

**A SORT OF DISAPPEAR**

**Of intuition and beauty**

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Of intuition and beauty

I titled my acceptance speech at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando with a DENODENTLY SEEKING BEAUTY, and I traced its general lines based on reason, to the scandal of some who understood, they told me, that artistic creation is more a matter of intuition. As if reason were at odds with intuition. And I can only agree with that apostille. And I would like with this reply to complete and qualify my speech of admission to the Academy.

In that speech I wrote about the breath of a gentle wind, SIBILUS AURAE TENUIS, taken from the Book of Kings to try to express that ineffable something that beauty brings us above reason. Because that sibilus aurae tenuis did not appear summoned by reason nor by all the reasons in the world. It appeared like Yahweh in Sacred Scripture, when the prophet Elijah least expected it, in an ineffable moment. And the fact is that beauty, beyond being the splendor of truth, splendor veritatis, or splendor ordinis or splendor formae, is something almost impossible to explain but easy to feel, ineffable but true, as was that sibilus aurae tenuis.

### BLAKE

To see a world in a grain of sand/ and a heaven in a wild flower/ hold infinity in the palm of your hand/ and eternity in an hour. [To see a world in a grain of sand/ and a heaven in a wild flower/ hold infinity in the palm of your hand/ and eternity in an hour].

This marvelous proposal that William Blake promises us in his well-known poem would be impossible to achieve with reason alone. With reason alone we would see nothing but sand, earth. Only when we apply our intuition, our imagination, our fantasy, on that grain of sand is when we discover there the whole world, and in each wild flower a paradise, and we are able to live eternity in an hour and hold in the palm of our hand the infinite. Once again, as poetry teaches us, the combination of reason and intuition is what makes it possible to achieve the much desired beauty.

It is so evident that the longed-for beauty is unattainable by reason alone that when I defend reason, thought, as the origin of beauty in its genesis, someone might think that I entrust the encounter with beauty to reason alone. Nothing could be further from my mind. That is why this poem by William Blake, which is the one I recite every year to my students at the beginning of the course, seems to me more than adequate to vindicate the need to dream in order to reach that beauty.

I defend the reason so reviled by some, because reason is forgotten, and especially in modern times, by many who call themselves creators, and especially by architects, who to set up their whims use as an alibi the feeling or intuition. And because it is very clear that the creative fact originates in the ideas that are born of thought. This is what I argued in my speech. Because reason generates the ideas that later intuition will make flourish, but it never sustains the occurrences or the whims that those supposed creators wield.

And so, if it occurs to an architect one day that his new building should be in the shape of a wave, he goes and designs and builds a building as if it were a wave. When I was a student, we were rightly branded as formalists if we were only guided by form.

All this comes from the fact that the defense I made and still make of reason as the cornerstone of creation, never means that I understand that creation can be the result of reason alone. How could I think that only with reason you can reach beauty? I would be crazy.

## GOYA, CERVANTES, GOETHE

"Fantasy united with reason is the mother of the arts and the origin of marvels", I argued from Goya's hand to qualify that "The dream of reason produces monsters" of the etching so many times already quoted and which I transcribed in that speech. How could I deny fantasy, the feeling in the creative act?

And in the same way with Cervantes. If in his precious prologue to Don Quixote he tells us that his book "is the son of understanding", of reason, I would translate, a few lines further down he declares:

The quiet, the peaceful place, the amenity of the fields, the serenity of the skies, the murmuring of the fountains, the stillness of the spirit, are great for the most sterile muses to show themselves fruitful and offer births to the world that fill it with wonder and contentment.

As if reason had vanished and the muses had appeared from the hand of Fray Luis de León.

And with regard to Goethe, on whom I relied to defend the primacy of reason, I must admit that I chose some words of his that were excessively partial. Today I bring here some precise considerations of Fernando Saucedo, a good Mexican philosopher, who vindicates the role with which, according to Goethe, feeling intervenes in the creative act:

Intellect should have intuition as a counterweight, Goethe said, fantasy, feeling and sensibility at the risk of becoming destructive of life. And what did Goethe teach? To put the totality of being in all acts, without ever dividing thought from feeling. Feeling and thinking spring from the same source, they are faces of the same function. To feel science and think art is a good way to think science and feel art.

I think this "to feel science and think art is a good way to think science and feel art", sums up Goethe's true spirit very well. And mine with him.

Juan Bordes rightly pointed out in his precious reply to my speech, that beauty in the highest degree, sublime beauty, is a giant step that can only be achieved with intuition.

How could I doubt that intuition is not an indispensable ingredient in the creative act?

How could I ignore the Dionysian aspect of artistic creation to remain only with the Apollonian?

How could I, returning to Vitruvius, give fulfillment only to *utilitas* and *firmitas* above reaching *venustas*? If I wrote that beauty as an end needs those two previous conditions, it was only to try, like Vitruvius, to reach that happy end of the *venustas*.

## THE SUSPENSION OF TIME: A SORT OF DISAPPEARANCE

I would like to bring here, to underline the defense of the unspeakable in the attainment of beauty, some examples from the cinema that I used some time ago to talk about the suspension of time when beauty appears. In the face of beauty we feel dumbfounded, we are left as if unarmed, unarmed. In front of beauty it seems to us that time stands still.

*American Beauty* is a film made by a novice Sam Mendes, and it is a masterpiece. At the heart of the film an unforgettable scene: Wes Benley and Thora Birch talk about love in the front of the car. Outside a simple white plastic bag brought in and carried through the air. And he says such things to her that they both cry and we cry with them, absorbed by the ability to put beauty with so little. There time disappears and our heart melts in five infinite minutes.

And even more intense in *Billy Eliot*. When almost at the end of the film and after the examination of the child seems unsuccessful, the last question of that member of the court who asks him "why do you dance? And "What do you feel when you dance? And the child's marvelous answer when, after declaring that he feels "electricity" and that he feels like a bird, he finishes with that "a sort of disappear" capable of expressing in so few words, "a sort of disappear", the intensity of beauty. How could Stephen Daldry summarize so precisely, with such a short speech, something as abstract as the suspension of time, something as concrete as the touch of beauty in artistic creation!

## LITERARY LYING IS NOT LYING

Juan Bordes, who made a beautiful speech in response to mine, made a fiery defense of intuition against reason alone, and argued very well by highlighting the value of lies as a strategy:

Likewise, I do not agree with Campo Baeza when he says tells us to pursue the truth, relying even on the words of great geniuses. I don't believe him either, because being a great creator, he must understand that he does not exist greater creative act than lying. The fabulator knows this well of stories and characters that have never existed, but have never that seem to the reader to be more real than life itself. Suffice it to a good storyteller such as Paul Sheerbart in his *Glasmarchitektur* (1914) to build in our minds the lie of a cathedral. and whose prismatic walls are made of glass, pierced by light, and whose prismatic walls

the colors of the spectrum. However, only with a "no" that denies its existence, it will collapse in our head the magnificent building that was being constructed its description.

It is by using lies that Campo Baeza knows how to deceive. to our perception and to make a space with a number of square meters, we feel it as the double.

And if Juan Bordes recommended this strategy of lying, I can only agree with Cervantes, who in the prologue quoted above, in the mouth of the friend who entered at the wrong time, recommends this lying with the pious lies of incontestable quotations. It is well understood that Don Quixote, like all literature, is all invention, all imagination, all a lie, but what a lie!

I still remember when to praise Cabrero and Sota, two masters of modern Spanish architecture, I lied and I invented a visit of Mies Van der Rohe to Madrid where, after contemplating the works of both Spanish architects, was unburdened in praise of them. And my enemies went on a tirade against me. But, like all good literature, what was more than credible turned out to be very effective in highlighting those undisputed masters.

Perhaps everything we are talking about is resolved in the phrase where Plotinus, speaking of beauty, tells us: "sensible beauty is a participation in intelligible beauty".

Or Stefan Zweig in that text we have already quoted:

The more we strive to delve into the mysteries of art and the spirit, the more we admire them for their immeasurability. I have no news of greater delight and satisfaction than to recognize that it is also given to man to create imperishable values, and that we remain eternally united to the eternal through our supreme effort on earth by means of art.

In short, it is about connecting with the transcendence that art grants us.

And when I quoted María Zambrano in her paradigmatic definition of "poetry as the word agreed with the number", I did not add that she speaks to us above all of "poetic reason as the reason that tries to penetrate into the depths of the soul to discover the sacred that reveals itself poetically" How could María Zambrano, and I with her, forget intuition, the heart, the shadow in order to value the light?

## FINALE

And finally Keats. The beautiful ending of the Ode to a Grecian Urn: "Beauty is truth, truth is beauty, that is all" that I have so often quoted and with which the introductory text was crowned, might seem to some excessively restrictive, by linking beauty to truth in this almost univocal way. I must admit that here, too, the quotation was erring on the side

of bias. Because in the same Ode to a Grecian Urn, Keats speaks to us with words that are of a very different nature: "sound then, my sweets, but not in the ear, but more seductive, play for the spirit, and hereafter all breathes superhuman passion that leaves the heart heavy and full, burning the forehead and the tongue parched".

These references to the most passionate aspects of artistic enjoyment are a clear way of the poet to bet also, as it could not be less, by the feeling and intuition and passion.

NB

This is the text that served as the basis for the Space for Reflection in the plenary session of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Fernando, which took place the week following my acceptance speech of November 30, 2014. Here I put forward arguments complementary to those of that speech. If there I emphasized reason as the main instrument of all creators, here I proposed intuition as a necessary complement to that reason.