

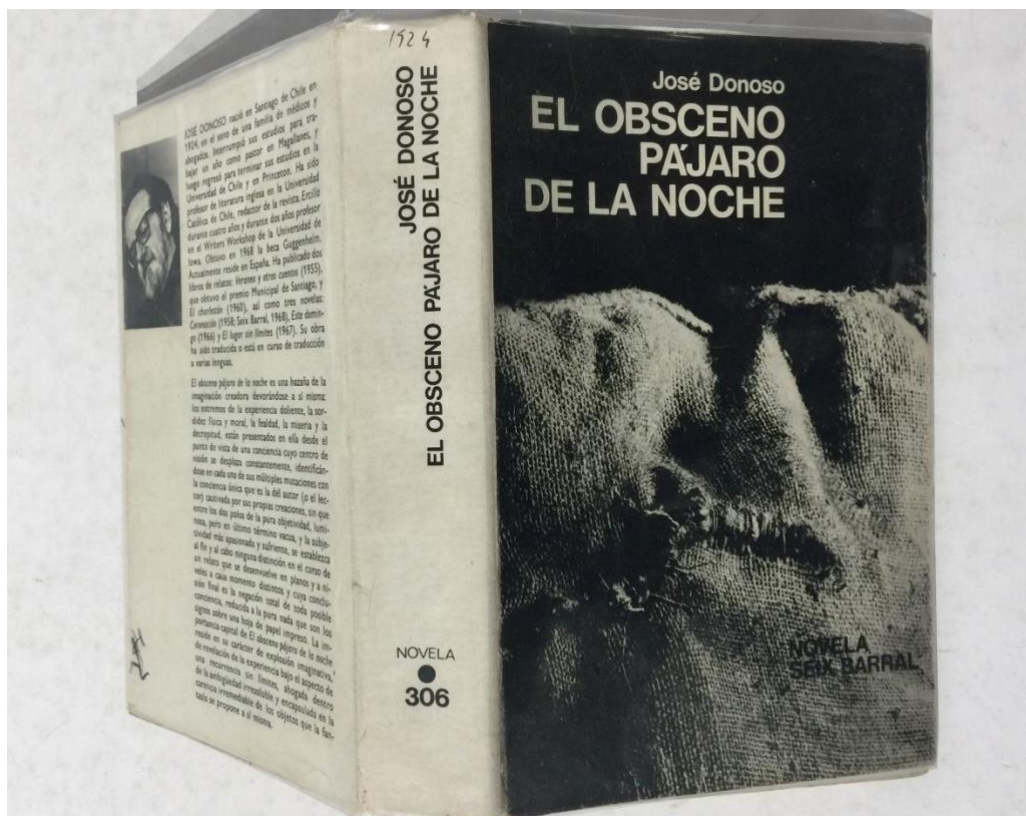
PROLEGOMENON TO ARTISTIC AND CULTURAL ENDOGAMY

By Juan Carlos Flores Zúñiga*

Imagine growing up with an artist mother or father. Watching them create art or work together could spark your artistic passion. And, influenced and inspired by your parents' creativity, you are very likely to grow up to become an artist.

Historically, there are some famous artistic families whose children seemed destined to become artists for the most part of those factors. Even today, there are many contemporary artists whose children have also decided to pursue the dream of becoming artists due to factors that we can identify later.

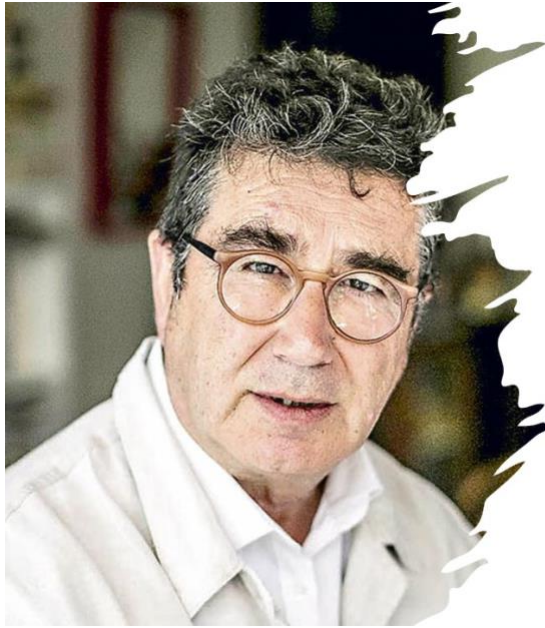
If we add to this family economic power, political influence, and social and cultural positioning, we have a formula for certain people to prevail in the artistic environment over others regardless of their merits.



This is precisely what is reflected in José Donoso's novel "The Obscene Bird of the Night," which describes an oligarch family that marries its members to each other, breeds monsters that are "kept" in a hacienda and are cared for by the attacks from the outside world.¹

When a society turns inward, with a fear of everything that comes from outside, it begins to create myths to establish false security and social

and cultural control.



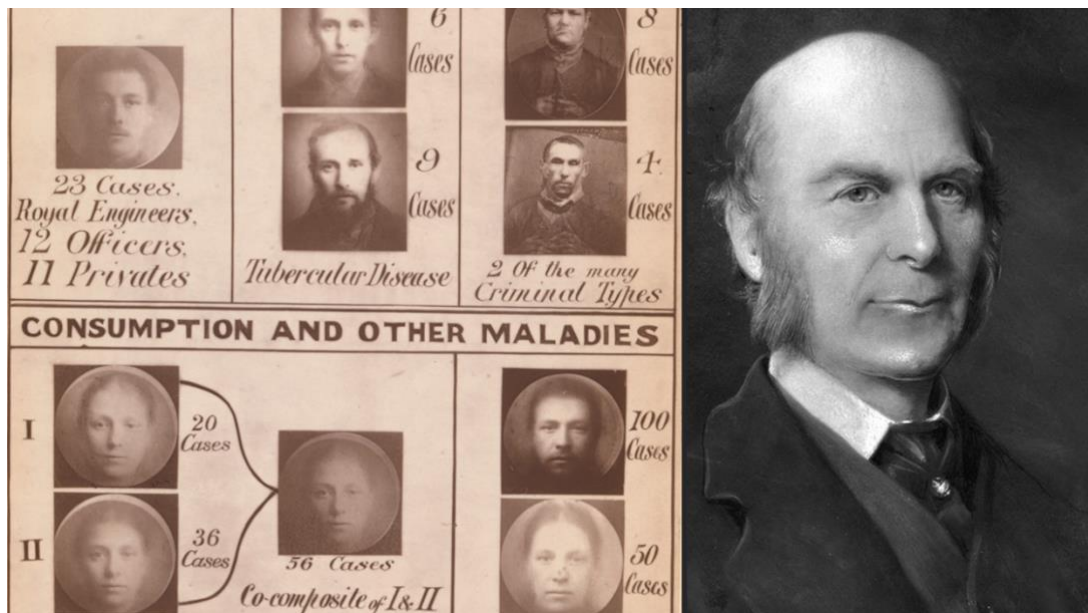
My friend, the Chilean critic, Justo Pastor Mellado, wrote to me days ago about the issue of endogamy in his country, and told me that we owe the existence of two types of art to this ancestral practice: one oligarchic and the other plebeian. ²

This article attempts prolegomenon to the origins of this typology by defining endogamy, some of its characteristics and some of its direct impacts on the development of art and culture.

INHERITANCE

In 1856 Francis Galton, the founder of the science of eugenics – the discipline that aims to modify the genetic inheritance of people to improve a race or the human species, applying biological laws and advanced genetic techniques – wrote a book called "Hereditary genius."³

In it, he examined 400 individuals known for their talents in art and creative endeavors, politics, science, and more.



He discovered that 50% of prose writers and more than 40% of poets were in direct relationships with other literary figures. Musicians and painters also showed a high degree of hereditary continuity (20% and 50% respectively). Whether by nature or nurture, or perhaps a

combination of both, it seems that heredity has something to do with artistic proclivity.

Certainly, it explains the existence of family dynasties in art, such as: HOLBEIN, BRUEGEL, LE BRUN, ROSETTIS, PISARROS, MORRIS, KLIMT, WYETH, DE CHIRICOS, PICASSO, AVERY, SCHNABEL, SAARS⁴



INHERITED ENDOGAMY

Inheritance has been promoted and expanded throughout the history of culture and art, through endogamy. A practice according to which a group of individuals rejects or denies the incorporation of individuals outside their own group. The word, as such, is composed of the prefix endo-, which means 'within', and -gamy, which means 'union'.⁵

Endogamy is a behavior or social attitude in which members of other groups are prevented from associating or uniting, either for marriage or reproduction, with members of a specific group.

In this sense, endogamous groups usually limit the unions, alliances, or marriages of those in their group considering factors such as: having a common ancestry or lineage, belonging to the same social class, having the same religion, being part of the ethnic group, or being a native of the same geographical area.

In Antiquity, endogamy was very common for various reasons: to maintain social, political, and economic power within the same family (aristocracies, hegemonic groups), to establish alliances with other groups of the same social class (aristocrats, bourgeois), or to maintain the purity of a supposed race.

ECONOMIC POWER AND ARTISTIC OCCUPATION

In the 2019 article titled "The origins of creativity: the case of artists in the United States since 1850," Danish academic and researcher Karol Jan Borowiecki confirmed that families with greater economic power and social position produce most of the artists.

Borowiecki compared the socioeconomic background and geographic location of people who identified themselves as artists, musicians, authors, actors, and other creative professions compared to other fields.⁶

According to his study, for every ten thousand dollars added to a family's annual income, a person is 2% more likely to venture into a creative occupation.⁷

For example, a person from a family with an income of USD \$100,000 is twice as likely to become an artist compared to someone from a family earning half that amount annually. If a family makes a million dollars a year, one of its members is ten times more likely to enter the arts than another whose family makes only \$100,000 a year.⁸



They may seem exorbitant sums for our environment, but 6% of families in this country generate more than that amount annually.

Below are some examples of families in art history that became endogamous dynasties, replicating the findings already cited according to research carried out by British art critic Verity Babbs:

Leonardo Da Vinci was the son of Piero Da Vinci and Caterina Buti del Vaca. Leonardo's father was a Florentine lawyer and notary. Da Vinci's paternal grandfather represented one of the most successful families of notaries in Florence.

Michelangelo came from a long line of Florentine bankers. His father worked in government positions and was the judicial administrator of his town. The family was descended from the nobility of Tuscany.

Rembrandt did not come from an artistic family, but his family was

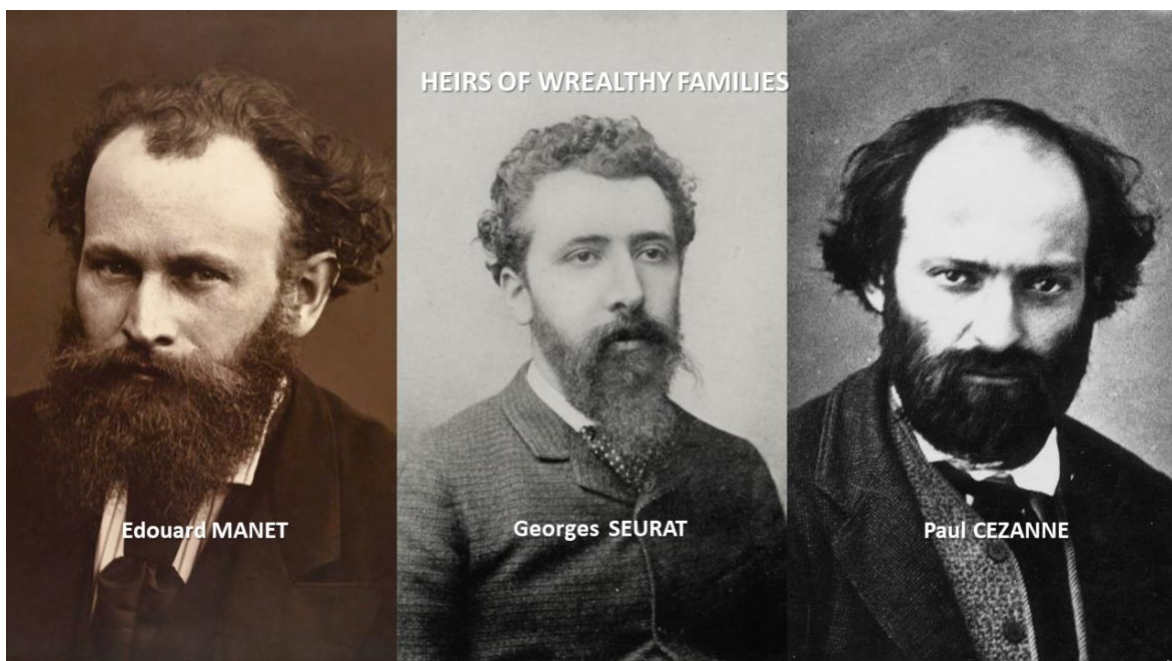
very well off financially. He married a woman who had many assets.



Edouard Manet's father was a successful judge, and his mother was born into a family of diplomats and was the goddaughter of the crowned prince of Sweden, Charles Bernadotte. Like Cezanne, his father wanted him to pursue a career in law.

Georges Seurat's father was a professional who made a lot of profits speculating in Paris real estate.

Paul Cezanne's father was a successful banker who acquired properties that the artist later took advantage of.⁹



MORE WOMEN THAN MEN IN ART

Borowiecki that at the end of the 19th century the gender trend changed in the arts, with women predominating over the number of men in the artistic occupation. The area in which there is the greatest presence of women is in music, followed by literature, visual arts and acting. According to the study, the probability of becoming artists is 18% higher in women than in men.

Regarding the presence of minorities in art, until 2010, it reached 20%. Economic income plays a determining role in the disparity.

SYMPTOMATOLOGY OF LATIN ENDOGAMY

Based on regional observations and conversations with other critics and researchers such as Victor Valembos who has written extensively on the topic¹⁰, the following are some of the most common symptoms of cultural endogamy in the Latin American context as a preliminary case study:

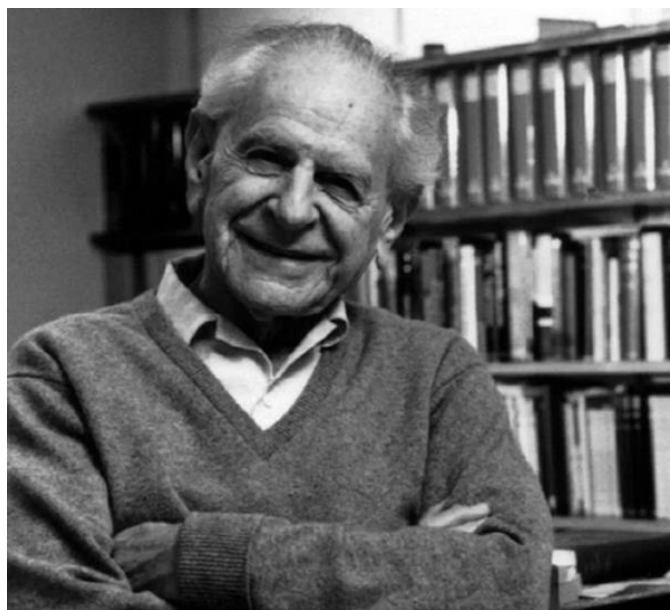
1. Society closed to profound and democratizing changes and innovations
2. Proliferation of nepotism
3. Restriction of critical spaces and when articulated it translates as a personal attack
4. Establishment of cultural policies that favor some groups to the detriment of others.
5. The defense of the "exceptional" Costa Rican
6. Self-indulgence through cultural Gradualism – little, little, slowly
7. We are "brothers" due to a few degrees of genetic separation.

IMPACT ON ART AND CULTURE: Closed society and exceptionalism

Art has always been associated with power. At times in history, individuals who made art were considered to have special powers. They could conceptualize figures and shapes and then bring them into existence. They could create images and objects from earth, ashes and stone that looked like living creatures. Endogamy responds to one type of society and opposes another.

The Austrian philosopher, political scientist and professor, Karl Popper¹¹, defines these societies:

- A. The closed society: where the individual is not free and is subordinated to a collective or to an incontrovertible truth. That truth is magical and tribal. It represents the inevitable destiny of the human being that he can only accept.



In artistic terms it marks the difference between a vassal art and an aristocratic one.

B. The open society, on the other hand, is one where individuals can and must make personal decisions. Where the truth is partial and subject to debate. Where the answers have not been completed.

It is a temptation in the Costa Rican case, since independence in 1821, to try to define our nationality and cultural identity in insular terms, decontextualized from the region and the world. To this end, through the educational system that raises awareness and informs and the political system that regulates it ideologically, we have influenced the creation and reinforcement of myths to defend our isolationism and exceptionalism, boasting of nationalist superiority in the face of other nations traditionally in conflict in the region and even proclaim our ideological neutrality when it has been convenient for us politically and economically.

Motto phrases come to mind that summarize some of those myths such as "We are the Switzerland of Central America", "Costa Rica is a country of white people with light eyes", "Costa Rica is a haven of peace in the middle of a conflictive world" , "We are the best democracy in Latin America", "We are a country of educated citizens" or in the field of local art "we are a country with an artistic tradition" or "our artistic identity is found in the rural and peasant landscape".

The reality is that we are a multicultural, ethnically diverse nation, very economically dependent, often ignorant of our history, with deep educational gaps, significant levels of corruption in both the public and private sectors, inconsistent in the defense of freedom and justice inside and outside our borders despite our democratic experience, and little or not at all civilized when it comes to arguing in any area of public interest or in particular, aesthetic.



Cultural and artistic endogamy fosters a closed and isolationist society. This is what Marta Traba identified to the annoyance of the locals when she was part of the jury of the first Central American biennial in 1971.¹²

Traba refines Popper's political philosophy and applies it to the Latin American context to talk about open and closed areas. The former is characterized by their progressivism, their civilizing desire, their ability to absorb and receive foreigners, their breadth of vision and their tendency to glorify capitals. There she located Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, Chile, Mexico, and Venezuela.

The second category, closed area, is defined by it as one where endogamous condition predominate, the closure the weight of tradition, the outside of an environment. And he adds that the culture of a closed area is characterized by the triple alliance of immigrant poverty, the defense of pre-Columbian and colonial tradition and the exaltation of local values: I place there Peru, Ecuador, Paraguay, Bolivia, Colombia, the region of central America and the Caribbean.¹³

NEPOTISM: Endogamous fruit

One of the most notable impacts in the endogamous society, which for purposes can be in the north or the south, in the old or new continent, is NEPOTISM.

The entire world of art is woven through relationships and friendships. But what happens when nepotism is not limited to family members, but

extends to friends, partners, and lovers.

At the 2017 Venice Biennale and Documenta 14, the curators of both events included their romantic partners in the exhibition programming.

Curator Adam Sysmczyk, artistic director of Documenta 14, included his colleague Alexandra Bachzetsis, and Christine Macel included the work of her partner Michele Ciacciofera in the central exhibition in Venice. ¹⁴



If blatant nepotism is manifested in two of the most important art events on the planet, what can we expect from other less prominent spaces where curators and cultural bureaucrats reflect that method as well.

In the elitist art world, nepotism matters. Showcasing artists in a show because of their merit, the success of their work and their significance should be the standard.

However, dull, and ephemeral exhibitions dominate, where the curator, for example, exhibits the work of her allies and herself. We rarely ask curators and institutions the rationale behind their decisions because art is generally subjective.

It is interesting that in the art industry curators are not required to share information about their relationship with the artists in the exhibition.

When he confronted the Documenta 14 organization about the nepotism evidenced, he responded "this decision does not violate the organization's code of conduct."

Our reality does not differ when, to award a national award, civil society has weak representation against groups of ideologically related curators and universities that protect their own jurisdiction by deciding by majority who they award and who they do not.

In a 1981 article by Jeffrey Deitch ¹⁵ "Who Has the Power?", he states that the most serious problem is not curating your friends, but excluding others who deserve to show their work for them. The origin of cliques is in socioeconomic origin, political favor, and academic training.

"These cliques often originate in an art school, solidify over time and attract other adherents as members as their influence in the art world grows." Deitch pointed out ¹⁶. Nevertheless, nepotism as an expression of modern endogamy produces bias, prejudice, and discrimination in art.

For this reason, art critics such as Roberta Smith, Jerry Saltz and Jonatan Jones affirm that they do not write about most of their artist friends so as not to become contaminated. His argument is that friendship corrupts critical judgment.

We have become accustomed to working in an environment dominated by endogamous power in the political, cultural, and academic system and its offshoots, namely, nepotism and isolationism.

However, this lack of transparency only fuels mediocre artistic production and perverts the opportunities of upright artists to project their art beyond the borders of this closed and endogamous society.

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RESUME



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