

## UNTANGLING THE SQUIGGLES: DOODLING AS A STREAM OF CONSCIOUSNESS TECHNIQUE

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Every spring of creativity, whether it is art, literature, music or even novel scientific inventions can be defined as an attempt to manipulate human mind. Creative productions cannot find roots if it is separated from the intricate circuit of imagination created by manipulating human psyche. Literature and art rule the domain of creative productions as they are the most convenient mediums to depict complex ideas in perceivable contexts. Complexities reached its zenith by the culmination of Second World War, marked in literary history as post- modern age. War taught men many a lesson and the most prominent among them was ‘reality’.

Both artists and writers engaged themselves on a quest to find the most appropriate technique that could represent reality as it is from late nineteenth century onwards by rejecting romanticism. While stream of consciousness technique was endorsed by modernist authors such as Woolf and Joyce, subject less forms of art such as cubism, fauvism and futurism was adopted by artists of the age such as Picasso, Braque, Duchamp and Matisse. Lamentation of lost spirituality in literature of modern age echoed in art also. The subject less forms of art was considered as spiritual remedy for soul less modern life. Though artistic technique such as cubism and surrealism opened up new possibilities in tapping subconscious, they were not able to provide a journey through it. This was made possible with the development of abstract expressionism which had its roots in psychoanalysis of Freud and Jung. In abstract

expressionism, art became the pursuit of the subconscious. Artists expressed hidden emotions, repressed desires, dreams and fantasies and the irrational and antirational forces of mind. The moment was pioneered by Jackson Pollock and included artist like William de Kooning, Franz Kline and Lee Kranser.

Automatism is considered as the principle underlying abstract expressionism and it is evident in the works of Jackson Pollock. Pollock who was well known for his inwardness and volatile temperament found an outflow of his inner self in his painting. Early works of Pollock were influenced by Jungian philosophy as one can observe in the painting Male and Female. “The painting is a representation of Pollock’s own primitive, uncultured life with

opposite pairs joining to form complex web of inter relationships” (Fitzgerald 4). The most productive period of his life is marked by the introduction of action painting technique and abstract expressionism. This period also marks his recovery from alcoholism. It is reflected in his later paintings by a calm and inviting aura as in *Lavender mist: Number 1*. The painting *Male and Female* and *Lavender mist Number 1* contrast each other in pattern and combination of colours. These paintings, produced during two distinctly different phases of Pollock’s life, throw light into his underlying mental struggles that made these paintings what it is. Abstract expressionists use continuous strokes without intervention to create their art, which gives much space for subconscious just like in automatism.

Abstract expressionism does not confine its premises to talented artists but also mediocre who doodle in the last page of his notebook. It can be said that abstract expressionism, though began as an avant-grade movement, survived into present in the form of doodles. But unfortunately, doodles are treated as a waste of time which distracts the doodler from his original role at the moment, which could be a spectator of an event, student or even a professional attending an international convention. According to Watts, “doodles are pictures of self expression that are usually produced in semi automatic manner while mind is in a preoccupied or trans-like state of consciousness”(qtd.in Qutub 72). It is the involvement of subconscious mind in solving unsolved problems of conscious mind. Ulam Spiral, the graphic representation of prime numbers was developed by Stanislaw Ulam while his conscious mind was playing the role of a professional attending an academic presentation. It is not always true to say that doodling shifts our attention from present to drift through illusions. Engaging oneself in doodling can increase concentration and thereby equip him with better understanding and memory about which ever subject he is dealing with. A study conducted by Dr. Jackie Andrade (2009), a British Professor of Psychology at the University of Plymouth, proves that doodling helps to remember more details. Half among her subjects were given the task of doodling while listening to a tape. It was found that those who doodled remembered twenty nine percentages more information from the tape compared to the other half who did not.

Freud and Jung were the first to treat these junk papers seriously and started interpreting them. But, doodle interpretation and treatment based on that became popular after the intervention of Dr. Robert Burns, US Psychologist and former director of Institute of Human Development at Seattle. He dedicated his entire career in doodle interpretation. Emma Steiger is another noteworthy name in this domain. Her work *Psychology of Doodles* acts as a reference point for interpretation of great number of doodles including geometrical shapes like circle, triangle, squares and loops. Doodles probe themselves into those moments in which even an accomplished author face writer’s block. Many of our favorite literary figures including Plath, Vonnegut, Pushkin and Beckett are doodlers. Even though both writing and doodling are creative processes, writing is logical which involves

left side of brain while doodling is initiative and involves right side of brain. While writers take their brief ‘ doodling break’, their conscious mind is at rest from accumulated deep thoughts while subconscious mind looks into the issue to come up with suggestions which integrate conscious thoughts. By undertaking a study of doodles in *Breakfast of Champions* by Vonnegut and Becket’s manuscript of his play *Endgame*, the role played by them in both integrating and projecting the stream of thoughts of both characters and author is made clear.

*Breakfast of Champions* is Vonnegut’s seventh novel. The novel revolves around Kilgore Trout, a science-fiction writer and Dwayne Hoover with an extremely complex narrative approach. Peter Prescott denounced its “gratuitous digressions”, its “cretinous philosophizing” its “self indulgence and its facile fatalism” as “pretentious hypocritical manure” (Prescott 40). However in another critical essay, Robert Merrill defended the novel as “not novel of facile fatalism, but a novel about facile fatalism”(Merrill 153). Unfortunately all the critics, positive and negative, ignored the most distinctive feature of the novel, its more than hundred hand drawn illustrations, or rather doodles. Vonnegut spares no effort to hide his skepticism towards modern life. Instead he uses the doodles to make his comments more explicit. According to Blake Schreiner, “*Breakfast of Champions* emphasizes through demonstration, the importance of visualization both in contemporary American culture and in post modern ideology” (15). The illustrations in *Breakfast of Champions* are not conscious drawings by a third person but idle pen-felt drawings by the author himself. According to his daughter Nanette Vonnegut, Vonnegut adopted the title of “Grand Master Doodler” along with his father and sister internalizing what she calls “the secret joy of doodling”. She also points out that her father “forget about the war when he doodled”(qtd. in Schreiner 16). Vonnegut must have resorted to this secret joy while writing *Breakfast of Champions*. The novel was written during the falling phase of author’s professional career. The sting of nihilism throughout the novel can be tied with the depression he faced during its production.

Approaching the illustration in *Breakfast of Champions* is rather tricky. At the surface, doodles in *Breakfast of Champions* are naïve, deadpan objective descriptions just like its narrations. They appear as mere visual representation of author’s words. Vonnegut takes up “the perspective of someone who must explain everything, drawing pictures for his readers-of a chicken, a cow, a hamburger, a holiday inn and most infamously of his rectum”(Allen 107). The true function of doodles is not the pictorial representation, but to symbolically enhance the themes of a text. To decipher every doodle in the book is beyond the scope of the paper. Fortunately doodles of the first two chapters throw light on the impact it has in the novel.

The first chapter is nothing but the history of America stripped down to the very base. Doodles that accompany this seemingly innocent retelling of American history, “demonstrate

the nearly subconscious role of non verbal symbols in constructing our experience of life” (Schreiner 24). Among the various landmarks in the history of America, Vonnegut chose to talk about the national anthem, which he calls, “gibberish sprinkled with question marks”. The national motto “E Pluribus Unum” has nothing to do with actual American life. The entire proud saga of America, according to Vonnegut is nothing but proud colonization of “sea pirates”. The first doodle that appears in this chapter is of American flag, which is followed by a comical description of taboo of flag dipping. The other doodle is of the year 1492, which is imprinted upon the mind of children as the year in which America was ‘discovered’ by humans. Vonnegut disagrees that “actually millions of human beings were already living full and imaginative lives on the continent in 1492. That was simply the year in which sea pirates began to cheat and rob and kill them”. The year 1492 can be well described in simple line, but author resorted to doodles to enhance its impact on reader. The third doodle is of “piece of evil nonsense” which the government taught the children as “beacon of freedom” and it looked like “an ice-cream cone on fire”(Vonnegut 8,10,10,10). This is nothing but Beacon of Freedom in Statue of Liberty. Vonnegut expresses his fear in “perpetuation of injustice and misfortune as visual icon by resorting to the very tool he critiques; words and images” (Schreiner 26).

The other important doodles in the work include beaver, cow, chicken and bomb. These doodles not only evoke the stream of consciousness, but also express the duality of meanings. Vonnegut confuses the word “beaver”, by doodling a large rodent at first, followed by vagina. He then goes on with the expression, “this is where the babies comes from.” Similarly “chicken” is represented both as alive, flightless bird and a bucket of deep fried meat. Vonnegut includes many other doodles including sign boards, apple, gun and even female underpants with the aim to emphasize the danger of visual culture. One of the sign boards near an inn said “EAT” and “so they ate” (Vonnegut 23, 157-158, 89). All these doodles represent the impact of visual culture on the readers.

Thus by the interpretation of seemingly innocent doodles, Vonnegut’s confession in the preface of novel becomes clear. In the preface of the novel, Vonnegut agrees that the doodles are devices to purge the subconscious mind. Protagonist of the novel, Kilgore Trout resembles the author himself. Trout shares the same skepticism about modern life as Vonnegut himself. Being an unsuccessful author he can only get his works published only in pornographic books. His stories are accompanied with pictures that are in no way related to it. Thus both media are disrupted. This distortion of both media is prominent throughout the novel. From the above quote, we understand that Vonnegut was finally able to conceive that both artistic and literary techniques are of equal importance in shaping our mindset. Schreiner concludes that, in order to fulfill the author’s desire “to do no more than “write about life” and “bring chaos to order”, it would seem that Vonnegut’s novel, just like human histories and minds it critiques, would be incomplete without its visual components (Schreiner 28).

While Vonnegut used doodles as an extra tool for his narrative, Samuel Beckett restrained from publishing his doodles along with his plays. His *Endgame*, was published following *Waiting for Godot*. Just like in *Waiting For Godot*, chaos and absurdity of life are the prominent themes of *Endgame* also. The play is set in an apocalyptic background with characters, Hamm, his servant Clov and his parents Nagg and Nill. The protagonists are far more inhuman than that of *Waiting for Godot*. “The inhuman quality derives from the terrible structures of *Endgame*, spatial and temporal. The physical disabilities and mutilations of the characters mean that they cannot move freely, but the “something” that is taking its course suggest they are also trapped in a deterministic or mechanical system”(Beckett 42).

Hamm, the protagonist is blind and is in wheel chair. Nagg and Nill appears from the trash bin. Plays of Beckett are strong in its visual effects. While writing *Endgame*, Beckett was deeply influenced by mimes. This is evident in the opening scene of the play. Clov, makes a dumb action show. It must have been this same artistic spirit that prompted him to take ‘doodle breaks’ while writing plays. Beckett’s manuscripts were published posthumously which are filled with such doodles in the margins. The most famous among them is *Watt* manuscripts. Beckett’s manuscripts of *Endgame* consist of one hand written draft and four typescripts. Doodles are most abundant in handwritten manuscript. Intervention of subconscious is obvious as he drew doodles while re- reading printed manuscripts.

Doodles in Beckett’s manuscripts can be divided into various basic shapes such as spirals, faces, people, creatures, wedges, mirrors, small and large abandonments. Beckett drew many spirals in his margins. Since Beckett was left-handed, these spirals seem to work from outside to inside which suggests withdrawal and contraction which is one of the themes of *Endgame*. The protagonist Hamm, his servant and his parents are trapped in a single house. His parents appear from within a trash can. Both Nagg and Nill cannot withstand modern world and withdraw themselves into the trash can. Hamm insists Clov to look into the outside world from within the house using a telescope, instead of moving out. Thus every character in the play is withdrawn into himself or herself. This aversion to life must have been playing in Beckett’s subconscious, throughout the writing process. There is a doodle of spiral attached to a stick which “could be a branding iron, whip, or a bishop’s crosier, all with their own connotations possibly related to *Endgame* which could be a Christian subtext”(William and Taylor 33). There is another spiral coiling each other possibly from top to bottom which indicates a strong desire for freedom and enlargement, but collapses into far stronger desire for withdrawal.

Another common type of doodles along the margin of *Endgame* is faces. Most of the faces in *Endgame* are monotonous and melancholic, possibly representing the characters themselves. There is a doodle of face of a man with protruding eyes which is half blind, which may be an illustration of Hamm, who is blind. The only cheerful doodle in the entire collection is a face with a pipe in his mouth, a nose and a brim of hat indicated through a straight line.

Third set of doodles is people. This can be considered only as the creative outflow during break times. There is a doodle of a man walking away which indicates Beckett's aversion towards modern life. Another doodle is of a man playing some kind of musical instrument. The most enigmatic is the last doodle, a complete alien. Among doodles of people, this is the only one that resonates the alienation in *Endgame*.

Beckett doodled many creatures between the lines of *Endgame*. This includes, six legged spider, a jelly fish, cow like face and a dissected cockroach. In the play *Endgame*, there are only few animals and they are all suffering; the dead rat in kitchen, stuffed three legged dog, the fly killed by Clov. Appearances of these weird creatures in a post-apocalyptic play, whether intentional or not, are entirely appropriate.

Doodles of wedges show the influence of architecture of the age in which *Endgame* was written. They show close resemblance with sculptures made by Marcel Duchamp. Mirrors are another frequently appearing doodle in the work and it signals author's attempt in vain to find symmetry; attain order in chaos, just like what Clov tries to do throughout the play. The names of characters were not determined in the handwritten manuscripts. They were represented as A and B, which might be the reason why there are various doodles evolved from letters A and B. Other than this, there are plenty of both large and small abandonments in Beckett's journal. They seem to be left out at the middle of drawing which sinks in with the mood of the play. They do not seem to have a logical ending. They exhibit what in work of art is referred to as "horror vacui" (Williams and Taylor 48). This desire to fill vacuum is in fact the key theme of the play. The abandonments are meaningless, but with meticulous attention given to details.

Doodles in both the hand written version of *Endgame* and in Vonnegut's *Breakfast of champions* are interventions of subconscious mind of the author. The transition between drawings and words is as easy and smooth as the digression of designated character A and B into drawings in *Endgame*. In other words, these doodles are directly out of mind in its raw form.

They are not modified by critical facilities. It is the expression of mind as it is before the thoughts are arranged or processed which make them analogous to stream of consciousness technique in literature. Doodles and abstract expressionism shares the basic principle; automatism which is also psychological phenomenon upon which stream of consciousness technique is built. The explicit relationship between abstract expressionism, doodling and stream of consciousness technique is thus solidified on a single foundation; automatism.

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