THE IMPORTANCE OF PROCESS OVER OUTCOME.
“it’s not what you do, but way you do it.”

The designers at Tomato - a studio based in London published a book titled, Process: A Tomato Project, which is a visual journey of the importance of process. The book is without full stops, and capital letters, to portray the notion of how process is continuous. My research thesis is about exactly that: to show the importance of process over outcome. I aim to cover why outcome has become so important over the years (Approval & Technology) and how I would like to believe are the ways to make process important again (Being, Pauses, Kids).

Having grown up in Singapore, I was part of an education system, which subtly encouraged students to memorise and regurgitate answers during their examinations. The proven way to do well in school was to study so hard to the point of memorising textbooks and simply regurgitate it out during the examination. My only goal was to do well in the examination; to get a good outcome; even if it meant I did not fully understand what I was being taught. Subconsciously, I was being taught that the outcome was more important than the process.

Now at the age of 24, and after having spent 4 years in Australia, I want to change my perspective on life. I am fighting all my natural instincts; everything that I was taught while growing up. The idea of focusing on the process rather than outcome intrigues me, and it is something I want to incorporate into my daily life. So bear with me, as I take you through a journey of my research of the importance of process over outcome.

Unique Individuals

Before moving into the whys and hows of the importance of process, we must first agree that we, as human beings, are all uniquely different. There are no two people in the world who are identical. Even identical twins are different; they are two completely separate beings. Our life experiences shape us to who we become and ultimately defines who we are. Two people who go through the same circumstance will take away different experiences because of their different personalities. Both their experiences may be similar in nature, but never the exactly the same.¹

This is what sets us apart as human beings; we are all uniquely different.

Approval

Now that we are on the same page, we can move into how the focus has shifted to outcome over the years. I believe the first reason is because of the need for approval.

I have been encouraged to believe that we are all created for love. To love and to be loved.⁴ Every religion has the element of love. Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Taoism; all these religions have a form of love, be it through karma, doing good deeds, loving each other, or God himself as Love. Even if you do not believe in a religion per say, you cannot deny that there is an inherent desire in every human being to find love.³

And out of this unexplainable inherent need for love, comes approval.

---


³ Mc Kenney, M.R 2010, Notes from the Counsellor on Approval Seeking, Associate Content, viewed on 20th May 2010, <http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/52216/notes_from_the_counslicor_on_approval seeker.html> par.25

From a very young age, we seek approval from our parents, as a sign of love. We then grow up and seek approval from others – friends, colleagues, teachers, peers, bosses and the people around us. We long for approval; we want to be accepted in society. Since we are created for love and to love, surely this need for approval is not such a bad thing?

The problem is that the more we seek approval from others, the faster we lose our sense of self. We become easily manipulated and shaped into what others want us to become rather than what we want to become.

For example, in Singapore, the benchmark for success is the ability to achieve the 5Cs (Car, Condominium, Cash, Country Club and Credit Card). Children are taught from a young age to work hard and aim high, and strive for this perception of success. We have a need to constantly stay ahead; we want to prove ourselves to the people around us. We have set paths to choose in life, instead of creating our own path in life.

We have seem to let our jobs define who we are, instead of defining our jobs. “Do we always need to force square pegs into round holes?” The idea of square pegs fitting into round holes is an absurd one, but unconsciously we have been sucked in this system. We allow the material things around us define us; and the sad part of it is that they are merely things. "To name is to control".

We need to remember that we are human and are all uniquely different from each other and hence cannot be defined. In Fight Club, Jack says to himself “What kind of dining room set defines me as a person?" It’s almost as if life has become one big Ikea store: pick and choose your path in life but stay within the boundaries of the catalogue. We were designed to be hunters, but instead we live in a society of shopping.

As creatives, do we influence society and culture? Or does the society and culture around influence us? From young, I always had the impression that a city is defined by the people. Could it be that it has become to the point where the people are defined by the city rather than vice versa?

Andy Warhol was an artist that had a major influence on America and the rest of the world. He was a pivotal figure in the Pop Art movement in the 1950s and was described as “one of the most influential artists of the 20th Century.” Andy said “As soon as I became a loner in my own mind, that’s when I got what you might call a following.” Andy Warhol never needed the approval of anyone, except from himself. He did what he wanted, whenever he wanted. He was true to himself, and because of this, success followed. I am led to believe his success was merely a by-product of his willingness to follow his heart.

References:
We live in a world where technology is advancing at such a frightening pace with no signs of slowing down. In his book *Faster*, author James Gleick writes that before the automobile defined a quicker way to travel, there was no slow way. Movement is only slow when compared to something faster. The advancements in technology has helped us save time and effort but as a result, our lives move at a much quicker pace.

For example, computers and the Internet have enabled us to communicate with people instantly from another continent through emails and online chats instead of having to hand write a letter and post it which would take days, if not weeks, for it to reach the intended recipient. Posting a letter has now been labelled as “snail mail”. What seemed normal to society before the age of computers and Internet now has a connotation of the pace of a snail tagged to it. Other examples include Speed Dating, Power Naps and Speed Mediation.

What technology has done is that it has helped us save time, but instead of having more time on our hands, we have less time because we fill up the spare time that technology has created with other activities. Award-winning Canadian author Carl Honore explains in his book *In Praise of Slowness* that in the last 150 years how life has become much faster and has become “an endless race against the clock”.

---


Technology is constantly making everything become more automated; allowing us to lead simpler lives, or so it seems. With a touch of a button, we are able to achieve an outcome in a short span of time. Tasks that used to be time consuming and strenuous not require little or even no effort at all. We no longer ever get our hands dirty; we have become a generation of clicks and buttons.\(^\text{20}\) Everything has become convenient because of the wonders of technology.

An example of the wonders of technology would be the IPA; the Intelligent Parking Assistant that Toyota and BMW have invented in recent years. Drivers no longer need to maneuver their way into car parks but instead can rely on the IPA to automatically park their vehicle for them. Other examples include Volkswagen developing a car that can drive itself even at high speeds, and BMW producing a car that race around a track without the need for human control.\(^\text{21}\)

On the popular TV series *Top Gear*, the host Jeremy Clarkson test drives the BMW i330 Track Trainer; the car that was designed to race around the track automatically. The car has the ability to turn corners at high speeds, breaking when necessary and accelerate when appropriate in order to cover the track in the fastest time possible, all without human control. At the end of the lap, Jeremy sarcastically exclaims, “Stig (who is the regular track trainer), you are sacked. You are fired.”

It seems like with the advancement of technology, it is inevitable that computers and technology will soon have the capability of replacing humans altogether. In the Oscar winning animation *Wall E*, Pixar portrays how life will be as a result of the over reliance on technology and lack of process. The movie shows how because of the convenience and over reliance on the automation of technology, humans become obese and ignorant to the world they live in.\(^\text{22}\)

The need for approval and advancement in technology has, and will continue to change the way we live life. The strive for success and solution; in the quickest and most efficient way possible; has been the driving force in the progress in modern society. As a result of this, the recognition of the value of process has dropped over time.\(^\text{23}\)


Why is process important?

“The paths travelled by us can be travelled once and once alone.”

I support the notion that experience is lived through process, which ultimately shapes us as individuals and defines us. Experience is an essential component in life, and hence so is process. I would like to think that solutions and outcomes merely depend on the circumstances of that time period. For example, a design that was effective in the 1950s may not be as effective in 1990s because of how life has changed over time. Since solutions and outcomes are inevitably commodities, their success is linked to the trends at that point in time.

Process, on the other hand, because of its unique nature, does not fade with time. It cannot be defined. The process makes us human; it keeps us alive.

“We are people, not definitions or even things.”

Fade to Black

My inspiration for this thesis started when I chanced across a Polaroid film called Fade To Black. After a photograph is taken, the film slowly changes to black over a 48 hour period. The end result is black; complete darkness. The idea of this intrigued me. The film is like a visualization of time. It is almost as if time tears at the picture’s existence in fast forward. It encapsulates everything about the concept of the importance of process.

In his book *Europeans*, Henri Cartier Bresson said, "Whether you are passing through or staying put, in order to give expression to a country or situation you must have established, somewhere, working in close relations, be supported by a human community; living takes time, roots form slowly..." He was never in a hurry to use his camera; he understood that only by fully being in a moment can one capture life’s fleeting moments in its purest form.

When asked what nationality he was, Henri Cartier Bresson replied, "I’m a Pole, a Czech, an Italian, a Frulian, a Ladin, a Slovene, a Croat, a Slovak, a Ruthenian..." He immersed himself in each country’s different culture; and I believe as a result of that mentality, he was able to produce such stunning images.

In the movie *Bright Star*, Poet John Keats likened understanding poems to diving into a lake. "The point of diving into a lake is not immediately to swim to the shore but to be in the lake, to luxuriate in the sensation of water. You do not work the lake out, it is a experience beyond thought." In order to fully appreciate the process, we must be able to just be, without any regard for time.

Being

I am inclined to take the position that the idea of being is one that is lost in this day and age.

The advancement of technology has caused our generation (Generation Y) to become a restless generation.27 In 2004, Pediatrics magazine published a study stating that watching television regularly produced impulsive and restless behaviour.28

I have observed and concluded that we have lost the ability to fully just be in a moment, but instead we need to constantly be doing something. For example, as a professional wedding photographer, I attend many weddings a year and at every wedding I’ve been to, at least 50% of the guests are snapping photographs during the ceremony. There is a need to do something; despite the ceremony already being documented by a hired professional. We feel the need to possess, the need to own something.29 We cannot simply just be, and enjoy the fleeting moment.

Henri Cartier Bresson is one of the most influential figures in the history of photography.30 His breath taking images drew me towards him, and his philosophies of life altered my perspective of life. He had a great understanding of the idea of being, and recognised the fact that as a photographer, he would always be an intruder to any situation.

“One is, alas, always an intruder.”31

---

In order to have no regard for time, we must first acknowledge that pauses are essential in life.

Pauses are a form of disengagement; a process of productive inactivity. We cannot deny that pauses as essential in life. Music rests in beats, eyes blink while looking, we must sleep in order to live. Without pauses, we simply cannot live.

In Halberstadt, John Cage composed the slowest and longest concert the world has ever heard playing. The song, “Organ 2 / ASLAP” will be performed over 639 years in the church of St Burchardi. The song began in 2001 and was designed to be played as slow as possible. It has only reached its sixth note to date, with the next musical change in November 2010. The project is a perception of time; the idea of time and space among art.

Artist Jonathan Monk says, "If you stare at a blank page for long enough, it starts to move."
Things happen amidst the pauses of life, but we are always in too much of a hurry to notice. I once heard this analogy: if a photographer was given a bottle of water to photograph with a set time of 1 minute, he would produce images of the bottle which most people would typically have seen before. But give him that same bottle and tell him that he has 30 minutes to photograph the bottle as creatively as possible, by the end of the session, he would probably have an array of amazing images.

Process takes time. It’s as simple as that. A rushed process will bring about a short changed experience. In order to gain the full experience of a process, there can be no time limit. We need to “stop and smell the roses”; to learn to appreciate life in its finest details again – the whisper of the wind, the touch of fabric against skin, the beauty of darkness.

Andy Warhol once said, “Sometimes the little times you don’t think are anything while they’re happening turn out to be what marks a whole period of your life.”

**Kids**

If we look at children, we can learn about how to appreciate process in its most natural state. A child’s fascination; their eagerness to explore; their wild imagination and idealistic dreams are some of the things that we as adults lose along the way while growing up.
Dream & Imagine

We need to spark our imagination again and dare to dream big. As children, we believe that anything is impossible. However, as adulthood inevitably dawns upon us, we are taught to put away our childish ways and be realistic. In school, we may start off believing that something can be done, but if we are told it cannot be done, we accept it and then believe it cannot be done.\(^49\)

“I have a dream.”\(^50\)

Martin Luther King had a dream. A dream that seemed impossible at that time. A dream to see racial equality in America and an end to discrimination. If we limit ourselves to the circumstances and let others define the possibilities of life, then we are living in a box.

As designers are called to think “outside the box”, as Lakshmi Mittal said. I believe in order to do that, we need to break away all notions of limitations and dream again. We need to allow our imagination breathe again; the way imagination has the ability to completely take over a child’s world.

Exploration

As a society, it seems we have become too comfortable with taking safe paths; paths that people before us have taken, paths that we know will lead to success or a specific destination.\(^46\) Unlike process, outcomes can be commodified, and hence we rather choose the more convenient option; the option that is proven to work; the option has no risk involved.

The beauty about exploration is that we do not know where the paths we take may lead us. Which is also the very thing that makes us scared of exploring in the first place. But because the paths we take lead us to unknowns, then the possibilities are endless.\(^47\) The outcome and solutions have the very possibility of being mind-blowing and revolutionary but having said that, there is also an element of risk involved.

Exploration almost definitely brings our failure, but we have to stop seeing failure as negative aspect but rather as another way not to do something. Thomas Edison took approximately 10,000 experiments before he invented the light bulb.\(^48\) Thomas Edison took 10,000 different paths in order to find one successful outcome, which eventually changed the whole world.

It is suggested as designers, we need to explore more. We need not fear failure. Instead of keeping behind the safety barrier and producing works that have been done before, we need to have the guts to jump over and push ourselves to the limit creatively.

I dare not draw a conclusion to my research, lest I contradict the whole concept of my research thesis in the first place. The journey to uncover the importance of process will never end, but for this publication’s purpose, I must draw it to a close.

From this I will move on to the creative output of showcasing my research. To embark on a journey on my hands and feet, feeling my way through the darkness. I know not where this journey may lead me, but I am going to take that step of faith. The idea of this terrifies me; and every part of my perfectionist nature is screaming at me not to take this road where I can barely see where my next step is. But at the same time, there is a little part of me that is telling me this may be the best thing that can happen to me, and that a world of endless possibilities awaits. And today, for the first time in my life, I am going to let that little man win.