

# INVESTIGATION OF CREATIVE EXPERIENCE OF CREATOR AND AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE OF VIEWER IN DESIGN

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Creative experience of a designer is an important event within the creative process which almost always brings about a transformative change in the solution space which the designer is striving to achieve. The aesthetic experience deals with the experience of the viewer when he's viewing an artwork.

Though a lot has been stated about the experience of the creator and of the viewer in the domains of arts and literature, the domain of design has been not very vocal about the same. Even though, the domain has immense studies done both in the area of creative process and creative experiences like the creative leap etc, as well as in the major area of experience of the user.

This paper tries to understand the experiences of the designer and viewer/user and try to find the correlation between both the experiences.

*Keywords:* Design, Creative experience, Aesthetic experience, Letting go.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The act of creation is considered to be very personal to the creator. Though it has been studied extensively as creativity in various domains, it still remains a very experiential phenomenon for the creator, be it a visual artist, a performer or as in the case of this study, a designer.

The act of viewing is similarly, a very personal and experiential phenomenon. Studied extensively in the domain of aesthetics, the viewing or tasting of the work of art is considered to be an individualistic experience of that viewer, or in the case of the present study, the user.

Both these experiential phenomenon are more deeply linked in the area of design as the designer designs with an intention of inducing a positive experience in the user who's viewing/using his/her product. This present study endeavors to understand the experiences, both creative as well as aesthetic, to understand the similarities and dissimilarities and the correlation, if any, between the two experiences.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Creativity has been studied extensively in the domains of psychology, philosophy and sociology since a long time. Creativity has been studied from the point of view of the person, product, process and the environment.

The present study is focused on the experiences of the creator within the creative process of design. Though it is realized that the study of the creative person, product, environment and the process are of great importance to the creative act, this study aims to understand only the experiential aspects of the

creative process for the designer. And within the creative process, the designer, in the act of creation undergoes varied creative experiences which are transformative, for both the designed product and the designer.

## 2.1. The Creative Experience

The creativity theories are abound with definitions of creativity from varied perspectives. But since this study is focused only on the creative experiences of the creator within the creative process, it is worthwhile to look into theory of the creative process and delve into its experiential perspectives.

Various theorists like Koestler, Rothenberg and Arieti talk about the creative process as a human experience which is brought about by the modes of thought. They also imply that there is something more to the experience than just thought; “something beyond the personal”. Gowan speaks of creative experiences as a mode through which the preconscious is accessed and the numinous is experienced in veiled manner in such a way that the self remains intact (Gowan, 1975).

Cross talks about the experience of creative leap which he says is central to the design process while creating novel ideas (Cross, 1997). But the identification of the occurrence of a creative leap is done post-production on the basis of the quality of the product usually by someone else. Hence the creative leap could be said to be more viewer perspective than an actual experience of the designer.

Another concept that directly talks about the creative experience is the phenomenon of letting go. The phenomenon of letting go describes the creative experience from the point of view of the designer. The state of “letting go” has been defined as:

- An episode of higher consciousness where the subject loses sense of time and space at the same time is extremely alert in terms of perception and feeling,
- A mental space where things seem to be happening unawares to the creator, something beyond self seems to be acting,
- Being transformative in nature both to the artwork and the designer (Sharma, Poovaiah, 2009).

This phenomenon of letting go is very personal, unpredictable albeit repeatable. Whenever the state of letting go is achieved, the output/ performance is of higher quality than the self assessed or expected capacity of that individual (Sharma, Poovaiah, 2009).

The phenomenon of letting go describes the deepest of personal experience of the designer/creator while in the creative process. Also there seem to be creative experiences which are varied in their structure and depth. And this study endeavors to examine the various shades of creative experiences within the creative process.

## 2.2. Aesthetic Experience

The experience of viewing a product is very much akin to the aesthetic experience. The field of aesthetics has various theories of the aesthetics of a product as also about the standards and judgments. But the concept of an aesthetic experience from the point of view of the viewer is developed very lucidly in John Dewey’s *Art as Experience*. Dewey talks about the viewer’s response and elaborates that the subject undergoes something or some properties, and the process continues until the self and the object which is the artwork are mutually adapted, ending with felt harmony (Dewey, 1934).

Aesthetic experience converts resistances into movement towards a close. Experiencing is a rhythm of intake and outgiving between which there are pauses each of which, in turn, incorporates within itself the prior doing. Dewey talks about the consummation phase of experience and says that it is not merely located at the end, but involves summing up what has gone before (Dewey, 1934).

In Indian Psychology, *Abhinavagupta* has talked about the aesthetic experience in detail in his commentaries on *Natyashastra* and *Dhvanyaloka*. He talks about the aesthetic experience as being characterized by a state of consciousness self centered, implying the suppression of any practical desire, and hence the merging of subject to object to the exclusion of all else. (Gnoli, 1985). *Abhinavagupta* says that the *rasa* belongs to the artist alone, it is his generalized consciousness. The spectator is also

enchanted by this perception. *Abhinavagupta* says that the *rasanubhuti* of the creator and the viewer is the same (Gnoli, 1985). This statement is quite intriguing to me and led to make this investigation to understand whether this holds true in the domain of design.

The present study endeavors to understand the aesthetic experience in its varied forms as pertaining to the domain of design.

Looking at the literature, one could observe that the experience of creating and viewing are dealt with separately. And since the designer creates a product to induce a positive viewing experience to his viewer, this study aims to explore and understand the aspects of both the experiences and identify if there is any correlation between the two.

### 3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study of creative experience, and aesthetic experience led me to take the study which would help me understand these experiences and their correlations, in any.

Hence the research questions for the present study would be the following:

- Understanding the experience of viewing a product
- Understanding the experience of creating a product
- Understanding the dissimilarities of the creative and aesthetic experience
- Understanding the similarities of the creative and aesthetic experience
- Understanding the relationship between the creative, and aesthetic experience.

### 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study was conducted using in depth interviews of the designers as well as written questionnaires from the users.

The study involved 10 in depth interviews of eminent designers which were in the form of semi structured interviews with open ended questions regarding their personal creative and aesthetic experiences. The participants of the study were from multi variant fields of design like communication design, interaction design, product design and transportation design etc. All the participants of the in-depth interview are extremely well-known in their field of work. The in-depth interviews were of duration of 1 to 1.5 hrs which were audio-video recorded. These were then transcribed for analysis.

In the second part, 4 products were chosen on the basis of the type of creative experience induced as reported by the creator/designer. The products were given to 10 random users who were asked to fill their viewing experiences in the form of an open ended questionnaire. The data was then collated and analyzed.

The rich data collated through both the in-depth interviews and the written questionnaires was then analyzed by thematic analysis method and followed by constant comparison method.

### 5. RESULTS

The rich data which evolved out of the in-depth interviews and questionnaires was subjected to thematic analysis and constant comparison analysis to arrive at the results.

#### 5.1. Issue 1: Understanding the experience of creating a product

The participants revealed that creating a product is a discreet process where the creator tries to tame the creative possibilities to fit into the constraints of the environment where he creates the product. The constraints include client, end user, and branding, global appeal to name a few. The designer, who's creating within these spaces, constantly tends to wear multiple hats. One of the participants *described the process of creation is to alternatively use the users or creator's hat and wade towards the final solution.*

Depending upon the product to be created, the creator experiences different types of creative experiences. The participants of this study revealed the following types:

*Type 1: Aesthetic Experience: Momentary glance*

This creative experience is purely analytical in nature. The creator is thinking critically and analytically about the subject and is involved in finding a solution to the problem at hand.

*Type 2: Deep Aesthetic Experience: Involvement*

This creative experience involves not just the analytical side of the creator. One can glimpse the self/ other side of the creator also being involved. The designers claimed that they felt an excitement and a passionate connect with the problem.

*Type 3: Deeper Aesthetic Experience: Connectedness*

This creative experience involves a deeper involvement of the creator. There is a more influence the other self of the creator over his/her analytical self. The designers claimed that they were able to create more novel solutions within this experience as compared to when they had earlier 2 experiences.

*Type 4: Deepest Aesthetic Experience: Unity*

This creative experience is the deepest and the most intense of all the creative experiences. The creator is totally absorbed in the subject. The designers claim that in these instances their analytical mind is no longer in their awareness and they are in a different level altogether. They lose the sense of time, space and also the self. The descriptions of their experience matched with the concept of phenomenon of letting go (Sharma, Poovaiah, 2000). During such instances, the designers claim to create much enhanced quality of outputs which was beyond their earlier capacities.

This study reveals that the creative experience of the creator happens in different types which could also be termed as levels. Another interpretation for the typification would be that the experience involves two aspects, the analytical process and the self of the creator. And depending on how much the other self overpowers the analytical processes, the creative experience would vary. The Type-1 being where there are purely analytical processes and then Type-4 having a complete overpowering of the analytical processes by the self.

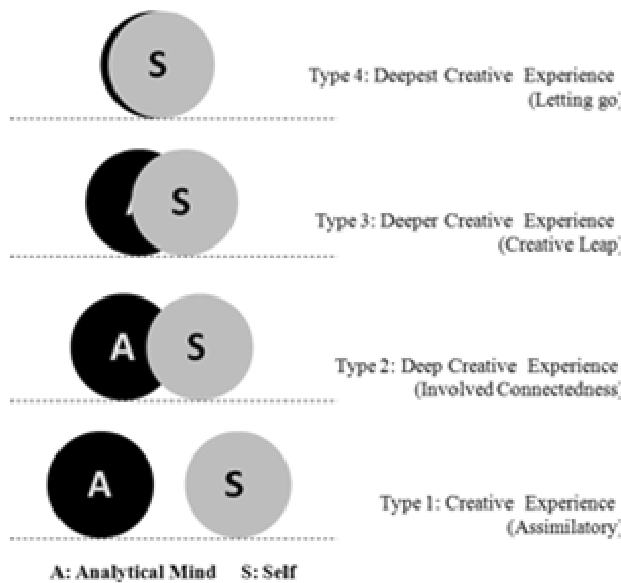


Figure 1. Types of Creative Experience: Influence of self on the analytical mind.

This reveals that the creative experience is variant and is dependent on the type of work involved, the constraints imposed, the priorities set (who sets the priorities is also very important), and very importantly, the kind of involvement invested by the designer.

## **5.2. Issue 2: Understanding the experience of viewing a product**

From the literature review, it was realized that even though there is ample knowledge base about aesthetics, there is no definitive explanation or description of aesthetic experience.

So for this present study, the aesthetic experience was loosely defined as:

*“The experience of the viewer while viewing the product.”*

The same study was undertaken to understand aesthetic experiences. As per the present participants, the analysis revealed that the aesthetic experiences could be also typified into 4 types.

### *Type 1: Aesthetic Experience: momentary glance*

The study revealed that this aesthetic experience involves the viewing and an experience of the visual form. This type involves the viewer to take in the entire object within a momentary glance. This is the most least sensory of all the types.

### *Type 2: Deep Aesthetic Experience: involvement*

This type of aesthetic experience expects a little involvement in the viewing. The viewer would, in this case, view the visual as well as the functional/critical aspects of the object. The viewer might get a personal experience of the product.

### *Type 3: Deeper Aesthetic Experience: connectedness*

This type of aesthetic experience involves the viewer to be deeply experiencing the product. The designers claimed that in such cases they experience excitement, a fun experience, a sense of discovery, a connectedness or identification with the product or aspect of the product.

### *Type 4: Deepest Aesthetic Experience: Unity*

This type of aesthetic experience is the deepest of the aesthetic experiences where the viewer is completely absorbed within the tasting of the product. The designers and artists claimed that they feel a sense of pause, a wait, to take it all in, where their self becomes one with the product/artwork. They lose the sense of time, space and also the self. They experience a sense of unity with the artwork/product.

The types of aesthetic experiences could also be analyzed from the influence of self on the analytical mind during the interaction with the object.

This reveals that the aesthetic experience also varies as per the creative quality of the product as well as the understanding of the viewer.

If the product innovation is on the functional side, then the viewer experiences a sense of discovery, while when the product innovation is on the form side, then the viewer experiences a sense of awe, appreciation. Like one of the participants described *his experience of an apple Magic Mouse, when he felt a great sense of discovery when he realized the functional feature of the touch/gesture sensitive top surface.*

Another participant described his experience of viewing a Porsche. He described a sense of awe and a leisurely perusal of all the visual features and accents of the car. He described a sense of flowing harmony and a deep sense of appreciation for the designed elegance of the product.

## **5.3. Issue 3: Understanding the dissimilarities of the creative and aesthetic experience**

The participants described that the creative and aesthetic experiences are very dissimilar in many aspects.

The most important aspect that differentiates the two experiences is the duration. The participants felt that the creative experience is long standing and the aesthetic experience is of a shorter duration. The aesthetic/ viewing seems to give a first response to the product where one is exploring and discovering

new elements within the product where as within creative experience one is more involved in trying to fit and assimilate all the requirements along with the discoveries into the product.

The aesthetic/viewing experience is more critical and precise. While the creative experience is described to be more optimistic and having phases of fun and joy as well as frustration and struggle.

**5.4. Issue 4: Understanding the similarities of creative and aesthetic experience**

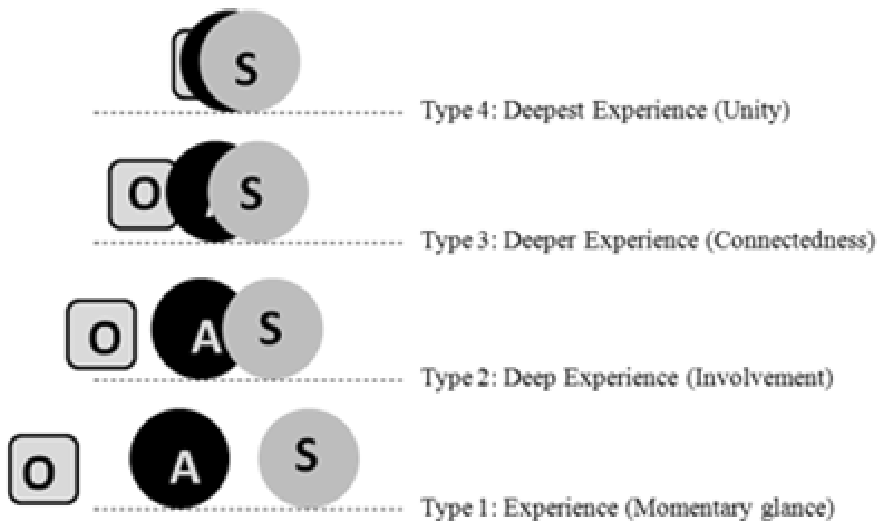
The study revealed that there are aspects of similarity between the aesthetic and creative experiences. Both the experiences reveal a sense of excitement and depth. The aesthetic experience described by one of the participants says that within the experience there is a sense of pause, a wait to explore and appreciate and to take it all in, to suddenly discover the new element in the product. And similarly within the creative experience, one of the participants described it as a sense of numbness of the brain and suddenly the idea is there.

Both the experiences describe a passionate connectedness. The creative experience involves an experience of letting go and the aesthetic experience, a sense of unity with the product.

The study showed that within the process of creating a product, they had some profound and deeper experiences which they described as letting go experiences. In the process of viewing also, the participants revealed that they had special experiences which they described in various verbalizations that could be clubbed together to form the overall aesthetic experience of unity with the object of viewing.

**5.5. Issue 5: Understanding the relationship between the creative, aesthetic and user experiences**

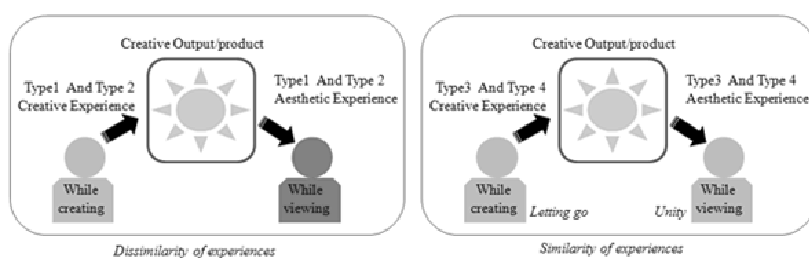
The present study described that there is a sort of correlation between the creative and aesthetic experience. As one of the participants describes it, “the *aha* moment”, or the triumph of finding a creative solution is often rediscovered by the user when s/he views the product. The results seem to show that creative experience gets rubbed on to the user experience.



**O: Object    A: Analytical Mind    S: Self**

**Figure 2.** Types of Aesthetic Experience: Influence of self on the analytical mind during interaction with the object.

Type of Experience	Similarities	Dissimilarities
Type 1 and Type 2 creative & aesthetic experiences	Less similarities	Duration of Time, difference in involvement, difference in characteristics/attributes
Type 3 and Type 4 creative and aesthetic experiences	Excitement and depth, different mental plane, loss of sense of time, space, and self, transformative, associated with feeling of awe and joy	Lesser dissimilarities



**Figure 3.** Probable correlation between the types of Creative and Aesthetic experiences.

The analysis revealed that there was more dissimilarity within the viewing experience of products which had reported Type-1 and Type-2 creative experiences. The descriptions also matched with that of the Type-1 and Type-2 aesthetic experiences.

The analysis revealed that there were more similarities within the viewing experience of products which had reported Type-3 and Type-4 creative experiences. The descriptions also matched with that of the Type-3 and Type-4 aesthetic experiences. And on such instances, one could say that the experiences of the creator and the viewer are of equally immersive nature and equally in depth. The descriptions of these experiences, both creative and aesthetic, showed more similarities in terms of attributes.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The present study revealed the different types of experiences of the creator and the viewer while creating and viewing a product. The study also showed the similarities of the creative and aesthetic experiences and the correlation between the two experiences.

The experience of creating a product is varied depending directly upon the involvement of the designer as well as the constraints s/he has to work against. According to the descriptions, these experiences have been typified into Type-1: creative experience (Assimilatory), Type-2: deep creative experience (Involved connectedness), Type 3: deeper creative experience (Creative leap), Type-4: creative experience (Letting go). The creative experience would vary in terms of its intensity and depth to a creator, the lightest one being that which is assimilatory and the deepest one is the letting go experience.

The study showed that the experience of viewing a product is highly dependent on the quality of the product and the understanding of the viewer. The experiences varied in terms of quality and immersion. The different types of experiences are Type-1: aesthetic experience (momentary glance), Type-2: deep aesthetic experience (connected identification) Type-3: deeper aesthetic experience (interactive fun) Type4: deepest aesthetic experience(unity). These experiences are described as “from the heart, a sense of discovery, Sense of pause, wait, to take it in, a sense of unity with the product”. When the aesthetic

experience is the deepest of the viewing experiences then it would bring a sense of unity with the product.

The study further explored the various similarities and differences between the creative and aesthetic experiences. The analysis showed that both the experiences had some characteristics which were similar and some which were dissimilar depending on the type of experiences experienced while creating and while viewing. The experiences were different in terms of duration, the aesthetic experience being of a shorter duration than the creative experience. The experiences also varied in terms of depth and emotions. Whereas the aesthetic experience is a direct response to new discoveries in the product, the creative experience is more elaborate, immersive and involved.

The letting go experience type of the creative experience is very deep experience, where one not only forgets the time and space but also one's self. These experiences are deeply transformative to the product as well as the designer. The deeper aesthetic experiences also echo some characteristics of the letting go experience in terms of the non-awareness of time and space, a total immersion and a sense of unity with the product.

It was of deep interest to me to not only understand whether the deeper aesthetic experience and letting go experience shared some common characteristics, but it was interesting to find whether there was any correlation between the occurrence of letting go phenomenon in the designer while designing a product and the aesthetic experience of the viewer while viewing the same product. And amazingly, there seems to be a positive correlation between both these experiences. It had been observed that there is positive relation between the occurrence of letting go phenomenon to the creative quality of the creation (Sharma, Poovaiah, 2009). But this study revealed that the occurrence of the phenomenon of letting go not only has a positive correlation to the creative quality of the product alone but also brings about a deep resonance of the creative experience into the aesthetic experience of the user.

And since the field of user experience design is growing widely, apart from taking the outwardly issues of the user needs and his interaction with the product, it would be worthwhile to understand this positive relation between the designer's experience of letting go phenomenon to the user's positive aesthetic experience of the designed product.

It would be interesting to undertake a deeper investigation to understand the factors which led the designer to experience the letting go phenomenon as also the user to experience the similar aesthetic experience of unity.

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