

## **Affects and the creative process: intra-views with cultural workers**

**Mireia Rosell Pons**  
University of Barcelona

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1344/jnmr.v3i2.40230>

### **Abstract**

Delving deeper into the creative process becomes quite a challenge, which goes beyond following some guidelines and at the end of these creating something. The creative process is a complex process resulting from the dialogue that occurs with everything that surrounds us and the connection with human, non-human and more than human forces, the affects, can allow us to access even the most intangible but often of great relevance in this process. Therefore, the creative affective process aims to awaken the importance of connection with the forces that cross us, as well as sharing attitudes and skills that facilitate our connection with what moves us.

### **Keywords**

Creative process; Affects; Cultural workers; New Materialisms.

### **Introducing affects and the creative process**

Social sciences and humanities are increasingly focusing on affects, emotions and feelings (Gregg and Seigworth, 2010; Massumi, 2002; Moraña, 2012). In this sense, the named affective turn is providing new ways to understand the relation between subjectivities, the social and the material world (Moraña, 2012) so it can also contribute to reconceptualise the creative process.

Spinozian affects highlight the importance of bodies and give insights into the ways bodies increase and decrease their capacity to act. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (2010) retrieve this notion to refer to those forces that, in different intensities,

potentiate action to human and more than human bodies. These affects are not always instantaneous. They appear as a sort of an echo that is not stable but breaks the present, past and future linearity (Massumi, 2002). The echo implies that there has been a movement, so it provides meaningful information about the relation of one-self with the world.

How to use this information for the creative process? It is necessary to be open to the intensities arising within the becoming (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980/2010) of the world. This means to challenge the killers of motivation (Hennessey, 2000) that the neoliberal trend is expanding through the noise, needs and distractions that negatively condition and promote a lack of presence towards the forces that run through us.

For instance, literature about the creative process tends to look for pre-established methods. It is the case of the “Creative Problem Solving” (Osborn, 1953) created by the Buffalo State College and the Creative Education Foundation. It provides a model for promoting creative capacities through 4 steps designs. Alternatives such as “Theory U” (Scharmer, 2007) seem more productive to be open to the becoming:

“U Process” pulls us into an emerging possibility and allows us to operate from that altered state rather than simply reflecting on and reacting to past experiences. But in order to do that, we have to become aware of a profound blind spot in leadership and in everyday life. [...] The blind spot is the place from which our attention and intention originates. It's the place from which we operate when we do something. We are blind to it because it is an invisible dimension of our habitual social field, of our everyday experience in social interactions. (Scharmer, 2007, p.5)

Otto Scharmer (2007) talks about the importance of presencing, which can help to collect the intensities that affect us to propel the creative process:

All real creativity, all profound innovation, and all deep civilization renewal are based on the same source: the capacity for sustained attention – the capacity to immerse ourselves in something, stay with it, and then finally, when we are lucky, catch the spark of inspiration and move with it, in order to “bring the new into reality as it requires” (Buber, 2000 in Scharmer, 2007, p.27).

On this matter, affects enable to see the creative process as an intra-action (Barad, 2007) where agencies are produced through the connection with these intensities and the material world. This intra-action allows us to make decisions to learn “from the future as it emerges” (Scharmer, 2007, p.7) and create something significant that can subvert the limitation of the past patterns. However, the intra-action of the creative process drives us to be aware of “the ethical obligation to act responsibly in the future of the world, to answer and rework what materializes and matters and what is excluded from such processes” (Barad, 2007, p.235). Creation, whether material or immaterial, needs to become coherent from an onto-episte-methodological and ethical point of view. That is, from how one understands reality, how one relates to it, and the actions that one carries out.

In order to explore how the creative process can be reconfigured through the affective turn gaze, 4 intra-views have been conducted with cultural workers:

- Maria Assumpta (Tuti) Cirera Bergadà (T): Art Historian working on museums and the University of Vic (Spain). The intra-view has been carried out the 31st of March 2022.
- Toni Casassas i Bover (C): Transdisciplinary artist focused on experimental cinema and photography (Spain). The intra-view has been carried out the 5th of April 2022.
- Mireia Barrera (B): Director of El Coro Nacional de España and La Capella de Música de Santa Maria del Mar. Founder of Coro de la Orquesta Ciudad de Granada (Spain). The intra-view has been carried out the 28th of April 2022.
- Joan Carles Sánchez Rico (JC): Industrial design engineer. The intra-view has been carried out the 30th of April 2022.

In all 4 intra-views, the author (M) is part of the entanglement. The dialogue emerges without a fixed pattern to follow but with the desire to answer the main questions: "how do we relate to the affects in the creative process?" and "what can emerge from them in the creative process?". These intra-views are analysed through sub-themes that can help to give insights about the introduced questions.

## Discussing the intra-views

### Affects

The concept of affects is new for all the participants. In explaining its meaning, all of them feel familiar with these intensities. JC is the only one that does not relate affects to the creative process at first, but while the intra-view moves forward he can identify them. On the contrary, T connects with affects immediately:

(T) Affects have been a major driver of my life.

(M) Can you notice them?

(T) Sure, on the stomach and then they go up to the head<sup>1</sup>.

Here it can be seen that affects are an embodied intensity. This force is not only constituting the body by the relation with other humans, but also with more than human bodies (Barad, 2007). In this sense, body appears as an experiential territory where connections, movements and relations happen (Grosz, 1994). In C words, affects are generating this experience which moves one to action: "I identify affects as a force that helps you to visualize a movement, a force that says to you that you have to act".

### Intra-actions

Intra-actions are key elements of the creative process. These intra-actions can be created voluntarily by the cultural worker to establish a dialogue between the different elements participating in the creative process. However, unconscious intra-actions are also part of it. In this sense, JC says:

You enable the soul of the designs and you wait for answers to what you are creating, and you say to them: now I put a click to you. And the design would say: here you do not put a click. You must see it.

This statement highlights the dialogue established as a result of conscious intra-actions with human, non-human and more than human forces in the decision-making of the creative process. This exercise of generating conscious intra-actions can be

---

<sup>1</sup>All the translations are made by the autor.

considerably enriched by transdisciplinary. As JC shows: “you have to know how to mix different universes that seem antagonistic sometimes [...] when I collide things that don't make sense a priori, new stories are generated there”.

Creating multidisciplinary intra-actions generate new affects, new experiences and opportunities to value and contemplate. This is the way the creative process can be considered a rhizomatic path where past-present-future is entangled (Barad, 2007). The intensities emerge within the living and changing intra-actions. In the creative process, this leads to do and undo many times, but it is worth it. As JC shows: “The design is not linear [...] in a creative process you do not know which turns you will make, when you think you will end up going back”.

### Connections

During the creative process, it is relevant to connect with affects. This is an ability that can be learned. As JC says: “there are inputs that are coming into you, there is something intangible that as you grow in this sector, life, you can be awake for receiving these inputs”. These inputs are the affects, here is when presencing (Scharmer, 2007) becomes essential. In this sense, T points out that:

The best way to connect [with affects] is to pay close attention. One key is to be attentive. When you are attentive you can see things differently because affects are often received in a physical way. Everything that happens affects us, everything external is something internal, we are connected to it. [...] when you pay attention the relation between inside and outside it is possible to generate something new.

### Opening

Affects generate new affects (Camps, 2011). As one move through the creative process, affects appear and it is possible to open channels that facilitate the connection with new affects. The intra-view with B helps to identify that this opening allows one to improvise and generate artistic ideas:

I have observed [...] that at home I rehearse, and the fact of preparing and being

present in that moment of my preparation makes the rehearsal improvise a lot, I get ideas that I had not thought [...] it's like that seed I cultivated about the nature of a song [...] connects me with those kids and adults with whom we will play, and makes me flourish.

This is the labour of the echo of affects which allows one to generate new ideas. It is learning from the future as it emerges, as Otto Scharmer (2007) would say. In this sense, it is important the contributions of JC: "you should imagine the result of what you want to do before you do it. Having an imaginary path makes it possible to open connection channels". This means to give oneself the permission for going to somewhere new, and this may require:

T: Flexibility [...] when you question everything is a lot of fun because internal schemas are destroyed but at the same time it makes it easier to open up and see a lot of things about yourself and others [...] many people live with very narrow realities, very small because they are the ones we create.

Hence, for the purpose of being ready for the new, one should work to be open to affects. It is the way that JC points out the importance of being attentive to the "uncontrolled inputs [because] you get information in a different way and when you have the ability to master this information you can also use it" in the creative process.

## Signals

During the creative process, there are signals which enable movement. These are affects that emerge from conscious and unconscious intra-actions. In JC words: "there is a squiggle [...] I go, I come back, I go, I come back and at the end you say it is ready, you see a light". Seeing the light is what affects enable. It is the moment "when you feel a click. But I can't tell you how it happens and why it happens. But it happens" (JC). These signals are uncontrollable and unpredictable. They are invisible but felt through the body in the very present of the experience (O'Sullivan, 2001) of the creative process. Similarly, C recognizes that:

Affects give you a clue, I think they create awareness. It's like a connector where

all the points have to be connected for it to explode, for that to happen. It's not in a programmed way, you're doing things you don't understand why you do them and all of a sudden everything makes sense.

### Obstacles

Obstacles appear in the creative process so it is important to develop the capacity for persistence in order to subvert the challenges. B explains it:

In a creative process, there has to be a lot of persistence, you don't get away with it, you don't find it. For many years, I was not sure this was the case [...] In the process a lot of insecurity is created [...] you have to constantly make decisions [...] you have to find your way trying to be as honest as possible [...] this is a very long way.

A flexible attitude enables to flow and capture better the opportunities that are emerging in the process. Once the creative tension has been overcome one can realise that obstacles are experiences that affects us and encourages the desire to keep moving forward. In B words: "there is something very curious that I do feel energetically [...] there is like an energy that I feel that yes, it will be difficult, but I will get out of it". This energy can be the result of the confidence one acquires over time as a result of overcoming obstacles. It is also how affects function increasing or decreasing one's capacity to act.

### Killers

As mentioned before, the neoliberal trend is providing killers of motivation (Hennessey, 2000). These killers can also be killers of affects: intensities made up with the will to distort us with superfluous and limiting information. To deal with these killers and to dialogue with them consciously, it is necessary to awaken the critical spirit, the reflection and later to reactivate the capacity of connection with those affects that makes you move or block. In this sense, JC thinks that: "taboos are killers. Social codes are limits and family experiences can be it as well". Educational institutions can also be killers of affects due to learning experiences are not often catalysing affects or awakening the critical spirit, but rather reproducing patterns that

disconnect us from our ability to create and to question:

T: I think there is something very important that is the process of culturization, which drives us to be uniform. Also, in school in general it is very difficult to contemplate one's own identity, I think life is a process of discovering who you are [...] but on the other hand it is very difficult to distinguish the role of culture, places, environments

Closely, B thinks that:

B: Every artist has to do their own creative process. [...] there is a part that can be taught in schools [...] You see young people who are very good [at arts] but they don't say: As an artist I want to contribute to... even if it takes me years to find it, even if you can't put words to it, it is important to look for your truth as you feel that, as you approach that.

M: As a society we all follow the same academic pattern...

B: We are all caught up in the same threads, where is the creativity? If we are all anchored in the same thing, we are all the same.

In the face of this reality, imagination is needed to let go of some tendencies or to create new things (Garcés, 2020). Greene (2005) quoting Camus (1955) emphasizes the importance of awakening the "why?":

It arises and it all begins in that weariness tinged with astonishment. It starts and that's important. Boredom reaches the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time, it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness (p.18).

Confidence

The creative process pushes oneself towards the need of "Daring, losing the fear" (C) in order to learn to flow and trust. In relation to self-confidence, even connecting with what moves you, it can be complex to empower to walk in that direction. In this sense T and C comment:

T: There is something important here. Being convinced that you want to do it, then it doesn't matter, if you have the strength and conviction the others also



end up convinced. [...] and confidence in life, there is nothing that is true but we want to live life with great certainty.

C: These killers are sometimes from people around you who appreciate you and are repressive, if you don't have the security that you have accumulated over the years you could be a failure. You go like a tightrope walker, you go down the line without a net, you don't have the insurance that the system gives you and if someone tells you something you can fall because you are trembling there, there is a shield but when you have it very clear you pass from them.

With the aim of being able to generate this security, intense transformation work is needed.

C: When you have a serious conversation with yourself or the environment there is a transformation. [...] if there is no transformation it is purely intellectual ... [...] if there is no personal transformation I think it is not a real conversation or a real listening and therefore it is very difficult to break with your areas of comfort, your fears, because a transformation is very scary and you may prefer not to listen.

The intellect is very present in our neoliberal society and the intuitive part that allows us to reach the most intangible is often neglected. Fortunately, affections do not only pass through the filter of the mind, but blur the dualism between mind and body (Camps, 2011). The statement of C is substantial: "if there is no transformation it is purely intellectual". This reflects on the importance of being able to connect with such significant forces in the creative process.

### Distillation

In neoliberal society, opening up a channel of conscious distillation is relevant to subvert the killers of affects. In this regard, JC comments that:

A lot of information causes us to lose the essence. What is being done a lot now is listening to the ancestral theme, going back to the essence of the Inuit world. Inuit have developed a system of generating solutions to problems to

survive and when you go to the base of everything is when you generate that ability.

I understand by essence what emerges once you have distilled a product, when you have removed all the layers that were not necessary. In creating it, in order to be coherent and ethical, it is necessary to do this process of distillation, of eliminating information. On the other hand, it is important the intra-action of different elements with the aim of creating what is necessary, which will make that one projects something with that intention.

With this desire to see the essence of things C shares a few words from Walter Benjamin: "I would like to say about things, what wine says about grapes" and he adds:

Referring to the creative process, you can make great buildings, great works of art, or works that seem to surprise you, but are of a learned product, of a methodology, of a copy, of a fashion, there are people very skilled at doing things, the reality is something else.

The essence in the creative process emerges after distillation. This gaze of the creative process is what makes genuine creations but, what is more important, it is what enables the desire to find a connection with something different and enjoy the state of Flow (Csikszentmihalyi, 1996).

## Thinking the affective creative process

Affects are opening new paths toward understanding and living in the world. The intra-views with cultural workers presented in this text provide evidence of the insights that affects bring forth the creative process. Rather than being a stable procedure that can be catalysed from steps to follow, the creative process from an affective gaze surrenders the complexity of the creation to be open to the unexpected.

In this sense, the cultural workers have shown that this process is affected by the embodied intensities that create movements. These forces, which are human and more than human, that connect the invisible with the material, generate an intra-action

in which agencies are produced. Affects circulate through them opening new possibilities. The connection with these forces is essential. It is what enables cultural workers to make decisions and move forward during the creative process in a way that is coherent with what is meaningful and what moves bodies to act. Signals, as echoes of affects, help to make these decisions while embracing the unpredictable of the creative experience. In this sense, obstacles can appear but embodying a flexible attitude will provide that affects can become motors for action and opportunities for moving forward. Killers of affects also should be challenged to subvert superfluous information. Imagination here appears as a key element of the creative process as it can be a force for creating the new. Confidence in affects and in one-self would help to connect with the intensities arising and to make possible the needed distillation for the creation.

The 4 intra-views demonstrate the complexity of the creative process, as well as the difficulty of establishing universal guidelines that become tools to follow to be more creative. The concept of affects and the onto-epistemology and ethics that it entails, push cultural workers to live more fluid creative paths and shed light on something one cannot have seen before.

## **Bibliography**

Barad, Karen (2007). *Meeting the Universe Halfway. Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning*. Durham y Londres: Duke University Press.

Camps, Victoria (2011). Spinoza. La fuerza de los afectos. In *El gobierno de las emociones* (65-86). Barcelona: Herder.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly (1996). *Creativity: Flow and the psychology of discovery and invention*. New York: Harper Collins.

Deleuze, Gilles & Guattari, Félix (2010). *Mil mesetas*. Pre-textos.

Garcés, Marina (2020). El contratiempo de la emancipación. In *Pedagogías y emancipación* (21-48). Barcelona: Arcadia-Macba.

- Greene, Maxine (2005). *Liberar la imaginación. Ensayos sobre educación, arte y cambio social*. Graó.
- Gregg, Melissa & Seigworth, Gregory (2010). *The affect theory reader*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Grosz, Elizabeth (1994). *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism*. Indiana University Press.
- Hennessey, Beth (2000) Rewards and Creativity. In Sansone, C. And Harackiewicz, J. (Eds.) *Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation. The search for optimal motivation and performance*. (55-78) Academic Press. Educational Psychology series.
- Massumi, Brian (2002). *Parables for the virtual: Movement, affect, sensation*. Duke University Press.
- Moraña, Mabel (2012). Postscriptum: el afecto en la caja de herramientas. In Mabel Moraña y Ignacio Sánchez Pardo (eds.). *El lenguaje de las emociones: afecto y cultura en América Latina*. (313-337). Madrid: Iberoamericana.
- Osborn, Alex (1953). *Applied imagination*. New York: Charles Scribner & Sons.
- O'Sullivan, Simon (2001). The aesthetics of affect: Thinking art beyond representation. *Angelaki: journal of theoretical humanities*, 6(3), pp.125-135.
- Scharmer, Otto (2007). *Theory U: Leading from the Future as it Emerges*. SoL. Society of Organizational Learning.

## Author information

**Mireia Rosell Pons** ([mireiarosellp@gmail.com](mailto:mireiarosellp@gmail.com))

Mireia Rosell i Pons is an architect currently working on efficient and sustainable architecture. She has been interested in the creative process since many years ago which has taken her to assist in different international conferences related with that topic and to observe and analyse different creative processes. She holds a MA degree in architecture (2005) from the Ramon Llull University of Barcelona, a postgraduate degree in Emotional Intelligence (2020) from the Girona University and a Master degree in "Visual Arts and Education: A constructionist approach" from the Barcelona

University (2022) where her work focused on the “Affects and the creative process from the Posthumanism and the Newmaterialism”.