

# MILENA CAPPABIANCA

STREAMFLOW

LA RICERCA ARTISTICA: PERCORSI TRANS-DISCIPLINARI / RAPPLAb6

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# STREAMFLOW

I chose this title to give an immediate picture and get instantly to the core of what it is. It's something that flows, that drifts away from a route to stay within the banks of consciousness.

I will begin with some historical references and we will gradually come to understand the human soul when we improvise.

## STREAMFLOW

The psychologist William James (1842-1910), brother of the renowned writer Henry James, was the first to understand that consciousness is a process rather than a state. He used the metaphor of the streaming brook himself, given the constant flow of psychic contents in which the role of the emotions is predominant.

Already at the end of the 19th century philosopher Victor Egger (1848-1909), Proust's teacher at the Sorbonne, had laid the groundwork on the investigation of what the inner monologue is.

The stream of consciousness, the key concept of improvisation, will then enter the field.

Such thoughts, that also involved theories by another philosopher, Henry Bergson, got to Sigmund Freud, who was beginning to test a new therapeutical approach: psychoanalysis.

## STREAMFLOW

The idea of an unconscious area, existing as past memory and remaining active in the adult psychism is something Freud and Bergson shared. Freud focused on the role of the dream and, after experimenting hypnosis with his patients, he switched to the method of free associations. We are in the early 1900s and this theme and the related strategies affected not only the psychoanalysis, but the entire artistic world.

I will start by showing you the meaning of free association, which has so much to do with improvisation. To deal with unconscious, a less structured language, made up of images and thoughts presenting themselves to the mind as freely as possible, can approach what intellectualism forbids. Freud advised against suppressing an idea as insignificant or absurd. This would prevent an over-systematized organization of thought and grant access to something surprising and new. Being able to do free association is not easy.

It is important to feel trust in the first place, to abandon ourselves fearlessly to our train of thoughts.

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Miles Davis used to say that improvising is going beyond what one knows, and to go beyond we must trust the inner journey we are about to take.

The parallelism I made between such different fields such as psychoanalysis and music allow us to sense the shared human need for discovery. Just think about theatre, music, dance, painting, literature.

Getting out of our comfort zone triggers knowledge. Even in the management field which is an arid world, a methodology has been found that has to do with improvisation. It is a way to find new solutions. The so-called "brainstorming" consists of holding a meeting in which each participant proposes solutions of all kinds without any censorship. The possibility to explore emerges, silencing inner judgments, without worrying about the outcome. Silencing judgment. This is a fundamental condition for being able to improvise. We express ourselves by reversing the course: from our inside out. Life itself, thinking about it, is improvising. Knowing how to sometimes make decisions without planning.

## STREAMFLOW

I must say that in our contemporary times planning is now an integral part of our lives, meaning that control dominates in everything we do. We sometimes find ourselves unprepared to what we had not foreseen. Virtuality helps but sometimes predisposes poor freedom of choice. In fact, panic attacks have increased, apparently for no reason, but they have to do with inability to cope with the unexpected. Let's think about the abuse of cell phones that we all do. We can learn a lot in a short time, and it is very useful. We can contact who we want without waiting.

Artistic improvisation must be looked at in its noble sense. It is not something reductive. To be able to improvise, our toolbox must be well stocked. Only deep knowledge, in our artistic field, anticipates the vital process that improvisation can give. I must say that in our contemporary times planning is now an integral part of our lives, meaning that control dominates in everything we do. We sometimes find ourselves unprepared to what we had not foreseen. Virtuality helps but sometimes predisposes poor freedom of choice. In fact, panic attacks have increased, apparently for no reason, but they have to do with inability to cope with the unexpected.

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Let's go back to that cultural excitement of the early 1900s.

I refer to literature, which also has within it definite rules, as does music. James Joyce had approached the world of psychoanalysis and transferred, finding another way of narration, his inner world. He started from some reflections that occupied his soul. While writing *The Dubliners* he had talked about "paralysis".

By this word he meant a self-deprivation, induced by the society he lived in, full of fears, which prevented a fulfilling existence. In order to talk about this he would turn to the experiment of the stream of consciousness.

By freeing his writing, Joyce is able to be more in touch with what resonates within himself, namely the 'idea that society paralyzes, forbids the courage of choice. Joyce expresses his courage, he perfects the inner monologue that speaks as the language of the dream. Thoughts flow untied, without punctuation, and present, past, images, memories appear.

Something messy that makes us experience the protagonists' feelings without following the overly structured rules of our consciousness. Of course every form of art has its own way of communication. In the musical field, the stiffening of the form has hindered the flexibility and freedom of improvisation.

## STREAMFLOW

It is not up to me to tell what happened, but to relate this free and evocative power within the various artistic fields. Just a reminder that centuries ago, in the field of music, improvisation was totally contemplated. So it was in dramaturgy. In ancient Rome, mostly with Plauto, improvisation becomes protocol. A significant moment, in this direction, is also represented by Italian 'Commedia dell'Arte' and by American avant-garde in the Sixties. Improvisation travels through the centuries, with more or less enlightened moments. In any case, it belongs to human history.

Let us also think about painting, which we have not mentioned so far. In the postwar period, in the U.S, a movement called "action painting" rises, linked with abstract expressionism. "Action" because one entered the process of creation and improvisation acquires much more space.

In this way, the canvas became a process rather than a product. Painter Jackson Pollock used to pour paints and colors onto large canvases from above. This technique was called "dripping". The supports, down from the easel, were left resting on the floor, and Pollock, turning around, could feel himself as part of the painting, in producing the final result without having planned it in advance.

## STREAMFLOW

Paalen, in his essay Totem Art, expressed his appreciation for those “great anonymous Indian sculptors” with their “raw creative power and content of primary consciousness and the unconscious”.

For Paalen, it is crucial to cross that bridge between the conscious and the unconscious, regarding art and, on this matter, he will write in *Image*:

“The possible does not have to be Justified by the known. This is the insight that in the midst of all

our troubles give us the certitude that someday the bridge between art and life will be built.

Other men will cross over. And on the other side it will no longer be phantoms that meet them.

The mountain of glass, whose reverberations sometimes blinded us, which too often reflected

only our own faces, will open for them and return intact the treasure of their childhood”.

## STREAMFLOW

The "mountain of glass" mentioned by Paalen is a kind of response to German expressionism, since crystal had become a symbol of their art. It is as if Paalen is saying: let us go further, inside one's subconscious.

In everything we have described so far two forces converge: on the one hand the strictness of knowledge, on the other the chaos of unpredictability. Nietzsche, in his work *The Birth of Tragedy*, compares these two forces that refer back to the myths of Apollo and Dionysus.

The Apollonian can be defined as the ability to grasp reality through the rational component of the individual, conversely the Dionysian is dominated by the vital impulse and inebriation. Apollo was closer to architecture and sculpture, while Dionysus was closer to the music that accompanied his rituals. Different forms of art have made one or the other element prevail, although the pinnacle of expressiveness was achieved by the Greek Tragedy, given the coexistence of the two Gods. Dance, singing and music (Dionysian aspects) blended with Apollonian acting and myth. According to Nietzsche, in Western history, the death of tragedy happens because of the claim (Socrates) to limit existence by imposing the primacy of reason.

# STREAMFLOW

We are now getting closer to the end of my contribution.

We have been moving in circles, through the world of the arts and calling in psychoanalysis, around a dichotomy that I would trivially call "reason and passion", to say how knowing to deal with the flow of the unpredictable within us and making it artistically relevant is not so simple.

The rational, although artistic, world of Apollo still requires the overflowing creative madness of Dionysus.

I will now leave space to a brief experiment we will do at the end of this presentation. Having shown the deep reasons for improvisation and the dichotomy in our being in the world, I will now list everything that can help us achieve our goal that spontaneity and confidence that enable us to improvise.

## STREAMFLOW

The starting point is always the deep knowledge we deal with. One cannot improvise without a solid foundation:

1. Trust as first requirement.
2. Willingness to what is new.
3. Not worrying about mistakes.
4. Beginning no matter what, even with elements that seem trivial to us, so that we do not risk, so to speak, to freeze in front of a blank sheet of paper.
5. Remove judgment and the fear of having our reputation ruined.
6. Not planning in advance.
7. Follow the unexpected flow of emotions and images.

# STREAMFLOW

The big surprise will be the emergence of our own personal voice, the most internal one, hidden from ourselves.

Now let's prepare for a little experiment. I will tell you the world's shortest story.

These are words that convey a story but our imagination can make it expand. With the means at your disposal, try to improvise.

Take note of what flows spontaneously, do not apply any censorship. Proceed with the utmost freedom.

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Augusto Monterroso (1921-2003) is the author.

Here is the story:

"When he woke up, the dinosaur was still there".

Thank you for your attention.