

DOODLING AND ART: THE SUBCONSCIOUS COMMUNICATION OF THE MIND

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Abstract

Doodle emanates from a subjective thought; it is a means of self-expression, a connotation that springs up from the heart. It is an alliance between the mind and the body. Doodling is executed consciously or unconsciously, it either originates from a negative pattern such as anxiety, self-esteem, bereavement, fears, emotional trauma and agony. This instigates a depiction expressed from an individual's emotions and the state of mind, as well as their thinking. The act of doodling reveals thought. Communication abounds in the mind, which is inherent and subjective. It is one's communication with the soul, as a way to ease the mind of accumulated thoughts and cognitive clutter, seeking a means to resolve them through counselling. Psychologically, doodling speaks the mind of a learner as a psychological conscience, leading to an awareness of the ideal and evoking the client-centred theory of John Eliot, which allows a client to explore subjective thought. If we could make a mark that in itself expressed anger or joy, then an abstract set of marks should be able to convey emotions just like the notes in music. Doodling is indeed considered a form of Art which can also be interpreted from a Psychological perspective. Both doodling and art can be incredibly fulfilling and rewarding activities, each with its own benefits. They can help to develop creativity, boost self-esteem, and provide a way to communicate ideas, solutions or feelings. The paper explores doodling as an expressive medium through which the mind externalises emotions, memories and cognitive processes that may not be easily articulated through language.

Keywords: Psychological, conscious act, emotions, unconscious act, subjective thoughts, expression.

Introduction

Art has long been perceived as a reflection of the human consciousness, but its relationship with the subconscious mind remains particularly compelling. Doodling—often created absentmindedly during moments of distraction, stress or contemplation—occupies a unique space between conscious intentions and

unconscious expressions. Unlike formal art, doodles are typically unplanned and uncensored, allowing deeper mental processes to surface organically. This paper investigates doodling as a form of subconscious communication, exploring how the mind uses visual symbols to express thoughts and emotions beyond the reach of words. The conscious mind may

be compared to a fountain playing in the sun and falling back into the great subterranean. Both doodling and Art can be incredibly fulfilling and rewarding activities, each with its own benefits. They can help to develop creativity, boost self-esteem and provide a way to communicate ideas and feelings. In the same vein, doodling and art can be regarded as a form of expressionism, or as an entangled piece of thoughts abound in the mind, itching to be revealed expressively. At the same time, art involves the creation of works intended to be appreciated for their unique skills and ideas. It can take many forms, from painting and sculpture to music, literature, and film. Art conveys sensitive messages through its projection, expresses emotions, makes social or political commentary, or tells stories.

The Psychology of the Subconscious in Art

The subconscious mind stores memories, emotions, fear and desires that may not be readily accessible to conscious awareness. According to psychoanalytical theory, particularly the work of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung, creative expression can act as a gateway to this hidden mental landscape. Jung's concepts of archetypes and symbols are especially relevant, as doodles often contain recurring shapes,

figures, and motifs that mirror universal psychological patterns. These visual elements may represent unresolved emotions or internal conflicts, offering insights into the individual's mental state.

Doodling as Cognitive and Emotional Processing

Research in cognitive psychology suggests that doodling can enhance focus, memory retention and emotional regulation. The repetitive, rhythmic nature of doodling engages the brain in a low-effort task, allowing the subconscious to process complex information without the pressure of deliberate thought. In emotionally charged situations, doodling may serve as a self-soothing mechanism, translating anxiety or restlessness into visual form. The resulting imagery can reveal emotional undercurrents such as tension, curiosity or calmness.

Symbolism and Meaning in Spontaneous Art

The "vocabulary" of a doodle is made up of spontaneous symbols like abstract patterns, faces, or geometric grids. Although these are not always meant to be "read" like a book, they often provide clues to persistent thoughts. For example, a tendency toward rigid, enclosed structures might suggest a psychological need for safety or order, while expressive,

chaotic strokes can mirror a state of restlessness. Interpreting this imagery does not require an art degree; it simply requires a willingness to see one's spontaneous creations as a mirror of one's emotional state.

Doodles and the State of Mind

Leo Tolstoy's (2022) exploration of Art centres on its profound role as a means of communication, particularly of emotions and feelings. He asserts that art is the intentional sharing of genuine experiences, such as joy or sorrow, to evoke similar feelings within the audience. Yes, doodling often reveals a person's state of mind unconsciously. Doodles are spontaneous drawings made absentmindedly while a person is engaged in another activity, such as listening to a lecture or having a long phone conversation. Often, these drawings can reveal a person's subconscious thoughts, feelings and emotions. For instance, if a person is stressed, he may unconsciously create doodles of repetitive patterns or shapes. Alternatively, someone who is happy or content may create more free-flowing, detailed doodles. Similarly, a person seeking a solution doodles in a circle as a way of finding a solution or an outlet in a depressed state of mind (Steiger, 2004). This human-centric creative process

becomes even more vital as we navigate the digital age in our contemporary generation, with technology and advancement alongside artistic tradition; it is essential to strike a balance that allows AI and artists' manual skills to drive innovation and development in the art world jointly. AI can be a viable tool in the artistic process, but the core value of art still resides in the unique emotions and creativity of human beings, which is subjective. In the future, collaboration between AI and analogue depictions could become a new mode of artistic conception, where both parties contribute to the evolution of art in complementary ways, as evident today. The germane question is whether this is possible.

Despite being labeled as "aimless" or "unproductive," doodling serves as a vital bridge to our internal world. When we allow our focus to drift and our pens to wander, we are not just creating mess; we are facilitating a subconscious dialogue. This transition from "thinking" to "doing" bypasses the need for formal language, instead using a raw, visual vocabulary of lines and patterns to communicate what is happening beneath the surface of our awareness. Olusegun stressed further that doodling is a mode of expression, even when it is inconceivable and seemingly

meaningless; the researcher believes it is an effort, perhaps to convey a feeling or emotion. He also believes these undecipherable markings can visually transform to create aesthetics as portrayed in his study.

However, Olusegun's (2010) assertions above highlight the diverse ways in which doodling is perceived, which takes us back to the essence of this paper. While consciousness is defined by an internal awareness of one's own state, the subconscious operates beneath the surface, driving behaviors through thoughts and memories that elude immediate perception (Brown, as cited in Olusegun, 2010). These hidden mental processes often find a physical outlet in spontaneous acts such as doodling or scribbling. In the fine arts, this is particularly evident in the works of several painters who utilised doodling to dissolve rigid conceptual forms into a more "inventive" or fluid state; the "doodle-like" aesthetics of **Edwin Parker Twombly Jr.** evoke doodling as a prime example of this transition. This connection between the mark and the mind finds its roots in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which famously influenced André Breton's *Surrealist Manifesto* (Pomerantz, 2008). Freud argued that for a hidden

impulse to move from the unconscious to the conscious, it requires a medium—traditionally, written or spoken words. However, Brown (2009) expands on Freud's logic, suggesting that the "connecting links" between these two mental states are not limited to language; they also include fantasies, dreams, and doodling.

When these doodles are intentionally transformed into art, the creator does more than showcase a skill; they become art. As Olusegun (2009) notes, they are effectively "objectifying the subjective realm" (Langer, 1957). In this sense, art becomes an essential tool for human insight. It allows us to give structure to those "verbally indescribable" patterns of our inner lives—mapping out aspects of reality that otherwise appear chaotic or amorphous (Dryden, 2008).

We can view the subconscious as a permanent record of our internal and external lives. McLeod (2013) asserts that this mental space retains all previous experiences, memories, and visual stimuli, creating a complex web of influence that dictates our behavior. When applied to the act of creation, this implies that every stroke of a pen is informed by a massive, invisible library of past perceptions. Based

on Jackie Andrade's 2009-2010 study, doodling helps improve concentration and memory during boring or monotonous tasks. Participants who doodled while listening to a dull message recalled 29% more information than non-doodlers. It aids cognitive performance by reducing daydreaming and keeping the brain engaged.

Key Findings from Andrade's Study Regarding Doodling Include:

- **Improved Memory and Attention:** Doodling acts as a cognitive tool to maintain focus, allowing individuals to process information better without getting distracted by daydreams.
- **Enhanced Recall:** In the study, the doodling group was better at monitoring phone messages for names and places, and they performed significantly better on surprise memory tests.
- **Reduces Boredom:** Doodling helps pass the time during monotonous tasks without hindering performance.
- **Counterintuitive Benefits:** Unlike many dual-task scenarios that divide attention, doodling helps maintain high arousal levels and focus, rather than daydreaming,

which takes up more cognitive resources.

The study concluded that doodling is a positive rather than distracting activity when trying to focus on mundane tasks (Andrade, 2010).

Analysis of Works



Fig. 1

Artist: Erin

Title: Eggsdoodz

Medium: Pastel

Source: Pinterest

The image in Figure 1 displays a collection of whimsical, pastel-coloured doodles created by Erin, known as Eggsdoodz. The central theme, as expressed by the artist, focuses on creativity, self-care, and finding joy in daily life. This exemplifies the intent of this essay titled "Doodling and Art: The Subconscious Communication of the Mind." The image portrays doodling, which may be done consciously or unconsciously. Hence, doodling is

subjective as it emanates from an individual's state of mind. The image appears quite playful overall, suggesting representations of the theme. One can also observe, from the inscription incorporated into the doodle piece—"I am really enjoying creating a nice little life for myself!!"—that this suggests an exciting state of the artist's mind, depicted subconsciously.



Fig. 2
Artist:Unknown
Title: Pink skies
Medium: Pastel
Source: Pinterest

Figure 2 portrays a collage-style wallpaper featuring various cute, pastel-coloured doodles, phrases, and symbols. The artist adopts a "kawaii scrapbook" or doodled aesthetic commonly found in phone

backgrounds, including drawings of hearts, stars, ribbons, butterflies, and a small scene of a house inside a bubble. This implies an individual's subjective thought emanating from the artist's emotions, with several inspirational and self-care messages written in a casual script, such as "take care of yourself" and "enjoy the little things." It also presents the inscriptions as a form of subconscious expression, which aligns with the article's title and intent.



Fig. 3
Artist:Unknown
Title: Monsters and characters
Medium: Digital illustration
Source: Freepik

The image portrayed in Figure 3 shows the diverse ways doodles are created. This is a digital expression of doodling, as clearly visualised. The image is a black-and-white vector illustration featuring a pattern of various doodle-style, cute monsters and characters. It is commonly used as a background for design projects, colouring pages, or mural art, as observed from the

source. It is a hand-drawn, doodle-friendly concept featuring numerous detailed cartoon characters, executed on a digital device such as an iPad or a digital drawing pad. This can also be created with programs like CorelDRAW, Adobe Illustrator, Canva, and other design software. The exploration can often be refined or edited by other artists for specific projects.



Fig. 4

Artist: Unknown

Title: Monsters and characters

Medium: Digital illustration

Source: HowJoyful 2021

Figure 4 is an untitled image that depicts arrows, animals, insects, food and drink, letters and initials, as well as squiggles, zigzags, dots, and circles. This image is a rendition of a black-and-white doodle-pattern collage featuring a variety of hand-drawn sketches. The collection includes drawings of food items like pizza, donuts, and ice cream. Natural elements such as clouds, stars, and rainbows are scattered

throughout the design. It also depicts everyday objects and tools, such as pencils, light bulbs, and musical notes. The overall style is reminiscent of a sketchbook filled with diverse, creative line art, which shares affinity with this article.

Doodles/Subjective Drawing

Doodling is rarely just "idle" work; like subjective drawing, it is an emotional output that reflects a person's current headspace. This creative process acts as a bridge, pulling together scattered memories and sensory data to form a cohesive visual narrative. By identifying a subject and choosing the right form to represent it, the artist or doodler effectively translates complex feelings into a tangible, symbolic language.

It could be said that a successful synthesis of these thoughts and feelings is, in fact, the content of the drawing children draw, bringing all their senses into play. If only we could learn to do the same. One of Picasso's more obscure deliverances was that "They should put out the eyes of painters as they do chaffinches so that they might sing more sweetly. What he meant is that our 'seeing' has itself inhibited the enormous possible vocabulary at our disposal. If only we were free from the restraints of naturalism. If we could make

a mark that in itself expressed anger or joy, then an abstract set of marks should be able to convey emotions, like the notes in music. Subjective drawing merely tries to utilise all aspects of drawing practice in a unique synthesis, forming a composite view. If we draw, what do we find, and what do we see? The doodles of our disengaged minds are often extremely revealing, as our dreams tell us something about ourselves; so our drawings can do the same, if only we let them. The doodles offer unmediated dream-time. This drawing course offers the opportunity to contemplate marks and images made intuitively. Tappenden & Taylor et al (2006).

Psychological Analysis of Doodling and Art

Doodling and art act as powerful, subconscious, and therapeutic tools that enhance focus, reduce stress by lowering cortisol levels, and aid memory retention. These spontaneous acts allow for emotional expression, acting as a "visual diary" that helps process feelings and triggers creativity, providing a sense of calm and self-efficacy.

Psychological Functions of Doodling

- **Cognitive Support:** Doodling acts as a buffer against boredom,

keeping the brain engaged just enough to prevent mind-wandering during dull tasks, thereby improving focus and memory retention.

- **Stress Reduction:** The repetitive motion of sketching shapes and lines calms the nervous system, reduces anxiety and provides a release for pent-up frustration or negative energy.
- **Emotional Outlet:** Doodles can serve as a nonverbal, subconscious or conscious expression of feelings and inner thoughts that might be otherwise suppressed
- **Psychological Mapping:** Doodling helps the brain make sense of life by organising thoughts and filling in memory gaps.

Common Symbolism in Doodles

Doodles often reflect the subconscious mind, incorporating symbols that may represent:

- **Mobility/Escape:** Planes, cars and boats suggest a desire for change, new opportunities or escape.
- **Structures/Order:** Squares and houses can indicate a need for security and organisation.

- **Internal State:** Organic or plant forms, spirals and repeating patterns can represent growth, anxiety or emotional fluidity.
- **Faces/People:** often indicate a focus on social relationships, personal identity or how the individual views themselves and others.

Interpreting Common Doodles

This article shall also examine the interpretation of some intuitive depictions produced by scholars' doodling. In this light, the *Psychology of Doodles* by Steiger (2004) interpreted a great number of doodles. The author drew on Freud's and Jung's works to interpret some common doodles and their interpretations. She observed that a person who writes his name in large letters implies that he has a larger-than-life personality and others like his company because he entertains them perfectly. Someone who has low self-esteem will probably write his name in small letters. An obsessive personality could be identified by repeatedly writing someone else's name. Drawing a circle around someone's name is a defensive attitude, while drawing a circle around your name reveals a lack of trust and emotions of isolation. A signature that has

a line reveals a lack of trust and emotions of isolation. A signature with a line beneath it indicates a person with high self-importance (Steiger, 2004).

The author further stressed that shapes emanating from doodles are extremely revealing and that almost everyone draws them (Rabach, 1972). The author, however, asserted that boxes and cubes project a practical, hard-working person. Triangles are usually drawn by men and convey a strong personality. They also represent a person who searches for intellectual answers and takes risks. A triangular doodler can sometimes be harsh on himself, and a triangle drawn inside another triangle is a reflection of threat. Squares show a solid, practical personality, but at the same time, they need extreme stability and security in relationships. In Jung's opinion, circles symbolise an individual's soul, and they are among the most essential doodles. A person who draws circles is likely to be loving and honest, caring for and supporting those close to them. In addition to this note, he added that circles reveal attempts to clear up conflict (Steiger, 2004).

Psychological Aspect of Art-Making

- **Flow State:** Artistic expression, whether through a quick sketch or a

complex painting, can lead to a "flow state," a powerful buffer against chronic stress. This state of intense, singular focus provides more than just a momentary distraction; it facilitates a genuine drop in cortisol and offers the mind a chance to recover from cognitive overload.

- **Externalisation of Emotion:** creating art helps to project internal unconscious and emotional states onto a tangible medium, which can be therapeutic for processing trauma, anxiety or depression
- **Self-Reflection:** Art-making promotes introspection and can act as a tool for understanding one's own mental and emotional state.

Impact on Mental Health

We often overlook doodling, yet research identifies it as a powerful, accessible medium for managing anxiety and improving brain function. It works because it is inherently non-judgmental—a "low-stakes" creative act that provides immediate stress relief. For those seeking to improve cognitive performance, these

small, repetitive motions offer a unique way to stabilise focus and process internal tension.

Conclusion

Doodling and informal art-making are far more than trivial habits: they are meaningful expressions of the subconscious mind. Doodling serves as a bridge between the subconscious and the page, capturing complex experiences that words often flatten. By validating these sketches as a legitimate psychological resource, we can better understand how spontaneous creativity supports mental well-being. Ultimately, leaning into these unscripted acts of creation allows for a more nuanced interpretation of a person's internal landscape. It is not a denial that doodling is indeed revealing, as the unconscious depictions that abound in an individual's mind attest. Doodling is again a form of communication from the soul, expressed in an abstract manner for the world to understand varied personality traits. This could be why both doodling and human psychology share an affinity for understanding diverse minds.

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