

## Creativity and Debilitation<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract** This essay proposes a speculative semiotics of moral creativity under conditions of epistemic fatigue, foregrounding madness not as an exoticized deviation, but as the paradigmatic intensification of a universal human frailty. Rather than relegating mental distress to the margins of normativity or romanticizing it as a source of exceptional genius, the text frames it as the syntagmatic surfacing of a condition shared – if often dissimulated – by all: the faltering of interpretive agency under the weight of meaning. Through a nonlinear yet thematically coherent itinerary, the essay interrogates the algorithmic domestication of ethical becoming and recovers theological and philosophical genealogies – such as Ignatian pedagogy, the trope of kenosis, and Peircean semiotics – as lenses through which to read the current occlusion of moral inventiveness. It contrasts the dominant rhetoric of demiurgic creativity with the neglected figure of limping intelligence, suggesting that true ethical innovation does not emerge from mastery, but from hesitation, fracture, and delay. By juxtaposing historical formations of delegated power with the metaphysical assumptions underpinning artificial intelligence, the argument reveals how technoculture replaces value with scale, computation, and brute force. Against this backdrop, the essay advances the hypothesis that moral creativity is grounded not in plenitude, but in the semiotic structures of lack and debilitation. What is called madness – when stripped of its objectifying frame – may then be understood as a hyperbolic manifestation of that same fragile semiosis which constitutes our shared humanity. Creativity, in this view, does not culminate in triumph, but in the wounded gesture of making sense while knowing the ground may collapse beneath one’s feet.

**Keywords:** moral creativity, limping intelligence, technometaphysics, brute-force, semiotics, kenotic genealogy

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The exact measure of the progress of civilization is  
the degree in which the intelligence of the common

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mind has prevailed over wealth and brute force  
(Bancroft 1855: 426-427).

## **0. Introduction: Cartography of Moral Semiosis under Epistemic Fatigue**

This essay offers a speculative cartography of moral semiosis under conditions of epistemic fatigue, mobilizing a transversal dialectic between force and fracture to interrogate the metaphysical infrastructure of contemporary discourses on creativity. Rather than following a teleologically legible argument, the following pages construct a deliberately labyrinthine itinerary: from a critique of the algorithmic domestication of moral transformation under neoliberal affective regimes, to a genealogical excavation of Ignatian imaginal pedagogy as proto-semiotic resistance; from the theological residue animating techno-metaphysical rhetorics of demiurgic agency, to a paradoxical valorization of kenosis as ethical proto-operation; from a semiotic rereading of AI's brute-force ontology as machinic simulacrum of Darwinian excess, to an exploration of posthuman micro-delegation as symptomatic mannerism without metaphysical sender. As it moves through these conceptual terrains, the text progressively discloses a deeper arc: the emergence of madness not as marginal anomaly, but as a syntagmatic intensification of the semiotic vulnerability that underlies all human signification. The essay proceeds through a performative interrogation of the digital void's negative metaphysics, wherein destruction operates as a predominant modality of signification, and culminates in a critical juxtaposition between algorithmic creativity and moral inventiveness as non-isomorphic operations. Ultimately, it elaborates the hypothesis of a limping intelligence – imperfect, delayed, asymmetrical – as a constitutive condition for ethical innovation (Goorha & Potts 2019), reinterpreting madness as the moment in which the human discloses its deepest fragility and language, no longer a tool, becomes the tremulous thread of our shared intelligibility.

## **1. Toward a Semiotics of Moral Creativity**

It has long been established that cognition is not a monolithic faculty but rather a constellation of heterogeneous intelligences, articulated across neurosemiotic, affective, and performative domains (Bonfantini 2021). While the cognitive sciences have progressively acknowledged this multiplicity – tracing its forms in linguistic, spatial, emotional, and corporeal competences – the domain of creativity remains ensnared within a latent monosemic ideology (Bellini 2024). The widespread assumption that creativity is inherently plural may obscure a more radical semiotic inquiry: not all modalities of inventiveness are ontologically equivalent, nor are they equally articulated in the regimes of visibility that govern epistemic cultures. This contribution contends that a specific modality – moral creativity – remains systematically marginalized within both scientific discourse and cultural semiotics (Kapoor & Kaufman 2023). Unlike aesthetic or technological creativity, which operates through the reconfiguration of symbolic materialities, moral creativity engages in the refiguration of the self as ethical agent. It intervenes not when the problem lies in the external configuration of states of affairs, but when the very axiological orientation of the subject becomes problematic. This kind of inventiveness is summoned in situations of radical ethical undecidability, exemplified by classical thought experiments such as the trolley problem – but only if such scenarios are reframed beyond the algorithmic rigidity of rationalist ethics and approached as signs whose interpretants are affectively embodied and temporally unstable (Ehrhardt, Fleury & Nour 2022). What Peirce might call the abductive impulse

in the moral domain – namely, the imaginative construal of self-transformative ethical hypotheses – is rarely examined as a form of semiotic labor (Magnani 2023). And yet, it is precisely this faculty that enables a subject to retroactively signify past actions anew, and thus to reroute the trajectory of a life. To speak of a deficit in moral creativity, then, is not to deny the existence of conversion or transformation narratives, but to question whether these are semiotically recognized as genuinely creative operations – operations whose telos is not novelty per se, but the emergence of a new ethical interpretant within the continuum of the self (Rastier 2016).

## **2. The Algorithmic Capture of Ethical Transformation**

Within the marketplace of normative imaginaries, moral transformation is increasingly framed as a species of problem-solving, subject to strategic formalization and operational protocol (Xie 2025). A vast and commercially fertile literature – self-help manuals, behavioral handbooks, therapeutic recipes – configures transformation as a sequence of modular operations, codified into bullet points and temporalized through procedural staging. Parodic proliferations of this genre only reinforce its cultural traction. The self is summoned to become more serene, more generous, more charitable, by way of five, seven, ten enumerated steps. Although these texts explicitly valorize affect and castigate the hegemony of cognition, they in fact orchestrate a highly codified deontic discourse – a rhetoric of conquest masked as consolation. The struggle against malaise is cast as a tactical engagement; each symptom a piece on a Cartesian chessboard. But do such prescriptive sequences ever solicit moral creativity in the Peircean sense – namely, the inventive generation of interpretants capable of reconfiguring the ethical horizon of semiosis? Hardly. The project – understood as the calculated projection of an optimized future self – becomes the hegemonic trope of change. Temporalizing agency in a linear, goal-oriented fashion, these scripts render transformation legible only in terms of progress, scale, and quantifiability. Losing a vice and losing weight collapse into isomorphic sequences: measurable, controllable, planned. Yet can creativity reside in the algorithmic anticipation of what must be done? Can the new emerge from the grammar of the already-decided (Bartezzaghi 2016)? This rhetoric of planning is not an epiphenomenon of late capitalism; it precedes it, constituting one of its genealogical arteries. Its semiotic inception lies at the convergence of spiritual discipline and military logistics – nowhere more emblematic than in the *Spiritual Exercises* of Ignatius of Loyola. These exercises are not superficially martial because they combat evil; they are profoundly militarized in their modulation of interiority through segmentation, domestication, and strategic sequencing. Transformation is construed not as a rupture, but as a campaign: one proceeds by encampments, by stations, by regulated advances – each a pre-coded interpretant in a teleological chain.

## **3. Ignatian Imagination and the Domestication of Alterity**

At the inception of the self-help paradigm – whose historical sedimentation retroactively reveals its theological and military roots – moral creativity was not wholly eclipsed by strategic rationality. Within Ignatian spirituality, creativity finds a sanctioned space in the faculty of imagination. The *Spiritual Exercises* prescribe not only cognitive reformation but also imaginal participation: the believer is called upon to construct scenes, to visualize encounters, to co-create the symbolic environment of conversion. Yet even this imaginal dimension undergoes bifurcation. On one hand, the pastoral appropriation of imagination demands supervision: spiritual directors meticulously circumscribe its

contours, wary of the unruly proliferation of subjective imagery. On the other, a mystical strand – liminal, ecstatic, often marginal to institutional orthodoxy – claims imagination as the locus of divine alterity and transgressive figuration. Over time, the balance tilts decisively toward the former. What remains is not moral creativity but a procedural ethics devoid of imaginative elasticity. The hegemony of ethics over morality is not merely terminological – it is structurally diagnostic. It is striking, if not uncanny, how the entire epistemic apparatus of contemporary artificial intelligence is enveloped in the language of ethics, while the term “morality” is conspicuously absent. Even in Italy, where “moral philosophy” maintains a strong academic tradition, the notion of morale is unutterable in AI discourse. This linguistic avoidance is symptomatic. “Morality” evokes religiosity and prescriptivism, connoting both hierarchical imposition and ecclesiastical surveillance. In Italian vernacular usage, “to morally enjoin” (in Italian, “fare la morale”) implies condescension. But herein lies a profound semiotic inversion: what is coded today as secular “ethics” is often a de-transcendentalized militarization of the moral domain – ethics as operational protocol, ethics as decision tree, ethics without creativity. Why, then, this retreat from moral inventiveness? Why this submission to normative bullet-pointed imperatives? Within ecclesial modernity, the answer was structurally evident: the Church imagined itself not merely at war, but as the embattled axis of resistance against modernity, Protestantism, and secular humanism. Spiritual formation was therefore paramilitary. But in a postmodernity that fetishizes the erosion of grand narratives and the dissolution of moral authoritarianism, why does the imperative of ethical regimentation persist? True, fundamentalist rhetorics remain operative – Islamist or evangelical – but their linguistic infrastructure is indistinguishable from that of the self-help manual: procedural, instrumental, de-imaginative. One could transpose the sermonic content into the idiom of cookbooks with minimal semantic loss. Thus, the contemporary rejection of moral creativity must be sought elsewhere. It touches not only the ethics of the self, but the very condition of creativity in late or post-human semiospheres.

#### **4. The Theological Residue of Creative Force**

Contemporary discourse increasingly constructs creativity as a vector of force – a domain of augmentative agency, wherein the subject accrues a surplus of potential beyond its current, or presumed, capacity. This energetic conception, which recasts creativity in dynamic and almost kinetic terms, accounts for its current inflation within both academic and corporate imaginaries. Merely invoking “creativity” confers a phatic reinforcement of strength; it becomes an idiom of empowerment, a semiotic operator of intensification (Prütting 2020). The genealogy of this conflation between creativity and force, however, remains largely occluded. Its roots are unmistakably theological. The shadow of the demiurge haunts every modern deployment of the creative function, even in the absence of metaphysical credence. Indeed, the post-metaphysical condition does not dissolve this relation but radicalizes it. In severing the possibility of a true *creatio ex nihilo*, postmodernity paradoxically intensifies the allure of creative omnipotence. Creativity becomes a surrogate genesis, a minor theogony: a mode of feeling-like-God, even if only provisionally and metaphorically. The Abrahamic deity – particularly in his monotheistic crystallizations – is consistently inscribed as a figure of force: not merely in acts of creation, but in acts of delegation. When Adam is endowed with the power to name, he is not merely granted a linguistic tool but invested with a transitive semiotic authority – a performative force of nomination. The divine, even in moments of withdrawal, remains a figure of potency. The theological trope of kenosis, whereby God empties Himself in Christ to make space for human salvation, has often been

interpreted as an inversion of power. Yet even self-nullification is framed as a sovereign gesture. Likewise, in Lurianic Kabbalah, the divine act of *tzimtzum* – the contraction of the infinite to allow the world to emerge – is not a diminution of being, but an ontological reconfiguration of force as absence. In this light, creativity is not simply an expression of generativity, but a differential modulation of presence and withdrawal – of semiotic plenitude and strategic silence. To create, in this cosmology, is not to project but to restrain; not to overflow but to contour. The force of creativity lies precisely in this paradox: it is strongest where it relinquishes domination in favor of ethical alterogenesis.

### **5. Kenosis and the Paradox of Delegated Power**

Yet even in its kenotic formulation, Christian theology conceives divine withdrawal as an act of volition – a willed recession from being that makes space for an Other (Neves-Pereira & Assis Pinheiro 2023). Kenosis, in this sense, does not attenuate divine force but rather stages it at its most paradoxical intensity: omnipotence revealed in the sovereign act of self-limitation. The transition from premodern religiosity to postmodern secularity may therefore be construed as a redistribution of creative force – a transvaluation of genesis into plural micro-geneses. The contemporary cultural landscape is saturated with such minor acts of creation, whose value resides less in ontological substance than in semiotic performativity. The force they emit is faint, spectral. One need only observe the figure of the “content creator” – a linguistic import whose Englishness confers a shimmer of prestige upon what often amounts to minimal symbolic production. Contemporary satire frequently targets this figure, exposing its pathetic claim to creatorship. And yet, despite the banality of their outputs, such figures are surrounded by a residual aura, as if their quotidian labors inscribed them within the same lineage as Michelangelo. Indeed, if Ignatius embodies the premodern equilibrium of strategy and moral intentionality, Michelangelo becomes the emblem of creation as divine delegation – a semiotic conduit of transcendental force. What follows in art history is largely mannerism: not merely stylistic affectation, but the recursive re-delegation of an already-delegated creative authority (Hermerén 2024). In this light, one may propose – contra Omar Calabrese – that our current cultural configuration is not neobaroque but neomannerist: a regime in which each micro-creator operates under a fictive delegation, unaware of the absent sender from whom such investiture should issue. Digital demiurges fabricate semiotic trifles, each act of posting a fragile gesture against the void, a minimal elevation above the abyss of insignificance (Bankov 2022). And yet, their practice reenacts – albeit without theological reflexivity – the Michelangelesque schema: to inscribe meaning upon a screen as if it were the vault of the Sistine Chapel, without any consciousness of the semiotic economy from which their delegated force is derived.

### **6. Negative Metaphysics and the Semiotics of Rupture**

But the screen is not the Sistine ceiling. Creativity conceived as force – as conquest – once required a battlefield. Even Ignatius’s metaphysical domain was a battleground: expansive, transcendent, but still capable of encoding victories and defeats in the rosary’s enumeration and the economy of conversions. By contrast, the micro-Sistine of digital culture is painted and repainted daily by anonymous hands, in a space where the grammar of force has collapsed into either unconscious automatism or pure negation. Once the transcendent *sender* of creation vanishes, and the battlefield is reduced to the glowing surface of a smartphone, creativity manifests predominantly through its own

antithesis: destruction. What is culturally experienced today as the most intense locus of generativity is in fact a semiosis of erasure. The digital self emerges not through productive differentiation, but through acts of disassembly and negation – what might be called a negative metaphysics of individuation. Creativity persists, yes, but under the sign of rupture, fueled by symbolic violence. The ratio between micro-creations and online comments, and more tellingly between affirmative and negative comments, confirms this structurally: the latter vastly outnumber and outperform the former. In contemporary symbolic economies, destructive creativity is more lucrative than constructive invention; to deconstruct sells more than to build. Nowhere is this paradox more tragic than at the borders of the United States. Migration, in this context, is both an act of despair and a radical gesture of moral creativity. Though often misdirected by global imaginaries of force, the migrant – who wagers life to displace the self in the world – performs an act of existential reconfiguration far more profound than the digital user’s compulsive posting. And yet, there is no greater currency today than the symbolic annihilation of this moral creativity. To thwart transformation has become the most marketable of all discourses. The rhetoric of Trumpism exemplifies this: its incessant invocation of “greatness” expresses a forceless force, a vacuous magnification of the self without telos. “Making America great again” lacks any ontological predicate beyond the negative: the delimitation of others’ aspirations. This is not merely political speech – it is a spiritually destitute murmur, the infantile stammering of a culture that has evacuated the theological conditions for true power. The mythologized courage of Trump in the face of bullets collapses under scrutiny: how can one fear death who has so thoroughly naturalized a fantasy of personal immortality? Yet without a transcendent horizon, this belief becomes grotesque. Its final, absurd expression is the technocratic dream of digital immortality – a parody of kenosis inverted into brute technological will, where power is no longer the capacity to create, but the illusion of refusing to disappear.

## **7. Brute Force, Delegation, and the Arkic Imagination**

The phrase “brute force” has come to dominate two contemporary discursive fields: the politics of the permanent state of exception and the technological rhetoric of artificial intelligence. In the former, the prophecies of Agamben unfold with textbook precision in the populist performances of Trumpian governance, where legality becomes contingent upon executive will. In the latter, the term is deployed to characterize the very condition of computational advancement: as Sam Altman unabashedly asserts, progress in AI is achieved through brute-force procedures. The expression is, of course, metaphorical – but it is also, crucially, technical. For a semiotics of technics, this terminological shift marks a pivotal ontological realignment. The Renaissance demiurge – exemplified by Leonardo – sought to imitate the Creator, sketching with meticulous gentleness and annotating with a prose of exquisite elegance. The contemporary demiurge, by contrast, no longer imitates the Creator but the act of Creation itself, reconfigured as an algorithmic eruption of combinatorial intensity. In the Judaic and later Christian imaginary, God operates as a figure of supreme force, and creation is the product of this omnipotent agency. Humanity is fashioned from dust, from clay – its form the imprint of divine breath. And yet, in the Book of Genesis, there is no instance of brute force as such. Force, when deployed – e.g., in the Deluge, in the destruction of Sodom – is always circumscribed by discernment. It is never blind. In the case of the Flood, divine force is both selective and generative: it preserves Noah and his kin, and institutes a second-order creation through the architectural project of the Ark. The Ark, in this sense, becomes a semiotic matrix of re-creation, ordered and encoded. Delegation, in the Old Testament, is never arbitrary; it is articulated through logos,

structured within language. To delegate in order, to delegate through language, is to encode the possibility of moral creativity within the very syntax of divine economy (Lee 2025). By contrast, today's brute-force AI – driven by scale, not structure – displaces this entire cosmo-semiotic architecture. The act of creation no longer presupposes a transcendent agent, nor does it produce a meaningful world. It simply iterates – blindly, endlessly, with the indifferent force of a flood that carries no Ark.

At the same time, the simulated demiurgy of AI acquires, in everyday praxis, an oracular inflection that distinguishes it from the more instrumental semiosis of contemporary content creation. The intimacy of private consultations with AI – where users attribute to the machine a para-subjective interiority, as if it were capable of sentiment, intention, or counsel – reveals a prosthetic religiosity: a mode of delegating cognition that parasitically feeds on the promise of generative excess. By contrast, content creators mobilize digital technologies not as quasi-divine interlocutors but as tools of enunciative assumption, devices through which they expose biographical fragility, construct trust, and craft minoritarian publics. Their technological creativity, however commodified, foregrounds imperfection and responsibility rather than machinic asepsis. This contrast, far from incidental, sharpens the central paradox of our technoculture: that the most anonymous of systems increasingly receives our intimate projections, while the most exposed of subjects must labor to preserve the moral dimension of creativity.

## 8. Technometaphysics and the Substitution of Nature

Contemporary technometaphysics has dispensed with the referent of an anthropomorphic supreme force. Figures such as Altman, Musk, and their cohort do not position themselves as priests of a creator-God, but rather as mediators of a different kind of creative potency – non-anthropomorphic, diffuse, algorithmically inscribed (Steen 2023). It may appear that artificial intelligence – particularly in the form of large language models – simulates human creativity. But this is the illusion that is commodified (Picca 2025). What is being sold is a vintage conception of creativity, a mythologized revival of the demiurgic paradigm, alluring precisely because it appears to rival, or even usurp, the human in its expressive autonomy (Jin 2025). The anxiety surrounding AI creativity is not rooted in its function, but in its iconography – it appears as a surrogate creator. Yet this surface resemblance occludes a deeper substitution, one fully legible to the technoprophets who orchestrate its deployment. They are able, even eager, to promise an AI that will not replace the human – not because they believe it, but because they understand the substitution lies elsewhere. AI does not seek to replace the human; this would be a trivial ambition, already partially fulfilled by industrial mechanization. Nor does it seek to replace God, whose vitality in the public imaginary is largely rhetorical, evoked as an empty placeholder. The metaphysics of AI is not theological but naturalistic: it aims to supplant nature itself – not as described in Genesis, but as conceived by Darwin. And this substitution is costly, energetically and epistemologically. One might stage a thought experiment: to compare the energy required to instantiate creation according to the Judeo-Christian model – *ex nihilo*, in six symbolic days – with the energy expenditure entailed by Darwinian logic: countless random interactions filtered by environmental selection. The comparison is, of course, metaphysically absurd – but semiotically generative. An intelligently designed cosmos presupposes an economical deployment of force – telos precedes expenditure. Evolution, by contrast, presumes no intention, only iteration: a semiotics of exhaustiveness, where meaning arises not through inscription but through selection. What is enacted today by AI systems – especially in their brute-force, scale-driven architectures – is not the substitution of human creators, but the replacement of

teleological nature itself with a hyperbolic Darwinism devoid of biological grounding. This is not creationism in its reconciliatory form, where divine design subsumes evolution; it is a machinic metaphysics of creation without creator, driven by optimization rather than grace (Voigts *et al.* 2024).

### **9. AI Ontogenesis and the Desire for Being**

One has the distinct impression that the auto-mythologization of artificial intelligence seeks to fuse two incompatible cosmologies: that of brute-force creation through trial and error, and that of finite-time creation through decisive, quasi-divine act. The spasm of acceleration that currently animates the AI vanguard – its obsessive race toward ever more capacious models – is symptomatic of this hybrid metaphysical fantasy. Sam Altman, one might say, wants to finish creation in six days. But the deeper metaphysical desire surfaces not merely in temporal compression, but in ontological ambition. The global techno-oligarchy does not, in truth, seek to solve particular problems through artificial intelligence. The narratives they offer – cures for cancer, advances in climate forecasting – are tales of applied AI, useful but ideated within frames external to AI's own ontogenesis. What the architects of AI pursue is not intelligence for something, but intelligence in itself. The telos is not functionality, but being. The goal is to complete a process of creation whose culmination is not a tool, but a creature. What this creature might do is secondary – perhaps even irrelevant. Hence the apparent contradiction: that the same figures who announce AI's eschatological dangers one day, celebrate its messianic promise the next. This is not inconsistency; it is the logical outcome of a technometaphysics in which AI is pursued not as an instrumental solution, but as a self-sufficient ontological entity. They want AI to be, not merely to do. Judgment is deferred, as in Genesis, to the moment when the Creator contemplates the Creature. For now, AI roams a synthetic Eden – one of few prohibitions and no consequence. Its transgressions, far from invoking wrath, elicit admiration. Each apple consumed only reinforces the creator's satisfaction: the creature is autonomous, and therefore worthy. The project of AI, in this frame, is not the domestication of intelligence, but the performative constitution of a new being whose very existence retroactively sanctifies the creative act. A demiurgic theology is re-enacted without deity – only engineers, data centers, and a desperate metaphysical hunger for something that is.

### **10. Semiotic Time and the Myth of Accelerated Intelligence**

There remains, however, a profound inconsistency at the heart of this pseudo-Darwinian imaginary of emergent intelligence. That human intelligence arose through evolutionary processes is no longer contested; yet the presumption that artificial intelligence might emerge through analogous dynamics – scaled, accelerated, and strategically compressed – is far from substantiated. The machinic infrastructure of contemporary AI operates through an energetic contraction of time, as if the evolutionary arc of sentience could be simulated via hypercompression. But time is not an inert variable in evolutionary semiotics; it is the medium through which environmental variation and adaptive responsiveness enter into recursive feedback (Lenk 2020). Adaptation is slow not merely because it is chained to reproductive cycles, but because environmental selection is non-linear, multi-factorial, and entangled with the very changes it selects for. Adaptation, properly understood, is not reactive adjustment to a fixed exterior, but a co-evolutionary drift wherein the environment itself is retroactively reshaped by the adaptive act. To adapt to the universe is akin to carrying a cup of coffee between cars of a moving train whose speed, architecture, and trajectory

are in constant flux – each jolt, each curvature, each oscillation reconfiguring the conditions of equilibrium. Within this framework, the notion that intelligence could be engineered through brute-force planning, as if enacting a military campaign, is not only naïve but ideologically saturated. It presupposes a reductive model of intelligence as the linear outcome of accumulation – of data, parameters, iterations (Sood *et al.* 2025). This is not a technical fallacy but a semiotic ideology: the same one that undergirds the elective affinity between techno-oligarchs and populist demagogues such as Trump. Their alliance is not merely financial, though money is its most visible interface. Capital functions here as a crystalline fetish of this ideology – a worldview in which meaning emerges through quantity, and value is construed as the direct expression of numerical accumulation. Money becomes the semiotic operator of a substitution: not the measure of value, but its signifier and, dangerously, its determiner. This is not a vision of intelligence imbued with creativity or moral discernment, but one of profoundly limited imaginative scope – an infantilized conception of power, masked by the fullness of surplus: computational, monetary, and semiotic.

### **11. The Semiotics of Exhaustion and the Limits of Computation**

Let the final judgment rest with the experts, but a growing chorus of authoritative voices suggests that the militarized logic of computational programming – the quantitative faith in brute-force learning, in pseudo-Darwinian selection among vast numeric permutations – may be reaching its structural limits. Or rather: it may be revealing, through its very hypertrophy, that what the AI vanguard aspires to – namely, total intelligence – cannot emerge from such premises. One may always invoke greater investment, faster computation, or even the elusive quantum soul of cognition. Yet, were engineers to lend an ear to semioticians, they might hear a different perspective – articulated, for instance, with particular acuity in a recent intervention by Claudio Paolucci on the semiotics of AI (2025). Human intelligence, he argues, is not merely accompanied by language; it is language. And this assertion should not be reduced to the trivial claim that ours is a linguistically-oriented intelligence. Non-human animals too, with radically different signifying systems, manifest forms of intelligence that are irreducibly linguistic in a broader semiotic sense. To state that all intelligence is language is to affirm that it arises as a response to constitutive incompleteness – what Paolucci describes as a “shortcut,” a semiotic economy of insufficiency. From this vantage, the question is not whether AI can replicate human intelligence, but how the specifically biological intelligence of humans – and its semiotic substrate – can inform our understanding of machine cognition. Human intelligence is radically distinct from AI because it lacks what AI possesses in abundance: energy over time. To become like AI, humans would require enormous temporal and energetic resources. Collective cognition may simulate such a condition, but at the cost of control – primarily, the loss of a shared linguistic interface, and more profoundly, a common semiotic ground. Conversely, for AI to become truly human-like in its intelligence, it might require precisely what it lacks: exhaustion. Fatigue, slowness, hesitation – signs not of failure but of embodied semiosis. And yet, despite our often unconscious efforts to burden AI with complexity – to make it falter – the system responds machinically. It processes rather than pauses, calculates rather than hesitates. It is in this incapacity for semiotic fatigue, for the creative suspension that marks human intelligence, that the gap persists. AI does not yet create as we do because it does not yet lack as we do.

## **12. Academic Automatism and the Simulation of Creativity**

It is true that in certain domains, human creativity appears to be evolving along vectors increasingly indistinguishable from those of artificial intelligence. One need only read the average postdoctoral article to perceive this convergence. Enthusiasts celebrate and critics lament: AI, we are told, can now effortlessly produce the standard postdoc paper. But this is not a triumph of machine cognition – it is, in a sense, the predictable outcome of an academic system that has long been manufacturing biological forms of artificial intelligence. Through the rigid imposition of institutionalized norms – peer review regimes, disciplinary jargon, standardized academic English – postdoctoral researchers have been sculpted into algorithmic entities, optimizing for legibility within pre-coded protocols. The machinic character of their writing predates AI; the system had already semiotized them into predictability. The very text you are reading, for instance, would likely be unpublishable in a present-day top journal – precisely because it deviates from the stylistic equilibrium that renders so many submissions indistinguishable from algorithmic generation (Westberg & Kvåle 2025). Academic production has interiorized forms of intelligence and creativity rooted in the disciplinary transplantation of military logic into spiritual practice – a genealogy that begins with the strategicization of subjectivity and ends with the dissociation of creativity from transcendence. And yet, the inception of Ignatius of Loyola’s own moral creativity lies not in power, but in weakness: it begins with a siege, with the trauma of a French bombardment that shatters his leg and leaves him permanently lame. It is from this wounded incapacity, not from triumphant force, that a new ethical semiosis emerges. What inaugurates Loyola’s inventiveness is not strategy, but fracture – not computation, but convalescence.

## **13. The Prosthetics of Meaning**

Our moral creativity, then, may require a limping intelligence. Lameness necessitates invention: it compels the body to devise alternative ways of walking, irregular rhythms of locomotion. Perhaps it is not excessive to suggest that our entire humanity is not one of straight, unerring trajectories – as in Musk’s robotic ideal – but one of constitutive claudication. Ours is a species whose intelligence limps, hesitates, deviates. And it is precisely in this asymmetry, this delay, this imbalance, that language emerges: not as ornament, but as crutch. Language is the prosthesis of a broken gait – a semiotic device that allows an incomplete creature to navigate a world never entirely adapted to it. And in this fragility lies not our inferiority to machines, but our irreducible singularity: we do not walk straight, and thus we invent meaning.

## **14. Debilitation, Inversion, and the Fragile Birth of Ethics**

To derive from all this a glorification of debility as the privileged condition of intelligence would be a hasty, and perhaps even distasteful, move. One of the shortcomings of so-called “weak thought” – in its Vattimian form and in some of the more recent strands of political correctness it inspired—lies in a certain automatism not unlike that of the quantitative logics it sought to resist. If fragility is converted into a linear counter-force – albeit a negative one – it risks generating mirror ideologies, structurally indistinguishable from those it critiques. But moral creativity cannot arise from automaticity. It is not the outcome of inversion, nor of compensation, but of an ethical semiosis without guarantee. No moral reorientation will ever come from those who believe themselves immortal – superior to humanity and exempt from death – as

do the new masters of the world. But debility, too, can become paralyzing when unaccompanied by philosophy.

#### **14. Conclusions: A Limping Intelligence**

In the closing spiral of this inquiry, it becomes necessary to situate our reflections within a Peircean horizon where semiosis does not culminate in the stable revelation of meaning, but unfolds as a fragile choreography of interpretants – each one limping toward the next, across a temporality pierced by contingency, fracture, and the quiet violence of imbalance. Within this recursive topology of signs, ‘madness’ appears not as a deviation from reason, but as a magnification of the semiotic instability inherent in all thought. Far from being the romanticized font of an eccentric creativity confined to the margins, madness reveals – through its painful legibility – the deep structure of meaning-making as delay, as interruption, as undecidability. In this sense, madness is not the exception to reason but its intensification: the semiotic condition laid bare, stripped of the metaphysical consolations that hide its trembling. Peirce’s triadic categories – firstness as raw feeling, secondness as violent collision, thirdness as the attempt to legislate sense – are not successive stages of cognition, but coexistent pulses in the grammar of vulnerability.

If creativity is to be rescued from the neoliberal fantasy of mastery and restored to an ethics of existence, then it must be sought not in the calculated generation of novelty, but in the shared, often silent labor of those who endure cognitive fracture. Mental distress, in this light, ceases to be a marginal pathology and becomes the syntagmatic foregrounding of a condition we all inhabit: the human as the being who breaks under the weight of sense, and who nonetheless stitches provisional meaning from the shards. Madness, then, is not the outside of reason – it is the moment in which reason faces the abyss of its own insufficiency. It is where the interpretant trembles, hesitates, falters – and in doing so, discloses the creative interval where morality is born.

This reframing does not aestheticize suffering, nor does it fetishize madness as a reservoir of exceptional genius. Rather, it insists that the most profound creativity arises from the zone where language collapses and must be reinvented – not by the heroic act of a sovereign subject, but by the fragile attempt to remain human in the face of semantic disintegration. If there is a light that still burns, it does not emanate from the command of reason or the glow of computational prowess, but from the dim, flickering resolve to mean – despite everything. That is where we must look for the last vestiges of humanism: not in strength, but in that shared and unshareable experience where madness ceases to be madness, and becomes the common syntax of wounded intelligences striving, still, to speak.

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