Creativity-provoking design education based on Jungian Psychoanalysis Theory

Kuanhua Chen\textsuperscript{a}*, Tien Ling\textsuperscript{b}

\textsuperscript{a}Department of Art Creativity and Development, Yuan Tze University, Chung-Li City, Taoyuan 32003, Taiwan
\textsuperscript{b}Department of Architecture, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York 14850, USA

Received November 5, 2009; revised December 8, 2009; accepted January 20, 2010

Abstract

Creativity, the core value in every field of design, cannot be taught in a traditional sense; anything taught to be learnt by the students would be just practical techniques, while true creativity must be inspired instead of instructed. This study adopts the theory foundation of analytical psychology derived by Carl G. Jung to review the teaching method in studio-based design education, and uses case studies to further illustrates how creativity is induced in studio environment.

Keywords: Design education; art education; creativity; carl jung; psychoanalysis.

1. Introduction

Compared to education for other disciplines, “design education” has always been hard to define, to regulate or to practice, and the outcome is often difficult to anticipate. The lack of a clear criteria and definite methods makes design teaching hard to evaluate. The traditional teaching for this practice, sometimes known as the master-apprentice model, is still adopted by many educators, although the process does not always work well with the modern education system.

This study attempts to use the theory foundation of analytical psychology derived by Carl G. Jung to review the teaching method and learning behavior in studio-based design education, aiming to explain the underlying dynamics between the teacher and students.

Creativity, the core value in every field of design, cannot be taught in a traditional sense; anything taught to be learnt by the students would be just practical techniques, while true creativity must be inspired instead of instructed. Although by no means viewing design students as patients, nonetheless the teacher often acts as a therapist or consultant. In this sense the studio-based design class session bears striking resemblance to Jungian clinical therapy,

* Kuanhua Chen. Tel.: +886-3-463-8800; fax: +886-3-456-6901
E-mail address: kuanhua@saturn.yzu.edu.tw
especially in terms of the individuation process in the analytical method. Carl Jung advised the analyst to stay close to every individual patient, suppress his or her own predilections and prejudices when making a judgment, and to consider each case as a new one. In design education, the same principles are not only valid but also vital to inspire true creativity among students.

The paper consists of a throughout analogy of a general design studio session and a clinical therapy process, focusing on the interaction and interdependence between the teacher and the student. Case studies are provided to illustrate important process in provoking design creativity. Finally, the paper initiates a discussion about how creativity is introduced and internalized within design students.

2. Jungian Theory on Creativity and Analytical Therapy

2.1. Creativity and Instinctive Forces

Emerging at the beginning of the Twentieth Century as a highly original thinker, psychiatrist, professional mental therapist, scholar and writer, Carl G. Jung sees creativity in an unconventional and throughout point of view. He classifies creative instinct as one of the five prominent groups of instinctive factors, along with hunger, sexuality, drive to activity and reflective instinct (Shamdasani, 2003). Among those five groups, hunger and sexuality are both fundamental impulses of self-preservation, while instincts of activity and reflection addresses to our natural tendency on our body (physical movement) and mind (consciousness and religious thoughts), respectively. Creativity, on the other hand, is a class by itself. In his own words:

Though we cannot classify it with a high degree of accuracy, the creative instinct is something that deserves special mention. I do not know if "instinct" is the correct word. We use the term "creative instinct" because this factor behaves at least dynamically, like an instinct. Like instinct it is compulsive, but it is not common, and it is not a fixed and invariably inherited organization. Therefore I prefer to designate the creative impulse as a psychic factor similar in nature to instinct, having indeed a very close connection with the instincts, but without being identical with any one of them. Its connections with sexuality are a much discussed problem and, furthermore, it has much in common with the drive to activity and the reflective instinct. But it can also suppress them, or make them serve it to the point of the self-destruction of the individual. Creation is as much destruction as construction. (Jung, 1936, p.245)

By making creativity itself a distinctive category, Jung takes “the urge to create” to a different level from other human instincts: it is neither entirely inherited from Homo sapiens’ animalistic nature, nor exclusively in our intellectual universe. It is neither physical nor spiritual, but could very possibly have portions of both. In other words, the instinct of creativity does not emerge all by itself, but comes along with our body and mind, heart and soul. It would therefore be a mistake to take creativity as either a pure given blessing of nature (as in “creative genius” that people often idealize,) or a specific kind of intellectual process that can be taught and learnt as a mere technique.

2.2. Creative Art and Dream Analysis

Jung has extensively written about art, creativity and psychology, noticeably in the chapter “Psychology and Literature” in Modern Man Searching for a Soul, and essay “On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry”. As a prolific writer himself, Jung’s writing often refers to literature, poetry or “the Poet”, however these terms apply satisfactorily across the spectrum of all arts.

When putting art and literature under the scope of psychological analysis, Jung is careful on not to diminish the creative process into reductive scientific explanations. “Art by its very nature is not science, and science by its very nature is not art; both these spheres of the mind have something in reserve that is peculiar to them and can be explained only in its own terms.” (1978) He disagrees even more on directly applying analytical psychology to try to
explain the “mechanism” of creativity: “If a work of art is explained in the same way as a neurosis, then either the work of art is a neurosis or a neurosis is a work of art.” (1978)

However, noticing the underlying similarity of inseparable mixing of conscious and unconscious mind working at the same time, Jung finds that “A great (art) work is like a dream; for all its apparent obviousness it does not explain itself and is never unequivocal.” (1978) Here we draw the important connection between a therapist analyzing a dream, and an audience appreciating a work of art. “A dream … presents an image in much the same way as nature allows a plant to grow, and we must draw our own conclusions…. As we perceive (the art) we are able to let the work of art act upon us as it acted upon the artist. To grasp (the art work’s) meaning, we must allow it to shape us as it once shaped (the artist).” (Jung, 1933, p.171-172)

The analogy of dream and art is not to say that we should see art as an analytical object, but we must approach art as we approach the delicate and unique personality of the artist. In an abstract sense, Jung sees the artist and the created art as one entity – he rhetorically claims that “It is not Goethe whom creates Faust, but Faust which creates Goethe.” (1933, p.170) The art and its artist come united under the creative mind and soul, where they define each other and in turn establish themselves. The artist and the work would never be meaningful independent of one another. Similar relationship exists between the dream and its dreamer: “No dream symbol can be separated from the individual who dreams it, and there is no definite or straightforward interpretation of any dream.” (1964, p.38)

2.3. Methodology on Dream Analysis and Art Appreciation

Jung’s view on art appreciation is related to his position regarding of analytical therapy methods, especially on the relationship between the analyst and the patient. This also makes one of the main differences between Jungian and Freudian theory of psychology.

Freudian theory on psychoanalysis finds that dreams can eventually be reduced to certain patterns. Subsequently from this observation, Freudian theory of repression and wish fulfillment is able to describe the causes of dream symbolism (1964 p.9, p.11). However, Jung differs in opinion on this generalization and simplification of dreams. He emphasizes on the importance of individual dreams and how differently they might represent varied states of unconsciousness. To him, the real task in psychology analysis is not merely to find out these specific images in dreams, but more importantly to understand why those images matter to the dreamer. Jung advises his followers to stay closed to each and every dream instead of trying to rush to a certain judgment: “Time and time again, in my professional work, I have had to repeat the words: Let’s get back to your dream. What does the dream say?” (1964, p.14) By paying attention to each single dream, Jungian theory stays away from the conclusive premise of Freudian analytical method.

In order to approach individual dream and to interpret its specific representation, Jungian therapists follow every patient, create the environment to encourage the patient to speak freely of their mind, but not too close to let the therapists’ opinion affect the patients’ own. To Jung, a therapist’s role is not to seize the right to speak for a patient’s mind through dreams, but to lead and to allow the patient to do his or her own interpretation. Jung says: “Learn as much as you can… then forget it all when you are analyzing a dream. …I can never understand somebody else’s dream well enough to interpret it correctly.” (1964, p.42) Since the only way to for the therapist to perform psychological analysis is to help the patient understand one’s own dream, the therapist must suppress his or her own predilections and prejudices when making a judgment, and for each clinical case the therapist must seek a new, individual approach. “No judgment can be considered to be final in which its reversibility has not been taken into account.” (1964, p.47)

On another note about the similarity between Jung’s view on art and dreams, he also states: “In order to do justice to a work of art, analytical psychology must rid itself entirely of medical prejudice; for a work of art is not a disease, and consequently requires a different approach from the medical one.” (1978)

3. Teaching Creativity in Design Studio

Creativity teaching has always been a delicate issue in contemporary education, especially since the idea of pluralism has been extensively accepted after post-modernism movement. In modern architectural education, specifically, the doctrine of design teaching has shifted from the late 19th Century Beaux-Arts system to the Bauhaus school of teaching in the early 20th Century, and continues to evolve since then. Generally speaking, the
value of design has changed from aristocratic monopolism to a more liberal, personalized multivalence. The question for educators in this generation is: how to teach design when the paradigm of design methodology itself has been challenged? In the following chapter, we propose a set of creativity-provoking activities in a design studio, and discuss the relation with Jungian theory of psychology.

3.1. Introduction to Creativity Studio

The Creativity Studio is prepared for first-year undergraduate level students majoring in architecture. The aim of the studio is not to teach certain design aesthetics or techniques, but to provoke the students to initiate their own understanding of creativity, and to develop unique representations of their creative minds by various artistic means.

The topic of the studio’s investigation is “Self”. On one hand, the studio guides students to look into one self, translate his or her own perception first into verbal and later into visual presentation. On the other hand, the studio critique of student works follows a reductive manner, aiming to strip away banal and superficial symbols and metaphors, focusing on the core essence of students’ inner creativity.

This studio consists of ten to twenty students and one instructor, working at a time frame of twelve weeks. Studio sessions take place twice a week, during which students present their preliminary works and receive group or individual critiques.

3.2. The Application of Jungian Analytical Theory to Creativity Studio

In order to allow the students to find their own creativeness, a series of assignment are designed. The preliminary task is “Self Introduction”, during which the student must prepare a talk to present of his or her “self” for no less than thirty minutes, with supplementary assistance of non-verbal means. The extensive time requirement forces the student to focus on one’s deep and personal “self” instead of providing general, conversational introduction. In previous years, this assignment usually led to students’ earnest research of one’s personal and family history, forming and shaping of personality, or re-visitation of significant events in life. The students are subsequently asked to take their introduction into non-verbal materialization, using the rest of the semester to continue producing and refining a collection of art works that communicates about their selves in the same depth as their thirty-minute oral presentation.

As discussed in the previous chapter, one of the most essential guidance of Jungian dream analysis sessions is not to let the analyst’s own reactions prevail the patient’s uncertainties and hesitations, and therefore be able to explore the content of a dream with the utmost thoroughness (Jung, 1933, p.42). Likewise, in this studio the teacher must restrain his or her subjective criticism, not to assume a preset procedure to instruct the students. In other words, the tutor must take the role as a close follower to the student instead of a leading one, always to encourage the students to go deeper into their own territory of self-discovery. The student is given total freedom to approach and express the inner creativity in one’s unique manner, just as how Jungian patient learns to analyze one’s own dream.

In previous teaching experience, when the instructor acted more as an adviser than a traditional didactic teacher, and allowed the students to develop their own expressions of “self”, the results were rewarding to both the tutor and the pupils. More often than not, the student’s work would evolve into an amalgamation of intuitive choices, which as a whole presents a dreamlike ambiguity between unforeseen expression and recognizable presentation of the student’s self. In a sense, the work would be the “model” of a certain aspect of the student’s mind. On the other hand, the student has created a work that is totally unique and unprecedented, reached beyond any existing formalistic or symbolic cliché.
3.3. Provoking Creativity in Art Work

Creativity Studio inherits an underlying common ground to Jungian clinical dream analysis. At its core, the student’s past memory largely forms the narration of self introduction. When trying to translate the oral presentation into a tangible work piece, however, the narration of verbal thoughts needs to be replaced by a series of operations of materials and mediums. The non-articulatory part of these manipulations refers to the unconscious, unspeakable share of one’s self, not unlike the “stream of consciousness” method in literary often points to a deeper state of the author’s mind.

To help the students reach the foundation of self-perception to inspire unique creativity, this studio encourages students to adapt a bottom-up approach to find their own expression. Because of its internal complexity, one’s self could never be sufficiently presented by a top-down, single-minded broad stroke approach. However, by articulating work pieces in a handcrafting manner, compiling seemingly insignificant personal choices to a certain volume, the students could often create a satisfactory representation of their self images. The resulting work would seem vague and ambiguous, unrecognizable and random at the first glance, but in fact it is a mass amount of tinkering and choosing, each decision derived from a piece of the maker’s mind, therefore as a whole contains great amount of information and understanding of the student. We argue that this accumulation of conscious choices would eventually lead to a unique expression of one’s unconsciousness, and fundamentally creates an original, one-of-a-kind work.

Jung has described how a literary work is conceived, in which the detailed portrayal of the artist working bears great resemblance to how the students create their work in the studio:

He submits his material to a definite treatment with a definite aim in view; he adds to it and subtracts from it, emphasizing one effect, toning down another, laying on a touch of colour here, another there, all the time carefully considering the over-all result and paying strict attention to the laws of form and style. He exercises the keenest judgment and chooses his words with complete freedom. His material is entirely subordinated to his artistic purpose; he wants to express this and nothing else. He is wholly at one with the creative process, no matter whether he has deliberately made himself its spearhead, as it were, or whether it has made him its instrument so completely that he has lost all consciousness of this fact. (Jung, 1978)

Jung continues: “In either case, the artist is so identified with his work that his intentions and his faculties are indistinguishable from the act of creation itself.” This sums up the intention of the Creative Studio: by guiding the student to the deepest understanding of oneself, tying his or her self-identification with the work one produces, genuine creativity is eventually introduced and inspired.
4. Conclusion

Artistic creativity is not something to be learnt: what could be taught are applicable techniques but not the originality itself. In that sense, creativity exists not as organized objective doctrines that can be passed on from educators to pupils, but in the form of “tacit knowledge” (Polanyi, 1962) in which the skill needs to be practiced to reach full comprehension. Add to the fact that to create by definition is the opposite of to mimic and copy, then creativity cannot be learnt by following examples as well, and it brings more complications to creativity teaching.

Jung’s insight into psychoanalysis, art and creativity provides a theoretical basis on how creativeness could be introduced by non-traditional teaching means. This method requires great dedication and effort from the teacher, as each student must be treated as an individual entity all the time, but nonetheless the result from previous experiences has been proved rewarding. We believe that further investigation in the relation between creativity, psychoanalysis and teaching techniques would be beneficial for educators in art education, design education and related fields.

Figure 2. Self Sculpture

References

Harvest, 1955 hardcover