. In every day practice the nurse must explore and adopt these functions which constitute the essence of nursing as an art. Nevertheless, the problems of defining art more precisely, makes difficult every effort to define nursing in terms of art.

Mallison (1993:7) emphasises in the difficulty to express by writing the multidimensional whole of nursing as she suggests that: "nursing like dance or painting is not primarily an art of the written word. Its partly Kinaesthetic - transmitted in facial expressions, posture, touch, silences, gestures, timing, intent. Attempts to pin it down with language is like chasing butterflies: It's most beautiful in motion, flitting freely outside the net of words".

However one can claim that the quality of imitation may explain more clearly the concept of nursing as nurses perform an everyday role of care through their nursing models and through their personal beliefs, knowledge and experiences.

Many works of art present an imitation or in its widest sense a representation of things in a real world. Constable’s truthfulness to nature and dedication to his native scene have passed into legend. Like in the Hay Wain picture one may discover an admirable and perfect representation of a characteristic English landscape.

Part of the interest people use to have when they are standing in front of a picture as a Constable’s landscape, is that they like recognising an area as ‘Constable country’. Additionally it seems that an artist is trying to awake individuals to identify what a painting or sculptor’s model represents and to make them interested in his work.

Sheppard (1986:7) suggests that: "The more successful the imitation the better the art". In a piece of art as a painting, we may admire skill of the composition, the cool harmonies of soft colours the symmetry between light and shadow or may admire the construction of a novel and the use of language in it.

In relation to this, a nurse can meet a patient needs by creating a comfortable climate thus establishing a commitment to healing. Therefore the nurse may stimulate the patient to regain control of his recovery.
The nurse who feeds a patient who has suffered a stroke, may try gently with confident gestures to feed him slowly enough as to give him time to swallow, by doing that task carefully without dirtying his clothes. In talking to him the nurse can instil in the patient’s heart, hope and determination to strive for a rapid recovery. A nurse in a multidimensional role may teach, support, provide, communicate, medicate and participate to his recovery. Thus providing the appropriate conditions to achieve a state of well-being.

Henderson (1966:39) stated that: "the unique function of the nurse is to assist the individual sick or well, in the performance of those activities contributing to health or its recovery (or to a peaceful death) that he would perform unaided if he had the necessary strength, will or knowledge, and to do this in such a way as to help him to gain independence as rapidly as possible" and she went on to describe what are these activities. (cited in Lister 1997).

The exploration of Henderson’s definition of nursing within the prism of Sheppard’s imitation, pinpoints a variety of appropriate competencies and attitudes that nurses must carry through, in order to comfort people, educate them to carry out the activities of living for those unable to do so.

For instance when a nurse is bathing a patient, her action involves more than simplified mechanical practicable work. It could be argued that bathing is a task, which could be done by everyone, such as mothers, relatives, or anyone else. However there is a significant difference when a skilled nurse performs this activity. Through her emotional art of caring the nurse may establish the trust between her and the patient.

She may assess patient’s mobility, patient’s perception of pain and so forth. The nurse helps the patient to restore his dignity and to value his self-image, and therefore she offers her understanding of the concept of well-being and stimulates patient to retrain his effort for recovery. Through her touch, the nurse may express that she care for him in a unique and tacit way. Through the discussion the nurse may teach the patient to care for his body and she alleviates the anxiety of the patient’s soul.

Thus the nurse may provide the imitation of health or the ideal stage of health and motivate the patient to acquire, by maintaining or restoring maximum independence.

However imitation does not fully explain the value of works of art and does not always constitute a common characteristic in all works of art.

Langer (1957:14) suggests that: "the principles that obtain wholly and fundamentally in every kind of art are few, but decisive, they determine what is art and what is not. Expressiveness in one definite and appropriate sense is the same in all works of any kind”.

Similarly nursing as a complex and dynamic whole of tasks and knowledge
may necessitate the application of the expressiveness as a possible instrument for the analysis of nursing in terms of art.

According to Sheppard (1986:18): "Expression is one of the sources of aesthetic value".

The artist expresses feelings and may attempt to convey these feelings to receivers whoever they are, audience or spectators.

Bethoven’s symphonies can be described as spiritual, sorrowful, or heroic, as the way each one of us perceives or imagines; feeling an emotion is not always the same.

Kalofisudis (2001), analysing the art as part of the heart and the mind of an artist which implies expression of inner "self" considers every piece of art as a mean for the artist "to go forwards to furthermore to take part of the sight of it, which is existed there, and to come back as a prophet, to express a creation, which includes the Universe" Kalofissudis (2001).

Many theorists of art in their effort to explain what constitutes the form of expression, develop and follow different pathways. In order to analyse the aesthetic transaction and communication between the artist and the audience or the spectators or between the work of art and the receivers.

Sheppard (1986:30) on the other side, claims that: "expression is not a definition of art but an opinion as to its purpose and that is wrong to suggest that the purpose of all art is expression".

Related to nursing expression may be the concept of caring, empathy, compassion, and optimism. For instance a nurse who is sitting at patient’s bed-side, performs a person to person interaction by her body language, through touching and talking with the patient or just sitting there and listening to a patient fears or feelings.

The nurse may express her closeness as a patient’s advocate and creates by her presence, a climate of encouragement and a commitment of healing. ‘Insignificant’ duties as to wash a patient’s hair or to settle the sheets of his bed are seen by the patient as indications of caring. In this example a nurse may show love, calmness, hope and care.

Jean Watson (1999) in her book "Postmodern Nursing and Beyond" suggests a transpersonal ontological caring-healing model adopting as a metaphor the idea of bed-making 'ZEN of bedmaking', as a vehicle of a universal consciousness of the whole and an ability of every nurse to mentally transform her inner self to a source of care from the patient.

Sheppard (1986:30) analysing the quality of expression in terms of art describes the expression as: "a purpose of art involves communication of emotions to invoke a response".

Nursing similarly, includes in its purpose a daily interaction and communication with the patient. Between nurse and patient there
is a continuous exchange of emotions and knowledge which flows and connects both in the same whole of ‘sharing’.

Quinn (1992:29) questioned herself if: “can the nurse be through of as the environment of the patient?”. Consequently, the nurse creates the environment of the patients on a basis of trust and commitment, by receiving effective messages from the patient and transforming them into positive responses and reactions.

"Thus patient and nurse become one in a unique connection expressed by strong feelings which is based in intuition and empathy that allows both patient and nurse under a mutually trust to achieve their aspirations”. Appleton (1993:899)

Appleton (1993:897) studied patient’s and nurses’ experiences of the art of nursing using a phenomenological approach. Participants stated that they experienced “a different energy going on”, one referred to as: 'spiritual in nature’, naming it, as a way of feeling, knowing and doing together.

In Appleton’s study the patient express the opinion, that nurses apply their practice in a humanistic perspective. The thoughtfulness expressed by the nurse to the person in need, honours the patient as a unique person of integrity. Consequently, creating an atmosphere of caring within the emotional responses of patients, nurse helps them to develop and achieve strength, realising the fullness of their being.

In addition a nurse must be able to elicit and understand a patient’s feelings and emotions and his concerns about his illness, in an individualised way. Otherwise a nurse may not properly transact these forms of expression, which will stimulate the patient to flourish positive emotions. In this case, the establishment of their relationship and interaction may be detrimental for achieving their aspirations.

The communication with the patient and the strong connection that can develop between patient and nurse can generate and mutually dignify the strongest feelings of respect, appraisal, comprehension and encompasses them as pure caring.

This is the main expectation leading nurse to provide and to maintain this relationship by eliciting or anticipating patient’ care needs.

However patients do not choose to be in the position to require nursing. We may think that this compulsory placing of the patient to the role of an audience can demolish the possibility of a positive expression of feelings.

Moreover in every day life, we use or see art, in the buildings around us or for example in the design of ours furniture. In each moment of our life there is the expression of the art in an endless variety. Very often one may pass by art without noticing that it is there and sometimes one may pass nursing in the same way. A patient may not realise the performance of
the art of nursing, however that not infer that the art of nursing is not existent.

According to Mathews (1979:46): "most of us do not know an artwork when we see one; we have to be told by someone - an ‘expert’ - who is going on something more than the accepted usage of the expression". (cited in Hanfling 1994:18)

It could be argued that in nursing the more skilful the nurse is, the less likely will be the observer or even the patient to recognise exactly what it is that she has done that makes the real difference. As Clark (1998:40), has pointed out: "to describe nursing as just what nurses do is like saying that loving is just what lovers do". In this phrase is concentrated all the underlying notion of the complexity of nursing activity, an activity which involves the whole person and implies as Clark reminds us in her lecture, commitment and personal investment to nursing and to the others on whom nursing care is focused.

Nevertheless, the characteristic of expression itself cannot explain fundamentally the wholeness of art. The combination of the elements, their articulation or their structure in a complex and multidimensional unity which aims to stimulate strong feelings (positives or negatives ones), express the form in the aesthetic knowledge of art as it is presented through the literature.

The admiration of people for the statue of Venus of Milo concerns in its expression of beauty, which is comprehended in the balance of lines and shapes, in the harmonious proportion and in the details, which creates a whole in its perfection.

As Worringer (1965:69) suggested: "The value of a line, of a form consists for us in the value of the life that it holds for us. It holds it’s beauty only through our own vital feeling, which in some mysterious manner we project into it". (cited in Harrison & Wood 1994)

According to Langer (1957:20) the principle of form is: "the way that the whole is put together", and suggests that: "expressive form as any perceptible or imaginable whole that exhibits relationships of parts or points or even qualities or aspects within the whole so that it may be taken to represent some other whole whose elements have analogous relations".

In music for example, the rhythms, the different instruments, the intervals between notes, constitutes the whole, subsequently the form of art.

Respectively, in nursing each theory or theoretical model constitutes a form in terms of art. Dickoff & James (1968:197) define theory as : "a set of elements in interrelation" and add that : "… theories vary according to the number of elements, the characteristic kind, the complexity of the elements, and the kind of relation holding between or among the theory's elements or ingredients".

According to Paterson & Zderad (1976) nursing is : "a form of human dialogue
which it is defined as events as they are acted out and experienced in day to day nursing, a particular form of intersubjective transaction and nurturance". (cited in Tucakovic 1994:21).

The design of nursing care should be accompanied by a sense of structure articulation, a sense of form as Langer (1957:16) pointed out. A form, which expresses an inner perception of balance, derived of nurses' personal aesthetic knowledge or it could be a nursing theory which may express nurses' philosophy of life or professional perception.

If a nurse, for example, uses skills underpinned by the model of the activities of living as it was developed by Roper, Logan and Tierney (1980), her aims will be to establish what the patient can and cannot do in each of the activities of living, bearing in mind, physical, socio-cultural, psychological, environmental and politico-economic factors that may influence the person. Both patient and nurse will discuss each one of the activities to identify ways in which they will take action to overcome the problem and to achieve together the goal they have set.

The nurse will act to promote the independence of the patient in these activities by carrying out those activities, which will comfort, and offer to the patient the opportunity to be supported, and to be taught how to achieve his/her independence in these activities.

Nursing constitutes a constant active form of art. It is more than a static linear knowledge. Thus as in art, each culture and each age is expressed by its own forms of art and beauty, similarly nursing as a dynamic form develops new theoretical frameworks expressing the conception of beauty in everyday activities.

Translating in terms of art again, people consider a flower, a starry sky in a summer night, or the sight of a picturesque lake among snowy mountains, as beautiful. However the kinds of beauty are as many as are the kinds of cognition and thus the concept of beauty is a controversial issue as well as subjective one.

Plato found ideal beauty and absolute pleasure in contemplating line, shape and mass. He said that: "I do not now intend by beauty of shape what most people would expect, such as that of living creature or pictures, but.... I mean straight lines and curves and the surfaces or solid forms produced out of these by lathes and rules and squares...for I mean that these are not beautiful relatively, like other things, but always and naturally and absolutely; and they have their proper pleasures, no away depending upon the itch of desire". (cited in Rader & Bertram 1976:20). Yet this definition of Plato is focused in the exploration and description of beauty within forms as lines, shapes and mass and he couldn’t define the concept of beauty in its broaden sense as it is expressed in the request of Thomas Aquinas: "Let that be
called beauty, the very perception of which pleases”. No more simple and satisfactory definition of beauty has ever been suggested. It contents two ideas. First beautiful things give pleasure and second, not everything that gives pleasure is beautiful, but only that which gives pleasure in immediate perception. (cited in Rader & Bertram 1976:20).

In relation to nursing the immediate perception of beauty is the core of caring, which is considered to be the heart and the soul of nursing practice.

Art arouses unique experience and meaning that transcend the material, the solid, the temporal and the spatial, so does caring in nursing. Art invites both artist and the perceiver to share the experience of the emotion that produced that expression; there by finding self-knowledge and understanding, and so does caring in nursing.

According to Hess (1995:221): “caring allows the commitment and the consciousness of the nurse to go beyond the physical surface to reach the human centre of the person”.

In every nursing task there is a conception of beauty seen as well as hidden, performed by the nurse daily. Through caring, the nurse converts all those ‘little’ things considered as fundamental elements, having in mind to heal rather than treat the patient.

Smith (1993:42) suggests that: “healing meant more than treating or caring. Healing involved the laying on of hands, that explored, palpated, touched, eased pain away; hands that were gentle, soft, kind, capable”.

Alexander (1944) pointed out that: “beauty depends… on characters inputted to the work by the artist. Thus dead marble looks alive and full of character, or in a picture stable forms are seen, aesthetically to be in motion, for instance, to be dancing’. The artist introduced himself into his art, giving the work characters which it only has so far as seen with the aesthetic eye”. (cited in Rader & Bertram 1976:28).

Similarly, a nurse through the art of caring, may transplant her perception of health into patient. Caring in nursing as Marks - Maran et al (1997:60), comprehend is the beauty of the art of sharing, of caring with, for, and about.

It could be added that care derives from love which forces caring to be the ultimate act and purpose of nursing. Kalofissudis (2001), strongly supports the idea of nursing as an art, because it is mainly expressed with love. According to him, "The principle of Art is love. As greater love can express the artist, as higher the artistic creation is", and goes on making a plea that: " Nurses owe to reach the point to re-define their role through all times and universal values, to observe the particular space-time, in order to sink themselves in the ocean of the universal consciousness, to think but at the same time not to think, to be the waves at the seashore, to be the air
which rustles through the foliages of the trees, to be the sand which is swept from the nightly air of the desert and emigrates kilometers away, to be the sound of the city, to be the love which is risen in his understanding, that these, are finally the waves, the ocean, the wind, the foliages, the desert sand, the sound” Kalofissudis (2001).

The above statement it is not an exaggeration of a person who wants to honour his profession. In fact, when a nurse washes and changes a patient, she offers him comfort and at times the patient may not be able to fully understand all the dimensions of the nurse’s performances. She conveys love expressed by acts of caring and even though the patient is not able to comprehend the beauty involved, he will eventually, express respect and appreciation to the nurse.

In art, commonly, what is worthy of aesthetic appreciation may pass unnoticed until there is someone who looks at it in a different perspective. Similarly, a nurse who washes and changes the patient, performs as well as creates possibilities for full expression of self as the fundamental caring art. She affirms patient’s dignity, in order to fully express her inner self through her art. The nurse uses the time and the space, the voice, the touch, the expression of her face to remove gently every discomfort, gradually building wholeheartedly a regenerate entity to the patient. All these almost spiritual functions are underpinned in a so common nursing task and only someone who looks from a different angle can realise and appreciate the beauty and the aesthetic arrest of the soul-to-soul connection between nurse and patient.

According to Schoenhofer (1994:8): "Aesthetic appreciation is a complex matter, involving both emotional and intellectual factors and as such it depends on the culture and society in which it develops”.

Just like aesthetic appreciation so nursing, in its progress, through the ages, involved a continuous transformation and development as it was constituted and constitutes an integrated and dynamic part of society and culture.

Art accordingly, as an integrated part of history it has been reflective or even influential to civilisation. The powerful impact of art, inspires people, leads and leaded by emotional and intellectual creative forces of the human kind as it has originated from history.

In the above ‘speculation’ is based the statement of Sparshott (1982:456) who suggests that: "each object of art, each master piece of art is a reflection and the outcome of human endeavour, taking their nature from the age they essentially belong". Furthermore, as Rader et al, support: "An enduring work of art holds interest not only as a presently enjoyable object but also as a record of it’s time, a record which can often be correlated with
other records and which can sometime help throw light upon the whole. A work of art is always a social document as well as an aesthetic object”. Rader & Bertram (1976:237).

Respectively, in the same cultures, nursing has grown gradually and developed. The improved status of women in society and the influence of the Nightingale’s concept as well as the other nursing theorists, accelerate the growth of nursing. The core of nursing, the art of healing and caring, visible or hidden, beyond the inventions and the advances of technology, is always fundamental and inseparable in the whole of nursing.

Donahue (1996:484) supports that: "Nurses are faced daily with clinical decisions making. They carry the spirit of caring through the ages as patient’s advocates but now they are being forced to examine ethics to an even greater degree from a world wide point”.

Nursing, in all the stages of its history preserved caring, although care varies according to societal events and needs. Art accordingly, preserved its qualities in the expression of beauty.

Moreover, as Kalofisudis (2001), supports: "the Nursing as an Art, derives its philosophical pedestal from the consideration of life as a fundamental value and unfolds the art of care - healing cased with moral, philosophical, mental, social and scientific values of every epoch". Kalofissudis (2001).

Historically nurses have risen to the task of overcoming barriers and meeting challenges and their ultimate goal, the beauty of their art it was and is their advocacy to the human kind and their effort to reconstruct a better society providing care for everyone in need.

"Nurses create their own images in society, as works of art explicit or implicit of the thought, feelings and attitudes of a time concerning itself”. Rader & Bertram (1976:241).

Thus today, a nurse must keep pace with the growing needs of society as rapid advances in technology constitute an integral part of our existence.

Concluding one may say that in this paper, the aesthetic values have been used to depict and to expose the invisible qualities of nursing.

Through the written text the attempt to explore the nature of nursing by an aesthetic approach, reveals that the essence of nursing is constituted by the same origins, which define the essence of art.

Searching the literature, it became apparent that the similarities between nursing and art shared both their principles. The concept and the notion of nursing based upon a single motivation; how it will help people to regain their quality of life and how it will reduce their suffering. This humanitarian and altruistic idea engrosses in every ‘simple’ nursing task.

Similarly art offers the quality in every creation and expression, which helps
people to forget every days problems by searching the beauty and the ideal in each activity of their life.

Nurses interact with people blazing a dimension of beauty and caring through their tasks. Every effort of nursing to restore the human dignity and health it may be nothing else than an expression of art comprehends the same characteristics as art does. One may admit that nursing, the searching and the restoring of well-being as well as art, the searching of that which pleases, both, blend their efforts inner-directed to the integration of every human being, by covering all their needs and sides of their unique personality.

One may accept through this exploration, the invitation of art to share the experience of the emotions, beyond the boundaries of reality, in the level of aesthetic consciousness. And one may recognise the beauty of caring and healing through the performance of skilled nurses as they instil care to the patient.

However it is difficult to capture the totality of nursing in this paper that attempts more to portray this beauty of nursing rather than to seek for a clear answer of what nursing is.

Donahue (1996:500) in her book 'Nursing the finest art' declares that: "No one ever, through pen or canvas will ever be able to entirely capture the true art and the caring spirit of nursing. Both defy expressions"
References

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