
Creative Practice as a Prospect for Self-Therapy During the Covid-19 Pandemic

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Abstract The Covid-19 pandemic has been globally affecting people for almost two years now. Many people have been psychologically overwhelmed by this, and isolation at home and social distancing have accentuated emotional distress. This has influenced all ages and especially adolescents and young people who have to confront reality in different ways than the young people of previous generations. In this article, I will offer a brief account of what creative practice in art and design encompasses and discuss why this practice can be taken as an opportunity for self-therapy during the current pandemic and the hardships it brings with it.

Keywords Creative practice, self-therapy, Covid-19, psychology, pleasure

1. Introduction

A designer, just like an artist, may wish to create for several reasons. In the first place, she might simply have the desire to create for the sake of creation without any special purpose entangled in this activity. Beyond creating for the sake of creation and the desire to represent something, the creative practice involves many other endeavours like exploration, experimentation, practice with a variety of media and processes as well as understanding and communication, among others. Therefore, the creative practice is a combination of physical labour and vigorous mental activity.

2. The creative process as self-therapy

Along with conceptual skills, the use of the medium and experimentation with it constitute a vital part of the designer's creative process and it can contingently create favourable grounds for self-therapy. This first argument in support of this claim is explained as follows. In art and design,

experimentation embodies a practical action of investigational manipulation of materials, tools, processes and techniques. It rests a lot on the creation and invention of new things, on combination, chance, error, and coincidence. It is the 'trying out' of conceptions together with materials, and in this process, there are numerous possibilities – and impossibilities can be made possible and restrictions can be ignored. It can be said that sometimes experimentation for designers is like playing. It is comparable with a child when she plays, where she invents what she plays *while* she plays; similarly, a designer invents what she creates *while* she creates. It is important to highlight here that for the designer, art making is not only the finished work but also the process of getting there. Therefore, experimentation as playing, being an essential process to reach the production of design, provides a gratifying and challenging venture for the designer, as she does not know what possibilities the process will bring along. One can endorse that the very act of experimentation (that which actually comes out) is spontaneous, unplanned and frequently accidental, even though the designer typically has a rough plan in mind. The act of experimenting is like an exploration of possibilities, impossibilities and limitations, and it entails freedom as it gives the ability to the designer to become the author of her work. This type of freedom and authorship which can ignore rules and anticipate any potentials is very valuable for the mind, especially when the mind is bound to fear, uncertainty and confinement, as is the current case with the pandemic. The practice of exploring possibilities through unplanned processes and applications of media which lead to unknown actions and end results can be a healing activity for the designer as it offers excitement and enthusiasm, and the prospect of what it is to come calls for a dose of thrill and pleasure. The painter Lucian Freud said: "I think half the point of painting a picture is that you don't know what will happen. Perhaps if painters did know how it was going to turn out they wouldn't bother actually to do it" (Gayford, 2010, p. 83). This statement enhances the assertion that the process of art making and the experience of the medium as experimentation and playing, creates feelings of pleasure and a certain degree of expectancy of how and what the design will reveal. Thus, it can be maintained that the creative process, besides aiming for communication, also promotes pleasure and enjoyment, and the attempt to factually turn a mental image or an image of reality into a material picture, all these in effect might afford healing benefits for the designer.

This leads to the second argument that through the creative process the designer experiences emotional and meaningful understanding of oneself and the world, and this can eventually generate space for

self-therapy. Essentially, the activity of creation itself can be a way (either conscious or unconscious) for the designer to understand herself and the world, and to make sense of certain things. Most importantly, during the creative process, the designer is deeply concerned with emotions, inner perceptions and intuitions, and has a desire to reach truth. In the effort to achieve that, as discussed above, she practically uses methods, materials and processes; simultaneously, she practises mental faculties like imagination, ingenuity, insight and originality. The designer is surrounded by states like desire, spontaneity and inspiration, and she can be intrigued and motivated by anything found both in her mind and the world. She has questions, she is curious, she is seeking something and sometimes the creative process helps her to gain knowledge and understanding of herself and the world. Through the creative process, she (re)-creates, and reconstructs herself and the world. She explores how parts of the world interrelate and examines how our perceptions of the world are structured. She visualises pictures, either pictures of the directly visible world or of her mind; fundamentally, the designer represents how she perceives the world. The designer, by creating art through the creative process, makes sense of that which she decides to explore (be it something tangible or emotional or conceptual).

These observations imply that sometimes the designer is so powerfully captivated by the creative process and the spur this brings with it that it can be applied as a self-therapy method to ease personal anguish. Being systematically concerned with creative practice can offer healing effects to people, particularly at times when they are more vulnerable and need reinforcement. Art making has been used as a therapeutic tool for a long time and outcomes are truly encouraging. According to Potash:

“Art in the context of psychosocial support groups allowed for the expression of emotions both positive and negative — gratitude, love, sadness, fear, anxiety, depression, anger, disbelief, grief — while engendering a sense of control in a safe environment. Art making altered perspectives and combated disconnection” (Potash et al., 2020, p. 105).

This remark acknowledges that indeed expression of emotions through art making can change the individual’s mindset and the way of looking at the world, and thus reward the individual with hopeful psychological results. As stated above, in the creative process, both the mind and the body are being concerned with two activities: the mental enterprises and the concrete experimentation with the medium. This creative process enables the designer to express feelings and let go of emotions, to stimulate freedom, to make choices and exercise

imagination and intuition. Jackson Pollock’s own words enhance this approach: “A mural is for me a kind of emotional spree... A certain kind of thoughtless freedom comes over me. I don’t give a damn about anything. Once on the wall, I paint with downright pleasure” (Landau, 1989, p. 26). This proposes that the designer may not necessarily find meaning in the end product but in the process itself or in the concept she aims to represent (or both). She has a thought or an idea to create something that precedes the end product and she may not be very interested in the final representation or the meaning the design will have for the viewer, but she might be interested in understanding what she wishes to express and to portray (be it psychological or something more concrete) and so she (re)-creates its picture; speculating not only on the directly visible world but also on the world of her imagination and intimate concerns. Most of the times, whatever the end product of a design might be, appealing or non-appealing, the designer is remained with a feeling of contentment or satisfaction.

3. Discussion

On a final note, when the designer creates, besides attaining the goal of re-creating and representing, she undergoes other states that matter to her, such as reaching a state of euphoria, completion, technical mastery and the understanding of herself and of the world. Hence, the creative process can be a way to minimise the negative psychological distress caused by the social pandemic effects. While any kind of emotions can be involved in the creative process (either positive or negative), this process is significantly encouraging as assumed by the previous two arguments. This brief discussion suggests that the feeling of expectancy and pleasure gained from the creative process and the mental relief art making has on the brain and our emotions can make designers better understand themselves and the world.

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