

TITLE

EMOTIONS: Emancipation of the Emotions through the Artistic Process

ABSTRACT

Can the art be used as a helping tool of understanding emotions and vice versa? Learning and understanding the emotions through art could help better understand the art? Can art therapy be taken as a form to liberalize practicing and consuming art for making art closer to the masses? How can the emotions be visualized?

KEYWORDS

art consumption, art democratization, artistic process, colors, emotions, learning

EMOTIONS: Emancipation of the Emotions through the Artistic Process

Biljana Angeleska
angel.biljana@gmail.com

EHEA Official Master's: Research Master in Art and Design

EINA, Centre Universitari de Disseny i Art. Attached to the UAB.

Excerpt of the Final Master Work

1. Introduction

Based on the problems of the present, such as the fear of modern life and dealing with the daily life, it is not difficult to get the impression that nowadays, the suffering from psychological flaws and mental disorders is on the rise. Daily we are surrounded with many evidence to get that impression, whether they come from some recent released researches or either personal experiences of people from our surrounding. Research has been conducted by various organizations such as the 2013 Gallup survey: "The State of the American Workplace: Employee Engagement" and the 2013 poll "The School Cliff: Student Engagement Drops With Each School Year". Both of these reports reveal that many American adults and children are unhappy in their work place and in school. According to the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, at least 1 in 5 Americans suffered from some type of mental health issue on a daily basis. This make antidepressants the most frequently used class of medications by Americans increased nearly 400% in the last two decades(Pratt *et alt.* 2011), reported U.S enters for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2011.

It's not just Americans who suffer from it. A report published in 2009 by the Mental Health Foundation in England found that 15% of people

living in the United Kingdom are currently suffering from an anxiety disorder, and that rates are increasing: 37% of British people report feeling more frightened than they used to be. A comprehensive global review of anxiety studies published in 2006 in the Canadian Journal of Psychiatry concluded that as many as one in six people worldwide will be afflicted with an anxiety disorder for at least a year during some point in their lifetimes. Also the evidence from the World Health Organization suggests that nearly half of the world's populations are affected by mental illness with an impact on their self-esteem, relationships and ability to function in everyday life.

Bearing in mind all this, as Scott Stossel concludes from his personal experience:

Few people today would dispute that chronic stress is a hallmark of our times or that anxiety has become a kind of cultural condition of modernity. We live, as has been said many times since the dawn of the atomic era, in an age of anxiety. And yet, as recently as 30 years ago, anxiety per se did not exist as a clinical category (Popova 2016).

Constantly we are in a pursuit of more pleasure, more happiness, more love, but in return it seems that they are lacking even more. Then, I wonder how is it possible to have such a huge failure and sometimes even a counter effect, when we are eager to improve our wellbeing. Where are all these things for which we yearn? What we are doing wrong? Are we totally missing the direction?

As world moving at a frantic pace, thinking our relationship with time, we are part of constant changes. In my opinion, in the race to beat the nature (concentrated on technology), we abandon the essential care about the things of which we are created. That conceal the absences of presence that rules our everyday lives. That preserves our sense of reality (Virilio 1991).

Evolution has produced marvelous mechanisms to aid our survival, but it cannot change us as fast as we can change our world. We should gather our strength to use ingenuity with which aeons of natural selection have endowed us, to make ourselves more fit to the environment that we have created (Carter 1998: 64).

In the past couple of years, I frequently encounter papers and articles talking about similar psychological issues as mentioned above, or I would hear about surveys, and even testimonials and experiences by friends and acquaintances on similar problems and mental sufferings. Therefore, I am under impression that somewhere we must be missing the essence. It seems to me that the way modern societies are headed, we kind of neglect the true values of the ordinary activities of daily

life and the simplicity of our true nature. Instead, we are slipping into the vertigo of meaningless second instance lives in cyberspace. There is not only Facebook, but lately people are literally living other imaginary life as virtual persons on the platform Second Life.

Provoked by these records, articles, and experiences, I started making some inquiries on how this matter could be treated by the artistic visual aspect. My question was: How, me as an artist, can explore and process this problem or phenomena? Initially, I would be intrigued to use the findings for my own benefit and healing and then as personal contribution.

An interesting observation was that all of these concerns about human mental state, and the effects of the modern living, run through my life and subtly through all of my previous artistic and/or creative work. Therefore, it become very clear that my domain of creative interest can be simply defined as “turning towards selves” motif because I believe that by investing in ourselves, we invest in humanity.

PhD psychologist, Guy Winch claims that most mental disorders are emotional disorders, mental problems reflect a breakdown of emotional order (Winch 2014). He offers the term “emotional hygiene” for maintaining the mental health. He insist on paying attention to the importance of good “Emotional Hygiene” for our mental health, the way we take care for our physical health “To maintain good mental health, you can practice “emotional hygiene” in the same way you practice good bodily hygiene to help maintain physical health”. That requires learning about emotions, as many other authors (e.g. LeDoux, Daniel Goleman, and Richard J. Davidson), who are dealing with the same topic are suggesting.

Therefore, the emotions become the core of my research. Through the research on emotions, I started questioning: What emotions are? Where is their origin? How they manifest as physical act?

I want to uncover their importance, and thus emphasize the importance of the everyday, seemingly ordinary values instead of being satisfied into a transient activities and stimuli.

For much of the twentieth century the emotions were excluded from the history and philosophy of art:

The three dominant modes in twentieth-century art history came to be formalism, connoisseur ship and contextual studies of one kind or another. Including the German scholars who were high rationalists, fearful of superstition and emotion dominated twentieth-century art history. They all excluded the emotions. The emotions were felt to be too random, too embarrassing and too incidental to the transcendental value of art (Freedberg & Gallese 2007: 198).

Ernst Hans Gombrich it made the significant attempt to bring art and scientific psychology together in his *Art and Illusion*, but without some particular attention to emotions. In *Languages of Art*, Nelson Goodman properly set up the problem with different theoretical and epistemological aims, argued what he called “the domineering dichotomy between the cognitive and the emotive” (Gombrich 2002). Nevertheless, the work of neuroscientists from the present like Giacomo Rizzolatti and his group in Parma, Joseph LeDoux and Antonio Damasio, including some other contemporaries, serves as a visible showcase of the shifting interest of sciences towards spirituality and philosophy issues. Perhaps, “the time has come of an evolutionary stage of development of a mankind where human being needs to create new immunities”, according the words of Rita Carter (Goodman 1976: 247).

2. The Projects

2.1. Initial point 1. Colors: EmoLab

Inspired by the significance of the colors, their chemical composition, came out the idea for the project EmoLab. The EmoLab project is about mixing of basic emotions into higher-order emotions by mixing the corresponding colors. One of the optional goal is, the colors i.e. emotions, to be brought to the stage where can be obtained onsite (with participation of the visitors) by mixing and merging the given chemicals in the form of chemical experiment. This where the name is derived from (Emotional Laboratory).

The Rita Carter’s comparison of the emotions to the colors was an inspiration colors to be one of the basic pictorial elements, implemented in the artistic project. This also coincides to a Plutchik’s flower of emotions which is considered as one of the better developed theories of emotion mixes. The circle of emotions, analogous to a circle of colors in which mixing of elementary colors gives new ones. This corresponds directly proportional to the colors.

| FORMULA | NAME OF CHEMICAL | COLOUR |
|------------------------------|------------------|---------------|
| $\text{Cr}_2\text{O}_7^{2-}$ | Dichromate | orange |
| CrO_4^{2-} | Chromate | yellow |
| Cr_3^+ | Chromium ion | green (grass) |
| Fe_2^+ | Iron (II) | green (dark) |
| Fe_3^+ | Iron (III) | yellow/brown |
| MNO_4^- | Permanganate | purple |

| | | |
|--------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| MnO_2 | Manganese dioxide | brown solid |
| Mn_2^+ | Manganese ion | pink |
| MnO_4^{2-} | Manganite ion | green |
| Cu_2^+ | Copper ion | blue |
| Zn_2^+ | Zinc ion | white |

In the experimental project the hearts are emitting particular emotion presented like process of blending the respective emotion through the three layers of colors which gradually are transferred one into another. In this case three emotions are treated: love = joy + trust (green); optimism = joy + anticipation (orange) and fear (turquoise). In lack of technical elements to construct this project, the approach has reduced only to a symbolical transmission of the emotions, even without factual support. Only the Plutchik's wheel, but it is just an organizational model and the colors doesn't have particular relevance and significance to the emotions.

This project is a trail project, it's in his experimental stage and is still in development and research.

2.2. Initial point 2. Process art:

Point 0 (zero)

The project Point Zero result of the union of mine research on emotions and Konstantina Tomoska on the principle of emptiness (according to Eastern philosophy). Based on both these principles this project gives priority to the process. Again as one of the basic artistic elements are the colors, likewise the term from the title which refers to the emotional purification reaching the pick of the emotional cone.

The installation is the space fulfilled with ice hearts in different colors hanged from the ceiling. Each heart represents emotion according to the Plutchik's division of emotions and colors. The focus is in the process of melting the hearts and purifying into the puddles of clear water on the floor covered with salt (which represents the element of purification). As the colored droplets of the melting ice

hearts fall into the puddle, they discolors. Once hearts will be melted, only remain their purified water, without form, without color, they are disappearing.

The intention is to create an environment of changes. Point 0 is not a static experience, in a sense that it's a kind of physical process in which the shape and color are disappearing. Mainly is a sensory stimulated experience where the viewer becomes subtle and unconsciously active part of the process (the body temperature of the spectators will affect accelerating the process of melting the ice hearts).

2.3. Initial point 3. Interaction and Knowledge:

Brain Field

(project by Biljana Angeleska, Vesna Prchkoska, Paulo Rodrigez, Dmtry Bogdanov)

The Brain Field project engages multi-field participants all with a common interest: visualize and reveal the mysteries of the human brain and also to learn about the brain through immersive visual, tactile and audio interaction. Mainly, the project is about to bring together the knowledge of recent neuroscientific discoveries, modern devices, and contemporary art to forge the mysterious world of the human brain.

The Brain Field project separates the 3D space into scientifically oriented ground level (2D space), versus abstract pictorial representations along the vertical space.

The floor of the installation room (2D space) represents a scatterplot of two personality traits (extroversion and risk taking) that divide the brain units into (the subjects whose brains where scanned) entrepreneurs and programmers. The upper part of the space in full represents the mind, with its ongoing complex communications, will be symbolically transferred in a colorful and dynamic installation with visual emphasis on (and inspired by) brain connections, of low interlocking threads representing specific bundles of a certain brain connections on which the brains will be attached. The 3D printed brains will be suspended accordingly to their position in the scatter plot, each lit from above in a different light color, as with his own shadows mark its position on the floor. The surface of the floor, all covered with sealant foam, will mimic the brain structure. Only the spot for the shadows and links/connections generated between the shadows will be remain clear making pathways.

Projectors and leap motion devices will be used to create the dynamic interactive environment. Real Time renderings of real human brains of the volunteers in this experiment will be projected on the walls. There will be ambient music (using Max/MSP programming environ-

Figura 1. Point 0 (zero)



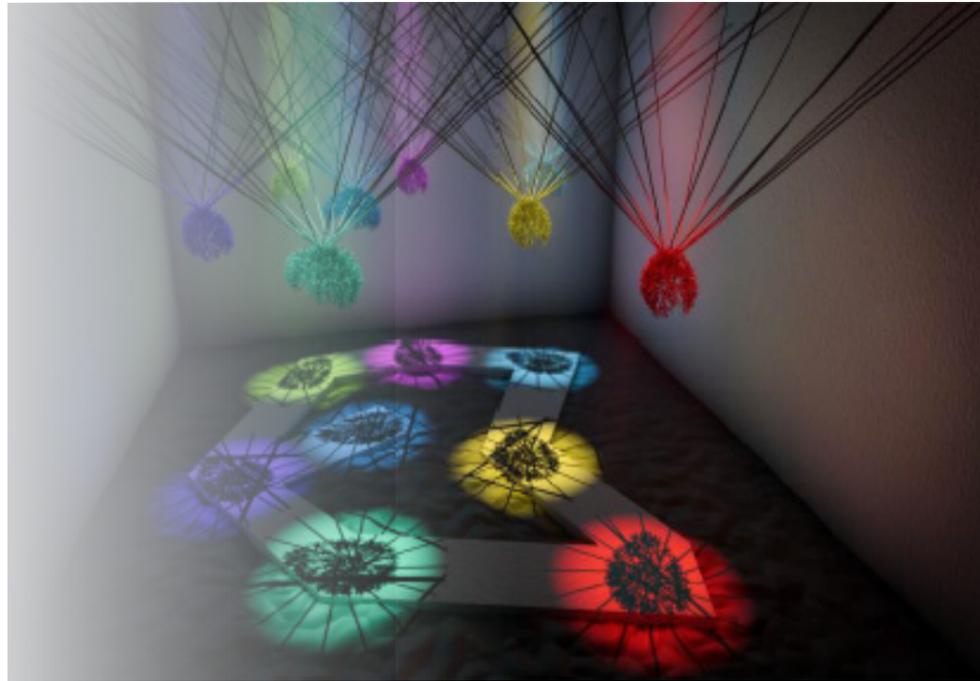


Figura 2. Brain Field

This will provoking sensational, entertaining and educational short stroll experience.

Here in the lack of systemic program that processes information related to emotions, again they are shown only symbolically through colors. That's why this project it utilizes the new technological and scientific developments to convey a scientific knowledge on an immense and entertaining way. Thus fulfills one component of the objectives I had set for this project. It is second, that results of viewer involvement, because the interaction contributes to generate new data. (It should continue to research and provide information on which will finalize specific emotions in the brain.)

3. Resume and conclusions

As explained in the introduction part, the motivation to work on emotions was latently present for many years and was major part of my inspiration as an artist. Treating daily ordinary simpleimportant things, which we don't pay much attention to, has always been my main focus as an artist. Until this point, the exploration of such topics (including emotions) from my perspective was purely artistic, which translates to a spontaneous, unaware and unstructured process and purely empirical way of dealing with the subject. The study presented here was my opportunity to resorb as much knowledge as possible from every aspect about the emotions with the aim to derive physical thematic material and technics for producing a work of art.

The guide throughout the process came from the will to profoundly dig

ment) generated algorithmically as a result of the zonification of the brain imaging data received by these EEG devices in real-time. The attendees at a time will modulate the rhythm and tonality of the music, and trigger different lighting patterns in the room in the whole room by wearing portable EEG devices that will read the brain waves as the participants experience the installation.

out knowledge, primarily for personal interest, and then for sharing in a manner of visualizing that knowledge later in a work of art. So, as a first problem-question the following occurred: How can one visualize the emotions?

This question developed into a puzzle of transmitting the emotions into visual information, but with an effort to cross-pollinate traditions for representing information and knowledge visually. In addition, the quest extended into a search for finding amusing way of achieving this visualization through art, supported and relevant to the scientific knowledge at the same time. At the end, the goal was to present it to the public in accessible way. The research started by excavating different areas that deal with the study of emotions, but have mutual sense and that carry similar essentiality. The effort was to conciliate the scientific facts and all findings from different fields with the artistic cases and conditions on those similarities. Therefore, the challenge of my research become the sketching of already existing bridges between multiple areas of a different nature and character that might not seem very associated at first sight. Some of them may only be distinguished by different terms, but have the similar or the same goal, and by merging them I want to generalize their mutual significance. Also at this certain point the antagonism of artistic research and artistic practice can be clearly seen. In my case the confluence one into another did not have a smooth flow.

My personal creative blockades at certain times during the research process appeared as another indicator to amplify and emphasize the curiosity of finding options for overcoming the barriers of self-expression, both creative and emotional. Thus, led to the conclusion that both (emotional and creative) are essential needs and they are functioning inherently: emotional release through creative expression. Art therapy today is established as a branch that deals with emotional relief by applying creativity i.e. art and art techniques.

My idea would be everybody practicing art on a daily basis, regardless of a professional determination, in order to constantly releasing creativity and thus the emotions, with increased emphasis on prevention practice in order to treat or to maintain emotional health. In this regard I agree with the popular statement of Beuys, I just mentioned before, anyone could be an artist. Consequently, the interest expanded towards improvements in the liberalization of creating, practicing and of course, consuming the art.

After reaching a certain quantity of knowledge and information, I have realized that the target I have set is complicated and very difficult to reach, almost impossible (at least not at this stage). The research have been showing and proving that the realm of the emotions is very com-

plex field and still stands as unexplored-uninvestigated territory. Even science has not discovered yet some answers that I was hoping to lead me to a certain solution. Not only that, but also because the emotions naturally represent a phenomenon. With intention to avoid the clichés of subjectivism (over exploited subjective expression of the author's emotions), other additional obstacle appeared as a problem such as the complication of objectifying and visualizing something invisible and untouchable, which is more personal and subjective.

Whatsoever, one thing stands out very clearly. By presenting the topic through art project my intention is to draw the spectator's attention and motivate to get back to think anew, and basically to recall the forgotten small-important things. The emotions are bigger portion of those things. One can draw attention to his/her own emotions by becoming aware of them. A way to achieve that is by learning about the emotions through a personal experience and practice on individual basis because through learning about emotions, they could be easily understood. That is why I substantially include art therapy, because art therapy is treating emotional problem issues.

The art today it follows the tendencies set from before (see note 6) and probably even more loses the interest about the feelings and emotions. Thus, art weakens its role for empathy and identification with the consumer, or in milder case it reduces it to only a targeted group of population, affected by the topic/issue that deals with. That also may sometimes make art difficult for understanding and thus the spectator is alienated and disposed of the contemporary art. In the research we concentrate on the sentiments and the emotions and from the evidence one can conclude that art has always had the capacity (fully, partially or primarily) to communicate the emotions. At times it was a primary role, while in other occasions just lingers unpretentiously in the background of the other political, economic, anthropological, historical roles. In both of such roles, art is not isolated from the emotions, whether it be as consequence or an effect of compassion of the audience.

Therefore the goal of my thesis was to approximate the user to their own emotions through artistic engagement (art therapy) while practicing art approaches to the art. By the artistic engagement, the individual becomes active participant. He/she emancipates itself about art, about his emotions, about to improve its wellbeing, about contributing the improvement of the better society.

My proposal and strive with this work is to reestablish the capacities and potentials of art to work hand in hand with other disciplines in targeting popular psychological and health issues. Uniting the forces with the different areas (working interdisciplinary), it has processed a terrain and foundation for easier access to those issues. Art with its sincerity, enormous resilience has the potential to engage in dea-

ling with many different types of problems. Just only with revisit and awaken its potentials, art could be a powerful intermediary that can coordinate and balance various concepts.

This creates a good basis for further inventing some model of work of art that will contain integrated techniques involving the viewer in the process of therapy. The idea is to bring the art therapy (or develop some other new invented term based on the same/similar principals as the art therapy) in galleries, exhibition rooms, public spaces, museums, not only the sessions in institutions.

References

- CARTER, R. (1998) *Mapping the Mind*. Los Angeles: University of California Press
- FREEDBERG, D. & GALLESE, V. (2007) 'Motion, emotion and empathy in esthetic experience'. Columbia University Academic Commons [online]. Available from <http://hdl.handle.net/10022/AC:P:8652> [1th June 2015]
- GOMBRICH, E. H. (2002) *Art and Illusion: A Study in the Psychology*. New York: Princeton University Press
- GOODMAN, N. (1976) *Languages of Art: An Approach to a Theory of Symbols*. USA: Hackett Publishing Company
- POPOVA, M. (2016) 'Culture and Costs of Anxiety? Global chronic stress? Or due to Globalization' [online]. Available from <https://adonis49.wordpress.com/2016/08/11/culture-and-costs-of-anxiety-global-chronic-stress-or-due-to-globalization/> [1th June 2015]
- PRATT, L. A.; DEBRA J.; BRODY, M.P.H.; QIUPING GU, M.D. (2011) 'Antidepressant Use in Persons Aged 12 and Over: United States, 2005-2008'. *Center for Disease Control and Prevention*. 76
- VIRILIO, P. (1991) *Aesthetic of disappearance*. New York: Semiotext (e)
- WINCH, G. (2014) *Emotional First Aid: Healing Rejection. Guilt, Failure, and Other Everyday Hurts*. New York: Hudson Street Press