

APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY IN DESIGN EDUCATION AND PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT:

Opinions on the experiential and emotional learner are varied within contemporary educational design circles. Experiential awareness is celebrated, but is the same value placed upon the emotional learner and practitioner? Do we understand the term 'emotional', as an imbalanced trait, or a celebrated, yet flawed aspect of the designer?

Emotion plays a key part within the design process, with individuals given kudos within art and design for their genius when the connection to emotions is visible. It is often understood as an integral aspect of the design process. If this is the case, there is room for design education to celebrate learning by feeling, alongside Kolb's (2001) *Learning by Doing*. In understanding that learning can be effective through using a holistic approach and lens, Kolb (2001) addressed the learner's cognitive awareness alongside the experiential and emotional aspect of the learning.

Contemporary design practice places much focus on structure and balanced organizational knowledge in the design processes. Yet the processes of design are influenced by varied, and often off balanced experiences, within and outside of the workspace. Awareness of linking experience to emotion within pedagogy is not new, yet it is possible to argue that if design students are actively engaging within pluralistic multiplatform formats the emotional and the experiential aspects of how it 'feels' to learn design is of importance. Understanding and appreciating how the daily experience of a working design process is impacted on emotionally could be a welcomed aspect of a design student's educational experience.

A model of Appreciative Inquiry (2008) can be used within pedagogic art and design education to understand how emotions assist in the facilitation of change-making processes of design and requisite outputs. It is argued that one aspect of this model, termed the 'positive principle', Cooperrider (2008), can initiate momentum and change. Moreover, feelings and emotion inflect excitement, inspiration, hope, and increase creativity and openness to new ideas. These ideas and feelings can also assist in the promotion of positive connections and relationships between people, particularly relevant for collective inquiry and change.

This paper places its emphasis on how the design process and practice in design and fashion educational environments can benefit from a greater understanding of the oscillation of emotion to experience and vice versa. Moreover, it is argued that further consideration of how the relationship between emotion and experience in learning and teaching can drive the design process and output. If design is underpinned by experimentation and a range of emotions, a lens of Appreciative Inquiry (2008) used to consider design process, practice, and, output offers opportunity for a paradigm shift in the way in which teaching and learning takes place. Reflections can, and do, inform frontline doing and thinking, yet these processes are driven by practitioner's drawing upon emotion to produce output. 'Appreciative inquiry uses artful creation of positive imager to refashion anticipatory reality' (2008). Therefore, appreciative inquiry can offer new ways to inform and understand the interrelationship between design, experience, and education.

Key words: Experiential, Emotional, Appreciative Inquiry, Design

1. INTRODUCTION

There are many different views and factors, which constitute to being a successful designer. Exploration of unknown landscapes can provide fertile territory for new lines of inquiry for a designer's research and practice. Yet, understanding and quantifying the importance of emotion in design inquiry, and the process of doing and making is intriguing. 'Inquiry is...the experience of mystery which changes our lives'. (Cooperider 2014) Fabricated realities often shape the form and function of creativity and practice. Yet, what else can prompt and fuel the creative design product?

Emotion can be understood as a key driver of the production process, and it can be argued, it is an aspect that captures the importance of the lived human experience of the design process. 'One feature that makes...an aesthetic emotion...is its dual nature. There are negative and positive aspects in it which alternate, creating contrasts and rhythms of pleasure.' (Brady and Haapala 2003)

It is debatable whether the emotional states of the designer, or the range of emotions experienced by a viewer or consumer is of any real importance. Design and artworks are not easily measured. Therefore a qualitative analysis for a reflective case study seemed appropriate. The case study is used more to capture a student's perspective on some of the elements and complexities of understanding the feeling of moving through the aspirations of a design process. Moreover, emotions and feelings that engender the design process of the maker are rarely considered.

2. EXPERIENTIAL LEARNING

Emotion is a fundamental element of most design processes. Therefore, recognizing emotion as a key element of the design process can offer new possibilities in teaching and learning. A

design student can consider new ways of 'being', or feeling like a design student. Being an active participant in the design process with a conscious awareness towards the power of emotion as an integral part of design production, can lead to greater understanding of how it feels to work with the different drivers of design production. (Kolb, 2005)

However, it is possible to argue, emotion, often in flux within the design process, can be named and understood as a potent facilitator and factor in the taxonomy of progressive design thinking. The naming of things in relation to taxonomy is more usually equated with science and nature. Yet emotion is an aspect of scientific discovery and is understood as an innate natural essence of an individual's state of being. Within humanities and art and design thinking, emphasis is often placed on the importance of the binary of nature and nurture, with young practitioners emulating fluctuating emotional behavior's to gain cultural capital and value. It is not a matter of simply doing design. Instead, emphasis here is placed on appreciating emotional feeling in the design process as an advantageous quality of the designer.

Kolb's (1984) early work identified a methodology to understand the way in which ELT – experiential learning and teaching - defines learning as 'the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience' (Kolb, 1984). For Kolb, focus is placed on certain qualities and elements of being an active participant within a process, '...experiencing, reflecting, thinking, and acting.' (Kolb, 2005) If there is no definitive answer to determine the power of emotion's importance within the design process, what can be argued, is that emotion, is always present in some way and is appropriated through an often challenging and questioning design process.

3. EMOTION AND DESIGN

Arousal is a psychological element within the diverse forms of the design process, with the maker of design work often using cognitive awareness to somehow understand the elements that work in shaping a design outcome. What is interesting is much of the psychological research places emphasis on the arousal of the those who receive and view design artworks, and little focus is placed on the notion of arousal that affects the designers or artists themselves who are embroiled within a diverse range of emotions when engaged in the design process. The term emotional in creative practice is often used pejoratively. The 'off' balance artist or designer while revered, is understood to be connected to a negative side of the self which assist's in creative genius and is celebrated through spectacle. Yet, the connection to emotion is generally viewed as a flaw. As noted by Brady and Haapala, (2003) creative outputs are often a connection to making the world a bearable place to exist within. The flawed artists create utopian idealism in the daily setting of what is understood to be, dystopian life. Thus, creative practitioners through the differing forms of arousal can be

understood to connect, and render design works that capture contentious emotions and feelings.

The aim here is not to use a prescriptive clinical lens to unpack arousal within the design process, instead, the intention is to utilise a more holistic approach underpinned with theoretical fact. Berlyne (1975) uses two models to unpack the way in which emotion is an integral aspect of artistic design practice. A set of what Berlyne named, Collative Variables, sits alongside an Arousal Model of Reward. For Berlyne, there is a binary of excitement and loathing at play, (1975) which is often involved in the duration of a design process from inception to completion.

4. AESTHETIC COMPLEXITIES

Silva (2005) notes that two key systems are important for Berlyne (1975), a primary reward system, whereby a positive affect occurred whenever arousal potential increased, resulting in things becoming more appealing as the complexities of arousal and emotion increased. The second system noted, is a primary aversion system, which generates negative affects when arousal potential is increased. Interestingly, the primary aversion has a higher activation response threshold than the primary reward system. The two systems operating alongside one another create an inverted U – curve. From a neutral position stimuli moves from positive but shifts to negative after arousal potential passes an optimal point. However, it is noted it is difficult to ascertain how the optimal point is accurately measured, as it can shift very quickly from one feeling to another. This does not suggest the model is not reliable, rather, taking emotion and arousal into consideration as operative entities suggests cognitive awareness shifts and lacks fixed boundaries to measure the complexities involved in measuring responses to aesthetic stimuli.

When looking at the work of Berlyne (1975), Silva (2005) notes, 'He assumed that the collative variables embodied in structural features of art...could be described as varying in complexity, novelty, uncertainty, and conflict.' This point in Berlyne's work is particularly pertinent in the emotional responses to both historical and contemporary design practice and experiential learning. These variables are embodied often as abstract entities of information and cannot always equate to a rational understanding of the visual qualities of information presented.

Therefore, aesthetic appreciation consists of diverse variables that encapsulate arousal potential, and importantly, the starting point of this arousal lays with the designer or maker of the work. Looked at this way, the emotional experience underpinning a design process can be understood for its potential to instigate and arouse an emotional response. Both the makers and viewers may tap into the variables and traits that initiated the design process, practice, and the potential and likelihood to initiate responses. Silva (2005) notes, 'As a result, preferences for art can be framed in terms of how collative properties of art affect the arousal

systems of reward.' The key point here is that the designer can be rewarded through diverse and variable emotional experiences that make a design possible. It is not simply the process of a design, but the conflicting emotions that assist in the creation of work. This model of emotional aesthetics offers a greater understanding of how design students move through creative processes. A designer can be both active and passive at the same time within the design process of learning. '...it is worth noting that a strength of Berlyne's theorizing was his emphasis on continuities between the experience of art and the experience of artlessness.' (Silva 2005)

To understand this duality of arousal potential and reward further, it is worth noting that the aesthetic design journey and encounter of making artwork has historically been connected to binary of nature and nurture. In this case, nature can be understood as emotion, and nurture the complex relationship the designer or artist has to the turbulent cultures and environments of the design industries. The form and functions of design process is often challenging. Traits of the designer are linked to emotion and as argued, both joy and fear participate in different measures of a process and become the catalysts for flights of the imagination. The dualistic nature of the pleasures and pains of daily life are a common feature in much design work and take center stage in the renderings of both traditional and contemporary practice. As Brady and Haapala (2003) argue, '... these aspects combine with the reflectivity that is at the heart of... the refined feeling of the emotion.'

With a focus on questioning and problem solving embedded within art and design education, students of design often operate by using emotion as a fundamental factor and tool within the image making process. Practitioners working within the print, screen, and physical environment's capture and render their ideas in the manifestation of a product. Moreover, by taking a retrospective look back and an undertaking an evaluation and reflection of previous bodies of work alongside emotional well being as part of that design process may offer a catalyst to ignite and align new thinking and ideation assisting in the process of identifying ways to generate new work. Reflection is an integral aspect of the creative process where emotion can be appreciated and learned from. 'In the grasping experience the learner can perceive new information through experiencing the concrete, tangible, felt qualities of the world, relying on their senses and immersing themselves in concrete reality. ' (Kolb, 1984)

For young creative practitioners, consideration of the responsibility of making new work can lead to a negative creative block. How can teaching and learning processes unlock an individual to engage with a collective and collaborative model to facilitate the design process to encapsulate much of the emotional questioning that can fuel and drive the design process? 'Questions that help us see possibility and opportunity—what's best and what works, and what's next and what's possible. These are not problematizing questions (what's wrong) but are based on appreciative inquiry into the true, the good, the better and the possible.' (Cooperider 2014) In this sense questioning and the negative aspects that hinder the design

process are challenged through a positive process of thinking and doing. Conversely, for Kolb (2005) to understand a process and learning experience is not solely governed by questioning. Focus is placed on actively doing and being involved in a process to fully understand the possibilities of a transformative experience. During a process of experiential learning and doing, the process is not prescriptive. The participant can intercept the rules of a process and can own them to suit their own journey of self - discovery.

'In the transforming experience the reflective observation ability tends to observe others who are involved in the experience and reflect on what happens while the active experimentation stage favors jumping in and starting doing things. It is important to note that the learner can enter the model at any stage.' (Kolb, 2005).

Locating the emotional struggles that are experienced can determine how a new model of learning, doing, and feeling, can impact upon the design process. (Kolb 2005) Emphasis is placed on the struggles and emotional turmoil with student designers. Young industry practitioners are always on the look out for new ways of managing their technical and creative processes. Within contemporary art and design education, student designers from all creative disciplines are often caught up with negative opinions of themselves. This is a conundrum for design led tutors. Locating and activating new models of pedagogy can be key to unlocking a creative block. But what is Appreciative Inquiry, and how can it be used to assist with an emotional design process? It is argued that one aspect of this model, termed the 'positive principle', Cooperrider (2008), can initiate momentum and change. Moreover, feelings and emotion inflect excitement, inspiration, hope, and increase creativity and openness to new ideas.

5. MAPPING APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY

Cooperrider (2012) notes 5 steps to initiate new ways to create positive and progressive design systems, which are fundamentally underpinned by collaborative actions. Buying into collective openness is a risk with honesty and transparency usually avoided.

An Appreciative Inquiry design summit is "a large group ...planning, designing or the implementation meeting that brings external stakeholders together in a concentrated way to work on a task of strategic, and especially creative, value." (Cooperrider 2014)

The first aspect of the model focuses on understanding the way individuals think alongside the systems of learning and practice. "But the other half of the equation is the underestimated power of wholeness: the best in human systems comes about most naturally, even easily, when people collectively experience the wholeness of their system." (Cooperrider 2014)

The designer can draw upon new systems to manage the production process that incorporates an understanding of the way in which the individual works with all of the contributory factors from concept inception to project completion. The question here is, why select a model of "Appreciative Inquiry Design? What purpose does the appreciative Inquiry model serve for an

aspirational young design student? Does the model improve momentum? How does a system operate towards personal and, collective goals? "...the best in human systems comes out when (1) we go beyond systems thinking and actually do systems thinking with the whole "living system" in the room; (2) when we go beyond the negative, deficit discourse of our society and engage the AI positive change tools for elevating and magnifying strengths, solutions, and scale, and (3) when we go beyond dialogue to design-inspired action—"the best plan is the plan you do." (Cooperider 2014)

Design is based on problem solving with traditional teaching methods caught up in the process of anxiety whereby students often fear an experience that brings on negative energy and a fragile emotional state of being. Yet ironically, it is often this emotional rendering that leads to successful design production, so negative energy can in fact assist in the promotion of a strong outcome within the design hierarchy and the processes of production, "...when it comes to enterprise innovation and integration, there is nothing that brings out the best in human systems more than collective openness."

But why bother with collective outpourings of collective emotion that can appear to mirror therapeutic session? 'Large groups in the room can be effective in unleashing coherent...strategies...it is possible to witness change occur.' (Cooperider 2014) Looked at from this perspective the appreciative Inquiry model can activate greater understanding in both the individual and collective design process in new ways that can positively affect the design production process.

By student designers vocalizing their strengths the model argues the weakness more usually focused upon, transfers into positives. Moreover, being vocal about actually facing design process constraints reflect real experiences. "We live in a universe of strengths—the wider the lens, the better the view. The appreciable world is so much larger than our normal appreciative eye. What we appreciate (seeing value), appreciates (increases in value)." (Cooperider 2014)

6. CASE STUDY #1

Yet how are young designers supposed to learn their practice? Are they to embrace or refute active emotion? A small focus group and question and answer session generated some interesting responses.

One design student – age 23 - offered to lay bare his thoughts on his practice and reflected on how he noticed his emotional well being shift through regular collective sharing. He noted that both his practice and confidence thrived when he confronted how he felt through the design process and he captured his sense of self through journal notes and recording conversations where he had engaged with his peers. The student noted he became less sensitive to feedback from peers and tutors and saw a positive change in how he balanced his design studies.

'I did not enjoy taking part in any group discussions as they seemed repetitive and dull. When

we actively focused on a model that looked at everything we experienced as a positive I really saw a difference in my engagement levels. A was a bit surprised by this. I was normally the last to arrive, but found I rather enjoyed attending sessions that were able to recognize all aspects of the human process of responding to a design led brief, both positive and negative could facilitate a stronger outcome in my work. I also started to work with very different people who became more visible to me at these group sessions. Weirdly, my personal struggles became an active ingredient of understanding how I work.'

The student noted and commented positively on seeing peers and leaders in new ways. The emotional aspect of the design process was a key indicator of how his design process was facilitated, something the student had not been previously aware of. Four large group sessions took place and the student acknowledged disappointment when the meetings, at apposite stages of the term, came to an end.

"I started to feel concerned that the meetings would end and I suggested to peers we should continue the pattern until the end of the term. We did three further group meetings and discussed more openly, how we felt while we learnt. It was such a surprise to work all this out."

While the small case study of the design student is qualitatively deconstructed it becomes apparent that very insightful knowledge is gained from how the student operates in the design led process, with a greater understanding to the positive power of emotion as a key part of the design process (Kolb 2005). The student had understood the underpinning principles of experiential learning and reflection to locate progressive ways to understand how feeling and emotion facilitate a design process.

Young designers can engage in dialogue in new ways to understand the complexities of emotional experience in the design process. Students can move through the complexity of dissolving boundaries and experience and understand the turbulence experienced in the design process in trying to unpack systems of thought that are often based on negative thinking. 'We literally have an army of deficit-based consultants, each one with sophisticated technologies for studying 'what's wrong'. (Cooperider 2014) It is possible to argue this conscious shift in thinking could in fact lead to creative doing and counter the negativity that blights productivity, as the underlying principle, 'uses artful creation of positive imagery...to refashion anticipatory reality' (2014).

Through engagement of new ideas and action can allow for greater ownership of collective thinking and practice. Ownership of practice can assist in fostering creative outcomes through facing constraints of the self in design related practice.

7. CONCLUSION

Using models of experiential learning (Kolb 2005), emotional aesthetics (Silva, 2005, Berlyne, 1975) with appreciative inquiry tools of visualization can have an impact of the process

relationship to the design process. The fundamental drivers of these models assist in understanding the complexities of emotion in the design process and places focus and value on embracing both passive and active emotional and experiential design. Seemingly difficult areas of emotional experience within the design, or perhaps any process and lived design experience can be transformed and understood in new ways for design led teaching and learning, with positive affect. Viewed through a multifaceted methodological lens, emotion becomes a productive force. Perhaps, even more pertinent, is that the process of studying a phenomenon, in this instance the physical manifestation of emotion in assisting an understanding of how it feels to 'be' while 'in' the design process, can in fact, change a design process. Where the changes lead the designer to is debatable.

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