

The shrinking corollary of habit. Creativity as expansion in everyday life with particular reference to the pandemic crisis.



creativity, 100x100cm, acrylic on canvas

Habit is a major drive in the way we engage in and carry through with our daily agenda, undermining our role as active agents in our own life and eroding our ability to define, shape, and experience our own reality. As the result of imitation, obedience, succumbing, or simple indifference when faced with a prompt for choice, habit interferes with and obscures our meanings and, therefore, our understanding of the world and of our place within it. In other words, it makes problematic the very notion of our identity (who we are, what we are like) and jeopardises our health on various levels.

Conceptualising identity as a unique system of multidimensional meaning, one is faced with the realisation that its formation relies heavily upon the way we perceive, internalise, process, and respond to external stimuli. It is also marked by the way we establish our unique positioning towards those stimuli, our interaction with them, as well as the outcome of such interaction. Although the stimuli may, more often than not, appear to bear similarities to others we have encountered in the past, they are, in fact, always new, specific to the complexity that defines and surrounds them. As such, they put out a call for consideration, judgement, conscious choice, and mindful action – in other words, for responsibility. Falling back to mechanical, habitual behaviours vis-a-vis such call is, in reality, a rejection of responsibility and results in the shrinking of genuine identity to the advantage of undecipherable intention, mass behaviour, and inappropriate action.

The shrinking effect of such responsibility deficit is explored in *Exchange vs. Repetition: a call for balance through economy and art* (Benco E., Viveli D., 2017, Eindhoven), in which the phenomenon is examined in terms of its reflection on human body and its impact on physical, mental, and emotional health. Specifically, it is argued that breaches in the economy of the body (using the self in ways that compromise its meanings, its good functioning, and the clarity and consistency over who we are) is mirrored in the body's shrinking position, postural and movement problems, and chronic pain. Conversely, conscious,

appropriate, contextualised, creative action that springs from consideration and uniquely responds to the specifics and particularities of a given situation, can restore the body's "economical" position, which indicates and fosters growth, development, expansion. It should be noted here that, in this frame of reference, the term "creative" does not refer to the subject matter of the action (e.g. engaging in art) but, rather, to the nature and the means of activity per se – the unique, synthetic way in which the individual perceives, processes, and responds to a specific stimulus, in a specific context, at a specific time.

The ability and willingness to respond creatively to the triggers of our milieu becomes even more crucial and relevant when seen in the light of the pandemic crisis. The unprecedented social restrictions and the continuous dangling threat that render impossible the continuation of the life we knew, directly challenge the very vehicle of shrinking itself: habit. The individual of the pandemic times is, all of a sudden, let off the hamster wheel, freed into a fluid, uncharted landscape in which the simplest, most ordinary things, are questioned, disputed, put to the test. With the peril of massive shrinking still remaining an option, inner expansion becomes more feasible than ever, as we are urged into a more introvert lifestyle, which calls for a restoration of personal responsibility in the construction and experience of our subjective reality. While things become harder and harder to go about, prioritisation becomes a necessity and the results of our choices have immediate backwashes, as the distractions we used to lean on are currently unavailable. Expansion or shrinking has largely turned into a dilemma that is only for us to answer.

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