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A Contemporary Atomistic Model of Art—A First-Person Introspection of the Artistic Process

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Abstract: In modern science and human activity, we increasingly refer to creative thinking that does not belong to the strict definition of art. Art studies and art theory should answer the questions that emerge in the complex interaction among diverse creative fields. Art experience may be considered as one of many different manifestations of creative thinking (general creativity). When we develop ideas involving heterogeneous nuclei, our thoughts aim to encompass or reflect upon the area in between their fusion. This paper proposes a method of implementing an introspective analysis that brings the artist to a new position—the position of an explorer of their own cognitive space.

Keywords: arts; holism; atomism; reductionism; liquid modernity; intersubjectivity; enactivism; autopoiesis; body-oriented approach; analysis

1. Introduction

The concept of the Contemporary Atomistic Model of Art (CAMA) affirms a discrete (discontinuous) construction of the art field in which the global art world exists as the sum of the interrelations between the particular realms of art owned by each single artist. The atomistic model discussed here requires each participant's sustained act of will in the process, and focuses on clarifying the role of the artist as an autonomous person whose unique creativity is meaningful without necessarily expecting external recognition. Since the inner sphere, the mind of the particular artist, and their conscious perception of themself are accessible practically only from the first-person viewpoint, the explorer and analyst who records their own cognitive space is the artist themself. The way of conducting introspection (self-observation, self-reflection) bears similarities to the specific cognitive technique of phenomenology (Merleau-Ponty 1962). In an identical way, the self-observing artist can register, describe, and record the conditions and temporal relations of the changing conceptual cores generated in their own cognitive space.

The ontogenesis of the artistic idea, and the intention to its materialization, involves a multitude of interacting factors that are of a heterogeneous nature. (Guilford 1950, 1961) Such factors include the computational modes of thinking, manifested as the linking of syntactic cues and the following of memorized algorithms. In addition, pre-discursive, nonlinguistic thinking is also exposed. It is the immediate body interaction with the material environment involving fine motor and automatic sensorimotor actions activated in the neural network of the cerebellum. In both cases, the computational process of the brain needs to be accompanied by conscious perception or the noncomputational processes of consciousness (according to R. Penrose), which have an impact on material production and imply multiple possible alternative solutions. The result is a final creative decision accepted by the artist, which they share with the public as a completed artwork and which is also subject to change. As Pierre Bourdieu argues, every comment, even an unspoken opinion or a conscious but unexpressed feeling, transforms the work of art without affecting its physical boundaries.

The same applies to the complicity of the author themself in the act of perception. The artist thinks of all the alternatives that were possible in their inner consciousness, but ultimately remains unfulfilled and reduced to what appears in material form.

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(Borst and Kosslyn 2008; Kosslyn 2001) It is possible that the author, in contact with the social environment, completely abandons their initial opinion and aesthetic sense they had previously considered themself to embody. A counter version also exists, where the artist "discovers" that the artwork they themself have discarded may acquire symbolic value in changed circumstances. All of the above-mentioned alternations make it clear that the linearity expressed in the line "concept > genesis of the concept > output" is actually chosen to trace the mode of existence of a unique version. This is a purposeful creation of a visible pathway of one of the many atomic units that compose a vast fluid of possible linkages, perishable configurations, and results of interactions between them. Our task is to enlarge our reflexive field to incorporate the world's image as composed of multiple interacting units.

2. The Artistic Act

The artistic act is a mental and physical deed that belongs to the field of art. With regard to the art, we accept it as a valid deliberate process which develops over time and takes place in an environment that is simultaneously physical, body-biological, and social. The art creator and perceiver participate in this process with the experience acquired and the body's sensoria. The process does not end with the creation of the artwork as an object or image, but continues in the modes of perception, interpretation, and comment by all recipients, both professional and nonprofessional. By agreeing with M. Maffesoli, we can state that the boundaries between art and life, incorporating an infinite ocean of images and material signs, are blurred (Maffesoli 2010). The same applies to the liminal zone between modes of thought and action, both between individual social actors belonging to art or not (intersubjective interactions) and in individual patterns relating to the single consciousness of a person (intrasubjective acts of thought). Stated in the context of Z. Bauman (Bauman 2011) P. Sloterdijk, and P. Gielen (Gielen 2015), division lines are boundaries in a liquefied or fluid medium. The solid foundations inherited from modernity and the art history of modernity have been deconstructed to the atomic level.

Two types of thinking are involved in the artistic act—by linking syntactic signs (linguistic, computational) and sensorimotor functions through direct action. The very posing of questions about the separation of thought from ways of acting generates an attitude of deconstructing the common field by separating visible, discrete parts. The aim is, by drawing the artist's attention to themself and to the qualities of their own creativity, to overcome the use of visual and aesthetic templates or to subject an idea to critical analysis in order to find out whether what has been achieved (thought) differs from the standard, and which is the path to its materialization. What is the novelty and how the artist themself changes what is borrowed also demands an answer. So too is the binding of the 'computation' of thought, manifested as a re-reflection, to the material production of the artwork, such as preceptive belief (in Merleau-Ponty's terms) and the sensorimotor extension of thought towards the environment and thinking with the physical characteristics of materials (with reference to S. Gallagher (Gallagher 2011, 2016, 2017) and L. Malafouris (Malafouris 2004). The disjunction in the pursuit of answers concerning the plan of thought and the plan of material production, in search of ever smaller parts of the overall field, requires the incorporation of models from the artist's memory that lead to a direct re-engagement with the artist's previous experience regarding the means of "making" (art) and the amplification of cognitive thought processes in this direction. These include:

Activation of the sensory memory of one's own body senses. All that affects the sensations (optical, tactile, kinesthetic) according to the characteristics of the materials involved in the interaction. This is the body's unconscious memory of "pure" sensory qualities that are represented prediscursively and nonlinguistically; the activation of memory models as "poor" knowledge expressed in comparing external similarity features and sensory analogies with morphological and typological prototypes of artworks and physical depictions.

- Activation of memories of other people's (the audience's) reactions to the perception of the artist's works, which were acquired in the artist's previous experience under similar material and social conditions, and identical circumstances for the performance of the activity.
- Activation of memory models for shared opinions in the first-hand self-reflexive linguistic statement of the artist's embedded sense.
- Activation of emotional memory as recollections of their own experience in analogous situations.
- Activation of the acquired theoretical knowledge according to individual training and education.
- Activation of memory of scenarios that have been developed over time for the realization of other artworks as alternative action programs for the future. "Memory for the future" using the terminology of D. Ingvar (*Memory of the future*). (Ingvar 1985)

John Searle (2004) has clearly revealed that not only does understanding have its place in consciousness, but so do subjective states and processes of sensibility. Searle insists on an "initial-personal ontology" which is the mode of being itself. A first-person ontology, wherein the holistic and qualitative experience of the artistic work subjective "Self" or the mathematical formula calculation are distinctive features of consciousness, but their significations belong exclusively to the particular individual. Despite being from a radically different scientific perspective, that of enactivism, debating the role of sensations and sensory modalities in the act of thought are inferred to be paramount, even indistinguishable from individual-to-environment bonding. It is precisely enactivism and its related theories which insist on autopoiesis—a process of self-emergence that the individual and the environment share. In the same vein, another view, albeit from a different field but often shared by enactivism, is that of James Jerome Gibson (Varela 1999; Maturana and Varela 1980). In his view, visual environmental information should not be seen as computational states that reconstruct information in the perceiver's consciousness. Visual information is an active field and the sensory effects within it can be modulated by our own activity. From this point of view, both the artist's own idea and the material production of the work, and any opinion about that work, involve a body-discursive comprehension that the artist, the self-explorer, can observe and grasp.

Since it is an evolving process over time, reflection must be renewed and conclusions updated according to changes in the contact zone, which we recognize as an unstable notion of an expanded art world, a fluid art world that is both global and individual. Mixing of all kinds is the norm within it (after N. Bouriot), and each individual artist attempts to make sense of how their way of thinking and doing relates relationally, and what it is opposed to.

3. Cognitive Techniques for Applying the CAMA

In introspection (self-observation), the artist becomes an explorer of the complex interaction between their own cognitive space and the actions of the body in contact with the environment, and the artworks are material signs, external representations, and structured sensations that are generated (computationally and/or in an autopoietic way) within an evolving process over time.

The technical implementation of the CAMA is an ever-renewing reflection on a series of questions seeking answers to two dimensions that merge into a common fluid flow or integrity mechanism of consciousness. In an ordinary situation, not applying a deliberate intention to think in the divergent manner proposed here, the plans of thought are practically inseparable.

To each procedure described below, a second reflective plan exists, which is to a significant extent discursive, to use Merleau-Ponty's terminology, in the language of silence. These are the specific sensations, feelings, and emotions, nonreproducible in spo ken language, that can be perceived by consciousness as mental images or states rather than being named. For example, to (1) "Determination of Self, corresponds (1A). Then, (1A) is the perception of the subjective self and the emotions (affective states) that arise from

perceiving the image of that self. The concentration of attention is precisely on the sensation and nothing else, with no attempt to name it. If we follow Paul Valéry's idea of art as a specific sensory experience, the environment of which is formed by sensations that have no precise physiological role, then this self-reflexive plan aims at the self-observing artist to study in practice the most specific sensory qualities. The experience gained here is a memory of sensory modifications as rarities and the ways in which these rarities manifest themselves in a purely sensible way or experience. At each renewal of the creative process, it is noted whether there is a similarity to a previous experience only as a person's familiar or nonfamiliar sensation. The artist should determine the type of mood and emotional and affective state that accompanies the particular procedure: positive and pleasant or negative and unpleasant. Another option is to indicate the degree of strength of the emotional or affective state without using a specific measuring scale. The only measurement is subjective assessment versus previous experience. All nonintentional states that are inherent to the individual at the point of the procedure (joy, depression, anxiety, etc.) can be noted here.

The second reflexive plan is a technique for implementing the philosophy of J. Deleuze and F. Guattari on art, such as "extracting" perceptions and effects from perceptual and affective states.

All that has been mentioned so far is reduced to freeing the artist's attention capacity to the conscious reflexive apprehension of processes that are part of the creative act, but their influence on artistic practice is ignored. Introspective reflexive analysis based on the CAMA considers the following procedures as basic:

- Defining the self and accepting the role of self-explorer.

It represents a determination of the self at the current moment, or a reflection on the current identity of the one performing the procedure, according to Michel Maffezzoli and Abraham Maslow. The goal is to answer the question: who performs the procedure of introspection? The answer is: in the current moment, I am the researcher who studies the artist-self, and both constitute a unified self. In the actual moment, it is the self-subjective that performs the self-as-object introspection. We believe that this is a self-determination procedure. A plan is being formed as to who is directing the procedure—the self, as the first-person founder and mover of the creative process.

- Brief formulation of the contact zone between the individual and the environment at the present moment. Where does the introspection procedure take place? When does it take place or in which period of time? What are the particularities of this environment?
- Insight in terms of a short phrase, keyword, or perceptual or affective state, i.e., the articulation of the primary conception. Focusing one's attention on the indefiniteness of an idea before a decision is made to objectify it. Grasping the point at which the primary vague boundaries between a piece of cognitive art and a work of art are still flexible and in the process of being formalized.
- Divergence of the idea. The very effort of forming a mindset to generate options. A purposeful effort to dissociate the emerging secondary nuclei of ideas from the original conception. Sustaining the artist's divergence of thought with no attempt to produce models and structures.
- Idea's "personal" ontology as a subjective, source-personal meaning of the existence of this idea. One of the imposed versions in practice is the artist's statement documented in a written text. This is a procedure of activating the aspiration of being understood. The articulation and systematization of previous facts involved in the dynamics of the creative process by similarity. They are related to the artist's previous experience acquired in a comparable situation. Recovering the facts from memory: Who? When? Where? What? (True, real past or present facts). They can be thought of as a kind of implication (a close connection to the Latin "implico") of the creative process, a logical operation version antecedent–consequent which expresses the relation that corresponds to the conjunction "if...it is". Which factors are essential to the creative process and are involved in decision making or have caused changes?

- Clarification of the context or circumstances of the process of change that has occurred as potential "action formulas". As Jacques Derrida says, context cannot be seen as fixed, but always as an open and constantly changing category. In this case, the important thing is to trace the changes that can be defined as recognizable 'action formulas' (part of standards, conventions) and their possibility of reproducibility (iterability) as the main performativity feature. (Derrida 1971)
- Indication of the action proactive party or the initiator. Who initiates the creative process (the self or someone else; what is the social status of the other; what is the perpetrator's own status in the procedure)? Such a procedure is essential for the subsequent elaboration of graphic schemes for personal and social interactions that are part of the creative idea development as a social fact. The procedure is renewed with each new encounter whose outcome affects the project.
- Systematization of the speech, imagery, and corporeal acts involved in the creative process. Exploring intentionality through the agency of words, images, and the cocreation of human bodies which are not the artwork itself but have indirectly influenced its production. Defining performativity in speech acts (Austin 1962) and image acts (image acts, after Horst Bredekamp) (Bredekamp 2018), which refer to the actions, results, and consequences that bridge the artist, the artwork, and the third parties.
- A study of the artwork material production as a "material object" in relation to a specific physical and social environment. This involves purposeful thinking of the materials required, their quantitative and qualitative parameters (size, number of molar parts, etc.), and the spatial characteristics of the environment of exposure necessary for the material production of social agents (mediating individuals). This refers to both the actions and interactions carried out at a particular moment, as well as planned actions and interactions. Although this procedure is about drawing up a plan and following it, the reassessing potential of the decisions at any moment must be taken into account. According to M. Csikszentmihalyi, the creative solution of a problem involves continuous experimentation and re-evaluation in the working process. "The most creative artists", he says, "modify the used technique as they paint, and their paintings emerge on the canvas in more unpredictable ways than the artwork of artists with a less original approach. This is because of the creative artist's willingness to learn as one progresses, one's openness to the unforeseen, and one's availability to take a better solution if such is revealed to him". Such flexibility is only effective if the process of solving the creative task is carefully monitored, the development direction is corrected in a timely manner, and through the feedback from the information received during the interaction with the environment.
- Theoretical justification and synergies based on scientific works, including those from scientific spheres outside art studies.
- A body-oriented analysis approach incorporating sensations, sensory modalities, and autopoiesis. Any interpretation of semantic structures is ignored. The reflection is directed towards the perception of the participation of one's own body in the creative process and the embedded ways of the recipient's body engagement. The procedure can be performed as following the new paradigm according to which sight is not a leading modality for aesthetic human experience. Vision is seen as inextricably linked to the joint action of tactile and kinesthetic sensations, as well as all other sensory body channels. The question "what do I want to "say" by this picture" is replaced by "how do I engage the recipient's senses". In terms of autopoiesis, the analysis can be completed comparatively by drawing and correlating information from a visual registration of the process (photograph, video, scan) accompanied by a brief description of the situation (I performed the following action—I received this output).

- Mixing as the norm. Analysis of the type of mixing based on well-known conventions and norms. Determination of what the art project under study resists and what it relationally relates to. Articulating the individual limits of the idea.
- Predicting alternative future "possible worlds" of the creative project—predicting scenarios and new potential situations for the idea and artwork development. Articulating the individual limits of the idea.
- Analysis of the changes and clear consideration of the motivations that have triggered these changes. This is a process that accompanies each of the procedures, at every point in the flow of thought and action. It could be said that this procedure is a systematic focusing of attention on the occurring transformations.
- Adapting an idea to the dynamics of the process and considering the constantly occurring changes, bearing in mind the impermanence and temporality of the coupling. The convergence of variations of the idea kernels and synthesis—the reformulation of the generated (or borrowed) ideas and their fusion in a new order under new circumstances.
- Systematizing views of the creative project, including both the individual material artworks and the acts of thinking about them (ideas and ideals) through the recipients' sight. An analysis of the receiving party "complicity" in the legitimation of the artworks, as P. Bourdieu discusses from a sociological perspective.
- Conscious perception and analysis of personal assumptions about the impact of institutional, social, political, and economic regulations that affect the creative act. Verifying the authenticity of one's own beliefs in the context of the artist's social and aesthetic conceptions. Self-reflection on the desire to be both conformant and nonconformist.
- The empirical creation activity of the artwork. All the questions posed and their answers are a parallel process of the biomechanical and sensorimotor action of the artist, purposefully towards the creation of the artwork material form in the specific physical environment, according to the interactive features of this environment and the transformations of the mental image of the artwork in the artist's mind. Essentially, this procedure is a reduction of all possibilities to the singular product. The reduction does not concern the possible material production of artistic work copies and does not concern the technical possibility of reproduction.
- Self-observation and active perception of all the noncomputational processes involved in the creative act—the imagination, sensations, feelings, and modes of expression, the moments of awareness and aesthetic feeling comprehension itself.
- Graphic notification of actions and interactions. It is implemented as the systematic production of diagrams that visually show how connectivity is realized in face-to-face interactions.
- Positive (nomic) anticonformism and a justified opposition to non-art and cultural industries. A motivated justification that discusses and explicitly clarifies the differences of the individual artistic project from entertainment media that simulate art or systems of conceptual, stylistic, and morphological devices unacceptable to the particular artist. It is also an analysis of the individual artist's views relative to the orthodoxy in art understood as a regulated social space.
- Dissipativity and temporal coherence. This procedure aims to link the mental models listed so far into a coherent (temporal) whole. To this end, it proposes the initial theoretical framework of synergetics as applied to sociology as a method for studying nonlinear dynamics in complex systems. "Synergetics establishes the relationship between the micro-level of individual decisions and the macro-level of dynamic collective processes in the society and provides a description of macro dynamics." The relationship between the integrative dynamics of macrophenomena, which are dependent on the decisions and behavior of individuals at the microsocial level, should be discovered. Such approaches have been successfully applied to model the nonlinear dynamics of innovation in science, which is a type of creativity. We can assume that

this is also applicable to art. The main difficulty for such synergetic analysis of art is the impossibility of collecting a sufficiently large number of objective output data on the basis of which to perform the calculations. In the present case, the opposite approach is adopted. The initial state of the art system is chaos, and we seek to locate not the instabilities but the coherent states at the microlevel. At the same time, the study adopts Penrose's thesis, according to which an incalculable component is available. The way out of the situation is to propose a conscious perception of dissipativity and coherence instead of a mathematical model. Again, we turn to the types of interaction convergence and divergence, which are also called the "funnel principle". In both of these processes we have a reduction of the atomic parts, in this case ideas and images, that are subject to the respective type of influence. Convergence can be represented as an action that has as the input the wide end of a funnel and the forces act in the direction of the narrowed exit. In this particular case, the forces are the willful effort of the individual to think in a concrete way and to perceive certain components purposefully. However, to these are added spontaneous decisions, environmental influences, intuition, and fortuitous factors. Far fewer atomic parts reach the funnel exit than the entrance. They are perceived by individual consciousness as linearly connected and coherent, unaware of the fact that this coherence is a part of a reduction process. If the circumstances changed, the linear order would be different. Returning to the idea of intentionality, convergence is a drive towards synchronicity that excludes the atypical, creating rules and norms that, as social fact, relate to the traditions of art. Once we invert the funnel and direct the atomic parts from the narrow to the wide end, then we obtain a process of spacing or divergence and differentiation. This is a process of creative thinking and possible birth of innovation that is clearly distinguishable from the tightly packed and relatively ordered parts at the narrow end of the funnel. In order for novelty to be embraced, it is necessary to resynchronize it with what is already established. It follows that the convergence process must be repeated, but under a new state of the whole system. This constant repetition suggests that the convergence and the divergence are parts of a common process. If we connect the two funnels we end up with something similar to an hourglass that purposefully rotates in the mind. Tight-end coupling imparts temporary coherence (or the illusion of coherence) in the dynamics of the complex and unstable nonlinear system at the level of individual consciousness (microlevel). The creator experiences this state as an optimal fusion of consciousness and action; in Csikszentmihalyi's terminology, a state of flow. This procedure is derived from J. P. Guilford's (1950) concept of divergent and convergent thinking in a broader sense, one in which individual consciousness is in the process of actively interacting with the environment and participating in its change. The creation of a set of diverse 'responses-solutions' at the microlevel that are figurative (visual, auditory, tactile), semantic, symbolic, and behavioral can give rise to significant changes at the macrolevel.

The listed procedures are not a step-by-step algorithm that can lead to a single output. Quite the contrary. The actual goal of introspection is to make visible and point out as many unknown but potential connections as possible. Both the beginning and the end of the process are contingent. We can start the introspection from any of the mentioned procedures and it will not disturb the nature of the process. When the procedure relates to future events, its introspective analysis is performed counterfactually and by constructing scenarios for the future which, at a particular point in the actual implementation, are subjected to re-examination in accordance with the facts. Each of the procedures leads to new outputs of thought if held through the prism of the various structuring patterns discussed as types of filters.

The procedures can only be performed first-hand as an ever-renewing introspection. It is a purposeful effort to clarify the role of the artist as an autonomous person with an individual creativity beyond the templates and hierarchies of the global art world and/or cultural industries. In the artist's everyday life, creative practice and social contact

(professional or not) procedures are spontaneously activated and experienced as doubts and constant threats of undergoing crisis. They are a common part of the viewpoints shared and the stories told about the ways one piece of art or another has emerged during informal meetings between their close friends and associates. The contemporary atomistic model of art rationalizes matters that have always been part of artists' agendas. This turns the thought objectified in the description and the physical presence of the artwork into equal parts of the creative act, both belonging to the individual "private" world of art.

Both description and drawing (modeling, construction) are materially involved processes capable of leaving the sphere intraposed in individual consciousness through the sensitivity of the body and sensorimotor actions to expand the artist's mind through the interaction with the physical and social environment, in which creative acts become shared between subjects and material things as an interposed fact. The symbolic and performative significance of material objects and physical images as works of art (but not only as such), demands a bodily involvement of the recipients that stimulates and affects sensations and perceptive experience. The primal contact zone between the artwork and the spectator's mind is the body—the eyes that can see, the hands that can touch, the direct contact and the intrabody experience. The spectator's bodily experience is mediated by the modes of interpretation and the norms that are imposed as generally accepted systems for symbols to be encoded and decoded, but meanings, as John Searle says, remain in individual minds. The art-receptive mind, conscious perception, and aesthetic experience cannot be simulated computationally, as Roger Penrose proved. The art shared between subjects, in the act of perception, can again be located as intrapose. However, there is a part of the process of creating a work of art that is experienced only by the author, but which can be transmitted, however limited, through language and other syntactic signifiers, partly to incorporate sensory intelligence (after Maffesoli), thinking with sensations (after Deleuze/Guattari), and the mind embodied into the medium.

Introspective analysis aims to make this particular part visible, and to increase the possibilities of sharing the multitude of individual models that function in parallel, synchronously and asynchronously, that clash, resist, bond with others, replicate from consciousness to consciousness, become accepted or rejected, bought and sold, used for political purposes, or are subjected to statistical analyses in the global art world, which itself is located in the unified universal physical world.

4. Conclusions

The CAMA deconstructs the whole into atoms and proposes a technique for tracing an atomic unit and its "inside" in global processes. If the implementation of the CAMA's introspective analysis is a systematic, daily activity conducted in parallel with the artistic practice techniques (drawing, modeling, constructing, etc.), the ultimate output will be a visible integral coherence between images, rational thoughts, conscious sensations, perceived and rejected aesthetic patterns, action models, and interactions in social, cultural, and physical environments.

If we were to ask ourselves whether the above procedures are sufficiently comprehensive, the answer would be no. These procedures are the possible initiation, the first step in the activation process to split the "atomic nucleus" and synthesize new nuclei, the targeted creation of an attitude to view and actively incorporate into artistic activity the parts of the whole that we usually overlook and perceive in a cohesive way. Through the CAMA, Z. Bauman's finding that "self-reflection has superseded tradition" has its particular practical implementation in relation to art.

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