

## Of Webs, Fangs, and Gravity: Reflections on artistic consumption

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**Abstract:** *Art inherently involves balancing consumption and creation. Artists continuously absorb and synthesize experiences, emotions, and ideas, yet such creative nourishment can risk becoming excessive, threatening coherence and meaning. This paper explores artistic consumption through three metaphorical analogies: the Spider, symbolizing controlled creativity and structural balance; the Vampire, representing restrained yet potentially contagious creative hunger; and the Black Hole, embodying unchecked ambition leading to destructive excess, yet paradoxically capable of initiating profound artistic transformations. These metaphors elucidate psychological, ethical, and compositional tensions artists face, emphasizing the critical necessity of self-awareness, ethical boundaries, and balance within creative practice.*

**Key-words:** *creative consumption, artistic metaphor, musical composition, cosmological analogies, artistic balance.*

### 1. Introduction

Throughout history, the relationship between creativity and consumption has fascinated artists, philosophers, and scholars alike. Artistic practice does not exist in isolation; rather, it continually engages with external inputs—ideas, experiences, emotions—transforming them into original expressions. This fundamental dynamic, common across various systems from biology to technology, acquires particular depth and complexity in the arts. The concept of “composition”, stemming from the Latin *componere* (“to bring together”), encapsulates this intricate process, highlighting how artists thoughtfully gather and align diverse materials into cohesive works.

However, the process of creative consumption is far from benign. While essential for artistic growth, consumption carries inherent risks: when unchecked, the artist’s pursuit of inspiration can lead to excess and imbalance, potentially threatening the integrity and coherence of both the artwork and the artist. This peril

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mirrors Erebus, the Greek deity representing insatiable darkness—a powerful metaphor for the potential destructiveness of unbounded creative desire.

Recognizing this tension, this paper investigates the complex boundary between healthy and excessive artistic consumption. It critically examines why artists select particular influences, how they navigate the delicate thresholds of creative nourishment, and the risks associated with both over- and under-consumption.

To clarify these intricate dynamics, the paper employs three metaphorical analogies drawn from natural and cosmic phenomena: the Spider, illustrating disciplined creativity and sustainable balance; the Vampire, embodying a constrained yet potentially contagious artistic hunger; and the Black Hole, representing unchecked ambition and destructive consumption, which paradoxically may also open pathways to radical artistic transformation. Through these metaphors, this study seeks a nuanced understanding of the interplay between consumption and creation, underscoring both its productive potentials and inherent dangers.

## **2. The Spider: Weaving dimension and detail**

The spider serves as a compelling metaphor for the artist's interplay between consumption and creation. Just as a spider meticulously weaves its web—a structure crafted from internally produced silk—so too does the artist compose, integrating diverse materials into a cohesive whole. This deliberate act of weaving is designed both to capture and sustain.

The spider's existence is inherently cyclical: it cannot weave without first consuming prey, and it cannot consume without its web. This mirrors the artist's process, where the creation of art consumes time, energy, and resources, yet simultaneously attracts and engages an audience—capturing their attention. Music similarly constructs sonic webs that subtly direct listeners' thoughts and emotions.

Ecologically, spiders indicate environmental health, helping control insect populations and maintaining ecological balance. Studies have shown spiders are sensitive bioindicators of habitat quality; for instance, research demonstrates spiders effectively measure grassland restoration success, emphasizing their role in ecological equilibrium (Springer Nature). Conversely, unchecked spider populations can disrupt balance, as observed in Australian cases where favorable conditions caused concerning population spikes (National Geographic). Analogously, excessive artistic output can overwhelm and disengage audiences. Thus, while artistic consumption and creation are essential, mindful regulation remains necessary to maintain effectiveness (Csikszentmihalyi, 2015).

Another aspect of the spider's behavior is its ability to operate in two dimensions while capturing prey from the three-dimensional world. The flat web effectively traps insects navigating complex spatial environments, suggesting that

disciplined creativity similarly allows artists to transcend conventional boundaries, elevating audience experience.

The spider embodies a model of sustainable, generative consumption. Its careful balance—taking only what is needed—represents ecological giving rather than disorder. The result of its devouring is stability, safeguarding environmental health by controlling potential overpopulation (Carroll, 2016).

Musically, this analogy resonates strongly. The composer, like the spider, weaves an intricate web designed to capture attention—not possessing it, but refining and returning it as something more profound: beauty, meaning, and transcendence. Structurally, musical motifs should function spider-like, balancing expressive presence without overwhelming cohesion. Classical sonata form exemplifies this metaphorically, weaving initially distinct themes into a balanced resolution, reflecting the spider's careful and successful entanglement.

Thus, the spider embodies functional balance, ethical consumption, and humility. Its meticulous labor mirrors the artist's persistent efforts to overcome obstacles, weaving seemingly disparate ideas and experiences into meaningful wholes. Beyond functional elegance, the spider's web captivates observers with patterns simultaneously beautiful and purposeful. Musically, the strength of these threads reflects compositions whose themes persistently resonate within listeners' memories.

Yet what exactly becomes ensnared in this artistic web? Perhaps artists inadvertently trap their own hubris, confronting humbling recognition of their limitations. Or maybe the web captures and dissolves distractions, freeing audiences for deeper contemplation and spiritual resonance. Possibly, art momentarily silences the chaos of modern life, allowing unity and clarity to emerge.

In a broader perspective, just as spider webs connect distant points, art bridges diverse experiences, cultures, and temporalities. The artist's web expresses multiplicity transformed into unity, echoing Daniel Barenboim's insightful observation that "sound does not remain in this world; it evaporates into silence. Sound is not independent – it does not exist by itself, but has a permanent, constant and unavoidable relationship to silence" (Barenboim 2009, 7). Thus, music and art reveal hidden connections, manifesting profound unity underlying apparent diversity.

In this deeper sense, the spider—through humility, adaptability, and meticulous craft—symbolizes the artist's role in integrating separate elements, transforming individual experiences into resonant, meaningful, and enduring wholes.

### **3. The Vampire: Necessary boundaries and viral influence**

As we move along the continuum from the carefully balanced spider, we encounter a more troubling metaphor of creative consumption: the vampire. The vampire represents a shift toward malignancy—a predator embodying anthropomorphized

passion and insatiable desire. The choice of this metaphor aligns with the understanding that metaphors profoundly shape our conceptual frameworks, influencing not only language but thought and action itself (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980). Unlike the spider, whose consumption sustains equilibrium, the vampire symbolizes consumption that has overrun all constraints, becoming an end in itself. Here, devouring is no longer merely functional but eclipses the consumer's identity and intentions.

In this reversal, hunger itself—the relentless impulse to consume—dominates. The vampire becomes an outlier, perpetually suspended between fulfillment and emptiness, never truly satisfied. Artistically, this represents the dangerous moment when passion ceases to enrich and instead threatens the artist's humanity, relationships, and sense of self.

Yet nuances exist. Popular narratives, like Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series, portray vampires consciously limiting their predation through ethical "vegetarianism." Similarly, artists can ethically manage creative consumption, drawing inspiration without harming others, consciously placing ethical boundaries to keep creative hunger balanced and respectful.

Indeed, the vampire is defined by its boundaries: hunting only at night, requiring invitations to enter homes, repelled by natural elements. These metaphorically mirror ethical, personal, and societal constraints artists navigate. The vampire's dependence on invitation highlights artists' reliance on audience engagement—without a listener's willing engagement, artistic work loses potency and meaning.

Structurally, music often behaves vampirically, feeding upon its thematic materials and transforming them. Variations on a theme demonstrate this clearly: an original motif is continually drained of its initial identity, yet remains identifiable, multiplied across new contexts. This structural consumption appears in hybrid or pastiche compositions, where styles feed off each other without total annihilation.

However, vampiric dynamics carry profound risks. Vampires sacrifice humanity, mortality, and genuine human connections, existing in liminality between life and death. Artists succumbing to excessive creative consumption risk isolation, losing genuine connections and becoming alienated from their humanity. Overconsumption thus carries the very real risk of painful detachment.

The vampire metaphor ultimately reminds artists that creative feeding quickly crosses into ethically complex terrain. Unlike the spider's balanced web, vampiric consumption must be deliberately restrained to avoid becoming harmful. Thus, despite darker connotations, the vampire instructively illuminates ethical responsibilities toward oneself, inspiration sources, and audiences, urging creative balance and integrity.

The implications become even more profound when extended beyond purely musical structures into composers' lived experiences. Though music can safely

function in structural vampirism, there is an inherent risk it may escape musical boundaries and subtly reshape real-world interactions, attitudes, and ethics.

Despite these risks, vampiric dynamics harbour positive potential—contagious creativity. Just as vampires create new vampires, composers inspire movements. Musical history illustrates this through Wagner's chromatic innovations or Stravinsky's rhythmic language, spreading widely and rapidly. Responsibly managed, predatory creativity can powerfully drive artistic evolution.

Unchecked, however, this logic can manifest destructively in composers' lives, making relationships transactional and reducing listeners to mere validation sources. Creative desire can devolve into unbalanced self-centeredness, with composers' impulses ruling their real-world behaviour.

Therefore, composers must cultivate awareness, remaining attentive to how creative impulses shape personal attitudes and ethics. By consciously reflecting and maintaining ethical boundaries, artists aim for creative consumption that remains constructive, balanced, and enriching, preventing unintended destructive or exploitative patterns.

#### **4. The Black Hole: The Danger — and breakthrough — of unchecked Gravity**

As we proceed along the continuum from the vampire's troubling hunger, we ultimately arrive at the most extreme form of creative consumption—the black hole. Black holes represent one of the most enigmatic phenomena known in cosmology. Defined as regions in spacetime exhibiting gravitational attraction so intense that nothing, not even light, can escape, black holes embody absolute consumption. (Hawking, 1998) Formed primarily through the collapse of massive stars that have exhausted their nuclear fuel, these stellar behemoths end their life cycles in cataclysmic supernova explosions. The sheer scale and brightness of such stars suggests, intriguingly, a form of cosmic excess—an overabundance of mass and luminosity. This evokes an ethical dimension within the universe itself: the brightest stars, dazzling and immense, burn intensely but briefly, inevitably collapsing into profound darkness. Here, cosmological processes offer a striking analogy to artistic ambition and the dangers of unchecked self-centeredness. Indeed, the excessive identity and unchecked hubris of an artist may mirror the stellar trajectory from brilliant luminosity into catastrophic self-consumption.

Once formed, a black hole functions as the ultimate predator. Its gravitational pull indiscriminately devours all surrounding matter and energy, leaving behind only an event horizon—the boundary beyond which nothing can return. Similarly, the black hole represents artistic overreach, an insatiable creative hunger extending beyond reason, ethical constraints, and initial intentions. At this stage, artistic consumption becomes utterly indiscriminate, losing productive or communicative

purpose. What began as luminous creativity collapses into a state where the artist consumes more than they contribute, overshadowed by an all-consuming internalized obsession.

Music history offers striking examples of artists whose brilliance approached this perilous event horizon, demonstrating how unchecked ambition or extreme self-centeredness may lead to personal or creative collapse. Richard Wagner was famously known for his overpowering ego, intense self-absorption, and problematic ideological positions, complicating scholarly evaluation of his legacy (Magee, 2001; Köhler, 2004). Karlheinz Stockhausen developed a musical philosophy so singular and uncompromising that critics and contemporaries characterized his late career as egocentric and mystically obsessive (Kurtz, 1992; Ross, 2007). Carlo Gesualdo remains infamous for radical musical experimentation and a deeply troubled psychological profile marked by obsessive behaviors indicative of personal instability (Watkins, 2010). Even Beethoven struggled intensely with isolation, self-doubt, and inner turmoil, increasingly withdrawing as he lost his hearing, paralleling a figurative collapse into a solitary, creative void (Solomon, 1998).

These examples illustrate the inherent risks when creative intensity is left unchecked or unbalanced by ethical awareness and self-reflection. Just as massive stars produce essential elements for life before potentially collapsing into darkness, these composers' extraordinary contributions remain foundational despite their struggles, revealing cautionary dimensions in the pursuit of ambitious creativity.

Yet, within this bleak narrative, paradoxes merit reflection. Massive stars destined to collapse into black holes are essential to cosmic evolution, serving as stellar forges producing heavier elements essential for life. Analogously, ambitious artists often generate influential ideas shaping cultural landscapes. This reveals a nuanced reality: excessive ambition, responsibly moderated, can play a critical role in artistic culture.

Moreover, some speculative theories in physics suggest black holes might serve as gateways to new universes, potentially leading to novel, transformative creative endeavors (Smolin, 1997). Indeed, Wagner, Stockhausen, Gesualdo, and Beethoven each embody this transformative potential. Wagner revolutionized harmonic language and operatic form, paving the way for subsequent composers. Stockhausen profoundly influenced electronic music and experimental practices still resonant today. Gesualdo's harmonic explorations significantly broadened the emotional vocabulary available to later composers. Beethoven transformed personal adversity into revolutionary innovations expanding expressive possibilities. These figures thus become creative analogues of white holes—entities whose inward collapse radiates new artistic possibilities into the broader cultural universe.

Beyond philosophical considerations, the black hole analogy offers insights at the structural level. Certain compositions mimic gravitational dynamics characteristic of black holes. Julia Wolfe's *Bang on a Can* embodies relentless pull through

repetitive patterns and escalating sonic density. Maurice Ravel's iconic *Boléro* mirrors cosmic gravitational attraction through unyielding repetition and mounting dynamic force. Dmitri Shostakovich's Symphony No. 7 and Alexey Rybnikov's "Toccata" movement similarly amplify tension through repetition and cumulative intensity, drawing listeners inexorably toward a structural center. These works leverage the metaphorical "event horizon", demonstrating that even the destructive characteristics of a black hole can be artistically effective.

Nevertheless, the black hole metaphor remains predominantly cautionary. It speaks compellingly to the necessity of balance, self-awareness, and humility in artistic practice. Without these elements, even talented creators' risk destructive self-consumption, sacrificing creative potential, sense of self, relationships, and human connections. This ultimate predator serves as a reminder that creative brilliance unrestrained can end not in illumination but irrecoverable darkness.

## 5. Conclusions

Artistic creation is rarely a straightforward act of personal expression; rather, it emerges from a complex interplay of intuitive impulses and rational structuring, passion and reflection, self-sacrifice and dominance. The metaphors of the spider, vampire, and black hole provide illuminating lenses through which composers can understand and navigate these inherent tensions. Each analogy highlights distinct psychological and structural dynamics of the creative process, offering both cautionary tales and constructive possibilities.

Despite the evident importance of these dynamics, university curricula — especially within music composition and related arts programs — seldom explicitly address the psychological and structural forces shaping creative practice. Yet these forces exert genuine gravitational influence upon composers, affecting their artistic choices, compositional processes, and even their lives. At the meta-level, heightened awareness of personal biases (Kahneman, 2015) and tendencies — recognizing spider-like patience and multidimensional ingenuity, vampiric intensity and contagious influence, or the black hole's obsessive risk and transformative potential — can significantly enhance creative health, helping artists avoid pitfalls such as isolation, exhaustion, and self-destructive behavior.

Structurally, informed recognition of motifs becoming overly dominant or forms demanding careful thematic balance can empower composers to avoid unintentional slips into destructive patterns, instead fostering compositions that maintain artistic integrity, clarity, and multidimensional depth. Analogous to how students of physics must comprehend gravitational laws to anticipate trajectories and interactions, composers benefit profoundly from understanding these

metaphorical gravitational pulls within the creative realm, enabling more conscious and skillful navigation of their artistic journeys.

Ultimately, embracing these analogies—mindful of both their creative promise and cautionary insights—enables artists to approach their practice with humility, balance, and resilience. By carefully integrating these perspectives into artistic education, composers can more consciously harness the spider's patient ingenuity, responsibly cultivate the vampire's contagious vitality, and prudently explore the black hole's transformative potential, all while vigilantly guarding against the dangers inherent to each. Such an informed awareness, guided by self-reflection and humility rather than certainty, offers perhaps the most promising path toward sustained artistic growth, meaningful creativity, and genuine self-understanding.

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