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crossing digital boundaries

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Boosting Creativity through a Number of Facilitative Factors: hybrid Recombination, urban Drifting and collective Disruption

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Abstract — This paper deals with the creative issue under an approach claiming that there are nowadays a number of new factors that facilitate the creative process. Some of these factors – related to hybridism and recombination, playful urban drifting, and collective campaigns against the establishment – are discussed here from the standpoint of how they are able to boost creativity by fuelling interaction between individuals. The role of information/communication technologies is emphasized in what concerns their potential to support creativity, binging about new practices that may overcome the obsolete metaphysical stance allegedly based on some form of ‘inspiration’. Creativity is as well put into the deterministic chaos context, showing that salient features of the creative process can be highlighted by a variety of concepts drawn from such a context.

Index terms — Collective campaigns, creativity, drifting, Homo Ludens, hybridism, recombination, situationists.

I. INTRODUCTION

The creative process is undoubtedly an extremely controversial issue, which can be addressed under a variety of perspectives. The case to be made here is that there are a number of factors that facilitate such a process. Without any injudicious purpose of exhaustiveness, I have selected three topics to be discussed in the context of how some salient traits of contemporary thought may affect the massive development of new forms of creativity that we face nowadays.

Those topics are associated with the increasing interdependence between individuals brought to the foreground of current concerns by the overwhelming globalization practice that is patent in our environment. Drastic changes in communication from a node of the global web to another – stemming primarily from the alleged ‘digital revolution’ with its amazing capacity of expansion – are also a matter of argument. This question takes a paradoxical contour in a more and more urbanized world, insomuch as the importance of nodes prevails over the links’ role (every type of working from the ‘barren territory’ seems to be really ineffective).

Since the above outlined features (among many others) lead to a relevant mutation in the power relationships that govern the globalized society, it is not surprising that increasingly numerous groups of people do not come to terms with the turbulence that

characterizes the new *modus vivendi* that we can not afford to ignore. Hence, myriad collective *campaigns* [1] against particular aspects of the ‘new’ state of affairs are emerging all over the world, entailing an important disruption on the ‘ancient’ status quo. Such a disruption is motivated by, and embodied in, a bottom-up contesting process that differs significantly from the well thought-out *movements* that have disputed the main conservative hegemonic ideologies of modernity.

Creativity is unquestionably one of the main features placed in the very core of this new ‘wave of dissent’. Moreover, creativity is simultaneously a fuelling element of this collective disrupting endeavor (insofar as it contributes to increase its power), and one of its more salient consequences (driven by the diversity of methods that are actually put into practice during the ‘fighting actions’ carried out by some of the contestants).

II. FROM TEXTUAL HYBRIDISM TO CULTURAL RECOMBINATION

The building blocks of any creative process contain unmistakably a set of *words*. Most of the time, these are written words and so, some kind of a *text* – in addition to other elements – underlies ubiquitously all forms of creativity.

According to a more and more hegemonic view, the contemporary *convergence* pulling together the – formerly divided – “two cultures” [2] depends above all on the conception that posits the *scientific discourse as literature*. In fact, there is no such thing as ‘natural science’, since the very articulation of scientific concepts belongs to the realm of human speech, rather than to the domain of a variety of separate physical *objects*, connected by *objective* phenomena where humanity is not supposed to get involved. The undeniable convergence between science and humanities that has occurred in the last few decades is arguably connected to the ‘new’ concept of complexity – driven by the so called deterministic chaos – that dominates (almost) all forms of ‘new’ knowledge. Indeed, combining (and recombining) hard – but rigid – quantitative analysis with soft – but flexible – storytelling techniques can be a powerful way to make sense of complex systems, ensuring – by attacking a given problem from various angles – the diversity of thought that such systems require for their understanding. In so doing, we

are supplementing quantitative methods with an artistic facility with qualities. It is clear that the *ancient* hard sciences, inasmuch as they embrace new paradigms (faraway from the ‘imperialism’ of Physics), get a fresh flavor that can only be seen as advantageous. Conversely, a plus point can be assigned to the *ancient* soft sciences by virtue of their growing role in the post-industrial landscape. By this token, the ‘truth’ of science rallies the ‘beauty’ of humanities.

It goes without saying that the circumstance of creativity building blocks being nowadays expressed under a common digital format is, as well, a factor of blending that cannot be disregarded when the gap between different forms of human knowledge is to be left behind. This new design of the linkage between previously unconnected pieces of knowledge brings into play the fresh concept of *hybridism*, underestimated in modernity (and even blamed by Aristotle). Undeniably, the easily performed recombination of diverse elements – graphics, sounds, films, and so forth – into the same *text* by means of zeros+ones [3] constitutes a strong upgrading of the creative process that cannot be ignored. This leads us to the contemporary acknowledgement of a number of hybrid forms of recombined cultural products, of which the hypertext may be considered as an overwhelming pinnacle in the scope of present-day “one culture”.

Moreover, this opens the door for a certain reinforcement of ‘extensive’ forms of disparate – and multidimensional – textual hybrids, to the detriment of ‘intensive’ ways of approaching the written word (“and, and, and...” is an increasingly efficient way of thinking a text, instead of the narrower “or, or, or...” style). In fact, the copulative connection between items is a relevant feature of an innovative text production endeavor that recombines – fuelled by some sort of positive feed-back – different kinds of knowledge.

This endless extension of forms and shapes as an infinite text is symbolized in Fig. 1, where limits seem absent.



Fig. 1. Embedded structures in Magritte’s creative form of text

III. URBAN DRIFTING AS A CREATIVE TRAIT OF *HOMO LUDENS*

Although immersed in the aforementioned context driven by the recombination of dissonant elements, a very different point is now to be raised, when creativity is seen in its connection to urban settings, rather than as a factor impelling individual scientific/artistic achievements.

This new point refers to ‘psycogeography’, a hybrid concept *created* by ‘situationists’, a political/aesthetical avant-garde group that emerged in France in the 1950s [4]. This group has expanded in a *creative* way the earlier Walter Benjamin’s approach to ‘flânerie’ (the French word denoting strolling, idling, often with the connotation of wasting time [5]).

Despite its ‘remote’ roots, psycogeography keeps on being currently ‘operational’ nowadays (see <http://submiologia.decentro.org>), since it is well suited to cope with some salient features of our Zeitgeist.

Psycogeography is a *hybrid* body of knowledge concerned with the effect of geographical environments on the emotional/cultural behavior of people. In its urban ‘branch’, psycogeography has its practical counterpart in the experience of *drifting* (“mettre en pratique la dérive”, as put forward by Guy Debord [6], a leading character in the situationist group). This practical exercise of drifting consists of a (pseudo) random walk in the urban text, performed intentionally by a structurally coherent set of individuals that make a creative ‘recording’ of their interaction with the various ambiances they are immersed in, along their trajectory through the urban fabric. As an outcome of such a ‘practical exercise’, an emotional map of the city is produced, *mapping* in space the *emotions* elicited by the urban axes that the drifters are fond of, and by the encounters they find there.

An example of such a map is given in Fig. 2, where pieces of Paris are represented, together with “fixed points and vortexes which strongly discourage entry on or exit from certain zones” [7].

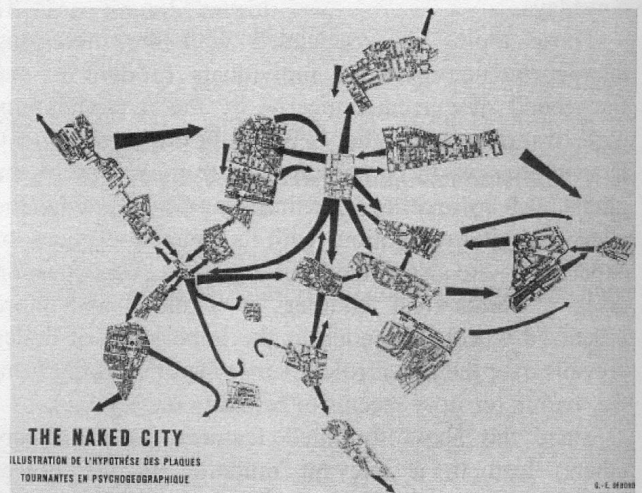


Fig. 2. The Naked City (Guy Debord, 1958)

The drifting is by no means governed by the 'laws' of probability. By contrast, it can be viewed as a particular case of a nonlinear dynamic system analogous to the well known process denoted deterministic chaos. Actually, situationists' reports on drifting give a vivid account of how a small shift in the starting conditions of the exercise may lead to unpredictable consequences.

On the other hand, insofar as drifting is also connected to speech (the situationists' oral or written accounts are a crucial point of such an experience), I claim that the free play of passions put into practice by drifters may overlap with some features of Wittgenstein's *Sprachspiel* (in fact, word is not born of scientific or logical thinking but of *creative* language).

Under a broad-spectrum way of thinking, the drifting experience conveys a flamboyant playful content, since drifters – through their disruptive, enjoyable and creative endeavors – eradicate to a certain extent the unhealthy dullness that (sadly) impinges every day life's usual routines. By his token, the situationists' attitude vis-à-vis the drift (as a kind of *Moveable Feast*) can be linked to the Huizinga's stance regarding some traits of *Homo Ludens*, i.e., "The Playing Man"[8].

Actually, both Huizinga and Debord stress the role of play as an important ingredient of culture and society. In what drifting is concerned, the city may be looked at as the physical/emotional space in which play occurs, corresponding (metaphorically) to Huizinga's conceptual space denoted "Play Theory". Furthermore, Huizinga suggests that play is basic to the generation of culture (in fact, he argues, the play is an element of culture related to the cosmic order itself). This can be seen as a (broad) generalization of the situationists' attitude towards drifting, since a specific form of 'emotional culture' may emerge from the playful content of drifting, leading to some form of *fun*.

It is clear that all characteristics identified by Huizinga as quintessential for the meaning that he confers to the play concept have their parallel in Debord's emphasis on the enjoyable facet of drifting. Indeed, Huizinga argues that: (1) play is an expression of freedom; (2) play is not 'ordinary life', being distinct from it both as to locality and duration; (3) play creates order, but no profit can be gained from it. On the other hand, as previously outlined, drifting is unable to coexist with any form of 'duty' (1); drifting is deliberately detached from routine (2); drifting leads to some sort of an *useless* report, which is yet structured according to a certain design (opposed to the 'ancient' concept of chaos) that emerges from the 'new' form of deterministic chaos (3).

Moreover, Huizinga *created* an indissoluble bond between play and poetry. It is evident that the playful element of drifting is nothing more than poetry.

IV. TOWARDS A DISRUPTIVE SHARED CREATIVITY

The situationists' stance was markedly conceived as a gesture against the establishment. It may be seen as some sort of a minute germ of a number of more extensive campaigns that came into sight in contemporary times, challenging the current status quo.

But such campaigns hold obviously a broader genealogy in those brief (but passionate) explosive intervals that have now and then disrupted the 'normal' course of history.

There is a clear connection between creativity and those 'bizarre' events that have emerged occasionally as outliers in a well-behaved long term time series. As Hessel – a former fighter in French Resistance during World War II – puts it nowadays: "Créer, c'est résister, résister c'est créer" [9].

Throughout such events that occurred in the last couple of centuries, a disruptive collective creativity can be acknowledged, for instance, in some traits of the "enragés" attitude during the 1789 French Revolution, in the wave of contest that swept Europe in the Spring of 1848, in the Paris Commune of 1870, and, and, and,

... Travelling now in time towards the turn of the 20th century, the riots of Seattle against the World Trade Organization may be regarded as the most expressive milestone of a new era of transgressing collective creativity (see Fig. 3).



Fig. 3. The Battle of Seattle (1999)

In the Battle of Seattle, Huizinga's *Homo Ludens* has emerged as part of the *multitude*, a concept put forward by Hardt & Negri [10] to denote a 'new' massive (but hybrid) set of singular (but interdependent) individuals that has taken the place of the 'ancient' Marx's proletariat.

The collective intelligence of the multitude draws heavily on the information/communication technologies. To highlight this, Rheingold suggested a creative label – SMART MOBS [11] – to denote the skilled groups of people that – when facing the establishment's pressure – make a passionate use of WWW type devices for the end of linkage and sharing.

The cunning advantage – fuelled by creativity – that is extracted from current technological achievements provided by the ‘enemy’ is a salient trait of the talent put on display by the actors involved in contemporary dissent campaigns.

Conversely, it is noteworthy that corporations are increasingly making use – for their profit – of some elements of the ‘new’ forms of creativity (based on the logic of “following and negating” [12]), on which dissent campaigns rely. In fact it is a meaningful sign of this demarche that, in 2012, a leading school of business puts in the Harvard Business Review an advertising poster as the one reproduced in Fig. 4.

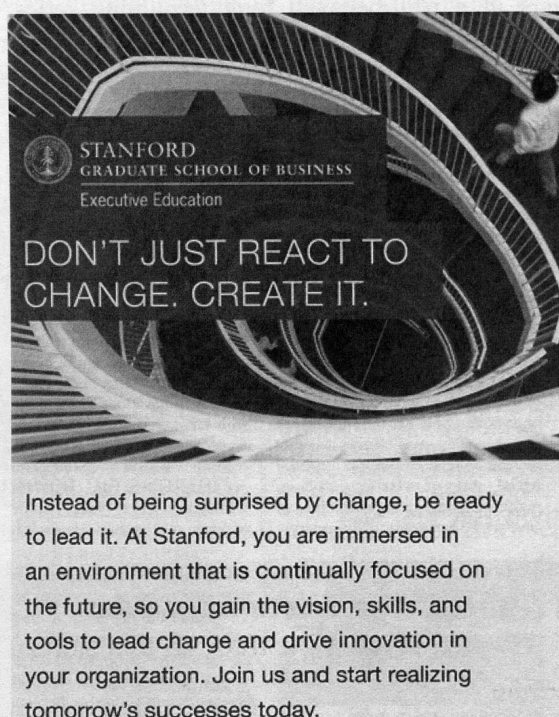


Fig. 4. Commercial advertising poster referring to creativity

Moreover, ‘new’ strategies for successfully *running a business* are drawing seriously on some facets of creativity that used to be a distinctive landmark of dissent campaigns [13].

V. CONCLUSIONS

This essay argues that ‘ancient’ types of creativity, allegedly based on some form of metaphysical inspiration, are being supplemented by ‘new’ improving features, facilitated by hybridism, play, and collective dissent.

It was demonstrated that textual hybridism is a significant vehicle for channeling individual creativity by recombining scientific with artistic endeavors. It was emphasized that the effort to relate insights from different disciplines is a relevant creativity feature, capturing the appeal of some form of productive cosmopolitanism.

This cosmopolitanism allows expanding individual into collective creativity, as it was illustrated by two assemblages at different scales, sharing a thriving call for recognition: the small group drifting experience of the situationists, where the playful content of the interaction with the urban environment is the most significant quality, and the global campaigns to break down the established views of the world, where the key characteristic is the ad hoc linkage of an increasingly large number of autonomous assemblages articulated bottom-up.

The point was made that the endeavor of the small scale situationist’s assemblages may be seen as a particular territorialization of Huizinga’s “Play Theory” where part-to-whole interpersonal relations maintain a physical bond. Regarding contemporary campaigns of dissent, it was demonstrated that their deterritorialized assemblages draw soundly on the digital revolution through their low-density, dispersed networks, able to empower their capacity of struggling for a (contingent) common goal.

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