



Creative Workshop as a Form of Contemporary Art and a Space for Subjective Development¹

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Abstract: *The article presents the original concept of the Author's creative workshop which is treated as an art form and the method of education. It contains a presentation of the structure of the original workshop developed by the Author in the context of multi-layered relations occurring in the interconnected areas of art and education leading to subjective development.*

Keywords: art education, creativity, personal development

The original concept of the author's creative workshop

The original concept of creative workshop, continuously developed by the Author in the practical implementations for over 20 years has been characterized by a concentration on the subjective experience, based on polysensory and mental experience of the artistic situation. The workshop is treated by the Author as an art form dating back to the premises of the avant-garde², and contained in the current of its post-avant-garde manifestations. It takes into consideration the demand for personalization of art, which causes the rejection of the rigor of the work imposed by the artistic structure that is defined by the technique. The essence of art becomes a functional relation between the main participants of the aesthetic events – the creative artist, the viewer, and the subject matter, a relation consisting in the experience of art. Their functions intertwine, creating an aesthetical field (Berleant, 2007).

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² Here the term “avant-garde” is broadly used to denote innovative artistic activity.

The author treats workshop as an alternative way of meeting reality, offering the possibility of a different, unusual occurrence, because the space of art offers a different way of experiencing oneself and one's relationships with others, which in turn leads to broadening of the knowledge by the aspects impossible to discover in conventional relationships.

The discussed concept of workshop was restricted to the artistic activities in the field of visual arts; therefore, the creative workshop is often referred to by the Author as "*a creative workshop accompanying artistic creation.*"

Creative workshop as a form of artistic production in the field of contemporary art

Before substantiating the position of *E. Józefowski* (co-author of this work) signaled in the title of this section on recognizing the creative workshop as remaining in the scope of contemporary art, its general assumptions will be discussed.

A trait of contemporary art is the distinctness of experience offered by the works in comparison with the quality of experiences designed for audiences of the so-called old, classical art. It results from: (1) widening of the scale of perceptual qualities, (2) a change in aesthetic experience, and (3) conscious inclusion of the art elements of everyday life (Berleant, 2007).

Expanding the scale of perceptual quality is caused by the new structure of the work, which requires the use of sense of touch of the member of the audience, their taste or kinesthetic sense. This broadening of the boundaries of perception, characteristic for modern art, abolishes the distance between the work and the viewer, which leads to a change in the manner of aesthetic perception (Berleant, 2007). The contemporary work of art imposes itself on the viewer, its concept sometimes requires entering into its center, finding oneself in the middle of the arranged artistic situation and partaking in the activities. The viewer has the double role – he is both consumer and participant in the creation of the work of art, constructs it, particularizes it during the process of perception (e.g. Ingarden, 1966; Berger, 2000). In the contemporary artistic activities, such as *environment* or *assemblage*, a work in the field of visual arts stops being solely the object of aesthetic contemplation; human becomes the creation – the artist and his/her actions (*performance*) or the arranged situation, to a varying degree controlled by the artist, and filled with content by the participants (*happening, action art, workshop*). The essence of this kind of activities is the concentration on the participation in the experience itself as the most important quality in the space of art.

Concentration on the subjective experience pertains to the aforementioned quality of adding elements of everyday life to art. This quality of art is mainly unveiled through its subject matter, reaching for the prosaic, often also deeply personal aspects of life, exposing the intimate details, also sexual, using the everyday items and phenomena present in reality.

Creative workshop recognized as a creative artistic realization in the area of contemporary art contains the aforementioned features. Characteristic is a departure from the contemplative model of experience in favor of highlighting the role of the creative process. Workshop abandons the idea of creating a static work – is simultaneous action of a few individuals engaged in artistic creation, focused on intensification of subjective experience, conducive to the feeling of subjectivity. Hence, it is an artistic situation arranged by the artist, a process organizing an aesthetic field, understood as a functional connection between all participants of the aesthetic events (creator, viewer, object) generating the aesthetic experiences (Berleant, 2007). In the workshop, the distance between the participants of the aesthetic experience is eliminated – the work (workshop) imposes itself on the viewers (participants of the workshop), through the agency of the structure, which causes their experiences and reactions, entering their private sphere.

The concept of workshop refers to the idea of shaping reality through art, espoused in all currents and formations of the avant-garde. The postulate refers to two dimensions of experiencing reality – external and internal. The shaping of external reality is achieved through the arrangement of the public space, introduction of the new order of the social space, defined by the work/artistic process. The shaping of the inner reality encompasses the influence of the creative situation experienced by the individual on his/her mental makeup: views, emotions, values. The essence of artistic intention is to induce experiences of the participant who simultaneously takes an active part in the creation of the artistic structure of the workshop – the subjective content of reflection which fills the structure of the workshop, concretizing its final form. Shared experience of art can reveal the truth deeply embedded in the life of the creator/participant, it is a kind of "talking a walk in into oneself" which offers a new kind of meeting – a meeting with oneself.

It should be noted that art is a key factor for this form of action. Awareness of this fact is important, especially when one considers the many misunderstandings arising from the tendency to assign the status of a creative workshop to activities which use fine art techniques, focused on the development of creative abilities, or referring to the therapeutic function of the creative workshop. Form or structure of some of them may have parallels to the forms and structures of this workshop, but ideologically and conceptually these are distant actions, belonging to disjoint areas. Thus, the basic condition for the realization of a creative workshop in accordance with the concept outlined here is the existence of two elements: (1) the artist, as the author of the "work" – workshop (its design and implementation), (2) the focus on the process – the activities and experiences of the individual in the aesthetic field.

In the discussed here meaning of the workshop it is an art form in which, due to the properties inscribed in the essence of artistic activity, personal development occurs.

The concept of original creative workshop

The essence of the activity prepared for the workshop participants is the experiencing of reality created within the area of art (aesthetic dimension). This includes both the external reality - social, established in an arranged artistic situation and internal reality, as determined by the experience of the entity - his thoughts and emotions arising in interactions with other participants of the workshop, and which result from the internal dialogue accompanying visual creation (the work's creation). The form of the workshop and the extent of the participants' experiences are only suggested through the elements of the original concept: idea, place of production, technique and material, structure of the workshop and the actions of the workshop instructor. These structural elements are filled by subjective content, particularizing the final form of the workshop.

Concept of the workshop

The workshop concept reflects the purpose of the workshop in all the complexity and versatility of this form of artistic activity. It necessitates the definition of (1) mental intention, disclosing the assumed ideology and the resulting goals, and (2) a structure, which points at the predicted forms of activity of the participants as well as the end result (the finished work). The idea also displays the character of the workshop, allowing for its assignment to the field of education or art, or for placing it "in-between" those areas. The basis of this assignment is the structuring of goals; guidance of the subject towards growth places the workshop within the scope of artistic education, accentuating the aesthetic experiences allows for categorizing it within the area of art, and the balance found between the aforementioned goals reveals an interdisciplinary character.

The idea of the workshop also finds its reflection in the suggested issues, but one should remember that it does not determine the character of the workshop, only constitutes the supplement of its overall concept.

The location of the workshop

The location of the workshop cannot be accidental; its selection, including its physical qualities and its symbolism, should be conducive to fostering a proper climate for workshop training, i.e. to initiate a deepened experience of the place's specificity, to inspire the participants' choice of untypical materials, taken from the surroundings, and to stimulate imagination and metaphorical (creative) thinking.

The intentional choice of the place results from the concept, the goal of the workshop and the desired effect. In some projects the originality of the place is prioritized, owing to the need to intensify the exploratory attitude and to inspire a polysensory experience of reality, which, as it is expected, is accompanied by unconventional ways of interpreting stimuli. In case of some workshops, mainly oriented introspectively – towards intensification of the experience of inner reality, austere space is optimal, in which the

external stimuli, which could interfere with the experience of oneself, are limited to a minimum. In such cases interiors devoid of decorative elements (stucco, images) and unnecessary equipment are preferred – for example, it may be a film studio, theater stage, an empty room and finally the factory hall.

Analysis of the Author's previous implementations of the workshop allows one to ascertain three main criteria of selection. The most suitable places for realization of the workshops should be characterized by: (1) presence, or availability of various natural resources, which can be utilized for artistic transformation (2) originality and lack of relation to the place of former artistic experiences of the participants, (3) a peculiar climate and attractiveness – characteristics which "attract" the participants and at the same time satisfy the needs stemming from the workshop premise.

Technique and materials

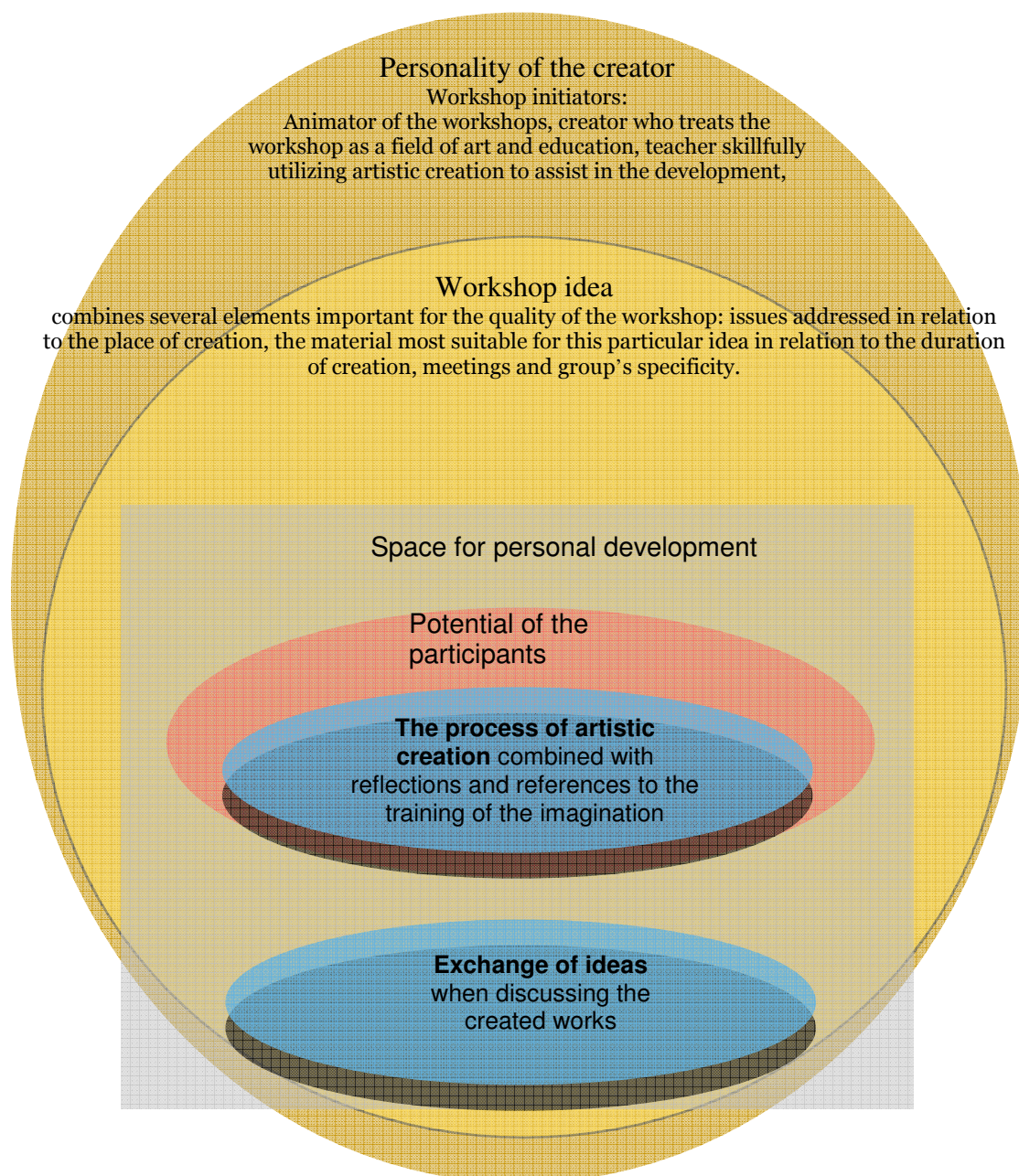
The main activity of the workshop is visual creation. The choice of technique for the created work/artistic object is dictated by the character and goals of the workshop. A variety of techniques is utilized – techniques typical for plastic arts and painting, drawing, graphics, sculpture, as well as mixed techniques, used for creating collages, montages, installations. The premise of many workshops is to use natural materials, originating from the place in which the workshop is taking place. It happens in case of many open-air activities, using the materials which are available in the place of creation, which is a natural consequence of the planned inspirations. The materials and natural elements replace the means of expression used in traditional techniques in plastic arts: line, patch, or form. This reduces the stress caused by the usually low esteem of the participant concerning his/her own artistic abilities, moreover it stirs the imagination and creative thinking, widening the sphere of sensual experiences accompanying the process of creation.

The choice of materials and techniques for the creation planned in the workshop remains not only in close connection with the choice of place for the workshop, but also reveals a broader relationship with the assumptions of contemporary art. Choosing a location which ensures a variety of materials inspires to use nonartistic materials, including raw materials, such as sand, stones, floral elements used to shape the artistic structure, thereby inscribing themselves in the postulate to broaden the scope of perceptual experiences, present in modern art. Another aspect resulting from the desire to change the aesthetics is experienced experience by shaping the new structure of the work is connected with the possibility of arranging public or natural space. Introduction to its fragment of artistic elements which one encounters gives it qualities of an aesthetic composition. In turn, another variant of the arrangement of space includes the transformation of the existing composition of reality made in the workshop activities, permanently changing its structure. In both cases we are dealing with the dissolution of the distance between the work and its audience, postulated by contemporary art, which is a consequence of creating the need of the member of the audience to enter the work and engage in its transformation – creation.

Personal development in the creative workshop

According to the views of the creator of the original concept, the workshop is an opportunity for development of its participants. Personal development is done by the multi-level feedback occurring between the components making up the workshop, the connections which are shown in

Diagram 1. Model of personal development in a creative workshop



Workshop's determining factor is the personality of the workshop's creator – animator who treats the workshop as the field of art and education. His or her way of experiencing reality, emotionality, artistic preferences, as well as the awareness of initiating the development of artistic creation are reflected in the idea – the idea of the workshop. The idea of the workshop comprises the place, material and activities for the participants, determined by training the imagination, the proposed type of artistic creation and the way we talk about the created works. Workshop activities comprise the steps of the workshop activities, thereby defining the structure of the workshop. These are: (1) imagination training, (2) visual creation, (3) discussion inspired by the works. The sequence of the stages is strictly defined; each of them is ascribed a different role in the entirety of the workshop process.

All these elements come into relationship with each other, creating a coherent, logical plan, none of them is accidental. Suggestiveness of the place and material intensifies the thoughts and emotions of the participants.

Workshop begins with an imagination training based on group or individual interaction. It takes the verbal form and leads to stimulating the imagination in a relaxed atmosphere³. During the training one is asked to assume a comfortable position, close one's eyes and comply with the narrative instruction. The content of the narration refers to the subject of the workshop in a metaphoric, pictorial manner; its purpose is to stimulate transformational images⁴, based on free interchange between sensory modalities (Maruszewski, 2000) It is assumed that the verbal stimuli in conjunction with the influence of the place's atmosphere and characteristics invoke associations which are transformed into visual imaginings; these, in turn, are the basis for creating visual symbols – an iconic code written into the created work. The mechanism of the individual training is analogous. The difference amounts to omitting verbalization, the participant undergoes the imagination training on his/her own, at any time and in any place, on the basis of the text. The advantage of this variety of training is the possibility of multiple returns to the sources of inspiration contained therein.

Training of the imagination allows one to refer to the past, to reach the self-image kept within. Visual creation becomes area of subject development; it consists of activities of the workshop participants which lead to the creation of a visual art object. Creation should be treated as a process of working with images that are stored in memory. Image invoked during training is subjected to interpretation; it becomes the basis for the transformation of the image forming new meanings. It is an alternative to

³ Introduction in the state of relaxation has the purpose of increasing the susceptibility to stimuli which create the space for workshop activities, among others: increasing the sensitivity of the subject to the suggestion contained in the training and orientation of perception to experiencing the "here and now."

⁴ There are two types of transformations of ideas: isomorphic, limited to one sensory modality (e.g. visual) and transformational, which navigate between multiple sensory modalities, for example the aural representations switch to visual (Maruszewski, 2000:184).

the verbal way of thinking – thinking with images, the essence of which expresses the metaphorical statement "*images are the roots of thought.*" The essence of creation is the expression of complex experiences which comprise the subjective experience initiated during the training of the imagination.

The mental space of creation becomes the internal dialogue accompanying it. It is composed of reflections and findings that transform the visual form of the created object, and these reveal new contexts for the assessment of the issues under consideration. The presented approach highlights two important aspects of creation: one is associated with the emergence of new, hitherto unnoticed aspects of the mental picture of reality; the second concerns the creation of a new way of understanding reality, thanks to a change in the interpretation of the relationship between the perceived elements. The way of thinking and its contents initiated in participants are different from those used previously in everyday life, which allows the inclusion of creation as a process of generating a subjective experience of artists (participants). Individual potential for reflexivity, the ability of retrospection and sensitivity to workshop inspiration determines the intensity of the subjective experience.

Creation occurring during a creative workshop has the purpose of taking a look at oneself, on one's own life. It takes on a cognitive character; it is a kind of self-discovery containing the elements of novelty.

Creation can thus be regarded as a way of reading the signals from the inner world, as a kind of experience of being oneself. Artistic composition is a mirror, in which participants reveal their internal order, and sometimes the lack thereof.

Art is here conceived as the ideal way to present the ideal of oneself, it is assumed that creativity is embedded in the curriculum vitae, is an expression of a kind of personal mythology. Figuratively speaking, it is like a "walking 20 cm above the ground" that enables meeting with each other and with the world, following other rules than before.

Three basic principles are assumed: the statements are voluntary, the statements of the author of the work are discussed at the end, after other participants have formulated their comments, and the valuation of works is abandoned.

Application of the rule that the statements of the work's author are last is important because of the necessity of obtaining feedback. The interpretations made by others, entering the role of the audience, reveal contexts often overlooked by the author, which inspires subsequent verification of their judgments. That exchange of ideas is essential in enhancing self-knowledge.

Individual interpretations accompanying the participants during creation, and made in reference to the work of other participants expand the perception field through new stimuli, which become the basis for the modification of representation relating to the aspect of reality under consideration (Maruszewski, 2001). The literature indicates that messages about the "I" engage the attention and emotions of the individual to a high degree. The validity of observing the rule is also confirmed by observations of authors' behavior when their works are discussed as well as their statements, in which they emphasize the importance of received feedback.

Thus, at the stage of creation and discussion of the works experience is accumulated, which is an expression of the subjective perception of reality (internal or external); the views pertinent to it are being established. Given that the workshop experiences introduce the participant to a new quality in the way of experiencing reality, the views constituted on their basis are new. This means that during the workshop ideas are deconstructed and built in relation to new categories.

Each of the aforementioned workshop stages has a specified meaning, none of them can be omitted or realized with lesser commitment; one also cannot change their order.

The responsibility for the course and effectiveness of the activities rests on the workshop leader. The quality of relations with the participants and the atmosphere during the activities are decisive for the quality of the experiences of the participant, and thereby the scope and strength of the changes (cognitive, emotional) generated in the participant's psyche.

The role of imagination in an authorial creative workshop

For the most part, workshop actions refer to the processes of the imagination. Direct appeal to the imagined takes place during imagination training (its goals are further specified by the concept of a specific workshop), and the process of visual creation is based on the imagination of the participant, his or her susceptibility to inspiration contained in the imagination training and individual propensity to generate ideas.

The mechanism of the training of imagination is based on the visualization process, i.e. the transition from verbal code to visual code (Maruszewski, 2001). The content of the training of the imagination and the suggestions contained therein stems from the purpose and character of the particular workshop. It is assumed that it will drive the participants to generate visual imagery, forming images of reality free from internal or external constraints.

The preference for initiating visual perceptions stems from their more extensive possibilities in terms of the transformation of the information they contain when compared with the possibilities of verbal representations, or representations based on other sensory modalities. It also refers to the primacy of visual thinking, which is inscribed in anthropogenesis and human ontogeny – it is believed that the prehistoric man used the image to convey thoughts even before the formation of speech; a similar sequence is observed in ontogenetic development – artistic expression precedes the development of the ability to speak. The indicated rationale was the basis for the assumption concerning the primal character of visual ideas as images produced without thinking, in response to verbal stimuli. What is meant here is the generation of an image in the imagination, which in the smallest possible extent contains the methods of interpretation imposed by culture in the processes of socialization and education.

The visualization also involves another aspect – it allows one to construct a picture of reality anticipated by the individual. Its mental

model, which reflects the semantic code acquired in the process of symbolization (Maruszewski, 2001), provides information – guidelines for planning actions to achieve the goal in reality, or avoidance, if the situation experienced in one's imagination leads to negative emotions.

In line with the premise of the workshop, the ideas generated during visualization are the starting point for the process of visual creation. The original image which is the result of visualization that occurs at the stage of imagination training undergoes multiple transformations during the creative work. The idea of the workshop excludes the replacement of reality by imagination. According to the concept of authorial workshop presented here, stimulating ideas aims at activating the individual to gain insight into the proposed content (themes), which will help to broaden the perspective of viewing the problem, thereby initiating a verification of the representations of reality (internal and external) experienced by the individual. The result will be the elimination of falsities in the individual's mental representations. This verification occurs in the field of aesthetic workshop activities, its space is largely visual creation.

The process of encoding information initiated during artistic creation planned under a creative workshop is entirely based on the imaginary. This allows for the recognition of ideas in terms of stimulants of changes in knowledge structures forming mental representations of the world. It should be added that in the workshop the main area of impact is the knowledge forming the inner reality – the subject's self-knowledge.

Conclusion

It should be noted that art is a key factor for this form of action. Awareness of this fact is important, especially when one considers the many misunderstandings arising from the tendency to assign the status of a creative workshop to activities which use fine art techniques, focused on the development of creative abilities, or referring to the therapeutic function. Form or structure of some of them may have parallels to the forms and structures of this workshop, but ideologically and conceptually these are distant actions, belonging to disjoint areas. Thus, the basic condition for the realization of a creative workshop in accordance with the concept outlined here is the existence of two elements: (1) the artist, as the author of the "work" – workshop (its design and implementation), (2) the focus on the process – the activities and experiences of the individual in the aesthetic field. In the discussed here meaning of the workshop it is an art form in which, due to the properties inscribed in the essence of artistic activity, personal development occurs. Subjective experiences induced in the aesthetic field become a development tool; for this reason workshop can be attributed goals within the assumptions of aesthetic education.

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