

MONSTERPIECE: A CASE STUDY OF GROUP CREATION

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Object of research: a yearlong creation process of a performance and digital arts piece, by a 4 persons group - a choreographer and performer, 2 digital video artists and an artistic consultant. *Monsterpiece* is the performative piece and had its 1st formal presentation at Festival de Marionetas do Porto, 2002.

Objectives: 1) to characterize the creative process from its origins and *problem finding* to the public presentation of the final product; 2) to map the individual contributions and the group dynamics that made it possible.

Theoretical basis: we see creativity as the result of identifiable processes which give birth to identifiable creative results; however, they occur integrated in the personal life history and life projects of their protagonists. On the one hand, creativity results in products or ideas that are innovative solutions to socially recognized problems; on the other hand, it appears both in life-paths of meaning construction and in the significant products of that personal construction. It occurs in specific social and cultural circumstances and we can't elaborate its psychological comprehension without them. If it's attributed meaning that intermediates the relationship between the artist, the world outside and his own artistic work, it's in interaction within his life context that the creator elaborates that meaning (Hoshmand, 1998; Gruber & Wallace, 1999).

As for a theoretical basis of data analysis we assume Amabile's Creativity Componential Model (reviewed) focused on the impact of social and individual variables on the process. The dimensions identified by Amabile (1996), such as task motivation, domain-relevant skills and creativity-relevant processes where all accounted for in the analysis. We complemented this

model with two other dimensions: 1) a life-long vision of the group and its participants and 2) the group dynamics.

Methodology: this case study was made in a real context of work. We have combined different kinds of sources and data regarding the different moments of the process, all qualitative ones: naturalistic observation by two investigators, individual questionnaires, one collective interview, video registrations of group work moments, graphical and written registrations of their own. All the data collected were analysed through the conceptual framework mentioned above and then organized in a coherent form. Then we made the search for the meaning and action connections, so we could elaborate a global vision of the process. Once identified important lacunas, the researchers asked for more elements that the group gave to them. Reanalysed the whole data, the results become clearer, more consistent, providing understandable results.

The Case: the creation of this piece was a year long process. To make it simple, we shall mention the most important and visible steps: 1) Application for funds at a project contest; here they defined the broad theme and title: *Monsterpiece*; they won the contest getting the needed funds for the production. 2) Initial meetings for project development where they decided to organize different events around the theme, with outside people. The objective was to include the interactive participation of the external *milieu* in the creative process. Important periods of time were attributed to collective creation. 3) 2 workshops (led by them) on performance, with the same theme: *Monsterpiece*. For the first one they proposed the *physical monster*. The results did not please them. So, they thought of a different concept for the 2nd workshop: *the inner monster connected to outer space*; it was later the one adopted for the piece. 4) A Freak Bazaar of *Monsterpieces* – they asked 200 people to make and offer them a mutant for a public sale where they could observe the public's reactions. They only received 9 mutants. 5) A month residency to the creation of the piece. They made here their first presentation to some specialists whom they asked useful feedback. 6) A week of intense rehearsals where they finished the final choreography. Another public rehearsal was made for a second group of dancers and choreographers. 7) The public presentation of the final work of *Monsterpiece*.

Results analysis and discussion

1) **The process:** Analysing all the collected data, we identified 3 main work phases. They're not totally different among them, but the prevalence of one or another kind of creative operations make them diverse.

The 1st one covers a) the previous works of group members individually, b) the 2 works this group had already developed together and c) this pro-

ject's first steps up to the project planning. It synthesizes a strong connection between their personal interests /qualifications and this project. Their previous worked themes were, among others, body and space, interactivity in the creative process, new ways of bringing the video to the stage. Also important, it includes the background construction of a shared vision of artistic creation based on i) their assuming challenges, ii) the error and failure integration in future projects, iii) experimentation as a work basis, iv) openness to the exterior and to the strange, v) the need for a strong articulation between different languages present on the stage and finally vi) a common aesthetic appreciation (based on principles like «we don't like spectacular works because they reveal just the surface of questions», that appeared translated in the absence of video manipulation effects, or in the common sportive clothes the performer dresses in the piece). In Amabile's process model, this phase is focused on *problem/task identification* and *building up response algorithms*.

A 2nd phase is made up of a broad research on the theme, with 3 kinds of actions: a) the open initiatives like the two workshops and the Freak Bazaar, b) bibliographical research on body and identity, c) first experimentations with photography (of little monsters they built, of body presentations simulating amputations...). In Amabile's process model their focus maintained the *building up response algorithms* work, and introduced the *generation of response possibilities* and *test response*.

The 3rd and last phase is made up of the effort of translating all the previous abstract decisions into the piece, and rehearse up to the public formal presentation – the making up of the choreography and video work, the task of mounting the stage, intensive rehearsals with constant refinement of every solution, the performance. Unity was the key word they kept in mind. It was an intense group work. In Amabile's process model the central operations were to *generate response possibilities*, make *test response* and *public presentation*.

As general characteristics we found a) a recursive process in which different kinds of cognitive operations are made simultaneously for the work's different dimensions; b) a flexible attitude that integrates different elements not thought before: for example, the rural landscape of the residency came to stage through the video; c) a strong coherence between explicit principles of work and observed behaviour; d) a clear path of establishing work heuristics and solutions, from a very broad creative intention to the final close of the piece.

2) **Motivation factors and its impact:** the prize won at the artistic contest, gave this group conditions for positive intrinsic motivation: autonomy and sense of control, the possibility of challenge definition. This was

the opportunity to connect the project to prior works and to individual interests/qualifications. We have a clear synergy of extrinsic and intrinsic motivational factors. But, it's important to observe that this group faces external evaluation in a very positive way. They use it intentionally as a divergent stimulus and as a self-exigency to do things better.

At the residency time some difficulties appeared related to the mentioned time allocation, explicitly for both digital artists. Nobody seemed to give great importance. The group had already defined work structure before, so they alternated individual tasks with collective sharing and elaboration.

3) **The group dynamics:** this four-person group ended up in an operating triangle because the artistic consultant moved away from town in the middle of the process. The other 3 members recognize him an important role in the project's conceptual phase. The group has a leader, the choreographer-performer. He is verbally recognized by other members and recognizable by his assumed protagonist behaviour. It's him who establishes the most important outside contacts assuring the production resources; it's him who develops the choreography's main structure; and it's him who asks external observers to evaluate their work. But it's a participatory leadership always respecting the specialized domain of the members. Apparently, this group operates according to a regular communication pattern based on a) open sharing of individually developed tasks, b) presentation of doubts and difficulties, c) asking and giving suggestions that are d) collectively discussed and refined. A cohesive group, around the shared vision and the satisfaction of working together, they learn with errors and failures. Defining new challenges in each new project, both aesthetic and process ones, they maintain all the intrinsic motivational factors active, after each project.

It's important to say new ways of collecting data avoid the pressure of the investigator presence in real contexts of work, bringing new possibilities to a kind of research respecting social constructivist principles. They must be explored as they make possible ecological visions and comprehensive explanations of creative groups. We can bring cognitive operations and social dynamics together into significant life experiences.

References

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