

Is There Practice Without Theory or Theory Without Practice?

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Abstract: This paper is born within the framework of the 2nd Academic Colloquium on teaching-learning experiences from the Faculty of Design of the Universidad Anáhuac México, North Campus, in relation to processes, methods and methodologies, as well as to different theories that depend on the institutional philosophy, the teaching profile, the student profile, the attitude of the actors in the teaching-learning process, contextual situations, as well as new realities.

Key words: design theory, processes, practice, creativity, methodologist

1. Introduction

Interpersonal communication between human beings has been modified by the virtual one, whether by digital age or by the demands derived of an avant-garde educational society.

However, creative thinking permeates to remain as a warm, multi and interdisciplinary activity of human approach, that takes us not only to present design proposals, but to ask ourselves about ethical judgments against these technological changes.

In this way, questions arise regarding whether the theory is associated with passivity and technology with sedentary lifestyle, while practice is linked to a dynamic restlessness and creative exploration of activity. Thus, renewal through personal exploration in the processes leads us to break paradigms between personal interpretation and what has been said about design, between theory and practice, and between the current challenges that we face as creative entities without losing our essence and without forgetting our origins or what we are made of.

2. Objective

Show the relevance of the practice in its theoretical foundation when the adaptive trend demands that creative careers have their permanence.

3. Methodology

The methodology applied will be empirical-analytical, through which the designer's creative process will be analyzed, being the observation and exploration what will allow us to establish connections between cause and effect, and in this way being able to get a concrete answer between theory and practice.

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4. Research Development

Human beings are by nature, created to coexist with each other, and that is why, their collective participation allows them not only to develop, but to enhance themselves, both in their abilities and skills, a product of their intelligence, as well as their creative and expressive capacities, in such a way that starting from their senses, they create repetitive patterns of behavior that give them the possibility to establish behavioral processes as a result of observation, exploration (examine, recognize, find out, record) experimentation (test, enquire, try, investigate, verify, demonstrate, discover, modify) and analysis (study, observation, comparison) to solve problems.

This concept works the same in Design, the designer collaborates with others to solve communication, shape and functionality problems of the objects, but this would not be possible without a theoretical fundamentation, a practical exploration, or the proper processes and methodologies. These structures have managed to create a vocation which, although it is young, has permeated many of the activities of human endeavor with or without an expressive and aesthetic sense. However, as Daniel Goleman¹ notes in his book *The Creative Spirit* (pp. 49–52), it is essential to point out that the creative experience goes hand to hand with the lived experience and in its beginning and it happens in a personal and sudden way, like a flash that illuminates the environment and, as a consequence of a constant concern to create, innovate, propose, solve, provide answers and solutions to diverse situations, being part of a process that is contagious and shared at the same time, which has diversified and become more ambitious and complex.

Just like children were asked to respect the border when coloring and using the correct color to paint the person's skin, design was ruled by very specific guidelines, defined only by theoretical bases, which little by little restrained the infinite and creative capacity of the designer. The norm was the search for perfect quality even when that was not the intention, aligning to certain editorial criteria was basic, and taking care of the standard proposals to avoid criticism was essential as well. However, this behavior had repercussions on the creative processes and design proposals, confining them due to fear of being rejected because of their dare as well as their lack of skills, and in this way they became conditioned.

However due to the human nature and the hope of being free of restraints in an activity which by its own nature should enjoy total freedom, Bob Gill² surprised us at the beginning of the 80's with his polemic book titled *Forget all the rules* that had been taught about graphic design, including the ones that are in this book, in it, he broke with all the theoretical structure in which he related the design problem with the solution, asking to forget what is beautiful and perfect on design and rather to evaluate its results from the aesthetic appreciation, receding from principles, conventionalism and trends to be able to resume and redirect the way in how the design problems are proposed, and how to design starting from exploration in a particular way, and in contexts in which practice becomes a fundamental element of each design proposal, in which the users, common sense, right balance, ideas association, and the nature of the question will become a triggering factor of the answer, the solution and the purpose itself.

Before, with theory only, the process was linear because it aimed to one objective only, the result. Now, with the prevalence of practice, which besides knowing the problem, identifying and observing it, it is investigated, explored, contextualized and analyzed to face it in an assertive way with proposals which in the search of solutions, could be right, wrong, frustrating or rewarding and that is because the process of design has been

¹ American psychologist, anthropologist, science journalist and writer.

² American illustrator and graphic designer.

connected to specialists who turned it into multifactorial and multidirectional, in which not only the objective aims to the result, but rather to a creative experience in which interpersonal communication has been extended to a virtual and multimedia communication whether interdisciplinary or multidisciplinary, that despite the distance, wants to earn a warm and approach place in the human experiences, not only finding solutions, but with their own emotions. In that way, the designer is resilient enough to overcome failure and his creative capacity encourages him with optimism to implement the process to find the optimal solution changing the frustration into challenge and at the same time in a wide range of new creative options that with dedication and a clear methodology process will lead to optimization and to the final idea.

On the other hand, when facing success, the designer must be humble and modest enough to not forget that his profession provides a service in which the person is the aim, and the design is the mean. Triumph or failure leads us not only to expose design proposals, but to ask us about the ethical judgments in emergent processes and methodologies before technological changes. Therefore, we question if the theory is pure passivity, whereas practice turns into an unreliable and senseless dynamism. Thereby, the personal experiences in the process, make us wonder if everything that has been said from the theory and the practice of the design facing educational changes and the current challenges that we have as creatives, not forgetting what we are and where we come from, where we will go, our dares and accomplishes, is only mere formalism.

Knowing that being creative is a human act that will be liable to observation for our own and collective judgments which are totally valid to appreciation, communication and functional works, and judgments that must be accepted with modesty to revise and improve them, so as we should remind that the design is always perfectible as its creator.

Having reserves about the theoretical principles is not that bad, at the end, they are our basis. The input that theory has given to design goes in a sense of the care and protection of the verb design and the own activity of the designer, moreover when nowadays this word has been misused in different environments, but applying the theory forgetting the social changes and technological advances would be a silliness. However, showing just the theory and working just starting from it, can detract the practical execution of the ideas, making the creative process mechanical, and not experiential, and with it, diminishing the pleasure that the act of creation should be given per se.

Trends themselves do not always win, what wins is to take advantage of them to adapt them to new environments and with new approaches that are only achieved with theoretical basis. In the design, these bases remain in the subconscious to, in their moment, detonate in a creative consciousness that goes beyond principles and guidelines in a fluid and practical way to optimize results and delve into one's own experience, and by making it conscious with practice, be able to design forgetting the rules. It does not mean to leave the theory aside, but its relevance is already stored in the subconscious and now it must be owned to create versatile, iconic, transcended and human designs.

In the classroom the teacher shares with their students, not only theoretical knowledge as principles of the thematical content of the course, but their own experience that enrich that shared theory in a more experiential way, through staging that theory in their professional practice, so that the student performs without a "textbook", but with their own interpretation, starting from their own experiences and shaping innovative ideas that will carry out exploration and experimentation to reach an adequate solution. To appreciate every idea, although at the end it will not be implemented, means to value human nature in an ethical and moral way.

One cannot forget that the creative process emerges as an act of creation that has theoretical bases, but in its ethical enjoyment as part of human dignity, should be full of values, and set in the practice through free processes and methodologies, in a reverie, reflective, absorbent, concentrated and respectful environment to enhance creativity, so as to recognize the human capacity to generate ideas, and vivid creations.

Alejandro Masferrer³ proposes a methodology to expose problems, analyze them, discuss them, and solve them, avoiding conflicts and threads that will unbalance the creative process.

Methodologies just are the processes that are activated to understand how teamworks work, dealing with arguments to celebrate success afterwards. In the design of creative processes, in addition to setting the adequate methodologies to address a problem and work on it in a team, the different mentalities and thoughts will face the comprehension of instructions to avoid improvisation, and with it not only affecting the team, but the demand and solution of the problem. Methodology will guide you on how to make things, which work systems will be used, thus the ideation will part from different inquiries and points of view to accomplish the creation process both, joint and interdisciplinary, and the practice that will enhance the team processes works.

The assistance in the creative process is needed, knowing how to lead and to have different leaders in a team is guaranteed, but that emerges with the practice. However, there will always be limiters such as: a priori judgments, acting without analyzing, being stuck in the analytical reflection, being afraid of exploration and experimentation, so as the lack of initiative when the rules are not clear. Going through the creative process not having investigated the problem, which must be shared with the team, and if all these limiters are not faced to solve them, the cooperative work will be quite difficult. Moreover, if we part from the issue that creative processes are abstracts, uncertain, confusing, digressive and in which each mind is a different world, these processes become complex and disordered. That is why the creative process must be agreed beforehand, adapting it to the requirements, and theoretical structure must be the basis for creation, in this way the ideas will flow consciously, intentionally and safely in the practice avoiding lost time and being assertive. So, practice will allow goal settings, identification and comprehension of the problem, ideation through experimentation, definition, delimitation, structure, filtration, improvisation, exploration, insight, projection, combination and systemic ideas association, and finally, the definite election to be presented to the client with the help of a dummy or a prototype.

Approaching the creative processes of design as an immersion in which we search to find and to know, and maybe to delete and to restart, but with a common idea of what it is, and with a specific mentality to finish the objectives of the project with strategic proposals, to ease the idea generation. That is not easy since each project is different and therefore, the parameters to approach them should be different as well, since the teamwork experiences intervene on them, besides the adverse situations that might hang around them, and so are the unforeseen variants and circumstances and that is why the practice in a changing world is essential for renovation, not only physical, but intellectual of the teamwork, since it is what enables the adaptive tendency that is required in projects and creative careers to achieve their permanence, avoiding creative uncertainty and giving intentional clearness to the work processes and methodologies without losing sight of the fact that is a teamwork, which is highly satisfying since it is a collaboration for a common goal, but also it is highly complex due to critical attitudes like rejection of new ideas, conformism, open-minded, tolerance, or lack of motivation, and those will be attitudes that with practice and teamwork will eventually be less harmful to design.

³ Designer specialized in methodologies to ease co-creation processes in teams of design and innovation. Founder of the pop Up Agency, a nomadic agency with 48-hour sprints. and creator of Triggers, a brand specialized in creative process consulting and tool design for equipment.

4. Conclusion

In a changing world, creativity cannot remain static in front of theory, since it must open itself to a new way of human communication, so does the technological changes that go hand to hand with the human being.

Science has given to humans the opportunity to grow, develop, and change, and that is why creativity, one of its most amazing capabilities, cannot remain just in formalism, but it has to be explored with practice so that we can grow in knowledge and abilities in order to be able to formulate new processes and methodologies that may enable the designers' ideas.

Asking if the theory led us to the practice, or if practice emerged from theory would be as questioning what was first, the egg or the hen? or what is more important, the egg or the fecundation?

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