

The Fine Art of Creative Perception

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What Language Learning and Drawing have in common:

"Learning to draw is a matter of learning to perceive" (Betty Edwards). Perceiving what is there involves learning to switch modes from the interpretive Left-mode to the perceptual Right-mode. Perception is increased by drawing (Edwards). Increased perception leads to increased creativity. Increased creativity leads to more accurate and complete understanding.

L&C-Learning is primarily a creative function:

1. It is a matter of learning to perceive in new ways.
2. It is self-expansive.
3. It is a source of deeper understanding of reality and God.

Anthropological and ethnographic research is creative:

- They are meant to help us see what is really there.
- These methods are meant to develop in us a mode of being and acting that is more free and creative.
- They can help us to develop a mode of perceiving and responding more fully to stimuli all around us.
- They can help us to develop greater creativity in problem-solving--especially in cross-cultural contexts.

Stages of the Creative Process:

- Herman Helmholtz, 1850, physiologist: "Saturation, Incubation, Illumination."
 - Henri Poincare, 1908: adds "Verification."
 - Jacob Getzels, 1910: stresses it is a matter of asking the right questions. Therefore creativity is a matter of also discovering the key problem.
 - George Kneller: adds the first stage: "First Insight."
 - Now: 1st Insight> Saturation> Incubation> Illumination> Verification (Next Insight).
1. The Puzzle: The mind is caught up in an idea that defies solution.
 2. An initial period of unease, distress.
 3. Suddenly, involuntarily, the mind focuses and insight occurs. Illumination is a brief flash.
 4. Concentrated work follows: fleshing out the insight in concrete tangible form.
 5. The process proceeds at different rates for different stages.

Illusion of "talent" and mysterious creativity.

- "I can't draw" syndrome.
- "I can't learn a language" syndrome.
- Is reading a "talent". In the 16th C. "Magic".
- Today in Africa reading is "magic."
- The myth of "the rare and out of the ordinary."

- Really just a matter of learning perceptual skills.
- Then basic technical procedures, the arithmetic.

Developing the brain of the future:

- Science shows that a balanced brain (both right and left) are most creative, intelligent and flexible.
- Each has an important role; each must be allowed to do what it does best.
- Two modes together are needed to complete the creative process.
- Processual thought needs both perceptual and verbal skills interrelating constantly.

Student vs. Learner (Brewster, p. 61)

Pre-course perceptions vs. Post-course:

"I never knew there was so much to learn!"

Learning to draw/speak another language increases perceptual skills.

- Learning the Hopi language makes us see the world in a different way.
- Learning to read trains the verbal system.

Learning to do ethnography requires:

- Learning to control brain shifts to R mode.
- Tricking the L mode (upside down: L doesn't know what it is.)
- Applied to LL and CL: Observe sounds, actions, shapes, relations in contexts. Tell L to keep quiet.
- Recognize the shift from symbols to words and actions in a different context. Begin to "think", "dream" etc. in the new language.
- Creativity is looking at things in a new way: Elias Howe 1838 and the invention of the sewing machine.
- Anth helps us to look at the problem in a new way.

Western Left-mode system values symbolic formation. Why? For quick processing of enormous amounts of information. For uniformity. It rewards NOT SEEING rather than seeing, rather than creative perception.

How to increase your perception:

- Learn how to overcome the suppression of visual data by verbal data.
- Learn to see what is there by drawing (or by detailed reporting, ethnographic record, diary, etc.)
- Creativity is analogous and uses metaphor.
- Creativity is done alone in silence.
- First insight and incubation require Right-mode and the eyes of the artist.

The modes and the creative process:

1. First Insight = Right (for observation)
2. Saturation = Left (for ordering observations)
3. Incubation = Right (for rethinking them in new ways)
4. Illumination = Right (for discovering a new integration)
5. Verification = Left (for making discovery tangible)

Learning to see differently:

- Language Learning and art both follow the steps of the creative process.
- Both involve Rt and Lt Modes.
- Both are learned by doing.
- Both open the way for the Rt mode.
- Both force us to use a different logic.
- Both let something seem to become something else.
- Both have states of involvement and isolation.
- Both involve "Seeing as an artist" in the Rt mode.

Language-learning and art both help us to see things in new ways and to look for answers in unexpected places.

Feelings associated with the Right-mode:

(while the problem is being dealt with outside of conscious experience):

- "outside myself"
- "inchoate--unable to describe it properly"
- "feeling of deep immersion"
- "no sense of time"
- "a sense of near mystical experience"

Rules of the Right-mode:

- Specificity: no general rules, actual concrete examples.
- Concrete: the concrete instances.
- Non-conformist: R-mode puts together information in new ways.
- Out-of-conscious self-awareness.
- When new logic is in place: L-Mode accepts in a flash.
- L-Mode acts like it dropped from the sky.
- L-Mode wants to "clean it up" (verification)

Developing the Skills for Better Perception

The five basic skills in drawing:

1. Perceiving the EDGES of the subject. The boundaries, what separates the problem from that which surrounds it, where one thing ends and another begins.
2. Perceiving NEGATIVE SPACE. What is the space around or behind the object? Do spaces help define the object?
3. Perceiving RELATIONSHIPS & PROPORTIONS. What are the constants and variables of the situation? How are they related to the problem?

What doesn't change? Can't change? Relationships of parts to the whole?

4. Perceiving the LIGHTS & SHADOWS of the problem. What is the relationship between the visible and the not-visible? The continuity? What is hidden in the shadows? What parts can't be seen but can be inferred?
5. Perceiving the GESTALT of the problem. The Wholeness, the unique set of qualities that make the problem what it is and none other.

These can be answered only by skillful perception. Learning to draw is the most efficient way to learn to perceive.

The Saturation Stage

The five skills in drawing are the basis for strategies for deepening perception in the saturation mode.

1. Identify the edges of the problem:

Perceive the edges. Do the ethnographic equivalent of a line-drawing. See the object as a unitary structure of interlocking edges distinguish the parts of the whole as pieces of a puzzle.

2. Identify the negative space of the problem:

Fig. 1
Negative Space

Characteristics of negative space:

- Sherlock Holmes: "Notice the dog barking?"
- Negative space is used in art to merge departments.
- Japanese use negative space in business dealings, in building designs, in informal movement, in merging procedures, in increasing the flow of information across boundaries of both departments.
- In Ghana employees get used to being merged ("acting" Rector etc.) then appointment is announced later.
- Americans don't use negative space; they feel uncomfortable with it. They formally name objects and objectify situations. e.g. "conception report", "inception report". They move ahead positively to deal with positive anticipated problems, anxieties or other difficulties.

Method for inducing the concept of space:

- Gaze into space. After some time the Left flees.
- Ask the essence of, or "itness" of, or "object" of an event, process, ritual, activity.
- Allow the shapes of negative space, time, sound to emerge and shape the thing.

- Make the problem "flat". Take out a dimension. Use a "glitch" (e.g. artists close one eye) to flatten perception bringing out negative space.
- Ethnographers look for "cultural themes" in negative space when comparing componential attributes.
- By delineating negative space the true object emerges by itself.
- Let the stronger concepts emerge first. Do not treat them as entities in themselves.
- Always shift to adjoining intervals of "non-entity."
- Then proceed from edge to edge, from space to space to let the whole emerge.

Creative thinking with negative space:

- You're on a desert island in your mind. Go ahead and lose your sense of time.
- Become absorbed in the activity or reflection of the moment.
- Direct a conscious shift in your mindset (L to R).
- Look at the things around you in the "new light."
- Something new will pop into view.
- The problem becomes an interesting puzzle.
- Feel the "kick" of success.
- Try to draw or lay out only the negative space of the object.
- Look at the shapes around the problem.
- See the negative spaces as filled with information.

Five questions for negative space:

- What is the proportional relationship of the negative space to the positive space of the problem?
- How much of the format is positive and how much negative?
- Is there a positive shape written that can function as a negative space? Sometimes something in reality is distorted beyond its normal conceptual form and cannot be perceived unless it is looked at as negative space.
- Begin to change negative spaces and see how the overall positive information is changed.
- Try to bring insights to the surface (if in the L-mode) by verbalizing discoveries. Give a name to what you've identified.

3. Perceiving relationships and proportions:

- Use the ethnographer's equivalent of Durer's grid.
- Lay out the field in time/space charts.
- Use a "spyglass" (big apple, small one). Ask where and what is it. What are the angles relative to something constant like the grid? What is the relative size? Take out a dimension, flatten it, plot it.

Sighting against constants:

- Ask yourself what are the constants of the situation.

- What are the givens, the facts of life that cannot be changed or manipulated. e.g. time?
- What are the changeable, impermanent factors?
- Imagine the constants as a grid: horizontal and vertical.
- Take a mental snapshot of the grid.
- Look at the problem through the grid constants keeping in mind your labels. e.g. advertising jeans, with two grids, cf. Mary Douglas' grid (p. 109).
- Examine all parts of the problem as parts of the grid.
- Note new information: proportional size of ingredients, where on the horizon, Right? Left?
- What constant factors influence your perception of the problem as a whole? Time, money, family relations, job?
- What happens if the grid lines are removed? Is the problem still there?
- Can constants be influenced? Removed? Changed?

Sighting to see things in proportion and in perspective:

- Place a grid over a drawing of the problem.
- Make one aspect "one" and the other "x".
- How big (important, urgent, significant) is "x" to "one"?
- What are the relative proportions of the parts of the problem?
- Check relationships by measuring them on the grid.
- What size is your role in the problem?
- Compare it with the role of others.
- Does the problem have many small parts or is it a single mass?
- Is the largest part high or low in the format?
- To the left, right or centre?
- Choose another aspect of the problem to use as "one" and "x".
- Continue until you have a good grasp of the relationship of the parts within the problem.
- Tag the insights with names and commit the new information to memory.

Use of glitches to correct the system:

A "glitch" is a bit of information that can be dropped into the system to see if it causes a new response to emerge or if it shows up the falsity of an old response. If you discover something, tag it.

Examples:

"what if"
 "upside down"
 "hidden image": something that looks like one thing but is something else.
 gaze at subject continually
 reverse the image such as in a mirror

Summary of steps 1, 2 & 3:

- Perceive the edges, negative space, put all into a relationship that is ordered and based on fresh perceptions of proportion and perspective.
- Words are to language what edges are to a drawing.
- Context is to language what negative space is to a drawing.
- Grammar and syntax is to language what proportion and relationships are to drawing.

4. Lights and Shadows:

- Seeing and drawing lights and shadows involves knowledge of "light logic" or shading.
- Lights and shadows establish mood, tone, reality.
- Dragons in the clouds: Leonardo's paintings encourage the viewer to "fill in". They capture enough of an image to encourage the viewer to fill in the rest. Artists thus control the viewer's response.
- The brain's drive to discover meaning: It will automatically fill in the details, only needs a little light in the right places.

Imaging: Seeing into the darkened areas.

- It depends on one's ability to see the known areas accurately without distortion.
- It depends on one's understanding the three-dimensionality of the problem:
- Here light provides clues.
- Extrapolate from the "soft shadows" first.
- Then move to the darkest shadows.
- Try to allow the information to seep in.

5. The perception of wholeness: Gestalt.

Perception of unity, truth, complexity, beauty, rightness.

The Incubation Stage

The Incubation stage draws the threads together.

- It encourages the "beautiful" question.
- It opens your mind to new information, new ways to see the problem.
- Through the other stages you have bounded the problem, researched it, sought solutions from patternings and shapes, spaces that looked at the deepest, darkest corners, seen the problem as a whole.
- Now the solution is just within grasp but must hold back.

The Illumination Stage

The big shift.

- Illumination occurs when all the information in the problem shifts to a different realm (R. mode).
- It can come quickly or slowly.
- It is R-mode: "Incubation, I therefore conjecture, is mainly R-mode manipulation of visual structured verbal and visual data, performed largely outside conscious awareness until that moment when the brain communicates the perceptual "Ah-ha" back to more conscious verbal processes." This can be through a model, a dream, e.g. the head of a spear (Howe), a mathematical formula, an invention, a business strategy or a cultural theme.

The letterbox approach to illumination:

- Assemble all information, see it in its complexity, see the stages you've gone through.
- Compare what you know now with what you knew at the beginning. You are doing an ethnography. Review the five techniques for drawing as applied to perceptual skills. Transform them into heuristics for problem-solving.
- Focus all energy on the problem. Accept the anxiety attached. Hand it over to the R-mode.
- Instruct R-mode to find a solution: letterbox approach.
- Let R-mode deal with it. Get on with other things. It will work out of consciousness.

The Verification Stage

Verification is L-mode.

- Take time to spell out the discovery.
- Prove that it corresponds to reality.
- Wholeness: the entirety must be kept in mind
- Harmony: it must have symmetry, proportion, balance
- Radiance: must be beautiful, harmonious, esthetic.