

The Creative Daemon (δαίμων) and the Hyper-Intellection of Art

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Abstract

We live in a time full of expressive possibilities, and we have unprecedented access to a tendentially infinite collection of information. However, for this very reason, we never before suffered such tremendous “anxiety of influence”, to use the title of Harold Bloom’s seminal work (1973). Not only because of this informational overabundance but also, in a way, as a hangover for all the vanguards that in the twentieth century redefined all frontiers of artistic expression and went far beyond them, almost to the apparent exhaustion of all the radical possibilities of Art. To these questions we will try to give one possible answer, pointing a direction or path that can integrate, in the same dynamic approach, the creative impulse, the *daemoniac* dimension (from the Greek δαίμων, a spirit that can guide us) so well identified by the Greek Culture of antiquity, with the seemingly overwhelming informational availability of the present. In short, the answer will be to look at the expressive dimension under the filter of a creative (ie, *daemoniac*) *hyper-intellection*, in the sense that if the whole creative impulse comes from an irrational drive it also requires, with the same intensity, to be guided by a filter of a pan-optic understanding of the artistic world, either in the current perspective of the landscape of contemporaneity or in a diachronic approach, that is, with a historical understanding of Culture.

Keywords: Creativity, Art, the anxiety of influence, daemon

1.

We live in a time full of expressive possibilities, and we have unprecedented access to a tendentially infinite collection of information. However, for this very reason, we never before suffered such tremendous “anxiety of influence”, to use the title of Harold Bloom’s seminal work (1973). Not only because of this informational overabundance but also, in a way, as a hangover for all the vanguards that in the twentieth century redefined all frontiers of artistic expression and went far beyond them, almost to the apparent exhaustion of all the radical possibilities of Art.

Bloom, incidentally, mentions that it is the sensation, regardless of the time and place, of arriving late to literature (we argue that now this feeling is even more oppressive), i.e. knowing that a long tradition precedes the writer, because “strong poets” transcend time and not only overwhelm future and contemporary authors but also that “poets create their precursors”, i.e., their influence can reach to a moment before their lifetime retroactively redefining the importance of their precursors (Bloom, 1973, p. 19).

What to do, then? Will there be only the way of renunciation as exposed in the *Bartleby y Compañía* of Enrique Vila-Matas (2002) or should one remain indefinitely waiting for, in Blanchot’s words *Le Livre à Venir* (1959)?

To these questions (that are not limited to literature but concern all aspects of artistic labour),

we will try to give one possible answer, pointing to a direction or path that can integrate, in the same dynamic approach, the creative impulse, the *daemoniac* dimension (from the ancient Greek δαίμων, a spirit that can guide us) so well identified by the Greek Culture of antiquity, with the seemingly overwhelming informational availability of the present.

This is only a first approach to the subject of the exhaustion of art. However, it does not yet answer the deeper question of whether Art (even if one knows that it will never cease because there will always be artists who continue to work even when, apparently, there is nothing new to be said) becomes irrelevant because no more is done than repeating specific formulas, variations over the same theme previously exploited to the point of utter exhaustion. An additional requirement is thus posed: how can this *daemoniac* spontaneity still be relevant?

The Greeks had a multiplicity of δαίμονες (*daemones*), minor deities who safeguarded various aspects of human life, and they are even mentioned by Plato (*Symposium*: 202d; *Apology of Socrates*: 31c). Some *daemones* were beneficial, and others were nefarious. Those who were good, who guided those who were possessed by them allowed reaching a state of happiness, *εὐδαιμονία* (*eudaimonia*). The artist, too, could experience this bonanza, letting him draw inspiration from such deities but without controlling the “when” and “what” of such a phenomenon. This idea has never

abandoned a somewhat subterranean or underlying perspective of Culture. In such a way that this same *mediumistic* state could be mentioned by Duchamp (1997) in the middle of the twentieth century. It is clear that the current physiological and neural paradigms of the brain and its cognitive functions will reject any supernatural dimension of creativity. However, this perspective can be used as a symbolic approach: there is "something" that imposes itself on the artist, on his will, which is sometimes quite unexpected at least in the sense that no one can predict, at the outset, the exact configuration of the outcome. It is like a force that can always reinvent itself: when everyone thinks that the boundaries are reached there is a new artist or artistic movement that pushes them even further.

In short and in our opinion, the answer will be to look at the expressive dimension under the filter of a creative (ie, *daemonic*) *hyper-intellection*, in the sense that if the whole creative impulse comes from an irrational drive it also requires, with the same intensity, to be guided by a filter of a *pan-optic* understanding of the artistic world, either in the current perspective of the landscape of contemporaneity or in a diachronic approach, that is, with a historical understanding of Culture.

However, we must try to explain what is this *hyper-intellection* and what is its role in the contemporary creative process.

2.

Rather than just saying that we are in the realm of randomness, creativity has traditionally been viewed as an expression of the irrational. This always meant two things: that the creative drive was never circumscribed to a deliberate program of aesthetic research because it always transcended the intentionality of the critics and the artists themselves and that, being something that subverted those intentions in an unexpected and impersonal way, always meant that for understanding the paradigms of rationality (if one wanted to have an integral idea of the human being) was also necessary to understand the problem of the irrational. This represented a challenge that the idea of *daemon* was no more than one of the answers. This *daemonic* hypothesis then presupposed another entity, with its semi-divine intellectual horizon which, possessing the artist or the thinker, explained this seemingly irrational and insubstantial dimension of creativity. Thus, even using the explanatory order of the myth, the essential character of the creative irruption was to be what is not circumscribed: the absolute horizon of the unexpected, that which resists the necessary deduction between premise and conclusion is, therefore, in *Kantean* terms, a free play between the faculties of imagination and

understanding (Kant, 1987).

However, in addition to the perplexity that this irreducibility of creativity entailed, there was also a way of dealing with its distressing dimensions, which is the artist's inability to control his creative impulses and thus deliberate freely: the artist's inscription in a school or movement. This collective dimension allowed a direction of the aesthetic exploration, a framework that defined the terms where the irreducible aspects of the creativity could be freed and put into context in the artistic work.

That is, it was a self-regulatory instance that established the order that framed creative chaos.

3.

However, these balances were broken by both the *avant-gardes* and the era of *hyper*-information. In fact, there is a substrate of disorientation where artists have to inhabit: the degree of *avant-garde* experimentation is radical; the access to a totalitarian collection of information about art is, also, radical. Modernism destroyed even the theoretical and pragmatic circumscription of art. Henceforth, it was neither possible to answer the question "what is art?" nor to recognise what is the artistic phenomenon, that is, to answer the practical question "is this art?" (D'Orey, 2007). The various theoretical avenues have been multiplying in order to arrive at a sufficiently comprehensive concept of the essence of Art and, besides the theory, in social and economic terms (i.e., in practice) there has been a movement of enlargement in order to accept any aesthetic proposal without being able to define *ex-ante facto* what is inside or outside the realm of Art, because Art can be, strictly and absolutely, everything. Whether it is "good" or "bad" Art, if it is relevant to the overall picture, if there is a greater or lesser potential for appreciation in the art market, these are other questions that, in a more or less inorganic way, attempt to be answered (specially, when there are the cyclical media scandals or works of Art full of irony to Art itself) and where, at the same time, the radical horizons of artistic endeavour, as happened with bio-art and extreme manifestations of the intersection between Art and technology, questions the ethical boundaries of artistic work — like the glowing bunny of Eduardo Kac (circa 1998). Because the systematic exploration of frontiers proceeds from Duchamp's radical proposals, notably with his *ready-mades* (1917), Malevich's iconoclasm with the suprematism initiated with his black square (Malevich 1915) or, in literature, with the Baudelaire's (1857) or Rimbaud's poetic irreverence (1972), or the decomposition of traditional forms of narrative with Joyce's Ulysses (1922); in music, with the application to the composition of Schönberg's twelve-tone scale

(1967), or Cage's 4':33 " (1952) just to cite some expressive cases of hundreds of others possible examples.

It is not absurd, in this context, to chose, like Bartleby (Melville 1853), a complete refusal of Art or even to be in a situation of extreme anguish. However, at the same time, a reaction to this state of affairs should be possible: a basic posture aimed at a path to go forward in the situation of a lack of aesthetic orientation. Well, today, the artist is asked to have an attitude of *hyper-lexical* response to the environment of *hyper-information*. An overall view that guides the irruption of that centuries' old virtuality to harness the forces of the irrational one meant as the *daemonic* experience. What we want to say is that there is a way of radically embracing the intellectual environment that we live in today and, at the same time, exercising the freedom of the artistic work in its maximum power. That road is always to try to reach the *pan-optical* vision as a contextual perception that will allow each artist to reconstruct his own aesthetic foundation. However, the question is still much more complicated: that this extreme rationality must be in a dialectical relation to the irrationality of the *daemonic* forces. For that we mean, at the same moment when the artist achieves the *pan-optic* perception of the whole he must also, in the very foundation of his newfound aesthetic, have to rely on that *daemonic* inspiration, in times before only reserved for the moment of the making of the actual works of Art. On the other hand, the reverse movement may also be relevant: the artist progresses as if he knew how to contextualise the works already performed in the sense that they can present clues to discover which way to go in the *hyper-intellective* whole of the Art world. That is, it is possible to discover deep dialectical relations between *hyper-intellection* as a paradigm of rationality and the irrationality symbolised by the extreme *daemonic* instance for the aim, from the artist's point of view, will always be to radicalise the old balances between rationality and irrationality to found out, exactly, what he can contribute to his *Zeitgeist*.

4.

What is fascinating is that, despite all the mutations in the conceptual paradigms about what is human, the theme of *daemonic* possession persisted, now under the guise of having an innate genius especially in the most idiosyncratic artists that have revolutionised their fields, perhaps as an inheritance of the ideals of Romanticism even in a historical moment such as ours in which it becomes increasingly clear that there is a predominance of what Adorno and Horkheimer had designated by "Culture Industry" (*Kulturindustrie*) in which the model of capitalist-industrial production also serves

as the context for artistic activity (Adorno and Horkheimer, 2002).

In fact, in spite of the myth of the *l'artiste fou* whose work derives only of his genius, any specific and monographic analysis on the majority of these artists discovers their deep work of reflection and analysis on their own diachronic and contemporary context, not to mention that most were also inserted in the artistic-intellectual *milieu* of their peers, although sometimes it was a minority of artists in the marginal fringes of the Art world, as was often the case with the vanguards of the twentieth century. That is, with all the differences from artist to artist, from movement to movement, and even from decade to decade, there was almost always a mix of programmatic vision about aesthetics and an unpredictable eruption of creative solutions even if those eruptions only happen after a slow maturation and under a multiplicity of influences that coalesced in a specific proposal, more or less radical, but always remarkable because a strong identity accompanied it.

Finally, we can try to understand this proposed concept of *hyper-intellection*: after all the vanguard movements of the twentieth century, in our time of an all reaching knowledge, the approach to the creative impulse must contain, *ex-ante facto*, a *pan-optic* understanding of the Art world.

5.

It is thus implicitly or explicitly asked of the artist that, in his activity, in addition to mastering the *τέχνη* (*techne*) specific to his field of artistic performance he asks himself about all these questions, takes a position on them, and be willing to continue this permanent search for "what more is there to be said" while demanding an extreme receptivity and attention to his inner *daemon* in order to remain faithful to his irreducible artistic vision. Those seem to be overly demanding and complex requirements for the artist, and this is true. Moreover, that is because the artist, when he is learning his craft (an even later), should pay attention not only to the technique but also to the theoretical aspects of his context: what is the state-of-the-art in his field?; what are the most influential movements of his time?; who were the most important precursors?; and he should have an idea of what art is, even if Philosophy cannot nowadays reach a consensus on that matter.

However, the means at their disposal are also exponential significant. It is the current communication infrastructure of the information society that allows them to access the wealth of knowledge that will allow guidance in this strange and hypercomplex conceptual labyrinth.

Given the impossibility of fully explore in this paper the complexities of the ontology of Art our intent

was not to debate the *state of the art* on the dominant conceptions of this topic but to provide a roadmap for solving the difficulties and anxieties that artists may face in the current context of Art much as Harold Bloom's intention in is *Anxiety of Influence* (1973).

In our view, that roadmap requires that the irrational drives in making the work of art must be in *equilibrium* with an intellectual perspective about Art as lucid as possible, that is, that the artist must also make use of a demanding and informed analysis of the artistic world. Thus, an explicit position was not taken on the underlying problem of knowing what Art is. Nevertheless, given what was said in this paper it is possible to infer a middle ground between the ontological theory of realism in art and the contextualism defended by Arthur C. Danto (2013) because when an artist is at work he must have some intuitive idea about what Art is, even if that is a kind of *naïve* realism, but at the same time the concern about the impact that his work may have is preordained by the assumption that Art has a strong contextual dimension that is given by the appreciation of the community of Art lovers, critics and fellow artists.

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