Daimon, Djinn, Muse and Duende

Variations on a timeless experience

Kairos -- the opportune moment for self-referential re-identification

A qualitatively significant period of time, possibly experienced as timeless, was termed kairos by the Greeks in contrast to chronos as sequential quantitative time. Modern echoes are to be found in:

- injunctions and efforts to "make space for quality time",
- the challenge of seizing the moment (Carpe Diem),
- the importance attached to detecting auspicious moments (notably amongst those of eastern cultures) and associated auspicious symbols,
- the timeless moments celebrated by haiku poetry (cf Ensuring Strategic Resilience through Haiku Patterns, 2006),
- "taking courage" in a desperate crisis situation (an emergency, going "over the top"), possibly to be subsequently celebrated by a fourfold medal (such as the Victoria Cross or the Iron Cross),
- certain forms of suicide: self-immolation (notably as practiced by Buddhist monks), seppuku (in the Japanese tradition), and possibly kamikaze acts (by Japanese pilots) and suicide bombing (inspired by jihad),
- an overriding sense of fate or destiny,
- transformative moments of discovery, realization or conversion (satori, etc)
- the moment of duende as the transformative experience of flamenco.

Kairos may be described as an "irreducible singularity" -- an experiential singularity in contrast with, or by analogy to, a technological singularity. How the singularity of experience can be thought through the concept of a "technics of the self" is explored by Jean-Philippe Milet (Experience as Technique of the Self, Tekhnema 2: Technics and Finitude, Spring 1995). It could be understood as a cycle of periodicity zero -- perhaps as implied by the final image in the series of 10 Zen ox-herding pictures.

It is perhaps no coincidence that this transformative moment is echoed in the spirit of flamenco -- as described in a review by Stephanie Merritt of Jason Webster's Duende: A Journey in Search of Flamenco (2002)

As famously described by the Spanish poet, Federico Garcia Lorca (Play and Theory of the Duende, 1933):

These dark sounds are the mystery, the roots thrusting into the fertile loam known to all of us, ignored by all of us, but from which we get what is real in art. . . . Thus duende is a power and not a behavior, it is a struggle and not a concept. I have heard an old master guitarist say: Duende is not in the throat; duende surges up from the soles of the feet. Which means it is not a matter of ability, but of real live form; of blood; of ancient culture; of creative action.

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In an account of the Greek deities of time, Amanda Núñez (Los pliegues del tiempo: Kronos, Aión y Kairós), notes with respect to Kairos: Esta tercera divinidad es menor (en el mejor de los sentidos de la palabra). No es un gran dios de lo eterno, sino un dioseccillo, un duende, un daimón o demonio, que llamáran los griegos. As notably adopted by Andalusian gypsies, the account of duende by Joseph Rouzel (L'éthique dans les pratiques sociales, 2004) relates it to an ibernian adaptation of the djinn of Arab culture, itself related to the daimon of Mediterranean cultures -- to which Socrates famously accorded attention at his death.

For the Greeks of Plato's time, the "gods" were understood to be archetypal or imaginal figures accessed through the arts, dreams, oracles and other forms of active imagination. It was considered that their invocation called on imaginal personifications with autonomous...
Duende or tener duende ("to have duende") is a Spanish term for a heightened state of emotion, expression and authenticity, often connected with flamenco. The term derives from the duende, an elf or goblin-like creature in Spanish and Latin American folklore. El duende is the spirit of evocation. It comes from inside as a physical/emotional response to art. It is what gives you chills, makes you smile or cry as a bodily reaction to an artistic performance that is particularly expressive. Folk music in Variations on a timeless experience. - / - Extract from Emergence of Cyclical Psycho-social Identity Sustainability as "psycically" defined (2007). Kairos -- the opportune moment for self-referential re-identification. Duende' is one of those words that is almost impossible to translate into English, because its meaning relies on a wide frame of reference that even many Spaniards would have difficulty explaining, so intimately is it rooted in Andalusian culture, particularly the music and lifestyle of flamenco. Perhaps the closest rendering would be 'spirit', but duende is far more than this -- it is the essence of flamenco, a moment of transcendence, almost possession, that is produced as the singer, dancer and guitarist merge into each other's rhythm.