

[論 文]

## The Art of Memory: Rethinking Baudelaire's Art Criticism

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### Introduction

The term “imagination” is invested with such poetic and philosophical significance in the texts of Romanticism that the task of giving a satisfactory explanation of its nature and workings is notoriously difficult. The concept of the imagination in Charles Baudelaire's art criticism is also no exception, partly because it is invoked in his many writings on art to different ends. Baudelaire (1821-1867), who continued to write on painting and sculpture throughout his life, never produced a systematic treatise on art. Most of his articles are occasional pieces, whether they are critical reviews of exhibitions or discussions of individual artists (Eugène Delacroix, Constantin Guys, some caricaturists), and his aesthetic ideas are closely connected with special events or figures of his time.

However, it seems possible to make a survey of Baudelaire's theory of art as a whole, and my object in this paper is to demonstrate that his doctrine of imagination, which occupies a central place in his art criticism, can be presented in systematic fashion. Here I will first try to present, in brief outline, Baudelaire's two aesthetic ideas linked to the theory of imagination (“Romanticism” and “supernaturalism”), and afterwards examine the principal aspects of the imagination emphasized in the *Salon de 1859*. Finally, I will shed light on the ideas of “genius” and “memory” in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*, which I think developed from the concept of “imagination”.

### 1. Baudelaire's “Romanticism” and “supernaturalism”: The evolution of his argument from the *Salon de 1846* to the *Exposition universelle* of 1855

In the second chapter of the *Salon de 1846*, which is the most controversial of his art-critical works, Baudelaire defines “Romanticism” as the most recent, the most modern expression of beauty. According to him, Romanticism lies not in the subject matter, not in realism or the depiction of local color as advocated by Victor Hugo(1), not even in the rejection of Greek and Roman subjects, since one can paint Romantic Greeks and Romans if one is truly Romantic oneself. Romanticism is another name for “modern art”, that is “intimacy, spirituality, color, aspiration towards the infinite”

[421]. Here no doubt Baudelaire is thinking of Delacroix's art of color, because Delacroix (1798-1863) is "up to the present the most worthy representative of romanticism" [422] (2), though not a painter of modern life. And of Delacroix's "intimacy", Baudelaire claims that Delacroix "starts out from the principle that a painting must above all reproduce the *intimate* thought of the artist, who dominates the model as the creator dominates his creation" [433].

Baudelaire's preference for Delacroix, whom his definition of romanticism places at the head of this movement, is also suggested in the fourth chapter. In this chapter on Delacroix, a hierarchy is established between three kinds of drawing: the exact, the physiognomic, and the imaginative. The first is dismissed as stupid. The second, associated with draftsmen like Dominique Ingres(3), is a "naturalistic but idealized" drawing; while the third, which is the "privilege of geniuses" and supreme artists such as Delacroix, can "neglect nature" and "represent another nature analogous to the spirit and to the temperament of the author" [434]. What Baudelaire means here is that Delacroix's imaginative drawing ("drawing of creation") ignores the external model and reflects his own temperament or "intimate thought".

It is in this light that Baudelaire praises Delacroix, who conceives of nature as a "vast dictionary" to be searchingly consulted. In reviewing Delacroix's paintings, Baudelaire quotes with approval Heinrich Heine, who wrote: "In artistic matters, I am a supernaturalist. I believe that the artist cannot find all his forms in nature, but that the most remarkable are revealed to him in his soul, like the innate symbology of innate ideas, and at the same instant" [432] (4). What Heine insists is that the artist should avoid the direct imitation of nature since nature can never supply all the types required for his art, and Baudelaire identifies Heine's Neoplatonic vision with Delacroix's method.

The importance Baudelaire attaches to the concept of "supernaturalism" is made more explicit in the late 1850's. In *Fusées XI*, Baudelaire defines supernaturalism as an atmosphere created through a combination of elements: "The supernatural comprises the general color and the accent, that is the intensity, sonority, limpidity, vibrancy, depth and reverberation in space and in time. There are moments of existence at which time and duration are more profound, and the sense of being is enormously quickened" (5). The qualities Baudelaire associates with supernaturalism can be produced in two ways: artificially by drugs; and by paintings like Delacroix's. In *Exposition universelle* Baudelaire explains that "the effect of opium upon the senses is to invest the whole of nature with a *supernatural* intensity of interest, which gives to every object a deeper, a more willful, a more despotic meaning" (6). He adds that everyone, without having recourse to opium, knows such especially vivid colors, and declares that Delacroix's paintings "seem to me to translate those fine days of the spirit" and "reveal the *supernaturalism*" [596] (7).

But Baudelaire, like Thomas De Quincy, denies the necessity of drugs as a means for achieving a new poetic world. In *Le Poème du hashisch* (1858), Baudelaire says that hashish provides the experience of an artificial paradise, which is the product of “a distortion of the senses” (8), and warns that the penalty for that experience is “enslavement of the will and the destruction not only of human autonomy and dignity but of creativity as well” (9). It is true drug experiences gave Baudelaire an essentially magical conception of representation, but the “supernaturalism” which he believes Delacroix’s art reveals is not a mere momentary utopia, but a poetic world, which can be produced by creative imagination.

## 2. The diverse aspects of “imagination” in the *Salon de 1859*

In the *Salon de 1859*, Baudelaire contrasts the realists, whom he prefers to call “positivists”, with what he calls “the imaginatives”. The realist seems to say: “I want to represent things as they are, or rather as they would be, supposing that I did not exist”. In other words, the universe without man. However, the imaginatives say, “I want to illuminate things with my mind, and to project their reflection upon other minds” [627]. Here we have reached a basic principle of Baudelaire’s art theory, his doctrine of imagination. How, in Baudelaire’s view, does the artist’s imagination conjure up a world that is nothing but human, while realism aims to depict a nonhuman world?

For Baudelaire imagination is by no means some loose faculty. On the contrary, it is a much higher function and “bears a distant relation to that sublime power by which the Creator projects, creates, and upholds his universe” [624] (10). The “constructive” imagination is both analysis and synthesis, while it can be sensibility. It is the faculty which activates all the others, and the noblest “queen of faculties” is essential for all creative work in the arts or in science. In painting it is imagination that teaches the moral meaning of color, outline and scent; what is more important, artistic imagination “decomposes all creation, and with the raw materials accumulated and disposed in accordance with rules whose origins one cannot find save in the furthest depths of the soul, it creates a world, it produces a sensation of newness” [621].

Here Baudelaire suggests that to create a work of art that is totally the product of the artist’s imagination is a supreme aim. Indeed the artist makes the most of his material from nature, but this does not compel us to accept the doctrine that art is an imitation of nature. In the fourth chapter, Baudelaire gives a fully elaborated version of Delacroix’s metaphor—which in 1846, he cited only in passing—of nature as a “dictionary” (11); besides, varying the metaphor, Baudelaire describes the process of the imaginative artist like Delacroix, who must be more than a mere copyist. Nature as a dictionary provides the words, their meaning and etymologies, but it is not “a *composition* in the poetic sense of the word” [624]. No one has ever thought

of his dictionary as a composition, because a painting can no more be an assemblage of diverse elements in the external world than a poem can be created by the arbitrary juxtaposition of words from a dictionary.

According to Baudelaire, the imaginative painters “search their dictionary for the elements which accord with their conception; still, give them quite a new physiognomy by assembling them with a certain art” [625]. In other words, the whole “visible universe” is no more than “a stock of images and signs” [627]. That imperfect universe must be digested, transformed and interpreted by the artist’s imagination. As for Delacroix, he accumulates and rearranges by the sensibility of imagination the elements which accord with his conception. And, giving order, unity and force, he creates a new world (“a composition in the poetic sense”), by the analytic and synthetic function of imagination.

It is in this light that we can understand Baudelaire’s forceful attack on indiscriminate realism of photography. He mocks his contemporaries who say, “I believe that art is and cannot be other than the exact reproduction of nature. Thus the industry that could give us a result identical with nature would be the absolute form of art”. They say to themselves, “Since photography gives us all the guarantees of exactitude that we could wish, then photography and art are the same thing” [617]. However, the real task of photography is to be the very humble servant of the sciences and of the arts, like printing and shorthand which have neither created nor supplanted literature. In giving voice to anti-realism, Baudelaire thinks that photography is not allowed to “encroach on the domain of the impalpable and the *imaginary*, on all that is of value because man puts his soul into it” [619] (12).

In addition, Baudelaire clarifies the “sensation of newness” produced by imagination. He claims that Delacroix paints “the soul in his beautiful time” (“fine days of the spirit”). It is a “dream” (13), and by this word Baudelaire means “the vision that comes from intense meditation” [637], analogous to the high moments of his own lyricism, and which he defines as “the infinite in the finite” [636] (14). These “romantic” and “supernatural” impressions that Delacroix’s paintings reveal are just regarded as the product of his fertile imagination, and in the 1860s Baudelaire develops this view of art in a more sophisticated manner.

### 3. The concepts of “genius” and “memory” in *Le Peintre de la vie moderne*

In *Le Peintre de la vie moderne* (1863), which is perhaps the most programmatic of his art-critical works, Baudelaire discovers in Guys (1802-1892), “the painter of modern life”, the characteristics of “genius”: the child’s freshness of sensation surviving in the powerful mental constitution of the adult. Baudelaire says that Guys can be regarded as “an eternal convalescent”, that is to say, a convalescent who, like the child, “enjoys to the highest degree the power to take a lively interest in all

things, even those which seem to be the most trivial" [690]. But Guys is not only the child who sees everything as new, but also the man who has "a genius for which no aspect of life has become stale" [691]. His genius is no other than "childhood recovered at will, childhood now endowed, in order to express itself, with the powers of manhood and with that analytic mind which enables him to order the sum of the materials which he has involuntarily accumulated" [690]. It is clear that this idea springs from the "imagination" which accumulates raw materials, and in Guys's solid nerves reason has taken a considerable place up, while most of the nerves of the child are occupied by sensibility.

The vital role this "genius" plays in Guys's works is mentioned in the chapter on his "mnemonic" art. Here Baudelaire asserts that Guys's memory is akin to "the delight with which a child absorbs form and color" [690], and that, like other great artists Baudelaire favors, Guys does all the drawings from memory, avoiding the photographic realism that delights in the innumerable trivia of circumstantial detail (15). His drawing is so rapid that it is as if perception, memory, and execution were not discrete and successive stages but immediate and inseparable elements of the creation of the work. It is similar to Delacroix's imaginative drawing, which can "neglect nature" and "represent another nature analogous to the temperament of the author".

Furthermore, it is at this point that we can see clearly why Baudelaire has a high opinion of Guys's art. Baudelaire claims that many of Guys's drawings have a peculiar sort of "barbarity", and extends its meaning beyond the fidelity to the original impression, to a vision which is "synthetic and abbreviative" [697]. The vision, like Camille Corot's drawing that is abbreviative and large [663], seizes immediately the structure, the physiognomy, and the principal characteristics of an object or of a scene, sometimes with an exaggeration useful for his memory. In Guys's works produced from the vision, things "revive on the paper, endowed with an enthusiastic life like the soul of the author", and become "natural and *more than natural*". This supernatural aspect, which results from his childlike and magical perception, can be compared to a phantasmagoria that "has been extracted from nature" [693-694]. The metaphor of the "supernatural" as a phantasmagoria (16), which is a name for a specific type of magic-lantern performance in the 1790s and early 1800s, reminds us of the "dream" Delacroix's imagination produces in the spectator.

### Conclusion

Baudelaire asserts that Guys's mnemonic art, which is inseparable from the workings of memory, appeals to the memory of the spectator. Thanks to Guys's abbreviated vision, the rapidity of the drawing and the "despotic" structure in his works, the imagination of the spectator is also activated; and the spectator becomes "the translator of a translation which is always clear and enchanting" [698]. A similar

idea is stated in the *Salon de 1846*. Baudelaire claims that Delacroix's painting, not only springs from his memory of the model recollected in order to be universalized and in a sense idealized, but also equally speaks to the memory of the spectator, because the effect on the spectator is "analogous to the methods of the artist" [433]. Here Delacroix's memory is not the one that exact imitation spoils. Considered from a philosophical point of view, it consists in "nothing but a very lively and easily-roused imagination" [470]. Adopting Baudelaire's idiom, we could say that Delacroix's art is also "mnemonics of beauty" [455]. For Baudelaire memory and imagination were indivisibly linked before he encountered Guys's drawings.

Of course, Guys's works are quite different in subject matter from Delacroix's great paintings. Many of Delacroix's works, with their heroic and noble subject matters, take us into the depths of our literary and historical past, but Guys's drawings of modern urban life are lacking in such a cultural dimension. However, Delacroix's creative imagination is virtually identical with Guys's true memory in artistic technique and above all effect on the spectator. It is because both of them are the artists who think that art must be an abstraction from reality and a sacrifice of detail to the ensemble, and who can create a kind of "pure art" (17), which is "an evocative magic, containing at once the object and the subject, the world external to the artist and the artist himself" [598].

### Notes

Abbreviation: *OC*. Charles Baudelaire, *Œuvres complètes*, texte établi, présenté et annoté par Claude Pichois, 2 vols., Gallimard, 1975-1976.

Page references in this paper are to volume ii. English translations are my own.

- (1) For the meaning of "local color", see Victor Hugo, *Cromwell*, Garnier-Flammarion, 1968, p.91. In the *Salon de 1846*, Baudelaire asserts that Hugo is less a creator and inventor than an accomplished craftsman, and accuses Hugo of creating his works according to a rigid aesthetic system founded on unrelieved symmetry [431]. See Rosemary Lloyd, *Baudelaire's Literary Criticism*, Cambridge University Press, 1981, pp.160-161.
- (2) However, Delacroix declares himself to be "a pure classicist". See George P. Mras, *Eugène Delacroix's Theory of Art*, Princeton University Press, 1966, p.5. With reference to further discussions, see Anne Larue, "Delacroix and his critics: the stakes and strategies", in *Art criticism and its institutions in nineteenth-century France*, edited by Michael R. Orwicz, Manchester University Press, 1994, pp.63-87.
- (3) For the evolution of Baudelaire's attitude towards Ingres, see J. A. Hiddleston, *Baudelaire and the Art of Memory*, Oxford University Press, 1999, pp.37-44.

- (4) Heine wrote his piece as a review of the Salon of 1831, and it was published in a French translation. See also Heinrich Heine, *Werke*, Bd.7, Akademie-Verlag, 1970, S.29.
- (5) *OC*, 1-658.
- (6) Here Baudelaire recalls a passage from Edgar Allan Poe's *A Tale of the Ragged Mountains* (1844), which he translates into French (1852) and quotes in *Le Poème du hachisch* [*OC*, 1-428]. As for Poe's Augustus Bedloe, who takes his daily dose of opium before his morning walk, the merest object or perception, the trembling of a leaf or the humming of a bee, is endowed with a heightened interest. See *The Complete Works of E. A. Poe*, volume v, edited by James A. Harrison, AMS Press, 1965, p.167.
- (7) For the relationship between "supernaturalism" and Baudelaire's philosophy of caricature, see Ainslie Armstrong McLees, *Baudelaire's "Argot Plastique"*, *Poetic Caricature and Modernism*, The University of Georgia Press, 1989, pp.126-128.
- (8) *OC*, 1-426.
- (9) M. H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism, Tradition and Revolution in Romantic Literature*, Norton, 1973, p.416. For a more comprehensive view of this subject, see David Carrier, *High Art, Charles Baudelaire and the Origins of Modernist Painting*, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996, pp.105-125.
- (10) Baudelaire quotes approvingly (and in the original English) from Catherine Crowe's *The Night Side of Nature* (1848). For a discussion of this quotation, see Richard Beilharz, "Fantaisie et Imagination chez Baudelaire, Catherine Crowe et leurs prédécesseurs allemands", in *Baudelaire, Actes du Colloque de Nice*, Minard, 1968, pp.31-40.
- (11) For a possible connection between Delacroix and Baudelaire, see Armand Moss, *Baudelaire et Delacroix*, Nizet, 1973, pp.73-82; and Anne Larue, *Romantisme et mélancolie, Le Journal de Delacroix*, Champion, 1998, pp.59-68.
- (12) For his brief discussion of photography, see Aaron Scharf, *Art and Photography*, Pelican Books, 1974, pp.144-146. For more recent discussion of this problem, see Richard Woodfield, "Photography and the Imagination", in *Filozofski vestnik*, XX (2/1999), pp.271-278.
- (13) In reinforcing his attack on the contemporary taste for realism and photography, Baudelaire warns that many painters become more and more inclined to paint not what they "dream", but what they see [619].
- (14) Baudelaire declares that imagination is "positively related to the infinite" [621].
- (15) J. Drucker states that Baudelaire's condemnation of photography called for "an imagery of memory, a making of images provided out of the recollection of experience, not in direct observation". See Johanna Drucker, *Theorizing Modernism, Visual art and the critical tradition*, Columbia University Press, 1994, p.13.

With reference to further discussions, see André Hirt, *Il faut être absolument lyrique, Une constellation de Baudelaire*, Kimé, 2000, pp.56-76.

- (16) The term “phantasmagoria” is used also in *Le Poème du hachisch* [OC, 1-419]. For the importance of this term in Baudelaire’s thought, see Max Milner, *La fantasmagorie, Essai sur l’optique fantastique*, PUF, 1982, pp.160-163.
- (17) In *L’Art philosophique* (1858-1860), this conception is sharply contrasted with the stance of “philosophic art”, which sets out to imitate literature and convey a historical, moral, or philosophical message [598].